

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

INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS NO. 93)
NAV NO. 18

Place: Tokyo
Date: 19 October 1945
1300

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: GILBERT-MARSHALL ISLANDS Operations.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Lt. Comdr. TOKUNO, Hiroshi, a regular officer of the Japanese Navy, was executive officer of the island garrison at MILLE between 20 July 1943 and 14 August 1944.

Where interviewed: MEIJI Building, Room 749.

Interrogator: Captain Steadman Teller, USN.

Interpreter: Lt. Comdr. Seymour Millstein, USNR.

Allied Officers Present: None.

SUMMARY

Lt. Comdr. TOKUNO had his share of the bitter experiences of defeat, having been in the battleship KERISEIMA and the destroyer HINEGUMO when they were sunk in the SOLOMONS ISLANDS and spending the last two years of the war on the bypassed and very much bombed island of MILLE. However, the officer was in good physical condition and in fair spirits as he described the effects of the U. S. invasion in the GILBERT-MARSHALL area on the forces and equipment available to his command.

TRANSCRIPT

Q. What was your Station and duty at MILLE from July 1943 to the end of the war?

A. I was executive officer to Captain SHIGA, Masanari, who was commander of the unit based there during the same period. Captain SHIGA was senior officer on MILLE ATOLL and commanded the following units: 66th Garrison Unit and also the Number One South Seas Detachment (Army Garrison Unit). Also the 552nd air unit and the 252nd air unit. Captain SHIGA was in charge of all the land units while he was senior officer present. Operational orders for the two air units was not his province but came from the Commander of the 24th Air Flotilla who was based either on ROI ATOLL or MALOELAP ATOLL. Neither I or Captain SHIGA had any connection with the air operations of the units based there.

Q. On the 1st of November 1943 what was the size of the garrison forces on MILLE?

A. Strength of the 66th Naval Garrison unit was 1200 men and strength of the Number One South Seas Detachment was about 850 men.

Q. Were they special Naval landing troops?

A. They were all what is called naval garrison troops which are quite similar to the SNLP troops but considered a separate body. Both air units had a total strength of about 500 men, maintenance and pilots included. The approximate strength of the two air units was 300 in Unit 552, 200 in Unit 252; but they worked in such close conjunction it was hard to distinguish their respective strengths. In addition there was No. 4 Naval Construction Unit of approximately 1200 strength. Approximate strength therefore as of 1 November 1943 was 3800 men.

Q. What was the date of the last reinforcement to the garrison troops?

A. 22 December 1943. On this day total strength on the ATOLL was approximately 5100 men. To reach this figure approximately 1500 reinforcements were added to the Army garrison unit, but approximately 400 members of the air units were transferred to WOTJE.

Q. Where did these reinforcements come from?

A. Reinforcements mentioned above came from KWAJALEIN.

Q. Do you know if reinforcements were brought into GILBERT or MARSHALL ISLANDS from outside during the period from November to December 1943?

A. I believe that in addition to the reinforcement of MILLE during November and December 1943, reinforcements from TRUK, PHILIPPINES, possibly JAPAN were sent to JALUIT, WOTJE and MAIOELAP. I think that the total number of reinforcements from the PHILIPPINES came to 2600 troops of which 1600 were sent to MILLE.

Q. When did your last surface ship arrive at MILLE?

A. Last convoy to reach MILLE arrived December 21st or 22nd, consisted of seven ships, the largest one being No. 2 NANKAI MARU. Cargo was supplies.

Q. Was there any damage done to the ships by attacks while they were at MILLE?

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A. The No. 2 NANKAI MARU was sunk by air attack on 22 December and sank without having unloaded her cargo. The attack was made by 30 single-engine bombers which I think were SBD types escorted by 12 P-39 or P-40. On that attack the sinking of the NANKAI MARU was the only damage suffered, no shore installations damaged or any of the other ships.

