

RESTRICTED

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

INTERROGATION NO (USSBS NO 459)
(NAV NO 101)

Place: Tokyo
Date: 17 November 1945
Time: 1415 - 1530

Division of origin: Naval Analysis Division

Subject: Sinking of the USS HOUSTON and HMAS PERTH - 1 March 1941;
Operations of First Transportation Corps in defense of
the PHILIPPINES - 1944.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Rear Admiral SHOJI, Akira, IJN was Captain of the MOGAMI in the Pacific Ocean from September 10, 1941 to 1 November 1942; Captain of NACHI in the North Pacific from 16 November 1942 to September 1943; Chief Staff Officer of MAIZURU Naval Station at MAIZURU from September 1943 to September 1944; Promoted to Rear Admiral 1 May 1944; Commander of the 1st Transportation Corps at TAIWAN and MANILA from 25 September 1944 to April 1945.

Where interviewed: Meiji Building Room 238

Interrogators: Commander T.H. Moorer, USN
Lt. Commander J.A. Field, USNR

Interpreter: Lt. Commander S. Millstein, USNR

Allied Officers Present: None

SUMMARY

Rear Admiral SHOJI describes the sinking of the USS HOUSTON and HMAS PERTH and also discusses the operations of the First Transportation Corps in defense of the PHILIPPINES - 1944.



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TRANSCRIPT

- Q. List the Forces assigned to the MALAYA Force on 8 December 1941.
- A. Forces assigned were the 7th Cruiser Squadron composed of four cruisers SUZUYA, KUMANO, MIKUMA, MOGAMI, and the Third Torpedo Squadron composed of the light cruiser YURA and 12 destroyers.
- Q. Trace the course of the MOGAMI from 7 December up to and including the MALAYAN Operations.
- A. The MOGAMI group operated West of BORNEO in support of the landing at MIRI and KUCHING using CAMRANH BAY as a base. After completion of the MALAYA Landings the MOGAMI returned to HAINAN and rendezvoused with the JAVA invasion force. This force arrived at unloading point off BATAVIA at 2300 29 February.
- Q. I think it was during this operation that the HOUSTON was sunk. Please describe the action from the first time the HOUSTON was sighted until she was finally sunk.
- A. The direct support unit was composed of the FIFTH Destroyer Flotilla with the cruiser NATORI as the Flagship, plus THIRD Destroyer Flotilla with the cruiser YURO as Flagship. Each Flotilla consisted of nearly ten destroyers. The indirect support unit consisted of two cruisers MIKUMA and MOGAMI, plus one destroyer. In addition there were nearly fifty transports which carried Army forces. These units with cruiser and destroyer escorts left SANGA on HAINAN ISLAND on 18 February at 10 o'clock and proceeded to vicinity of BATAVIA. At 2300 on the 29th of February they arrived at BANTEN BAY. The length of time required to make the cruise was due principally to the fact that when information was received that Allied Forces were in the vicinity of BATAVIA the force would reverse course and proceed north until the area was considered clear.

The Destroyer (FUBUKI) which was on patrol north of BANTEN BAY first sighted the HOUSTON March 1st at 0030 TOKYO Time. The HOUSTON was followed by the PERTH. The HOUSTON was sighted about 12 miles from SOEMBA STRAIT. The FUBUKI was north of the HOUSTON and turned so as to follow her. At the same time MOGAMI and MIKUMA were patrolling to the north and as soon as they saw the firing from the Allied ships they turned and headed for the STRAIT in order to prevent their escape. At about 0130 the cruisers closed within range of the HOUSTON and PERTH. Prior to this time the HOUSTON sighted the NATORI and patrolling destroyers to starboard ahead, and turned northwest towards them. Upon sighting Japanese destroyers the HOUSTON and PERTH ceased firing at transports and turned sharply to the right and headed to the north northwest, it was at this time that the FUBUKI which had been trailing the Allied ships delivered a very effective torpedo attack on the HOUSTON. At the time the HOUSTON was torpedoed the MOGAMI and MIKUMA were several miles to the north and had not yet entered the engagement. Simultaneously with the right turn by the HOUSTON and PERTH they ceased firing at the transports and directed the fire towards the NATORI and patrolling destroyers. The HOUSTON was torpedoed by FUBUKI at about 0100. After being hit by the torpedo the HOUSTON gradually slowed from 20 to 10 knots. The PERTH remained in company and the Allied ships continued to fire at the destroyers. At 0130 the MOGAMI and MIKUMA had closed the range sufficiently to enter the engagement. When this firing began the HOUSTON and PERTH ceased firing at the destroyers to the south and directed their fire at the Japanese cruisers, the Japanese destroyers withdrew in order not to interfere with the cruisers. Because of PANJANG ISLAND being dead ahead and the fact that Japanese cruisers were on opposite course to the PERTH and HOUSTON, they reversed course to starboard thereby closing the range and continued the action immediately after changing course. The PERTH was sunk at 0145, the HOUSTON was sunk 15 minutes later at 0200.

