

HEADQUARTERS
U. S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY
(PACIFIC)
A/O #234
C/O POSTMASTER, SAN FRANCISCO

INTERROGATION No. 475

PLACE: TOKYO
DATE: 29 Nov 1945

Division of Origin: Military Analysis

Subject: Japanese Naval Air Personnel Attrition in the Solomons Campaign

Person Interrogated and Background:

Commander OKUMIYA, Masatake, IJN
1931(Nov)-1933(April): Ensign on light cruiser and destroyer
1933(April)-1933(Dec): Flying School
1933 (Dec): Ordered as Lieutenant (jg) to Omura Air Group
1935-37 : Operated from carrier Ryujo in Japanese waters
1938-1939: Flew in China in rank of Lieutenant; parachuted
safely when his dive bomber caught fire; scarred
about face and wrists.
1940-1941: Division Officer in Yokosuka Air Group
1941-1942(March): Lieutenant Commander, instructor in
flying, Kasumigaura.
1942: Attached as Staff Officer to Second Air Fleet; aboard
Ryujo at Dutch Harbor strike; aboard Junyo in Battle
of Santa Cruz.
1943: At Rabaul, Buin and Singapore as Staff Officer of
Second Air Fleet.
1944(Feb): At Rabaul when all JNAF strength was pulled out
of Solomons.
1944(June): Aboard Junyo as Air Staff Officer for Battle
of Marianas.
1944(July and Aug): Based at Okinawa
1944(late Aug): Assigned to Naval General Staff, 1st
Section-stayed there until end of war
Flying time: About 2,000 hours

Where interviewed: Naval War College

Interrogator: Donald Meiklejohn, 1st Lt., MI

Interpreter: Taji, John H.

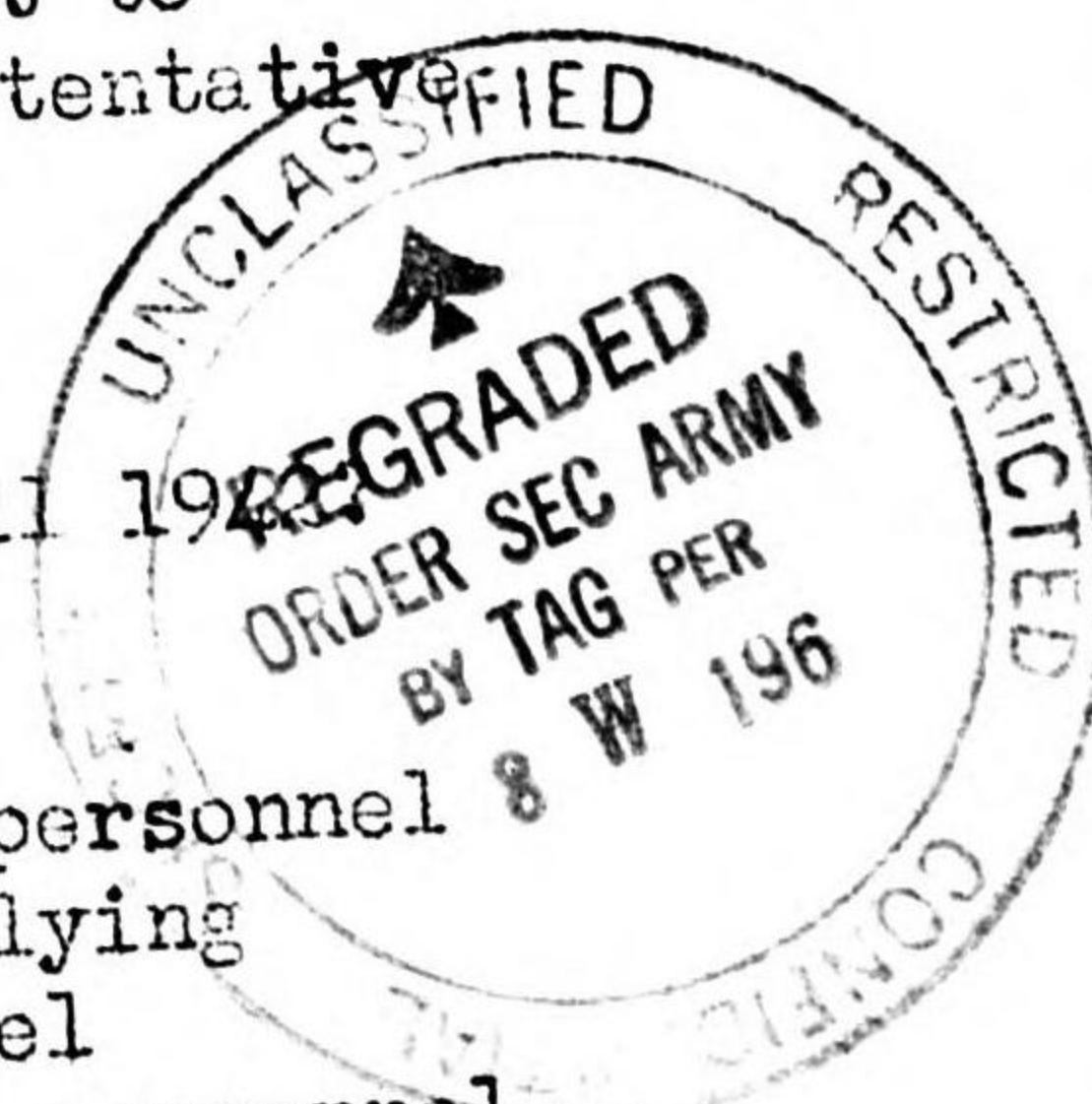
SUMMARY: Commander Okumiya reviewed the strength in carrier and land-based JNAF planes and personnel in the Solomons between April 1942 and February 1944, also listing the carrier-based strength transferred to land bases during that time. He also gave tentative estimates of plane and personnel losses over the period.

