

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

received

date entered

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Landing Beaches, Aslito/Isley Field, and Marpi Point, Saipan Island

and or common Saipan International Airport and Beaches, Saipan

2. Location

street & number _____ not for publication

city, town _____ vicinity of Chalan Kanoa

state Saipan code 69 county Mariana Islands code 010

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Government of the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands

street & number _____

city, town Saipan _____ vicinity of _____ state Mariana Islands

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Government of the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands

street & number _____

city, town Saipan _____ state Mariana Islands

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Isley Field has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date July 1980 federal state county local

depository for survey records National Register of Historic Places

city, town Washington _____ state D.C.

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The National Historic Landmark recommendation for Saipan Island consists of three separate geographical areas that are closely united in terms of their World War II history: the landing beaches, Isley Field, and Marpi Point.

General

The Marianas are a chain of fifteen volcanic, coral-reefed islands aligned roughly in a north-south axis in the western Pacific Ocean. The United States seized Guam, the largest and most southern of the islands, from Spain in 1898. The remaining islands, occupied in turn by Spain, Germany, and Japan, are known as the Northern Marianas and have recently elected to become a commonwealth with close ties to the United States. Of these, Saipan is the largest and most populous. It lies about 100 miles north of Guam, is 1,260 miles south of Tokyo, 1,500 miles east of Manila, and 3,200 miles west of Pearl Harbor.

Near the center of the island, Saipan's highest elevation, Okso Takpochao (Mount Tapotchau in 1944) rises to 1,548 feet. Stretching north from it is a long, broken ridge ending in a steep cliff, Laderan Banaderu (Suicide Cliff). North of the cliff is a low, level stretch of land named Banaderu (Marpi Point in 1944). The southern end of the island is dominated by a promontory, I Naftan (Mount Nafutan in 1944). The land between Naftan and Takpochao is relatively level and here the Japanese built an excellent airfield, Aslito. The Americans reconstructed and enlarged this field for B-29 bombers, eventually renaming it Isley Field. Today, the same area is modern Saipan International Airport.

Most of the Chamorro population lives along the west coast of Saipan, the principal communities being Chalan Kanoa, San Antonio, Susupi, San Jose, and Garapan. Garapan, the former Japanese capital, is oriented toward tourism, with most visitors coming from Japan. Puntan Muchot (Mucho Point in 1944) in Garapan has been set aside as American Memorial Park and is administered by the (U.S.) National Park Service. North of Garapan is Tanapag Harbor, the island's principal port, which was rebuilt and expanded by the U.S. Navy in 1944 and 1945. Also near Garapan is the administrative headquarters of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI), administered by the United States under a trust from the United Nations. Saipan is both a municipality in and the capital of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Government offices, the governor's office, the courts, and the legislature are concentrated in Chalan Kanoa and neighboring Susupi.

Invasion Beaches

On June 15, 1944, United States Marines stormed ashore on the relatively level southwestern shores of Saipan along a line about 7,600 yards in length, extending from near Puntan Agingan in the south to above today's San Jose.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below					
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)		

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Capture of the Mariana Islands by United States forces was vital to the plan of massive strategic bombing raids on Japan's industries and ports by the new very-long-range B-29 bombers from bases within range of Japan. Saipan, being in the center of the Marianas and regarded as a principal military base, was selected as the first Mariana target. The capture of the island by U.S. Marine and Army divisions meant a breach of Japan's inner defense line, opening the way to the Home Islands. A Japanese naval officer said, "Our war was lost with the loss of Saipan." The large land mass of Saipan, as compared to earlier Central Pacific battles on coral islands, combined with dense vegetation, mountains, and caves, caused the American forces to employ different tactics to advance and take terrain. Japan learned an important lesson from its defeat; its forces would organize in depth in future combat, a reality Americans met with in the battles for Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. The loss of Saipan forced the resignation of Premier Hideki Tojo and the entire Japanese cabinet. Finally, less than five months after its capture, November 24, 1944, 111 B-29s departed Saipan to carry out their first massive raid on Tokyo.

American Preparations

Following the capture of Kwajalein and Enewetak atolls, the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that the next advance of Adm. Chester W. Nimitz's Central Pacific forces would be against the Mariana Islands. Saipan was selected as the first objective and the invasion date was set for June 15, 1944. Under Admiral Nimitz at Pearl Harbor, Adm. Raymond A. Spruance, in command of the Fifth Fleet, led Operation "Forager." Vice Adm. Richmond K. Turner took charge of both the Joint Expeditionary Force (Task Force 51) and, under it, the Northern Attack Force, which was to assault both Saipan and Tinian. Feisty Lt. Gen. Holland M. Smith, USMC, "the father of amphibious warfare," was the commanding general of Expeditionary Troops and Northern Troops and Landing Force (NTLF). For the invasion of Saipan, Smith had three infantry divisions: Second Marine Division, Maj. Gen. Thomas E. Watson; Fourth Marine Division, Maj. Gen. Harry Schmidt; and Twenty-seven Infantry Division as a reserve, Maj. Gen. Ralph C. Smith, USA. The Marine divisions were experienced in Pacific warfare, one or the other having fought at Guadalcanal,

1. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., Bernard C. Nalty, and Edwin T. Turnbladh, Central Pacific Drive, History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II, vol. 3 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), p. 346, quoting Vice Adm. Shigeyoshi Miwa.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data Landing Beaches

Acreeage of nominated property 1,366 acres land and water

Quadrangle name Saipan

Quadrangle scale 1:25,000

UTM References

A

5	5	3	6	1	6	1	1	0	1	6	7	8	5	4	1	0
Zone			Easting						Northing							

B

5	15	3	5	9	5	3	1	0	1	6	7	1	5	1	6	0
Zone		Easting						Northing								

C

5	5	3	5	8	8	3	0	1	6	7	1	7	4	1	0
Zone			Easting						Northing						

D

5	15	3	5	8	4	1	6	1	0	1	6	7	1	3	0	1	6	0
Zone		Easting						Northing										

E

5	5	3	5	9	9	1	8	1	0	1	6	7	1	8	5	1	1	0
Zone			Easting						Northing									

F

Zone		Easting						Northing										

G

Zone		Easting						Northing										

H

Zone		Easting						Northing										

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Erwin N. Thompson, Historian

organization Denver Service Center, NPS

date July 1, 1984

street & number 755 Parfet Street

telephone (303) 234-4509

city or town Lakewood

state Colorado

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title _____ date _____

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Aslito/Isley Field

Acreege of nominated property 1,453 acres

Quadrangle name Saipan

Quadrangle scale 1:25,000

UTM References

A

5	5	3	6	4	3	3	0	1	6	7	2	9	0	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

5	5	3	6	4	7	7	0	1	6	7	2	2	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

5	5	3	6	4	9	2	0	1	6	7	1	5	7	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

5	5	3	6	4	0	3	0	1	6	6	9	9	3	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

5	5	3	6	1	6	5	0	1	6	7	0	3	7	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

5	5	3	6	1	5	4	0	1	6	7	1	0	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

5	5	3	6	2	9	4	0	1	6	7	3	1	9	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title

organization

date

street & number

telephone

city or town

state

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title

date

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date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Marpi Point, Suicide Cliff, and Banzai Cliff

Acreeage of nominated property 737 acres

Quadrangle name Saipan

Quadrangle scale 1:25,000

UTM References

A

5	5	3	7	2	8	6	0	1	6	9	0	2	1	1	0
Zone			Easting					Northing							

B

5	5	3	7	4	1	4	1	0	1	6	8	1	8	6	1	0
Zone		Easting					Northing									

C

5	5	3	7	0	3	0	0	1	6	8	8	9	9	1	0
Zone		Easting					Northing								

D

5	5	3	7	1	9	1	8	1	0	1	6	9	1	0	6	1	0
Zone		Easting					Northing										

E

Zone		Easting					Northing										

F

Zone		Easting					Northing										

G

Zone		Easting					Northing										

H

Zone		Easting					Northing										

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title

organization

date

street & number

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Keeper of the National Register

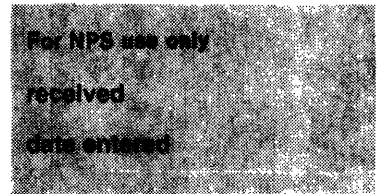
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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These beaches are protected by barrier reefs which create wide lagoons, Lagunan Chalan Kanoa and Lagunan Garapan, between the ocean depths and land. These wide stretches of shallow water made an amphibious landing both difficult and dangerous. While this water area has not been examined for World War II artifacts, one can observe two U.S. medium tanks standing motionless a short distance out. The narrow sandy beach itself is public domain, as is a fair portion of the strip of land of varying width lying between the beaches and the main north-south highway (Beach Road). Toward the north, this strip of land is undeveloped and is landscaped with grass and palm trees as far south as San Jose. At that town, a few structures have appeared on the western side of the highway. Between San Jose and Susupi, Civic Center Park lies between the highway and the beach. The land in front of Susupi and Chalan Kanoa is considerably developed, there being the legislative buildings, two resort hotels, and numerous other structures. One of the hotels is on Puntan Susupi (Afetna Point in 1944). This point marked the boundary between the Second and Fourth Marine Divisions who landed on either side of it. The point itself was heavily defended by the Japanese.

