Japanese Intelligence in WWII: Successes and Failures

KOTANI Ken*

Summary

This report considers the role Imperial Japanese Army intelligence played in the early stages of the Pacific War.

In European and American intelligence research, a failure in intelligence, namely underestimation of the Imperial Japanese Army, is stressed as the reason for the defeat of the Allied forces in the early stages of the Pacific War. However, this conclusion differs somewhat from Japanese research, in which the general perception of the situation is that the Imperial Japanese Army triumphed thanks to repeatedly training for those early stages, coupled with the fact that its enemies were colonial garrisons comprised mainly of local soldiers. Nevertheless, there exist many cases of failure in terms of intelligence by the Imperial Japanese Army during the Pacific War.

This report will probe the details of this, based on examples of intelligence management by the Imperial Japanese Army.

Introduction

World War II was an all-out war. At the same time though, it was heavily colored by the element of information warfare. In this war in particular, it is no exaggeration to suggest that signals intelligence (SIGINT) to monitor enemy correspondence held the key to victory on the battlefield. Methods of reading the intentions of the enemy by intercepting encrypted communications, and furthermore of concealing the plans of partners were fundamentally reflected in the prosecution of the War. However, in reality there was a considerable degree of trouble accompanying efforts to implement this. A high level of ability was required in all areas, beginning with the ability to gather information on matters such as decryption, then to analyze and develop the raw information into a processed form, the process involved in intelligence, as well as other abilities including operations planning capabilities to facilitate the application of such information in strategies and tactics.

Naturally, since this kind of intelligence management was a confidential matter to all nations concerned, following World War II its concealment continued. However, in 1979 the British government published *British Intelligence in World War II* as an official account of intelligence history.[1] Through this book, details relating to British information warfare against Germany were elucidated for the first time. It describes Allied intelligence operations during the War, including the details of German Enigma cipher reading by the British Information Service, Allied forces deception in Normandy, and counter-intelligence operations which mobilized German spies as British double agents.

However, this official account of intelligence history is limited in its portrayal to the fighting in Europe. With regard to the Far East, it explains that “Although it is recognized as important,

* Fellow, 1st Military History Research Office, Military History Department, the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS).

1 F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in World War II* (London: HMSO, 1979).

the Far East was the domain of America. We cannot describe it based solely upon British primary sources on intelligence."[2] In order to disclose these historical records on intelligence during World War II publicly, the British government made a governmental decision at the Prime Ministerial level. Meanwhile, there was concern that demanding the same kind of decision of the US would result in considerable diplomatic issues. Moreover, if one considers the situation regarding the Cold War, any declassification pertaining to matters such as American decryption capabilities would surely have been undesirable. Furthermore, in the case of the US, if the British unilaterally incorporated elements such as the Pearl Harbor controversy (the theory that the US had sensed the attack by the Imperial Japanese Army on Pearl Harbor beforehand) in a discussion of the Pacific Theater, it would not be welcome.

On the other hand, with regard to research into American decryption efforts against Japan, with the publication of *The Codebreakers* by David Kahn in 1968, one can say that to a certain extent, details of the deciphering of Imperial Japanese Army codes by American forces were known to a certain extent. Subsequently, there was a range of research which discussed the intelligence activities of the Allied Forces against Japan in the Pacific Theatre.[3] However, a great deal of the implications were along the lines of "The Allied Forces succeeded in deciphering the Japanese Army and Navy [codes], while such activities by the Japanese were weak" and cite "The unpreparedness of the Allied Forces and negative organizational effects used by Japan at times," retaining a lack of consideration toward Japanese intelligence.

Of these trends in British and US research, Atsushi Moriyama points out that "Intelligence history that focuses on the wartime period is characterized by an overwhelming quantitative and qualitative asymmetry. Across the board, the publications repeatedly focus on the ways in which Britain solved the German Enigma ciphers to defeat the Nazis, and the ways in which the US broke the diplomatic and Naval ciphers of Japan, thus advancing the state of the war in an advantageous manner."[4]

Here we shall discuss the question of how the defeat of the Allied Forces in the early stages of the Pacific War is perceived. Regarding this question, British and American research states that the reason was underestimation of the enemy arising from a failure in intelligence on the Allied side. To put it simply, what is striking is the suggestion that British and US forces in the Far East failed due to unpreparedness. However, when looked at from the Japanese side, it can be acknowledged that the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Battle of Malaya were the fruits of advanced training and information gathering, and that it is hasty to determine the cause of the defeat of Britain and the US to be unpreparedness.

Hence, this report will consider the role played in the early stages of the Pacific War by Imperial Japanese Army intelligence.

---

2 Ibid., p. X.

3 Please refer to the following for the latest main research. John Prados, *Combined Fleet Decoded* (U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1995), Peter Elphick, *Far Eastern File* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1997); Richard Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War against Japan* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); Michael Smith, *The Emperor's Codes* (Bantam Press, 2000); Roland Worth Jr., *Secret Allies in the Pacific* (University Press of America, 2001).

4 Yu Moriyama, "Senjiki Nihon no Ango Kaidoku to Amerika no Taio – Ango Unyo no Kanten kara [Wartime Japanese Code Reading and American Response – from Perspectives on Code Application]," *Interijensu* [*Intelligence*], No. 9, p. 83.

1. Information gathering activities of the Imperial Japanese Army

Historical records pertaining to the intelligence activities of the Japanese Army and Navy were mostly incinerated at the close of the Pacific War, so there are still many questions about the ways in which the Army gathered information. However, according to a textbook used by the North China Area Army, the "Text Book for Intelligence," intelligence activities were first classified as either information gathering or information duties on the battlefields. Among information gathering activities were included (1) intelligence activities carried out by general overseas organizations, foreign forces and so on (including open source intelligence, observation, interviews with important people, purchasing of information, human source intelligence and spy photos), and (2) radio interception and signals theft. Among information duties on the battlefields were included (1) spotting by general forces, (2) spotting by reconnaissance units, (3) information gathering by special agencies (signals monitoring teams), (4) prisoners of war, (5) captured document, and (6) the use of spies on the battlefield.[5]

Furthermore, the headquarters of the Expeditionary Army to China drew up a monthly intelligence list known as the "Summary of Domestic and Foreign Affairs." This consolidated the monthly intelligence relating to each region of the world (Japan, the course of the Pacific War, the US, Great Britain, China, the course of the Soviet-German War, the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, the Near and Middle East, South America, and the South). Behind that information are cited sources such as "newspaper information," "A information (SIGINT)," "secret telegrams," "the Shanghai Agency," "the Sanwa Agency" and "liaison departments."[6]

It is possible to get clues relating to the information gathering activities of the Navy from "Situation Estimate Document" drawn up by the Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff in 1945.[7] This historical record, from October 1944 to July 1945, in the 1st Operations Department, the Imperial Japanese Navy Staff, is something that collates the kind of information that was reported. Since information sources are specified in reports, it is possible to see an aspect of the information gathering activities by the Navy. These information sources are listed simply below.

Information source	Number of items of intelligence and data gathered between 1 October 1944 and 10 July 1945
Signals Intelligence	393
Attaché	102
Prisoner-of-war questioning	27
Captured Documents	2
Spies	7
Army intelligence	11
Ministry of Foreign Affairs information	2
Open Source Intelligence (radio, etc.)	110
Open Source Intelligence (published material, etc.)	769
Other	23
Source unclear	38
Total	1484

5 A Group Staff Office, "Joho Kinmu no Sanko [Text Book for Intelligence Duties]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

6 "Nigatsu ni Okeru Naigai Josei Gaiyohyo [Summary Table of Affairs at Home and Abroad in February]," *Showa 15, 16 Nen Senji Geppototsuzuri* [*Wartime Monthly Report between 1940 and 1941*], (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

7 1st Operations Department, Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff, "Jokyo Handan Shiryo [Situation Estimate Document]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

The section from special intelligence to Ministry of Foreign Affairs information consists of undisclosed information, but that alone comprises more than one third of the total. It is said that the present-day ratio of undisclosed information to intelligence-gathering activities is less than 10%, so this proportion is fairly high. It is also evident that special intelligence carries significant weight.

Special intelligence is that which Japan has monitored and deciphered from communications by the Allied nations, and is generally referred to as SIGINT. With regard to SIGINT, after the war, the US Military Intelligence Service (MIS) which investigated Japanese intelligence concluded that "Japan ended [the War] without having deciphered the high level codes of the US and Great Britain."[8] One can assume that this is probably based on the prevalent explanation long after the war, pertaining to Japan's deciphering abilities. However, the SIGINT abilities of Japan were not as low as has traditionally been thought. The Imperial Japanese Army was able to read the diplomatic codes of the US, Great Britain, France and China, and some of the military codes of China and the Soviet Union.

From the features of this kind of SIGINT, it is evident that both the Army and Navy had a considerable interest in the subject. However, this does not mean that SIGINT can be used in its unadulterated form in areas such as foreign policy and operations. When contrasted with other forms of information, we find that it is often the case that such information is wasted unless it is raised to the level of intelligence. That is to say, communications intelligence is like a precious ingredient, the true flavor of which one cannot draw out without attempting to cook with it.

