

HEADQUARTERS  
U.S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY  
(PACIFIC)  
C/O Postmaster, San Francisco

INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS NO. 525 )

Place: Tokyo.  
Date: 13 December 1945  
1530 - 1700.

Division of Origin: Military Analysis.

Subject: Shipping in the New Britain, New Guinea, New Ireland Area,  
February and March 1943.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Rear Admiral Shunsaku Nabashima, Chief of Staff, Fourth Fleet at Truk during early 1943.

Colonel Kamao Imoto, Staff Supply, Eighth Area Army, Rabaul, early 1943. Worked with Colonel Sagita in planning Bismark Convoy.

Where interviewed: Office of A-2 ADFEAF, Tokyo.

Interrogators: J. V. CRABB, Brig. General, USA.  
WOODBURY BURGESS, Colonel, AC.

Interpreters: Mr. John Atsumi, interpreter who was representing the Japs.  
Staff Sergeant Hugh Tamashiro, U. S. Army.

SUMMARY

1. The personnel herein interrogated were either very poorly informed or did not desire to disclose any information.
2. Colonel Imoto gave the impression of pretending to know more than he does know. He contradicted his own statements repeatedly.
3. During the latter part of February and first part of March 1943, apparently ten to fifteen ships moved to the New Britain area. The routes of these ships varied, sometimes from Truk down past the Admiralties into the Western Bismark Sea and then to New Britain. At other times to the east of New Ireland and thence to New Britain. All movements were within this boundary.
4. There is a possibility that a small undetermined number of submarines, merchant shipping and escort vessels could have been in the area of the Bismark Sea Battle at that time.
5. Instructions from the Japanese Navy required ships to send radio distress messages when they were in battle as a fleet unit. Ships en route to join the fleet or a convoy were instructed to remain silent even if in distress.

Transcript of Interrogation. (Rear Admiral Nabashima & Colonel Imoto. - -

- Q. What areas did the Fourth Fleet operate over?  
A. The Fourth Fleet operated in a rectangular area around Truk extending to Saipan, Marshalls and Gilberts.
- Q. Do you have information of convoys, merchant or naval, down towards the Bismark Sea?  
A. I got the information only for the important convoys.
- Q. Did he furnish vessels of the escort fleet or of the Fourth Fleet for escort purposes of important convoys?  
A. He states that the convoys that came within his area he had to dispatch the ships to convoy them in.
- Q. When it leaves a point within his area to go to a point without he furnishes it all the way or just to a certain point?  
A. His fleet was very limited in number of ships. The Japanese have a fleet called a "Combined Fleet." A certain amount of ships are dispatched to that convoy. He has nothing to do with any ships out of his area. If it is a very important convoy, the main fleet will dispatch ships to convoy them?
- Q. What shipping was out of Truk into the New Britain area during the latter part of February 1943, was it supply, carrying troops, etc? Was there a rather large amount of shipping, ten ships a month, twenty ships a month?  
A. In that period there were just about fourteen or fifteen ships and what they carried was mainly stuff for the Navy. Food, fuel, munitions, and stuff for defense purposes. They were going to either Kavieng or Rabaul.
- Q. What were the routes of those vessels? (Ships leaving Truk).  
A. They came in from Truk down sometimes towards Biak and then sometimes to the east of Kavieng and usually within that general area.
- Q. Could either the Admiral or Colonel give me any information on submarine activities which would cover the area here during that period. Generally, were there ten submarines, two or three, and were they carrying supplies to these bases?  
A. In that period of time there were about nine submarines and the main objective was supply and not attack.
- Q. Ask them if they know of any of the information of some of the strafing attacks of shipments that our pilots made on their submarines in this area?  
A. He says in Bougainville there was intense strafing and bombing but in this area there was hardly any attack against submarines. There may have been some but he states there were hardly any.
- Q. Did he hear of any submarine sinkings in this area?  
A. No, sir. He has not heard of any. He said the losses in that area were very low.
- Q. What was the route of those submarines from Rabaul to Lae?  
A. He is not a Navy man but according to what he knows most submarines took the southern route.

- Q. Does he recall how many vessels were sunk?
- A. He thinks it was seven transports. The escort he doesn't know about but believes several of the escort vessels were sunk. He said that submarines in this vicinity went to rescue these men who were drifting in that direction.
- Q. Did Captain Matsunaga, have information as to the submarines that were in this area?
- A. He said he doesn't know the number of submarines in this vicinity. All he knows is that the submarines went out to rescue the men.
- Q. Were any of those submarines attacked by aircraft?
- A. He said about ten submarines went to rescue these men, but doesn't know if any were sunk or damaged. He received no reports on this.
- Q. Does he have knowledge of any other merchant shipping in the Vitiaz Strait or the Huen Gulf in this general area at the time the Lae Transport operation was attacked and sunk in that area?
- A. He believes that there were no merchant vessels in that vicinity.
- Q. We had a citing on the 26th February of three (3) freighters, one (1) passenger vessel (Transport), two (2) unidentified vessels and one (1) possible submarine near Ubili off Lolobau on the 26 February, what might have been their course?
- A. In his opinion he figures they were Army transports going along the North coast of New Britain.
- Q. From where to where would they be going?
- A. Such ships were routed all the way from Cape Gloucester to Rabaul and in between. Since the transportation on land was so bad, the army used small transports. During day they hid near shore afraid of airplane attack. He thinks we misinterpreted the pictures or report, they were small vessels.
- Q. Does he remember whether or not there were two (2) cargo vessels off the west tip of New Hanover, 26 February 1943?
- A. He thinks there might well have been two vessels there at that time because they were still having transportation between Palau and Rabaul.
- Q. Could those vessels have been sent on down into the Vitiaz Strait from that position?
- A. He doesn't believe that two (2) ships could have gone from here because they had to go into Rabaul. No transport plied between New Hanover and Vitiaz Strait.
- Q. Where the vessels which escorted the Lae Transport Operation furnished by the Escort Fleet or did they come from the battle units of the Eighth Fleet?
- A. He said that the escorts were all from the battle units because the escort fleet only escorted ships from Rabaul northward and westward.
- Q. Were any of the following destroyers at any time in the Escort Fleet? Did he ever have control of any of the following destroyers: Shirayuki, Shikinami, Uranami, Asashiwo, Arashiwo, Tokitsukaze, Ukikaze, and Asagumo.
- A. (Negative answer to each). No destroyers.