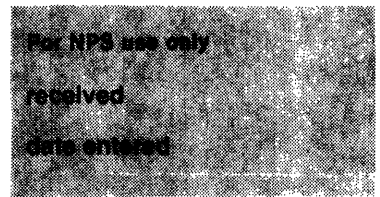
Immediately below Chalan Kanoa is the Admiral H.G. Hopgood Junior High School. South of the school is a U.S. Coast Guard Station, on Puntan Afetna (unnamed in 1944). This point marked the southern end of the beaches on which the Marines landed. Between the station and Puntan Agingan, relatively little development has occurred. Along the beaches, particularly in the stretch north of Puntan Susupi, a few Japanese, reinforced-concrete pillboxes remain. A Japanese light tank has been placed on one of these, thus creating a monument.

South of the landing beaches is a rocky promontory, Puntan Agingan (Agingan Point in 1944), pointing toward Tinian Island three miles away. The Japanese were constructing a reinforced-concrete, 6-inch gun battery here at the time of the American invasion. The two British, Whitworth Armstrong guns, model 1900, had already been mounted, but only one casemate had been completed. Both weapons had been damaged by naval bombardment. The guns are gone, but a steel pedestal remains as does the battered casemate. The general area is unkempt and until recently was a trash dump. Nearby, is a Japanese pillbox built into the edge of the cliff. Also, a small but sturdy concrete platform stands at the tip of the point. Its function has not been determined. No trace remains of Japanese machine guns and anti-boat guns that were positioned on the point. Agingan is public domain land. It is recommended that the following areas be included in a national historic landmark commemorating the American landings on Saipan on June 15, 1944:

-
1. It should be noted that today's Puntan Afetna is not the Afetna Point of 1944.

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The waters between the coral reefs and the land, including Lagunan Chalan Kanoa and Lagunan Garapan, from a point 4,000 feet north of the junction of Beach Road and Wallace Highway (where an unnamed road joins Beach Road from the east near Bench Mark 3.8), south to where the reef joins to Puntan Agingan.

The nearby unbroken sandy beach between the above two mentioned places.

The strip of land between Beach Road and the beach from the above mentioned northern point south to the junction of Beach Road and Wallace Highway.

The strip of land west of Beach Road that is designated as Civic Center Park.

And a strip of land west of Beach Road, south of the U.S. Coast Guard Station, continuing south to and including Puntan Agingan.

Aslito/Isley Field

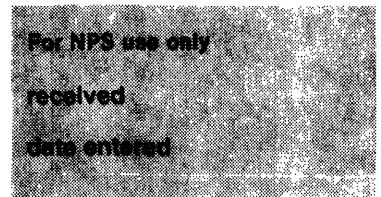
Japan began construction of Aslito Field, its principal air base in the Marianas, in 1934. Captured by U.S. forces early in the battle, a considerable number of concrete structures survived the fighting, although battle damaged. In the general vicinity of today's air terminal are the air operations building, two power plants, four gasoline storage buildings, fourteen standard air raid shelters, an aerial bomb magazine, a partly underground structure for gasoline storage tanks, and various structural ruins. The air operations building, similar to structures on Tinian and Roi islands, has been fully restored and is occupied by a tourist bureau. The other structures are abandoned.

Navy Seabees repaired Aslito Field soon after its capture for use by fighter planes. Then, Army engineers swiftly expanded the field into a large airbase for the mighty B-29 bomber. Eventually, the base was named Isley Field.² Of the two 8,500-foot, parallel runways, the southern one has been modernized to carry today's commercial jet planes. The northern runway has been maintained in part for emergency occasions. The nearly seven miles of B-29 taxiways and

2. U.S. Army troops captured the field and the Army officially named it in honor of Col. Gardiner J. Conroy, USA, killed in action in the Gilbert Islands in 1943. Later, the airfield was renamed in honor of Comdr. Robert H. Isely, USN, who had been shot down over Saipan. It was soon discovered that Isely's name had been misspelled, but the official spelling was retained as Isley.

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over 100 out of 181 hardstands (parking areas) around the runways may be traced in part, although the area is covered with the ubiquitous tangantangan that was aerial seeded on war-ravaged Saipan. In total, Isley Field had about ten million square feet of pavement.

The large administrative area of the Seventy-third Bombardment Wing, stretching along the south side of the field on the Opyan coast (Obyan in 1944) on southern Saipan, is also densely covered with tangantangan. Recently, local citizens have cleared an interpretive trail through a portion of this area, leading past concrete pads of quonset huts, wartime rock-bordered walks, exotic shrubs and trees brought in by airmen, and other vestiges of 1944-1945. At one point along the cliffs of Opyan is a secluded beach of white sand, Unai Peo or, popularly, Ladder Beach. Here, off-duty airmen relaxed in the Pacific sun, and the beach remains popular with today's citizens. Not far away at another accessible beach, Unai Opyan (code-named Beach White 2 in 1944), is a large, circular, reinforced-concrete Japanese blockhouse (one of three extant on Saipan). Although American intelligence concluded that its design was German-inspired, the fortification is most likely inherently Japanese. It has four embrasures spaced at sixty degrees, each having a sixty-degree angle of fire. Thus, its four cannon could cover the beach in either direction as well as the ocean. A low, now-roofless, steel turret protrudes from its roof for observation purposes. This solid structure is in relatively good condition, although an interior magazine has been removed, or was never built. The blockhouse serves as a dramatic reminder of Japanese defenses.

Southwest of Isley Field, the United States constructed a third, but slightly shorter runway, complete with taxiways and 79 hardstands. Christened Kobler Field, it served primarily army and navy air transports. On occasion, carrier aircraft took refresher training at Kobler and overflow B-29s from Isley parked there. The field has lost the greater part of its integrity, having become the site of a large-scale, low-income housing development. (One row of houses marches straight down the runway, providing the occupants with asphalt lawns.)

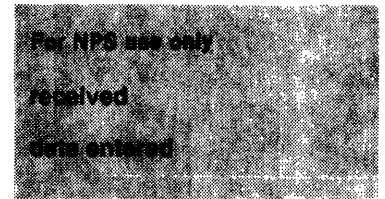
Recommended as part of a national historic landmark is the general area formerly known as Aslito Field and Isley Field to include: the site of the two B-29 runways, taxiways, and hardstands; the site of the Seventy-third Bombardment Wing's administrative area; the Japanese blockhouse on the beach at Unai Opyan; and the concrete Japanese structures associated with Aslito Field. Exempted are the modern air terminal, its vehicle parking lot, and its concrete aircraft parking area in front.

Marpi Point

The area that the Americans called Marpi Point at the north end of Saipan has several official names today. The great cliff where unknown thousands of

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Japanese civilians and military committed suicide in 1944, popularly known as Suicide Cliff, is officially named Laderan Banaderu. The level land north of it on which the Japanese had begun construction of an air field and where the American Navy constructed Marpi Field for training aircraft carrier groups, is now called Banaderu. Banzai Cliff, where more Japanese ended their lives by leaping into the ocean, still goes by that name.

