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Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

SUBJECT: ALEUTIAN Campaign, Seaplane Operations, the Naval Battle of the
KOMANDORSKI ISLANDS, and the Defense of the KURILES.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Commander Kintaro MIURA was senior air officer on board the seaplane tender KAMIKAWA MARU from the outbreak of war until December 1942. He then served in the northern KURILES, first as the Air Officer on the staff of Commander FIFTH Fleet until August 1943, then on the staff of the TWELFTH Air Fleet until March 1944. Thereafter he served with the USA Air Group through August, 1944, on the staff of the 25th Air Squadron (OKINAWA) through October, 1944, on the staff of SECOND Air Fleet (PHILIPPINES) through December, 1944, and then again on the staff of the TWELFTH Air Fleet (HOKKAIDO) through June, 1945. He is at present attached to the YOKOSUKA AIR GROUP based at MISAWA on Northern HONSHU. He is a regular officer and a pilot with 2500 hours of flight time.

Where Interviewed: Room 618, MEIJI Building.

Interrogator: J. S. RUSSELL, Captain, USN.

Interpreter: D. BARTLETT, Lieutenant Commander, U.S.N.R.

Allied Officers Present: S. B. SPANGLER, Captain, USN, present at first
interrogation only.
PEYTON HARRISON, Captain, USNR, (Chief of Staff
of U.S. Naval Force at Battle of KOMANDORSKIS),
present at second interrogation only.

SUMMARY

The KAMIKAWA MARU, Captain Tarohachi SHINODA, carried 14 single float, two seat, spotting biplanes type zero, and four single float, two seat, reconnaissance biplanes type 95. She was detached at sea and ordered north from a group of auxiliary vessels which were in the ill-fated MIDWAY expedition. She arrived in KISKA HARBOR on 15 June 1942.

The ships present upon the arrival of the KAMIKURA MARU were, to the best of Commander MIURA's memory, the light cruiser KISO, four to six destroyers, and a few auxiliaries, including the KIMIKAWA MARU which had arrived four or five days earlier with six twin float, three seat, reconnaissance monoplanes, type zero. The Commanding Officer of the KISO, Captain ONO, was in command of forces afloat; Lieutenant Commander MUKAI was in command of the landing force ashore. Personnel were highly nervous due to bombings. No great damage had been caused, but the attacks were persistent.

The KAMIKAWA hoisted out her planes and sent them to the beach where a base was set up. Gasoline was put ashore in 200 liter drums. A row of buoys was laid just off-shore for the use of the small planes. The planes moored at the buoys in fine weather, but were dragged ashore, using bamboo mats and hand power to get them through the surf, during bad weather and for servicing. Sometimes the planes were flown over and landed in the calm waters of SALMON LAGOON for engineering work. SALMON LAGOON was also used for operations when the wind was high. The planes flew three hour anti-submarine and reconnaissance patrols.

About 19 June the KAMIKAWA MARU withdrew from KISKA HARBOR because of the U.S. bombing attacks and went to AGATTU. While there she made frequent short visits, or sent a destroyer, to KISKA with supplies and fuel, while the seaplane base was building. She usually went in under cover of darkness.

At AGATTU there were no air attacks until about 10 July, when about seven B-24's attacked for about 90 minutes from an altitude estimated to be 6000 meters (19,500 feet). Present at the time were the KAMIKAWA and KIMIKAWA MARUs, an oil tanker and six destroyers. The KIMIKAWA MARU received a near miss which killed a few and injured several, of her bridge personnel, but no material damage was done to any of the ships present.

After the attack by the B-24's, the KAMIKAWA MARU tried to use an anchorage off ATTU, but found the fog conditions too severe. Instead, she lay to in an area about 100 miles southwest of KISKA. While operating in this area and about the end of July one destroyer, the TODOROKI, was sent to reconnoiter AGATTU for shelter. While at AGATTU this destroyer was blown in two by a submarine torpedo. About 30 of her personnel survived by swimming ashore.

