SINGAPORE 1941-1942

LOUIS ALLEN

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FRANK CASS
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To Tim, Louise and Felix

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Author's Note: Japanese names in the text are given in the Japanese order, ie surname first.

PREFACE TO NEW EDITION

In reprinting the text of *Singapore* 1941–42 I have naturally taken the opportunity of correcting errata that slipped into the first printing. I have also taken the chance to write a new introduction, responding to the suggestions and queries readers sent to me after the book was published.

One example of a factual correction occurs on the first page. I followed the usual description of the British surrender of Singapore on 15 February 1942, propagated at the time by Japanese journalists, and accepted later by most historians, as an 'unconditional surrender'. I have now deleted the adjective 'unconditional'. It will be recalled that General Percival was given no copy of the surrender terms for his own retention; and as he had clearly insisted – successfully – on a number of conditions, it no doubt did not occur to him that the British defeat would go down in history as an 'unconditional surrender'.

That the very term 'unconditional' was never used in the negotiations by any of the participants was confirmed to me by General Sugita Ichiji, who, as the chief go-between (though not the official interpreter) between Yamashita and Percival, appears in all the photographs of the British party marching up the Bukit Timah Road to the Ford Factory, and those of the surrender parley inside the factory. General Sugita's English was (and is) good, he had lived for some time both in Britain and the USA, and his duties as a staff officer often brought him, after February 1942, in contact with the problems of the Japanese Army in South-East Asia.

In 1987, General Sugita published an autobiographical account of his years as an intelligence officer attached to Imperial General Headquarters, under the title *Joho naki senso shido* [War Leadership Without Intelligence] (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1987). In an appendix, he refers specifically to the Singapore surrender in these terms.

> The accepted post-war view was that the British forces had surrendered unconditionally, as Singapore fell, but the phrase 'unconditional surrender' did not appear in the surrender document and the 'provisions for treatment accompanying the surrender of the British Forces'. Rather, it was stated that the officers and men

> surrendering would be treated *according to the spirit of Bushido* as in the main document.
>
> It seems that a telegram was sent to Imperial General Headquarters saying 'the British forces have surrendered unconditionally', and this was investigated later among the staff officers of 25 Army, and was not acknowledged.
>
> The author remained on the site of the parley between the two commanders and discussed the details with Captain Wild, a British staff officer, and since it was the middle of the night before he returned to [25] Army headquarters, he had no knowledge what kind of signal had been sent from Army to Imperial GHQ. Perhaps a staff officer sent from Imperial GHQ signalled 'unconditional surrender' to Imperial GHQ. At the time, the war correspondents were flushed with victory, but Army HQ was relatively quiet. It was on that night of the discussion that the author sent a box of tinned foods to Captain Wild, as a consolatory gift, and he in turn gave the author his binoculars as a souvenir.
>
> On the battlefield, there are things you encounter which are not taught in peacetime military academies. The treatment of surrender is one of these (p.406).

For the benefit of the people of Singapore, who were unlikely to come across his autobiography, General Sugita had clarified the issue two years before in an interview given to a Japanese-language newspaper in Singapore, *The Pana Times* (No. 31, 29 November 1985, p.7): 'the newspapers reported it at the time as "unconditional surrender", and that is how it has entered Japanese histories of the war, but I never, myself, at that time, uttered the phrase "unconditional surrender" nor did General Yamashita'.

In the end, given the overwhelming triumph of Japanese force, and the subsequent treatment of prisoners of war and internees, the issue may seem irrelevant. But it is not so for the historical record, or for Percival's reputation.

On page 51 I referred to the massive Intelligence losses sustained in the seizure of top secret British documents from the Blue Funnel liner, *Automedon*, in November 1940 and wrote that she had been sunk by a German submarine, whose captain searched her before sinking her. This information was derived from a letter I had found in the Brooke-Popham files in King's College,

London. Squadron-Leader Wiles had written to Brooke-Popham in 1948, enquiring if he had ever received the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation of 15 August 1940. Brooke-Popham had not, for the very good reason that it was one of the documents seized from the *Automedon*. Paradoxically, the sea-route had been chosen for this important mail for greater security. In fact, the *Automedon* was stopped in the Indian Ocean not by a submarine but by a German surface raider, whose captain forwarded his documentary booty promptly to Vice-Admiral Wenneker, then German naval attaché in Japan. News of its contents was wired at once to Berlin, where the decision was taken to hand over the documents to the Japanese (not then, of course, at war with Britain).

The documents taken from both the captain's safe and the Mail Room yielded a large pile of secret mail stamped 'Safe Hand – British Master Only'. This mail contained material which far exceeded the Germans' highest expectations: the whole top secret mail for the Far East Command, new cipher instructions for the fleet, secret information for seafarers, net and mine clearance manuals, a comprehensive report of the War Cabinet concerning the defence of the Far East, Intelligence Service material and much else besides. (Cf. J. W. Chapman (ed.), *The Price of Admiralty*, Vols. II and III (Ripe, 1984), p.582.)

The material was handed over to the Japanese on 11 December 1940, and Wenneker noted the next day that Admiral Kondo had repeatedly expressed to him how valuable the information contained in the War Cabinet memorandum was for the [Japanese] Navy. *Such a significant weakening of the British Empire would not have been identified (from external appearances)* (Chapman, p.337; my italics).

The documents were quite precise on just how weak the British position not only was in August 1940 but was likely to be for the next eighteen months. Few reinforcements would be forthcoming for Singapore. Against aircraft requirements of 582 planes, a maximum of 336 would be available (and even that proved to be theoretical). Most important, no tanks at all were to be sent to Malaya. And the British War Cabinet, aware of Japan's designs on French Indo-China, regretfully acknowledged its inability to do anything about them. So, however much Brooke-Popham and the forces under him attempted to

bluff the Japanese by a show of naval and military strength, the Japanese knew beforehand that the show was hollow.