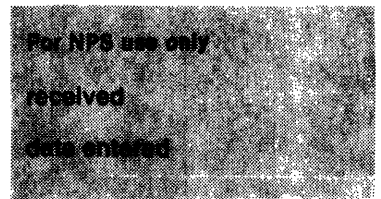
Little remains of the U.S. Navy airfield, which had two runways, 5,900 feet and 3,500 feet in length. Of nearly three miles of asphalted taxiway, only a few hundred yards are extant. The rest of the area is smothered in tangantangan. Around the base of Suicide Cliff and on the top are several elaborate memorials to the great tragedy that occurred in the last days of the battle. At the base of the cliff, three large, impressive memorials are dedicated respectively to Okinawans, Koreans, and Japanese. A peace memorial stands on top, 770 feet above low ground. Yet another, simpler memorial has been erected at Banzai Cliff. At the northwest base of Suicide Cliff is a Japanese fortification composed partly of a natural cave and partly of poured concrete. Easily accessible, this rather impressive work is heavily visited and is known popularly, but erroneously, as the "Last Command Post." Adjacent to this stronghold, a collection of Japanese artillery, a tank, and other military artifacts have been assembled for public display.

An additional feature at Marpi is an outstanding example of a Japanese coastal pillbox constructed with local coral rock and concrete. It is built into the rugged coral-limestone cliff on the west side of Puntan Laggua. This perfectly camouflaged (by its own nature) pillbox commanded the entire northern coast of Saipan.

Recommend as part of a national historic landmark on Saipan, with emphasis on its tragic history, is the general area of Marpi Point to include Suicide Cliff, Banzai Cliff, the airfield, and the two Japanese fortified works.

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Tarawa, and Kwajalein. Only six of the Twenty-seventh's nine infantry battalions had been in combat, four in the Gilbert Islands, two at Enewetak. The three divisions trained in amphibious landings in Hawaii; then, the 71,000-man ground force staged through the Marshalls and advanced toward Saipan.

Japanese Defenses

Between the attack on Pearl Harbor and early 1944, the Japanese considered Saipan to be a rear area and did little to prepare for its defense. When the United States captured Kwajalein and Enewetak atolls in February 1944, Japan rushed to bolster defenses on Saipan. By June, army strength amounted to 25,470; naval forces had increased to 6,160. No unified command existed. The senior naval officer was Vice Adm. Chiuchi Nagumo, commanding the Central Pacific Area Fleet. Admiral Nagumo had led the attack on Pearl Harbor and had been defeated in the Battle of Midway. Lt. Gen. Hideyoshi Obata had his Thirty-first Army headquarters on Saipan. He, however, was trapped on Guam when the invasion came, and Lt. Gen. Yoshitsugu Saito, commanding the Forty-third Division, took tactical control of the island. Other army units included the 47th Independent Mixed Brigade, 3d Independent Mountain Artillery Regiment, 9th Tank Regiment, and 25th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment. Naval forces were composed principally of the 5th Special Base Force, 55th Naval Guard Force, and 1st Special Naval Landing Force.

Due to the effectiveness of American submarine actions, the Japanese on Saipan suffered from a shortage of armament and fortification construction materials. Nonetheless, they struggled against time to effect defenses, still placing emphasis on defending the beaches even though Saipan's topography was much different than the coral islands of earlier battles. A letter from Saipan in May 1944 stated that the distribution of men and weapons was completed but fortifications could not be strengthened because of the shortages, "The situation is unbearable."²

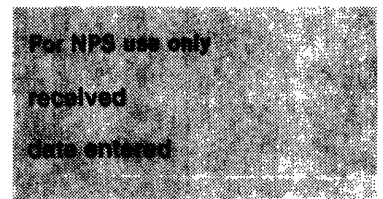
American Offensive

In February 1944, Vice Adm. Marc A. Mitscher had led his Fast Carrier Task Force on a two-day raid on Saipan and the other Marianas. Beginning June 11, Mitscher's Task Force 58 (seven fast carriers, eight light carriers, and seven fast battleships) returned to the Marianas and commenced aerial and surface

2. Translations of Captured Japanese Documents on Japanese Defense Plan, Saipan. U.S. Marine Corps Records, World War II. Washington National Records Center, Suitland, MD, hereinafter cited as WNRC.

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bombardments. On June 14, seven old battleships, highly trained in shore bombardment, joined the attack. Naval underwater demolition teams reconnoitered the landing beaches. Landing ships bearing the Second and Fourth Marine Divisions slowly approached Saipan from the east.

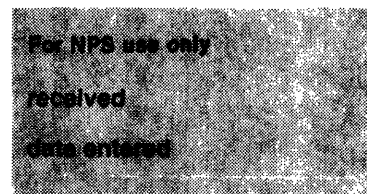
Invasion

At 5:30 a.m., June 15, an intense naval bombardment commenced against Saipan's southwestern beaches, while Marines carried out a diversionary demonstration farther north, off Garapan. Carrier planes began a thirty-minute strike at 7:00 a.m. Almost three miles offshore, landing ships started disgorging more than 700 amphibian tractors and tanks. Farther out, other vessels loaded with artillery and tanks stood by. Larger troop transports carrying reserve troops and heavy equipment swung at anchor ten miles to sea, on the horizon. The line of departure, 4,250 yards offshore, was marked by naval craft flying flags that displayed the colors and numbers of the landing beaches. Shortly after 8:00 a.m., gunboats began firing their automatic weapons and rockets. Soon, the first wave of amphibian vehicles crossed the line. When the lead vehicles came within 300 yards of the beaches, naval gunfire ceased, except against Afetna Point (Puntan Susupi) which lay between the divisions' beaches. At that moment, 72 carrier planes made a last-minute strafing run.

North of Afetna Point, the Second Marine Division landed with four battalions abreast: 6th Marines on Beaches Red, and 8th Marines on Beaches Green. South of the point, the Fourth Marine Division's 23d Marines landed on Beaches Blue, and the 25th Marines assaulted Beaches Yellow. When the first waves crossed the reef and started across the lagoons, the Japanese opened up with well-directed machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. In the Second Division's sector, some battalions got off course in the confusion and landed farther north than planned. All touched land between 8:40 and 8:43 a.m., with only seven vehicles knocked out of action. The Fourth Division's leading elements reached the southern beaches at the same time, with a loss of three tanks and two troop tractors. Critics of the landings have noted two factors that caused the scheme to be judged less than perfect. Because elements of the Second Division had drifted northward, a serious gap developed between the divisions, a situation that continued for three days. Also, the plan for the amphibian tanks to dash immediately inland and to deploy and protect the troops following in their tractors failed. Many of the tanks stopped on the beaches, their drivers refusing orders to move inland. Other tanks, underpowered and lacking sufficient armor and armament, floundered about or bogged down. Intense enemy fire and confusion on the beaches added to the failure to break through to objectives.

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The amphibian tanks on the Fourth Division's left flank had more success than most. They moved through the ruins of Chalan Kanoa with surprising ease and half of them reached their objective, Fina Susu (Fina Sisu) Ridge, 2,000 yards inland, by mid-morning. Farther south, almost no progress was made on Beaches Yellow. Fierce fighting occurred in this area and, one hour after landing, Marine infantry on Beach Yellow 1 had been able to push inland only twelve yards. Pillboxes and artillery on Agingan Point delivered heavy fire on the 25th Marines, forcing them to dig in for the night with their right flank exposed.

The Second Division's confused landing created its own problems. On Beach Green 1, two battalions of the 8th Marines tried to land at the same time, creating mix-ups and congestion. The 6th Marines landed 400 yards farther north than their assigned beaches thus creating a serious gap between themselves and the 8th to their right. By noon, the 6th had 35 percent casualties. It succeeded, however, in knocking out a small Japanese counterattack force of three tanks. The right flank of the 8th Marines had the unenviable task of attacking south along the beach toward the antiboat weapons on Afetna Point which guarded the one channel through the reef to Chalan Kanoa. Progress against the numerous pillboxes was slow. By nightfall on D-Day the Second Marine Division had suffered over 1,500 casualties.

