

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

RESTRICTED

INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS 448)  
NAV NO. 99

Place: Tokyo  
Date : 25 November 1945  
Time : 1000-1200

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: Shore Based Air in the MARIANAS.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Captain FUCHIDA, Mitsuo, IJN, has been a naval aviator since 1928. In August 1941 he went to the AKAGI as air group commander, and later led the attacks on PEARL HARBOR, DARWIN and CEYLON. After duty as an instructor in the Naval Staff College and War College, he became senior Staff Officer of the First Air Fleet, in which capacity he was in the MARIANAS from September 1943 until April 1944. In April 1944 he became Air Staff Officer to CinC Combined Fleet and held that post for the duration of the war.

Where interviewed: Room 718, MEIJI Building

Interrogator: Rear Admiral R. A. Ofstie, USN

Interpreter: Mr. F. C. Woodrough

Allied Officers Present: None.

SUMMARY

When Central PACIFIC forces approached the MARIANAS, in early June 1944, the Japanese put into effect the "AGO" Plan for the defense of these islands. The plan provided for an attack by the Japanese Fleet, and employment of fleet and shore based naval air forces.

Captain FUCHIDA gives details of the organization, strength, operations and losses of the shore based naval air forces. He also comments on the Army concept of the PACIFIC war.

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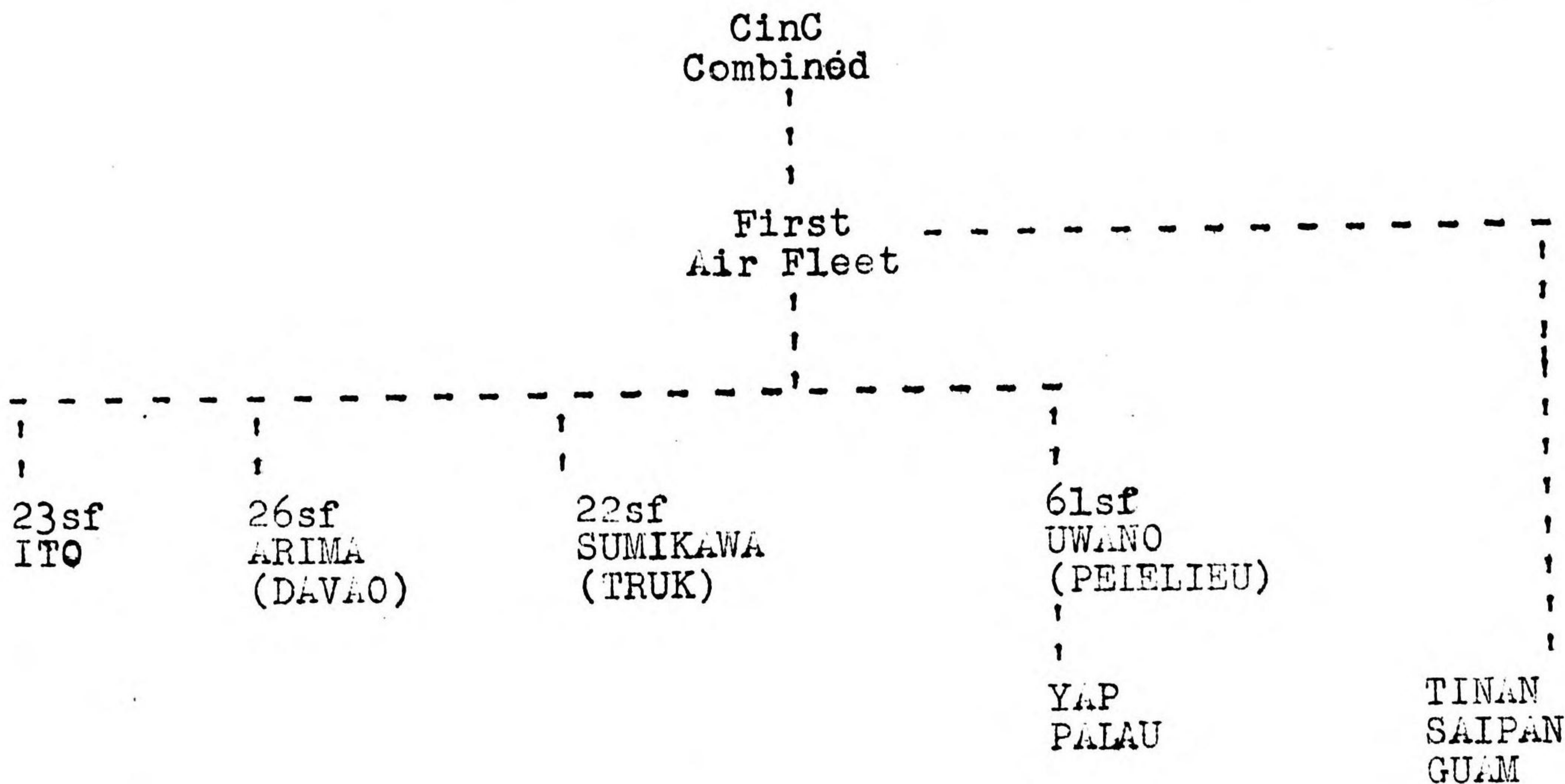




