

# **Keynote Address**



# **Island Defense and Seizure Operations, and Naval Strategic Lessons: Learned by Imperial Japan in the Pacific Theater of Operations during World War II**

Yoji Koda

## **Introduction**

It goes without saying that at the background of the increasing interest in island defense within Japan lately is the manifestation of island-related issues in the Asian region in recent years along with an increased consciousness about problems related to maritime security among the countries in this region. Positioned with the Eurasian continent at our back, this region faces the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean to the south and the east with the enormous maritime area of the Indian Ocean stretching far out to the west, and there are a number of island states within this space. While keeping these geographical characteristics in mind, I would like to discuss island operations, one facet of today's main theme of "The Diplomacy and Strategy of the Protection of Islands in War" which played a major role in the Pacific War during World War II, in terms of their characteristics, their lessons, and their significance for us today. In my address I shall be referring to the conflict as the "Pacific War." In addition to the island battles of the Pacific War, I will also briefly touch upon two cases from modern warfare, the operation of the British for the Falkland Islands in 1981, and the operation of the US for Grenada in 1983, which are not well known in Japan.

## **Scope of discussion**

The relationship between Japan and island defense is explained by our geographical location, with Japan itself "being a state comprising approximately 6,850 islands." As we think about today's subject of island operations in the Pacific War, there is a need to consider not only the characteristics inherent to Japan, but also the operations that occurred in all of the islands located within the theatre of war at that time, which are located over a wide area stretching from the Pacific Ocean to the South China Sea and the eastern part of the Indian Ocean. "The South Sea Islands under Japanese Mandate," which Japan administered as a consequence of World War I, consisting of the Caroline and Marshall Islands, and the Mariana Islands excluding Guam of US territory, was the main battle area of the Pacific War fought between Japan and US where they waged fierce battles for islands. So particular attention should be paid to all of this when considering the subject.

Before I move on to my main topic, I would like to define its key terms as they apply to my argument. These terms are "islands" and "island operations and defense." As can be understood from the term Pacific War, being central to this conflict were maritime operations along with air support, and island operations. First, allow me to define "islands." Here I don't mean New Guinea, Luzon, Sumatra, Taiwan or any of the other particularly large ones in the region as one of "islands." Rather, the upper size limit I imagine here covers Okinawa Island,

Guam, Saipan, and islands of similar size. Next, in terms of island operations and defense, I define it as “both operations that attempt to land by eliminating and neutralizing the enemy resistance, and defensive operations against it.” This term does not refer to such instances in which island is defenseless or the defense is extremely weak that the island can be taken without resistance or bloodshed.

Keeping what I mentioned in mind, I shall now give an overview of the island operations in the Pacific War. During the war there were many island battles, the Japanese attacks on Guam Island, Wake Island, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and so on at the outset of the war, battles for Guadalcanal Island and the Solomon Islands and for the Aleutian Islands in the middle of the war, and finally, the counteroffensive by the US against the islands of the Central Pacific such as the Gilbert Islands and Marshall Islands as well as Okinawa and other places. Many of these were extremely fierce.

Along with the very bloody Battle of Tarawa, another battle that had a major impact on Japan’s island operations was the Battle of Peleliu in September 1944, taking place after the Combined Fleet had lost the Battle of the Philippine Sea and control of the sea and air in the Western Pacific. Of course, everyone knows the history of this operation from the U.S. Military perspective, but from the Japanese side, the battle can be summarized as follows. The garrison (approximately 6,000 combatants including navy land fighting units), mainly consisting of the 2nd Infantry Regiment (organized in Mito; commanded by Colonel Kunio Nakagawa), fought a fierce and historic battle against overwhelming combat power of the US 1st Marine Division (approximately 24,000 soldiers), which had been seasoned from the battle for Guadalcanal, and repelled it. Without control of the sea or air, the Japanese was cut off from any reinforcements and supplies. After they exhausted the stockpile with defensive battles, the Japanese garrison, now in tatters from accumulated losses over successive battles, launched one last stand against the US 81st Infantry Division, which had taken the place of the US 1st Marine Division. They fought with all of their might, but to no avail; the Japanese side was annihilated.

Battles for islands were fought in a similar fashion everywhere in the area from the Solomon Islands to the eastern part of the Indian Ocean. It is the task of those of us charged with defense of Japan to guard against and deter aggression to remote islands of our sovereign territory by extracting as many lessons as possible from these past combat experiences in which so many of our predecessors sacrificed their lives, and applying them to today’s environment in order to construct a flawless defense system. With that in mind, it is clear that this forum is the best possible venue to consider that mission. As such, I would now like to begin my specific remarks about today’s main theme of island operations.

### **Island Operations in the Pacific War**

Island operations involving the Japanese Army and Navy can be organized into the following major categories.

