

WHY WAS THE FALL OF SINGAPORE SUCH A SHOCK?

Extracts from a report on the health of prisoners at Changi prisoner of war camp in Singapore July 1942

Catalogue ref: CAB 106/42

SICK.					
No. excused work.	No. with diarrhoea.	No. with dengue.	No. with skin disease.	Remarks.	
81	16	16	45		

CLOTHING.					
No. with no boots.	No. with bad boots.	No. with unserviceable shirts.	No. with unserviceable shorts.	No. with no hats.	Remarks.
70	451	25	59	198	

Subject:- Medical Supplies. AM/2.

To:- Officer Commanding,
Imperial Japanese Army
Guard over Prisoners of War.

On the 30th. June I informed you that the Medical Officer in charge of this Camp required medical supplies. On the 3rd. July I informed you that these supplies could not be obtained from Changi Hospital but were to be supplied by the Japanese Army Medical Service in accordance with Imperial Japanese Army Order No. 259 dated 30th. June. This morning we were given by your Medical Officer one small bottle of iodine, one tin of aspirin tablets, two small bottles of disinfectant and three packages of bandages. These supplies are totally inadequate for this Camp. At the moment the Doctor has no medicine with which to treat cases of diarrhoea or dysentery and these medicines are urgently required.

ASIA 1939–1945: SINGAPORE

What is this source?

This source comes from a report by the commanding officer of the British POWs (prisoners of war) in the Changi Prison Camp in 1942.

The extract is one of a series of exchanges between the officer and the commander of the camp

What's the background to this source?

In February 1942 Singapore fell to the Japanese army. Around 80000 troops defending Singapore surrendered. Around 30000 had already surrendered in Malaya in December 1941 to February 1942. Some of these prisoners were held in Singapore at camps like Changi. Thousands more were shipped out to Singapore to work on a railway for the Japanese forces, as well as other projects.

The death rates in Japanese prison camps were extremely high. Estimates vary from around 30% to 37%. The main causes of death were disease, inadequate food and brutal treatment by Japanese captors.

It's worth knowing that...

As well as the approximately 130000 prisoners taken in Singapore there were thousands of other civilians used in labour camps by the Japanese.

The issue of whether Japan accepted its guilt for the treatment of prisoners is still controversial today. Many British former POWs still believe they should get compensation and an apology from Japan.

How will you use this source?

1. What health problems are listed in this source?
2. What does this source tell you about conditions for the POWs?
3. What does the source suggest about the attitude of the Japanese commander?
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.

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