

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

RESTRICTED

INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS 389)
NAV NO. 78

Place: Tokyo
Date: 16 November 1945

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: EMPRESS AUGUSTA Bay - 2 November 1943.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Vice Admiral OMORI, S., IJN. Commander-in-Chief, RABAU
Assault Force. 15 October 1943 - 15 November 1943.

Where interviewed: IJN Staff College.

Interrogator: Captain C. Shands, USN.

Interpreter: Lt. Comdr. S. Millstein, USNR.

Allied Officers Present: None.

SUMMARY

Detailed account of Japanese operations at Battle of EMPRESS AUGUSTA Bay, 2 November 1943 resulting in sinking of SENDAI (CL) from shellfire and HATSUKAZE (DD) from collision. Minor damage to HAGURO, MYOKO (Cas), SAMIDARE and SHIRATSUYU (DDs). Japanese attempt to stop UNITED STATES landings at EMPRESS AUGUSTA Bay, during BOUGAINVILLE Occupation, thwarted by UNITED STATES cruiser-destroyer action.

Establishment of bases in BOUGAINVILLE Area accelerated neutralization of RABAU. Losses sustained in attempt to hold southern perimeter seriously effected defense of the Central PACIFIC Area.

Navigation track chart, Battle of EMPRESS AUGUSTA Bay submitted.



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TRANSCRIPT

Transcript of Interrogation (Vice Admiral OMORI, S., IJN)

- Q. Give a description, including ships present in the Battle of EMPRESS AUGUSTA Bay, 2 November 1943.
- A. Our operations during that period commenced on 31 October. The ships that were employed varied slightly due to arrivals and departures from RABAU. It was one of our weak points because we were not able to train together. However, it was necessary because we had to maintain a continuous supply line to RABAU.

At 1000 31 October, I received orders to get underway to intercept an American Task Force that had departed GUADALCANAL and was steaming up the SOLOMON ISLANDS. We did not know its destination but it was my opinion that it was SHORTLAND ISLANDS.

We got underway at 1500, 31 October and proceeded down ST. GEORGE'S Strait towards the TREASURY ISLANDS. The following Eight Fleet ships were present:

5 S (CA) MYOKO (F), HAGURO. Vice-Admiral OMURA.
3 S (1 CL) SENDAI (F) Rear Admiral IJUIENE, S. and
(CL) NAGARA and 2 DD's.

Two observation planes were MYOKO and one from the HAGURO. They searched for the UNITED STATES ships but due to bad weather were unable to find them. The planes returned to BUKA that night, while the ships retired towards RABAU at slow speed.

At 0030, 1 November, we received a report that American ships were near BUKA, so we turned to the north to intercept them. By the time that we approached SAND ISLAND we had no further contact report, so turned northwest again, returning to RABAU and anchoring at 0900, 1 November.

Immediately upon returning to RABAU, headquarters there notified me that American forces were landing at CAPE TOROKINA. I was then ordered to take a force and make a counter landing at MUTUPINA Point and near TOKO. 1000 military personnel were then being loaded upon 5 destroyer transports. At 1500, 1 November I got underway with the following ships:

5S (CA) MYOKO (F), HAGURO
10S (CA) AGANO
(DD) HATSUKAZE
WAKATSUKE
NAGANAMI
3rd (CL) SENDAI
(DD) SIGURE
SHIRATSUYU
SAMIDARE
5DD (Army personnel transports)

After reaching St. GEORGE'S Channel I received a despatch that there was a delay in loading the military personnel, so was forced to wait until 1830 before all ships rendezvoused. Due to submarine activity in this area I did not like this delay. Furthermore, it later affected our operations because the destroyers were old types which limited our speed, which prevented us from regaining the time. As soon as all ships joined up we proceeded on course 160 degrees at 26 knots. Just after leaving ST. GEORGE'S Strait a UNITED STATES submarine was sighted. In order to avoid it, we took a course to the south which caused additional delay in reaching our destination. The three reconnaissance planes which we had launched the day before came out from BUKA and gave us cover and search during the passage.

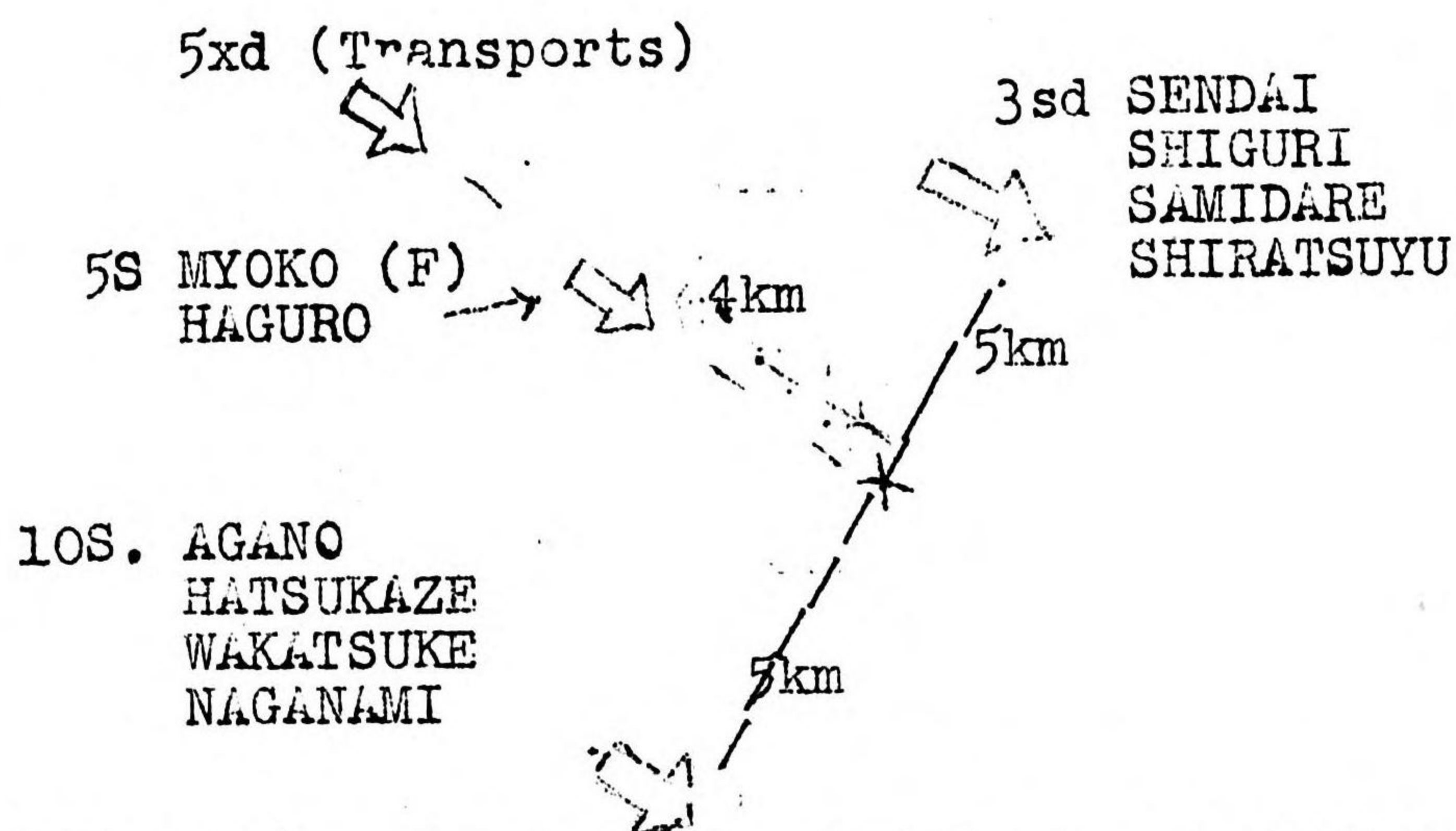
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Transcript of Interrogation (Vice Admiral OMORI, S., IJN)

