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## JAPANESE INTENTIONS TOWARD AUSTRALIA (1939–42)

DCS Sissons

### Editors' note

The Australian War Memorial (AWM) commissioned David Sissons to write this 1997 essay as a part of the development project for a new Second World War gallery, which opened in 1999. Peter Stanley was the head of the AWM's Military History Section and the project's concept leader. Stanley asked Sissons to produce a scholarly assessment of Japanese intentions towards Australia during the Second World War and his resulting historical interpretation of the issue was included on one of the gallery's interpretive boards.

In this essay, Sissons explains how the Japanese military proposed and rejected the idea of invading Australia in mid-1942, and argues that Japan did not subsequently plan to invade and occupy the mainland. Yet, the Australian public's belief in Japan's plan to invade Australia remained prevalent for many decades. The myth was finally debunked during fierce public debates in the early 2000s, and Stanley published *Invading Australia: Japan and the battle for Australia* in 2008. Stanley credits Sissons with inspiring him to pursue the topic. This essay again demonstrates Sissons' thorough research and comprehensive review of Japanese source materials.

Fortunately, enough is available from Japanese sources to demonstrate what Japan's objectives were in the Second World War and what part the Japanese planners saw for Australia in the achievement of those objectives.

Japan's objectives were clarified in mid-1940 in the weeks following Hitler's conquest of the Low Countries and France and the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk. Japan took this opportunity to conclude the Tripartite Alliance with Germany and Italy on September 27th. The purpose of this was to deter the United States from interfering while Japan: (i) achieved victory in her war with China; (ii) secured the oil, rubber and other resources of the Netherlands East Indies; (iii) organised Asia and the South Seas into a Japanese sphere of interest. In pursuit of the first objective she then proceeded to cut off China's sources of arms and materials by placing an occupation force in French Indo-China and by requiring Britain to close the Burma Road. In pursuit of the second she despatched a negotiating mission to Batavia demanding exclusive prospecting concessions and contracts that would enable her to purchase there three-fifths of her overall oil requirements. The importance of this was that Japan was dependent for oil on her potential enemies and, without oil for her armed services, lacked both the capacity to wage war and the diplomatic power that this conferred.

The breadth of Japan's ambitions are revealed in the brief for negotiating the Alliance adopted at the Four Ministers' (Prime Minister, Army, Navy and Foreign Affairs) conference of September 4th. In this Japan's sphere of interest was described as extending to 'the islands of the Pacific held by Germany in 1914, French Indo-China and France's Pacific islands, Thailand, Malaya, British Borneo, the Netherlands East Indies, Burma, Australia, New Zealand, India, etc.'<sup>1</sup> It is clear, therefore, that Japan hoped to include Australia within her 'Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere'. It is also clear, however, that the plans in accordance with which Japan went to war in December 1941 did not include the capture of Australia, New Zealand or India.

The strategic policy for the conduct of the war adopted by Cabinet, General Staff Headquarters and Naval Staff Headquarters at the Liaison Conference of November 15th (1941) commences with the statement:

Our policy is: by quickly destroying American, British and Dutch bases in the Far East to establish self-reliant defence; by the adoption of more vigorous measures against the Chiang Kai-shek regime to hasten its fall: in co-operation with Germany and Italy, to defeat Britain first and destroy America's will to continue the struggle.

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<sup>1</sup> International Military Tribunal for the Far East, Exhibit 541, Item 3, 'Decisions made by the Conference of the Prime-Minister and the ministers of War, Navy and Foreign Affairs on 4 September 1940 ...', Cited in H Feis, *The Road to Pearl Harbor* (Princeton, 1950), p. 114.

The very minor place occupied by Australia and India in this strategy is made apparent in the portion of this document in which the means of first defeating Britain are spelt out:

Japan, Germany and Italy will act together to defeat Britain first. To this end Japan will: (i) by political tactics and the destruction of commerce sever the connection between the United Kingdom and India and Australia and cause them to revolt; (ii) hasten the independence of Burma and thereby stimulate India to Independence.<sup>2</sup>

## The limits of Phase 1 Operations

The orders, ‘Outline of overall operational plan’, issued by General Staff Headquarters to Commander-in-Chief Southern Expeditionary Force at this time indicate clearly the limits of the operations to be undertaken.