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TRANSCRIPT

Transcript of interrogation (Captain FUCHIDA, Mitsuo, IJN)



- Q. What were your duties in June 1944?
- A. I was Aviation Officer on the Staff of Commander in Chief, Combined Fleet.
- Q. Tell me what Naval Air Forces were based on SAIPAN, GUAM and TINIAN on the 1st of June.
- A. Starting with SAIPAN -- Two airfields on SAIPAN: first one, ASLITO, had about 100 type ZERO Fighters; on second airfield at MARPI POINT there were about 50 SUISEI (Dive bombers). At that time airfield No. 2 was not in perfect condition as yet so part of the SUISEI were transferred to ASLITO. There were three airfields on TINIAN: No. 1 was the biggest, and had about 80 types of land-based attack planes and 20 reconnaissance planes (converted SUISEI); No. 2 airfield about 50 SUISEI and 20 GEKKO (Night fighters); No. 3 airfield was incomplete, still under construction. On No. 4 airfield, which was just off No. 1, were 80 type ZERO fighters. There were two airfields on GUAM (completed), and one under construction. About 100 type ZERO fighters on No. 1; about 10 GEKKO on No. 1; on No. 2 about 60 GINGA (Bombers). On ROTA although there was an airfield, it wasn't used. On YAP about 15 type zero fighters and 50 SUISEI. On PELELIU there were about 40 type one land-based attack planes and 40 TENZAN (ship based torpedo planes). There was nothing based on ANGUAR. On BABELTHUAP there were about 20 type ZERO Fighters. On IWO JIMA there were 20 ZERO type fighters and 10 TENZAN.
- Q. What was the command organization tying all those aircraft together?
- A. See diagram on top of page.
- Q. What general orders had been issued to these units by Commander FIRST Air Fleet to cover the expected attack?
- A. The plan was that if the U.S. Task Force struck the MARIANAS, then the strength from PALAU would be moved up to the MARIANAS to reinforce and attack with all the forces except Air Flotilla 23. It was made very mobile to meet the expected attack. When the attack was expected, Admiral OZAWA's Task Force which was in LINGGA and the Homeland were to rendezvous at TAWI TAWI and then move up to position northeast of PALAU and stand by so as to meet the attack.

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Transcript of Interrogation (Captain FUCHIDA, Mitsuo, IJN)  
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The duty of Air Flotilla 22 and 23 and 26 was mainly to carry out reconnaissance on that occasion. Part of the MARIANAS Force was sent to WOLEAI to search. The main attacking force was Air Flotilla 61 and Admiral OZAWA's Task Force. That was the general order issued prior to the attack. Then when the earlier attack came to BIAK (May 27) about half the force from the MARIANAS and PALAU were ordered to Western NEW GUINEA. On the 1st of June about half the force was shifting from the MARIANAS down to NEW GUINEA.

Q. Were those forces returned to the MARIANAS, or what happened to them down there?

A. About half of the force that was transferred to Western NEW GUINEA was lost in the BIAK Operation, the other half was to return to their original station. But when they got to PALAU they were attacked by large type planes and were practically all lost.

Q. When did you first get word of our fleet movement?

A. About 10 A.M. on the 9th of June. I think that was from reconnaissance plane.

Q. Were any new orders then issued to the Air Fleet?

A. That was the time when the planes which had been shifted to BIAK were ordered back to their original position.

Q. After the action started and the fleet came within range of the MARIANAS were any new aircraft units ordered into the MARIANAS?

A. Reinforcements were brought from the Homeland through IWO JIMA. They started to arrive about the time of the SAIPAN landing, about 200 to 250 planes.

Q. Were they organized units?

A. They were formed from planes from the YOKOSUKA Air Group and Air Flotilla 27 which was up in HOKKAIDO, and they were placed under the command of Commander Air Flotilla 27. It was a temporary organization of about 200-250 planes and known as the HACHIMAN Air Attack Force, then later this became a formal organization and was made the THIRD Air Fleet. This was right after the MARIANAS Operations, around July.