## ○ Japanese Offensive Operations at the Outset of the War

**There were 2 landing operations by the Japanese Military on Guam and Wake Island at the outbreak of the war. While the courses of events of the two operations contrast each other, their characteristics can be summarized as follows.**

### ● The Guam Island Operation

#### **Maritime and Air Strength of the Two Sides:**

The Japanese were overwhelmingly superior.

#### **Development of the Sea and Air Battle:**

No full-out sea or air battle occurred.

#### **Ground Strength:**

The invading Japanese Military was superior. The US Military did not deploy reinforcements.

#### **Summary of Battle:**

The Japanese Military, overestimating the strength of US defensive troops, attacked the island with the overmatching troop strength of the Army supported by the navy land fighting units and finished the operation within a day. It was a nearly bloodless capture.

#### **Characteristics / Problem points, etc.:**

The incorrect estimation of the US policy for the defense of Guam (the island was believed to be hard to defend, and it was abandoned in the end) as well as the miscalculation of the number of the U.S. troops guarding Guam Island exposed weakness in Japan's ability to collect and analyze information and intelligence.

By fully concealed behind self-claimed victory, there was no introspection or corrective measures taken in response to this. Critical problems or defects plaguing the Japanese Military were left unexamined until the end of the war.

### ● The Wake Island Operation

#### **Maritime and Air Strength of the Two Sides:**

The Japanese Military was superior locally.

There were U.S. Navy Fleet Carriers in the nearby seas.

#### **Development of the Sea and Air Battle:**

A Japanese land-based air unit launched a preliminary attack. US fighters intercepted them, and then attacked Japanese invading fleet.

#### **Ground Strength:**

The two sides were well matched. The Japanese side had 600 navy land fighting units of two companies, and the US side had approximately 600 Marines.

#### **Summary of Battle:**

*First Landing Attempt*—The Japanese side attempted a landing after air raids. Rough waters in the high seas caused the invading force to meet with difficulty, and the counter fire from the US coast defense battery along with bombardment by US fighters inflicted heavy casualties (two supporting destroyers were sunk) on the Japanese side. The Japanese abandoned the landing and retreated.

*Second Landing Attempt*—After the retreat, the Japanese side regrouped. Ten days later it

again launched a landing operation with reinforcements, including two aircraft carriers that were returning from the attack on Pearl harbor. There was a hard battle with the US garrison after the landing, and for a time the two sides seemed locked in a stalemate. After the Japanese Military eventually took the US commander a prisoner, it called on the US garrison to lay down its arms. And it was accepted.

*US Military relief operation*—Although there were plans initially to rescue the island using mainly US aircraft carriers, in the end officials in Washington D.C. decided to abandon this idea (This led to discord between the US Marines and Navy, with the Marines feeling that the Navy had abandoned them).

**Characteristics / Problem points, etc.:**

The fatal errors of the first landing attempt were a result of the Japanese side being unprepared, and in particular, of its underestimation of the opposition and the inadequate deployment of troops (excluding the deployment of Army units).

Although this was considered an unsuccessful operation of the outset of the war, being overshadowed by other successful invasion operation, its lessons were not learned and there was no earnest application of those lessons to subsequent operations. This remained to be the constitutional flaws of the Japanese Military until the end of the war.

This operation exposed the problems of insufficient equipment and training, including the procedure of transferring troops from transport-ships to Daihatsu-class landing crafts (Daihatsu is abbreviation classifying the vehicle as a large motorized craft). Yet measures to address these problems were greatly delayed.

As a result the battle exposed insufficiencies and deficiencies in the ability of the Japanese Military to perform landing operations in the face of the enemy.

On the US side, despite there only being four remaining fighters, they made a great contribution to the defensive struggle (including through the use of ad-hoc handmade bombing device).

○ **Guadalcanal Island and Solomon Islands Type Operations:**

**Sea and land battles over which control of the air and sea was fluid due to equally matched air and sea strength of both sides**

**Maritime and Air Strength of the Two Sides:**

The two sides were well matched.

**Development of the Sea and Air Battles:**

To establish routes for reinforcements and supplies, these were long battles of attrition in which each side vied for sea and air control.

Guadalcanal Island: Six months (August 1942 through February 1943)

Solomon Islands: One year (February 1943 through February 1944)

**Ground Strength:**

The US side achieved the superiority, though both sides deployed reinforcements: The US side had secured a resupply route.

### **Summary of Battles:**

The US military, which had been making progress in sea and air battle of attrition, successively and progressively secured sea and air control, and established and maintained sea lines of communication (SLOCs) for its logistical support.

Having established a logistical support system, the US military then seized initiative in the ground battles.

The Japanese military, which had been losing the battles of attrition and for supplies, saw the disruption of its logistical support system, faced difficulty in the ground war, and eventually retreated.

