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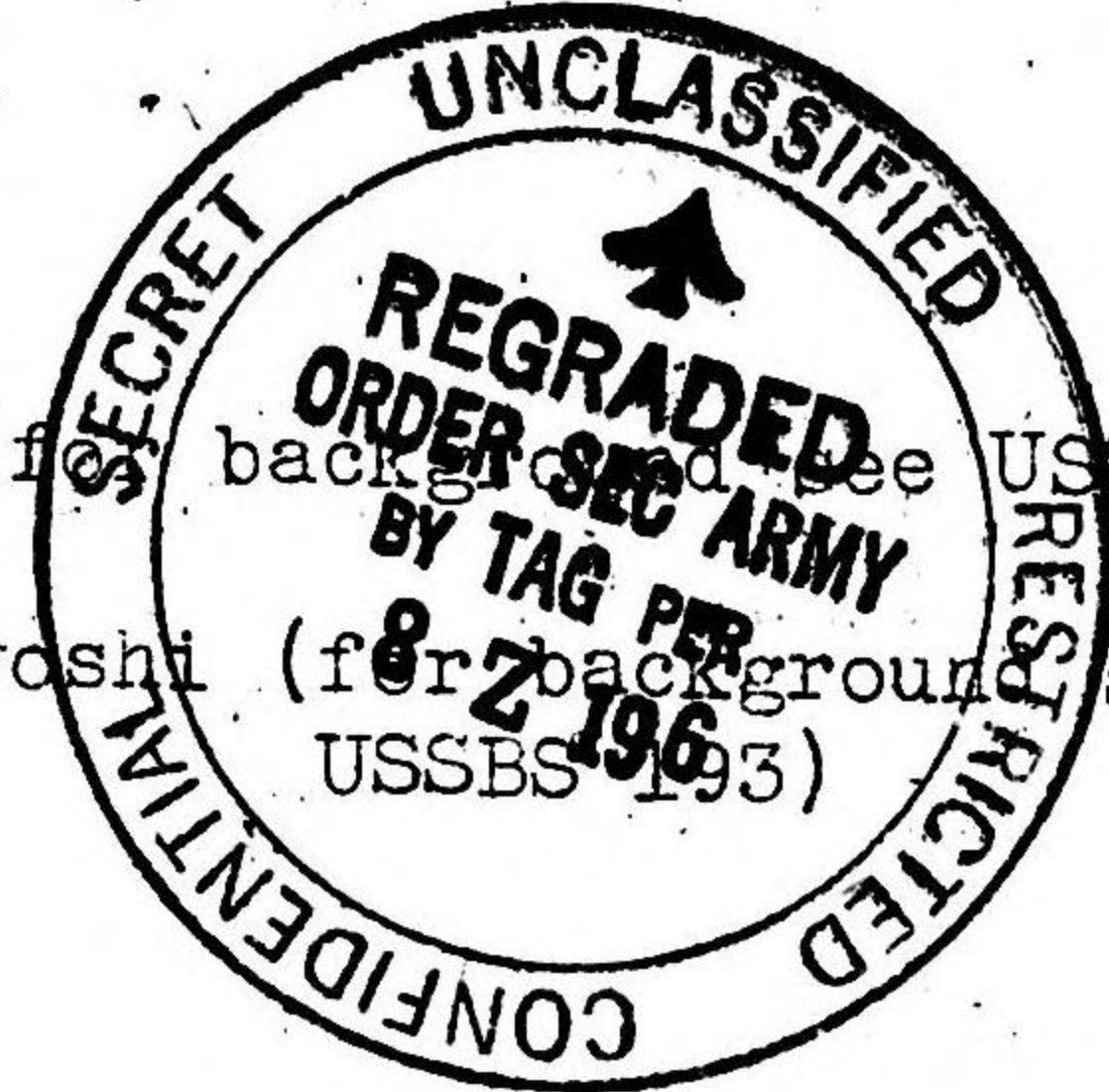
INTERROGATION NO. 495

PLACE: Tokyo
DATE: 6 December 1945

Division of Origin: Military Analysis Division

Subject: Japanese Navy Air Force

Personnel interrogated: Captain OHMAE, Toshikazu (for background see USSBS 150)
Commander YAMAGUCHI, Meriyoshi (for background see USSBS 193)



