

RESTRICTED

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

INTERROGATION NO (USSBS NO 424)  
(NAV NO 88)

Place: Tokyo  
Date: 18 November 1945

Division of origin: Naval Analysis Division

Subject: 21st Air Flotilla

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Captain SHIBATA, Bunzo, IJN, was Senior Staff Officer 21st Air Flotilla in Formosa from December 1941 to March 1942; Staff 26th Air Flotilla in Kisarazu from March 1942 to August 1942; Staff 26th Air Flotilla in Rabaul from August 1942 to November 1942; one month rest at Yokosuka from November 1942 to December 1942; Attached to Yokosuka Air Group in Yokosuka from January 1943 to March 1943; Commanding Officer Toyohashi Air Group in Toyohashi from March 1943 to February 1944; Commanding Officer 762nd Air Group in Konoya from February 1944 to July 1944; Staff 2nd Air Fleet (Kyushu) from July 1944 to December 1944; one month rest at Yokosuka from December 1944 to January 1945; Commanding Officer Omura Air Group at Omura from January 1945 to May 1945; Commanding Officer Nagoya Air Group at Nagoya from May 1945 to July 1945; Commanding Officer Meiji Air Group at Meiji from July 1945 to present.

SUMMARY

Captain SHIBATA discusses Japanese shore based air operations during the PHILIPPINES and SOLOMONS Campaigns (December 1941 to January 1943).



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TRANSCRIPT

Q. List the number of aircraft assigned to the 21st Air Flotilla?

A. First Group (TAKAO)  
72 VF (Type Zero)  
24 VF (Reserve)  
6 - 9 (Reconnaissance)

Kanoya Group (TAIGHU)  
54 VB (2) Type One  
18 VB (2) Reserve

Toko Group (PALAU)  
12 VP (4) (Type 97)  
4 VP (4) (Reserve)

Note: 18 fighters of the first group and 27 bombers of the Kanoya Group were based on SAIGON.

Q. At what time was the 21st Air Flotilla sent to FORMOSA in preparation for the war?

A. Between the 1st and 15th of November 1941.

Q. What was the general plan for the use of the aircraft in FORMOSA after the war started?

A. The mission of the 21st Air Flotilla at the very beginning of the war was divided into three parts: first, to attack and destroy the American Air Force on LUZON; Second, to attack the surface vessels in and around the PHILIPPINES; and third, provide coverage for Japanese invasion forces.

Q. What was the state of training of Naval aircraft at FORMOSA?

A. The state of training at FORMOSA was as follows: the First Air Group was well trained and practiced day and night bombing attacks and day torpedo attacks, but no night torpedo attack. One third of the First Air Group was particularly trained in night attacks. The flying boats of the TOKO Air Group practiced long distance reconnaissance, to a distance 700 miles and approximately one-fourth of this group was trained in night reconnaissance. The KANOYA Air Group trained in the same manner as the First Air Group. The Third Air Group of the First Air Attack Force (which is the same as the 21st Air Flotilla) practiced air coverage and strafing tactics and fighting tactics. The air coverage practice was to a distance of 500 miles.

Q. Does this state of general training apply also to the 23rd Air Flotilla?

A. The degree of training of the 23rd Air Flotilla was approximately the same as for the 21st Air Flotilla except that the KANOYA Air Group of the 21st Air Flotilla was considered a little stronger than the TAKAO Air Group, and the Third Air Group of the 23rd Air Flotilla was considered a little stronger in its fighting ability than its brother air group, the Tainan Air Group.

Q. On the day the war began, what was the first mission flown by the 21st Air Flotilla?

A. The first mission flown by the 21st Air Flotilla, combined with the 23rd Air Flotilla, was made on the morning of December 8th, because of the fog we were delayed. We intended to attack at dawn but actually delivered the attack on CLARK Fields and NICHOLS Field about 1230.

Q. What was the purpose of the first attack?

A. The purpose of the first attack was to destroy enemy planes and installations on the ground. The fighters were to provide coverage for the bombers and intercept any American planes which arose



Transcript of interrogation of (Captain SHIBATA, Bunzo)

in the air. After the bombers successfully completed their mission, they were to withdraw and the fighters were to strafe.

