

Attached is an essay about the Effort at Tinian as printed for the 112th NCB reunion this past October. Many Tinian Vets contributed the content and reviewed it after I recorded their contributions. This was an ongoing 1 1/2 year project that I wrapped and printed for the 112th NCB reunion Oct 2003.

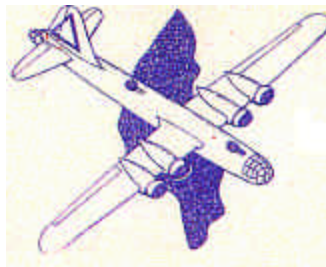
Thanks to all who contributed and edited.

Please post so that all Tinian Vet family members may be informed about their father's (grandfather's etc.) most significant historical contribution.

I take no credit for this essay - the credit belongs to all the Tinian Vets who lived the story , contributed info and edited the essay.

Salute.

Edwin Foster
112th NCB Historian
Cleveland, Ohio



TINIAN IN WWII – TEAMWORK AND EFFORT

Tinian is a tiny 39 square mile coral island in the Northern Marianas Islands that rests atop the seven mile deep Marianas Trench. Tinian became the largest and most valuable airbase of World War II while the United States and the Empire of Japan were locked in mortal combat. Beginning in late 1944, two complete airfields- North Field and West Field were efficiently constructed in record time from the island's plentiful coral deposits. A vast and confident fleet of long – range B-29 "Superfortresses" soon arrived from the China-Burma-India Theater and directly from the United States. Shortly thereafter, Tinian based B-29s launched from the newly constructed and expansive 8500+ feet long runways, besieged the Japanese home islands on a continuous 24 hour basis. Many incredible feats in construction, logistics, teamwork and air-warfare were witnessed on and from this tiny coral island. Paramount was Tinian's contribution to the Manhattan Project that culminated in two atomic bomb missions that hastened the end of World War II and clinched Tinian's deserved place in history.

Both the Japanese and the Americans realized the strategic importance of air bases at Saipan, Tinian, and Guam in the Central Pacific in mid-1944. The U. S. invasion of the Marianas Islands on 15 June 1944 brought the Japanese Navy out fighting for the first time since the naval battles of Guadalcanal in the fall of 1942. Determined to force a showdown battle, Admiral Soemu Toyoda ordered a combined fleet of 9 carriers and 18 battleships and cruisers to attack the U. S. warships protecting the landing on Saipan. There Admiral Raymond Spruance, Commander of the U. S. Fifth Fleet (14 battleships, 25 carriers and carrier escorts, 26 cruisers, 144 destroyers and countless transports), organized defensive preparations and sent 15 fast carriers of Task Force 58, commanded by Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, west to intercept the Japanese, then only 90 miles away.

The Battle of the Philippine Sea commenced early on 19 June 1944 with an attack on Task Force 58 by Japanese land-based planes from Guam and Truk. Hellcat fighters from US carriers destroyed 35 enemy fighters and bombers. The remainder of the battle was fought by 430 Japanese carrier planes attacking the 450 planes of Task Force 58 in four fierce waves. At the end of the eight-hour onslaught, only 100 of the enemy planes returned to their carriers. The rest had been destroyed in the most decisive aerial combat victory in the history of aviation. Thirty American planes were lost in what the American Fliers called the "Marianas Turkey Shoot." Incredibly, no damage was done to the U. S. Navy Fifth Fleet's ships. By 9 July 1944 at a cost of 2,949 Americans killed and 10,364 wounded, Saipan had fallen. The Japanese fared much worse with 24,000 dead from burial count, 3,612 missing, 1,780 prisoners and the Japanese commander of the Pearl Harbor attack, Admiral Nagumo killed.

