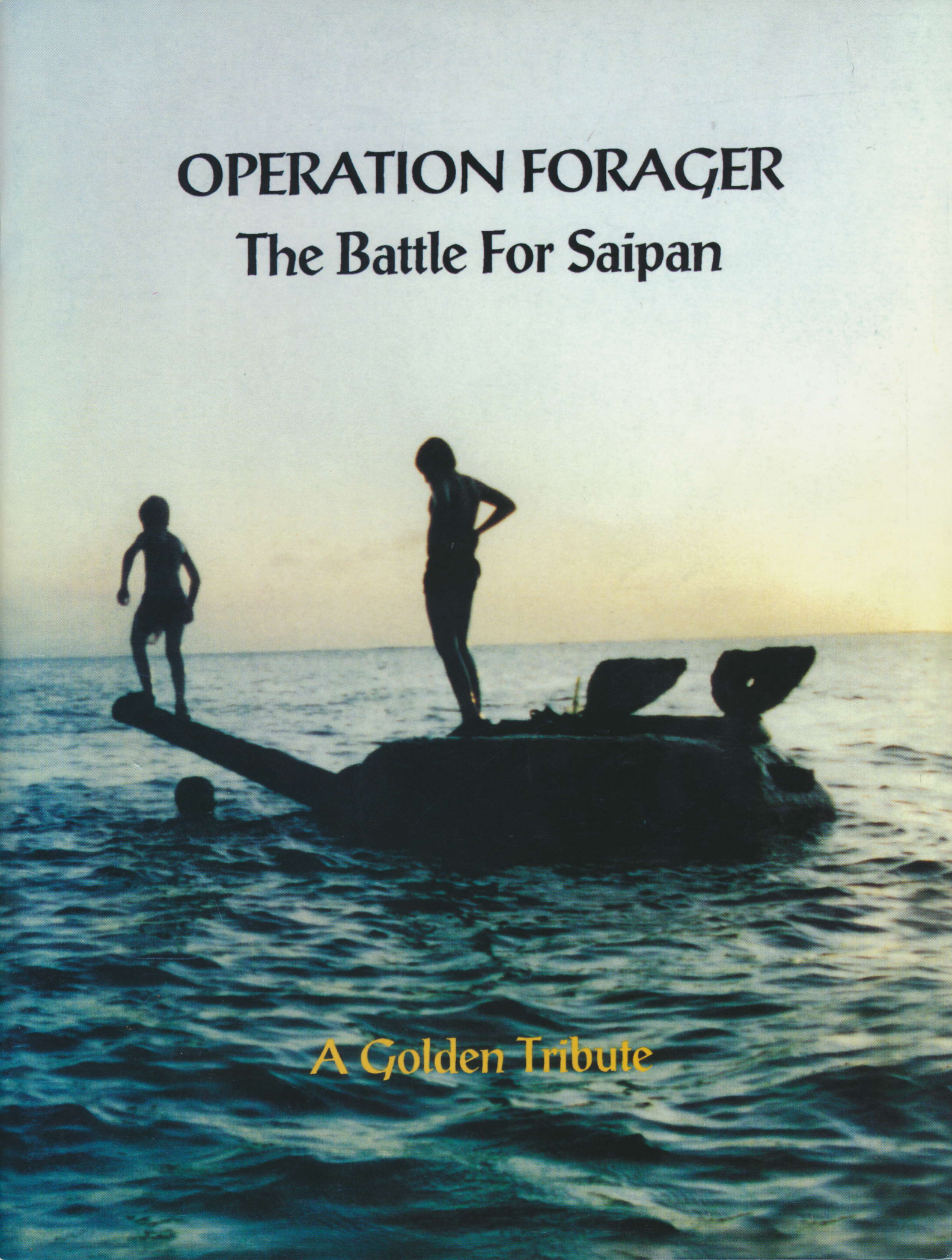
OPERATION FORAGER

The Battle For Saipan



A Golden Tribute



Introduction

In addition to the thousands of people of all nationalities who lost their lives in the Battle of Saipan, we especially dedicate this written memorial to all Veterans as a Golden Tribute in their honor. Welcome to a pivotal chapter in the history of the Pacific and the history of the Northern Mariana Islands. The Battle of Saipan marked the turning point in the Battle of the Pacific, and an abrupt change in the fortunes of the islands, the Pacific and Asia.

Saipan was devastated by the battle. As the Chamorros and Carolinians emerged from the caves in the hills and jungles where they had sought refuge, they encountered a charred landscape and a new occupational force whose language and culture was as foreign as that of the Japanese had been in 1914.

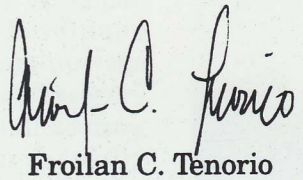
Since that fateful summer, the Northern Mariana Islands have become the only lands occupied by U.S. forces during World War II to become part of the United States of America. On March 24, 1976, President Gerald Ford signed the law approving the covenant that formed the political union between the people of the Northern Mariana Islands and the United States. The people became U.S. citizens and the islands achieved commonwealth status.

As U.S. citizens and a Commemorative Community as designated by the United States Department of Defense, we welcome our compatriots in the commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of World War II on Saipan. We will never forget the supreme sacrifice made by the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions, the 27th Infantry Division and the 73rd Bombardment Wing to liberate the Northern Mariana Islands, in what was one of the bloodiest battles of World War II.

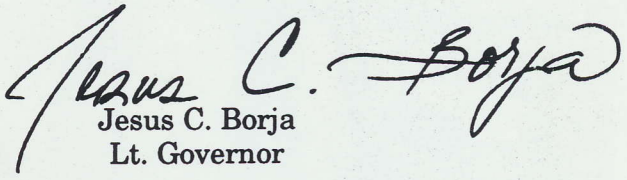
We also wish to extend our warm welcome to Japanese veterans and their families. Their losses were enormous.

It is our profound wish that the spirit of peace and friendship existing in the Pacific today prevail throughout the world, and that confrontations like the Battle of Saipan remain where they belong, in history books such as "Operation Forager."

Our Sincere Best Wishes and Hafa Adai,



Froilan C. Tenorio
Governor



Jesus C. Borja
Lt. Governor

Saipan: An Early History

The island of Saipan, possessing 122 square kilometers, is the second largest in the Marianas archipelago. Roughly 22 kilometers long and eight kilometers wide, its topography is distinguished by a central mountainous spine running north-south for nearly its entire length. Mt. Tapochau which rises 466 meters above sea level, dominates this spine. On the western side of the island, the mountainous interior gives way to a narrow strip of flat coastal land bordered by white sand beaches. A fringing reef runs parallel to the shoreline and forms a narrow protected lagoon for virtually the entire length of the western coast. By contrast, the eastern and northern coasts are ringed by high rocky cliffs which drop precipitously into the sea.

Saipan has a long and interesting history. Archaeological evidence suggests that the indigenous inhabitants of the archipelago, known as Chamorros, have lived on Saipan (and on the other southern islands of the archipelago) for nearly 4000 years. The ancient people were skilled sailors and fishermen who resided in houses constructed atop impressive stone columns known as *latte*.

The written history of Saipan begins shortly after Ferdinand Magellan visited the archipelago during his epic voyage of discovery in the early 1500s. A half century later, Miguel Legazpi formally claimed the archipelago for the Spanish crown. Thus began over 300 years of Spanish rule.

In 1668, a small band of Jesuit priests established a mission on Guam. The mission received essential support from Queen Mariana of Spain and in recognition of her assistance, the archipelago was named the Mariana Islands. While the priests were initially accepted by their Chamorro hosts, misunderstandings soon erupted into open violence. For the next thirty years, the Jesuits, backed by a small but determined garrison of soldiers, at-

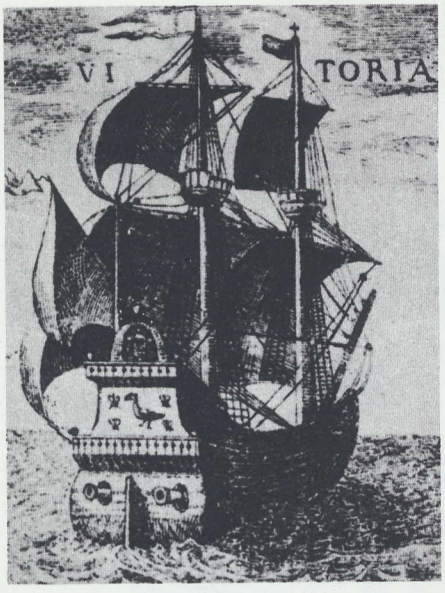


A sketch of a high status Chamorro at the time of European contact.

tempted the forced conversion of the formerly pagan Chamorro population. By the early decades of the eighteenth century, these efforts had succeeded, although at the cost of much of the Chamorro population and its indigenous culture.

During the Spanish administration, life on Saipan revolved around work on the farm and attending daily mass at the Catholic church. The island's small population resided in the mission village of Garapan on the western shore. In the early decades of the 19th century, immigrants from the low atolls of the Carolines settled on Saipan thus establishing the island's second native population.

This peaceful slumber was broken at the very end of the nineteenth century by the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. As a growing Pacific power, the United States easily captured Spanish holdings in Philippines as well as the strategically placed island of Guam 120 miles south of Saipan, the largest and southernmost of the Marianas. The Spanish moved quickly to sell their remaining Micronesian holdings to Germany.





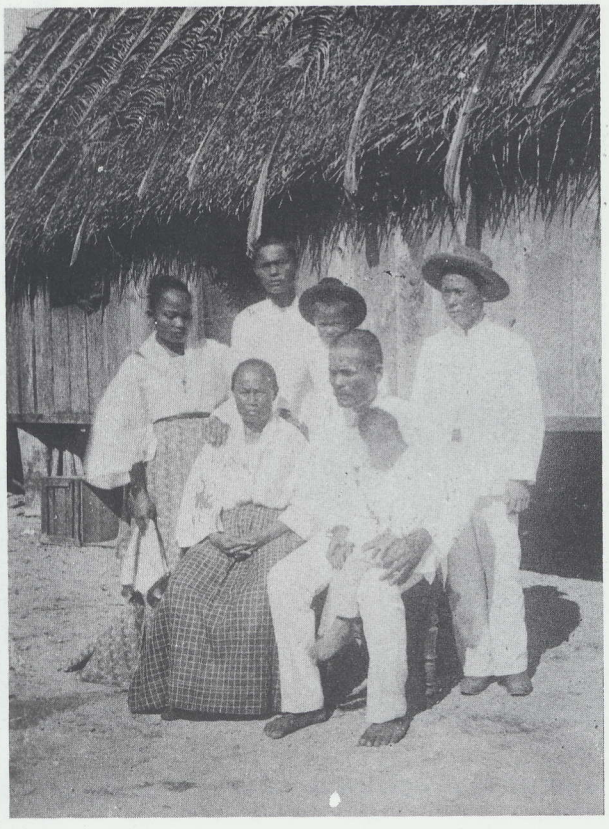
Germany assumed control of the Marianas (with the exception of Guam) in November of 1899. For the next fifteen years, a small but energetic administration ran the affairs of the German Marianas from the village of Garapan on Saipan. The German administration undertook a wide range of public works projects, improved health care and implemented compulsory public education. Attempts to develop the economic potential of the islands met with little success, however, as did the administration's efforts to attract German farmers to the Marianas.

