

BECAUSE MARINES NEVER FORGET

Keene, R R

Leatherneck; Nov 2011; 94, 11; Marine Corps Gazette & Leatherneck Magazine of the Marines
pg. 32



Visitors with Military Historical Tours (above) walk the same beaches at Tinian in July 2011 where the 4thMarDiv (right) came ashore on July 24, 1944, navigating through submerged mines and initially intense, but overall light resistance. (USMC photo at right)

BECAUSE MARINES NEVER FORGET

Part II, Tinian

By R. R. Keene

There are clues about Tinian's small-town atmosphere. Signs outside the domestic airlines of Saipan International Airport read: "No chewing or spitting betel nut," another name for the seed of the areca palm that grows well in the Marianas. It is a mild stimulant, apparently habit-forming, banned in schools, and it stains sidewalks and teeth.

Star Marianas Air and Freedom Air have six Piper PA-32-300 Cherokee Six aircraft, each of which can accommodate

up to six passengers. One of the pilots, a young woman with her hair pulled back to keep it from blowing in the cockpit, wears big sunglasses and tells Rick Spooner's son to hold the door open. The single prop spins, the plane rolls, it lifts off, and she tells the younger Spooner to close the door, reaches across him and locks it. Seven minutes later the plane touches down on Tinian's West Field now grandly dubbed Tinian International Airport. It is the only way to Tinian.

Tinian has two gas stations and a casino. Gas is expensive, but then the residents

don't have far to drive. The Dynasty Hotel & Casino stands out like a huge scar in the island's lush hues of greenery. The Dynasty opened in 1998 with more than 400 rooms, marble floors, mammoth chandeliers and an opulence that seems out of place in Tinian. But the owners of the gas stations and Dynasty Hotel & Casino and more than 3,000 residents are betting Tinian has a future, perhaps with a little help from the United States Marine Corps.

It certainly has a past with the Marines: The fighting on Saipan was not yet over on July 20, 1944, when U.S. Marine 105 mm



and U.S. Army 155 mm "Long Tom" cannon were towed south to Ailingan Beach and started shelling Japanese defensive positions on Tinian three miles away. U.S. Navy destroyers, cruisers and battleships eventually joined in.

Then came the Army Air Force and Navy aircraft with rockets, bombs and a new weapon: napalm. Invented in 1944 at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., it was a "fire bomb" concocted with diesel oil, gasoline and a metallic salt from naphtha used in the manufacture of soap. It morphed into an incendiary jelly that would stick to any surface and suck up the air to burn at temperatures of 800 to 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit. It is a ghastly and horribly effective weapon, ideal against troops in the open, foxholes, trenches and bunkers.

Tinian, with the exception of a few 300-

foot hills and Mount Lasso at 540 feet, is flatter than a wheat field in Kansas. It is precisely that flatness that caused strategic planners to mark Tinian for an amphibious assault by Marines in 1944. Intelligence reports cited the island's three airfields easily could be expanded to 8,500-foot runways needed as platforms for the B-29 Superfortress bombers that would strike Japan.

The 2d and 4th Marine divisions prepared for another amphibious assault little more than a month after landing on Saipan. On July 23, combat leathernecks of the 4thMarDiv, hefting weapons, ammunition and their 782 gear, clambered aboard 27 landing ship tanks anchored off Saipan. They carried a light combat load, according to historian Richard Harwood: "A spoon, a pair of socks, insect repellent

and emergency supplies in their pockets, and no pack on their backs."

The 2dMarDiv also loaded onto transports at Saipan's Chalan Kanoa Harbor and were hauled off the southern shores of the island near Tinian Town, known today as San Jose.

The Japanese had a garrison of 9,000 men: members of the 50th Infantry Regiment, who were veterans of the Manchurian border dispute with Russia and the 56th Naval Guard Force with other maritime detachments. Between them they possessed a few light tanks, medium-range artillery, mortars and several batteries of coastal defense guns.

Although a limestone plateau, Tinian's coastline is encircled by coral cliffs ranging from 6 to 100 feet. There are only a few beaches even remotely suitable for



yards before turning about and returning to their mother ships.