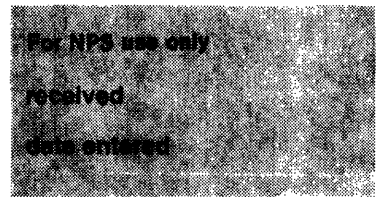
On the whole, however, the landing was a success. By nightfall the Marines had established a beachhead 10,000 yards long and, in places, 1,000 yards deep. Artillery and tanks had come ashore and division command posts had been established. The most serious problems for the morrow were Japanese-held Afetna Point between the divisions, Agingan Point on the Fourth Division's right, and Japanese artillery sited on the Second Division's left flank. While the most critical stage of the landing was past, no one was prepared to say the beachhead was secured.

During the night the most serious Japanese counterattack hit the extreme left (north) flank of the 6th Marines when three separate attempts were made by infantry and tanks crashing down the coastal road from Garapan. All were repulsed and about 700 Japanese were killed.

June 16 brought welcomed successes when the 8th Marines took Afetna Point. In the south, the 25th Marines finally captured Agingan Point, along with five machine guns and two mountain guns. By evening, the Fourth Division was established on Fina Susu Ridge. That night, General Saito ordered another counterattack. It too failed and 24 out of 37 Japanese tanks were destroyed. Also on June 16, Admiral Spruance learned that a Japanese task force was steaming from the Philippines to do battle with the Fifth Fleet.

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Aslito Field

Among the many changes of plans caused by the Japanese fleet's movement were orders to Maj. Gen. Ralph Smith to land two of his reserve regiments, the 165th and 105th. The 165th came ashore during the night of June 16-17 and, with orders to capture Aslito Field at 7:30 a.m., relieved the 25th Marines in the south. Attacking across cane fields toward a ridge that commanded the western approaches to the airfield, the 165th made good progress until it reached the strongly defended ridge. There, the Japanese forced the regiment's right wing back practically to its starting point. The battalion on the left had better success. In mid-afternoon, patrols reached the west and south sides of the airfield and made contact with the 25th Marines to the north. This same day, the Army's 105th Regiment landed, but without much of its equipment. The transports had been ordered east because of the advance of the Japanese fleet. The 105th's vessel did not return to Saipan until June 25.

The two Marine divisions made satisfactory progress on the 17th, but nightfall found a worrisome 600-yard gap between them, caused primarily by the sniper-infested swamp that surrounded Lake Susupe (Hagoi Susupi). Also on the 17th, Lt. Gen. Holland Smith established his NTLF command post in Chalan Kanoa.

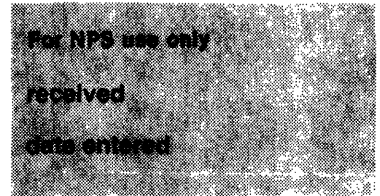
On June 18, the 165th Regiment completed the capture of Aslito Field against almost no opposition, as well as taking yesterday's difficult ridge to the southwest. When Maj. Gen. Ralph Smith arrived at the command post that afternoon, the airfield was officially named Conroy Field in honor of the 165th commander, Col. Gardiner J. Conroy, who had been killed on Makin in November 1943.³

In the Fourth Marine Division's area, the 25th Marines cut across Saipan and easily gained the beaches of Magicienne Bay (Bahia Laolao), where it was soon joined by the 24th Marines. The division's 23d Marines, on the left, ran into the heaviest opposition of the day, making slight progress. The Second Division remained almost stationary during June 18, owing to the 23d's difficulties on the right. That night, General Saito ordered his forces to withdraw to a new line of defense extending from Garapan in the northwest and running past the southern slopes of Mount Tapotchau (Okso Takpochao) to Magicienne Bay.

3. It has not been determined who changed the name to Isley Field nor when the change took place.

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Battle of Philippine Sea

When the Americans invaded Saipan on June 15, a large Japanese fleet under Vice Adm. Jisaburo Ozawa moved toward the Philippine Sea west of the Marianas to activate Operation A-Go, a plan to destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet wherever it appeared with one blow. On June 16, Admiral Spruance decided to postpone the assault on Guam, which had been set for June 18, and to detach part of the fleet supporting the invasion of Saipan to augment Admiral Mitscher's Fast Carrier Task Force (TF-58). By evening on July 18, Ozawa's search planes had located Mitscher's force, but the American admiral was still in the dark with regard to the Japanese. At 5:30 a.m., June 19, an American Hellcat spotted two Japanese planes near the fleet and shot one down. The battle had begun. Between 10:00 a.m. and 2:50 p.m., Admiral Ozawa's carrier planes carried out four massive raids against American ships. Not one succeeded in inflicting serious damage on Mitscher's ships. By dark, 315 Japanese planes had been shot down; the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot had ended.

Meanwhile, American submarines Albacore and Cavalla put torpedoes into Japanese carriers Shokaku and Taiho, the latter being Japan's newest and largest carrier. Both exploded and sank during the afternoon.

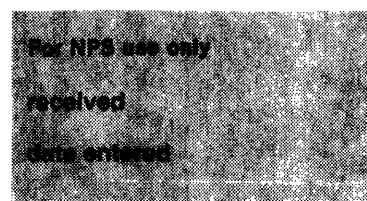
Not until the afternoon of June 20 did planes from Task Force 58 finally spot the Japanese ships. Admiral Mitscher decided to attack, knowing that his planes would have to return to the carriers after dark. The attack commenced just before sunset. When darkness fell, Americans claimed one more Japanese carrier, Hiyo, and destroyed two-thirds of Ozawa's remaining aircraft while losing only twenty of their own. The planes returned to their carriers in total darkness. Admiral Mitscher, throwing caution overboard, ordered carrier lights turned on. Many planes crashed on deck or ditched in the ocean, but the recovery rate was remarkable--only 49 men were lost. While most of the Japanese task force escaped, the Philippine Sea was made safe for the conquest of Saipan and Tinian and the liberation of Guam. Japanese land forces on those islands had no hope of being reinforced.

Saipan Captured

Having cut the island in two, American forces now faced the main Japanese defensive line in the north and a small body of the enemy on Nafutan Ridge in the south. Gen. Ralph Smith's army troops began the reduction of the southern Japanese positions. The infantry battalions made only small advances on June 20 and even less on the following day. Marine Gen. Holland Smith decided on June 21 that the Twenty-seventh Division was needed in the north against the principal Japanese defense. He ordered the division to move north, leaving one infantry battalion and a platoon of light tanks to finish off Nafutan Peninsula. During the next several days the battalion struggled forward but

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made only small gains. Then, on the night of June 26-27, about 500 Japanese troops slipped through the American lines, using the password, "Shichi Sei Hokoku," or "Seven lives for one's country." Racing north, the Japanese hit the airfield with small arms fire, destroying a fighter plane and damaging two others. They then dashed toward their (former) headquarters on Hill 500. There, they unexpectedly encountered U.S. Marines who wiped out the marauders. Marine Gen. Holland Smith was more than disappointed with the Army's performance.

Meanwhile, the Second and Fourth Marine Divisions began the assault on General Saito's new defense line. On June 23, the Army division was inserted in the center of the corps against the objectives known as Death Valley and Purple Heart Ridge. For two days the Twenty-seventh was frustrated by the rugged terrain and a stubborn enemy. Its failure to advance angered Marine General Smith who relieved Army General Smith on June 24, causing an uproar that reached back to the Pentagon and lived on until after World War II.⁴ The dispirited soldiers of the Twenty-seventh carried on. On June 28, the division received a new commander, Maj. Gen. George W. Griner.⁵

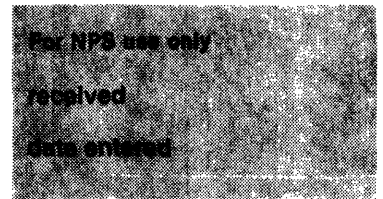
By the end of June, the Second Marine Division, after several days of hard combat, had captured the peak of Mount Tapotchau and a particularly stubborn hill, Tipo Pale (Tipo Poli) and stood on the outskirts of Garapan. Since D-Day, the division had suffered 4,488 casualties. The Twenty-seventh Division in the center finally broke through Death Valley and came abreast of two Marine divisions on its flanks. Its casualties since landing amounted to 1,836. On the right, the Fourth Division consolidated its considerable gains, having swept through the plains of Kagman Peninsula.

