

Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands, WWII Heritage City

A series of lessons from the [World War II Heritage Cities Lesson Collection](#)



Figure 1: Aerial view of Tinian Island during the war. Credit: National Archives, War in the Pacific National Historical Park.

Introduction

The four lessons, and culminating fifth lesson, support the development of understanding the significance of the [Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands, World War II Heritage City](#). The first lesson supports students in learning about the history and culture of the islands in preparation for the lessons on World War II. It is recommended that this lesson is used first for building background knowledge. The second lesson shares primary sources and perspectives from the Battle of Tinian that began in July 1944. The third lesson builds on the invasion of Tinian by sharing information on experiences from the American occupation of Tinian. These include readings connected to the work of the Navy Seabees at Tinian; Camp Chulu, a refugee camp for the surviving civilians of the island; and the U.S. Army Nurse Corps stationed there. The fourth lesson focuses on the critical role

Tinian played in the Manhattan Project and the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan. The final, fifth lesson guides students in summarizing the contributions of Tinian & Aguiguan, and leads into comparison with other World War II home front cities as a culminating activity.

Lessons (with World War II home front topics):

All lessons highlight specific developments and contributions of the municipality but connect to larger themes and understandings of the home front during wartime. A mix of primary and secondary sources is used, including oral histories and photos.

1. [History and Culture of the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands, World War II Heritage City \(p. 5\)](#)

- History and culture of the Northern Mariana Islands

2. [The Battle of Tinian in the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, World War II Heritage City \(p. 14\)](#)

- Armed forces
- Marines
- Pacific Ocean Theater
- Seabees
- Navajo Code Talker

3. [American Occupation of Tinian in the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, World War II Heritage City \(p. 30\)](#)

- Navy
- Seabees
- Army Air Force
- Army Nurse Corps
- Chulu Camp for refugees (Churro Camp)
- Military development and construction

[4. The Atomic Bomb on the Municipality of Tinian and Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands, World War II Heritage City \(p. 50\)](#)

- Atomic Bomb
- The Manhattan Project
- Army Air Force
- *Enola Gay*
- *Bockscar*
- Little Boy
- Fat Man
- B-29 Bombers

[5. Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands: Comparing and Connecting WWII Home Front Cities \(p. 68\)](#)

Positioning these Lessons in the Curriculum:

The standards listed beneath the lesson links are a collection of standards covered in the lesson collection. The lessons have been aligned to national standards and topics and to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Social Studies standards (as of 2020). Objectives, materials, and resources are listed within each lesson.

Time period: World War II

Topics: World War II, women's history, workforce migration, science and technology

United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following [National Standards for History](#) from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools:

Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)

Standard 3: The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following [Curriculum Standards themes for Social Studies](#) from the National Council for the Social Studies:

- Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society
- Theme 9: Global Connections

Relevant Common Core Standards

These lessons relate to the following [Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies](#) for middle and high school students:

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 6-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 6-12.2

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 6-12.4

[Integration of Knowledge and Ideas](#)

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.9

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 6-12.10

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Social Studies Standards

The lessons align to standards within the following content areas defined by the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System (as of 2020):

- Grade 6 Social Studies
- World History
- Northern Mariana Islands History

The lesson series was written by Sarah Nestor Lane, an educator and consultant funded by a National Council on Public History's cooperative agreement with the National Park Service.

Lesson 1: History and Culture of the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands, World War II Heritage City

About this Lesson

The lesson provides a reading and activities to support learners in building background knowledge on the Northern Mariana Islands, with a focus on the [Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan](#) as a [World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson is recommended to support students in developing a deeper understanding of the history and culture of the Commonwealth prior to the start of World War II. This lesson supports later engagement with other lessons in the series. The lesson does not follow the same format as the other lessons since it is meant to be exploratory and a background builder for the World War II-centered lessons.

Objectives:

1. Identify the location of the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan on a world map and describe its geographic features.
2. Describe the history and culture of the Northern Mariana Islands, using historical details and modern connections.
3. Reflect on the importance of learning local perspectives, history, and culture of the Northern Mariana Islands to better understand the impact of events of World War II.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 2-7 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Background Reading
3. Directions for Activities 1-3, and materials to support, such as notetaking materials and computers or tablets
4. *Recommended:* World Map, with Tinian and Aguiguan and the Northern Mariana Islands marked



Getting Started: Essential Question

How does understanding the geography, history, and culture of Tinian and Aguiguan help us better understand the impact of World War II on the Northern Mariana Islands?

Photos



Figure 2: “Northern Mariana Islands (United States)” [Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1989] (Credit: Library of Congress)

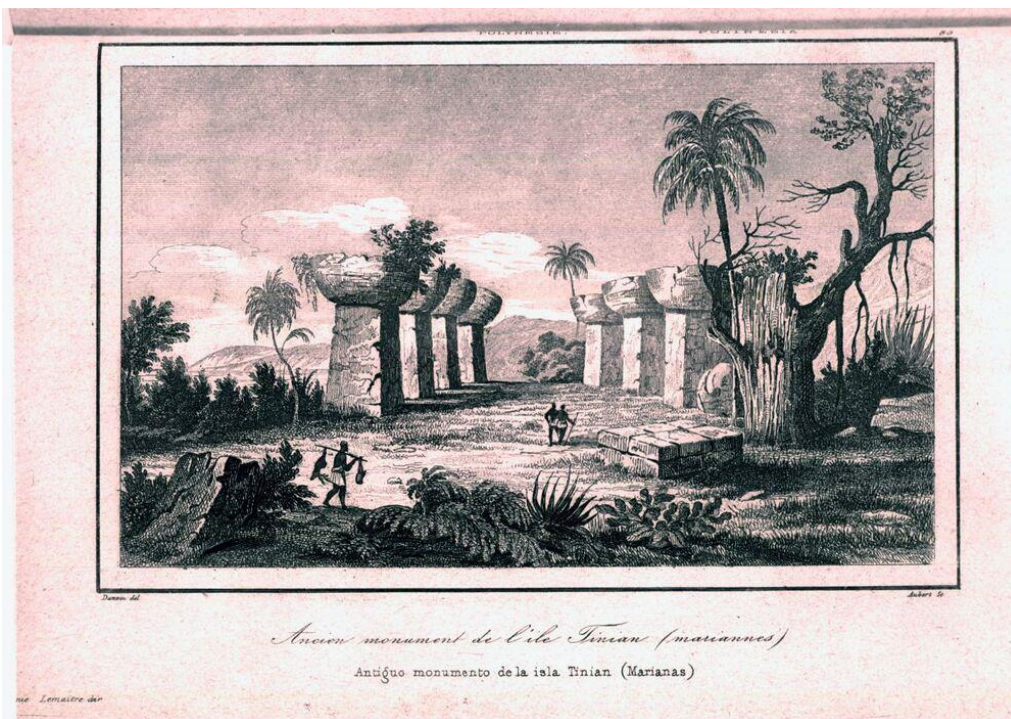


Figure 3: "Ancien monument de l'île Tinian (mariannes)," UHM Library Digital Image Collections. An engraved print, 1870. (Credit: UHM Library Digital Image Collections)



Figure 4: Boy holding two fish, Northern Mariana Islands. Likely pictured on Saipan. McPhetres, No. 0578 Untitled. (Credit: McPhetres Collection, Northern Marianas Humanities Council Digital Archive)

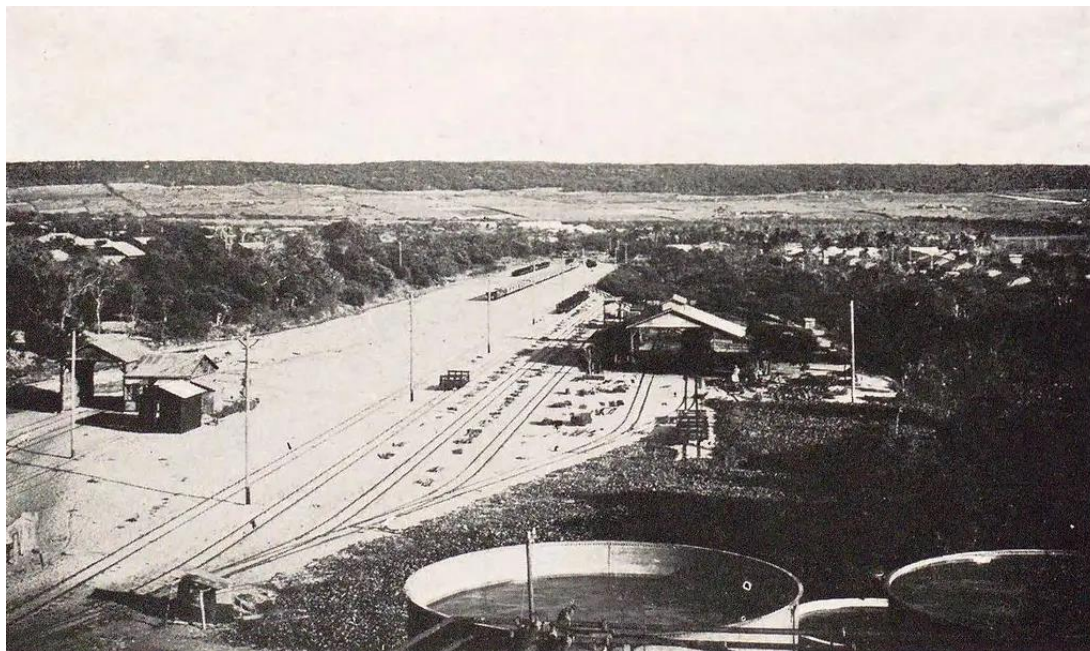


Figure 5: Sugar factory of Nanyo Kohatsu Kabushiki Kaisha, Tinian in 1932. (Public Domain)

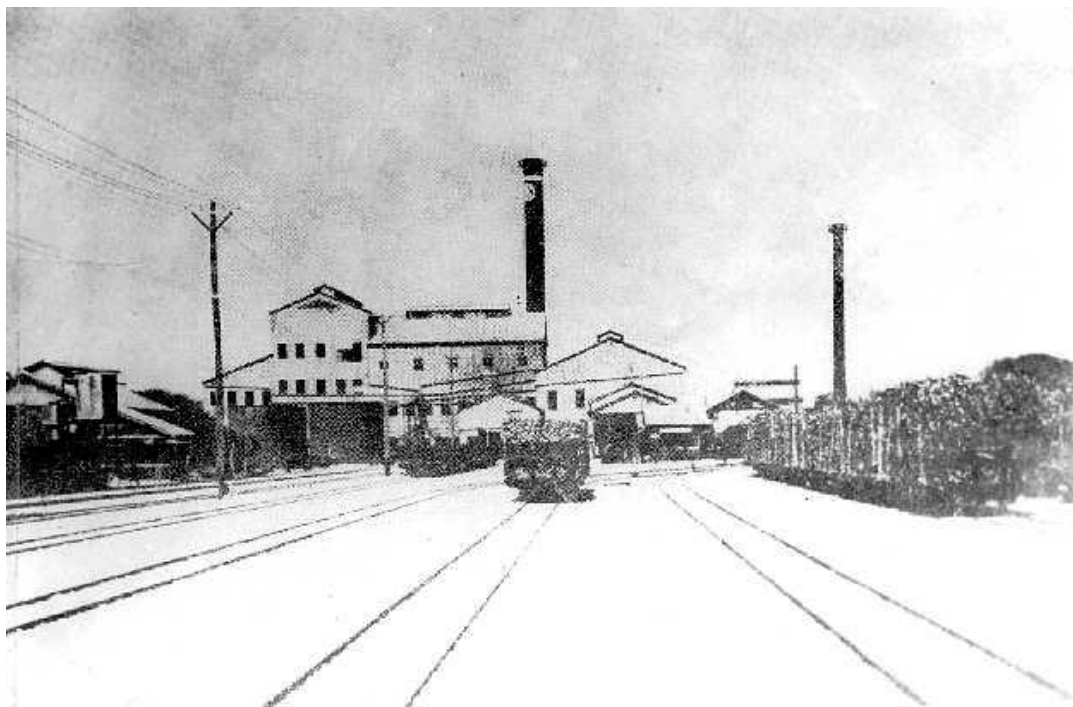


Figure 6: Sugar mill and railway freight yard in Tinian. Approximately 1930. (N-2544.01). (Credit: University of Hawaii – Trust Territory of the Pacific Archives Photos)



Figure 7: Camp Churo, or Chulu, a refugee internment camp administered by the Naval Civil Affairs on Tinian for civilians during American occupation. (Credit: Navy Civil Affairs RG 38, No. 040, Northern Marianas Humanities Council)



Read to Connect

Background Reading

Note: This text is introductory. More information about the role of the Municipality of Tinian and Aguiguan during World War II are provided in Lessons 2-5 in the series.

The Northern Mariana Islands: Tinian and Aguiguan

By Sarah Nestor Lane

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is a United States territory made up of 14 islands and islets in the western Pacific Ocean. Most people live on the islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. Together, the islands cover about 183 square miles. Tinian and Aguiguan together form one of the four municipalities of the Northern Mariana Islands. The municipality of Tinian and Aguiguan covers about 42 square miles and had a population of 2,044 people in 2020 (of 47,329 total on the islands). Tinian is larger and populated, while Aguiguan lies about five miles to the southwest and is uninhabited. Aguiguan is sometimes called "Goat Island" because of the wild goats that live there. Aguiguan also provides

habitats for rare birds, bats, and native plants. Both islands are known for natural beauty and unique wildlife.

Cultural and Political History

The first people arrived in the Northern Mariana Islands around 1500 BCE. These Austronesian settlers likely traveled from the Philippines and became the ancestors of the Chamorro people, the Indigenous people of the Mariana Islands. The Chamorro developed a strong maritime culture centered on fishing, canoe building, navigation, and trade across the Pacific. Later, migrations from other Pacific islands added to the area's diversity. Today, Chamorro culture remains an important part of life in the Northern Mariana Islands, alongside Carolinian and other cultural traditions. English, Chamorro, and Carolinian are the official languages of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Spain claimed the Mariana Islands in 1565 and renamed them Las Marianas in honor of Mariana of Austria in 1668. During Spanish rule, many Indigenous people died from European diseases. Spain encouraged Catholicism throughout the islands, and many Chamorros were moved to Guam, located immediately south of the southern Mariana islands. After Spain lost the Spanish-American War in 1898, Germany purchased most of the Northern Mariana Islands in 1899, while Guam became a territory of the United States.

Japan gained control of the islands in 1918 with the defeat of Germany in World War I, as part of the Japanese Mandate under the League of Nations mandate system (all islands in Pacific above the equator went to Japan). Under Japanese naval administration, Tinian became a major center for sugar production. By the 1930s, nearly all of Tinian's land was devoted to sugar cane farming, with about 98% of the island dedicated to it. The island's sugar mill could process 1,200 tons of cane daily. Japanese, Korean, and Okinawan settlers moved to the island, and railroads, roads, and schools were built to support the economy and local population.

World War II

During World War II, Tinian was strategically important because of its location in the Pacific. Prior to the invasion, Japanese occupation authorities evacuated the Chamorro population from Tinian, relocating many families to Saipan and some to Rota. This wartime displacement was disruptive and painful for island communities.

Following the Battle of Saipan, U.S. forces invaded Tinian in the [Battle of Tinian](#) on July 24, 1944. The island came under American control after a week of fighting. During the war, displaced Chamorro people were interned at camps such as [Camp Susupe](#) on Saipan.

Japanese and Korean sugarcane families had not been removed from Tinian before the battle, and approximately 4,000 of these civilians died in the conflict. 11,500 surviving

civilians were placed in protective custody in a refugee camp on Tinian, Camp Chulu, also known as Camp Churro. This camp was developed by Navy Seabees with many refugees helping, and camp development was overseen by Military Government Civil Affairs personnel. The camp evolved into a self-governing civilian community.

The U.S. military transformed Tinian into one of the largest bases in the world. Navy Seabees supported redevelopment and construction on the island. Army Nurse Corps service women were sent to Tinian to support the medical needs on the island and casualties coming in from bombing missions over Japan.