- Q. Did the fact that you were delayed by the fog interfere with the accomplishment of the mission?
- A. There was really no effect although we were very worried because we were sure after learning of PEARL HARBOR that you would disperse your planes or make an attack on our base at FORMOSA. At FORMOSA we put on gas masks and prepared for an attack by the American aircraft.
- Q. How many American aircraft did you expect to find on LUZON?
- A. According to intelligence report from headquarters, we figured on about 300 American planes.
- Q. Were they divided according to fighters and bombers?
- A. I don't remember what the division was, but I think that there were 70 to 80 bombers and the rest fighters.
- Q. After the flight was delayed by the fog, were you surprised to find that the American planes were still on the field?
- A. Yes, as I said before, we were surprised because we thought that on account of the fog the American planes would be coming over to make an attack and we might possibly pass them in the air.
- Q. In the original plan, how long did you estimate it would take to destroy the American air force in the PHILIPPINES?
- A. We figured that if complete surprise was attained on 8 December it would take about four or five attacks; one week.
- Q. Were planes launched from PALAU at the same time on 8 December to attack Southern PHILIPPINES?
- A. At PALAU there were flying boats and fighters that were used to attack the Southern PHILIPPINES.
- Q. Were there any aircraft carriers in this operation?
- A. No carriers present at all. At one time we considered launching planes from a carrier to support the LINGAYAN landings but the carriers were needed at PEARL HARBOR.
- Q. At what date was the 21st Air Flotilla moved into the PHILIPPINES Area?
- A. It was two or three days before the Japanese landed at DAVAO. I think it was the 19th or 20th of December when the headquarters moved to PALAU.
- Q. What forces were moved to PALAU?
- A. About 27 planes of the KANOYA Air Group and about one-half of the TOKO Air Group went to PALAU.
- Q. After the Japanese had made successful landings on LUZON and had commenced their movements south of the PHILIPPINES, did Japanese naval aircraft continue to operate in the area north of DAVAO or was that mission taken over by the Army?
- A. Part of the 23rd Air Flotilla was left in FORMOSA. Most of them needed repairs, but there were some operational planes left there in the event of air attacks by the Americans. They were later used to bomb CORRIGIDOR.
- Q. But in general, the support of the Japanese Army troops in the PHILIPPINES were taken over by the Army Air Force?
- A. Yes, the area south of the PHILIPPINES was assigned to only Navy aircraft. Army aircraft operated in LUZON and SAIGON.



Transcript of Interrogation of (Captain SHIBATA, Bunzo).

- Q. When was the headquarters moved from PALAU to DAVAO?  
A. We moved to DAVAO about the end of January of first of February.
- Q. At that time from what bases were the aircraft of the 21st Air Flotilla operating?  
A. In the operation against MANADOA about one-half of the Third Air Group and about one-half of the KANOYA Air Group operated from the field near DAVAO. The other half of the 21st Air Flotilla operated from FORMOSA.
- Q. At what time did the 21st Air Flotilla move from DAVAO to MENADOA?  
A. The move was made between 10 and 20 February. At this time the Naval Air Forces were organized into what was known as the First Air Attack Force. It was composed of units of both the 21st and 23rd Flotillas as follows: KANOYA Group-27 VB planes, No 1 Air Group-36 VB planes; No 3 Air Group-48 VF planes, TOKO Group-18 flying boats.
- Q. What type of operations did the 21st Air Flotilla conduct from MENADO was preparation for operations against KENDARI. This was to destroy American aircraft in this area, to destroy American surface vessels and to provide coverage for occupation forces. Also we took paratroopers from DAVAO to MENADO.
- Q. In the paratroop operation from DAVAO to MENADO, were the troops engaged Army or Navy personnel?  
A. Navy personnel, special Navy Landing Force.
- Q. How many troops and planes were involved in that operation?  
A. 20 transports and about 600 troops.
- Q. Was the operation considered successful?  
A. Yes.
- Q. Was this force used in future operations?  
A. Yes, they were used at KOEPANG.
- Q. Why were paratroopers used at MENADO?  
A. The idea was to take the field as fast as possible and to set up preparation for future operations as fast as possible.
- Q. Do you know why no further use was made of paratroopers in later operations conducted by the Japanese?  
A. I had no connection with the use of paratroopers and don't know why they were not used elsewhere after KOEPANG.
- Q. Were those the only two units?  
A. There were no others.
- Q. At what time did the 21st Air Flotilla move to KENDARI?  
A. About one week after the occupation of KENDARI (24 January).
- Q. From what bases was the attack on AMBON launched?  
A. Nine attacks were made from DAVAO, many attacks were made from MENADO.
- Q. Did the 21st Air Flotilla participate in the attack on the American ships on 4 February?  
A. Yes, we had gathered all our air strength at KENDARI because of the very good landing field and prepared for the operation against JAVA. While on a bombing mission to SOERABAJA one of our aircraft spotted the Allied ships and the attack resulted. We used all aircraft available.