*Aim* — The object of operations in the Southern Region is to destroy the principal American, British and Dutch bases in East Asia and to occupy and secure the key areas of the region. The area we plan to occupy in these operations consists of the Philippines, Guam, Hong Kong, Malaya, Burma, Sumatra, Borneo, the Celebes, the Bismarck Archipelago, Dutch Timor, etc.

*Method* — With close co-operation between the Army and the Navy operations will commence simultaneously in the Philippines and Malaya to complete the mission in the shortest possible time<sup>3</sup>

It was pursuant to the above plan that an invasion force of brigade group strength (‘South Seas Force’) supported by 7th Fleet landed at Rabaul on January 23rd (1942).

The operations in the Pacific and South-East Asia progressed so smoothly that Naval Staff Headquarters sought the approval of General Staff Headquarters to enlarge the scope of the plan to include the occupation of points in Papua/New Guinea and the Solomons. Their reasoning was as follows:

In order to make secure the occupation of the Bismarck Archipelago region, we should make Rabaul the main base for air, sea and land forces and occupy as advanced bases Port Moresby in the south and Tulagi in the east to forestall the enemy’s sea-borne counter-attack. Accordingly, the major portion of the

2 Resolutions of 69th Liaison Conference, 15 November 1941, reproduced in S Takagi, *Taiheiyo Kaisenshi* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1959), pp. 186–89. For translations of the proceedings of these conferences see N Ike, *Japan’s Decision for War: Records of the 1941 Policy conferences* (Stanford: University Press, 1967).

3 Reproduced in T Hattori, *Daitōa Sensō* (Tokyo: Masu Shobō, 1953), vol. 1, pp. 299–307. An English translation of this work, T Hattori, *The Complete History of the Greater East Asia War* (Tokyo: US 500th Military Intelligence Group, 1953) is available on microfilm at the Australian War Memorial.

Navy's air strength allotted to operations in the Southern theatre should be transferred to this area and to the Marshalls in readiness to destroy the American counter-offensive.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly on February 2nd agreement was reached that, in order to sever communications with the Australian mainland and to secure command of the sea to the north-east of Australia, the Army and Navy should together promptly capture Lae and Salamaua, and thereafter Port Moresby if possible, and that the Navy, either alone or with the Army, should seize any opportunity to establish an air base at Tulagi.<sup>5</sup> Lae and Salamaua were duly occupied on March 7th, Tulagi on May 3rd. The force to occupy Port Moresby set out from Rabaul on May 4th but as a result of the Battle of the Coral Sea was forced to return there.

## The Naval Staff's Australian proposals

The Phase 1 operations were substantially completed with the surrender of the Netherlands East Indies on March 9th (1942). Naturally, planning for Phase 2 had been under way throughout Phase 1.

In the 1960s the authors of the official history of the Japanese Navy in the Pacific War interviewed the two officers principally concerned in the Navy's contribution to the planning of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 operations, R/Adm. Fukudome (Director, Operations Division, Naval Staff Headquarters 10/4/41 – 15/6/43) and Capt. Tomioka, who headed Fukudome's Operations Section 7/10/40 – 20/1/43. Both were critical of their own and the Army's thinking in the period preceding the outbreak of hostilities. Engrossed in the task of planning the complicated and large-scale initial operations, they had given inadequate attention to the problem, how to make success in the Phase 1 operations contribute positively to bringing the war to an end. They had, accordingly, to address their minds to this after operations had actually begun. They went to war undecided about how far they intended to advance.<sup>6</sup>

In November (1941), when the plans for Phase 1 had been sent to Combined Fleet for their comments, the latter had enquired how the Naval Staff proposed to make secure the gains acquired in Phase 1. According to Tomioka, the Naval Staff's response had been that, although they had not given the matter careful thought, they desired to destroy, if they could, the enemy's strategic points in: (i) East New Guinea,

4 *Senshi Sōsho* (Tokyo: Asagumo, 1970), vol. 35 [Official War History: Army Division of Imperial Headquarters — Part 3 (to April 1942)], p. 353 citing recollections of Cdr Miyo (Senior SO Air, Operations Division, Naval Staff Headquarters, 1940–42).

