

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

INTERROGATION NO. (USSBS 165)
NAV NO. 39

Place: Tokyo
Date: 25 October 1945

Division of Origin: Naval Analysis Division.

Subject: BATTLE Of MIDWAY, 4-6 June 1942. Damage to Aircraft Carrier, SORYU.

Personnel interrogated and background of each:

Captain OHARA, H., IJN, was a member of the Hydraulic Bureau in TOKYO from December 8th to December 25th, 1941. Served on the SORYU in the Pacific from December 25th, 1941 until June 5th, 1942. Captain OHARA was a member of SOERABAJA Branch and was also an instructor of Naval Navigation at YOKOSUKA. At the present time Captain OHARA is the Commander in Chief of the OMINATO DEFENSE CORPS at OMINATO.

Where interviewed: MEIJI Building. Room 748.

Interrogator: Captain C. Shands, USN.

Interpreter: Lt. (jg) R. P. Brown, USNR.

Allied Officers Present: None.

SUMMARY

The First Air Fleet, CinC Vice Admiral NAGUMO, departed HIROSHIMA BAY on 27 May 1942 for MIDWAY ISLAND to provide air support during the planned Japanese occupation about 6 June 1942. The loss of all aircraft carriers forced the plan to be abandoned. This deficiency was also felt in the subsequent SOLOMON Campaign. The SORYU received three hits from dive-bombers during the morning, 4 June, which set planes and fuel tanks afire. While trying to escape at reduced speed later in the day, it was sunk by torpedoes from a submarine. No aircraft torpedo or horizontal bomb hits received. Dive-bombers considered most effective attack against ships, horizontal-bombers against land areas. Definite turning point of the war considered SAIPAN.

TRANSCRIPT

Transcript of Interrogation (Captain OHARA., H., IJN)

Q. What ships were present in your force?

A. Flagship AKAGI with Vice Admiral NAGUMO. Rear Admiral YAMAGUCHI was on the HIRYU. KAGA and SORYU were the other two aircraft carriers. Battleship KIRISHIMA and HARUNA. Heavy cruisers CHIKUMA and TONE. The light cruiser NAGARA with about 11 destroyers. About 4 tankers were also present. Admiral YAMAGUCHI was killed. He was so outstanding from the time he was a captain that many thought that he would have succeeded Admiral YAMAMOTO. (See Chart.)

Q. What was your navigational track?

A. The 1st Air Fleet left HASHIRA anchorage in HIROSHIMA BAY on 27 May passing through the BUNGO STRAITS towards MARCUS ISLAND, then easterly to about 32N 179E, then southeast towards MIDWAY until the day of the battle. We refueled every third day from the tankers. Anti-submarine aircraft patrols were maintained; but that was about all, due to the bad weather.

Q. What was the mission of your Air Fleet?

A. We were to bomb MIDWAY in preparation for a landing operation to be made by transports approaching from the southwest. The JUNYO and maybe the HIYO were to bomb and maybe occupy KISKA and DUTCH HARBOR. The ZUIKAKO and SHOKAKU were being repaired in JAPAN.

Q. What effect did the loss of your carriers have upon the completion of your future plans?

A. The loss of the carriers meant loss of control of the air. We did not think that we could capture MIDWAY after we lost air control, so we returned to JAPAN. The loss of the carriers and planes also slowed up the occupation of the SOLOMONS. If we had been stronger in the air, maybe we could have stopped some of your convoys to the SOLOMONS.

Q. When did you received your first attack?

A. About two hours after sunrise, we were attacked by torpedo planes. They looked like small twin-engine flying boats and single-engine carrier planes. No hits were made. The torpedos were dropped too far away and were slow enough for us to avoid them.

Q. Did you know of the American carriers?

A. No, we had no information until we were attacked by dive bombers. Then we thought that they had come from MIDWAY. It was about two hours after sunrise. About the middle of the morning, we were attacked by everything. Our planes returning from the attack on MIDWAY reported carrier air groups in the area so we knew your carriers were there. A little later one of our scout planes gave a definite location.

