

HEADQUARTERS
U. S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY
(PACIFIC)
APO 234 c/o PM San Francisco

INTERROGATION NO. 277

Place: Tokyo
Date: 2 November 1945

Division of Origin: Military Analysis (See Note.)

SUBJECT: KAMIKAZE TACTICS AND THE JAPANESE ABILITY TO RESIST

Where Interviewed: Room 722, Meiji Building

PERSONNEL INTERROGATED AND BACKGROUND OF EACH:

1. Lt General KAWABE - Deputy Chief, Imperial General Headquarters; Commanding General KOKUSOGUN; Director KAMIKAZE operations, Philippines and Okinawa campaigns; Dec 1941 - Chief of General Affairs Section, Army Air Headquarters and Inspector General, General Affairs Section, Army Air Headquarters.

2. Maj General MIWA, - Assistant Chief of Staff, KOKUSOGUN

Interrogators: Col Ramsay D POTTS, AC
(see note) Mr Alexander P de SEVERSKY, former Major, AC

Interpreters: Lt Cmdr NICHOLS, USNR
Mr T SATO, a Civilian (Nisei)

Allied Officers in attendance: Maj Gen Orvil A ANDERSON, USA
Brig Gen J B CRABB, USA
Col TERRILL, AC
Col BURNSIDE, GSC
Col BURCHINAL, AC
Maj LANE, AC
Maj McELWAIN, GSC

SUMMARY:

Lt General KAWABE discusses the background of the development of the KAMIKAZE tactic, emphasizing that it was, in all cases, voluntary, and arose out of the desire of the individual to dedicate his body to this cause. The organization of the KAMIKAZE units is discussed, and the general plan for countering the invasion of KYUSHU is developed.

Gen KAWABE came to the conclusion in April, when the B-29s began precision bombing, that Japanese industrial capacity would probably be destroyed but that, despite such destruction, they would still be able to construct planes and continue to fight to the very end. Gen KAWABE states that he himself would have taken off in a plane and crashed it in a KAMIKAZE attack had the invasion taken place.

He does not think that a single unified air force would have been advantageous for Japan.

Fighter tactics in opposition to B-29s are discussed.

NOTE:

This was a JOINT INTERROGATION conducted by COL POTTS, representing the USSBS, and by MR SEVERSKY, representing the SECRETARY OF WAR.

Interrogation Cont'd

- Q. Did I understand right that in this Kamikaze group both Army and Navy were participating?
- A. Yes, that is right.
- Q. So apparently in that particular action you had succeeded more or less in achieving the unification of the command?
- A. The Kamikaze operation only lasted one month, but before that, in the Okinawa campaigns, the Army tactical units were under the command of the Navy commander.
- Q. What equipment was unified: Was the equipment developed by the Army or the Navy?
- A. The entire Army organization was under Army control--planes, equipment, pilots, everything, were supplied by the Army in entire units to the Navy commander in Kyushu.
- Q. The Kamikaze consisted of Army and Navy: The Army was supplied entirely by the Army and placed at the tactical disposal of the Navy commander, but it operated as an Army organization: Is that right?
- A. That is right.
- Q. But it consisted of both Army and Navy pilots and Army and Navy airplanes?
- A. The only connection evidently through the tactical command which was under control of the Navy.
- Q. And who developed the tactics?
- A. It was evidently only the Navy who planned the campaign. When they had made a decision as to how the campaign should be run, they informed the commander of the Army outfit what the plan was and then left it up to him to set up his own organization for the carrying out of that plan.
- Q. Was it possible for you to apply the same tactics to the Army and Navy equipment when they were entirely different for example, different radios, different frequencies, etc. How did you organize, synchronize, and coordinate all this variegated equipment and personnel?
- A. I believe it would be easier to go through the entire organizational setup; therefore I would like to tell you about the whole organization; Taking as an example the Okinawa campaign, the Army unit was the 6th Air Army which was sent down to Kyushu for that purpose; the Naval outfit was the 5th Air Fleet.
Both Army and Navy organizations completely, besides being assigned to the Kamikaze operation, were assigned other tasks. Only for aerial operations, the 6th Air Army was entirely under the command of the 5th Air Fleet.
- Q. You are apparently describing general employment of air power, both Army and Navy. My question was, specifically, about Kamikaze--that's supposed to be composed of the Army pilots and the Navy pilots, and you said Army supplied the needs of the Army section as the Navy supplied the needs of the Navy sections, tactics were developed by the Navy and the commander was a Naval man. Now, what I want to know is, how were they coordinated; Two different factions flying different equipment--were the tactics equally applicable and practical for both types of equipment and both types of training, only as far as the Kamikaze unit is concerned?
- A. The Army Kamikaze and the Navy Kamikaze were never organized as one unit--the Army ran its own, the Navy ran its own. They were under a single command. The Navy was a very loosely organized command--i.e., the command the Navy had over the Army consisted only in the selection of the target so that the Navy would say: we are going to attack a certain target at a certain time; giving them both the target and the time. Then it was entirely up to the Army, having that information, to coordinate with the Navy attack, but the tactics involved were left entirely to the discretion of the Army commander.

