



Defeat In Malaya The Fall Of Singapore

— Compiled By HO AH CHON —

Defeat In Malaya The Fall Of Singapore

By HO AH CHON



PUSTAKA
NEGERI
SARAWAK

Dengan Julus Ikhlas
With Compliments from

PUSTAKA NEGERI SARAWAK
SARAWAK STATE LIBRARY

ISBN 983-9172-09-3

Copyright Ho Ah Chon

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the author.

Printed in Kuching by See Hua Daily News Bhd.



Contents

Acknowledgement

**The author of Defeat in Malaya:
Arthur Swinson**

Arthur Swinson served in the British army from 1939 to 1946, seeing action in India, Assam, Burma, and Malaya. He joined the BBC in 1949 as writer and producer, and has 300 credits for plays, documentaries, and films. He has also written stage plays, and his principal military works include 'Six Minutes to Sunset' (about the Amritsar massacre), 'Kohima', and 'North-West Frontier'.

Compiled and edited by

HO AH CHON

No. 376, Taman Tabuan Desa,

Jalan Kerangi Lorong 4,

93350 Kuching, Sarawak.

Printed by See Hua Daily News Bhd.

Lot 1125, Section 66,

Jalan Kemajuan Kawasan Perindustrian Pending,

93450 Kuching, Sarawak, East Malaysia.

28-12-1995

Contents

Collapse Of A Facade

Introduction By Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart	1
The General And The Task	2 - 9
The Fortress In The Sun	10 - 21
The Taste Of Reality	22 - 30
Disaster At Jitra	31 - 35
The Long Retreat	36 - 40
Wavell Takes Command	41 - 47
Retreat To The Island	48 - 56
Prelude To Battle	57 - 62
The Fall Of Singapore	63 - 72
Postscript And Post Mortem	73 - 77
Japanese Propaganda In Airforce	78 - 96
"Asia Timor Raya" Propaganda	97 - 119

<u>Page</u>	<u>Errors</u>	<u>Correction</u>
3	tot he	to the
3	tojo	Tojo
4	immediatye	immediate
4	culd	could
11	hinself	himself
13	1092	1902
13	herre	her
13	wer	we
14	Malaysan	Malayan
15	Japanwse	Japanese
17	tos ay	to say
17	sstem	system
17	exvellent	excellent
17	risento	risen
17	aptitude	attitude
24	wre	were
25	tok	took
25	asket	asked
25	agin	again
25	ther	there
27	8t	8th
27	reainstroms	rainstorms
28	tp	to
30	hole	hold
32	jnbroken	unbroken
32	int he	in the
33	mater	matter
35	trrops	troops
35	theri	their
39	wuld	would
39	Japa	Jap
39	tot he	to the
40	te	the
40	worred	worried
42	wavell	Wavell

<u>Page</u>	<u>Errors</u>	<u>Correction</u>
42	wasd	was
42	bolck	block
42	ahd	had
44	berofe	before
44	thr	the
44	tojo	Tojo
46	tatch	watch
46	wer	were
46	equipment	equipment
47	teh	the
49	leaing	leaving
56	practicvally	practically
58	lifrt	lift
60	werenot	were not
60	agenta	agents
60	gheir	their
60	bu	by
61	feelong	feeling
65	foar	far
65	ar	at
65	ans	and
67	mush	much
67	gres	grew
68	ack	back
71	commder	commander
73	Malays	Malaya
74		(Bayonet Practises)
75	ed	these tactics could be employed, air ...
75	nee	need

Sorry for the inconvenience caused.

Ho Ah Chon

Mr. Ho Ah Chon

Collapse of a facade

Introduction by Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart

Arthur Swinson's book is an able and fascinating account of the Japanese campaign in Malaya which was launched in December 1941 and culminated in the fall of Singapore, early in February 1942.

In the Japanese plan, the task of conquering Malaya and Singapore was allotted to General Yamashita's Twenty-fifth Army, comprising three divisions with supporting troops - a combat strength of about 70,000, and a total strength of about 110,000. Moreover the sea-transport available only sufficed to carry a quarter of the force direct across the Gulf of Siam - 17,000 combat troops, and 26,000 in all. This advanced fraction was to seize the northern airfields. The bulk of Yamashita's army was to move overland, from Indo-China through Siam.

The chief Japanese landings were made at Singapore and Patani on the Siamese neck of the Malay Peninsula, with four subsidiary landings further north on the coast of Siam. These landings were made in the early hours of 8th December, by local time. The intended British forestalling advance, Operation 'Mata-dor', started too late because of reluctance to cross the frontier before Siam's neutrality had been violated by the Japanese. By the morning of 10th December the Japanese 5th Division had already swung across to the west coast and penetrated the frontier of Malaya, advancing by two roads into Kedah.

That day a decisive disaster befell the British at sea. After the decision in July to cut off Japan's oil supplies, Winston Churchill had 'realised' the formidable effects of the embargoes' belatedly, by his own admission - and a month later, on 25th August, proposed the dispatch of what he called a 'deterrent' naval force to the East. Accordingly the Prince of Wales and the battle-cruiser Repulse sailed for Singapore - but without any

aircraft carrier. The one that had been earmarked ran ashore in Jamaica and had to be docked for repairs. There was another actually in the Indian Ocean, and within reach of Singapore, but no orders were given for her to move there.

The Prince of Wales and Repulse reached Singapore on 2nd December, and next day Admiral Sir Tom Phillips arrived to take command of the 'Far Eastern Fleet'. By midday on the 8th Phillips heard that they were disembarking their troops at Singora and Kota Bahru, while covered by at class, five cruisers and twenty destroyers. In the late afternoon Phillips gallantly sailed north with what was called Force Z - his two big ships and an escort of four destroyers - to strike at the transports, although no shorebased air cover could be provided so far north now that the airfields there were lost.

