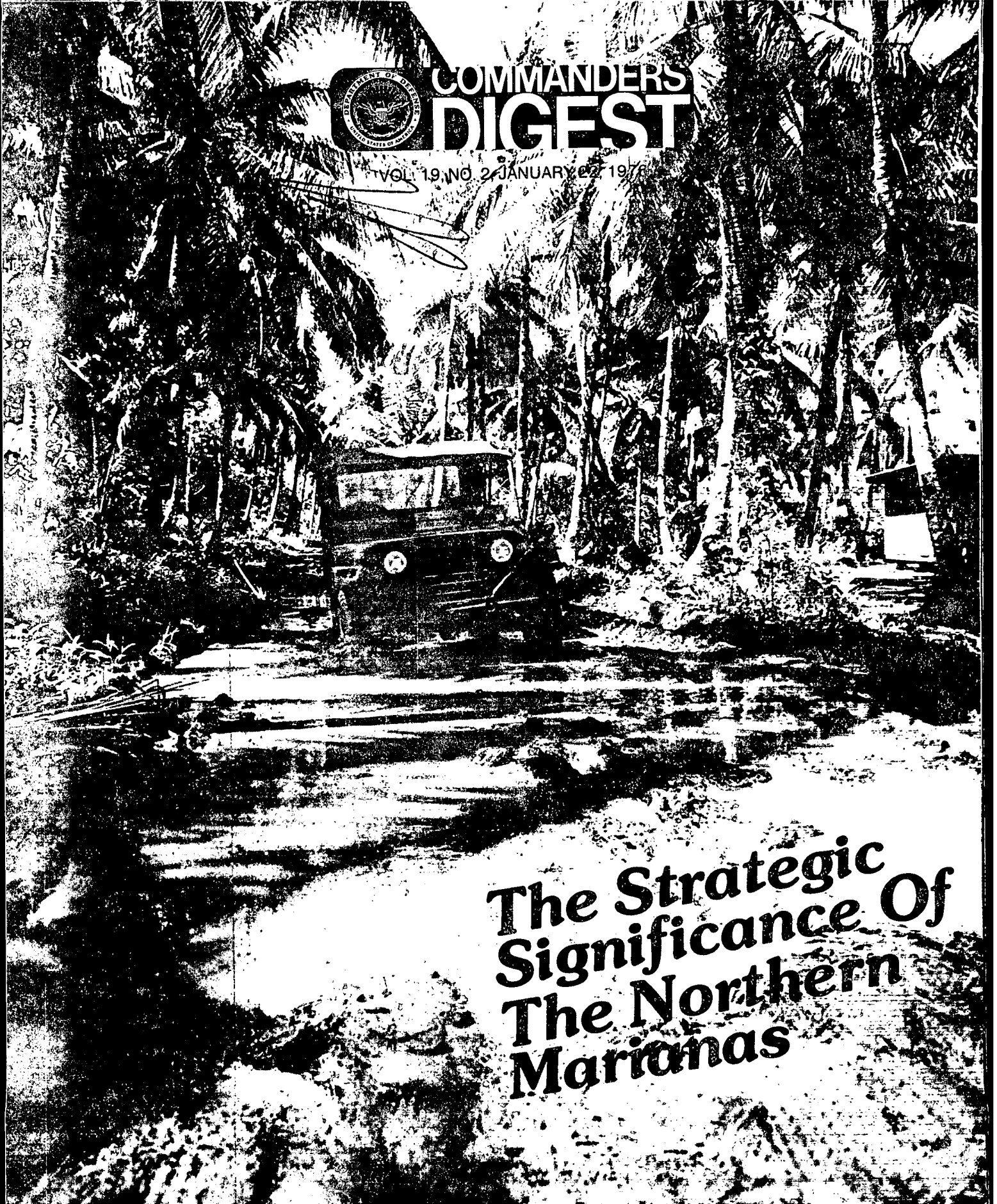




COMMANDERS DIGEST

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A black and white photograph of a military jeep driving on a dirt road through a dense tropical forest of palm trees. The jeep is in the center of the frame, moving towards the viewer. The road is unpaved and appears to be in a rural or undeveloped area. The forest is thick with palm trees and other tropical vegetation, creating a canopy overhead. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

**The Strategic
Significance Of
The Northern
Marianas**



U.S. DEFENSE INTERESTS IN

The Northern Mar

BY ROBERT ELLSWORTH
Deputy Secretary of Defense

The strategic importance of the Northern Marianas stems from their geographic location—relative to Asia, the Pacific Basin, and Guam—and the value of these islands in terms of our access to them and their denial to others.

