

SAN FRANCISCO

INTERROGATION NO. 501

PLACE: Tokyo
DATE: 1300 5 Dec 1945

Division of Origin: Military Analysis.

Subject: General Supply Problems, New Guinea, Solomons.

Personnel interrogated and background:

Lt. Col. SHIRAI, Fumitaba, who in 1940 to November of 1941 in Manchuria served as Supply Officer of the 4th Army. From November 1941 to 1945 he was on the general staff in supply. From March 1945 until the termination of the war he was chief of supply section of the 4th Area Army.

Where interviewed: Room 806, Meiji Building.

Interrogator: Lt. Col. Shine.

Interpreter: Lt. Col. Swift.

Allied Officers Present: Lt. Pinkstaff.



Q. Do you have any figures or plans as to how you were to supply troops in New Guinea and Solomons?

A. In general they are as follows: The expeditionary units left Japan with 30 days supply. Advance troops usually carried various amounts mostly 1 weeks supply. From then on stocks would be supplied as they advanced. In general this was the case.

Q. On a Division level was such the case?

A. Divisions departed with 1 Kaisenbun or 4 months supply of ammunition (3,000 tons).

Q. Take one area for example, New Guinea, can you tell me how your dumps were set up and the method of distribution of supplies to the troops?

A. I have prepared an explanation here in Japanese for you. Within the homeland there has always been a depot system used. They have shipping and air depots. (See attached chart).

Q. Will you explain the operation of overseas depots?

A. Ordnance stores took care of guns, trucks, small arms, tanks, and repair parts. The Air Depots handled all the requirements of the Air Forces except vehicles. Field Shipping Depots took care of all food, provisions and fuel. Field Freight Depots handled all the remaining items and had the job of collecting, assembling, storing and issuing of these items. These depots were responsible to supply up to 4 divisions, however, this also varied according to the amount of troops in the area.

Q. Suppose you had a division on each of 3 islands, would you have depots set up on each?

A. Main depots would be set up on the principle island along with the Army Headquarters.

Q. At this point Col. Shine shows on the map area that he wishes to talk about their methods of supplying and indicates New Guinea and New Britain.

A. The 8th Army Area was set up in Rabaul to control New Guinea, New Britain, and Bougainville. At that time main or head depots were all set up in Rabaul. The branch field depots were located at Wewak, Buin (Bougainville), under the Wewak depot. Other depots were located at Hansa Bay, Madang, and Finchhafen. I am not certain but believe that the forces at Buin did not have any particular supply unit. An agency was established later. Hollandia became the site of this agency. The 17th Area Army was in Guadalcanal or to the west of the 8th Area Army and the 18th Army further to the west.

The 4th Air Army worked under direct control of the 8th Area Army. Hollandia was the dividing line and under control of the 4th Air Army. Rabaul was an agency that worked under direct control of the supply system of the 8th Area Army. The Dutch New Guineas but was the dividing line and under control of Rabaul.

- Q. What stock levels were required in these depots?
A. 1 Kaisenbun of ammunition (approximately 4 months); fuel and food for 3 months. Later with difficulties arising of supplying the area (August to October 1943) the stock level was increased to 1 year.
- Q. What was the method of distribution of this equipment to combat troops?
A. Almost entirely by small boat. The only exception was that we decided to build a road in the Madang to Lae area, but abandoned this after completion of about 70 kilometers of the road.
- Q. Were there any critical shortages of combat materials in these depots?
A. Yes. Stocks were in these depots but along the New Guinea coast the shortage was mostly of food. In Guadalcanal there was a critical shortage of all items of supply.
- Q. Why was this?
A. Due to air attacks. Later on this situation became even more acute due to the fact that we were denied use of what supplies were there because our troops abandoned these supplies.
- Q. Were any of these depots destroyed or the material damaged done by air action?
A. No, for the reason that there were no warehouses, rather the goods were stored in Nipa huts. Later in Rabaul during severe raids some damage was done but by this time most of the stocks were underground. There was a lot of loss of stock in transit due to bombing of supplies landed on the beaches. Provisions suffered heavy loss later from bombing and we were unable to put them underground.
- Q. What was the percentage of loss in transit?
A. No definite figures on that but I can estimate that not more than 50% reached the troops on long hauls. From Wewak to Lae not more than 20% arrived.
- Q. What caused the loss in transit?
A. Air attacks and P.T. boats, in my opinion the greater percentage was air.
- Q. Was there any changes in plans to try to overcome these losses?
A. Some thought was given to airplanes and submarines to move our supplies but due to lack of planes this plan was never developed. The only material change was that fleets of small boats were used to transport supplies with orders to hug the shore lines. This made a longer trip but they were not so susceptible to PT attack. Another step taken was the arming of these supply boats.
- Q. Was there any vital shortage of combat equipment?
A. At the times when the 18th Army withdrew to the area between the Sepic River and Hollandia there was an extreme shortage of combat material caused by the troops abandoning their equipment. Another case was in the Torokina area. There was sufficient stock at Bougainville but it could not be delivered to Torokina because of air action.
- Q. What general effect did these lack of supplies have on the combat efficiency of your troops?
A. You know the situation at Guadalcanal, that was lost because of our inability to furnish them supplies. In New Guinea itself the denial of supplies stopped our advance and eventually resulted in our gradual withdrawal.
- Q. What method was used to get these supplies to the troops after the small boats had got them ashore?
A. In the Madang area there were a certain number of roads and they were utilized for car transportation. In other areas there was nothing but jungle so supplies had to be man handled.

- Q. Did the man handle the efficiency of troops?
A. Yes, extremely so, in that it cut down the number of troops in a particular area for combat purposes.
- Q. Did these combat troops here have any service troops to take care of these supply problems?
A. No, the combat troops had to do their own work. The only exception was in the depot areas like Rabaul where there were some troops attached to handle supply problems.
- Q. Were there many casualties while working with supplies on beaches?
A. I am not able to say for sure, but since there was a heavy loss of supplies, I presume that the loss of men was heavy too.
- Q. We have been told that in some of your landings on these islands, ships were sunk and the troops got ashore without equipment. How were these troops re-equipped?
A. They were not re-equipped.
- Q. In February of 1943 at Guadalcanal what percent of field guns, etc., was left of the original 100%?
A. I cannot answer officially. Personally my guess is they did not have over 5% of their original equipment and I believe they had lost all their cannon.
- Q. Back to the New Guinea area - were plans of future operations ever changed due to lack of supplies?
A. Yes, in the 18 Army area previously mentioned there was such a situation - all plans had to be changed because of the supply shortage.
- Q. Was the plan of defense based on the supply situation?
A. I believe the major element was air attack - a specific instance was the Wau area which should have been an advance defense post, but due to the failure of supply we were forced to place our defenses in the Salamania Area. We would definitely have been able to hold Wau had our supply lines not failed.
- Q. Were replacements sent in fully equipped or were they equipped after they came in?
A. Yes, they came in fully equipped.
- Q. When did they first feel they were losing the battle of the supply lines?
A. That would differ by areas. In the New Guinea, New Britain area, my opinion would be that it occurred in December 1943. Solomons, in July 1942 or immediately after your landings at Guadalcanal.
- Q. Were the supply officials ever consulted as to their ability to supply these intended operations before decision of an operation was made?
A. Yes, that was always done.
- Q. How much weight did this carry?
A. It is very difficult to say as it depended on the personnel and situation, however there were frequent instances when operations were planned in spite of the fact that supply was unable to function properly.
- Q. Generally, does this discussion apply to the Solomons, New Guinea, New Georgia, Makin, Tarawa, and Saigon?
A. Yes.