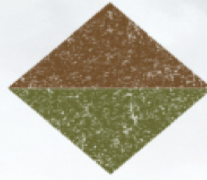
THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

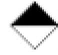


PAUL HAM

SANDAKAN

THE HARROWING TRUE STORY OF THE BORNEO DEATH MARCHES 1944–5

About the Book

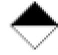


After the fall of Singapore in 1942, the conquering Japanese Army transferred some 2,500 British and Australian prisoners to a jungle camp at Sandakan, on the east coast of North Borneo. There they were beaten, broken, worked to death, thrown into bamboo cages on the slightest pretext and subjected to tortures so ingenious and hideous that the victims were driven to the brink of madness. For decades after the Second World War, the British and Australian governments would refuse to divulge what had happened there for fear of traumatizing the families of the victims.

But it was only the beginning of the nightmare. In late 1944, when Allied aircraft began bombing the coastal towns of Sandakan and Jesselton, the Japanese resolved to abandon the prison camp and take the prisoners 250 miles inland to Ranau as slave labour, carriers and draught horses. The journey there became known as the Sandakan Death marches. Of the thousand-plus prisoners who set out on the epic marches, only six survived. This is both their story and the story of the fallen.

This important and harrowing book narrates the full story of Sandakan for the first time, as told through the experiences of many of the participants and through interviews with the families of the survivors and the deceased. Paul Ham has consulted thousands of documents to assemble a chilling portrait of exactly what happened to the people who suffered and died in British North Borneo, and who was responsible.

CONTENTS



Cover
About the Book
Title Page
Dedication
Letter to His Imperial Majesty The Emperor of Japan
Map of Sandakan–Ranau Death Marches
Map of Borneo, 1945

Part 1: Before

1 Singapore Lost
2 The Boat
3 British North Borneo
4 No. 1 Prisoner of War Camp
5 Officers and Men

Part 2: The Camp

6 First Escapes
7 The Commandant
8 The Drome
9 Flesh and Bone
10 The Cage

Part 3: Resistance

11 The Radio
12 The Underground
13 The Berhala Eight

14 Guerrillas
15 Arrivals
16 Betrayal
17 The Kempei-Tai
18 Mountain Revolt
19 Kuching
20 Execution
21 Rescue?

Part 4: They March

22 New Year 1945
23 The First March
24 White Porters
25 The Guards
26 An Example
27 Self-Sacrificed
28 Rescue?
29 The Second March
30 Two
31 The Chaplain
32 The Last Jungle Camp
33 Three
34 One
35 Mati Mati
36 The Last
37 Crucified

Part 5: Revelation

38 Surrender

39 Relics
40 The Trials
41 The People
42 Home

Picture Section

Appendices
1 Honour Roll of Australian and British Soldiers who Died at Sandakan or on the Sandakan–Ranau Death Marches
2 List of Sentences in the Trials of the Sandakan Underground
3 List of Borneo Natives who Helped Prisoners

Acknowledgements
References
Bibliography
Index
Postscript
About the Author
Copyright

PAUL HAM

SANDAKAN

THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE SANDAKAN DEATH MARCHES

Dedicated to the Australian and British prisoners of war in Borneo who never came home, the few who did, and the local people who tried to save them

Paul Ham
Sydney
Australia

Tennō Heika (天皇陛下)
His Imperial Majesty The Emperor of Japan
The Imperial Palace
Tokyo
Japan

October 2012

Your Majesty,
You may think it impertinent of me, an Australian historian, to presume to address the Emperor of Japan. No doubt, many of your countrymen will think so and urge you to ignore this unsolicited letter.

But I write to you in an effort to find some connection between our countries beyond trade, tourism and the memory of the most terrible conflict our world has known. We are still recovering from that experience. Of the 50 million people who died in the Second World War, more than half were Asian people and Allied servicemen and women, the victims of Japanese aggression.

I write not in anger or bitterness, but rather in the spirit of respect and friendship. I do not share in the slightest degree the racial intolerance of some of my countrymen and women, whose hatred of the Japanese people festers decades after the last drop of blood fell to earth in the dying months of the Pacific War. But it is absurd and wrong to ‘hate’ a whole people, as Robert Menzies, a former Australian prime minister, reminded us in 1942. Few Australians seem to realise that Japan was our ally during

the First World War, and treated German and Russian prisoners of war with exemplary care and restraint.

I therefore appeal to our shared sense of humanity, which recognises no social or cultural distinctions, transcends race, religion and the colour of our skin, and reaches out to embrace the higher attributes of human nature: justice, compassion and mutual goodwill. It is in this spirit that I present you with my book, *Sandakan: The Untold Story of the Sandakan Death Marches* (Random House, 2012), the history of a little-known war crime that occurred between 1942 and 1945 in Borneo, when the island was an outpost of the Japanese Empire. It is the story of the agonising last days and needless deaths of more than 2400 Australian and British prisoners of war. Enslaved for three years in a Japanese prison camp at Sandakan, many died of disease, malnutrition and appalling treatment. Some 1100 survivors were then force-marched into the heart of the island. Of these, six came home – a 99.5 per cent death rate, the worst of any prisoner-of-war camp in the Pacific or European theatres of the Second World War.