Where interviewed: Meiji Building

Interrogator: Major Edwin McElwain, GSC

Interpreter: Lt Comdr Walter Nichols

Allied Officers Present: Captain Charles Haskins, AC

SUMMARY

1. This interrogation is supplementary to USSBS interrogations 150, 160 and 193.
2. Captain OHMAE amplifies his previous statements about Japanese plans at the beginning of the war, the Solomons campaign, the Marianas operation and the second Philippines campaign. He also gives an account of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea.
3. Commander YAMAGUCHI describes briefly the early land based air operations against Wake. He there amplifies his previous remarks about the employment of land based Naval Air Craft in the second Philippines Campaign.

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Estimate of US Air Forces on 7 December 1941

To Captain OHMAE

Q. We have been told that the Japanese Army Air Forces were prepared to face a numerical inferiority in both the Philippines and Malaya at the beginning of the war; and that it was counting on a superiority in the quality of its effort. It believed its planes and pilots superior to those of the USAAF, the US Navy and the RAF, and it thought that it could overcome a superiority in numbers. Did the Japanese Navy share this view?

A. No. The Japanese Navy thought that it would have superiority of numbers in the Philippines, and it thought the Army and Navy would have similar superiority in Malaya. There was a foreign office report that there were 900 US planes in the Philippines, but this report was not believed; and it was subsequently shown to be false by photo reconnaissance toward the end of November.

Q. Will you tell us all about those photo reconnaissance missions?

A. I was not there, and I know nothing about them.

Q. The Japanese Army has told us that at the beginning of the war it had a strategic reserve of air units in Manchuria with a strength of at least 250 aircraft. Did the Navy possess a similar reserve?

A. The Army thought it necessary to maintain such a reserve in Manchuria to guard against Russia. The Army also had commitments in China, and it was charged with air defense of Japan. The Navy had no such commitments, and the only reserve in rear areas which it maintained consisted of its training units. At the beginning of the war, all fully trained units of the Japanese Navy Air Force were committed. We thought it best to use as much force as possible in order to obtain victory as quickly and cheaply as possible. The first line units ordinarily had substantial reserves of aircraft behind them in the forward areas - sometimes as much as 50%.

Wake Island & Guam - 1941

To Commander YAMAGUCHI

Q. What type of planes were used from Kwajalein against Wake in December of 1941?

A. Type 97 heavy bombers (Nell).

Q. How many of these planes were there based in the Marshalls?

A. About 36.

Q. How many did you lose in the Wake operations?

A. About 10.

Q. What was the level of training of the pilots who took part in this operation?

A. From 500 to 1,000 flying hours each. In addition, the crews of those aircraft were specially trained in over water navigation.

Q. What air attacks were made on Guam in 1941?

A. Mostly float planes. No substantial air effort was necessary.

Doolittle Raid

To Captain OHMAE

Q. Did you have any advance warning of the attack made on 18 April 1942 by medium bombers launched from the carrier Hornet?

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A. Yes. A picket boat reported the presence of two US carriers on the morning of the 18th.

Q. Was this picket boat sunk by the carriers?

A. Yes, it was sunk, but it had managed to send us warning.

Q. What, then, were you not prepared for the attack?

A. We expected it to come the next day if at all. We had no idea that the carriers had planes capable of flying the distance involved. We did not know that B-25's were to be employed. We thought the carriers were going to approach much closer and so were taken completely by surprise.

Q. What effect did the Doolittle raid have upon Japanese plans?

A. We decided that we must push out our defenses even farther, and accordingly we decided to take Midway, New Caledonia and bases in the Aleutians.

Q. Are you sure of this? I thought that the attack on Midway at least was planned before the war and had been scheduled all along to take place in June of 1942. Captain Genda has indicated that this is correct.

A. My personal recollection and opinion is that the Midway operation was not decided upon until after the Doolittle raid, and that the raid was responsible for the decision to undertake it. There may have been plans to take Midway, but the decision to execute these plans had not been made.