When the television series 'Timewatch' made the *Automedon* the theme of one of its programmes, I was asked by the producer if any concrete instance could be adduced from Japanese documents that the seizure had in fact entered into high-level Japanese discussions at the time. The obvious place to look was in the brief reports kept by the Army Chief of Staff, Lt-General Sugiyama, of meetings between the Cabinet and the High Command, known as Liaison Conferences (*Sugiyama Memo*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1967)). Sure enough, in the notes of a discussion in the 34th Liaison Conference of 27 December 1940, the Navy Minister referred to possible future Japanese moves further into Indo-China and possibly an invasion of the Netherlands East Indies. '*According to documentary intelligence*,' he said (my italics) 'Britain will not desire to go to war if Japan stops at Indo-China, but it is estimated that war is inevitable if we extend operations to the Netherlands East Indies' (*Sugiyama Memo*, I, p.157). This reflects exactly the limitations of the Chiefs of Staff in Whitehall in August 1940.

The presence of a traitor among the staff of the British Legation in Bangkok (pages 86-7) startled me, but was dismissed as of no great consequence by Sir Andrew Gilchrist, author of *Bangkok Top Secret*, who had been Secretary at the Legation in 1941. He told me that the man's name was Piroshow, that he was a Bombay Parsee who was not proceeded against because he was not in contact with top security material and it was possible he could be used to convey disinformation to the Japanese. On the other hand, correspondence with Mr J. R. McEwen of Edinburgh revealed to me that a predecessor of his as RAF intelligence officer at Sungei Patani, close to the frontier with Thailand, had been in communication with the Japanese, or at any rate with pro-Japanese elements in Thailand. Mr McEwen referred to correspondence in the Sunday press following publication of Middlebrook's *Battleship*, an account of the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* based on detailed interviews with survivors. One writer averred that the truth about the sinkings would never be cleared up till more was revealed about

some sinister activities that were going on in Malaya at the time, and which had never been brought to light or even suspected. To illustrate his case, he quoted the Intelligence officer at Sungei Patani. 'This man, he said, had been in the habit of making regular expeditions to the Thai border, ostensibly to watch (and photograph) birds. But what he was really up to was handing over secret material to Japanese spies. He might have got off with it had not his driver twigged what was going on; and reported him to his superior officer; whereupon the man was arrested, tried by summary court-martial, convicted, and shot.

'As you say, all this sounds melodramatic and quite incredible. I confidently expected to see an immediate rebuttal – official or otherwise. But nothing appeared. Was this a tacit acknowledgement that the facts as reported were indeed true?

'One thing more: about six months ago [Mr McEwen was writing in February 1979], I was visited in Edinburgh by Major Reg Newton of the Australian Army, who had been with me in captivity in Japan, had been on the Railway, and fought in Malaya. I told him this strange story, and asked for his comments. He seemed to think that it was not so surprising after all. He said he knew that Sungei Patani was a hotbed of intrigue. Had I gone there, he said, and pried too curiously into what was going on, he was certain I should have been quietly disposed of.'

Another episode which seems to indicate a Japanese source in the British Legation in Bangkok is contained in a file of telegrams I came across during research into the archives of the Japanese Foreign Ministry. A report to the Japanese Foreign Minister, Togo, from Tsubokami, Japanese Ambassador in Bangkok, referred to a secret meeting between the Thai Premier, Pibun, and the British Minister Resident in Singapore, Duff Cooper, at the Bangkok airfield. The reported gist of the conversation between the two men is not particularly startling: Duff Cooper assured Pibun that the Japanese intended to invade Thailand, and his best course was to sever relations with Japan, stop exporting rice to Japan, and intern the Japanese. Pibun countered by saying that if Japan entered Thailand, the Thais would resist, and would defend themselves in co-operation with British forces. He hoped the British would not anticipate an invasion

by the Japanese. The only puzzling thing is that Sir Andrew Gilchrist has no recollection of such a meeting ever having taken place. However secret it may have been, it would have required *some* people to be in the know, certainly including cipher personnel, all of whom he knew, and none of whom had any recollection of the event. His explanation of its appearance in Japanese diplomatic files is that some Japanese agent might have overheard plans for such a visit being discussed in the Legation, and drawn exaggerated conclusions. On the other hand, that such secret visits by British personalities did occur is well-known: the C-in-C, Far East, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, called on Pibun in civilian clothes, using the name 'Mr Brooke'; and the statements attributed to Duff Cooper are so circumstantial that it is difficult to dismiss them as agent's fantasy.

One feature of my book, in contrast to the various official accounts from the services, was to give a voice to the civilian element, which the military seemed to use as a scapegoat for their own shortcomings. In particular, I quoted C. A. Vlieland, the Secretary of Defence, Malaya, and the Governor-General, Sir Shenton Thomas, whose case had never been put before the public. Both Mr McEwen and Mr T. C. Carter, who had been a senior RAF officer in charge of radar in Singapore, took me to task for this. For McEwen, Thomas was inadequate as a public personality in times of emergency; and for Carter he was to blame for the clumsy arrangements made for warning the services and civilian population of Japanese air-raids.

'I should, of course,' Mr McEwen wrote, 'register a personal caveat here. What I am recording is my own individual reaction. Granted, in the Scots ear, the more extravagant nuances of Southern English (especially U class) diction do not sound as captivating as the Sirens' song, but with this proviso – I found his radio pep-talks quite disastrous. The gutless quality of his voice utterly depressed me. It was what our family used to call "wishy-washy". Australians are not without their own brand of vocal idiosyncrasy. But the ones I came in contact with did not take to his hortatory manner any more kindly than I did. It is impossible to assess what the general effect of this was upon the people of Singapore, but I think it must have been pervasive and

wholly deleterious'.

