

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



Interrogation No. USSBS 460
NAV. NO. 102

Place: Tokyo
Date: 19 November 1945

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: Organization and Development of Japanese Convoy Escort.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Captain OI, Atsiishi, I.J.N. Staff Officer of Combined Escort Fleet from Nov. 1943 to Aug. 1945; Commander SOGAWA, Kiyoshi, I.J.N. Member of Naval General Staff from 27 Nov 1942 to the end of the war.

Where interviewed: Naval Staff College

Interrogator: Captain Steadman Teller, U.S.N.

Interpreter: Lt. Cmdr. Seymour Millstein, U.S.N.R.

Allied Officers Present: None.

SUMMARY

At the outbreak of war the Japanese had neither an efficient organization nor adequate ships for escort of convoys over their long lines of communications. As the war progressed, various ineffective steps were taken to improve the organization until finally tactical commands were established for this particular purpose. This was a belated step and only half of the planned number became active. Various reasons are given for the adopted policy of sailing unescorted merchantmen in groups rather than singly when routed through dangerous waters.

Partial information is given on the damage to Japanese shipping caused by the carrier air strikes on CORON BAY in September 1944 and on SAIGON in January 1945. The dates and places of sinking of several escort carriers engaged in convoy escort are also listed.

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TRANSCRIPT

Transcript of interrogation of (Captain OI, Atsiishi; Commander SOGAWA, I.J.N.)

(Captain OI)

- Q. What were the various steps in development of convoy escort organization following establishment of the Combined Escort Fleet in November, 1943?
- A. The reorganization of escort units under the Combined Escort Fleet consolidated control of the naval stations which heretofore had attained direct from the Naval General Staff the few instructions available to them. The First Escort Group actually controlled single escorts until the spring of 1944. It was desired to organize escort flotillas at the time of organization of the C.E.F. but the lack of officers in the grade of Commander and Captain prevented. Consequently a convoy commander system, similar to that of the British in World War I, was inaugurated. Retired Captains were called to service, 15 being assigned to the First Escort Group and 4 to the Second Escort Group. Because of the age of these officers only one-third to one-half of them were available for duty at any one time.

Organization of the two escort groups did not place active senior officers in command of convoys and escorts because these groups were purely administrative. Commencing in the spring of 1944 the first flotilla was organized as a tactical unit of the First Escort Group and additional ones were added very gradually. It was desired to have 11 such flotillas but by May 1945 only 6 had been established.

The Second Escort Group Headquarters which had originally been located at TRUK was moved to SAIPAN in March 1944. At SAIPAN it also acted as the Base Force Headquarters Group. All the personnel of this headquarters were killed following your landing in June and the Second Escort Group was never reestablished.

- Q. What carriers and air groups were employed primarily on missions of protecting shipping?
- A. The first use of a carrier in convoy escort was the experimental trip of the CHITOSE with a convoy to SINGAPORE in January 1944. The SHINYO, TAIYO and UNYO were assigned to escort duty throughout the war until each was sunk by submarine torpedoes. The 801 Air Flotilla was shifted to the First Escort Squadron about August 1944. The 931 Air Flotilla was a training force for escort carriers and was placed under the First Escort Group about December 1944. The 901 and 936 Air Flotillas also were engaged primarily in protection of shipping during the latter part of the war.
- Q. Why did you so often sail unescorted merchant ships in groups rather than singly when they were routed through dangerous waters?
- A. We found it better to keep unescorted ships in groups for the reasons; first, that they might be sure to get a radio message back to base giving essential details of the attack; second, to make better use of the few convoy commanders; third, to improve the chance of rescuing crews of sunk ships; and fourth, because the British appeared to have found it successful in World War I. There was an added factor in that the Navy had taken many of the experienced merchant ship captains and chief officers leaving comparatively inexperienced merchant marine officers to take charge of the ships. These officers had no training in handling ships under attack. There was also reluctance on the part of many merchant captains to sail singly in dangerous waters. Most of them who did sail singly in dangerous waters were lost in the early part of the war. After that, if a ship was ordered to sail alone the captain often would put into port at the first scare and wait until he thought the threat of the attack was over. This caused reduction in the usefulness of shipping of course.