The 509th Composite Group of the United States Army Air Forces was one group deployed to Tinian. It was from this unit that the B-29 bomber *Enola Gay* took off from Tinian's North Field carrying the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Three days later, the bomber *Bockscar* left Tinian and dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki. Many historic locations on Tinian, including [North Field and the Tinian Landing Beaches](#) are preserved because of their significance to the atomic bombing missions and military presence during World War II.

After the war, the Northern Mariana Islands became part of a United Nations trust territory administered by the United States. Residents voted to establish closer ties with the United States, achieving self-government in 1978. In 1986, the Northern Mariana Islands officially became a U.S. commonwealth, and residents were granted U.S. citizenship.

Conclusion

Today, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands, including the municipality of Tinian and Aguiguan, work to preserve their cultural heritage and natural environment. Their history reflects centuries of Indigenous traditions, colonial rule, wartime experiences, and relationship with the United States. After World War II, Tinian was largely depopulated and later resettled as families from other islands in the Marianas moved there to rebuild communities and reestablish farming and village life. Over time, residents worked to restore local traditions while adapting to ongoing U.S. military presence and land use changes on the island. The islands are an important part of Pacific history.

The islands are an important part of Pacific history.

Questions for Reading 1 and Photos

1. Describe the location of the Mariana Islands.
2. How did the Chamorro people come to be on the islands?
3. How did European contact impact the islands?
4. What were some of the effects of Japanese administration of the islands?

5. What was the significance of Tinian during World War II?
6. Photos: What do you notice and wonder? How do the photos connect to the background text?

Activities

Teacher Tip: A combination of the activities is recommended to support a deeper understanding of the history, culture, and perspectives from Tinian and Aguiguan and the greater Northern Mariana Islands.

Activity 1: Timeline

Use the background reading to create a timeline for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The timeline should have significant historical events, particularly focusing on years prior to the start of World War II. Use additional research to add more depth and details to the timeline. Continue to add to the timeline throughout the lesson series. The timeline could be developed individually by students, within small groups, or collaboratively as a class.

Activity 2: Cultural Exploration

Pose the following guiding research question to students: *How is culture practiced, preserved, and celebrated in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands today?*

Divide students into small groups, assigning each group to a different aspect of culture, such as creative expression (art, music, dance), historic preservation, religion and traditions, language, and food. Each student group then researches this topic.

The [Northern Marianas Humanities Council Digital Archive](#) and [The Northern Marianas College Archives](#) are examples of websites that could be used for research. Students should use additional approved, reputable research sites, books, and media resources that are accessible for your school community.

Encourage students to find and identify specific examples of their topic in Tinian and Aguiguan when possible. Students can verbally report back, contribute to a collaborative bulletin board, or post findings on a shared digital workspace.

Activity 3: Oral Histories – Past and Present

Provide students with time to listen and read oral histories from the Northern Mariana Islands. Have students connect findings from the oral histories to the areas of culture they researched in the second activity.

Examples of recommended resources with oral histories:

- [Northern Marianas Humanities Council Digital Archive](#)
- [The Northern Marianas College Archives: Oral History Project Collection](#)
- [Voice of Elders](#) from Guampedia.com

The video “[Talking with the Past #2: Oral History](#)” from the National Park Service can be an additional resource to support the interpretation of oral histories as a primary source.

If you are teaching at a school in the Northern Marianas, consider extending this activity by supporting students to conduct oral history interview(s) to continue learning from personal, local perspectives. This could be completed as a class with a community member, or students could interview family members. A resource by Ethnographer Oral Historian Rlene Santos Steffy and the Northern Marianas Humanities Council, [How to Conduct Oral History Interviews: A Guide](#), can be used to supplement this work.

Lesson Closing

Pose the following reflection questions:

Why is it important to learn more about the culture and complex history of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (and Tinian and Aguiguan), both prior to World War II, and today?

How might this help us better understand the impact of war and its aftermath?

Lesson 2: The Battle of Tinian in the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, World War II Heritage City

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series about the World War II home front in the [Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands, World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson includes an initial reading on the pre-invasion aerial bombardment of Tinian beginning in February 1944 and its important location in the Pacific for military operations. The other readings and sources provide information and perspectives on the Battle of Tinian that began in July 1944. These perspectives include oral histories, like an interview with a Navajo Code Talker. This lesson includes content about combat and wartime casualties, that may be sensitive for some students.

Objectives:

1. Explain why control of the island of Tinian was important to military operations in the Pacific.
2. Describe the impact and losses of the Battle of Tinian using primary sources.
3. Compare historical perspectives from oral histories to synthesize and connect to larger wartime perspectives and themes.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 8-15 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2, 3 (and optional extension activity)
3. *Recommended:* World Map with Tinian and Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands marked, alongside the United States and Japan



Getting Started: Essential Question

Why was control of Tinian important during World War II, and how can different perspectives deepen our understanding of the battle?

Photos



Figure 8: Marines land on Tinian Island. They waded in from stalled landing boats while LVTs (Landing Vehicle Tracked), known as amphibious tractors, move in and out from the beachhead. July 25, 1944. Credit: National Archives, War in the Pacific National Historical Park.



Figure 9: Tinian after naval and aerial bombardment during the Battle of Tinian. Credit: National Archives, War in the Pacific National Historical Park.



Figure 10: Soldiers and equipment on the beach during the Battle of Tinian. Credit: National Archives (#91044), War in the Pacific National Historical Park.



Figure 11: Marine Sergeant Charles Monges providing a cup of water to a Japanese child on Tinian. The child had wandered out from the woods. Photo by Sgt. Larry Porter, July 29, 1944. (Credit: University of Guam Digital Archives and Exhibitions)



Figure 12: American troops crossing former sugar cane fields in mopping up operations on Tinian. Credit: National Archives, War in the Pacific National Historical Park.

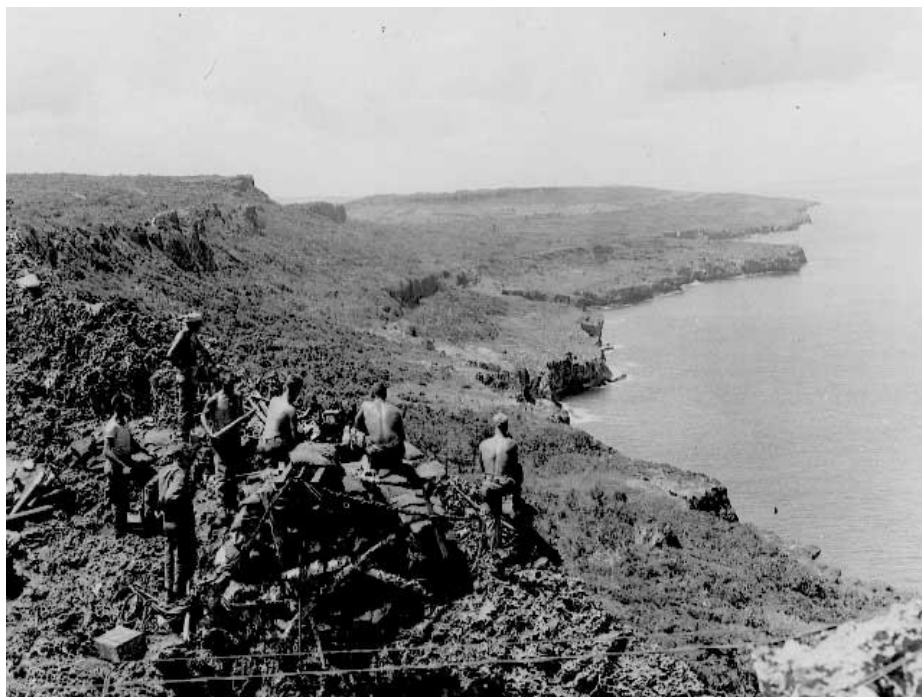


Figure 13: Marine artillerymen set up with a field howitzer on a sheer cliff in Tinian. Parts were carried by hand and reassembled. It was used to bombard Japanese cave positions. August 25, 1944. Credit: National Archives (#94661), War in the Pacific National Historical Park.



Read to Connect

Teacher Note: Address the use of historical language and labels describing the Japanese with students before launching the lesson. This language is not appropriate today. The sources and readings contain mature content related to the battle and loss of life and should be reviewed before use with students. Oral history readings and quotations have been lightly edited for readability.

Reading 1: Newspaper Article Excerpts

Background: Prior to the July 24, 1944 land invasion of Tinian, air raids began in February 1944. The Navy bombed the Marianas Islands, including Tinian, to begin destroying ports and storage. The pre-invasion aerial bombardment leading up to July also served as reconnaissance and preparation for the land invasions. In the article, the spelling of Tokyo is “Tokio.” This was a common spelling at the time in Western media.

Marianas Are Gateway to Jap Island Empire

Chicago Daily Tribune, Feb. 24, 1944

The Mariana Islands, raided for the first time by the American Pacific fleet Tuesday, are the gateway to Japan's hundreds of mandated or captured Pacific Islands. The archipelago includes the Island of Guam, the United States Possession which was seized by the Japs in 1941.

The Marianas lie almost directly south of Tokio some 1,400 miles, and in a direct line between Japan and New Guinea. The Philippines are 1,400 miles directly west; Pearl Harbor is 4,000 miles northeast.

The Marianas were discovered by Magellan in 1521 and were named Las Marianas in 1668 in honor of Maria Anna of Austria, widow of King Philip IV of Spain. Later they were known also as the Ladrones. They lie in almost a straight north-south line 380 miles long. The Marianas are composed of volcanic rock containing little level land; in places their heights rise to 3,000 feet.

Has Big Air Field

Saipan, one of the two targets in Tuesday's raid, is the main island of the Marianas, and the largest except for Guam. It is 15 ½ miles long and 4 ½ miles wide, and had a population of 23,800 in 1936.

The Japanese built a large commercial air field at the southern end of Saipan Island, and in 1939 the Japanese Airways company inaugurated a twice monthly service from Yokohama to the Palau Islands with Saipan as a stop.

Saipan has a reef-bound harbor known as Tanapag at its northern end, and four shipping services were maintained to this and other islands before the war.

Having acquired these islands under mandate of the league of nations in 1920, Japan was pledged not to fortify them, but travelers who visited the Marianas before the war reported feverish activity on Saipan. There were indications that a submarine base was being built.

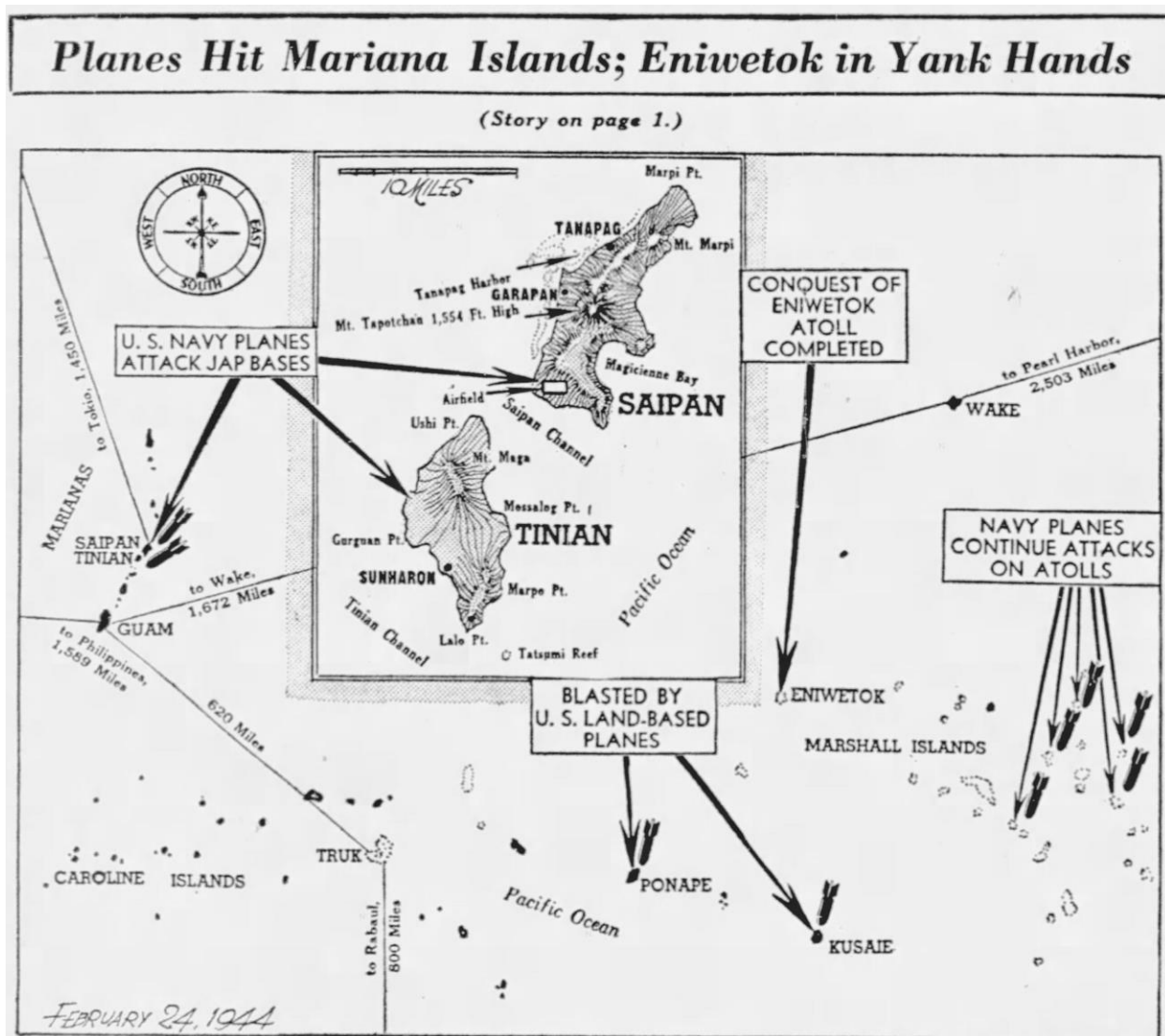


Figure 14: This map was included with the newspaper article. The map magnifies Saipan and Tinian with labeled landmarks. On the larger map it also shows the Conquest of Eniwetok Atoll and Navy plane attacks on the Marshall Islands.

Tinian Has Naval Base

Two and a half miles across the Saipan channel, to the south, lies Tinian Island, the other target of Adm. Nimitz's raiders. Tinian is 10 ½ miles long and five miles wide and had a population of 15,000 in 1936. Tinian is believed to be a naval base, with a good airdome.

Tinian is 564 feet high, with cliffs at its edges, and two peaks, one at each end, give it the appearance of being two islands. It has a town named Sunharon and a good harbor.

The Marianas Islands are only 764 miles south of the Bonins which, with Marcus, now stand between the attackers and the target Tokio. At Saipan the fight was carried to the enemy more than 1,300 miles from Kwajalein, which the enemy held until three weeks ago.

Questions for Reading 1

1. Why does the article describe the Marianas Islands as the "gateway" to the Japanese empire?
2. Which two Marianas Islands were targeted in the raid discussed in the article? Why?
3. Why was Tinian valuable to the United States?
4. Using the map and the article, describe how geography influenced military planning and strategy in the Pacific.
5. What information does the article provide well, and what perspectives and history may be missing?



By the numbers: casualties of the land invasion of the Battle of Tinian

- 15,600 US Marines from the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions landed on Tinian on July 24, 1944. There were 6200 Japanese troops on the island and about 15,700 Japanese and Okinawan civilians.
- 389 Americans were killed and 1,816 wounded.
- 252 Japanese troops were taken prisoner. The rest had been killed in the battle or were missing.
- Up to 4,000 Japanese and Korean civilians were killed by Japanese troops, in combat zones, or died by suicide to prevent American capture.
 - *American Memorial Park, Northern Mariana Islands and Naval History and Heritage Command, The Pacific War Encyclopedia, NPS*
- Based on various Naval records, around 11,500 surviving civilians were placed in protective custody in a refugee camp on Tinian, Camp Chulu.



