



## **DOD is beefing up operations at Andersen Air Force Base and throughout the Marianas.**

# **A**

**CCESS** is the name of the game for security in the Pacific. For airmen, this access hinges on Guam.

Guam is an American possession—US soil. While there are many other desirable basing locations in the western Pacific, Guam—nearly 220 square miles of sovereign American territory about 3,900 miles west of Hawaii—is the only one where basing rights will never be an issue.

Andersen Air Force Base, at the northern tip of the island, is a historic installation. The main runway is famous for its dip in the center, an ocean cliff at the end, and its white color—radiating from crushed coral mixed in the concrete. Andersen hosted US combat aircraft in World War II and throughout the Vietnam War and the Cold War.

For the last 10 years, USAF has been increasing its presence on Guam. So has the Navy, which homeports submarines there, and plans call for some Marine Corps aviation and ground units from Okinawa to move to a new home on the island. The strategic importance of Guam extends to other territories in the Marianas island chain such as Tinian and Saipan.

President Obama's Asia-Pacific rebalance leans heavily on Guam for access, transient staging, and presence.

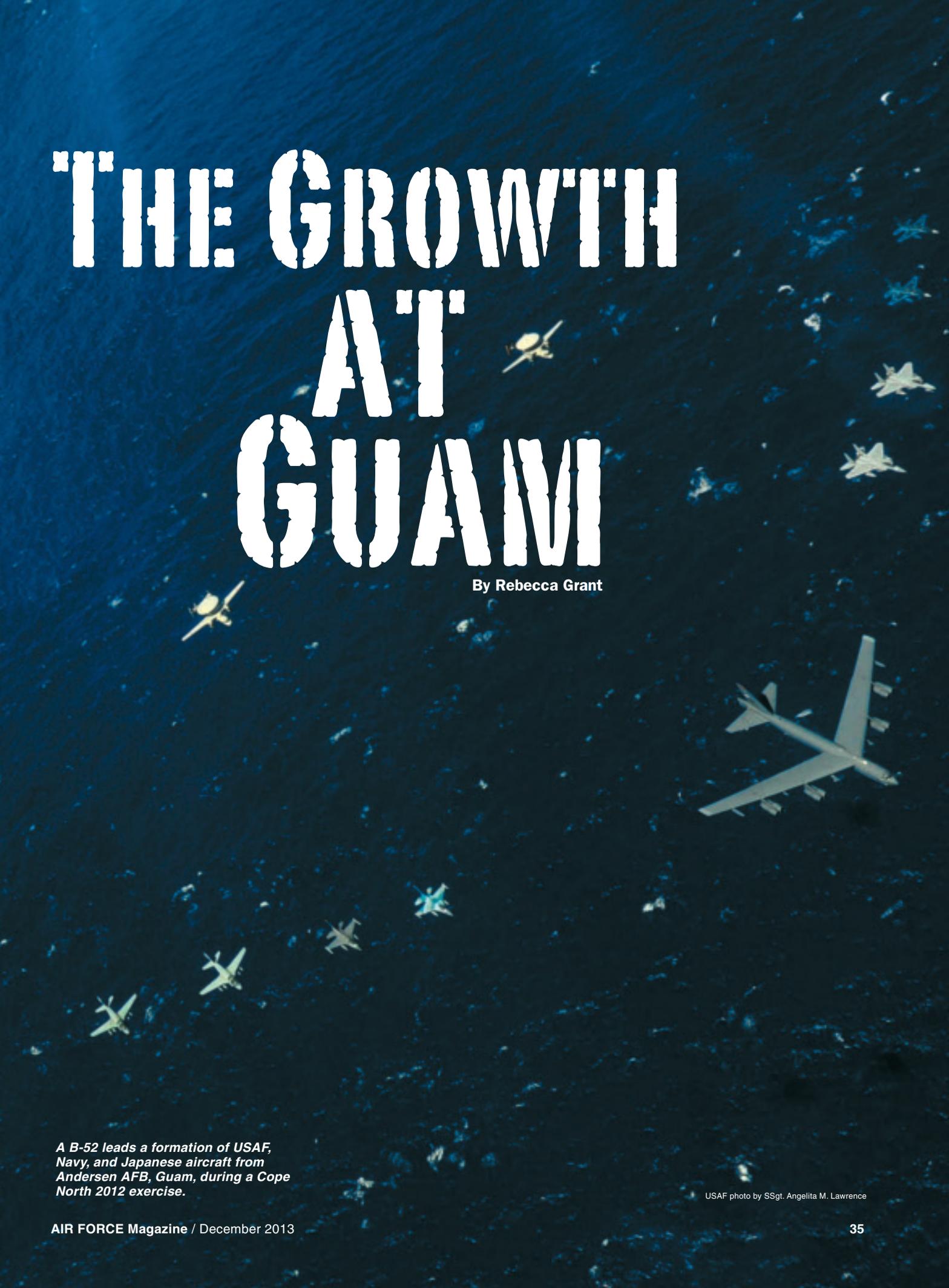
"What many people do not realize is that it sits at the tip of the spear for the defense of our nation and is woven into the strategic fabric of the Pacific theater," noted Rep. Solomon Ortiz (D-Tex.) in 2009.

