



Venezuelan Crisis of 1902

Michael Harris

Cold Wars 2011

Admiralty Trilogy Seminar

Presented by:

Clash of Arms Games





The BIG Question

Question – How close was the United States in going to war with Imperial Germany in 1902?



The BIG Question

Question – How close was the United States in going to war with Imperial Germany in 1902?

Answer – Within hours.

Surprised?



Components of the Crisis

- Recurring Civil Wars in Venezuela
- Extensive European Investment and Financial Loans
- Decision by President Castro of Venezuela to withhold payment to Europeans in view of Venezuelan debt
Venezuela owed 62 million bolivars (almost \$12 million), but was bankrupt
- Castro's belief that America's Monroe Doctrine would prevent European military action in Venezuela
- Decision by European nations to use force to reclaim debts and protect national interests





Monroe Doctrine

- The Monroe Doctrine is a policy of the United States introduced on December 2, 1823. It stated that further efforts by European countries to colonize land or interfere with states in the Americas would be viewed as acts of aggression requiring US intervention.
- It asserted that the Western Hemisphere was not to be further colonized by European countries, but that the United States would neither interfere with existing European colonies nor meddle in the internal concerns of European countries.





So Where is Venezuela?





Background Events

- May 1901 – German warships *Vineta* and *Falke* arrive in Venezuela to show flag/protect German interests
- Jul 1901 – Germany urges arbitration on Venezuela, it is declined
- Aug 1901 – Germany and Britain discussion on use of naval force to compel payment of debts and reparations
- Dec 1901 – US President Roosevelt – “If any South American country misbehaves towards any European country, let the European country spank it.”
- Jan 1902 – Civil War in Venezuela . . . Again
- Feb 1902 – British seek resolution of debts – attempt is ignored
- Jun 1902 – Venezuela gunboat seizes British ship *Queen* (carrying arms onboard for rebels)
- Aug 1902 – Britain and Germany agree on naval blockade strategy
- Sep 1902 – Haitian rebel ship seizes German ship with arms for Haitian government. *Panther* sails to Haiti, finds and sinks rebel ship
- Nov 1902 – British-German ‘Iron-Clad’ Agreement for Venezuela



Background Events

- Nov 25, 1902 – Britain and Germany advise US of intended blockade
- Dec 7, 1902 – Britain and Germany present ultimatums and close embassies in Venezuela
- Dec 9, 1902 – Britain and Germany impose unofficial blockade, destroy four Venezuelan gunboats
- Dec 11, 1902 – Italy sends ultimatum
- Dec 13, 1902 – British and German warships bombard Venezuelan forts at Puerto Cabello
- Dec 13, 1902 – Venezuela sends request for Arbitration to US. US forwards to Britain and Germany without involvement
- Dec 16, 1902 – Italian warships join blockade
- Dec 17, 1902 – Britain agrees to arbitration, Germany does not
- Dec 19, 1902 – Germany agrees to arbitration
- Dec 19, 1902 – President Roosevelt asked to arbitrate in matter
- Dec 20, 1902 – Formal blockade is announced



Putting Distances into Perspective

US Navy Exercise Area
- Roughly 48 hours steaming to Venezuelan waters at 10 knots