Mr Toby Carter was equally dismissive: 'Shenton Thomas, whom I met only once, when I was bidden to dine at Government House, seemed to me a man quite devoid of spark. And I was utterly shocked by Percival when I reported to him and Pulford on the evening of 13 February 1942 in Fort Canning; I never thought I would live to see a British Commander in such a state of dither. He appeared utterly broken.' [Letter of 5 December 1979.] But Carter's real criticisms are organizational, not personal. In his notes on events, Sir Shenton Thomas concentrates on the fact that the lights were on in Singapore during the first raid. 'Memory tells me,' Carter comments, 'that we considered this a relatively trivial issue. Before the outbreak of war it was accepted doctrine, at least on the RAF station, that a UK-style blackout in the conditions of temperature and, especially, humidity prevailing in Singapore was incompatible with work of any sort, so there was never any intention to have a full blackout. No provision was made for it. There was at least one practice "brown-out", but memory tells me that opinion among aircrew who flew during the brown-out was that it was a waste of time: it interfered with our work, but there was no likelihood that it would impede enemy aircraft. So the question of lighting was unimportant, at least until Japanese infantry were on the island. What was important, in their view, was that adequate warning be given of the approach of enemy aircraft, so that (a) if by day, fighter aircraft could be got airborne and climb to the height at which the Japanese bombers normally operated, above 18,000 feet, and for this the Buffaloes needed a lot of time, (b) whether by day or night, the guns could be alerted and told the direction from which the raid was coming and its approximate height, and (c) personnel, both Service and civilian, could be warned to vacate potentially dangerous buildings and take whatever cover was available. (There were no air-raid shelters and very few slit trenches.) For (c) the civil ARP centre had to be manned. And the facts, no matter what Sir Shenton Thomas said in his notes, were (a) that by 6 December 1941 Brooke-Popham considered the international situation to have deteriorated so far that he put the Services on first-degree readiness, which must surely have implied that he considered attack possible, if not probable, (b)

Thomas was well aware of Brooke-Popham's action, yet (c) he failed to rescind his order that sirens (whether Service or civilian) were not to be sounded in Singapore – for all I know, anywhere in Malaya – without his prior personal permission, with the consequence that (e) the Service population received virtually no warning of the raid and the civil population none at all, despite its having been plotted from the moment when it was 75 miles north-east of Mersing. Thomas was right in implying that the raid was a relatively trivial affair: by the standards of what I had experienced in London it was. But he is demonstrably wrong when he claims, in paragraph 96 [of Shenton Thomas's Notes] that "Everyone was caught napping". He was. But the RAF was not. And because no timely action was taken on the warning given by the RAF, the war in the Far East started off with a tremendous blow to confidence in the RAF and the government in general. The irony is that, so far as the RAF was concerned, this particular blow was unjustified, though a general lack of confidence would have been justified, so starved had we been of modern aircraft, other equipment and experienced personnel. Among radar personnel, at least, confidence in the civil government, which had for months been low, thanks to the seemingly endless delays in obtaining the land on which to erect the radar stations, now sank to rock bottom, from which it never rose.' [Letter to the author, 19 December 1979.]

Thomas was present at a secret meeting held at the Naval Base at 0200 hours on 8 December 1941, presided over by the commander of Force Z, to discuss the proposed use of the force.* The meeting broke up about 0440 hours well after the first bombs had been dropped, and Carter drew implications from this timing: Thomas had been absent from Government House throughout the time when the first Japanese raid had

* Arthur Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies* (p.406, n.68), says of this important conference that it 'is not mentioned in any of the sources or published material'. There is in fact what appears to be an allusion to it in the Brooke-Popham Papers (v/5/70), 'Notes on the war in the Far East'; though there are discrepancies. Under the date Sunday 7 December he writes: 'Met GOC and decided against Matador. We proceeded together to Naval Base to consult with CEF Admiral Phillips but decision on Matador adhered to. Spent night at Naval Base. News received about 0200 Monday 8th Dec. of Japanese attack on Kota Bahru'.

been plotted – from about 0320 to 1415 hours, when the first bombs were dropped. In his post-war comments Thomas affirmed

(a) Pulford telephoned him at 4 am that hostile aircraft were approaching, and were within 25 miles of Singapore . . . he had just time to telephone the Harbour Board and ARP before the raiders appeared.
(b) The raid took place at 4.15 am, so he had only 15 minutes' warning.
(c) Maltby says the RAF had 30 minutes' warning, ie they got it at around 3.45 am. They seem, therefore, says Thomas, to have spent some 15 minutes trying to contact ARP Headquarters. The History says the RAF got the warning at 3.30 am in which case the RAF waited even longer before contacting him.

Against this, and in the light of the Seletar meeting described in Arthur Marder's *Old Friends, New Enemies*, 'My interpretation is,' writes Carter, 'that Thomas had imposed, and had failed to lift, a ban on the use of sirens and had failed to ensure that his destination was known to the staff at Government House when he left there to go to the Naval Base, probably at about 0140 hours on 8 December 1941. But Pulford knew where he was, since Pulford had attended the first part of the conference. So when Pulford, by then back at AHQ, realized around 0400 hours that the sirens had not been sounded, he (a) ordered all RAF stations to be woken up, short of sounding the sirens, and (b) he telephoned Thomas who, he knew, was in the War Room of the Naval Base. Thomas then realized it was urgent for him to lift the ban. First he telephoned the Harbour Board, which was government-owned and almost a state-within-a-state – it certainly ran its own fire service – probably ran its own ARP service as well. I think Thomas telephoned in order to lift the ban, and the Board did respond by sounding its own sirens, and that is why both Percival, who was in Fort Canning at the time, and Ian Morrison of *The Times*, who was in his flat in the Cathay skyscraper, said they heard sirens before the bombs. I think they heard the Board's sirens; Fort Canning and the Cathay are close to the docks. And I think Thomas then telephoned his ARP headquarters, also to lift the ban, but it could not sound the city's sirens for the reason already given, and that is why other people who have written about the raid, but were further away

from the docks, did not hear any sirens before the bombs.*

'I now feel reasonably satisfied [Carter concludes] that I have got very close to the truth of what happened that night. If so, I find it very hard to forgive Thomas for his failure to mention explicitly, in his post-war comments, his imposition of a ban on the use of sirens and his failure to lift it when the Services went on to first-degree readiness. The report I wrote for AHQ India in 1942, and in which I said he had imposed such a ban, must have been available to him after the war: it was available to others. And I find it very difficult to forgive him for his attempt to shift the blame on to the RAF. Our people did their job, brilliantly, in the face of unbelievable civil administrative inertia. But most of them, unlike Thomas, came to a very nasty end, by bombing on the way out of Singapore, by malnutrition, disease or brutality in prison camps in Java or, near the end of the war, by drowning battened down in the holds of Japanese ships that were sunk by Allied submarines. They cannot speak for themselves.'

