
Back Me or Sack Me

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The fall of Singapore and the loss of 130,000 men were as shocking to the British as the death of General Charles George Gordon at Khartoum was to an earlier generation. In the years following the 1919 Treaty of Versailles and before the outbreak of World War II, the Fortress of Singapore, known as the “Gibraltar of the East,” stood as a symbol of the power, might, and stability of the British Empire and Commonwealth. Unfortunately, the “Gibraltar of the East” was not an impregnable fortress but a castle in the air. The reasons for this state of affairs go back to 1919. In that year, the British government adopted the “Ten Year Rule,” which required the military to base their preparations and budget requests on the assumption that there would be no major war in the coming ten years. The rule was abandoned in November 1933, but during the period it was in place, the Royal Air Force (RAF) and Army were pared to the bone and the Royal Navy “was at all points deficient in the means to protect overseas communications and supplies, a duty which lay at the heart of Imperial defence policy.”¹ When Britain began to rearm, things went slowly because reduced defense orders from 1919-1933 seriously diminished the capacity of British industry to respond when greater quantities of equipment were wanted.² The Royal Navy also suffered from another problem, the abandonment of the Two Power Standard, a policy whereby the navy maintained sufficient strength to overcome the next two largest navies. The reductions and constraints imposed by the Washington Treaty of 1921 forced Great Britain to adopt a One Power Standard.³

The Washington Treaty gave the Royal Navy a forty percent margin of superiority over their likely enemy, Japan. British strategy dictated that in the event of hostilities with Japan, Great Britain intended to send her main fleet to Singapore. Only enough ships to secure the home waters would remain in Europe. Unfortunately, this strategy rested on two conditions, the first being the existence of a modern naval base at “Fortress Singapore.” The British never completed the modernization and expansion of the naval base at Singapore in spite of the fact that British strategy made a modern, secure, fortified base an absolute necessity.⁴ The problem was whether Singapore could truly be considered a fortress. Historian J. R. M. Butler observed, “If by a fortress is meant a strategic point naturally or artificially defended on all sides, then a fortress Singapore was not—in any of the senses mentioned. True, there were coast defenses at other points

than at the naval establishment, but it is perhaps safest to think of Singapore as a fortified base.”⁵

In the event of war with Japan, the British calculated Singapore would have to hold out thirty-eight days, later raised to ninety and, ultimately one hundred eighty, before the arrival of the main fleet. But the arrival of the fleet was predicated on its not being needed elsewhere. While in the 1920s Japan was the only likely enemy, by 1936, things had changed. As the Defence Requirement Committee put it: “It is a cardinal requirement of our national and Imperial security that our foreign policy should be so conducted as to avoid a possible development of a situation in which we might be confronted simultaneously with the hostility of Japan in the Far East, Germany in the West and any power on the main line of communication between the two.”⁶ When war came with Germany in 1939 and Italy in June 1940, it was clear there would be no main fleet sent to Singapore in the event of war with Japan.

In addition to the problems set out above, the Empire forces in Singapore suffered from other problems. Among them, an unrealistic grand strategy for defense, a totally inadequate Royal Air Force component, ineffective leadership from General Arthur Percival, dissension within the British chain of command, lack of equipment and training on the part of the army in Malaya, and poor pre-war planning and lack of coordination between the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy, the British Army and the British Indian Army in Malaya.

All of these things played their part in the British defeat in Malaya. This paper’s thesis is simply that responsibility for failing to mount an effective defense on the Muar River on the Malay Peninsula, which led directly to the siege and surrender of Singapore, belongs to General Archibald Wavell, at the time Supreme Commander of American, British, Dutch, and Australian forces (hereinafter “ABDA”). Wavell’s 9 January 1942 orders for the defense of Johore to Percival then commanding the army in Malaya, ensured the defeat of the troops on the Muar River line and led directly to the fall of Singapore. It is not contended that, except for Wavell’s intervention, Singapore would have been held. The author argues that Wavell’s intervention made a bad tactical and operational situation worse, and unhinged the ability of the forces in Johore to hold their positions and keep the Japanese away from Singapore.