The victims of Borneo were starved, tortured, shot, bayoneted or beheaded. Many died of untreated illnesses or starvation. One was crucified and disembowelled, according to a witness. The Death Marches were the biggest killer: sick and hungry men were forced to carry heavy loads through jungle and swamp, and over mountains, until they collapsed from exhaustion or disease or hunger, whereupon the guards shot or clubbed them to death. It was a policy of mass extermination. The killing continued until 27 August 1945, nearly a fortnight after the armistice. These crimes were committed in the name of the military regime over which your father held supreme command, under Article 6 of the Imperial Japanese Constitution.

The facts only partly convey the horror of the individual stories – stories of men who experienced unearthly

suffering. Chaplain Harold Wardale-Greenwood, for instance, was an officer who led his troops on the Death Marches with his Christian god in his heart and hope for his men in his head, but he lost his faith in the face of such cruelty days before he succumbed to sickness. Captain Lionel Matthews, arrested for running an underground smuggling operation in Sandakan Prison Camp, was tortured to within an inch of his life but never broke. After each torture session, he would tap Morse signals on his knee to warn his fellow prisoners of what they were about to endure at the hands of the Kempei-tai. Added to this were the countless acts of bravery and resistance by soldiers beaten, starved and exhausted beyond reach of hope or deliverance, prodded at bayonet point to a lonely death in the sodden jungles of Borneo.

These facts were laid before the War Crimes Tribunal, which convened in a tent on a beach in Labuan in January 1946. They outraged every scrap of humanity enshrined in the Geneva Convention, to which Japan was not a signatory, but by the terms of which your country had promised to abide. Many of the perpetrators, Japanese and Formosan, were executed; most were imprisoned and then freed, in the 1950s, under a general amnesty.

Since the end of the war, no Japanese government has recognised or accepted historic responsibility for the Death Marches in Borneo. None has apologised to, recognised or made an effort to compensate the Australian and British families and the native people of Borneo for the atrocities that left behind so many widows, fatherless children and families in mourning for their boys. Of course, nothing can ‘compensate’ a family for the loss of a father, son, husband or brother – except his return.

Japan’s silence on these crimes – crimes that will disgust every human heart capable of feeling – implies a reluctance to accept responsibility for them and redounds to the disgrace of the Japanese nation.

That does not mean the victors are immune from the same charge. Any honest analysis of the Pacific War accepts that the Allies committed unconscionable acts of wanton barbarity. I am the author of *Hiroshima Nagasaki*, a history of the atomic bombs. Only the wilfully ignorant or prejudiced could fail to conclude, after examining the evidence, that the nuclear attacks on your country were not only crimes against humanity but also militarily unnecessary. Was the breaking, burning or irradiation of hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians justified as revenge for Pearl Harbor, as the American Government claimed at the time? We debase ourselves, and the history of civilisation, if we accept that Japanese atrocities warranted an American atrocity in reply.

Crimes against humanity, war crimes, atrocities – whatever legal name we choose to give them – affront everything we hold dear as human beings. They do not admit of justification or excuse or qualification. 'Revenge' is no defence. They are singularly abhorrent. They revolt us.

Many people would prefer to let these issues wither unread in the dusty chronicles of war. Let the past be, they cry, dimly unable to see that ignorance of the past dooms us to repeat it. Many resort to facile banalities, and excuses, for such acts, that of 'victor's justice' and 'all nations commit war crimes'; or, from the Allied perspective, the Old Testament equation of an 'eye for an eye', or the infantile 'Japan started it'. But there are absolutes in the realm of human cruelty, which transcend the special pleading of nations and tribunals – and bring me to the point of this letter.

What happened to the tens of thousands enslaved on the Burma–Siam Railway, to the 'comfort women', to the citizens of Nanking, to the Koreans and Chinese and millions of people throughout the Pacific, from 1931 to 1945, and indeed to the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and of the firebombing of Japanese cities will appal all fair-

minded people in perpetuity. Their story is part of our collective human history.

I do not presume to speak for them – others are better qualified to do so. But I do feel entitled to speak on behalf of the families of the victims of the Sandakan Prisoner of War Camp and Death Marches, many of whom I have met. And I make a simple request of you, as the ultimate representative of your people: that you publicly recognise these events and apologise on behalf of the Japanese nation for the crimes committed in Borneo in 1942–45.