Q. Did you observe other damage to shipping from air attack at any other time?

A. On 20 November there was an attack by approximately 300 fighters and bombers from an American Task Force. The naval damage to the base was three small landing craft. Shore damage consisted of damage to the runway which was shortly afterwards repaired, destruction of ten barracks (none repairable), and the main communication shack destroyed. Casualties - one killed, one or two injured. Except for other minor damage such as a few automobiles and water tanks about the camp, that is the total damage suffered during the entire series of attacks. On November 20, 1943 total strength of airplanes was approximately 10 single engine bombers - Type 97. On the 15th of December planes increased to about 20 Type 97. After December 15th the bombers were sent to RABAU and ten to twenty Zeros were sent to MILLE from MALOELAP. This was the best strength in planes we had until the end of December. This was the first time Zeros were on MILLE. All Zeros had left approximately by the end of December.

A. Did the bombers from other islands pass through MILLE on their way to attack our forces?

A. Yes.

Q. How often, how many?

A. During November and December on ten different occasions such stops were made. Altogether during November and December about 100 planes stopped. The most that stopped at any one time were 41 planes, on which occasion they were all fighters. On other occasions bombers stopped; specifically those which took part in the night action in the GILBERTS, staged at MILLE. These were Type One twin-engine bombers (Betty's).

Q. How many and what kind of AA guns did you have on MILLE?

A. 8x12.7 CM AA guns, about 12x25 MM machine guns, about 30x13 MM, and about 12x30 MM, more than 100x7.7 machine guns.

Q. What kind of fire control did the heavy guns have?

A. Type 95 fire control mechanism. We had no radar fire control.

Q. During the period immediately before our landing on TARAWA, did you receive night attacks from our planes between approximately 13 November and 19 November?

A. No, positive of that.

Q. Did you receive any day attacks during that period from land-based planes? That is multi-engined planes?

A. Yes, first attack occurred on 15 November by B-24's, possibly only ten, recollection not very good. Ten dead, ten wounded, two air unit barracks burned, bomb fuse warehouse destroyed. About 16 November 10 B-24's participated, no damage or casualties in this raid as far as I know. Installations or personnel in area bombed in next raid was the 18th of November with 19 B-24's

participating. Small house was the only damage, no casualties and no installations touched. On the 19th of November approximately 10 B-24's, no damage.

Q. Were these raids intercepted by your fighter planes? Was there any air opposition?

A. The only planes based on MILLE at that time were the Type 97 bombers which became airborne more to avoid destruction on the ground than to intercept your planes; although two or three did attempt interception with no results. No losses on their side. During the entire series of four raids only one B24 was hit and I don't know whether or not it crashed or was able to return to its base.

Q. Were your planes able to take off every time to avoid damage on the ground before the raid?

A. To the best of my memory on all occasions except possibly once were the Japanese planes able to take off safely before the arrival of the B-24's. On one occasion the attack came just as it was growing dark and possibly one Type 97 was unable to escape, but there was no damage.

Q. How did you receive warning of these raids?

A. Warning was received by our one radar installation. Distance from MILLE at which any American planes were recoverable on the radar screen varied with the altitude at which the attackers were flying. However, the best warning we were able to get was at a distance of 110 kilometers. Radar equipment was Type One, not sure of what mark. Our radar equipment was effective until the middle of August 1944 when it was put out of commission by air attack. It was a permanent installation on the northern extremity of the same island as the air strip. It was damaged many times but always repairable until then.

Q. After 19 November, to what extent was the airfield made usable?

A. The field was first damaged November 20, 1943 but was not made inoperable until February 4, 1944. In the case of attack during this period the field was always repairable in a matter of hours or overnight except on the 20th of November raid which took two days. The most effective plane for damaging the airfield was the small type bomber rather than the four-engine types like the B-24's. Accuracy was far better in the case of small bombers whereas the B-24's invariably missed the runway. The thing that was most effective in my opinion was actually damaging the runway rather than hitting other installations. My reason for feeling this way is that other installations such as gas, communications, supplies were placed in many different areas and dispersed so that some of each type of supply was always available, whereas we had only one runway. During the period of 20 November to the 25th the field was inoperable due to successive attacks during the raids on the GILBERTS. As soon as we fixed the runway successive attacks would render it inoperable immediately.

Q. After about 24 December when our fields at TARAWA were useful for all types of planes, was there any difference in your situation at MILLE?

