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INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS 447)
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PLACE: TOKYO
DATE: 26 November 1945

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: Overall Planning and Policies.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Lieutenant General KAWABE, IJA. From beginning of the war until April 1943, Chief of General Affairs Section of the Army Bureau of Aeronautics. May 1943 to August 1944, Commander of the Air Army in MANCHURIA. Until April 1945, Deputy Chief of the Army Bureau of Aeronautics. From April to October 1945, Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff.

Where interviewed: Room 748, Meiji Building.

Interrogator: Rear Admiral R. A. OFSTIE, USN - Captain T. J. HEDDING, USN.

Interpreter: Mr. F. C. Woodrough, jr.

Allied Officers Present: Colonel COLE, AUS.

SUMMARY

General KAWABE discusses cooperation between the Army and Navy, the responsibilities and primary interests of the two services, and the effects of operations in the various theatres. The General was a strong advocate of fighting the war "to the very end", in the belief that had they been able to inflict heavy casualties on the U. S. landing forces it might have been possible to get terms more favorable than absolute surrender.



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TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Lieutenant General KAWABE, IJA).

TRANSCRIPT

Q. (Admiral Ofstie) General, we want some clarification of certain features of planning and decision in the Japanese Army, and your opinion on certain matters in which you might be considered a principal authority.

Do you feel that while you were on the General Staff, that organization had full information on naval operations of import?

A. Basically there was interchange of information as much as possible, and exchange of staff officers. I don't know exactly when this started and I learned it only after I became Deputy Chief of the General Staff, but as a regular thing we met three times a week in a joint conference to confer on operational matters. So I believe that the senior staff officers were well aware of the progress of operations on both sides.

Q. Were there any major differences of opinion during the period you were on the General Staff; if so, will you give us the substance of such matters?

A. While I was in office, as far as operational matters were concerned, there were no differences of opinion.

Q. Differences of opinion were more confined to matters of national policy?

A. Since I became Deputy Chief, I had no experience of any such difference of opinion between Army and Navy, but admit that my time was short in the General Staff.

Q. Just after the start of the war in early 1942, were you familiar with the overall plan of the defense perimeter that it was the intention of JAPAN to hold?

A. I will have to first of all say that at that time I was not on the General Staff so it has to be just hearsay, my personal opinion and what I heard as rumors. But, I think that the extent of the Japanese line was to have been what it was in about March 1942; in other words, SUMATRA, JAVA, and BORNEO.

Q. What was the then current opinion in your circles as to the ability of JAPAN to hold that line?

A. I felt, or my associates felt, that if we stopped at this line which I just mentioned, we were confident that we could hold it. The feeling in the Bureau of Aeronautics was that if we had stopped at that line and then made subsequent strategical moves and political moves, that we could have held the extent which was held in March 1942.

Q. What was the current opinion as to the greatest danger to that line, the greatest threat?

A. As far as the extent of thinking of the Bureau of Aeronautics went, we felt that some time, eventually, there would be a counter-attack from the U. S. forces. But from what direction that would come, the Bureau of Aeronautics people hadn't given it consideration.

Q. Were you informed, or did you get the information at the time of its occurrence, of the failure of the first attempt to land at PORT MORESBY or of the failure to land at MIDWAY?

A. I don't recall exactly, but I first learned about PORT MORESBY comparatively early; but I think that considerable time passed before I learned about the failure of the MIDWAY Campaign.

Q. At what time did you consider that the outer defensive perimeter had actually been broken, and where?

A. As I said before, the original plan was to maintain the line mentioned before, but then at that time it was found that the U. S. forces were weaker than had been originally expected; so the Japanese forces fanned out to PORT MORESBY, BISMARCK, etc. Actually when I first thought the inner line was broken was when SAIPAN fell; but as for the turning point, when the positive action ceased or even became negative, it was, I feel, at GUADALCANAL.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Lieutenant General KAWABE, IJA)