5 Imperial Headquarters, Army: Shi [Direction] no. 1915 of 2 Feb. 42 reproduced in *Senshi Sōsho*, 1970, pp. 334–35.

6 *Senshi Sōsho* (Tokyo: Asagumo, 1975), vol. 80 [Official War History: Naval Division of Imperial Headquarters/ Combined Fleet – Part 2 (to June 1942)], p. 296.

New Britain, Fiji, Samoa, etc.; (ii) the Aleutians and Midway; (iii) the Andamans; (iv) the Australian area. When Combined Fleet replied that not just destruction, but occupation, was necessary, the Naval Staff had agreed on the formula 'destruction or occupation'.<sup>7</sup> In retrospect, Fukudome and Tomioka felt that, to the extent that the Naval Staff had before the outbreak of hostilities considered subsequent strategy, their favourite concept for Phase 2 operations had been the capture of some strategic points in northern Australia and on the lines of communication between Australia and the United States.<sup>8</sup> Their argument was that Australia would become a base for air and submarine attacks threatening the areas gained in Phase 1 and for the enemy's counter-offensive. Because of northern Australia's isolation it would be difficult for the enemy to reinforce it. They could therefore capture strategic points there relatively cheaply, move in their planes, and from there strike at the bases from which the enemy's counter-offensive would be launched.<sup>9</sup>

It was in the weeks immediately following the outbreak of hostilities that the Naval Staff developed their thinking with greater precision. They considered that America's losses in capital ships at Pearl Harbor dramatically increased her need of Australia as the base for the counter-offensive. They also now, belatedly, gave thought to the fundamental strategic problem: the capture and occupation of South-East Asia provided Japan with the resources with which to fight but it did not threaten the capacity of Britain and America to fight or enlarge their fighting power. Time was on the side of the Allies and what Japan needed was a means to bring the war to an end. The Naval Staff now reinforced their preference for action against Australia with the argument that to force Australia to surrender would be a very direct contribution to the accepted strategy of defeating Britain first. They therefore proposed that, in addition to points in northern Australia, points in north-east Australia should also be captured. This together with operations against Australia's lines of communication with America and the destruction of the enemy's naval forces in the Australian region would cause Australia to sue for a separate peace.<sup>10</sup> The loss of Australia could, they argued, bring about the surrender of Great Britain.

By about December 20th (1941) Tomioka had conveyed these views to his opposite number in the Army's Directorate of Military Operations at General Staff Headquarters and learnt that the Army was opposed to them.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless the Naval Staff persisted and on January 4th explained to General Staff Headquarters this approach together with others being considered by Combined Fleet such as the capture of Ceylon or the capture of Hawaii.<sup>12</sup> Of these the Naval Staff continued to prefer the Australian operation. They argued that the Phase 2 operations should

7 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1975, p. 299.

8 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1975, p. 296.

9 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1975, p. 307.

10 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1975, p. 308.

11 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1975, p. 312.

12 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1975, p. 314.

commence with it and that it was the only plan available that would contribute to bringing the war to a speedy conclusion. They argued that, if the areas of Australia to be occupied were limited to northern Australia and the northern part of the east coast and that if this was co-ordinated with an attack by the Navy on strategic points on the east coast and on the Australian fleet, then only three divisions would be required to capture and hold the areas concerned.<sup>13</sup> This the Army would not accept. According to its calculations, operations in Australia would require at least 10 divisions and 200,000 tons of merchant shipping and were therefore, in the situation then prevailing, completely out of the question. The Army, however, acknowledged that in order to defend vital areas of the newly acquired possessions it was necessary to control northern Australia. In an entry in the War Diary of the Director of Military Operations (DMO) dated December 6th (two days before the commencement of hostilities) Darwin is included among the places where, after the completion of Phase 1, forces should be deployed for the purpose of defence. Another diary entry also shows that on January 23rd a temporary lodgement at Darwin to destroy installations there was under consideration.<sup>14</sup>