Saipan was the staging area for the attack on Tinian 24 July 1944. Task Force Five One, commanded by Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill, along with the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions commanded by Major General Roy S. Geiger, teamed up to invade the island of Tinian which is only three and a half miles distant from Saipan. Defending the island were 9,162 Japanese troops. The invasion of Tinian hinged on a fake landing on the southern part of the island near Tinian Town. Supported by shore bombardment from the USS Colorado (which received 22 damaging hits from Japanese shore batteries), the 2nd Marine Division faked an invasion by lowering landing craft and men into the water. Simultaneously, the 4th Marine Division was launching an all out invasion at White Beach on the northwest side of the coral island. The Marines efficiently overcame the numerically superior Japanese force on 1 August in what is considered to be the best-executed amphibious operation of the war. Marine casualties were 328 dead and 1,571 wounded. The entire Japanese garrison was destroyed and as previously witnessed on Saipan, many remaining Japanese chose suicide instead of surrender by jumping off nearby cliffs.

Tinian's history is forever intertwined with the culmination of the atomic "Manhattan Project" and the infamous U.S.S. Indianapolis tragedy but in the annals of war, the tiny island holds other, lesser-known distinctions. At the request of Marines who would soon invade Tinian, The SeaBees removed steel members from the Japanese sugar mill on Saipan and built ten ramps mounted on AMTRAKs that they called their "doodlebugs." These ingenious landing ramps allowed the Marines to easily scale the 8-foot cliffs along the landing area at White Beach. General Smith and Admiral Turner were very impressed with the SeaBee handiwork. Needless to say, the Tinian invasion was flawless, and extremely successful. Another first in the history of warfare that later proved so useful to US forces on Okinawa was napalm. As part of the 13-day bombardment preceding the Tinian invasion, napalm successfully cleared the Japanese defenders from the cane fields and also destroyed enemy defenders in Tinian Town.

Tinian was declared "safe" by the 4th Marine Division on 2 August 1944. Or was it? During the night of 30 January 1945 thousands of pounds of TNT exploded near the center of Tinian, jarring and shaking the ground all over the island and waking everyone asleep. Several GI's were killed in the terrific explosion that authorities believed to be the result of sabotage by Japanese soldiers still at large.

A tiny and fairly flat coral island 75 miles north of Guam, Tinian became an ideal B-29 "Superfortress" base for the rest of the World War II. As spoils of war go, four captured runways as well as bountiful coral construction resources made the island an outstanding catch. Right behind the Marines, in their Can-Do manner, SeaBees in jungle green fatigues with uplifted tropical baseball caps swarmed over the island expanse of coral and cane fields to carve out the huge airbases necessary for the new B-29s. A short few months later, North Field and West Field combined was the largest airbase in the world, with six vast 8,500+ foot long runways and a total of 19,000 combat missions launched against the Empire of Japan.

The rapid and intensive construction effort on Tinian enabled the B-29 onslaught against the Empire of Japan. On this remote coral island, SeaBees of the Sixth Naval Construction Brigade consisting of the 9th, 13th, 18th, 38th, 50th, 67th, 92nd, 107th, 110th, 112th, 121st and the 135th Battalions commanded by Commodore Paul James Halloran, Civil Engineer Corps USN, built the largest airport in the world. Tinian's B-29 airport, consisting of North Field and West Field, was

larger than any airport anywhere in the world. North Field had about 13 miles of taxiways and runways. West Field was only a fraction smaller. Tinian's runway construction measured from 425 to 500 feet wide with the then unheard of runway lengths of 8500+ feet.

The Naval Construction Battalion, the fundamental unit of the SeaBee organization, comprised four companies that included the necessary construction skills for doing any job, plus a headquarters company consisting of medical and dental professionals and technicians, administrative personnel, storekeepers, cooks, and similar specialists. The complement of a standard battalion originally was set at 32 officers and 1,073 men, but from time to time the complement varied in number. Twelve complete Battalions as well as specialized Seabee "Specials" and detachments participated in the effort at Tinian in early 1945.

The SeaBees did all the construction on Tinian. No Army Engineers were involved, as were on many of the previous jobs that were done jointly. In what was the largest construction project that the recently formed (The "SeaBees" were born 5 March 1942) Naval Construction Battalions had ever undertaken up to that time, Battalion builders hauled, blasted and packed down enough coral to fill three times the volume of Hoover Dam. They built six huge B-29 bomber strips, each a mile and one half long and a block wide, along with miles of taxi ways with "hardstands" sufficient to park 400+ aircraft. The SeaBees dug and moved eleven million cubic yards of earth and coral on Tinian. Piled on flat ground, this would form a cube 6700+ feet in height.

