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United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe

AIR INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

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REPORTS ON THE JAPANESE AIR FORCES

The following reports are reprinted from the JAF report disseminated by the Office of the Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, Headquarters, USAAF, on 14 May, 1945. Data on which the analysis and conclusions are based are as of 30 April.

Order of Battle : Total combat strength disposed in tactical units during April averaged 3,380 aircraft, a decrease of 16 percent from March. The total unit strength on 1 May was 3,210 aircraft, a decrease of 628 or 16.4 percent from 1 April. All major areas shared this substantial decrease. The major loss of strength, percentage-wise, occurred in the China-Formosa-Ryukyus area with a decrease of 30 percent or 223 aircraft from 1 April. Strength decreased by 12 percent, or 301 aircraft in the Japan-Kuriles-Manchuria-Korea area, principally due to heavy loss of Homeland strength in the enemy's air counter-offensive against our Ryukyus operation.

Largest numerical decrease in strength during April occurred in Japan proper, while the largest percentage decrease occurred in China. Between 1 April and 1 May, 1945, JAF unit strength in the Honshu-Shikoku-Kyushu area previously had declined seven percent between 1 March and 1 April. These statistics clearly reflect the effects on the JAF of heavy combat attrition, and decreasing production.

Largest percent loss of strength during April occurred in China, when on 1 May unit strength was 180 aircraft, or 35 percent less than on 1 April. Strength in the Formosa-Ryukyus area decreased during the same period by 73 aircraft, or 28 percent. Redisposition of strength during April to Manchuria-Korea and Formosa, plus unreplaced losses, are probably responsible for the loss of strength in Formosa-Ryukyus.

The Burma-Siam-Malaya-Sumatra-French Indo-China area strength incurred a decrease totalling 136 aircraft, or 28 percent. This loss of strength is attributed both to unreplaced losses, and to withdrawals northward.

The Manchuria-Korea area showed a sharp increase during April, totalling 78 aircraft, or 55 percent. Similarly, the Kuriles-Hokkaido-North Honshu area

strength increased by a total of 58 aircraft, or 36 percent. The latter increase is seasonal, and far less than noted for the similar period of 1944. The former increase is probably responsive to recent Russian developments, and possibly in anticipation of Allied attacks on East China and Yellow Seas shipping.

Continuance and intensification of our air offensive against the Homeland, the Ryukyus, and Formosa continues to reduce the operational efficiency of the JAF by maintaining pressure on its chronic deficiencies in organization, maintenance, and repair.

In view of the new Japanese policy of committing combat aircraft assigned to operational training units in suicide missions, it is of importance to note that the current strength in such training units is estimated at 1,975 aircraft, 1,065 of which are probably located in the Home Islands. It is anticipated that the use of such OTU aircraft in combat missions will continue.

JAF Operations in April

OPERATIONS of the combined Japanese Air Forces in April were marked by the initiation and maintenance of a costly maximum-scale counteroffensive against our shipping in the Ryukyus chain of islands southwest of the Japanese homeland which include Okinawa. Approximately 75 percent of the JAF combat losses during April were incurred in this effort.

The enemy's secondary effort was against sustained B-29 attacks on Japanese homeland targets, principally against the major airdromes on Kyushu from which the bulk of the attacks on Okinawa are launched.

In all other areas the JAF, weakened by lack of replacements and low serviceability, virtually withdrew from combat in order to conserve its remaining strength.

During the first 10 days of our operations in the Ryukyus, the reaction of the JAF was weak and desultory. Approximately 100 enemy aircraft were shot down in this period. On 6 April, five days after our landing on Okinawa, the JAF made its first and most powerful major strike, attacking our invasion and escort shipping with an estimated 500 to 750

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aircraft. In all 375 Japanese aircraft were claimed destroyed. Our losses in shipping were three destroyers sunk and eight destroyers and escort craft damaged.

Possibly coordinated with this air effort, an enemy naval task force composed of the battleship Yamato, one light cruiser and nine destroyers was intercepted on 7 April by our carrier aircraft of Task Force 58 off Southern Kyushu, and all the enemy force was sunk except five destroyers, all of which were probably damaged. On the same day Task Force 58 was attacked by an estimated 100-125 enemy aircraft, of which 64 were destroyed.

