

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

RESTRICTED

INTERROGATION NO (USSBS NO 392)  
(NAV NO 80)

Place: Tokyo  
Date: 20 November 1945

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division

Subject: Japanese Naval Plans

Personnel Interrogated and Background of each:

Fleet Admiral NAGANO, Osami, Supreme Naval Advisor to Emperor. Member Board of Field Marshals and Fleet Admirals. 1934 - Promoted Admiral; 1935 - Chief delegate to London Naval Conference; May 1936 to June 1937 - Navy Minister in Hirota Cabinet; December 1937 - Commander, First and Combined Fleets; April 1941 to February 1944 - Chief of Naval General Staff; June 1943 - Fleet Admiral. Named to Board of Field Marshals and Fleet Admirals; February 1944 - Supreme Naval Advisor to Emperor.

Where Interviewed: Home of Admiral NAGANO

Interrogator: Rear Admiral R.A. OFSTIE, USN - Captain T.J. HEDDING, USN.

Interpreter: Mr. F.C. Woodrough.  
S. Mizota - Japanese National

Allied Officers Present: None

SUMMARY

Admiral NAGANO discusses features of high level planning, cooperation with the Army, and effects of U. S. Operations on the national war potential.

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- Q. Admiral, we want to get a clarification of some features of the high command planning and decision and to ask your opinion on various subjects which presumably fell within your purview. One of the first problems on which we haven't gotten a full understanding is the change in the plans after the initial perimeter was established. What we would like you to do is just tell us the reason for the expansion in that perimeter, where the new plan originated. (Referring to chart).
- A. I took over the Naval General Staff in April of 1941. I believe that the line which my former subordinates have indicated here for you was a line which they determined as a result of their studies together in my office.
- Q. Was it the original basic plan to obtain the so-called southern resources and to establish a perimeter for its defense?
- A. This perimeter which has been drawn here for you, I believe, indicates one part of the total naval operations plan, namely the part which had to do with the procuring of the source of supplies from the southern region; but once that operation was started it went so smoothly that after securing this perimeter, decision was made to extend the line further by way of securing the defense of the area which had already been occupied. The southward advance was commenced shortly after this line was completed.
- Q. In conceiving and arriving at this plan to expand, was that explained to the Army General Staff and did it have their agreement? First of all, did the Army General Staff agree on the basic elements of that initial step?
- A. This plan was adopted as a result of consultation between the two staffs.
- Q. Was the further expansion to the south and the expansion to the east also with the agreement of the Army General Staff?
- A. Both as a result of consultation with the Army.
- Q. And would you say that there was full agreement, complete agreement?
- A. Yes, in that respect, complete agreement. There had to be because the operations could not be undertaken without Army support.
- Q. In general, did naval plans of such a magnitude always require the Army's agreement?
- A. I think that it might be a misnomer to look upon this as a naval operation; because the problem is such a large one, it is a problem of the entire nation.
- Q. With respect to the operations in CHINA, which you might say were predominantly Army in character, did the Navy have full information as to the extent, the resources required, and so on, of those operations?
- A. On the continent, in respect of operations which were purely land operations, the Navy had no part in preparation of plans or direction thereof; but in cases of what might be called joint operations, plans were drawn up by the Army and they were presented to the Navy for its approval. Frequently if the operation was one which a sailor could not understand, the approval or consent would be given without any study or discussion. Fortunately the two staff headquarters were located close together in TOKYO. Communication was easy and cooperation between the two went smoothly without effort on either side to conceal the facts from each other.
- Q. With respect specifically to the ALEUTIANS, would you say that was initiated by the Navy, was it of primary naval interest?

Transcript of interrogation of (Admiral NAGANO, Osami).

