

HEADQUARTERS
U.S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY
(PACIFIC)
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Interrogation No. (USSES 467)
NAV. NO 109

Place: Tokyo
Date: 20 November 1945
Time: 1300 - 1700



Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: SOLOMON Islands Actions 1942-43.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Commander YAMAMOTO, Tadashi, IJN, Communication Officer and Adjutant, Staff, Destroyer Squadron 2, aboard HOYASHIO (DD) at GUADALCANAL 11-14 November 1942. Also participated in other SOLOMON Island engagements. Captain OHMAE, Toshikazu Chief of Staff South Eastern Fleet (RAFAUL). Responsible for planning and operation, SOLOMON Area, 1942-43.

Where interviewed: Room 707, Meiji Building.

Interrogator: Captain C. Shands, USN.

Interpreter: J. H. TAJI (Interrogation conducted in English except for technical questions).

Allied Officers Present: Comdr. T. H. Moorer, USN.

SUMMARY

Battle of GUADALCANAL 12-14 November 1942. General attack upon U. S. Forces in late October, 1942 considered unsuccessful due to failure of Army and Navy to maintain planned schedule. Description of Battle of GUADALCANAL 12-14 November resulting in loss of HIEI, KIRISHIMA (BE) AYANAMI (DD) by gunfire: KINUGASA (CA) and 11 transports by divebombers and torpedo planes. The loss of this battle was the last major effort to recapture GUADALCANAL. The constant attrition of firstclass pilots in the SOLOMONS campaign (Air Groups 21, 24, 25, and 26) weakened Navy defense of the MARSH Area. Losses never replaced due to curtailment of training program in 1943. Summary including ships present and track chart confirmation on Battle of SAVO Island, 9 August 1942, VELLA LAVELLA 6-7 August 1943, VELLA LAVELLA 17-18 August 1943, VELLA LAVELLA 6-7 October 1943 and CAPE ST GEORGE 25 November 1943.

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TRANSCRIPT

Battle of GUADALCANAL 12-14 November 1942

Q. What was your estimate of the situation existing in the SOLOMONS in November 1942?

A. The situation was becoming very serious. When you first landed on the SOLOMONS in August we thought that we could easily retake the areas that you had captured. Our information was that your forces were small in the GUADALCANAL area therefore the Army did not think that it was necessary to send many troops. They reported that you had less than a thousand troops ashore. They based their requirements to retake GUADALCANAL on the Army forces required against CHINESE in the CHINA and MALAYAN Campaign. We also had information that you were hard pressed in America due to PEARL HARBOR losses and shipping losses in the Atlantic, therefore we did not believe that you would be able to engage in a major operation at that time. Our Army misjudged both your strength and fighting ability at GUADALCANAL between August and November.

Our first effort to reinforce our garrison at GUADALCANAL failed when a submarine sank our transport 9 or 10 August near RABAU. It may have been the SHINYO MARU. It was loaded in TINIAN with 600 marines who had returned after the failure at MIDWAY. This was a well trained special unit for landing operations. During August and September we continued to send Army reinforcements each time expecting that there would be a sufficient number to retake GUADALCANAL. We also deployed our submarines in an effort to cut your supply lines.

In September you appeared to be getting stronger so after a general conference in TRUK between the Army, CinC Combined Fleet and CinC Southeastern Fleet, a general assault was planned for 21 Oct but failed, principally because the Army did not carry out the schedule agreed upon for attacking your airfield on GUADALCANAL. The Navy lost ships, airplanes and pilots while trying to give support to the land assault which was continually delayed. The Army did not understand the position of the Navy in that it could not stay in one area indefinitely without being attacked. We were also consuming valuable fuel. When the assault was finally forced we had become weakened both at sea and in the air, although there were about 26,000 Army troops ashore and 3,500 special Navy landing force.