In concluding, he stated that the first carrier-based operations in the China Theatre were carried out on 15 August 1937 by three carriers. (Before the formal interrogation began, Commander Okumya explained that exact data on the Solomons is contained in documents now being boxed at the NYK building for shipment to USSBS in Washington. He agreed, however, to supply such tentative answers as he could.)

- Q. What was the strength of the JNAF in the Solomons in April 1942?
- A. Air Flotilla 25 had the following strength there:
- | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| 4th Fighter Group: | 27 planes | 40 flying personnel |
| Tainan Air Group | 45 planes | 60 to 70 flying personnel |
| Yokohama Air Group | 18 Flying boats | 250 flying personnel |
| At Kavieng and Truk | 8 seaplanes | 75 flying personnel |

R E S T R I C T E D

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- Q. When was additional strength moved in?
- A. Early in May the Genzan Air Group, with 27 planes and 300 flying personnel, was moved to Vunakunau to provide additional strength for the Port Moresby operation.
- Q. What losses did you suffer in the Battle of the Coral Sea?
- A. Fewer than 10 landbased planes and about 60 carrier-based planes in all, including those lost in combat, those missing and those which crashed and were a total loss. About 100 flying personnel were lost.
- Q. What was the next reinforcement?
- A. In July the 14th Air Group moved in with eight Kawanishi flying boats and between 100 and 120 flying personnel. Then, on 23 August, the carriers came down to the Solomons. After the battle, 36 fighters from the Shokaku and Zuikaku were based at Buka.
- Q. What were your losses at the Battle of the Eastern Solomons?
- A. The Shokaku had 72 planes, the Zuikaku 63 and the Ryujo 30, for a total of 165 planes. About 40% of those were lost, but no land-based planes were lost.
- Q. When the Marines landed at Guadalcanal, what attacks were launched by the JNAF?
- A. 18 to 27 dive bombers based at Rabaul attacked - also a few fighters and some other bombers. About half of them were lost in combat and the rest crashed near Shortland out of fuel. We saved about half the personnel.
- Q. When were you again reinforced?
- A. Kavieng received planes from the carriers after the battle.
- Q. Where did the carriers go after that battle?
- A. To Truk to replenish and retrain. New personnel were sent from Japan.
- Q. What was then the average flying experience of the new pilots?
- A. It was the same as of those who were lost: between 400 and 500 hours.
- Q. When did reinforcements next come in?
- A. In October Air Flotilla 21 was moved to Kavieng and other New Ireland bases. It included Air Group 701, with 27 attack bombers, and Air Group 253, with 36 fighters.
- Q. When did the Junyo sortie from Japan?
- A. Near the end of September, with Hiyo and Zuiho. They joined the Shokaku and Zuikaku on 1 October, and sortied from Truk on the 3rd. Just before the Battle of Santa Cruz, on 25 October, the Hiyo returned to Truk because of engine trouble.