New Guinea, Rabaul and Guadalcanal

To Captain OHMAE

Q. When did you first go to Rabaul?

A. In June of 1942.

Q. What was Japanese air strength there at that time?

A. About 80 Japanese Navy fighters, 30 land attack planes (Betty), 10 reconnaissance planes and 30 float planes, a total of about 150 aircraft. These planes belonged to the 25th AIR FLOTILLA.

Q. How were those planes employed in July of 1942?

A. We ran occasional raids on Port Moresby and attempted to support the Japanese Army troops which were then going over the Owen Stanley mountains in the direction of Port Moresby.

Q. Did you drop supplies to those troops?

A. Not until they started to retreat. They began the operation believing that they could get along without air supply. The Army units involved were especially trained elite units from Manchuria, and the Army thought they did not need any aid. Army HQ at Rabaul kept very secret the progress they were making, and it was not until the retreat started that we were asked to drop supplies.

Q. What sort of a supply - dropping effort did you make?

A. We sent 3 or 4 land attack planes (Betty) each night. The Army reported that it received only 25% of the supplies.

Q. Did you ever practice supply dropping?

A. No. This was an improvised affair. But practice should not have been necessary. The operations were really very simple, and I am sure the Army actually received more than 25% of the supplies.

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Q. Now you said there were 150 aircraft at Rabaul when you arrived in June. How many were there at the time of the US landings on Guadalcanal on 7 Aug 1942?

A. About the same.

Q. What was the effect of the B-17 attacks on Rabaul which preceded the landings?

A. No great effect. As I recall it, the weather was very bad and hindered the reconnaissance aircraft which should have spotted the landing forces. The weather may also have hindered the B-17's.

Q. What did you do after the landings?

A. We immediately attacked using all aircraft available. We attempted mass attacks on the 7th, 8th and 9th. We lost one-half of our available strength in those attacks, and we asked for reinforcements. The 26th Air Flotilla was brought in with about 120 planes. It arrived about the 25th of August. The 21st Air Flotilla also came in about this time from SABANG (Sumatra). And in November, an army reconnaissance unit arrived, but it wasn't worth much.

Q. Well, what was Japanese Navy air strength in Rabaul in the middle of August?

A. About 40 planes.

Q. And this was built up to 160 planes about the 25th of August?

A. Yes.

Q. What happened then?

A. We then used our full plane strength in support of the first attempt by ground forces to dislodge you from Guadalcanal.

Q. What losses did you suffer?

A. I cannot recall the details of losses by individual action.

Q. Well, can you give us a figure for losses from 1 August 1942 to 1 January 1943?

A. Yes. We lost about 300 planes in that time.

Q. What was your aircraft strength on 1 January 1943?

A. 100 fighters, 30/40 land based attack planes, and perhaps 70 reconnaissance planes, float planes, etc.

Q. Replacements were sent from Japan which allowed you to maintain this strength?

A. Yes.

Q. What was the level of training of your pilots during this period?

A. When we began, in August of 1942, most of our pilots were very well trained with more than 500 hours flying time. The pilots from the 26th and 21st Air Flotillas were equally well trained. But by 1 January 1943, only about 15% of them were left and we were receiving pilots fresh from school. They had only about 100 flying hours.

Q. Do you mean they had only 100 hours total flying time or 100 hours in combat type aircraft?

- A. About 100 hours in combat type aircraft. Perhaps 200 hours in all.
- Q. When did you ask the Army to send reinforcements to Rabaul?
- A. In September of 1942.
- Q. Why?
- A. The Army ground forces were continually asking for direct support and we felt this should be given by Army aircraft.