Once again, the affairs of powerful nations were to dictate the course of life on Saipan. By the first decade of the 20th century the world's great military powers had organized into two rival alliances. In August of 1914 war began, and although thousands of kilometers from Europe, the German Marianas were quick to feel the effects of the conflict.

above: Magellan's ship Victoria which visited the Marianas in 1521.

above right: An early sketch depicting trade between Spanish ships and Chamorro canoes.

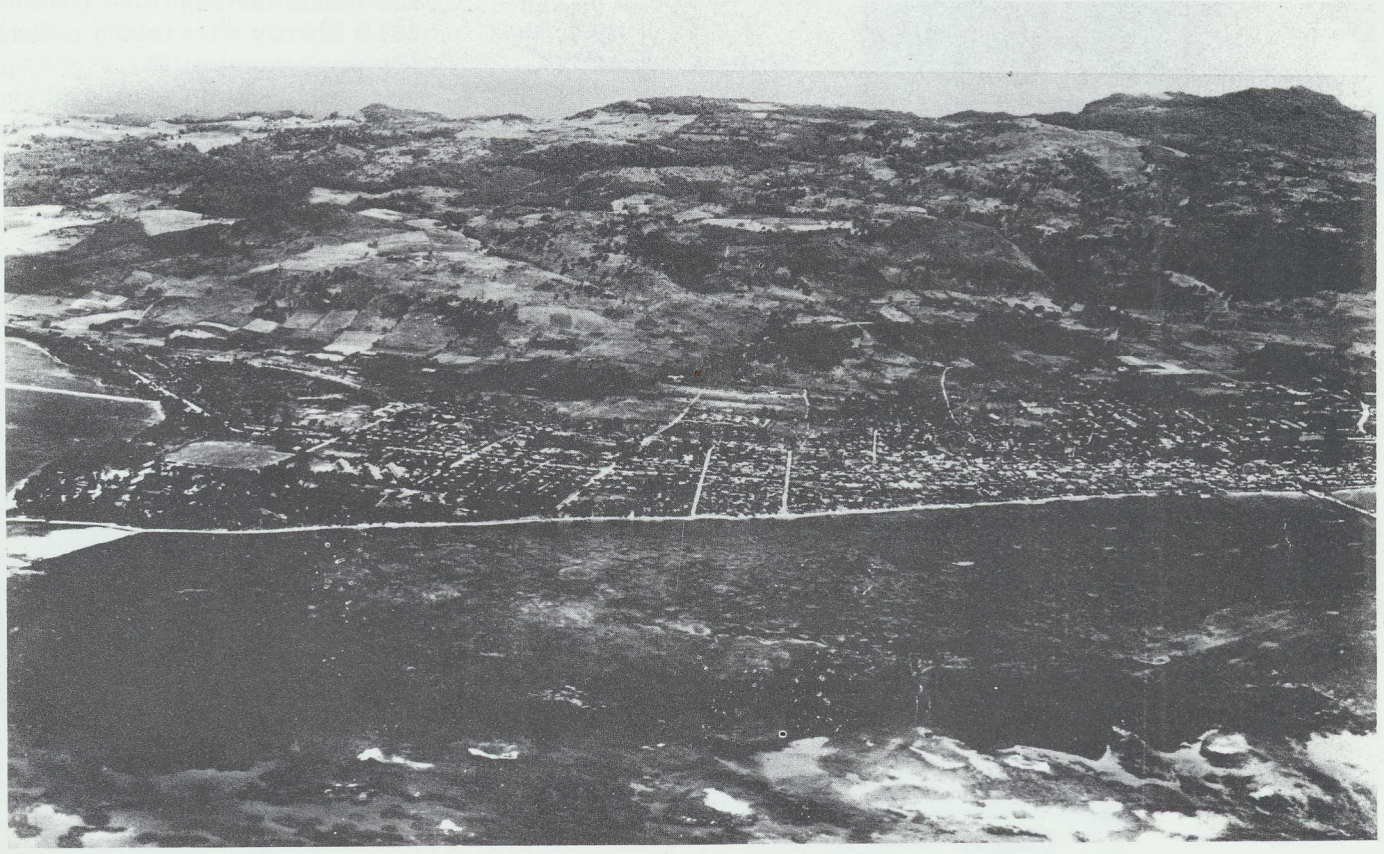
right: A Chamorro family during the German administration.



Saipan as a Japanese Island

Japan emerged as a world power after defeating Russia during their war in 1904-5. She recognized that the European conflict provided an excellent opportunity to expand her influence and holdings in the central Pacific at very little risk. With Germany's military occupied in a European war, Japan was free to move against German Micronesia. In September 1914, a powerful Japanese naval squadron steamed out of Yokosuka Harbor with orders to proceed to Micronesian waters. Its mission was twofold: to engage and destroy German naval vessels in the area and to occupy Germany's island possessions.

Japan's interest in the *Nan'yo*—or the "South Seas" as the Japanese came to call their Micronesian holdings—stretched back to the 1880s, when a few disenfranchised *samurai* attempted to establish trading companies in several island groups. Later, as Japan's naval power grew, the Nan'yo became important for its strategic value, as well. It is not surprising that the United States, also an emerging Pacific power, viewed with alarm Japan's easy conquest of the former German holdings. While the islands had been of marginal value to far-away Germany, they were the key to any future



An aerial view of Garapan Town and the surrounding area taken before the invasion.



A Commercial district of Garapan Town in the 1930's.

Japanese expansion in the Pacific area.

Despite protests raised by the United States, the League of Nations granted Japan a mandate over the islands in 1921. Under the terms of the mandate, Japan was free to administer the islands as "an integral portion of the Empire of Japan" and could "apply the laws of the Empire to the territory subject to such local modifications as circumstances required". In addition, Japan was obligated to "promote to the utmost the material and moral well being and social progress" of the indigenous population of the mandated territory. Japan's freedom of action was subject to only one significant restriction - the islands could not be fortified for military purposes, a condition insisted upon by the United States.

The Japanese administration of the Marianas began in October 1914. Shortly after taking control, the provisional military government expelled all German administrators, traders and missionaries. Military rule continued until 1922

Okinawan fieldworkers cutting and loading sugar cane for shipment to the mill.



when, in accordance with the terms of the League's mandate, it was replaced by the civilian run Nan'yo Cho - or South Seas Government. Headquarters of the Nan'yo Cho was established on Koror, Palau with Saipan serving as the seat of the Marianas Branch administration.

The Marianas soon attracted the attention of Japanese businessmen who hoped to establish profitable ventures in the newly acquired territories. Because of the humid, tropical climate, sugar production appeared to be particularly promising. In 1921, the *Nan'yo Kohatsu Kaisha*—more commonly known as NKK—was established in the Marianas under the direction of Haruji Matsue, an American educated entrepreneur who had earned his fame and fortune producing sugar in Taiwan. Under Matsue's skillful and resourceful management, NKK, after surviving a few lean years, by 1924 began to prosper. In 1925, Matsue expanded his operations to Tinian and Rota. Refining mills, connected to the fields by miles of narrow-gauge railroad tracks, were soon constructed on the three major islands. By the early 1930s, NKK accounted for nearly 60 percent of the revenues of the entire mandate area.

Intensive commercial exploitation, the hallmark of the Japanese administration, was responsible for ushering in profound changes in the Marianas. Large tracts of land on Saipan, Tinian and Rota were cleared of native forest, divided into parcels and planted in cane and a few other commercial crops, greatly changing the physical appearance of the islands. Farm roads were constructed allowing for isolated areas to be developed and, by the mid-1930s, an extensive network of railroad lines linked the cane fields to the sugar mills.

By far the most dramatic change resulting from the commercial development was the rapid growth of the islands' for-

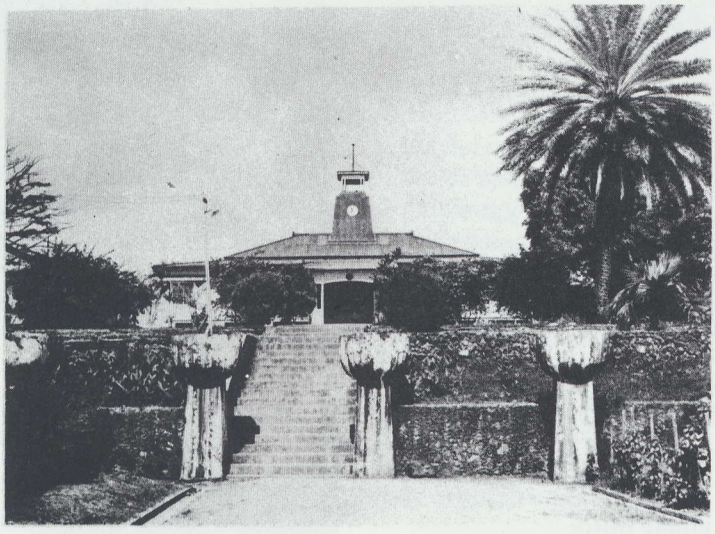




above: Japanese "Pioneers" on a rare day of leisure in 1926.

left: A main street in Garapan Town in the 1930's.

