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Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division

Subject: Battle off CAPE ENGANO.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Rear Admiral MATSUDA, Chiaki, IJN, former commanding officer of YAMATO, and Commander Carrier Division 4 (ISE and HYUGA) from May 1944 to February 1945.

Where interviewed: MEIJI Building, room 340.

Interrogator: Lieut. Comdr. J. A. Field, jr., USNR.

Interpreter: Lieut. (jg) R. P. Brown, USNR.

Allied Officers Present: None.

SUMMARY

Rear Admiral MATSUDA discusses the conversion of ISE and HYUGA to hermaphrodite battleship-aircraft carriers, their employment in the Battle off CAPE ENGANO in October 1944, and their subsequent movements. He gives his opinions of the causes for the decline of the Japanese Naval Air Force, and information on Japanese doctrine for maneuver under air attack.



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- Q. When approximately, was it decided to convert ISE and HYUGA?
A. After MIDWAY, I think; it took about nearly a year to complete.
- Q. Was it decided upon in consequence of the carrier loss at MIDWAY?
A. Yes.
- Q. Who made that decision?
A. General Staff I think.
- Q. You were the first Commander?
A. Yes.
- Q. Did you yourself think it was a sound procedure, a sensible conversion?
A. Not so very good because planes could only takeoff and not land, so at first all were landplanes; after, half landplanes and half seaplanes, and we had 11 seaplanes and 11 land bombers (PAUL and JUDY).
- Q. Had you yourself had any experience in aircraft operation before receiving command of this division?
A. I was in command of KAMO I, a seaplane carrier converted from a tanker, in CHINA on the YANGTZE River in the second year of the CHINA War.
- Q. On ISE and HYUGA, did you carry all planes in the hangar, or some in the hangar and some on deck?
A. About half on deck, half in hangar.
- Q. Just half in number or one type above and one type below?
A. They were mixed types in both places.
- Q. When you catapulted these planes, did you have wind off the bow?
A. Catapulted the planes broad on the bow into the wind.
- Q. What was the purpose of having two different types of planes aboard?
A. It was preferred to have landplanes only, but in order to be able to recover some to the planes it was thought necessary to include certain number of seaplanes.
- Q. So that when operating the plan would be to have the landplanes go to shore and seaplanes return to the ship?
A. Yes, seaplanes particularly for reconnaissance, landplanes for attack.
- Q. Did you in fact ever operate planes from these ships?
A. No, for the PHILIPPINES Campaign training for pilots was insufficient so the planes were used land based for this operation.
- Q. If the ships had been converting ever since MIDWAY, why were the pilots insufficiently trained?
A. Squadron was newly organized; the squadron in question was organized middle of May, the operation took place in October so training was incomplete. Pilots for ISE and HYUGA were more or less complete, however the JUNYO and RYUHO had been added to my command and the pilots of those two carriers were not well trained so they did not participate in the operation.
- Q. But so far as operating aircraft from ISE and HYUGA, even in practice operations, that was never done, is that correct? I heard that this was not done because parts were missing.
A. Parts okay, but pilots were not. The total planes under my command was 150 - 44 in ISE and HYUGA, the remainder in JUNYO and RYUHO.
- Q. That is, four ships together made up the 4th Air Squadron (Carrier Division)?
A. Yes, those two carriers did not take part in the PHILIPPINES SEA Battle.
- Q. Why was that?
A. ISE and HYUGA participated in the sea battle off the PHILIPPINES as battleships.

