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Islands Under Fire: The Improbable Quest to Save the Corals of Puerto Rico

Kevin McCarey

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A portrait of an often overlooked part of America—Puerto Rico and the Spanish Virgin Islands—this is the little-known story of how the U.S. government, in particular the Navy, almost destroyed a pristine coral reef to provide a target for gunners. The author's true, and humorous, account of his role in the sometimes bizarre tale reveals how locals, politicos, and mariners came together to save a coral reef from certain destruction, and how the need to protect the fragile marine environment can bring meaning and direction to anyone's life, young or old. The conservation efforts represent a perfect example of what highly motivated citizens and political leaders can achieve when taking action to protect what they love. The author, hired as captain of a small research vessel, led the underwater search for evidence of the coral reef damage that would be used to convince the U.S. government to stop its bombardment of the island. While he did not have a direct role in the legal activities of Washington, DC, his efforts to collect factual evidence that was used by the lawyers proved to be of immeasurable importance. His role enabled the Culebrans, the residents of this tranquil island paradise, to gather proof of the destruction, which ultimately convinced everyone—including President Nixon—to stop the carnage. This triumphant tale serves as an inspiration for anyone wanting to make a difference in environmental conservation.

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