Perhaps even more interesting than the long, detailed case Carter makes against Shenton Thomas is a short note he wrote which reflects on the state of preparedness of *Prince of Wales*. He had been asked to go to the Naval Base, and to take with him two of his best radar mechanics. 'The man I was to see explained that the *Prince of Wales* had been fitted with a new type of naval radar shortly before sailing from the UK, that it was unserviceable, that they could not repair it, and please could we – in the next few hours, as she was due to sail? Once more I felt slightly irritated, because she had been in the Naval Base for several days and now they wanted the RAF to repair the set, for which we had no spares, in a few hours. In the event nothing that we could do succeeded and she sailed with that set unserviceable . . . In the event it seems unlikely that its unserviceability affected the course of history. In the first place, the *Repulse* had a serviceable set and detected the incoming Japanese aircraft at long range. In the second place, Phillips' failure to break W/T silence, even when there could no longer be any reason for maintaining it, because they were under attack, made sure that the Buffaloes from

* The man in charge of the civil ARP organization had gone off duty (it was still officially peace-time) taking the master-key with him.

Sembawang could not reach Force Z in time to do anything useful. Not, let me add, that the Buffaloes could have done much if they had arrived; this was partly because their flying performance was so poor but also because the policy had been not to release any VHF R/T for use in aircraft in the Far East, and the MF R/T was virtually useless at ranges of more than a mile, because of interference from the electrical storms that were so common there.' [Letter to the author, 5 December 1979.]

Another correspondence which made me reflect on Percival's need to surrender was with Mr P. C. Marcus, a Singapore accountant, and arose as the result of an interview I gave to Singapore Television and the local press on the anniversary of the surrender in 1982. The camera walked me round the offshore island of Sentosa, formerly Blakang Mati, where lay the heavy gun emplacements of the 1930s; and which is now a pleasure resort for the citizens of Singapore, complete with waxworks showing the surrender ceremonies of 1942 and 1945. During the interview I mentioned that in reading the oral testimonies kept in the Singapore National Archives in Hill Street, I had come across a statement by someone I mistakenly took to be a water engineer, that if Percival could have provided 10 lorries and 100 Royal Engineers he could have guaranteed Singapore's water supply. It should be remembered that one of Percival's major anxieties was the risk of plague to a population twice its normal size, concentrated in the inner city zone of the island, and deprived of water.

The water had not been cut off by the Japanese. The cause of the shortage was the pipe system, shattered and broken everywhere by relentless bombing and shelling. The newspaper *Straits Times* reported this interview, and in response I received a letter from Mr Marcus himself. He repeated that Singapore's municipal engineer, Mr Murnane, had told Percival he could keep the water supply going, provided Percival could guarantee him ten lorries and a hundred Royal Engineers. Mr Marcus continues:

> Well, I want this recorded. Percival, in his memoirs said, 'What are the reasons for surrendering? Singapore's surrendering was because

of water supply.' Well, in the last week, there was damage to the main and water was being wasted – running out of the mains. And the service reservoir at Fort Canning was going down; [it] was never really empty but it was going down. That supplied water to the centre of Singapore by gravity. About [a] few days before the surrender of Singapore, Mr Murnane, the Water Engineer, met Percival at Fort Canning, with the other civilian people – the Governor, etc. And he asked about the water supply. He told Percival – this is what he told me – 'Give me 10 trucks and 100 Royal Engineers and I'll have the water supply back, as far as possible, to normal within 48 hours.'

When he came back he said Percival promised to give me that. The next day, same night I think, what arrived was one truck with 10 frightened Sikhs. So we sent them away. Then, the last conference held was in the City Hall itself . . . And Percival was there with his staff. And he told Percival, 'You haven't given me the men I want.'

Percival said, 'You can have them. I'll get them for you.'

What happened? The next night we got one truck and 10 Royal Officers [*sic*] under the command of a captain. That was on the night of Saturday, the 14th. They went out on the 15th and Singapore surrendered on the 15th. That is, as far as I know, the story of the water supply of Singapore at the time of the surrender.

(Singapore Oral Archives, Reel 03, p.25 of transcript.)

INTRODUCTION

Victory and Defeat

I

At nine o'clock in the evening of 15 February, 1942, the telephone rang in the house of the Marquis Kido, the Japanese Emperor's closest adviser. It was the Prime Minister, Lieutenant-General Tōjō, with a message for His Imperial Majesty. A telegram had just been received from Malaya. Singapore had fallen. At 19.50 hours on that day, the Japanese Army in Malaya had received the surrender of the British defenders. An hour later, General Sugiyama, the Chief of Staff, called on the Emperor in person. He was bubbling over with enthusiasm at the speed and courage of the Japanese Army, which had taken the city in such a short time. Kido had an interview with the Emperor the following morning from 10.50 to 11 am, and although they were concerned with routine diplomatic business – the correct form of dress for a proposed envoy to the Vatican – Kido could see how deeply moved the Emperor still was by the news from Malaya.[1]

The Emperor had been bitterly sceptical at first about Japan's preparedness for a southward advance and had upbraided Sugiyama for over-confidence, and for making promises about a speedy ending to the war in China which he had not achieved; but the promises about Malaya had been more than fulfilled, and the Emperor composed a Rescript to his troops:

> Our army and navy [he wrote] working in close co-operation in Malaya, have resolutely carried out difficult maritime escort tasks, transport duties and landing operations, and in the teeth of tropical diseases, and enduring intense heat, they have harried and hunted a strong enemy and broken through his defences at every point, capturing Singapore with the speed of the gods, and destroying Great Britain's base in East Asia.
>
> We express our profound esteem for these deeds.[2]

The Emperor took his white horse to the bridge over the moat from the Imperial Palace, and went out into the winter sunshine. For an hour he sat there, on horseback, the focus of the triumphant gaze of a victorious people.[3] Back in the Palace, he made a decree about the captured city. Henceforth, he declared, it would no longer be called Singapore. It would become 'Shōnan', 'the radiant South'.[4]

One of Japan's best-known novelists, Shiga Naoya, expressed perfectly the kind of satisfaction many ordinary Japanese must have felt when the news came through. He wrote in an essay entitled 'The Fall of Singapore':

