

WHY WAS THE FALL OF SINGAPORE SUCH A SHOCK?

Film clip from a British newsreel called News from Singapore, January 1942

ITN Ref: BP150142131416

Courtesy of [ITN/Source](#), London.

"Planes! We must have more planes."

The cry that was heard above the din of battle in Norway, France, Crete and Britain comes now from Malaya.

Early in December just prior to the first Japanese raid, a consignment of Beaufort aircraft arrived at Singapore, fresh from Commonwealth factories and so soon to go into action.

North of Singapore in the Malay Peninsula Australian troops help to make every inch of the way to the fortress island a deathtrap for the yellow plague infecting the strait settlement.

In a jungle waterway, patrol boat on the lookout for Japs. Patrols like this may suddenly come across hundreds of them scurrying about the undergrowth and scaling trees like so many monkeys.

Mind you, a digger is no amateur at climbing trees, especially when it's a coconut palm.

ASIA 1939–1945: SINGAPORE

What is this source?

This source is an extract from a British newsreel broadcast on January 15th 1942.

The government would have closely controlled the newsreels of this period.

What's the background to this source?

WW2 broke out in Europe in 1939. In the Far East war broke out on December 7th 1941 when Japanese forces destroyed the US fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. However, it was very clear before December 1941 that Japan was a threat to the British Empire in the Far East. Japan had established good relations with Nazi Germany and become part of the Axis Pact. Throughout the 1930s Japan had built up an empire in the Far East. It invaded Manchuria in 1931, China in 1937 (including Korea) and French Indochina (modern day Vietnam) in 1940. This brought the Japanese to the borders of Malaya. Malaya was part of the British Empire. At the southern tip of Malaya was the island and naval base of Singapore, the most important base in the British Empire outside Britain itself.

At the time this clip was shown, Japanese forces were advancing through Malaya. Although the Allied forces outnumbered the Japanese, they were less experienced and less well equipped. By the end of January, Allied forces had been driven from Malaya and retreated to Singapore. They suffered heavy casualties and about 50000 troops were captured.

It's worth knowing that...

This clip features troops from different parts of the British Empire. When it was attacked Singapore had around 85000 troops defending it. The Japanese force was around 30000.

By far the largest contingent of troops was Indian. There were also British, Australian and Malayan troops.

How will you use this source?

1. Would you describe the tone of the newsreel as: cheerful, depressing, realistic, optimistic, or severe?

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/>

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2. Do you get the impression the defences of the island were strong in early 1942?
3. Do you get the impression the Allies respected and feared the Japanese?
4. How do the notes and sources help you to find out why the fall of Singapore was such a shock?

Use this [table](#) to record your comments.