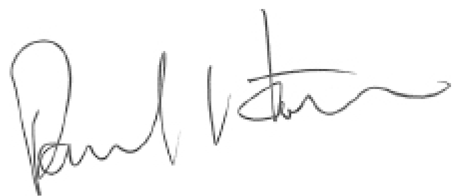
Japan has not hitherto apologised *as a nation*. Individual Japanese officials have expressed personal remorse for ‘mistakes’ made in the war, or used the term ‘*owabi*’, which, as I understand it, means an apology that is not heartfelt. The most sincere form of Japanese apology is, I believe, rendered by the phrase ‘*moshiwake gozaimasen*’ Yet the world has never heard a Japanese leader say this on behalf of the Japanese people in relation to Pacific War crimes.

A sincere apology from the Emperor would express, on behalf of all Japanese people, a genuine acknowledgement of these crimes, and that Japan recognises them as uniquely heinous and abhorrent. As our former prime minister, Paul Keating – whose uncle died on the Death Marches – has stated: ‘Sandakan should be remembered because it was more than a battle between nations and … conflicting ideologies; it was a war between human decency and human depravity.’

No apology can alleviate the terrible losses suffered by thousands of families. But it can atone for Japan’s silence and obfuscation, and render these events in the true light of history rather than as forgettable ephemera, untaught in Japanese schools and unacknowledged by the nation that perpetrated them. And your words – coming from the highest moral authority in Japan – would bring our two countries a step closer to that most elusive quality in the

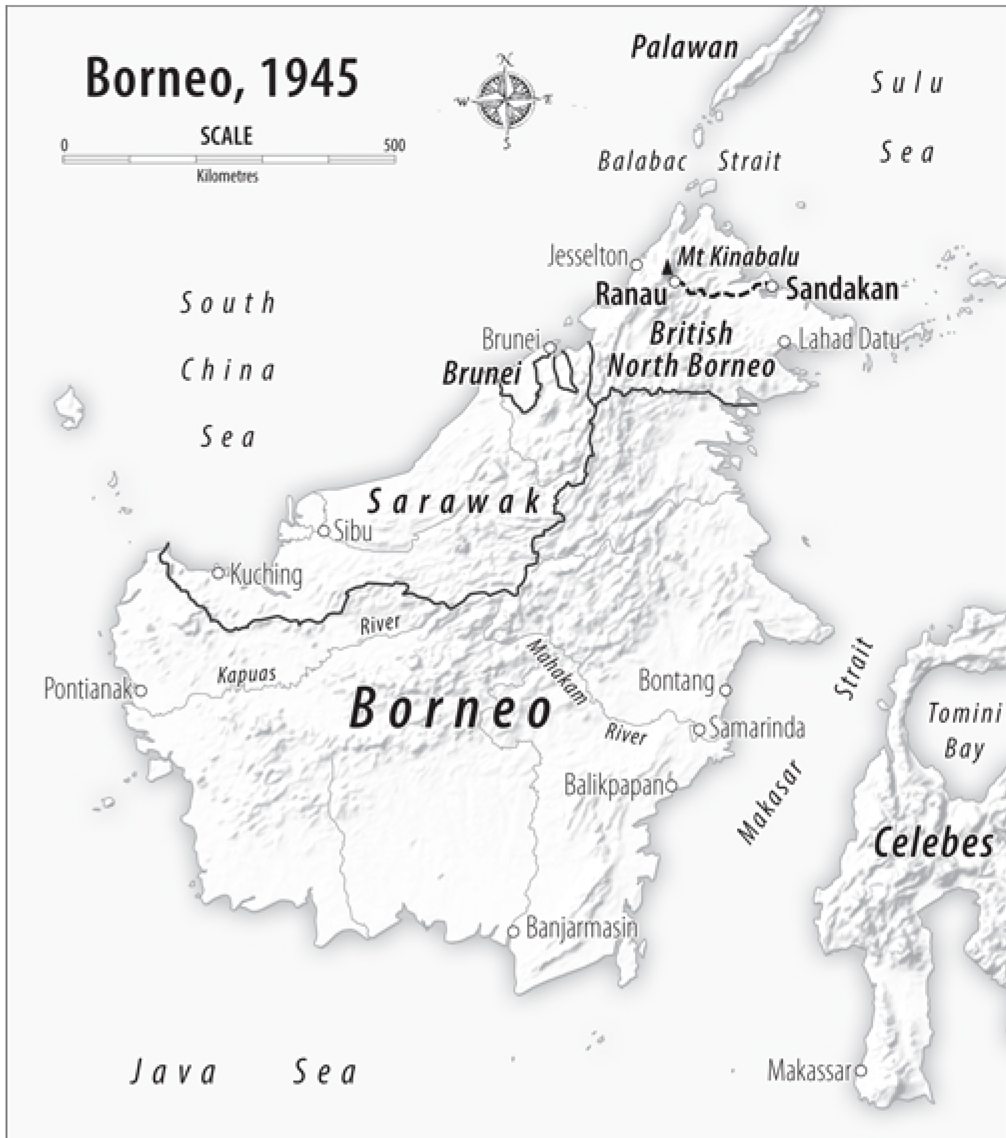
affairs of people, mutual understanding, which is surely the beginning of true forgiveness and friendship.

