

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

INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS #90)

NAV No. (17)

DIVISION OF ORIGIN: Naval Analysis

SUBJECT: Invasion of the PHILIPPINES and NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Captain ISHIHARA, Kawakita was on the Staff of the 3rd Fleet where he was stationed on the ASHIGARA from June 1940 to April 1941. Since April 1941 he has been with the Military Affairs Bureau of Navy Ministry (Gummukyoku).

Where interviewed: Room-749-MEIJI Building.

Interrogator: T. H. Moorer, Comdr., USN.

Interpreter: R.(JP) Brown, Lt. (jg), USNR.

ALLIED OFFICERS PRESENT: None.

SUMMARY

The general plan for the invasion of the PHILIPPINES and the NETHERLAND EAST INDIES was simple in concept but the execution was very complex. This interrogation covers the movements of the Japanese Third Fleet which actually conducted the innumerable small invasions from LUZON to JAVA. Captain ISHIHARA furnishes general information on Allied Air Attacks, on Japanese invasion forces, and the action at LUZON, MAKASSAR ATRAITTS, BALI and the JAVA SEA. Of special interest is the description of the destruction of the United States ships HOUSTON and POPE and the British ships EXETER and ENCOUNTER.

Transcript of Interrogation (Captain Kawakita ISHIHARA)

- Q. List the Japanese forces which were assigned the mission of invading LUZON?
- A. The forces were as follows:
- (1) First Base Force.
 - (2) Second Base Force.
 - (3) Sixty Submarine Sqd.
 - (4) Two Mine Layers.
 - (5) One Seaplane Carrier (15 planes).
- The Base Forces were composed of troop transports and ships loaded with shore defense guns and ammunition. The above forces were supported by three heavy cruisers (ASHIGARA, Flag Ship), one light cruiser and four or five destroyers.
- Q. What time during the approach from FORMOSA to LUZON did the force receive the first air attack?
- A. We were not attacked at any time during the approach, but were attacked after the landing operation commenced on 22 December.
- Q. How many times were you attacked by aircraft?
- A. We were attacked during the course of the entire day, 22 December.
- Q. Were Japanese fighters available to protect the Japanese landing force?
- A. No fighters were available.
- Q. Did any of the Japanese ships receive damage from air attacks?
- A. One mine layer was sunk by strafing at VIGAN.
- Q. Was the cruiser ASHIGARA damaged by air attacks?
- A. The ASHIGARA was bombed about 100 miles Northwest of LINGAYEN by five American four-engine bombers, but no damage was received. After the attack the Japanese intercepted a radio message from the Americans claiming that the Battleship HARUNA had been sunk, but the HARUNA was not present and no damage was received by any ship.
- Q. Were any large ships with the ASHIGARA at the time?
- A. Yes, she was accompanied by two heavy cruisers.
- Q. What did the ASHIGARA do after the attack?
- A. We intercepted a radio message ordering the American aircraft to attack again. The ASHIGARA moved to the Northwest into a rain squall and wasn't attacked again.
- Q. What ships were to bombard the beach prior to the landing?
- A. One light cruiser and about five destroyers gave fire support to the landing.
- Q. Did the ships supporting the landing suffer any damage from air attacks?
- A. Yes, the light cruiser received several strafing holes from a close bomb.
- Q. Were the destroyers damaged by air attacks?
- A. The destroyers also received some kind of damage, but no way interfered with the operation and did not interfere with their battle efficiency.
- Q. After the LUZON landing was completed, describe the movements of the Third Fleet.

- A. The Third Fleet returned to FORMOSA for services and then proceeded to DAVAO.
- Q. When the Third Fleet arrived at DAVAO, was the invasion by the Japanese landing force underway?
- A. Yes, the invasion was completed.
- Q. What was the next move made by the Third Fleet?
- A. The Third Fleet was split up and proceeded to JOLO - 6 January, TARAKAN - 11 January, MINADO - 11 January.
- Q. Were the forces in DAVAO attacked by air?
- A. Yes, one of the heavy cruisers embarked was hit in the bow with a bomb and forced to return to Japan for repair. I think this attack was made by B-17s.
- Q. Are you familiar with the attack on shipping at JOLO by American flying boats?
- A. No, however, a tanker proceeding to TARAKAN about the same time was attacked from the air and was seriously damaged.
- Q. Was the Third Fleet attacked by surface ships or submarines during the operation in the PHILIPPINES?
- A. The seaplane carrier at APAREI was attacked by a submarine ten or eleven times, but all were misses except one torpedo which did not explode. No damage was received. In addition, one destroyer was sunk by submarine south of MAKASSAR and I think one at MIRI, but not sure.
- Q. Do you know of the attack on Japanese transports by the American destroyers at BALIKPAPAN on 24 January?
- A. Yes, I will tell you all I know. The American destroyers slipped through the Japanese screen and commenced an attack, maneuvering very fast. The Japanese were unable to identify the ships and couldn't fire at them because they were so close to the Japanese transports. Heavy damage was received by two or three transports, but I don't think any were actually sunk. These transports did not have troops aboard, since they had unloaded them the afternoon before. The attack caused much confusion. The Japs thought that these American ships were Cruisers, and Japanese cruisers north of BALIKPAPAN steamed south to support the force, but did not arrive until after the American Cruisers left.
- Q. Did the attack by the American destroyers delay the Japanese movement to the South?
- A. That did not interfere anyway.
- Q. Describe the movements of the Third Fleet as the Japanese moved further to the South?
- A. On 26 January we occupied KENDARI and on the 31 January we occupied AMBON. On the 4th of February the Japanese Naval Air Force conducted a very successful attack on the American and Dutch Cruisers.
- Q. Do you know of the action South of BALI on 19 - 20 February, at night?
- A. Yes, a Japanese Force of two troop transports and six destroyers occupied BALI in order to procure the airfield for use against JAVA. When returning from this operation on the night of 19 February, they encountered a force of American ships, estimated to be four or five destroyers or possibly cruisers. It was very dark and identification was difficult. The Japanese attempted to use search lights, but they were not very effective. We also had difficulty with the torpedoes which exploded prematurely and in some cases were mistaken for hits on the enemy.

