

HEADQUARTERS
U.S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY
(PACIFIC)

RESTRICTED

INTERROGATION NO. 428

Place: Tokyo
Date: 23 Nov 1945

Division of Origin: Military Analysis Division

Subject: 1) A COMPARISON AND EVALUATION OF AMERICAN AND JAPANESE PLANES
AND TACTICS
2) THE MANCHURIAN INCIDENT OF 1939

Personnel Interrogated and Background of Each: Major SAKAI, Iori

A graduate of the Army Air Academy (RIKUGUN SHIKAN GAKKO) in 1932. Previously served as an EM from 1927, reaching rank of Sgt. prior to entering the Air Academy. Assigned to 6th Flying Regiment (HIKORENTAI) in Heijo, Korea in February 1934. In July 1935 was a student at Akeno Air School and from August 1936 until March 1938 was an instructor at Tokorozawa Air School and then until July 1941 he served in the 64th Flying Regiment in China and Manchuria. From July 1941 until April 1943 he was again at Akeno as an instructor. From April 1943 until the end of the war he was with the Army Air Testing Dept. (RIKUGUN KOKU SHIN-SABU) at Tachikawa.

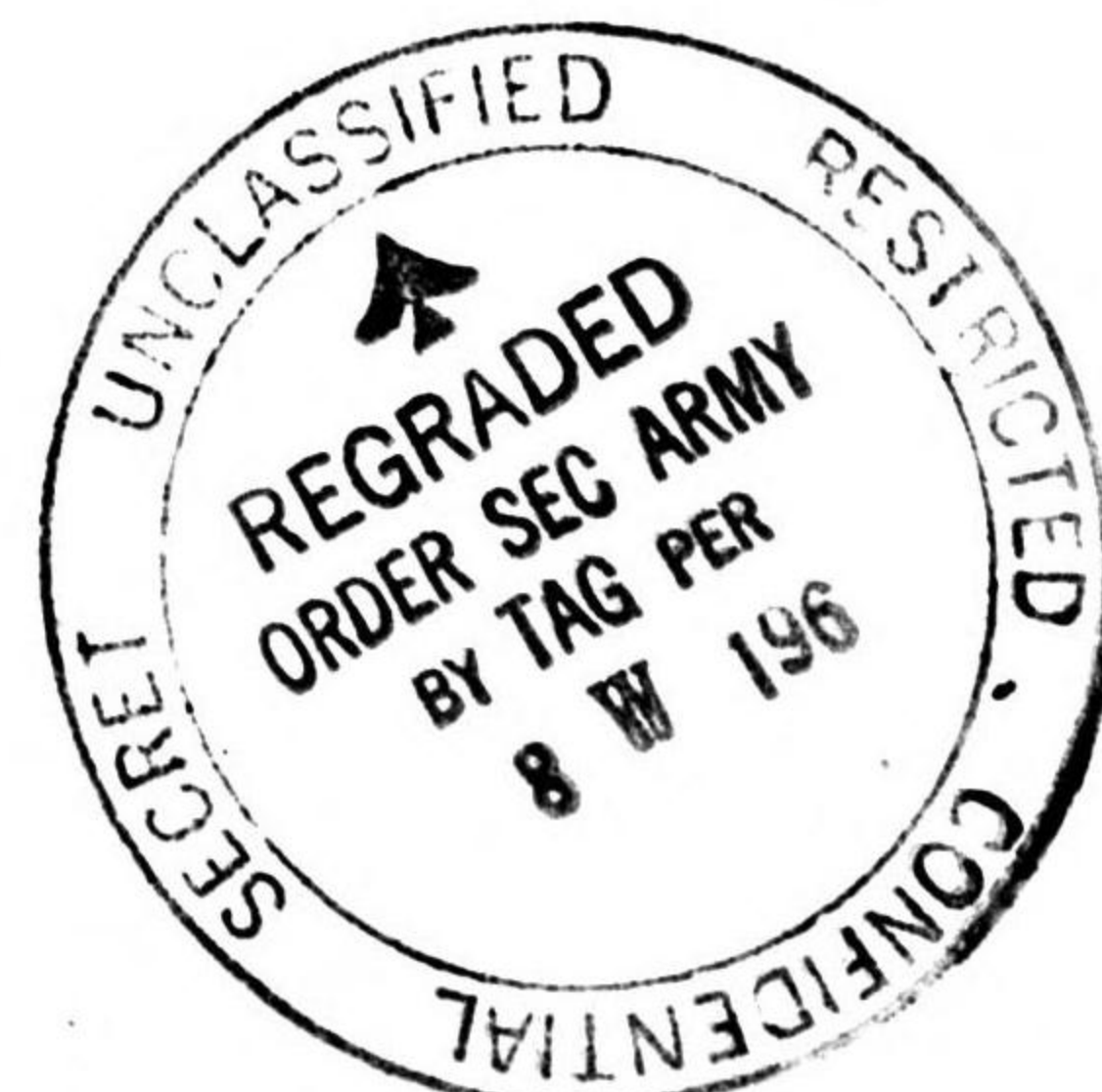
Interrogators: Major John J. Driscoll; Captain John C. West

