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DATE: 21 October 1945.

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: GILBERTS - MARSHALLS Operation. Naval Strategic
Planning.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Commander NAKAJIMA, Chika Taka, has served 19 years
with the I.J.N.

Where interviewed: MEIJI Building, Room 749.

Interrogator: Captain Steadman (n) TELLER, U.S.N.

Interpreter: Lieut. Comdr. Seymour (n) MILLSTEIN, USNR.

Alled Officers Present: Captain C. (n) SHANDS, U.S.N.

SUMMARY

Commander NAKAJIMA gives the JAPANESE estimate of UNITED STATES intentions and capabilities at various stages of the Central Pacific Campaign and describes the JAPANESE plans for countering these anticipated moves. Although not responsible for decisions in planning, he summarizes discussions among the Staff Planners of the Combined Fleet and explains certain changes in JAPANESE Plans during the campaign.

The costly SOLOMONS Campaign reduced and absorbed JAPANESE Naval and Air Strength to the point that almost complete reliance was placed on the island garrisons of the MARSHALLS - GILBERTS to make our westward advance slow and costly. Our landing on KWAJALEIN was unexpected and our assault on the MARIANAS came before JAPANESE Air Strength in those islands had reached the planned level. Our swift movement into the PHILIPPINES following the PALAU and MOROTAI Operations again exhibited capabilities of their local ground and air forces.

Notes on Battle of MIDWAY 4 - 6 June 1942 and Battle of SANTA CRUZ 26 October 1942.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Commander NAKAJIMA, Chika Taka).

TRANSCRIPT

Q. What were the plans for the Fleet in defending the MARSHALLS Islands?

A. Until April 1943, the overall plan for the Japanese Navy was to make every effort to hold NEW BRITAIN, RABAU and probably the MARSHALLS. After April 1943, losses in aircraft and surface craft became so severe that a study was made of pushing back this defensive line to approximately the tip of Northwest NEW GUINEA, TRUK and the MARIANAS and letting the other loosely held Japanese occupied islands go at a great cost to enemy and consuming as much time as possible. By July 1943 this plan was actually put into effect which possibly explains reasons for half-hearted attempts to defend the GILBERTS and MARSHALLS. There was a lot of discussion at the time as to exactly how to handle the situation. The problem was complicated by lack of air strength and the fact the SOLOMONS Campaign was occupying a good deal of our fleet strength. A decision was made in October, 1943 to commit strength as far possible to SOLOMONS from RABAU. However, tentative plans for fleet movements in connection with sending more troops to the GILBERTS Area were made at the beginning of November. Three of four cruisers and destroyers of the 2nd Fleet left TRUK about 24 November to rendezvous with the 4th Fleet in the KWAJALEIN Area. This movement had been delayed due to previous action participated in by the 2nd Fleet at RABAU. By the time the fleet had assembled in KWAJALEIN, the GILBERT Island Campaign was already lost. At the end of November or beginning of December, a small unit composed mainly of two light cruisers believed to be NAKA and ISUFU, and 2 or 3 destroyers under command of the 4th Fleet left KWAJALEIN with the intention of landing about one battalion of troops on TARAWA; but by that time the situation in the GILBERTS had so deteriorated that these troops were discharged at MAJURO. This operation actually was a normal reinforcement plan which went wrong due to delay. The 2nd Fleet was in the KWAJALEIN Area at the end of November or early December to assist the small force of the 4th Fleet to land troops on TARAWA if the situation had permitted. Both 2nd and 4th Fleets then returned from KWAJALEIN Area to TRUK. There were no battleships in these forces. The reason for retirement was that the reduction in airplane and surface strength did not warrant further immediate offensive action.

Q. What was the Japanese estimate of the UNITED STATES probable intentions after we had taken the GILBERT Islands?

A. Opinion in the Japanese Navy had it that you were advancing exactly in the track of the Japanese occupation scheme at the beginning of the war; in which case you would obtain control of the Western PACIFIC to insure your supply lines to AUSTRALIA and then proceed to take the MARSHALL, SOLOMON, NEW BRITAIN, NEW GUINEA and PHILIPPINE Islands. We realized that you would not attempt to take very strong points such as RABAU and TRUK. There was divided opinion as to whether you would land at JALUIT or MILE. Some thought you would land on WOTJE but there were few who thought you would go right to the heart of the MARSHALL and take KWAJALEIN. There were so many possible points of invasion in the MARSHALL that we could not consider any one a strong point and consequently dispersed our strength.