4. As a result of this incident, Marine General Smith was promoted to command the new Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Never again was he in direct command of combat troops. Army General Smith was transferred to the European Theater.

5. The bitterness between the Marines and soldiers may be exemplified by events in Death Valley. The 106th Infantry Regiment's operational reports are filled with messages from the 8th Marines that the Army's supporting artillery fire was falling on the Marines. In contrast, when the Army complained that Marine fire was hitting its men, a Marine colonel is said to have retorted, "goddam you, in order to shoot at you, I'd have to reverse every weapon 180 degrees, and you'd still be out of range." 106th Infantry Regiment, "Operations Reports," June 26 and 27, 1944, Record Group 407, WNRC; Allan R. Millett, Semper Fidelis, The History of the United States Marine Corps (New York: Macmillan Co., 1980), p. 414.

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In his cave headquarters in a ravine east of Makunsha (San Roque), General Saito held a conference with Admiral Nagumo and issued orders for a final banzai attack on the enemy for July 7. The tired and wounded general then committed suicide. Before sunrise, July 7, 3,000 Japanese soldiers poured down the Tanapag plain from Makunsha and fell upon the 105th Infantry Regiment. A wild fury of hand-to-hand fighting took place as the Japanese pushed on south to assault artillery positions of the 10th Marines. Expendng its strength, the attack exhausted itself. A counterattack soon recovered lost ground. In those few hours, the 105th Regiment, whose earlier performance had irked Gen. Holland Smith, suffered almost 1,000 casualties. No Japanese survived.

The Fourth Marine Division took over the entire front north of Makunsha and advanced toward Marpi Point. After a stiff fight, they captured "Prudential Hill" which overlooked Karaberra Pass. By the afternoon of July 9, the Marines stood on the northern cliffs and Saipan was declared secured.

Suicide Cliff and Banzai Cliff

The Marines' triumph was tempered by a tragedy unfolding on northern Saipan. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of terrified Japanese civilians committed suicide by leaping from Suicide Cliff (Mount Marpi or Laderan Banaderu) and from Banzai Cliff overlooking the rocks and angry surf below. Some families carried their children to their deaths:

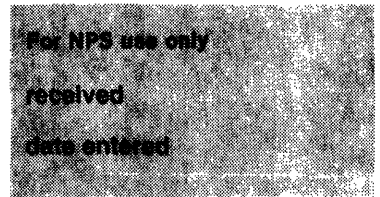
In spite of continuous American efforts to induce both military and civilian survivors to give themselves up, the traditional Japanese code of death before surrender prevailed in most cases. Shortly after the declaration that the island was secured, hundreds of civilians leapt from the cliffs of Marpi Point to the knifelike rocks below. At times the waters below the point were so thick with the floating bodies of men, women, and children that naval small craft were unable to steer a course without running over them.

6. The location of Admiral Nagumo's last headquarters is unknown. General Saito's cave has been identified. His remains were cremated by his staff. Later, when the ashes were identified, U.S. forces gave the late general a formal military burial.

7. Philip A. Crowl, Campaign in the Marianas, United States Army in World War II (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), pp. 264-265.

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The number of these tragic deaths cannot be determined with accuracy. The two sites remain as hallowed ground, marked with imposing memorials dedicated to the dead of Japan, Okinawa, and Korea, and to peace.

Isley Field

On June 22, while fighting raged elsewhere on Saipan, the first P-47 fighters of the Seventh Air Force set down on the former Aslito Field. Two additional squadrons and some P-61 Black Widow night fighters were soon on the island, completing the formation of the 318th Fighter Group. For the first time in the Pacific war, Maj. Gen. Willis Hale's Seventh Air Force had the mission of providing close support to ground troops. A Japanese soldier recorded his anguish on seeing the American planes over Saipan, "The enemy planes are taking off from ASLITO airfield, flying freely in the air; it's maddening to see them flying."

In late July the airfield was sufficiently expanded to allow B-25 medium bombers to begin operations against Tinian and Guam. They were reinforced by the arrival of the B-24 heavy bombers of the 30th Bombardment Group. The 30th Group maintained its headquarters at the field, now renamed Isley, until late November, when it moved next door to Kobler Field to make room for B-29s at Isley. Bombing raids were carried out over Iwo Jima and Chichi Jima north of Saipan and Truk and Yap to the south.

On November 2, the first Japanese air raid on Isley Field occurred when nine aircraft from Iwo Jima caused minor damage. Additional nuisance raids were carried out during the month until, on November 27, fifteen Japanese planes attacked, destroying three B-29s and damaging three others. By the time of

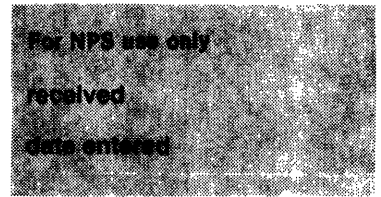
8. The pre-invasion civilian population of Saipan was estimated to have been between 24,800 and 30,000. In August 1944, 13,290 had been placed in camps. Almost half of them were children. Civil Affairs Officer to Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, September 22, 1944, U.S. Marine Corps World War II Records, WNRC.

9. Japanese soldier's diary, Report on Japanese Defense Plan, Saipan, Translations of Captured Japanese Documents, U.S. Marine Corps, World War II Records, WNRC.

10. Kobler Field, first known as Isley 2, was named in honor of Lt. Wayne F. Kobler, the Seventh Air Force's first pilot to lose his life in the Marianas when he was shot down over Tinian on June 27, 1944.

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the last Japanese raid, in January 1945, eleven B-29 bombers had been destroyed at Isley Field.

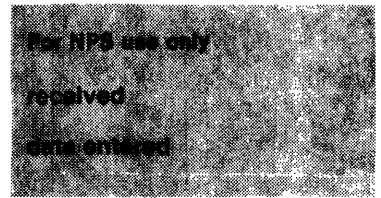
One of the principal reasons for capturing the Marianas was to construct airfields for bombing Japan's cities and ports with the new B-29 Superfortress. On Saipan, army engineers rapidly constructed two 8,500-foot, asphalted runways at Isley in addition to the necessary taxiways, hardstands, and support facilities. The first B-29, "Joltin' Josie, The Pacific Pioneer," landed on October 12, 1944. Within a few weeks the entire 73d Bombardment Wing (12,000 personnel, 180 bombers), under the command of Brig. Gen. Emmett "Rosie" O'Donnell, had arrived. On November 24, General O'Donnell led 110 B-29s on their first raid, against a large aircraft manufacturing complex in Tokyo. This daylight, high-altitude, precision attack set the pattern for the next three months. Isley's B-29 raids continued against the Japanese aircraft industry in Tokyo, Nagoya, Yokohama, and Kobe. Early in 1945, additional B-29 fields were completed on Tinian and Guam and the tempo of the attacks increased. The first two-wing attack, from Saipan and Tinian, against Japan occurred on February 4, 1945. By then, the Army Air Force had concluded precision attacks were not succeeding. Despite 22 missions, nearly all from Isley Field, not one Japanese aircraft production complex had been destroyed. Moreover, losses of the big bombers had been high, rising to 5.7 percent of those airborne in January 1945.

The last daylight, high-altitude, precision attack on Japan, 192 planes, took place on March 4. By that time, Isley's Superfortresses had participated in 2,148 sorties and dropped the larger share of 5,398 tons of bombs on Japan.