SeaBee equipment was kept busy 20 hours a day while their maintenance crews worked to repair bulldozers, shovels, trucks and other equipment damaged as a result of the rough construction activity. Sharp and abrasive coral was especially damaging to tires and GI's shoes. In typical SeaBee fashion, one innovative construction crew had a Marine tank team fire armor-piercing shells into the side of a hill so dynamite charges could be placed to break up the coral. The 15,000 Seabees on Tinian operated all types of construction equipment including asphalt plants to pave the airstrips. In addition to the airfields, they built Quonset huts and a wide variety of service buildings including the shop in which the atomic bombs were assembled. Every airstrip was completed on time and none required more than 53 days to build. The SeaBee's motto, "We Build, We Fight" and their "Can Do Spirit" distinguished this group as being able to do any kind of work, any place, under any conditions. The effort of the 6th Naval Construction Brigade on Tinian was truly remarkable.

Tinian is about the same size and shape as Manhattan, and as soon as U.S. forces captured it in August 1944, a system of roads in the same grid pattern as Manhattan was created. In order to transport the huge quantities of bombs and supplies up from the port at the southern end of the island, a divided four lane highway appropriately named "Broadway" was built. The GIs gave the roads typical New York names like Broadway, 8th Avenue and 86th Street. The main north-south road, Broadway, runs parallel to the other main north-south road, 8th Avenue. The strange coincidence that Tinian has streets named after streets in Manhattan, New York has no provable connection with the Manhattan Project, although personnel involved in the project were stationed on Tinian.

As soon as rudimentary accommodations were prepared, squadrons of B-29s eager to undertake strategic bombing operations against the Japanese home islands began arriving in October and November at Isley Field on Saipan. The first B-29 mission from the Marianas (Saipan) was witnessed on 24 November 1944. Soon, camps on Tinian were constructed to house up to 50,000 U.S. troops and 1.2 million pounds of crops were produced, all of which were consumed on the island. By August 1945, a year after construction started, Tinian was the largest airbase in the world at the time, and accommodated nearly 450 B-29s.

During the last two months of 1944, B-29s began operating against Japan from the islands of Saipan and, Guam. Initial bombing missions were flown during the day at high altitude, concentrating on chemical plants, aircraft factories, harbors and arsenals. Gen. Curtis LeMay studied the poor results and instructed the bombers to begin low-level incendiary raids at night. The raids targeted Tokyo and some of Japan's other major cities, Nagoya, Osaka, and Kobe.

In January of 1945, the 20th Air Force, 313th Bombardment Wing (6th, 9th, 504th, and 505th Bombardment Groups) under the command of Brig. Gen. John H. Davies took over the newly built North Field on Tinian. They took part in a high-altitude daylight raid on Kobe on 4 February 1945. In April and May 1945, West Field, Tinian received the 58th Bombardment Wing, (40th, 444th, 462nd, and 468th Bomb Groups) which had been redeployed from the now-defunct XX Bomb Command in the China-Burma-India (CBI) theatre. Approximately 450 B-29's could now be efficiently launched on a mission from Tinian in 70-80 minutes.

On 22 December 1944, the Army Air Force issued orders for mining operations of Japanese waters to begin on 1 April 1945. After the order was issued, the Navy moved a team of mine experts to Tinian. One month later, the SeaBees had a mine assembly depot completed and in operation on the island.

In late March 1945 the 504th Bomb Group of the 313th Bombardment Wing operating from the newly carved out facilities built by the SeaBees on Tinian lead-off this highly specialized mission - the aerial mining of Japanese waters from the dangerous altitude of 5000 feet. Each B-29 carried 12,000 pounds of half ton and one ton mines to be strategically and accurately placed in Japanese shipping lanes patrolled by Japanese Navy warships. Japanese Navy searchlights and all anti-aircraft weapons were most effective and deadly; much deadlier than their land based counterparts. During a mine run, a B-29 caught in searchlights could take no evasive action – they took everything that was thrown at them by the enemy. Many crews were lost in this operation that was described as “Hell”.