Q. Why did you not put more air strength in the MARSHALLS knowing that we would probably land there?

A. To a certain extent we did increase the aircraft by sending in the 24th Air Flotilla, but other commitments such as RABAU and the SOLOMONS were attrition of air strength was very severe made it impossible to send real air reinforcement to

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERROGATION OF (Commander NAKAJIMA, Chika Taka)

the MARSHALLS. Furthermore the decision had been made that we would make a supreme effort to hold the strong defensive line through the MARIANAS, PALAU and NEW GUINEA including TRUK, for the defense of which we were training and forming new air units in JAPAN. We were reluctant to use up this fresh air strength for the defense of obviously lost territory.

Q. Did you expect us to land at TRUK?

A. The opinion was pretty evenly divided; some staff people thought you would land on TRUK, not in force, but to neutralize it. Other opinion was that you would circle TRUK and land on PULUWAT where there is a good air strip.

Q. Why did you not have effective search planes to warn you of our carrier strike on TRUK, 17 February 1944?

A. Due to the shortage of available aircraft there was simply insufficient scouting activity carried on.

Q. When did the Combined and Second Fleets abandon TRUK as a base and why?

A. The Combined Fleet left TRUK on 3 February and we thought we had better leave. The YAMATO and the NAGATO plus elements of the 2nd Fleet proceeded to PALAU on 4 or 5th February. On the 10th of February the group known as the Combined Fleet proceeded to JAPAN. It consisted of the MUSASHI (Admiral KOGA'S Flagship), one light cruiser, and two or three destroyers. The reason for the YAMATO, NAGATO and other units proceeding to PALAU was because of the danger of air attack at TRUK. The CinC Combined Fleet returned to JAPAN with MUSASHI and units directly under his command for the purpose of discussing defensive tactics with General Headquarters. By that time the plans for strong defense of the so-called Secondary Defense Line were made. Admiral KOGA took his unit back for the purpose of discussing actual tactical moves towards implementing this defense plan and to arrange for proper convoying and for transport of troops to this area, as well as to obtain an increase of ship and airplane construction.

Q. What fleet movements occurred between TRUK and the BISMARCKS during November?

A. On 3 November, 1943 the 2nd Fleet, consisting of the 4th, 5th, and 7th squadrons and 2nd SUISEN, went down to assist in the BOUGAINVILLE Operations and staged at RABAU. A part of this force received severe damage at RABAU Harbor on 4 or 5 November from Carrier Task Force.

Q. What was the staff estimate of the UNITED STATES ability to conduct successive amphibious operations?

A. We couldn't estimate when you would be ready for operations after the MARSHALLS because we didn't know where you were going. We thought you would be ready to land in the MARSHALLS by January 1944.

Q. How many submarines were occupied in defending the GILBERTS?

A. About six submarines.

Q. Why were not submarines used more to oppose our advance through the PACIFIC?

A. The main reason was the lack of submarines. Many were used in the SOLOMONS Operation. It was also very important for them to supply even isolated and ineffective bases because the Army, which was also a partner in the planning, would have refused to send additional strength to the South PACIFIC if the Navy had left men to starve. The exact use of submarines was the point

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERROGATION OF (Commander NAKAJIMA, Chika Taka):

of much discussion at headquarters, but we were forced to let them be used for supply, actually, because of the shortage of warships and supply ships of all types. While opinion and advice were handed down freely from General Headquarters the decision as to use of submarines were made by Combined Fleet Headquarters. Another point was that this use of submarines as supply weapons fitted in with our overall strategic planning for fighting delaying actions on all islands.

Q. What main fleet base was substituted for TRUK after 5 February 1944?

A. The next base to be used as such was PALAU. Even at that time the high command realized they would have to use bases even closer to JAPAN than PALAU in the near future. They realized that PALAU was not completely suitable as a main fleet anchorage for physical reasons, due to its shallowness, and that they would soon be forced to move to either TAWI TAWI or to GUIMARAS STRAIT in the PHILIPPINES on account of lack of tankers and shipping.

Q. What shipping losses did you sustain in the carrier air strike on TRUK, 17 February 1944?

A. There were quite a few cargo and transport vessels sunk and one NAKA Class cruiser, the KASHIMA (a converted light cruiser).