On 26 October, after this attack I (Capt. OHMAE) went to GUADALCANAL by destroyer to organize another general assault with all ships and troops that could be assembled. The entire HIROSHIMA Division of the Army and a large quantity of supplies were in the RABAU-SHORTLAND area. These troops were destined for an attack upon PORT MORESBY. Following the conference General HYAKUTAKE, Commanding General of the 18th Army ordered the plans to attack PORT MORESBY changed to attack GUADALCANAL. Since it appeared that the advance in the SOLOMONS was more serious than the advance through NEW GUINEA, this plan was supported by the Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet. The force to be landed consisted of about 10,000 Army troops and 1000 special Navy landing troops. The Navy troops also had about 38x8cm guns. A large amount of supplies were also being sent the forces that were already on GUADALCANAL.

Q. What ships were present in the Japanese Forces at GUADALCANAL 12-14 November?

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A. There were three main units which were geographically separated to the north, center and south.

Bombardment Force (north) 12 November 1942.

Second Fleet.

Bombardment Group: Batdiv 11 : HIEI (F) KIRISHIMA
Bombardment Screen: Desron 10 : NAGARA (F)
Desdiv 16 : AMATSUKAZE, TOKITSUKAZE
Desdiv 61 : TERUZUKI
Desdiv 6 : AKATSUKI, INAZUMA, IKAZUCHI
Sweeping Group : Desron 4 : ASAGUMO (F)
Desdiv 2 : MURASAME, SAMIDARE, YUDACHI,
HARUSAME
Picket group : Desdiv 27 : SHIGURE, SHIRATSUYA, YUGURE
between Russells :
and GUADALCANAL :

Bombardment Force (North) 14 November.

Bombardment Group : Crudiv 4 : ATAGO (F) TAKAO Vice Adm. KONDO
Batdiv 11 : KIRISHIMA
Bombardment Screen: Desron 10 : NAGARA (F)
Desdiv 61 : TERUZUKI
Desdiv 11 : SHIRAYUKI, HATSUYUKI
Desron 4 : ASAGUMO (F)
Desdiv 2 : SAMIDARE
Desdiv 6 : IKAZUCHI
Sweeping Group : Desron 3 : SENDAI (F)
Desdiv 19 : URANAMI
SHIKINAMI
AYANAMI

GUADALCANAL Reinforcement Force (Center)

Escort Unit: DesRon 2 : HAYASHIO (F) R. Adm. TANAKA, Rasizo
Desdiv 15 : OYASHIO (F) KUROSHIO, KAGERO
Desdiv 24 : UMIKAZE (F) KAWAKAZE, SUZUKAZE
Desdiv 31 : TAKANAMI (F) MAIMNAMI, NAGANAMI
Desdiv 30 : MOCHIZUKI
AMAGIRI

Transport Unit ARIZONA MARU: KUMAGAWA MARU, SADO MARU, NAGARA
MARU, NAKO MARU, CANBERRA MARU, BRISBANE MARU,
KINUGAWA MARU, KIROKAWA MARU, YAMAURA MARU,
YAMATSUKI MARU

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OUTER SOUTH SEAS SUPPORTING UNIT (SOUTH). (Eighth Fleet)

Main Body : CHOKAI (F) KINUGASA, ISUZU R. Adm. MIKAWA
Desdiv 8 : ASASHIO, ARASHIO

Supporting Unit : Crudiv 7 : SUZUYA (F)
Crudiv 4 : MAYA
Crudiv 18 : TENRYU
Desdiv 10 : MAKIGUMO (F)
YUGUMO
KAZAGUMO
Desdiv 8: MICHISHIO

The Eighth Fleet always operated from RABAUL. The Second Fleet operated from TRUK. These two fleets operated together in any big action. The senior officer normally had general command of the action. The Grand Fleet Headquarters was at TRUK since the Commander-in-Chief of the Second Fleet was the senior officer.

Q. What were your plans for landing the troops?

A. We were providing direct support for the transports. I (Capt. YAMAMOTO) was in the HOYASHIO (DD) with the staff. We departed from the SHORTLAND Islands at 8½ knots. It took us 2½ days to reach GUADALCANAL. Prior to our arrival, the battleship and cruiser forces were scheduled to bombard your airfield in order to destroy your planes and sufficiently damage the airfield and supplies so you would be unable to recover from that attack before we landed our troops.

During the first part of November we had landed some troops at KOLI Point. We already had a large number of troops on the west end of the Island. Our plan was to land the HIROSHIMA Division at KOLI Point to reinforce the Army already there. Following the landing a general assault was scheduled from both the east and west side of your defense. We thought that we would make you divide your land forces and felt that we would then have sufficient strength to defeat each half.