> Just recently I read the story of how the US President – during the Japanese-American talks – left for the country to go and eat turkey, without waiting for the arrival of the Japanese envoy Kurusu, who had travelled many thousands of miles, by plane and railway, to meet him. We have seen not only that discourtesy, but also the sight of Churchill losing his temper and making threatening proclamations that he would declare war within the hour if hostilities broke out between America and Japan. In a very short time, that is exactly how things stand today. Has there ever before been such a rapid fulfilment of a prediction? This sudden turn of events seems unparalleled in history.
>
> They are saying in America that they were defeated because they underestimated Japan's capability. But what does the American view of Japan's capability mean? America has made a demonstration to the whole world of her gigantic war budget, her reliance on her own economic power. But the fact that no one has raised the issue of how poor a country can be in *spiritual* power – this the Japanese feel to be very odd.
>
> We Japanese ourselves have been astounded at the spiritual and technical achievements of our armed forces, from the very start of hostilities. When we realize how much of our victory has depended on heaven, we need humility, and every day brings fresh instances of this. The confidence that heaven is with us makes us all the more humble.
>
> Without our expecting it, the unanimity of the entire nation has been achieved. Pro-British or pro-American views are no longer possible in Japan. Among ourselves, we keep a modest frame of mind, we preserve harmony in the

country, and not a single blemish will stain our brilliant victories. It has been a useful lesson for the God-forsaken arrogance of Britain and America. There is cause for rejoicing that hope is born among our young people.

Our spirit bright, clear and calm, we bow with reverence before the spirits of our heroic dead.[5]

II

The day after the Emperor of Japan re-named Singapore Shōnan, the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, faced an angry and disturbed House of Commons. Surprisingly enough, their anger and his concern were not for Singapore – at least not at first. His statement to the House dealt with the successful escape of the German battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* from Brest up the English Channel, in spite of British attempts to sink them. *Hansard*[6] devotes three columns to this event, and only one to Singapore, which was the second item in Churchill's speech. He made a plea for no recriminations to be made and did not think a debate would be appropriate.

Both Mr Pethick Lawrence and Earl Winterton, in reply, deplored the impression he gave that to raise queries was disloyal. While the Deputy Prime Minister, the Labour leader Clement Attlee, carefully and industriously drew an intricate pattern of doodles on the paper in front of him, and Churchill pawed the ground angrily with his left foot,[7] 'We are not satisfied' affirmed Winterton, 'with this attitude in the press that you must not ever question the actions of the Government and that all this is inevitable.'[8] He called for 'a Grand Inquest of the Nation on all that has gone on and is going on, for the country is profoundly concerned.'[9] The Labour MP, Mr Bellenger, who had a reputation as the soldiers' MP, re-affirmed the deep disquiet and refused to be put down. 'I go so far as to suggest to the Prime Minister,' he said, 'that there is in the country and indeed in this House at the present moment, a feeling that we have not got the right kind of persons to direct this war to a satisfactory conclusion . . . we have

not got the right kind of government.'[10] The House cheered him to the echo.

Churchill's blank refusal of a debate – he had sensed he could not prolong it – gave way to a promise that one would be held, but it would be wrong to debate in the present moment of 'panic and anger'.[11] The phrase was unfortunate, the House thought its courage and wisdom were being disparaged, and protested vehemently. Oddly enough, the concession he made at the end of his speech, 'to tell the House about the Inquiry',[12] did not refer to Singapore but to the German ships. The attack was taken up by the solitary Communist member, for Fife, Willie Gallacher, at which, with a cold humourless smile on his lips, Churchill stalked out of the Chamber, followed by many members. 'I see that other honourable Members are going now,' said Gallacher, not to be outfaced, 'The Führer goes, the yes-men follow. Is it any wonder that we are losing the war; is it any wonder that the Empire is lost, when we have such types as that? They are simply crawlers.'[13] On that occasion, much as the House resented it, Churchill had his way.

But, of course, his own attitude must have been ambiguous. Grievous as the loss of what he considered the 'fortress' Singapore must have been, particularly since it was defended by tens of thousands of troops; and although he had received the news of the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* as the blackest news of the whole war; yet the main redeeming feature of Japan's entry into the war was never lost on him. Japan's attack had brought America into the war. From that moment, Britain was saved. Whatever happened, victory would come. His inner confidence in this was so profound that it coloured everything else.

His formula for dealing with disaster was a traditional parliamentary one. The days demanded blood sacrifice, and one was made: there was a Cabinet re-shuffle. Captain Margesson left the War Office and was succeeded by his Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir James Grigg, a substitution of a civil servant for a politician which was hardly justifiable. Beaverbrook left the Cabinet, and Sir Stafford Cripps joined it to become Leader of the House of Com-

mons, a chore Churchill found too time-consuming, as he told the House when it gathered again on 24 February to hear his report on the war situation. For two days the British Parliament expressed itself on the recent reverses, but since no particular subject was singled out, the debate ranged first round administrative detail, from Churchill's own nostalgic evocation of the small War Cabinet days of Lloyd George in 1916, to the machinery of the Pacific War Council and Imperial Defence. It was a smoke-screen. There were more urgent matters than committee procedure and he knew it. When he finally came to the business of Malaya, he stalled and proved inept.

The defenceless state of Penang was recalled, in inexcusable terms:

> I saw that some gentlemen who escaped from Penang announced to the world with much indignation that there was not a single anti-aircraft gun in the place. Where should we have been, I should like to know, if we had spread our limited anti-aircraft guns throughout the immense, innumerable regions and vulnerable points of the Far East instead of using them to preserve the vital life of our ports and factories here and of our fortresses which were under continuous attack and all our operations with the field Armies in the Middle East?[14]

No one picked him up on this question-begging allusion, or asked why the intolerable alternative had arisen in the first place, but there was a gasp of disbelief when, without more ado, he told the House, 'I have no news whatever from Singapore'.[15] The House was, as the Glasgow ILP member, James Maxton, reminded it, expecting 'a post-mortem examination of the Government which has failed'.[16]