By mid August 1945, B-29's had dropped more than 12,000 mines mostly in Shimonoseki Strait between Honshu and Kyushu. Eighty percent of Japanese shipping used this route. In less than five months these planes flew 1,528 mine laying sorties. This campaign devastated the Japanese merchant fleet. The Tinian based B-29's in this mining operation sank half of all the tonnage losses suffered by the Japanese merchant marine in the entire war! The 20th Air force operating from Tinian caused the loss of 9 percent of all Japanese ships operating in the war.

Not long after the arrival of the B-29's on Tinian, a very special comradeship developed between SeaBees and Airmen. Many SeaBee Battalions would "adopt" an aircraft by officially painting their logo and name on the B-29's nose. The quality of life for the crew of the plane

improved considerably because the SeaBees provided the crew of "their" Superfortress with better Quonset huts, washing machines, better mattresses, ice cream, cold beer and many other comforts of life. The SeaBees in return were personally and proudly represented in the B-29 raids against the Japanese homeland.

On 16 July 1945 the USS Indianapolis arrived at the Naval Weapons Center- Port Chicago, California and received a three foot diameter by four foot tall canister of top-secret cargo. The heavy cruiser then proceeded at top speed unescorted to Tinian on a record setting 5000 miles in ten day voyage across the Pacific. Upon arrival 26 July 1945, the ship anchored 1,000 yards off the shore of Tinian and delivered the radioactive components of one of the newly created atomic bombs. SeaBees of the Sixth Naval Construction Brigade helped with the unloading of the components of a newly- developed secret weapon. The SeaBees then stored the elements in a shed built by them, and organized a detachment to guard the shed and its mysterious contents. Atomic scientists assembled the weapon in the shed with several SeaBees assisting.

After this historic delivery, the heavy cruiser set out for the Philippines but the worst of fates awaited her. At noon 26 July 1945 Japanese Submarine I-58 hit the heavy cruiser with two torpedoes sinking her in only 12 minutes and sending 1199 sailors into the shark infested sea. In this most infamous tragedy of World War II, only 316 men survived.

Atomic Bomb Pits, slightly larger than a grave, were prepared for loading the world's first atomic bomb to be detonated in anger. The bomber aircraft would be rolled over the pit, until the bomb bay was directly above the bomb. Then, the bomb would be hoisted into the aircraft weapon bay. At No. 1 Bomb Loading Pit the atomic bomb was loaded aboard an American B-29 dubbed Enola Gay on the afternoon of August 5, 1945, to be dropped on Hiroshima the next day. On August 9, 1945 at nearby No. 2 Bomb Loading Pit, a second atomic bomb was loaded aboard Bocks Car and dropped on Nagasaki.

On 06 August 1945 the specially equipped B-29 "Enola Gay" piloted by Colonel Paul Tibbetts, in what was described in military terms as a perfect mission, dropped the world's first atomic bomb on the Japanese City of Hiroshima. The 509th (Atomic) Composite Group stationed at Tinian Island, launched "Special Bombing Mission 13" at 0245 on that fateful August morning. Once safely airborne, Navy Captain William Parsons climbed into the bomb bay and armed their special weapon--a 9,000-pound uranium-235 bomb, called "Little Boy" which had the explosive power of 12.5 kilotons of TNT. At 0815 Hiroshima time, on time and on target, bombardier Tom Ferebee released the weapon which detonated at 1885 feet above the ground leveling everything within a 1.2 mile radius within the city.

Three days later, on 09 August 1945, a second and even larger 22 kiloton plutonium bomb mission was launched from Tinian. With Major Charles W. Sweeney at the controls, "Special Bombing Mission 16" proceeded aboard a B-29 named Bocks Car. The primary target was the city of Kokura, but clouds obscured it. With fuel running low due to a fuel transfer problem, Sweeney proceeded to the secondary target, Nagasaki, a leading industrial center. The bombardier had specific orders not to drop the bomb unless he could see the target. There was enough fuel for only one bombing run, and a last minute break in the clouds allowed the bombardier to bomb visually as specified by the field order. When the bomb detonated at 1100 Nagasaki time at 1500 feet above the ground, it felt as though Bocks Car was "being beaten

with a telephone pole” said a crew member. With fuel critically low, Sweeney turned toward Okinawa where he landed to refuel before returning to Tinian.