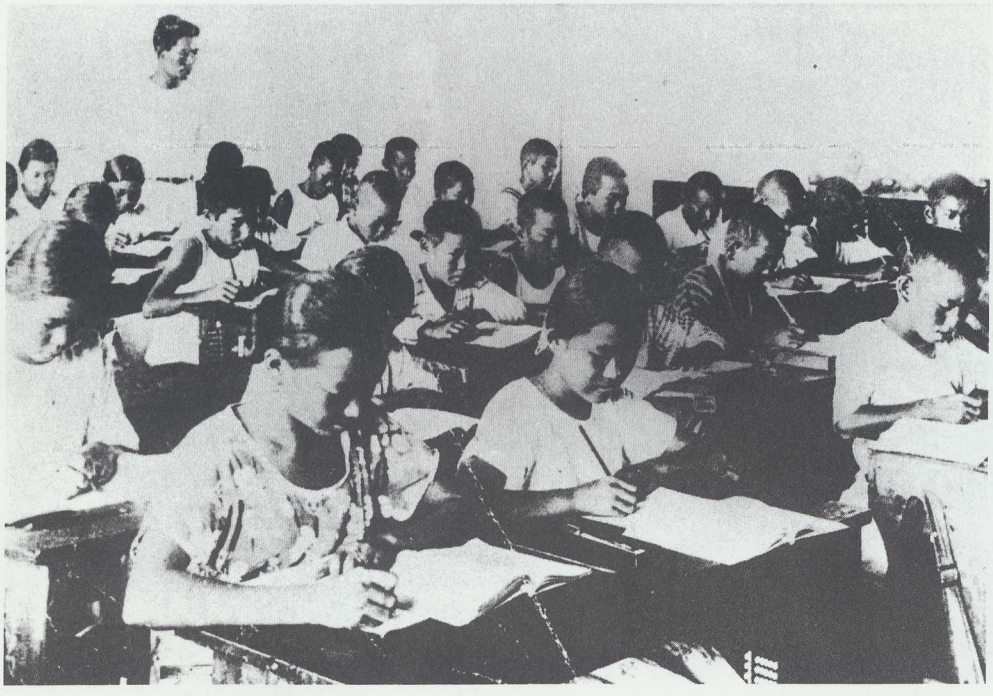
eign population. The sugar industry was a labor intensive operation and many mill and farm laborers were required. While some home island Japanese were brought in, a majority of the immigrants were from Okinawa. By the late 1930s, over 42,000 Japanese nationals resided in the Marianas. In the face of this onslaught, the Chamorros and Carolinians, who numbered slightly more than 4000, were effectively reduced to an insignificant minority in their own islands.



The Japanese government headquarters building on Saipan.

The Nan'yo Cho actively encouraged local residents to develop cultural and emotional ties with the Japanese Empire, especially through public education. Prior to the Japanese administration, education in the Marianas had been the responsibility of Catholic missionaries. However, the Nan'yo Cho soon implemented a compulsory educational system which required local children to attend three years of schooling. In addition to vocational training, the school system placed strong emphasis on the study of the Japanese language and history and the adoption of Japanese cultural values. To supplement classroom instruction, the Nan'yo Cho also encouraged the formation of young men's associations *(seinendan)* in which Japanese moral values were stressed. The administration even arranged for promising students—those being groomed for future leadership positions within the native hierarchy—to be taken on inspirational tours of the Japanese home islands. An important aspect of local culture which remained unchanged during the Japanese administration was the church. Although the Japanese practiced the Shinto and Buddhist faiths, local residents were encouraged to practice their own religion, and Catholicism remained firmly rooted in the Marianas.

Chamorro students hard at work in the 1930's.



The Outbreak of the Pacific War

As the Mariana Islands were being assimilated as an integral part of the Japanese Empire, the Government of Japan began its move towards militarism. The army, which had traditionally played an important role in the affairs of the Japanese nation, assumed an even greater influence over foreign policy in the 1930s.

Japan's attack on China in 1937 raised serious concerns among the Western powers, particularly the United States. Even before the invasion of China, the United States suspected that Japan was secretly fortifying the islands of Micronesia in violation of the League of National Mandate. The U.S was particularly fearful that the Mariana,



Honolulu Star-Bulletin 1st EXTRA

WAR!

(Associated Press by Transpacific Telephone)

SAN FRANCISCO, Dec. 7.—President Roosevelt announced this morning that Japanese planes had attacked Manila and Pearl Harbor.

OAHU BOMBED BY JAPANESE PLANES

SIX KNOWN DEAD, 21 INJURED, AT EMERGENCY HOSPITAL

Attack Made On Island's Defense Areas

Hundreds See City Bombed

Names of Dead and Injured

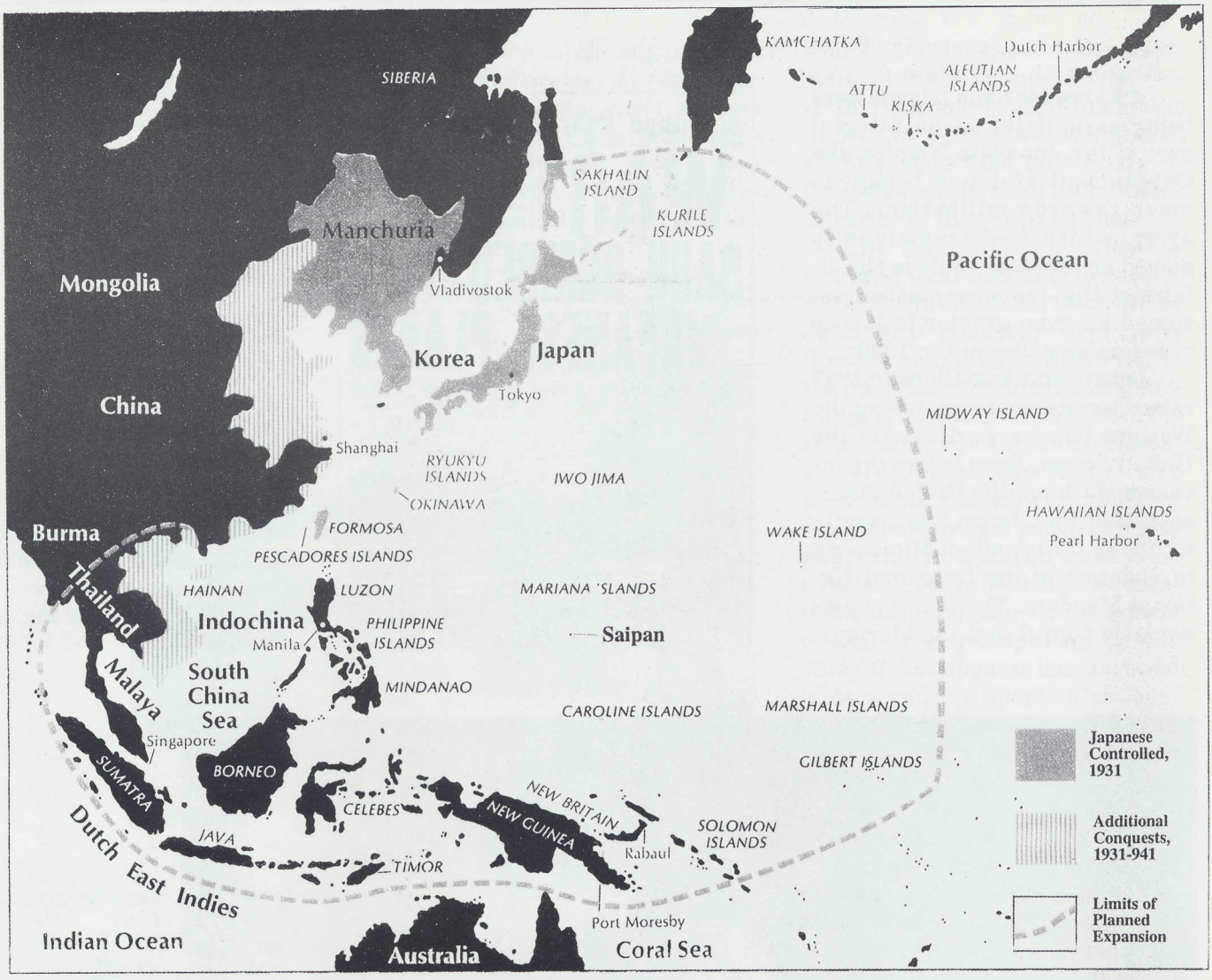
Schools Closed

Editorial

left: Headlines of a Honolulu newspaper announce war in the Pacific.

below: Black clouds billow from the Battleship Arizona. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor started the Pacific War.





A map of the Pacific area showing the apex of Japanese conquests by early 1942.

Caroline and Marshall Islands groups were being fortified by the Japanese preparatory to offensive military operations in the western Pacific area. Unfortunately, the terms of the mandate agreement contained no provisions that permitted the inspection of the territory by League officials. This point became moot, however, when in 1935, the Japanese unilaterally withdrew from the League. By virtue of this action, the islands of Micronesia became *de facto* possessions of the Japanese Empire.

While it is difficult to support the contention that Japan fortified the mandated islands prior to 1940, there is evidence that the construction of seaplane ramps, oil storage facilities and airfields was accelerated. On Saipan, for example, the Japanese constructed a major seaplane base at Punton Flores in 1935 and two years later began the construction of Aslito Field, which would become the principal naval airbase on the island. Between 1934 and 1940 the sum of 14 million yen was appropriated by the



Imperial Japanese Army troops celebrate an early victory.

Japanese government to finance major construction projects in the Marianas. While not of an exclusively military nature, the facilities built during this time had military applications, and later would be utilized by Japanese forces in support of wartime operations.

By early 1941, military construction of a more overt nature commenced. Reinforced gun positions, ammunition storage sheds, communications facilities and radio direction finders were constructed on Saipan. Later in that same year, additional funding was appropriated to allow for the construction of troop barracks, torpedo storage sheds and air raid shelters.

War finally came to the Pacific on 7 December 1941 (8 December Saipan time) after planes of the Imperial Japanese Navy delivered a devastating attack against U.S. forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Although the United States government was aware that Japanese military operations were likely somewhere in the Pacific, the Sunday morning attack against Hawaii caught its military forces completely unprepared. As a result of the attack, the Pacific fleet was severely crippled and, until it could be restored to full strength, the United States was forced to assume a defensive role in the Pacific Theater.

The attack on Pearl Harbor was followed by an unbroken string of Japanese victories starting with the invasion of Guam. Captured within a few weeks of the attack on Pearl Harbor were Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippine Islands.

Emboldened by numerous early victories, the Japanese military chose to continue their rapid advance eastward rather than to consolidate gains already made. Believing that their armed forces were invincible, the Japanese began planning ambitious operations directed against Port Moresby, New Caledonia, Fiji, Samoa, Midway and the Aleutians. The entire course of the Pacific war was to change, however, following the Imperial Navy's unexpected defeat during the battle of Midway in June of 1942. Having lost four heavy carriers and many of its best combat pilots, the Japanese Navy

was forced on to the defensive, a posture it remained in for the remainder of the conflict. Shortly thereafter, American forces were finally ready to launch offensive operations of their own.