Quotations to consider:

“In February 1944, the first air raid on Tinian took place. Because the U.S. troops landed in Shinminato beach, at the northwestern section of the island, all the Japanese military and civilians ran down to the Carolinas Hill, where we lived. We escaped to a cave under a cliff but decided to return home because we knew we could be killed, and, in the meantime, all our supplies were at home. We hid in a cleavage in the rocks near our house in the daytime and returned home to prepare food at night.

The U.S. troops expanded to the Carolinas area. . . . I lost two daughters and son among three who were born on Tinian. My leg was wounded by a bullet. When American soldiers came and pointed a gun at our group of five, we became prisoners. We lived in the Chulu Camp between August 3, 1944 and April, 1946. I heard Mr. Kikumoto was giving food to military stragglers who entered the camp. We produced food outside the camp. Former fishermen caught fish. Others participated in road construction and macadam works. My third son was born on December 1945 at the camp after one year and a half of capture.”

- Asato Uto, in an interview with Dr. Wakako Higuchi. Uto was a woman who moved from Okinawa to Tinian in 1937 to marry a farm laborer, Asato Shison. (Dixon, B., Jones, R., Welch, D., & Nelson, I. (2021). Archaeological Survey of WWII Remains at Laderan Kastiyu, Tinian, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. *Pacific Asia Inquiry*, 12 (1).)

“I wrote quite a bit about this in my memoirs to my children. As they say, I was brainwashed as you might say, by Hollywood. And of course we'd gone through Pearl Harbor, and, you know, everybody wanted to kill the old lousy Japs and all that sort of thing. But it was kind of interesting in that we had heard all the kinds of stories, you know, about what they were like and all this sort of thing. And during the battle you very seldom ever see a live enemy. You either -- you see dead ones, and that's about it. The hand-to-hand combat is usually maybe within a hundred yards or something like that where you're shooting where -- where others are hidden, and this sort of thing. Except in our case, we were advancing, so we'd be out in the open.

But on Tinian, on the last day, we were pushing forward. And we came upon a bunker that had been destroyed during the night with naval bombardment. And [we] came about this Japanese soldier. He was a young officer. He had been killed, but it must have been a concussion or something because he wasn't -- it was just like he was asleep. And scattered around him were a lot of pictures. There was one of him in his dress uniform. There was one of a young girl in her finest kimono; I guess his wife. There was one of a small baby. And there was one of a middle-aged couple; I guess it was the parents of one of them. And I

guess at that moment on my feelings about the enemy changed, because all of a sudden I realized that -- maybe came as a surprise, that they got married; they had children; and they had parents. And they were probably been told how -- well, I know they were told how vicious we were . . . the same as we had been told about how bad that the Japanese were. And of course, from then on, I -- I had a different attitude towards the Japanese people. But of course the enemy, the soldiers is one thing, you know, you -- you can like the people, but you don't want your war -- of course, you have to fight."

- William F. Rhodes, excerpts from his [interview](#) on January 1, 2002 for the Veterans History Project, Library of Congress

Questions for By the Numbers, Quotations to Consider, and Photos

1. What do the casualty numbers reveal about the scale of the battle? (*By the Numbers*)
2. What were some of the challenges and fears civilians on Tinian faced, based on Uto's quotation? (*Note: Students will learn more about the Chulu Camp, also known as Camp Churro, in [Lesson 3](#).*)
3. What does Rhodes mean in his quotation by him saying that his "feelings about the enemy changed"? What caused that shift?
4. Photos: How do these photos help you to better visualize the Battle of Tinian and the role that geography played?
5. How do the quotations and photos help you understand what numbers alone cannot show? Why is it important to study both data and personal narratives when learning history?

Reading 2: Memoir

Excerpts from the Memoir of Robert T. Webster, Jr.

From the [Robert T. Webster, Jr. Collection](#), Veterans History Project, Library of Congress

. . . Around June 30, I rejoined my unit as we prepared for the next battle, which was the island of Tinian. It was only about three miles from Saipan, so the Japs had time to prepare their defenses because they knew we would be coming there next.

The Japs were expecting us to land on the broad beaches near Tinian Town, but we went in on smaller beaches farther north but met with lighter resistance. We went into the beach with the third wave of assault troops. When our amphib hit the beach, the driver did not go very far on the beach. We had to jump out into the water, which was shoulder deep. As we were running up the beach and. . . getting wet, when we heard an explosion behind us.

When we looked back the amphibious was upside down. The driver had attempted to turn around to go back to the ship, and when he moved up about a yard, he had hit a land mine. We didn't complain about getting wet anymore.

Since we were in the third wave of troops going ashore, we didn't meet much opposition except for snipers that the troops ahead of us had missed, because the snipers were hiding in the trees.

We had gone about 25 yards inland when the snipers started shooting at us. My buddy and I were watching the Seabees (I guess they were Seabees) because this guy we were watching had a small bulldozer, and he was bringing it inland when the sniper started shooting at him. When he would climb back on and start up again. After about three times doing this, the sniper finally got him. We didn't know how bad he was hit. About that time, I felt something tug on my jacket and the guy on my right fell over. He had been hit, and the bullet had gone through my jacket without touching me. The Navy corpsmen did a great job of taking care of the wounded. They risked their lives over and over again. . . .

There were lots of cane fields. We would cut sugarcane and suck the sugar out as we moved through them. Sometimes we would follow the tanks as we advanced, when the terrain permitted. We always carried lots of equipment. Since I was the number one gunner in our squad, I always carried the machine gun ammo. We usually carried [K-Rations](#) for food. We always rationed ourselves on our water. I have seen many times when I would have given a months pay for one canteen full of water.

. . . We spend [sic] several days advancing slowly across the island. We met mostly small arms fire and mortars. Whenever we encountered heavy fire, we would call upon the artillery, which was behind us, and they would fire over us at targets out front of us. Sometimes the Navy would fire their big guns over our heads . . .

There were lots of cliffs on Tinian, and they had caves in them that the Japs would use for gun emplacements. They would have a clear view of the land below. As we approached one such cliff, we were in an open field, and these shells started landing around us. We did not have any cover except to lay flat on the ground. I spotted this flash from the side of the cliff, and our mortars were ineffective against it because they could not penetrate the cave. I needed to get to my commander and have him call up a half-track with a five-inch gun that could penetrate the cave opening. I had to run about 500 yards across this field, and I think I must have set a record for running this distance. I felt like the shells were hitting right on my heels. I made it, and we pinpointed the cave, and when the big guns came up, they finally got the Japs guns quieted. When we got up there we found that the Japs had a big

gun on tracks that they could roll out and fire, and then pull it back into the cave to reload. .
..

Questions for Reading 2

1. Explain how the geography of Tinian affected the fighting and advancement on the island, using examples described in Webster's memoir.
2. How did Japanese forces use caves and cliffs as defensive positions?
3. How do Webster's descriptions show how different military units worked together during the battle?
4. How does Webster's account and perspective deepen your understanding of some of the physical and emotional challenges faced by service members at Tinian?

Photo



Figure 15: Dan Akee in 2004 (Credit: Dan Akee Collection, Library of Congress)

Reading 3: Oral History

Background: The Navajo Code Talkers were service members who served in the U.S. Marine Corps during the war. It is estimated that more than 400 Navajo men served in this role. Their use of the Navajo language in transmitting coded messages was a significant factor in the victory in the Pacific. To learn more, read the Introduction from [Navajo Code Talkers: A Guide to First-Person Narratives in the Veterans History Project](#), a research guide from the Library of Congress.

Dan Akee (1919 – 2016) is one of several Navajo Code Talkers who have an oral history collection with the Veterans History Project. Akee was sent to a boarding school in Tuba City, Arizona at the age of six, where he was punished with soap or work tasks for speaking Navajo words instead of English. In 10th grade he volunteered into the Marine Corps by lying

about his age. The oral history excerpts below have been selected and edited for readability. The full interview can be found in the [Dan Akee Collection](#), Library of Congress.

Oral History Excerpts: Dan Akee

Collected July 24, 2004

Dan Akee (DA): . . . I kind of lied to my mom that I was drafted. So that's why I got in. I'm not the only one, there's a lot of Code Talkers didn't that say that they -- they were young. Some were 16 when they went in . . . But [at] that time, they really didn't care about the age . . . Lied about your age, they accept it. That's [the] way I got in, so -- so I took my boot camp training in San Diego. Within seven weeks, I was clear with my boot camp training.

Since I was a volunteer . . . I was eligible to select any branch in the Marine Corps. So, this time I was asked a question about what tribe I was in. I told - Navajo. So that's when they told me that there's some Navajo with a communication -- they don't call the Code Talker [at] that time. It was . . . very secret, confidential, what we were doing. So they sent me to Camp Pendleton, and there was some -- quite a few Navajos there. . . . After my training, I took some tests, and it was really hard, because the words, some were ABC, and it goes into vocabulary. That's the hardest part there. The other, once you learn how to be -- say ABCs, not too hard, but vocabulary you have to really learn by heart, because we were told we're not going carry any kind of paper with us, that it's by the code -- code we got. So that's the reason why they told us that if you make the littlest mistake, you know, might cost somebody's life. So within five months, they sent me -- they were 4th Marine Division, while there's six divisions in Marine Corps, so this one Marine division was one overseas. So the one division, they informed us about two -- 20,000 men in their service. So -- they attach me to that 4th Marine Division, that's with 25 other -- no, 23 other Navajos. . . .

. . . Then they sent me with 4th Marine Division right straight from the United State into combat. That was in Marshall Island where Kwajalein. . . That was my first combat, I was in with the 4th Marine Division. After we secured the island, they sent us back to Maui. That was our main camp there because there's no other place that the division can stay. . . . Then from there, the 4th Marine Division start, you know, attack Saipan. So I was with them at Saipan. So there -- after we secure that, then they -- we attack Tinian. That was my third invasion I was on there. So at Tinian, it's the place where they load atomic bomb[s]. I went back over there about six years ago. They invited me because [of] the 50 anniversary there. So I went back over there, and was really different place . . . Then after that -- after we secured the island, I mean, that Tinian - they sent us back to Maui again. We train again. We get some more recruits. From there, we start going again. . .

We have to learn how to operate the radios. How to give a signal, how to line -- a telephone line, all that. That's something that is very important, because we were assigned with a special group. . . . And that's the reason why every Navajos know a lot to anticipate, in order to learn more about what the combat . . . they'll tell you, what I should do? And that's why most situations we handle machine gun, rifle, grenade, all that. We're no different from the other people, that we have to use our own equipment, that's what we have to learn.

Carol Fleming (CF): And then also make the communications?

DA: Yeah. That was our special -- special training we got, know, there's some -- just with the infantry. Like some Navajo Code Talkers, you probably heard about them with the radios. . . . Radio is the one that fight behind our enemy line. . . .

CF: Do you remember any special communication? And was [Samuel Holiday](#) your partner?

DA: Well, he was my partner, but we're not together. See, there are some -- they represent one man in the headquarter division with where -- all the generals are. Then there's three regiments which they assign to -- to the regiment. Then there are some, a battalion, there are company. All the way down we're not together, because if the -- the platoon goes first, then the next one is the company, then battalion, then regiment. So, it's all Navajos are attached to that. . . .

I was in the front line there at Saipan. . . They [did] have a Japanese interpreter for us, that's how they intercepted they going to have a banzai attack. But I, on Saipan, I think it was on the second night, banzai attack . . . So I got this message - it says that there would be a banzai attack in -- from division headquarter in Navajo code. So, I receive there -- there will be a banzai attack, just hold your position there, don't move . . . So that's what I sent a message to all -- all the division, the -- where the Navajos, they got the message, and they already knows the Japanese don't know what we said that we're ready. And I think that was really important things that we did. So about the time about 3:00 in the morning, that's when the flare start going up. And that's when we have attack. You see, I haven't a sent that message to all the company, all of the 4th Infantry Division, but the Japanese didn't know it. But we were ready. And that's how they -- lot of us life was saved, because if it was surprise attack, there will be a lot of our men would have been killed. . . . And that's how the -- as far as we -- we know what we did, it -- it saves lives, because nobody understand. . . .

CF: . . . Did you have any times in battle where you were almost hit? Or were you wounded?

DA: No. No. Lot of time came close, very close.

CF: Do you remember any of those times in particular?

DA: Well, a lot of times - it's just normally we're very close to front line. Sometimes we're even with the front line. Like, when we were landing, that's the worst part you can get. Like, it so happen that on Tinian, we landed -- I think it's second invasion . . . the first bunch went in, and I was on the second one there. And they were shelling us right there. I notice that we can't move. Told us, stay. Then I heard one of my friend, he got shot. Then he point me, because I know him pretty well. He was holding his hand like this to me (*indicating wave of right arm*), but I can't make a target of myself. So -- so I stayed there. And pretty soon, his arm went down. I don't know what he was going to tell me, but it got into my mind though, I should have went over there. But that's how -- some of these things where, it's a very close call, I might say, because it so happen that we're told to go certain time to move . . . and we can't get back up. We just got continue going with the other troops . . .

CF: And tell me about the necklace you have, that's beautiful.

DA: Well, there's a story [that] goes with our uniform. The red cap represents Marine Corps color. Then with the yellow (*indicating shirt*), there's a -- a corn pod, you know. When the corn stop, there's a pod that comes out there where you shuck, yellow color. They use it for prayer. So that represent that. And our pants, these are khaki pants color of the dirt. It represent the earth. And we have a shoes, black shoes, that some -- related to our prayer that ye shall walk with the _____ shoes where we -- you won't be defeated. . . . And our jewelry represents a turquoise. It's a moonlight sky, and also it goes with the pearl. They had some small piece of seashell all that they use the prayer. This is special to us . . .

We represent our Navajo Nation right now. Everywhere we go, we represent our tribe, what we did. Sure, it's the language, I'm just like the instrument. But the -- what something that comes out in language is the one -- is the one that gave us a -- means that we fight for our country. Right now, we're the first Indian to be among the Pentagon, among the heroes. . . .

Questions for Reading 3

1. Who were the Navajo Code Talkers, and what was their role during the war?
2. What special training did Akee receive? What were some of his responsibilities?
3. How does Akee's recollection of the landing on Tinian help you understand dangers Marines faced during the Battle of Tinian?
4. Akee said, "if you make the littlest mistake, it might cost somebody's life." What does this show about the responsibilities and pressures faced by Code Talkers? Why were Code Talkers critical to the U.S. armed forces?
5. How did Akee connect his Navajo identity and traditions to his military service in the interview?

6. *Connect Reading 2 & 3 and Quotations to Consider:* What do firsthand accounts and oral histories share that you may not find in official reports? Why is it important to consider multiple perspectives when analyzing historical events?

Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: Why was control of Tinian important during World War II, and how can different perspectives deepen our understanding of the battle?

Extension

Exploring Additional Oral Histories

Review the oral histories before using them with students to ensure they are appropriate for your grade level. While older students may be ready to explore collections independently, teachers of younger students are encouraged to pre-select oral histories that align with students' maturity levels and curriculum guidelines. Some interviews include descriptions of combat and wartime experiences that may be upsetting or inappropriate for younger audiences.

Also, guide your students in analyzing oral histories as sources. The video “[Talking with the Past #2: Oral History](#)” from the National Park Service is an additional resource to support the interpretation of oral histories as a primary source.

- **Oral Histories from the people of the Northern Mariana Islands:** Support students in exploring additional oral histories that may connect to the battle and its aftermath. For example, one resource is the video [Tinian | World War II Stories of the People of the Northern Mariana Islands](#) from Pacific Historic Parks. Other resources include the [Northern Marianas Humanities Council Digital Archive](#) and [The Northern Marianas College Archives](#).
- **Oral Histories from Veterans:** Support students in using the [Veterans History Project](#) from the Library of Congress to find additional oral histories of service members who served in the Battle of Tinian. By searching for “Tinian” and narrowing the years of the search, your students will find many veterans who have Tinian listed in their service history. They can also search for the term “Navajo Code Talkers” to hear personal memories from more Code Talkers who served on Tinian.