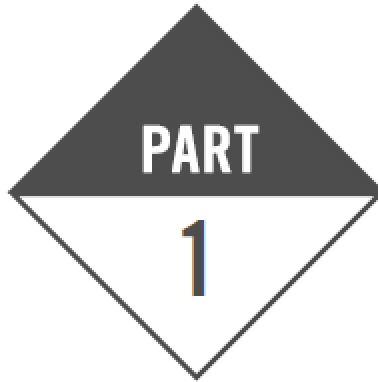
Yours sincerely,



Paul Ham

Sandakan Death Marches
Approximate Route
SCALE
0
30
Kilometres
Sungai Sungai
Lingkabau
Labuk Bay
Sulu Sea
Botitian
Poring
British North Borneo
Ranau
Klagan
Nalapak
Nabutan
Liwagu River
Segindai
Beluran
Maunad
River
Pandan-Pandan River
Maunad River
Manjang River
Approximate Route of March
Sandakan
Matupang
Labuk
Bital
Paginatan
Mt Mentapok
River
Simpang Dua River
Kapat River
River
Berhala Island
Sandakan Harbour
Liwagu
River
Maringkan
Miruru
Tagak River
Sapi
Segaluid
Sekong Bay
Tampias
Kegibangan
River
Monkilau River
Taviu
River
Wonod
Boto
Luang Maris
Lolosing River
Tundom Baba River
Telupid
Tapang River
Telupid River
Mailo River
Mt Tawai
Parayon
Suanlamba
Kaling
Kuamut
To Lahad Datu


Borneo, 1945
SCALE
0
500
Kilometres
N
S
E
W
Palawan
Sulu Sea
Balabac Strait
Jesselton
Mt Kinabalu
Ranau
Sandakan
British North Borneo
Lahad Datu
Brunei
Brunei
South China Sea
Sarawak
Sibu
Kuching
River
Kapuas
Pontianak
Borneo
Mahakam
River
Bontang
Samarinda
Balikpapan
Strait
Makasar
Tomini Bay
Celebes
Banjarmasin
Java Sea
Makassar



BEFORE

1

SINGAPORE LOST

[F]urther resistance would not only serve to inflict direct harms [sic] and injuries to thousands of non-combatants living in the city, throwing them into further miseries and horrors of war, but also would not add anything to the honour of your Army and result in annihilation of the city and civilians.

Japanese leaflet, signed by General Yamashita Tomoyuki, dropped on Allied positions in Singapore days before the British surrender

---

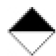
THE WAR COMES TO SINGAPORE with a bloody, terrible suddenness that shocks the British and Australian forces who garrison the city's naval base. In their field offices, on the outskirts of town, Allied war diarists record Britain's greatest military humiliation in short, handwritten phrases, like taps on a snare drum pacing the approach of oblivion.

'Civilians,' warns an Australian diarist of the 8th Division General Staff, on 2 February 1942, may hear 'war-like noises – range practice etc' – a ruse conceived by the Allies to prevent civilian hysteria.[1] To further this illusion of safety, the British commander Lieutenant General Arthur Percival postpones plans to build proper land fortifications along the coast. But those 'warlike noises' hammering Singapore's north coast are *actual* war noises, writes the Australian war diarist. Real Japanese guns and bombs are destroying the naval fortress, whose huge new docks have not contained a warship for weeks.

Defeat is everywhere: in the smell of encroaching shellfire, the cries of terrified Chinese, and the bewildered eyes of Allied soldiers and commanders, who fall back on

the island beneath the rampaging forces of Nippon. The Japanese control the Johore Peninsula and since January have turned their sights on the little island to the south, Fortress Singapore, hitherto thought impregnable. With their backs to the sea, British and Australian troops prepare to fight to the last man in defence of this sumptuous colony, the pride of the Empire. Just weeks earlier, pink gin, linen suits, croquet and the calm of Raffles Hotel seemed the unassailable constituents of civilisation. Today, these trinkets of colonial life have vanished in the cordite-filled stench of defeat. Everyone knows Singapore's surrender is imminent.

Churchill is already resigned to the fact, having lost hope of the colony's salvation after the sinking of the *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales* the previous December; he will later describe the Fall of Singapore as the 'worst disaster' and 'greatest capitulation' in British history. Reasons beyond his control, he implies at the time, have forced the defeat. Yet the responsibility is the British Government's, in its inability to reinforce the colony, chiefly with crucial aircraft. Stretched to the limit fighting Germany, Britain simply hasn't the resources to defend its Far Eastern garrison. The prime minister will never forgive the Japanese for the loss of Singapore, which envenoms his mind against 'the Wops of the East', the deaths of whom he later demands in great numbers to avenge British honour.[2] If the voyage of Christopher Columbus marked the dawn of the European colonial era, the great clanking sound of the retreat of Western imperialism has surely started here.