Some members hauled the debate back to the Far Eastern issues. Sir Archibald Southby said openly what had been at the back of many members' minds, that a tiny fraction of the aircraft which had been sent to Russia should have been made available in Malaya: 'One month's supply of the aircraft sent to Russia would have saved Malaya'.[17] He went on to hope that Burma would be saved, and that

if Britain had to choose between Burma and the Dutch East Indies she would choose Burma. Mr J. H. Martin pressed the issue closer. Pre-war ineptitudes in policy-making were responsible for the catastrophe in Malaya. But even given these initial blunders, why was there no policy for evacuating the tens of thousands of troops in the Island in case of defeat? Why was no effort made to re-victual the garrison, if it was true that lack of food and water forced the surrender? Sir Percy Harris was puzzled by the fact that 'the native population have been standing by as idle spectators of what has been happening in the Colonies' as opposed to the 'magnificent fight for their own country'[18] which the Filipinos were putting up. Mr A. Sloan, the member for South Ayrshire, had no doubts about why the public conscience had been so shocked by the events in Malaya. His speech, more perhaps than any other, turned the attention of the House to the economic role of Malaya and to what, in his view, were the shortcomings of those who fulfilled it. It was a legend that lingered, and one that did great damage:

> Malaya and Singapore were merely names of far-off places in foreign lands. They conveyed little to the average mind. The general public do not study Stock Exchange reports. They are entirely ignorant that rubber, tin and oil are the main attractions there. They are in the main completely unconscious that this area is the greatest sink of corruption in the whole world. They are unfamiliar with the fact that these ornaments of British capitalism have done more to degrade Britain in the eyes of the East than any scoundrels since our depredations in Africa. These tin, rubber and oil companies have exploited the bodies and souls of the natives of the Far East. Those natives have lived in poverty and misery, and the only crime they have committed is to be born in the richest country in the world. Those companies have made fabulous fortunes...
>
> How is it that the natives of Singapore were so indifferent to the fate of that island ... Is there any cause for wonder? Their land was invaded by an Imperialist-minded army, but they were already dominated by another of the same type. What material difference would it make to the Malayans?

> Merely exchanging one set of vultures for another, not the difference perhaps of a bowl of rice.[19]

Mr Sloan quoted the despatch from the *Times* correspondent (Ian Morrison) which declared that both officials and British residents were completely out of touch with the people. British and Asiatics lived their lives apart, Morrison had said. There was never any fusion or cementing of these two groups. British rule and culture and the small British community formed no more than a thin and brittle veneer. 'Surely this is about the most complete and damning indictment of British Imperialism ever written,' he went on, and he accused the British companies in Malaya of being more concerned with loss of assets than with loss of soldiers' lives:

> Whatever may be the opinion of the people in this country with regard to the after-war settlement of Malaya, there is no dubiety in the minds of the swindling gang of sharks there. They are less concerned about the loss of life than about the loss of assets.[20]

Dutch capitalism in Java was as bad. The fault went a long way back. The very week fortification of Singapore was begun, the financiers of the City of London loaned to the Japanese £25,000,000 to build a navy for the purpose of destroying the Singapore base which was costing us £20,000,000 to build.

His forthrightness found little response. But Mr Pethick Lawrence claimed that he and others had been saying for years that the administration of the British Colonies was a scandal. For a century before 1929 there had been no labour legislation and no social services: 'The coloured man was the bottom dog who could be exploited to an almost unlimited extent by his white master.'[21] Britain was losing her Colonies in the war precisely because of 'Blimpery' which had remained blind to these conditions.

Leslie Hore-Belisha gave a more balanced view, in which social criticism was fairly mingled with strategic considerations. Britain had lost an important part of her Colonial Empire, and with it a crucial source of supply. Japan had

forced an entry into the Indian Ocean and could interfere with communications to the Middle East, India and Australasia. The Colonial Secretary had admitted the loss of Singapore was inexplicable, and it was not anticipated. An army of considerable dimensions had been lost. The mistakes made were not entirely military. Colonial administration left much to be desired. It had not enlisted the support of local people, it lacked imagination and foresight. But it would be unwise to blame exclusively those on the spot. Possibly Colonial administration had become too centralized, its machinery too cumbrous. Those on the spot had been shorn of initiative, and when the need arose, had been reluctant to rely on their own judgment.[22]

Commander Stephen King-Hall forthrightly called what happened in Singapore 'the greatest surrender in numbers of British troops in the whole history of the British Army.'[23] He contrasted the feeling of February 1942 with the mood after Dunkirk. Then, the Prime Minister was the epitome of the nation. 'We felt very near him and he must have felt very near us.'[24] They had been dangerous times, but great times. The times were dangerous again, but there was no more greatness. There was instead a sense of apathy and frustration in the air, 'a littleness'.[25]

Professor A. V. Hill, who sat for Cambridge University, and voiced the mind of the scientific 'boffins', turned crisply to the Navy and accused it of being disastrously out-of-date. It had persistently clung to the conception of the large capital ship as the basis of the Fleet. These ships could not protect themselves effectively, alone, against enemy air attack. Those who had expert knowledge and had not been misled by tradition had known this all along. The sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* had made it manifest to all. The decisions about the future of the Navy should therefore be taken out of the hands of the admirals:

> These precious ships, each costing some 30,000 man-years to produce, are the greatest liability. The basis of the fleet of the future will be the aircraft carrier. She need not fight the battleship, she can keep out of range and engage the battleship with bomb and torpedo. If that is so, and I think

> it is inevitable in the end, a decision should be taken on the matter not solely by admirals and naval constructors brought up in the old tradition, but largely by a combined operational staff, after close consideration of all the technical and strategical questions involved.[26]

Other members used the occasion to query the policy of concentrating the energies and material of the RAF on bombing Germany. Had the role of supporting the Army not suffered as a result? Professor Hill made the same point in reference to the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. They sailed up the Channel at top speed after 4,000 tons of bombs had been dropped on or around them:

> Everyone now knows what those who do arithmetic and have an elementary knowledge of the facts knew long ago, that the idea of bombing a well-defended enemy into submission or seriously affecting his morale, or even of doing substantial damage to him, is an illusion.[27]

The blitz had proved it in Britain. Total air-raid casualties since the war began were two-thirds of the numbers lost at Singapore, and there was no question which loss was the greater military disaster. The loss of industrial production in the worst month of the blitz was about equal to that due to the Easter holidays . . .