Importance to U.S. Security Interest

Along with Guam, the Northern Marianas are located on the threshold of Asia, where U.S. traditional interest has been to prevent any potentially hostile power or combination of powers from dominating the area. Since the turn of the century, the United States has given expression to this interest by several different and changing objectives, depending upon the assessment of the then existing situation.

These objectives have included an open-door policy for trade and commercial relations, the territorial integrity of China, the roll-back of Japanese military conquests during World War II, the containment of a Sino-Soviet threat in its aftermath, and the

post-Vietnam effort to establish and maintain a regional balance of power.

Politically, economically, and militarily, it is in the national interest of the United States to be capable of maintaining an equilibrium of power in the East Asia and Pacific Region, as well as to be able to uphold this Nation's commitments to allies in the area. To do this requires a credible presence on the part of the United States, particularly in a military sense—to demonstrate resolve, to add substance to political endeavors, to protect economic interests, and to inspire trust and confidence in the U.S. defense posture. The ability to deny the Northern Marianas to the military of other nations, coupled with the right to operate and base U.S. forces in the area, is important to the maintenance of such a posture in the years ahead.

The Marianas Islands are important to the maritime posture of the United States. Essential trade routes crisscross through the area to seaports in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the continent of Asia. The Marianas, along with Palau, also lie very close to north-south shipping lanes, linking Japan and Korea to oil resources of the Persian Gulf, via the Lombok Straits, and to the mineral resources of Indonesia, Australia, and the South Pacific islands.

Beautiful sunshine weather as seen on this golf course in the Northern Marianas is often punctuated by a scene of mud and rain as portrayed on the cover of this issue.