Beginning in March, the bombers began a series of nighttime, low-altitude, incendiary attacks on Japan's urban areas. Isley's planes participated in the first of these when 15.8 square miles of Tokyo burned in what is regarded as the most devastating air attack of World War II, exceeding even the nuclear attacks in deaths and destruction. By June 1945, Japan's six most important industrial cities lay in ruins. Isley's bombers had participated in seventeen maximum-effort incendiary attacks that dropped 41,592 tons of bombs. Further incendiary raids were carried out over Japan until August when Japan agreed to unconditional surrender. In nine months of operations, the 73d Bombardment Wing flew 9,894 sorties, with a loss of 182 aircraft. The B-29 bombers did not themselves bring an end to the war, but they made a significant contribution toward a state of peace.

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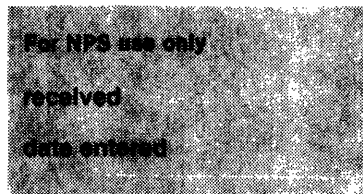
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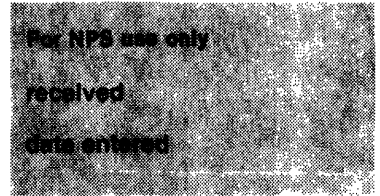
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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Landing Beaches

Starting at the southwest corner of the junction of Beach Road and an unnamed east-west road at Bench Mark 3.8; then south southwest along the ocean side of Beach Road to its junction with Wallace Highway; then in a straight line due west to the ocean beach; then generally south southwest along the beach on a line that separates the beach from firm land past the village of San Jose to an east-west dirt road that marks the northern boundary of Civic Center Park; then east along the dirt road to its junction with Beach Road at Bench Mark 3.2; then along the ocean side of Beach Road southwest 2,600 feet to its junction with a dirt road marking the southern boundary of Civic Center Park; then along the northeast side of the dirt road northwest to the beach; then generally south southwest on a line that separates the beach from firm land past Susupi, Chalan Kanoa, and San Antonio to Punta Afetna; then south southeast along the line that separates the beach from firm land to a point marking the northeast beginning of Putan Agingan; then projecting this line straight across Puntan Agingan to the ocean at Unai Dikike Agingan; then in a west northwest direction following the coast of Puntan Agingan to its western tip; then generally north northwest along the outer edge of the reefs past Lagunan Chalan Kanoa and Lagunan Garapan to a point on the reef due west of the starting point; then due east in a straight line to the point of beginning.

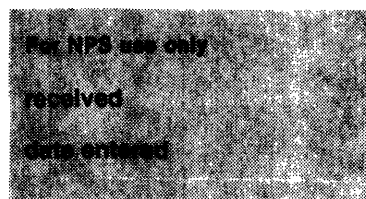
These boundaries encompass the reef and the lagoons that U.S. landing forces crossed in the invasion of Saipan; the portions of the landing beaches possessing integrity; and the surviving Japanese fortifications on Agingan.

Aslito/Isley Field

Beginning at a point on the inside edge of a dirt road 2,000 feet due west from Bahai Laolao and 450 feet northeast of the most northeasterly B-29 hardstand at former Isley Field; then following the inside edge of this dirt road generally south southeast for 4,800 feet to its junction with another dirt road; then generally southwest 3,800 feet along the inside edge of a dirt road to its junction with a dirt road 300 feet southwest of the most southerly B-29 hardstand; then generally south along the west side of a dirt road to the water's edge at Unai Opyan so as to include the ruins of a Japanese blockhouse on the beach; then generally west along the shore of Saipan Channel to the western end of Unai Peo (Ladder Beach); then generally north along the east edge of a dirt road 2,000 feet to its junction with an east-west dirt road; then along the inside edge of a dirt road running east-west then generally northeast to its junction with Wallace Highway; then across Wallace Highway and continuing along the inside edge of the same dirt road east southeast then northeast to the point of beginning.

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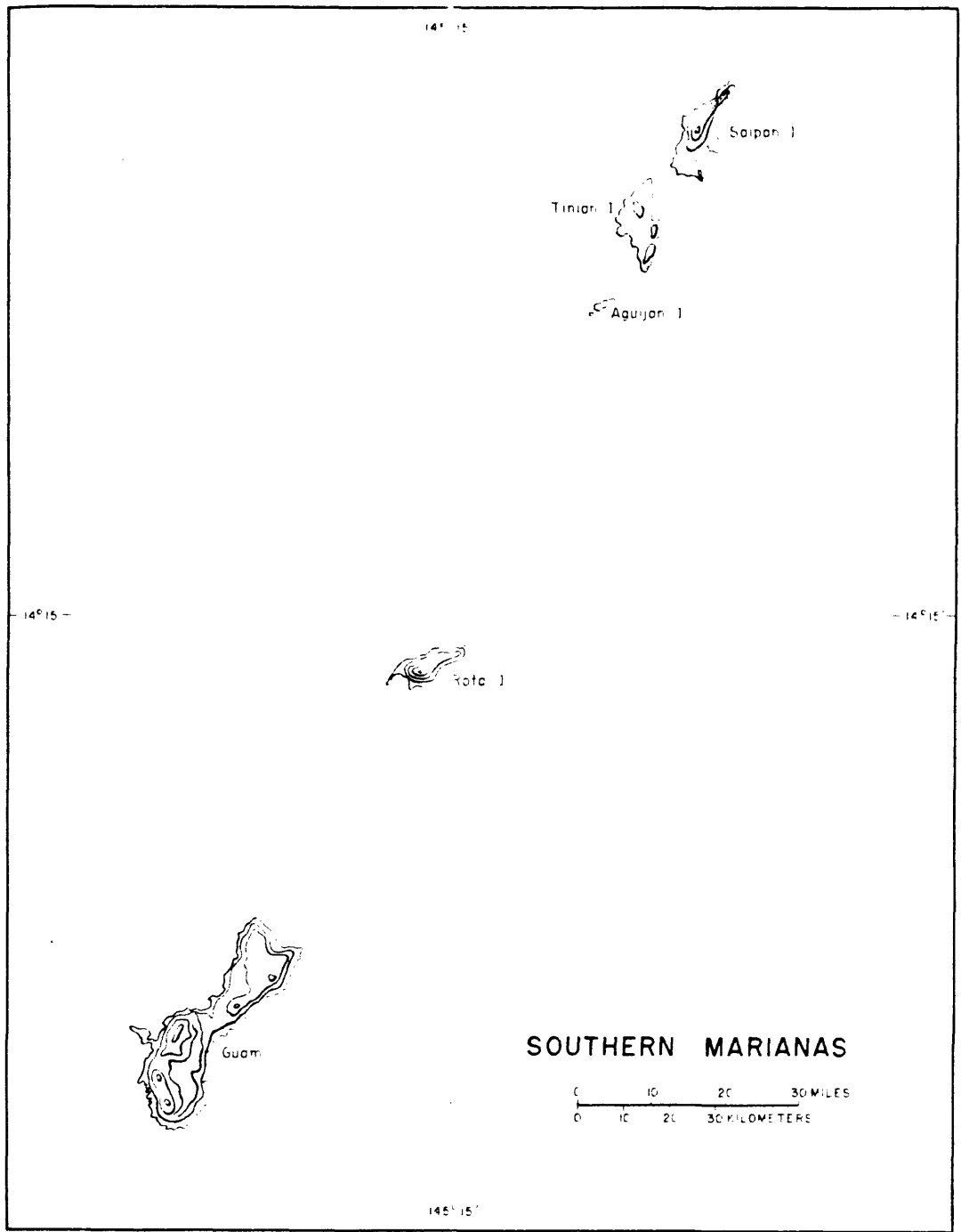
These boundaries encompass the following significant sites and structures at Japanese Aslito Field and American Isley Field: 73d Bombardment Wing administration area on the Opyan coast; Japanese blockhouse at Unai Opyan; B-29 taxiways, hardstands, and the two modified runways at Isley Field; and the Japanese reinforced-concrete structures of Aslito Field.

Excluded are the modern air terminal, its parking area, and water reservoirs.

Marpi Point

Beginning at the northern tip of Puntan Laggua Kattan then southeast following the coast to the tip of Puntan Laggua; then west northwest in a straight line to the summit of Suicide Cliff or Laderan Banaderu; then generally west in a straight line to a point on the ocean shore immediately north of Puntan Makpe; then generally northeast along the ocean shore to the tip of Puntan Sabaneta; then along the ocean shore generally southeast past Banzai Cliff to the point of beginning.