### **The Guam Hub**

Before airpower, the Northern Marianas were the site of Spanish imperial stopovers and Japanese occupation. A small contingent of marines built the first strip there at Orote Peninsula and kept it in use from 1921 to 1931, when the naval air station was abandoned to cut costs.

Guam was seized by imperial Japan on Dec. 13, 1941. Later in the war, Guam, Tinian, and Saipan were the scenes of ferocious battles. US success on the lava and limestone island led to huge air bases, as Navy Seabees and US Army construction battalions built airfields for the B-29 Superfortresses of Twentieth Air Force.

After V-J Day, Tinian, Saipan, and what is now Guam's Northwest Field closed. Operations on the main field at Guam continued, providing air interceptors and famously hosting B-52s during the Vietnam War. But the other white, crushed coral airstrips disappeared beneath tropical foliage.

An aerial photograph of a B-52 bomber leading a formation of various aircraft, including USAF, Navy, and Japanese aircraft, over the ocean. The B-52 is the largest aircraft, positioned in the lower right quadrant. It is followed by a formation of smaller aircraft, including fighters and bombers, arranged in a loose V-shape. The ocean is a deep blue color, and the sky is a lighter blue. The aircraft are silhouetted against the sky.

# "THE GROWTH AT" GUAM

By Rebecca Grant

*A B-52 leads a formation of USAF, Navy, and Japanese aircraft from Andersen AFB, Guam, during a Cope North 2012 exercise.*

USAF photo by SSgt. Angelita M. Lawrence

Nearly 70 years later, the battle for access and influence in the Pacific has led the Air Force and joint partners back to the long-quiet strips. They now resonate with the sounds of RED HORSE bulldozers, C-130J propellers, and fighter jets. Guam's Northwest Field is in limited use again, and expeditionary operations are focusing on Tinian and Saipan, too.

One of the first to predict a new role for Guam was James H. Webb. Back in 1974, the future Navy Secretary and senator wrote a study of the region speculating, "It is quite conceivable that in 10 to 20 years the entire US Pacific presence will be centered on a Guam-Tinian axis."

Webb's prediction was premature, but not by much. China's expanding military presence and ongoing tensions with North Korea have made Guam essential to America's Pacific air and sea power projection.

"The US military faces a major basing disadvantage in the western Pacific," wrote Jan van Tol in his 2010 study of AirSea Battle for the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. According to van Tol, "Bases and facilities on US territory in the western Pacific comprise a small number of very large and effectively undefended sites located on a handful of isolated islands, all within range of PLA [China's People's Liberation Army] weapons systems."

