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HEADQUARTERS  
U.S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY  
(PACIFIC)  
C/O POSTMASTER, SAN FRANCISCO

INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS 440)  
NAV. NO. 94

PLACE: TOKYO.  
DATE: 21 November 1945.

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: Japanese Army Air Force - NEW GUINEA Area.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Colonel KANEKO, Rinsuka, I.J.A., from December 1941 to January 1942 he was with the Japanese Embassy in PERU; from August 1942 to June 1943 he was attached with the Army Air Headquarters in TOKYO; from July 1943 to August 1943 on the Staff of 8th Area Army at RABAUL; August 1943 to September 1944 with the Fourth Air Force Staff (Supply) at RABAUL; September 1944 to January 1945 with the MANILA Army Air Departement (Maintenance); April 1945 to August 1945 with the Army Affairs Ministry at TOKYO; August 1945 to the present Colonel KANEKO is with the Military Affairs Bureau of Army Ministry.

Where interviewed: Room 748, MEIJI Building.

Interrogator: Commander T. H. MOORER, U.S.N.

Interpreter: Lt. Comdr. Seymore MILLSTEIN, USNR.

SUMMARY

Colonel KANEKO discusses the formation, the operation and the destruction of the Fourth Air Army which was based in NEW GUINEA from July 1943 until July 1944. By that time it was almost completely destroyed.

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TRANSCRIPT

2. When the Japanese Army Air Force initially moved into NEW GUINEA, what forces were planned for that area and where were they to be located?

. The Fourth Air Army Headquarters at RABAUL controlled the 6th and 7th Air Divisions. It was planned to base the 6th Air Division principally at WEWAK and the main strength of the 7th Air Army Division at BUT, with about a third of its strength at AMBON and related air fields. As of 10 August 1943, one-third of the Fourth Air Army strength was in RABAUL and two-thirds at the above fields. The original plan was to have advance staging fields at TSURUBU, LAE, SALAMAU, MADANG, ALEXISHAMEN. Main operating air fields in the NEW GUINEA Area were to be at MANSA, WEWAK, BUT, AITAPE. HOLLANDIA, according to original plan, was an auxiliary field to be used for withdrawal purposes. Each of the above localities had two airfields with the exception of LAE, SALAMAU and MADANG and the two fields at AITAPE which weren't operational until the end of 1943. In addition to the above there were two fields at MANUS I land in the ADMIRALTIES. Overall strength of the Fourth Air Army was as follows: 6th Air Groups strength - 5 fighter air groups containing 36 planes each; three reconnaissance squadrons-12 planes each; and three bomber groups-36 planes each; total 324 planes. This entire strength was at WEWAK. At BUT the 7th Air Division had one reconnaissance squadron-12 planes, two fighter groups-36 planes each, and two bomber groups-36 planes each; total 156 planes. The 7th had the remainder of its strength mainly at AMBON which consisted of one fighter group-36 planes, and one reconnaissance squadron-12 planes, one bombing group-36 planes. Between 10 August 1943 and 20 September the entire strength of the Fourth Air Army moved to NEW GUINEA from RABAUL and AMBON with headquarters at WEWAK. Except for a small maintenance unit and a small transport plane unit, the 6th Division moved its entire strength from RABAUL to WEWAK. However prior to 7 July there were 12 reconnaissance planes in RABAUL attached to Eighth Area Army. There were no planes in NEW GUINEA at that time because no fields were ready. The Eighth Area Army commenced moving to RABAUL by 1 August 1942 and between that date and 7 July 1943, they kept moving forces into RABAUL, and between August 10th and September 20th this strength moved gradually to WEWAK. During the same period the 7th Division strength was moved from the CELEBES and AMBON to WEWAK.

During the time the 6th Air Division was in RABAUL attached to the Eighth Area Army, what missions did they fly?

. The 6th Air Division's duties were cooperation in the GULF OF GUADALCANAL operations and providing air cover to convoys going between SOLOMONS and RABAUL and between NEW GUINEA and RABAUL.