- Q. Were all the carrier planes of the other four engaged in the battle?
- A. Yes. The planes of the Hiyo were sent to Buin.
- Q. Did any land-based planes take part in the action?
- A. I think not. Some recon planes went out but did not find any U.S. planes.
- Q. What were your losses at the battle of Santa Cruz?
- A. About 60% to 70%. After that the Zuikaku, Shokaku and Zuiho went back to Japan. The Junyo's losses were made up from remaining planes on the other carriers and she remained in the area for operations. On 5 November she provided screen for battleships and cruisers operating east of the Solomons. In the action of 12-14 November she provided cover for the Hiei and Kirishima and shot down two Allied flying boats and also damaged two B-17's. At the end of November she returned to Truk for training and then went to Wewak to provide air cover for forces there. After the end of January she went again to Wewak for ferrying aircraft and personnel there (I landed with them). The planes of the Junyo were transferred to Wewak - 24 fighters and 6 attack bombers, but 18 dive bombers and 3 attack bombers remained with the ship.
- Q. Why were the planes transferred?
- A. There had been severe attacks by B-17s, B-24s and submarines in the vicinity of Wewak. Previously the Army had only one battalion there, but at this time a new division came in and required more cover. It was unsafe, because of the submarines, for carriers to operate there regularly.
- Q. Where did the Junyo go then?
- A. To Truk, until about July. Then the planes of the Junyo and Hiyo were sent to Buin, and thereafter those carriers were used to ferry planes between the Empire and Truk. In October the Junyo's planes were returned to her: some were from her original complement and some had been sent from Japan. Then she went to Singapore with Hiyo for training (the Shokaku and Zuikaku were still in Japan). At the end of December she went back to Truk with Hiyo, and Ryuho joined them there. The flying force of the three carriers then flew to Rabaul, leaving the carriers. We kept our planes at Rabaul until 22 February, which was the last time that we had more than a few planes at Rabaul.
- Q. What happened to the planes that had been sent to Rabaul at that time?
- A. One half were destroyed and the rest went back to Truk. About 200 planes were destroyed there, many on the ground, but only 60 flying personnel were lost. (In April 1943 all the planes of the Third Fleet except for the attack bombers went to Rabaul: That is to say about 200 planes.)
- Q. Where did the carriers go then?
- A. They returned to Japan, to stay until the end of May - then to Tawi Tawi.

- Q. At the end of January what was the average flying experience of carrier pilots?
- A. Between 300 and 400 hours.
- Q. And of land-based pilots?
- A. Between 50 and 100 hours less. The last time we were at Rabaul some pilots were so inexperienced that we would not allow them to take off: many accidents accrued.
- Q. What reinforcements of land-based aircraft were made during the Solomons campaign?
- A. At the end of 1942 Air Flotilla 25 was replaced by Air Flotilla 26, which comprised Air Group 705 (36 attack bombers), Air Group 204 (45 fighters) and Air Group 582 (27 dive bombers and 18 fighters), based at Rabaul, Buin and Buka. Air Flotilla 25 was replaced because (1) many personnel had been killed and (2) the type-99 dive bombers of Air Group 705 were replaced by type-1's.
- Q. How long did Air Flotilla 26 stay at Rabaul?
- A. Until January 1944, when it was replaced by carrier planes and sent to Truk.
- Q. What losses were suffered by Air Flotilla 26 while it was at Rabaul?
- A. We lost about 3 times our original strength in planes and 2 times our original strength in flying personnel. Only 5% to 10% of the original personnel complement in flying personnel returned to Japan.
- Q. From where did you get replacements?
- A. From Japan. The new fighter pilots came in with about 300 hours, the attack bombers with 500 hours, and the dive bomber pilots with 300 to 400 hours. In general, those pilots performed adequately by day but were weak by night or at dusk and dawn.
- Q. How much of your losses was non-combat?
- A. About 15% to 20%.
- Q. What other JNAF forces were at Rabaul?
- A. The Eleventh Air Fleet there also had Air Flotilla 21, which had been brought in about June 1943 with Air Group 751 (36 attack bombers) and Air Group 253 (36 fighters). Their losses were about twice their original plane complement and $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the original flying personnel.
- Q. What losses were suffered by Air Flotilla 25 in 1942?
- A. About $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the original planes and personnel both.
- Q. Why did not the carriers return to the Solomons campaign from Japan in 1943?

- A. Shokaku had suffered serious deck damage, and Zuiho also was seriously damaged. Zuikaku returned with its few remaining good pilots to provide nuclei and instructors for new groups forming in Japan.
- Q. When did you derive in China waters?
- A. I was in operations at Shanghai and Nanking, flying land-based bombers in 1937 and 1938.
- Q. Were any carrier-based operations carried out in the China area?
- A. Yes, there were many. Carrier Division 2 (Hosho and Ryujo) and Carrier Division (Kaga) operated against the Shanghai area on 15 August 1937. That was the first carrier action in the China area. Later those ships went to Canton.