Guam falls within what China calls the second island chain, a notional line running from the Kurile Islands in the north through Japan, the Bonins, the Marianas, the Carolines, and down to Indonesia.

RAND Corp. analyst Roger Cliff explained that, for China, denying an adversary access to the region "implies attacking the adversary's transportation, bases, and other facilities and systems besides its main combat forces." By this thinking, "preventing the adversary from deploying its combat forces into the region will in turn enable China to avoid a direct confrontation with the adversary's forces." Holding Guam at risk would be a major coup.

### Up the Ante

USAF has been steadily increasing its missions out of Guam for more than a decade, and the 36th Wing at Andersen is structured to host forces arriving in a hurry. The 36th has no permanently assigned aircraft. The whole function of the wing is to support detachments from the many aircraft units that deploy to the Pacific.

Best known of these is the continuous bomber presence. Short-term rotations

of bombers to Guam began officially in 2004 during a period of tension with North Korea.

"The ability to project force from Guam is very valuable to us," commented Gen. William J. Begert, who was commander, Pacific Air Forces, at the time. Bombers have since flown sorties to all points of the compass to reinforce partnerships with allies and show resolve throughout the theater. In recent years, B-52s and B-2s have taken turns deploying to the island.

In 2010, a trio of Global Hawk Block 30s joined the mix. F-15Cs, F-22s, and other fighters also rotate through Guam as part of formal theater security presence operations. Guam's 36th Wing also has the ability to stage a contingency response group in support of expeditionary deployments.

Although the air operations center on Guam consolidated to Hawaii, Guam remains very much a forward perch for theater command and control.

"I was there when the President and Secretary of Defense walked in and said, 'We're pivoting to the Pacific; this is our new focus,'" said Gen. Herbert J. Carlisle, head of Pacific Air Forces, who was serving in the Pentagon at the time.

The rotational bomber presence through Guam will continue. PACAF is also considering a rebalancing of its own with more permanent change of station slots taking over for some of the temporary duty rotations. That option might give airmen "a little bit more of an opportunity" to "spend a couple of years" on Guam, according to Carlisle.

Guam's rotational role is set to expand along with other bases in theater.

Carlisle explained, "We're not going to build any more bases in the Pacific." Instead, planned unit rotations will resemble the Checkered Flag exercises in Europe during the Cold War days. "Every 18 months or two years, every unit would go and work out of a collateral operating base," Carlisle explained. Looking ahead, "the most capable platforms will be rotated into the Pacific."

As for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability, the Global Hawks will stay at Andersen. "The best capability will go to the Pacific as it's developed and brought on line," Carlisle said.

### A Target, Too

As a major power projection asset, Guam is also a likely target, according to rhetoric from adversaries in the region. In theory, China's ballistic missiles are capable of reaching Guam. China could

National Archives photo



USAF photo by A1C Marianne Santos



USAF photo by SSGT Nathan Allen





***The US military plants the US flag on Guam on July 20, 1944. The island was occupied by Japanese forces for two-and-a-half years during World War II.***

also hit Andersen with cruise missiles launched from its H-6 bombers.

In 2009, Army Lt. Gen. Walter L. Sharp, then commander of US Forces Korea, told Congress, “North Korea is now fielding a new intermediate-range ballistic missile capable of striking Okinawa, Guam, and Alaska.”

North Korea directly threatened Guam during the spring 2013 crisis. “The moment of explosion is approaching fast,” the North Korea news agency ranted early this year.

Reports from South Korea stated that North Korea appeared to have moved an intermediate- or mid-range Musudan missile to a coastal site. The Musudan missile has a reported range of more than 1,800 miles, putting Guam potentially within reach.

That was enough for DOD. In a swift response, the Defense Secretary reconfirmed Guam’s important military role. “As they have ratcheted up [their] bellicose, dangerous rhetoric, ... some of the actions they’ve taken over the last few weeks present a real and clear danger,” Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel said,

***SSgt. Ryan Vogt marshals a B-52 on the flight line at Andersen. The B-52 was there as part of the continuous bomber presence mission.***



singling out threats by North Korea against “our base in Guam.”