Captain Yuzuru Sanematsu, who was involved as a US intelligence specialist in the Japanese Imperial Navy for an extended period, recollected that "the SIGINT of our special intelligence section proved to be extremely useful in areas such as the operations department. We had no sense of regret that it had been overvalued. (omission) Since SIGINT is like fresh food, it can easily cause diarrhea if one lacks caution. To an amateur to the field of intelligence, the distinction is rather difficult."[9] The difficulty in handling of communications intelligence is evident.

Attaché reports are from officers resident in allied and neutral nations. It is conjectured that a more substantial volume of information was obtained via this source before the War. In the case of the Navy, Captain Yuzuru Sanematsu was deployed to Washington, Commander Itaru Tachibana to Los Angeles, and Lieutenant Commander Sadatomo Okada to Seattle, where they engaged in information gathering activities pertaining to the American Navy. In the case of the Army, soldiers referred to as China experts gathered information in mainland China. In Europe, the information obtained by individuals including Major General Makoto Onodera, who was dispatched to Sweden, and Colonel Eiichi Hirose, who was dispatched to Finland, is assessed as having been to a high degree of accuracy.[10] During the war, officer reports from persons resident in the neutral nations of Azerbaijan, Spain, and Switzerland, as well as Germany were valuable.

---

8 J.W. Bennett, W.A. Hobart and J.B. Spitzer, *Intelligence and Cryptanalytic Activities of the Japanese during World War II* (Aegean Park Press, 1986), p. 6.

9 Yuzuru Sanematsu, "Joho Sakusen ni Tsuite (Zensho) [Regarding Intelligence Operations (prior approval)]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

10 Please see the following for information relating to Makoto Onodera. Onodera Yuriko, *Barutokai no Hotori nite* [*In the vicinity of the Baltic Sea*] (Kyodo News, 1986). The activities of Onodera have been clarified also by the investigative materials of the British Intelligence Service. Activities and Liaison with the Japanese Intelligence in Sweden and Finland, KV 2/243, *The National Archives, Kew* (Hereinafter abbreviated at PRO [British National Archive]).

As sources of information, prisoners of war and captured documents are probably unique to wartime. Colonel Toshihiro Imai, who worked alongside Sanematsu in the 5th Section of the 3rd Department of the Navy Staff (American intelligence) conducted actual questioning of prisoners of war at a prison camp in Ofuna, Kanagawa Prefecture. According to Imai's records, the method of questioning was principally based on lead questioning. Conversations began with discussion of individual things close to the prisoner. By implication, subsequent talk related to the vessel to which the prisoner was assigned, questions on where they were staying and so on. This information was extracted from as many prisoners as possible, and the fragments of these conversations were later consolidated.

In Imai's words the plan was that "The individual did not know what they were being asked and so would talk appropriately. Then however, a number of different lines of questioning were inserted from all directions, so that they would not be realized." By so doing he said, it was possible to eliminate time spent drawing out information through coercion, while minimizing the risk of being provided false information. About this, Imai stated the following.

> In the case of submarines, we accurately learnt their movement cycle: approximately when they left harbor, when they entered the port at Hawaii, roughly how many days they stayed for rest, where they set off toward, how many days were spent in operational waters, what kind of results were obtained, and around how many days it took to Hawaii. When this was calculated backward from the total number of American submarines, we could formulate estimates from the general number of vessels present in this area of ocean, to their range of mobilization.[11]

In addition to the questioning of prisoners of war, as one would expect, captured documents were an important source of information. According to Sanematsu it was the case that "The items which we obtained were mainly documents carried by airplane crew members. The U.S. forces' "US Planning of Amphibious Operation in Okinawa (a top secret document of around 200 pages)" was extremely useful in preparation for decisive battles of Okinawa and Japan."[12] Among the captured documents was a black covered volume on which was written "U.S. Navy Task Binder" obtained by the Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff. It showed amongst other things, the equipment of major U.S. Navy vessels, their arrangement, and photos. Imai, who had seen this, recollected that "We saw things such as the Essex class aircraft carrier which we learned of for the first time. An outline of the equipment was as plain as day, with the rows of numerous anti-aircraft guns lined up along each side of its flight deck and so on. Even now, it is a real eye opener."[13]

There exist many puzzles regarding spies. For example, before the War, the Imperial Japanese Navy employed foreign persons as spies, such as Frederick Rutland and Bernard Kuehn, former British and German naval officers, respectively.[14] The existence of 1st Lieutenant Takeo Yoshikawa, who was resident in Honolulu, as a Secretary of Japanese Consulate in Honolulu, Tadashi Morimura

---

11 "Gunreibu Taibei Johobuin Imai Toshihiko Shuki [Imperial Japanese Navy, American Intelligence Department Member Toshihiro Imai's Private Notes]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies). Below abbreviated as "Imai Shuki [Imai's Private Notes]."

12 Yuzuru Sanematsu, *Nichibei Joho Senki* [*Military History of Japanese-US Intelligence*] (Tosho Shuppansha, 1980), p. 214.

13 "Imai Shuki [Imai's Private Notes]."

14 Ken Kotani, "Nihon Kaigun to Rattorando Eikugun Shosa [The Imperial Japanese Navy and Royal Air Force Major Rutland]," *Gunji Shigaku* [*Military History Society of Japan*], Vol. 38, No. 2 (September 2002).

is also well known. The activities of these persons contributed to naval gathering of foreign intelligence.

A significant amount of the intelligence from the Army included types of information that the Navy was unable to obtain, for example, intelligence relating to the deployment of Soviet forces in the Far East, and information from mainland China. In this intelligence was communications intelligence gathered by the Army Staff office, and HUMINT. Its accuracy was classified into three levels; A, B and C.[15]

Open source information was mainly obtained from magazines, newspapers and broadcasts, and was published information on the war situation and the military authorities of the enemy. During the war, the information section of Domei News Agency gathered the news on every country around the world daily, translated it, consolidated it and reported it to the military as hostile intelligence.[16]

However, the side passing across the information worked on the assumption that the information was known to the enemy. The truth was not necessarily publicly disclosed at all times. Thus, the side considering it also had to always bear in mind the question of whether the information was true. Imai recollected that "It is enough if one is able to read the intentions and actions hidden behind the news. One is not a real intelligence officer if they are not able to do this. (omission) As the foreign news covered propaganda, anything more than this could be trouble. Of course they were up to something in providing the news that they did, so it was necessary to decipher what was behind the hidden information, the true intention and purpose of the news."[17]

According to the navy's "Situation Estimate Document," the open source information in this period can be confirmed as including Reuters, AP, UP, *Life*, *Time*, *News Chronicle*, *the New York Times*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, U.S. Central broadcasts, Hong Kong broadcasts, and the military magazines of each nation. During the Pacific War, these types of magazines were gathered in the neutral countries of Sweden and Azerbaijan. Individuals such as Masao Tsuda a branch head of Domei News Agency in the latter, and the aforementioned Makoto Onodera in Sweden were engaged in this role.[18] During the war, the Imperial Japanese Army, the access to whom the open source information had been restricted, appeared to place considerable importance on information from Domei News Agency and correspondents in other countries. Imai furthermore attested that "We were able to obtain *Life* and *Time* magazines, as well as the magazines and supplements of *The New York Times* until the end of the war drew near."[19]

Photographs appearing in magazines also served as an unexpected source of information. For example, on 21 January 1941, a photograph of the British ambassador to the US Edward Halifax arriving in the US aboard the British battleship *King George V* was printed in Life magazine. It showed the latest anti-aircraft rocket launcher, which the Japanese Navy witnessed for the first time.

---

15 "Showa Jukyu Nen Matsu Goro ni Okeru Higashi 'So' 'So' Gun no Heiryoku oyobi Haichi [Around End 1944 East Soviet Union and Soviet Forces Military Force and Deployment]," *Higashi 'So' Gun Handan* [*Judgment on the East Soviet Forces*], (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

16 The information section of Domei News Agency, "Tekisei Joho, Shusen Zengo [Enemy Intelligence, Around the End of the War]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

17 "Imai Shuki [Imai's Private Notes]."

18 Civil Intelligence Section, G-2 Operations Compilation Branch, 29 April 1947; Taketoshi Yamamoto ed. *Dainiji Taisenki Nihon no Choho Kikan Bunseki* [*Analysis of World War II Japanese Intelligence Agencies*], Vol. 8, Europe-America Edition 2 (Kashiwa Shobo, 2000).

19 "Imai Shuki [Imai's Private Notes]."