Q. The air action began there on the afternoon of the 11th with a fighter sweep. Did you then begin getting reports as to the losses, and what was going on in the MARIANAS?

A. We didn't know the absolute detailed losses but were aware in general of the losses as we received daily reports of the number of planes which were available for the following days operations. From that we could tell what the losses were.

Q. What was the nature of those losses?

A. On 11th, 12th 13th practically all of them were wiped out. It was ordered that aircraft carriers were to be the target, all the time, but we received no reports that they were effective.

We did receive reports that attacks were carried out on one or two cruisers and one or two auxiliary carriers, but got reports that their attacks against the Task Force as a whole was ~~rich~~ of a success.

Q. Did any of the planes come out of there, return to the PHILIPPINES or PALAU or to the homeland?

A. A few planes did get back to the PHILIPPINES, less than a hundred all told. In that number there were some which originally were on Admiral OZAWA's Task Force carriers which had flown in to the MARIANAS and then returned to the PHILIPPINES.



Transcript of Interrogation (Captain FUCHIDA, Mitsuo, IJN)  
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- Q. Sometimes after the battle of 19th-20th of June there were a few planes being flown in from PALAU and YAP at night. Do you recall the orders for those planes, how they happened to be coming in?
- A. 25 fighters moved up from PALAU, first to YAP then from YAP to TINIAN, as I recall on the 18th or 19th. The order was to send as many as possible in every way possible. We also sent planes from IWO to attack during the night and land at GUAM, and then at dawn move on to PALAU. They were ordered to do what they could.. Admiral KAKUTA on TINIAN had reported that around the MARIANAS there were quite a number of escort carriers whose planes were acting as cover for the landing on SAIPAN, so the plan was to inflict as much damage as possible on these escort carriers so as to temporarily gain control of the air. Another plan which was carried out, although in small numbers, was after we learned that a powerful Task Force had retired to refuel. Planes were sent from IWO JIMA to attack, and then return to PALAU and TRUK, then attack at SAIPAN and down to GUAM. Because of these attacks from PALAU and IWO JIMA, to TRUK, SAIPAN, GUAM, etc., we used up practically all of our planes.
- Q. That is, the planes assigned to this operation; not additional planes?
- A. Yes, when it was seen there was no chance to recover SAIPAN, then orders were issued to retire to the PHILIPPINES. That was the hundred planes mentioned a while ago.
- Q. When did they decide that SAIPAN was lost?
- A. About 5 July. At that time there was a plan proposed to take the entire surface force and carry out one final attack, but by that time we didn't have air strength so it was called off.
- Q. Did you assume that the U.S. would continue with the occupation of GUAM and TINIAN after finishing SAIPAN?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What steps were taken so far as air was concerned to counter that operation?
- A. We had no intention of trying to carry out any large scale attacks having assumed that GUAM and TINIAN would be lost. So first we planned to build up the air strength in PALAU but couldn't do that so retired to PHILIPPINES to build up the defenses there. In the meantime the planes did carry out small scale nuisance attacks, but nothing on a big scale.
- Q. At any time during this operation did you ask the Army for air assistance?
- A. We did ask the Army to carry out attacks from MINDANAO, PALAU and Western NEW GUINEA but nothing came of it. That is, the Army didn't have the ability to carry out attacks on the sea.
- Q. Did the Army have planes?
- A. They had a total of about 300 planes in that area.
- Q. What would you say was the effect of the MARIANAS Operation on the Naval air strength; did it virtually eliminate the remaining Naval air?
- A. Fundamentally this operation, which was known as the AGO Operation was to be a decisive one because we felt if the MARIANAS were lost there could no longer be a dependable line even in the PHILIPPINES. So we planned an all out attack and used up practically all of our air strength.



Transcript of Interrogation (Captain FUCHIDA, Mitsuo, IJN)  
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Q. The only considerable number of aircraft which you had left then, after the AGO Operation, were the planes of units in training?

A. That is correct, about all which were left were the training planes which were used in the SHO Operation about 3 months later. We estimated that for the UNITED STATES to consolidate their position on SAIPAN and move to TINIAN, GUAM, PALAU and HALMAHERA would take about 3 months, so the training program was stepped up to end in about three months time.

Q. Did you build a new Naval Air Force in that three months period?

A. That is correct. Although we estimated three months for training the period it actually did take four months. Then the UNITED STATES attacks came a month earlier before we were ready for them, in the PHILIPPINES. These new trainees would have been ready to participate in actual operations in November, but the attack came in October.