Transcript of interrogation of (Rear Admiral SAOJI, Akira, IJN)

As soon as the ships were sunk the Japanese cruisers returned to their station.

- Q. Were these ships sunk solely by cruiser gunfire or did the Japanese destroyers enter the action also?
- A. In addition to gunfire the Japanese heavy cruisers also attacked with torpedoes and towards the end of the action the PERTH and HOUSTON were torpedoed by the destroyers which had previously withdrawn. The torpedo hits were decisive factors in sinking these ships.
- Q. At what range were the HOUSTON and PERTH firing at the transports?
- A. Nearly seven miles at the beginning. The range was rapidly close and finally it was so close that the Japanese transports were subjected to heavy machine gun fire.
- Q. Did the PERTH use torpedoes against the transports?
- A. During the engagement two or three of the transports were sunk and several were damaged by gunfire; also personnel were lost from machine gun fire. However, it is thought that the main damage was caused by torpedoes, probably fired by Japanese destroyers, attempting to hit the HOUSTON. I am not sure whether the torpedoes were from FUBUKI or from patrolling destroyers north of BANTEN BAY. In the latter case they would have been fired at extremely long range.
- Q. What damage was inflicted on Japanese cruisers and destroyers by allied gunfire?
- A. One Japanese destroyer was hit shortly after the HOUSTON was torpedoed. Although there were many near misses there were no direct hits on the Japanese cruisers. After the PERTH was sunk the HOUSTON divided her fire so as to attack both Japanese cruisers. The fire was very accurate. Many straddles but no hits.
- Q. At what range was the engagement between the HOUSTON and PERTH and the MIKUMO and MOGAMI fought?
- A. From 7 to 5 kilometers.
- Q. What was the exact location of the sinking of the Allied vessels?
- A. PERTH and HOUSTON were sunk in that order north of SOEMBA STRAIT. I do not remember the exact location.

Note:

For track chart of the above action see Annex "A" attached herewith. The remainder of interrogation pertains to operations of the First Transportation Corps during the defense of the PHILIPPINES - 1944.

- Q. I understand that you commanded the First Transportation Corps, which was charged with PHILIPPINE reinforcement in the latter part of 1944. To whom were you responsible for the operations of this command?
- A. This command, which was organized on 25 February 1944 was under the direct control of the Combined Fleet.
- Q. Were you not responsible to the Commander, Southwest Area Fleet in MANILA?
- A. That came later. I am not sure of the date, but it was about 17 October that I was put under the direct control of the Southwest Area Fleet.
- Q. Were you at MANILA at that time?
- A. The headquarters of the First Transportation Corps was organized in JAPAN proper, and moved to FORMOSA on 23 October and to MANILA about the 28th, then briefly back to FORMOSA returning to MANILA about 7 November.

Transcript of interrogation of (Rear Admiral SHOJI, Akira, IJN)

Headquarters finally left MANILA for FORMOSA on 30 December 1944.

Q. What was the purpose of organizing the First Transportation Corps?
A. It was organized for the transport of supplies and personnel.

Q. Did you have a regular complement of ships assigned your Corps?
A. When first organized, the First Transportation Corps was composed of nine transport ships and as time went on new ships built in JAPAN were added. In the end about 30 ships were permanently under the control of the First Transportation Corps.

Q. In view of the nature of your duties at this time, perhaps you could tell us whether the Army originally planned to reenforce and strongly defend only LUZON, or whether it was planned to establish a mobile counter-landing force which was to oppose our invasion at whatever point in the PHILIPPINES we might land?
A. I am not sure, but both alternatives seem to me to be correct.