However these plans were changed about 3 or 4 November, and the KOLI Point forces retired by mountain trails behind your airfield to the west side near KOKUMBONO. When this retirement was completed we were ordered to land the troops between CAPE ESPERANCE and TASSAFARONGA.

(Capt OHMAE) In August we had only about 80 landing barges in the SHORTLAND Islands where the troop movements originated. About 50 were used to support GUADALCANAL while the other thirty were used to strengthen the other SOLOMON Islands. In order to decrease the water haul, about September we planned to build a road down the length of SANTA ISABEL. We set up three landing points on the island but the road was not completed by November. We used a few trails and moved a few troops from the southeastern tip of SANTA ISABEL to TASSAFARONGA and KOLI Point, but we were never able to use it as we had intended.

Q. Did any of your ships bombard GUADALCANAL?

A. None of the Escort force bombarded but both the Northern and Southern Forces were supposed to bombard. They succeeded but they also had a surface engagement. The Northern Force was supposed to bombard the field at about 25,000 meters, then retire between SAVO Island and FLORIDA Island, but they were intercepted and

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fought the night battle. The HIEI was damaged and later lost in the first night battle. The KIRISHIMA was lost in the second battle. The AYANAMI (DD) from the northern group was also lost. These ships had special ammunition for bombardment and were very short on ammunition for ship engagements so were not prepared for a general ship action. After the southern group retired the KINUGASA was sunk the 14th by dive bombers south west of RENDOVA Island. The attack occurred between 0640-0845. At the same time the ISUZU was seriously damaged, while the CHOKAI and MAYA were moderately damaged.

Q. What transports were lost?

A. On 14 November the following transports were sunk by dive bomber and torpedo planes:

ARIZONA MARU	(JDZD)	9683 T	Sunk
KUMAGAWA MARU	(JRBJ)	7508	"
SADO MARU	(JPAN)	7179	"
NAGARA MARU	(JBNH)	7148	"
NAKO MARU	(JRWJ)	7145	"
CANBERRA MARU	(JPLK)	6477	"
BRISBANE MARU	(JJAC)	5425	"

On 15 November the following ships were beached at DOMA Cove GUADALCANAL, due to damage received in the air attack during the 14th:

KINUGAWA MARU	(JURM)	6936
HIROKAWA MARU	(JFFO)	6872
YAMAURA MARU	(JCAM)	6798
YAMATSUKI MARU	(JYXL)	6438
		<u>77,609 T</u>

Q. Did you lose any other ships in this action?

A. No, but in supporting actions the FURATAKA (CA) was sunk near SAVO Island on 11 October during a night cruiser action and the TERUSKI (DD) was sunk on 12 December.

Q. Were you in company with the transports when they were attacked?

A. Yes. We received our first attack early in the morning of 14 November. It was from a dive bomber. I do not remember if any hits were made. Only one or two planes. We were very happy because we thought that the bombardment groups had succeeded in destroying your planes the night before. But about 0900 14 November (-9) we started to receive many attacks from dive-bombers and torpedo planes. We had some fighter cover during the day but not enough. All afternoon your dive-bombers and torpedo planes were very plentiful. We also had a B-17 attack about noon. No hits registered but near misses. Our fighters attacked them before they inflicted damage, but we did not have enough fighters to protect us all day.

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The first big attack occurred north of VANGUNU Island. The second occurred northeast of VANGUNU. The last main attack occurred north of the RUSSELL Islands. There were smaller attacks between the main attacks. At the end of the day all of the eleven transports had been bombed or torpedoed. Seven of them had been sunk or sank during the night, four of them badly damaged were able to beach themselves at DOMA Cove and land a few of the troops. The afternoon attacks were very severe. Most damage occurred between about 1300-1500 in the afternoon.

Q. Were any of the escorting ships damaged?

A. None of the combatant ships in the Escort Force were attacked. The 15th Destroyer Squadron left the transports and went over to join the northern force after the attack upon the transports. The 31st and 24th were busy picking up survivors so did not join. We later escorted the four damaged transports to DOMA Cove then part of the escorts passed west of SAVO Island while the others passed east of it. All destroyers then returned to SHORTLAND. The heavy units returned to TRUK.

