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INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS NO 399)
(NAV NO 76)

Place: Tokyo
Date: 17 November 1945
Time: 0930 - 1130

Subject: Japanese War Planning

Personnel Interrogated and Background of each:

Admiral YONAI, Mitsumasa, Navy Minister; graduate Naval Academy, 1901; Naval Staff College, 1913. Appointed Admiral 1937. Navy Minister in various cabinets as follows: MAYASHI, Cabinet February / June 1937; First KONOYE Cabinet, June 1937. / January 1939; HIRANUMA Cabinet January / July 1940; Appointed Member Supreme Military Council, August 1939; Premier January / July 1940; Appointed Deputy Premier and Navy Minister in KOISO Cabinet, July 1944; appointed Navy Minister in SUZUKI Cabinet, April 1945.

Where interrogated: NAVY MINISTRY Building.

Interrogator: Rear Admiral R.A. OFSTIE, USN

Interpreters: Mr. Fred WOODROUGH
Mr. MIZOTA, a Japanese National

Allied Officers Present: Admiral J.H. TOWERS, USN, Comdr. 5th Flt.
Captain T.J. HEDDING, USN
Lt. Commander W. WILDS, USNR

SUMMARY

Admiral YONAI describes the functions of various agencies having major responsibilities in government and for the prosecution of the war, and discusses significant developments of the war and other events leading to its termination.

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(Rear Admiral OFSTIE)

Q. Admiral, we are generally familiar with your career. We have a brief period missing, however, between the time you were Premier in 1940 and the time you joined the KOISO Cabinet in 1944, and we would like to know what your activity generally was during this period?

A. Practically nothing during these years.

Q. Were you in a position, however, in your associations, to be generally familiar with the tenure of thought in the country; perhaps, you might say, the high level discussions that were going on?

A. In the newspaper circles in JAPAN, any person who has once served as Prime Minister or is accorded the treatment as ex-Prime Minister by the Emperor, is looked upon as "Jushin". This Jushin is Senior Statesman and the general impression seems to be that they should know everything that is going on in the upper circles; but the fact is that they are told nothing as to what is going on in the Government or the Supreme War Council. Consequently whether the trend of the country is toward war or against it, so-called Senior Statesman are in no position to know.

The so called Jushin or Senior Statesman is a group of persons set up principally for the purpose of getting their advice or opinion when, upon the resignation of a cabinet, the question comes up; their advice is asked. This group of so-called Senior Statesman is rather a strange existence. It has no power of decisive action; it is merely consulted by the Privy Seal. Such information as they give him may not be adopted at all. It is merely an advisory council, and there appears to have been some misunderstanding on the part of the general public as to the exact function of this group.

Q. Today we wanted to get a clarification of some features of High Command planning and decision and to get your opinion on certain features on which we naturally assume that you are a principal authority.

A. As I have already stated, having been completely out of touch with Government activities until I joined the KOISO Cabinet toward the end of July 1944, I am in no position to know anything, and consequently can make no statement in regard to plans prior to this time. Subsequent to the end of July 1944 however, of course from my positions of Deputy Premier and Navy Minister I am ready to tell you what I know.

Q. In our questions, we'll take note of that. Admiral, would you give us, please, a brief description of the functions of the Supreme War Guidance Council and its manner of operation?

A. The Supreme War Direction Council was made up of two parts: (1) Regular members consisting of six - Prime Minister, Army Minister, Navy Minister, Chief of the Army General Staff, Chief of the Navy General Staff, and Foreign Minister; (2) In addition, however, they had authority to bring any other Cabinet Minister as a regular member whenever necessary. In addition there was what might be termed the Secretariat which had no direct responsibility for anything that took place in the meetings of the Council. In addition, while they were not regular members, there also attended the meetings of the Council these two: The Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff and the Deputy Chief of the Naval General Staff. The fact that the two deputy chiefs of the General Staffs attended and not the Vice Ministers is explained by the fact that this custom arose from the fact that formerly the Chief of the Army Staff and the Chief of the Navy Staff were Imperial Princes, and it was felt that the attendance of the deputies was necessary to assist, and this custom was maintained even after the two Imperial Princes were replaced by Commoners.