The main anti-aircraft weaponry of the Japanese Navy at the time were machine guns. Hence, the naval top brass paid attention to the new equipment installed upon the *King George V*.[20]

In January 1944, a Domei News Agency reporter transmitted a report to Tokyo regarding the production of US aircraft engines, information obtained from *The Wall Street Journal*. Reports from such private sector companies were not solely from the press though. Local reports from staff members of trading and oil companies abroad reported information such as the appearance of airports and harbors to the military authorities. For example, during the course of the Palembang operation which on 14 February 1942 would use paratroopers to gain control of Sumatra's largest oil field Palembang at no cost, information such as local maps, and oil field and airport details were provided to the military authorities by Japanese enterprises in the area.[21]

Furthermore, Japan also received information supplied by its ally Germany, but it appears that this was not particularly useful. Since conversely, the US and Great Britain had built strong connections in the area of intelligence, even here the difference between the Allied Nations and Axis Powers truly presented itself.

Regarding the exchange of information between Japan and Germany, on 11 May, prior to the November 1937 Anti-Comintern Pact, the Agreement of the German-Japanese Information Exchange on Soviet Union was realized between Hiroshi Oshima, the Japanese ambassador to Germany, and Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. This was to facilitate an exchange of information between the two parties. However, it failed to work in practice, and lost substance with the 1939 Russo-German Nonaggression Treaty.[22] Sanematsu rated the intelligence from Germany poorly, stating that "There was a tendency for Germany to underestimate US war capability even more than us."[23]

Of course, on occasion, the navy obtained information from front-line operational forces. According to Sanematsu, the following kinds of information were stressed in particular for judging enemy movements.

> (1) The movements of enemy forces during action; (2) the situation regarding implementation of enemy efforts such as reconnaissance and attacks on our positions; (3) the relation between Allied leaders meetings and subsequent operations; (4) the relation between military meetings and subsequent operations; (5) the deployment of enemy submarines, in particular the movements of submarines thought to have missions other than operations cutting sea lanes; (6) the movements of supply convoys (mainly merchant vessels) from mainland America to Hawaii and the front line; (7) the movements of aircraft from the western coast of America (principally San Francisco) towards Hawaii (mainly air freight situations); (8) the characteristics of commanders of operational forces; (9) the relation between memorial days and holidays (both Japanese and American) and operations; and (10) the relation between climate (including typhoons and weather fronts) and operations.

When we consider the situation in the latter stages of the war, the Navy can be thought of as

20 Arthur Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 337-338.

21 Nakano School Alumni Association, *Rikugun Nakano Gakko* [*the Nakano School*] (Hara Shobo, 1981), p. 491.

22 Further details regarding this are below. Nobuo Tajima, *Nachizumu Kyokuto Senryaku* [*Nazism Far East Strategy*] (Kodansha Metier, 1997).

23 Yuzuru Sanematsu, *Nichibei Joho Senki* [*Military History of Japanese-US Intelligence*], p. 214.

gathering information rather well. The important point here is that since these are solely naval intelligence gathering activities, and none in particular are being conducted by the Army or Ministry of Foreign Affairs, overall, a considerable volume of information was accumulated.

2. Army intelligence

(1) Image of the US and Great Britain

First, let us take a general view of the image the Imperial Japanese Army held of British and American forces. In the early stages of the Pacific War, the main enemy of the Army were the British Forces in the Far East deployed mainly in Singapore. Therefore, as previously stated, the Army advanced investigation into the British forces defending Malaya and Singapore in the latter half of 1940. According to data from the General Staff office, the assessment of British Army leaders was that they "generally cannot be recognized as satisfactory."[24] Moreover, the colonial garrisons were a composite force comprised of soldiers from Great Britain, Australia and India, each of which was evaluated as follows.

> British soldiers: "After all, they are forces in the colonies. When looked at from the situation of their past training, their war potential should be significant. However, when we look at the British soldier from their national trait, we should be able to resist them against a fair amount of tenacity in defensive battle. Furthermore, since the majority of British soldiers in Malaya will be allocated to defend Singapore, there will surely not be many going out into battle."
>
> Australian soldiers: "Their character is generally unfavorable. Among them are unemployed people, villains and so on. They are known for their lack of military discipline and public morals. Based on their military achievements in the Near East, and due to their national trait of adventurousness and determination, they will demonstrate considerable bravery. Nevertheless, neither their training nor equipment can be classed as favorable."
>
> Indian and Malay soldiers: "There are many with no desire to fight against Japan, and no shortage of numbers possessing anti-British sentiment, with some soldiers always revealing this [attitude]. Furthermore, there exist multiple factions even within the Indian soldiers. The British, while able to skillfully manipulate them and prevent insurrection, cannot on the other hand expect their integration."[25]

When we look at these evaluations, we find a trend for the Japanese Army to think lightly of British soldiers. However, the troops which comprised the Malayan garrison were unique in that they were evaluated as a specific nation. The General Staff office assumed the people who the Imperial Japanese Army which attacked the Malay Peninsula first fought were Indian soldiers, and in addition to the above, did not rate them highly, assessing that "although they should have potential to exhibit a considerable resistance force in forward battles, they lack adequacy in moving battles. In particular,

---

24 "Eiryo Marai Joho Kiroku [British Malaya Information Records]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

25 "Eiryo Marai Joho Kiroku [British Malaya Information Records]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

they are weak against a surprise attack from the flank."[26] Furthermore, by emphasizing the disharmony between the British and other soldiers, one can assume that the comprehensive evaluation of the Malayan garrison was low.

> The evaluation of training of the entire British Army suggested that "Training is of a low level in general, and heavily focused on defense."[27] If we look at this from the perspective of the attack-driven Japanese Army, it would seem to be subdued training. The Army also underestimated the Royal Air Force, stating that "although the qualities of the pilots are relatively good, and although top-grade commercial planes are included among their aircraft, the situation regarding training is lacking."[28]

The Army printed 400,000 copies of a pamphlet called "Surefire Method of Winning the War" for soldiers leaving for the southern front in which the following was written of the British forces.

> Compared to the Chinese Forces the officers of this enemy are westerners while the enlisted men are mostly aborigines (original wording). Hence, there is absolutely no lateral emotional bonding between the troops. The number of aircraft, tanks, automobiles and artillery, is far greater than those of the Chinese Forces, so we must exercise caution. However, not only are there many old units, the men which use this special weaponry are weak soldiers, which negates their usefulness.[29]

In attempting an appraisal of the British forces, the Imperial Japanese Army seems to have assessed that the British soldiers possessed reasonable fighting ability, but that their relationship with the local soldiers was poor, concluding that the British forces in the Far East as a whole were not a significant threat. Furthermore, as stated above, the thorough, detailed information gathering activities from the Malay Peninsula to the Singapore Army was able to grasp the appearance of the region well. Consequently, even in the Singapore Operations which was under consideration in January 1941, it was determined that the possibility of success was high, based on the Malayan Operations.[30] The basic assumption of the Army was that it intended to fight a limited war against the British, due to the divisibility of the British and Americans.

What kind of image then, did the army possess of the US forces? There are no historical records remaining with regard to this, which consolidate this information.[31] Originally, the war against the US was principally one of naval territory. Compared to the Battle of Malaya, the secondary elements in the Philippines Operations at the beginning of the war were strong, which led, it is thought, to a

---

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Imperial General Headquarters, *Necchi Sakusen no Sankou – Kore Dake Yomeba Ikusa wa Kateru* [*Reference on Operations in the Tropics - Surefire Method of Winning the War*], (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

30 John Chapman (ed. and trans.), *The Price of Admiralty, vol. II & III* (Sussex: Saltire Press, 1984), pp. 526-530.

31 Please see the following with regard to Imperial Japanese Army cognizance of America. Fumitaka Kurosawa, *Taisen Kanki no Nihon Rikugun* [*The Japanese Army in the Interwar Period*] (Misuzu Shobo, 2000); Kimitada Miwa, "Taibei Kessen he no Imeji [Image of the Decisive Battle Against America]."

lack of investigation conducted into the US Army.[32]

The Army's view of the US was vague. The American citizens were liberalist, individualist, and would probably tire of a long-term war. The soldiers would not be able to endure shortage and discomfort on the battlefield, like their Japanese counterparts.[33] In this respect, it was similar to the British undervaluation of the Imperial Japanese Army. The issue here is that against an enemy for whom information is lacking, there is likely to be significant scope to incorporate subjective information.

The General Staff office, on the occasion of planning the Philippines Operations, made the following evaluation of US garrisons in the Philippines.

> Approximately 80% of regular military officials, and approximately 40% of soldiers are American, while the others are aborigines (original wording). Although the character of the Americans is generally excellent, they are bothered by tropical climates, have a tendency to relax mind and body, and are lacking in sincerity. The aborigines, while being experienced with the climate and content with a simple diet, have limited fortitude in other areas, as well as a sense of responsibility and so on. Compared to the Americans, their military ability in the ranks below official is notably inferior.[34]

Here too, due to an estimate which provided a poor assessment of the local soldiers, the evaluation of the U.S. garrisons in the Philippines as a whole was rather low. Ultimately, the Army's concern was always the Soviet forces, while even in the Pacific War the immediate enemy was the British forces. Hence, ignorance toward the US garrisons remained unchanged until the commencement of the island battles, beginning with the Battle of Guadalcanal. After the War, General Staff office Operations Bureau member, former-Captain Shinobu Takayama recollected the following.