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

A. Up until this battle we were determined to retake GUADALCANAL. The Army particularly desired to do so, but the transportation was too difficult mainly due to your dive-bombers and strafing planes which were able to locate and destroy the transports and landing barges which were hidden during the day time. Following the battle it was decided to do as much as we could by reinforcing the GUADALCANAL Garrison by destroyers while a sufficient supporting force of aircraft was being built up in RABAUL. This plan was not too successful. We were able to land a number of troops and supplies, but our air losses were too great. Almost all of the Navy's first class pilots and a few of the Army's were lost in the SOLOMON operations. The greatest portion of these were lost against GUADALCANAL. At one time we had three or four squadrons at RABAUL but they were sent down one at a time. The constant attrition was very expensive. The 21st, 24th, 25th and 26th air groups were lost. This loss was keenly felt in the defense of the Empire during the MARSHALL-GILBERT campaign. In 1943 our training program began to be restricted so we were never able to replace these losses, although we still had a number of carriers. In January 1943 due to your increased strength and our difficulty in supplying GUADALCANAL it was necessary for us to withdraw.

Q. From your records, sketch the navigational track of the Japanese Forces in the Battle of GUADALCANAL 12-14 November 1942.

A. See Annex A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H.

SAVO ISLAND 8-9 AUGUST 1942.

Q. What ships were present in the Battle of SAVO Island?

A. CHOKAI (F) Adm. MIKAWA

Cruidiv 6 : AOBAK (F)
FURATAKA
KINUGASA
KAKO

Cruidiv 18 : TENRYU
TATSUTA
lxd

See Annex I for track chart.

Q. Give a description of the battle.

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A. We had arrived at RABAU on 29 July and had not had an opportunity to operate these ships together. The CHOKAI and Crudiv 18 departed RABAU and joined up with Crudiv 6 between GREEN Island and CAPE ST GEORGE. About 1000 off KIETA one of your planes sighted us and maintained contact for about an hour. At that time Admiral MIKAWA reversed course in order to make it appear that we were returning to RABAU. After the plane departed we again reversed course and headed for GUADALCANAL between the islands. In order to avoid confusion and accidents during the night we just maintained one column. Since our mission was to pass around SAVO Island, bombard your transports, then retire we did not expect any difficulties. On our way to GUADALCANAL we received a despatch that one of your transports at GUADALCANAL was burning so we felt that we could easily locate your force.

About an hour before reaching SAVO Island we catapulted seaplanes to search the area and also to drop flares. These planes provided us with the position of your two cruiser forces as well as the transport forces at GUADALCANAL and TULAGI.

Just to the west of SAVO Island we sighted two of your destroyers steaming very slowly to the southwest. We passed between them, about 500 yards astern of the southern one. We were afraid that they would open fire upon us so had all guns trained upon them. When the one to the south did not fire, I was afraid that we may have been seen and reported but not fired upon.

Our destroyer remained outside SAVO to act as a picket and also to engage your destroyers if they should follow us.

Soon after we passed around SAVO Island we sighted your southern force of cruisers. About two minutes after sighting we fired torpedoes, then opened fire with guns. Immediately after firing the torpedoes we changed course to the left and sighted your northern force.

During the turn left the column broke up but the divisions remained together. The CHOKAI and Crudiv 6 passed to the east of your force while Crudiv 18 passed to the west. We fired both torpedoes and guns. The CHOKAI illuminated briefly with search lights. your ships concentrated upon her but most of the hits were made by machine guns. The range was very close. Outside of machine gun hits the only damage received was by the CHOKAI which was hit by a salvo from your leading cruiser in the northern group. Two shells landed in the operations room, just aft of the bridge and killed about thirty men. They also burnt up all of our charts.