Transcript of Interrogation of (Captain SHIBATA, Bunzo).

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- Q. During the time the 21st Air Flotilla was operating in KENDARI, where was the 23rd Air Flotilla?
- A. The 23rd Air Flotilla did not operate east of the CELEBES; main bases were TARAKAN, BALIKPAPAN, and BANDJERMASIN.
- Q. In general, what was the mission of the flying boats?
- A. Reconnaissance. At the early part of the war we made night bombing attacks on AMBON.
- Q. Did the 21st Air Flotilla move south of KENDARI?
- A. No, but we went to AMBON for a while then returned to KENDARI and then back to JAPAN.
- Q. Are you familiar with the action south of JAVA in which the LANGLEY was sunk?
- A. Yes, the ship was sunk by aircraft from the 21st Air Flotilla and the 23rd Air Flotilla.
- Q. Did you launch a special search for the LANGLEY or was she located during a routine search?
- A. Before the occupation of JAVA, we carried out extensive regular patrols south of SUNDA Island and it was one of the patrols that located the ship. An attack was launched immediately and succeeded in sinking the LANGLEY.
- Q. Did they consider that the American flying boats were a particular threat to your operation?
- A. No, there was very little interference by American flying boats. They made bombing attacks at DAVAO and JOLO but I don't know details. They were used mostly for reconnaissance.
- Q. Did you make any special effort to locate and destroy the planes and the tenders that these planes were operating from?
- A. Yes, we generally sent out about 10 planes to bases where we thought there would be flying boats, for the purpose of strafing and setting them afire. There was no special effort made to locate and destroy the bases of the flying boats.
- Q. What units of the 23rd Air Flotilla based at KOEPANG?
- A. About one-half of the Third Air Group - only fighters.
- Q. Did this group participate in the attack on BROOME the end of February?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What damage did they inflict in that attack?
- A. They destroyed 10 large seaplanes.
- Q. How did you know the flying boats were at BROOME?
- A. Fighters attacking BROOME were sent out on a regular reconnaissance attack mission. This attack mission was standard throughout the campaign.
- Q. What was the relationship between the Naval Air Force and the surface forces conducted the advance to the south?
- A. Before the operation orders were issued setting forth all details of air operations and the air force acted accordingly. As a general rule we provided cover up until the day of the landing and then supported the landing. There was cooperation but no direct chain of command. The commander of the Second Fleet was the controlling authority.
- Q. Were the Japanese able to construct airfields as rapidly as planned?



Transcript of interrogation of (Captain SHIBATA, Bunzo) - - - - -

A. Generally speaking, the construction of the airfields was slower than we anticipated.

Q. In regard to the maintenance of aircraft, was that considered satisfactory during the operation?

A. Yes, we had good supplies and the maintenance personnel were efficient.

Q. How many aircraft were lost in the operation?

A. Actually there were very small losses. The majority of losses were operational due to poor navigation, also aircraft were lost due to bad condition of air-fields. About 10 to 15 planes were lost in the whole operation while on combat missions.

Q. Did you expend your reserve aircraft during the operation?

A. Yes, most of the reserve planes were expended. Originally the reserve planes were left in FORMOSA and ferried down as needed. Later, repair depots were set up in the PHILIPPINES and replacement aircraft assembled there. No additional aircraft were received from JAPAN as the reserves were sufficient to fill our needs.

Note:

The remainder of this interrogation deals briefly with the activities of the 26th Air Flotilla, of which Captain SHIBATA was senior Staff Member, in the RABAUL Area during the fall of 1942. Information obtained is summarized below.

Immediately after the capture of RABAUL the 25th Air Flotilla was ordered into the area. The aircraft assigned was as follows:

TAINAN Air Group	48 fighters
FOURTH Air Group	15 bombers
TOKO Group	6 flying boats

The primary mission of the Japanese aircraft was to search south of RABAUL and make attacks against PORT MORESBY and HORN Island. After the American invasion of GUADALCANAL the 25th Air Flotilla was joined by the 26th Air Flotilla which at that time was composed of:

KISARAZU Air Group	36 bombers
MISAWA Air Group	36 bombers
SIXTH Air Group	48 fighters

The 25th and 26th Air Groups operated together and were assigned the following mission:

- (1) Destroy American Air power
- (2) Assist in the capture of GUADALCANAL

It was anticipated that the Americans would feed 400 planes per month into the SOLOMONS and plans were made accordingly.

Until January 1943 there were no operational Army aircraft in the RABAUL Area.