The US military invaded northward each island of the Solomon Islands following a similar process before closing in on Rabaul at New Britain island, which was a major Japanese base and stronghold in the Solomon Islands at that time.

The island operations in this region exhausted the Japanese Navy to a point from which it could not recover after one and a half year of continuous battles.

### **Characteristics / Problem points, etc.:**

The Japanese military having caught up in a war of attrition that it should have avoided at all costs, it lost the only one set of forces for its “decisive battle” against the United States, in particular most of its naval aviation force.

Guadalcanal Island: From the Japanese perspective, the battlefield was too far from a logistic base at Rabaul.

This is a model for battles in which air and sea control is in a fluid situation. It was difficult for one side or the other to maintain definitive superiority.

These battles highlight the importance of logistical support for islands that are isolated mutually—the battle centered on securing SLOCs.

The US military won by fusing together science and technology (RADAR, CIC (Combat Information Center), etc.) with anti-air and surface tactics in the fight against the Japanese.

### **○ Gilbert Islands and Marshal Islands Type Operations:**

**The invading side secured control of the sea and air from the start of the operation, and then began its attack.**

**The defending side launched an interception operation using air forces and submarines as well as defensive operations by isolated ground forces.**

### **Maritime and Air Strength of the Two Sides:**

The U.S. Military was superior (aircraft carriers, landing support and invasion forces)

The Japanese Military was inferior—it had limited counter strength (a land-based air unit and submarines)

### **Development of the Sea and Air Battles:**

After the US Military took control of the sea and air at the start of the offensive, it launched invasion operation, and captured islands. The Japanese side lost its control of the sea and air and faced difficulty receiving reinforcements, being only able to launch isolated operations on

each island.

**Ground Strength:**

The US side was dominantly superior.

**Summary of Battles:**

The US Military took the initiative of the battles, having acquired control of the sea and air at the start of invasion.

While fierce fighting by the Japanese garrisons delayed each invasion, the US Military nevertheless conquered each isolated island one by one.

The US Military launched successive attacks against each island such that the Japanese Military did not have time to rebuild its defense systems against coming invasions.

The Japanese side lost many islands in a short period of time due to the loss of control over the sea and air and the successive attacks.

The period of successive operations for the Gilbert and Marshal Islands was approximately three months.

Due to the loss of the islands, Japan was directly exposed to the US military at its last line of defense, the Mariana Islands.

**Characteristics / Problem points, etc.:**

The Japanese Navy, which had already lost its strength during the Guadalcanal and Solomon campaign, particularly its air and destroyer forces, attempted an organized resistance through naval operations, but it was inconsistent and ended in vain.

Plans to interdict US invasion by deploying the remaining operational air units and submarines failed completely. This further weakened the Japanese Military's already remarkably exhausted naval aviation force, and greatly reduced Japan's submarine strength, which had a tremendous effect on subsequent operations.

Throughout these operations, the US Military tested new strategies, new air operation, and new tactics using new carriers and carrier air-wings composed of newly developed aircrafts, and extracted lessons from those tests. Problems were thoroughly corrected, and these resulting strategies were formed into a model for the island operations carried out from the Central Pacific to the Philippines and Okinawa.

○ **Midway Atoll and Mariana Islands Type Operations:**

**Island invasion operations dominated by fleet victories.**

**Maritime and Air Strength of the Two Sides:**

Main forces were composed of aircraft carriers.

The invading side deployed strong landing forces and supporting fleets.

**Development of the Sea and Air Battle:**

Both sides entered into an all-out battle of aircraft carriers with interception of invading fleets by land-based air units.

**Ground Strength:**

The invading force of the Midway (the Japanese Military) was fairly superior.

Both sides matched in force size during the Mariana invasion.



### **Summary of Battle:**

The outcome of aircraft carrier battles influenced the development of the following operations:

*Midway Operation*—The Japanese Military, having lost the fleet battle, abandoned its invasion plans and retreated.

This was a turning point in the Pacific War.

*Mariana Islands Operation*—The US Military, having won the Battle of the Philippines Sea (as the Battle off the Mariana Islands is also known in Japan), established control of the sea and air and began its invasion of the islands. Japanese garrisons were isolated, and the US Military conducted the ground operations with an advantage, capturing each isolated island.

This was actually the last carrier fleet battle of the Pacific War. After this, the US Military essentially controlled the Pacific Ocean.

### **Characteristics / Problem points, etc.:**

The outcome of the battles between battle fleets (aircraft carriers) decided whole operations.

The Japanese Military lost 4 aircraft carriers in the Battle of Midway, but many of the pilots posted on these ships survived (approximately 100 pilots died out of the approximately 700 pilots that participated in the operation), and they went on to fight in air operations in the Solomon Islands and Central Pacific (the fierce air operations in Guadalcanal Island and Solomon Islands diminished the Japanese Military's strength—the personnel strength of the Japanese Navy Aviation was practically exhausted). Midway Atoll made a great contribution to the operations of the US Military. Being centrally located in the Pacific Ocean, it served as a supply base for submarine operations for commerce raids against Japanese commercial ships.