The battleship *USS Colorado* (BB-45) and destroyer *USS Norman Scott* (DD-690) moved within 3,200 yards of two 6-inch Japanese naval guns that had gone undetected and were unscathed by the barrage, and they returned fire. *Colorado* took 22 brutal and direct hits. *Norman Scott* took six. Sixty-two Americans were killed at their battle stations, 223 were wounded. Among the dead were 10 Marines of *Colorado*'s seagoing detachment that also counted 31 wounded.

Col Ogata mistook the faint as an initial victory. His brief report to Tokyo stated his forces had “repelled 100 landing barges.”

According to Marine historian Col Joseph Alexander, USMC (Ret), the 4thMarDiv, meanwhile, boarded landing craft off southern Saipan and, at 0717, closed across 3,000 yards to “White Beach 1 and 2.” The Japanese, however, had prudently taken care to mine all beach approaches. Three amphibious tractors (LVTs) struck mines at White Beach 2. One was hit 10 yards from a Marine who later said, “That vehicle, weighing seven tons, was flipped into the air and folded up like a Parker House roll.” However, with the exception of some intense fire from a small beach detachment, the Marines encountered relatively light resistance.

Nonetheless, it was about as narrow as any beachhead that Marines had ever been challenged to take. Although troops had little trouble getting ashore, it was tight for their vehicles and equipment and there were underwater boulders and coral heads. Seabee ingenuity provided the way with portable vehicle ramps called “Doodlebugs,” which could be emplaced by LVTs, allowing more access for tanks, halftracks, 75 mm howitzers, trucks and jeeps.

By nightfall, 15,000 Marines were occupying a front that ran along several thousand yards of coastline. Their casualties were 15 killed in action and 225 wounded in action.

Private First Class Robert F. Fleischauer, a rifleman with Company A, 1st Battalion, 24th Marines commanded by Captain Irving “Buck” Schechter, was a veteran of Saipan, where he had achieved notoriety when he took out a bunker by sending a Mark II fragmentation grenade through the gunport. The blast was heard by the sound of broken glass. PFC Fleischauer had found the island’s cache of Japanese *sake* and with one grenade completely destroyed it. Buck Schechter told him: “Fleischauer, if you stay in the Corps for 20 years, you’ll never see corporal.”

Fleischauer was sporting his Maui-inked tattoo with the proud eagle, globe

Above: The posh Tinian Dynasty Hotel & Casino with 400 rooms, marble floors and a large, modern gaming room is in striking contrast to the rest of Tinian's small, American-town atmosphere.

Below: One of the mammoth latte stones that held the house of Taga still stands and is a popular site with tourists and the residents of Tinian. Taga, a legend of the Marianas, was a chief of great wisdom and strength who defended the Chamorros against the Spaniards.



RAQUEL STINN

amphibious assault. Thus, the Japanese commander, Colonel Keishi Ogata, expected the Marines to land at Tinian Town on Sanhalom Harbor with its limited anchorage and two piers, or land at Asiga Bay in the northeast, which has 125 yards of beach. Less likely for a landing were two narrow strips of white sand on the northwest coast where the waters were friendly to swimmers. The locals called them *Unai Chulu* and *Unai Babui*; American planners called them “White Beaches 1 and 2.” Ogata prepared his defenses accordingly.

Dawn broke just off Sanhalom Harbor on July 24, with Marines making their way down cargo nets into 22 landing craft and back up several times. No troops were in the boats when they went toward shore. Above them, 244 Navy and Army aircraft began strafing and bombing Tinian Town, followed by 30 minutes of saturating naval gunfire. It was to be a classic ruse that would hopefully hold the Japanese defenders at Tinian Town while the 4thMarDiv landed at White beaches. The Japanese returned fire from artillery batteries ashore. The landing craft churned to within 400

and anchor on his left forearm. The result of a night's revelry with fellow comrades, Fleischauer noticed only later that the Corps' motto tattooed in the riband was written "Semper Fidles." An unknown Japanese soldier on Tinian got Fleischauer medically evacuated. But first, he did Fleischauer the favor, by bullet or with grenade, of taking a chunk of skin out of the misspelled tattoo. Fleischauer did stay in the Corps for more than 20 years and retired a master sergeant.