Cruising Disposition



A time schedule of the main events of the battle is as follows
(All time -9):

1 November

- 1920: SENDAI attacked by one UNITED STATES plane about 6° 30'S, 153° 30'E. No damage received. Apparently a large search plane, type not remembered. The original plan was to land the troops before dawn, 2 November. In view of the initial rendezvous delay, the additional delay due to avoiding the submarine, the limiting speed of the destroyer transports at 26 knots, and the fact that we were sighted by the American plane, I recommended that the counter landing not be attempted, but that our combatant ships attempt to destroy the American transports unloading in the vicinity of EMPRESS AUGUSTA Bay.
- 2230: Approval of plan received. Five destroyer transports returned to RABAU. The remaining ships increased speed to 32 knots and proceeded to a point south of SAND ISLAND.
- 2330: HAGURO attacked by UNITED STATES plane off Cape MOLTKE. One bomb hit received amidships. Opened up side plating and reduced speed of formation to 30 knots. Due to darkness, the type of plane was undetermined.
- 2340: HAGURO reconnaissance plane sighted an American force consisting of 1 cruiser and 3 destroyers about 50 miles from the beach halfway between TORO and MOLTKE.
- 2350: Changed course to engage UNITED STATES force.
- 2400: Just after changing course information was received that reconnaissance plane had dropped flares over EMPRESS AUGUSTA Bay and found many transports unloading troops.
- Changed course again towards EMPRESS AUGUSTA Bay to engage transports.

2 November

- 0045: SENDAI sighted UNITED STATES force of 1 cruiser and 3 destroyers about 10 km. off port bow. Eighteen torpedoes were launched by the SENDAI and its destroyers. Changed course 160° to 180°. Received report that 2 torpedo hits have been made.

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Transcript of Interrogation (Vice Admiral OMORI, S., IJN)

0050: UNITED STATES ships commenced firing. SENADI received many hits, thought to be from CA's, and became un navigable. In avoiding fire of UNITED STATES ships, the destroyers SAMIDARE and SHIRATSUYU which were with the SENDAI collided. The collision occurred while in a turn just after firing torpedoes. Due to the damage received in the collision, these two destroyers were only able to navigate at 14-15 knots. Since they could not maintain sufficient speed in combat, they turned in toward the beach of BOUGAINVILLE, then proceeded back to RABAUl arriving there at 1300, 2 November.

0100: Just after collision, SAMIDARE attacked by gunfire from UNITED STATES destroyer. 3 hits received. Not much damage.

UNITED STATES forces still not definitely fixed in position. MYOKO fired starshells but were apparently duds. No illumination resulted. MYOKO under fire of UNITED STATES ships. HATSUKAZE (DD) also under fire, turned to the left to avoid, then in turning right to regain position in formation collided with the MYOKO. MYOKO apparently cut HATSUKAZE in half. One portion floated along port side of MYOKO damaging main deck structure and tearing off 2 torpedo tubes.

HAUGRO received six 6" hits. 4 of them were duds. One man killed. 5 men wounded. Minor fires started.

Due to collision and general evasive action, Japanese force now separated into three distinct groups: Fifth Cruiser Squadron (MYOKO and HAGURO) to the southwest, Tenth Cruiser Squadron (AGANO and 3 DD) in the center, Third Destroyer Squadron (SENDAI and 3 DD) to the northwest.

0113: MYOKO (F) sighted UNITED STATES force for first time bearing 080° T. CruDiv 5 changed course from 180° to 160° to close range. Opened fire on UNITED STATES force.

0120: MYOKO launched 4 torpedoes. HAGURO launched 6 torpedoes at UNITED STATES force.

0127: Received report that 1 torpedo hit leading UNITED STATES cruiser, 2 torpedo hit on second UNITED STATES cruiser, 2 torpedo hits on third UNITED STATES cruiser. Shell fire hits also reported on UNITED STATES force.

0128: Changed course to 180°T.