Battle of Bismarck Sea

- Q. Do you recall a series of US air attacks on a convoy going from Rabaul to LAE in March of 1943 which we call the Battle of the Bismarck Sea?
- A. I do.
- Q. Do you know how many ships were in that convoy?
- A. To the best of my recollection 6 destroyers, one Navy "Special Ship" and 7 transports.
- Q. How many were sunk?
- A. All but three destroyers.
- Q. Was that an important convoy?
- A. Yes. Very important. It was carrying about 7,000 troops (6,500 Army and 500 Marines). Early in 1943, it was decided that Southeastern New Guinea should be reinforced, and on 9 January 1943, we landed a brigade at LAE. There we decided that we should land at least a division, and we had plans to land five or six divisions in an attempt to take all New Guinea.
- Q. At that time you still thought you could take Port Moresby?
- A. We not only thought we could take Port Moresby but hoped to take all New Guinea.
- Q. Well, what about the 1 March 1943 convoy?
- A. This convoy carried part of the division we expected to land. It was the mission of these troops to go as far inland as WAU and to hold Morobe. If we could have done that you could not have built up your large airfields in the Markham Valley.
- Q. At that time, you foresaw the possibility of our building up large air bases in the Markham Valley?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What happened when the convoy was sunk?
- A. We cancelled our plans for sending a division to LAE, and began to reinforce Wewak. We thought we could proceed overland from Wewak towards the Markham Valley and accomplish a part of the original mission by breaking up your air field development but the Japanese Army is not very good at building roads.
- Q. So that, as a result of the Bismarck Sea action, you abandoned your plans to reinforce LAE and to take all New Guinea?
- A. Yes.
- Q. And you attempted to stop our development of the Markham Valley by a ground advance from Wewak?

A. Yes.

Operation of carrier planes from land bases

Q. When did you first use carrier based air groups from land bases in the Solomons?

A. In April 1943.

Q. Why?

A. The land based air groups at Rabaul were not effective, largely because there were only a few experienced pilots. We still attached utmost importance to the Solomons campaign, and we had to have a better air effort. The Army had just come into Rabaul, but it was no help. Japanese Army units had had no training in navigation and in any event these planes had too short a range. In February, I personally asked to have the carrier air groups brought into Rabaul, but at that time it was felt that they should be kept intact for use with the carriers. But in March the situation was even worse, and I succeeded in pushing through my plan to land base the carrier groups.

Q. Did your losses of aircraft in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea have any bearing upon this decision?

A. No.

Q. How many aircraft did you lose in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea?

A. About 40 out of 80 aircraft which were covering the convoy.

Q. How many did the Army lose?

A. I don't know.

Q. Returning to the carrier groups, which groups were involved?

A. CARDIVS 1 and 2 both were land based at this time.

Q. How many planes?

A. About 500. We still had 200 land based planes, making a total of about 700 Navy aircraft in the Bismarcks - Solomons area.

Q. When these planes arrived, what did you do with them?

A. We ran two big attacks in the Solomons and one on the New Guinea side. It was originally planned to attack Port Moresby, and we thought the Owen Stanley mountains were too high for the aircraft we had available, so we attacked Buna and Milne Bay instead with about 250 aircraft - not full strength. In the 3 attacks, we lost about 15% of our strength, and Admiral Yamamoto, who was then at Rabaul, thought this was excessive, and so ordered the carrier groups back to Truk on 17 April.

Q. Was the Army involved in this operation?

A. No. There would have been confusion if the Army attacked with the Navy. So it was not allowed to.

Q. What was your next operation?

A. It was proposed to send a joint Army - Navy parachute force into the Markham Valley to prevent your development of the airfields there. Any Army and a Navy parachute expert came to Rabaul to discuss the project. I told them it never could succeed because at that time we could not supply fighter cover. My view was adopted, and the project was abandoned.

Q. When did the carrier divisions next operate from land bases?

A. In July of 1943, after the US landings at Rendova, we attacked as best we could and because of the very low level of the training of our land based pilots, we lost three-quarters of our strength and had only 40 or 50 planes left. We made an urgent call for reinforcements, and the CARDIV 2 air group was sent in about 25 July. It never went back to its carriers and was merged then and there with the 26th Air Flotilla. Thereafter, a new CARDIV 2 air group was formed, but it was a completely new group with none of the pilots from the original CARDIV 2 air group.

Q. How about the Army Air Force at this time?

A. The Army was still in Rabaul and had not yet moved to New Guinea, but it participated in the New Georgia operation only once. Its pilots were poorly trained and their planes were old and short ranged.

Q. What was the state of the training of the CARDIV 2 air group?

A. Very good. Its pilots were very experienced.

Q. How many planes did it have?

A. About 175.

Q. Where was it based?

A. It first had a forward base at Buna, but after your landings at Munda this base became untenable and it retired to Buks, and finally, at the end of August to Rabaul. At that time, total Navy aircraft strength at Rabaul amounted to 100 fighters, 30 single engine bombers and 30/40 land based attack planes (Betsy).