No doubt, there is great bravery in the path of defeat, isolated acts that do little to stanch the downward rush of Japan. No fair account of the withdrawal could overlook the stoic role of Australia's 22nd Brigade, whose 2/30th

Battalion at Gemas on 14 January inflicted a tactical blow distinctly absent from the rest of the Malayan campaign. Ordered to 'stop' the enemy, as part of the wider fighting withdrawal from Muar, the battalion's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick 'Black Jack' Galleghan, commanded his men to set an ambush at a wooden bridge over the Sungei Gemencheh River. At 4 pm that day, as the Japanese crossed on bicycles, the Australians blew the bridge and turned their machine guns, rifles and grenades on the enemy. The initiative was short-lived: unable to call in artillery because the Japanese had broken their telephone lines, the Australians fought on for two bloody days before withdrawing, during which they inflicted several hundred Japanese casualties (not a thousand, as popularly claimed) and destroyed a few Japanese tanks, for the loss of 81 men.

It was a fleeting tactical victory. Yet if the action achieved little, it was not the fault of Captain Lionel Matthews, an Australian signaller, who ran into no-man's-land several times to reconnect broken communications lines, for which he would earn every shred of his Military Cross. (Matthews would later perform the same feat, 'laying a cable over ground strongly patrolled by the enemy and thus restoring communication' between his divisional headquarters and a brigade during the battle for Singapore.)

The stand at Gemas was but a straw in the wind. At Bakri, from 18 to 22 January, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Anderson, a South African-born Australian, earned the only Victoria Cross of the Malayan campaign. Anderson, commanding Australia's 2/19th Battalion, was ordered to halt the Japanese near Parit Sulong Village. Cut off deep inside enemy territory, without air or artillery support, Anderson repelled 'persistent attacks on his position from air and ground forces, and forced his way through the enemy lines to a depth of fifteen miles', his citation would

state.[3] Suffering severe casualties, 'he personally led an attack with great gallantry on the enemy who were holding a bridge, and succeeded in destroying four guns … throughout all this fighting, [he] protected his wounded and refused to leave them'. Captured, Anderson and a few survivors were doomed to spend years on the Thai–Burma Railway; to his fury, the Japanese would massacre all the Australian wounded.

A great assortment of British forces engaged in the biggest and most sustained battles during the 'fighting withdrawal' (a noble euphemism, disguising what had become a hasty and disorganised Allied retreat) down the Malayan Peninsula: the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 2nd Gordon Highlanders, regiments raised in Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, Lanarkshire, East Surrey, as well as anti-tank, anti-aircraft and artillery units. The measureless courage of a few failed to inhibit the onrush. Near the end, the Scots bore the brunt of combat – fighting, pulling back and regrouping to fight again – during which the Argylls were decimated. A handful of bloody survivors, led by their kilted pipers, staggered across the Causeway, the last troops over this 1100-yard sea bridge linking Singapore island to Johore Peninsula, before the Royal Navy blew it up on the morning of 31 January.

And then there were the Indians. The heroic failure of several Indian units confounds later reports of wholesale cowardice and disloyalty. Denouncing their 'low morale' after the war,[4] the Australian commander Lieutenant General Gordon Bennett (Major General at the time of the fall) – himself in no position to condemn others – would spare the performance of the 11th Indian Division, who endured the hellish four-day battle of Kampar. None who lived through it would forget the performance of the Sikh units of the 6/15th Brigade, and the hair-raising war cries

of 1/18th Punjab Regiment, who fell on the Japanese with bayonets fixed and eyes ablaze. Just 30 survived the carnage.

Against this, the Japanese proved an unstoppable force. Superbly led, jungle-trained, phenomenally brave and driven to the limits of endurance by Tokyo's craving for raw materials, the soldiers are easily the better and more experienced. Psychologically programmed to scorn death, they present the terrifying aspect of an army utterly indifferent to its own preservation, in accordance with the revitalised code of the samurai, the bushido, whose opening words, '… to die!' ring in the heads of thousands of screaming young men swarming up the beaches.[5] Indeed, they relish the prospect, in battle and captivity, of self-annihilation in the name of the Emperor.

The last days of Singapore are a frenzy of blood and iron. The Australian war diarist, seemingly oblivious to his own coming doom, dutifully completes his chronicle: on 4 February, the civil authorities order 'all natives living within one mile of foreshores' to evacuate. The reason appears overhead, in a squadron of triumphant, low-flying Zeros, rolling and diving like flocks of playful birds, in complete control of the sky. A million terrified people are now crammed onto the little island.