On January 26th at the planners' level the Army agreed to the Navy's proposal that Samoa, Fiji, and New Caledonia, key points on the lines of communication between America and Australia, be captured. The Naval Staff, however, continued to press for operations on the Australian mainland. The debate increased in intensity when on February 4th the Prime Minister directed urgent discussions to be undertaken to enable a Liaison Conference promptly to agree on 'Future strategic guidance' for Phase 2 operations.

From the records of various participants it is evident that the Naval Staff, in the discussions with the Army, continued to press its Australian proposal as the preferred option.

The War Diary of the Army division of Imperial Headquarters contains the following entries for conferences between the two Services:

*February 8th.* Conference at 1000 hrs in the General and Flag Officers Conference Room at which representatives of Army, Navy and Foreign Affairs discuss the proposed list of topics for 'Future Strategic Guidance'.

The Navy, who are aiming at Australia are not happy ...

*February 14th.* On the subject whether or not the existing plan for operations was sufficient we expended much effort restraining Navy's simplistic view that it was insufficient — in other words, in restraining their dash to Australia.

<sup>13</sup> *Senshi Sōsho*, 1975, p. 312.

<sup>14</sup> *Senshi Sōsho*, 1975, p. 314.

*February 22nd.* Difficulty of reconciling our overriding principle of ‘resilience of national defence capacity’ [i.e. sufficient reserve capacity for flexible response to any likely enemy move in any theatre?] and Navy’s proposed advance to Australia, which would extend our deployment and prevent us making any move in Manchuria ...

*February 25th.* ... No agreement yet reached on whether to include the India and Australia issues in our plans. Each side merely reiterated its existing position.<sup>15</sup>

## The reasons for the Army’s opposition

An invasion of Australia would have been quite inconsistent with the basic principle of the Army’s strategy for future operations. These are set out in a brief for the DMO by his Operations Section dated January 20th (1942).

1. We should establish an impregnable position in this war by bringing to a successful conclusion our plan for Southern operations, securing the area in which operations have been conducted and establishing self-sufficiency.
2. In order to bring the war to a speedy end our political and military strategy towards enemy countries should be: (a) to pick off the Allies one by one; (b) to defeat Great Britain and destroy America’s will to fight; (c) to cause China to make a separate peace; (d) to make our best efforts to avoid war with Russia while at the same time making preparations for such an eventuality.
3. By conserving and expanding the defence potential of the nation we should build up the capacity both to endure a long war and break up the enemy’s counter-offensive.<sup>16</sup>

The Army’s reluctance to extend the offensive in the Pacific and its preference for operations in the Indian Ocean are spelt out in the following brief for the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) or discussions that he had with the Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) on January 30th.

Although at the end of the Southern operations it is desirable to apply effort to conducting operations to hasten the war’s end, we must nevertheless give particular emphasis to establishing quickly self-sufficiency and to increasing the resilience of the nation’s defence potential. We should bear this in mind when considering the occupation of further territory and place limits on this lest we become bogged down in a profitless war of attrition. Furthermore, in Southern operations after the end of Phase 1 it is absolutely essential always to have in mind the situation on the Manchurian border. In so far as our aims

<sup>15</sup> *Senshi Sōsho*, 1970, pp. 471–73, 477.

<sup>16</sup> *Senshi Sōsho*, 1970, p. 339.

lay weight on the defeat of Great Britain, operations in the Indian Ocean are important. Britain and America are building up their strength. It is greatly to be hoped that our Navy will concentrate its strength in that area.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to these questions of principle, the Army advanced specific objections against conducting operations in Australia.