3. After the Fourth Air Army was fully activated in August 1943, for what general area was it responsible?

. At the beginning the Fourth Air Army, with headquarters at WEWAK, operated under Eighth Area Army and was responsible for the NEW GUINEA Area east of longitude 140°E. In November 1943 the 7th Air Division was withdrawn to AMBON and although still attached to the Fourth Air Army it was controlled operationally by the Second Area Army at MENADO. This move was made in order to assist the Navy in protection and patrol of the CELEBES Area. At this time the 23rd Naval Air Flotilla in KENDARI had been greatly weakened because most of the strength had been sent to RABAUL to replace heavy losses in the SOLOMONS Area.

By 25 March 1944 the losses at WEWAK was such that the Fourth Air Army moved its headquarters to HOLLANDIA and less than one month later (15 April), when the invasion of HOLLANDIA appeared imminent, the headquarters were moved to MENADO. It was at this time that the Fourth Air Army, less the 6th Air Division which was completely destroyed in the HOLLANDIA operations, reported to the Second Area Army, and assumed responsibility for all operations in NEW GUINEA.



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TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Colonel KANEKO, Rinsuka, I.J.A.) . . .

Q. Then after loss of HOLLANDIA, the only Army air forces remaining were assigned to the 7th Air Division at AMBON?

A. Yes, with the exception of a few utility aircraft at WEWAK, that is true. The 6th Air Division was physically destroyed and then deactivated. The number of Army aircraft operated in the NEW GUINEA Area after HOLLANDIA was about 50. The 7th Air Division also had 50 planes in the CELEBES Area.

Q. After loss of HOLLANDIA, how was it planned to use Army aircraft in NEW GUINEA?

A. The original plan provided for 7th Air Division to operate from AMBON and 6th Air Division to operate from BIAK. However, the 6th was destroyed and the Americans moved so fast we were forced to change the plans. The Fourth Air Army at MENADO operating through the 7th Air Division at AMBON, BIAK used fields at NOEMFOOR, SAOWI, SAMATE until NEW GUINEA was completely lost. After that planes were flown from MENADO through LOLLOBATA to attack your forces in NEW GUINEA.

Q. When was the Fourth Air Army built back up to strength after losses in the NEW GUINEA Campaign?

A. While we were at MENADO, we got the order that informed us that we would receive reinforcements; actually we didn't receive reinforcement in MENADO but in the PHILIPPINES. After the Fourth Air Army moved to the PHILIPPINES, its strength was built up to over 400 aircraft. These aircraft were practically all destroyed during October, November and December of 1944.

Q. Where did your reinforcements come from when the Fourth Air Army was built up in preparation for the defense of the PHILIPPINES?

A. About two-thirds from CHINA and JAPAN and one-third from SINGAPORE, BURMA and DUTCH EAST INDIES.

Q. What directive governed the Fourth Air Army defense of MOROTAI?

A. We had orders to operate nightly attacks from MAKASSAR and MENADO in the defense of MOROTAI and were supposed to carry out nightly attacks by few planes, but in actuality, due to weather conditions and American air activity only sorties of from one to four planes were possible.

Q. What were the primary targets during your defense of MOROTAI?

A. Our mission was to prevent the Americans from completing their airfields.

Q. Did the Japanese defense of MOROTAI interfere with the reinforcement of the PHILIPPINES?

A. It didn't really interfere because the defense of MOROTAI and interfering with your airfield construction was part of the PHILIPPINE defense plans. Our idea was that the more we interfered with your fields at MOROTAI the easier the PHILIPPINE defense would be.

Q. After the loss of NEW GUINEA, what policy was in effect as to the relative responsibility of the Army and Navy in the CELEBES Area, insofar as aircraft was concerned?

A. The NEW GUINEA Operation was an Army responsibility. BIAK Operation was an Army and Navy job. In the HALMAHERA Operation, the Navy was supposed to have cooperated from DAVA0. In BORNEO, the Navy had no connection and it was the Army planes in MENADO and KENDARI that were primarily responsible for operations in that area.