Thinking in terms of the importance of aircraft carrier construction capacity, from the Battle of Midway to the end of the war, the only newly built full-size aircraft carrier of the Japanese Navy to have participated in a full-on aircraft carrier battle was HIJMS Taiho. This exposed the critical and unprecedented disparity between the manufacturing capacity of Japan and the United States—which the Japanese manufacturing sector was simply unable to effectively complement successes in the battle.

In the Battle of the Philippines Sea, the aircraft carrier strength of the Japanese Navy was essentially destroyed. After that, the Japanese Military lost its ability to carry out organized naval operations matching the US Military.

The Mariana Islands held great significance as a base for strategic bombings against Japan at the end of the war.

### **○ Iwojima and Okinawa Type Operations:**

**Island Operations taking place in a strategic and tactical environment in which the defending side has substantially lost its ability to form an organized defense**

#### **Maritime and Air Strength of the Two Sides:**

The US Military was dominantly superior

#### **Development of the Sea and Air Battle:**

At the time of invasion, the US Military had already established control of the sea and air.

### **Ground Strength:**

The US Military was superior.

### **Summary of Battle:**

The US Military maintained freedom of actions and initiative for its operations from the start of the invasions onward.

The offensive actions by the Japanese Military were limited, with kamikaze attacks (known as “special attacks” among the Japanese) becoming commonplace during the final stages of the battle.

Although its actions in the sea, air, and ground battles achieved the aim of the Japanese side to delay an invasion to some extent, the Japanese Military failed to defend each isolated island.

### **Characteristics / Problem points, etc.:**

This was the final stand of the Japanese Military, which had physically lost the ability to resist.

It made no contribution to the Japanese vision of ending the war, which was ‘realizing peace after making one last blow to the US Military.’

Kamikaze attacks became commonplace (they were no longer “special.”)

In contrast to the courage of the soldiers, sailors and airmen, Japanese leadership acted in a degenerate manner.

### **○ Special Case Study: The US Military’s Makin Island Raid of August 1942 (the First Battle of Makin)**

This operation was an island raid carried out by the US Navy and US Marines at a time when the Japanese Navy still controlled the sea and air in the entire Central Pacific, despite having lost the Battle of Midway in June 1942. The US Navy deployed a little over 200 Marine Raiders in two separate submarines. They advanced undetected underwater off Makin Island, which was then under Japanese Military control. Before the dawn of August 17, from the submarines surfaced in secret, they moved onto rubber boats and landed on an undefended beach. They swept the Japanese garrison on the island, and then withdrew on their submarines the next day. After the landing, both sides stumbled considerably during fighting on the island, and it was thus judged that the battle was a draw. In fact, doubts remain about whether or not the US Military fulfilled its operational objective of “confusing and diverting Japanese attention from the battle for Guadalcanal Island.” Nevertheless, it can be said that the US Military achieved its tactical goal of “raiding the island and sweeping through it using submarines.”

In terms of the raid’s secondary effects, it leads to a dramatic strengthening of Japan’s defense in the area. The Japanese Military became very concerned about its defense around the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, and swiftly moved to reconstruct it. This can be said to have served as preparation for the bloody battle that fought on Betio Island in the Tarawa Atoll of Kiribati (generally referred to as the Battle of Tarawa) in November 1943, and from that perspective, although the first Makin Island raid ended extremely unsuccessfully for the Japanese, it became one of the few examples in which the Japanese Military earnestly examined the lessons of a battle and applied them to subsequent operations.

During the Battle of Tarawa that fought one year and three months later, the commander in Kiribati for the defensive operation against the US Military offensive was Rear Admiral Keiji Shibazaki of the 3rd Special Base Defense Force of the Japanese Navy who fought with valor and was killed in the action. He is known to have said of the island's reconstructed defense posture, "Even if we were up against 1 million enemies, they could not conquer this island." In actuality, attacking the Japanese navy land fighting units of 1,700 men, equivalent the size of infantry regiment (and there were additional 2,500 engineers and workers of air field construction unit), the 2nd Marine Division with the strength of about 20,000 marines suffered heavy casualties. It was much more than had been thought possible prior to the battle. This is an example showing that the tactical success of the first Makin Island raid did not necessarily contributed to the operation in Gilbert/Kiribati in strategic terms.

Then again, the lessons of the intense fighting during the Battle of Tarawa, which was the first offensive against the Japanese in the Central Pacific, became a great "opportunity" for the US Navy and US Marines to improve their landing operation tactics and equipment. It is also a fact that through these improvement measures the US Military remarkably made its capabilities of amphibious operations and island seizure competent from that time until the end of the Battle of Okinawa.

