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Place: TOKYO
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Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: Defense of the PHILIPPINES, 1944.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Commander YAMAGUCHI, Meriyoshi, is a Naval Officer of 20 years service, and a pilot with 2000 hours in the air. During the war he alternated between staff assignments with operational commands and training duty. From August 1944 to January 1945 he was Operations Officer on the Staff of Vice Admiral FUKUDOME, CinC Second Air Fleet (FORMOSA), and from 23 October, CinC First Combined Base Air Force (LUZON).

Where interrogated: Meiji Building.

Interrogator: Lt. Comdr. James A. Field, jr., USNR.

Interpreter: Lt. Comdr. D. Bartlett, USNR.

Allied Officers Present: None.

SUMMARY

Commander YAMAGUCHI discusses the PHILIPPINE Campaign of 1944 from the point of view of the Naval land-based air forces. So far as the general aspects of the campaign are concerned, his descriptions and statements are considered accurate; many of the statistics offered, particularly as regards losses and replacements of aircraft, are believed to be far from the truth and should be accepted only with considerable reservation. In one sense, however, this very inaccuracy is important evidence of the deterioration of the Japanese position and of the disorganization of Japanese forces in the PHILIPPINES.

TRANSCRIPT

- Q. When did you reach the PHILIPPINES in 1944?
 A. October 20, I arrived from FORMOSA with the staff of Admiral FUKUDOME, CinC 2nd Air Fleet. I was Operations Officer.
- Q. When were the First and Second Air Fleets combined?
 A. About the 23rd of October.
- Q. What was the strength of the Second Air Fleet when it arrived in the PHILIPPINES?
 A. The Second Air Fleet, on arrival in the PHILIPPINES, was composed as follows:
- | | | |
|---------------|---------------|-----|
| 202 Air Group | (VF-Zeke) | 200 |
| 341 Air Group | (VF-George) | 100 |
| 763 Air Group | (VMB-Betty) | 55 |
| | (VMB-Frances) | 50 |
| 141 Air Group | (VB-Judy) | 15 |
| | (VS-Myrt) | 10 |
| | (VFN-Irving) | 20 |

This gives a total of 450 aircraft not including 15 transport planes of 1081 Air Group, and 150 training planes which remained in FORMOSA. Of these 450 aircraft we could count on at least a half being operational at any one time.

NOTE: In-as-much as exception is later taken to some of Commander YAMAGUCHI's statistics, it should perhaps be stated here that these figures on the strength of the Second Air Fleet are considered substantially correct.

- Q. When the Second Air Fleet moved to the PHILIPPINES did it move entirely or did some of its components remain in OKINAWA, FORMOSA, or KYUSHU?
 A. They all moved to the PHILIPPINES; although for some reason a few planes were left in FORMOSA or KYUSHU, actually the entire Air Fleet moved to the PHILIPPINES. 2/3 of the total number given above went to the PHILIPPINES.
- Q. Then is it a fair estimate to say that when the Second Air Fleet arrived in the PHILIPPINES it brought out 300 planes total?
 A. About 300.
- Q. What was the strength of the First Air Fleet about that time when you arrived in the PHILIPPINES?
 A. The First Air Fleet had about 100 planes, that was after the damage caused by your task force. It was all told 400 in the First and Second Air Fleets.
- Q. Now these 400 in both First and Second Air Fleet, how many were operational at any one time?
 A. Two-thirds were operational.
- Q. Do you know roughly what number of planes the Army had in the PHILIPPINES at that time?
 A. The Army had about 200 planes (Operational) perhaps they might have 300-400 total.
- Q. That was the Fourth Air Army commanded by General TOMINAGA?
 A. Yes, that is correct.
- Q. About ten days before you came to LUZON, on about 12-14 October, our Carrier Task Force attacked FORMOSA; about how many planes did you lose in that attack?