The British Army is usually blamed for the Singapore debacle.⁷ However, the British government never intended that the British Army carry the primary burden of defending Singapore. In the period leading up to the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, the British put the primary burden of defending Singapore on the Royal Navy. The British believed that only by having a fleet large enough to

dominate the South China Sea could they “make it virtually impossible for the Japanese to disembark or supply a landing force on the Malay Peninsula or the Isthmus of Kra.”⁸ Unfortunately, by November 1941, the Royal Navy was so committed to the North Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and escorting convoys to the Soviet Union that it was impossible to send a large, balanced fleet to Singapore. In an effort to deter the Japanese from launching hostilities against Great Britain and the Empire, the Royal Navy sent two capital ships, H.M.S. *Renown* and H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* to Malaya.⁹

In the absence of a dominating naval presence, the primary defense burden was supposed to fall on the Royal Air Force (RAF). In expectation of receiving a large enough air force to defend Malaya, the British built three air fields near Khota Baru and a landing field at Kahang, stocked with provisions, ammunition, and gasoline. The British engineers who sited these airfields did not consult the army authorities who had the responsibility for their defense and security.¹⁰ If the main burden of defense was to fall on the RAF, they would need the aircraft to carry out the task. The British Chiefs of Staff estimated the minimum number of aircraft needed to successfully defend Malaya was 336 modern aircraft but subsequent calculations caused them to raise the figure to 582.¹¹ When the war broke out, the Malaya Command had 158 aircraft such as Vildebeestes, Brewster Buffaloes, Blenheims, and Lockheed Hudsons, altogether a motley collection of aircraft, all either approaching obsolescence or already obsolete.¹²

The British Army in Malaya was not an impressive force. It was short of anti-tank weapons, anti-aircraft weapons, and artillery and possessed not a single tank for the whole of Malaya. On the eve of war, the army consisted of thirty-three mostly inadequately trained infantry battalions. In a study carried out in August 1941, the staff decided a minimum of forty-eight battalions and two tank regiments with complete supporting artillery were necessary to defend Malaya. The British never met these minimum requirements due to the decision of the Churchill government to send war materiel to the Soviet Union instead. Prepared lines of fortifications could have offset the weakness of the army. Percival refused to consider establishing prepared positions for the troops to occupy “because he thought it would be bad for morale.”¹³

The British High Command in Malaya lacked any sense of operational coordination as the commanders of the three services acted independently of each other. Air Chief-Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham was Commander-in-Chief Far East. On 1 November, his superiors notified him that Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, a soldier with recent battle experience, would replace him.¹⁴ Pownall did not arrive in Singapore until 23 December and took effective command on 27

December; until then Brooke-Popham was expected to carry on as air commander. Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, an aggressive officer, led the navy but lacked recent experience at sea. Air Vice-Marshal C.W.H. Pulford, a competent enough officer, commanded the RAF but, due to his command being understrength, the RAF was unable to assume the major defensive role expected of it. This left the army.

The General Officer Commanding, Malaya was Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival who was a colorless, uninspiring man, quite unable to dominate events or impose his will on others.¹⁵ Percival's career was largely as a staff officer between the wars, although it must be noted that in World War I he led men quite capably and bravely and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.¹⁶ Percival's problem was a lack of experience in the area of operational command. Although Percival was a successful staff officer, it was not clear to the British high command that a good staff officer does not necessarily make a good commander.¹⁷ Percival's principal subordinates were unimpressive and contentious. Lieutenant-General Sir Lewis Heath commanded the 3rd Indian Corps consisting of the 9th and 11th Indian Divisions. Heath was the only one of Percival's commanders to have seen combat service so far. Heath's "relations with Percival were strained from the very beginning. Heath was senior to Percival in both age and experience and it cannot have been easy for him to serve as a subordinate."¹⁸ The 3rd Indian Corps was deployed in northern Malaya and would be the first unit to meet the Japanese. The final commander to consider is Major General Gordon Bennett, "a soldier suffering from extreme paranoia who was a rasping, bitter, sarcastic man, given to expressing his views with great freedom."¹⁹ The Australian Chief of Staff offered Percival the opportunity to rid himself of his troublesome subordinate but Percival elected to keep Bennett.²⁰ It was a fatal decision.