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- Q. Now, how were problems or questions presented to the Supreme Council? What was their method of functioning?
- A. Discussions of this Supreme Council were not confined to discussion of operational plans; rather, the greater emphasis was perhaps placed on other phases of the war effort--measures for maintaining fighting strength, especially the economic side, and discussion of the question as to whether, under the present situation, the war could be successfully prosecuted.
- Q. And those questions were presented by some outside medium or by the Chiefs of Staff or from what source was material received for consideration?
- A. It all arises within; that is, among the six regular members. In other words, nothing is submitted from the outside.
- Q. I gather then that the six regular members are the only ones who have what you might call "voting power", or do the extra members have any power in this direction?
- A. Yes, the six regular members have the voting power. They adopt any measures that they consider necessary. However, this is not final, for with relation to any matters of great importance, the subject matter, once adopted by the Supreme Council, is passed on to the Cabinet and unless also passed by the Cabinet, it does not become final.
- Q. Does the Supreme War Direction Council have direct access to the Emperor in matters of difference of opinion or dispute?
- A. In case the discussions are considered to be of special importance, the Council requests the Emperor to attend its meeting. Of course it is left to the members of the Council itself to determine whether or not a question is of sufficient importance to warrant the Emperor's attendance; and there were occasions upon the initiative of the EMPEROR, informal meetings of the Supreme War Direction Council were held. One instance in point of an informal meeting of the Council being held upon demand of the Emperor was, I believe, June 6 when a meeting was held to discuss whether it would be possible to continue this war. Another one of similar nature, I believe, was the 22nd of June.
- Q. Would you give us a brief description similarly of the Imperial General Headquarters--Dai Honei--how it worked?
- A. As contrasted to the Supreme War Direction Council, the Imperial General Staff confined its activities to questions of operations; consequently, members of the Supreme War Direction Council frequently knew nothing about operation plans.
- Q. But was the Imperial General Staff an organized body with secretariat and functioning continuously or did it simply become known as such a body when it met, yet was more or less of a permanent organization for the period of the war? How were agreements reached in these two bodies--or one or the other as you may see fit to talk of--by voting or by what means?
- A. This is with reference to the Imperial General Staff, what is discussed and adopted within the Staff is known only to the two Chiefs. Certainly prior to the adoption, it is known to no one else; and frequently even after adoption, it is not made known to the others. Once a question is adopted there it may be passed on to the Supreme War Direction Council which in turn discusses whether the execution of such a plan is possible or not, but not always.

I believe that any misunderstanding regarding the nature of the Supreme War Direction Council will be removed if you will look upon it as a liaison organ between the military and the cabinet. It's name tends to create the impression that it is sitting at the top of the pyramid which is the national war effort; but I think it is really a misnomer because it really was more of a liaison organ between the military and the government.