Interrogation Cont'd

- Q. Did the Kamikaze tactics represent a temporary expedient until they developed better types of airplanes which would not require the suicidal action or was it planned as a legitimate continuous military effort and a permanent part of your tactics?
- A. At no time was it the policy or a planned thing for the planes to crash themselves on their targets, but it resulted from need which arose from the shortage of pilots and the shortage of types of planes capable of carrying out the tactics which they would like to have used and which were similar to your tactics. In other words it was a temporary expedient but temporary only in view of the fact that we were incapable of combating you by any other means, for technological reasons.
- Q. That was simply to compensate the technical deficiencies of Japanese pilots-- You had to compensate for the technical deficiency?
- A. Yes, exactly.
- Q. Were you aware of the fact that Germans had tried the same thing and gave it up because they found it impractical?
- A. No, I didn't know that.
- Q. They tried it against our air force.
- A. That is entirely in opposition to what I have heard myself of the situation. Of course all I have to rely on is what the German Military Air Attache told me. The Germans themselves told me that the Japanese were the only people capable of carrying out such attacks intentionally; that although they had tried it out in Germany, that no matter how they planned it there was never any question that the pilots wanted to come back alive.
- Q. Do you understand that the Germans tried it only against airplanes--you may be confusing ships and airplanes?
- A. I knew that that had happened. I'm talking about ships.
- Q. I am perfectly willing to give you the credit. It is true that, as far as suicide tactics are concerned, the Germans did not have the same stamina as the Japanese did; but did you realize at the time that the very fact that they have to resort to such measures is in effect a ready indication that ultimate defeat is in the cards? that if the technological disparity was so great that only by suicidal attempts could they partially compensate for this? Was it clear to you that the very reason you have to resort to this measure is that defeat was already in sight?
- A. No matter how you look at it, everyone who participated in these attacks died happily in the conviction that they would win the final victory by their own death. I did not believe that Japan was beaten by resorting to these tactics.
- Q. We found, in the United States, that to manufacture crews is more difficult than planes, and even if we decided to resort to this measure, our own calculations had shown that if we were to expend our crews we would very soon be denuded of the flying personnel, and that alone would defeat us. How does that compare with your calculations on the attrition of pilots through suicidal methods: Can you justify that?
- A. Despite this, I agree with you in general that your opinion is right? That you would soon run out of crews; but since our strategy was aimed solely at the destruction of your fleet and transport fleet when it landed here in Japan, that was our view as to our strategy to destroy your fleet at landing. It was not very difficult to manufacture second-rate planes--that is, make-shift planes--and it was not difficult to train pilots for just such a duty; and since pilots were willing, we had no shortage of volunteers. At no time did we run out of pilots to man these planes, but our big difficulty was, rather, a question of manufacturing than a shortage of crews.
- Q. In your planning on using the Kamikaze against our invading fleet during the invasion of Kyushu and other places, do you realize that before we invade

we would neutralize every airport within the Empire? We had the power to do it. Did you foresee this possibility and how did you intend to launch your attack? Where from? What was your official plan for that?

A. It didn't take a very elaborate field for a Kamikaze plane to take off. We believed that, despite your destruction of our major fields, we could very easily construct fields from which Kamikaze planes could take off. Everywhere we had built little fields capable of launching Kamikaze planes. As long as there was only a question of launching them and not getting them back, there was no question about that.

Q. In Germany, two strategic air forces neutralized German industry, and the Air Forces we had there pinned their Air Forces down during the invasion. Now we would have here three Air Forces on Okinawa besides the B-29s and the carrier-based air planes, so we would have a much greater weight exerted against Japan than against Germany, and therefore we believe that all the landing strips, no matter how small as long as they resembled flying fields, would be destroyed or neutralized. How had you intended to disperse your airplanes and control the operations, because you would have to operate from widely separated little flying fields all over Japan? 8000 planes are a lot of planes.

A. We knew you would do everything in your power to destroy all our airfields but we believed the airfields necessary for launching Kamikaze planes were such simple affairs that they could be mended very quickly. We believed that by taking advantage of weather--heavy overcast--intervals between your bombing raids, we could repair the airfields enough to keep them serviceable. Also we could use stretches of beach along the Coast. We realized that we might not be able to do it, but we planned to do everything possible and thought probably we would be able to if we exerted ourselves to the utmost.

Q. I'd like to ask you the same question I asked the others to see what your reaction is: Remember when we reached your industrial capacity with B-29s and we were able to destroy your industrial capacity, yet our industrial capacity was unmolested, did you realize that, then and there, the war was over because you would be deprived of your means to wage war? When did you realize that it would be only a matter of time?