## **Island Operations of the Post-Pacific War Era**

### **The Falklands War (1982—the British Military against the Argentinian Military)**

The Falklands War, started by the Argentine side with the invasion of the South Georgian Islands in March 1982, involved very different sizes of military forces and different scales of battle compared to the previous examples. However, from the perspective of it being a fight in which, in the later stages, the British side established control of the sea and isolated the island garrison, it can be said to be a Gilbert Islands and Marshal Islands type of operation. This war can be divided into three periods: the outset of the war (from the end of March to the beginning of April) when the Argentine Military landed on the Falklands and proceeded with small scale battles, the capture of the island, and preparation against a British attack; the mid-period, from April 21, when the British Military launched its operation to retake the South Georgian Islands (with a nearly bloodless capture); and the latter period that started in May with bombings by long-range bombers of the British Royal Air Force and then the full-on assault by the British Military and subsequent defensive operation by the Argentine Military. The mainland of Argentina is about 500 kilometers from the islands. Its nearest domestic air base was approximately 800 kilometers away. On the other hand, the British forward logistics base on Ascension Island was 6,000 kilometers away. It is thus only natural that the focus was on the battle in May and June just after the two sides had completed their preparations and deployment around the island. The geographical positions of the island have similarity with the Guadalcanal Islands and Solomon Islands type of operations that took place in the Pacific War.

Cancellation of the interdict operation by the Argentine Military to deploy an aircraft carrier and submarines against the British because of equipment malfunctions, along with

the sinking of the *ARA General Belgrano* by the British nuclear submarine, the *Conqueror*, led the Argentine Military to abandon its entire naval operation. As a result, the British was able to establish complete control over the sea surrounding the islands and conduct its island operation with a remarkable advantage. However the continued air strikes by the Argentine Military caused the British to lose two destroyers, two frigates, and a large requisitioned container ship used for the transport of aircrafts, along with moderate and minor damage to a number of small ships. The damage was far higher than the Argentine side. This saw the characteristic of a naval battle and island operation under fluid control over the skies, similar to the battles for Guadalcanal Island and the Solomon Islands. It is unclear whether the frequent misfires of the general-purpose bombs dropped by the Argentine Air Force were a result of problems with the Force's live ammunition training—its low altitude live ammunition bombing training may have been insufficient, or they may have been poorly maintained. The numerous misfires uncovered a critical flaw of the Air Force as a combat unit, and it is thought to have sounded an alarm for the militaries, including Japan Self Defense Forces, with zero or very little real combat experience. Moreover, regarding the submarine actions of the Argentine side, although the activities of the *ARA San Luis* initially greatly restricted the movement of the British fleet, after *ARA Santa Fe* was hit by air-bombing, stranded, and abandoned in mid-April, the situation took an extremely negative turn. Argentine submarines were unable to suppress or restrain the attacking British forces, and, as has been pointed out above, that the general-purpose bombs dropped by the Argentine side misfired continuously are points particular attention should be paid from the perspective of extracting lessons from this war.

This war concluded with the surrender of the capital of the Falkland Islands, Port Stanley, on June 14 due to the isolation of the island's garrison and loss of the ground battle stemming from the loss of sea control by the Argentine side. This was followed the next day on June 15 by the President of Argentina issuing a statement calling for an end to the battle, and then on the 20th of that month the British military captured the South Sandwich Islands and the British Government issued a statement calling for an end to hostilities, wrapping up the war 72 days after it had begun.

### ○ **The Grenada Invasion Operation (1983—the United States)**

The US invasion operation against the Caribbean Island of Grenada in 1983 is an example of a modern invasion operation against an island with little defense. The characteristic of this invasion was that it was a military operation by a substantial offensive force against an island that had a light military defense despite its sizable population living a modern, urban lifestyle. I believe that future island defense operations by Japan or the Japan Self Defense Forces are going to bear the highest similarity to this operation out of all the operations presented today.

Grenada is an island nation located in the Caribbean Sea to the north of the South American country of Venezuela. It has a population of approximately 100,000 people over an area of 344 square kilometers. At the height of the Cold War around 1983, the country was promoting pro-Soviet Union and anti-US policies led by a revolutionary government. The United States worried that the country was going to become a second Cuba (note: the areas of

Ishigaki Island, Miyako Island, and Yonaguni Island are 222, 159, and 29 square kilometers respectively).

Out of concern that the situation would worsen, the Reagan administration set operational objectives of toppling the revolutionary government in Grenada through a military invasion, preventing the country from moving toward the Soviets, and stabilizing the region around the Caribbean Sea. The invasion was carried out by a Joint Task Force (JTF) comprising four services of the US armed forces.