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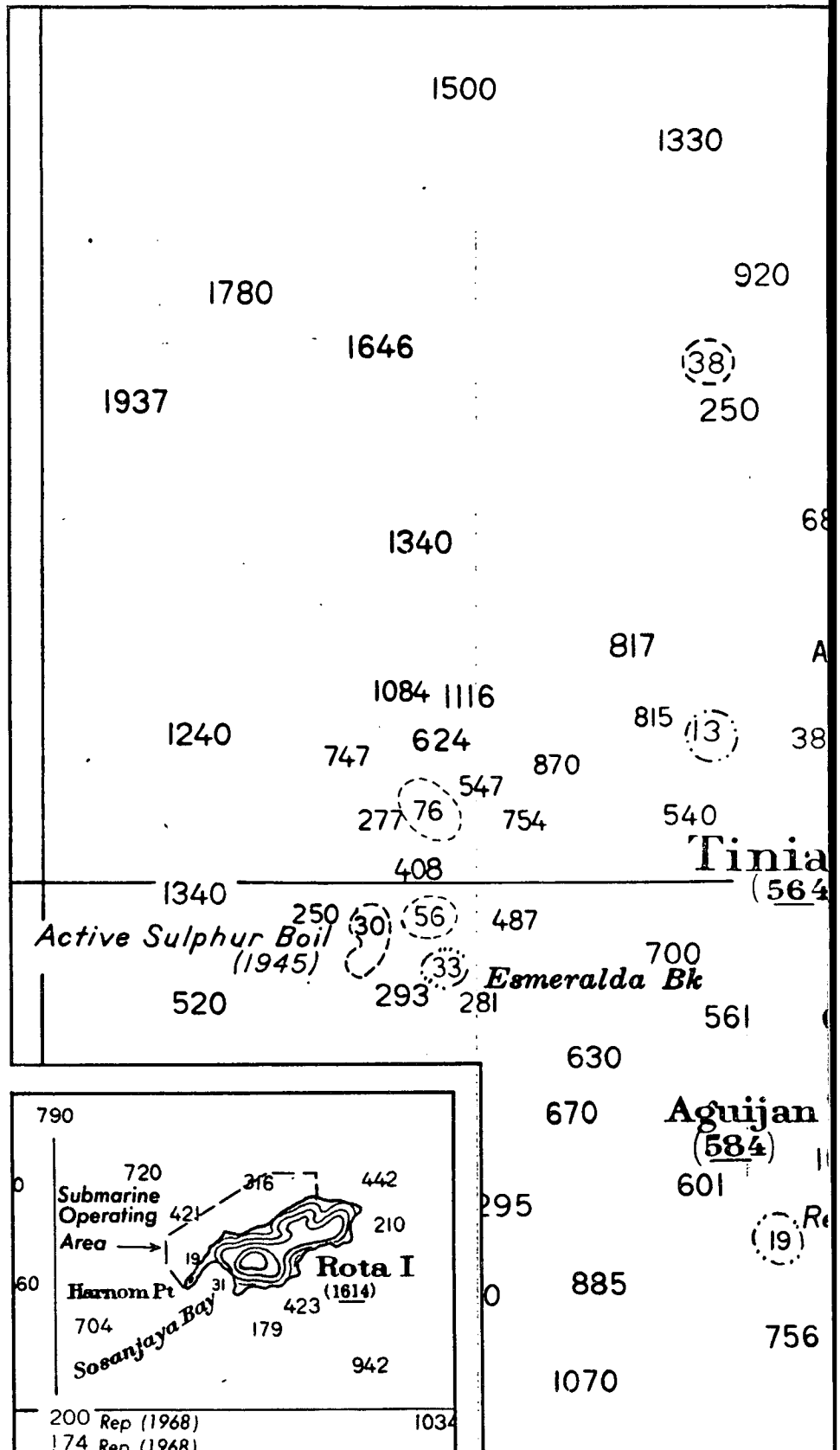
Major international air routes, both east-west and north-south, also lead to the Marianas, because of their central location as a fuel stop, enroute to other countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region. The freedom to transit this area, without fear of harassment or interdiction, is an essential element of our strength as a maritime nation and our value as a friend and ally to other countries in the region.