These boundaries include the following historically significant sites and structures: Suicide Cliff and its several memorials on the summit and at its base; Banzai Cliff; former Marpi Field; a Japanese fortification known as "the last command post," and a coastal pillbox on the northwest shoulder of Puntan Laggua.

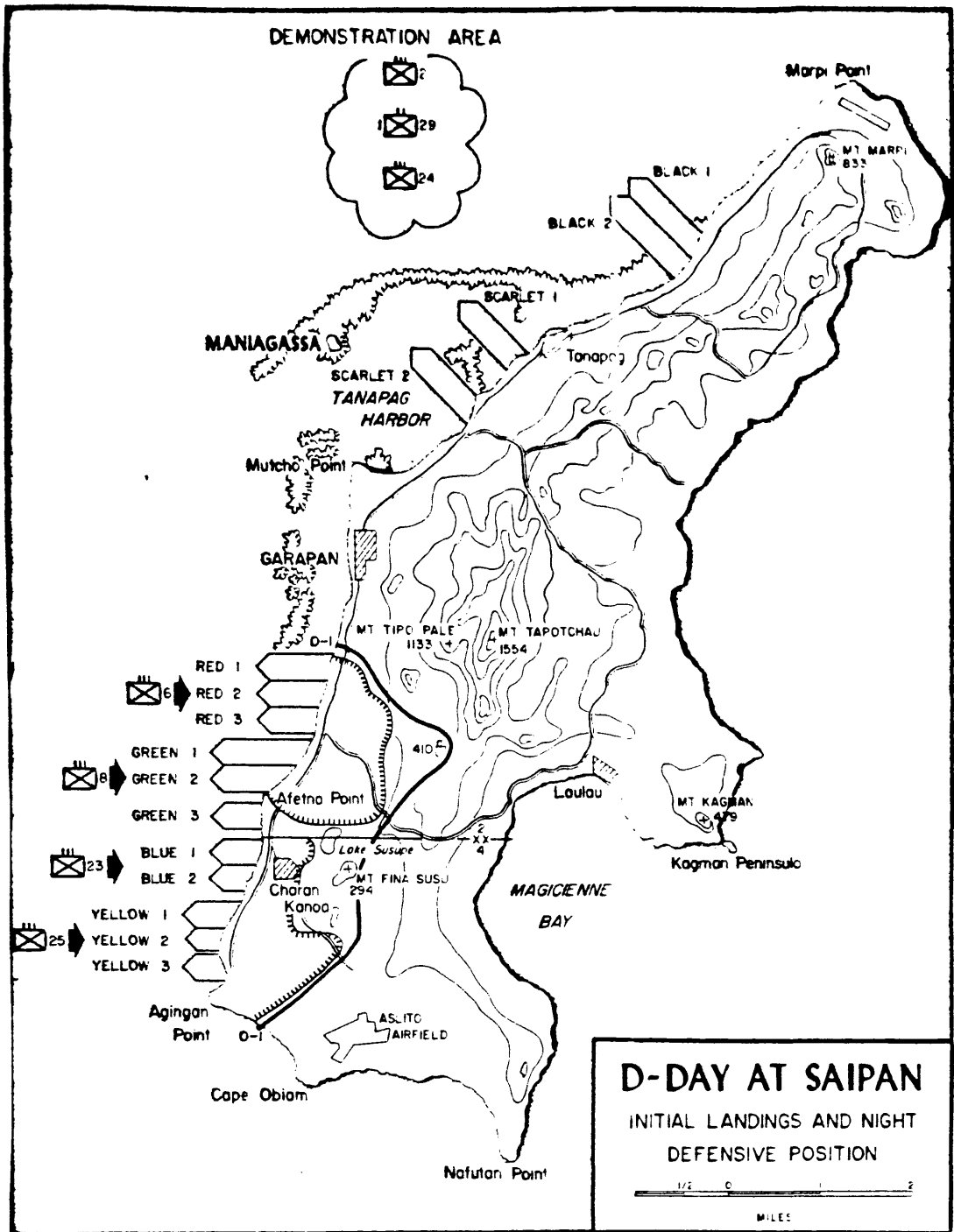


MAP 2

F. Temple

FROM CROWL, CAMPAIGN IN THE MARIANAS