If the British high command did not inspire confidence, the same could not be said for the Japanese. General Tomoyuki Yamashita commanded the Japanese. He entered the army in 1908, served in a variety of positions, and attended the War College. He was regarded as an effective, aggressive officer who steadily advanced in rank.²¹ Yamashita took command of the 25th Army on 5 November 1941.²² His task was the capture of Singapore. It was critically important for the Japanese to secure the rubber and tin resources of Malaya to keep their war machine going.²³ In order to accomplish this, Yamashita was allocated the 3rd Air Group, comprising 459 modern aircraft superior to anything the British had in Malaya. The army component was to consist of a three tank regiments, engineers, heavy artillery, and three infantry divisions.²⁴

Yamashita invaded Malaya with the 5th Division commanded by Lieutenant-General Takuro Matsui. This highly mechanized unit and its

commander had seen extensive combat in China and underwent rigorous training for amphibious operations and jungle warfare on Formosa. Matsui had a reputation for being aggressive and competent.²⁵ Yamashita's former chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Reyna Mutaguchi, commanded the 18th Division. Mutaguchi was choleric and ambitious. He intended to make a famous name for himself. His 18th Division was less mechanized than Matsui's 5th Division, but it was still a formidable and experienced fighting force.²⁶ Yamashita knew both Matsui and Mutaguchi and worked well with each of them. Unfortunately, the same was not true of the third division commander, Lieutenant-General Takuma Nishimura, who commanded the Imperial Guards Division. Before World War II, the Japanese Army employed violence and murder to intimidate civilian governments into following policies the army favored. In 1932, eleven junior naval officers assassinated Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi, effectively ending civilian control of the military. Nishimura was president of the court that tried the assassins and ensured they received light sentences. Yamashita was critical of Nishimura's handling of the trial, which led to a long-standing grudge between the officers.

Nishimura was a commander of limited ability and gave his division little field training. In fact, when Yamashita saw the Guards Division on maneuvers, their performance horrified him and he ordered Nishimura to conduct intensive battle training for the division at once. Nishimura, however, did nothing in this direction. When his division embarked for the campaign, opinion among the Twenty-Fifth Army staff was that it was "unfit for combat."²⁷ With the exception of Nishimura's troops, Yamashita had under his command a well-trained, mission oriented force that was very capable of carrying out his orders while Percival had the most inexperienced and untrained units in Asia. The wartime expansion of the Indian army led to,

an extensive withdrawal of regular and experienced officers and men from existing units so as to provide a nucleus for newly-formed units—a process known as "milking." Not only were British Indian Army units destined for Malaya milked heavily before leaving India, but the milking process continued after arrival in Malaya.²⁸

In terms of training, the British and Australians were no better off.²⁹ They were not milked, but there was no realistic schedule for training the troops. Evidently, the British believed that the Japanese would not invade from December to March, the rainy season. The British were wrong.

The British had a plan to deal with Japanese landings at Khota Baru in Malaya and at Singora and Patani in Thailand. Called Operation Matador, this operational plan required the 3rd Indian Corps to dash into Thailand at least a day ahead of the Japanese landings, take up positions on the beaches, and repulse the Japanese. Major-General D. M. Murray-Lyon commanding the 11th Indian Division was prepared to launch Matador but received no orders to do so. The Commander-in-Chief of the Far East Command, Air Chief Marshal Robert Brooke-Popham decided to postpone Matador indefinitely, leaving the 11th Indian Division waiting for orders for ten hours. Finally, the 11th Indian Division learned that Matador was cancelled. The division was ordered back to Jitra.³⁰ Meanwhile, the Japanese began landing troops at Khota Baru on 8 December. Things began to go seriously wrong for the British.

By 11 December 1941, the RAF had suffered the loss of up to half the aircraft in the northern airfields. Air Vice-Marshal Pulford pulled his squadrons



Figure 1. Royal Engineers preparing to blow up a bridge near Kuala Lumpur during retreat. From the collections of the Imperial War Museums, UK.

back to Singapore.³¹ Because of this decision, the army would fight its battle without air cover. On 10 December, as a result of reports of a Japanese landing at Kuantan, Admiral Tom Phillips, commanding Force Z consisting of the *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*, sailed the fleet north to intercept the Japanese. The report of a Japanese landing proved to be false. Philips ordered Force Z to return to Singapore. Japanese aircraft attacked as he moved south. This resulted in the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. Now the burden of defending Malaya fell squarely on the army.