0137: Issued order for all ships to retire to RABAUl. This decision was based upon several factors. The definite composition of the UNITED STATES forces was never established. The analysis of reports indicated that there were at least 7 heavy cruisers and 12 destroyers opposing us. I had lost one cruiser by shell fire, one due to collision and 2 additional destroyers out of action due to collision. The MYOKO had lost 30% of its torpedo tubes. Our formation speed was reduced to 26 knots due to bomb damage of the HAGURO. We had exhausted our supply of flares. Aircraft flares did not seem effective. The HAGURO had received six 6" hits although four of them were duds. In addition I felt that I should retire by 0100 in order to be outside of the radius of dive bombers by dawn. This radius was considered 250 miles.

0140: Cru Div 10 launched 8 torpedoes at leading cruisers but it was at extreme range.

Transcript of Interrogation (Vice Admiral OMORI, S., IJN)

- 0154: CruDiv 10 reported 1 torpedo hit on a UNITED STATES cruiser.
- 0200: SENDAI sank.
- 1300: Arrived RABAU.
- 1500: RABAU attacked by about 200 B-25's. Attack directed at airfields and installations. No ships reported lost or damaged.

Summary of Losses:

- 1 (CL) SENDAI sunk from gunfire. 20 men killed, 300 missing. A number of men reached BOUGAINVILLE on rafts. I also ordered a submarine to the area. The submarine rescued some personnel including the commanding officer. About 20 of the Third Destroyer Squadron Headquarters Staff personnel were killed by shellfire.
- 1 (DD) HATSUKAZE sunk as result of collision. All personnel lost.
- 2 (DD) SHIRATSUYU and SAMIDARE damaged due to collision.
- 1 (CA) HAGURO received minor damage from shell fire.
- 1 (CA) MYOKO received one 6" hit from cruisers, and structural damage from collision.

Q. What caused your unusual number of collisions?

A. Lack of training in night operations. By the time of this battle we had lost about 40 destroyers and about 6 cruisers from the fleet that operated in the RABAU-SOLOMONS Area. In order to maintain our bases we had to substitute ships from other fleets. These ships never had an opportunity to train together. Sometimes, as in this action, they would report in the afternoon and be engaged in an action the same night.

We had some modified aircraft radar sets in this action but they were unreliable. I do not know whether the sets or the operators were poor, but I did not have confidence in them.

Q. What effect did this action have upon your plans?

A. I do not think that this action by itself was too important. However, when considered with the other actions of this campaign, it appeared to me to be the climax of your advance up the SOLOMON ISLANDS. This advance was a cleverly conceived strategic plan which we were not prepared to counter in force.

After this battle you were able to establish bases on BOUGAINVILLE which permitted you to maintain constant air assault upon RABAU, which prevented us from providing support and air cover to our bases on NEW GUINEA and NEW BRITAIN.

We had thought that your counter-action against the EMPIRE might come from the south. We planned to use RABAU as a main point of the NEW GUINEA-BISMARCK-SOLOMON perimeter defense. By your constant advancement of airbases through the SOLOMONS you were able to neutralize RABAU without actual assault. During 1943 we attempted to hold this line at all costs. It was very expensive. We lost most of our best pilots, many valuable ships and many well trained military personnel that we were unable to replace.

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

HEADQUARTERS
U. S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY

Washington, D. C.
January 1946

Interrogation No. USSBS 389 - Sup.
(Nav No. 78)

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: EMPRESS AUGUSTA Bay - 2 November 1943.

Interrogation of: Vice Admiral OMORI, S., IJN.

Interrogation by: Captain C. Shands, USN.

The attached chart(s) supplement Interrogation No. USSBS
389 (Nav No. 78).

Enclosure: Annex "A"