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- Q. And do far as war direction is concerned, the Imperial General Staff would be a more influential body?
- A. Yes, so long as questions of operations are concerned, decidedly so.
- Q. How were decisions actually reached in the Imperial General Staff? Was it a matter normally of unanimous agreement or just what was the physical means of arriving at decisions?
- A. Within the Imperial General Staff as far as questions of Army operations are concerned, if the Chief of the Army General Staff says that we will do this, that is the end of it; and so far as the Navy operations are concerned, if the Chief of the Navy General Staff says we will do this, that fixes it; and should there develop difference of opinion between the two chiefs, then nothing can be accomplished.
- Q. Isn't the makeup of the body such that, that is to say, there was no majority vote to settle an important question?
- A. There is no such. The question of majority could not arise. The situation is very similar to that of a Cabinet meeting. It isn't a question of a majority vote. If they can't obtain agreement on a question, it means that is a lack of unity.
- Q. Questions then would not be put directly to the Emperor in case of a definite difference of opinion?
- A. In case of failure to arrive at an agreement, if the question is of very great importance, it may be passed on to the Emperor for his decision, and such was the situation at the end of the war. In the period just prior to the end of the war, such a situation did arise. While there was general agreement to bring the war to a termination, there was disagreement on certain detailed points; so such were presented to the Emperor with two possibilities asking for the Emperor's decision on one or the other; and he gave his decision.
- Q. Now, with reference to the Supreme War Direction Council again, was there any difference in the influence of the Army or of the Navy in this body--the weight or strength?
- A. It is very difficult to make a general statement on that. I myself had to speak up quite strongly at times in the meetings of this War Direction Council. Generally speaking it might be said that the Army and Navy have quite different complexions; and should a proposal be made by the Army representative which I considered not proper, I never hesitated to oppose it, and some strong arguments did take place at these meetings.
- Q. I assume, particularly in the latter stages of the war, that there would be some fundamental differences that were very difficult to reach agreement on. I wonder if you could give us briefly the substance of the principal discussions?
- A. The fundamental question on which there was a definite split of opinion between the Army and the Navy was the question as to whether we should continue the war or bring it to an end. This difference began on a period as early as round June and cropped up in the meetings of the Supreme Council on the 6th and 22nd of that month; but I think that it was really in the early part of August that this split became definite--the Army insisting upon continuing to the very last, whereas I expressed the belief that there is a limit to all things, that in view of both the world situation and conditions within Japan, the time had come to terminate the war.
- Q. In this connection, was the Army fully cognizant of the Navy's condition and the Navy fully informed and cognizant of the Army's position, strength, etc, throughout?

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A. At least the Navy knew the situation as regards the strength of the Army that was left and I believe that the Army authorities were cognizant of the situation with regard to the Navy strength. The reason for my so stating is that modern war is not a question of the Army fighting it or the Navy fighting it. It depends upon total strength of the nation and since the question of total strength is not considered at all, one cannot say that the Army did this nor what was the situation in regard to the Navy, or vice versa.

Q. Then, what was the relative influence, if you could express an opinion on the subject, the relative influence of the Army and the Navy on national war policies?

A. This is toward the end?

Q. At any time during the war?

A. Politically.

Q. Politically, yes.

A. On political influence, definitely the Army. The Army had some power which it was impossible for us to analyze or measure. I believe that such a situation prevails in other countries.

Q. Did that power extend to the point where it directly affected Naval operations, the scale of effort that the Navy would be able to employ?

A. Toward the end of the war I recall that a situation arose in which the Navy felt that it should take control of our air forces, but we were not able to realize that. Although I cannot cite any concrete instances, I felt that the Army's political influence did have some effect on the Navy's operations.

Q. And the intent of the item you mentioned, that is to take over direction of all the air forces, was to coordinate that force to employ it against the greatest threat?

A. There might have been differences of opinion on this point but I at least felt that the Navy was superior to the Army in all phases of air activity and therefore felt that it would be to mutual advantage for the Navy to take control of all aspects of air effort.

Q. What was the Army's answer? What was their primary objection to such action? Was it pride?

A. Yes, I think it boils down to a question of its pride. They didn't like to give up part of its own forces to the Navy. I believe that there were numerous instances where the Navy felt that this should be the principal objective of a combined air attack. The Army would disagree considering that some other point should be made the butt of a combined attack; and because the chain of command of the two forces was completely divided the Navy could not persuade the Army to bring their air force to support the Navy effort, and vice versa. That was one of the reasons for the Navy's insistence that it should be given control of the entire air force. Toward the end of the war there was one instance when the Navy's view was accepted to a certain degree by the Army, as a result of which the Army agreed to place a part of its air force under the command of the Combined Fleet. This took place at the time of the OKINAWA Operations when the Army placed its Sixth Air Force under the command of the CinC of the Combined Fleet.

Q. Was the difference of opinion on the employment of air forces one of a question of wide dispersion of objectives on the part of the Army, or what was specifically the differences of opinion as to how they should be employed?