Following this action we passed north of SAVO Island. At that time the formation was inverted with the flagship (CHOKAI) in the rear due to the different turning circles used after the first engagement. We considered returning to the area to attack your transports. Due to about a two hour delay in reforming we felt that we would be within radius of your planes the next morning if we returned. We knew that you had planes in the vicinity because we had been listening to "RED BASE" and "WHITE BASE" broadcast all day. We did not have air cover. In addition all of the charts on the flagship had been destroyed, which would have made navigation dangerous, therefore we decided to retire. The KAKO was sunk by submarine the next morning entering the harbor at KAVIENG.

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VELLA LAVELLA

Q. What ships were present in the battle of 6-7 August 1943?

A. Desdiv 4 ; HAGIKAZE (F), ARASHI, Capt. SUGIURA, Kaju IJN.
Desdiv 27 : KAWAKAZE, SHIGURE.

Q. Describe this battle.

A. These four destroyers were transporting 950 Army troops and 55 tons of supplies to KOLOMNANGARA when they were surprised by your cruiser force. The ARASHI and KAWAKAZE received torpedo hits which caused fires to break out. The KAWAKAZE sank very quickly. The HAGIKAZE and ARASHI were also lost. The SHIGURI received some damage but was able to fire torpedoes at the American force then retire. It rendezvoused with the SENDAI which had been carrying supplies to BUIN, then returned to RABAUL. Some of the survivors were able to swim ashore. Then walked overland and reached SHORTLAND about two weeks later.

Note: The chart of this action shown in Combat Narrative # XI was considered true except that Captain YAMAMOTO thought that the Japanese ships sank about three miles from the VELLA LAVELLA coast line. This distance was judged as "swimming distance".

VELLA LAVELLA 17-18 August, 1943.

Ships present:

Desron 3 : SAZANAMI (F) Capt. IJUIN, Matsuji

Desdiv 17 : HAMAKAZE (F), ISOKAZE
Desdiv 27 : SHIGURI

Transports: 17 landing barges (DAIHATSU)
2 auxiliary subchasers
4 shipboard landing craft
2 armed Daihatsu
1 armored boat.

The four destroyers were acting as an indirect escort for the landing craft some of which were transferring two companies of Army troops and 80 naval personnel to HORANIU while others were empty and destined to evacuate troops from VELLA LAVELLA to BUIN. The destroyers had been waiting at SHORTLAND but when it was reported that American destroyers were proceeding towards VELLA LAVELLA, our destroyers went down to protect the landing craft.

The night action started with gun and torpedo fire at 2230. No damage was received by any of the destroyers, although 2 auxiliary subchasers, 2 landing craft and 1 armed Daihatsu boat were sunk. When the American destroyers were closing the range on the loaded barges the SHIGURE left the formation and made a feint towards the U. S. Force firing torpedoes in order to turn them away. During this action the loaded transport unit headed for HORANIU alone, arriving at dawn of the 18th successfully landing 290 Army troops and 80 Naval personnel.

Note: The track chart shown in Combat Narrative XI is considered correct.

VELLA LAVELLA 6-7 October 1943.

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Ships present: Desron 3 : AKIGUMO (F) Capt. IJUIN, Matsuji,
IJN.
DIRECT ESCORTS: Desdiv 17 : ISOKAZE (F)
Desdiv 10 : MAKIGUMO (F) KAZAGUMO, YUGUMO
Desdiv 27 : SHIGURE (F) SAMIDARE
Transport Unit : FUMITSUKI (F) MATSUKAZE, YUNAGI
Cover unit : Auxiliary subchaser and small boat
units from 1st Base Force.

The transport Group was on a mission to evacuate personnel from VELLA LAVELLA to BUIN. When the American forces were sighted by the Main Body of escorts, the Transport Unit was ordered to retire, therefore did not participate in the engagement. American forces were engaged between 2100-2130. There was a delay in opening fire due to erroneously identifying the U. S. destroyers as our own Cover Unit. During the action the YUGUMO was sunk. The next day 3 officers and 22 enlisted men returned to BUIN in a motor launch from a U. S. destroyer. During the action the subchasers and small boats evacuated 576 personnel from the northern tip of VELLA LAVELLA.

Note: Track chart shown in Combat Narrative XI considered correct

CAPE ST. GEORGE 25 November 1943.