Q. To go back to the early operations, who was responsible for the furnishing of supplies to the Army force in NEW GUINEA?

A. The responsibility for supplying Army Air Force in NEW GUINEA

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TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Colonel KANEKO, Rinsuka, I.J.A.)

changed with the period. In the beginning of the war the supply from JAPAN to the PHILIPPINES was the responsibility of Air Headquarters in JAPAN and from the PHILIPPINES onward to the front line bases the responsibility was that of units under the control of the Fourth Air Army. From the beginning of 1944, there was a direct air transport service set up from JAPAN and an effort was made to bypass the PHILIPPINES.

Q. At what time did the Japanese abandon the practice of sending large merchant vessels into NEW GUINEA?

A. The last vessel to come into WEWAK was 9 March 1944; this was sunk on the way back and no more came to WEWAK. During May, the last vessel to come to MANOKWARI arrived and no more were dispatched to the NEW GUINEA Area. However, there were the sea trucks that came down the coast of NEW GUINEA. The last of the small coast supply vessels to operate around GEELVINK Bay was in July 1944 according to a report by a senior officer who walked up the coast from HOLLANDIA. Subsequent to that, there were ships supplying west of HALMAHERA and I don't know what day they stopped.

Q. What was the primary reason for discontinuing the sailing of large ships in the NEW GUINEA Area?

A. Destruction of ships by American aircraft in NEW GUINEA Area and by submarines northwest of NEW GUINEA.

Q. Did the Army Air Force furnish air coverage for these transports coming into the NEW GUINEA Area?

A. The policy was to provide air coverage to convoys within 125 miles radius of the port, but up to that point small naval escort vessels did the job.

Q. Were these escorts designed to protect the ships against submarine or air attacks?

A. From the Army point of view, the coverage was against enemy aircraft. The Navy escort vessels protected against submarines.

Q. How many aircraft were normally employed in convoy protection?

A. The number of planes dispatched varied with the time and place, but the most we ever sent out was 80 and several times we sent groups of 25. We always sent out our full fighter strength.

Q. During these operations in NEW GUINEA what was your normal aircraft availability?

A. Up until April 1943 about 50% of aircraft on hand were in normal operation; subsequent to that time only about 25% of the total aircraft on hand were in full operation. This figure was even lower as the war progressed.

Q. Name the order of importance of primary reasons for such a large number of grounded aircraft.

A. The two main reasons were: first, poor maintenance which was due to the poor equipment and lack of maintenance personnel which also resulted in high operational accidents rates and second, the lack of pilots due to illness. There were other causes, but they all stem from the above conditions.

Q. Did the Fourth Air Army have an adequate supply of heavy equipment necessary to change engines and make major structural repairs?

A. Although we had an air depot at WEWAK and HOLLANDIA, equipment was very poor and the satisfaction we got from these repairs and replacement units was very small. We could not move much heavy field and shop equipment because of inadequate shipping.

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TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Colonel KANEKO, Rinsuka, I.J.A.).

Q. In regard to quality of the spare parts in the aircraft themselves, did you notice any marked decrease as the war progressed?

A. Yes, there was a marked decline in quality of engine parts and spare parts in general. The Zero Mark 4 had many operational accidents due to bad quality of spare parts.

Q. What ratio of pilots to planes did the Fourth Air Army endeavor to maintain in the NEW GUINEA Area?

A. According to our standard practice in a squadron of 54 planes, including reserve planes, we would have about 48 pilots. However, that was the idea and actually the figure was less in both categories.

Q. Did the proportion remain the same?

A. No, the proportion changed. Actually many of the squadrons would usually have less than their assigned number of planes.

Q. In other words, the number of pilots assigned each unit would remain approximately the same, but the planes would change?

A. Yes, generally speaking, we usually had more pilots than planes, although we lost many pilots through combat and sickness.