Hagel’s next move was to order the first-ever operational deployment of an Army Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) unit to Guam. The system reached the island in April. “THAAD is deployed to the region as a precautionary measure to strengthen our regional defense, including Guam,” Pacific Command spokesman Army Col. Michael Donnelly told Pacific News Center.

“This deployment will strengthen defense capabilities for American citizens in the US territory of Guam and US forces stationed there,” according to an official Pentagon statement.

Guam residents welcomed the new defense layer although they expressed concern.

***A boat tethered to a parachute flies out the back of a C-17 over the ocean near Guam during a joint service and international operability mission.***



“While we were fortunate to welcome the nation’s newest land-based missile defense system, I believe we must continue working with our nation’s leaders to permanently secure missile interceptor systems on Guam to effectively protect our island, its people, our neighbors, and regional allies,” stated Frank B. Aguon Jr., a Guam state senator.

## **Tinian Again**

Guam’s growing role has also enhanced the strategic value of its neighbors in the Northern Marianas. Two tiny islands, Tinian and Saipan, have come out of the historical mists to take up serious new missions in the Pacific rebalance.

Tinian is about 100 miles north of Guam. Spain, the US, and Germany all controlled the 39-square-mile island prior to the international mandate after World War I ceding it to Japan. Although its strategic importance dated back centuries, World War II put Tinian in the spotlight.

The US took Tinian from Japanese forces on Aug. 1, 1944. Massive construction began almost immediately. “A great coral ridge was half-leveled to fill a rough plain and to build six runways, each an excellent 10-lane highway, each almost two miles long,” recalled Philip Morrison, who helped assemble the first bomb, in Richard Rhodes’ 1986 history *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. The result was a busy bomber base laid out to resemble lower Manhattan.

At its peak Tinian hosted 269 B-29 bombers. Crews faced daunting missions. The distance to targets in Japan averaged 1,500 miles, one-way. As a result, Tinian also became a massive fuel dump.

Tinian today shows little sign of the bomber fleets, and most surviving military buildings are of Japanese origin. They date back to the early 1940s, when Japan used the island as a regional air command center and transit point for forces deploying south.

During World War II, runways covered 11 miles on the northern end of the island. From Tinian, Twentieth Air Force launched the most fearsome military operation of all time when the specially modified B-29 *Enola Gay* took off to deliver the first atomic bomb on Aug. 6, 1945.

The two devices—“Fat Man” and “Little Boy”—were differently shaped, but each was too bulky for standard bomb loading. Pits were dug to hold the bombs. The B-29s were then backed over the pits with doors open to receive them.

The pits remain on Tinian and are now glassed over, a striking memorial.



An F-16 aggressor from Eielson AFB, Alaska, takes off from the runway at Andersen during a Cope North exercise.

“It’s just two pits now under glass enclosures, somewhat like the entrance to the Louvre,” noted Alex Wellerstein, who visited Tinian in 2012 and wrote about it on his Nuclear Secrecy blog.

For now, Tinian is technically just a “divert” base. However, detachments of Marine Corps fighters, helicopters, and C-130Js landed there in 2012 during two expeditionary warfare training exercises.

First came Exercise Geiger Fury.

“We are setting up a [forward operating base] in order to better control and coordinate Exercise Geiger Fury,” said Capt. Mark Schouten of the Marine Wing Support Squadron 171. The units home-based at Iwakuni in Japan deployed to test out the feasibility of bare base operations on Tinian and to “conduct repairs to the island’s northern airfield built during World War II,” said Schouten, according to a USMC press release.

Next, Exercise Forager Fury saw the marines offload 87,000 gallons of aviation fuel from KC-130Js to F/A-18D Hornets, MV-22 Ospreys, and CH-46 helicopters.