The United States, by virtue of its geographical location, vast resources and national interests, was called upon to carry the brunt of the fighting against the Japanese. As early as the 1920s, U.S. military planners had begun devising strategies for defeating the Japanese in a Pacific war. These plans were collectively referred to as the "Orange Plans" and called for a war that would be

> "primarily naval in character ... directed towards the isolation and exhaustion of Japan through control of her vital sea communications and through aggressive operations against her armed forces and her economic life." The plans also anticipated a "step by step process involving seizure and occupation of key Japanese islands in the Marshall and Caroline groups."

The Marianas, by virtue of their more northerly location, did not figure prominently in the early Orange plans.

U.S. military planning, however, was to be affected by the development of a formidable new aircraft, the B-29 Superfortress. Although originally designed to be employed primarily in the European Theater, Pacific strategists quickly realized the aircraft's potential as a strategic weapon. Possessing a range of approximately 5600 kilometers, a bomb capacity in excess of four tons and being heavily armed, the Superfortress was indeed a formidable weapon. Air power proponents were convinced that concentrated Superfortress bombing raids against the Japanese home islands would crush Japan's war industry, thereby avoiding the necessity for launching a costly invasion of Kyushu and Honshu.

All that stood in the way of conducting B-29 raids against Japan was a lack of bases from which to launch them. Since Saipan, Tinian and Guam are all located approximately 2000 kilometers from Japan, and hence within the bombers' range, it was decided that their capture should be given top priority. Accordingly, plans were modified and the Marianas were targeted for seizure as soon as possible after operations in the Marshall Islands were completed.



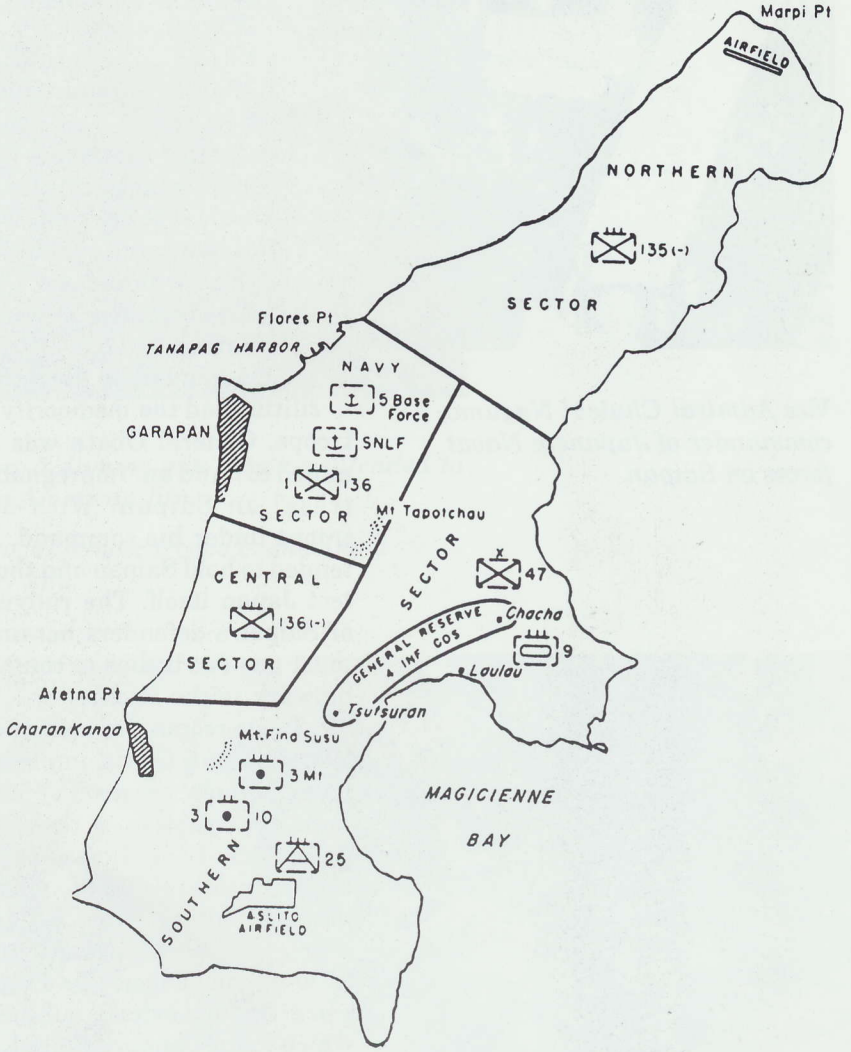
Japanese troops on parade during the early years of the war.

A Bulwark of the Pacific: Japan's Defense of Saipan

Following the loss of key atolls in the Marshall Islands, which fell to American forces in early 1944, the Marianas became the front line of Japan's central Pacific defense. The islands, however, were far from ready to assume this new role. During the early years of the war, Saipan served the Japanese primarily as a staging base for troops, ships and planes engaged in battles well to the east and south. Because of their troop requirements in other parts of the Pacific, the Japanese maintained only a modest garrison on Saipan during the first few years of the war. Even as late as the end of 1943, Saipan was occupied by fewer than 1000 Japanese troops and possessed virtually no fixed defensive positions.

Overall command of the Marianas was split between the 31st Army, commanded by Lt. General Hideyshio Obata, and the Navy's Central Pacific Fleet under the command of Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, of Pearl Harbor fame. Nagumo, however, had no ships and only a few thousand men under his direct authority. Due to inter-service rivalries, no attempt was made by the Japanese to appoint an overall island commander. As a consequence, there was to be virtually no coordination between Army and Navy forces.

Obata's first priority was to reinforce the Saipan garrison and by May 1944 two divisions, two independent brigades and three expeditionary units had been brought to the island. The core of their defense was the 43rd "Glory" Division under the command of General Yoshitsugu Saito. Despite its name, the Glory unit was not an impressive division. Saito, an aging cavalry officer, had no previous combat experience and his men were recent draftees led by inexperienced officers. Moreover, the 43rd, which departed Japan in two separate convoys, had been severely mauled by American submarines while *en route* to the Marianas. The first ech-



Map of Saipan showing principal Japanese defensive sectors.



Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, commander of Japanese Naval forces on Saipan.

elon, with Saito at its head, reached Saipan safely. The second convoy, however, lost five of its seven ships and with them a significant number of men and all of their weapons and equipment. Particularly hard hit was the 118th Regiment. Of its 1000 survivors, half were badly burned or wounded.

Compounding this problem was the unplanned arrival of Japanese "straggler" troops:

> "Other units bound for other islands in the Pacific were similarly shipwrecked and turned up in the Marianas by circumstance not plan, so that Obata's command was increasingly burdened with a motley collection of weaponless units that washed up like flotsam to the shores of Saipan."

Undaunted by the lack of facilities and the mediocrity of his troops, General Obata was determined to build an "impregnable fortress" on Saipan. With 30,000 troops under his command, he intended to hold Saipan and thus protect Japan itself. The rallying cry of Saipan's defenders became "we must use our bodies to construct a bulwark in the Pacific."

To overcome the lack of defensive positions, Obata implemented an emergency program of fortifications construction, a task greatly hampered by the shortage of materials. By March 1944, when the main Japanese effort began, the Marianas were virtually cut off from Japan. Especially dangerous were the American submarines which found Japanese supply ships to be inviting and easy targets. Thousands of tons of much needed equipment and supplies reached the bottom of the Pacific rather than Saipan during a four-month period in early 1944. This situation was described by a Japanese officer on Saipan:

> "We cannot strengthen the fortifications appreciably now unless we can get materials suitable for permanent construction . . . no matter how many soldiers there are they can do nothing in regard to fortifications but sit around with their arms folded . . ."

The shortage of materials was aggravated by the shortage of time and the relatively large size of Saipan. Although the exact date of the American attack was not known, the Japanese realized that the blow would probably fall within six months. Following an initial period of inactivity, construction work was carried out around the clock by all available military and civilian personnel.

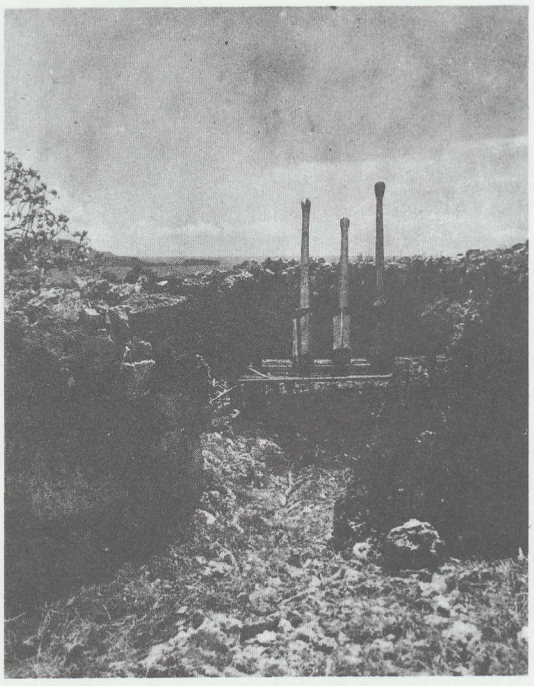
Japanese defensive efforts were also to be affected by the prevailing defensive strategy adhered to by the military at this time. Since the beginning of American amphibious attacks in the Pacific, the Japanese military utilized a defensive strategy that called for meeting the enemy's attack at the beachhead and driving the invaders into the sea. As a consequence, little attention was directed to developing interior positions that could be occupied when beach defenses were overrun. Although this 'meet-them-at-the-beach' strategy made sense on the small, low-lying coral atolls of the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, it was not appropriate for the large, rugged high islands in the Marianas, where the terrain was tailor made for in-depth defenses. Fortunately for the invading American forces, the Japanese remained true to form and concentrated their defenses within the coastal fringe in areas suspected of being likely American invasion locations.

A final blow to Japanese defensive efforts resulted from the last-

minute absence of its most experienced combat commander. Obata mistakenly suspected that Palau was to be the next American target and a few weeks before the invasion of Saipan he left for the southern defense district on an inspection trip. This miscalculation left Obata stranded in Palau with no way of returning to Saipan before the battle commenced. In his absence, Saito assumed command of all Army units. Although Nagumo was the senior military officer on the island, he exercised no control over Army troops who made up the bulk of the island's garrison. As a result, the primary responsibility of commanding the defense of Saipan fell on the shoulders of an aging officer ill-equipped to deal with modern warfare.

In February 1944, Chamorro and Carolinian residents of Garapan were ordered to their farms and the town was taken over by the military. Houses were used as troop billets and the Catholic Church converted into a storehouse. Able-bodied men were soon pressed into labor gangs to work on defensive positions while women and children were sent to tend vegetable gardens in order to feed the island's expanded population.