- A. 40 fighters, because most of them had remained at KYUSHU at that time and were safe. Damage was mostly to fighters, also about fifty medium bombers which flew from KYUSHU were lost. This total of 90 planes was lost in the three days action.
- Q. Were these losses of planes in FORMOSA principally lost on the ground or in air combat?
- A. Majority of planes lost were in the air.
- Q. Did you know if the Army lost any planes in FORMOSA during those three days?
- A. I think about 30 losses on Army side.
- Q. The losses suffered in these raids on 12 and 14 October, were they serious when it came time to move to LUZON or had they been made up by reinforcements from JAPAN?
- A. The damage was very heavy, we had to have reinforcements from JAPAN, and they were replaced. Up to that time we could manage well as far as reinforcements were concerned because they had plenty of planes at home. That was the last time that losses were fully made up, after that reinforcements were not so good.
- Q. Do you think it is correct to say that the total losses in FORMOSA were only about 90 Navy and 40 or 50 Army planes?
- A. I think these figures approximately correct. Some of the planes were hidden and avoided attack from Task Force.
- NOTE: The figures of losses given here are believed to be far below those actually suffered. Attention is invited to the statement above that "the damage was very heavy", an assertion which is confirmed by a number of other interrogations and to Commander YAMAGUCHI's willingness to revise his figures upward later in the interrogation.
- Q. What damage did you believe you had inflicted on our Task Force off FORMOSA in those raids?
- A. About 30 Army bombers cooperated in this action from KYUSHU. Five carriers, it was estimated, received heavy damage or perhaps sunk. Including other damage, altogether 30 vessels was the result of this attack, the General Headquarters issued results of the action. I have my own opinion which is, I didn't see it myself, I heard crew report, but they like to boost it up. To sum up, the public number would be larger than actually. The published number about 30, the actual number I thought was 1/3 of that or about ten including the five carriers.
- Q. When you arrived in the PHILIPPINES, what mission was assigned the Second Air Fleet?
- A. The first mission was to attack the Task Force and to wipe out the American Landing Force in LEYTE GULF; second mission would be to fight back the Army Landing Force.
- Q. Was there any plan for giving fighter protection to the Japanese Fleets, to Admiral KURITA, Admiral OZAWA or Admiral NISHIMURA? Did you plan to give them fighter protection?
- A. There was no plan like that because of the shortage of planes, but some protection was given to KURITA's Force.
- Q. What type of protection was given to KURITA's Force as it came through, and on what day?
- A. More or less, ten fighters were above fleet movements; ten airplanes was standard to be above a fleet. Anti-submarine work ahead of this fleet course, it was done until time the fleet comes off LEYTE. This protection was begun at two hundred miles from CLARK FIELD and then continued all the way through. Our main force was at CLARK FIELD.

Q. Was this what was planned or was it later ordered?

A. It was planned.

Q. How much of it was actually performed?

A. 24 and 25th, it was carried out exactly according to plan. On the 26th they could not very well do that on account of the shortage of planes.

Q. Admiral KURITA the other day said he did not get any planes at any time.

A. Actually ten planes were above the Fleet but they could not make effective protection on account your Task Force was very strong; cooperation between the Air Force and KURITA's Force was not very good, they did their best.

Q. Why was the cooperation not good, bad communications, visibility or what?

A. It was true communications weren't good; the main reason for bad cooperation was caused by fact they were fully occupied by your Task Force.

Q. We have also been told that there were not enough planes to spare to protect KURITA and that they concentrated on our Task Force to give "indirect protection" rather than give him protection by being over him. Is that correct?

A. That is true in that our object was to attack your Task Force and by doing that we would have given KURITA indirect protection. But it was true there were always ten planes above the Fleet; your Task Force was so strong, it wasn't very good.

Q. Was that ten planes all day?

A. There were big intervals between ten planes refueling and coming back, I am afraid these intervals of planes were too long. Admiral KURITA was very unsatisfied with the fact protection was not satisfactory or good enough.

Q. Did he send messages telling you he was not satisfied?

A. Yes, but we couldn't do anything else.

Q. In addition to these planes for cover of Admiral KURITA and for attack on our Task Force, did you have planes for search?

A. Search was a principal duty.

Q. To search and then attack or to search and bring back information?

A. If they searched and found enemy force they would send a message by telephone and then attacking force would come to the scene.

Q. On the 24th, did you feel that you had good information about the position of all our forces?

A. I think the information was not so very good; the work of patrolling was not good particularly at that time and they could not figure out total strength of your Task Force. Generally speaking the fact that the patrolling work of Japanese Navy was very poor was main reason for final defeat.

Q. Why was it poor, what difficulties did it have?

A. Due to shortage of planes, all they could do was attack and couldn't spare planes for patrol and reconnaissance. A second reason for this inefficient reconnaissance may have been the poor radar work, also the reconnaissance was not sufficiently appreciated by the personnel assigned to reconnaissance duty who preferred to attack, and had little training in reconnaissance.