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- A. I believe that the difference arose from the difference between the Army and the Navy as to what your next probable objective would be. In other words as one instance, the Navy might think that you would probably attack OKINAWA next; whereas the Army would guess that your offensive was going to be directed against FORMAOSA.
- Q. Admiral, just a question here to place your status a little more accurately. When plans for the major naval operation had been approved by the proper agencies, to what extent did the Naval Minister exercise control over the manner of conduct of that operation?
- A. The actual situation was this: There had to be close coordination of the Chief of General Staff and the Navy Minister before any big operation plan was adopted, because two chief functions of the Navy Minister are (1) to make it possible for front-line forces to carry out any plan of operations that is adopted, and (2) is to maintain control within the Navy Department. Since the Navy Minister has control of the material, properly speaking, it was up to the Chief of Naval General Staff to consult the Navy Minister prior to deciding upon any major operation. This was my own personal private opinion, but I held the view that the Naval General Staff should be brought within the Navy Department under the Minister.
- Q. Then did the Navy Minister from time to time, following the course of an operation, exercise any control, advisory or direct while an operation was progressing?
- A. Once an operation is started, the Navy Minister exercised no further control.
- Q. Referring now to the basic war plan, you might say, as expressed by the scope of the initial advances - and here I am asking your opinion unofficially since you were not directly concerned at the time, but realizing your broad general understanding of the potentialities of Japan - what were your views as to the correctness of the initial plan and the capability of the Japanese nation to meet the probable demands?
- A. I think to this day that it was not a proper plan in view of the situation, our national war strength.
- Q. That is, you thought initially that it was too much expansion, too big a plan, or what would be your thought?
- A. I can't give you any details, I don't know them; but I think it should not have been undertaken at all and I firmly believe that, had I been Prime Minister at the time, we probably would not have had this war.
- Q. In the early stages of the war, Admiral, recognizing again that you were in an unofficial position, what was the opinion as to the major threat to holding the perimeter or to holding the southern resources and the perimeter - that is both together, the southern resources and the perimeter? Where did this major threat come from - Russia, China, American forces to the east or what?
- A. Would you be satisfied with the answer that the American strength was the principal threat, or do you want this broken down?
- Q. Well, let's have it broken down?
- A. To express this from the opposite side of the picture, the part where we felt the safest was where your forces could not reach.
- Q. Well, then, what did they think we would do alternatively? What were those areas we could not reach? What did you feel we would do toward this perimeter? What would we do which would constitute this threat?

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- A. I don't know whether this will be a direct answer to your question but I will put it this way: Once the war started we had to get the resources from the south, especially oil, and the points down south which were the furthest away from your Naval Bases were the easiest for us to capture. When you took the PHILIPPINES, that was the end of our resources, in cutting off the southern supplies.
- Q. But in the early stages, what was it that JAPAN had to defend, against; what force?
- A. You mean the task force, submarines, or what?
- Q. That, or was it the Army forces in Australia, India?
- A. The United States Fleet. So long as the United States Fleet didn't interfere, it was easy for us to get hold of southern supplies.
- Q. Well, would you say that this was primarily a naval war or did the Army command have greater or equal responsibility, as looked at from the Japanese side?
- A. I think it was the Navy's war.
- Q. We have been given to understand from various discussions with prominent Japanese Government officials that the coordination between the Army and Navy was not all that could be desired. If you are in agreement with that, what were the principal points of friction? Was it personalities or was it war aims, or what was the reason for the lack of cooperation?
- A. Fundamentally I believe it was a difference in education between the Army and Navy. The Army starts its education with young boys of 15 and 16 and from that early age teaches them nothing but war. Therein I believe lies the fundamental difference between the ideas of the Army and Navy officers. As a result it follows as a matter of course that the Army develops a narrower vision, can't see as broadly as the Navy officers.
- Q. I gather that when you say they are taught nothing but war, you conclude that they taught nothing of the broad international picture?
- A. Yes, I believe not teaching them anything outside. This is of course merely my feeling on the matter. I do not make the statement by the way of criticizing the Army.
- Q. Admiral, we'd like to have your opinion, and discuss it as you will, on what you consider the turning point of the war - the occasion or the situation where there were definite indications of the doubtful successful conclusion of the war?
- A. To be very frank, I think that the turning point was the start. I felt from the very beginning that there was no chance of success, but of course this is not an answer to your question. Once the war had started, I would pick either MIDWAY or our retreat from GUADALCANAL as the turning point, after which I was certain there was no chance for success. Later on of course it was the loss of SAIPAN followed by LEYTE, and I felt that that was the end.
- Q. Why do you pick MIDWAY and why do you pick the retreat from GUADALCANAL?
- A. I pick MIDWAY principally from the naval standpoint because of the heavy fleet losses suffered there. GUADALCANAL on the other hand, I pick from a more general point. When we had to retreat, taking the whole situation, I felt that there was no further chance of success, and our defeat at LEYTE of course I felt was tantamount to loss of the PHILIPPINES.