Ships present: Desdiv 31 : OHNAMI (F) MAKINAMI. Capt. KAGAWA,
Kiyosun
Desdiv 11 : ANAGIRI (F) YUGIRI
DESDIV 30 : UZUKI

The above destroyers departed RABAU for BUKA at 1330 24 November. They unloaded 920 Army troops and 35 tons of supplies completing the operation at 2210. 700 troops being evacuated were then loaded on board for the return trip. The destroyers were proceeding in two columns (no radio contact) when engaged by a U. S. Force. The OHNAMI and MAKINAMI received damage immediately and were later sunk. The other three destroyers proceeded to the north at full speed. During the retirement the YUGIRI was sunk about 60 miles east of CAPE ST. GEORGE at 0110 the 25th. Before the YUGIRI sank it fired all torpedoes at the U. S. Force.

Note: The track chart shown in Pac-5-1p, A16-3/November, serial 00806 dated 28 February 1944 is considered correct.

- Q. Were you present in RABAU during the aircraft carrier raids on 5 and 11 November 1943?
A. Yes. The damage that we received there was due to an error in judgement by the headquarters of the Grand Fleet at TRUK. The Grand Fleet wanted to make an attack on your ships in the SOLOMONS. We had advised them that they should proceed direct from TRUK instead of stopping at RABAU for fuel. We considered this necessary because RABAU had been within range of your carrier aircraft in the SOLOMONS for some time.

The fleet entered RABAU about 0600 5 November and immediately started to refuel. About 0800 the carrier strikes started. There were about three mass attacks. The worst thing about the carrier raids, was after the planes dropped their bombs they went back for more and kept coming. When the raids started the ships got underway and tried to evade the dive bombers and torpedo planes.

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The MAYA received a bomb hit and was burning badly so could not get underway. It returned to TRUK under its own power some time later. The TAKAO, MOGAMI and AGANO were also hit by bombs. They were not seriously damaged although they suffered some casualties. The CHIKUMA and ATAGO received some shrapnel casualties from near hits. One destroyer had half of the stern blown off by a torpedo. I think that it was the NAGANAMI.

During the attack I was in a small boat carrying a message from the Commander-in-Chief of the Southeastern Area Fleet to the Commander-in-Chief of the Second Fleet. I (Capt. OHMAE) was strafed by a dive-bomber. One of the members of the boat crew was wounded but that was the only damage. About 1300 the ships finally rendezvoused and returned to TRUK where they were repaired. Some of them required quite a long time before operating again.

On the 11th there were very few naval vessels present because they were being repaired in TRUK. About a dozen transports were sunk which was very discouraging to everyone. The AGANO which had received minor structural damage on the 5th received a torpedo hit in the stern and could only turn in circles. It was later repaired. The SUZANAMI (DD) was sunk.

- Q. What overall effect did the SOLOMON campaign have upon your plans.
A. The loss of the SOLOMON Islands was not too important, but the losses in ships and pilots trying to hold them was vital. When the war started it was not planned to take the SOLOMONS. However the early actions were so easy that it was decided to increase the perimeter defense line and to gain a position which would control American traffic to AUSTRALIA. Expansion into the SOLOMONS from RABAUl was then carried out. Unfortunately we also carried out other expansion at the same time instead of consolidating our holdings in that area.

After you captured GUADALCANAL we still thought that we would be able to retake it and use it as an outpost for the defense of the Empire. This effort was very costly both at the time and in later operations because we were never able to recover from the ship and pilot losses received in that area.

As you advanced through the SOLOMONS it was necessary to revise our defense lines. When you occupied the MUNDA area about September 1943, the SOLOMON Islands became just an outer defensive area for RABAUl. Then RABAUl lost its effectiveness after you occupied NEW GEORGIA, BOUGAINVILLE, LAE and SALAMAUA.

I personally think that a major reason for our defensive failure was due to the loss of our naval air power. First we lost our best carriers at MIDWAY then our pilots in the SOLOMONS. Due to our reduction of fuel we were unable to properly train replacements even though we were able to produce carriers. In the MARSHALL-GILBERT campaign we were unable to support the islands because we were afraid to risk a fleet action without aircover. The defense of those islands was made by a few land-based planes and the military garrisons. You moved too quickly for us to replace our losses. The same thing happened through the MARIANAS and the PHILIPPINES.

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