Additional Resources

[Battle of Tinian](#) – American Memorial Park, Northern Mariana Islands

[Historical Photos of the Saipan and Tinian Invasion of World War II](#) – War in the Pacific National Historical Park

[Invasion of Tinian](#) – Naval History and Heritage Command, National Museum of the U.S. Navy

[Native Words, Native Warriors](#) – Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian

[Operation FORAGER: Expanding Documentation and Research of WWII Maritime Heritage in the Mariana Islands](#) – The Museum of Underwater Archaeology

[The List of Names at the Marianas Memorial and the Court of Honor](#) – American Memorial Park, Northern Mariana Islands

[The Marianas Campaign](#) – National Museum of the United States Navy

[World War II's Navajo Code Talkers, In Their Own Words](#) – Library of Congress

Lesson 3: American Occupation of Tinian in the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, World War II Heritage City

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series about the World War II home front in the [Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands, World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson shares about life on Tinian in the aftermath of the Battle of Tinian. This includes information about Camp Chulu (also known as Camp Churo), a refugee internment camp, and perspectives from a Japanese American service member. The lesson also includes information about the construction efforts of Navy Seabees to develop Tinian as a military base and an oral history from an Army Corps nurse stationed there.

This lesson does not include all aspects of life in Tinian during the war, offering only a small sample of experiences and perspectives. More information related to the atomic bombs and Manhattan Project (as connected to the airfield construction by the Seabees) is within [Lesson 4](#).

Objectives:

1. Describe the background of Camp Chulu and the experiences of civilian refugees interned there.
2. Explain the role and purpose of service members stationed on Tinian – including, but not limited to, military intelligence officers, Navy Seabees, and nurses.
3. Compare local historical perspectives to synthesize and connect to larger wartime perspectives and themes.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 16-24 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2, 3
3. *Recommended:* World Map with Tinian and Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands marked, alongside the United States and Japan



Getting Started: Essential Question

What was it like to live and serve on Tinian during World War II, and how did those experiences differ between civilians and service members?

Photos: Camp Chulu

Note: There are two sets of photos in this lesson. One set is of Camp Chulu, or Camp Churo, the refugee internment camp on Tinian. The second set of photos shares images from the Navy Seabees and 313th Bombardment Wing.



Figure 16: Aerial of Camp Churo (Camp Chulu). (Credit: Navy Civil Affairs RG 38, No. 039, Northern Marianas Humanities Council)



Figure 17: Korean Seamstress shop. Civilian refugees, including children, are gathered in the area. American women are also pictured within the group, mostly on the left side of the photo, who were members of the Red Cross. Credit: Navy Civil Affairs RG 38, No. 049, Northern Marianas Humanities Council)



Figure 18: Labor checkout at Camp Churo (Credit: Navy Civil Affairs RG 38, No. 052, Northern Marianas Humanities Council)



Figure 19: Young boys gathered to play school games at Camp Churo. The Education Office, within a Quonset Hut, is pictured in the background. (Credit: Navy Civil Affairs RG 38, No. 047, Northern Marianas Humanities Council)



Figure 20: Boy and Girl Scout First Aid class within a Quonset Hut at Camp Churo. (Credit: Navy Civil Affairs RG 38, No. 034, Northern Marianas Humanities Council)



Figure 21: Playhouse performance at Camp Churo. (Credit: Navy Civil Affairs RG 38, No. 021, Northern Marianas Humanities Council)



Read to Connect

Reading 1: Background Text

Teacher Tip: The video, “[Why U.S. Victory in Tinian Didn't Mean the End of Violence](#),” (2:15) from “The Pacific War in Color: Striking Distance” by the Smithsonian Channel can be used to show the transition from the Battle of Tinian to the complete American occupation of Tinian. The ending shows the emergence of surviving civilians who were then transferred to Camp Chulu (Camp Churo).

Camp Chulu (Camp Churo): A Refugee Internment Camp on Tinian During World War II

Note: This student reading was assembled by Sarah Nestor Lane with information from the sources listed below. For a more detailed, advanced text, see: Farrell, Don, “[Camp Chulu: From Tragedy to Triumph](#).” University of Guam, Mangilao, Guam: Paper delivered at the 5th Annual Marianas History Conference (2021).

After American forces captured Tinian in July 1944, thousands of civilians remained on the island. The U.S. military established a refugee internment camp, Camp Chulu, on July 30, 1944, just six days after the invasion began. The camp was built in the former farming village of Chulu, named by the Indigenous Chamorros, which is why it is called Camp Chulu. Some U.S. military records and photographs refer to the name Camp Churo, reflecting the Japanese pronunciation of the village's name.

The camp was organized by U.S. Marines, Navy Seabees, Navy Civil Affairs, and military government personnel. At first, it was a one square mile barbed-wire enclosure with temporary shelters. It grew into a much larger and thriving community with homes, organizations, and businesses.

Who Lived at Camp Chulu?

Camp Chulu held more than 10,600 civilians by the end of August 1944. Over 8,000 were Japanese. Many had come from Okinawa before the war to work in Tinian's sugar industry. The camp also housed more than 2,300 Koreans, who had been brought to the island by Japanese companies as laborers before the war. A very small number of Chinese civilians lived there (estimated to be under 10). Nearly 5,000 of the refugees were children under the age of fifteen. Many had become orphans from losing their parents during the battle.

Before the American invasion of Tinian, the Japanese government had evacuated Tinian's Chamorro population to nearby Saipan. As a result, there were no Indigenous Chamorro civilians living in Camp Chulu.

The Marines and Seabees used a detention center to interrogate each refugee to ensure they were not a Japanese service member in disguise. After interrogation, internees were brought to Camp Chulu within 24 hours. Japanese prisoners of war were detained and eventually moved to Saipan.

The first weeks after the battle were extremely difficult. Many civilians arrived exhausted, hungry, thirsty, and suffering injuries or illnesses after surviving months of hiding. Several died in the immediate aftermath. These civilians had lost homes, family and friends, and livelihoods in the pre-invasion bombardments and the Battle of Tinian. As historian Don Farrell wrote, “Their once peaceful Pacific paradise had been destroyed, along with everything they owned.”

Building a Community

The Navy’s Construction Battalions, or “CBs,” were known as “Seabees” based on the sound of the acronym. The Seabees were established to perform construction work in combat areas. Not only were Seabees working on Tinian to develop the military base and airfields, but they also worked to improve conditions at the established Camp Chulu. Civilians were surprised by the treatment they received from the Seabees, as they had been taught that American troops were cruel. The Seabees cleaned old water cisterns, built shelters, dug latrines, established kitchens, and created a hospital and dispensary. Shelters and buildings included the use of [Quonset huts](#). The Seabees even repaired a Japanese electrical plant with salvaged materials, which eventually brought electricity to the entire camp.

Civilian internees helped build homes, repair vehicles, and maintain the camp. Skilled civilian workers, like electricians and mechanics, supported the efforts of Seabees. They opened barbershops, repair shops, furniture businesses, and other small stores. People who worked received wages from the U.S. Navy. By late 1944, civilians worked each day in construction, farming, sanitation, education, healthcare, and other jobs. It was estimated that in August 1944 alone the civilians in the camp had provided over 44,000 man-days of labor. By the end of July 1945, there were 38 private businesses in the camp.

Schools opened for children, and many students participated in after-school Boy and Girl Scout programs. These education and scouting programs also were used as a means of Americanizing the population, even though their native languages were still taught and encouraged in the schools.

Farmers planted vegetables, while fishermen supplied fresh fish for both civilians and American troops. Two [Higgins Boats](#) were converted for offshore fishing. Island gardens were used to supplement the use of captured food stores. The Seabees supported the

expansion of the camp to include more agricultural lots. In September 1944, over 36,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables like melon and eggplant had been harvested. Pineapple plants were planted on the island as well.

Medical Conditions

Doctors, nurses, and other medical workers who had lived on Tinian before the war helped care for patients. However, medical care still fell short of demand. Refugees faced health issues and sometimes death from dengue fever, dysentery, pneumonia, malnutrition, tetanus, intestinal parasites, and others. Efforts were taken to stop disease, such as giving children under the age of eight the typhoid vaccine.

Twenty-two volunteer girls from the camp began working at the dispensary and hospital and received nursing training. Lt. William G. Paine, the Tinian Island medical officer, shared that the girls “proved very ingenious in making their own clothes from scrap materials, such as making skirts from the pieced together bottoms of trousers cut off to make shorts.” He also shared, “There has been no feeling of hostility or animosity expressed by either war or action between the staff and the volunteer nurses. They seem to treat the war and its effect upon civilians as some great calamity of nature, to be endured in silence and without protest.”

Camp Leadership

The U.S. military encouraged civilians to help manage many parts of camp life. The camp was divided into two sections – Japanese and Korean communities. Each community selected leaders who supervised work crews and helped solve problems. Civilian police forces were also organized to maintain order inside the camp, while American military personnel continued to guard the outside perimeter.

In July 1945, Camp Chulu held its first elections. Residents elected representatives who formed Japanese and Korean councils, and each council selected a camp president. These leaders worked with the U.S. military government to oversee daily life in the camp.

After the War

When the war ended in August 1945, Camp Chulu remained open while plans were made to return civilians to their homes. There were 12,031 civilians in Camp Chulu in February 1946. At this time, civilians began to be repatriated to their home countries. Some Okinawan residents hoped to remain on Tinian to continue farming, but their requests were denied. By the summer of 1946, Camp Chulu had closed.

Camp Chulu reflects the complicated relationships that developed after the Battle of Tinian. Although the civilians had lived under Japanese occupation before the war, and most were Japanese themselves, they worked alongside American military personnel to

rebuild daily life. Don Farrell wrote the following about the repatriation: “When they arrived home, they told the story of their life in Camp Chulu and how they had been treated by the American military personnel on Tinian. Not only had the United States won the war against Japan, but it had also won the hearts and minds of thousands of men and women who had called America their enemy.” Today, the camp remains an important part of Tinian's World War II history because it illustrates the hardships civilians experienced, their resilience in rebuilding their lives, and impacts on postwar international relations.

Sources

Dixon, Boyd. "Okinawa as transported landscape: understanding Japanese archaeological remains on Tinian using Ryūkyū ethnohistory and ethnography." *Asian Perspectives* (2015): 274-304.

Cho, Hohee. "The Making of a Frontline Laboratory: The United States Naval Medical Research Unit No. 2 and Wartime Colonial Medicine." *Journal of Northeast Asian History* 21, no. 1 (2024): 79-113.

Farrell, Don. "[Camp Chulu: From Tragedy to Triumph](#)." University of Guam, Mangilao, Guam: Paper delivered at the 5th Annual Marianas History Conference (2021)

Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department. Civil Affairs Handbook, Japanese Mandated Islands. 1944.

Ota, Evan Z. "Anchoring in the American Lake: US Military Government on Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Okinawa from 1944 to 1951." (2020).

Questions for Reading 1 and Photos

Use both evidence from the reading and photos to answer the following questions.

1. What challenges did civilians face during the battle and at Camp Chulu?
2. Why did the U.S. military interrogate civilians at the detention center before sending them to the camp?
3. How did the Seabees improve living conditions in the camp? How did civilians support these efforts?
4. Why did the population of Camp Chulu include so many children? How might that have affected life in the camp?
5. What evidence shows that Camp Chulu became more than just a temporary refugee camp?
6. In what ways did Camp Chulu reflect both hardship and resilience?
7. How might experiences at Camp Chulu have influenced how civilians viewed the United States after the war?
8. If you were designing a historical marker for Camp Chulu, what would you include and why?

Reading 2: Oral History

Oral History Excerpts: Don Oka

Chikara Don Oka (1920-2015) was interviewed for the Densho Digital Archive on December 14, 2000 by interviewer Gayle K. Yamada. Oka was a second-generation Japanese American citizen (Nisei) who served as a translator with the Military Intelligence Service in Alaska, Saipan, and Tinian. His time at Tinian included working at Camp Chulu. Oka had two brothers who were in the Japanese military (one was killed as a kamikaze pilot on Saipan) and two others in the American military, also working in intelligence. Oka's full interview can be accessed [here](#).

Don Oka (DO): . . . all the Niseis, the interpreters, were off limit to any press people. No information given out, supposed to be secret.

Gayle K. Yamada (GKY): So in terms of what you were supposed to do, did you then say, "Oh yeah, we're going to interpret documents or we're going to interrogate prisoners," or what you really were -- your assignment really was? Did you let the Signal Corps people know, or did...

DO: No, we didn't. We didn't talk about our work. They thought we were one of the troops and we let it go at that. . . .

DO: Saipan and Tinian, when they're invading, we got there a little after the thing started, and landed on Tinian, and there I think fighting was still on toward the end and a lot of prisoner[s], mostly civilians, were coming out. And United States, they had the camp constructed and we were supposed to take care of the prisoners, mostly Japanese, Koreans, and some islanders, but not too many. Our job was under Naval Civil Affairs and we took care of those people.

GKY: When you say, "take care of," what do you mean by that?

DO: Our camp commandant was a Marine colonel, and they call us and said, asked me to see that schools built, see the sanitations taught to these people so that nobody get sick, and also started the farmers' cooperative so that they could raise the green vegetable, which [was] totally lacking. And they said that's important for the interned civilians' health.

GKY: You said that you consider one of the most important jobs you did in the war working with civilians in this way.

DO: Yes, uh-huh.

GKY: Why do you think it was important?

DO: I think I tried to make a good impression of United States, because first the school that the Marine Corps guys got to them. They got these benches and desk from all over the island. Although, they didn't match, but they apologize for not matching. They got it ready and kids were happy, provided with enough material to start. But the biggest part was get a teacher to teach, and they don't know what to teach. Marine colonel told me just use your common sense and tell them to, you know, conduct the classes. And I told them not -- I think if you cut out the military part of the training, you'll be okay, and they agreed and the school went smoothly.

. . . Common sense was the thing that I depended on. And language. Not that MIS training didn't help me that much. But one time, there was a trial of one of the civilian working at the infirmary that he stole some soap, or something, and I was called to interpret. I told the navy officer, "I don't know any terms of, you know, trial of defendant, and accused, and not guilty," or -- and he says, "Do the best you can." So, I pretend and did the interpreting for the man. He plead guilty to stealing soap, or something, and was given a sentence of -- he didn't have to go through any confinement.

. . . GKY: There were a lot of guys who had brothers or cousins, or some sort of relative, on the Japanese side even though they were fighting for the United States' side. How did you feel, in terms of serving your country? I mean, you were drafted. You didn't enlist. And so, in a way, you had to serve your country.

DO: You know, I, myself, got drafted and served and kept everything to myself and I did my best even though soldiering is not one of my favorite pastimes. I did my best at all times, and I'm proud of that. And, as I said before, as you get older, you get more prouder than ever because this is one great country we serve, you know. And no doubt about that one, because even after I got out of the hospital, they took excellent care of me and still here.

GKY: What kind of documents did you translate?

DO: Mostly diaries and company order, or something like that. But one important one was Japan's directory of heavy industry where the war-making part is, and this was in Hawai'i. It was assigned to about half dozen of us, and about half a dozen officers. We're supposed to translate these document[s] as quickly as we can, so we worked long hours and whenever we find factory's location, we dot it on the map and it went to army command, I'm sure. But I don't know if they use it or not. But after the war, when we landed in Japan, they were flattened. The city was bombed with a fire bomb and all that. I don't know if they used the hard work of meticulous translating and indicating where the factories are. . .

GKY: And, other than what you did with the civilians on Saipan [and Tinian], what do you think your greatest contribution was?

DO: I think to both sides, by serving loyally and doing our best, all the *Nisei* have done is one great thing of letting people in the United States know that we're Americans. And I'm so proud of these young guy that came out from camp, relocation center, concentration camp, to volunteer. And to even this day, I know my friend Harry [Akune] and Ken [Akune] and Chris Ishi, and many others that came, I saw them the first day they came into Camp Savage to our barrack. I still can't believe they have done it, because I think that's the most beautiful, noble act I have ever seen of any American. If I were in their shoe, I very much doubt I would have done it. I might have, but I doubt it. . . .