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- Q. What do you consider the major effects on the Japanese naval war potential of the U.S. operations? Which part of our total operations had the major effect on the naval war potential? Just what was the major U.S. effort that had the greatest effect?
- A. Generally speaking, the fact that the U. S. overseas operations were carried out, were planned on a large scale and were successfully carried out, apparently according to schedule, was the cause of greatest difficulty to the Japanese Navy. Then, with individual cases, I point out that the greatest blow to the Japanese Navy at MIDWAY was your air force. At LEYTE I believe it was your submarine activity, together with the fact that your air force in the PHILIPPINES was much stronger than we had expected.
- Q. To clarify the last part of that answer, the strength of the air force in the PHILIPPINES in those initial stages at LEYTE?
- A. From the beginning of the LEYTE Operations right up to the end of the war. The fact that we suffered virtually complete destruction of our fleet, we attribute principally to the fact that your air strength in the PHILIPPINES was much stronger than we thought.
- Q. In the late Autumn of 1944 the Japanese radio broadcasts told of tremendous losses inflicted upon the U.S. Navy off FORMOSA. The Japanese staged a major naval offensive in the PHILIPPINE Area from the 23rd to the 25th of October. Did the Japanese Navy really believe that heavy losses had been inflicted and expect to meet a much weaker U. S. Fleet than they did meet?
- A. I don't remember, of course, what figures were given in those broadcasts from Tokyo in the Autumn of 1944, but it is possible that there was some exaggeration in the figures announced. But generally speaking, I think that there is bound to be some differences in the judgement of those who actually take part and the judgment of those who see it from the Central Headquarters, especially in the case of air engagements where most of the damage is inflicted by our air force. Reports from different flyers would often overlap. This is not known at the front, so mistakes sometimes creep in without the deliberate intention to exaggerate.
- Q. What I really meant was: Did that--we'll say, exaggeration--have any real effect on the subsequent operation in October? Was there a belief in the High Command that, when the operations were ordered, the American Task Forces were less strong than perhaps was the fact?
- A. I don't know whether there was actual exaggeration.
- Q. Can you express an opinion as to the relationship between the naval war potential at any time in the war and the national war potential, expressed as a comparison between them?
- A. As a direct answer, I believe that whenever the Navy suffered a heavy blow, that naturally brought down the nation's fighting power because of the necessity of replenishment of what the Navy had lost. But generally speaking, the general situation is perhaps the reverse; i.e., change in the nation's fighting power directly affected the Navy's fighting power. In this war, however, balance between those two was completely lost, principally owing to shortage in material. The question of education and training came into some extent, but principal cause of loss of balance between the nation's fighting strength and the Navy fighting strength was shortage of materials.
- Q. Do you feel that General TOJO had a full understanding of the implications and the problems, etc, of naval strength and naval warfare?

