

Transcript of Interrogation of (Admiral YONAI, Mitsumasa). - - - -

A. I believe that the difference arose from the difference between the Army and the Navy as to what your next probable objective would be. In other words as one instance, the Navy might think that you would probably attack OKINAWA next; whereas the Army would guess that your offensive was going to be directed against FORMAOSA.

Q. Admiral, just a question here to place your status a little more accurately. When plans for the major naval operation had been approved by the proper agencies, to what extent did the Naval Minister exercise control over the manner of conduct of that operation?

A. The actual situation was this: There had to be close coordination of the Chief of General Staff and the Navy Minister before any big operation plan was adopted, because two chief functions of the Navy Minister are (1) to make it possible for front-line forces to carry out any plan of operations that is adopted, and (2) is to maintain control within the Navy Department. Since the Navy Minister has control of the material, properly speaking, it was up to the Chief of Naval General Staff to consult the Navy Minister prior to deciding upon any major operation. This was my own personal private opinion, but I held the view that the Naval General Staff should be brought within the Navy Department under the Minister.

Q. Then did the Navy Minister from time to time, following the course of an operation, exercise any control, advisory or direct while an operation was progressing?

A. Once an operation is started, the Navy Minister exercised no further control.

Q. Referring now to the basic war plan, you might say, as expressed by the scope of the initial advances - and here I am asking your opinion unofficially since you were not directly concerned at the time, but realizing your broad general understanding of the potentialities of Japan - what were your views as to the correctness of the initial plan and the capability of the Japanese nation to meet the probable demands?

A. I think to this day that it was not a proper plan in view of the situation, our national war strength.

Q. That is, you thought initially that it was too much expansion, too big a plan, or what would be your thought?

A. I can't give you any details, I don't know them; but I think it should not have been undertaken at all and I firmly believe that, had I been Prime Minister at the time, we probably would not have had this war.

Q. In the early stages of the war, Admiral, recognizing again that you were in an unofficial position, what was the opinion as to the major threat to holding the perimeter or to holding the southern resources and the perimeter - that is both together, the southern resources and the perimeter? Where did this major threat come from - Russia, China, American forces to the east or what?

A. Would you be satisfied with the answer that the American strength was the principal threat, or do you want this broken down?

Q. Well, let's have it broken down?

A. To express this from the opposite side of the picture, the part where we felt the safest was where your forces could not reach.

Q. Well, then, what did they think we would do alternatively? What were those areas we could not reach? What did you feel we would do toward this perimeter? What would we do which would constitute this threat?

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A. I don't know whether this will be a direct answer to your question but I will put it this way: Once the war started we had to get the resources from the south, especially oil, and the points down south which were the furthest away from your Naval Bases were the easiest for us to capture. When you took the PHILIPPINES, that was the end of our resources, in cutting off the southern supplies.

Q. But in the early stages, what was it that JAPAN had to defend, against; what force?

A. You mean the task force, submarines, or what?

Q. That, or was it the Army forces in Australia, India?

A. The United States Fleet. So long as the United States Fleet didn't interfere, it was easy for us to get hold of southern supplies.

Q. Well, would you say that this was primarily a naval war or did the Army command have greater or equal responsibility, as looked at from the Japanese side?

A. I think it was the Navy's war.

Q. We have been given to understand from various discussions with prominent Japanese Government officials that the coordination between the Army and Navy was not all that could be desired. If you are in agreement with that, what were the principal points of friction? Was it personalities or was it war aims, or what was the reason for the lack of cooperation?

A. Fundamentally I believe it was a difference in education between the Army and Navy. The Army starts its education with young boys of 15 and 16 and from that early age teaches them nothing but war. Therein I believe lies the fundamental difference between the ideas of the Army and Navy officers. As a result it follows as a matter of course that the Army develops a narrower vision, can't see as broadly as the Navy officers.

Q. I gather that when you say they are taught nothing but war, you conclude that they taught nothing of the broad international picture?