> As one responsible for operations, I should have more thoroughly investigated the situation regarding the US and Great Britain, and of the US in particular. I should have respected the opinions of the individuals in charge of US and British intelligence within the General Staff office, as well as Japanese officers resident in other places such as those, and other, neutral countries.[35]

Incidentally, since the army was carefully investigating Soviet forces, there was a considerable accumulation of intelligence related to that party, and one sometimes finds evaluations which saw the Soviet forces as a threat. As an assessment of the Soviets, an affirmative evaluation of their overall capability was that "they exhibit flexibility at the roots of their national traits to oppose and overcome the elite German forces, and to continue fighting hard. Whether their fighting spirit will weaken is

---

32 The National Institute for Defense Studies Military History Department, *Senshi Sosho, Hitou Koryaku Sakusen* [*Military History Series, Philippine Capture Operation*] (Asagumo News, 1977), p. 27.

33 Akira Fujiwara, "Nihon Rikugun to Taibei Senryaku [The Japanese Army and Strategies Against America]"; Chihiro Hosoya et al., ed., *Nichibei Kankeishi 2 Rikukaigun to Keizai Kanryo* [*Japanese-American History 2, The Army and Navy and Economic Officials*] (University of Tokyo Press, 1971), p. 13.

34 General Staff Office, "Hitou Sakusen Kiroku Kan Ichi [Philippine Operation Records Volume 1]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

35 Shinobu Takayama, *Sanbo Honbu Sakusenka* [*General Staff Office Operations Bureau*] (Fuyo Shobo, 1985), p. 355.

something worthy of particular attention. Although originally lacking in organizational capability, in the current war the Soviet forces have confirmed that deficiency, and quickly corrected it. They now demonstrate excellent organizational capability, and a readiness for the demands of war."[36] Put in broad terms, the Japanese army's cognizance of the Soviet forces was that they were an aggressive army with strong firepower, in which the fighting spirit of the solders was tenacious.[37]

Commander Seiichi Niimi who at the time was gathering information on Soviet forces in Latvia and Germany, reported the following.

> When looked at in both military and manufacturing terms, the actual capabilities of the Soviet forces are considerable. Although there may not be a disparity of the degree which existed during the Russo-Japanese War, one must see that there is an appreciable difference in national strength which exists at present between Japan and the Soviet Union.[38]

When looked at in this way, we see that the Japanese Army of the time considered the Soviet forces to be their strongest enemy, compared to which, it seems that the US and British forces defending the south were not portrayed as much of a threat. Furthermore, since the Imperial Japanese Army was actually engaged in fighting with Soviet forces in areas such as Nomonhan, the formidableness of those forces was likely to be understood well from first-hand experience.

Since in measuring the performance of its forces, the Japanese Army was thorough, placing importance on psychological factors, it had a natural tendency when judging the war potential of its enemy's armies to do so based on psychological criteria. In the 1939 Battle of Khalkhyn Gol, it was clear that the Japanese Army was late in modernization of its units, in areas such as mechanization. Therefore it is difficult to imagine that the Army would avert its eyes from this point, and lean toward spiritual theory. That way of thinking was evident also in the aforementioned "Surefire Method of Winning the War." The fact remained that even if a side possessed modern ordinance, if the humans using them were poor soldiers, it would not lead to improved war potential. Hence, evaluation of the US and British forces took the form of determining weak points that did not appear in the data and emphasizing them. This included the low morale among local soldiers, and the discord between soldiers of the home country and local region.

(2) Use of Army intelligence in operations in the south

(a) Intelligence activities associated with the Battle of Malaya

In the Southeast Asian region, the Army deployed an attaché in Thailand from 1935, strengthening information gathering relating to Malaysia and Singapore. The Army attaché in Indonesia, together with the Taiwan Area Army, was engaged in the gathering of information in the south.[39] Since Thailand was the only independent nation in Southeast Asia, before the war there were many instances of Japanese bases for intelligence activities being situated in Bangkok. Examples of organization of

36 Imperial Veterans Association Headquarters, "Sogun Joshiki [Common Knowledge Regarding the Soviet Union]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

37 Ibid.

38 Seiichi Niimi, "Showa 16 Nen 7 Gatsu Sogun Heiki oyobi Soren Kogyo ni Kansuru Kansatsu [July 1941, Observations Relating to Soviet Forces Weapons and Soviet Union Manufacturing]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

39 Nakano School Alumni Association, *Rikugun Nakano Gakko* [*the Nakano School*], p. 892.

this kind included the F Kikan (F Agency) and the Minami Kikan (Minami Agency). The man who concentrated intelligence activities in Bangkok was Colonel Hiroshi Tamura, an attaché attached to the consulate there. In this region, which had a strong anti-Japanese bent, Colonel Tamura engaged in investigation into map information, the deployment of British Thai troops and other areas of intelligence for the purpose of the war.[40] In particular, careful investigation was carried out into the route through southern Thailand for the Battle of Malaya, and Kota Bharu, the disembarkation point on the Malay Peninsula.

The department researching Taiwanese forces, in cooperation with the Governor-General in Taiwan and the University of Taipei, Nanpou Association (which had been carrying out continued investigation of the south for a dozen or so years) investigated the military situation of the British forces, map information, hygiene and quarantining, and so on. Based on this investigation, landing training was carried out in Hainan Dao.[41]

Information gathering in the region advanced rapidly from the summer of 1940, when the Army began to become aware of the war against the British. The General Staff office, sent men such as Lieutenant Colonel Kazuo Tanigawa and Captain Teruhito Kunitake to the Malay Peninsula. For two months from January 1941, they investigated the peninsula.[42] The results were left as "Intelligence Report of British Malaya."[43] In them were included detailed map information leading from the Malay Peninsula as far as Singapore, as well as military information. Numbers of garrisons, tanks and gun batteries, and the locations of bunkers were recorded in detail.[44] Of the bunkers situated within the City of Singapore for instance, detailed records were left stating "Thickness weak with low resistance to shells. Blind spots in structure extremely large. Positions exposed. Foundation structure insecure." Detailed plans of the arrangement of garrisons within the city were also compiled. Information such as this was used during the Battle of Malaya.[45]

In addition, the Malay spy agency (F Agency) was born in September 1941 under Major Iwaichi Fujiwara. The purpose of the F Agency was to employ covert operations to break down the Indian soldiers comprising 70% of British Malayan Garrisons, to facilitate the Imperial Japanese Army's Battle of Malaya. In Thailand at the time, a secret organization existed known as the Indian Independence League (IIL). By cooperating with this organization, anti-India espionage was forwarded. Furthermore, the F Agency mediated contact between the leader of the Indian independence movement then staying in Berlin, Chandra Bose, and the IIL. The results of such infiltration and espionage were the surrender to the Japanese side of many Indian soldiers at the time of the Battle of Malaya.

(b) Intelligence espionage associated with the Hong Kong Operation

On 12 October 1941, the Expeditionary Army to China Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Jun Ushiroku gave the order to the 23rd Army to plan the Hong Kong Operation. At the time, the Hong Kong

40 Hiroshi Tamura, "Taikoku Kankei Tamura Bukan Memo [Attaché in Thailand, Colonel Tamura's Memos Regarding Thailand]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

41 The National Institute for Defense Studies, Military History Department, *Senshi Sosho, Mare Shinko Sakusen* [*Military History Series, the Battle of Malaya*] (Asagumo News, 1967), p. 53.

42 Ichiji Sugita, *Joho Naki Senso Shido* [*War Leadership Without Intelligence*] (Hara Shobo, 1985), p. 146.

43 General Staff Office, "Showa Juroku Nen Eiryou Marai Joho Kiroku [1941 British Garrisons in Malaya Information Records]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

Koa Agency (Asia Development Organization) was also ordered to plan the indirect support for the capture. The Koa Agency was a covert organization led by the China expert Lieutenant Colonel Yoshimasa Okada, and its duty was to provide lateral support to the Imperial Japanese Army in its Hong Kong Operation through deception and espionage, and information gathering in Hong Kong. The Koa Agency was born as a nameless organization in early 1941, but the story goes that in the middle of the Hong Kong operations in December of that year, then Chief of Staff for the 23rd Army, Major General Tadamichi Kuribayashi who later spearheaded the command of the Iwo Jima defense, suggested the name: "how about the Koa Agency?"

The order for the plan from the 23rd Army was as follows.

1) Indirect support for the Hong Kong Operations
   (1) Prevent destruction of the main routes into Hong Kong which the British forces are preparing
   (2) Situate signs on the roads to Hong Kong, and situate personnel for guidance
   (3) Obstruct the movement of British forces
2) Internal disruption and espionage
   (1) Destroy power plants, telephone exchanges, water sources and train sheds
   (2) Distribution of anti-British posters, bombing of cinemas etc.

