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HEADQUARTERS
U.S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY
(PACIFIC)
(APO 234)
C/O POSTMASTER, SAN FRANCISCO

INTERROGATION NO: 401

PLACE: Tokyo
DATE: 23 Nov 45

Division of Origin: Shipping and Rail Transportation

Subject: Convoy Difficulties

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Captain KAWAMURA, Chugi - Last ship captain to leave
Singapore

Where interviewed: Meiji Building

Interrogator: Mr A. C. Ingersoll, Jr

Interpreter: None

Allied Officers present: 1st Lt J. D. Heldt

SUMMARY

Captain KAWAMURA, C, sailed from Singapore on the last ship to leave this port, as Asst Chief Officer on the KAZUURA, a hospital ship.

He was Captain of a tanker leaving MOJI in a convoy of ten merchant and eight escort ships the last of December 1944, arriving at Singapore January 1945. His was the only ship to get through to port.

This interrogation is a story of that convoy. It brings to light the difficulties experienced in shipping and losses as a result of combined Allied attack.



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Interrogation of Captain Chuji Kawamura, Tanker Captain. - - - - -

- Q. Will you please give us your name and your present occupation?
- A. I am Captain Chuji Kawamura and now I am Captain of the San Diego Maru at Yokohama.
- Q. What is the tonnage?
- A. 7,268 gross tonnage, an oil tanker.
- Q. How long have you been on that ship, Captain?
- A. This month.
- Q. Just this Month?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What was your last ship before that?
- A. The Sarawak, gross tonnage 5,000, an Army Tanker.
- Q. When did you get on that ship?
- A. November 20, 1943.
- Q. Where did it sail?
- A. We made three trips to Singapore, bringing back aviation gasoline. On the fourth voyage to Singapore the bow of the ship, about sixty feet, was blown off and it was towed into Manila. Repairs at Manila were impossible so we returned to Yokohama at the end of August, 1944. Repairs were concluded at Yokohama in the middle of December. I sailed from Yokohama for Singapore again on December 31, 1944.
- Q. In convoy all the way?
- A. Yes, convoy.
- Q. How many ships were in the convoy?
- A. Ten merchant ships.
- Q. How many escorts.
- A. Eight. It was a very difficult voyage.
- Q. Will you please describe that voyage?
- A. At first that convoy was ten ships, most of them tankers, and eight escorts.
- Q. What was your speed?
- A. 12 knots.
- Q. Can you tell us about that trip now?
- A. It was a very rough trip. We sailed at the end of December from Moji. The convoy expected to go as far as Manila. At that time Task Force 58 was in the South China Sea, so the plans were changed and the convoy entered Raffels Island near Shanghai. It then proceeded to Takao and Formosa. On the way over one ship was sunk by submarine off Formosa near Keeling, January 8th. In the port of Takao we were attacked by carrier planes and three more ships were sunk.

Interrogation of Captain Chuji Kawamura cont'd. -----

Q. What date was that?

A. January 9th we were attacked by airplanes and three ships were sunk; no escort ships were hit. One ship broke down and was also lost.

Q. Were they in the harbor at Takao?

A. One in the harbor and two outside the harbor.

Q. Now, I would like to have you describe the air attack in detail.

A. From daylight to evening four successive waves came that way (indicating with hands).

Q. About how many planes each time?

A. 300 planes altogether during the day.

Q. How many other ships besides your convoy were damaged in this attack?

A. Two ships inside the harbor besides my convoy, and many smaller ships were damaged.

Q. I wonder if you could guess how many bombs fell in the harbor?

A. About 100 bombs.

Q. There were three ships sunk in the harbor altogether?

A. Yes, and maybe some small ships. Much damage was done to the city and the port.

Q. Was there much anti-aircraft fire?

A. Not much from the city, but ships in the harbor shot down four or five planes.

Q. Where was your ship when the attack happened in the harbor?

A. In the harbor tied to the buoy.

Q. What did you do on your ship when the planes came?

A. We had twelve machine guns and fifty Navy men in my gun crew.

Q. You stayed right there. You didn't try to leave?

A. No.

Q. You stayed right there. Did any planes attack your ship?

A. Yes.

Q. How many bombs were dropped aimed at your ship?

A. About ten bombs near it.

Q. How far did they land from your ship, approximately?

A. 100 meters. Another ship 200 yards away was sunk.

Q. Did the machine gun fire from your ship keep the planes from hitting you?

Interrogation of Captain Chuji Kawamura Cont'd:

- A. It was very cloudy weather, low hanging clouds. The visibility was so poor that we couldn't see the planes in time to shoot at them. The clouds were hanging about 2,000 meters above the ships.
- Q. Didn't the planes come lower than that?
- A. The planes were down as low as 2 to 300 meters above the ship.
- Q. How long after this did you sail from Takao?
- A. The next day, the 10th.
- Q. Can you tell us what happened after that?
- A. We followed the China coast in shallow water past Hong Kong.
- Q. Did you pass down outside of Hainan?
- A. Yes. When we had reached a point just north of Hainan Island we received news of Task Force 58 proceeding north through the China Sea and we returned to Hong Kong. On January 13th, we reached Hong Kong. On January 15th and 16th, two days, we were attacked by carrier planes in Hong Kong harbor.
- Q. What damage was done by that attack?
- A. Four out of the five cargo ships remaining in my convoy were sunk in Hong Kong harbor. No other ships were sunk.
- Q. Tell us something about those attacks?
- A. No escort ships were sunk, just hit. Each day about 300 carrier planes, for two days 600 planes.
- Q. Were they just attacking ships or were they also bombing the harbor, docks, and towns?
- A. They attacked the airfield and the docks.
- Q. Was there much anti-aircraft fire there?
- A. There were no land anti-aircraft guns and no Japanese planes. The only resistance was by the ship's anti-aircraft from moored ships.
- Q. Do you consider that was a sufficient defence?
- A. I think on these two days our defense was effective.
- Q. Four ships were sunk and six convoy vessels damaged. It doesn't sound as though it were effective.
- A. About twenty to thirty airplanes were shot down; maybe more. On the evening of the second day we had only 200 or 300 rounds of ammunition left on the ship. Because of the shortage of ammunition at the end of the second day and the probability that we would be sunk on the third day if the attacks were continued. I consulted with the convoy commander and he suggested to fill the ship's tanks with water to make it appear to be half sunk to deceive possible attackers, but this procedure was not carried out. No attack materialized on the third day.

Interrogation of Captain Chuji Kawamura Cont'd:

- Q. What happened after that?
- A. My ship with four escorts on the morning of the 17th left Hong Kong and proceeded down along the China coast, passing north of Hainan Island and following the coast of Hainan Island to the port of Yulin, where we spent the night. The next morning we cut across directly to the coast of Indo-China and followed the coast south past Saigon to Pointe de Camau, the southernmost point in Indo-China, and then crossed directly to the coast of Malaya. Just off the coast of Malaya, an escort ship was hit but not sunk by torpedo on January 24th. The remaining three escorts accompanied me down the coast of Malaya to the Singapore Straits. On January 26th, the balance of the convoy anchored in the Singapore Straits. That night India-based B-29's dropped mines in the Singapore Straits channel near our anchorage. The next morning while attempting to enter the port my ship was damaged by a mine and we anchored waiting for the Navy to sweep the channel, remaining there from the 27th to the 31st of January. Then my ship entered dry docks at Singapore the middle of February and emergency repairs were completed March 15th. Six merchant ships and six escorts sailed on the 19th of March in a north-bound convoy.
- Q. What were those six merchant ships, were they all tankers?
- A. No, there were three tankers, including one small tanker and two large tankers, two cargo ships going to Formosa.
- Q. Were the three tanker loaded?
- A. Loaded.
- Q. What kind of oil?
- A. My ship was loaded with diesel oil.
- Q. And the other two?
- A. The big tanker was loaded with gasoline for Japan and the small tanker was loaded with gasoline for Formosa.
- Q. Now will you tell us about that trip?
- A. The convoy started March 19th, and my ship struck a mine.
- Q. Where?
- A. Right outside Singapore in the main channel near Horsburg light.
- Q. And then what?
- A. It got a big hole in the engine room and it was towed to shore.
- Q. And put on the beach?
- A. Yes, but it sunk on the way.
- Q. A total loss?
- A. Yes.