Q. Did your Transportation Corps have any particular mission assigned in connection with the SHO-GO Operation?
A. At this time some small landing vessels were put under my command to supplement the transport force, and we carried one brigade and also war material to MANILA.

Q. Are you acquainted with the TA-GO Plan for the reenforcement of ORMOC?
A. Yes, in this operation I carried personnel and material to LEYTE; this plan was made after 17 October when your landings began.

Q. At that time, was the TA-GO Operation considered to be a change in the basic strategy for the defense of the PHILIPPINES?
A. I am not sure about that. However, I did have part of the responsibility for the LEYTE reenforcement and at that time great importance was placed on this operation. My force was ordered entirely to this duty.

Q. What strength was made available to you for escort?
A. No escort was provided me. Once or twice I had some destroyer support, but these transport vessels were heavily equipped with AA guns and machine guns so it was not thought necessary to have many escorts.

Q. How about air cover from Japanese fighter planes?
A. I recognized the importance of this type of protection and requested support from planes, but I did not get as much as I desired. These planes were requested both from the Army and the Navy, inasmuch as the LEYTE reinforcement was a joint operation, conducted in coordination. We had support alternatively from the Army and the Navy, one one day and the other the next, or sometimes one from 0800 to 1000 and the other from 1000 to 1200, etc. I would make the requests but the allocation of planes was not made by me. Both Army and Navy tried to meet my requests but I still did not get as many planes as I requested.

Q. How many convoys did you send to LEYTE?
A. I reached MANILA on 7 November, and convoys were sent from the beginning of November to the beginning of December; nine convoys were sent during this period.

Q. Roughly how many troops were successfully landed on LEYTE?
A. About one brigade of Army troops and nearly one company of Marines. Some merchant ship transports were added to the Transportation Corps for this operation.

Transcript of interrogation of (Rear Admiral SHOJI, Akira, IJN)

Q. Was that the number that was sent from MANILA, or the number that actually reached LEYTE?

A. That number actually reached LEYTE.

Q. Roughly what were the losses in personnel sent from MANILA?

A. The loss in these operations was three ships at ORMOC and two off MASBATE and two off MARINDUQUE, so far as my Transportation Corps was concerned. All these losses were caused by aircraft bombing and strafing. What the losses in these ships of personnel and material amounted to, I do not recollect.

Q. Were other ships not connected with your Transportation Corps involved in the reinforcement of ORMOC?

A. There were some.

Q. Who controlled such ships?

A. At one time the Commander of Torpedoes (DesRon Commander) controlled the operation, and at another time the Commander of Escort Group would be in control. At one time also, by order of the Commander of the Southwest Area Fleet, some ships under my own direct control were placed under the control of these commands.

Q. Do you know the dates of the losses to your ships that you mentioned?

A. I don't recollect the precise dates. These losses were caused not at the same time but at separate times.

Q. Do you know what were the results of the strike by our carrier aircraft against your shipping in CORON Bay?

A. None of my ships were there at that time, and I do not know what damage was incurred by other ships.

Q. Could you give a general estimate of the results of our carrier plane strikes on shipping in MANILA Bay?

A. I was stationed at MANILA from October until late December, and during this period, to the best of my memory, two cruisers were lost and perhaps three or more destroyers although I am not sure, and one tanker and several merchant ships. These are the losses which I now remember, but probably there were more. In any event MANILA Bay became extremely difficult for shipping, so our ships were diverted to SAN FERNANDO; this change was decided upon at the end of November and put into effect at the beginning of December.

Q. From the beginning of December, then, MANILA was no longer of importance as a port?

A. A very few ships entered MANILA Bay after this time, but as a port it had lost its importance.

R-E-S-T-R-I-C-T-E-D

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U. S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY

Washington, D. C.
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Interrogation No. USSBS 459 - Sup
(Nav No. 101)

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1 March 1941 Operations of First Transportation
Corps in defense of the PHILIPPINES - 1944.

Interrogation of: Rear Admiral SHOJI, Akira, I.J.N.

Interrogation by: Commander T. H. Moorer, USN
Lt. Commander J. A. Field, USNR

The attached chart(s) supplement Interrogation No. USSBS
459 (Nav No. 101).

Enclosure: "A"