In a communication to the CNS dated February 12th the CGS contested the Navy's claim that it was possible to conduct limited operations in Australia without fear of their escalating into full-scale operations throughout the continent:

Australia can be regarded as a very large base from which Britain and America can mount their counter-offensive against us and it is essential that we preempt this. But, if we were to conduct operations in part of Australia without a plan to deal with Australia as a whole, this could involve us in a war of attrition on that front which could progressively escalate in a piecemeal fashion into a profitless full-scale war. Accordingly we must eschew operations for the capture of part of the country that do not form part of a plan to deal with the whole continent.

To preempt the counter-offensive it is essential that we prevent troops and materiel being brought into Australia. It is considered that the best way of doing this would be to occupy places in the Pacific such as Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia.<sup>18</sup>

The most detailed statement of the Army's objections is given in the notes taken by Cdr Sanagi of the views expressed by the Army's spokesman at a conference between the Army and the Navy's Operations sections on February 27th:

The capture of Australia is not an absolute requirement for the prosecution of the war. It would be useful; but it would not be a death blow to America and England. Nor would it contribute much to our self-sufficiency.

To capture it would require at least 10 divisions and it would be impossible for us to find these. We put Australia's military strength at 300,000 Caucasian troops at present and at 600,000 on full mobilisation. In our operations to date the strength of our forces relative to that of the enemy has been: in Malaya 130,000:70,000, in the Philippines 75,000:100,000, in the Netherlands East Indies 50,000:70,000. We have not sufficient troops to put against 600,000 in Australia. If we put sufficient troops into Australia, we should be in danger in the North [i.e. on the Manchurian frontier]. The operation would require 2 million tons of merchant shipping — perhaps more because of the long distances involved.

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17 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1970, p. 344.

18 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1970, p. 470.

In short, the Army regards the Java operations as the end point of our advance. If we extend further we shall lose our flexibility of response. Beyond there, we are able to do no more than inflict temporary damage.

We have reached the limit in our mobilisation of resources and manpower. One must wage war on a scale that accords with one's national resources. One must remember Frederick the Great's principles of war. The one thing that is vital is that we are ready in the North. We have no intention of attacking there. But if war broke out in the North when Japan had entered the final stage of the present conflict, we should have no prospect of victory. There is the danger that in such circumstances America and Britain would put pressure on the Soviets and act in the North.<sup>19</sup>

This minimum force considered necessary — 10 divisions — was only one division less than the entire force used in the southern operations (i.e. from the Philippines westwards to and including Burma). Similarly, the shipping considered necessary, 2 million tons, was almost as much as the whole quota available for the Southern operations. Of Japan's 6 million tons of shipping the Liaison Conference had in November allocated to the Army for the southern operations 2.1 million tons for four months, 1.7 million for the fifth month, 1.65 million for the sixth, 1.5 million for the seventh, and from mid-July only 1 million. This allocation could be increased only by cutting into the 1.8 million allotted to the Navy and the 3 million required to sustain industrial production. Lack of shipping had already demonstrated its restricting effect on operations. The Army component for the Java invasion force had to be scaled down because, in the event, of the 870,000 tons of shipping allocated, only 670,000 was available. (The deficiency was the result, not of shipping losses, but of the acceleration of the Java and Burma operations resulting from the unexpected ease of Japan's victories. Certain transport tasks that were to have been undertaken in sequence had, in fact, to be performed simultaneously).<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the reference to Russia was not added merely to strengthen the argument. To the General Staff the security of the northern frontier was at all times the primary concern. This is illustrated by the size of the Japanese Army in Manchuria, which was increased from five divisions in 1937 to eight in 1938, nine in 1939, 12 in 1940, and 13 in 1941.<sup>21</sup> When the Head of the Operations Section in the Operations Directorate, Col Hattori, had on January 30th briefed the Minister for the Army, Tōjō (concurrently Prime Minister), on current planning, Tōjō had commented that on the completion of Phase 1 five divisions should suffice for southern operations and had stressed that immediate thought must be given to the state of readiness in the north.<sup>22</sup> There were many who took with a grain of salt the General Staff's

19 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1970, p. 475.