Q. Were you receiving any replacements?

A. We were then receiving the type zero model 52 fighter (Zeke 52) which was very good. But the replacement pilots were very poor.

Q. When did you next land base the CARDIV 1 air group?

A. About 1 November 1943. This coincided with the Bougainville operation, but purely as a matter of coincidence. CARDIV 1 stayed in Rabaul about 2 weeks, suffered 30% losses and then withdrew. Thereafter, it was reorganized, and went to Singapore to train. It had only a few really experienced pilots. I went with it, on the new TAIHO, so I don't know what happened at Rabaul after that?

Marianas

Q. I have read what you have said about the Marianas Campaign in response to questions put you by the Naval Analysis Division, and I do not wish to duplicate, but there are several points I should like to clear up. First, I understand that land based Navy aircraft moved from the E NEI to Palau and Saipan where the US landings were expected. Could you tell me how many and under what circumstances?

A. When we saw your fleet approaching the Marianas, we cancelled the KON plan (operations in New Guinea), and began to move the fleet and all available aircraft from the E NEI towards the Marianas. About 100 aircraft moved from the E NEI to Palau and Yap through Halmahera, but the pilots were so poorly trained that half were lost, and one contributed very much to the operation.

Q. How about planes from Japan?

A. The 2nd Air Fleet was then in process of formation in Japan, and its pilots were not sufficiently trained to participate in this operation. But we put together a group of about 120 or 130 planes manned by the best pilots we could get, and moved it to Iwo Jima. We called this group the HACHIMAN BUTAI. It attacked your task force and landing forces from Iwo and lost about half of its strength. Meanwhile, we lost about 400 planes in the

carrier action west of the Marianas.

2nd Philippine Campaign

To Commander YAMAGUCHI

Q. After the Marianas operation, the 1st Air Fleet moved its Hq to the Philippines. How many aircraft did it have there by 1 September 1944?

A. About 150 planes, mostly fighters.

Q. And the 2nd Air Fleet was to defend Formosa, the Ryukyus and Kyushu. How many planes did it have?

A. About 300.

Q. The carrier groups were not under the 2nd Air Fleet?

A. No, they were not.

Q. Why did you not make any air defense of Palau where it was invaded on 15 September 1944?

A. It was out of effective range.

Q. Why did you not use your planes to defend Morotai when it was invaded on 15 September 1944?

A. By then we had decided that the Philippines should be our outer line of defense. We had put Sho operations (Defense of the Philippines) into effect, and Sho operations did not call for the defense of Morotai.

Q. On 10 October 1944, the US fleet attacked the Ryukyus, and on subsequent days, it attacked Formosa and the Philippines. Will you describe the Japanese reaction?

A. On 12 October 1944, the main strength of the 2nd Air Fleet was based at Kanoya. We made a night attack on your fleet with about 100 aircraft, and on the next two nights we made similar attacks with about 100 aircraft. Then on the next day, we attacked with 150 aircraft from the 2nd Air Fleet and 150 aircraft from the carrier groups, a total of 700 sorties in three nights and one day. After the first action our inexperienced pilots reported that they had sunk at least five major fleet units. At the end of the three days, they reported that they had sunk at least 30 warships. We made reports of this to the Emperor. As a result of these reports, preparations for the Philippines campaign were not pressed as they should have been. We were overconfident, and did not anticipate an immediate landing in the Philippines. This overconfidence lost us the Philippines campaign.

Q. What were your actual losses in these attacks off Formosa?

A. We lost about 60% of the aircraft committed - about 400 planes.

Q. Did you make a maximum effort to destroy our fleet?

A. Nothing was held back. We made a maximum effort. We thought your fleet was resting in an ideal position on Formosa, and that we had a very good chance.

Q. How many planes did you lose on the ground in Formosa and the Ryukyus as a result of our carrier strikes?

A. Only about 30 or 40.

Q. What was the effect of the air attacks on Formosa which took place at this time?

- A. Air depots and repair facilities were badly hit, and this had a great effect on our ability to get planes into the Philippines later in the month. But the B-29's destroyed very few planes because the planes were well dispersed.

To Captain OHMAE

- Q. Did the action off Formosa have any effect on the efficiency of the Northern Force in the Battle for Leyte Gulf?