About the last of July the KAMIKAWA was ordered to return to JAPAN. She passed through the KURILES just south of PARAMUSHIRO, through LA. PEROUSE STRAIT, and down the west coast of JAPAN to SASEBO. Thereafter she went to the SHORTLAND ISLANDS.

Commander MIURA said that of the 24 float seaplanes from the two tenders, only two or three were operational at the end of two months. The losses in the surf and otherwise due to weather comprised about 60% of the total loss. The other 40% was shown down by B-17's and B-24's, or damaged beyond repair as a result of enemy action. Six of the seaplanes operated from the KIMIKAWA MARU, staying with her during her cruises around the other islands as well as at KISKA. The four type 95 float planes operated similarly from the KAMIKAWA MARU. The remainder, 14 type zero float planes were shore-based in KISKA HARBOR. Flight crews for the latter totalled 40 pilots and 20 men, and the planes were supported by a shore party of almost 70 men.

Commander MIURA returned to the northern area in December, 1942, when he relieved (then) Lieutenant Commander Taisuke ITO as Air Officer on the staff of Commander FIFTH Fleet, embarked on the heavy cruiser NACHI. The flagship based at OMINATO, but made several cruises to PARAMUSHIRO during the winter. The FIFTH Fleet engaged primarily in training operations, both ship and air, in the OMINATO area. When Commander MIURA relieved as FIFTH Fleet Staff Air Officer, KISKA had six type zero twin float reconnaissance monoplanes supported by the KIMIKAWA MARU. Of these six, he said, about four on the average were kept operational. Of Japanese Army troops in the ALEUTIANS he had been informed that the Army occupying force originally on ATTU had been moved to KISKA, reinforced, and placed under the command of Brigadier General MINEKI. The Army troops which left ATTU were replaced by a troop movement from PARAMUSHIRO. These latter troops were commanded by Colonel YAMASAKI who remained on ATTU until the end. (Commander MIURA's estimate of troops on ATTU, as of 12 May, was 2500; his estimate for those on KISKA at the same time was 5000).

THE BATTLE OF THE KOMANDORSKIS

Commander MIURA's first cruise to the ALEUTIANS as a staff officer was on board the flagship NACHI. All the forces then available to the FIFTH Fleet were to accompany a three-transport convoy to ATTU, in order to get this convoy through the growing interference which U.S. surface forces were causing the Japanese line of communications with the Western ALEUTIANS. The convoy was comprised of two 10,000 ton, 15 knot ships, the ANATA MARU and the ASAKA MARU, and a smaller (3000 to 4000 ton) slower ship, whose name he did not remember. All transports carried supplies and ammunition. The escort force was comprised of 2 CA's, NACHI and MAYA; 2 CL's, TAMA and ABUKUMA (Flagship of the FIRST Destroyer Squadron); and six DD's. Commander FIFTH Fleet, Vice Admiral Moshiro HOSOGAYA, with his flag in NACHI, was in command.

The one slow transport was sent on ahead with orders to rendezvous with the main convoy at a point about 150 miles west of ATTU, at 0500* 27 May. The escort force with the two large, fast transports sortied from PARAMUSHIRO, about 25 March, in unpleasant weather: high wind and scud clouds. The weather improved, and on the early morning of 27 March became calm with a broken overcast sky. Commander MIURA had the morning staff watch and was keeping a sharp lookout for the small transport, since the main convoy was approaching the rendezvous point. The ships were in a single column on a northerly heading, order in column: NACHI, MAYA, TAMA, ABUKUMA, the six destroyers, and the two large merchantmen. The masts of a ship were sighted on the horizon to the south, and thinking this to be the small transport, Commander MIURA so reported it to his admiral. A column right through approximately 180 degrees was executed and the masts of additional ships were sighted to the south. The range closed rapidly and a U.S. force, consisting of one 10,000 ton heavy cruiser, an OMAHA class light cruiser, and five destroyers, was made out. It was realized that the Japanese force was superior so the range was closed with the intention of destroying the American force. The NACHI was the only ship carrying aircraft, and she was ordered to launch planes. She was very slow in complying and the order to open fire was given before she had her planes off. The Japanese opened fire at about 0540, slightly ahead of the Americans. The first salvo of the NACHI ruined the two single float two-seat type zero spotting planes on the starboard catapult. These were jettisoned. The plane on the port catapult, however, was undamaged and was launched. This was a twin float three-seat, type zero, reconnaissance seaplane. It was the only Japanese plane airborne in the battle area, served as a spotting plane throughout the engagement, and landed safely at ATTU.