- Q. Now at GUADALCANAL and at RABAU, who had the major responsibility for Japanese Air?
- A. The Navy was the one mainly responsible. As far as the Army was concerned, Western NEW GUINEA was as far as they could possibly go. Even supplying Western NEW GUINEA was a very difficult task, and I know that because I was in that part of the Bureau of Aeronautics.
- Q. Why was it difficult to supply Western NEW GUINEA with aircraft? What was the limitation?
- A. In the first place, the Army put emphasis on that area; they emphasized FRENCH INDO-CHINA, BURMA and MALAYA. So with that as a center, Western NEW GUINEA became very far off. Moreover, there is this long supply route by sea which the Army was not well experienced in handling.
- Q. Was the matter discussed between the Army and Navy Staffs, and did the Navy request additional aircraft to support the SOLOMONS Operation?
- A. I was in TOKYO at the Bureau of Aeronautics and got a request from the Army General Staff to send as much aid as could be sent from the points where we had placed the emphasis to aid in the SOLOMONS Operation, but I imagine that that request originated with the Navy. But we did send some reinforcements or aid.
- Q. What were the major causes of loss of Army aircraft that were moved forward into the Eastern NEW GUINEA and SOLOMONS Area?
- A. Although there may be many reasons, the biggest reason I still think was the long supply route. We couldn't send adequate strength down there and they were being constantly chopped off. It was the long supply route which was the biggest cause for losses.
- Q. Was it lack of shipping to support the intermediate bases or was it inability of the pilots to carry out the flight all the way from the home island?
- A. I feel it was more the actual inability of pilots and also lack of material rather than shipping difficulties which brought about that weakness. Just to ferry the planes all that long distance was a very difficult task to be undertaken by the Japanese air forces of that time - from the technical inability standpoint. I want to add, because I have had a particular interest in this phase of things, that the very first pilots who were sent down to the SOLOMONS-BISMARCK Area were very good, excellent pilots, and to have them killed was a very painful thing.
- Q. Did the Army request the Navy to take steps to provide carriers to transport planes down, or to assist them in any way in getting planes into the area?
- A. As far as I recall, the Army never did make any request for help from the Navy for transportation of these planes, but there may have been some cooperation locally.
- Q. Would you say that there were sufficient aircraft being built in JAPAN to render much more aid, but that it was primarily a failure of the supply line?
- A. At that time, although we didn't have any to spare, I feel that the production was more or less adequate. But of the planes produced in the home country, we couldn't have one-hundred percent of them in action at the destination.
- Q. What percent could you have, normally?
- A. I can't express it exactly in figures, but it was a very small figure. One of the reasons for that low percentage of planes reaching the destination which were operational was that, unlike the UNITED STATES, the maintenance bases enroute were very poor. Had we been able to set up good bases fast like the UNITED STATES did, our losses would have been much smaller; but as it turned out, only a very small percentage actually became operational at the destination.
- Q. Well, roughly 10 or 25 percent?
- A. The ones that actually engaged in combat after they got there, I would guess around 10 percent.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Lieutenant General KAWABE, IJA).

- Q. What effect did that effort to support the SOLOMONS Operation, and the losses incurred in getting them there, etc. have on later operations to the west - Western NEW GUINEA, the PHILIPPINES, and so on?
- A. Generally speaking, the planes that were sent down there were wiped out. Those losses both enroute and at the destination, especially the loss of our best pilots, had a big effect on later major campaigns.
- Q. Now to go a little further on, in May 1944, U. S. forces were landing at BIAK. About the 1st of June, the naval air forces in the MARIANAS sent a certain number of planes down to BIAK, just before the MARIANAS Campaign. Was that done at the request of the Army?
- A. I don't know a thing about it because I was in MANCHUKUO at that time.
- Q. When you returned to JAPAN in August 1944, operations were still going on in the MARIANAS. Did the Army supply any aircraft to the defense of the MARIANAS?
- A. The MARIANAS Campaign was over in July. I don't remember exactly when it was, but it was before the fall of IWO, the Army carried out an attack against SAIPAN from the mainland via IWO. This was in very small force, just sort of a guerrilla attack, and we had no intention of recovering SAIPAN or anything like that; just nuisance value.
- Q. When you returned to TOKYO at this time, August 1944, what was the feeling in the Army as to the significance of the loss of the MARIANAS?
- A. It was considered a very great loss. The loss of SAIPAN and, at the same time, the matter of the defense of the homeland really became serious matters. That was the general idea within the Army.
- Q. What was the status of Army aviation as a whole at that time, strength in various positions, training of pilots and adequacy of aircraft?
- A. The main body of the combat strength of the Army Air Forces was at that time in LUZON. A part of the strength was in CHINA and another part in the MALAYA - BURMA Area, with a fairly strong training force still in the homeland. There was practically nothing in MANCHURIA. I was in command of the air forces in MANCHURIA, and while I held that position all of my planes were taken away from me, and that is why I returned to the homeland. Those planes had been sent forward to the PHILIPPINES.
- Q. About the planes in CHINA and BURMA, what was their status? Were they obsolete, were they well equipped, or were they limited in numbers and in efficiency?
- A. The number, as far as the force goes, was small; but some of the pilots were fairly well trained and well experienced as a whole, both in CHINA and in the BURMA-MALAYA Area.
- Q. Why were the aircraft units maintained in CHINA at this time? Was it considered that there was a considerable threat in that region?
- A. They had a two-fold purpose - one was to aid the Army operations in CHINA, this CHINA War was still going on, and the second was to act as defense against CHINA-based American planes.
- Q. Do you feel personally that the Japanese Army did their best to settle the affair in CHINA as early as they could, or did they simply want to continue in occupation?
- A. The time element of the CHINA Incident was utmost in their mind. It was very, very rigid policy to finish that incident or affair as fast as possible.
- Q. Would you say then, that throughout the period of the war the Army was more involved, more interested in CHINA than to the East?
- A. Numerically of course, they had the biggest forces in CHINA, but they had to divert strength to the PHILIPPINES and even way out to the MARSHALLS for defense purposes. But basically, they still put most of their emphasis on the CHINA Campaign. Fundamentally, after the start of the CHINA Incident, every effort was made to settle it, but actually it turned out to be the forerunner to the big Greater East ASIA War and so it was found that unless they settled the war in other areas, the CHINA affair couldn't be settled. That is why they did divert some strength down into the southern area.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Lieutenant General KAWABE, IJA).