- A. Some of the carrier air groups were employed and suffered substantial losses. When we were ordered to sortie with the carriers a week later, we had to take an odd assortment of pilots who were by no reason fully trained. Perhaps some of the pilots who were lost would have been better. But at that time we had no really experienced carrier groups, and in that action we were operating only as a "lure" to help the control force penetrate to the Leyte Gulf.

- Q. I believe you have previously stated that the 2nd Air Fleet finally arrived in the Philippines on 23 October with about 300 planes. Is that correct?

- A. Yes.

- Q. How many planes did the 1st Air Fleet have at that time?

- A. About 50. About 100 had been lost in the carrier strikes of mid-September and October.

- Q. About how many planes did the Japanese Army have at that time in the Philippines?

- A. About 300.

- Q. So that on 23 October you had about 650 planes in the Philippines, both Navy and Army. As you know, we had only a few land based planes operating from one airfield at that time. Why then did you not exploit your numerical advantage and drive use from the beaches?

- A. At that time, the Navy was primarily concerned with attacks on your carrier task force. The Army did attack the beachheads, and I do not know why it had no more success. It had lost a lot of planes in carrier strikes on the central Philippines.

- Q. Was the inexperience of your pilots a factor in the poor success you achieved at this time?

- A. Our pilots were very poor and inexperienced.

- Q. How about repair facilities?

- A. We had depots at Manila, Legaspi and Cebu which could make 4th echelon repairs, change engines, etc. But there were shortages of all sorts of parts because of your attacks on the route from Japan through Formosa, and because your submarines were beginning to cut us off from the South. In addition, we had far too many different kinds of planes, and the parts were almost never interchangeable. We had not been prepared for your landing at so early a date, and we did not have a sufficient store of supplies or adequate repair facilities. The airfields had not been built up as was planned, and the poor state of many airfields caused many landing accidents. The bombing of the repair facilities really did little damage, but this caused us to stop work on the planes, when such work was very necessary.

- Q. The Army has told us that throughout the Southern areas, maintenance was ordinarily so poor, because of factors similar to those you mentioned, that it was often necessary to discard planes which could easily have been fixed if they had been near a good depot. How about the Navy?

A. All through the Southern area, the Navy was about as bad as the Army. We might have salvaged many planes by bringing them back to Kanoya, but of course we never could get them there.

Q. How did you service aircraft in forward areas?

A. There were very few gasoline trucks outside Japan, and we used to service our planes by hand from drums.

Q. How long would it take you to service a flight of 36 fighters?

A. About 3 hours.

Q. Can you give us a rough estimate of the monthly losses and replacements received by the 1st and 2nd Air Fleets in the Philippines?

A. I estimate them as follows:

	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Replacements</u>
1 November	180	200	30
1 December	250	150	200/300
1 January	50	500	300

Q. Was it the Navy's responsibility to protect the supply convoys you ran into Ormoc in November and December 1944?

A. It was a joint Army - Navy effort.

Q. How many planes would you commit to the defense of these convoys?

A. We had a joint Army - Navy pool of about 60 planes. We tried to keep 30 planes over the convoy at all times. We suffered 20/30% losses in this operation.

Q. What was the serviceability rate at this time?

A. Well below 50%.

Q. How often did you attack the Mindoro convoy?

A. We made a total of about 60 suicide attacks in the 3 days.

Q. How about the Lingayan convoy?

A. We could only throw about 30 suicide planes against it. That left our strength in the Philippines about 20 planes. Those planes went to Tuguegarao and ultimately back to Formosa.

Q. Can you tell us about the suicide crash which Admiral Arima is supposed to have made on a US task force some time in October 1944?

A. About 18 October, Admiral Arima crashed his plane on a US carrier to the East of Luzon. He was then a Rear Admiral and was promoted posthumously to Vice Admiral. Later, men who crashed were promoted 2 grades posthumously if they hit a ship, and one if they missed.

Q. What was the organization of Japanese Navy suicide units in the Philippines?

A. The 201st Kokutai was converted completely into a suicide unit, and suicide pilots were continually fed into it during the campaign. Some other Kokutai made suicide attacks, but this was the only one which was completely a suicide unit.