Interrogation of Captain Chui Kawamura cont'd. -----

Q. Then what did you do?

A. On the way to the beach the ship was sunk. At that time all but seven of the crew were transferred from the ship to another ship in the convoy and they proceeded with the convoy to Saigon. I and the other officers remained on the ship overnight, beached. A Naval vessel came from Singapore and rescued us. I landed again at Singapore on March 20th and then waited until April 1st when a hospital ship was leaving Singapore, the Kazuura. I sailed from Singapore on the Kazuura as Assistant Chief Officer.

Q. What happened after that?

A. The hospital ship left Singapore April 1st and arrived at Hoji the 25th. Between Singapore and Hong Kong we observed many land planes from the Philippines scouting over the ship but we were never attacked.

Q. What did the ship carry?

A. No cargo, only wounded soldiers.

Q. No cargo?

A. Shortly before the Kazuura sailed from Singapore the Awa Maru was sunk by a submarine in the South China Sea on April 1st, presumably because of suspicion that it was carrying cargo in addition to wounded soldiers. Because of this event the authorities at Singapore were very careful to avoid any cargo being on the Kazuura.

Q. Now, there were no other events on the homeward trip?

A. Between Ferrosa and Shanghai the ship was again scouted by American land planes.

Q. When you left Singapore on the Sarawak did you think you could get through to Japan?

A. The convoy was only planned as far as Hong Kong. Beyond Hong Kong there were no definite plans at the time we left Singapore.

Q. What did you think were your chances?

A. Being a very foggy season, I think we might have been able to get to Japan safely; that is my opinion. But in spite of the fog, planes were always able to follow the ship.

Q. What happened to the rest of the ships in that convoy?

A. None arrived in Hong Kong.

Q. What happened to them?

A. They are presumed to have been sunk off the coast of Indo-China. The details are unknown.

Q. Do you know what the last convoy was to come up?

A. March 19th was the last convoy.

Interrogation of Captain Chui Kanamura cont'd. -----

Q. None after that left Singapore?

A. No.

Q. Can you tell me how the crew on the Sarawak acted with all these attacks going on? Did any of the crew desert at Takao or Hong Kong?

A. No. One died at Takao.

Q. What did the men on ships at that time think about the chances of the war? What were their ideas about the future or rest of the war?

A. When I was in Manila for repairs in the summer of 1944 I learned that the ships sailing between Formosa and Luzon were suffering heavy losses by submarines in the Bashi Straits north of Luzon, and at that time I and my associates began to fear that the war was beginning to be lost, or began to feel uneasy.

Q. When were you sure that it was lost?

A. In March at Singapore I began to think that the war was lost.

Q. What caused you to come to that opinion?

A. The fact that few or no ships were able to arrive at their destination safely.

Q. Do you know that in March, 1942, beginning in 1942, Japan was losing ships faster than you were able to build them? From March, 1942, on, ships were lost faster than they were built. From then on always less ships. Do you know it started down from then on?

A. I knew that at the time, only just the outline, not the exact number.

Q. If you knew as long ago as 1942 that Japan was losing ships faster than she was building them, what was your idea as to what would be the outcome in 1942?

A. I didn't believe the actual state of things. I believed in the statements of the Japanese Imperial Headquarters that Japan was winning the war. I actually knew the fleet was becoming smaller and smaller, but I liked to believe in the statements issued by the Japanese Imperial Headquarters that Japan was winning the war against America.