In the evening of the 9th the weather cleared, and with it his cloak of obscurity. His Force Z was spotted from the air. So he turned south and headed for Singapore. But that night a signal came from there reporting, mistakenly, that a Japanese landing had been made at Kuantan, a midway point. Reckoning that surprise might be possible, and the risk justified, he altered course for Kuantan.

The Japanese were well prepared from any interception move by Force Z, whose arrival at Singapore had been broadcast to the world. Their elite 22nd Air Flotilla, with the best pilots of the Naval Air Arm, was based on the airfields near Saigon, in the south of Indo-China. Both ships were sunk, the Repulse by 1230 and the Prince of Wales by 1320.

This stroke settled the fate of Malaya and Singapore. The Japanese were able to continue their landings unchecked, and establish air bases ashore. The superiority of

their air force over the meagre British air strength in Malaya was decisive in crumbling the resistance of the British troops and enabling their own troops to push down the Malay Peninsula and force the backdoor into Singapore.

From 10th December onwards, the British retreat down the west coast became almost continuous. Road blocks were overcome either by Japanese tanks and artillery or by flank threat from Japanese infantry infiltrating through the bordering jungle.

On the night of Sunday 8th February, 1942, the two leading divisions of the Japanese invading force, which had swept down the 500-mile length of the Malay Peninsula, crossed the narrow channel which separated Singapore island from the mainland. The crossing was made on an eight-mile stretch of the thirty-mile straits, which here were less than a mile in width.

Armoured landing craft carried the first waves of attackers, but the rest followed in any sort of boats that could be collected, and a number of the Japanese even swam across with their rifles and ammunition. Some of the craft were sunk, but most of the assault troops landed safely, helped by failures on the defenders' side that have never been satisfactorily explained. The beach searchlights were not exposed, means of communication failed or were not used, and the artillery was slow to put down its intended curtain of defensive fire.

By daylight 13,000 Japanese were ashore, and the defenders had fallen back to inland positions. Before midday the invaders' strength had risen to more than 20,000 and they had established a deep lodgement in the north-western part of the island - which is about the same size as the Isle of Wight. Later a third Japanese division landed, making the total well over 30,000.

There were two more divisions close behind on the mainland, but General Yamashita did not consider that he could effectively deploy them in the island advance.

Numerically, the defenders had more

than sufficient strength in the island to repel the invasion, particularly as it came in the sector where it was most expected. General Percival, even now, had some 85,000 troops under his command - mainly British, Australian and Indian, with some local Malay and Chinese units. But the majority were ill-trained to match the Japanese attacking force, which was composed of troops specially selected for the purpose, and had been repeatedly outmanoeuvred in the dense jungle country or rubber plantations. The leadership in general was poor.

The air force had been outnumbered and outclassed from the outset of the campaign, and the little that remained was withdrawn in the final stage. Lack of protection against the enemy's fierce and incessant air attacks was the more demoralising to troops whose spirits were already depressed by the long retreat down the Malay Peninsula.

At Singapore the end came on Sunday 15th February - exactly a week after the Japanese landings. By that time the defenders had been driven back to the suburbs of Singapore city, which lies on the south coast of the island. Food stocks were running low and the water supply was liable to be cut off at any moment. That evening General Percival went out under a white flag to capitulate to the Japanese commander.

The immediate strategic effects of the loss of Singapore were disastrous, for it was quickly followed by the conquest of Burma and the Dutch East Indies - two-pronged sweep that brought the Japanese menacingly close to India on the one flank and Australia on the other. Nearly four years of struggle followed, at immense cost, before Singapore was recovered as a result of Japan's own eventual collapse from exhaustion, and atomic bombshock.

But the longer and wider effects of Singapore's initial fall were beyond repair. Singapore had been a symbol - the outstanding symbol of Western power in the Far East, because that power had been erected and long maintained on British seapower.

The General and the task

On the morning of 2nd November 1941, three senior lieutenant-generals of the Imperial Japanese Army reported to the Chief of the General Staff, General Sugiyama. They were Masaharu Homma, Hitoshi Imamura, and Tomoyuki Yamashita, and the news they received was probably the most important in their whole careers: that in a few weeks' time Japan would be at war and they would be the chief field commanders. Homma would lead Fourteenth Army against General Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines; Imamura, Twenty-sixth Army against the Dutch East Indies; and Yamashita, Twenty-fifth Army against Malaya and Singapore. Pausing a moment to allow the generals to express their humble gratitude at the honour being paid them, Sugiyama was surprised to find himself under a barrage of questions from Homma, who wanted to know exactly who had compiled intelligence summaries regarding enemy forces, who had laid down the target dates for completing the campaigns, and how troops for the operations had been allocated. Homma detested Sugiyama, and before long the atmosphere had grown some-

what tense but fortunately Imamura was able to restore calm by pointing out that while target dates were necessary, no one was being asked to give guarantees. Homma, he added, should accept the task allotted to him and do his best. No soldier could do more.

In due course the meeting broke up and, having wished each other luck, Homma, Imamura and Yamashita departed for their respective headquarters to begin planning. Time was short and there was a great deal to do. Though appreciating Homma's viewpoint, it would not have occurred to Yamashita to argue in such a manner, for he was far too deeply versed in the samurai code which demanded that a soldier should carry out any task to the death, even if it were quite hopeless. His standards were rigid and absolute, as was his devotion to the Emperor.

Nevertheless, Yamashita received his command with mixed feelings, for

Lieutenant-General Tomoyuki Yamashita, Commander 25th Army.

