

HEADQUARTERS  
U. S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY  
(PACIFIC)  
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INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS 445)  
NAV. NO. 96

Place: Tokyo  
Date: 24 November 1945

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: MARSHALLS - GILBERTS Operations.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Rear Admiral NABESHIMA, Shunsaku, I.J.N.: Chief of Staff of Japanese Fourth Fleet (Inner South Seas Area) December 1942 to December 1943.

Where interviewed: MEIJI Building, Room 618.

Interrogator: Captain Steadman Teller, USN

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

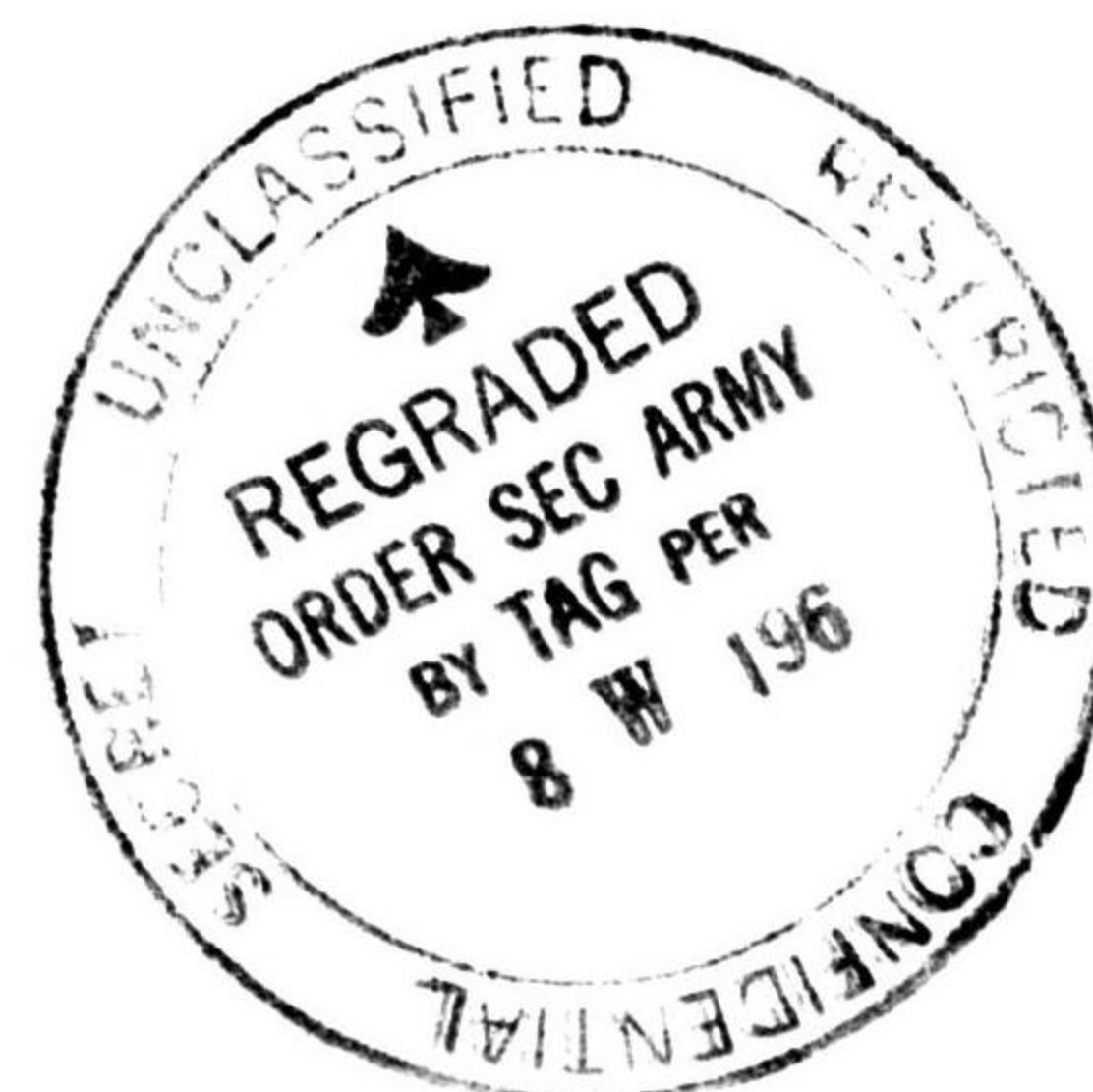
Allied Officers Present: None.

