

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 19, 2010

**A Tale of Long Ago (1945):** In the current issue of *Preservation*, the magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, there appeared a photo that jumped out at me. Under the title "Pagat, on the northern coast of Guam," the flat ridge in the background, nearly 600 feet above the sea, was obviously the location of World War II's North Field. Here B-29s, with their full load of bombs, took off for targets in Japan, 1,600 statute miles away. Two parallel runways, 6,000 feet in length, ended just where the cliff dropped off to the Pacific below. These airplanes, loaded to 138,000 pounds (Boeing planned them for a maximum weight of 120,000) barely became airborne when they reached the cliff, then they would drop some 300 feet over the water to gain airspeed and finally climb several miles out to their normal altitude. A similar airfield, called Northwest Field, was on a peninsula to the west. Saipan and Tinian, about 100 miles to the north, also were home to several squadrons of B-29s.

The purpose of the current article was to point out the location of an ancient village of the *Chamorro*, the indigenous people of present-day Guam, recently discovered with its 50-plus mounds containing evidence of day-to-day life and some 20 sets of limestone pillars that once supported dwellings of wood and thatch. These are in a small tropical jungle below the North Field cliff, and their existence is threatened by the U.S. military, if present-day major operations are transferred from Okinawa to Guam.

The Weekly News of December 24, 2007, told of my experiences on North Field during the Christmas period of 1945. The war having ended more than three months before, the bomber squadrons had abandoned the west side of the field, and the jungle had fast encroached, with weeds growing through the floor of the former officers' club. Several of us (just two at first) were sent up there from our Weather Squadron headquarters on Harmon Field, 10 miles away, to "stabilize" the area for the ill-fated and most impractical relocation of our squadron to more spacious quarters. Our time there was not all bad, however. We were, for the most part, away from the "brass" and could do as we pleased. Three or four of us decided to build a deluxe tropical cottage on the highest point of the cliff with a splendid view across the ocean to Rota, a small island halfway between Guam and Tinian. For two or three days, we cut down the jungle in a space about 50 feet square and laid out our plans for the structure, which would be built with scrap lumber, of which there was plenty from the abandoned barracks. Nothing more happened, but I could see exactly where this was on the current photo in *Preservation*.

For relaxation, we would descend the cliff, the steepest part by hanging onto a rope tied to a tree at the top, walk across 100 yards of poison-free weeds at the bottom, come out on the beach, and have a swim. The only residents of this low-lying area were abandoned Japanese who would hide during the day and come out at night to seek food from the U.S. military's garbage areas behind the few kitchens still functioning on the east side of North Field. We never saw them, and we surmised that they didn't know the war was over. They were hiding out, and we went swimming almost exactly where the ancient village existed. Little did we know!