- A. When the plan came to me it was already a completed plan; so exactly how it started I do not know. It is like sitting at a dining table and having a well prepared steak placed in front of you; the steak is good but one does not know from that who the cook was. It was a relatively small operation, so my guess is that staff officers from the two headquarters on the lower level got together and during discussions arrived at a decision on this operation. It was one upon which the Combined Fleet was set on undertaking; very anxious to carry it out. At first the Naval General Staff was opposed, but the Combined Fleet was so urgent about it, that the Naval General Staff finally gave its consent, although with disastrous results.
- Q. With respect to the movements in the South, GUADALCANAL and down the SOLOMONS, was that primarily of Navy or Army interest and initiation?
- A. I think that the GUADALCANAL and TULAGI Operations were mainly naval. I believe that those two operations were initiated by the Navy and supported by the Army.
- Q. In the southern resources area, would the defense and the interest there be primarily Army or primarily Navy, or equal?
- A. I think that the interest in the national resources area was neither mainly Naval or Army, both were equally interested. Not only the two services but the civilian elements were extremely interested because after the UNITED STATES, GREAT BRITAIN and the NETHERLANDS refused to sell any more oil, our country was seriously threatened by oil shortage. Consequently, every element in JAPAN was keenly interested in that region. I think that one of the large causes of this war was the question of oil.
- Q. In general, could it be said that the interest of the Army was largely continental and the interest of the Navy was primarily toward the East?
- A. No, I would not say quite just that. In respect of CHINA herself, the continent, the Army undoubtedly had greater interest than the Navy; but so far as this entire area was concerned. I think that the Army was just as deeply interested as the Navy.
- Q. Would you express an opinion as to whether the operations of the Army in CHINA, for what they accomplished, detracted from the operations to the East in which the Navy had more active participation?
- A. At least during the time that I was in office as Chief of the Navy General Staff I did not have such an impression that the Army's activities in CHINA detracted from the effectiveness of naval operations. Looking back upon it now, however, if instead of having such large land forces engaged in CHINA and MANCHURIA, and bringing them down in greater strength to the southern regions, the naval operations down south might have gone more successfully.
- Q. Admiral, several high ranking Japanese naval officers have expressed opinions regarding the capabilities of JAPAN to hold and develop the areas acquired in the initial stages of the war. We would like to have your opinion on that subject.
- A. I certainly felt a deficiency in naval strength, especially in its air arm, as a force for maintaining its hold on the area within the initial perimeter.
- Q. Similarly, opinions have been expressed as to the wiseness of extending and advancing towards the east and towards the south-east; I would also like to have an opinion on that subject.

Transcript of interrogation of (Admiral NAGANO, Osami). - - - - -

- A. Question of wisdom quite aside, I think that this was just about the limit, the maximum limit of our capability. With the forces at the command of the Japanese services, that initial perimeter was just about the limit.
- Q. In the early stages what was considered the greatest danger to that perimeter? Where did the greatest danger to its security come from?
- A. My idea throughout was that the principal line of your counter-offensive would be more or less of a straight line, (beginning with the MARSHALLS as a sort of stepping stone) through SAIPAN in the direction of the PHILIPPINES, and that the operations down here (indicating NEW GUINEA-SOLOMONS) were merely by way of preparation for that main counter-attack. Not only as hindsight, but my idea was that from the beginning and I expressed my opinion as such at the time.
- Q. The fleet supported operations were the principal danger?
- A. Yes, the American naval forces together with its air support.
- Q. Admiral, what would you consider was the turning point from the offensive to the defensive for JAPAN, and what was that caused by?
- A. I look upon the GUADALCANAL and TULAGI operations as the turning point from offense to defense, and the cause of our set back there was our inability to increase our forces at the same speed that you did.
- Q. Since the movements were primarily in the ocean area to the east, how would you describe the principal responsibility for holding the line? Would you say it was a Naval responsibility or an Army responsibility?
- A. I find it difficult to define responsibility definitely or clearly between the two services. It was, of course, the duty of the Army to maintain hold on any newly occupied territory, but at the same time it was the duty of the Navy to keep those occupying forces supplied. So in that sense it would be more proper to say that there was joint responsibility for maintaining that line.
- Q. Now as to the operations in NEW GUINEA, which were primarily of ground forces, would you say they were principally holding operations, or did they have a direct immediate effect on other operations throughout the area?
- A. This island was held principally by Army forces with some naval support on land. The object of that occupation was not only to keep hold of that island, but also to utilize that hold near-by operations. Utilize the hold on the island to facilitate operations in neighboring regions.
- Q. Admiral, looking at the whole operation in the PACIFIC during the time you were Chief of the General Staff, what particular U.S. force would you say had the most effect against the Japanese war potential?
- A. I was most bothered by Naval Air Forces.
- Q. Did the Chief of the Army General Staff express a similar view in your discussions with him?
- A. I myself believe that I was very fair and impartial in my views and judgements, but to others it may appear not to be so. In the same way the Chief of the Army General Staff may think that he is very fair and straight-forward in his views and judgements. I myself think there were times when, after all, I was taking the Army's point of view. That is not in answer to your question.

Transcript of interrogation of (Admiral NAGANO, Osami). - - - - -

Judging from the fact that your Naval Air Force was also the cause of considerable concern to the Chief of the Army General Staff, I believe that he was generally of the same opinion as myself. It was one of the causes of great regret to me that notwithstanding that we put everything we had into building up our air force to something comparable to yours, we were never able to do so.