British Navy Local HQ



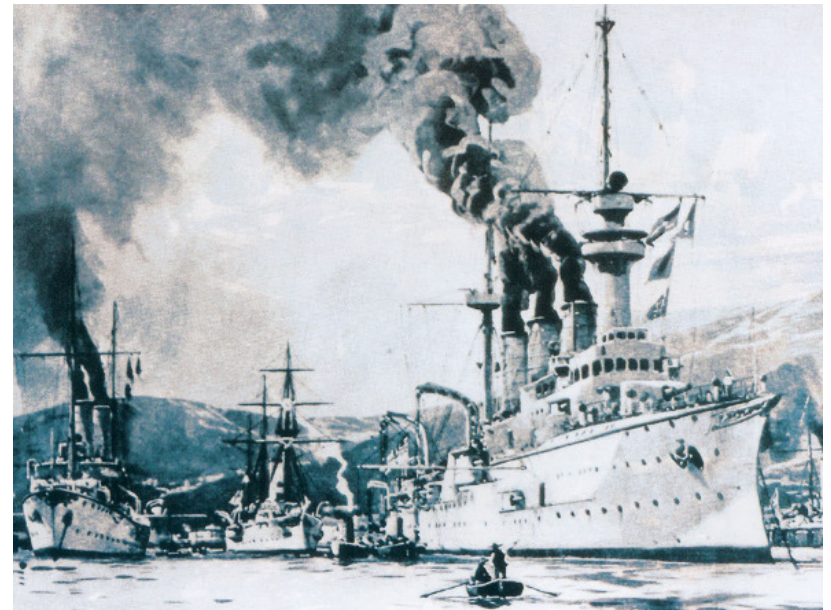
Venezuela's Key Ports

- Maracaibo
- Puerto Cabello
- La Guaira



Background Events

- Jan 1903 – German warship bombards Maricao
- Jan 1903 – Roosevelt advises Germany that US Fleet is still at Puerto Rico and can “sail at an hour’s notice”
- Feb 13, 1903 – Britain, Germany and Italy reach arbitration agreement with Venezuela – the Washington Protocols
- May 1903 – Britain, German, Italy and seven other nations submit agreement to Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague for preferential treatment.
- Feb 1904 – International Court agrees with request. The United States disagrees with decision
- Dec 1904 – Roosevelt establishes his ‘corollary’ in an address to Congress





Roosevelt Corollary

“All that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous. Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.”



And the Rest of the Story?



Rest of the Story

Roosevelt's concerns regarding German actions

- Germany's recent and driving expansionism
- An aggressive, impatient and emotional Kaiser
 - “We will do what is ever is necessary for our Navy, even if it displeases the Yankees. Never fear!”
- Ambitious German foreign policy elite
 - Bismarck forced out in 1890
- China Precedent
 - 1898 – Germany ‘temporarily’ acquired Kiaochow as result of reparations enforced by naval landing . . .
Became 99-year lease
- Fear of German military presence near the Canal Zone





Rest of the Story

Roosevelt's Plan

- Assemble large naval force in area
 - Naval maneuvers out of Puerto Rico, with the island of Calebra turned over to Navy . . . as an exercise area
 - First time ever conducted outside of US continental waters
- Admiral Dewey is put in charge . . . Dewey has known anti-German attitude
- Guidance to Dewey
 - “Fleet to be kept in hand and in fighting trim, and should be ready to sail at an hour's notice.”





Background Events with Rest of the Story

- Nov 1902 – Roosevelt hosts White House dinner and seats Dewey next to senior German diplomat (*hint, hint*)
- Nov 1902 – US fleet begins to assemble in Puerto Rico – for naval maneuvers
- Nov 25, 1902 – Britain and Germany advise US of intended blockade
- Dec 1, 1902 – Admiral Dewey heads south with orders
- Dec 7, 1902 – Britain and Germany present ultimatums and close embassies in Venezuela
- Dec 8, 1902 – Roosevelt meets with German Ambassador von Holleben, gives 10 day ultimatum for declaration by Berlin that Germany will not occupy Venezuelan territory . . . or US will “be obliged to act”
- Dec 9, 1902 – Britain and Germany impose unofficial blockade, destroy four Venezuelan gunboats
- Dec 11, 1902 – Italy sends ultimatum
- Dec 13, 1902 – British and German warships bombard Venezuelan forts at Puerto Cabello



Background Events with Rest of the Story

- Dec 13, 1902 – Venezuela sends request for Arbitration to US. US forwards to Britain and Germany without involvement
- Dec 14, 1902 – Von Holleben meets with Roosevelt, Kaiser will not back down. Roosevelt cuts 24 hours off deadline.
- Dec 16, 1902 – Italian warships join blockade
- Dec 16, 1902 – Press learns that US Fleet has left Puerto Rico headed south – destination Trinidad, 60 miles from Venezuela
- Dec 16, 1902 – Von Holleben to Berlin fully occupies transatlantic cable
- Dec 17, 1902 – Britain agrees to arbitration, Germany does not
- Dec 17, 1902 – Secret communiqué from Berlin – Kaiser will accept arbitration, there will be no seizure of Venezuelan territory
- Dec 18, 1902 – Press runs story on widespread Christmas holiday port visits of US Fleet throughout Caribbean
- Dec 19, 1902 – Germany agrees to arbitration
- Dec 19, 1902 – President Roosevelt asked to arbitrate in matter
- Dec 20, 1902 – Formal blockade is announced