That night, unmolested, the Zeros bomb the precincts of the Causeway. On 8 February, they strafe the town centre. Panic is open and everywhere, amid reports of Japanese landings on the island's north-west shore and manifestly *not* in the east, where Allied commanders had expected them. In fact, that day, one and a half divisions, some 30,000 Japanese troops, heave ashore directly in the sights of Australia's vastly outnumbered and thinly spread 22nd Brigade, who mount a desperate, if futile, resistance before

being utterly overwhelmed, as the diarist glibly notes: ‘2330 … situation very confused … Penetration has occurred’.

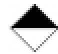
The Australian forces are being ‘pushed back’, notes the 8th Division war diary. Their British comrades, occupying the same poorly fortified positions, are similarly routed – a direct consequence of British commander General Arthur Percival’s refusal to build proper coastal defences. This eases the task of the Japanese shock troops, who fall on the shallow Allied defences in a screaming, seemingly limitless tide; they blow holes in the thinning lines and charge through, shooting or butchering the wan face of resistance.

The news resonates at the command centre in the city: the Allies’ tactic of spreading the men thinly around the shores rather than concentrating them at likely landing points has failed. Percival anticipated an enemy force of at least five divisions, some 100,000 troops; in fact, the Japanese attack the island with just 30,000 strike troops and 35,000 in reserve, against total Allied forces of some 88,000. The latter include tens of thousands of dozy ‘base wallahs’ – staff and supporting units – who are more likely to raise a glass of crème de menthe than a rifle. By contrast, *all* Japanese personnel – the cooks, batmen, medics and drivers – double as combat troops.

At 4.30 am on 9 February, the situation rapidly deteriorates. ‘Brigade disorganised and comm[unications] extremely difficult,’ the Australian scribbles. ‘HQ withdrawing … Situation in Brigade area not clear … unknown where actual front of brigade [is] situated …’ At 8 am, the Western Area HQ moves its Operations Room to underground dugouts, and British and Australian troops fall back on the city. Lieutenant Tony White, an Australian officer, looks into the clear blue sky: nothing. ‘In the last days it was rumoured the skies were going to be black with

American planes,' he recalls.[6] Today, only the dismal sound of the oncoming Zeros can be heard.

The last charter plane, packed with startled civilians, leaves Singapore that day. That night, some 2000 Australians are reported to be holed up in the Anzac Club – a figure later found to be 'grossly exaggerated', the diarist notes. In truth, British and Australian morale has plummeted. Whole units crack, and their soldiers, unable to bear the shame of defeat and the horror of what awaits them, desert. Australian and British stragglers – most cut off from their units – wander the city's precincts in disbelief that it has come to this. '[T]hroughout Singapore,' writes another witness, 'small bands of British and Australian troops could be seen wandering aimlessly about, with a very dispirited demeanour'.[7]



In the command bunker at Allied HQ Western Area, west of the town, General Archibald Wavell, commander-in-chief, Far East, General Percival, general officer commanding Malaya, and Lieutenant General Gordon Bennett, commander of Australia's 8th Division, confer.

Wavell, imperturbable, possessed of charm and intelligence, is sent to Singapore with failure howling in his head, after Rommel's forces chased the British out of Crete and Greece and destroyed their offensive in North Africa. Removed by Churchill after that debacle, Wavell arrives in Asia to confront another.

Percival cuts an ungainly figure in his baggy shorts, snub moustache and buck teeth, the epitome of the chinless Pom in the eyes of resentful Australians. In fact, he is a brave officer, the recipient of the Military Cross in the Great War, and a sound administrator. But he is not equipped for his present challenge. In Singapore, Percival's unpromising

appearance, timid grip on command and indecisiveness fail to inspire his subordinates – and hasten the colony's doom.

Bennett, nominally Percival's most senior subordinate, is an insufferably proud Australian, decorated at Gallipoli, where he led 300 men in an attack south of Lone Pine, and Pozières, the worst Australian clash on the Western Front. Bennett is a front-line commander, prickly to the point of insubordination and utterly unsuited to working with his British superiors. He makes little effort to disguise his contempt for Percival, and their relationship is 'devoid of harmony'[8] – a serious mark against Bennett's attitude and any hope of smooth and decisive command in Singapore.

These are the men charged with leading the defence of the colony. In early February 1942, they deliberate inside a heavily fortified bunker beneath Japanese aerial bombardment. With every shuddering blow, the obvious outcome stares them in the face: surrender, or face obliteration. Outside the bunker, the casualties of the air attack are 'light', the 8th Division diarist wishfully writes. Inside, the British generals exhibit 'exemplary coolness', Bennett records.[9]

Wavell delivers the message he has been sent to convey: British and Australian forces must hold the island to the last man. '[O]ur whole fighting reputation is at stake and the honour of the British Empire,' he declares[10] – echoing Churchill's grim injunction, sent via a personal signal, that there must be 'no thought of saving the troops or sparing the population'. The battle for Singapore, Churchill insists, must be fought to the bitter end 'at all costs'. Britain's 18th Division 'has a chance to make its name in history. Commanders and senior officers should die with their troops … I rely on you to show no mercy or weakness in any form.'[11] Percival accepts the order; Bennett grumpily demurs.

