

# Japanese invasion of malaysia



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## **the reasons for the rapid Japanese invasion of Malaya**

**In 1942**

### **INTRODUCTION**

After the victory and glory on many significant wars such as during Sino (1894-1895), Russo (1904-1905), Manchuria (1931) and China (1937), the Japanese was become the great power in the northern regional of Asia and also had steadily rose as a world power with much advancement in its military and related aspects[1]. Japan also had become the leader in the revolution of economic through the great empowerments in the development of industrial after the successful of Industrial Power Plan during the Meiji Dynasty era in 1867-1912. Japan also look their self as Leader from the East and bring his motto “ Asian for Asian” of becoming part of a “ Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” [2]

In 1939, German attack Poland from the West and Soviet Union (USSR) attack Poland from the East. Because of that, the British’s Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain had declared war against the Germany on 3 September 1939. Meanwhile, France also had allied with the Great Britain to corporate and work together against Germany. As the newly colonial territories were getting larger, the British army were incapable to either control or defend it from outside attack. In view of this golden opportunity, the Japanese had intendedto take control oversome regions in South East Asia such as Malaya and Singapore. The sanction of resources supply by the United States to Japan after the invasion of China in Sino Japan War in 1937, forced the Japanese to look for alternative suppliers to fulfill its requirements.

**REASON TO ATTACK RAPIDLY**

The reason for the rapid of Japanese Invasion to Malaya can be shown from before invasion and after invasion started. In 1939, Malaya was the resource of 40% of the world's rubber and 60% of the world's tin; that fact alone interested Japanese expansionists, but others additional reasons sealed the approval on the invasion planning that started in early 1941. Before the war, rubber and tin were exported to United States by its main producers mostly in Southeast Asia region. With the war sanction upon Japan by the United States and as the internal stocks were depleting, Japanese were forced to take drastic action to conquer the resources as soon as possible. Malaya was a part of the target.

The Japanese needed oil badly as every drop of oil consumed by Japan's military and industrial capacities had to be imported. For example, its Navy required 400 tons of oil/ hour to maintain its war readiness. While Malaya only had a limited amount of oil production, the peninsula was a perfect staging point to launch and support further invasion for the oil rich islands of Borneo, Java, and Sumatra. This will strongly support the military requirement its further objectives as well as from the previous war i. e. Sino Japan War.

Japan was looking for alternative resources as in Jun 1941, Japan was refused supplies of iron and oil from United States, Britain, and Netherlands, therefore further reinforced Japanese thought that Southeast Asia must be taken. This reason make a main part of the Japanese invasion to Southeast Asian. The British & France had allied and against the Germany, this was the

positive advantages as the loop holes significant in Malaya as well as other regions in Southeast Asia.

Percival had decided to surrender at 1400hrs, Sunday, 15 February 1942 since his troops had limited supplies which enough only for two days. In the other hand, Yamashita's troops also had depleted ammunitions which was enough for couple days. In this point, it was obvious that Percival did not have sharp intelligence mind, weak and insufficient logistic supports. The reason for rapid invasion is because actually Japanese only have a little support from logistic. Yamashita pursue Percival to surrender immediately because he knows, the longer operation can make him lost. Yamashita also use weather as the advantage. The Monsoon weather through December and January become a good concealment and the Japanese had taken advantages over erratic weather.

## **THE REASON FOR THE RAPIDLY INVASION**

### **The Failure British Strategies**

When the invasion started on 8 Dec 1941 in Kota Baharu, Kelantan, Japanese move from one place to another with " smoothly". So many factor are contribute for this rapidly invasion. The important factor for victory from Sun Tzu was " If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the results of a hundred battles" [3]. This factor failed used by British to understand where the treat come from and the underestimating their enemy. British's defense concentrated on Singapore as well as " Main Fleet to Singapore" strategies adopted to safeguard its territory. The Repulse and Prince of Wales stayed in Singapore. This strategic plan focus on Singapore, but Japanese attack from the North.