Q. Give a general figure percentage of cause of losses suffered through the NEW GUINEA Campaign.

A. During the period between May 1943 and April 1944 including HOLLANDIA Operation, the losses were divided as follows: result of aerial combat, 30%; destroyed on ground, 50%; operational losses, 20%. These are general figures only. I can remember occasions when entire flight failed to come back. The figure varies with operation conditions. For planning purpose it was estimated that during big operations 50% of the fighters, 40% of bombers and 20% transport planes would have to be replaced. However, due to low production and shipping and ferry losses this plan was not followed; and consequent, the NEW GUINEA Air Force was destroyed.

Q. How do you account for the extremely high loss of aircraft on the ground?

A. With machinery and labor available, we were not able to provide an area large enough to disperse our planes and had to keep them all in a narrow confined area. Also, low availability mentioned above made it impossible to withdraw aircraft from threatened fields after receipt of warning of a possible air attack.

Q. What type of American aircraft would you consider most effective on attacks on the ground?

A. That varies with the area involved. Speaking for the NEW GUINEA Area, I would say that the B-24's and B-25's were most effective, particularly the formation of 30 or more B-24's; also the use of many small bombs were effective in this sort of operation.

Q. Did the Fourth Air Army make any particular effort to attack the American aircraft sent out against Japanese shipping at night?

A. A few night fighters were used to defend shipping in the harbor but no night protection of convoy was done.

Q. Will you make estimate as to the total number of aircraft you lost in the NEW GUINEA Area during the campaign?

A. From August 1943 until HOLLANDIA Operation, April 1944, I would estimate a total loss of 800 planes.

Q. If it had been possible to receive supplies in the NEW GUINEA Area by use of large ships, do you think the Fourth Air Army would have been able to maintain supremacy in that area?

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TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Colonel KANEKO, Rinsuka, I.J.A.) --

A. Yes, in my opinion we failed not only because we received insufficient planes, but because we did not have sufficient personnel and heavy equipment to build proper airfields and properly maintain what planes we had.

Q. At what time was the last replacement aircraft received in NEW GUINEA?

A. In HOLLANDIA, several days before the landing, we received a few planes.

Q. When did airplanes cease coming in a flow to the NEW GUINEA Area?

A. About 10 April 1944, just before the HOLLANDIA landing.

Q. Prior to that time, did you receive the number they requested?

A. They came regularly but never in quantity as planned.

Q. Were aircraft deliveries to the Air Army in New Guinea made via Rabaul or direct?

A. Prior to March 1943 aircraft were delivered by carrier and by air via TRUK and RABAUL; after that time they came direct from PHILIPPINES and CELEBES.

Q. Why did the Japanese Navy not oppose the invasion up the coast of NEW GUINEA with a large force of combat ships?

A. Due to shortage of sea power, the defense plan was to attack your landing with land-based aircraft.

Q. Are you familiar with the KON plan?

A. Yes.

Q. Did the Fourth Air Army endeavor to give air coverage in their approach to BIAK?

A. The Fourth Air Force which was based at SAMATE did the best they could, but the force was so small it was ineffective.

Q. Are you familiar with any of the air operations during the American invasion of TARAKAN and BALIKPAPAN?

A. There weren't many. There were so few airplanes, it was impossible to make any worthwhile plan.

Q. Were there any weaknesses in the American attack methods of your air bases?

A. In my opinion, the outstanding weakness was that you always attacked about 11 o'clock and we were able to anticipate your attack.