According to a report from the Pacific Islands Development Program of the East-West Center in Hawaii, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) government has “long been pitching to the US Department of Defense to make further use of their leased lands on Tinian for additional training needs.” DOD’s leased holdings on Tinian total 15,353 acres.

The Air Force brought Exercise Cope North to Tinian in February 2013. Building on experience from Cope North 2012, this year’s exercise saw Australian, Japanese, and US forces practicing rapid setup of humanitarian relief operations.

“The [goals] of the exercise on Guam and Tinian are similar—to demonstrate the capability to rapidly execute establish-

ing an operating airfield at a location in the event of a real-world HA/DR [humanitarian assistance, disaster relief] operation,” said USAF 36th Wing spokesman Capt. Chris M. Hoyler.

Running a portion of Cope North on Tinian tested a training environment, with Guam as the hub and Tinian as the spoke.

“Practicing the hub and spoke training objective increases multilateral interoperability to deploy and rapidly deliver supplies in austere conditions,” spokeswoman Capt. Kim T. Bender told a local newspaper after the exercise. The Air Force is planning to operate from Tinian again in 2014.

Tinian could also provide additional facilities that won’t fit on Guam. One example, suggested in a 2010 feasibility study, is a training range for marines.

Then there is Saipan. USAF may favor the island as a future divert and deployment airfield site. The idea behind another site is to make notional targeting of Guam’s airfields a more difficult tactical problem. Practical reasons favor a divert site, too. In 2012, an Air Force F-16 made a forced landing on Saipan after an in-flight mechanical emergency.

The Air Force completed a full study of environmental impact and options in the Northern Marianas in 2012. At 44 square miles, Saipan is also the most developed of the CNMI chain. But USAF may have to purchase additional acreage on Saipan to construct an adequate divert field.

Another big advantage favoring Saipan lies in access for ships bringing fuel, according to the study. To augment Guam’s fuel capacity, Saipan could in theory assist with additional reception of fuel from ships. Guam hosts one of the largest fuel farms in USAF. However, contingency requirements for strike and transient aircraft could draw down fuel fast.

Meanwhile, the Marines are going forward with more plans for exercises on Tinian. Either way, additional USAF presence in the Northern Marianas is seen as a win-win by local leaders.

“Whether it’s built on Tinian or Saipan, the revenues generated from those expenditures will go to the general fund. It is of benefit to the CNMI,” Don Farrell of the Tinian mayor’s office told *Pacific Islands Report* in August 2013.

## Into the Future

Guam has its own World War II relic at Northwest Field.

Operations there stopped in 1949. Over time, tropical vegetation advanced up to the taxiway, and winds eroded the berms between parking hardstands. The airfield was all but invisible to those driving along the road.

Northwest Field got back in action during the Cope North exercises. USAF, the Royal Australian Air Force, and Japan Air Self-Defense Force personnel used it to practice humanitarian relief operations. This included setting up a command center, perimeter security, and receiving C-130 flights and airdrops.

Guam is due for further expansion. The US Navy’s Joint Guam Program Office plans envision a USMC aviation area for the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing on a section of the main field at Andersen.

Northwest Field could well open up as a contingency or transient site. The waterfront at Apra, Guam, could receive more submarines, destroyers, cruisers, and amphibious ships if a new deep water pier is completed there.

The total cost of relocating upward of 5,000 marines to Guam could run \$8 billion, and Congress has most of the plan on hold, pending fiscal and environmental reviews. Some Navy work on upgrades for Marine Corps aviation units is continuing. Other potential concepts could even include a missile defense task force for the Army and facilities for a transient nuclear aircraft carrier for the Navy. Yet to be resolved are questions about where to locate auxiliary training such as live-fire ranges.

However, the priority of Guam as an aviation hub is beyond dispute. It remains the sovereign option as US airmen reinforce their Pacific posture. ■

*Rebecca Grant is president of IRIS Independent Research. Her most recent article for Air Force Magazine was “Spatz’s Quest for Air Superiority,” in the October issue.*