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- A. I wouldn't venture a guess on that. It is impossible to make a statement without asking General TOJO first.
- Q. At what stage of the war would the Navy High Command, as it existed at various periods and had it been free to make the decision itself, have taken steps to terminate the war?
- A. I believe that the first occasion would have been in looking at it solely from the Japanese side, I believe that the first opportunity would have been the month in which the war was begun; that is, after the victories of HAWAII, SINGAPORE, etc. The second, I believe, would have been after the loss of SAIPAN, and after that it appeared to be a question of being dragged along, fighting on by inertia, etc. That is looking at it from only the Japanese side, but even if the Japanese Navy had proposed to end the war, I don't know how it would have ended. That depended on the attitude of the enemy.
- Q. Would the younger officers of the Navy, alone, have been willing to accept such an action, say after SAIPAN? Just an opinion, of course.
- A. That is a question. It would appear that it's impossible to end a war until the proper time has come. A certain inertia moves it along until that time does come.
- Q. How much influence in delaying the conclusion of the war would you say the ultimate hope of German victory had?
- A. So far as I am concerned it had no effect at all because I felt from the very first that GERMANY had no chance. I believe so firmly from the very outset that GERMANY had no chance that I was one of those who strongly opposed a tie-up with GERMANY; and because that feeling of mine was known in certain quarters, that I was forced more or less to resign from my position as Prime Minister because the feeling in those quarters was that with Admiral YONAI as Prime Minister there was little chance of the tie-up with GERMANY materializing.
- Q. At what time did the overall military situation first give rise to positive statements and expressions of opinion in the High Command, High Government circles, that the war should be brought to a conclusion?
- A. Beginning in May of this year.
- Q. And what were the significant factors of the Japanese war potential at that time? What were the major deficiencies at that point? How capable was Japan of continuing war?
- A. About that time it was definitely realized that our economic strength was just about depleted as to the military side. I could not point out any particular thing that was significant because everything had just about come to the bottom level. To explain in a little more detail-the question of oil shortage, for instance, had become acute because after the loss of the PHILIPPINES not a drop came from the south. On the shipbuilding situation, the capacity had fallen immensely owing to the steel shortage. In the field of manpower, while we appeared to have plenty so far as number was concerned, for some reason that did not appear in production, i.e., we were not able to use the manpower effectively so that by May, I personally felt that looking in whatever direction, we had come to the end of the road.
- Q. Would you give us the substance of any discussions you had with Admiral SUZUKI, after joining his cabinet, on the matter of taking positive steps to terminate the war?

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A. The SUZUKI Cabinet was formed early in April of this year and at that time it was difficult for me, or I think for anyone else, to broach the subject of war conclusion to anyone. But after Admiral SUZUKI became Premier I did speak with him in an abstract way, saying to him that "I don't think we can continue with this much longer". The first concrete step taken with the idea of terminating the war was probably the instruction given to the Coordination Bureau within the Cabinet to make an investigation as to the present state of various war materials. As a result of that investigation the situation became more and more clear that continuation of the war was going to be difficult. In May I felt personally that it was going to be extremely difficult, and by early June I felt that it was absolutely no sense in continuing this any longer.

I would like to repeat something I have already stated about Senior Statesmen because there does seem to be so much misunderstanding about the position and character of this familiar body; even among our own people there appears to be much misunderstanding. As I have already stated, it has no power whatever, does not discuss questions of national policy. Because of a misunderstanding in JAPAN, itself, by some people, Senior Statesmen have been placed in rather difficult position, and I wish to make this repetition to remove any possible misunderstanding on your part.

One thing that was a great source of worry to me at the end of the war was this: The Imperial Rescript was issued on August 14th and broadcast on the 15th; and being deeply concerned for what young officers in the Navy might do, I took every possible measure to forestall possible untoward incidents, and I believe that I was more or less successful, and the same may be said with regard to the Army. But after all, the thing that made it possible to avoid serious trouble of any kind was the power of the Emperor rather than anything that I or the Army were able to do. During my long career as Navy Minister I probably never worried so much as I did during the period from the 14th to about the 23rd of that month, and I felt greatly relieved when we were able to go through this period without any serious trouble in the Navy.