Captain Lionel Gammans combined strategic considerations with a defence of the Malayan civilian community which had come in for a verbal beating at the hands of Mr Sloan. Captain Gammans had spent fourteen years in Malaya, and had travelled in Japan, China and Manchuria. He was sure the full impact of the loss of Singapore had not yet sunk in. It was a political as well as a military disaster. We had lost half the world's tin and rubber. The Japanese now had raw materials which would permit them to wage a prolonged war. They need no longer worry about tin, rubber, iron ore, fats or oil, and our strategy had been aimed precisely at depriving them of these things. Five million British subjects had passed under enemy rule. He pooh-poohed the notion that local people had not been encouraged to resist. He himself had commanded a company

of Chinese volunteers before the war, and it had always been difficult to fill the ranks. They had no desire or aptitude for military service. But as to the ultimate impact of what had happened he had no illusions:

> Perhaps the greatest tragedy of all was the scene on that Sunday morning when the Union Jack was pulled down on the flagstaff on Fort Canning in the middle of Singapore, and that great city, which Raffles founded and our own kith and kin built up, came for the first time under the Rising Sun. Do not let us underestimate the significance of that event. Our contact with Asia has been a long and on the whole an honourable one, and during all those years the Union Jack has never once been lowered. The story of that scene at Fort Canning will reverberate in the bazaars of India, on the plains of China and in the islands of the South Seas when every one of us has long since been dead and gone.[28]

The House of Lords undertook its own inquisition, but profited from a greater supply of information from the Colonial Secretary, Lord Cranborne, making his maiden speech as Leader of the House, than Mr Churchill had seen fit to supply to the Commons. As he saw it, the troops had orders to hold the place to the last, and did so. This valiant phrasing gave rise to sympathetic cheers, but Lord Wedgwood pronounced a gloomier verdict: 'The surrender of Singapore is the blackest page in our military history for all time.'[29]

To some piaculative eyes, it seemed like divine retribution. Dorothy L. Sayers's radio series on the life of Christ had recently been performed on the BBC, and in it the figure of Christ had been directly portrayed. This blasphemous use of God in a stage performance roused hidden ire. One listener wrote in fury to the BBC that the fall of Singapore was God's punishment on the British nation for such a transgression of moral standards.

III

While the debates and the breast-beating continued in Great Britain, and as hubris began to invade the imaginations of the Japanese Imperial Headquarters, when they surveyed the numerous moves made possible by the fall of Singapore, another actor waited in the wings. That actor was Germany.

The Germans naturally wanted to profit from the Tripartite Pact by applying pressure on Britain in the Far East, through Japan. It was more important, at one time, for Japan to do this on their behalf than for her to intervene against Soviet Russia from Manchuria. Many years later, Lieutenant-General Percival, in his book *The War in Malaya,*[30] proclaimed his conviction that the expedition against Singapore was undertaken at the behest of the Germans. But arrangements between Germany and Japan were never so precise as to bring about complex military operations in common; and Japan naturally considered her own needs and interests first.

Hitler himself had already reached certain firm conclusions about Japan four months before he attacked Russia. If he could bring Japan into the war, he could create a war on two fronts against Great Britain, which would lessen the risk of the projected invasion of Russia in June 1941. At his headquarters, on 5 March 1941, a document (Directive No. 24) was drafted which outlined the co-operation he was prepared to give to the Japanese and what he expected to gain from it. The draft was signed by Keitel, as Chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces, but there is no doubt that the views are Hitler's own. He was prepared to strengthen Japan's fighting power by every possible means, and instructed the commanders-in-chief of the various branches of the German Armed Forces to respond generously to Japanese requests for information about the lessons derived from recent campaigns, and for economic and technical assistance. Co-ordination of operational plans was the task of the Naval High Command.

The purpose of all this was to induce the Japanese to take action in the Far East as soon as possible: 'This will tie down strong British forces and will divert the main effort of the United States of America to the Pacific.'[31]

America was not to be drawn in. Quite the contrary: 'The common aim of strategy must be represented as the swift conquest of England in order to keep America out of the war.'[32]

Germany had no aims in the Far East which need interfere with Japanese intentions. He recommended powerful Japanese forces being used to prosecute the same successful warfare against merchant shipping which Germany had undertaken. Japan must obtain territories which would give her raw materials, 'particularly if the United States is engaged'. Deliveries of rubber were vital for Germany. 'The seizure of Singapore,' he added, 'England's key position in the Far East, would represent a decisive success in the combined strategy of the three powers.' [Germany, Italy and Japan][33]

The actual date for beginning operational discussions was left open and the Military Commissions constituted under the Three Power Pact were to deal only with matters affecting the enemy economy. A final note reminded recipients of the draft (only fourteen copies were distributed) that no mention whatever of the proposed invasion of Russia was to be made to the Japanese.

Germany's interest in Japanese intervention in the Far East, *after* Operation Barbarossa began, naturally altered. Not only was it desirable to face Britain with a war on two fronts, by the taking of Singapore and the threat to India, but an invasion by Japan of Soviet Russia's Maritime Province of Siberia would relieve pressure on Germany's eastern front. Japanese troops had already occupied the Maritime Province once twenty years before, in the international attempt to suppress the Russian Revolution. Either way, Japan would be contributing directly to Germany's victory in Europe. But it was not in Germany's interests to bring the USA into the war. The pressure on Great Britain was in fact aimed at keeping the Americans out. A

threat to Malaya and India would, in Germany's view, divert US attention from the Atlantic to the Pacific. A shooting war had already begun in the Atlantic between US destroyers and German submarines.[34]

It was, of course, difficult for Japan to reconcile this urging with the strategic requirements forecast by her own Navy: the need to destroy the US Pacific Fleet and so assure the Pacific flank of the operations in South-East Asia.