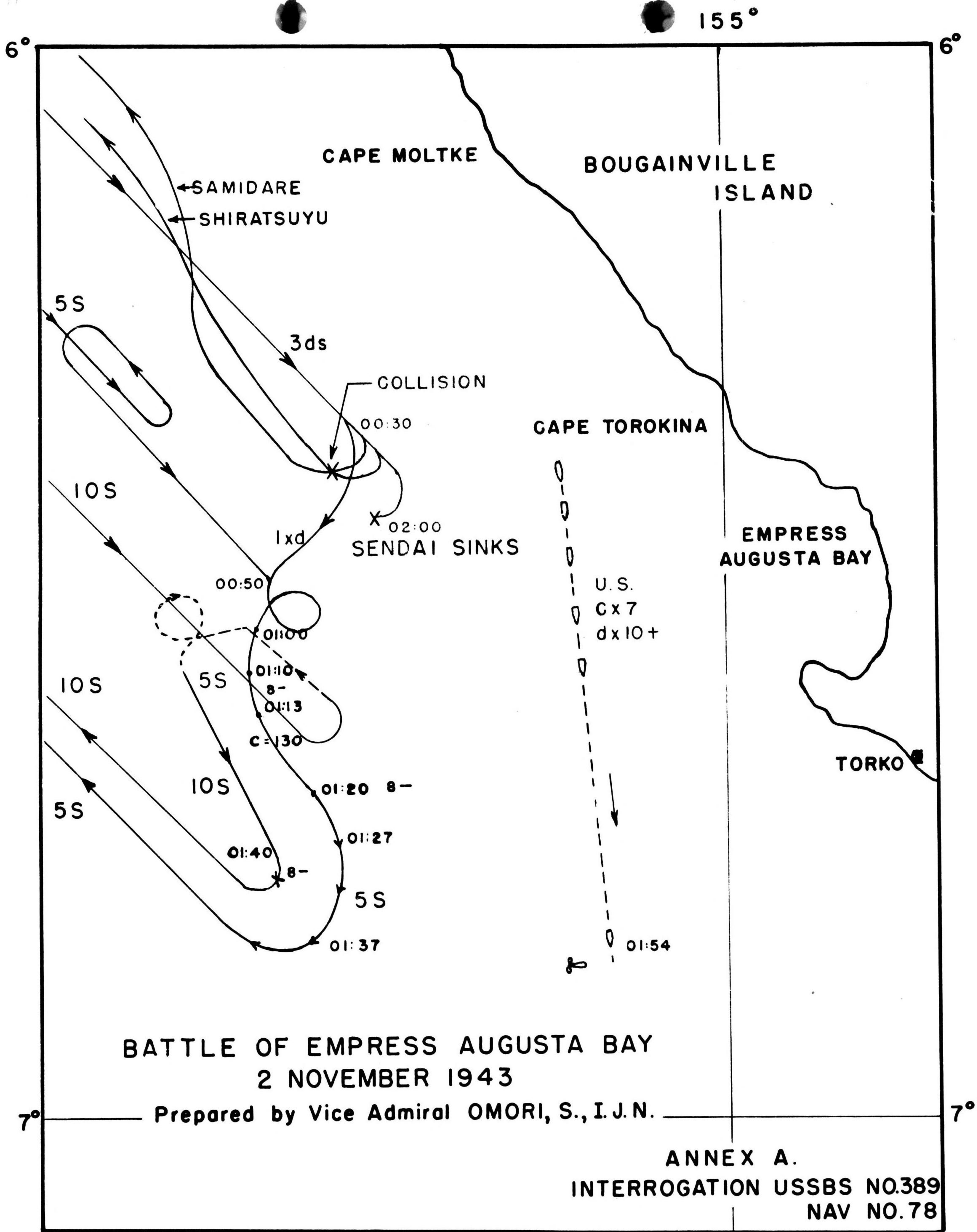


PLATE 78-1

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

INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS 390)
NAV. NO. 79

Place: Tokyo
Date: 18 November 1945

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division

Subject: Battle of SURIGAO STRAIT.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Commander NISHINO, Shigeru, IJN, commanding officer of the Japanese destroyer SHIGURE in the Battle of SURIGAO STRAIT on 25 October 1944.

Where interviewed: MEIJI Building, Room 748.

Interrogator: Lieut. Comdr. J. A. Field, jr., USNR
Interpreter: Lieut. Comdr. S. (n) Millstein, USNR

Allied Officers Present: None.

SUMMARY

Commander NISHINO is the only surviving commanding officer of the force commanded by Vice Admiral NISHIMURA, which attempted to force the southern entrance to LEYTE Gulf on the morning of 25 October 1944. His discussion of the planning and execution of this operation gives valuable information on the condition of the Japanese Navy at the time of its last desperate battle.

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TRANSCRIPT

- Q. Would you tell us what ships were in Admiral NISHIMURA's Force?
- A. The Second (battleship) Squadron composed of YAMASHIRO and FUSO, the flag being in the former, plus MOGAMI and four destroyers; these were MICHISHIO, ASAGUMO, and YAMAGUMO from DesRon 1, and SHIGURE, of which I was commanding officer.
- Q. In the SAIPAN engagement, did SHIGURE operate as a part of the Second or Third Fleet?
- A. The Second Fleet.
- Q. Had FUSO and YAMASHIRO been in either the Second or Third Fleet in the MARIANAS engagement, if not where were they?
- A. Both were in the Combined Fleet, they were in the INLAND SEA at the time of the MARIANAS Operation, I am not sure why but I think it was for training.
- Q. MOGAMI was a Second Fleet ship all the time?
- A. Yes, and participated in the MARIANAS engagement.
- Q. In regard to the SHO-GO plan, when did NISHIMURA's Force learn of their mission in the defense of the PHILIPPINES?
- A. They arrived in LINGGA on 10 October and on the 20th we received documentary orders to participate in the SHO-GO Operation.
- Q. Are you sure they arrived at LINGGA on the 10th and left on the 20th? I believe you left LINGGA for BRUNEI on the 17th or 18th.
- A. I think that possibly you are right on your dates, I now remember being at BRUNEI Bay when we received the documents.
- Q. Who issued the operation plan which was received by you at BRUNEI Bay?
- A. Evidently NISHIMURA received the order from KURITA, not from the Combined Fleet Headquarters, and on the basis of this order, NISHIMURA issued his own operation order.
- Q. You now believe, Commander, that this plan was received in BRUNEI Bay and not in LINGGA?
- A. I am positive it was at BRUNEI Bay.
- Q. Before you received this plan at BRUNEI Bay, in your own mind had you expected to operate with NISHIMURA's Force separately, or to operate in KURITA's Fleet?
- A. We knew in general that we were going to operate in the LEYTE Area, but did not know in what capacity; we came up to BRUNEI with the YAMASHIRO and in general knew we were to proceed in this area but didn't know exactly in what capacity. We knew we were going to operate in general with the Second Fleet, but the fact there was going to be a division into two forces was not known until later when we received the operation plan.
- Q. When you got the operation order what was your assigned mission?
- A. The orders were to reach LEYTE Bay at dawn on the 25th, at 0530 in the morning, the mission was to attack immediately surface forces there as well as transports which were attempting a landing. (NOTE: The time used by Commander NISHINO throughout this interrogation is one hour behind that kept by U.S. forces, e.g. the ETA at LEYTE given as 0530 was scheduled for 0630 our time.)
- Q. Was there a choice between surface forces and transports, was either one given preference?
- A. The first job was to attack the transport force, if we were fully occupied with that we would not bother with the warships, the primary mission was to destroy the transports.
- Q. What opposition did you expect inside the Gulf?
- A. I do not remember too clearly; in general the advance information was that you had two or more battleships, five or six cruisers, ten or more destroyers, and eighty transports.
- Q. Did the operation order which you received at BRUNEI include the battle plan?
- A. Yes, it did.