SUMMARY

Reliance for defense of the MARSHALLS - GILBERTS was placed largely on the reinforced island garrisons and reinforced land-based air squadrons. Reinforcements in both categories were in progress at the time. U.S. forces invaded the GILBERTS. The combined strength of Japanese fleets in the Central Pacific was not sufficient for a concerted effort to oppose the invasion. Severe attrition of land-based aircraft in the area and lack of air groups for their carriers made impractical any form of surface force attack on the U. S. forces.

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Transcript of interrogation of (Rear Admiral NABESHIMA, Shunroku,  
I.J.N.)

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- Q. I have been told in earlier interviews that, in November 1943, the general plan was to defend the MARSHALL - GILBERT ISLANDS by reinforcing the island garrisons, by bringing in more shore-based aircraft from TRUK and RABAU and relying on the island garrisons aircraft to defend the MARSHALLS-GILBERTS. It was not planned in November to use the major portion of the fleet in the defense. Is that correct?
- A. Reinforcement aircraft were brought in from KISARAZU. Some troops were sent from TRUK to reinforce the MARSHALLS - GILBERTS. It was planned that the Fourth Fleet would cooperate with the Combined Fleet in defending the MARSHALLS - GILBERTS. Of course, the Fourth Fleet being small, could not do much by itself. The general expectation was that you would attack either NAURU, the GILBERT ISLANDS or WAKE. These points would be defended by the troops on hand and the Navy. Army troop reinforcements would be moved into the KWAJALEIN Area and from there would be distributed where needed in the MARSHALLS for defense. It had been intended to send reinforcements also to NAURU, GILBERTS and WAKE, but the U. S. Attack on the GILBERTS occurred before this could be done.
- Q. Did the Commander of the Fourth Fleet determine where reinforcement troops were to be sent and order them to those islands?
- A. Two days prior to your initial attack on the GILBERTS, an attack in this general area was anticipated. The headquarters of the Fourth Fleet was moved to KWAJALEIN by air on 19 November. It was planned to bring troops from TRUK to the area for reinforcement, using three cruisers and two destroyers. It was also planned to bring reinforcement aircraft into the area from RABAU and TRUK. However, recent aircraft losses and damages in the RABAU Area prevented any substantial reinforcements. It was the responsibility of the Commander of the Fourth Fleet to deploy troops as he considered necessary for defense of the islands.
- Q. Can you recall the troop reinforcements which you received subsequent to July 1943 from JAPAN and other areas outside of the CENTRAL PACIFIC.
- A. Between July 1943 and the initial GILBERTS Operation, only one Army division of about 15,000 to 16,000 was brought into the Inner South Seas Area. No naval reinforcements were received. The 22 Air Flotilla was reinforced, but I don't recall to what extent. I believe them to be about 40 planes. I believe the Army troops spoken of were brought from UTSUNOMIYA.
- Q. What was the A(KOO) detachment?
- A. I don't know of a detachment by that name, however, I believe it was probably an Army detachment. Early in October, two Army battalions passed through, one via TRUK and the other PONAPE; both going on without delay to KWAJALEIN.
- Q. When you moved the Headquarters of the Fourth Fleet to KWAJALEIN, did the flagship move there or did you go ashore at KWAJALEIN?
- A. The Headquarters of the Fourth Fleet was always ashore, normally at TRUK. In this instance, we flew to KWAJALEIN and based ashore.