A. Yes, I believe not teaching them anything outside. This is of course merely my feeling on the matter. I do not make the statement by the way of criticizing the Army.

Q. Admiral, we'd like to have your opinion, and discuss it as you will, on what you consider the turning point of the war - the occasion or the situation where there were definite indications of the doubtful successful conclusion of the war?

A. To be very frank, I think that the turning point was the start. I felt from the very beginning that there was no chance of success, but of course this is not an answer to your question. Once the war had started, I would pick either MIDWAY or our retreat from GUADALCANAL as the turning point, after which I was certain there was no chance for success. Later on of course it was the loss of SAIPAN followed by LEYTE, and I felt that that was the end.

Q. Why do you pick MIDWAY and why do you pick the retreat from GUADALCANAL?

A. I pick MIDWAY principally from the naval standpoint because of the heavy fleet losses suffered there. GUADALCANAL on the other hand, I pick from a more general point. When we had to retreat, taking the whole situation, I felt that there was no further chance of success, and our defeat at LEYTE of course I felt was tantamount to loss of the PHILIPPINES.

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- Q. What do you consider the major effects on the Japanese naval war potential of the U.S. operations? Which part of our total operations had the major effect on the naval war potential? Just what was the major U.S. effort that had the greatest effect?
- A. Generally speaking, the fact that the U. S. overseas operations were carried out, were planned on a large scale and were successfully carried out, apparently according to schedule, was the cause of greatest difficulty to the Japanese Navy. Then, with individual cases, I point out that the greatest blow to the Japanese Navy at MIDWAY was your air force. At LEYTE I believe it was your submarine activity, together with the fact that your air force in the PHILIPPINES was much stronger than we had expected.
- Q. To clarify the last part of that answer, the strength of the air force in the PHILIPPINES in those initial stages at LEYTE?
- A. From the beginning of the LEYTE Operations right up to the end of the war. The fact that we suffered virtually complete destruction of our fleet, we attribute principally to the fact that your air strength in the PHILIPPINES was much stronger than we thought.
- Q. In the late Autumn of 1944 the Japanese radio broadcasts told of tremendous losses inflicted upon the U.S. Navy off FORMOSA. The Japanese staged a major naval offensive in the PHILIPPINE Area from the 23rd to the 25th of October. Did the Japanese Navy really believe that heavy losses had been inflicted and expect to meet a much weaker U. S. Fleet than they did meet?
- A. I don't remember, of course, what figures were given in those broadcasts from Tokyo in the Autumn of 1944, but it is possible that there was some exaggeration in the figures announced. But generally speaking, I think that there is bound to be some differences in the judgement of those who actually take part and the judgment of those who see it from the Central Headquarters, especially in the case of air engagements where most of the damage is inflicted by our air force. Reports from different flyers would often overlap. This is not known at the front, so mistakes sometimes creep in without the deliberate intention to exaggerate.
- Q. What I really meant was: Did that--we'll say, exaggeration-- have any real effect on the subsequent operation in October? Was there a belief in the High Command that, when the operations were ordered, the American Task Forces were less strong than perhaps was the fact?
- A. I don't know whether there was actual exaggeration.
- Q. Can you express an opinion as to the relationship between the naval war potential at any time in the war and the national war potential, expressed as a comparison between them?
- A. As a direct answer, I believe that whenever the Navy suffered a heavy blow, that naturally brought down the nation's fighting power because of the necessity of replenishment of what the Navy had lost. But generally speaking, the general situation is perhaps the reverse; i.e., change in the nation's fighting power directly affected the Navy's fighting power. In this war, however, balance between those two was completely lost, principally owing to shortage in material. The question of education and training came into some extent, but principal cause of loss of balance between the nation's fighting strength and the Navy fighting strength was shortage of materials.
- Q. Do you feel that General TOJO had a full understanding of the implications and the problems, etc, of naval strength and naval warfare?