The following month, the Japanese ship *Amerika Maru,* left Saipan bound for Japan loaded with 1,700 passengers, most of whom were family members of employees working for the island's large commercial firms and a handful of high-ranking government officials. Thousands of other civilians, mostly Koreans and Okinawans, resigned themselves to the task of defending Saipan from the rapidly approaching enemy.

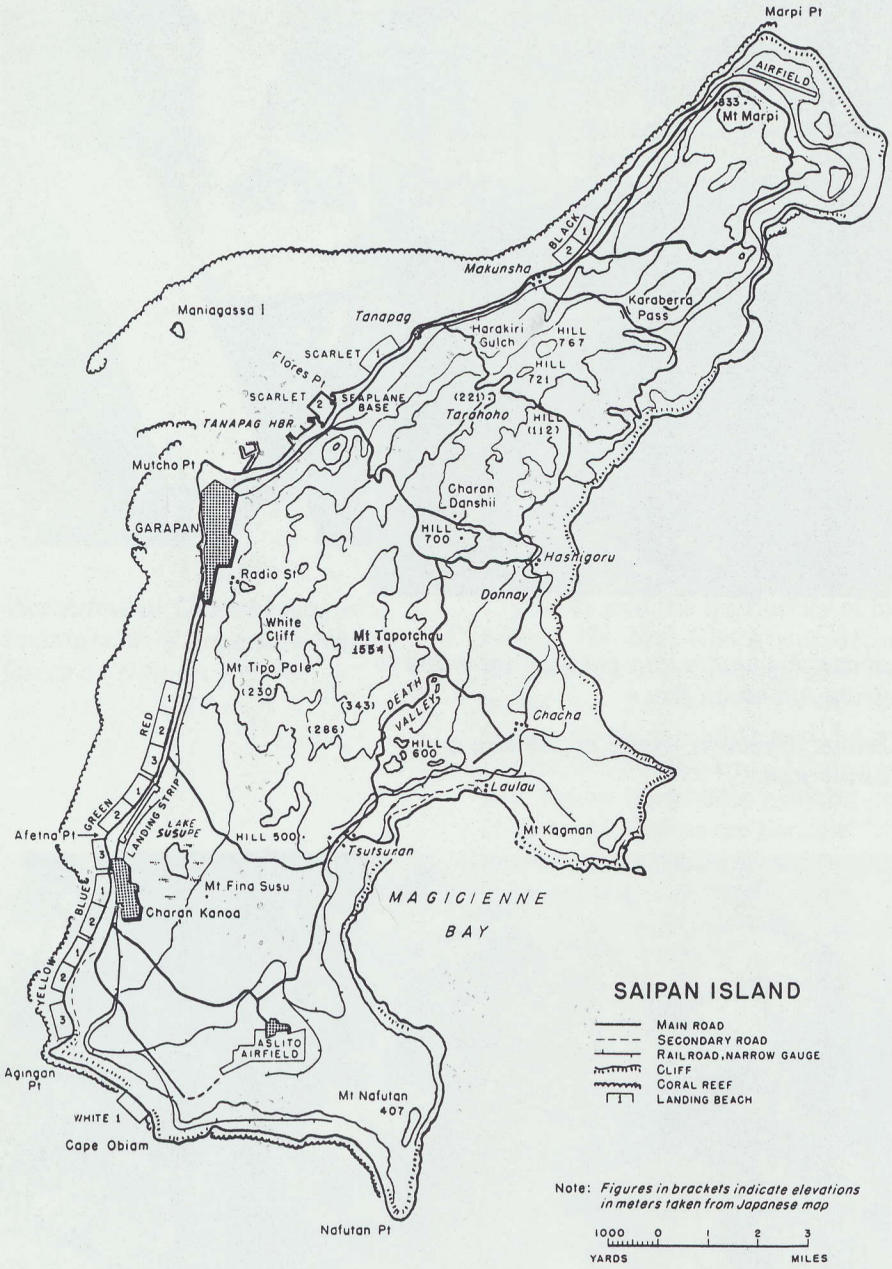


above: A dummy gun position intended to draw American fire.

below: Japanese troops emplacing a heavy gun.



Operation Forager: The Battle for Saipan



Map of Saipan showing principal American landing beaches.

The invasion of the Marianas, which would begin with Saipan, was code named Forager. More than 105,000 combat troops supported by a naval task force comprising over 500 ships were to attack, with some 66,000 men participating in the invasion of Saipan and Tinian. The 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions supported by the 27th Army Infantry Division were to invade Saipan. Invasion date was 15 June.

On 11 June over 200 carrier-based fighters and bombers, launched from Admiral Mitscher's Task Force 58 located to the northeast, hit Saipan. These raids continued for three days and virtually wiped out Japanese air power and damaged defensive positions around the island. On 13 June, the main elements of the U.S. invasion fleet arrived off Saipan and began the pre-landing bombardment. During the first day of action, seven battleships and eleven destroyers fired over 15,000 rounds of sixteen inch and five inch shells at military targets along Saipan's western coast. The bombardment, which continued for three full days, heavily damaged Garapan Town and Chalan Kanoa and caused casualties among Japanese defenders. As one Japanese participant noted:

> "The first salvos exploded along the beach. The extreme intensity of those flashes and boiling clouds of smoke still remain in my mind. They went sixty meters straight up. Huge guns! From battleships.



An American carrier bomber attacking Japanese positions during preinvasion bombardment. Japanese planes can be seen burning on the ground at Aslito Field.

> The area I was in was pitted like the craters of the Moon. We just clung to the earth in our shallow trenches . . . half buried."

On the eve of the invasion, men of the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions, under the command of Lt. General Holland Smith, were packed in the LST's steaming a few miles off Saipan. At 0200 on the morning of 15 June they were awakened by the braying of ships' horns and soon began the familiar pre-landing ritual which included a breakfast of steak and eggs. Before sunrise, they clambered into the amphibian tractors or "amtracs" where they awaited the order to "Land the Landing Craft."

At approximately 0840, the first wave of amtracs began churning towards the landing beaches, code named Yellow, Blue, Green and Red, which stretched along the island's southwestern shore. Once within the reef, they encountered heavy automatic weapons, antiboat guns and artillery and mortar barrages. Resistance increased as the second and third waves headed for shore. Particularly deadly was the heavy and accurate artillery fire which came from Japanese positions in the hills to the east of the invasion beaches.

The landings did not proceed according to plans and by mid-day, the invasion beaches were covered with a confused mass of men, equipment and supplies. At day's end, following heavy fighting, the Marines had succeeded in securing a beach head 10,000 yards long and 1000 yards deep. This gain had come at the cost of over 2000 casualties, many of



American Amtracs off Saipan.

Marines hit the beach under heavy Japanese fire, 15 June 1944.



which were officers. According to one source, 15 June

> "turned out to be the roughest day in Marine Corps history for majors and lieutenant-colonels. In a very few hours, the personnel of the command changed amazingly, and yet the Division never became disorganized, and there was always someone—at whatever level—to carry on."

In accordance with their meet-them-at-the-beach strategy, the Japanese launched a major counterattack against Marine lines during the early morning hours of 16 June. More than 1000 Japanese troops, backed by 44 tanks, smashed into positions held by elements of the 2nd Marines. The battle

"evolved into a madhouse of

Navajo Code Talkers

One essential element of the American victory at Saipan and at other Pacific battle sites was a special code used to transmit combat messages. Rather than devising an actual code, the Marines Corps. utilized a little-known Native American language, Navajo, which they hoped would withstand deciphering. In 1942, the first Navajo volunteers were recruited from reservations in Arizona and New Mexico and underwent special training. After training, the Code Talkers, as they came to be called, were assigned to Marine units in the Pacific Theater. Navajo Code Talkers participated in every Marine assault in the Pacific undertaken between 1942 and 1945, including the battles for Saipan, Tinian and Guam. The code was never broken and the accurate messages transmitted and received by the Navajo Code Talkers contributed significantly to eventual defeat of the Japanese. In 1982, in a belated recognition of this contribution, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed 18 August as "National Navajo Code Talkers Day."

noise, tracers and flashing lights. As tanks were hit and set afire, they silhouetted other tanks coming out of the flickering shadows to the front or already on top of the squads."

The attack was beat back by concentrated naval fire, and at sunrise the smoking hulks of 24 Japanese tanks and hundreds of dead Japanese troops were found at the edge of Marine positions.

For the next two days, Marines pushed steadily inland against heavy Japanese resistance. By the evening of 16 June, most of the southern part of the island east of Aslito Field was in American hands, and the following day the assault of Mt. Fina Sisu began. Marines also advanced to the northeast as they approached the southern outskirts of Garapan Town.

On 17 June, two regiments of the 27th Infantry Division were committed to the fighting. Among the first objectives of the troops, under the command of Major General Ralph Smith, was the Japanese airfield at Aslito. It was overrun by the evening of 18 June. Following this, Army troops assaulted Japanese positions within the Nauftan Peninsula which lay to the east of the airfield.

Although the Japanese defenders were being pushed back on all fronts, their morale was bolstered by the word that a powerful Japanese naval strike force, under the command of Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa, was steaming to the Marianas to destroy the American fleet and end the siege of Saipan. Ozawa's First Mobil Fleet, eager to fight the long awaited "decisive battle", engaged Mitschers' Task Force 58 in the Battle of the Philippine Sea on 18 June. It soon became

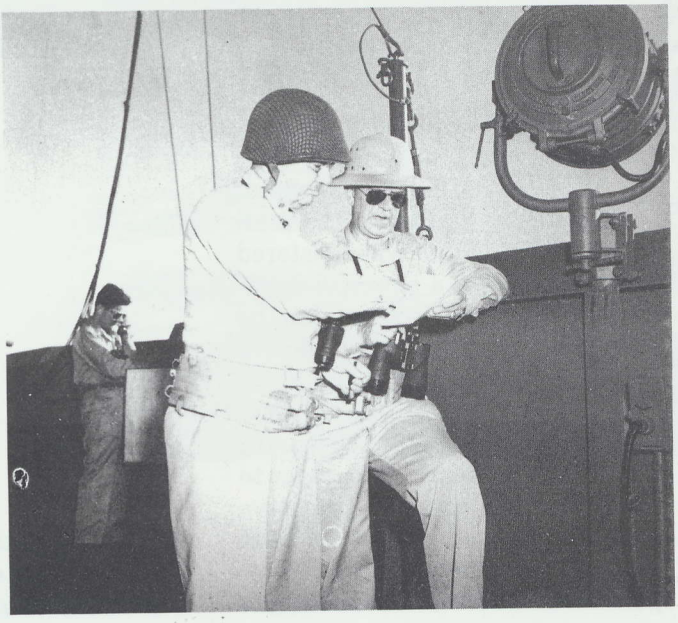


Equipment and supplies clog the invasion beaches during the first days of fighting.

clear that Ozawa's zeal was not enough; his outdated aircraft and poorly trained pilots were no match for the powerful American carrier force. During the two day battle, the Japanese lost over 300 aircraft in what became known as the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot." With this defeat, Japanese naval air power evaporated and the fate of the Saipan garrison sealed.