20 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1970, pp. 345–47.

21 Hattori, 1953, vol. 1, Table 6, p. 314.

22 *Senshi Sōsho*, 1970, p. 342.

protestations that its aim was to avoid hostilities there and believed that its real purpose was to have a large uncommitted force in readiness to invade Siberia as soon as the German spring offensive in the Caucasus achieved success.<sup>23</sup>

When the debate between the proponents of continuing the offensive in the southern region and those who insisted on going on the defensive ended in deadlock among the planners, it was referred for resolution to a higher level — to an inter-service conference at which the Army was represented by the DMO at General Staff Headquarters (Maj.-Gen. Tanaka) and the Head of the Military Affairs Bureau at the Army Ministry (Lt-Gen. Mutō), and the Navy by the Director of the Operations Division at Naval Staff Headquarters (V./Adm. Fukudome) and the Head of the Naval Affairs Bureau at the Navy Ministry (V./Adm. Oka). This assembled on March 4th at the Navy Minister's official residence to agree on a report on the principles of future strategy for submission to the Liaison Conference. This meeting commenced with each side reiterating its established position. The Navy argued that now was the time to inflict a decisive blow against American naval forces, to destroy the bases for her counter-offensive and to act against any signs of a counter-offensive whenever and wherever appearing. The Army argued that to consider that they had reached the pursuit phase of war was complacently to underestimate America's armed strength and that to embark on strategic pursuit and seek a decisive battle with the enemy's main force would be an act of recklessness. [The Army continued], 'The scale of operations should not exceed the limits of our military and national resources. To place the enemy on the defensive and to nip his counter-offensives in the bud we must, of course, maintain our offensive stance; but we must eschew long distance attacks such as Australia or Hawaii.' The correct policy for Phase 2 operations, the Army contended, was to stand on the strategic defensive on the Pacific front and by means of necessary tactical offensives dominate the western Pacific and make Greater East Asia impregnable.

At this meeting the Navy by and large accepted the Army's arguments. A strategic policy along these lines was accordingly tendered to the Liaison Conference on March 7th and adopted by it. The Navy had abandoned its proposal for operations on the Australian continent.<sup>24</sup>

On March 19th the CGS tendered a report to the throne on future operations. The relevant passages read as follows:

*Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia.* These are important points on the lines of communication between Australia and America and important bases for the enemy's counter-offensive from the south-east. Accordingly, their capture will be extremely valuable both strategically and politically in making the Southern

23 S Takagi, *Taiheiyō Kaisenshi* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1959), p. 48.

24 Takagi, 1959, pp. 512–13.

Region impregnable and in progressively isolating Australia. As an extension of our existing plan of Southern operations we shall be able to take them at some suitable time after June with a force of about nine battalions under the direct command of Imperial Headquarters. This is the subject of joint study between us and the Navy.

*Australia.* This is the largest base from which to mount a counter-offensive that remains in Allied hands. Its capture therefore would render our new order in Greater East Asia unshakeable and would be an effective step towards bringing Britain and America to submission. The problem, however, is whether this is possible. Its capture would require a large force and, from the Army's standpoint, to throw in such large forces could prejudice the resilience of our national defence capacity and would, in the present circumstances where the threat in the North continues unabated, be extremely dangerous. Furthermore, to throw in forces of such magnitude in the Southern area could lead to the weak points in our overall national defence being revealed. It could bring down a Soviet attack upon us. It follows that we should deal with the Australian question when necessity demands it and after our anxiety regarding the Soviets has been resolved, after the Chungking regime has surrendered, and after the situation regarding such matters has markedly improved. For the present we consider the limit of our activities against Australia to be the operations in the Fiji region referred to in the preceding paragraph and intensifying the pressure on Australia by the Navy's destruction of commerce and coastal raids and destruction. In addition we are examining whether it may be necessary, depending on circumstances, to make temporary lodgments at strategic points in northern Australia — particularly Darwin and suchlike places.<sup>25</sup>