Q. What decisions were made at General Headquarters upon arrival of Admiral KOGA in February?

A. The decision was made to firmly defend, construct fortifications and build up personnel and material strength in the outlying bases which would form our secondary line of defense; namely: the MARIANAS, Western CAROLINES, PHILIPPINES and Northwest NEW GUINEA, with special emphasis on the MARIANAS and Western CAROLINES. In the MARIANAS and Western CAROLINES bases were to be constructed and all preparations were to have been completed by April. Actually they were ready in May.

Q. How was it planned to use the Fleet in assisting the defense of this line?

A. Implementing this plan of defense, the Fleet would be used mainly for convoy and transport work. We assumed that fleet support would not be absolutely necessary if we were able to build up strong enough bases and at the same time carry out the aircraft building program that was being put into effect.

Q. Why then did your Fleet come out and fight in the first Battle of the PHILIPPINES, June 1944?

A. The Fleet sortied at the time of the First PHILIPPINE Battle because you had approached and penetrated what we had decided was our last stand line, and we were forced to commit our ships.

Q. The Japanese Fleet lost quite a few tankers at TRUK and some more at PALAU. Did the loss of those tankers effect fleet movements?

A. The Japanese Fleet had serious difficulty, not only because of the oilers and freighters lost at TRUK and PALAU but because even before those losses there was a shortage of tankers.

Q. What was the estimate of AMERICAN intentions and capabilities about 1 October 1944 after our occupation of PALAU and MOROTAI?

A. From the summer of 1944 general opinion was that you would land somewhere in vicinity of MINDANAO, SAMAR or LEYTE in the PHILIPPINES. At the time of your landings on PALAU and MOROTAI,

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERROGATION OF (Commander NAKAJIMA, Chika Taka).

Staff opinion was that it would take you a month to land in the PHILIPPINES; but with the developments on both these islands we thought that your attack would not take place before November 1944. About 1 October we sighted large concentrations of shipping in MOROTAI and PALAU and realized that some new action was imminent. But most of us felt that it was too early for a landing in the PHILIPPINES and that possibly you were going to YAP or TALAUD Islands. The thing that bothered us was that preparations appeared too big for landings on the two above mentioned islands and too small for the PHILIPPINES. We couldn't make up our minds as to your most probable objective. We decided that in the event of a landing in the central or southern part of the PHILIPPINES, we would be able to take care of it with part of our SINGAPORE-based fleet assisting our strong forces in the PHILIPPINES. We had a Fleet in JAPAN which was going to take care of any Task Force which might sortie toward the north.

Q. Did you think there was any chance of our landing at FORMOSA or points north?

A. Absolutely no chance. We felt that our forces in PHILIPPINES and FORMOSA would adequately defend against such a move.

(Captain SHAND'S Interrogation)

Q. In order to confirm previous information give a description of your activities at the Battle of MIDWAY, 4 - 6 June 1942.

A. I was Communication Officer on the ATAGO which was Admiral KONDO'S Flagship in the force escorting a number of transports, which were carrying troops to capture MIDWAY. We approached MIDWAY from the west-southwest and were a little ahead of schedule, so countermarched for several hours waiting to get on a schedule that would coincide with that of the First Air Fleet which was to attack from the northwest. After returning to the base course to MIDWAY, during the afternoon of 3 June, speed about 10 knots, we were attacked by high-altitude long-range bombers. That was the day before the carriers were sunk. It was only a few planes. No hits. About midnight that same night, we were attacked by several seaplanes. One transport hit but not sunk. No more attacks were made on the Transport Force. We did not see any dive-bombers.

The transports and some destroyers were ordered to retire the next night, but the cruisers continued toward MIDWAY until we were attacked by a submarine. When the submarine was sighted we were ordered to zig-zag, but the MIKUMA and MOGAMI collided so we were ordered to retire. I think that much damage was done to the bow of the MIKUMA. It was later sunk. The MOGAMI was damaged at the same time.

Q. Give a description of the damage that you received at the Battle of SANTA CRUZ, 26 October 1942?

A. I was on the SHOKAKU. The ZUIKAKU and the ZUIHO were also there. The JUNYO was in the area some place. The HIYO was in TRUK with engine trouble. The SHOKAKU received six bomb hits. The ZUIKAKO did not receive any. The ZUIHO received one or two. I do not know about the JUNYO. I think that the CHIKUMA received about four hits. I don't think that the TONE was hit. The night before the battle started, one plane attacked the ZUIHO about midnight, but did no damage.

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The night after the battle the aircraft carriers looked for the American ships but were unable to find them. However, some destroyers found the HORNET and saw some American destroyers shelling and sending torpedoes into her. One of our battleships, I think the KONGO, was in the area but not close enough to fire.