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- Q. I was wondering why the other two did not participate.
- A. The planes belonging to them were allocated to land bases and were used there, the 3rd Air Squadron under command of Admiral OZAWA supplied aircraft for Japanese Fleet. They divided the force: two carriers were under direct command of Admiral OZAWA, and two carriers under myself.
- Q. The aircraft from all four of your carriers were sent to FORMOSA, is that correct?
- A. The planes attached to my carriers were sent to FORMOSA to reinforce land-based air, and to attack your Task Force about 12-14 August.
- Q. Do you know, Admiral, if any of the planes from the 3rd Squadron, from OZAWA's Squadron, were sent to FORMOSA at that time?
- A. The planes belonging to the carriers under direct command of Admiral OZAWA took off from their respective aircraft carriers, later attacked the American Fleet, and then returned to the PHILIPPINES.
- Q. When they left JAPAN for that attack did Admiral OZAWA have his full air strength, or were some of his planes used for attack from shore bases?
- A. A little less than half of the original complement of planes were taken away before they left the INLAND SEA.
- Q. So they took all your planes and half of OZAWA's planes?
- A. Yes. That was the decision of Admiral TOYODA.
- Q. Do you know what reasons he had for weakening his carrier force at that time?
- A. For the reason that the pilots belong to those two aircraft squadrons were insufficiently trained for sea operation but trained well enough for land operations.
- Q. I had understood that decision to take planes away from the carriers was a sudden decision based on inaccurate reports of damage to our Task Force off FORMOSA, is that not correct?
- A. I am not very familiar with the reasons for high-up decisions.
- Q. In September and early October of last year were you familiar with planning for the SHO-GO Operation?
- A. I was given battle orders.
- Q. About what date did you receive plans or orders?
- A. End of September or beginning of October.
- Q. At that time what employment of your ships was planned in the event of our attack on the PHILIPPINES?
- A. I rather think that the operation as carried out was according to the original plan. The vital difference was that the American Fleet attacked early than had been expected so we were unable to use all the force in this operation that we had originally planned.
- Q. Approximately when had you expected the invasion?
- A. Though the planning of the high command was not well known to me, the directive regarding training indicated it would be complete by the end of October; possibly I think invasion was expected in early November.
- Q. You said you thought the operation was carried out more or less according to plan; we had information that the Third Fleet had intended to go into LINGGA and operate in conjunction with the Second Fleet, as in the MARIANAS, rather than operating as a decoy as eventually happened.
- A. My recollection might not be accurate but I do remember that the 3rd Air Squadron was to go to LINGGA on completion of training. However I recollect that as an emergency measure, if the attack came too soon they were to act in the way they actually did. I also recollect that after Admiral OZAWA and the Third Fleet had gone south to LINGGA my own 4th Air Squadron was to combine

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with the Fifth Fleet under Admiral SHIMA and act as a decoy. However it turned out, I was to be a decoy.

Q. In your belief and recollection, the plan of using a decoy force from the north was part of the original plan?

A. Yes.

Q. And therefore the use of the Third Fleet as a decoy was probably no surprise to OZAWA, that is, he must have expected it in the event of an early invasion; is that correct?

A. That is correct.

Q. Was the 4th Air Squadron a part of the Third Fleet, or merely operating with it on this occasion?

A. Part of it.

Q. Would it have been transferred to the Fifth Fleet if OZAWA had gone south?

A. No the 4th Squadron would merely have operated temporarily under the command of SHIMA.

Q. We heard that your two ships were to act as battleships with OZAWA's force. Was that as defense against airplanes or was there some thought of surface action?

A. Originally for anti-aircraft, but if necessary to carry out assault, as battleships.

Q. Could you draw a sketch of the cruising disposition of OZAWA's Fleet as it came south to the PHILIPPINES?

A. (Annex A)

Q. Did the two groups stay on the same bearing, in the same direction, from each other?

A. The bearing varied, it did not remain the same. We merely kept within visual signaling distance.

Q. When you changed course, did you also change the axis to coincide?

A. Sometimes change axis, sometimes individual turns. As a rule, if the course change was for less than one hour it would be made by turn movement; this was also the case in emergency as in the case of submarine sightings.

Q. How long did you cruise in these two separate formations? Did that continue or did you unite as you approached the PHILIPPINES?

A. When we expected attack, we formed this separate formation, but in cruising formation both groups were united. When we drew near the PHILIPPINES, we split the force.