A. During the period of December 1st to 24th one effect of your air operations from TARAWA was to force our bombers, formerly based on MILLE, to fly to other islands bases in the vicinity. Second effect was the extreme difficulty of supply ships unable to make harbor. We were able to get our supply ships in but it became very difficult. However, provisions and gas supply were held for a six month period so that in spite of the difficulty of getting supplies ships in we were still able to continue. We were able to operate our fighters until February 24, 1944. We were able to provide gas to planes using MILLE as a staging point for the last time on 24 February 1944.

Q. What was the most effective weapon and form of air attack against anti-aircraft guns?

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- A. Against anti-aircraft emplacements, the small type single-engine bombers were most effective. Against machine gun emplacements, the bombs carried by fighters were most effective. The largest type demolition bombs as carried by the single-engine bomber was most effective. In general the use of bombs was more effective than strafing.
- Q. What type of attack caused most personnel casualties?
- A. When the personnel was protected by slit trenches the large type bombs were most effective. If personnel do not have the advantage of such protection the anti-personnel type bomb which explodes on the surface is most effective. Most of our casualties were caused by heavy type bomb.
- Q. What were the total casualties in combat suffered by your garrison during the entire period you were there?
- A. 1200 killed, 100 wounded. Out of 1200 persons actually hit by bombs 100 recovered. The high percentage of deaths was due mainly to lack of medical supplies and proper food.
- Q. How many do you estimate died from other causes than bomb wounds?
- A. Another 1200 deaths resulted from other causes such as lack of food, eating poisonous fish, diseases such as beri-beri, dysentery. Nobody escaped.
- Q. Can you say approximately how many airplanes were damaged or destroyed on the island so they couldn't leave?
- A. 30 planes.
- Q. What communications between MILIE and other islands did you have after 1 January 1944? (radio or surface craft), how long?
- A. The inter island radio communications were maintained until the end of the war. We were unable to maintain communications by surface craft.
- Q. How did you keep your men busy after the 1st of January 1944?
- A. The main occupation was making gardens to provide food.
- Q. Did you build up your protection more? Was that important?
- A. They were very assiduous in building fortifications until June 1944 then they gave up the idea. We felt it was more worthwhile to grow food than to build fortifications.
- Q. Do you know of any Japanese plan for defending these islands by using the fleet as well as the airplanes that were based on these islands?
- A. At the time of the actual operations I knew nothing. Only plans to assist the defense of the GILBERTS by surface forces after the operations were overheard from a fellow officer that there was a fleet assembled at KWAJALEIN which was supposed to have come to our assistance. But the plan, if it existed, was cancelled. Rumor had it, it was due to a lack of plane strength to cover such a force.
- Q. While you were at MILIE were you able to keep a good account of the way the war was going in other places?
- A. Our only means of being aware of how the general battle situation

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was going was the regular DOMEI broadcast. Due to the fact the codes we held were antiquated, and no longer in use, we no longer could receive official Army or Navy traffic. Occasional American and Australian broadcasts were heard so we got an idea of what was going on.

Q. Which of the two broadcasts did you believe?

A. I figured there was a medium point between the two types of broadcasts. When I came back found out I was right.

Q. Were any American prisoners taken on MILLE?

A. Five American prisoners. Think they were crew of a B-24 which crashed in the sea shortly before the Americans landed on KWAJALEIN. These five were killed at the beginning of February 1944 and the case is being investigated by Americans at MAJURO ATOLL.

Q. Did you have any particular experience during your duties on the battleship KIRISHIMA?

A. I was second in command of the secondary batteries and stationed in the top control point. The KIRISHIMA participated in the PEARL HARBOR Attack. I was in the following actions: JAVA SEA, March 1942, Operations in the INDO CHINA (In support of landings in INDO CHINA) of March 1942, also CELYON, TRINCOMALEE, MIDWAY, SANTA CRUZ, and GUADALCANAL (where she was sunk).

Q. What was your experience on the destroyer MINEGUMO?

A. I made one supply trip on this ship to the island KOLUMBANGARA during which operation the ship was sunk on March 5th 1943. My duties were senior gunnery officer.