GKY: You spent your twelve formative years in Japan. Do you think it helped you understand -- or how did it help you understand the Japanese mentality?

DO: You know, when I was on Tinian and taking care of civilians, I was working with a Japanese doctor, and went around and did many things. He pulled me aside and he said to me, "You know something, Mr. Oka?" I said, "What?" He said, "Even the real Japanese couldn't have done better than you, the thing you're doing." And I was so proud of that.

GKY: How do you think the Japanese mentality differed from the American mentality, you know, in facing the war or in serving their country?

DO: From my standpoint, viewpoint, there is no difference. I mean, one's just doing their job for their country, either side.

Questions for Reading 2

1. Who was Don Oka and what role did he serve in during the war?
2. According to Oka, what were some of the responsibilities of translators working under Naval Civil Affairs?
3. How did Oka and others help support civilian health and daily life at Camp Chulu?
4. Describe Oka's interaction with the Japanese doctor on Tinian. Why do you think Oka was proud in that moment?
5. What does this interview suggest about the complexity of loyalty and identity for *Nisei* soldiers during World War II?

Photos



Figure 22: A photo of African American Seabees from the Sixth Naval Construction Brigade - Brigade Log - Task on Tinian. The photo was labeled "Cooks and Stewards." African American service members were often limited in types of roles due to discrimination and the segregation of the armed forces during the war. (Credit: Naval History and Heritage Command)



Figure 23: Members of the 313th Bombardment working on a B-29 on Tinian. Folder WG-313-HI Aug 1945 Vol. 1-313-332a. (Credit: 313th Bombardment Wing Collection, Northern Marianas Humanities Council Digital Archive)



Figure 24: Seabees at North Field. The top photo shows the movement of white coral and is labeled "They've Got a Job to Do!" the bottom shows a picture of Seabees in front of a plane with the label "Seabees and their Adopted Plane." 313th Wg, No. 313-25. (Credit: 313th Bombardment Wing Collection, Northern Marianas Humanities Council Digital Archive)



By the numbers: Seabees on Tinian

- Approximately 13,000 to 15,000 Seabees served on Tinian.
- Four runways were built at North Field, each measuring 8,500 feet long and 500 feet wide. These were large enough to launch the B-29 Superfortress bombers.
- Seabees constructed more than 11 miles of taxiways and 265 aircraft hardstands at North Field alone, creating parking and movement space for hundreds of aircraft.
- At the West Field, crews built 16,000 feet of taxiways, 70 hardstands, 345 Quonset huts, and a 75-foot control tower in just over six weeks.
- One design change increased the amount of earth that had to be moved by an additional 500,000 cubic yards. (This is enough to fill more than 150 Olympic-sized swimming pools!)
- Housing and support facilities were built for more than 46,500 people, including 12,000 Seabees, 13,000 other Navy personnel, and 21,500 Army personnel.
- By the end of the war, Tinian's medical facilities had grown from a 100-bed tent hospital to hospitals capable of serving more than 6,000 patients, including a 4,000-bed hospital under construction on V-J Day.

- Information sourced from *“Building the Navy’s Bases in World War II,” Naval History and Heritage Command*



Quotations to consider: Seabee Perspectives

“My Seabee Battalion helped build the West Field - the B-29 airstrip, which was instrumental in bombing Japan. And then after Tinian, we left Tinian in July 1945 and went to Okinawa, and our mission there was to build hospitals, anticipating an invasion of Japan. . . . The Seabee outfit I was in was the 112th Seabee Battalion which was in a regiment, which consisted of three or four battalions and we, amongst other regiments, were commissioned to – when the invasion of the Marianas was complete - to land there and to build airstrips, anticipating the B-29, which was on the board at the time being built. So, we built on Tinian. My battalion participated in building an airstrip that was 8,500 feet long, roughly a mile and a half. And from which the 29s took off, usually loaded with incendiaries or high explosive bombs and headed toward Japan.

. . . I was the pharmacist’s mate. I never saw or treated a Seabee who I would term a malingerer – never happened. There were no lazy people in the Marines or the Seabees, particularly. I see occasionally a Marine veteran now, and he always emphasizes the fact that he has such great respect for the Seabees and what they did for the Marines.”

- Lewis E. Foster, excerpts from his [interview](#) on May 27, 2004, for the Veterans History Project, Library of Congress

“[Major Robert H. Langdale] is recognized on Tinian as one of the best pilots in the service, and easily one of the best B-29 men. One time he brought his plane back on one engine, which is quite a feat; another time he brought it in with 136 flak holes in it; and another time with 51 holes in it. And he is one of the best liked fellows on Tinian. Like all Texans, everybody knew him within a week after he got there. He has had 48 missions over Japan. . .

There are seven strips there [on Tinian], the shortest one a half-mile longer than the longest strip at La Guardia Field. It’s the finest air field in the world.”

- Neel G. Barnaby, Chief Warrant Officer and Chief Carpenter, Seabees, quoted in “Tinian Airfield Best in World, Seabee Says,” in *Fort Worth Star - Telegram* on July 12, 1945

Questions for Photos, By the Numbers, and Quotations to Consider

1. What types of structures did Seabees build on Tinian? What challenges do you think they faced in doing this construction?
2. How did the Seabees contribute to both military operations and daily living conditions?
3. *Quotations to Consider:* How do the perspectives of Lewis E. Foster and Neel G. Barnaby help explain the importance of the work of the Seabees?
4. *Photos:* How do the photos show examples of the work of military service members on Tinian? What other types of photos would you like to see?

Reading 3: Oral History

Teacher Tip: For supporting students in analyzing oral histories, you can use the [“Talking with the Past #2: Oral History”](#) video from the National Park Service. You can also use resources from the National Park Service to continue learning about [Military Nurses during World War II](#).

Oral History Excerpts: Ethel Christie Smith

Ethel Christie Smith (1922-2016) was interviewed for the Veterans History Project with the Library of Congress on May 28, 2009 by interviewer Jeanne Marie Christie. She was a member of the Army Nurse Corps and was stationed on Tinian. The full interview can be accessed [here](#). The headings have been added for readability.

Getting started in the Army Nurse Corps

Ethel Christie Smith (ECS): . . . I worked for a year because the hospital was short of nurses. A lot of the nurses enlisted, and I thought that I could do better if I worked at the hospital there. And the fact that my parents were adamant that they did not want their only daughter in the service. I decided that I would work for a year and one day I just decided that I was 22 years old and I didn't have to answer to anyone at this point and I felt I was going to volunteer and use my profession and see some of the world.

Jeanne Marie Christie (JMC): Why did you pick that particular branch of service?

ECS: We had Army nurses and Navy nurses come to our hospital to try to recruit us to join. And I decided that I wanted to go in[to] the Army, and I had 3 brothers in the Navy.

JMC: Do you recall your first days of service?

ECS: I do recall my first days of service, and it's one that I will probably never forget because I got my orders, and my parents were really upset. And so, my mother and my brother – I was told to go down to Newark and the railroad station and a certain platform and so I stood there with my little suitcase, and the troop train came in and I was invited on! So, I waved goodbye and with my little suitcase I went in, and it was full of young women. And I sat down in an empty seat and said to the woman, "Did you just join the army?" And she said yes, and I said, "So did I. Where are we going?" She said, "I have no idea."

So, the train pulled out and we're riding and all of a sudden (I said) I'll tell you where we're going. We're going into Atlantic City, because I recognized going into Atlantic City – there's a lot of telephone poles. And I recognized that, and that's where we went – Atlantic City, for basic training.

JMC: What did it feel like at that time?

ECS: It felt like I had made a big mistake. . . I was already homesick. I had only been gone a couple hours and I realized that we were still at war and this was the big step in my life because I had always been a homebody. And all of a sudden, at 22 years old, I made this big decision, and once you signed down that you were going to be in the Army, you had to go. So, that lasted until I got off the train and when we got off the train and all we women were there, all young women - they had some officers there to meet us and greet us and they took us - they had taken over a hotel down there, and that's where we were housed for a whole month – in a hotel. And I knew then that I had done what I wanted to do. . .

JMC: What made you realize that's what you wanted to do? Anything special?

ECS: I liked the atmosphere that I found, the officers, the uniforms, the discipline, and the fact that everyone was just really nice to me. I got along very well. . . .

I must say that any nurse that was in World War II was very respected. You never had to worry about being outside. You never had to worry about where you went on any of the camps. The nurses were really highly loved by everybody. . . .

[Tinian](#)

. . . And from there [Ft. Dix] we got on a troop train, and we went across the country to Seattle, Washington.

JMC: And how long did you stay there?

ECS: We were there for about a week and we were primed to go overseas and there was a big luxury liner – the [SS] *Matsonia* - sitting there in the harbor and they loaded us on that with a bunch of troops because they were expecting, getting ready for the invasion of Japan.

JMC: And you went where?

ECS: From there we sailed to Tinian – the Marianas. . . . Tinian, when we got there, had been cleaned up by the Seabees. And Tinian had a lot of white coral there, and it was a B-29 base. and that's where the atomic bomb was flown off of– the Enola Gay. And all the streets were paved with coral because they have coral pits there, and they were all named after New York Streets. And it was a typical beautiful island that you would expect to see in the South Pacific, and I have some very happy memories there. We ate in big tents. The cooks - that's where we ate. We were in [Quonset huts](#). And we slept in Quonset huts, and the nurses were in [a] double-guarded compound because there were about 45,000 troops on there and only about 500 women, so we were well-guarded. . . .

JMC: And you said there were how many nurses there with you?

ECS: If I remember correctly, there were about 500 nurses there. . . .

JMC: . . . Do you remember any humorous pranks or jokes that people played or that you played?

ECS: Well, I was always breaking rules and we - when you went out you were never allowed to go out of the guarded compound unless you were with someone. You always had to leave with a friend and two people. There had to be 4 people to go out together and we had [groups] that we went out in.

And one day we went out and we were going to go on a picnic and apparently when we were gone, they had a scare because they thought that some Japanese had come out of the

caves. And we didn't hear about it. So, when we got back, the Captain was waiting for us. "I am so worried. Well, I didn't know what happened to you and where you've been." And she was so worried and rightfully so, although we signed out. And apparently, they did have a scare where they put all the nurses back in the compound, so they couldn't be touched. And all the while that she was scolding us, she had one of those praying mantises going up and down. [Laughing and moving hands to indicate it was crawling on her neck] I always got in trouble when I laughed when I shouldn't. It struck [sic] me funny because that thing looked like it was this big. [Holds out hands]

. . . Of course the island was all – the Seabees came in and cleaned that island up for us, and it was a really beautiful island and I remember that the chaplains they had: a Protestant chaplain and a Catholic chaplain. And my friend and I – we sang. And they tried to get little choirs, and we sang in both of them and we would be down there on Sunday we would have service. And it was so beautiful with the palm trees and the blue ocean. And then one time we had like a hurricane come through and everything was molded.

JMC: How did you get rid of the mold?

ECS: We had a lot of washing to do. Even in your shoes. Your shoes were moldy, because it was tropical weather.

JMC: Did you wear leather shoes?

ECS: Combat boots . . . yes, yes, we did.

JMC: You weren't wearing whites then?

ECS: No, we never wore whites on Tinian because we weren't taking care of patients on Tinian. We were getting ready for the invasion of Japan. And they were going to fly the wounded back to Tinian where we would take care of them in the field like a field hospital. And at that time in World War 2, you didn't fly all over, you went by ship. . . .

After they dropped the atomic bomb, one night we were - it was about one o'clock in the morning and we heard a lot of bells ringing – I don't know where the church bells came from- and they were shooting guns and everything so we all jumped out of our bed in the Quonset hut and we went to our Captain was there and we said, "What's going on?" And she said that the war is over – they dropped the atomic bomb.

"What's that?" We were sitting with it, but we did not know what was there.

So, after they dropped the atomic bomb, there were five hospital units there and three of them went back to the states and two were deployed to Japan and I was in one of those that went on up to Japan. . .

Closing Reflection

. . . I am just very proud of what I have done. I was a very quiet, shy person growing up and I never was outstanding like as a good student or anything, and I found out when I went to nurses' training that I had found my niche and going into the Army made me more sure of myself and I knew then that if I could – at 22 – go overseas and come back and still have all my marbles, that I would be alright.

Questions for Reading 3

1. Why did Smith decide to join the Army Nurse Corps?
2. How did Smith's emotions change about joining the Army? Consider the span of her thoughts when boarding the train to her closing thoughts in the interview.
3. Based on her recollections, what was life outside of the hospital like for nurses on Tinian? Use details from the interview.
4. What was the expected role of nurses during the planned invasion of Japan (that did not occur)?
5. Why were the nurses surprised to hear about the dropping of the atomic bomb?
6. Compare the perspectives and experiences of Oka (Reading 2) and Smith (Reading 3). How were their experiences on Tinian similar and different? What evidence from the readings helps explain why their perspectives differ?

Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: What was it like to live and serve on Tinian during World War II, and how did those experiences differ between civilians and service members?

Additional Resources

[135th Naval Construction Battalion](#) [Navy History and Heritage Command]

313th Bombardment Wing Collection - [Northern Marianas Humanities Council Digital Archive](#)

[Building the Navy's Bases in World War 2: Chapter 28](#) - Bases in the Marianas and Iwo Jima [Navy Department Library]

[Seabee and Naval Operations on Tinian Islands](#) (17:30) [Video footage from the Seabee Museum]

[Sixth Naval Construction Brigade - Brigade Log - Task on Tinian](#) [Navy History and Heritage Command]

[The Road to Tinian: The Story of the 135th USNCB](#) by George A. Larson [Navy History and Heritage Command]

[Tinian Island Capture and Construction](#) [6th Bomb Group]

Lesson 4: The Atomic Bomb on Tinian, World War II Heritage City

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series about the World War II home front in the [Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands](#), [World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson contains readings and photos to contribute to learners' understandings about the importance of Tinian to the success of the Manhattan Project. A memoir, oral history, and a letter are the main readings, offering students firsthand perspectives from service members on Tinian at the time.

Objectives:

1. Explain why Tinian was important to the success of the Manhattan Project.
2. Describe responsibilities of service members who supported the assembly of the atomic bomb and bombing missions from Tinian.
3. Compare historical perspectives from service members to synthesize and connect to larger wartime perspectives and themes.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 25-31 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2, 3 (and optional extension activities)
3. *Recommended:* World Map with Tinian and Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands marked, and the United States and Japan



Getting Started: Essential Question

Why was Tinian critical to the success of the Manhattan Project and the atomic bomb missions?

Photos



Figure 25: 313th Wg, Vol. 1 No. 313-348 Panoramic Photograph of North Field (Credit: 313th Bombardment Wing Collection, Northern Marianas Humanities Council Digital Archive)



Figure 26: "Enola Gay in the revetment where B-79 was originally parked, Tinian CNMI [1945]." The bottom of the photo reads, in handwriting, "They had to rework it for the atomic bomb." (Credit: Francis L. Strekel Collection, Library of Congress.)