### **Matador Plan**

Eight months before the invasion, British Military strategists in Singapore prepared the secret plan called "Matador". This plan for defending forces to cross the Malayan - Siamese border 24 hours before any suspected Japanese landing south of Siam[4]. British realized that Japanese most likely landing at Singora and Patani because both towns have airfields. But the Japanese employed effective operations security, deceptive routing, and speed to protect the movement and intended destination of their naval convoys. The result was that the Japanese were able to rapidly secure those ports, push their ground forces ashore, and begin their attacks down the Malayan peninsula against the British army before Operation Matador could be ordered into execution. The predictions, as they happened, are accurate but Matador is largely led by British top brass and ultimately failed[5].

### **Japan Strategies**

The Japanese army had obeyed the Thai non-aggression pact and also set up a special unit named Doro Nawa which acted as intelligence and sourcing for relevant information before launching its attack. Besides that, all of the troops were well conditioned with the tropical weather and picked Hainan Island as training ground, they were also well trained and had wide experience in war. They had landed during night time or while heavy monsoon rain by surprise. While on the land, they were moving through road or rail line to the south. In addition, the troops were tough and able to live off the land, with no reliance on re-supply lines.

Another example of arranging operations was the Japanese decision to press their attack on Singapore rather than just shelling it. They had successfully

occupied the entire Malayan peninsula, moving a large distance in constant contact with the enemy in a relatively short period of time, and they could have taken the opportunity to rest their forces and simply shell Singapore into submission. Instead, they decided to directly attack Singapore. The Japanese felt that the psychological impact of the rapid capitulation of the so-called impregnable fortress of Singapore on both their enemy and their own people would be significant. They also wanted to take possession of the British naval base as soon as possible, and thus ensure safe passage of their ships through the Singapore straits. In addition, the troops involved in the Malaya-Singapore operation were sorely needed for the ongoing campaigns in the Philippines and the Netherlands East Indies [6]. The Japanese forces still had momentum, whereas the British and their allies had been in retreat and on the defensive for most of the campaign. Pressing the assault on Singapore thus exploited the Japanese strengths and the weaknesses of their enemies.

### **Japanese Strengths**

The strength of this troops were consisted of 36, 000 military, 28 Infantry Battalions, 80 Tanks, Aircraft for Army were 459 and then 158 for Naval usage, Its ships contain 6 Cruisers and 7 Destroyers and also 4 submarines.

However, British troops were only used the outdated equipments with limited supplies of ammunition and fuel for its operation. Meanwhile, the strength of its army consisted of 125, 000 military with 38 Infantry Battalions, aircraft with 158 air forces, ships facility were 2 Cruisers and 4 Destroyers and without tank at all.

This situation make a lot of different. British army always told their soldier that Japanese is very poor weapon and machinery, but when the invasion started most of the soldier especially British Indians Army, are run away because shocked looking for the tanks and aircraft.

### **Well Training**

The Japanese make a good decision to train their soldier at Hainan Island. The similarity of weather and terrain make advantage for the rapid invasion in Malaya. The first exercise took place in March of 1941, and involved large-scale navy and army maneuvers. Simulating an attack on Singapore following an amphibious landing in Malaya, the 5th Division (Army), escorted by Combined Fleet elements and with cover from army air units, crossed the East China Sea while under simulated attack from air and naval units, made a landing on Kyushu, and simulated the capture of coastal defenses. That very successful exercise focused on development of antisubmarine and anti-aircraft defense of convoys, the tactical challenges of amphibious landings, and rapid construction of airstrips in newly occupied areas. The commander of the exercise later became Yamashita's chief of staff in Malaya [7].

### **Japanese War Tactical Plans**

In order to invade the Malaya effectively and rapidly, the Japanese adopted various war tactical plans in the aspect of maritime, air as well as land which had proven successful with flying colors. In the Maritime Tactical Plan, they had made sudden amphibious assault at night by using local sampans and succeeded in the sinking of two British's major ships namely HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse.

In other hand, Japanese Air Tactical Plan included having air superiority with greater number and modern aircraft which operated from south Thailand. They also had built secured aerodrome in the north Malaya which provided support for ground troops. Beside that, they also had provided air support from sea and would destroy British aircraft on the ground Land Tactical Plan covered the utilization of light tanks and 18, 000ish bicycles which made them manoeuvre rapidly in jungle and jungle terrain faster with flanking tactics. As addition, the deployment of well trained 25th Army which had wide experiences in battle in China also advantages for Japan [8].