- Q. You said that most of your planes from MANCHURIA were sent to the PHILIPPINES; what reports did you get on the operation of those planes as to their losses and so on, that first group that was sent down there?
- A. I can say in general that the original Army air forces were lost in that SOLOMONS Campaign; so it was planes from MANCHURIA, plus replenishments from the homeland, which were in the PHILIPPINES and which were also eventually wiped out.
- Q. (Captain Hedding) During these campaigns from September 1944 to January 1945, I would like to have a general statement as to the approximate losses sustained by the Japanese Army, planes sent down to reinforce the PHILIPPINES.
- A. I don't have definite figures, but from September 1944 to January 1945, practically all the planes that were sent out there were wiped out.
- Q. General, would you give the major cause for the loss of those planes?
- A. The strength of the U. S. forces.
- Q. What forces?
- A. The whole matter is that the UNITED STATES were numerically superior to the Japanese air strength. For example, during the LEYTE Campaign, I don't know whether they were shore-based or carrier-based, but numerically the U. S. air strength finally got the uppermost of the Japanese. As far as the Japanese were concerned, of course, they were all shore-based planes.
- Q. I would like to get a general comparison of the strength and capabilities of the Japanese Army air forces in four different time periods; namely, in the SOLOMONS in the middle of 1943, after the fall of the MARIANAS in July 1944, after the completion of the LEYTE Campaign in November 1944, and the status as of April 1945 when you became the Deputy Chief of Staff.
- A. First of all, from the standpoint of number and also of trained personnel, I think that around that MARIANAS time was the highest, it was at its peak. Next to that I think it was around the time of the SOLOMONS, the middle of 1943. The second one, that is, the period of the SOLOMONS, we didn't have the number of planes but the pilots and crews were best trained during that period. And then after that comes the LEYTE period; and then the final, April of 1945. This is very much of a personal guess, but assuming the MARIANAS period to be 100, I would say that the LEYTE period would be around 70, and April of this year to be in the vicinity of 50.
- Q. (Admiral Ofstie) When you first went to MANCHURIA, what roughly was the size of the Army air forces which you had there?
- A. When I first got to MANCHURIA it was still fairly well equipped. I roughly guess that, although they were old-type planes, there were about 1500 all told in May of 1943.
- Q. Those were pilots who had been there some time and might be called fairly well trained?
- A. They were very well trained pilots, they had very good commanders out there.
- Q. What were the principal occasions, military reasons, for gradually moving those people out; and at approximately what time were they moved out?
- A. In July or August of 1943 the bulk of the planes were moved out of MANCHURIA. The reason for that was that most of the planes that were sent out to other fronts had been lost, and it was as replenishments that the planes were moved. Before I assumed my post in MANCHURIA, in about February of 1943, that was the first time that the Manchurian air force was called upon for planes and they went straight to RABAUL. The first ones sent out after I assumed my post went from July to August 1943 and, as I recall, their destination was the PHILIPPINES. I never was aware of their destination. They just called for the planes and I turned them over.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Lieutenant General KAWABE, IJA).