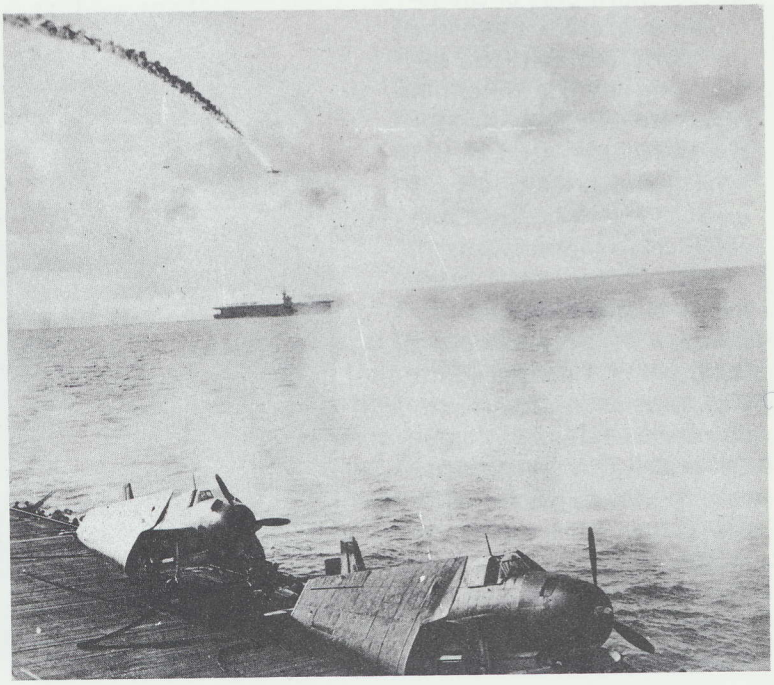
After securing most of southern Saipan, American forces wheeled north. The order of battle had the 2nd Marines on the left, the 27th Army in the middle and the 4th Marines on the right. In the hilly interior, well-armed Japanese troops used the terrain to the best defensive advantage and the going was slow especially for Army units, which met well-defended enemy positions in the "Death Valley" area. The 27th's failure to promptly take its objective led to the dismissal of its commander, General Ralph Smith, and to the well-known controversy between the Marines and the Army. After days of bloody fighting, the Death Valley area finally fell to Army troops.

Another important objective was Saipan's highest peak, Mt. Tapochau, which possessed a commanding view of the entire island. This imposing feature was honeycombed with caves, each of which was a personal fortress. On 27 June, it was captured by the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Marines. A



above: General Holland Smith (on left), commander of American invasion forces.

right: A Japanese plane plummets in flames during the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot.



Local Scouts

The island of Saipan was officially declared secure on 9 July 1944. In spite of this proclamation, however, many more weeks of fighting were necessary to neutralize hundreds of Japanese defenders who refused to surrender. To aid in this dangerous work, the Marines recruited local Chamorro and Carolinian men to serve as guides. Most were in their late teens and were selected because of their knowledge of the island's terrain and the location of Japanese strongpoints. Each was given a uniform and weapon and assigned to a Marine unit. The work was dangerous and the scouts, as these local volunteers were called, often came under heavy Japanese fire. Their services, although never officially recognized by the United States military, saved many American lives and contributed significantly to the final victory.

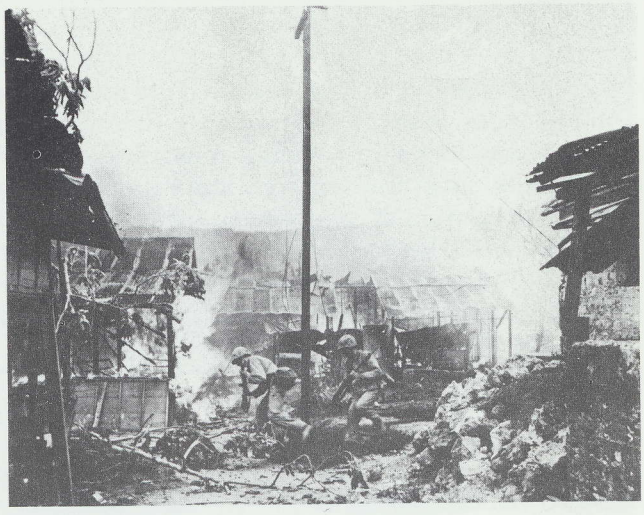


Dead tired troops take advantage of a lull in the fighting for a quick nap.



American troops cautiously inspect a reinforced Japanese tunnel.

Marines dash through the flaming ruins of Garapan Town.



Weary Marines carrying in a fallen buddy for burial.



Troops pay their last respects to commrades killed in action.



combat correspondent who accompanied the Marines during the final assault provided the following observation of events:

> "I spent three hours on the highest crag of Tapochau today, seventy minutes of it pinned flat while Japanese snipers killed one Marine and wounded two others. I wanted to see what breed of men captured this peak, which as an observation post commands the entire island, and I found assault Marines of unrivaled fearlessness, courage and tenacity."

With the failure of their defensive efforts south of Mt. Tapochau, General Saito realized there was little chance the island could be held. Despite the hopeless military situation, troops were told that "positions are to be defended to the bitter end, and unless he has other orders every soldier must stand his ground." True to their orders and tradition, surviving Japanese troops fought tenaciously for every foot of territory.

On the morning of 2 July, Marines moved into Garapan, the island's largest settlement, precipitating the first urban fighting experienced by American troops in the Pacific theater. As the Marines moved in, they found a devastated town. Garapan was little more than a mass of rubble, and while there was stiff Japanese resistance the Marines, supported by tanks and armored amphibians were able to occupy half of the town by day's end. The attack on Garapan was supported by a flanking assault performed by elements of the 2nd Marines which had been positioned on the mountain slopes to the east of town. On 3 July

> "they surged around the great Royal Palm park, where on a 40-foot shaft, was the double life-size



A terrified Okinawan women and her two children are rescued from their cave hideout.



Marines take time out from the fighting to bring local civilians to safety.

statue of a Japanese statesman dressed in western clothing. They sheared over the gentle ridge where the homes of the wealthier mainland Japanese were spread in neat landscaped rows . . . some of which still had unmarred ornamental gardens. Delicate modeled concrete bridges, crossed tiny, burbling brooks and shell-shocked tropical fish floated belly up on the now dirty waters of decorated ponds."

By the evening of 3 July, most of Garapan had been secured. The following day, Marines succeeded in reaching the Japanese sea-plane base at Punton Flores which they found deserted except for a few snipers and the burned wrecks of eight huge Japanese seaplanes. Moving along the flat coastal plain, elements of the 27th Army Division approached Tanapag Village, which was on a small point of land on the beach. The village fell to American forces on July 5.

By this time, the Americans were confronted with a new problem; how to deal with the thousands of civilians who were caught in the deadly crossfire of two opposing armies:

"Japanese, Chamorros and Korean laborers had fled their homes at the outset of the invasion and taken refuge in the hills. As troops advanced, whole families, from aged grandfathers to tiny infants, were flushed out of hiding. This created a ticklish problem for our



A battle hardened Marine offers candy to a child in the internment camp.

men, for it was difficult to distinguish Japanese soldiers from Saipan farmers who wore the same type of clothing."

Specially trained Japanese-speaking language officers went out daily to convince terrified civilians to surrender. Due largely to their efforts, which often involved exposure to Japanese fire, many thousands of civilians were taken into protective custody and placed in internment camps run by civil affairs personnel. In the beginning, these camps were nothing more than tents surrounded by barb wire. Later, more permanent facilities were constructed. Although primitive, these camps provided food, shelter and emergency medical treatment to thousands of starved, injured and shell-shocked individuals who were lucky enough to have escape death on the battlefield.



Local civilians take comfort from their strong religious traditions.

With the capture of Tanapag Village, U.S. forces were ready to begin the final assault against Japanese positions in northern Saipan. On 6 July Army troops were ordered north to bring their lines abreast of the Marines operating on their right. Nightfall on 6 July found the American forces dug in several hundred yards north and east of Tanapag Village. One matter of concern was a 500 yard gap in the lines between the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 105th and Company G. The ground was flat in the area and the battalion commander took the precaution of siting all available antitank guns on the gap.

While the Americans were digging in for the night of July 6, the Japanese made last-minute arrangements for a final offensive operation. Facing overwhelming firepower, General Saito no longer held allusions about the outcome of the battle. Rather than allowing his men to be destroyed piecemeal, he decided to launch a *gyokusai* attack, a term that translates to mean "crushing the jewel." Its military implication was that all surviving units would be destroyed in a final battle. Unable to make such a decision on his own, Saito requested, and soon received, permission from Imperial headquarters in Tokyo.

In a written message, Saito called upon surviving troops to deliver a heavy blow against the Americans and promised to leave his own bones "as a bulwark of the Pacific." Too feeble to participate in the attack himself, Saito, together with Admiral Nagumo, committed suicide in a cave in a valley above Matansa village. Even without their commanding officers, surviving Japanese troops began preparing for the final charge. The attackers were drawn from almost every unit remaining on the island.

By the early hours of 7 July, about 3000 Japanese troops had massed near Matansa Village two kilometers north of Tanapag. Many troops were poorly armed, some

with makeshift spears fashioned from knives or bayonets lashed to bamboo poles. Five light tanks supported this motley collection of service and combat troops. The attack began at 0400. The first to feel the impact of the charge were the 1st and 2nd Army battalions of the 105th. At 0530, the regimental commander telephoned division headquarters and advised them that they were under heavy mortar attack. The two isolated battalions were overrun by 0630 after a fierce but hopeless fight. Typical of the conduct of the American forces was Lt. Colonel William J. O'Brien, commander of the 1st Battalion. Although wounded, O'Brien manned a machine-gun until he was cut down. Shortly before he was killed, he radioed the command post and told them

> "There are only 100 men left from the 1st and 2nd battalions. For God's sake, get us some ammunition and water and medical supplies right away."

Reinforcements could not get through, and the remnants of these two battalions fell back to the ruined village of Tanapag, where house to house fighting followed.

