The occupation of Tsingtao

On entering the war, the Tsingtao operation was carried out. On 23–4 September 870 soldiers from the South Wales Borderers Second Battalion stationed in northern China under the command of Brigadier N.W. Barnardiston, landed. The Japanese side assumed that the British troops’ first battle would be around Mount Shihmen three days after they landed. But this plan was cancelled by the British who proposed to stay at Puli from the 25th and to prepare for battle there. After the battles at Kushan and Fushan, the British acquired half of the 36th Indian (Sikh) Regiment of 450 men and reached the front line. Thereafter, for a month the British and the Japanese prepared for a full-scale offensive which they launched on 31 October. But the British force did not move.1 The Japanese units concluded ‘it was hard to trust you as war comrades if you permit only our troops to engage in the fighting at this time’, that ‘the British army was baggage’ and that it was ‘no more than decoration on the battlefield’.2 Consequently, Japanese newspapers and magazines reported that: British soldiers were different in nature from Japanese soldiers and were excessively ‘elegant’ (cautious) when it came to launching joint operations. Only when nothing happened were British soldiers wonderful and it was like taking a lady on a trip. However, such a lady can be a burden and lead to total disaster for a force when the enemy appears. Such reports, when reported back to Britain, generated considerable revertemt among the British public.3

On the other hand, the Royal Navy dispatched an old battleship Triumph, a destroyer Usk, and the Delta, a hospital ship. The Triumph which had 10-inch guns was, although old, great support for the blockade in terms of firepower and in landings greatly aiding the IJN which was short of shells. Lieut. Cdr. Yamanashi Katsunoshin, who was dispatched to China Squadron Headquarters, had great respect for the British commanders’ indomitable spirits, their continuous observation of the whole situation and the organization and training on board their ships. Captain Yoshida Seifu, involved in the
joint operation as chief of staff at the IJN Second Fleet, praised British preparations, stating that ‘during this battle, the British ships did not use gun plugs even in heavy rain. Every evening the electric circuits of each gun were checked. The scrupulous attention to detail was impressive.’ This praise reflects clearly the view that RN morale and fighting spirit was higher and more positive than that of the British Army who were merely participating because of political considerations. Although possibly diplomatic language, the Japanese side evaluated RN operations as ‘entirely successful’ and highly valued its effectiveness and full of good faith.

As Tsingtao collapsed and the German Eastern Squadron lost its base, the objectives of the joint Anglo-Japanese naval operations were achieved. According to the British official naval history of the war, ‘the Tsingtao operation did not only bring special benefit to Japan but also performed the utmost and best service she could render to the Alliance’. However, the British Consul, Sir John Pratt, resident in Tsinan recalled that the dispatch to Shantung was a perfect farce for the British. Professor Ian Nish has also written that the Tsingtao operation brought condemnation rather than satisfaction between Japan and Britain until the war ended. The British political goal of increasing its reputation and its influence in China was not achieved. Moreover, the fact that IJA made light of the British Army’s contribution was constantly repeated. This was all reported to Britain and caused strains on Anglo-Japanese relations which contributed to the later breakdown in relations between the two countries.

**Occupation of the South Sea Islands**

Although the IJN wished to acquire the South Sea Islands, they stated: ‘we are suspending our Southern advance and will observe and await developments in the situation.’ This was due to anti-Japanese feelings in the USA; and the request by the British government for Japan to limit her theatre of operations. Furthermore, Japanese government policy was that the occupation of Kiaochow Bay would be the main operation. On 13 August, a report came through the IJN attaché in London, Captain Abo Kiyotane, attending a celebration for Japan’s participation to the War, that the IJN were being asked to dispatch the cruiser *Izumo* to Mexico and to Esquimault due to the shortage of naval forces covering the security of the coasts. This was outside Japan’s ‘limited’ theatre of operations and prompted Foreign Minister Kato Takaaki to assert to Ambassador Sir William C. Greene in Tokyo that the ‘limited theatre of operations’ could not be included in the final notification. In addition, the minister protested, ‘it [the request] is against the limitation suggested [by the Foreign Office] . . . nowadays, it seems that the communication among authorities in your country is unreliable’. Then, Kato instructed Ambassador Inoue Kaoru that due to differences between the Foreign Office and the Admiralty and the contradictory demands of the