- Q. What force did you estimate we had and where were they located on the 24th?
- A. (Referring to chart). In the afternoon of the 24th, we figured that your Task Force was located East of SAMAR. As to the strength of your force, we were not sure, but we thought a very strong force was there.
- Q. Did you feel that was the main Task Force at that place?
- A. There was some information to the effect a Task Force was around 130 degrees east; we had an RDF fix on a radio message sent from about 130 E 14 N.
- Q. On the 24th, had your planes attacked this Force off SAMAR or any other force?
- A. Only the force off SAMAR.
- Q. No attacks on any force east of LUZON?
- A. No attacks.
- Q. Do you know what types of combatant ships, and how many we had inside LEYTE GULF?
- A. We knew transports and battleships were there, but we had no intention to make attack on force in Gulf, simply concentrate on Task Force outside; and KURITA's Force was supposed to take care of the transports inside the Bay.
- Q. On the 24th, did any planes from Admiral OZAWA's carriers land on your shore bases?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Had they attacked any of our forces before coming ashore?
- A. They received a report that OZAWA planes did attack one carrier.
- Q. Did you know where that carrier was located?
- A. It was known later that that carrier group was proceeding North about 14 N 127 E, but it was not known at that time where they were.
- Q. How many planes from OZAWA's Force landed ashore?
- A. About 15 or 20 airplanes, they came in separately and made emergency landings. They landed mostly at CLARK FIELD; total about 15 or 20 planes landed everywhere between APARRI and CLARK.
- Q. Was the information you received from your planes, Admiral OZAWA's planes and other sources, was that information sent out to Admiral OZAWA as soon as you collected it? Did they continue to send out what information they had to the Admiral?
- A. They sent all communications whenever they received any information, but I think communication to OZAWA not so good; communication to KURITA was good.
- Q. So Admiral KURITA had all the information that was available to you?
- A. Yes, all the information we had was transmitted to KURITA.
- Q. On this same day on the 24th, were the Army aircraft in LUZON performing the same mission?
- A. Army planes were taking care of the land attack. That was because of the fact that Army planes were incapable of adequate sea combat, as they were not trained that way. It is originally planned that Army should take care of land campaign, Navy sea campaign; but the Army personnel training was not rounded enough for sea campaign.

- Q. The Army was then attacking ships and landing boats in the Gulf?
A. Yes.
- Q. When did the Second Air Fleet begin to use Kamikaze tactics?
A. It started from the 25th, the same day that the First Air Fleet also began.
- Q. Had those tactics been planned in advance or planned on spur of the moment?
A. It was planned by Vice Admiral ONISHI (CinC First Air Fleet) about a month previously to our arrival at MANILA, it was planned at the end of September.
- Q. How about the plans for planes from OZAWA's aircraft carriers did they carry out Kamikaze attacks?
A. They did not at that time.
- Q. After the battle of the 24th and 25th about what was the Naval Air strength remaining in LUZON? What losses did you suffer?
A. We lost about 1/3 of total strength, and later some reinforcements were made, but very little and very slow. We never again came back to the original strength, always going down.
- Q. After this battle, what particular missions did the combined First and Second Air Force have? What were their duties?
A. The mission was not changed, it was to continue to attack your forces in LEYTE and they did this. Of course they did not forget your Task Force coming; whenever they saw your force they would fight. The final objective was to cooperate with Army planes in LEYTE Gulf. Additional mission was to protect the Japanese reinforcements of LEYTE.
- Q. Who was in charge of protecting the convoys for reinforcement of LEYTE?
A. That was the cooperative effort of First and Second Air Force and the Army; it was done by cooperation of Admiral FUKUDOME and General TOMINAGA.
- Q. Was the cooperation successful in this instance; did they work well together?
A. With the very small strength they had, the cooperation went smoothly; it resulted unsuccessfully because of the lack of strength.
- Q. When was the reinforcement and defense of LEYTE given up?
A. This reinforcement and defense work was continued until time you occupied SAN JOSE (MINDORO).
- Q. When we sent a force and landed at SAN JOSE (MINDORO), were you able to offer effective air opposition to that operation?
A. Our position was very weak because of the shortage of planes. A scattered attack was made.
- Q. At that time roughly how many operational planes did you have?
A. About 100 planes, both Army and Navy together, and only 50 could be used freely and effectively.
- Q. Why was that?
A. We could not use most of the planes because of the fact we could not receive any parts.
- Q. Was there any interference that day of our aircraft or was it merely shortage of parts?
A. Your interference was very great and all we could do was hide the small numbers of our planes. They were concentrated on defense work; very few of them did takeoff.