The 11th Indian Division fell back to Jitra and began to prepare a defensive line. The “defences had not been completed when the War in the Far East broke out. Barbed-wire lines had to be erected and anti-tank mines laid—while all the time a steady downpour of rain flooded the shallow trenches and gun pits. Many of the field telephone cables were hurriedly laid across waterlogged ground and failed to work.”³² On 11 December, the Japanese began their drive down the Malay Peninsula. The 11th Indian Division was unable to hold the Jitra

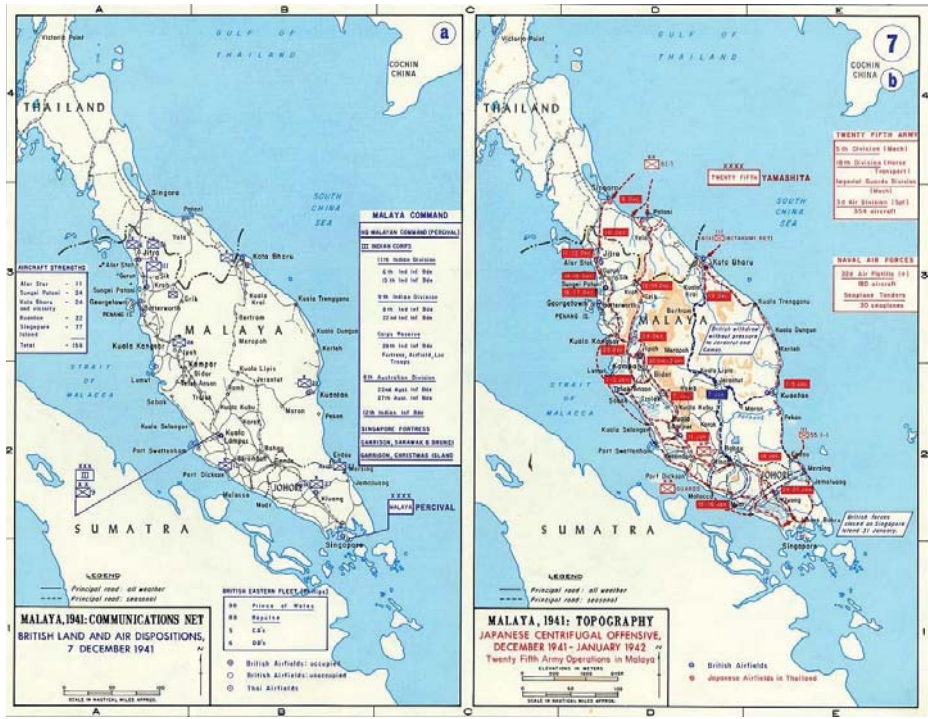


Figure 2. Pacific War—Malaya, 1941-1942. Pacific War maps of the United States Military Academy.

Line and on the night of 12-13 December, began to retreat. The Japanese used an operational technique called the driving charge aimed at maintaining the initiative and keeping the enemy off balance by continually advancing. As the British reeled back in confusion, the Japanese charged forward.³³

Yamashita was unhappy with the way events were going because the British were retreating down the Trunk Road, thereby avoiding the Japanese encirclement.³⁴ The British managed to halt their retreat long enough to form a line on the Slim River on 3 January 1942.³⁵ The British attempted to set up a defense in depth to halt or slow the Japanese. On 7 January, the Japanese struck at the Slim River position. They destroyed the fighting power of two brigades in a morning. For the British, it would be hard to imagine a more confused and mismanaged battle. As Japanese armor and infantry smashed forward, there was no coordination of artillery on the part of the British. There was no central direction for the British forces engaged. They were simply defeated piece meal.³⁶

Meanwhile, there were changes in the Allied High Command in Asia. General Archibald Wavell was appointed Supreme Commander of ABDA and was primarily responsible for the defense of the Dutch East Indies and Malaya. Wavell arrived in Singapore on 7 January to assess the situation. He did not like what he found. On the north side of Singapore Island, no fortifications were prepared because Percival told Wavell “fortifications are bad for morale.”³⁷ Wavell overruled Percival and ordered him to begin building fortifications at once. Then he went north to see for himself what was going on. He found the commanders of the 3rd Indian Corps dispirited and exhausted.³⁸ Wavell had found himself with two distinctly different subordinates:

Percival as a rule did not make a good first impression. He was quiet, reserved, thoughtful. His better qualities—a keen analytical mind, relentless work, devotion to duty, and a tendency not to panic—did not necessarily leap out at once. Major-General H. Gordon Bennett, g.o.c 8th Australian Division and commander of the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) in Malaya, did make a good first impression, at least on Wavell. Bennett was outspoken, charismatic, aggressive, and confident to the point of brashness. He dismissed the current situation as the result of errors made by Heath and of the weakness of his Indian units, complained that his fighting-fit Australian brigades were languishing while the battle was being lost, and insisted that he and his men knew exactly how

to stop the Japanese and would do so, given the chance. Bennett talked a good fight and stood out to Wavell as the only senior leader who seemed unaffected by the long retreat, with ideas about how to stop it, fresh troops, and a burning desire to get into the fight. In comparison, Percival seemed to be at a loss.³⁹

Wavell had clearly lost confidence in Percival. He did not, however, take the logical step of relieving him. Instead, after ordering a strategic withdraw to Johore, Wavell summoned Percival to a conference on 8 January and, without any discussion at all, handed Percival his orders.⁴⁰ A few days earlier, Gordon Bennett proposed that the 3rd Corps and the 8th Australian Division switch places, making the Australians responsible for defending the western part of Johore. Percival rejected this plan in favor of a defense in depth along the Muar River. Now, overruled by Wavell, instructed to implement a plan he had already rejected, and forced to entrust the execution to a contentious commander in whom he had no confidence, Percival truly had the worst of all worlds.⁴¹ The question remains why Wavell did not sack Percival, or in the face of such a monumental lack of confidence, why did not Percival ask to be relieved? There is no answer to these questions.⁴²

However, the die was cast and Gordon Bennett would have to fight the main battle for Singapore with the 45th Indian Brigade, a completely inexperienced unit, the 8th Australian Division, less one brigade in the east, and the 9th Indian Division. The 8th Australian's staff was to coordinate and control all forces in Johore, but this was too heavy a load for a divisional staff. The 18th British Division was due shortly so the Muar Line could expect reinforcements. Bennett was defending a line from Muar Segamat with inadequate forces. Bennett made his problem worse by spreading the 45th Indian Brigade too thinly and directing the Brigade to deploy infantry on both sides of the Muar River. The main force was concentrated in depth at Gemas and Segamat. In addition to having the Indian Brigade defending too long a front, Bennett simply did not trust

the Indians to fight aggressively, he insisted on their applying his tactics of active defence based on counterattacks rather than passively holding the river line. To ensure this, he directed the brigade to have both its two forward battalions place two rifle companies—nearly half their strength—north of the river to delay the enemy, the rest digging in on

the south bank of the river itself.⁴³

Bennett planned to fight the main battle of the campaign in Central Malaya and paid no attention to his weak left flank. On 13 January, Wavell and Percival visited Bennett's headquarters. Both men approved his dispositions.⁴⁴

On 14 January, the Japanese 5th Division began its attack. At first, things went rather well for the British. Bennett set an ambush for the Japanese at Gemas that cost the Japanese some eight hundred men. The casualties would have been higher but for two factors. First, the Royal Artillery could not supply fire support because the telephone line was not working. Second, Percival had altered Wavell's plan by substituting an inexperienced brigade for the 22nd Australian. Percival promised Bennett the 22nd Australian Brigade would join him as soon as possible.⁴⁵ When the Japanese came down the road to Gemas, the 22nd Brigade was still sitting on the east coast. Bennett's ambush temporarily halted the Japanese 5th Division. The British line appeared to have stabilized around the Muar-Segamat-Mersing Line. Unfortunately, for the British, catastrophe was just around the corner.

Commanding the Imperial Guards Division, General Nishimura was performing well for Yamashita. It must be admitted, whether or not the Guards were as well trained as they should have been, they conducted their operations up to this point with great élan. Now, discovering that the elements of the 45th Indian Brigade were on both sides of an unfordable river, the Japanese overran the two companies north of the river on 15 January without firing a shot.⁴⁶ Even worse, the 5th Imperial Guards Regiment crossed the Muar at dawn on 16 January and moved west with the intent of capturing Muar City.⁴⁷ Incredibly, neither Percival nor Bennett were aware that the inexperienced 45th Indian Brigade was contending with the entire Imperial Guards Division. Bennett was too occupied directing the Australians and Indians in their successful fighting retreat. Although the British succeeded in the center, the Japanese tore Bennett's left flank apart.