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- A. I wouldn't venture a guess on that. It is impossible to make a statement without asking General TOJO first.
- Q. At what stage of the war would the Navy High Command, as it existed at various periods and had it been free to make the decision itself, have taken steps to terminate the war?
- A. I believe that the first occasion would have been in looking at it solely from the Japanese side, I believe that the first opportunity would have been the month in which the war was begun; that is, after the victories of HAWAII, SINGAPORE, etc. The second, I believe, would have been after the loss of SAIPAN, and after that it appeared to be a question of being dragged along, fighting on by inertia, etc. That is looking at it from only the Japanese side, but even if the Japanese Navy had proposed to end the war, I don't know how it would have ended. That depended on the attitude of the enemy.
- Q. Would the younger officers of the Navy, alone, have been willing to accept such an action, say after SAIPAN? Just an opinion, of course.
- A. That is a question. It would appear that it's impossible to end a war until the proper time has come. A certain inertia moves it along until that time does come.
- Q. How much influence in delaying the conclusion of the war would you say the ultimate hope of German victory had?
- A. So far as I am concerned it had no effect at all because I felt from the very first that GERMANY had no chance. I believe so firmly from the very outset that GERMANY had no chance that I was one of those who strongly opposed a tie-up with GERMANY; and because that feeling of mine was known in certain quarters, that I was forced more or less to resign from my position as Prime Minister because the feeling in those quarters was that with Admiral YONAI as Prime Minister there was little chance of the tie-up with GERMANY materializing.
- Q. At what time did the overall military situation first give rise to positive statements and expressions of opinion in the High Command, High Government circles, that the war should be brought to a conclusion?
- A. Beginning in May of this year.
- Q. And what were the significant factors of the Japanese war potential at that time? What were the major deficiencies at that point? How capable was Japan of continuing war?
- A. About that time it was definitely realized that our economic strength was just about depleted as to the military side. I could not point out any particular thing that was significant because everything had just about come to the bottom level. To explain in a little more detail--the question of oil shortage, for instance, had become acute because after the loss of the PHILIPPINES not a drop came from the south. On the shipbuilding situation, the capacity had fallen immensely owing to the steel shortage. In the field of manpower, while we appeared to have plenty so far as number was concerned, for some reason that did not appear in production, i.e., we were not able to use the manpower effectively so that by May, I personally felt that looking in whatever direction, we had come to the end of the road.
- Q. Would you give us the substance of any discussions you had with Admiral SUZUKI, after joining his cabinet, on the matter of taking positive steps to terminate the war?

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A. The SUZUKI Cabinet was formed early in April of this year and at that time it was difficult for me, or I think for anyone else, to broach the subject of war conclusion to anyone. But after Admiral SUZUKI became Premier I did speak with him in an abstract way, saying to him that "I don't think we can continue with this much longer". The first concrete step taken with the idea of terminating the war was probably the instruction given to the Coordination Bureau within the Cabinet to make an investigation as to the present state of various war materials. As a result of that investigation the situation became more and more clear that continuation of the war was going to be difficult. In May I felt personally that it was going to be extremely difficult, and by early June I felt that it was absolutely no sense in continuing this any longer.

I would like to repeat something I have already stated about Senior Statesmen because there does seem to be so much misunderstanding about the position and character of this familiar body; even among our own people there appears to be much misunderstanding. As I have already stated, it has no power whatever, does not discuss questions of national policy. Because of a misunderstanding in JAPAN, itself, by some people, Senior Statesmen have been placed in rather difficult position, and I wish to make this repetition to remove any possible misunderstanding on your part.

One thing that was a great source of worry to me at the end of the war was this: The Imperial Rescript was issued on August 14th and broadcast on the 15th; and being deeply concerned for what young officers in the Navy might do, I took every possible measure to forestall possible untoward incidents, and I believe that I was more or less successful, and the same may be said with regard to the Army. But after all, the thing that made it possible to avoid serious trouble of any kind was the power of the Emperor rather than anything that I or the Army were able to do. During my long career as Navy Minister I probably never worried so much as I did during the period from the 14th to about the 23rd of that month, and I felt greatly relieved when we were able to go through this period without any serious trouble in the Navy.