- Q. When did you stop receiving reinforcements of new planes and pilots from the north?
- A. In December,
- Q. You speak in December of having a large number of planes which could not fly for lack of parts. Was it because there were no parts in LUZON, because the parts were at other fields and couldn't be distributed, or what was the trouble?
- A. They had trouble in production, were unable to produce in JAPAN because of lack of raw materials which could not be imported; principally because of submarine attacks and secondly by interference from China-based airplanes. It is also true that there were many spare parts around CLARK but mostly for different type planes than what we were receiving. Also, there was some disorganization, bad automobile transport, and the telephone wires were cut down.
- Q. What particular raw materials do you feel were critical or missing?
- A. Bauxite.
- Q. Was there ever any shortage of aviation gasoline in the PHILIPPINES?
- A. Although we did not have plenty of gasoline, we had enough to take care of the planes on hand.
- Q. How about gasoline for motor transport?
- A. We received a supply from the Army; there was enough of that too.
- Q. On the 1st of January, roughly, what was the air strength of operational planes in LUZON?
- A. Both Army and Navy included 50 or less fighters and 20 or less bombers.
- Q. Were all pilots at that time Kamikaze pilots?
- A. Yes, they were all Kamikaze.
- Q. On the way to our landing at LINGAYEN, our convoys were attacked by your Kamikaze planes. What instructions were given to the pilots as to what type of ship they were to attack?
- A. Principally transports.
- Q. No carriers any more?
- A. Not on carriers any more because PHILIPPINES didn't have enough planes to spare; secondly battleships, cruisers, etc.
- Q. How many transports did you estimate were hit?
- A. I think about 10 or 15 among 200 transports, no great success.
- Q. On 6 and 7 January our battleships and cruisers were in the Gulf and were heavily attacked by Kamikaze. Were those your planes or did they come from FORMOSA?
- A. All from CLARK Field, no planes from FORMOSA.
- Q. Insofar as you know, no attacks were made in the LINGAYEN Area by planes from FORMOSA?
- A. As to the combat on or after 12, the planes from FORMOSA participated, but not before.
- Q. On the approach to LINGAYEN, we noticed that some pilots still preferred to attack carriers rather than transports.
- A. Although orders were definite that they should attack transports first and always, sometimes temptation was too great when the pilot sighted a carrier; would violate orders to the distress of his command. We tried to persuade them of the importance of attacking the transports again and again.

- Q. Was a Kamikaze pilot given a greater promotion for successful attack on one type of ship over another?
- A. There is no difference in merit given to the pilots according to the ships they attacked; they were treated the same.
- Q. We understood at one time that for hitting an aircraft carrier the pilot would be promoted two grades, for another ship one grade; is that not correct?
- A. There was a case like that in the beginning of the campaign, sometime in October. The pilot who sank a carrier got two grade promotion because that was main target at that time. That system of two grades promotion tempted them later on, even though situation had changed.
- Q. When did you leave LUZON?
- A. January 8. I flew to FORMOSA during the night.
- Q. How many planes got out of LUZON?
- A. From 30 to 40 planes evacuated to FORMOSA during January, February, March, (total).
- Q. What type of passengers did they take out?
- A. The Commanders of the Headquarters, then preference given to pilots.
- Q. Aside from staff and command personnel, pilots were most valuable people you had at that time?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What would be your estimate of the total number of Japanese planes lost in the PHILIPPINES between October and February?
- A. I cannot answer very accurately, perhaps from 500 to 1000 both Army and Navy were lost there. (NOTE: these figures are believed to be considerably below the actual total).
- Q. What do you estimate, the best you can, the total number aircraft reinforcement received from October to December 20 when they stopped?
- A. About 200 planes each month, 100 Army, 100 Navy, total about 600.
- Q. Did Admiral FUKUDOME request more planes than that; did he ask for a specific number or just all he could get?
- A. Every day he sent request to send as many planes as possible.
- Q. Did he ever send to headquarters his estimate of the number necessary to hold the PHILIPPINES?
- A. He knew that the original strength would not be enough to hold the PHILIPPINES, but even the original strength could not be maintained.
- Q. At the time of our LEYTE landings, were all Navy planes in LUZON?
- A. Some ten or fifteen in DAVAO and in CEBU-LEGASPI about 50 planes of the First Air Fleet.
- Q. Most of them however were in MANILA Area?
- A. Yes.
- Q. How about the Army?
- A. Their main force was at BACOLOD, some at LIPA Airbase.
- Q. To return to the FORMOSA attack of 12-14 October, you said total Japanese losses were about 140. Other officers have said they thought there were about 500.
- A. That might be the figure which included Army and Navy. My

figure is only Navy, particularly Second Air Fleet. If we include Army plane losses, then his figure might be increased, and the Japanese losses made public by headquarters was also 500 planes.

- Q. Were there other Navy planes in FORMOSA at that time that did not belong to the Second Air Fleet?
- A. As far as the Navy is concerned, besides the Second Air Fleet the only planes present were from the carriers, flown down from KYUSHU. If you add them in, the losses might come up to 500.
- Q. What do you feel was the decisive factor in the failure to defend the PHILIPPINES?
- A. First, I think that reinforcement for YAMASHITA's Force was not carried out successfully; only one-fifth of the original plan was executed. Second, reinforcement of airplanes was not carried out successfully and control of the air was in your hands.
- Q. Why was not this plan of reinforcing YAMASHITA's Force carried out?
- A. The submarine interference and planes from CHINA took a great loss. The third reason to previous question is shortage of oil for the fleet, the force in the INLAND SEA could not move from there to anywhere else because of the oil shortage. I think those three reasons are about equal in importance.