When Bennett learned of the disaster to his left flank, "He realized that his communications were threatened. He therefore sent the reserve battalion of the 27th Australian Brigade (2/29) from Gemas to Bakri. He did not however at the time grasp the seriousness of the situation."⁴⁸ Percival did not learn that the 45th Indian Brigade was in trouble until the afternoon of 16 January. For the British to regain the line on the Muar River, Percival needed immediate, effective action. It was not forthcoming. The Japanese surrounded the 45th Brigade and destroyed it battalion by battalion.⁴⁹ With the Japanese solidly on the south side of the Muar River, the British position collapsed. The defeat of the British was "pivotal in

the campaign. It was so rapid and so heavy that Malaya Command was unable to mount another prepared defence on the mainland.”⁵⁰ Nothing now remained but a retreat to Singapore Island where the garrison, under heavy Japanese attack, surrendered on 15 February 1942. The Japanese marched approximately eighty thousand men off into captivity. It was the largest mass surrender in the history of the British Army.

In analyzing the British conduct in Malaya that led to defeat, it is tempting to say simply that they did everything wrong and move on, but some analysis of the campaign is necessary. First, there was no army commander or staff for forces in Malaya. Percival was GOC Malaya but had too many other duties to function solely as an army commander. Second, Percival failed as a leader. He never took control of the situation and was unable to impose his will on his commanders. Percival did his best, but in the decisive battle for Malaya, Percival was required to implement “a plan imposed on him by Wavell, and [entrust] its execution to a subordinate in whom he lacked confidence.”⁵¹ Bennett was capable of talking a good fight but lacked the experience and the staff to carry out what Wavell wanted.

Wavell is perhaps the most culpable of the British commanders. He should have sacked Percival since he plainly had no confidence in him—he did not. Further, Wavell, knowing that Percival was lax in following orders, as seen by the issue of fortifying the north side of Singapore Island, did not see to it his orders were carried out. Historians will never know whether Wavell’s plan might have been better than Percival’s defense in depth idea. However, having issued orders for how the Battle for Johore was to be conducted, he should have ensured they were carried out—he did not.

When the Japanese struck, the situation in Malaya was probably beyond redemption. Untrained troops, lack of equipment, no air cover—the situation in Malaya was a defeat waiting to happen. The defeat did not need to turn into a catastrophe. It took Archibald Wavell to do that.

APPENDIX

The order issued to Percival by Wavell is reproduced in full in the official British recount of the War with Japan, *History of the Second World War: United Kingdom military series, War Against Japan, Volume 1: The Loss of Singapore*. It reads as follows:

- III Indian Corps, after delaying the enemy north of Kuala Lumpur for as long as possible, was to be withdrawn by rail and road into Johore, leaving only sufficient mobile rearguards to cover demolition schemes.
- 8th Australian Division (Less one brigade group which was to remain in the Mersing area) was to move immediately to the north-west frontier of Johore, and prepare to fight a defensive battle on the general line Segamat-Mount Ophir-mouth of the Muar River. The brigade group remaining in the Mersing area was to be moved to the same general line as soon as it could be relieved by troops from Singapore Island, but this could not be carried out until after the arrival of the 53rd Infantry Brigade.
- 9th Indian Division, made up of the freshest troops of the III Indian Corps and 45th Indian Infantry Brigade from Malacca, were to be placed under the command of 8th Australian Division and used in the southern portion of the position as indicated.
- III Indian Corps after withdrawal was to take over responsibility for the east and west coasts of Johore south of the line Mersing-Kluang-Batu Phat, thus leaving General Bennett free to fight a battle in north-western Johore. The III Indian Corps was to reorganize 11th Indian Division, and organize a general reserve from reinforcements as they arrived.

Notes

1. N. H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, Volume 1: Rearmament Policy (London: HMSO, 1976), 79. For the Ten Year Rule see: 3-6, 55-64, 69-71.

2. Geoffrey Till, "Retrenchment Rethinking Revival 1919-1939" in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy*, ed. J. R. Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 325.

3. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. 1, 20-4.

4. *Ibid.*, 375-6.

5. J. R. M. Butler, *Grand Strategy, Volume 2: September 1939-June 1941* (London: HMSO, 1957), 334-5.

6. Richard Overly with Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Road To War* (New York: Penguin Books,

1999), 85.

7. Anthony Beevor, *The Second World War* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012), 254 for an account of issues and lack of cordial relations between the British commanders.

8. Basil Collier, *The War in the Far East 1941-1945* (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1969), 107.

9. Ibid., 108. An aircraft carrier, H.M.S. *Indomitable* was supposed to accompany the ships but was damaged in a grounding at Kingston, Jamaica. See Arthur Swinson, *Defeat in Malaya* (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1970), 43.