As the Japanese continued their southerly movement, they approached the 3rd Battalion of the 10th Marines who had moved into position the previous day to provide supporting fire for the 23rd Marines. The most forward position, Battery H, was soon assaulted by nearly 500 Japanese equipped with machine guns, rifles, grenades and tanks. To hit the advancing Japanese without endangering nearby American positions, batterymen cut their fuses to four-tenths of a second. As a result, shells exploded only 50 yards forward of their positions. As the fighting grew more intense, one battery was wheeled around and brought to bear on a Japanese tank advancing from the rear. Nearly surrounded, the surviving batterymen were forced to spike their guns and fall back.

After overrunning the Marine battery, the Japanese tide surged south, approaching the regimental command post of the 105th. Here the tiring Japanese troops were unable to break through the American positions and the charge began to lose momentum. By 1130, the Japanese attack was considered stopped, although several hours of fighting remained to silence isolated pockets of resistance.

By 1800, most of the ground lost to the Japanese attack had been recaptured. The Japanese *gyokusai* attack, called by American survivors "The Raid" had been costly to both sides. American casualties were 451 killed and 592 wounded. Japanese casualties were much higher, somewhere in the neighborhood of 3000.

The mass attack on 7 July ended organized Japanese resistance on Saipan and at 1650 on 9 July, 1944, the island officially was declared "secured". Despite this proclamation, many weeks of dangerous "mopping up" operations were necessary to complete the destruction of small groups of Japanese who hid in the many caves that honeycomb the hills of northern Saipan. In spite of concerted American efforts, a sizable band of combat troops, under the command of Captain Oba, continued to put up limited resistance until finally surrendering in December of 1945, nearly five months after Japan's capitulation.

At 1220 on 9 July the American flag was raised at Marpi Point. A few hours later, an official flag raising ceremony marking the conquest of the island was held at Corps Headquarters in the ruined village of Chalan Kanoa. It had taken 25 days of fighting and more than 3000 American casualties to capture Saipan. While the cost was

high, the victory was essential. In the words of one observer: "Saipan was more than a mere stepping stone to Tokyo. It was an intersection on the main highway."

In a tragic postscript to the battle, hundreds of Japanese and Okinawan civilians, mostly women and children, committed mass suicide at the northern end of Saipan. Although thousands of civilians had been captured and were safely housed in internment camps at southern end of Saipan, hundreds had fled northward in advance of the pursuing American troops. Convinced that they would suffer torture and death at the hands of the enemy, many chose suicide over surrender. Some individuals hiding in caves used hand grenades to blow themselves up (and often other members of their family) while hundreds of others gathered atop the high cliffs which front the sea at Banaderu. In vain, Japanese speaking American interpreters in small boats just offshore pleaded with the terrified crowds to surrender and save themselves, but the ocean soon became so thick with floating bodies that the American naval craft were unable to steer a course without running into them.



Burial ceremonies for General Saito.



American flag raising ceremonies in Chalan Kanoa Village, 9 July 1945.

Saipan as an Airbase

Even as the fighting for Saipan raged, American construction battalions began work on air facilities needed to accommodate the B-29 Superfortress. Work was initially focused on Aslito Airfield, which previously had served as the principal Japanese naval air facility on the island. Aslito was renamed Isely Field in honor of Lt. Commander Robert H. Isely, a navy pilot killed during a preinvasion bombing attack.

Five Army Engineer Aviation Battalions were assigned the task of transforming Isely Field into an operational B-29 base. These battalions built two runways, 186 hardstands, taxiways, fuel and bomb storage facilities, mess halls and other support buildings. The demand for coral fill was so great that a special haul road was built connecting several coral quarries to Isely Field. This road was restricted to trucks hauling coral, which left quarries every twenty seconds, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Isely Field, which was the first operational B-29 facility in the Pacific, received its first Superfortress on 12 October 1944 when *Joltin Josie the Pacific Pioneer* touched down on the just completed runway. Following *Joltin Josie,* two or three B-29s arrived daily and by 1 November, most of the aircraft of the 73rd Bomb Wing were on Saipan.

The first B-29 mission against Japan was launched from Isely field on 16 November 1944. In March of 1945, a new technique, fire bombing, was employed against Japanese targets for the first time. On March 9, more than 300 bombers from Saipan, Tinian and Guam



Captain Sakae Oba surrenders his sword to Marine Major Herman Lewis on 1 December 1945.

Camp Susupe

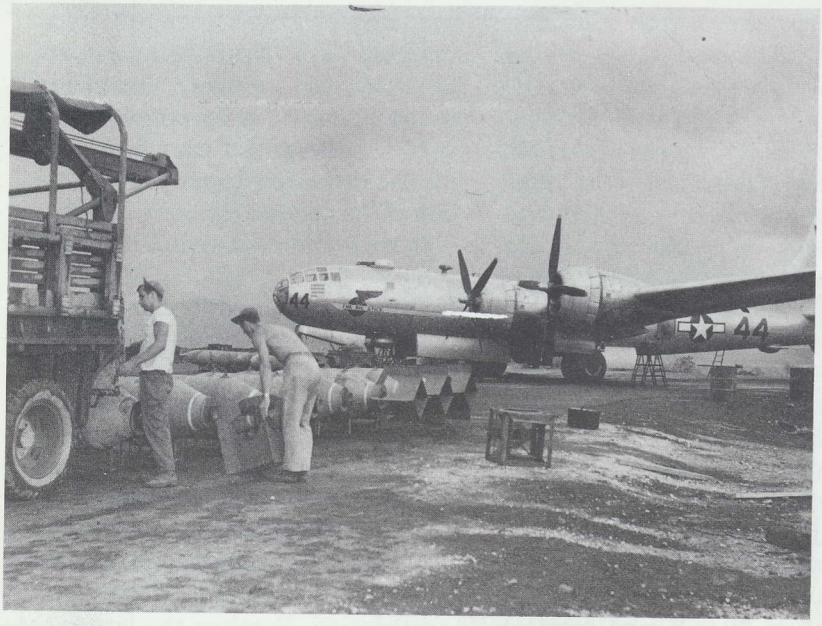
Saipan was the first Pacific battle site where American forces encountered large numbers of civilians. During the fighting, thousands were taken into protective custody by American forces. In order to house these individuals, a large interment camp was constructed along the southwest coast of the island. Camp Susupe, as the facility was called, contained three separate compounds: one for Japanese and Okinawans who were considered to be enemy civilians, one for Koreans and a third for Chamorros and Carolinians. While living conditions were less than ideal, food, medical treatment and secure shelter provided in the camp ensured the survival of thousands who would have otherwise perished from hunger, injury and illness. In 1946, Japanese, Okinawan and Korean civilians were repatriated to their home countries and in July of the same year, the camp's gates were opened permanently.

launched the first concentrated fire bombing raid against Tokyo. The results were staggering. Over 1600 tons of incendiaries were dropped causing intense firestorms which destroyed 25 square kilometers of Tokyo. By the end of the month, 51 square kilometers of area in four Japanese cities had been destroyed. These raids continued and resulted in the destruction of large areas of Japan. Only a few temple cities, such as Nara and Kyoto, were spared.

As effective as these new techniques were, the most devastating force was yet to be used against Japan. On 6 August 1945, a Tinian based B-29, nicknamed the *Enola Gay* dropped the first atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. The force of this new weapon completely leveled the city. Three days later, on 9 August, *Bock' s Car,* another Tinian based B-29, dropped a second atomic bomb, this time on Nagasaki, with similar results. These two bombs killed over 100,000 persons and are credited with hastening Japan's surrender. In an emotional address to his subjects, the Emperor of Japan an-



Lt. Colonel John Wilkenson and crew of the B-29 Satan's Sister.



Ground crew preparing to load bombs aboard a Saipan based B-29.

nounced his government's intention to surrender to Allied powers soon after the bombing of Nagasaki. Surrender ceremonies, aboard the U.S. Battleship *Missouri* anchored in Tokyo Bay, were held on 2 September 1945. With the signing of the peace agreement, the long and bloody war in the Pacific came to an official end.

Considerable debate continues regarding the use of the atomic bombs against Japan. Proponents claim that the destruction wrought by the bombs convinced Japanese leaders that further resistance was futile and, as a consequence, spared millions of casualties on both sides that would have resulted from an invasion of the Japanese home islands. Critics point out that by July Japanese leaders were well aware of the hopelessness of the military situation and were willing to surrender provided that a few face-saving conditions could be met.

While the debate over the use of atomic weaponry may never be resolved, there is no doubt that conventional B-29 raids launched from Isely Field and other bases in the Marianas broke the back of Japan's war industry. B-29s of the 73rd Wing flew a total of 9,894 combat sorties and dropped 48,532 tons of bombs on Japanese targets. By the end of the war, few targets remained. The 73rd compiled this impressive record at the cost of 183 aircraft lost and 1033 men killed.