On 12, 16, 22 and 28 April, the enemy again attacked the Okinawa transport area in force, inflicting substantial damage on our shipping. In these attacks the enemy sustained losses of 219, 182, 95 and 120 aircraft respectively. During periods between these heavier efforts, the enemy restricted his operations to frequent small-scale attacks, usually at dawn and dusk.

Reactions over Japan : As a result of the enemy's air counteroffensive, B-29s during the second half of April were diverted in large measure from their strategic bombing of the Japanese homeland to tactical attacks on the main Japanese repair and depot airfields on Kyushu.

The JAF at first failed to react strongly to these counter air force operations but toward the end of the month probably the serious damage inflicted on the enemy's airfield installations provoked increased interceptor reaction, particularly over army airdromes in Northern Kyushu and in the Kanoya-Kokubu naval area in the South.

During the first 12 days of April and before the start of the tactical effort against Kyushu targets, 11 B-29 attacks were made against strategic targets on Honshu. Only one such attack was made during the last half of the month. The Tokyo urban area and the industrial suburb of Kawasaki each received two medium-level night incendiary attacks. Total destruction in Tokyo was increased to 32.7 square miles by these attacks.

A total of 20 B-29s were lost during these four attacks. The enemy's air, anti-aircraft and searchlight defenses showed substantial improvement and were implemented by the first extensive night use of ground and airborne rocket fire. In addition there was evidence of a new rocket bomb, possibly piloted, or rocket aircraft described as "balls of fire."

Seven attacks by B-29s, four of them at night, were made during the first half of April against aircraft engine plants in the Nagoya and Tokyo areas. A similar attack was made on the last day of the month. Opposition to the night attacks was weak in scale and aggressiveness and only one B-29 was lost. The three daylight attacks early in the month met numerically strong but relatively unaggressive fighter opposition. Largest interception numerically was reported

over Nagoya, where 422 enemy aircraft made 233 attacks. Most aggressive opposition was over Tokyo, where one mission received 530 attacks from 170 enemy aircraft. These large interceptions were wholly ineffective, and the only B-29 lost to enemy air action was by ramming. The daylight attack on the last day of the month on the Tokyo area was opposed by only 44 enemy aircraft making 27 attacks. This weak opposition was possibly due to the enemy's effort to conserve his aircraft. It may also have reflected the substantial reinforcements sent out of the area to Kyushu.

Other Areas : Continued heavy Allied attacks against enemy air and industrial installations, cities and communications on Formosa were entirely unopposed.

In Burma, the enemy (probably seeking to buttress the morale of his disorganized ground forces) made five small-scale attacks against advancing Allied ground forces and one negligible night attack on advanced Allied airfields. Defensively, one inconsequential interception occurred over South Burma.

In the rest of the Southeast Asia theater, the enemy failed to oppose damaging attacks against his rail communications and airdromes in Thailand and Lower Burma. Two minor and ineffective interceptions of B-29 photo reconnaissance missions over Singapore were reported.

In China, the JAF flew four small attack missions, two against airfields and two in support of advancing ground forces. A total of four small-scale ineffective interceptions at Nanking and Laohokow summed up the defensive effort against daily sustained Allied attacks on East China ports and shipping.

The enemy's ineffective, costly effort during the previous two months, to give air support to his shipping running the Allied air blockade of the South China Seas, virtually came to an end in April.

Capabilities and Intentions

THERE is not much change to report in the estimate of the situation and capabilities of the Japanese Air Forces as of the end of April, 1945.

Developments during the month indicate that the Japanese high command was determined to make an all-out effort against our operations in the Ryukyus.

The JAF is estimated to have sustained an overall attrition of approximately 3,000 aircraft during April, or more than double the estimated aircraft production.

Strength of tactical units declined by approximately 625 aircraft, primarily in fighters and bombers.

Advanced training units appear to have been employed on an increasing scale in combat operations. In so doing the JAF is depleting its future air potential in current operations.