A. We believed probably we would lose the war and we knew we could never win the war; but we never gave up the idea of continuing the fight, using whatever special attack planes we could manufacture, and we intended to continue the fight unto the very end and make a showdown fight of it, involving transports at landings; that is, we intended to wait until we could attack the transports at landing although it was very clear to us that you could eventually destroy our industries to the point where we could no longer wage war.

Q. When did you come to that conclusion?

A. I came to that conclusion when in April the B-29 raids began attacking various small targets in Japan--not only the larger ones; that is, when the precision bombing started. Despite the fact that we knew you could destroy most of our industrial capacity--our capacity to produce planes--we still did not think it would become impossible for us to construct planes and in some way or another we would construct them.

I want to explain something to you: This is a very difficult thing which you may not be able to understand. The Japanese, to the very end, believed that by Spiritual means they could fight on equal terms with you, yet by any other comparison it would not appear equal. We believed our Spiritual conviction in victory would balance any scientific advantages and we had no intention of giving up the fight. It seemed to be especially Japanese.

Q. I understand: You could fight to the last man, but you did that knowing perfectly well that victory would be impossible?

A. No, we still thought that that would offset the technological superiority, and the issue was still in doubt. That's probably a contention that you cannot understand--that's the Japanese feeling: we'd made up our minds to fight to the very last man and thought we still had a chance.

Interrogation Cont'd

Q. Well, we might as well stop this line of questioning here and now because it is true, I myself cannot understand it. How does it happen that the Naval aircraft industry went underground sooner and on a much greater scale than the Army? What was the reason for that difference?

A. That wasn't in my department; would you please question Major General ENDO who will be here at 1530 hours? I understand that was the case but I don't know why.

May I point out one thing: You call our Kamikaze attacks "suicide" attacks. This is a misnomer and we feel very badly about your calling them "suicide" attacks. They were in no sense "suicide". The pilot did not start out on his mission with the intention of committing suicide. He looked upon himself as a human bomb which would destroy a certain part of the enemy fleet for his country. They considered it a glorious thing, while a suicide may not be so glorious.

Q. In our country, it is glorious to die for your own country, but at the same time we try to use tactics and equipment on which it is not necessary to base the whole plan of defense on this premise.

A. This was originally a voluntary action on our part, and despite what the policy might be, our spirit was that we wanted to do this.

Q. We call it suicide because we cannot find any other word in our vocabulary to describe those certain tactics. Maybe from now on we may not call it suicide; We'll call it "Kamikaze".

A. I just wanted to explain the way I felt about it.

Q. We agree with your interpretation, except we have no word in our vocabulary to call it properly: We have had demonstrated a new concept in this war.

We have a principle of very little difference except that when we sent out a mission the probability of return is not less than 50% and never went under that figure. In your case, to compensate for the technological difference, you had reduced the possibility of return to zero.

A. Originally we did not plan these suicide attacks as suicide attacks, but because of the results achieved by suicide attacks, gradually the Japanese Air Force had decided to become a special attack force from the top down to the lowest man, including myself. Although I remain to tell the story, I myself had fully determined to crash a plane into the invading fleet. My place now is to utilize myself to the best of my ability in the reconstruction of Japan, but I feel that if the war had continued to a finish fight, I would have crashed my plane into the enemy and I feel that everyone in the Air Force feels the same way.

Q. Was there any discussion of unifying the Air Forces under a single command? Now that this thing is over, I am not referring to tactical use of Air Force in the theatre but strategic preparation. What is your feeling? Would you have been better off if the entire air potential of the country-- that means everything; men, manpower, industry, plants, materials--had been incorporated under a single command? What is your feeling now?

A. Actually, a decision like that, whether to have a separate air force or an Army Air Force and a Navy Air Force under separate commands, depends upon the theatre of operations in which a country is at war. For example: In Japan the Army was committed to Asia and the continent, whereas the Navy was committed to the East. Therefore it was not practical for us to have one air force and it was more practical for us in fact to have two so that the Army could concentrate on certain strategy and operations over the Continent of Asia and the Navy could concentrate on the construction of planes useful for action over the water to the East at long range. I do not believe that it would have been more practical for Japan to have one single air force.

I think, if Japan had been intended to wage war with the United States that it would have been better to have had two separate air forces but to have detachments from each air force which were composed of bombers and fighters for special missions, mostly consisting of bombers, for attacks on the United States.

Interrogation Cont'd

The balance of the interview may be summarized as follows:

Japan attacked the United States without any large scale planning for a long war.

In defending the main islands against B-29 attacks large air units were staged in the areas of Kyushy, Osaka, Kagoya and Tokyo. The main purpose of the intercepting fighters was to shoot down the B-29s and orders were given accordingly not to engage the B-29 escorts but to go straight after the bombers. During the last six months of the war the interception of B-29s became progressively more difficult because of a shortage of skilled pilots, because the night raids of the B-29s meant that interceptors had to fly at night which they were not capable of doing, and due to the lack of an adequate warning system.