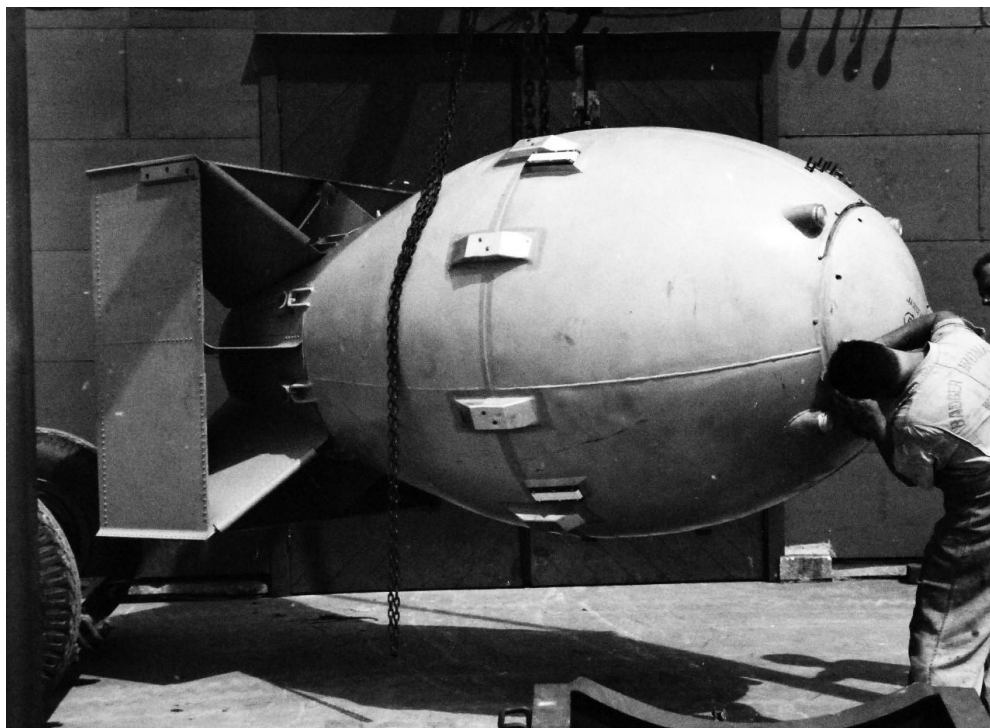


Figure 27: Tinian Island, August 1945. Atomic Bomb, Fat Man, being worked on in cradle outside building #2. Official photograph of the Office of Chief of Engineers (National Archives).



Figure 28: Tinian Island, August 1945. Atomic bomb, Little Boy, on trailer cradle being hoisted into bomb bay of Boeing B-29 Superfortress, Enola Gay. Official photograph of the Office of Chief of Engineers, now in the collection of the National Archives.



Figure 29: Deak Parsons (right) supervises loading the Little Boy bomb into the B-29 Enola Gay. Norman Ramsey is on his left, with his back to the camera. Photo taken on August 5, 1945. (Credit: Project Alberta, National Archives)



Figure 30: Enola Gay reworked atomic bomb pit on North Field, Tinian CNMI [1945], Photo by service member Francis L. Strekel. (Credit: Library of Congress, Francis L. Strekel Collection)



Figure 31: No. 1 Atomic Bomb ("Little Boy") loading pit today, North Field (Tinian). (Credit: Wikimedia Commons, Mztourist)



By the numbers:

- The 'Little Boy' atomic uranium-based bomb was 10 feet long and weighed 9,700 pounds. 'Fat Man,' which was plutonium-based, was 10 feet 8 inches long and weighed 10,800 pounds.
- Final assembly was completed on Tinian, then the bombs were stored in two loading pits that were concrete lined and about 20 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 8 feet deep.
- 2 atomic bomb missions departed from Tinian's North Field. The B-29 Enola Gay left Tinian on August 6, 1945, to bomb Hiroshima, and Bockscar departed on August 9, 1945, to bomb Nagasaki. ([Timeline](#))
- 15 specially modified B-29 "Silverplate" bombers were stationed on Tinian as part of the 509th Composite Group, the secret unit created to carry out the atomic bomb missions.
- 7 B-29 bombers took part in the Hiroshima mission. *Enola Gay* carried the atomic bomb, while 6 other B-29s helped by gathering weather information, taking

photographs, collecting scientific data, and serving as backup. For the Nagasaki mission, there were 6 total.

- More than 200,000 people, many civilians, died by the end of 1945 in Japan as a direct result of the atomic bombings.



Quotations to consider:

“While on Tinian, Crew C15 had little to do as it awaited orders for its highly secretive mission. What the crew did not understand was that it was waiting for the successful explosion of an experimental plutonium bomb (which occurred July 16 in the New Mexico desert) and delivery of plutonium to its island base.”

- Lane Earns, [Reflections From Above: An American Pilot's Perspective On The Mission Which Dropped The Atomic Bomb On Nagasaki](#)

“We know the take off time – 0230 6 August. We know the drop time, 0915 / 6 August. We know it's going to work, and all that remains to be determined is its effect on the war and the target. I guessed at Tokyo Bay, though this area will probably wait / or a later bomb. It is the general opinion that this first one will be used as terrifyingly as possible – say, dropped in the center of a city not yet bombed.”

- Benjamin Bederson (*author of Reading 1*), a diary entry from Tinian

“Few of the personnel at the Tinian field knew the nature of the first bombing trip, Lt. Del Genio said, although the highly secret work drew sarcastic comment from regular personnel that ‘if they’re winning the war why can’t we go home?’

After the results of the two bombings were made known, Lt. Del Genio said, the attitude of the men underwent a complete change and they were enthusiastic about the ‘secret’ way of winning the war.

For security reasons the bombs were taken to the Pacific base piecemeal. Lt. Del Genio carried one small part and he was under orders to proceed ‘as rapidly as security will permit.’

Lt. Del Genio, back at Oak Ridge now, is no longer with the security division of the Army. He is now with the legal division but, true to his training in the days when he wouldn’t say anything and wouldn’t permit anybody else to say anything about Oak Ridge, he tells nothing more about his activities.”

- “Atomic Bomb ‘Short Snorter’ Is Lt. Del Genio’s Top Relic,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, October 29, 1945



Read to Connect

Teacher Note: “[Tinian Island](#),” from the National Park Service – Manhattan Project National Historical Park can be used as a background text. Additionally, these WWII Heritage Cities lesson collections connect to the production of the atomic bomb and can be used in connection to this lesson: [Oak Ridge, Tennessee](#); [Los Alamos, New Mexico](#); and [Tri-Cities, Washington](#). Camp Chulu, the refugee internment camp on Tinian, is discussed in [Lesson 3](#) of this series.

Reading 1: Memoir Excerpt

Benjamin Bederson (1921-2023), kept a personal diary on Tinian and later documented his memories in his [memoir](#) (2001), which is used for the excerpt below. Bederson served as an enlisted soldier in the U.S. Army’s Special Engineering Detachment (SED) in [Oak Ridge, TN](#) and [Los Alamos, NM](#) prior to serving on Tinian.

SEDs at Los Alamos: A Personal Memoir

By Benjamin Bederson

Tinian

It was now May 1945. The war in Europe had just ended, and our attentions were focused totally on Japan. It was clear that we were getting ready to use the bombs in Japan, although the Alamogordo test [[Trinity test](#)] had not yet taken place. I along with a number of others received orders to go to the South Pacific, although at first we did not know our final destination. I made my preparations. . . .

We left Los Alamos on July 9, flying from Albuquerque in a B-29, the now famous Green Hornet. This plane was dedicated to flying equipment and personnel from Los Alamos to, it turned out, the island of Tinian. My particular flight was not the first one made by the Green Hornet, but it certainly felt like a momentous adventure to me. Since it was obvious that I was in the middle of a historic event I decided to keep a diary, which contained entries for almost every day until I returned to the U.S. The flight was reasonably uneventful. We first landed in San Francisco for refueling, then we flew to Hickam Field in Hawaii, where we stayed overnight – no flying in the dark! I was put up in the enlisted men’s quarters at Hickam Field. I slept in a top bunk. Directly over my head were gouged out bullet holes in the cement ceiling from the Japanese attack on December 7, 1941.

From Hawaii we flew to a tiny speck of an island, called Johnson Island, a convenient refueling stop about halfway between Hawaii and the Marianas, where we again were put up for the night. This was my first experience with true military life, although without any nasty direct dealings with the enemy, but with powdered milk, very soggy corn flakes, and Spam. We received literature describing the island, called by the occupying GIs “no island atoll.” We took off in the morning and after a very long flight landed on Guam in the Mariana Islands. These islands had only been captured recently from the Japanese, at considerable cost in Marine lives. But they were of great strategic value, since they were close enough to Japan to be a Japanese protectorate, not an occupied country, and were within bombing range of Japan by the new B- 29s. The overall strategy of the U.S. Air Force was to use the Marianas as a base for the strategic bombing of the Japanese mainland. A neighboring island, Tinian, was chosen as the best location for a huge Air Force base, and it was to this island that we flew and set up shop. By then Tinian had become the largest airfield in the world, being the launching pad for Air Force raids directly over the Japanese mainland. There was a continuous roar of engines as hundreds of Boeing B-29s took off with bomb loads and returned many hours later, after having deposited them on Japan. We would watch this show for hours on end. I also watched more than once as new graves were dug for returning fatalities, as airmen were killed by antiaircraft fire and Japanese fighter plane attacks. It was a matter of great pride and satisfaction that I was aware that I was playing a role, however modest, in helping to stop this killing.

The local inhabitants of Tinian apparently were considered to be loyal to Japan. They had been herded into internment camps; they lived in tents and makeshift corrugated tin huts behind barbed wire. Entire families lived in very primitive conditions [in Camp Chulu]. Long, narrow, and mostly flat, Tinian roughly resembled the island of Manhattan, and in one of those ironies of fate had been laid out with streets and avenues named after Manhattan main streets and avenues – the Manhattan project! I and a friend, Henry Linchitz, a civilian Ph.D. chemist, occasionally would wander around the island, exploring caves and low hills where it was rumored a few Japanese soldiers were still hiding. Once we came across a family home that had been bombed almost beyond recognition, but which still had the remains of a bedroom in it with children’s paintings on the walls. This brought home to me a different picture of the “enemy” than the one I normally had held. We also explored some Japanese bunkers along the shore that still contained remnants of bodies.

We worked in a converted Quonset hut, where I assembled the spark igniter testing equipment and ran tests on the igniters, using the same streak camera I had used at Los Alamos. I was to select the best set of triggers, that is, the ones that fired fastest and most closely together, out of the many supplied, and this I did. We already had heard from recent visitors that the Trinity (Alamogordo) test had been a huge success, so we were very

confident that our efforts would not fail. Finally we were finished. We knew on the evening of August 5 that Little Boy, the first bomb, would be used the following morning. We were visited in the enlisted men's tent by a pair of Navy photographers who were to take pictures of the event on the following day and also by the senior *New York Times* science reporter William Lawrence. We felt very important since we were for the first time almost permitted to discuss the bombs, which we did albeit rather circuitously. We went to bed late. It didn't take long the next morning for the radio to report the explosion. The secret was out. It was a truly awesome feeling to have participated in this historic project and to have been at the site of its dramatic denouement. . . .

My work was essentially completed with the testing of the triggers for Fat Man,* which was used three days later. A few days after that we heard of the Japanese surrender, and had a minor celebration, realizing how our own efforts had so strongly influenced this early, welcome end to the war. . .

** In later years I had a fantasy that I could have chosen the worst, not the best, triggers for inclusion in the Fat Man. The bomb would therefore have been far less effective, and might even have fizzled. Think of all the Japanese lives I could have saved. But the thought never crossed my mind at the time, and even in hindsight I have no regrets whatever about this.*

Questions for Reading 1, By the Numbers, Quotations to Consider, and Photos

1. Why was Tinian chosen as the location for the atomic bombs?
2. What resulted in a "different picture of the 'enemy' to the author? Why do you think this was?
3. What was the author's job while stationed on Tinian?
4. At the end of the text, the author reflects in the footnote that he has "no regrets" about selecting the bomb triggers, even though he had imagined a different outcome. What conflicting feelings do you think he was experiencing, and why?
5. Why is it important to recognize that individuals involved in the Manhattan Project held multiple perspectives about their work, both during and after the war? What are the strengths and limitations of personal accounts for understanding these perspectives?
6. *By the Numbers:* Where were the atomic bombs stored? How many Silverplate B-29s were on Tinian and involved in the atomic bombing?
7. *Quotations to Consider:* What is similar and different across the three perspectives?
8. *Photos:* Share ways that Tinian changed over time and an example of the unique history being preserved.

Reading 2: Oral History

Norris Jernigan Oral History Excerpts

Norris Jernigan served in the 509th Composite Group at [Wendover, Utah](#), and Tinian Island during the Manhattan Project. He was assigned to the Intelligence Office of the 393rd Bomb Squadron. The interview, conducted on September 13, 2018 is provided courtesy of the Atomic Heritage Foundation, Voices of the Manhattan Project (All Rights Reserved). The full interview transcript and video can be viewed [here](#). Headings have been added to the excerpts for readability. (Note: When discussing Camp Chulu, he was incorrect that the refugees were not Japanese. They were not Japanese prisoners-of-war, but they were Japanese and Korean civilians who were living on Tinian prior to the invasion.)

Norris Jernigan: . . . One day, we were told to assemble near the orderly room, somebody wanted to talk to us. We all assembled out there in front of the orderly room, and this Lieutenant Colonel got up on the back of a truck and said, “Men, you’ve been brought here for a reason.” He said, “You’re going to become part of a unit that will be trained to handle a new secret weapon that if successful, should shorten the war by at least two years.”

At first, he introduced himself as, “I’m Lieutenant Colonel [Paul W. Tibbets](#).” We never had seen him before or heard of him before. We had not realized that he had visited Fairmont, Nebraska and selected our squadron, because of the three squadrons of the 504th Bomb Group, the 393rd was ahead of the other two squadrons. He wanted a unit that was reasonably trained, so there would be a minimum of training for them to go through to be part of this new group. . . .

While he was addressing us from the back of this truck, he said, “This new project is a highly secret project, you’re not to discuss it with anyone. You’re not to tell anyone where you’re stationed. You’re not to answer any questions from anyone. You just don’t say anything. Okay, men, you’re now on a two-week leave. Go home, rest up, because we’re going to be in intense training seven days a week for the next few months.”. . .

Headed to Tinian

Alexandra Levy (interviewer): When did you and your fellow Air Corps men learn that you were being sent to Tinian?

Jernigan: I guess I didn’t know until we were on the way over. I went over on a ship. I did not fly over. They called us the advance echelon. We went ahead of the flight crews and the other personnel.

They divided the group into about half. Half of us went by ship. The other half were able to fly over. They flew either aboard one of the B-29s or one of the C-54s. We went over on a

Victory ship. Shipped out of Seattle, and got in a horrible storm between Seattle and Hawaii. Everybody was sick, especially me.

. . . It took us a week to get to Hawaii, because we were battling that storm out there. Then we were in Hawaii for two or three days. Then shipped out of there, and the next stop was in Eniwetok and from there to Tinian. I'd never heard of Tinian before we got there. I knew about Guam. I knew that it was in the Marianas. But I didn't even bother to know the names of the other islands in the Marianas.

Life on Tinian

Levy: Can you talk about what Tinian was like as an air base?

Jernigan: We arrived there at the end of May. They didn't have any housing for us when we first arrived. We were living in pup tents and outdoors most of the time, until a tent area opened up and we moved into a tent area. We were all housed in the tents, and so that wasn't too bad. I forgot just how long we were in that area, until the Seabees moved out of their area, which was one of the nicest bases on the island of Tinian. That's where the 509th then was moved to.

Levy: What kind of facilities did you live in, once you moved into the more permanent facility? . . .

Jernigan: Oh, we were in Quonset Huts.

Levy: What were those like to sleep in?

Jernigan: They were nice, yeah. Yeah, it wasn't the Hyatt Regency but it was certainly better than the tents. They were comfortable. . . .

Levy: Did you ever encounter or see any of the Tinian natives, or Japanese prisoners of war on the island?

Jernigan: They had what they called Camp Churo [Chulu], but it wasn't Japanese [prisoners of war]. It was natives of the island that were put in—I guess you'd have to call it a concentration camp, almost. But they were fenced off, so we had no access to them at all. You could drive by and see them behind fencing, but there was no interaction between us.

Levy: As the advanced echelon, what kind of work were you all doing?

Jernigan: Same thing we were doing in Wendover. Because when the air crews started arriving, they started flying practice bomb missions to some of the small islands around Tinian, and as far away as Marcus Island. I think there were several missions there. But they were just using conventional bomb[s].

We were getting kind of antsy, wondering, “Well, what’s our big weapon that we’re supposed to handle?” Then they started introducing missions for them to fly to Japan proper, using this huge bomb, what they called the pumpkin bomb, which was the same housing [bomb storage and loading pits] that they used for the Nagasaki bomb mission. Things started getting a little more exciting then. Then we thought for a while, “Do you suppose this is what they’re talking about?”