For this plan a variety of espionage equipment was prepared. Among the items were small explosives incorporated into trunks which were manufactured by the military police in Shanghai. Furthermore, small bombs in items such as tobacco tins were produced. However, during the manufacture of the latter, an explosion occurred killing one Russian individual involved in making the bombs. In order to bring these bombs to the required location, staff uniforms were made for certain occupations with a public quality, including power plants, telephone bureaus, water sources and trains. Anti-British posters were put up, and 1,000 hand grenades and 200 pistols were brought into Hong Kong. However, hiding these resources so that they would not be uncovered by the British authorities was of considerable trouble.

The Triads, a local underground organization, was employed in information gathering within Hong Kong, checking things such as the location of British forces, important traffic positions, as well as the location of reservoirs and the security situation. The man active here was a former associate of Okada, a contracted individual named Shigemori Sakata who had studied at Peking University. Since Sakata could freely manipulate the Mandarin language, he assumed the role of a Chinese person named Tian, and became involved with the Hong Kong Triads. In order to gain the Triads' trust, he even officially married a local Chinese woman.

On 8 December, Okada gave the order from the command post in Shenzhen to the Hong Kong side to execute the operation. The first duty of the Koa Agency was to prevent the destruction of the main roads by the retreating British forces. Responsible for this destruction was a section comprised of Indian soldiers. It therefore seemed likely that they could be bribed not to destroy the roads. However, the section charged with the British soldiers had no choice but to prevent the destruction directly by attacking their units. Once the fighting actually began, they were able to stop the destruction in tens of locations seized beforehand. Three points were actually destroyed. Even still, the

destruction was not major, with the roads repaired by engineers with merely an hour's work.

Furthermore, Triads hiding in Hong Kong had already begun to act. Within just eight days, the destruction of Indian barracks, the Kowloon power plant, train sheds, and water supply pipes leading to British bases had been carried out. At the same time, hand grenades were thrown into the cinema. This terrorist activity sent the people of Hong Kong into disarray. According to the recollections of Okada though, there were zero casualties in the cinema. Moreover, warnings in the telephone exchange were firm, so none of the trunk bombs made it in. However, the Koa Agency control of water sources was significant, thus serving as one of the factors encouraging British capitulation on 25 December.[46]

(c) Palembang Operation

On 14 February 1942, 329 Army paratroopers succeeded in attacking the Palembang oil refinery on the island of Sumatra, and gaining control of it at no cost. Again, behind this magnificent operation lay meticulous advance preparation.

First, in April 1941, General Hajime Sugiyama, Chief of the Army General Staff, ordered Lieutenant Colonel Masao Ueda, Senior Staff of the Nakano School, to gather information to facilitate the formulation of a plan for the Palembang Operation. This corresponded with the previous essential elements of information (EEI).

Then, together with Major General Yuujin Kawamata, Commandant of the Nakano School, and Shigeo Okayasu a teacher at the school (specializing in statistics), Colonel Ueda began to investigate the literature, looking into the distribution of oil resources, details regarding output and planned development sites, the supply and demand situation in each major country, as well as oil resource diplomacy, and oil extraction, transport and storage facilities. Eventually, fieldwork was advanced at the oil fields in the Niigata region to investigate oil extraction, and refinement facilities. Furthermore, they succeeded in obtaining aerial photographs of the Palembang oil refinery from private sector companies. These data were analyzed at the Nakano School, and information such as early target detection methods, the internal structure of the refinery and the deployment of troops were compiled into a detailed report which was submitted to the General Staff office.[47]

In this way, a circular intelligence cycle was formed. The Army top brass demanded the information. The information was gathered and analyzed, with the results reported to their customers. They were then used by the 1st Paratroop unit of the Southern Army, the unit which executed the operations.[48]

3. Naval intelligence

(1) Image of the US and Great Britain

Since the Navy measured the war potential of the enemy using factors such as the numbers of

---

46 Yoshimasa Okada, "Honkon Kosaku no Kaiso [Reflections of a Hong Kong Agent]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

47 Nakano School Alumni Association, *Rikugun Nakano Gakko* [*the Nakano School*], p. 491.

48 The term "intelligence cycle" corresponds with Hajime Kitaoka's *Interijensu Nyumon* [*Introduction to Intelligence*] (Keio University Press, 2003). The concept of the IDA (information-decision-action) cycle with regard to the term intelligence cycle, is applied within the Ministry of Defense and Self-Defense Forces. Basically, the intelligence cycle is a concept of information application at the policy and strategy level. The IDA cycle may be considered a concept of information application at tactical and operational level.

battleships and aircraft, it seems they could calculate the enemy's war potential in a relatively objective manner. In the case of the Navy, psychological analysis was not conducted, rather, until the very end they worked to ensure the state of the enemy was judged objectively.

The concern of the Imperial Japanese Navy was always in the US Navy. Directly prior to the Pacific War, the fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy comprised 10 battleships, 10 aircraft carriers, 28 cruisers, 112 destroyers, 65 submarines (totaling approximately 980,000 tons), and 3,300 aircraft. In contrast, the war potential of the US Navy calculated by the Imperial Japanese Navy was 17 battleships, 8 aircraft carriers, 37 cruisers, 172 destroyers, 111 submarines (totaling approximately 1.4 million tons), and 5,500 aircraft. Looking at the full picture, the Imperial Japanese Navy possessed around 70% the marine power of the US Navy.[49] However, the result of taking each others' utilization rates into account derives the war potential of the Imperial Japanese Navy, a figure of 75% compared to the US.

To the Imperial Japanese Navy, the value 70% is important. This is because, based on Lanchester's laws (which the Navy refers to as the N-2 Law), if it has a war potential of 70% compared to the US, then the Imperial Japanese Navy is calculated to be capable of fighting equally with the US and British navies. Put another way, if they take down 70%, there can be no chance of winning. This was the ratio of the Imperial Japanese Navy against the US as it was in 1941. Subsequently, by 1943, the ratio was predicted to fall below 50%, due to the fact that American warship-building capacity was estimated to be greater than three times that of Japan.[50]

As for aircrafts, in 1941, Japan possessed 3,300 units and the US possessed 5,500. It was estimated though, that the US could use around 2,600 in the war against Japan. However, as time passed, this aircraft ratio would turn to a disadvantage for the Japanese, and by 1944, compared to Japan's 12,000 aircraft, the US was predicted to have more than 100,000. Consequently, if Japan were to provoke war, the discrepancy between her and the US was estimated to be at its lowest in 1941. Hence, the words of Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet Isoroku Yamamoto, "In the first half year or year we will put on a fine performance"[51] were based on such an estimation.

This calculation was actually rather rational. Numerically speaking, the Imperial Japanese Navy would be capable of fighting on equal terms with the US Navy for just one year from 1941. However, it was clear from the outset, that in no way could they match the enemy after that.

Furthermore, the Imperial Japanese Navy had to cross swords with the British Navy (or Royal Navy). Since war had already broken out between Great Britain and Germany, the Royal Navy was estimated to have a fleet that it could dispatch to the Far East of roughly 2 battleships, 5 cruisers, 10 destroyers, and 336 aircraft.[52] This was a fairly close estimate to the reality of the situation. Originally, the Imperial Japanese Navy assessment of the Royal Navy was very high in areas such

---

49 2nd Veterans Remaining Work Processing Division, "Showa 16 Nen Kaisen madeno Seiryaku Senryaku Sono Go [1941 Politics and Strategies Until the Start of War, Volume 5]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

50 Ibid.

51 Teiji Yabe, *Konoe Fumimaro* (Jiji Press Ltd., 1986), p. 162.

52 "Kaisenji ni Okeru Nichibei Senryuku Hikaku [Comparison of Japanese and American War Potential at the Start of the War]"; "Showa 15 Nen Ei tai Nichi Sakusen Yoso Heiryoku [Military Force Expected in British Operations against Japan in 1940," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies). In fact, if one considers the war potential of the British forces in the Far East to have been 2 battleships and 362 aircraft, the estimate is fairly correct. JIC(41)11 Scale of Attack on Malaya, Jan. 1941, WO 208/871, PRO.

as tradition and discipline, but it was nevertheless optimistic when it came to the prospect of fighting against the British. This is expressed in words of the 8th Section Chief of the 3rd Department, Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff, Captain Kanyei Chudo.

> We believe that the British Far Eastern Fleet can be crushed with no difficulty. Due to the war in Europe, the Royal Navy is probably unable to dispatch strong reinforcements to the Far East region.[53]

This kind of conviction stemmed from the qualitative superiority of the Imperial Japanese Navy against the Royal Navy. The firing range of the Imperial Japanese Navy's main battleships was longer than that of the British battleships that would be likely to attack the Far East. It was therefore judged that the enemy forces could be attacked from beyond their range.[54] Consequently, the Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff thought it could win in a fight against the British, and eventually came to the conclusion with regard to the fight with the US, which it could fight on equal terms, if only for the first year.

Basically, in contrast to the Army, the Imperial Japanese Navy believed in the concept of the US and UK being inseparable.[55] This was the idea that even if the British were forced to surrender, either way they would ultimately have to fight with the US. Furthermore, during the Southern Operation, the Japanese Navy fleet would have to expose its flank to US territory, namely the Philippines, while in the South China Sea. Such an action could not be strategically permitted. Therefore, the Navy had to keep the war against the US in its mind at all times.

