

HEADQUARTERS
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INTERROGATION NO. (USSEBS NO. 53)
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Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: SOLOMON ISLAND OPERATION AND BATTLE OF CORAL SEA.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Captain YAMAOKA, M., IJN, on operation staff 5th Air Flotilla at Battle of CORAL SEA, 7 - 8 May 1942. Later served on staff of 2nd Air Flotilla and instructor at IJN Staff College. Currently on duty at IJN Navy Department, 26 years Naval Service.

Where interviewed: MEIJI Building, Room 749.

Interrogator: Captain C. Shands, U. S. Navy.

Interpreter: Lieutenant R. P. Brown, and Lieutenant OGI, H., INN

SUMMARY

(a) Two task units in CORAL SEA, 7-8 May. SHOHO (sunk) Unit consisted of transports to occupy PORT MORESBY. SHOKAKU (damaged) and ZUIKAKU, were to support operations, intercept American ships and to attack TOWNSVILLE, AUSTRALIA, where U.S. planes and Army were being disembarked. Interception by U.S. Carrier Task Force thwarted plans which were later abandoned. Resultant damage to Jap CV's weakened air strength at MIDWAY, contributing to annihilation of Jap Carrier Force and failure to capture MIDWAY, 4-6 June 1942.

(b) Tribute to Marines at WAKE, December 1942.

(c) Admiral YAMAMOTO shot down and killed in airplane enroute BUIN.

(d) Japanese started night carrier operation about 1933.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Captain YAMAOKA, M., IJN) -----

Q. What was your assignment at the Battle of the CORAL SEA, 7-8 May 1942?

A. I was Executive Officer of the HIRYU but left in February 1942. At the time of the CORAL SEA Battle, I was Staff Officer of the 5th Air Flotilla.

Q. Were you in the SOLOMON area during the Battle of CORAL SEA, 7-8 May 1942?

A. Yes, I was on the ZUIKAKU, which was the flag ship.

Q. What was the mission of the SHOHO?

A. The mission of the SHOHO was first to defend the transport ships in its Task Force going to PORT MORESBY, and secondly to scout for submarines.

Q. At what distance were the anti-submarine patrols maintained?

A. About 15 miles.

Q. What type of planes were used for anti-submarine patrol?

A. Zero Fighter - type 97. Torpedo Planes were used for scouting at the same time.

Q. About how many planes did the SHOHO carry?

A. 12 Zero Fighters and about 9 to 12 torpedo planes. The SHOHO isn't a main aircraft carrier.

Q. Were any land based planes employed in this action?

A. Yes, RABAU based planes. It was the 25th LAND BASE AIR FLOTILLA 50 to 60 fighters, Zero type, 30 to 40 bomber planes. They attacked cruisers.

Q. Were any planes stationed at MUNDA?

A. No, not until later.

Q. Were any planes operated from TULAGI?

A. Yes, TULAGI was prepared as a seaplane base for operation against PORT MORESBY. DEBOINE and TULAGI are the seaplane bases which were used against PORT MORESBY.

Q. What was the mission of the SHOKAKU and ZUIKAKU and their task force?

A. The missions of those two aircraft carriers was; first to defend the PORT MORESBY attacking group, The second mission was to attack the American Fleet which was expected to appear on the scene; and the third, to make an air raid on TONNSVILLE and to destroy American and Australian planes and ships that were being delivered there.

Q. When did you first receive information regarding the location of our American Force?

A. On the 4th of May, TULAGI was attacked by your planes.

Q. Were you at TULAGI at the time?

A. No, I was to the North of TULAGI with the Sixth Squadron, which was composed of the SHOKAKU, ZUIKAKU, NOKO, NAGURO, seven destroyers and one tanker.

Q. Do you know what damage was incurred at TULAGI?

A. I am not certain, I heard that several small torpedo boats were damaged and sunk- one destroyer and one minelayer received mediocre damage. No seaplane tender present. The damaged destroyer was beached and then later swept out by the tide and sank. (Name: KIKUZUKI)

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Captain YAMAOKA, M., IJN) -----

Q. Do you know if any planes were destroyed?

A. Two or three sea planes were damaged.

Q. Was the minelayer sunk or damaged?

A. It was damaged by near misses and one hit. It sailed to SHORTLAND where it was repaired.

Q. How did you first know the location of the American Force?

A. Following the attack on TULAGI we knew the force was in the general area, but the exact location wasn't known, but it was expected that American carriers, battleships and possibly some British Forces were in the CORAL SEA. After our attack on the tanker and destroyer the morning of the 7th June and your attack on SHOHU, about 4 PM we sent out a dusk attack of about 27 bombers and torpedo planes to attack the American Carrier Force. They did not find it although searched for almost 300 miles. Finally they jettisoned their bombs and torpedoes and returned to their own carriers. While returning they passed over the American Carrier Force at night. Some planes mistook the American force for the Japanese carriers, turned on their lights and tried to land before they realized their mistake. Then all planes returned to the Japanese carriers. About ten planes were lost during this flight.

Q. Why did you attack our tanker and destroyer, instead of our carrier force during the morning of 7 June?

A. Our scouting planes from the SHOKAKU and ZUIKAKU erroneously reported the tanker group as the American carrier group, therefore the Japanese carrier planes attacked them instead of the American carriers.

Q. Did you have radar at that time?

A. No.

Q. Do you know how close the two forces were that night?

A. I thought that they were about 40 miles north of our force and did not want to have a night action, therefore retired to the North, intending to attack your force in the morning. I wanted to attack your force that night but we did not know how many ships you had so it was decided not to attack until morning.