After opening fire at about 20,000 meters the leading American ship turned left approximately 90 degrees and it appeared that the American force was fleeing.

After the first salvo was fired, the main battery of the NACHI was made inoperative because of loss of electric power due to low steam pressure at the generators. (The generator steam supply was shifted too early to a boiler which was just getting up steam.) For thirty minutes the main battery guns were at maximum elevation and could not be laid. The confusion caused by this casualty was added to by 15cm (6 inch) shell hits from the first American salvos. One 15cm (6 inch) shell severed the leads between the director in the top and the guns of the main battery. When electric power was restored this casualty had to be discovered and corrected before the main battery guns resumed firing. The other 15cm (6 inch) shell hits were all "high" and located as follows: one pierced the bridge structure, forward and below the first hit (that which severed the fire control leads to the foretop); two amidship through the base of the catapult structure, a short distance above the main deck; and one which severed a mainmast backstay. (Note: Commander MIURA was questioned closely about the caliber of the shells which hit the NACHI. He was very positive that all the hits enumerated above, which pierced the ship's superstructure, were 15 cm (6 inch), and was quite sure that the one which severed the stay was of the same caliber, since it arrived in a salvo with 15cm shells. He stated repeatedly that there were no 20cm (8 inch) hits. These heavy shells made many close misses, but the vast majority landed just forward of the ship's bow, drenching the bridge with water. He complained of smarting eyes, which he attributed to the dye in these shell splashes. He was eloquent on the subject of the American destroyers' gunnery, saying that their 13cm (5 inch) shells landed aboard like rain.)

During the 30 minutes in which the NACHI's main battery was inoperative, she continued to lead, but maneuvered to avoid interference with the MAYA's shooting. The Japanese cruisers fired torpedoes, soon after opening fire with their main batteries, while the range was still closing. All torpedoes missed. The ABUKUMA and her six destroyers were ordered to close and carry out a torpedo attack. However, the NACHI steamed at speeds up to 33 knots and the destroyers had a difficult time making over 28, hence, although they "cut corners" trying to catch up, they could not execute their mission. The destroyers did fire their torpedoes about an hour after the action started, but the range was extreme and no hits were made.

* Note the error of two hours in Commander MIURA's recollection of time. This is consistent throughout his account and was checked by his statement that sunrise was about 0530 (actually 0330 TOKYO Time).

About an hour and a half after action was begun the American destroyers laid smoke. The American ships zig-zagged and fired between smoke columns. About 0700 a 13cm (5 inch) shell from the U.S. destroyers passed through the gun port of No. 1 turret on the NACHI, exploded inside, and killed the entire turret crew. The American destroyers' fire was very heavy. Many 13cm shells burst above and showered the main deck with fragments; about 40 of the NACHI's topside personnel were killed this way. Fairly early in the action a 13cm shell struck the after end of the flag bridge and detonated against the deck house. At this time the Admiral was standing at the forward center of the flag bridge with his two principal staff officers on either side and slightly behind him. The other staff officers were standing in a single rank to the rear. Commander MIURA was second from the right in this rank and in a relatively exposed position. Miraculously, all shell fragments missed the officers, but killed three communication personnel whose stations were further aft, and set fire to the after end of the bridge. This fire burned briskly for a short while, but was rapidly extinguished.