Their first night on Saipan was still fresh in the memories of the Marines. Consequently, they expected a Japanese counterattack and so they set in, well-positioned behind rolls of concertina wire. When darkness enveloped the island, tracers and flares probed the leatherneck perimeter.

In his August 1994 *Leatherneck* feature, "Amphibious Blitzkrieg at Tinian," Col Alexander said in essence: The first wave of the navy *keibetai* guard force came south from Ushi Point at 0200. It was followed at 0300 by "a stinging artillery barrage" and tanks with Imperial Army infantrymen in trace from near Mount Lasso.

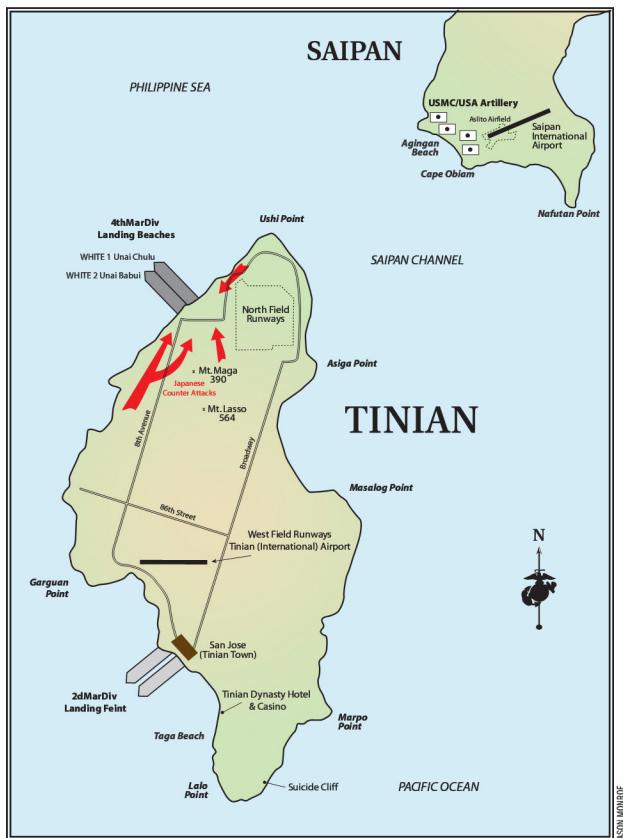
Neither side could afford failure. Consequently, there was no quarter given by either side.

It was a slugfest all along most of the perimeter, and Lieutenant Mickey McGuire's antitank men were firing 37 mm guns loaded with canister rounds at point-blank range. Two Marines, Cpl Alfred J. Daigle and PFC Orville H. Showers, fired their machine gun into the onslaught of Japanese infantry. The next morning there was "a cone" of 251 Japanese bodies spreading out from the machine gun where the two Marines lay dead. Cpl Daigle was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross, and Showers' family received his Silver Star.

Fourteenth Marines "literally tore the Japanese to pieces," one Marine officer reported. Howitzers and .50-caliber machine guns killed 600 Japanese at the center of their attack.

Col Alexander wrote about Gunnery Sergeant John G. Benkovich, who "kept his gun [M3A1 37 mm antitank gun] crew at its exposed position until each man fell wounded. Benkovich, wounded himself, evacuated his casualties, then crawled back to dismantle the gun before the Japanese could capture it."

Alexander further wrote: "Sergeant John H. Fritts Jr., in 2/24, became a platoon commander when his lieutenant fell. A Japanese probe discovered the location of Fritts' machine guns. Fritts, knowing what would come next, redeployed his platoon, covering the old position by machine-gun



and 37 mm fire. When the Japanese struck ... they entered a crossfire. Dawn revealed 150 dead Japanese."

Company A, 1/24 was down to 30 Marines with weapons and ordered engineers, corpsmen, communicators and members of shore party up and into the fray. Flares and mortars went up. Fourth Tank Bn began crushing the last attacking group. Just before dawn the Japanese began tapping their grenades on rocks and their helmets to commit suicide. The sun rose over Tinian, revealing 476 Japanese lying akimbo before the guns of Able Co.

The attack had been an unmitigated disaster. The enemy left 1,241 bodies on the battlefield. It had broken the back of their Tinian defenses. According to historian Frank Hough, "For the next seven days, small groups took advantage of the darkness to [launch night attacks], but for the most part they simply withdrew

in no particular order, until there remained nowhere to withdraw."

