



# News Release



## Headquarters Pacific Air Forces Public Affairs

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### Air Force seeks input on historic sites

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**JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii** – The U.S. Air Force is asking those with interest in the historical sites related to Francisco C. Ada (Saipan International) Airport, Tinian International Airport and the seaports of both islands, to provide information that they wish to be considered by the Air Force as part of its ongoing assessment of potential effects related to a planned Exercises and Divert Activities airfield improvement project.

The Air Force is considering the Saipan and Tinian airports as possible sites for future training exercises and missions related to overall emergency preparedness in the Pacific. The Air Force is proposing improvements to an existing airport that would involve construction of facilities and infrastructure to support a combination of military cargo, fighter, and tanker aircraft and associated support personnel for periodic divert landings, joint military exercises, and joint and combined humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts.

Existing capabilities at each of these airports and seaports will play an important role in determining what improvements need to be made, and which site is ultimately chosen for the proposed project. The Air Force could also choose to employ some combination of both airports to meet its objectives.

Saipan and Tinian were the sites of intense fighting in World War II as the U.S. sought to wrest control of the islands from Japanese forces. After a massive loss of life to the forces of both nations, the U.S. captured Japan's main airfield on the island, known as Aslito Field, on June 18, 1944.

The capture of Aslito Field proved decisive for the U.S. in the battle for Saipan. U.S. forces immediately began using the airfield for airstrikes, supply runs, and aerial photography missions that allowed for accurate mapping of Japanese positions, bunkers, and trench lines as well as Saipan's rugged terrain.

On July 24, 1944, two weeks after capturing Saipan, U.S. forces invaded Tinian. The island was secured on Aug. 1, 1944, after a loss of 8,010 Japanese lives. American casualties included 328 dead and 1,571 wounded.

American troops immediately began work repairing and expanding Gurguan Airfield, today the site of the international airport, and Ushi Point Airfield, which was transformed into the North Field, the largest airbase in the Pacific.

A year later, North Field became one of the most significant airfields in history when it served as the deployment point for the atomic bombing missions by Enola Gay to Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, and Bockscar to Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 1945. These missions, the only wartime use of nuclear weapons in history, were a critical factor in Japan's surrender on Sept. 2, 1945.

Today, the landing beaches on Saipan used by U.S. forces, as well as Marpi Point, are part of the same National Historic Landmark as Aslito/Isley Field. North Field on Tinian is now a national historic district and part of the Tinian Landing Beaches, Ushi Point, and North Fields National Historic Landmark.

According to the National Park Service, national historic landmarks are buildings, sites, districts, structures, and objects that have been determined by the Secretary of the Interior to be nationally significant in U.S. history and culture. Designated national historic landmarks include some of the most historic properties in the U.S. and its territories. Many national historic landmarks still serve modern needs. North Field is part of the Exclusive Military Use Area military training area.

Not only is the consideration of potential effects of actions on historic properties required under various laws, but an understanding is essential to design and operation of the airfield improvements to fully evaluate the environmental impacts from the proposed action. The Air Force is in the process of preparing an Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, for the proposed training exercises and missions.

The public has participated in these processes during Air Force sponsored EIS scoping meetings held on Guam, Saipan, Tinian, and Rota last September and during public hearings in Saipan and Tinian in July 2012, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The Air Force is also working with agencies charged with management of historic resources including the CNMI Historic Preservation Office, National Park Service, and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to properly evaluate and avoid, minimize, or mitigate any effects to historic properties.

This article is intended to solicit public involvement in the effort to identify and protect historic resources that could be impacted by the proposed action. In addition to recognizing the rich World War II history of the CNMI, particularly Saipan and Tinian, the Air Force is also interested in gathering information pertinent to the area's history and use before European contact and its possible role in traditional beliefs and customs of native islanders and other communities today.

Those with interests and information pertaining to the historical attributes of the area are encouraged to submit their comments to PACAF/PA, 25 E Street, Suite G-108, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, HI 96853, ATTN: PACAF Divert Marianas, or by email at [pacaf.paops@us.af.mil](mailto:pacaf.paops@us.af.mil).

The Air Force has also set up a Web site at <http://www.pacafdivertmarianaseis.com>, which houses important information about the proposed project and alternatives, including the Draft EIS and all related documents the Air Force has released for public review. Interested parties may also submit comments relating to the historic properties pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act via this Web site.