## **ANALYSIS**

Based on the discussion, we can differentiate the strategies, approaches as well as implementation by both parties either the Japanese or the British in this Malaya & Singapore Campaign. This analysis can compare the reason for rapid Japanese invasion in Malaya.

### **The Japanese**

The factor as per below :

1. Innovative Tactic - The troops had embraced innovative Flanking Tactics and utilization of traditional sampan as a medium of local maritime.
2. Japanese air superiority - They had advancements in term of modern aircraft which provided air support to ground troops and eventually succeeded in the sinking of British warships.
3. Surprise - They had planned their attack well by putting surprises elements such as good concealing intentions, attacked at night as well as unpredicted utilization of light tanks in their movements.



4. Deception - They were good in camouflage as local people since they were quite resemble the Chinese while advancing. Beside that, they had done diversionary attack on NE coast of Singapore
5. Filtration - The soldiers were penetrated into British line by using the jungle and had launched their operation in the small units.
6. Continuity - They were capable in fully exploiting their advancing momentum to the optimum and as a result they had successfully attacked on Singapore in within a week preparations.
7. Rapid Manoeuvre - They were able to move faster by using bicycles and each soldier also carry minimal payload beside no dependency on conventional supply delivery.

### **British**

The factor as per below :

1. Poor appreciation - They were having lack of preparations for this war such as made an assumption that Malaya was not accessible by tanks beside no tanks to stop land advance.
2. Plan Matador averted - The late decision by London to launch Matador make a first mistake and effect badly for British.
3. Lack of air support - Their aircrafts were heavily attacked by the Japanese and as a result all of them had destroyed on the ground. Besides, these small number aircraft were older, outdated and deteriorating.
4. ' Fleet to Singapore' strategy collapsed - This strategy was aborted with the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse

5. Lacks of jungle training - Although the strength of British army were outnumbered the Japanese soldiers, they were incompetent to have a battle in the tropical jungle compared to Japanese army which had intensive training in the tropical Hainan Jungle.
6. Lack of resources - Most of military or war equipments such as aircrafts belongs to British troops were outdated and insufficient. The worst part, important war machine such as tank was not provided.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Japanese success during the Malaya campaign, like any success, can be attributed to a number of factors. It could be argued that political decisions on the part of the British with respect to theater priorities and force allocations prevented the British in Malaya from being better supported by their air and naval forces. It could be argued that there were issues of leadership and unity of command, issues of training and morale, and that elements of luck played a part. Certainly these were all factors, as no doubt were others. But it doesn't change the fact that the Japanese conducted a joint warfighting campaign as it would be defined in today's terms, and it was that aspect of their operations that was crucial to their success in Malaya, irrespective of other factors.

Japanese victory on its instant invasion over Malaya and Singapore were significant and historical moments for Japan because it was shown to the world that Japanese army was superior compared to the British forces. Beside that it was important to note that the Japan succession was heavily rely on well planned mission by its brilliant commander, General Yamashita as well as his experienced troops. They had prepared accordingly in term of

modern military and war equipments, effective and excellent tactics, strategy and coordination. The Japanese propaganda also important because it was accepted by people to release them from British.

Meanwhile, from the wide perspectives, the British had badly defeated mainly due to unprepared nest of British army as well as the Malaya itself to fight in the battle. They were being complacency with the assumption that no other country could overpower their colonial territories in Malaya. They also concentrated to the updates on the newly declared war between their country and the Germany. Although their troops were outnumbered the Japanese, most of them were soldiers who have no battle experience in the jungle. The sufficient, appropriate military and war equipment such as the absence of tank and enough ammunition, naval and air defense for these young soldiers also had contributed to the loss.

### Japanese Invasion of Malaya

December 8, 1941 - January 31, 1942

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[3] Tzu, Sun. *The Art of War*. Edited by James Clavell. New York: Delacorte Press, 1983 p 8.

[4] Ong Chit Chung, Operation Matador, Eastern Universities Press 2003, p 233.

[5] The Fall of Malaya, Media Master Guides To Pacific War Battlefields (1941-1945)

[6] Falk, Stanley L., Seventy Days to Singapore. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975, p 44.

[7] Falk, Stanley L., Seventy Days to Singapore. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975, p 25

[8] Edward L Dreyer, China at War 1901-1949, Published by Longman, London 1995, p 206.