On July 25, the 2d MarDiv went ashore and hooked up with the 4th MarDiv. Together they formed a skirmish line of infantry and tanks that stretched across the island and swept south. By July 28, Japanese opposition was limited to pockets of resistance.

It was still a very dangerous situation. On July 30, Private Joseph W. Ozbourn, a Browning Automatic Rifleman in 1/23, and fellow Marines were involved in clearing pillboxes and dugouts when a grenade landed in their midst. Ozbourn threw himself on the enemy explosive and posthumously was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Col Ogata and his staff had abandoned their headquarters on Mt. Lasso early in the battle. On July 31, elements of the 4th MarDiv moved through Tinian Town

and found the body of a colonel in the wire. Nobody is sure to this day, but odds are it was Col Ogata.

There were two last *banzai* attacks. One, on the night of July 31, saw the Japanese fruitlessly spend themselves. They rushed toward a 37 mm gun manned by Marines of G/2/23. The company's "skipper," Capt Carl W. Hoffman, said, "That gun just stacked up dead Japanese. ... As soon as one Marine gunner would drop[, another] would take his place. Soon we were stacked nearly shoulder-high with dead Japanese ... hundreds of them as a matter of fact." Hoffman went on to fight two more wars and retire as a major general.

The next morning there was a final, fanatical *banzai* charge at 1/28. It took approximately 30 minutes for the Marines to gun down 100 Japanese across a 70-yard front.

One last act of supreme valor and sacrifice was made by PFC Robert L. Wilson of 2/6. On Aug. 4, advancing with his fellow Marines through heavy brush, Wilson saw the grenade land among them. He yelled a warning and threw himself on the missile. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

The civilians had been hiding in the southeast and now their care and feeding fell to the Marines. There were approximately 18,000 Japanese, including Okinawans and Koreans, and approximately 11,500 civilian refugees maintained in the Camp Chulu stockade until July 4, 1946.

There's a photo of bearded PFC Federico Claveria, a combat photographer, kneeling and passing candy through barbed wire to a child. It depicts, as well as anything, the Corps' vaunted capacity to go from warriors to humanitarians. Claveria, a native of Mexico, became an American citizen, opened a successful restaurant and tortilla factory in Santa Barbara, Calif. He loved his adopted country so much that when he recited the Pledge of Allegiance in Spanish, he finished with tears in his eyes.

The reason for the Marines taking Tinian landed on the island shortly after it was declared secure on Aug. 1. Engineers and Seabees of the 121st and 38th Naval Construction battalions went to work enlarging the island's northern airfields. The four-engine B-29 bombers had a range of 2,800 miles and now were based only 1,200 nautical miles from Honshu. Over the next year, five wings of the 20th Air Force, two from Tinian, flew 29,000 missions from the Marianas, dropping 157,000 tons of explosives.

Meanwhile, an event that would forever change the world was unfolding. USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) holds a place in this history. On July 26, 1945, she delivered

Members on the Military Historical Tours trip to Tinian stand beside the pit at North Field where technicians from Project Alberta of the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, N.M., loaded "Little Boy," the 9,700-pound atomic bomb, into the B-29 "Enola Gay."



R. KEENE

critical parts, including enriched uranium, for the first atomic bomb, named "Little Boy," to the air base at Tinian.

With *Indianapolis*' mission completed, she set sail for the Philippines and at 0014, July 30, was torpedoed by Imperial Japanese Submarine *I-58*. *Indianapolis* rolled and sank within 12 minutes. Of the 1,196 crewmen, including her 39-Marine detachment, 300 went down with the cruiser. Only 880 men had the time or chance to get into the water alive. It turned into a nightmare of survival.

While waiting to be discovered, the sailors and Marines faced exposure, dehydration and, most frightening of all, shark attacks. Three and a half days later a Navy PV-1 Ventura aircraft spotted what was left of the crew: 316 survived, including nine Marines. *Indianapolis* was the last

major U.S. Navy warship sunk in World War II and the greatest single loss of life at sea in the history of the U.S. Navy. But she delivered her world-altering cargo.