These discussions and decisions were naturally handled by the Japanese with the utmost secrecy and, it would appear, did not become known to Allied intelligence organisations.<sup>26</sup>

25 Takagi, 1959, pp. 528–29.

26 The Japanese refused to impart such information even at the highest level to their Axis partner. Allied signals intelligence intercepted and decrypted the following report of what transpired at a meeting between the German Ambassador and the Japanese Foreign Minister on April 13th:

Otto said that he would like to ask whether Japan's future attacks were to be centered in India or Australia, and also that the recent Japanese attacks on Ceylon would indicate to him that Japan was doing this in order to interfere with British–Indian relations. Judging these operations he said he was thinking that probably the former.

In reply to this the Minister said that, although Japan had opened attacks on Ceylon and ports north of that, gradually they would extend operations to western Indian seas, and he presumed this would no doubt coincide with Germany's wishes (Assistant Chief of Staff G2, Washington, Magic Summary SRS 575, 18 April 1942, *The Magic Documents* (Washington: University Publications, 1980), reel 1, cited in DM Horner, 'Australia under threat of invasion', M McKernan & M Browne (eds) *Australia: Two centuries of war and peace* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1988) p. 265). The Ambassador's questions suggest that his Service attachés were on the ball and were receiving from their Japanese contacts in the Operations sections strong hints about what was under discussion. Whether Allied signals intelligence organisations were reading the telegrams from the German service attachés at Tokyo is not known.

In the event, anxiety regarding the northern frontier increased, the Chungking regime did not surrender, and the rapid development of the Allied counter-offensive precluded any subsequent consideration of operations on the Australian continent.<sup>27</sup> With her heavy losses at Midway in June, Japan lost overall sea supremacy. As a result, the forthcoming operation to capture Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia was cancelled on July 11th. And in the weeks that followed the Allied counter-offensive commenced. On August 7th the Americans landed at Guadalcanal and Tulagi and in late September the Japanese attack on Port Moresby was repulsed at Ioribaiwa and the Australian advance to Buna begun.

The only Japanese landing in Australia was made by a small party from 19th Army's clandestine Special Operations unit in Koepang which came ashore in Admiralty Gulf in Western Australia on 17 January 1944 and spent two days reconnoitring the locality. Its purpose was to find out whether a naval base was being established there and to test the feasibility of a plan to establish a chain of about 10 permanent observation posts of about four men each to monitor enemy activity in the Australian north-west including aircraft movements out of Darwin and Drysdale airstrip.<sup>28</sup> Although the landing was not detected on the ground, the fact that it had taken place became known to Allied intelligence — probably through signals intelligence.<sup>29</sup> The plan to establish the observation posts was not proceeded with.

15 April 1997

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27 Recollections by two Australian officers that at HQ 21 Bde and HQ 7 Div during the advance to Gona in December 1942 they saw among documents found on the bodies of Japanese officers 'operational orders for the occupation of Australia' (*West Australian*, 5 August 1986) are incorrect. These particular documents, which are listed and described in detail in the War Diaries of 39 Bn, 21 Bde, in *ATIS Spot Report 34* and in *ATIS Bulletins 45 to 51*, dealt with the transport and landing of elements of 170 Regt at Basabua the previous week.

28 Nakano Kōyūkai (ed.), *Rikugun Nakano Gakkō* (Tokyo: Nakano Kōyūkai, 1978), pp. 593–98. M Yamamoto, 'Wārera Gōshū Hondo ni Jōriku Suru', *Rekishi to Jimbutsu*, no. 170, 1 August 1985, pp. 112–21.

29 US Military Intelligence Service, 'The Japanese intelligence system' (typescript, 135 pp, 1945), US National Archives, Records Group 457, Special Research History no. 254, p. 41. This report has been published under its original title by Aegean Park Press in 1986 (ISBN 0894121332) and in microfilm in *Top Secret Studies on US Communications Intelligence during World War II* (University Microfilms, 1989, ISBN 1556551835), part 1, reel 41.

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