



U.S. Air Force

Johnston Island (this is all of it) soon to be virtually abandoned by Air Force.

## Air Force Closing Base at Johnston

Tiny Johnston Island, once a key refueling stop in Pacific aviation, has fallen before the progress of the air age.

The Air Force announced officially yesterday that it has started to close down its base at Johnston, some 700 miles southwest of Honolulu. The announcement confirmed an Advertiser story on May 3 that Johnston was in for a drastic rollback because so few planes needed it any longer.

**BRIG. GEN.** Julian M. Chappell, Seventh Air Force commander, said Johnston will be reduced to a "closed field" status. About 100 Air Force personnel will be retained on the island to handle communications and emergency service for military and commercial planes which might need it.

At one time there were more than 600 men stationed at Johnston. As of last June 30, there were only 220 military personnel, 40 civilians and 50 dependents on the island.

Gen. Chappell said no time-

table has been set for closing the base. All personnel with school-age children will be transferred out by Oct. 1, he said.

**THE "PHASING OUT"** operation will take several months, Air Force authorities said, because it will be necessary to "pickle" equipment and buildings against deterioration.

Air age progress is responsible for Johnston's decline in stature. Today's planes have enough range to enable them to by-pass the island on trans-Pacific flights. During World War II and for several years after, Johnston was a main refueling stop for planes flying between Honolulu and Guam.

The island was once described by the late newsman Ernie Pyle as looking like "two aircraft carriers strapped together." It is one mile long, and one-third mile wide at its bulge. It was only a third that size before it was enlarged by dredging coral

from the surrounding area during its 14 years occupancy by the Navy.

On Dec. 7, 1941, 134 years to the day after it was discovered by Capt. Charles Johnston, the island was shelled twice by Japanese warships. It was shelled on two occasions after that.

**THE AIR FORCE** took over Johnston in 1948 and permitted its personnel to have dependents with them there. At one time, more than 200 dependents were on the little island. The Air Force built a chapel, school, service club and recreational facilities for them.

As recently as two years ago the Air Force had planned to keep Johnston open and had undertaken a \$5 million building program.

By the end of this year, Johnston will be open only to planes in trouble and the sooty terns which flock there by the thousands each year to nest.