10. Ibid., 108-9. See also Sir John Smyth, *Percival and the Tragedy of Singapore* (London: Macdonald & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1971), 49-50

11. See: Smyth, *Percival*, 61, Collier, *Far East*, 108-9.

12. Collier, *Far East*, 108. For the types of aircraft available in Malaya see: James Leasor, *Singapore* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968), 163. Leasor gives a figure of only 141 serviceable aircraft.

13. Beevor, *Second World War*, 262.

14. Ong Chit Chung, *Operation Matador* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 226-7 is the fullest account of immediate pre-war planning by the British.

15. Keith Simpson, "Percival" in *Churchill's Generals* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 256-276. Simpson is the best account of Percival we have. He shows Percival's few strengths and is even handed in assessing the weaknesses. See particularly 264-8 dealing specifically with events in Malaya.

16. Ibid., 257-9.

17. Ibid., 259 for Alan Brooke's concern that "officers were being promoted to high command because they were proficient in staff work."

18. Ibid., 263.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 264.

21. The only biography of Yamashita is by A.J. Barker in Ballantine's *History of the Violent Century*. See A. J. Barker, *Yamashita* (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1973), 14-20 for his early career.

22. Arthur Swinson, *Defeat in Malaya* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), 17.

23. James Leasor, *Singapore* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968), 128-129. *Singapore* contains an excellent discussion of the tin and rubber trade.

24. Swinson, *Defeat* 19-20.

25. Ibid., 18-9. See also: Barker, *Yamashita* 48.

26. Ibid., 19. Barker, *Yamashita*, 48.

27. Ibid., 19.

28. Smyth, *Percival*, 86-7.

29. Ibid., 88-9.

30. Chung, *Matador*, 232-233; Swinson, *Defeat*, 53.

31. Swinson, *Defeat* 55.

32. Frank Owen, *The Fall of Singapore* (London: The Quality Book Club, 1960), 71.

33. Brian P. Farrell, *The Defence and Fall of Singapore* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2006), 176-82.

34. Swinson, *Defeat*, 96.

35. S. Woodburn Kirby, *Singapore: The Chain of Disaster* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1971), 176-178.

36. Farrell, *Defence and Fall*, 218-9. Farrell used the word “fiasco” to describe the British efforts. He isn’t wrong.

37. Brian P. Farrell, “The Dice Were Rather Heavily Loaded: Wavell and the Fall of Singapore In *Leadership and responsibility in the Second World War*, 208-111. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004, 223-4.

38. Ibid., 223. “Wavell was briefed personally by Brigadier I.M. Stewart, recently elevated to temporary command of 12th Indian Brigade, the lead formation scattered by the Japanese tank assault. The exhausted Stewart made a poor impression on Wavell, provoking him to remark that it was one of the most incoherent reports that he had ever heard.” This was not calculated to give Wavell confidence in 3rd Corps ability to manage the situation.

39. Ibid., 224.

40. These are found in Appendix 1.

41. Simpson, *Percival*, 267. See also Smyth, *Percival* 263, wherein Percival disclaims all responsibility for Wavell’s plan.” Percival wrote to the official historian ‘On the evening of 8 January General Wavell, on his return from visiting my troops north of Kuala Lumpur, sent for me and dictated his own plan. I can take no responsibility for it.’”

42. This was not the first time Wavell retained a commander in whom he had no confidence. In April, 1941 in the Western Desert Wavell was very unhappy with General Neame yet refused to sack him with the same unhappy results. Ronald Lewin, *The Chief* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1980) 123-5.

43. Farrell, *Dice Were Heavily Loaded*, 226.

44. Ibid., 228. According to S. Woodburn Kirby in *The War Against Japan* Reprint (London: HMSO, 1957) 5 vols., vol. 1, 306, Percival, contrary to Wavell’s instructions used the 53rd British Brigade in place of the 22nd Australian. Evidently instructions to concentrate the Australian Division

were being ignored.

45. Farrell, *Defence and Fall*, 256-8.

46. Kirby, *Singapore*, 198-9.

47. *Ibid.*, 199-200.

48. *Ibid.*, 200.

49. Farrell, *Dice were heavily loaded*, 228.

50. *Ibid.*, 229.

51. Simpson, *Percival*, 267.

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