Naval Forces

Allies - 29 total ships

British

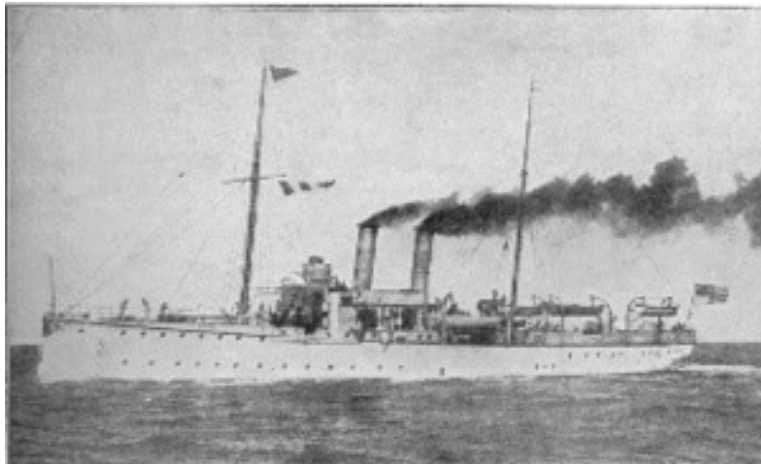
- 3-4 Cruisers and gunboats

German

- 2-3 Cruisers and gunboats

Italian

- 2 Cruisers



American - 53 total ships

- 9 Battleships
- 9+ Protected cruisers
- 6+ Gunboats
- Squadron of torpedo boats
- Colliers and supply ships





American Navy Christmas Plans

Once the ultimatum threat no longer needed ready fleet, cover story was . . . Christmas in the Caribbean!

- *Kearsarge, Alabama, Massachusetts, Iowa, and Scorpion* to Trinidad
- *Illinois, Indiana, and Hist* to St. Thomas
- *Texas and Topeka* to Pointe-a-Pitre
- *Chicago, Newark, and Eagle* to Curacao
- *San Francisco, Albany, and Wasp* to Mayaguez
- *Cincinnati, Atlanta, Prairie*, tugs and torpedo boats to San Juan
- *Gulgoa* to Mayaguez
- *Olympia, Nashville, and Machias* to St. Kitts
- *Detroit* to Antigua
- *Mayflower and Vixen* to Porto Rico waters
- *Dolphin* to Antigua



Conclusion

- Roosevelt Corollary – Strengthened resolve to keep European entanglements in South American to a manageable degree
- Increased support in Congress for Naval expansion – Needed to have the resources to back up National Policy
- Naval maneuvers outside of local continental waters – Use of Puerto Rican waters for training and exercise of US Navy continues even to today

BLOCKADE OF VENEZUELA.

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad, Dec. 10.—The entire coast of Venezuela from the Orinoco River to La Guayra will be blockaded from to-day on by British war vessels, while the Venezuelan coast from La Guayra to the Colombian frontier will be blockaded by German warships.





Putting the Crisis into Gaming Context

- Change historical setting – New Operational Situation to allow for actual fighting to occur (not much ‘war’ in a war game if no one fights . . .)
- Even out the fighting forces – Keep the Yankee battleships out of fight, so background changes slightly with threat from German battle fleet preparations. Both sides should have a fighting chance.
- Establish doable and believable victory conditions – What is real end goal of game? Give players chance to win if they are smart.
- Assemble the players and have at it!! – Balance the numbers to keep mob size manageable and let the players have fun with ships and setting they’ve never had before.
Give them a ***Willing Foe and Sea Room to Maneuver***



Bibliography

- "A Matter of Extreme Urgency" by Edmond Morris in Naval War College, Spring 2002, Vol LV., No 2.

- Various Articles from New York Times; Dec 12 - 21, 1902

- German Diplomatic Documents, Ch XI, The Joint Action Against Venezuela, 1902-03, (German Diplomatic Documents, 1871-1914, selected and translated by E.T.S. Dugdale, Vol III, "The Growing Antagonism, 1898-1910", (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930) pp. 160-165

- The Age of Battleships, 1890-1922 by Brayton Harris, (Franklin Watts, Inc.; NY, NY, 1965)