Q. Have your pilots been trained to land on the carriers at night?

A. Yes, about 2/3 of all pilots were thoroughly trained at night.

Q. When did you first start night carrier operation?

A. About 1933.

Q. Was one carrier used for night operation or did you have pilots on each carrier?

A. Each carrier had a few night pilots at first, then increased. About 2/3 of all pilots on each carrier were thoroughly trained in night carrier operation. About 1/3 were familiar but not so well trained.

Q. How did you land at night, did you have light on deck?

A. We used a green and red light which were lined up for a flight path to come aboard. We also used a signalman.

Q. Did he control the speed during the landing?

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Captain YAMOKA, IJN)

A. No, after a night battle, only signal used was that the pilot was O.K. and should land or that he was not O.K., and should be waved off in which case he made another approach. During the training more signals were used to indicate speed and altitude. These signals were given by blinker guns at night.

Q. Did you have many accidents during these operations?

A. They had no accidents.

Q. Were any accidents incurred in training?

A. Through basic training was given at night on land, therefore, we had very few accidents in night landings aboard ship.

Q. How was the SHOKAKU sunk?

A. Damaged by dive bombers but sunk by torpedos. It capsized.

Q. Do you know how many hits were made?

A. Do not know exactly. More than five torpedoes hit and many bombs.

Q. Were many personnel lost?

A. About 200.

Q. About how many on board?

A. About 800.

Q. How were personnel rescued?

A. By destroyers and if they had had more destroyers more personnel would have been saved.

Q. Was the SHOKAKU hit?

A. About mid-morning on the 8th, two bombs hit, one well forward on the port bow; second, well aft on the starboard quarter. The first bomb forward set the gasoline afire and destroyed anchor windless room. The second bomb destroyed the airplane motor repair room. As result of the first hit, the flight deck was badly damaged and were unable to launch planes; however, they were able to land them aboard for following the bomb hits, four planes landed aboard and later the fire was put out.

Q. Where did the remaining planes go?

A. Some of them went to ZUIKAKU.

Q. Did any land at seaplane bases?

A. Two landed at seaplane base and the pilots recovered. Five or six planes made a force landing in the water near carrier. The pilots were recovered by destroyers.

Q. Was the ZUIKAKU attacked?

A. Yes, but no damage. Bombs missed, torpedoes launched far away, easily avoided.

Q. How about the torpedo attack on the SHOKAKU?

A. In the torpedo attack on both the ZUIKAKU and SHOKAKU, the torpedoes were launched at too great a range permitting both carriers to avoid them. Slow torpedoes and long range, could turn and run away from them.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Captain YAMAOKA, M., IJN)

Q. Following the damage, where did the carriers Go for repairs?

A. SHOKAKU went to KURE for repair. The ZUIKAKU went to TRUK

Q. About how many planes were lost in the entire operation?

A. 30 planes and about 30 pilots and plane crew.

Q. What effect did the losses in this battle have on current and future plans?

A. They gave up the plan to attack PORT MORESBY by sea. The Army desired to take PORT MORESBY so attempted to capture by land from BUNA area. These carriers were to take part in MIDWAY occupation, but due to damage were unable to participate, this weakened their air striking force at MIDWAY, with loss of carrier force and failure to capture MIDWAY.

Q. Were any Me-109's in that battle?

A. No. No Messerschmitt planes in Japanese Navy.

Q. Did you know how much damage was made on our carriers?

A. More than six torpedoes hit on the LEXINGTON, more than eight bombs hit, two torpedoes hit the YORKTOWN.

Q. Which type of attack did you most fear?

A. Dive Bombing, because it is difficult to avoid.

Q. Do you know anything about RABAU action, 19-22 February 1942?

A. No.

Q. The WAKE action in March 1942?

A. No, but I am a little familiar with the capture of WAKE in 1941.

Q. Were you present when the Japanese captured WAKE in December 1941?

A. Not at the island. I was returning from the Pearl Harbor attack.

Q. What forces were present at WAKE ISLAND?

A. On the way home from HAWAII, 2 carriers were ordered to assist in the attack on WAKE ISLAND. I don't know what specific forces were in the WAKE ISLAND attack group. Our planes did not see them. We just bombed the island while enroute to JAPAN.

Q. Do you know what ships were lost at WAKE?

A. Two destroyers hit the reef and were subsequently dive bombed and shelled from the beach.

Q. Was a light cruiser damaged or sunk?

A. No damage, however, our Navy admires the ability and courage of the pilots and fighters that defended WAKE in the operation. The airplane pilots were very brave and skillful.

Q. Were any military personnel lost during the landing at WAKE ISLAND?

A. None of the Navy, but severe losses were suffered in the Navy Special Landing Force.

Q. Did you expect an attack from us at WAKE in order to recapture the island?

A. Yes.

TRANSCRIPT of Interrogation (Captain YAMAOKA, M., IJN)

Q. What was the purpose of capturing WAKE?

A. One, to seize it because it was held by the Americans and the other reason to use it for a base from which to scout and search that area.

Q. Did the American raids on WAKE ISLAND do any damage?

A. On the 6th and 7th October 1942 between 500 and 600 planes bombed WAKE.

At the same time 10 cruisers and destroyers bombarded the island resulting in losses of more than 300 personnel. The installations above the ground were almost completely destroyed. (That I learned from a person who came back from WAKE.)

Q. How was admiral YAMAMOTA killed?

A. Shot down while flying in a two engine bomber to BUIN. Five or six of his staff officers including the Chief of Staff and the Chief Medical Officer of the fleet were killed at the same time.

Q. In the opinion of the Japanese pilots was there any difference in the American Army and Navy pilots or planes?

A. Both good. Generally, aircraft carrier pilots are more skillful. Army planes a little faster.