During the maneuvering to westerly and northwesterly courses, the light cruiser TAMA ended up in the van of the cruiser column. When the American destroyers began an attack the anti-aircraft guns put out a barrage as a deterrent to their advance. Commander MIURA expressed admiration for the skill and daring of this attack and the volume of 13cm fire which the destroyers delivered. He said he did not know how a ship could live through the concentration of fire which was brought to bear on the leading destroyer. There were no torpedo hits as a result of this American attack, and he stated that he was not aware that any torpedoes had actually been fired.

For three hours the action see-sawed back and forth across the surface of the ocean. The Japanese registered few hits, the Americans many, although the main battery salvos from the heavy cruiser were consistently close misses ahead. The Japanese ran short of ammunition. Vice Admiral HOSOGAYA calculated that American planes from ADAK would join action in three hours from the start of the battle. He therefore broke off the action by continuing to the west, while the American ships went south.

The NACHI sustained the heaviest damage of any of the Japanese ships. In addition to the hits mentioned above, Commander MIURA said there were 13cm (5 inch) hits too numerous to record. The next most damaged ship was the light cruiser TAMA, although her damage was all "topside" with none of the vitals of the ship deranged. The heavy cruiser MAYA got off almost "Scot-free", with only light superficial damage. He knew of no damage to the ABUKUMA and her destroyers.

As for damage done to the enemy, Commander MIURA said it was claimed that one destroyer was very seriously damaged, and one major caliber hit had been made on the American heavy cruiser.

Commander MIURA stated, positively, that there were no troops embarked in any of the Japanese combatant ships, and none to his knowledge in any of the three merchant transports. The latter ships continued to the northwest to an area about thirty miles south of BERING ISLAND where they awaited orders; thence they returned to PARAMUSHIRO. While standing by awaiting orders the transports sighted two to four PBY's.

After breaking off action the combatant ships went west to the coast of KAMCHATKA, then down the coast to PARAMUSHIRO. One American aircraft was sighted by the combatant ships during the day of the battle. This aircraft was not definitely identified, but it was reported as, and thought to be, a flying boat. No Japanese aircraft support from PARAMUSHIRO was planned or given. Fog was not encountered on the return voyage.

The NACHI was sent from PARAMUSHIRO to OMINATO for repairs. Since the heavy repairs could not be effected there, she went on down to the Navy Yard at SASEBO.

THE ASSAULT AND RETAKING OF ATTU

Commander MIURA had little to say of the Japanese own operations to assist the ATTU garrison in the defense of that island. He said many plans were made, but cancelled due to weather and that the operations were generally unsuccessful. When an attack group was sent they were preceded by a weather plane. The Japanese weather forecasting, he said, was rather good. This he attributed to the fact that they had broken the Russian weather code and hence could include a considerable area in their weather analysis. He said that prior to the American bombardment of ATTU there had been a plan to send 48 landbased type zero fighters to operate from the strip at HOLTZ BAY.

THE EVACUATION OF KISKA

At the time of the evacuation of KISKA Commander MIURA was at PARAMUSHIRO. Most of the other members of the staff were with Commander FIFTH Fleet, Vice Admiral KAWASE, embarked in the TAMA which was at sea southwest of KISKA. Commander FIRST Destroyer Squadron, Rear Admiral KIMURA, embarked in the ABUKUMA, was in direct charge of the evacuation force.

Because the supply routes were cut, KISKA could not be maintained. The evacuation was effected by one light cruiser and thirteen destroyers. (Note: See summary of interrogation of Commander Nifumi MUKAI, who was one of the evacuees. He stated that two light cruisers, ABUKUMA and KISO, and eight destroyers participated.) The approach was made from the south because the fog was thickest in that direction. The evacuation was successful only on the third attempt. On the second attempt, when very near KISKA, the entire force was exposed by a complete lifting of the fog, and had to retire. On the third attempt, the fog persisted until the force was close to the south end of KISKA ISLAND; then it thinned enough to permit navigation along the coastline. The ships had no radar. With the shoreline in sight and close aboard, the force passed up the west coast of the island, around the north end, and down the east coast into the harbor. The fog lifted in the harbor. During the approach arrangements with the shore party were completed by radio. The force anchored just before sunset. Within 30 minutes (Commander MUKAI said one hour) upwards of 5000 personnel were embarked. No equipment or supplies were taken aboard, just personnel. After loading, the ships departed, and again followed the shoreline close aboard, north around the island. They took departure from the southern end of the island. Returning to PARAMUSHIRO the force followed a track not quite so far south as the outbound track. They refueled en route at a point about half way to PARAMUSHIRO from an oiler which had accompanied them part way out.