- Q. Will you draw the cruising, approach, and battle dispositions?
A. (See Annex "A") In the change from approach to battle disposition, the two destroyers screening YAMASHIRO fell into column astern of the two leading destroyers. This disposition was suitable either for gun or torpedo attack.
- Q. Was a conference of the Commanding Officers of these ships held before leaving BRUNEI Bay?
A. Yes.
- Q. In general what matters were discussed at this conference?
A. We were told to look out for a shoal in northern part of LEYTE Gulf. We determined to do our best. Then we had a few drinks. The Captain of YAMASHIRO and the Admiral had already talked it over at LINGGA so it was already decided, and they did not participate in the discussion.
- Q. At the time of this conference what knowledge did you have of the overall plan including coordination of the forces of Admirals KURITA, SHIMA, OZAWA, and NISHIMURA?
A. We know that SHIMA and the Fifth Fleet were coming down to help us, and there was some discussion about joining up with him; however, SHIMA was senior to NISHIMURA and therefore they couldn't cooperate. NISHIMURA did not want to be under the command of SHIMA.
- Q. What were his reasons for not wishing to subordinate himself to SHIMA?
A. To the best of my knowledge NISHIMURA was older than SHIMA and had more Naval and battle experience, in spite of that SHIMA was his superior; probably nothing more than a personal antipathy, in my opinion however, we should have joined forces.
- Q. We have been told that one reason they did not cooperate was that SHIMA did not have full plans on the operation, that he had been ordered there as an after-thought and therefore although he was senior he did not have enough information to command. Is that correct?
A. I have not heard of that. I do not know the real reasons for the failure in cooperation but merely give my opinions.
- Q. What did you know of the movements of KURITA relative to their own?
A. I was not on the Staff but I am fairly certain NISHIMURA must have known.
- Q. But did you yourself know?
A. I knew KURITA's general plan because I was in on the meeting, I knew that KURITA was supposed to approach by SAN BERNARDINO STRAIT and rendezvous with our force off SULUAN ISLAND on the 25th, after we had attacked according to our particular mission.
- Q. What time was the rendezvous scheduled?
A. I do not remember the time, it was soon after dawn because we were supposed to enter the Gulf at dawn and KURITA was to attack just off SAMAR at this time.
- Q. Was it not intended that KURITA was to enter the Gulf also to attack transports?
A. When I referred to attacking the enemy off SAMAR I meant a provisional objective, that is if an enemy was encountered, they were to attack. I think their primary objective however was to attack you in LEYTE Bay, and probably after the NISHIMURA attack in the same area. According to the best of my knowledge, NISHIMURA was to enter the Gulf and attack first, then go out to the rendezvous point, then KURITA was to go in.
- Q. While at BRUNEI Bay, at this conference was it believed that NISHIMURA's Force was strong enough to force an entrance into the Gulf against the expected opposition?
A. We thought we would succeed, but even if we did not the plan was to attack in the Bay regardless of the enemy strength. According to the estimate of the situation we would be able to force the strait; except for a possible excess of strength on your part in heavy cruisers. I thought the balance was evenly matched.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Commander NISHINO, Shigeru, IJN) - - - - -

- Q. What did you know of the projected movements of Admiral OZAWA in the northern force?
- A. I knew no details but in general I thought that OZAWA's job was to come down from the north and in an indirect way cooperate with KURITA, possibly engaging American Forces in this area (indicating area east of LEYTE and SAMAR).
- Q. Did you at that time or later have any information on the location of our Task Forces?
- A. We had occasional reports of American Task Force from patrol planes but in this particular part of the operation we were not concerned with your Task Force.
- Q. After the attack on the transports and the rendezvous with KURITA what was your plan for retirement? Were you and KURITA to retire together or separately?
- A. I do not know the details of any withdrawal plan; they must have had one but I do not know what it was.
- Q. For example, you do not know whether your force planned to withdraw by SURIGAO STRAIT or by SAN BERNARDINO STRAIT?
- A. I do not know.
- Q. When did NISHIMURA's force leave BRUNEI?
- A. At 1500 on the 22nd we left BRUNEI Bay.
- Q. Had KURITA's Force previously departed?
- A. I think KURITA's force left at 1000, I am certain KURITA left on the same day, but before we did.
- Q. What course did you follow to LEYTE?
- A. (See Annex B).
- Q. What was the purpose of these detours enroute?
- A. Following our usual practice of avoiding submarine patrol areas, and although we had no specific information at this time, from previous experience we made a wide swing to the westward from BRUNEI before turning east. Then while passing through the SULU SEA, our course was diverted to the north in an attempt to avoid the air search from MOROTAI.
- Q. What was the speed of advance during this approach?
- A. 18 knots.
- Q. What was your first contact with American Forces?
- A. About 22 or 23 carrier based planes attacked on the 24th at 0800. The FUSO received one bomb in the region of the catapult which caused a fire; her planes were destroyed, I am not sure whether there were two or three, and the fire raged for about an hour. I do not know the casualties. I think the aviation gasoline caught fire. The SHIGURE received a direct hit on the No. 1 turret, an armor piercing bomb which exploded in the turret and killed five and wounded about six. This bomb hit on SHIGURE had no effect on speed or navigability, but forced them to borrow personnel to man the gun, and the gun was inefficient; it was not put out of action, but we had to borrow radar personnel to man the gun. The FUSO, so far as I know, was not seriously affected by the hit.
- Q. No other hits on any of the other ships?
- A. No, and no near misses either; as far as I could see, the planes dove on FUSO pulling out over SHIGURE and did not attack other ships. (See Annex A)
- Q. Did the planes in this attack fire rockets?
- A. I did not see any.
- Q. Did this attack slow you down behind schedule or have any serious effect on future plans?
- A. No.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Commander NISHINO, Shigeru, IJN) - - - - -