- Q. In July and August 1943, was there considered to be a threat to the PHILIPPINES that would warrant a large number of planes being sent there, or were they more in the nature of a replacement pool to be maintained in the PHILIPPINES?
- A. As the gradual advance of the U. S. forces made us feel that the PHILIPPINES should be better defended, that was the reason for sending out those planes. As you know, the SOLOMONS and GUADALCANAL were followed by a move farther north, and the air strength from MALAYA and that area was called on for replenishment in the NEW GUINEA Area. They put up a very bad showing there, one after another being wiped out and leaving this general PHILIPPINE Area empty of planes. That was why the General Staff ordered that the PHILIPPINE Area be reinforced, and it could also be called a replenishment center. The airplane production in the homeland was satisfactory. It was on the up-grade at that time but the training of personnel was not adequate, and that was the reason they had to call on such forces as from MANCHURIA.
- Q. What was the reason that the training was inadequate in mid 1943, the basic reason?
- A. It was just at a period when, although we had a good number, we hadn't reached that point where the training was sufficient to carry out operations in an adequate manner.
- Q. Then for the last 8 or 10 months of your time in MANCHURIA you had practically no aircraft left there, is that right?
- A. For the last six months I was there, anyhow, the actual planes which could be considered operational were nil - practically none. They had some trainers and were engaged in training, not combat.
- Q. Now to go again to the MARIANAS. The MARIANAS had been lost and you say the plane and pilot situation was bad because of lack of training. What was the view then as to the next move? How could the Army expect to improve its position in the future if that were the case?
- A. One step they took was to have the government emphasize the air production industry. Much emphasis was put on training pilots, even by drawing on student bodies to be trained as fast as possible.
- Q. And what was the intended objective of these trained pilots? What American forces were they going to fight against primarily?
- A. The main objective, main targets, were U. S. aircraft. That is, they put the emphasis on fighter pilot training and not so much on bombers. Overall it was to put the most effort in fighter pilot training.
- Q. That was defensive, in other words?
- A. Yes, defensive. The general trend of the war made bombers less important. Another thing was that the manufacture of the bombers took so much more material than fighters, and the natural trend of things had become more defensive. It was twice as easy to produce fighters with the material on hand.
- Q. Why was it, in your mind, General, that the MARIANAS were lost; what was the major cause of the loss?
- A. It is my personal opinion, but basically I feel that there was too much delay in setting up defenses of the MARIANAS, the defense preparations were inadequate.
- Q. The MARIANAS you considered, as you stated earlier, was a major catastrophe, the breaking of that line?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What effort did the Army Air make to try to prevent that break?
- A. I don't know clearly but I do know that many troops were sent in there as fast as possible.

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Q. But why didn't Army Air contribute to the defense? What, if anything, did they contribute to the defense of the MARIANAS?

A. Nothing. That was entirely under the Navy jurisdiction, and even the Army forces which we put on those islands came under the command of Commander in Chief, Combined Fleet. It is my understanding that the plan was for the Commander in Chief Combined Fleet to have under him the fleet and the army personnel on the islands, an adequate number to carry out the defense of the entire area.

Q. The Navy, then was entirely responsible for the adequate air strength in that defense?

A. Yes.

Q. General, looking over the whole war as it was carried out, the operations in CHINA and MANCHURIA and in the PACIFIC, would you say that the Navy or the Army had the greater responsibility for the conduct of the war?