Transcript of interrogation of (Rear Admiral NABESHIM, Shunsaku,  
I.J.M.)  
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Q. Tell me of the movements of the Fourth Fleet cruisers and destroyers after 1 November 1943.

A. On 18 November, the cruisers NAKA, ISUZU, and NAGARA and four unidentified destroyers left TRUK. The NAGARA and ISUZU plus two destroyers were carrying troops to MILLE. The NAKA and remaining two destroyers were carrying Army troops to KWAJALEIN.

Q. When these ships left TRUK, did you intend them to go to MILLE and KWAJALEIN or to some other islands?

A. The reinforcements in NAGARA and ISUZU were intended for MILLE because the garrison there was considered weak. The ships bound for MILLE arrived at that island on the evening of November 22nd or 23rd, unloaded their troops during the night and departed the next morning for KWAJALEIN, arriving at KWAJALEIN one day later. The ships which went directly from TRUK to KWAJALEIN arrived the 22nd November.

Q. Did all seven ships remain at KWAJALEIN then until our carrier attack on 4 December?

A. The NAKA and her accompanying two destroyers had left KWAJALEIN on the 23rd for TARAWA to take troop reinforcements, and consequently were not at KWAJALEIN for the carrier attack on 4 December. These three ships landed reinforcements at TAROA and left immediately returning direct to TRUK.

Q. When did the Second Fleet units enter and depart KWAJALEIN?

A. Units of the Second Fleet arrived KWAJALEIN on 22 November. A conference was held between the Commanders-in-Chief Second and Fourth Fleets to discuss the situation then developing in the GILBERT Islands. It was decided that the combined forces of the Second and Fourth Fleets were not sufficient to attack or repulse the American force and that the Third Fleet, namely the carriers, would be necessary for this purpose. However, since there were no aircraft groups available for the carriers, the use of this force was not possible. Consequently, since air strength was insufficient, the Second Fleet retired to BROWN Atoll leaving KWAJALEIN on the 24th and arriving at BROWN on the 25th where it remained until 5 December, at which time it departed for TRUK.

Q. Did you have any warning of the air attack on KWAJALEIN by carrier planes on 4 December?

A. We were alerted for attacks at all time, but the exact time was not anticipated.

Q. Do you recall the damage to ships and installations that was done in that carrier attack on 4 December?

A. The NAGARA received near misses only and was able to navigate. The ISUZU received two bomb hits putting rudder out of commission and making her un navigable but she was eventually repaired. Three freighters, 2,000 to 3,000 tons were sunk by bombs and strafing. In this connection, it was customary to send only the small type freighters to the MARSHALLS Area. Estimate ten aircraft destroyed on the ground, personnel casualties very slight. On 25 December, the 24th Air Flotilla was brought in to the MARSHALLS because of the losses sustained by the 22nd Air Flotilla originally there. About this time, 20 fighters from the Third Fleet were also brought into the MARSHALLS for reinforcement. These fighters came from the Second Carrier Division which was a part of the Third Fleet.

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Transcript of interrogation of (Rear Admiral NABESHIM, Shunsaku,  
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Q. When did the NAGARA and ISUZU return to TRUK from KWAJALEIN?

A. About 1 January.

Q. Were there any other movements of your ships in this area in November or December?

A. The only movement of large ships was the trip of the NAGARA and ISUZU from TRUK to NAURU, towards the end of October, for the purpose of carrying troops. In early November two destroyers went from TRUK to KWAJALEIN also carrying troops. There were about 20 auxiliary powered sailing vessels of approximately 300 tons, wooden construction, which were used for supplying the MARSHALLS - GILBERTS Area.

Q. Do you remember the Number 2 NANKAI MARU which went to MILLE about 22 December?

A. I'm not familiar with this ship, but she may have been one of the two aviation supply ships operated by the 22nd Air Flotilla, which carried aviation gasoline and aircraft parts to various bases.

Q. On 18 September 1943 some B-24's attacked NAURU. Do you recall what damage was done during that attack?

A. Air fields were heavily damaged and ten aircraft destroyed.

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