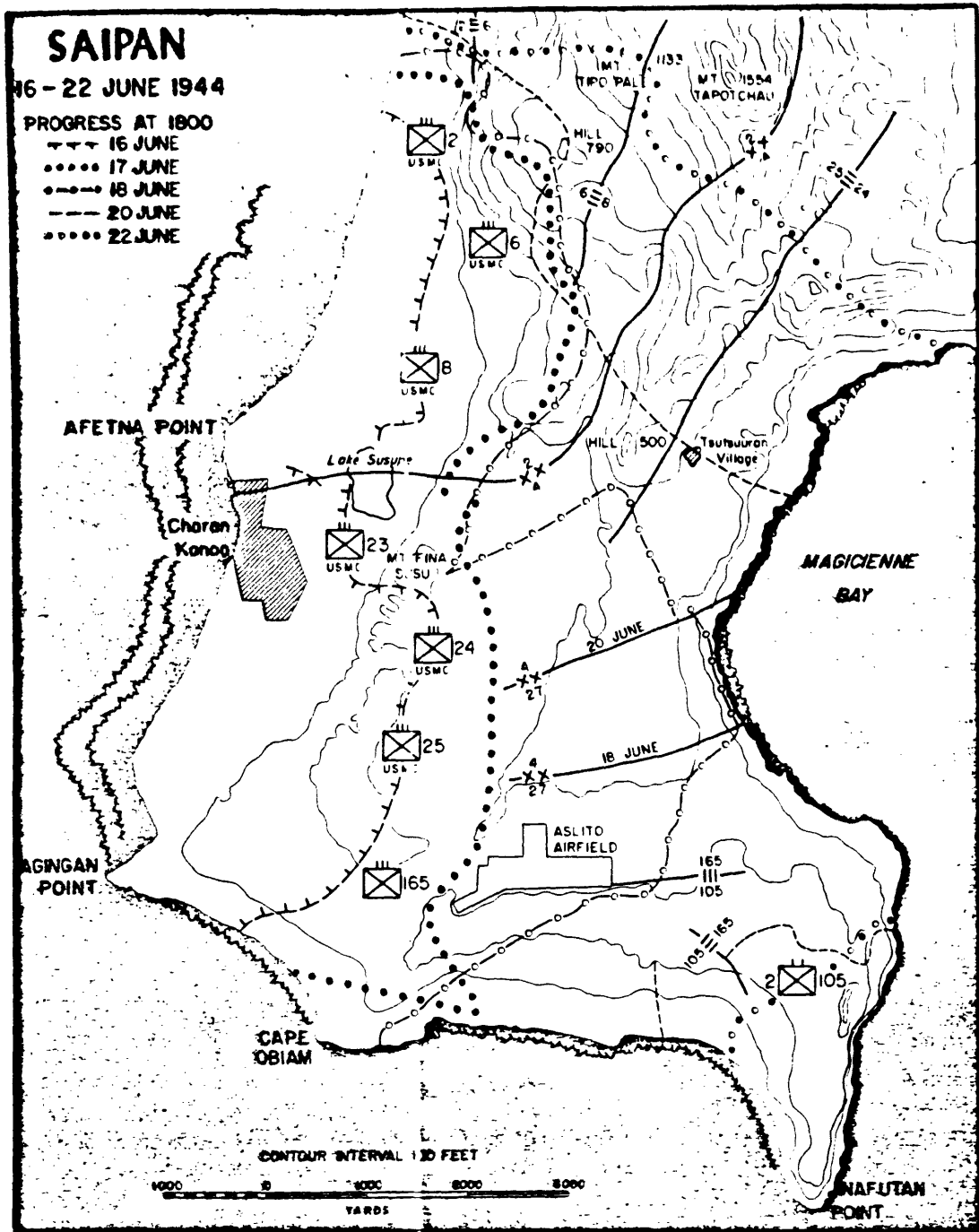
SAIPAN : THE FIRST DAY



MAP 16

R. F. STIBIL

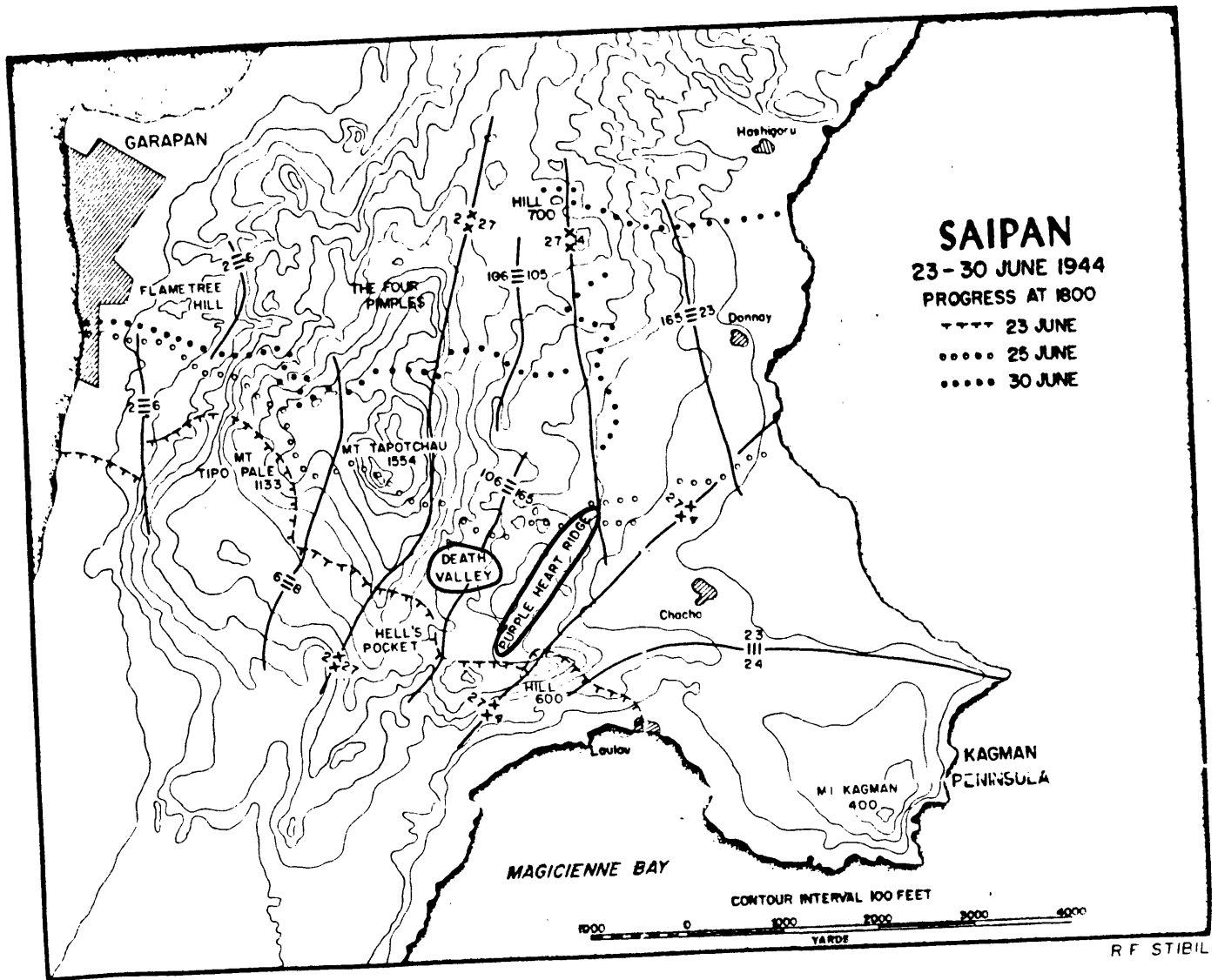
FROM SHAW, ET AL, CENTRAL PACIFIC DRIVE



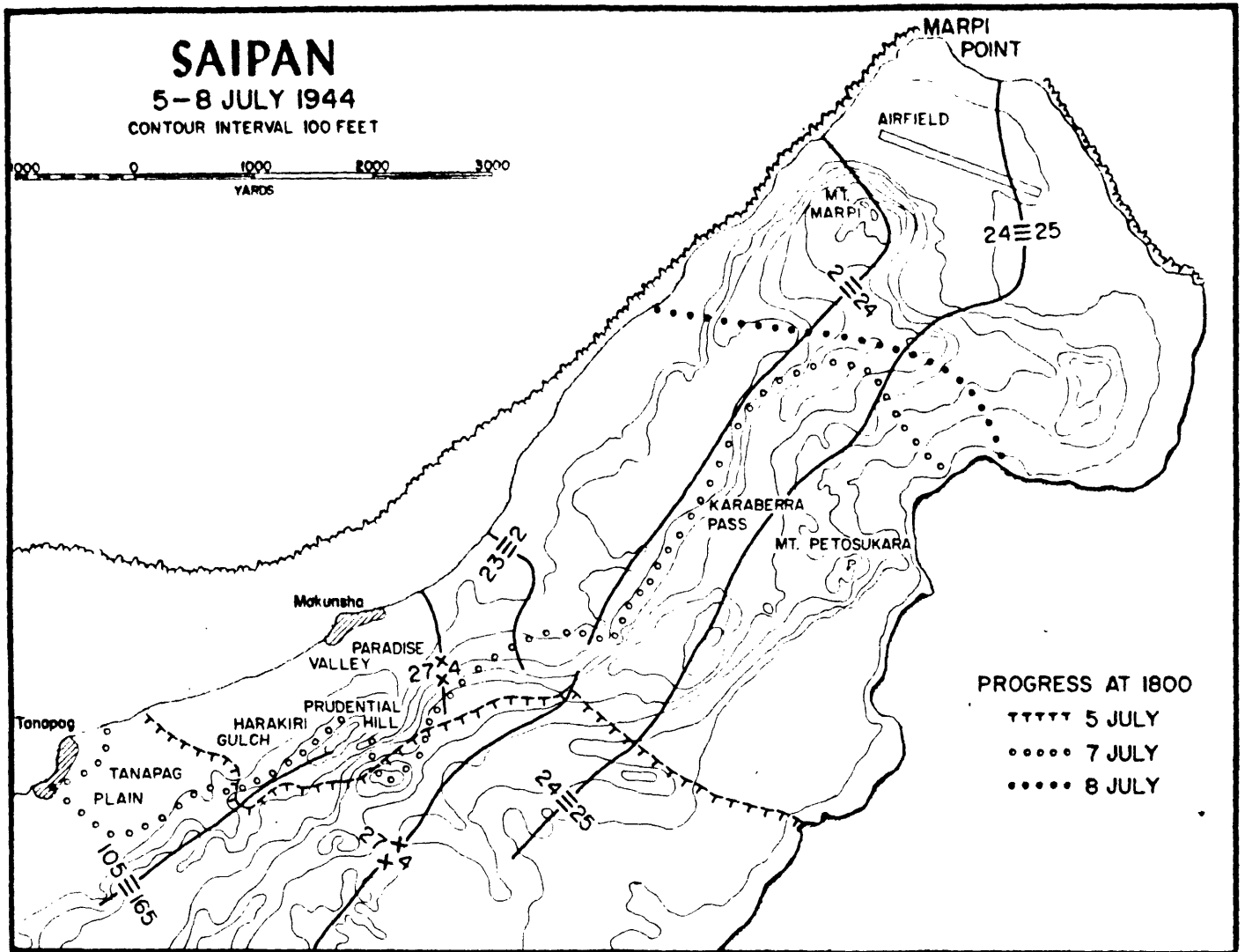
MAP 17

R.F. STIBIL

FROM SHAW, ET AL, CENTRAL PACIFIC DRIVE



FROM SHAW, ET AL, CENTRAL PACIFIC DRIVE



MAP 20

R.F. STIBIL

FROM SHAW, ET AL, CENTRAL PACIFIC DRIVE