Specifically, the US Military went in with the recognition that “the state of affairs was such that the worsening of the security environment in Grenada threatened the safety of a number of US medical students studying at a local university.” The raid operation aimed to save those students. The commander of the US Second Fleet assumed command of the JTF for the operation, with Major General Norman Schwarzkopf (Commander of United States Central Command during the first Gulf War in 1990) serving as JTF deputy commander and the land component commander. That invasion force was made up of approximately 7,000 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers, a Rangers Regiment, Delta Force, Navy SEALs, a Marine Expeditionary Unit and so on. With the support of Navy and Air Force units, the troops rushed the Grenadian Military (approximately 2,000 soldiers) on October 25, 1983. The islands airports, seaports, and major infrastructure facilities were secured, and the US troops fulfilled the operational objective of protecting the US exchange students. The substantial operation was brought to an end in a matter of days. There were military advisory groups from Cuba, the Soviet Union, East Germany, and North Korea present on the island, but they were moved to an area outside of the field of the operation and were kept under surveillance by the U.S. military. They did not bring about an expansion of the military situation.

This summarizes the US invasion operation against Grenada. I believe that this operation holds a number of beneficial lessons for island defense operations by our Self Defense Forces and for the development of a Japan-US bilateral defense system on such operations, in terms of what it says about the preparation of a system for receiving reinforcements from the mainland and the establishment of mutual support systems among forces on the islands. While it is true that no foreign country would invade Japan in the exact same way as in the Grenada operation, I believe that within this example are lessons that will become universal issues in the future and that we must work further on. These include the response to raids by Special Forces, defense against (cruise) missiles, and improvements of our survivability against an enemy’s first attack. There are also many points of reference and lessons here on such matters as constructing an alert system against sudden attacks, estimating the invasion strength of opposing countries against comparatively small islands, and making assumptions on the development of battles. I expect that there will be positive moves by the Self Defense Forces on these initiatives, including research into other similar cases.

## **Lessons from the Island Warfare Cases and Their Significance for Today**

### **○ Overall**

In the end, the greatest lesson to be taken from the Pacific War and the characteristic of island operations that have taken place since is “never let the enemy take the shore.” In particular then, it goes without saying that each military must sufficiently prepare their air force and naval force in order to secure control of the air and sea, which is a prerequisite for a landing. In the case of the Japanese military during the Pacific War, while its posture for ground battles was superior, in the end there were many cases in which it failed to defend an island because its SLOCs were cut off as a result of the loss of control of the sea and air. In other words, as should be apparent at this point, there is a direct relation between control of the air and sea and the success or failure of an island defense operation. At the same time, obviously the development of ground fighting during island defense once deterrence has failed and the enemy has been allowed to land is what determines whether or not an island will be defended. Hence, the experiences of the Japanese Military in World War II contain tremendous lessons for the future construction of island defense postures by the not only Self Defense Forces, but the militaries of all countries, in addition to the lessons for Japan given our lack of combat experience.

In summary, island defense is built upon a balance of three points:

1. The prerequisite for island defense: the capability to maintain control over the sea and air;
2. A posture that can sufficiently deter enemy intent to invade; and
3. Ground strength that can repel enemy forces should they actually invade.

Taking deterrence of an invasion, posture by which reinforcements and mutual support can be received from the garrisons on neighboring islands following an invasion, and consideration for organization and tactics in case mutual support is difficult to achieve into account, I believe that it is vital to possess the capability of controlling the sea and air and strong ground defense forces in the area.

### **○ Strengthening Warning and Surveillance Systems and Improving Capabilities for Dealing with Surprise Attacks (Including Raids by Special Forces)**

When analyzing the first Makin Island raid, the Falklands War, and the Grenada invasion operation, it is clear that the type of island invasion that Japan will likely be forced to deal with in the future is shifting away from the type of island battle operations developed and carried out by the US Military in the Pacific War in which the advancing military combined a pre-landing bombardment (air bombings and naval gun fire) with an amphibious assault that took on the enemy's defenses head on. There is an increasing likelihood that a secret or surprise landing will be made by deploying Special Forces units or that landings will be made by invasion forces after Special Forces units have thrown garrisons into confusion and lowered the strengths of those garrisons. While there is a high chance in a traditional island invasion of being able to destroy enemy defense forces and to maintain an island once fighting

has ended, at the same time, such invasions commonly result in great losses for both sides, and they are therefore increasingly uncommon among modern operations. Put another way, I believe that there is now a strong tendency toward “clean wars” like the first Gulf War which put a halt to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait, in which the war is brought to an end with the minimum amount of damage and operational objectives are achieved in a short time period. The rapid strengthening of Special Forces units is a common phenomenon among the powerful countries of the modern world that possess island invasion capabilities, and it is obvious that the trend toward clean wars underlies this phenomenon.

