Marines to Rebuild WWII B-29 Airfield on Tinian for Training Use

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The airfield that launched the B-29 bombers that dropped the atomic bombs on Japan in World War II is being partially refurbished for use as a divert field and refueling point for Marine Corps aircraft in training events.

The United States has "opened up a long-term contract to be able to utilize the north [air]field" on Tinian, agreed to with a 40-year deal with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to use the north airfield on Tinian, said Col. Robert Brodie, commander of 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), speaking April 23 to the Potomac Institute in Arlington of the MEU's recent patrol in the western Pacific in early 2019.

One of the coral runways of the airfield will be improved, Brodie said. That runway currently is in condition to receive KC-130 aerial refueling/transport aircraft, but "it isn't user-friendly for a lot of jet airplanes," said Brodie, an F/A-18 Hornet pilot.

The runway refurbishment is expected to cost $20 million.

The Mariana Islands and Guam are becoming increasingly important to the upcoming move of thousands of Marines and Sailors from Okinawa to Guam, forces who will need combat training sites for maintaining readiness.

Brodie took the opportunity to look at potential beach landing sites and live-fire training sites. He noted that two new hangars for aircraft have been built at Andersen Air Force Base on Guam for Marine Corps aircraft.

The 31st MEU was heavily involved in relief efforts in Tinian after Typhoon Mangkhut swept through the Marianas in mid-September 2018, when the rooves of most buildings on Tinian were destroyed. The MEU's Marines and the Sailors spent a month on Tinian rebuilding and relieving the suffering of the island's 2,500 residents.

Brodie said the Marines and Sailors were gratified by the opportunity to help fellow American citizens, telling the islanders, "We're here to support America!"

He said Tinian's mayor has asked for a Marine Corps recruiter to come to the island to "focus their high school kids" on considering service in the Corps.

"I can't tell you what a good feeling it is to have a great relationship with the leadership of the Northern Marianas," Brodie said. "What I think that is going to directly contribute to the Marine Corps in our path forward as we start to move forces down there."