Q. How many hits did you receive?

A. About twelve planes divided into three groups dove upon us at the same time. One group on each bow and one from astern. We received three hits. The first hit in the middle of the flight-deck between the two elevators. It went through and exploded in the lower hangar deck, setting planes on fire which had returned from MIDWAY and were being refueled and rearmed. The second hit in the center just forward of the forward elevator, starting a fire on the flight deck and hangar deck. The third hit was near the after elevator.

Q. Did you receive any torpedo hits or hits from high horizontal bombers?

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- A. No torpedo hits from airplanes. In the middle of the afternoon, we had a big explosion which set more gasoline tanks afire and sank the ship. It was torpedoes from a submarine. We did not receive any hits from horizontal-bombers. The formation was attacked in the early morning, but planes were very high. It was just after we had been attacked the first time by dive-bombers. The bombs fell someplace near the battleships, but I do not think that they were hit. In the afternoon late, we were also attacked by horizontal bombers, but no hits. We were already sinking.
- Q. Did any of the American planes dive into the decks of the carriers?
- A. None on the SORYU. I did not hear of any on the other carriers.
- Q. Where were you standing during the battle?
- A. I was on the bridge all day. After we left the ship, I was picked up by a destroyer. Two or three destroyers rescued about 600 men. About 700 were lost including about 30 pilots.
- Q. When the U.S. torpedo planes attacked, how were they shot down?
- A. The fighter patrol from the AKAGI and HIRYU shot most of them down. Guns may have hit some. They came in very low and straight and were easy for our planes to hit. Most were hit before they dropped the torpedoes, but a few were able to drop before being hit.
- Q. Were the battleships KIRISHIMA and HARUNA attacked?
- A. They may have been attacked, but they were not hit.
- Q. Were any other ships attacked?
- A. No other ships in our force were hit. The MOGAMI and MIKUMA were attacked and the MIKUMA sunk. They were in the Main Body.
- Q. Were any transports attacked?
- A. I heard that the transports were attacked, but none were sunk.
- Q. How many planes did you lose at MIDWAY?
- A. About 250 planes were lost. Some were lost in the attack on the island, some at the American carriers, the remainder were lost on the Japanese carriers.
- Q. As a result of your experience in this war, what type of aircraft attack do you consider the most effective?
- A. In the Navy against ships, the dive-bomber was most effective because it was much more accurate and hard to hit by gun fire because of the speed and high angle of fire. Because they came very low, it was difficult to avoid the bombs. We did not fear the high horizontal-bombers because we could watch the bombs fall and avoid them. They never hit targets except against the land. The fire raids were very bad. They also made landing ships useless for one or two days. We feared the torpedo attacks although they did not do much damage, but we had to maneuver to miss them.
- Q. Did the planes from the SORYU attack the U.S. carriers?
- A. No, they attacked MIDWAY. Then while they were being refueled to attack the American carriers, the SORYU was attacked and damaged so the flight of planes could not be launched. The planes were delayed while changing bombs to attack the carriers.
- Q. When did you think that the turning point of the war occurred?
- A. It was the opinion of most officers that the loss of the aircraft carriers during the summer of 1942 stopped the expansion because we did not have air cover. However, we thought that we could hold the area that we had occupied. When we lost SAIPAN, we felt very bad because we did not expect to lose it. I think that was the main turning point.

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Q. Were you present during any of the carrier attacks against land targets?

A. Yes, I was at YOKOSUKA on 18 July. Not much damage done. One bomb hit the battleship FUJI. One or two hangars caught fire. Most damage was to airplanes. They were all shot down or landed someplace else, because they did not come back.

Q. Were you in any other battles?

A. I was in the INDIAN OCEAN when the HERMES and CORNWALL were sunk by our dive-bombers using 250 kilo bombs, but that is all. I was in TOKYO when the REPULSE and PRINCE OF WALES were sunk.

Transcript of Interrogation (Captain OHARA, H., IJN)

() NAGARA

() KIRISHIMA

() HARUNA

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() ASAGI (F)
CinC Flag Ship

() HIRYU
Squadron Flag Ship

()

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() NAGA

() SORYU

()

()

()

() Tankers
()
()

COMPOSITION OF FORCE