Interpreter: Mr. YANO, Haro

SUMMARY

Major SAKAI was a fighter pilot during the fighting along the Russo-Manchurian border in August and September 1939. He was able to give a graphic account of his experiences there which seemed typical of the utter confusion and lack of organization which characterized the whole Japanese operation. As a test pilot during most of the present war, he was able to give a good evaluation of most Japanese fighter planes. He also was able to give some information on types and methods of aerial gunnery training.

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Q. How much flying time do you have?

A. About 5,000 hours on 50 different types of a/c.

Q. How many planes have you shot down?

A. I have a total of 15 to my credit. They are all Russian a/c, but 4 of them were piloted by Chinese during the operations there.

Q. Will you tell us in more detail about your experiences in the China and Russo-Manchurian operations?

A. Well, my unit (64 HIKOSENTAI) was moved up from China to take part in the fighting which was on the Nomonhan plain near the border. There was next to no movement of the ground troops. The whole operation was a battle for aerial supremacy, and even the relatively minor ground operations were directed toward seizing each other's airfields. In some cases, these airfields were less than 200 kilometres apart. We had about 10 airfields, while the enemy had 20 to 30. It was the worst operation I've ever been through. I had to fly 4 to 6 sorties a day and I was so greatly fatigued that often I could barely see to land my plane. The enemy planes came over like a black cloud, and our losses were very heavy.

Q. How many Japanese planes were involved in this fighting?

A. I don't know exactly. Everything was very confused, both then and later. And, of course, now, all the records are burned. I think that there were 5 fighter regiments, two recon regiments, and possibly 3 regiments of bombers. I know they moved practically all the a/c out of China for the operation as well as massing in that area all the a/c in Manchuria.

Q. What were your losses in personnel and a/c?

A. I don't know exactly. But I do know that we lost about two-thirds of our pilots and planes and it is my impression that other units suffered similar losses.

Q. You were very fortunate to have come out alive.

A. Yes. Especially after one sortie in which I returned with over 50 holes in my plane.

Q. I note that your next assignment after your combat operations was as an instructor. Was this by reason of your combat experience?

A. I suppose it was. It was a very common experience, particularly after the Manchurian incident, for combat pilots to be taken back as instructors.

Q. What combat lessons do you feel as though you learned from your experiences which you could pass on to your students?

A. Well, it caused me to put great conviction into my efforts at teaching. We had excellent text books which embodied all my combat-learned tactics and I had great confidence in them.

Q. Were these text books written by people who had fought with you?

A. I don't know. However, I think that they were adapted from the latest American and British books on air tactics. I don't think that they were written by a Japanese, but they covered very well everything that I had learned in combat.