In a pit at North Field, near Ushi Point, technicians from Project Alberta of the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, N.M., loaded "Little Boy," a 12-foot-long, 28-inch-in-diameter, 9,700-pound atomic bomb, into the belly of the 509th Composite Group's B-29 "Enola Gay." The pit is still there and so, too, is the runway from where *Enola Gay* rose. One can almost feel what it was like taking off by driving down the old runway. The plane was airborne at 2:45 a.m., Aug. 6, 1945. At 9:16 a.m., Japan time, the southern Honshu city of Hiroshima disappeared in a blinding flash.

Three days later on Aug. 9, a B-29



PFC Federico Claveria passes candy through barbed wire to a child. It was an iconic photo that captured print in many newspapers and magazines as a depiction of the Corps' vaunted capacity to go from warriors to humanitarians.

USMC



If you stood on this spot at North Field Runway at 2:45 a.m., Aug. 6, 1945, you would have seen Enola Gay lift off the runway and head toward the Japanese mainland where at 9:16 a.m., Japan time, it released the bomb that destroyed the city of Hiroshima. (Photo by R. R. Keene)

called "Bockscar," named for the aircraft commander Capt Frederick C. Bock, carrying the nuclear weapon called "Fat Man," lifted off Tinian and destroyed Nagasaki.

For all intents and purposes, World War II was over. The initial offer of surrender was tendered on Aug. 10. The Emperor of Japan announced his decision to quit the war on Aug. 15, and the formal surrender took place on Tokyo Bay on Sept. 2, 1945.

Today, Tinian rings of small-town America. People have known one another all their lives and many are related. Life is laid back, wonderfully pleasant, with camping and picnics on the same beaches Marines once stormed across. Barbecues include fresh-caught tuna, breadfruit served like potato salad and iced coconut milk still in the husks. "Tuba," made from tree sap, is the moonshine of the islands.

Tinian's citizens cling to their heritage, which is symbolized on the Northern Mariana Islands U.S. quarter minted in 2009. Although symbolic of all the islands, to those who've been there, it speaks heavily of Tinian. Pictured near the shore is a large limestone latte, or column, similar to those that supported the house of Taga, the nearly mythological chief who was a 17th-century Chamorro of great wisdom and strength.

Legend says Taga's daughter died of remorse over Taga having killed her older brother. Taga buried her in the capstone of

the one latte that remains standing. Because Taga defended the Tinian Chamorros against the Spaniards, local legend has it that as long as one of his latte stones stands, Taga lives.

The people of Tinian also are patriotic Americans who proudly wave the flags of the United States and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or CNMI. Their children join the local Army Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps at Tinian High School. Travelers arriving from Saipan are struck by the plaques and photos of Tinian's two sons and daughter [Army Staff Sergeant Julian A. Manglona, Army PFC Victor M. Fontanilla and Seaman AnaMarie Camacho], lost to the war on terrorism, posted prominently and proudly at the airport.

"I knew them all. We always think about them and still miss them terribly," said Don Farrell, historian of the Marianas and long-time resident of Tinian.

"Because Marines never forget," said CNMI Delegate Kilili Sablan, Tinian residents and U.S. Marines turned out on July 1 to remember and honor those leathernecks of the 2dMarDiv who fought on Tinian. Delegate Sablan said such events "are necessary reminders of what the Marines accomplish and of what we owe them."

A ceremony unveiling the new monument to the 2dMarDiv took place at the edge of the airfield's apron with the shell

of the Japanese 1st Naval Air Division command post serving as a backdrop and reminder.

The Marines in the ceremony are assigned to the Marine Corps Activity Guam and CNMI, led by Col Robert D. Loynd, who made the keynote address. He said the Battle of Tinian is considered to be the most brilliantly executed expeditionary and amphibious operation. "Today's Marines go forward into battle carrying the armor of their forebears and the same fighting spirit and élan as those Marines ... that landed in the Marianas 67 years ago."

Farrell, who served as master of ceremonies, said the monument was built because another Marine never forgot.

"It was a Marine named Michael L. Emerson," said Farrell. Emerson noticed that while there was a monument to the 4thMarDiv, no monument honoring the 2dMarDiv was among those of other units at Tinian's historic North Field. A Desert Storm veteran, Emerson had visited Tinian with Military Historical Tours and collaborated with Farrell to ensure the 2dMarDiv would have a place of honor next to the monument to the 4thMarDiv.