Then things started happening differently. People started showing up that we didn’t know. People in khaki clothing, but no military designation, so we knew they were civilians. High-ranking people all of a sudden, milling around our area and being, meetings and so forth.

We knew things were beginning to happen. Things started looking up for us. Then we thought, “Well, maybe we do have one.” We always referred to it as “the Gadget” or “the Gimmick,” prior to the first drop. We never referred to it as an atomic bomb until after the Hiroshima mission.

The Atomic Bomb

Levy: When did you first learn of the atomic bomb, or Gadget, or Gimmick? Did you know when the parts started arriving from the continental U.S.?

Jernigan: Not really, no. That was not our squadron. The 1st Ordnance took care of assembling the bomb and so forth, so we had no contact with 1st Ordnance. Even though they were a squadron of our group, we had no interaction between that squadron. In fact, every squadron had their job to do. You didn’t ask what they were doing, and they didn’t ask what you were doing. They just were following instructions. “Do your job, do it well, and this thing will all come together.”

Levy: When did you find out about the atomic bomb missions?

Jernigan: Actually, the first I heard about it being called an atomic bomb was after it was dropped on August 6th. They said they had dropped the first atomic bomb. I thought, “What in the world is an atomic bomb?” Soon to find out, but had no prior knowledge.

Some of the people that were more knowledgeable, as far as physics and so forth, had figured out that it probably was going to be an atomic bomb. I had no clue that’s what it was going to be. I just knew it was some new secret weapon that had never been used before and if was successful, should shorten the war by at least two years. Of course, that was our goal, that was our dream, that was our hope. That’s what we were all working for, working toward. . . .

Levy: What was the reaction like when the Enola Gay and the other planes returned?

Jernigan: Oh, elation. The whole day, August 6th, was sort of a celebration day, because we knew that they were going on this big mission that everybody had been waiting for since we first arrived at Wendover. They were sort of having a picnic, a fun time. Then when they came back to the area, Colonel Tibbets got up in front of the guys and said, "Mission accomplished. City sighted, and city gone." Something to that effect. He said it was a success.

We were greatly elated because if it was true that it was going to shorten the war by two years, we could see the end of this thing coming, because we saw no end to it. It just was grinding on and on. The Japanese just would not surrender. . . .

Levy: What were the few days in between the two atomic bombing missions like?

Jernigan: Oh, we were just excited and ready for the next one, and knew it was coming. Couldn't say anything. Couldn't write home and say that, "We had dropped that first one and getting ready to drop the second one," because all of our letters were censored. When your folks get a letter at home, it would be so cut up with words cut out that sometimes they couldn't make sense of what kids were saying to their parents.

But we knew there was a second one coming. We knew that there would be another one shortly, because we knew that one of our crews had flown back to the States to pick up the third bomb. We knew that one would have gone to Kokura. That much we knew, anyhow.

Levy: What are your memories of the second atomic bombing mission? Did you get to see those planes take off?

Jernigan: No. No, I didn't go to the flight line, because they take off at about 2:00 in the morning. That's not the best time to be out of bed. You know, we were just kids, all of us. Even the flight crews were just kids. We thought, "No big deal. They dropped one, they'll drop another, and there will be another one until they quit. That's all." Which was true, that's the way it would have been, unfortunately.

Levy: Were you there for the return of Bockscar or the other planes?

Jernigan: Same thing. When they came back, we were so glad to see them back and that they made it okay. I was housed in the same Quonset hut with the enlisted men from both missions, so I knew the guys. They were buddies, they were friends. Of course, you were glad to see them back. Because each of the missions, there was a possibility that you wouldn't see them again. . . .

Levy: When did you find out that the Japanese had surrendered?

Jernigan: It was about midnight. I don't know why we were all up, probably playing cards or something. We heard somebody yell, "It's all over!" We wondered what this yelling was about. We all went out, and then we could hear other voices, "It's all over!" They had picked up radio announcements that the Japanese had surrendered. Of course, "Bingo!" What we did, did it. . . .

I had my twentieth birthday on Tinian, soon after we arrived over there. Like I say, we were just kids.

Levy: Were you able to interact with any of the crews that were non-509th? Or were you very much isolated within the 509th?

Jernigan: Pretty much isolated, by choice. We weren't too popular when we arrived on Tinian, because these other groups had been over there several months before we arrived, and had lost crews and had bad experiences. Here we show up with almost 1,800 men and 15 B-29s with no gun turrets or anything. There was a lot of animosity toward us.

Another reason was that we showed up with all kinds of high priorities. Whatever we needed, we got, for completing our operation. Some of the other people had been there a long time through hardships, bad weather, and being shot down. It didn't make us too popular when we arrived there. . . .

Levy: How do you feel, looking back, about your role in the 509th and the Manhattan Project?

Jernigan: How I feel about my involvement? It was an exciting time, and I'm just glad that I was part of it, because it brought the war to an end. Of course, that was the dream of everyone, no matter where you were. . . .

Questions for Reading 2

1. Who told Jernigan's unit that they would be part of a secret project? Where was this shared?
2. What details from Jernigan suggest that members of the Manhattan Project often knew only their own responsibilities?
3. How did Jernigan find out about the end of the war? How was the end of the war connected to his perspectives on the atomic bomb?
4. Why might Jernigan have emphasized that they "were just kids"?
5. Why did some of the other air crews on Tinian resent the arrival of the 509th Composite Group?

Reading 3: Newspaper Article Excerpt

Note: The following reading uses historic language labeling the Japanese that should not be used today. Address this with students in advance.

"About Boys in Service"

All Making Fine Record - Regarding Promotions and Furloughs of Butler County Boys

Butler County Press, David City, Nebraska

September 27, 1945

Stationed on Tinian in the Pacific, Sgt. Michael J. Danaher, member of a bomb squadron, has written his parents, Mr. And Mrs. Mike Danaher, to tell some interesting things about a flight over Tokyo on V-J day and also of happenings on Tinian, especially regarding the atomic bomb. Extracts from the letter are as follows:

'The atomic bombs were on this island and the missions were made from here. We never even knew it until the first bomb was dropped so it really was a well kept secret. Our group C.O. [commanding officer] went to see the second bomb but even he couldn't get a look at it and he is [a] full Colonel. After the first one was dropped a lot of fellows got uneasy about being on the same island with any more of those bombs around, as the island isn't very big. The black soil here is very rich and most anything can be grown here at any time. There is only about two feet of soil and the rest is coral rock down to the ocean bed. The Japs had a lot of trees planted in rows along the rocks for landscaping and there are also wild tropical trees. They still get a few Japs out of the hills now and then, I guess they are getting hungry.

Well V-J day has finally become official and I can hardly believe it as it came so unexpectedly. I had a ringside seat on the whole show while the surrender was going on the [Battleship Missouri](#) as I was along in the big air armada which flew over Sunday morning Tokyo time. I first saw the Japanese homeland about 100 miles north of Tokyo at about 9:10 a.m. The countryside and small towns were very beautiful and the rice fields were all green just as when we flew over China and India. I think the Japs have their fields and towns laid out much better than the Indians or Chinese. The fields and towns all run back about 25 to 50 miles from the coast to the foot hills and mountains. All the way down the coast I really took in the sights of scenic Japan in style. We flew around the coast for quite a while as we got into formation and then headed for Tokyo. Along the way we could see the results of the bombing and strafing, especially of factories, railroads and airfields. We flew low at about 2000 feet and some places at about 1500 feet. Towards Tokyo the cities were all destroyed and Tokyo is really burned out. All we could see was burnt trash all over the area and lonely smoke stacks. Buildings of concrete and steel were still standing but blackened and gutted

by fire. Only a few streets were passable and I saw a few cars and trucks moving down them. On the outskirts of the city we could see the Japanese people looking up at us in the sky. They must have been impressed as there were about 465 B-29's. That's what it was – a display of power to impress the Japs and I'm sure it did.

Over Tokyo Bay we saw the Missouri and another battleship, also hospital ships, destroyers, cruisers, many transports and hundreds of other little boats. Also saw some big Japanese boats but only one Jap battleship and a lot of little Japanese fishing boats. We flew so low over the Missouri that we could see the sailors all lined up for review when the [peace pact](#) was being signed. We were tuned in one the airplane radio and knew exactly what was going on down below. It was an impressive sight to me and one I won't forget for a long time. We flew over Yokohama, which was plenty flat too and then climbed up above the clouds and had a good look at the peak of Fujiyama and then headed for Tinian. The navy was really there in force in Tokyo Bay and to make the sky more congested the navy had hundreds of fighter planes buzzing around too.

We got back at Tinian at 6 p.m. after 15 ½ hours in the air, and boy was I tired. I flew enough miles to get me half way home. We clipped along at 200 to 235 miles per hour. I saw a lot of water and very few islands. Iwo Jima off to one side looked like just another rock in the Pacific. I first saw the coast of Japan through a radar scope, 30 minutes before we got there. Radar has been kept a secret. You probably heard about it when the said B-29's bombed by instruments, that was radar. We could see the ground through clouds on a little screen inside the plane. It is something to see and how it works. These airplanes are pretty safe except on the take off as 70 tons of airplane isn't exactly light. I always pray on the take-off and have always made it. I went on the same airplane that I came back from China on last fall.'

Sgt. Danaher, who enlisted December 1, 1942, had been in the China-Burma theater since March, 1944, and who has 77 points to his credit hopes to be home by the end of this year and asks his mother to save a place for him at the table on Christmas day.

Questions for Reading 3

1. Where was Sgt. Danaher stationed when he wrote the letter? What was the primary purpose of the letter? (to inform, persuade, entertain, or a combination?)
2. What details given by Danaher show the scale of the U.S. military presence over Japan on V-J Day? Do you agree or disagree that this was intended to be a “display of power?”
3. Describe how Danaher shares both descriptions of destruction and natural beauty.
4. How might this letter be interpreted differently by American readers in 1945 compared to readers today? Consider changes in historical perspectives over time.

Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: Why was Tinian critical to the success of the Manhattan Project and the atomic bomb missions?

Extensions

1) Additional Oral History

Robert Shade served in the Army Air Corps in the Ordnance Corps. He also was sent to Wendover, Utah and served on Tinian. In his [oral history](#), collected April 19, 2009, for the Veterans History Project - Library of Congress, he shared about his experiences in securing the area in which the atomic bombs were held and work on assembling the Fat Man bomb. This oral history can be used by students to learn about another perspective on this work and to compare to Readings 1-3.

2) Multiple Perspectives on the Use of the Atomic Bomb

After completing this lesson, explore additional historical perspectives on the atomic bomb by using the lesson “[\(H\)our History Lesson: Historical Perspectives on the Atomic Bomb created at Los Alamos, Los Alamos County, New Mexico, WWII Heritage City.](#)”

Compare the viewpoints of those stationed on Tinian with perspectives from Japan and other groups affected by the bombings. These questions can be used for additional reflection:

- a. How do these perspectives differ from those shared by people stationed on Tinian?
- b. How did each person's role and experiences during the war shape their perspective?
- c. Why is it important to consider multiple perspectives when studying historical events?

You can also use the Manhattan Project National Historical Park's [Reflection and Remembrance](#) resources, which encourage students to consider the lasting human impact of the atomic bombings. News coverage of Tinian's annual peace ceremony can support students in examining local perspectives of the atomic bombings today. For example, during the 2023 ceremony, Tinian Mayor Edwin Aldan shared, “It is up to us to make sure that we spread the message of peace, reconciliation, and hope as we remember the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Let us also honor them by working to eliminate the threat of nuclear weapons and the devastation that they cause. The Tinian peace ceremony is a call to action.” (Kuan News, August 20, 2023). Exploring these commemorations helps students understand how communities continue to reflect decades later.

Additional Resources

Atomic Bomb Island: Tinian, the Last Stage of the Manhattan Project, and the Dropping of the Atomic Bombs on Japan in World War II. By Don A. Farrell. Lanham, MD, Globe Pequot/Stackpole Books, 2021.

[A Tale of Two Bomb Designs - Why were both Little Boy and Fat Man created?](#) [Los Alamos National Laboratory]

[Atomic Bomb Loading Pits](#) [Atlas Obscura]

[H-052-1: The U.S. Navy's Role in the Development and Employment of the Atomic Bomb, 1939–45.](#) [Naval History and Heritage Command]

[General Paul Tibbets – Reflections on Hiroshima](#) [Atomic Heritage Foundation]

[Life on Tinian – 6th Bomber Group](#)

[Northern Marianas Humanities Council](#)

[Reexamining Tinian's Role in Ending WWII](#) – Example of a Preservation Planning Grant [National Park Service]

[The Manhattan Project](#) – Atomic Heritage Foundation

[The Manhattan Project](#) - Assembling and Delivering the Uranium and Plutonium Bomb [U.S. Department of Energy]

[Tinian North Field National Historic Landmark](#) - StoryMap by Don Farrell

Lesson 5: Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands: Comparing and Connecting WWII Home Front Cities

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series teaching about the World War II home front, with the [Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands](#) designated as a [World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson contains photos, readings and a culminating project. The first reading shares a post-war perspective on the impact of war on Tinian that connects to details from prior lessons. The second reading connects the municipality to the designation of a Heritage City. An optional research extension supports students in researching current news and information about historical preservation efforts and the role of the military in Tinian & Aguiguan today.

The culminating project contributes to learners' understandings of the municipality as a WWII Heritage City, with the opportunity to combine lesson themes from the four other [lessons in the collection](#). This is to summarize the municipality's contributions and encourage connections to the overall home front efforts.

Objectives:

In a culminating product:

- a. Share details about the history and culture of the Northern Mariana Islands, including specifically for Tinian & Aguiguan.
- b. Describe the importance of Tinian & Aguiguan to Pacific military operations and how this led to the Battle of Tinian.
- c. Explain how the U.S. military developed Tinian and the experiences of service members and civilians during the occupation.
- d. Explain the role of Tinian in the Manhattan Project and its impact on the war.
- e. *Optional:* Describe similarities and differences of the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan and other Heritage city(s) or World War II home front(s).

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 32-36 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2 (Optional: resource links for the research extension)
3. Maps, project materials (as needed)
4. Student graphic organizers (See Figure 37 at end of lesson, for reference)
 - Create Comparison Matrices for your students to use. To compare two cities, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows. Label the left column Theme/Topic and the other columns City 1 and City 2. For a Comparison Matrix for three cities simply add an additional column.
 - Create two Single-Point Rubrics to assist students' self-assessment. One is for assessing proficiency in meeting teacher-selected standards. One is for assessing proficiency in meeting objectives.
 - For the rubric on standards, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows of content. Label the first column "Areas for Improvement," the second column, "Proficient (Meeting Standard)," and the third column, "Areas of Exceeding Standard." Leave the first and third columns blank. In each row of the second column identify a Standard and indicate a space for noting the evidence for meeting the standard. Include a space at the bottom of the page for assigning points for each column.
 - For the rubric on objectives, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows of content. Label the first column "Areas for Improving toward Objective," the second column, "Proficient (Meeting Objective)," and the third column, "Areas of Exceeding Objective." Leave the first and third columns blank. In the four rows of the second column identify these four objectives:
 - a. Share details about the history and culture of the Northern Mariana Islands, including specifically for Tinian & Aguiguan.
 - b. Describe the importance of Tinian & Aguiguan to Pacific military operations and how this led to the Battle of Tinian.
 - c. Explain how the U.S. military developed Tinian and the experiences of service members and civilians during the occupation.
 - d. Explain the role of Tinian in the Manhattan Project and its impact on the war.
 - e. *Optional:* Describe similarities and differences of the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan and other Heritage city(s) or World War II home front(s).

Include a space at the bottom of the page for assigning points for each column. See the last photo of this lesson for reference.

Getting Started: Essential Question

Why was the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan chosen as a World War II Heritage City, and what are its similarities to and differences from other home front cities?

Photos



Figure 32: 313th Wg, Vol. 1 No. 313-330 June 1945 Map of Tinian #2 (Credit: 313th Bombardment Wing Collection, Northern Marianas Humanities Council Digital Archive)



Figure 33: Marines looking at a Japanese tank, destroyed during the Battle of Tinian. Credit: National Archives, War in the Pacific National Historical Park.