Q. What other impressions did you get from the Manchurian incident?

- A. Well, I felt very keenly the lack of aircraft which was our greatest single weakness. Of course, we also lacked pilots.
- Q. What about your experiences in China?
- A. As I have said, I was in China from 1938 until 1941 with the exception of the time spent in Manchuria in 1939. In China, our ground forces were very strong and the Chinese Air Force was very weak. We had to search out the Chinese planes to get any encounters. In fact, we spent most of our time doing that. Our air force in China was very strong.
- Q. Did you use China as a sort of testing or training ground for your pilots?
- A. The units (HIKOBUTAI) remained the same there, but there was a great rotation of personnel. I believe they did rotate the personnel more than in normal units so everyone could get experience.
- Q. Do you know what air strength you had in China?
- A. Not exactly, but my impression was in 1939 that we had 3 Flying Brigades (HIKODAN) there, one each in North, Central, and South China, respectively.
- Q. In your aerial gunnery, what sighting system did you use?
- A. We used an optical sight, model 100, having a reticle with three concentric rings representing air speed of 100 kilometres, 200 kilometres, and 300 kilometres. The apparent speed of the target decreased as did the angle of approach.
- Q. What other gun sights did you use operationally?
- A. I used only this model, from 1940 until the end of the war.
- Q. Did you use tracer ammunition?
- A. Yes, one in every four rounds. The other rounds were usually one incendiary and two armor-piercing. This was standard with my unit, but varied according to the tactical commander's decision.
- Q. Did the tracer aid your sighting?
- A. Only to a very limited extent. We had no training in its use.
- Q. What other gunnery training did you receive?
- A. We had three phases of training:
1) In ground school, we had training in recognition of the aspect angle of the target aircraft.
2) Camera gunnery exercises.
3) Tow target firing.
- Q. What type of gun cameras did you use?
- A. Principally, still pictures. We had used movie cameras to a limited extent, but this procedure was far from perfected.
- Q. What problems did you have with the movie cameras?
- A. Mostly mechanical failures. These precision instruments were poorly constructed. Furthermore, the film would run out, and often the photographic results were poor.
- Q. Was this gunsight satisfactory in your estimation?

- A. This gunsight was very inadequate. We should have had automatic computing gunsights such as we heard were in use in the U.S. Air Force. We were doing research on automatic sighting devices.
- Q. What fighter a/c were considered the best combat types for the years 1939-45?
- A. From 1939 until the end of 1941, the T. 97 was considered the best; from 1941 until the end of 1943, the T.1 (Ki 43 - "Oscar") was best with the T.97 next best. From the end of 1943 until the conclusion of the war, the T.4 (Ki 84 - "Frank") was best, but toward the end of the war, we developed the Ki 100 which many considered just as good if not a better a/c. During this latter stage the T.1 ("Oscar") and the T.3 (Ki-61 which was a slightly different version of the Ki-100) were considered the second best planes (fighters).
- Q. What were the principal defects encountered by you in your testing of Japanese Fighter aircraft?
- A. The design of water-cooled engines was very inferior. This type engine was subject to all varieties of breakdowns.
- Q. What was the armament on these a/c?
- A. T.97 - 2x7 mm MG
T.1 - 2x7 mm MG plus 1x13 mm MG
T.3 - 2x13 mm MG plus 2x20 mm cannon
T.4 - (Same as T.3)
Ki 100 - 2x20 mm cannon
Ki 102 - 1x37 mm plus 2x20 mm cannon
- Q. What is your personal opinion of the ideal fighter gun-battery?
- A. I believe that a fighter should have more than 4 guns, with each larger than 20 mm. Even 10 guns would not be excessive provided the maneuverability was not materially affected.
- Q. What was the extent of Army-Navy cooperation?
- A. There was none whatsoever, until towards the end of the war. However, to be effective, this cooperation would have had to have been in effect a long time ago.