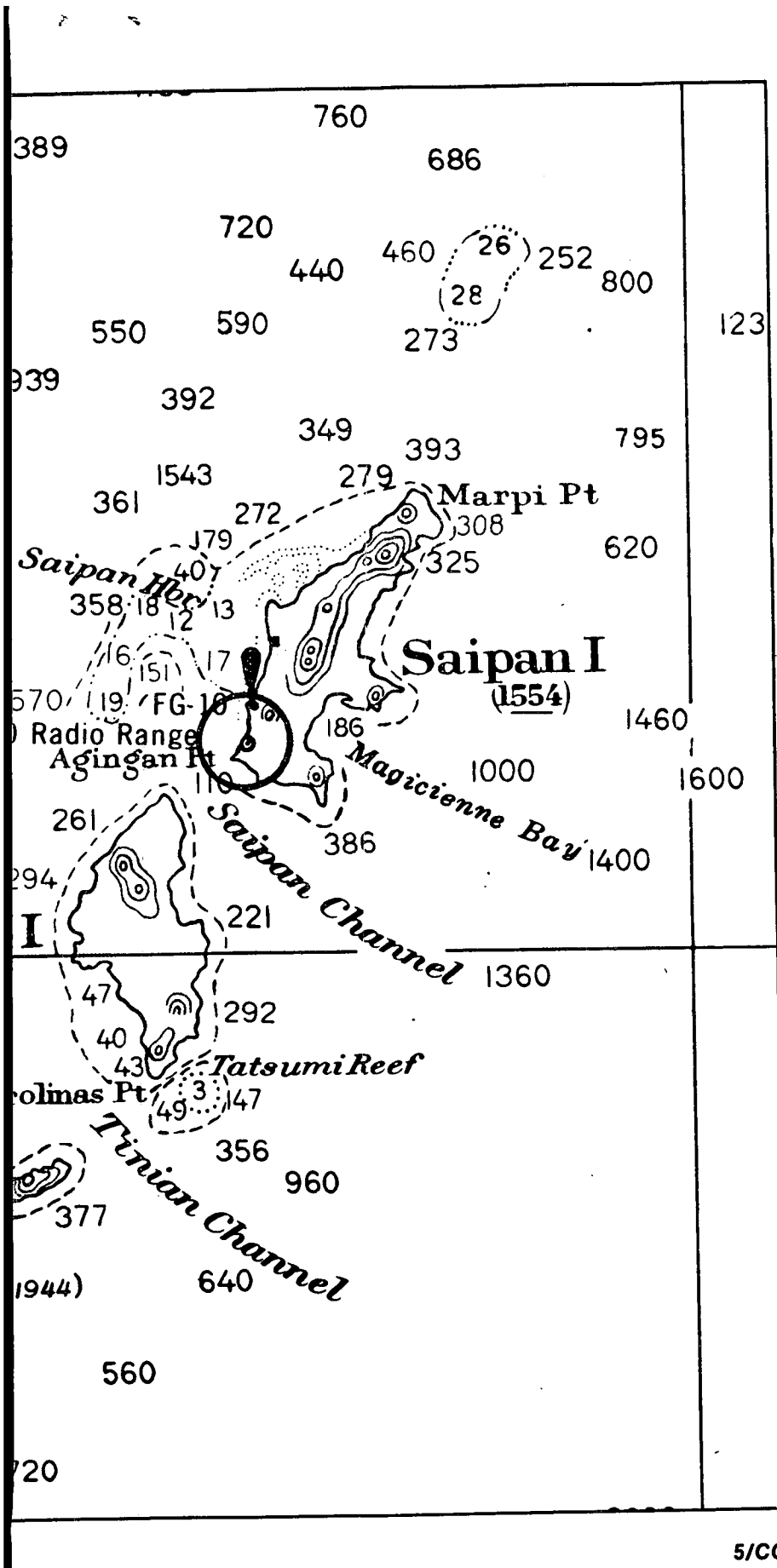
The close proximity of the Northern Marianas to the sea and airspace surrounding Guam is an important factor in terms of the defense of this island community, which has been a U.S. territory since 1898. U.S. ability to exercise full authority over defense matters in the Northern Marianas is related directly to local defenses and the effectiveness of communications, surveillance, patrol, and reconnaissance activities conducted from military installations on Guam.

Northern Marianas Covenant

The covenant to establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, in political union with the United States, clearly supports this Nation's national security interests and defense posture in the Western Pacific.

This map of the Northern Marianas, prepared by the Defense Mapping Agency Hydrographic Center, Washington, D.C., indicates soundings in fathoms as illustrated by the numbers. Rota I (inset) is located south of the other islands, half way between Tinian and Guam.





Denial of these islands to the military forces of any foreign nation will prevent the establishment of a military foothold which might be used to weaken the defenses of Guam, to interdict U.S. commerce, to deprive allies of essential raw materials, or to endanger the resupply of those countries who rely upon the U.S. government for the production and delivery of defense material.

Access to these islands will improve the capability to sustain the military preparedness of U.S. forces during peacetime, to logistically support forward deployments from U.S. soil, if necessary during contingencies, and to provide a hedge against unforeseen changes in the U.S. base posture elsewhere in the Western Pacific.

Equally important, the covenant reflects a desire by the people of the Northern Marianas to join the American family and to voluntarily place their islands under U.S. sovereignty. As future citizens of the United States, they fully understand and support their contribution to the "common defense."

Land Required for Defense Purposes

Under Article VIII of the covenant, the future Government of the Northern Marianas will make available approximately 18,182 acres of



land to the Government of the United States by long-term lease to enable it to carry out its defense responsibilities. In addition to an interest in the land as a hedge against unforeseen changes in the U.S. overseas base posture, the Department of Defense has immediate and long-term requirements which cannot be satisfied on Guam or elsewhere in the Western Pacific. In general, these requirements fall into three categories: training and readiness; facility realignment, and contingency planning.

Training and Readiness

With the end of hostilities in Indochina, it has become more, rather than less, important to provide opportunities for joint services exercises, including amphibious operations, ship-to-shore bombardment, and weapons delivery by tactical air units. This sort of training, which is essential to our combat readiness during peacetime, was difficult to schedule for deployed units, even before the Vietnam conflict. Because of population growth, urban expansion, and other environmental factors, it is even more difficult today.