- Q. Do you feel that throughout the period of the war, during the period you held your position, the Army General Staff had a clear picture of the problems as they developed?
- A. I myself spent some time in explaining those problems as they developed, not only to the Chief of the Army General Staff but to the Army Minister as well and his assistants, in particular the Deputy Chief; so I believe that those problems were fairly well understood by the Army General Staff.
- Q. With respect to oil, which was mentioned earlier as one of the most vitally necessary items for war, what was the primary cause of the inability to get an adequate supply of oil from the South, such was the case, and when did it become critical?
- A. I can't remember the date when we got our final refusal from the Dutch Government.
- Q. I mean during the war.
- A. In the early stages, submarines constituted the main difficulty but afterwards it was your air force; and I believe that the air force, once it got operating, was more effective than the submarines in checking shipment of our oil.
- Q. What was your feeling, Admiral, with respect to the German position? Did you benefit by your association with them, did you feel assurance in their success, did that help you overall? What did you gain from the alliance with Germany?
- A. That comes to a question which is not military in nature so that I do not feel fully competent to discuss it. However, it is true that the idea of a tie-up with GERMANY was expressed in Army circles from some time back, but had been consistently opposed by the Navy. As a result of the endeavors made for and against such a tie-up, there were two cabinet changes over that question. In 1940, however, the Three Power Pact became a reality; but even at that time my predecessor, the prior Chief of the Navy General Staff, expressed the opinion that even with the formation of the Three Power Pact it was not advisable for JAPAN to undertake a war against AMERICA and GREAT BRITAIN, and it was that sentiment in the Navy which had kept the naval authorities constantly opposed to a tie-up with GERMANY. Once that Three Power Pact was signed, however, the trend in the nation went in the direction which the Navy considered undesirable, but it was, so to speak, a force let loose, similar to the water in Lake Erie flowing into the upper rapids and in turn into Niagara; it could not be stopped. Consequently, whether it was good or bad I do not say but I regretted the formation of the Three Power Pact. After the war started, however, we hoped for the success of German arms, since she was then our Ally, in the hope that success would serve to check the employment of BRITAIN's forces against JAPAN, would reduce the amount of force that ENGLAND could apply against JAPAN.
- Q. Now with respect to naval operations in the PACIFIC, did the Germans through their representatives attempt to get you to change any of your plans; did they, for example, suggest different employment of submarines or any other arm; was there any pressure from them to do differently than you did in the PACIFIC?

Transcript of interrogation of (Admiral NAGANO, Osami) . . . . .

A. There were never any such suggestions from German sources. To be sure there were exchanges of opinion between representatives of Germany and our side, exchanges of facts or information which we considered might be of mutual benefit, but no such suggestions were ever made to us by German Representatives. Once we received a gift of one or two submarines from GERMANY and on that occasion they sent their technicians and gave our officers some technical instructions. Aside from that, there was some activity by German submarines in the INDIAN OCEAN, and once a converted cruiser came out into the PACIFIC, but that was about the extent of German participation or assistance in the PACIFIC War.

Q. Admiral, we are very much interested in your employment of submarines in the war. Did you have a specific limitation or directive on the employment of submarines?

A. I know practically nothing about submarines.

Q. Aside from the supply of outlying and cut-off islands, it would appear that your submarine employment was not very energetic, very little of our shipping was lost, and we wondered if the submarines were being held back for some specific purpose.

A. No, I do not think that there was any policy or restricting the employment of submarines. If they proved ineffective against our shipping it must have been either some defect in the submarines themselves or, in the method of their use. The number used in supplying outlying islands was relatively few and I do not believe that there was any special restriction on the employment of the remaining submarines. Commander YAMAGUCHI believes that we did not have enough of them and also the inefficient employment of the submarines.

Q. We have heard in prior discussions with leading persons in the Japanese Government that the coordination and cooperation between the high commands of the Army and of the Navy was not of the best. Can you tell us what was the real basis for divergences of opinion or inability to full cooperate?

A. Your informants on this point are civilian officers.

Q. Military as well. High level cooperation.

A. I personally cannot remember any particular cases where there was outstanding or pronounced lack of cooperation or coordination between the two headquarters. There was, however, quite a strong opinion from the outset that the two General Staffs should be combined into one command. However, that opinion did not prevail and I wonder if it were not the advocates of that merger who might have pointed out to you instances of lack of close cooperation. --- Commander YAMAGUCHI comes to my assistance and says that there were two or three cases of disagreement between the two headquarters due principally, he thinks, to differences in viewpoints which they had regarding operations. By the time those things reach the Admiral, however, they are so nicely fixed up that he can't see the difficulties that were encountered on the way.