Reflecting its failure as an orthodox air implement, the JAF appears to have adopted the suicide attack as

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Notes on Japanese Fighters and Tactics

THERE are numerous differences, as well as similarities, in combat conditions in the Pacific Theater as compared with those to which US fighter pilots have become accustomed in Europe. Aside from the matters of weather, climate, supply problems, living conditions, and other factors, tactical abilities and combat characteristics of Jap planes and pilots deserve careful study prior to redeployment. The notes in this article have been supplied by Operations and Training officers, and are based on experience and intelligence during the first part of 1945.

Main differences in AAF tactical fighter operation against the Luftwaffe and the Japanese Air Forces are summarized briefly. In general, except for these differences, the same tactics that proved successful against the German Air Force will be effective against the Japanese.

Turning Radius : The turning radius of Japanese fighters is considerably less than that of any fighter we operate, in contrast to our better rate of turn in comparison with German fighters. This fact must be understood by ETO fighter pilots who expect to fly against the Japanese airmen. Pilots must depend upon mutual support and never attempt individual dogfights.

Training in mutual support is very important, and a bounce from above is the surest way of getting a Jap. The standard four-plane flight and two-flight sections are most effective. Formations never break up below a two-plane element. Flights and elements fly almost abreast in a mutual support formation, each element or flight covering the tail of the other.

Climbing Rate : Here again the Japanese fighter excels any of our present fighters. The Japanese rate of climb is greater in feet per minute, but the best climbing speed is lower in miles per hour.

If bounced, therefore, our fighters can pull away in a shallow fast climb and attempt a 180-degree turn for a head-on attack. Japanese fighters have been at a disadvantage in this type of attack because of lighter armament. The standard Japanese 20 mm. machine gun has a slow rate of fire. For these reasons, the Jap avoids a head-on trade if possible. Pilots must keep in mind that some Japanese will ram if possible.

Japanese Radar and Ground Control of fighters is considerably below the operating standard of the German Air Force. Pilots should be indoctrinated in the value of low-level surprise attacks to exploit to the fullest advantage this weakness of Japanese radar. Low level is 25 feet off the deck at high speed. There is some indication that Japanese radar is improving.

Japanese Pilots : The ability of the Japanese pilot is somewhat below that of the German. However he does not lack courage and in some cases is much more fanatical. For the most part, however, he shows a decided lack of ability to think fast "on his own feet." Pilots should be taught to carry the initiative at all times and to fight a planned battle.

Escort of Bombers : Fighter support is a problem in the Pacific theater because of the great distances involved. With bases closer to Japan, fighters will undoubtedly undertake this duty. This will have to be worked out according to the availability of bases, distances and types of fighters, and no specific recommendations can be made. Close cover escort will be more important than over Germany because so far mass attack has not been characteristic of Japanese fighter formations. The fighter sweep ahead and the bombers should prove valuable.



JAP AIR FORCE

(Continued from page 2)

its primary offensive weapon against shipping and has placed into operation for the first time the "Baka," its new piloted suicide bomb, launched from a mother aircraft (see page 11). The JAF also appears to have developed a ground-launched piloted bomb which has not yet been definitely identified in operation. It is believed designed for use against aircraft rather than shipping.

Intentions : The JAF will probably continue to withdraw its air strength from all areas south of Shanghai and concentrate it for the defense of the Homeland and vital adjacent areas on the Asiatic mainland.

The JAF may further continue its counteroffensive against our Ryukyus operations indefinitely regardless

of the necessity of conserving strength for the defense of the main Japanese islands.

It may maintain the counteroffensive only as long as lucrative shipping targets are available.

It may abandon the counteroffensive in the immediate future and attempt to rebuild and conserve strength for the defense of the main Japanese islands.

The remaining capability of the JAF to disrupt seriously future Allied advances lies in increasing the destructive effect of suicide attacks by conventional aircraft and by development of new type suicide weapons. The limiting factors on the effectiveness of suicide attacks are listed as follows :

The substantial volume of orthodox air cover required to escort attacks in force to the target.

The rapidly deteriorating quality of the Japanese pilots.

Technical difficulties in perfecting new weapons. Improvement in Allied counter-measures.

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