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U. S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY

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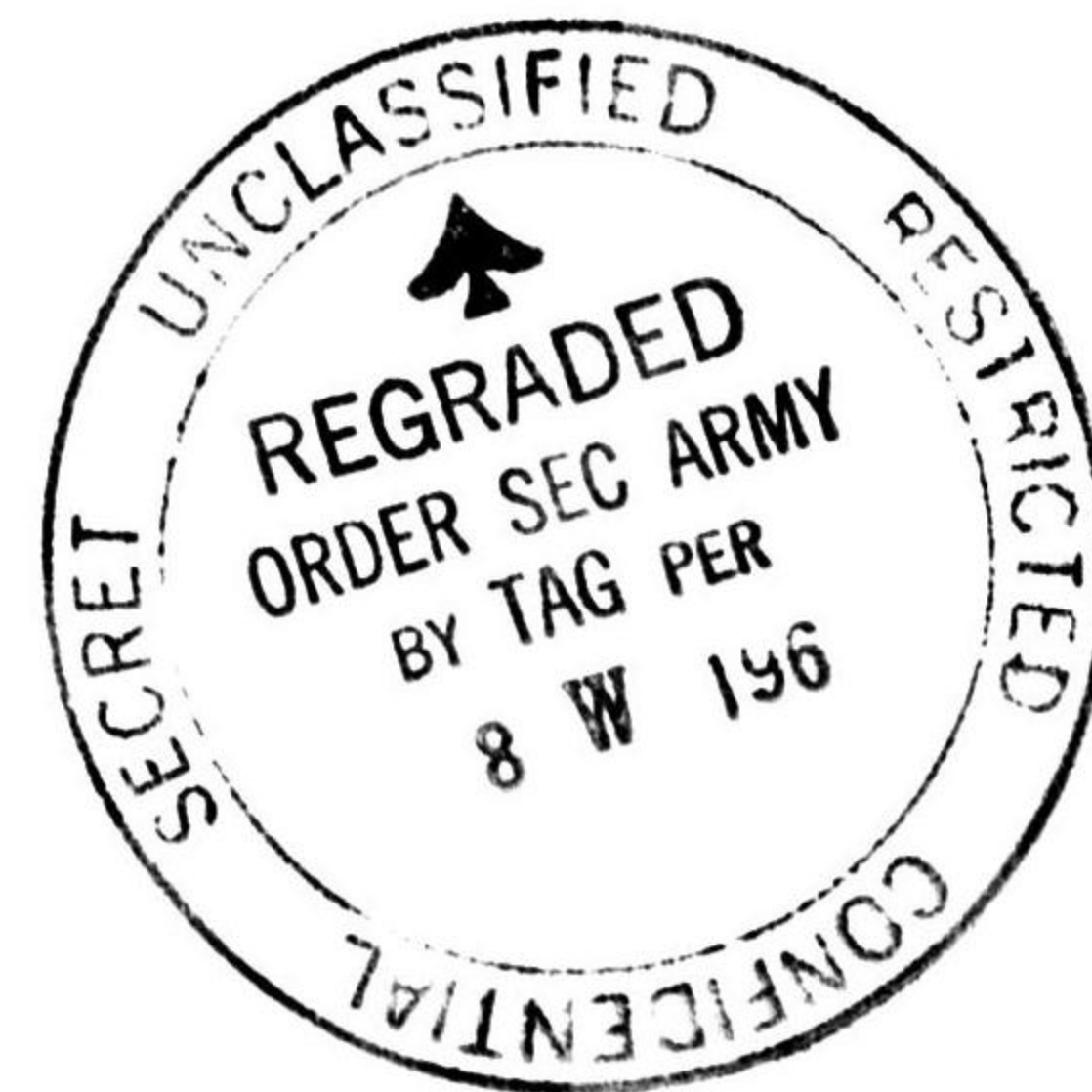
Subject: Japanese Army Air Force - NEW GUINEA Area.

Interrogation of: Colonel KANEKO, Rinsuka, I.J.A.