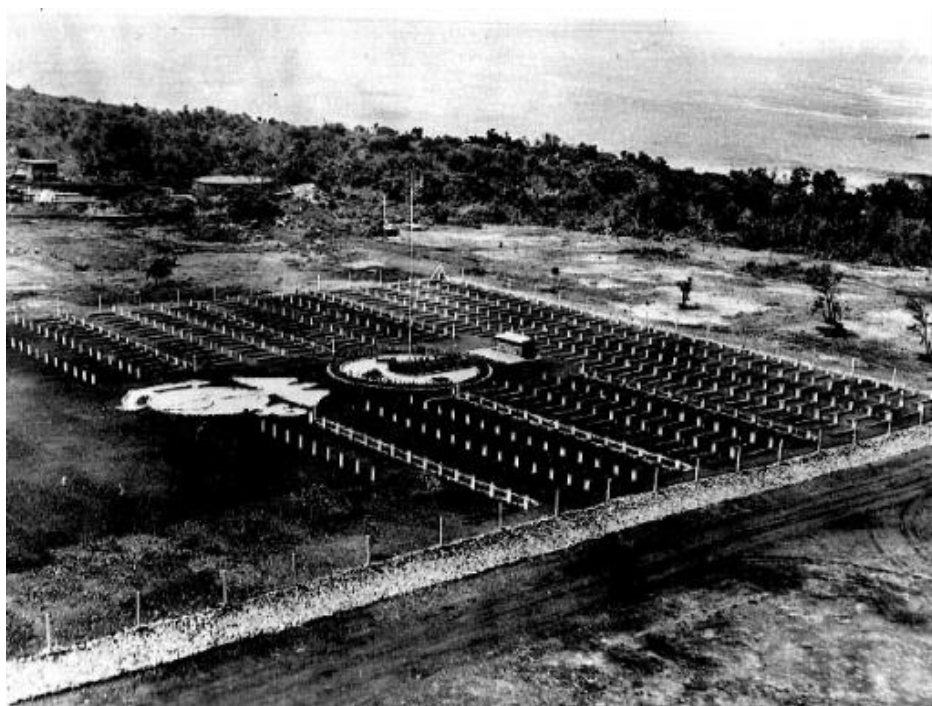


Figure 34: American Cemetery on Tinian Island, 1945. In 1947 servicemen began to be exhumed from the site to be shipped to next of kin or buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at the Punchbowl, Oahu, Hawaii. Credit: National Archives, War in the Pacific National Historical Park.



Figure 35: "B-29 Flying in Formation over our Airfield on Tinian." Credit: Francis L. Strekel Collection, Library of Congress.



Figure 36: Camp Churo, or Chulu, a refugee internment camp administered by the Naval Civil Affairs on Tinian for civilians during American occupation. Students play school games outside and a Quonset Hut is seen in the background. (Credit: Navy Civil Affairs RG 38, No. 048, Northern Marianas Humanities Council)



Quotations to consider:

“There is always casualties. I guess that was probably one of the biggest shocks is the first casualty. . . During the invasion of the battle for Tinian, it only lasted two weeks. But we took fairly heavy casualties. But the first -- first marine that was killed nearby was a boy from Iowa, the same place I was from. What made it really pretty tough is that his twin brother was walking right beside him. Well, it was the end of the war for both of them -- because of the Marine Corps program at that time that if any of your brother or anything was killed, they sent the other one home. And so, the other boy was pulled off the line right then and sent home. And so, the war was over for that particular branch of the family . . . but they wanted to make sure that the mother didn't lose more than one son. This all came about after the [Sullivan brothers](#) were -- I think there was six or seven [sic] of them on one naval ship and it was sunk and they were all -- they all died at the same time. And they didn't want this to happen again. . .”

- William F. Rhodes, excerpts from his [interview](#) on January 1, 2002 for the Veterans History Project, Library of Congress

“ . . . We all felt that after 60 years, it was time to begin to open the next chapter . . . so there could be healing. . . . When you experience something like that – see people from Nagasaki and American soldiers – you get a perspective on what’s really important in life. . . . If everyone could see it first hand, I think it would cause you to re-evaluate what’s really important in life.”

- Anderson Giles, who supported planning the event on Tinian to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of the war in the Pacific (quoted in “Professor helps Pacific island with memorial,” *Bangor Daily News*, November 12, 2005)

“Your participation [in the 80th commemoration] reflects a shared commitment to remembering the past, honoring those affected, and working together towards a future defined by peace, healing, and understanding. . . .

This commemoration, under the [theme] '80 years of peace in the Pacific from ashes of war to hope,' is more than just a remembrance. It is a reflection of how far we've come and a reaffirmation of what we must continue to strive for. . . .

The events of World War II left a mark on this island and the world. Tinian, once the launch site of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is now transforming that legacy into a platform of dialogue, learning, and unity.

This commemoration serves as a solemn reminder that we must never forget, we must remember the lives lost, the choices we made, and the consequences we endured.”

- Tinian Mayor Edwin Aldan at the Tinian Bomb Site in North Field on August 6, 2025, as reported in “Tinian commemorates 80th anniversary of Hiroshima atomic bombing amid military buildup” (August 7, 2025, RNZ)

Reading 1: Newspaper Article Excerpt

Taking a Look at Tinian

Pacific Daily News, August 13, 1989

By Wes Goodman

In 1944 a young man named Manuel L. Dela Cruz volunteered to join the U.S. Marines in the Marianas campaign of World War II to help secure Tinian, his home island, from the Japanese.

Dela Cruz, whose parents died in fierce fighting on nearby Saipan, watched and helped U.S. forces as his island was turned into the air base that ended the war.

In August 1945, the Enola Gay and Bock's Car B-29 Superfortresses took from the Tinian North Field runway with atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Today, Dela Cruz says he likes to talk with the U.S. and Japanese veterans and their children who visit Tinian. He says he enjoys showing them the island's war sites and trading stories with them over coffee at his home.

Since the height of the Pacific campaign, Tinian has been transformed from the largest air base in the world to a quiet western Pacific island. Islanders, called Chamorros, still maintain many traditional customs, but have also adopted much of the American lifestyle. . .

Reminders of the war are all over the island and are evident in the lifestyle. The Enola Gay runway is still intact and is used for American military training. Spam, introduced by the U.S. forces, is still a popular food on the island. The invasion beaches are now picnic sites where beachcombers find WWII shrapnel in the shallow waters inside the island reef.

Streets on the island are still called by then names they were given by invading Americans who thought Tinian was shaped like Manhattan and gave the roads New York names.

Broadway, 8th Avenue and 42nd Street, constructed by the 107 Naval Construction Battalion to transport the 1,000-pound bombs that were dropped on Japan, are all still in use.

Today, islanders and tourists drive down Broadway through Central Park and Harlem, to the remote North Field runway to visit the control tower and airstrip that launched the Enola Gay in 1945 with the world's first atomic bomb, which was targeted for Hiroshima.

That run secured a place in history for the Enola Gay, but Bock's Car, which followed three days later, is lesser known. The story of both is told on Tinian war memorials. . . .

Nearly half a century later, the mayors of Tinian and Hiroshima exchange letters of friendship, peace and good will once a year to reaffirm the unique historical bond they share.

The war history can be seen today in the buildings, runways, bomb pits and bomb shelters from the Japanese and U.S. administrations that dot the Tinian landscape. Residents maintain the facilities to keep alive their history as the island that ended World War II and ushered in the nuclear age.

Hundreds of tourists each year cruise the 8,500-foot path Enola Gay runway in their cars.

Especially designed pits that stored the huge atomic bombs are filled in now but are well marked for sightseers.

The war history also lives through the stories passed from the Chamorros who lived through the battle to their children. One of those is Manuel L. Dela Cruz, a Tinian native who says he joined the 2nd and 4th U.S. Marine divisions in the invasions of Saipan and Tinian.

Dela Cruz says he was rescued by American forces from a sinking Japanese cargo vessel he worked on just before the outbreak of hostilities in the Northern Marianas.

Dela Cruz started his career in the Marines in the invasion of Saipan. 'It was early in the morning, 5 o'clock. The only thing I think is my father and mother because they stay on Saipan. My father, he died from the bullet. He wasn't fighting. My mother the bombs,' Dela Cruz says.

'When the Marines finished landing on Saipan, they tried to land on Tinian. And I joined the Tinian landing in the Marines,' he says.

Tinian was invaded July 24, 1944, after U.S. forces secured nearby Saipan on July 9. Saipan is often remembered as one of the bloodiest battles of the Pacific.

Forty years later, Dela Cruz still lives on Tinian with his wife, 12 children and 62 grandchildren. Dela Cruz, 68, says he likes to talk to visiting Japanese and U.S. veterans when they visit the former battleground.

‘A group of about 40-something U.S. veterans, all of them fought on Tinian, came back last year to pray. They went to landing beach and some went to the battle grounds,’ he says.

The Tinian veteran says one member of the group recognized him.

‘I remember you. You are Dela Cruz, isn’t it? I thought you already died,’ Dela Cruz says a visitor told him.

‘I don’t remember that soldier, but I say, “God has given me luck,”’ Dela Cruz says. . . .

Questions for Reading 1, Quotations to Consider, and Photos

1. Who is Manuel L. Dela Cruz? Why do you think he enjoys meeting with both American and Japanese veterans?
2. How does the article describe examples of the long-term impacts of the war and American occupation?
3. Reflect on the importance of preserving historical sites like North Field. What might be lost if these places were not preserved?
4. How do historical landmarks, acts of remembrance, and personal stories work together to preserve history? Use Tinian & Aguiguan as an example.
5. *Quotations to Consider*: What feelings do the speakers relay in these quotations? Why do you think communities continue to commemorate difficult events of the war over time? What might these commemorations teach future generations?
6. *Photos*: Examine the photos. What surprises, interests, and troubles you about the photos? Describe how each connects to Tinian’s wartime history.



By the numbers:

- At its peak prior to the war, Tinian had around 18,000 - 20,000 people on the island. Thousands of settlers – Japanese, Okinawan, and Korean – were working in the sugarcane fields and agriculture.
- Nearly 15,600 U.S. Marines invaded Tinian on July 24, 1944.
- Tinian became a base of over 40,000 military personnel.
- In 1945 the Manhattan Project had about 100 people on Tinian working on the atomic bomb.
- The population in the [U.S. Census Bureau 2020 Island Areas Censuses](#) reported the population of Tinian as 2,044 (with Aguiguan as a population of 0 and uninhabited). The overall population of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands was 47,329.

Reading 2: Heritage City Designation

Excerpt from: “[House Report 115-998](#), “*To Direct the Secretary of the Interior to Annually Designate at Least One City in The United States as An ‘American World War II Heritage City,’ and for other purposes*” (October 30, 2018)

“ . . .PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The purpose of H.R. 6118 is to direct the Secretary of the Interior to annually designate at least one city in the United States as an “American World War II Heritage City”.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

On December 7, 1941, military forces of the Empire of Japan attacked the U.S. Naval Fleet and ground bases at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. On December 8, 1941, one day after what President Roosevelt referred to as, “a date which will live in infamy,” the United States declared war against the Empire of Japan. Three days later, on December 11, 1941, Japan's ally, Germany, declared war on the United States. Sixteen million Americans, mostly young working-age men, served in the military during World War II, out of an overall United States population of 113 million.

While an unprecedented number of Americans served in World War II, the country drastically increased its war production on the home front, serving not only the needs of the armed forces of the United States but her allies as well--in what President Franklin Roosevelt called “The Arsenal of Democracy.” The combination of millions serving in the military, during a period of necessary and drastic increases in production, led to significant social changes on the American home front.

The World War II period resulted in the largest number of people migrating within the United States in the history of the country. Individuals and families relocated to industrial centers for good paying jobs out of a sense of patriotic duty. Many industrial centers became “boomtowns,” growing at phenomenal rates. One example, the City of Richmond, California, grew from a population of under 24,000 to over 100,000 during the war. . . .”

Questions for Reading 2 and By the Numbers

1. What was the purpose of the bill (H.R. 6118) according to the report?
2. What contributed to the development of Tinian by American armed forces? Is it a traditional “boomtown” as described in the report? Why or why not? Use *By the Numbers* to support your answer.
3. Why do you think the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan was designated as a World War II Heritage City? Connect details from the bill and evidence from the first reading, and/or readings from the other lessons.

4. Are there other cities you think of when considering home front contributions during wartime? Which, and why?

Research Extension

Tinian Today

The first reading was written about 45 years after the end of the war. Continue your research by exploring how the legacy of the war continues to shape Tinian & Aguiguan today. Investigate current historical preservation efforts, commemorations, archaeological work, and community perspectives on preserving the island's history.

Look for recent news articles, press releases, videos, and official updates from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan. Useful resources include, but are not limited to, the [Mayor's Office of the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan](#), the [Commonwealth Historic Preservation Office](#), the [Northern Marianas Humanities Council](#), [Advisory Council on Historic Preservation](#), and the [National Park Service](#). You can also use Google Earth or Street View, maps like this [interactive one](#) from the Mayor's Office of the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, [Tinian North Field National Historic Landmark](#) StoryMap by Don Farrell, and satellite imagery to explore the island's geography and historic sites today.

Consider also researching the role of the U.S. military on Tinian today and how current defense activities intersect with and present challenges to preservation efforts. In recent years, North Field has been revitalized as part of U.S. efforts to strengthen security and training in the Indo-Pacific. Resources may include news and planning documents from [Joint Region Marianas](#) and the official U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force websites.

The research completed in this extension activity can also be used as a part of final mastery products.

Culminating Activity/Mastery Product

To demonstrate student understanding, support students in creating a final product that meets the following objectives:

- a. Share details about the history and culture of the Northern Mariana Islands, including specifically for Tinian & Aguiguan.
- b. Describe the importance of Tinian & Aguiguan to Pacific military operations and how this led to the Battle of Tinian.

- c. Explain how the U.S. military developed Tinian and the experiences of service members and civilians during the occupation.
- d. Explain the role of Tinian in the Manhattan Project and its impact on the war.
- e. *Optional:* Describe similarities and differences of the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan and other Heritage city(s) or World War II home front(s).

Mastery products should be:

- . . . **student-led**; Students work as individuals or in collaborative groups.
- . . . **student-directed**; Students are offered a variety of choices for product type.
- . . . **student-organized**; Teacher facilitates by providing students with the comparison matrices and/or resource links from throughout the series of lessons.
- . . . **student-assessed**; Teacher supports student self-assessment and reflection by providing students single-point rubrics to assess for meeting standards and/or lesson objectives.

Note: Depending on time and scope, the comparison of the Municipality of Tinian & Aguiguan, Northern Mariana Islands to another WWII Heritage or home front city(s) within the mastery product may be omitted. However, comparing cities is recommended, as it connects students to a deeper understanding of the WWII home front.

Examples of mastery product choices include, but are not limited to:

- **Written:** Letter (opinion or informative), essay, poem, narratives, biography, articles, class book or children's book, speech or debate (then presented orally), blog / website, plaque or historical displays, pamphlets or rack cards
- **Graphic Organizers:** timeline, flowcharts, mind or concept content maps, Venn diagrams, comparison matrices, posters
- **Artistic Expression:** song, dance, theater (ex. skits), 3-D models, dioramas, photo journal, stamp and coin designs, visual art, architecture/building or monument, museum design
- **Media design and creation:** podcast, historical markers, social media content, interactive virtual maps or tours, infographics, video, comic strips or graphics, game design, slideshows, digital scrapbook

Please view the [NPS Heritage cities lesson collection](#) for information and resources on other cities.

Single-Point Rubric

Areas for Improvement		Proficient (Meeting Standard)	Areas of Exceeding Standard
		Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
		Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
		Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
		Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
Points			

Figure 37: Single-Point Rubric (Standards; Blank) [Teacher selects priority standards for assessment.] Courtesy of Sarah Nestor Lane

Acknowledgment

The lesson series was written by Sarah Nestor Lane, an educator and consultant funded by a National Council on Public History's cooperative agreement with the National Park Service.