DEFENSE OF THE KURILES

The air defense of the KURILES in the period June to September, 1942, was provided by 18 Army fighter planes based at KASHIWABARA on the west side of PARAMUSHIRO STRAIT, and by 36 Navy fighters and 36 Navy land based attack planes (BETTIES) based at HOROMUSHIRO at the south end of PARAMUSHIRO ISLAND. The operational radius of the land based attack planes was considered to be 700 nautical miles. At the SHIMUSHU Navy Seaplane Base were approximately four three-seat, twin float reconnaissance seaplanes, twelve single-seat, single float, seaplane fighters, and four two-seat single float spotting seaplanes.

There was a Navy strip on a small area of flat land on the southeast end of MATSUWA ISLAND. In this location the weather was very bad. There was an Army strip on the north end of URUPPU ISLAND. There was a Navy airfield at TENNAI in the vicinity of HITOKAPPU WAN on ETOROFU ISLAND, where there was normally based a six-plane unit of carrier attack bombers.

All personnel evacuated from KISKA were taken to SHIMUSHU and PARAMUSHIRO. There were three Army divisions in the KURILES; about half of these troops were on PARAMUSHIRO, the remainder divided between MATSUWA, URUPPU, and ETOROFU. The heaviest anti-aircraft and coast defense was located on both sides of PARAMUSHIRO STRAIT. From about August 1942 onward there were approximately 60 13cm guns and 15 7cm guns installed there. The American air effort against the KURILES accounted for the sinking of three or four cargo

ships off KASHIWA MA, however, little damage was done to the airfields. Ship bombardments caused considerable damage at airfields by the destruction of buildings and the pocketing of runways. After a bombardment at HOROMUSHIRO it took one week to repair the runway. There was lighter damage at SURIBACHI. The hangar and beach installations were heavily damaged at MATSUWA.

During the period between the Summer of 1944 and the Spring of 1945 all Navy personnel and about one Army division were withdrawn from the KURILES, principally because American submarines had rendered supply too difficult. Navy personnel went into training in the OMINATO area with a view toward defense against landing operations in NORTH JAPAN. Army personnel went to HOKKAIDO to principal Army bases to train for the same purpose. As to the sinking of supply ships, Commander MIURA could not give concrete figures, but he said there were many, in his opinion from ten to twenty. Of these a few were 10,000 ton ships, but most were in the 3000 to 4000 ton category. The heaviest rate of sinkings occurred in the area east of KARAFUTO (SAKHALIN), and off straits of LA PEROUSE and TSUGARU. At the end of the war the submarines were sinking ships in ISHIKARI BAY on the west coast of HOKKAIDO. The submarines did much more harm than airplanes. He considered airplanes ineffective due to weather.

When the Navy personnel were withdrawn from the KURILES, all Navy airplanes were withdrawn also. The Army withdrew all airplanes except for about eighteen fighters on PARAMUSHIRO. The last Navy air units to be withdrawn were a six plane carrier type attack plane unit at KATAOKA and a similar unit at TENNAI, ETOROFU.

Commander MIURA gave the following random items of information:

During the night bombardment of PARAMUSHIRO in January, 1944, there were some small ships in harbor at HOROMUSHIRO, but none were sunk. In the February, 1943, bombardment of ATTU, no ships were sunk. In the April, 1943, bombardment of ATTU he had heard that one 5000 ton ship was sunk. He had been ashore once at HOLTZ BAY, ATTU, once on the south side of AGATTU ISLAND, and once at KISKA HARBOR. The ALEUTS from the village on ATTU were removed to a point near SAPPORO, HOKKAIDO, where they were in the hands of the Army.