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- Q. Is this a reasonable picture of the united cruising disposition? (Admiral MATSUDA was here shown Annex A to interrogation of Captain OHMAE, USSBS #150, NAV #36)
- A. That is correct sketch!
- Q. On the 24th, when your fleet launched its attack by air against our Task Force, were you in one or two groups?
- A. Two, but distance very small.
- Q. How long did you stay in those two groups? Did you stay in them permanently until our attack or was there a change during the night?
- A. Toward evening of the 24th, we united forces. Then the two battleships and four large (TERUTSUKI) destroyers formed a detachment and steamed southward to attack your Task Force in night battle. The information we received at that time was that the American Task Force had had two carriers damaged, also I think that there only remained one carrier and two battleships, and it was thought this force could cope with them. We steamed southward from four or five o'clock until the middle of the night.
- Q. Did you sight our force or make contact in any way?
- A. About eight o'clock TOKYO time, we observed some flashes of light in the distance; it was suspected perhaps it was caused by Japanese land-based air assault against American Force.
- Q. You thought it was gunfire?
- A. Gunfire, or perhaps blasts by bomb hits, by Japanese land-based planes. My staff officers told me it must be gun flashes or bomb bursts but I was not sure; we suspected it might have been air electrical storm in the distance. I saw it myself very briefly.
- Q. What did you do when you saw these flashes? Did you report to OZAWA, what action did you take?
- A. Because of radio silence ordered I did not make report to OZAWA. I thought if it were an actual aircraft raid, if I should draw close to the battle, there would be confusion; so I steamed parallel to the supposed course of the American Fleet.
- Q. And then what happened?
- A. Even after that we occasionally observed flashes, it might have been electrical storm after all.
- Q. You had no radar contacts in that direction, ships or planes?
- A. I remember that there was radar contact in that direction, on planes. Because of the distance, we could not make radar contact with ships; I remember it was plane contact.
- Q. Do you remember roughly what the range was?
- A. Fifty kilometers.
- Q. Had Admiral OZAWA ordered radio silence for his force, had you carefully maintained radio silence?
- A. I was given discretion, under the circumstances I was permitted to make the judgement by myself, so I judged not to.
- Q. And that was the only contact you had during the night?
- A. Yes.
- Q. About what time were these flashes first seen, and what time did they end?
- A. First around seven o'clock. We continued seeing it occasionally until eight or nine o'clock.
- Q. At what time did you turn northward to rejoin OZAWA?
- A. Between ten o'clock and midnight. I have been trying all day to recall the exact time but I cannot. Soon after 10 o'clock I received orders from OZAWA to cease the surface operation and turn northward; however I did not obey the orders right away, but continued the southeast course for sometime. The flashes

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thought to be gunfire were seen a little bit west of south and I shaped a course parallel to them intending to close shortly after 10 o'clock; however, I received orders to rejoin from OZAWA.

- Q. What in general were plans for the 25th? Almost all your aircraft had gone; was it intended to cruise back and forth until an attack came?
- A. I thought that the entire fleet in a body, according to the orders of TOYODA, would act as decoy the next day.
- Q. What time in the morning did you rejoin OZAWA?
- A. It was just at sunrise, about 6 o'clock I think. The formation had just been completed when American bombers appeared on the scene.
- Q. Up to the time when our planes attacked you on the 25th, what information was available to you on the progress of NISHIMURA, SHIMA or KURITA?
- A. By the morning we had received the information that KURITA's Force had re-traced his course and that SHIMA's Fleet was successfully operating according to the plan; it was later that I learned that KURITA's Force was engaged in surface operation here east of SAMAR and that NISHIMURA's Force had received a rather bad beating.
- Q. That information of KURITA's action off SAMAR and of the damage to NISHIMURA only reached you after our attack?
- A. It might have been just before dawn, I am not quite sure.
- Q. On the 25th, what damage was done to ISE and HYUGA?
- A. No damage to HYUGA, very little to ISE; but to some of our other ships great damage.
- Q. On ISE, was the damage from hits or near misses?
- A. ISE damage appeared to have been inflicted by a small bomb which hit outboard on the mount of the port catapult, casualties 40 to 50. Both ships had their blisters perforated by near misses. ISE took on board a little water. HYUGA took 4 or 5 degree list due to perforation, but it was easily righted.
- Q. We have heard some information to the effect that OZAWA's force planned a torpedo attack on our American force that afternoon or evening of the 25th; do you remember anything of this nature?
- A. At seven or eight o'clock, OZAWA radioed his intention of a torpedo attack, and steamed southward about two hours but could not find the American force. All surviving ships steamed south. OZAWA and my two battleships and two or maybe three destroyers steamed southward from about 7 to 9 o'clock. Admiral OZAWA was in receipt of the intelligence that two new battleships and several cruisers and destroyers were chasing us, so he turned around to attack them thinking that he had adequate forces, but finding nothing then turned north again.
- Q. Where did that information come from; how did you remember that?
- A. It might have been result of reconnaissance of land-based planes.
- Q. It did not come from any of your ships which were lagging behind and were under our attack?
- A. Some intelligence might have been received from the ships but the other intelligence came from land-based planes, and the summary of these reports amounted to two new battleships some cruisers and destroyers.
- Q. Were you attacked or was any of your and OZAWA's ships attacked by submarines as you went north?
- A. No, not attacked; at the mouth of SATUSUKA BAY anchorage in AMAMI-O-SHIMA, I believe there was a torpedo attack by American submarines, but no damage.
- Q. Do you know if TAMA was sunk by American submarine?
- A. We had no report.
- Q. Where did your ships retire?
- A. AMAMI-O-SHIMA, then to KURE after two days stop, and reported KURE 31 October.