Q. Did you consider that this new Air Force would have been well trained by November?

A. Good enough to participate effectively in the campaign. The Navy alone figured on 1000 planes by that time, ready for the PHILIPPINES Operation.

Q. You had no plans then for any considerable air operations when PALAU was attacked?

A. No, we had no large scale plans for air employment in PALAU at that time.

Q. Due to lack of trained units?

A. Yes. The original plans, which were carried out to certain extent, were to move all the air power from the RABAU area up to TRUK, all the air power in the Southwest area to the PHILIPPINES, HALMAHERA, CELEBES, and Western NEW GUINEA, and the FIRST Air Fleet to the north of the MARIANAS. The plan was to use all these air forces, amounting to 2,000 planes, in one big decisive battle which was expected to be around the SAIPAN area. However, when the attacks came to the MARIANAS we couldn't concentrate our attack in one all-out attack, and we had to move part of our forces to Western NEW GUINEA because of the attack on BIAK. Another factor was that quite a few which were in Western NEW GUINEA caught malaria. Anyway, we couldn't have one big decisive battle, so our strength was shittled down a little at a time until finally all of it was wiped out.

Q. At what time would you say your Naval air power was wiped out?

A. Within a month after landings on SAIPAN.

Q. At that time what would you say was the position of the Army Air Forces?

A. Although in number they had about the same as the Navy they weren't very active because they didn't have the ability to carry out any operations over the sea. The Navy was convinced that if the line was broken from the Homeland to IWO JIMA to the MARIANAS, BIAK, and Western NEW GUINEA it would be just a matter of time until the end. The Navy was firmly convinced of that. The Army, although they believed this too, didn't have the conviction of the Navy and weren't willing to pour all their strength into one decisive battle. Instead they kept some air strength in BURMA, CHINA, PHILIPPINES and weren't willing to throw in everything on one defensive stroke. The reason for that split was that in spite of the fact that the Commander may have had the same ideas, since the chain of command was entirely separate they couldn't have coordinated the operation. The Army refused to consolidate forces with the Navy and unify the entire thing.



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Army refused to do this. After the failure of the operation to hold that line, the SHO Operation was activated. This was to hold the line from the mainland through FORMOSA and the PHILIPPINES. Having learned a lesson from the failure of holding the first line, to a certain extent the Army and Navy did unite air forces but by that time it was too late.

Q. Did you consult occasionally with your opposite number in the Army Headquarters?

A. Yes, I did. As for major problems, the General Headquarters took them up but I would confer sometimes with regard to local operations.

Q. Did you feel that your opposite number had a good understanding of such an operation as the AGO Plan?

A. I think that he did have a thorough understanding of the situation, but that the Army man had too much confidence in ground forces. That is, he felt that with the ground forces on GUAM, SAIPAN, TINIAN, etc. that they could hold these islands without air assistance. Actually, he was wrong.

Q. What did you think of the Army generally in your dealings with them; were they generally alert to the import of the U.S. Fleet movement across the PACIFIC?

A. I felt that they did not have a thorough understanding of the entire PACIFIC Campaign. Even in the SOLOMONS area they couldn't see any reason for air support. They were much more interested in their Continental operations than in the PACIFIC Operation. Even in placing ground forces in the MARIANAS the Army was rather opposed to it. It was only through the efforts of certain high Army officials that they were finally able to get about three divisions from MANCHURIA into the MARIANAS. Even those Army forces weren't sent until the MARSHALLS reverse; until then we just had Naval Guard Divisions holding the MARIANAS. After the MARSHALLS reverses, however, the Army suddenly realized in March that they should send in forces from the KWANTUNG Area, but they were still unhappy about it.

Q. What would you have done differently in the MARIANAS if you had conducted the AGO Operations?

A. The biggest mistake was to spread the air power from the MARIANAS, and send them to the BIAK Operation. The BIAK Operation should have been carried out with Army Air Forces from the PHILIPPINES-CELEBES area. Prior to that operation Admiral KOGA, CinC Combined Fleet, had been killed and one month elapsed before Admiral TOYODA assumed position of CinC Combined Fleet. During that one month period the Commander in Chief Southwest Fleet was acting as overall commander for this entire area. The CinC Southwest Fleet, being SOERBAJA, had placed too much weight on the BIAK Operation. Naturally from his position down in SOERBAJA that looked like the most important operation, that was why this Naval Air strength was taken out of the MARIANAS and shifted down to Western NEW GUINEA. If KOGA had been in command, or if TOYODA had taken over immediately, I don't think this mistake would have been made.

Q. What mistakes do you think we made with our Task Forces?

A. No mistakes.