Transcript of Interrogation (Captain Kawakita ISHIHARA)

We received major damage to two destroyers which were forced to return to MAKASSAR. One of the destroyers was towed and the other could only proceed at eight knots. We estimated that one allied destroyer was sunk and there was probability that another was damaged.

Q. Do you know what forces were available in the JAVA SEA for the invasion of JAVA?

A. Yes, in the SOEMBA STRAIT was a part of the force that had supported the invasion of BRITISH MALAYA. Just north of SOERABAJA was located another force of three heavy cruisers and about 2 destroyers. A third force composed of 2 heavy cruisers and four destroyers was stationed to the Eastward of SOERABAJA Force as a support force. This force included ASHIGARA, which was the flag ship of the Commander of the Third Fleet, Vice Admiral TAKAHASHI. He was in command of the entire operation. The troops for the invasion of JAVA were sailed from JAPAN, FORMOSA, and the PHILIPPINES. The transports carrying the troops which invaded western JAVA assembled in LINGGA with the Seventh Squadron of the MALAYA force and proceeded to vicinity of BATAVIA. The transports carrying the troops which invaded the SOERABAJA AREA assembled at JOLO and proceeded through the MAKASSAR STRAIT to JAVA. At the same time all combatant ships of the Third Fleet which had participated in the various invasions I told of before rendezvoused in the vicinity of MAKASSAR and proceeded into the JAVA SEA on 27 February.

Q. Tell me all you know about the Battle of JAVA SEA?

A. When the Japanese force moved towards JAVA, we didn't expect to fight the Battle of the JAVA SEA because we thought the air attacks on the allied ships on 4 February had seriously damaged most of them. Although ships were seen in SOERABAJA, it was considered that they were too badly damaged to fight. We were taken aback when the allied forces were discovered. The transport force was immediately ordered to retire to the North and the Eastern Support Force composed of two cruisers and four destroyers steamed at full speed to support the SOERABAJA Force. This was necessary since it was thought that the enemy out numbered us in cruiser strength. First attack was in the late afternoon and the Japanese destroyers made a torpedo attack. We thought that two or three allied cruisers were sunk, but again the Japanese torpedoes exploded prematurely and gave false indication of the damage. No damage was received by Japanese ships in the first part of the battle. Later in the night another battle was fought. Two Japanese destroyers were heavily damaged and temporarily put out of action and retired to MAKASSAR. The actual damage to the allied force wasn't known, but what was left of the allied fleet withdrew and the invasion of JAVA was completed according to plans.

Q. Are you familiar with the action in which the EXETER, ENCOUNTER and POPE were sunk when they attempted to escape after the Battle of the JAVA SEA?

A. Yes, I witnessed the entire action. The two Japanese forces were maneuvering North of BAWEAN ISLANDS in support of the invasion. One force composed of two cruisers and four destroyers was 20 miles north of an additional force composed of three cruisers and ten destroyers. It was about noon time on 1 March that a destroyer in the North Force was suddenly hit by gun fire from the EXETER which was proceeding on a Westerly course accompanied by two destroyers. This was the first knowledge that the Japanese received that enemy ships were present. The EXETER steamed between the two Japanese Groups which promptly destroyed the two destroyers, EXETER and ENCOUNTER, by gun fire and torpedoes. The American destroyer POPE turned away, but was hit on the stern by a bomb from an ASHIGARA seaplane and slowed down to such an extent, that it was destroyed by surface ships. I think survivors were recovered from all ships.

Q. Also after the Battle of the JAVA SEA, the cruiser HOUSTON attempted to escape. Do you know what happened to it?

Transcript of Interrogation (Captain Kawakita ISHIHARA)

- A. Yes, while attempting to pass through the SOEMBA STRAIT, the HOUSTON steamed directly into the invasion force operating on the Western tip of JAVA. The HOUSTON steamed between two groups of cruisers and destroyers. The Southern Group was supporting troop transports. A violent battle was fought at close quarters during which the two transports loaded with troops were sunk. The HOUSTON was sunk at very short range by gun fire and torpedoes. The range was so short that the ships exchanged machine gun fire. It is estimated that the location of the sinking of the HOUSTON was in the immediate vicinity of DUIZEND ISLANDS. Survivors were recovered.