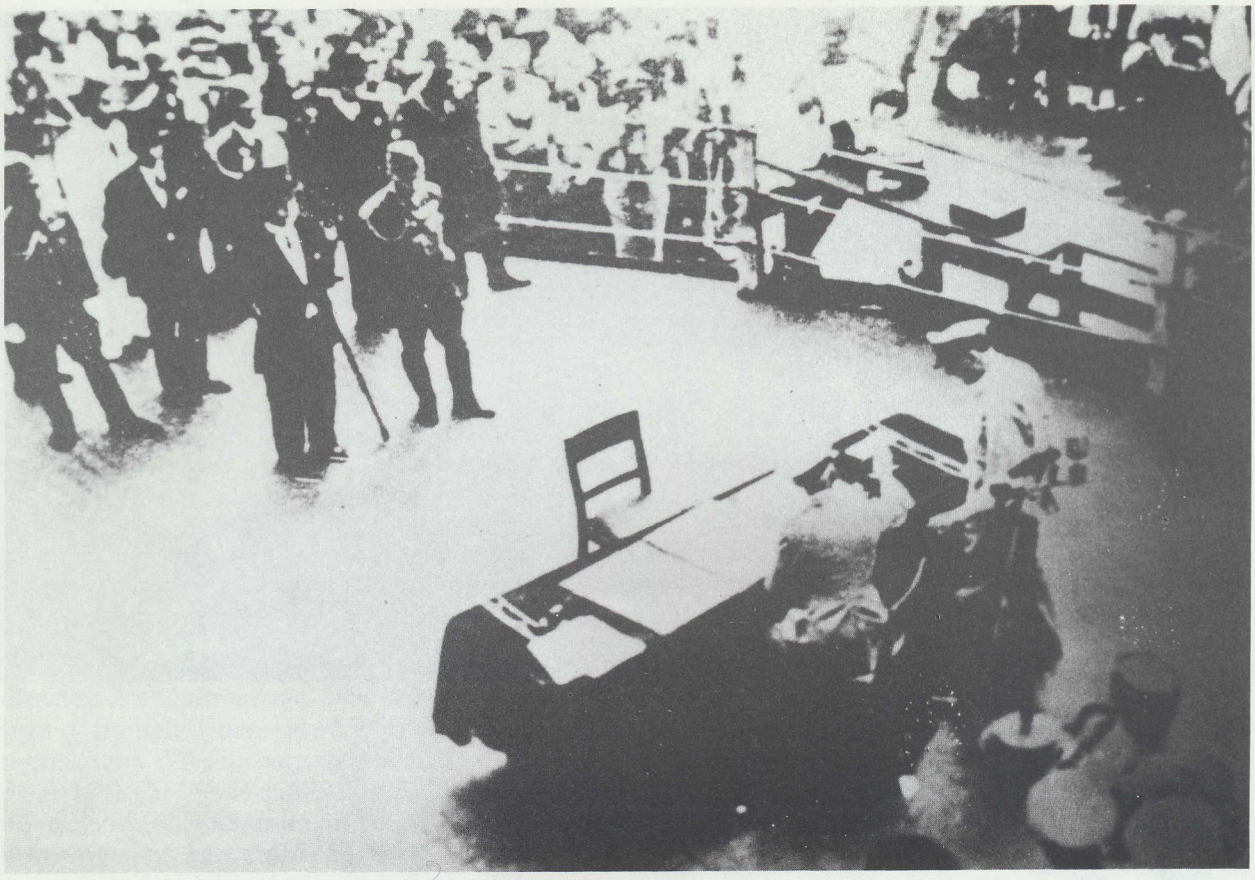
1944 Babies

Almost 150 Chamorro and Carolinian babies were born in 1944. Many of them either starved to death or died of dehydration—casualties of Operation Forager. These tragic losses left many a family scarred. Born into a devastated world, the survivors grew up with their developing island. Many were among the first islanders educated on the U.S. mainland. They returned with new ideas, fresh insights and the determination that their island thrive. The 1990 census shows 92 persons born in 1944 still living on Saipan. Many have become leaders in the community. They have gathered together to observe the 50th Anniversary by organizing several events for the returning veterans. As a group they will march in the parade honoring the WWII veterans on June 15.

Saipan: The Aftermath

The battle for Saipan and the total defeat of its Japanese defenders had long reaching effects, some of which are felt even today.

For the Japanese, the loss of Saipan, and the near total annihilation of its 30,000 man garrison, represented a major strategic setback. Their inner defensive perimeter had been pierced and the home islands would soon be vulnerable to destructive bombing attacks that would eventually lead to final capitulation. Further, the losses suf-



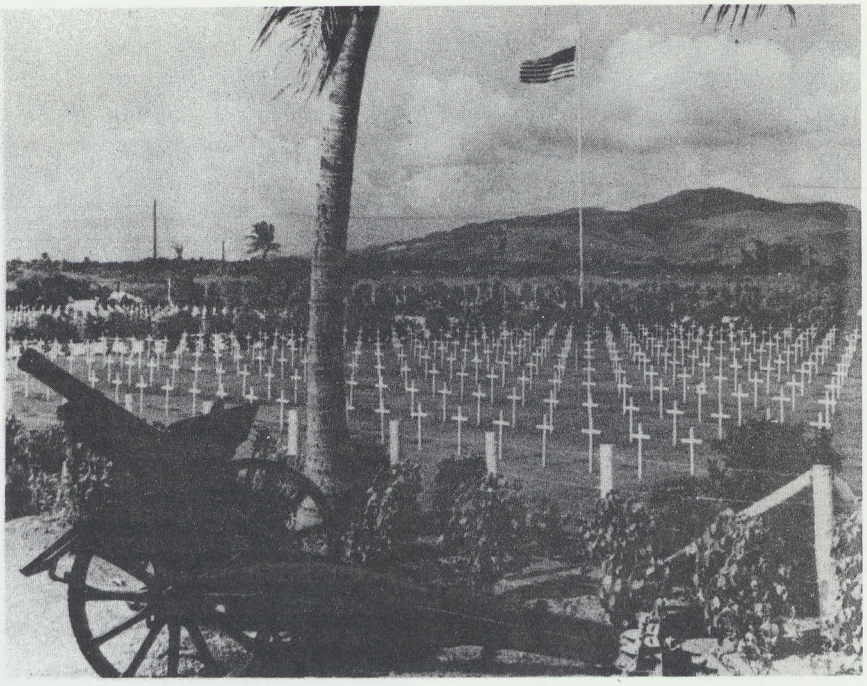
The Pacific Was was brought to an end when surrender documents were signed aboard the U.S.S. Missouri on 2 September 1945.

fered during the Battle of the Philippine Sea essentially drained Japan's naval air power in the Central Pacific theater. The defeat at Saipan came as a profound shock to the Japanese military leadership and the general public and led directly to the resignation of Prime Minister Tojo and the fall of his government.

The loss of Saipan also resulted in major revisions to Japanese defensive doctrine. One prominent change to military practice was the ban on *gyokusai* attacks, which had featured so prominently in earlier Pacific battles. While they undoubtedly provided tradition-bound Japanese soldiers with the opportunity for honorable death, they did little to defeat the Americans. If the battle for Saipan had to be continued, it would have been far better to retreat to defensive positions and wage a war of attrition on the American attackers. In both cases there was only defeat, but the second course of action would have forced the enemy to pay a much higher price. This lesson was not lost on the Japanese high command. After the fall of the Marianas, Japanese defensive strategy underwent a fundamental change. Henceforth, defense was to be in depth. American landings, for the most part, would not be contested at the beaches. Rather, positions would be established in areas suited for defensive warfare. There were

right: One of three American cemeteries established on Saipan following the battle. A total of 3,126 Marines and soldiers were killed during the capture of Saipan.

below: A Shinto Shrine spared destruction during the battle for Saipan.





to be no more suicide charges. The results of this new policy were to be seen in the higher American casualty figures on Peleliu, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

In addition to the military implications of the defeat, the loss of Saipan was felt by thousands of Japanese and Okinawans who had made the island their home. For two generations, the Pioneers, as the Japanese settlers called themselves, had labored to transform Saipan into a prosperous outpost of the Empire. They had fought the humid tropical heat and unfamiliar surroundings to clear dense jungle, plant crops, build roads and factories and raise families. With the coming of the war, most found themselves stranded with no way of returning to the safety of the home islands. During the invasion, civilians were forced to hide in caves and undergo the terrifying naval bombardment that went on around the clock for weeks. Many died and those who survived were placed in civilian camps where they

later learned of their country's defeat. Others had the opportunity to glimpse at the total destruction of their 30 years of toil, as once orderly cane fields and busy factories lay in ruins. In 1946, these individuals were unceremoniously repatriated to Japan and Okinawa and all contact with their former homes was ended.

For the victorious Americans, the Marianas campaign was a final vindication of their deadly island-hopping strategy which was used effectively in the vast reaches of the Central Pacific. With its industrial and technological might, the American military was able to project overwhelming power half way around the globe and bring the war directly to the Japanese. The capture of Saipan represented a strategic victory since its acquisition led directly to the final defeat of a determined enemy. Saipan, and later Tinian and Guam, were quickly transformed into giant airbases which placed Japanese targets within range of the B-29 bomber. Daily bombing raids launched from Saipan airfields left much of Japan in smoking ruins and the atomic bomb raids launched from nearby Tinian forced Japan's surrender without the need for a costly invasion of the home islands. The price in human terms for this strategic acquisition was high; over 14,000 American casualties including 3126 men killed in action.

In addition to the immediate effect on the Pacific war, the capture of Saipan and the subsequent acquisition of all of Japan's former Micronesian holdings turned the Pacific into an "American Lake" for the next 40 years. The possession of these small but strategically placed islands, awarded to the United States as a Strategic Trust Territory by the United Nations, was a key factor during the cold war struggle with the Soviet Union and ensured that the Russian bear



A young victim of the battle.



American doctors operate on a civilian injured during the fighting.



Japanese and Okinawan children whose parents were killed during the battle.

An American G.I. talks with local civilians residing in a temporary internment camp.



would remain bottled up on the landmass of Asia. The acquisition of the Micronesian islands also brought about long-term social and economic responsibilities which America assumed under the terms of Trusteeship agreement.

Finally, it is only fitting to examine the effects the battle for Saipan had on the island's indigenous inhabitants, a topic which has received little or no attention in most historical accounts. Chamorros and Carolinians had played no role in bringing about the Pacific War. They had simply been at the right place at the wrong time. The most obvious impact of the battle was the large number of local residents killed during the fighting. Although the exact number of dead has never been established, recent research suggests that more than 700 Chamorros and Carolinians were lost during the battle. While this number at first glance may appear modest, it should be kept in mind that the entire native population of Saipan totaled slightly more than 4000 on the eve of the invasion. Those killed during the battle represented nearly eighteen percent of the population.

Even those fortunate enough to avoid death were not spared the trauma associated with the battle. After surviving weeks of intensive bombardment, local residents, often in poor physical shape, were taken to a makeshift civilian camp in Susupe. Most had only the clothes on their backs. Their homes and personal property were gone and their lives were changed forever. When the gates of Camp Susupe were opened in July of 1946, local residents found an island which had undergone a radical change. Gone were their homes, fields, livestock and even their churches. In their places were huge airfields and extensive military facilities all connected by a new network of paved roads. For the third time in less

than half a century, Saipan had been seized by a world power, this time by the United States. That the local population was able to adapt and prosper in the face of such dramatic changes is a testament to the resiliency and strength of the Chamorro and Carolinian cultures.

During the half century since the battle, Saipan has undergone further changes. After eighteen years of military rule, the island's administration was assumed by the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Saipan, as the seat of the Trust Territory government, enjoyed an economic development that, while very modest on a world scale, was unprecedented in other parts of Micronesia. In the late 1960's, the leadership of the Marianas District sought to establish a closer relationship with the United States. Following years of negotiations, a compact was signed between the two governments thus establishing the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Under this agreement, residents of the Northern Marianas enjoy the rights and privileges of U.S. citizenship while retaining control of their local government. Over the last decade, the pace of economic development on Saipan has accelerated, driven by an impressive visitor industry. Scores of resort hotels, golf courses and shops have been built on Saipan to cater to the hundreds of thousands of visitors, primarily Japanese, who visit the island each year. Sites and the artifacts associated with the battle are now popular tourist attractions. After many decades, the scars from one of the bloodiest campaigns in the Pacific war have nearly healed.



A statue of Jesus stands unharmed in the ruins of the Kristo Rai Church in Garapan.

The ruins of the sugar mill in Chalan Kanoa.



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