Q. Admiral, what do you think was the major mistake made by the Japanese High Command; would you say that the senior officers were too old or that they were not air minded, or that they weren't broadly enough experienced? Was there some major item like that that was important in decreasing the efficiency, let us say, of the military forces?

A. Apropos of your comment about being too old, it is quite possible the Chief of the Navy General Staff was too old.

Transcript of Interrogation of (Admiral NAGANO, Osami).

- Q. We've heard a great deal about the influence of one group or another, the Army or Navy, on national policies. Would you care to say how you feel about the position of the Army or of the Navy politically in the country, their strength and its effect?
- A. The question of service men participating in politics or political affairs of the state was, I believe, a point of fundamental difference between the Army and the Navy. Many Army officers have definite opinions on political questions and undertook to have their opinions exert influence in questions of national policy, especially as regards the affairs in CHINA. The Navy, on the contrary, believed in keeping completely out of political affairs, strictly in accordance with Emperor MEIJI's instructions to service men. There was neither any desire for, nor effort made, to obtain political influence for the Navy in state affairs. Army officers had numerous opinions about political subjects and many officers who wanted to give expression to those opinions, but generally speaking, naval officers were very quiet on subjects of politics.
- Q. Admiral, you have stated that the Army had more of a tendency to take part in political discussions and expressions of opinion, but do you consider that the Army exerted political influence?
- A. Undoubtedly some effort was made to exert political influence on the part of the Army officers, but I think to some extent that was checked by the efforts that were made by the Navy to maintain close coordination with Army officers. Consequently, the Army was not able to run its own sweet course, there being efficient Navy officers cooperating and coordinating with Army officers with the result that they were able to check their political influence to some extent. I confine my remarks to question of an administrative nature, questions that went through the Cabinet. On matters that did not go through the Cabinet, I am not in a position to know to what extent Army's political influence was exerted.
- Q. This is rather a broad question. In tracing the whole war, following the whole war as you saw it in your position and thereafter in private and retired life, what do you consider were the chief reasons for JAPAN's failure to carry out her war aims?
- A. This is going back just slightly to the opening of the war. In the official discussions that took place with a view to commencement of hostilities, I expressed my opinion that we should be able to carry on this war successfully for about two years. After that there would arise the question of replenishment and expansion successfully, we would be up against definite difficulties from that time on. And as I had feared, when that time came, we could not. The difference in the speed and effectiveness with which you carried out those things, namely, keeping up and increasing of forces, was so much greater than the speed and effectiveness with which we were able to do it that the dire results which I had foreseen in the event of our inability to do that transpired. Behind that difference was the difference in production capacity of the two countries. Another important cause for our failure, I believe, was the fact that we were far behind you in our scientific researches. Also in civil engineering technique, air field construction, etc. We were very poorly equipped as compared with you who were able to produce sufficient arms, many kinds of them, in tremendous quantities.
- Q. Admiral, do you feel that if you had been able to have the unrestricted use of the resources that JAPAN acquired early in the war, you could have maintained your production facilities and possibly achieved your war aims?

Transcript of Interrogation of (Admiral NAGANO, Osami).

- A. Had we received no restrictions on the utilization of resources from the south, we certainly could have endured a long war, a protracted war.
- Q. Admiral, you stated before that you considered that the turning point from your offensive to defensive operations was GUADALCANAL; but now with the overall progress of the war, at what point do you think, either in your position or your knowledge, was the turning point in the war, the time when definite steps must be taken to terminate the war?
- A. When that time arrived I was no longer Chief of the Navy General Staff. Would my opinion still be worthwhile?
- Q. Your personal opinion, please.
- A. When we lost SAIPAN, "Hell is on us". Not to the extent of being ready to throw up our hands, but this was terrible.
- Q. Would you use the expression "the handwriting is on the wall"?
- A. I don't mean it in just that way. It isn't so strong as to exclude the will to continue, nor to the extent of giving up all further effort; but in any case, we had come to a precarious situation.
- Q. What would you say was the reasoned situation, a comparison of strengths; not the will to continue but the reasoned or calculated position of the country?
- A. Of course a comparative study had been made all along, but when SAIPAN was lost to you "this is terrible." This gives expression to an emotion neither scientific nor calculated.