In order for the defending side to prevent this kind of surprise attack and prepare for all eventualities, constant air, sea, and underwater surveillance systems must be established and maintained. Furthermore, the current security environment is such that countries can no longer put off the deployment of defense units with counter Special Forces capabilities to depopulated areas or isolated islands with high strategic value. The great likelihood of warfare making use of surprise attacks especially with Special Forces should clearly set an alarm off for operation planners of island defense.

### ○ **Choosing the Best Option for Defense Forces: The Operation of Japanese Naval Submarines**

During the Pacific War, from the Gilbert Islands and Marshal Islands battles (November 1943) to the Battle of Okinawa (June 1945), once the major air and sea strength of the Combined Fleet was exhausted the Japanese Military place all of its hope on the deployment of submarines for island defense operations against the United States. Counter to the Navy’s expectations, the results of such deployments were wretched, with an incredibly high number of submarines lost for little military gain. After all was said and done, the contribution of the submarine operations to Japan’s island defense operations was essentially “zero.” In fact, in terms of the losses of the operational submarines of the Japanese Navy throughout the Pacific War, from the outset of the war up until March 1943, the Navy lost 19 of the 22 submarines it built. Conversely, at that same point in time it still maintained 61 of the 64 seaworthy ships it began the war with. The retreat from Guadalcanal Island following the substantial defeat there was completed in March 1943, and from that point onward, the Japanese Navy entered a period of realignment in the face of an expanded battlefield.

In November of that same year, just seven months into this process, the Japanese Navy lost six submarines during the defensive operation at the Gilbert Islands (out of nine deployed, with the submarines sinking one US escort carrier in the process). From there, the Navy lost 17 of the 29 submarines deployed for the defense operation at the Mariana Islands (the submarines made no military gains), and lost an additional 7 out of the 14 deployed for the defense operations in the Philippines—these too returned tragic results, with zero ships sunk among them. From March 1943 to October 1944, the Japanese Navy saw its submarine fleet shrink dramatically from approximately 65 vessels to just 35, the number it ended the war with. The final results being that Japan lost the 11,000 submariners on the 127 submarines sunk out of the 156 submarines constructed and operated by the Japanese Navy throughout

the Pacific War. After March 1943, when the operation in Guadalcanal Island ended and the Japanese Military began to reorganize stretched defensive line for further operations against the United States, Japan actually went on to lose over 100 additional submarines. Most of those were sunk in island defense operations reacting to invasions by the US Military.

In the latter half of 1943, the aviation strength of the Combined Fleet had been viciously exhausted, and the fleet had been yet unable to rebuild. Along with the full force of all deployable aviation units, submarines became a major force for the defense against the counteroffensive by the US military that started from that time. I believe that the Combined Fleet had no other option but to rely on submarines in these operations. At this point in time, the United States had exposed the inferiorities of German U-boats in the Battle of the Atlantic, shifted the flow of battle, and introduced the latest equipment and tactics used against those U-boats in the Pacific; yet the Japanese Navy had absolutely no knowledge on any of this. On the contrary, the Japanese Navy continued to repeat its previous tactics stubbornly and without criticism, which can be said to have resulted in the tragic losses expressed in the aforementioned numbers. In addition to weaknesses in the Japanese Military's intelligence capabilities, its negative attitude toward lessons from the battle was fatal. It was, for instance, unable to seriously deal with the loss of a submarine, something that happened with greater frequency from the Gilbert Islands defense operation onward, pushing the loss aside as being the result of simply "a lack of aggressiveness and fighting spirit of inexperienced young submarine captains." The Navy ignored the report on combat lessons and the opinions filed by captains, who had managed to barely escape the fierce anti-submarine attacks of the US Navy, and did not seek out the detailed causes behind the tremendous loss of submarines. In particular, even though 17 submarines were lost in just three weeks during the operation in the Mariana Islands—nearly the same number as the 19 submarines lost in the prior one year and four months since the onset of the war—the Japanese Navy did not earnestly seek out the cause of these losses or take countermeasures. As a former leader of the JMSDF, the organization founded on the tradition of that Navy, it pains me to say this, but the leaders of the Navy, Combined Fleet, and submarine units at that time lacked sensibility. They can be said to have suffered from a loose sense of sound responsibility and degeneracy. This is a great and serious lesson on mental activities for today's leaders of the JMSDF and all the navies of the world.

As can be seen in the examples of the British and Argentina in the Falklands War, as well as the Japanese Navy in the Pacific War, all of which involved submarines, the true value of these vessels arises when they are operated properly. Conversely, I am convinced that operating them in the wrong way leads to great tragedy. This is of course not just true of submarines—it should be applied to all types of military forces, from Air Force to Special Forces units. All officers in charge, from strategists, operational planners, and doctrine developers, to the commanders in the field, are expected to have a flexible mindset that does not get caught up in preconceived notions. We must not let anyone repeat the mistakes of the Japanese Navy in its submarine warfare.