- Q. Was this the only air attack of the day?
A. No more air attacks, no untoward incidents until arrival at SURIGAO STRAIT.
- Q. Do you know if a report of that attack was made to the other forces?
A. NISHIMURA sent a report to KURITA; this report so far as I know simply said, FUSO and SHIGURE were attacked, light damage, no effect on navigability.
- Q. What information did you have at that time, or later during daylight of the 24th on the position of Admiral SHIMA's Fleet?
A. We received word on the 24th that SHIMA's Force was coming south in the SULU SEA.
- Q. Did you ever sight it or communicate with it?
A. No.
- Q. Did you believe SHIMA would be astern or ahead of you, and why?
A. I do not know. We thought they were astern, but I do not know where or why. There was no plan as to how far behind SHIMA was supposed to come, but I do know they were supposed to follow.
- Q. During the afternoon of the 24th, what information if any did you have of KURITA's progress?
A. We received word that Admiral KURITA's Force was having a difficult time due to bombing attacks, and that he had changed his plan of going through SAN BERNARDINO STRAIT and had withdrawn back on his same course, at which time KURITA dispatched a signal to TOYODA informing him that for the above reasons he could not make passage according to plan; however TOYODA sent an answer to the effect that NISHIMURA and KURITA were to proceed according to the original plan.
- Q. Did SHIGURE receive both KURITA's message and TOYODA's reply?
A. Yes, received both messages.
- Q. Did the delay caused by KURITA's retirement have any influence on your action? For example, did you slow your advance?
A. NISHIMURA's Force continued its cruising speed according to plan without any regard for events as they happened to KURITA.
- Q. Did you feel that the message from TOYODA saying to advance applied to them as well as KURITA?
A. The message came directly from TOYODA, but NISHIMURA was simply an information addressee.
- Q. You said your time of arrival was 0500 or 0530; at what point were you supposed to be at this time in the morning?
A. We were to be at the southern entrance to SURIGAO STRAIT at 0530.
- Q. And this was the plan scheduled in the operation order?
A. That was all Admiral KURITA's order.
- Q. What time did you reach that point?
A. At 0130 in the morning.
- Q. Why did you get there four hours early?
A. I do not know.
- Q. Do you have any knowledge of a message sent from NISHIMURA to KURITA, perhaps about 2200 on the 24th, informing him that the hour of arrival had been advanced?
A. I am pretty sure that NISHIMURA must have dispatched such information although I do not know when because it was standard procedure during the day to advise KURITA of our position at certain times so KURITA must have received it. For example, NISHIMURA reported the morning air attack and save our position at that time.

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TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Commander NISHINO, Shigeru, IJN) - - - - -

- Q. So far as you know, advancing the time of arrival by four hours was the decision of Admiral NISHIMURA alone, is that correct?
- A. I am pretty certain that it was NISHIMURA's own decision. I think it may have been due to the fact that NISHIMURA was an old style Admiral and preferred a night engagement to a day engagement.
- Q. The original plan, however, had contemplated a morning daylight engagement?
- A. I think it probably was planned to have a day battle; actually NISHIMURA's time of arrival here was not according to the plan.
- Q. What were your own expectations? Did you yourself expect a day or night battle after arriving at SURIGAO?
- A. I know that NISHIMURA was the type by reputation the sort of fellow who would prefer to fight a night battle. I originally thought there would be a day battle as a result of KURITA's order.
- Q. Was the speed of 18 knots raised as you made their final approach?
- A. At midnight we increased speed from 18 to 20 knots; I think it was planned to maintain 20 knot speed until we reached the objective.
- Q. What was the best speed of FUSO and YAMASHIRO?
- A. 23 - 24 knots was top speed of the FUSO and YAMASHIRO.
- Q. When did you assume the approach disposition instead of the regular daytime cruising disposition?
- A. About 2000 on the 24th the MOGAMI and the three destroyers ASAGUMO, YAMAGUMO, MICHISHIYO, were advanced to reconnoitre ahead of the main force; my belief is that they approached to within a couple miles of PANASON ISLAND and then returned to rejoin the remainder of the force, at 2330 they rejoined.
- Q. What was the purpose of this reconnaissance?
- A. Previous routine air patrols had given us the idea that possibly there was a danger of enemy ships being active in this area; this was the reason for sending them out to make certain such ships were not there.
- Q. Do you know at what speed they were advanced?
- A. About 23 to 26 knots probably. At 2045 what were originally thought to be four American torpedo boats (later on the quantity increased) were sighted southeast of the formation at a range of between 6000 and 8000 meters, sighted by the deck watch. Upon this sighting SHIGURE, which was directly ahead of the two battleships at a distance of 2000 meters, fired flares, as a result of which the torpedo boats were plainly visible; they closed in to a distance of about 2000 meters. At this point the three ships executed a turn movement toward the torpedo boats in order to present a smaller target. I am fairly certain that torpedoes were fired by these boats, but no tracks were seen and no hits. Soon afterward, left hand turn was again made to resume course and the formation proceeded. The three ships fired a heavy barrage at the torpedo boats and I saw what I thought might have been one torpedo boat destroyed; these torpedo boats followed us until the entrance to SURIGAO STRAIT. Although we could hear their inter-ship telephone all the time, we were not able accurately to determine how many boats there were. They did not again attack.
- Q. Are you sure that the first contact with torpedo boats was west of CAMIGUIN ISLAND?
- A. To the best of my memory, it was to the west of that island; I am uncertain because the conditions for determining position were not good.
- Q. Is the time pretty certain, if not the location?
- A. Now that you bring it up, there may be an error of an hour.
- Q. What was the weather and visibility at that time, were you navigating by radar?
- A. Weather was bad with rain but the sea was calm.

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TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Commander NISHINO, Shigeru, IJN) - - - - -