A. This is a very interesting problem on which I have put much thought lately. I would like to have you thoroughly understand that these are just my personal views. Very basically, the general plan for the defense of the nation was, where the Continent was concerned it was the Army's duty, and where the PACIFIC was concerned it was the Navy's duty. Both from the standpoint of desire and from effort, it was always well known by most people that JAPAN couldn't carry out war on the scale that it actually did. It was materially impossible to employ our entire Army on the Continent while at the same time using our entire Navy on the PACIFIC. That such a situation should not be allowed to arise was one of the basic principles. From an Army man's standpoint, I felt that any kind of a campaign on the Continent could be carried out entirely by the Army alone, that we needed no cooperation or assistance from the Navy. Since both the Straits of SHIMONOSEKI and the TSUGARU Straits were quite freely navigated, we didn't have to call on the Navy at all to carry on Continental warfare, but if war was to be carried out on the PACIFIC, we would leave that entirely to the Navy. I felt that with the Japanese naval strength the Western PACIFIC could be adequately held by the Japanese Navy alone; that is, strictly the Western PACIFIC, I don't know about anything further. This war was the kind of a war which should have been avoided at all cost according to theory. But right after the opening of the war the Navy did rush down very fast and obtain all that area, and so I felt that I was justified in my earlier belief that the Navy did have the strength necessary to look out for the whole Western PACIFIC. So after the first line was established, I thought it was the wisest thing to stop there. Moreover, I thought that was the plan, that they were going to stop there and stabilize their position, consolidate their position and build up defenses. Then after that, when they started such things as the MIDWAY Campaign and the SOLOMONS Campaign, I personally was very much surprised. Then when the sort of a turning point came, when they started to retreat, they didn't have any position consolidated enough on the original line that they could hold and carry out successful defensive warfare. I feel that the naval losses that were suffered during that time had a great effect on the unfortunate termination of the war. If the Army had had a bit more strength, if they had been able to pour in more troops and more strength in NEW GUINEA and all those various island bases, possibly they would have been able to hold that perimeter. If I were to try to say who was responsible, the Army or the Navy, for the final defeat, I would say it was mutual. They both didn't have the power to carry out the war to a successful termination. I feel, looking back on it now, that had JAPAN been prepared for the eventuality of such a war on the scale of this one, then we might have had a better chance. The national potential wouldn't allow JAPAN to build up a military force adequate for a war on this scale, so the bold beginning at the outbreak of this war was just a very unfortunate thing.

Q. Now at what point in the war would you say that it became obvious that JAPAN didn't have the war potential to carry their effort on successfully?

A. I am not in a position to speak for JAPAN as a whole, but I do know from hearsay that even at the time of the outbreak of the war, or even before that, there were many people both in government and in military circles, both Army and Navy, who had considerable anxiety as to whether the national potential could maintain or carry on such a war.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Lieutenant General KAWABE, IJA).

Q. At what time did you first realize that there was talk of arranging a termination of the war, talk in any high circles?

A. As far as I myself am concerned, the time it actually happened was the first I heard, August 15th. As Deputy Chief of the General Staff, I was of the opinion that we would fight to the very end, and moreover I believe that we should have fought to the very end.

Q. How far would you say that "very end" extended?

A. I desired a landing operation; I felt that should the UNITED STATES attempt landing operations that, with our strength in the homeland, we could have inflicted heavy casualties on the U. S. forces and caused considerable damage. At no time did I have any thought that JAPAN would be able to use the strength that was left over after that to recover the PHILIPPINES or the MARSHALLS. There was no thought like that, but I was convinced that considerable damage could have been inflicted on any landing attempt by the U. S. forces on the mainland. It was my desire that that would result not in an unconditional surrender but probably a compromise, and I was under the impression that I was given this duty to continue the war to that extent. I also feel that even if things didn't turn out where we could inflict heavy damage and so forth, if things turned out more unfortunately and U. S. troops occupied the main points, that even at the cost of becoming a second GERMANY, I felt the battle should have been carried on.

Q. Was that, you might say, the general attitude and opinion of the Army? Of the High Command?

A. I would say it was pretty well general throughout the Army.

Q. Would you then say that perhaps one of the influences that brought about the early termination of the war was the Navy, or was it a civilian group.

A. Of the opinion in Navy circles, I am not aware. But I feel that there have been quite a few in civilian life, of course, who had also suffered quite a bit; and among the politicians, who weighed profit and loss of immediate surrender against fighting on. Those people may have, in some way, influenced the EMPEROR to arrive at that final decision. I can't of course, say which was the right thing to do, to stop it when it was stopped or to go on to the end; but as far as I myself am concerned, I would have gone on to the very end.

Q. In line with this general subject, did you notice any change in the attitude of the Navy that you associated as a consequence to their loss of the fleet?

A. I did not get that impression. I feel that at least in the Naval General Staff circles, the Navy was prepared to even put their men on shore to carry the fight to the end. That was the impression I got.