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Q. Then when did you go south?
A. The HYUGA left on the 8th, ISE on the 9th and they rejoined at SASEBO. They left SASEBO the 11th and went south.

Q. Directly to LINGGA or SINGAPORE?
A. Initial order was to take munitions on both carriers and go to MANILA but it was changed a bit; so we went to PARACEL Islands, to trans-ship the munitions to small ships who would take it to MANILA. The greater part of munitions we transferred but some we had to leave on board. We trans-shipped munitions to specially constructed transport vessels displacing 1000 tons, capacity 500 tons cargo.

Q. After this operation, did you continue south?
A. Here at the PARACEL Islands we rendezvoused with SHIMA's Fleet from BRUNEI, and went south to LINGGA arriving 21 November. Then on 9 or 10 December, I left LINGGA and proceeded to SAIGON where we stayed in the outer port for a week or so, and then went to CAMRANH BAY remaining there until the end of December. On 1 January we left and returned again to LINGGA, remaining there in the SINGAPORE area until 10 February.

Q. Why did you go to LINGGA on 1 January?
A. There were two objectives: first, to back up the transportation route between SINGAPORE and JAPAN which was getting more and more precarious, and second, to mass our forces and stand by to give bodily attack against Americans in the PHILIPPINES according to the development of the campaign. While we were in SINGAPORE, we were scouted by B-29s based on CALCUTTA, so you must have been aware of our location.

On 10 February, having taken on a load of gasoline and other materials, we left for the EMPIRE, arriving at KURE on the 20th. The Squadron was disbanded on 1 March.

Q. What is your opinion of the planning of the SHO Operation to defend the PHILIPPINES; do you think it was as good a plan as could be made with the forces available?

A. My opinion at that time was that after all the plan of the operation was insufficient to check your advance; however, under the circumstances, I thought it was the best plan. I thought it would be the last engagement for me and counted on death in the action.

Q. We thought it a very bold plan, and one which came very near success. In your opinion where did the operation break down, what was the principal cause of its failure?

A. The JAPANESE surface forces were depleted, the main hope of the operation was the Air Force. Had Japanese pilots been as skilled as in the initial stages of the war, perhaps it would have come close to succeeding.

Q. Are you speaking particularly of carrier pilots, or of shore-based units, or both?

A. Mainly of the carrier pilots; however, the pilots of land-based planes were far below standard.

Q. What was the principal cause of this degeneration in your pilot ability; was it impossible to train them, what was the trouble?

A. My principal observation is that when the Japanese air unit is placed at the front, they stay there until all the pilots are killed without leaving any skilled nucleus to create new force; furthermore, the training organ was insufficient and gasoline ran short. Altogether, training was insufficient and your force always came earlier than expected, so always training was insufficient.