Hence, DoD has turned to the Marianas, where Tinian currently is being used for small scale amphibious exercises and



The close proximity of the Northern Marianas to the sea and air space surrounding Guam is an important factor in terms of the defense of this island community. The top photograph depicts an airfield on one of the islands while the bottom one shows Naval administrative housing.



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the island of Farallon De Medinilla for ship-to-shore bombardment. Because the latter island is completely uninhabited, it also is used as a target for air-to-ground weapons delivery.

Facility Realignment

There is no immediate intention or authorization to undertake a military construction program on the island of Tinian. However, DoD facility planners are faced constantly with the problem of how to protect the operational capability of various overseas installations and, at the same time, protect the local residents' safety, health, and welfare.

These problems stem from such factors as the gradual deterioration of some logistic support facilities, increasingly stringent environmental factors, the partial relocation of community development, particularly around military airfields. If adjustments become necessary, as a result of such factors, the partial relocation of facilities to the Northern Marianas would be an attractive option, because there is not the pressure of urban development on and around Tinian that is found elsewhere and the long-term capital investment would be on U.S. soil.

Contingency Planning

Having made the transition from a wartime to peacetime posture in the Western Pacific, DoD also faces the problem of where to pre-position and

maintain war reserve materials so as to maximize deterrent and defense capability. Tinian provides what is lacking most on Guam and at many other logistic support bases in the Western Pacific—space to accommodate conventional ammunition storage facilities.

Tinian also is close to U.S. defense installations on Guam, making it possible for the two base areas to be mutually supporting. Together, Guam and Tinian would increase the U.S. Government's preparedness to deal with a crisis in the East Asia and Pacific Region, without having to rely on a widely scattered network of logistic support bases located in foreign countries. This is an important option in the post-Vietnam political environment, because the United States cannot be absolutely sure of access to these foreign bases in all of the contingencies which might arise.

Harbor and Airfield Rehabilitation

At present, the Tinian harbor and airfield are in the advanced stages of deterioration. It is necessary to upgrade the basic infrastructure on Tinian in order to support our training requirements and to provide for

rapid expansion in the future.

Thus, the fiscal year 1976 budget includes \$1 million for the planning and design of work necessary to repair the wharf, breakwater, causeway, and runway surface. When it is necessary to initiate any construction, the U.S. Congress will be approached for authorization and approval of any such projects.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the Department of Defense believes, for several reasons, that approval of the Northern Marianas Covenant by the United States Congress is both important and timely.

—The location of the Northern Marianas—on the threshold of Asia, at the crossroad of essential trade routes, and only 40 miles from Guam—is important in terms of U.S. national security interests, commitments, and strength as a maritime nation.

—Access to the Northern Marianas for defense purposes will enable the United States to sustain the military preparedness

of its armed forces during peacetime, to logistically support forward deployments from U.S. soil, if necessary during contingencies, and to provide a hedge against unforeseen changes in the U.S. base posture elsewhere in the East Asia and Pacific area.

—The land provided for in the Covenant will enable the Department of Defense to solve a dilemma faced at several other locations in the Western Pacific:

how to protect the operational capability of our installations and, at the same time, the safety, health, and welfare of the local civilian community. The Tinian area will provide the operational flexibility needed, without violating the U.S. Government's own safety standards and environmental protection laws.

—As future citizens of the United States, the people of the Northern Marianas fully understand and support their contribution to the "common defense." This understanding and support is of utmost importance

to the U.S. defense posture and to any military presence which might be established in the Northern Marianas, now or in the distant future.

—The commitment to defend the Northern Marianas will be the same as the commitment to Guam, which shares sea and airspace in common with the islands of Rota, Tinian, and Saipan. U.S. access to the Northern Marianas, coupled with the denial of this area to the military forces of any foreign nation, will strengthen the United States' defense posture in this area of strategic importance, without involving any new U.S. military commitments to any foreign country.

A Seabee equipment operator smooths out the coral on an old roadbed while in the process of reconstructing a road on one of the Northern Marianas Islands.