On the other hand, Germany did not view with any pleasure the likelihood of an agreement between Japan and the USA. Baron von Weizsaecker of the German Foreign Office submitted a memorandum to his Foreign Minister, Ribbentrop, on 15 May 1941, in which he affirmed that 'any political treaty between Japan and the United States is undesirable at present,'[35] fearing that Japan might be lured away by the US, in such an event, from her two partners in the Tripartite Pact. The interruption of the Hull-Nomura talks, when Japan occupied Southern French Indo-China in July 1941, was more to Germany's liking and her Ambassador in Tokyo, General Eugen Ott, expressed his Government's disquiet when the talks were resumed in August.[36] The Germans failed to realize that the ultimate breakdown of the talks would in the end bring about what they least desired, the entry of America into the war.

On 23 November 1941, Ott informed his government that Japan clearly intended to move south, and wanted to know if she could expect German support. Russian resistance by this time was beginning to stiffen, and the Germans were in no position to offer more than moral backing. And they did not know that Japan intended to attack the US (this was two days before Nagumo's fleet set out from Hitokappu Bay to Pearl Harbour). So in the case of their most important strategic decisions of 1941, both Germany and Japan refused to divulge their plans to each other. Ribbentrop spoke to General Ōshima, the Japanese ambassador, in Berlin on 28 November 1941. After that day's council of war, presided over by Hitler, he said Germany's attitude towards the US was changing. The Reich would

back Japan if she went to war with America. He did not think the US-Japan negotiations likely to succeed and 'if Japan reaches a decision to fight Britain and the United States, I am confident that not only will it be in the interest of Germany and Japan jointly, but would bring about favourable results for Japan herself.'[37] It was just what Oshima wanted to hear, but he was nevertheless surprised and asked for confirmation. 'Is Your Excellency,' he asked Ribbentrop bluntly, 'indicating that a state of actual war is to be established between Germany and the United States?'[38] Then Ribbentrop knew he had said more than he intended. He turned the question by saying Roosevelt was a fanatic and capable of anything. But Oshima would not let go and pressed for a precise answer.

'Should Japan become engaged in a war against the United States,' was the reply, 'Germany, of course, would join the war immediately. There is absolutely no possibility of Germany's entering into a separate peace with the United States under such circumstances. The Führer is determined on that point.'[39]

The German Army seems to have had a somewhat different impression of Japan's aims and intentions from that gained by the German Foreign Office. This is rather surprising, since Japan's diplomatic representation in Germany was very heavily weighted on the side of the ideas of the Japanese Army. The career diplomat and future Foreign Minister, Tōgō Shigenori, had been Ambassador to Berlin until superseded by his own military attaché, Lieutenant-General Ōshima Hiroshi, who had the reputation of being more Nazi than the Nazis themselves.[40] Togo resented the habit of Japanese military attachés of making direct contact on matters of high policy with the governments of the countries to which they were accredited. It indicated a clear superseding of the normal diplomatic channels by the military, and in fact in the end Tōgō was transferred to Moscow as a result of his opposition to an alliance with Germany, and his place taken by Ōshima.[41]

The officer who served under Ōshima as military attaché, the appropriately named Lieutenant-General Banzai, visi-

ted the German Director of Military Intelligence, Matzky, on 4 August 1941 and referred to the possibility of Japan attacking Russia. A minimum of sixteen Kwantung Army divisions would be used, combined into four armies.[42] General Halder, Chief of the German General Staff, noted in his diary that Banzai indicated September 1941 as the month in which this was supposed to happen, and that Vladivostok was expected to be in Japanese hands by November. This meant that although preparations for taking Singapore had been made by the occupation of French Indo-China, further moves in that direction would be postponed.[43]

A month later, Halder noted that the whole picture had changed. 'Situation uncertain,' he jotted down in his diary. 'The Führer does not want to give the impression that we need the Japanese. The [Japanese] Army has got cold feet and looks like doing nothing until further notice. The [Japanese] Navy wants to go into Thailand, Singapore, Borneo and Manila one after the other and believes that America can do nothing to stop them. There may be a change of government and at all events a waste of time.'[44] Some German officers were not particularly perturbed by Japan's change of intent. Colonel Walter Warlimont, Deputy Chief of Operations in the High Command, thought German confidence in the outcome of the Russian campaign was such that when Japan was thought to have made an offer of assistance it had been rejected. 'We don't need anyone,' one officer remarked, 'just to strip the corpses.'[45]

This makes Germany's final decision even more puzzling. Without any assurance that Japan would intervene against Russia (indeed Tōgō had impressed upon Ōshima that no armed clash with Russia was desirable until strategic circumstances permitted),[46] and in open contradiction to the wish, expressed earlier, not to come into conflict with the USA, Germany declared war on the United States once the news of Pearl Harbour came through, but not immediately. Ribbentrop pointed out to Hitler that the terms of the Tripartite Pact bound Germany to assist Japan only in case of an attack against Japan herself. And Japan was

now clearly the aggressor. Oshima asked for a formal declaration of war at once. On the other hand, the United States had not, so far, declared war on Germany and Italy. In fact there was a strong current of feeling in Congress that the US Army and Navy ought to concentrate on Japan and not take on the added burden of fighting a simultaneous war with Germany. The existence of this opinion might have made it difficult for President Roosevelt to declare war on Germany.[47] In the upshot, Hitler took the deliberations out of American hands. 'If we don't stand on the side of Japan', he told Ribbentrop, 'the Pact is politically dead. But that is not the main reason. The chief reason is that the United States is already shooting against our ships. They have been a forceful factor in this war and through their actions have already created a situation of war.'[48] He waited until he could address the Reichstag on 11 December. Shortly afterwards, Ribbentrop handed the official declaration of war to the US *chargé d'affaires* in Berlin. It did not, of course, bring about a common strategy between the Axis powers. It merely ensured that they had ranged against them the three most powerful industrial nations on earth.

IV

The original aims of the Japanese assault on South-East Asia were achieved with the conquest of Java: the assurance of a source of supply of oil. The establishment of a defence perimeter within which they could exploit their gains was accomplished soon after. But further ambitions began to make themselves felt at once, as soon as the phenomenal rapidity of the British surrender at Singapore sank in. Proposals had been made as early as 6 December 1941 – before the outbreak of hostilities – to occupy Calcutta and Ceylon as a way of ensuring that no counter-attack could be made from India.[49]

On 30 December, to the list of naval bases to be secured (Hong Kong, Manila, Davao, Tarakan, Surabaya, Singapore) which had been drawn up before the war, the Chief