That night, Wavell dines with the governor Sir Shenton and Lady Daisy Thomas at Government House. Premonitions of the end obsess him; in his mind, British Singapore, this Gibraltar of the East, is a thing of the past. He sits 'thumping his knees with his fists' (as Sir Shenton observes in his diary), saying over and over, '"It should never have happened."'[12] But his work is done here – he has delivered his instructions, assessed the situation – and he prepares to leave Percival and his embattled men. His duty is elsewhere, in the vast amphitheatre of the Pacific, the defeat of which now threatens not only whole nations but also his very career. Lady Thomas, sick with dysentery, declines Wavell's invitation to accompany him to Java – a last, perfunctory act of chivalry. The general leaves Singapore after midnight.

On 10 February, British and Australian commanders order the destruction of the island's petrol reserves and all classified documents, while Allied units withdraw to the outskirts of the city. Australian units in the vicinity of the village of BT Panjang are ordered to hold the line. That night, a large Japanese force with tanks attacks the area. A British counter-offensive fails, or never occurs, as reported, and the Allies resume the withdrawal, 'in confusion after suffering heavy casualties'.[13]

The Australian diarist ends the day on a plaintive note: 'It appeared that there was little of our force on the road to stop any breakthrough by the enemy SOUTH … towards SINGAPORE.' The very breakthrough occurs that night. Australia's 2/29th Battalion becomes 'disintegrated': 'Bn HQ and one coy and stragglers move back to HALL ROAD.' The Japanese grab control of the food, petrol and supply dumps in the area, as the Allies retreat in a loose semicircle around the heart of town.

On the morning of 11 February, Japanese planes scatter leaflets signed by General Yamashita Tomoyuki calling on all British forces to surrender:

> [F]urther resistance would not only serve to inflict direct harms *[sic]* and injuries to thousands of non-combatants living in the city, throwing them into further miseries and horrors of war, but also would not add anything to the honour of your Army and result in annihilation of the city and civilians.[14]

If the Allies continue to resist, 'I shall be obliged though reluctantly from humanitarian considerations to order my army to make annihilating attacks on Singapore'.

Countless Chinese towns can attest to the seriousness of the threat; Nanking offers the apotheosis. The Allied forces converge on the racecourse and the city's precincts. Incidents of lawlessness and looting erupt in the city; small groups of soldiers are found 'searching the waterfront for some means of escape'.[15] That day, British military police block at least two attempts by drunken troops to rush the last ships, designated for white women, children and nurses. Discipline severely lapses, as drunk and nerve-racked troops undermine the stoic example of most soldiers, no less anxious and exhausted.

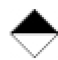
The most potent symbol of the colony's end is the destruction of its financial reserves. The sight of Captain Hartley James Walker towing out to sea and throwing overboard the banks' bullion coinage astonishes the local people.[16] Walker casts a stern eye on those who attempt to board the ship. Elsewhere, he sees cowardice and defeatism at the highest levels: officers at the Union Jack Club – 'hopeless cases' – are heard whining, 'They gave them a chance at Dunkirk and Greece and Crete! What about us!'[17] It is too late to evacuate the remaining civilians, who nervously await the invader in the churches and clubs, their grand old homes and the ballroom and

lobby of the Raffles Hotel. Hundreds sing hymns in the beautiful cathedral and pray. God is their only weapon left.

There follows an atrocity committed by the invading Japanese that bears out the Allies' worst reports of the enemy's incomprehensible cruelty. On 13 February, Japanese advance troops strike along the Pasir Panjang Ridge west of town. They penetrate Alexandra, where a military hospital contains 900 sick and wounded patients.

At 2 pm, they cut the water supply to the city; the reservoirs promise just a few days' flow. 'There are now one million people within radius of three miles,' Governor Thomas cables London. 'Many dead lying in the streets and burial impossible. We are faced with total deprivation of water, which must result in pestilence …'[18]

On 14 February, at 1.40 p.m., the first Japanese troops enter the hospital, where a British female officer presents them with a white flag. They reply by bayoneting her, burst into the main hospital and proceed to slaughter the medical staff and patients. According to one witness, '[The Japanese] ran amok on the ground floor. They were very excitable and jumpy; neither pointing to the RED CROSS brassard nor shouting the word HOSPITAL had any effect.'[19] In the operating theatre, they run through five doctors and nurses with their swords, as well as an anaesthetised corporal on the operating table.[20] Hundreds are herded into tiny cells in a nearby industrial site and left there overnight, where many die of heat or thirst; the survivors are bayoneted the next day. Over two days of inexplicable slaughter, the Japanese forces massacre 320 staff and patients at Alexandra Hospital.