To the Navy, a fight against the British was a realistic war, while one against the US was practically hopeless. No matter the kind of strategies they possessed, failure was inevitable. Rear Admiral Tasuku Nakazawa, chief of the Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff Operations Section who worked in the field with the head of operations, reflected as follows.

> [In the event that Japan attacked both the US and Great Britain simultaneously] Even if we used all of our means to fight, there would be practically no chance of victory. The results of war games have shown that the fleet will be gradually pressed, until eventually all marine traffic is ceased. (omission) Even if we fought a protracted war against the British and the Americans, the fact that we have nothing that could serve as a deciding factor resulting in their surrender was a fatal weakness.[56]

The Operations Bureau, which was the main pillar of the Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff at

53 Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 340.

54 Ibid. p. 339.

55 Please see below for discussions regarding the US-UK being separable or inseparable. Chihiro Hosoya, "Nihon no Eibeikan to Senkanki no Higashi-Ajia [Japanese Views of Britain and America, and East Asia in the Interwar Period];" Chihiro Hosoya ed., *Nichiei Kankeishi 1917 – 1949* [*Japan-Britain History from 1917 – 1949*] (University of Tokyo Press, 1982), pp. 29 – 30; Yu Moriyama, "'Nanshin Ron' to 'Hokushin Ron' ['Discussion about the Advance Southward' and 'Discussion about the Advance North'];" *Iwanami Kouza Ajia / Taiheiyou Sensou 7 Shihai to Bouryoku* [*Iwanami Courses Asia and Pacific War 7 – Control and Disorder*] (Iwanami Shoten, July 2006).

56 Tasuku Nakazawa, "Nakazawa Tasuku Chusho Kaisoshu [Recollections of Rear Admiral Tasuku Nakazawa]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

the time, recognized that there were already no prospects for victory in a fight against the Americans and British. However, this was clear even before consideration by the General Staff. Thus, if we consider the Navy, we find that it was incredibly foolish of it to provoke war with this knowledge. However, the problem was that they had to consider the possibility of an attack being launched by the US.

The conclusion of the Intelligence Bureau in February 1941 was as follows.

> Comparison of the various military forces of Japan and the US after 1944 should lead to confidence in US prospects for victory against the Empire (Japan). Therefore, after that time pressure policies against the Empire will cease to be lukewarm like now. We are expecting the use of force, and therefore should take extremely drastic measures.[57]

The thing the Navy feared the most was the above kind of situation. It was concerned that the discrepancy in war potential between the US and Japan would increase, and that furthermore, Japan's strategic stockpiles, in particular oil, will dry up leading to no possible way to succeed. Ultimately, forceful anti-Japanese measures would be instigated by the US. Therefore, it was inevitable that it would reach the conclusion that if the prospects for victory would disappear as time went on, it would be best to start war as soon as possible.

However, the problem was that although it was possible to fight the Americans and the British on equal terms temporarily, if the war was protracted, then defeat would become inevitable. The one who proposed a solution to this difficult problem was Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. This in fact was the surprise aircraft attack on Pearl Harbor. Furthermore, the Navy was reliant on US public opinion being governed by a sense of war weariness, and German domination in Europe, following the success of the surprise attack. In other words, although Yamamoto suggested a method of striking a tactical blow against the US forces, it did not go as far as presenting a clear solution in the form of a strategic method of resolution.

Perhaps when looked at from a tactical viewpoint, the decision of the Navy was extremely rational. On the other hand, when looked at strategically, the decision to go to war with the US was completely devoid of meaning. As previously mentioned, there never existed a department in the Imperial Japanese Army for judging circumstances from a long-term perspective. Hence, the Navy relied on the groundless assumption that US public opinion would not be able to withstand a long war. Yamamoto seems to have thought that the attack on Pearl Harbor would provide a blow to US public sentiment, but it was soon revealed that the effect of this idea was the complete opposite.[58] It remained insufficient to wager on the spread of war weariness among the American public, and the advance of the German army, while carrying out propaganda and espionage targeting American public opinion, and implementing objective research into the German army.

(2) Attack on Pearl Harbor

The attack on Pearl Harbor represented a milestone in operations intelligence by the Navy, having

---

57 1st Operations Department, Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff, "Jokyo Handan Shiryou [Data for Situation Assessment]."

58 The National Institute for Defense Studies, Military History Department, *Senshi Sosho, Hawai Sakusen* [*Military History Series, Hawaii Operation*] (Asagumo News, 1967), p. 480.

received the direct order from Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet Isoroku Yamamoto, carried out scrupulous tactical planning and training based on thorough information gathering and maintenance of confidentiality, and then keeping the tactical intention a secret until the very end.

In late January 1941, Yamamoto gave an order for the formulation of an operation plan for the attack on Pearl Harbor to 11th Air Fleet Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Takijiro Onishi. In this way, when the top ranks indicated their tactical plan, the chiefs of staff carried out careful operational planning and intelligence gathering, bringing the IDA (information-decision-action) cycle into effect.

Then, the Navy reinforced its information gathering efforts in Hawaii. The most famous part of this was probably Ensign Takeo Yoshikawa of the 3rd Section of the 5th Department (American intelligence) of Navy General Staff who was active in Honolulu as Secretary of the Japanese Consulate in Honolulu Tadashi Morimura. Since Yoshikawa was in poor health, he was enrolled in the Intelligence Bureau as a reserve, but he was hurriedly selected for a post conducting intelligence activities in Hawaii.

Yoshikawa was trained for a few months within Japan, and became active in Hawaii in March 1941. Yoshikawa observed bases of the US Navy such as Pearl Harbor (the anchorage point for the United States Pacific Fleet) and Hickam Air Force Base. He recorded detailed information regarding their deployment and so on. The fact that Yoshikawa was not detained by counterintelligence agencies such as the FBI was due in large to his avoidance of conducting intelligence reports by radio. As stated previously, this was because spies such as Richard Sorge had been caught via radio detection. Instead, Yoshikawa handed detailed records and memos to an officer of the Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff 3rd Section, 5th Department, Minato Nakajima who had come to Hawaii in October, via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Consul-General Nagao Kita.

In October 1941, Navy officers were placed onboard a merchant ship which sailed between Yokohama and San Francisco, the Tatsuta Maru, and the Taiyo Maru which sailed between Yokohama and Honolulu, where they investigated the routes of task force and Pearl Harbor. This investigation was implemented in considerable detail, resulting in detailed intelligence on Hawaii being gathered through on-location observation and questioning.[59]

At the time, the Combined Fleet was attempting to determine which the United States Pacific Fleet was using, Oahu's Pearl Harbor or Maui's Lahaina Anchorage. The above intelligence activities clarified that Lahaina was not being used, helping to narrow down the attack target to Pearl Harbor.[60] In addition to Yoshikawa, the Imperial Japanese Navy made use of the aforementioned Rutland and Kuehn in Hawaiian intelligence gathering. The contribution of these two men to the attack on Pearl Harbor however, remains unclear. Furthermore, the situation regarding vessels anchored at Pearl Harbor was understood in detail back in Tokyo thanks to communications intelligence, while there was also a thorough investigation conducted into the route to Pearl Harbor and climate.

The Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff collated this information, analyzed it, and reflected it in the attack plan for Pearl Harbor at the Combined Fleet headquarters. The confidentiality of the operation was thoroughly maintained; even among naval staff there were only a handful of people who knew of the plan. The fact that the target for attack was Pearl Harbor was not known by a number of

59 Toshihide Maejima, Ei Suzuki "Hawai Houmen Teisatsu Houkoku [Reconnaissance Report on Hawaii]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

60 The National Institute for Defense Studies, Military History Department, *Senshi Sosho, Hawai Sakusen* [*Military History Series, Hawaii Operation*], p. 297.

organizations including the Army, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and even the Prime Minister.

Although there exists a conspiracy theory related to Pearl Harbor that President Franklin Roosevelt sensed the imminent attack on Pearl Harbor, but accepted it and let it happen nowadays, the possibility of this is extremely slim.[61] At the time, US forces were able to decipher the Purple ciphers of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the theory that it was unable to decipher as far as the Naval tactical codes is prominent. Even if they were hypothetically able to read them, since the attack target of the task force was not explicitly stated, it would have been difficult to determine the target as being Pearl Harbor from SIGINT.

Furthermore, there is a theory that the mobile forces heading for Pearl Harbor violated strict orders of radio silence, and used their radios, from which the US forces detected directional measurement. However, thanks to a tactical diary from the mobile forces[62] obtained in 2007 by the National Institute for Defense Studies, Military History Department, it was established that the mobile forces did not emit any electromagnetic waves.

Consequently, the Imperial Japanese Navy plans relating to the attack on Pearl Harbor were concealed fairly strictly. It is no exaggeration to suggest that the success of the attack on Pearl Harbor demonstrated the intelligence capabilities of the Imperial Japanese Navy intelligence. This may be a reiteration, but the success in the attack on Pearl Harbor was significant in the areas of detailed information gathering and planning, and maintaining confidentiality.