Interrogation by: Commander T. H. Moorer, USN

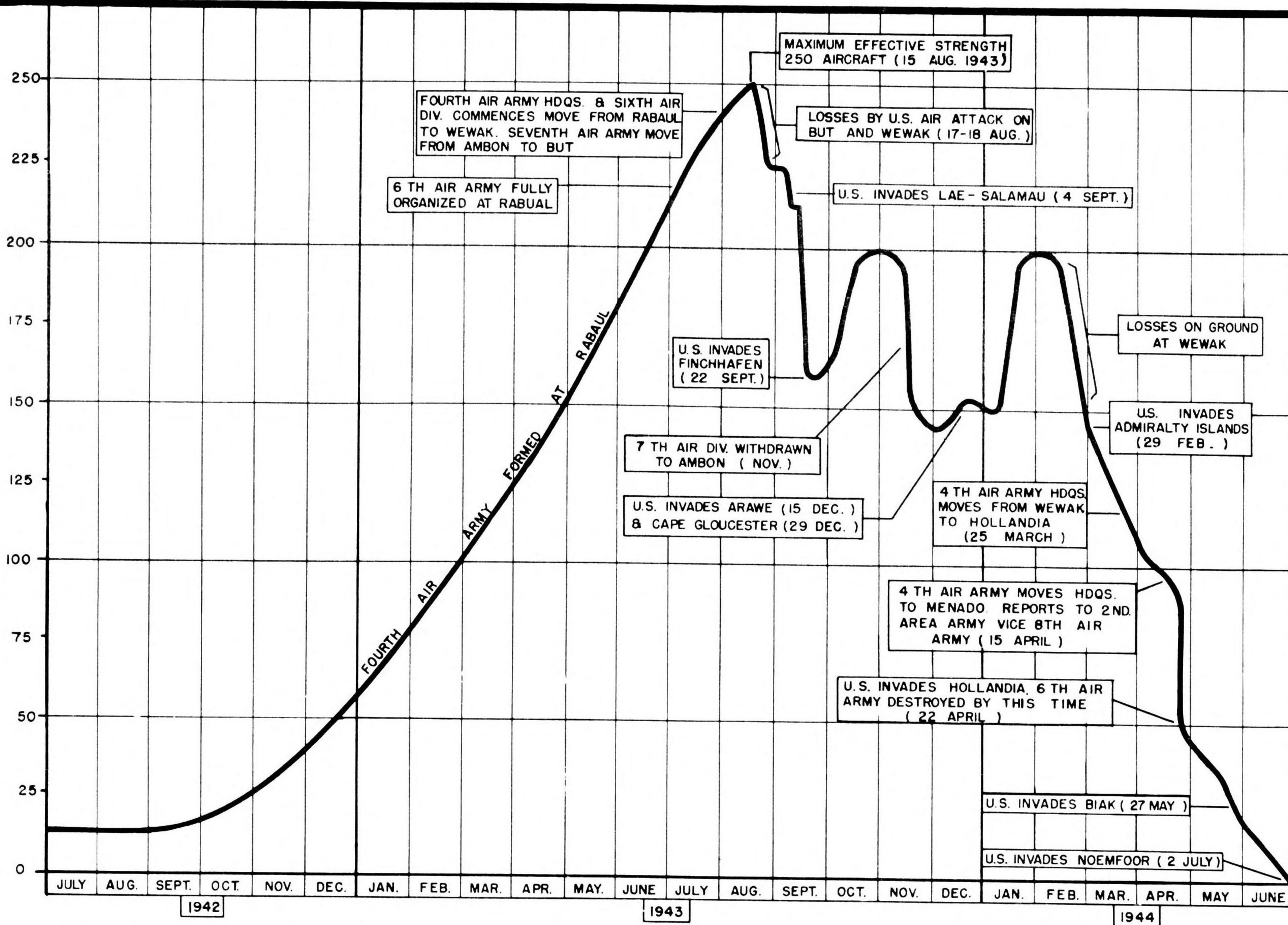
The attached chart(s) supplement Interrogation No. USSBS  
440 (Nav No. 94).

Enclosure: Annex "A"





NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT AVAILABLE FOR OPERATIONS



JAPANESE ARMY AIR FORCE ( New Guinea Area )  
 1943-1944  
 FOURTH AIR ARMY ( 6th & 7th Air Div's. )