### ○ Strategy, Tactics, and Equipment Development

The Japanese Navy's concept of operation centered on the "phased attrition" of the US Pacific Fleet which it sought to intercept and in the final phase exterminate in the area from Central Pacific to the waters around Japan as the fleet moved west across the Pacific Ocean. Basically, the concept was envisioned as follows: Japanese Navy would ascertain the location and bearing of advancing enemy fleet through reconnaissance by submarines and large flying boats, and then continuously repeat torpedo attacks by submarines and land based aviation units, succeeded by night torpedo attacks by cruisers and destroyers once the US Fleet reached the waters near Japan, and in the final phase, the annihilation of the enemy fleet by the main guns of main battle ships would decide the war between Japan and the United States. The Japanese side expected that it would see an accumulated effect through a series of battles. For this reason, the Japanese Navy focused its research on fleet battles between main battle ships like the Battle of Jutland in World War I, and had almost no interest in the Gallipoli Campaign, an amphibious battle which ended in fiasco as a result of fierce fighting between landing forces supported by fleets and defending land forces. It only barely introduced lessons from that campaign, with just the understanding that "fleet units must not commit to battles with land-based cannons." I believe that this lesson holds some meaning in itself. At the same time, Japan came to administer the islands of the Pacific through a League of Nations mandate it received following the end of World War I. Even the peace treaty prohibited the use of those islands for military purposes. Japanese Navy should not have neglected research and planning work related to the defense of those islands in the event of an emergency. Unfortunately, I see some traces of evidence that lessons of the Gallipoli Campaign were utilized as an excuse to keep the Combined Fleet, a precious asset to decide the war with US, away from the amphibious operations and island operations.

Although the Japanese Navy passionately engaged in research on how to utilize the South Sea Islands under Japanese Mandate as bases for the wartime forward operation base of submarines and aircraft intended for use in the "phased attrition" strategy employed against the United States, it can be said that there was almost no interest in defending the islands themselves. As a result, research on amphibious operations was delayed, and the Japanese side went into the Pacific War with extremely insufficient equipment and tactics. Following on the offensive period at the outset of the war and into the Guadalcanal Island and Solomon Islands campaign, which became long-term wars of attrition, the Japanese Navy finally came to understand the true essence of island warfare and hastily started development of equipment and tactics that could be used for island operations. However, with everything postponed, by the time the Navy saw the fruits of this research in mid-1944, the Combined Fleet had already suffered a dramatic loss of operational capabilities, and the chance for implementing island operations had already been lost. Among the results of research are such ideas as the creation of a 1st class transporter (Itto-Yusokan) and 2nd class transporter (Nito-Yusokan) better than even the U.S. Military's LSTs. Nevertheless, struggling against the delayed timing of the development, the reality is that they made only an extremely small contribution to island defense by Japan. This issue too suggests much for future island operations.

## Conclusion

Today I have analyzed the lessons learnt through the defeats of the Japanese Navy in the Pacific War in particular and I have considered the modern implications of those lessons. Within all of this, the element that I want to emphasize the most is people. After all, central to the efforts that will make a response to our new era possible is the flexible mindset of our service members, one free of preconceived notions and fixed concepts.

From the establishment of our military in 1869, the Japanese Navy was at the frontline of modernization in Japan. However, even such an organization started to take on a culture of bureaucracy and precedent sometime after the Russo-Japanese War, when forty years had passed after its foundation. I see that the culture began to reject flexible thinking. It focused all of its effort on the “phased attrition” strategy, a bookish plan believed to be perfect for a fleet overpowered by the Americans. It is thought that at some point in time, the Navy came to reject deviation from this plan as well as any attempts to point out its contradictions and develop new ideas to search for more realistic schemes.

Within that timeframe, although only momentarily, the Japanese Navy came to lead the world in the use of navy aviation. However, the origin of its development was of course nothing more than a supporting role to contribute well to the “phased attrition” strategy. Commander-in-chief of the Combined Fleet Isoroku Yamamoto led and pushed the Japanese naval air fleet toward modernization in this period, and it is widely acknowledged to be thanks to his strong leadership that the Japanese Navy was finally freed from the “curse” of making a contribution to the “phased attrition” strategy, and this enabled it to think up and realize aircraft carrier strike groups, an innovative use of naval air power, leading to remarkable results at the outset of the Pacific War. But from the end of the battle at Guadalcanal Island onward, Japan, or more specifically, the Combined Fleet, the singular decisive force of the Japanese Navy, became unfortunately exhausted over the course of the battles I have discussed here today. There are of course many reasons behind that and many causes for the failures of the Japanese Navy in the Pacific War, yet among them all, I would like to end my speech by again emphasizing that the most important reason was of course, people.