4. Problems concerning the intelligence management by the Imperial Japanese Army

(1) Cases of leakage

During the Pacific War, cases of secret information leakage occurred many times within the Navy. For example, cases of codes being read include the Battle of Midway during the war, and the assassination of Admiral Yamamoto (Operation Vengeance), while examples of confidential documents being lost include the January 1942 sinking of the I-124 submarine, and Incident B in April 1944.

When compared with the Army, which possessed counterintelligence agencies such as the military police and its investigative department, one cannot ignore the effects exerted on naval policies and the state of the war by the existence of such organizations. In the case of the Army, counterintelligence activities were relatively effective, and there were no cases of Army codes being deciphered by the Allies until the final stages of the war.

The Battle of Midway is famous as an example of naval operational ciphers being read. However, code-related documentation had already found its way to the Allies from the I-124 submarine which was sunk in January 1942 near northern Australia. As a result, it was clear that concern was mounting with regard to the operational codes of the Navy.[63] However, despite this failure, the Navy fought the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway without enacting any countermeasures.

In the June 1942 Battle of Midway, regardless of the fact that there were signs that codes had been deciphered, the poor sense of counterintelligence on the Japanese side resulted in defeat. In addition

---

61 Please see the following with regard to the conspiracy theory. James Rusbridger, Eric Nave, (translation by Yuji Yunosuke), *Betrayal at Pearl Harbor* (Bunshun, 1991); Robert Stinnett (translation supervised by Sadao Seno) *Day of Deceit the Truth about FDR and Pearl Harbor*, (Bunshun, 2001); etc.

62 3rd Squadron Headquarters, "Daisan Sentai Senji Nisshi [3rd Squadron Diary of Wartime]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

63 Sunao Samejima, *Moto Gunreibu Tsushin Kacho no Kaiso* [*Recollections of a Former Chief of the Navy Signal Division, the Navy General Staff*] (Hibaihin, 1981), pp. 142 – 143.

to the code documentation of the I-boat, the reasons that D Cipher, the tactical code of the Navy, was cracked included the fact that (1) the code used a limited number of random numbers and could be solved logically, (2) renewal of the code documentation were not in time for the operation, and (3) an increase in communications traffic with the operation.[64] By the time of the Battle of Midway, the D Cipher had been fully deciphered.[65]

During the war, confidential documents fell into enemy hands due to accidents and other reasons. As such, it was unavoidable that encoded communications would be deciphered. A more substantial problem is that while there were indications that the confidentiality of the Imperial Japanese Navy had been compromised, thorough investigation of the cause and countermeasures were not implemented. This does not mean that the Navy had completely failed to notice the leak in confidential information. Rear Admiral Ryunosuke Kusaka, who had participated with the assistant chief of staff of the 1st air fleet, stated that "The fact that the planning of the Combined Fleet in relation to the Battle of Midway was leaked to the US side was a major cause of the failure of that operation."[66] In an Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff diary, it was stated that "the enemy had sensed our plan."[67] However, even though these suspicions remained in the Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff, the cause of defeat at Midway was basically considered to be technical operational factors, such as problems in cooperation with supply ships and inadequacy in searching for the enemy. Ultimately, the fact that the Japanese codes had been deciphered was not touched upon.[68]

Certainly, the cause of defeat at the Battle of Midway arose from the accumulation of a number of problems as well as the deciphering of codes. Nevertheless, the problem of code reading must at least be counted among these problems.

The fact that the cause was not thoroughly considered here is linked to the later incident wherein Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet Yamamoto was shot down. The Americans had intercepted and deciphered the Imperial Japanese Navy cipher traffic "the 131755 secret cipher traffic," then after ambushing Yamamoto's craft that had come to inspect the frontline base of Solomon, they shot it down. As one might expect, at this time, suspicions had appeared within the Navy, that their codes could have been intercepted and read by the US.[69] However, a lack of decisive proof resulted once again in no thorough causal investigation being conducted. Colonel Sunao Sameshima, head of the Communications Bureau reflects as follows.

---

64 The more encoded communications are used, the more material is provided to the enemy to decipher. Thus, an increase in hasty use before operations invites the risk of codes being read. In fact, the Ministry of the Navy of Japan's chief of electronic communications expressed this opinion to the chief of the Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff Operations Bureau pointing out that "In the stage of preparation for operations, supply, adjustment, manufacture and repair-related telegrams are being sent in great volumes. Surely this will cause our plan to be exposed." Ibid. p. 147.

65 Please refer to the following with regard to this point. Nagata, Junko, *Ango* [*Codes*] (Diamond Publishing, 1971), pp. 291 – 341; Miyauchi, Kanya, *Shinko Yamanobori Re Ni Maru Hachi* (Rokko Shuppan, 1975), pp. 446 – 457.

66 Ryunosuke Kusaka, "Midoue Kaisen ni Okeru Seikakunaru Nihongawa Kantai Hensei to Honkaisen Sankasha no Kojinteki Iken [Correct Fleet Organization by Japan in the Battle of Midway and the Personal Opinions of Individuals Who Participated in the Battle]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

67 Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff, "Gunreibu Sakusen Nisshi (2) [Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff Operations Diary (2)]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

68 Matome Ugaki, "Senso Roku Sono San [War Diary]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

69 Hiroyuki Agawa, *Shinban Yamamoto Isoroku* [*New Edition Isoroku Yamamoto*] (Shinchosha Publishing, 1969), p. 377.

> This incident was an extremely important one for the Imperial Japanese Navy. Hence, an immediate and detailed investigation was carried out which included the existence or otherwise of the possibility that our encoded telegrams had been deciphered. However, we were unable to find the definitive materials required to deduce that the US side knew of Admiral Yamamoto's inspection tour plan beforehand. Rather, the codes used were very strong and furthermore, the random number charts had only recently been renewed on 1 April, so we assumed that it could not be the case that they were deciphered. On the following day, the 19th, in a broadcast from San Francisco, the Americans simply announced that "in the northern Solomons, US Army aircraft shot down two ground attack craft and two fighters of the Imperial Japanese Army, while we lost one craft." The Japanese side had been leaning toward the judgment that this battle had been a chance occurrence. Consequently, we never thought of taking steps like renewing the code documentation.[70]

The understanding of coded communications expert Sameshima is that it is hard to imagine it was to this extent. But at least the possibility of being deciphered by the US forces should have been pointed out then. However, in the end, even on the occasion of the significant incident of Admiral Yamamoto being shot down, the Navy was unable to straighten itself up. Consequently, such a lapse in counterintelligence attitude appeared even more striking one year later, during Incident B.

Incident B was a case where on 1 April 1944, two flying boats running from Palau in the central Pacific to Davao went down.[71] Onboard the first craft was Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, Fleet Admiral Mineichi Koga, who was killed in the incident. Onboard the second craft was Rear Admiral Shigeru Fukudome Chief of Staff of the Combined Fleet. In a waterproof document case onboard the latter was also Imperial Japanese Navy code documentation, and information on Operation Z, a detailed tactical plan pertaining to an operation to ambush the US. When the two crafts were lost, the whereabouts of this case became unknown.[72] Then Rear Admiral Fukudome and others were captured by local Cebu guerrillas.

Meanwhile, the US side had confirmed a Japanese naval craft making an emergency landing in the sea near Cebu Island, and discovered the confidential documents. They were transported by submarine to Australian Army intelligence, then, once all the documents had been duplicated, the case was floated in the vicinity where the craft had gone down, in order to be discovered by the Japanese side. In the end, the document case was discovered by a native of Cebu Island, who innocently returned it to the Japanese.

The problem here lies in the subsequent response of the Navy. No questions were asked about the secret documentation, as it had been returned unharmed. Instead, it was concerned with the fact that Fukudome and the others who were captured may have violated the "Instructions for Military

---

70 Samejima, *Moto Gunreibu Tsuushin Kachou no Kaisou* [*Recollections of a Former Chief of the Navy Signal Division, the Navy General Staff*], p. 153.

71 Ministry of the Navy of Japan 1st Section, "Kaigun Otsu Jiken Kankei Shoruitotsu [Documentation Related to Navy Incident B]," (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies).

72 Please see the following regarding Incident B. Akira Yoshimura, *Kaigun Otsu Jiken* [*Navy Incident B*] (Bunshun, 1982), pp. 111 – 115; The National Institute for Defense Studies, Military History Department, *Senshi Sosho, Nansei Homen Kaigun Sakusen Dai Ni Dan Sakusen Iko* [*Military History Series, Naval Operations in the Southwest 2nd Stage Operations Onwards*] (Asagumo News, 1972), p. 380.

Personnel," and suffered the shame of being taken prisoner. At the time, the naval staff engaged in a long dispute regarding the treatment of Fukudome, rather than the confidential documentation. Eventually, since the ones that caught him were a local guerrilla group and not a regular army, it meant that they were not officially prisoners of war. This theory led to Fukudome and the others avoiding punishment. On the contrary, the Imperial Japanese Navy concealed the facts, and soon after promoted Fukudome to Chief of the 2nd Air Fleet.