Q. Between the two considerations, the lack of competent instructors and shortage of fuel which is the more important?

A. I would divide the entire period between prior to sea battle off FORMOSA and after that. Before the FORMOSA operation we had a satisfactory number of in-

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structors and also a considerable amount of fuel; after that loss, oil and instructors ran short and got worse and worse by degrees. Perhaps oil was more serious. Also the mechanics and engineers that kept planes in operation were left on islands. As islands fell, pilots came home, but maintenance men did not and gradually skilled mechanics ran short. That was another cause. And of course the skilled men producing planes got lower and lower in standards so that the output of planes was inferior.

Q. If you had a number of ships that were attacked by air and you turned to take evasive action, was it the idea to all turn together so as to maintain same position or would you scatter in various directions in an attempt to spread out?

A. The order was for the guide carrier to change her course as seemed fit according to the attack. According to the course shaped by the carrier, all the ships changed course simultaneously, but sometimes it was not acted upon like that. Sometimes they scattered. If there was time enough to give signal, they gave signal to change simultaneously; but if not time, the carrier would change course and the others would change course to follow.

Q. Would the signal be given by flags or telephone?

A. Radio telephone and flag were both used, but radio telephone was not as developed as it should have been so we mainly depended on flags.

Q. When you speak of giving signal if there is time enough, you mean time for flag signal?

A. Yes. You see Japanese cruisers particularly and also destroyers were so fearful of your air raids that although strictly ordered to do as I mentioned, their adherence to orders was not particularly well carried out.

Q. Did they feel that by scattering they lessened chance of being hit?

A. They were so fearful of the attack they didn't pay any attention to the original course, changing course without watching and as the result, confusion.

Q. To go back to conversion of ISE and HYUGA, you said the conversion was started because of the Battle of MIDWAY, and that it took about a year. When were the ships complete in their new form?

A. The Battle of MIDWAY came in June 1942. Conversion of these ships began in September that year, completed December 1943. My squadron was organized in May 1944.

Q. What did these ships do between December 1943 and October 1944?

A. Did nothing but hide because of the deficiency of aircraft.

Q. There was no thought of using them as battleships at that time?

A. No.

Q. In your opinion, or in the general opinion, was the Japanese Navy anxious for war with the UNITED STATES in 1941?

A. Preparations were going on but the Navy, I believe, did not wish to open hostilities.

Q. Would you say it was primarily the Army that wished the war?

A. I was not close enough to the central authorities to give a definite verdict; however, I think that even the Army was not desirous of opening hostilities, but I believe circumstances and world affairs and economic pressure by the UNITED STATES against JAPAN forced the war.

Q. When the war began did you expect a long war or a short war?

A. Long war, three to four years.

Q. At what point in the war did you begin to feel that things were going against JAPAN?

A. First inkling came when JAPAN lost its carriers at MIDWAY and when I observed Japanese air force could not cope with American air forces in the SOLOMONS;

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and then when the MARIANAS were lost I thought the situation had become most grave. In the SOLOMONS Campaign, the depletion of Japanese aircraft was so great that construction could not cope with the losses, so the situation was worse and worse.

Q. During 1943-1944 which of our lines of advance do you think was the most serious threat, our approach across the PACIFIC or from the SOUTH PACIFIC?

A. I thought that the attack against TRUK and the MARIANAS was very serious.

Q. Considering the war as a whole what do you feel was our most effective weapon or device?

A. I think that chiefly submarine attack and aircraft most serious; your numbers just overwhelmed Japanese air force. However, I did not think bombing by aircraft was so serious, number alone.

Q. What was the bore of the YAMATO main battery?

A. 45CM (18 inch). It was officially designated as 16 inches, even though it was 18 inches. Officers and men connected with firing of the guns knew their size, but in all records of the size it was always written 41CM rather than 45CM. It was called special type 41CM gun.

Q. Did you ever have radar fire control?

A. Although it was not quite well developed, there was radar fire control toward the end of my command of YAMATO.

Q. That was special radar set for firing guns?

A. We attempted to use the search radar; they conducted special research in radar fire control, but it was incomplete.