At that hour, Percival confers with senior officers at Fort Canning. All are 'unanimous' that further resistance is 'hopeless',[21] writes Bennett, and the question arises: are we to fight to the death? In deference to his orders, Percival favours continued resistance – at least until his men can resist no more. The Australian officers disagree: 'did Singapore still have a strategic value to justify the sacrifice of 720,000 civilians?' Brigadier Jim Thyer, general staff officer commanding the 8th Australian Division, later writes.[22] Bennett, similarly, believes surrender is inevitable and escape a senior officer's duty.

The next day, Percival orders the artillery to fire only on 'observed targets' due to an acute shortage of Allied shells. 'There was practically no ammunition left,' Lieutenant Colonel Charles Kappe, commanding the Australian 8th Division Signals, later writes while a prisoner in Changi.[23] The water reserves are almost drained, with at best 48 hours' supply. Yet still Percival vows to fight on – for as long as the water lasts. Bennett, however, has made up his mind. Without informing his British counterpart, he cables Australia's prime minister John Curtin that he intends to surrender to avoid further, needless loss of life.[24] The message enrages Percival when he later hears of it.

On 15 February, at 11 am, brandishing a telegram from Wavell, Percival summons his senior commanders for their last conference as free men. The telegram qualifies Churchill's Armageddon strategy. 'So long,' Wavell writes, 'as you are in a position to inflict losses and damage to [the] enemy and your troops are physically capable of doing so you must fight on … When you are fully satisfied that this is no longer possible I give you discretion to cease resistance.'[25] The exhaustion of the men and the lack of water and ammunition make up Percival's mind. 'Unable therefore [to] continue the fight any longer,' he replies. 'All ranks have done their best and grateful for your help.'[26]

The Japanese celebrate the Allied surrender with shouts of *Banzai!*' and a clatter of swords. The world, too, must share in the British humiliation, see and feel it, their commanders decide. The abjection of the white man must be milked for all it's worth, insists General Yamashita Tomoyuki, the big, bullet-headed commander of the Japanese armies in Johore. Revelling in his nickname, the 'Tiger of Malaya', Yamashita orders the British commanders to prostrate themselves before him.

And so, a little after 4 pm, Percival and his staff, bearing a Union Jack and the white flag of truce drive north along the Bukit Timah road to the Japanese lines, whereupon they begin the walk of infamy to Yamashita's headquarters. Photographs of this terrible procession are broadcast around the world. At the same time, the Rising Sun flag appears over the Cathay Pacific Building, Singapore's tallest. The British commanders enter the Ford Automobile company, where Yamashita sits at his desk and lays down the terms of unconditional surrender.

Ignoring the thudding demands for his signature, Percival quietly peruses the surrender document and dares to request a ceasefire instead of a surrender; he asks as well that 1000 British troops be allowed to maintain order in the town and protect civilians. Yamashita ignores him, to which Percival replies that the Japanese commander must accept full responsibility for the lives of the troops and civilians remaining in Singapore. To such impertinence, Yamashita bangs his fist and declares that 'Bushido would look after these things'.[27] (In the event, Yamashita, while still in charge, restrains the Guards division of the Imperial Army from entering the city centre; and yet, had Percival not surrendered – as Yamashita later admits – the Japanese Army would have razed the town and subjected half a

million citizens to the treatment of Nanking.)[28] The Allies are committed to the unconditional surrender of Singapore.

The Australian war diary concludes with the pitiable realisation: 'Captured enemy maps [show] all our dispositions and HQs.' In short, the Japanese know everything – the fruit of busy, local fifth-columnists. Later that night, the Australian 8th Division makes a crueller discovery. Bennett, their commander, is missing, apparently absent without leave: 'General Gordon Bennett was not seen at HQ after this hour.'[29]

Vowing never to be caught, Bennett flees with two subordinates, Major Charles Moses and Lieutenant Gordon Walker. Their exit is distinctly unedifying: having burnt their papers, downed last drinks with a few Gordon Highlanders, who share the Australians' loathing of the English, Bennett and his staff commandeer a Chinese sampan and pitch into the sea. A witness later describes the ensuing fiasco, of Bennett screaming 'like a young girl' as pandemonium erupts on the crowded vessel.[30] That night, while the crew argue over the best route to Sumatra, the sampan crashes into a series of exposed fishing stakes. Despite these mishaps, the three Australian officers eventually get home. Their flight later attaches ignominy to the Australian commander's name, which his fussy, self-serving memoir does little to dispel.

For his part, Percival is sent to Changi, to spend years in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, unable to defend himself from the charges, *in absentia*, of responsibility for the disgrace. He provides, sadly, a perfect scapegoat for the failures of Whitehall.

The general ceasefire takes effect at 8.30 that night, with the surrender of all arms and ammunition. The Japanese troops, delirious on the shoreline, fling their arms in the air