

# FORAGER: INVADE SAIPAN!

**S**ince the fall of the Marshall Islands to American forces a few months earlier, both sides began to prepare for an American onslaught against the Marianas and Saipan in particular. The Americans decided that the best course of action was to invade Saipan first, then Tinian and Guam. They set D-Day for 15 June 1944, when sailors would deliver Marines and Army troops to Saipan's rugged, heavily fortified shores.

The Navy's involvement bookended the operation: Naval vessels and personnel ferried Marines and Army troops to the beaches and then, after ground combat was over, took leading positions in the administration of the occupation.

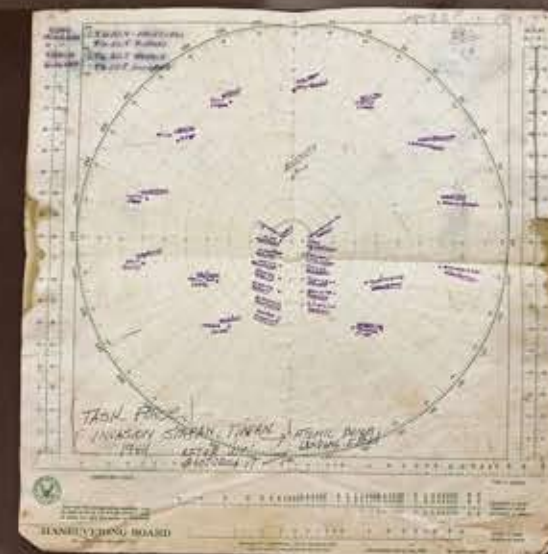
The logistical demands of the invasion of Saipan were dizzying. Planners had to see to it that 59 troopships and 64 LSTs could land three divisions' worth of men and

equipment on an island some 2400 miles from the base at Guadalcanal and 3500 miles from Pearl Harbor. These challenges aside, Navy, Marine Corps, and Army leadership anticipated a quick campaign based on intelligence they were receiving about enemy troop levels on Saipan. They were very wrong.

The logistics were amazing. There had to be over one ton of supplies per soldier and this included 32 days of rations, 30 days of medical supplies, 20 days of maintenance supplies, seven days of ammunition for ground weapons, and ten days of anti-aircraft ammunition.

American personnel in Hawaii

ran their final rehearsals in May. Unfortunately, the Marines and Army had conducted most of their training separately. The results: Conflicting tactics, conflicting expectations, and



Radar plotting board from USS *Ballard* showing the US Navy ships during the invasion.



WHEN IT HAPPENED DURING JUNE AND JULY 1944, THE CONQUEST OF SAIPAN BECAME THE MOST DARING — AND DISTURBING — OPERATION IN THE AMERICAN WAR AGAINST JAPAN TO DATE. WHEN IT WAS OVER, THE UNITED STATES HELD BASES THAT COULD PLACE B-29 BOMBERS WITHIN RANGE OF THE HOME ISLANDS

**BY ADAM BISNO AND DAN GREENFIELD**



Smoke rises from Navy guns during the mass bombardment of Saipan while uncontrolled fires rage on shore.

D-Day for Operation *Forager* — American forces move towards the heavily defended island of Saipan.