- Q. Did the squalls interfere with navigation?
A. Somewhat; we did not navigate by radar however. The visibility ranged from a low of 5000 meters to a high of 10,000 meters; sometimes due to the squalls we were unable to see the mountains.
- Q. Did you know you were being shadowed by night flying aircraft at that time?
A. I did not know that.
When the three destroyers and MOGAMI returned from their patrol and rendezvoused at 2330 approximately we then formed the approach disposition. At 2400 speed was increased to 20 knots. At 0130 we passed through the entrance to SURIGAO STRAIT and at approximately 0200 three or more American destroyers were sighted to the north-northeast at a range of 8000 to 10000 meters, approaching on a southerly course. Shortly after the sighting, these destroyers changed course and went back where they had come from.
- Q. During the rest of the approach, were there any attacks by torpedo boats subsequent to the ones you mentioned before, and was there any damage?
A. No further torpedo boat attacks and no hits.
- Q. So up until the approach of the three American destroyers, no attacks and no damage?
A. That is correct. Immediately upon sighting the destroyers at 0200 searchlights were employed and the battle opened, all our ships opened fire. As far as I know, these destroyers did not fire at all, I am sure they did not fire torpedoes, and if they fired any shells, they were very few.
- Q. By their maneuvering did they appear to be attempting a torpedo attack? If so did the Japanese ships attempt evasive action?
A. I did not see them that close, I only saw their funnels; there was a possibility but they seemed too far away. At 0215 at a distance of 9,000 to 12,000 meters we saw through a smoke screen to the northwest the funnels of what we thought was one cruiser and two or more destroyers, also heading south.
- Q. Did you fire on this second group?
A. Shortly after this second sighting some of the ships opened fire on these new forces but due to the poor visibility they were unable to sight the target very well and although SHIGURE attempted to aim by radar, we could not differentiate between the ships and the land, we just got one merged reaction on the screen. We fired regardless but I think it was very ineffective.
- Q. Did the American ships in the second group launch torpedoes or open fire?
A. The second American force was inactive, fired no shots and no torpedoes.
- Q. Still no damage of any sort?
A. No. At 0235 hours immediately after assuming battle disposition, with SHIGURE the last destroyer in column, torpedo attack was received both from port and starboard sides. Hits were registered on the first three destroyers, the third destroyer YAMAGUMO sank, the MICHISHIO and the ASAGUMO were hit and though they did not sink were un navigable and fell out of the disposition. The hits that sank YAMAGUMO came from port. The SHIGURE took evasive action and avoided all torpedoes. This was comparatively easy for SHIGURE since at the moment of the attack we were still heading northeast in the transition from approach to battle disposition. I think the torpedoes which passed close to us came from the west but I am not sure. I did not see the hit which registered on YAMASHIRO but those who did told me she received a torpedo hit amidships, from which side is not know, evidently hit the magazine for the ship exploded and broke in half. No damage was inflicted on FUSO and MOGAMI.
Only torpedoes were used, there was no gunfire seen from American ships. Admiral NISHIMURA issued commands by wireless telephone, we received a communication from NISHIMURA: "We have received a torpedo attack. You are to proceed and attack all ships."
- Q. We heard from a member of the staff of Admiral SHIMA that they intercepted a telephone message from NISHIMURA to reverse course to avoid torpedo attack,

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do you recall any such message?

A. I received no such message.

Q. During these various attacks by American destroyers, and up to this message you just mentioned, did Admiral NISHIMURA issue any new instructions for the conduct of the battle?

A. No.

Q. That leaves FUSO, MOGAMI and SHIGURE still untouched, is that correct?

A. That is correct. I increased speed to 26 knots, after the torpedo attack at which speed SHIGURE maintained a northerly course for a time without any sightings and without knowing my exact position. I then made a complete turn proceeded south for a very short distance, as I was concerned about the whereabouts of YAMASHIRO. I went back to find out what had happened to YAMASHIRO and to get orders if possible, then made a second turn and proceeded north again. MOGAMI and FUSO were still continuing north at this time, and at 0255 he gave up the search for the YAMASHIRO which had been for the purpose of finding out what had happened to the flagship and also the possibility of changing the flag to my ship. At 0255 I determined there was no more use looking for the YAMASHIRO and decided I must go to the van of the force; we were unable to make telephone communication with YAMASHIRO. While searching for YAMASHIRO, the lookout informed me he had sighted what he thought was the YAMASHIRO sinking. I did not attempt to pick up survivors but shortly after this information proceeded to continue the battle. I was able to maintain communication with the FUSO.

Q. Did FUSO take charge of the operation?

A. The Captain of the FUSO, Captain BAN, took charge. At the time of my turn north at 0255 I did not know the position of the FUSO and MOGAMI relative to me, this was only discovered later.

Q. What orders did Captain BAN issue for the conduct of the battle?

A. No orders at all.

Q. How did you know he was in command?

A. On the basis of prior knowledge the BAN was senior officer next in line, I assumed that command had fallen to him, however, at no time did I communicate with Captain BAN on the FUSO nor he with me. I made radar searches but was unable to locate the enemy force.

Q. Could you locate your own ships, FUSO and MOGAMI, on your radar?

A. If they did I did not hear about it. I heard and saw vague flashes of fire in LEYTE Gulf but we got no reaction on the radar screen and made no location. At 0313 or 0315 being unsuccessful in finding the enemy, and determining that the rest of our force had been annihilated, I decided to withdraw without receiving orders from anyone. (Commander NISHINO was shown the plot of this battle reproduced as one of the plates in the CinCPac publication, Operations in the PACIFIC OCEAN AREAS, October 1944, and stated that he remembered sighting ITIBUSON ISLAND before reversing course, and that he believes he advanced farther up the Strait than this chart would indicate.)

Q. Was your ship under gunfire at any time?

A. I was receiving a terrific bombardment, there were so many near misses that the gyro compass was out, the ship was constantly trembling from force of near misses, and the wireless was out.

Q. At 0310, shortly before you turned, you said you saw FUSO and MOGAMI afire. Did they appear to be out of the action or were they continuing northward at this time?

A. MOGAMI's course was south and FUSO headed east.

Q. Was FUSO dead in the water or still underway?

A. I saw hits register on the FUSO and at that point I saw big explosions and she appeared unnavigable; shortly before this point, however, FUSO had been firing at American ships to northward.

