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Chuuk lagoon - the 'Gibraltar of the

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Pacific'

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Abstract: This paper focuses on Japan's transformation of a group of remote and small Pacific Islands into a major Japanese World War II (WWII) naval base. Chuuk Lagoon (formerly Truk Lagoon), located in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM),

contains a wealth of WWII heritage. For instance, WWII relics can be found buried beneath the ground and hidden among Chuuk's lush tropical vegetation as well as stored within caves and underground tunnels. Japanese artillery guns, perched high on cliffs and strategically placed in caves, overlook the lagoon. The lagoon's foreshores contain Japanese coastal fortifications represented by pillboxes and anti-aircraft gun embankments, together with docking facilities and Japanese engineered sea-walls. Chuuk also possesses significant WWII aviation infrastructure, such as runways, communication towers and airbases. This paper focuses on the construction of Etten airfield, which is located on the small island of Etten. Etten's airfield, like other Pacific airfields that were constructed on remote Pacific islands and atolls, illustrates the central role that engineering and airfield construction played in the Pacific conflict (Daniel 2011; Fitzgerald 1992). Importantly, Etten Island shows that Japan was prepared to go to great lengths to secure a naval base in the central Pacific region—even if that involved physically levelling mountains to construct runways and airfield infrastructure.



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