It is little known that the B-29 was a global US bomber fashioned in 1942 at a price of three billion dollars to protect America in case England fell to Germany. Independently, the atomic bomb (Manhattan) project was driven by a two billion dollar price tag. American industry had brought together the atomic bomb and the B-29 at just the right moment in August of 1945 on Tinian Island. This terrific weapon combination helped force the end of this terrible World War. The lives of thousands of civilians and POWs who were perishing at the hands of the Japanese and the untold lives of countless brave American servicemen as well as Japanese who would have perished in the invasion of Japan were spared by the surrender of Japan. As a direct result of the successful B-29 effort, The United States Air Force was soon established as a separate service.

On 14 August 1945 Emperor Hirohito, without his cabinet's consent, decided to surrender. As the Emperor was traveling to a palace to record his surrender message, a group of young army officers attempted to kidnap him and force Hirohito to broadcast false orders to continue the war. The Emperor escaped the coup attempt and the next day, citing “the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is indeed incalculable”, broadcast his surrender message – thus ending World War II.

The legendary inter-service effort on Tinian that enabled a relentless B-29 air campaign against the Empire of Japan had undoubtedly hastened the end of World War II.



Addenda: Emperor Hirohito's surrender message, 15 August 1945

At noon (Tokyo time) on 15 August, 1945, for the first time in history, the voice of the Japanese emperor was heard on the radio. His Imperial Majesty Hirohito had recorded the message the previous day, and he spoke to his people in the very formal language of the Imperial Court, which many of his subjects could not understand:

To our good and loyal subjects

After pondering deeply the general trends of the world and the actual conditions obtaining in Our Empire today, We have decided to effect a settlement of the present situation by resorting to an extraordinary measure.

We have ordered Our Government to communicate to the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that Our Empire accepts the provision of their Joint Declaration.

To strive for the common prosperity and happiness of all nations, as well as the security and well-being of Our subjects, is the solemn obligation which has been handed down by Our Imperial Ancestors, and which We lay close to heart. Indeed, We declared war on America and Britain out of Our sincere desire to ensure Japan's self-preservation and the stabilization of East Asia, it being far from Our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark upon territorial aggrandizement. But now the war has lasted for nearly four years. Despite the best that has been done by everyone--the gallant fighting of military and naval forces, the diligence and assiduity of Our servants of the State and the devoted service of Our one hundred million people--the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have all turned against her interest. Moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is indeed incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should We continue to fight, it would not only result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization. Such being the case, how are We to save the millions of Our subjects; or to atone Ourselves before the hallowed spirits of Our Imperial Ancestors? This is the reason why We have ordered the acceptance of the provisions of the Joint Declaration of the Powers.

We cannot but express the deepest sense of regret to our allied nations of East Asia, who have consistently co-operated with the Empire toward the emancipation of East Asia. The thought of those officers and men as well as others who have fallen in the fields of battle, those who died at their posts of duty, or those who met with untimely death and all their bereaved families, pains Our heart night and day. The welfare of the wounded and the war-sufferers, and of those who have lost their homes and livelihood, are the objects of Our profound solicitude. The hardships and sufferings to which Our nation is to be subject hereafter will certainly be great. We are keenly aware of the inmost feelings of all ye, Our subjects. However, it is according to the dictate of time and

fate that We have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is insufferable.

Having been able to safeguard and maintain the structure of the Imperial State, We are always with ye, Our good and loyal subjects, relying upon your sincerity and integrity. Beware most strictly of any outbursts of emotion which may engender needless complications, or any fraternal contention and strife which may create confusion, lead ye astray and cause ye to lose the confidence of the world. Let the entire nation continue as one family from generation to generation, ever firm in its faith of the imperishableness of its divine land, and mindful of its heavy burden of responsibilities, and the long road before it. Unite your total strength to be devoted to the construction for the future. Cultivate the ways of rectitude; foster nobility of spirit; and work with resolution so as ye may enhance the innate glory of the Imperial State and keep pace with the progress of the world.



1945-CO-PLT., LT.COMDR. FRANK E. WADE, CMDR. DAVID Y. TAYLOR, PLT.-WEST FIELD, TINIAN