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- Q. At 0310, when MOGAMI was sighted on fire heading south, was she still receiving gunfire?
A. MOGAMI was under constant heavy fire when we sighted her.
- Q. Did you launch your torpedoes in the general direction of the American ships, or had you already launched them, or did you take them back with you?
A. I had not fired any torpedoes during my maneuvering in the Strait in search of YAMASHIRO and my later return northward; I had received torpedo attacks but no hits. At no time did I myself fire torpedoes because I was not able to find any enemy ships; I did not fire any torpedoes before going south. At about 0315 SHIGURE received a 23cm hit on deck aft which penetrated to an oil storage tank but which did not explode.
- Q. Was this at the time you were turning, or after you had turned south that you received this hit?
A. I think it was just after turning south.
- Q. That was the only hit SHIGURE sustained during the engagement?
A. That was the only hit.
- Q. From the moment that you turned and headed south, was MOGAMI always in sight? What condition was she in?
A. When I saw MOGAMI, as far as I can recall she was dead in the water. When I started on a southerly course I was making 30 knots, so I saw her for a very short time. She was dead in the water, on fire amidships. At 0335 I lost steering control. To repair the rudder took thirty minutes. The damage was to the automatic control of the rudder lines, imposed by the force of a near miss, but was soon repaired. The rudder never was usable in satisfactory fashion, but we were able to navigate after repairing the rudder. I retired at 24 knots and at 1400 hours passed south of NEGROS and went to CORON BAY. While proceeding through the MINDANAO SEA about 1100 on the 25th, we received a bombing attack from one B-24 which was part of a flight of possibly 16 others which were attacking other units in this area; no damage was done in this air attack.
- Q. On your way out of the Strait, did you sight Admiral SHIMA's Force advancing to the attack?
A. about 0350 I sighted Admiral SHIMA's Force advancing northward, while we were repairing the rudder.
- Q. Did you communicate with Admiral SHIMA's Force to tell him what damage had occurred?
A. I signalled to Admiral SHIMA by blinker because the telephone was broken.
- Q. What did you tell Admiral SHIMA?
A. I signalled to the approaching force requesting them to identify themselves, as I was not sure but that they might be American surface units; the answer received was "I am the NACHI". I answered "I am the SHIGURE, I have rudder difficulties." There was no communication after this message.
- Q. Why did you not inform Admiral SHIMA of the course of the battle?
A. At 1200 hours of the 25th I sent the following dispatch to Admirals TOYODA and KURITA, "The Third or "C" Force has been annihilated, location of enemy unknown, please send me your instructions, I have trouble with my rudder, my wireless, my radar, and my gyro, and I received one hit." The reason I did not communicate directly with Admiral SHIMA and inform him of the situation was that I had no connection with him and was not under his command.
- Q. Under such circumstances as you mention, was that the usual procedure? Was it not Japanese practice to exchange useful information between separate forces?
A. I assumed that SHIMA knew conditions of the battle and that he would get his instructions from his Commanding Officer, Admiral KURITA or from TOYODA.
- Q. How did you assume he had learned of the battle in the entrance to the Gulf?
A. In my opinion Admiral SHIMA would know the situation by sighting the burning ships FUSO and MOGAMI, and by seeing me on a retiring course.

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Q. That being the case, it was not considered necessary to give any other further information?

A. Yes, that is correct.

Q. Why was it necessary to wait until 1200 to send the message to KURITA and TOYODA?

A. Because my wireless was not functioning and secondly I was busy with the air attack.

Q. At what time approximately did you complete repairs to your wireless?

A. I used my auxiliary wireless set (the "TM" set). This set had been in commission all the time, I probably could have used it earlier to send the message. When I sent the message I relayed it through Admiral NISHIMURA because of the short range of the TM set, its range is about 150 miles.

Q. Were you able to receive messages during this time when his wireless was out?

A. Yes, I could receive to a certain extent.

Q. We have some information that KURITA's Force heard of his battle fairly early in the morning, perhaps 8 or 9 o'clock. Do you know, or do you think it possible that MOGAMI sent such a report?

A. As far as I know, mine was the first information relayed to higher authority.

Q. Are you positive that this message was sent at 1200?

A. That is correct as far as I can remember. It is possible that SHIMA from the NACHI may have sent some sort of situation report.

Q. Did you witness the collision of NACHI and MOGAMI?

A. No, I only heard about it about 15 days later.

Q. What other crippled ships did you see during the retirement besides MOGAMI?

A. I saw of course the FUSO, later on I saw two burning hulks but, although I approached quite closely, I still am not sure whether it was the two halves of the YAMASHIRO or the two destroyers. I am inclined to the view that it was the destroyers, these two destroyers were the MICHISHIO and ASAGUMO.

Q. As you passed out through the southern end of SURIGAO STRAIT, did you see the ABUKUMA?

A. No.

Q. On the 25th did you receive any air attacks except from the single B-24?

A. No other air attacks; we made a sighting once but no attack.

Q. So far as you know, FUSO was never hit by torpedoes, only by gunfire?

A. According to the best of my knowledge that is correct.

Q. I would like to have your professional opinion regarding the operation here in SURIGAO STRAIT.

A. The most important reason for the way the battle went was that except for Admiral NISHIMURA and the YAMASHIRO and FUSO, our ships had trained together in LINGGA. This battle we engaged in was the first time that this force had fought together with the above two ships under NISHIMURA's command, and basically NISHIMURA's tactical conceptions were quite different from those of the other ships under his command in the above engagement. Another reason was that the efficiency of the American radar fire control was far ahead of the Japanese.

Q. Would you elaborate a little on the tactical conduct of the battle by Admiral NISHIMURA?

A. I think the tactics used were wrong for the type of place we were going to fight in. NISHIMURA's basic strategy was advancing in a straight column which I think makes the force a set-up for radar detection and radar fire control. I think it would have been better to have advanced in a staggered formation, zig-zagging as we advanced. Furthermore, it would have been much better to have joined SHIMA's and NISHIMURA's units, and have let all the destroyers from both forces take the lead with the heavy ships in the rear. It was foolish

to have two independent forces engaged in the same operation.

- Q. What in general was Admiral NISHIMURA's service reputation, what type of officer was he considered to be? What was his specialty?
- A. He was an old destroyer man. I never met NISHIMURA personally, but it was said of him that he was clever, and a capable Navy man. I will say this much, though, that there are some people who think NISHIMURA was very fortunate not to have returned from this battle.

(NOTE: The Commander states that before turning back he saw HIBUSAN Island and his memory is that he advanced further up the Strait than is shown in the Annex to the Cincpac report.)