This kind of Japanese response is problematic in that it falls short of a level expected of counterintelligence. The seriousness of the fact that confidential paperwork had gone missing on the battlefield was not considered in any way. Commander Chikataka Nakajima who was a specialist in communications within the Navy recalls that "the greatest deficiency in our Navy's coding plan was inadequate consideration of the fact that our code charts could fall into enemy hands." [73]

The weak awareness of counterespionage on the part of the Imperial Japanese Navy at the time, and the lack of a self-cleansing function caused a number of problems to arise. When we consider the effects exerted on subsequent naval strategies, they were all serious. Even if one of the codes were taken, the arrogance that "our codes cannot be deciphered" meant that little labor was put into counterintelligence work.

(2) Problems in the Intelligence Sharing

In the latter half of the war, Imperial Japanese Army intelligence reached a point of almost complete absence of function. Although it had been suggested that Army codes were being deciphered, a more serious reason for this was the fact that it relied on its own judgment in operations, barely placing any importance on information from its intelligence department. When the operations and policy departments began to handle information, the amount of suitable information gathering and analysis carried out increased no matter what, so there were many cases of an objective grasping of the situation becoming impossible. Hence, these kinds of cases occurred frequently in the latter half of the Pacific War.

For example, in April 1944, the naval Intelligence Bureau determined that an attack target of the US Navy was the Mariana Islands, focused on Saipan, and that the time of the attack was from May to June. This judgment of the situation was precise, but the general decision of the Operations Bureau ignored the Intelligence Bureau's determination of the Philippine attack, and the north New Guinea and west Caroline Islands attacks by the US. In actuality, it was the judgment of the Intelligence Bureau which was correct.

The impression of the Tasuku Nakazawa chief of operations staff at the time was that "Mariana would probably come someday, but we never thought it would be in June." Captain Chikao Yamamoto chief of the Operations Bureau similarly stated that "It is not that we thought Mariana would not happen at all. We just never assumed it would come that early."[74] There must have been capable staff present in the Operations Bureau, and yet since operations and intelligence were completely different domains, even if the Operations Bureau conducted information analysis and situational judgment, it had a tendency to do so in an amateurish manner.

Famous among problems of this kind are the misrecognition of military results in the Aerial Battle

---

73 "Ougi Kazuto [Ougi Kazuto Document]," (Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room, National Diet Library).

74 Yuzuru Sanematsu, *Nichibei Joho Senki* [*Military History of Japanese-US Intelligence*], p. 236.

of Taiwan-Okinawa. The Aerial Battle of Taiwan-Okinawa was an air battle between Japan and the US which ran from 12 to 16 October 1944. Japanese air power suffered a crippling blow in the fight, but Imperial General Headquarters accepted reports from the site at face value, subsequently announcing crushing victory, sinking 19 aircraft carriers (the number of U.S. aircraft carriers participating in the operation was only 17) and 4 battleships, impressing the whole of Japan. If in fact this result were true, it would mean practically complete annihilation of the U.S. aircraft carrier force in the West Pacific. In reality, not a single aircraft carrier was sunk. The exaggerated results were due to the reports of inexperienced crew members in the field, and the fact that the commanders who received those reports failed to conduct confirmation work.

According to records of intercepted communications and a report on the war situation by the special information department, it was clear in fact, that both enemy aircraft carriers and battleships were in good health.[75] As one might expect, the central officers including 2nd Air Fleet commander Rear Admiral Fukudome had not yet achieved any significant war results at that point. Even still, it appears that they assumed four or five aircraft carriers had been sunk. Following that line of judgment, Sho Ichi Gou Operation, positioned as a fleet battle between Japan and the US, was put into operation. This resulted in devastating damages being incurred by the Imperial Japanese Navy at Leyte Gulf.[76]

Put another way, one might say that this kind of distorted reading of the situation came from the necessity of putting Sho Ichi Gou Operation, a decisive battle against the US Navy, into operation. In order to execute Sho Ichi Gou Operation, the US aircraft carriers could not be in good condition. It may seem an extreme suggestion, but it seems plausible that a certain mentality was in effect, which assumed the operation could not be executed, unless a number of ships were sunk.

In contrast to the expectations of the Operations Bureau, the naval Intelligence Bureau was prudent in its judgment of the results gleaned from the Aerial Battle of Taiwan-Okinawa. Sanematsu recalls that "We judged that we at least had sunk one aircraft carrier and battleship.[77] However, as usual, such judgment by the Intelligence Bureau was not reflected. The Chief of Staff of the Combined Fleet, then Captain Atsushi Ooi, reported the following regarding the state of affairs.

> (The 5th Section of the 3rd Department of the Navy General Staff) Section Chief (Captain Kaoru Takeuchi), and a senior staff member (Commander Yuzuru Sanematsu) spoke together in agitation. "That lot in the Operations Bureau are inexcusable. It is madness (original wording) to refuse to listen to a word we tell them, and then say that the US mobile forces suffered a crushing defeat. We cannot deal with it, because those crazy men are behaving so arrogantly. (omission)" It seemed that their resentment toward the Operations Bureau, which continually ignored information, was expressed strongly and without restraint.[78]

This difference in thinking between the Operations and Intelligence Bureaus reached a peak with

---

75 1st Operations Department, Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff, "Jokyo Handan Shiryo [Data for Situation Assessment]."

76 The National Institute for Defense Studies, Military History Department, *Senshi Sosho, Kaigun Shogo Sakusen (1)* [*Military History Series, Navy Shogo Operation (1)*] (Asagumo News, 1977), pp. 713 – 729.

77 Yuzuru Sanematsu, *Nichibei Joho Senki* [*Military History of Japanese-US Intelligence*], p.232.

78 Atsushi Ooi, *Kaijo Goeisen* [*Marine Guard Battle*] (Koyosha, 1953), p. 229.

the end of the war. The Operations Bureau was working out the US forces' war potential for invading Japan based on exaggerated results from front-line troops, of the kind observed in the Aerial Battle of Taiwan-Okinawa, while the Intelligence Bureau was producing information based on communications intelligence and publicly disclosed information on the US side. Consequently, the judgment of the Intelligence Bureau always estimated the scale of the US forces more fairly than the Operations Bureau. However, the judgment of the situation by the Intelligence Bureau was not accepted, since it would affect the fighting spirit of the forces.[79]

In addition, the Intelligence Bureau drew criticism of the following kind from the operations staff, when conservatively calculating reports of war results by the Kamikaze Suicide Bombing.

> The men of the Intelligence Bureau were not in the field of action, and they did not actually see the results. It is inexcusable for them to still comment on war results, ignoring the reports of the Operations Bureau.[80]

Perhaps, it would not have been that difficult to judge the sinking of aircraft carriers and battleships if it had been possible to accurately carry out the actual gathering of intelligence. If it were understood through sources such as intercepted communications and newspapers, that there were vessels operating which should have been sunk, then the misrecognition of war results would have been clear. According to the situational judgment by the Operations Bureau, the US aircraft carrier *Lexington* had been sunk six times, and the *Saratoga* four times. Even the Emperor showed candor when discussing the excessively careless reports with Admiral Koshiro Oikawa Chief of the Navy General Staff, stating that "If I am not mistaken, this sinking of the *Saratoga*, I believe, is the fourth such time."[81]

5. Conclusion

When we take an overview of Imperial Japanese Army intelligence in the early stages of the Pacific War, it becomes clear that both organizations gathered a considerable amount of information and utilized it in operations. Consequently, the "carelessness of the Allied Forces" spoken of by the US and Great Britain need not necessarily be thought of as having led to the tactical victories of the Imperial Japanese Army.

However, such application of intelligence by the Imperial Japanese Army gradually deteriorated as the war progressed. By the latter half of the war, it had almost completely lost functionality. As highlighted in this report, the reason for this lies in counterintelligence issues such as the deciphering of codes, and in the failure to share strategic information well, both within and between the Army and Navy.

These problems could potentially serve as a topic for consideration by the current Ministry of Defense and Self-Defense Forces. In 2002, the Self-Defense Forces Act (1954 Law No. 165) was amended, enabling the imposition of sentences up to five years for individuals who disclose defense secrets. Subsequently, however, cases of information leakage are still occurring. Further consideration of security systems is therefore required.

79 "Imai Shuki [Imai's Private Notes]."
80 Yuzuru Sanematsu, *Nichibei Jouhou Senki* [*Military History of Japanese-US Intelligence*], p. 228.
81 Ibid., p. 229.

There remains scope to improve the problems which exist in information sharing. Even when they were driven into a situation like the one at the close of the Pacific War, the Army and Navy failed to share information, so perhaps this problem can be considered a difficult one that is unique to Japan. The key to promoting information exchange is to shake off this sense of sectionalism, and build a cross-organizational relationship of cooperation. Those participating in information duties, regardless of uniform or business suit, should endeavor to always share information, as persons responsible for the same information duties.