The question as to whether to sail unescorted ships singly or in groups was discussed frequently in the Naval General Staff during the war. The policy of sailing in groups was adopted in 1942 and adhered to throughout the war. The chief of N. G. S. was opposed to it but was persuaded by

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(Captain OI)

A. (cont.) other members to adopt it for the above reasons.

- Q. Do you recall when and where the escort carriers you mentioned were sunk?
- A. SHINYO - September 1944 in YELLOW Sea.
TAIYO - August 1944 off LAOAG, LUZON.
UNYO - 17 September, 1944 in middle of SOUTH CHINA Sea.

(Commander SOGAWA)

- Q. What plans existed at the beginning of the war for escort and protection of shipping?
- A. Each year the officers in the fleet who would be responsible for this operation submitted a plan for escorting shipping and a recommendation for building escort vessels which they knew would be needed. It was estimated that 360 escort vessels would be needed for our long lines of communication. The Navy postponed building additional escort vessels so when the war started we had old destroyers, a few mine sweepers and such craft assigned to this duty under the various area fleet commanders and commanders of naval bases. At that time there was no unified control of escort and these various commanders did the best they could with the means at their disposal. It was not until 10 April, 1942 that the First Escort Unit was formed.

- Q. What was the command organization in the convoy-escort combination at the time of organization of this unit?

A. At first the senior escort vessel captain was in charge. The convoy ship captains however had difficulty in navigating and maneuvering, and in carrying out the instructions given to them at sea. The Senior escort captain was too busy running his own ship and was not experienced enough to handle several other escort captains and a group of convoy ship captains. The result was utter confusion. To remedy this a number of retired naval captains were introduced as "Chief Navigation Officers of Convoy". This, in effect, produced divided command, the Chief Navigation Officer having charge of the convoy ships and the Senior Escort Captain commanding the escort vessels. The method of coordination was left to these two officers thus producing a variety of methods and generally poor results. Some Chief Navigation Officers made their headquarters on an escort vessel and used flag signals. This was unsatisfactory, particularly in bad weather. Some used their escort vessels like sheep dogs to round up stragglers, some paid no attention to the escort commander, particularly if the latter was the junior.

Naval General Headquarters tried the expedient of placing classmates in these two positions and also tried making the senior of the two the overall commander. Neither innovation helped the situation very much and finally to improve matters there were established 8 Escort Convoys with flag officers in command. But these flag officers and their staffs remained shore based and were administrative commands only. The Chief Navigation Officer and escort commanders were retained in their respective assignments and matters did not improve as desired.

The next step was to provide these Escort Convoy Commanders with flag ships and to make the tactical commanders of both convoy and escort. Although it was planned to have 8 of these organizations, there were never more than four.

- Q. If I send an official questionnaire to the Navy Minister asking for information of planned and actual construction of escorts and charts showing the development of convoy organization during the war, will you be able to provide the information?

A. Yes.

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- Q. What reports of actions were made upon completion of a convoy escort operation?
- A. Upon return to port the Chief Navigation Officer or convoy commander made a personal report. Also the escort commander made a written action report in addition to submitting the ship's logs.
- Q. Why did you so often sail unescorted merchant ships in groups rather than singly when they were routed through dangerous waters?
- A. There were several reasons for sailing them in groups most of which developed from experience. First, we considered it better for communications and easier to keep track of our ships; second, we considered that a group of ships offered better defense against air attack; third, it was possible to rescue survivors, and fourth, it made best use of the experience of our convoy commanders. We tried sailing ships singly and in pairs but our experience showed it was better to form them into larger groups.
- Q. Give me the names or description of your merchant ships sunk in CORON Bay Philippines by carrier air attack in September, 1944.
- A. I know of the following:
Naval vessels sunk
AKITSUSHIMA - provision ship
IRAKO - depot ship
KAMOI - transport
Transports sunk
KOA MARU (JDFJ)
KOGYO MARU (JFEM)
one name unknown
Transports burned
2 - names unknown
- Q. Can you identify any of the vessels sunk by carrier air attack at or near SAIGON on 12 January, 1945?
- A. I know of the following:
Naval escort ships:
KASHII
No. 35 coast defense vessel
No. 43 coast defense vessel
No. 51 coast defense vessel
No. 101 sweeper
No. 103 coast patroller
No. 31 submarine chaser
No. 41 submarine chaser
No. 43 submarine chaser
Transports:
More than 10
- Q. Where were the carriers which were employed in convoy escort sunk?
- A. KUMOTAKA (UNYO) 17 September, 1944
KAMITAKA (SHINYO) 17 November, 1944
UMITAKA (KAIYO) 10 August, 1945
OKITAKA (CHUYO) 3 December, 1943
OTAKA (TAIYO) 18 August, 1944

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