Leatherneck—On the Web

See additional photos of the visit to Tinian and the WW II battle at www.mca-marines.org/leatherneck/tinian

Yet, even as the small contingent of Marines recalled those whose lineage they perpetuate at Tinian's North Field, members of Marine Corps Activity Guam and CNMI are key players in the future role of Marines on Guam and Tinian.

Tourism is the principal economic activity for the CNMI, and most tourists are Japanese and Americans. Other tourists are Chinese, Korean and Russian, thus, the Dynasty Hotel & Casino. Unfortunately, the number of tourists has dropped substantially due to world monetary problems. There is need for an economic boost.

The Marines reappeared on the horizon when, in 1995, it was announced that 8,600 leathernecks of III Marine Expeditionary Force and their 9,000 dependents were to be relocated from Okinawa, Japan, to Guam and the CNMI.

According to U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific, relocating the Marines would allow the Corps to have "a long-term enduring presence in the Pacific and to respond quickly to military and humanitarian crises." Plans initially called for facilities and infrastructures to support the leathernecks as well as their training on Guam and Tinian. The Marines say planning for the relocation continues to occur in cooperation with officials of the governments.

However, plans for the relocation or structure of what would become Marine Corps Base Guam and Marine Corps training facilities come at a time when

U.S. funding for the \$17.4 billion buildup has slowed down, exacerbated by the national debt crisis. Recently, members of Congress have had second thoughts about the relocation, saying it will be too expensive. Not only that, but in March 2010, Representative Hank Johnson of Georgia's 4th Congressional District warned in a committee meeting that Guam might "tip over and, uh, capsize" if 8,000 United States Marines and their families are added to the current population.

Many plans lie with the decision-making authorities of the Department of the Navy and have yet to undergo final approval. Things appeared to be moving in August, according to the *Guam Buildup News*' Sharla Torre Montvel-Cohen, who reported that a "Navy contract awarded to Hensel Phelps was the largest procurement yet in the buildup of Marine Corps facilities on Guam, bringing total program investment to more than \$320 million.

"Meanwhile there continues to be a healthy stream of money from Japan, the buildup's primary financier, and the stakeholder most interested in moving the Marines to Guam as a means of reducing the troop-hosting burden on Okinawa."

Thus far plans for Tinian are limited to ranges to train Marines with weapons in a "tactical scenario" in battalion-sized maneuver exercises. The buildup, however, essentially remains on hold.

Proposed range construction would be

a known-distance rifle range, an automated combat pistol range, a platoon battle course and a field firing range. Training would occur at least once a month with about 200 to 400 Marines staying on Tinian for a week and a total of 16 weeks of training per year. There currently are no plans for major permanent structures or assigning Marines permanently on Tinian.

Nonetheless, the island, like any small American community, still has its past, its pride and hope. During his remarks July 1, Tinian Mayor Ramon Dela Cruz said, "But as we stand here today on historic North Field, it is unfortunate that many Americans do not truly understand the global significance of the heroic acts our veterans performed more than 65 years ago.

"In fact, it is ironic that as important as Tinian is to world history, many Americans don't even know where Tinian is located, or that our island even exists."

It is something the Marines understand. Tinian to them is far more than a potential training range. It is inculcated into their heritage, a place of honor, a place of reverence ... because Marines never forgot.

Editor's note: The spelling of some locations use Chamorro terms rather than the Japanese names.

The first part of this article appeared in the October 2011 Leatherneck.



MABEL EVAN

With the weather-beaten shell of the Japanese 1st Naval Air Division command post in the background, the new plaque to the 2dMarDiv is unveiled July 1, 2011, at Tinian's historic North Field. Left to right: LtCol Roy Elrod, USMC (Ret), a 2dMarDiv veteran of Salpan; CMNI Delegate Killili Sabian; Mayor of Tinian Ramon Dela Cruz; and Maj Rick Spooner, USMC (Ret), a 2dMarDiv veteran of Salpan and Tinian, raise the Marine Corps color from the monument that is adjacent to the 4thMarDiv monument.