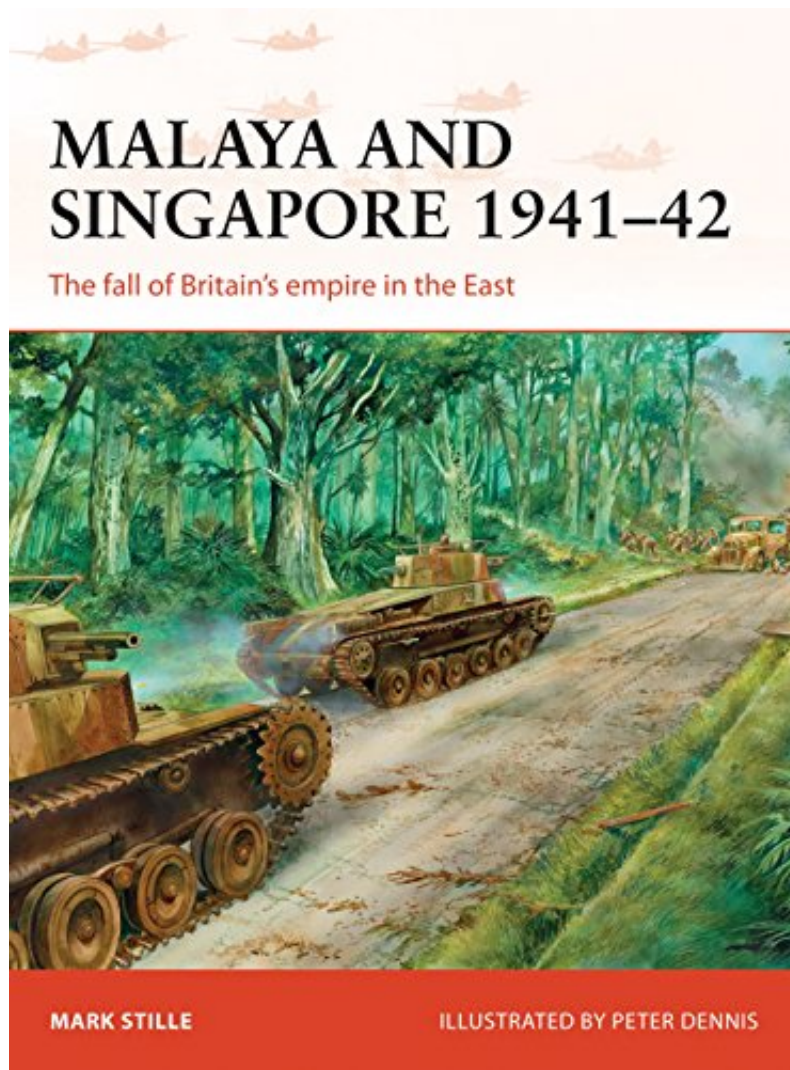


# Malaya and Singapore 1941–42: The Fall of Britain's Empire in the East (Campaign Book 300)

*by*  
Mark Stille



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## **Synopsis**

For the British Empire it was a military disaster, but for Imperial Japan the conquest of Malaya was one of the pivotal campaigns of World War II. Giving birth to the myth of the Imperial Japanese Army's invincibility, the victory left both Burma and India open to invasion. Although heavily outnumbered, the Japanese Army fought fiercely to overcome the inept and shambolic defence offered by the British and Commonwealth forces. Detailed analysis of the conflict, combined with a heavy focus on the significance of the aerial campaign, help tell the fascinating story of the Japanese victory, from the initial landings in Thailand and Malaya through to the destruction of the Royal Navy's Force Z and the final fall of Singapore itself.















## What people say about this book

Max Prendergast, "Solid Account of an Important Campaign. Mark Stille (USN ret.) is Osprey's current go-to author for the Pacific theater in World War II (author, for example, of the excellent *The Imperial Japanese Navy in the Pacific War*). His account of the Malaya Campaign is a typically solid account, and a good read. In a swift 96 pages he provides an excellent overview, orders of battle, the usual Osprey Campaign thumbnails of key commanders, and a clear account of the battles down the Malay Peninsula and onto the island of Singapore itself. As a specialist in naval affairs he includes a good (though necessarily brief and summary) account of the loss of HMS Prince of Wales and Repulse. Definitely recommended for those wishing to learn the basics of one of the key campaigns of the Pacific War. The weaknesses are fairly minor given the brevity of books in this series. There is some evidence of rushed editing with some facts or sentences repeated redundantly, and what might (?) on page 13 be swapped photo captions. The unhelpful attitude of local British civil authorities is not discussed, and while this is of course a military history those actions did contribute to the final military result. The "Aftermath" section also seems a bit truncated with no mention of the British and Commonwealth POW experience, the raising of Bose's pro-Axis Indian volunteers, or the fact that the British commander, Lt. Gen. Arthur Percival, survived captivity to attend the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay at war's end. As for the campaign itself, the capture of Malaya and Singapore was a linchpin of Japan's Pacific plan of conquest. The defeat and expulsion of the British may have done more to set the stage for post-war de-colonialization in Asia than any other single event. Japan had gained access to Indochina bloodlessly through the defeat of France by another European power, but in Malaya the British were soundly and swiftly defeated in the field. In this the performance of General Percival has been roundly, and probably rightly, criticized from then to now, including in this latest account. It must be recognized though (and author Stille does point this out) that with Britain stretched to the limit in other theaters and massive reinforcement out of the question, any general would have found it daunting to do more than delay defeat. Moreover, while Churchill weighed in from a distance with fiery orders to fight to the last bullet in the ruins of Singapore, this was probably never in the cards. In a colonial city, with the local population understandably dubious about enduring sacrifice for one foreign colonial power to the detriment of another, it was probably doubtful that anyone could have inspired the spirit sacrifice of a Leningrad or Berlin."

Joe Krakovsky, "How to lose a fortress in 70 days. "Malaya and Singapore 1941-42: The fall of Britain's empire in the East" was a textbook example on how to lose a fortress in 70 days. Being one of the victors in 1918, Britain was a world power perceived by many at home and abroad as invincible. Japan, though an ally, slowly became the next threat in the 20's and 30's. Thankfully, all that is covered elsewhere, but that was setting the stage for what followed. Although at war again with Germany in 1941, and taking a whopping from them, the British Empire still covered

much of the world. Its navy had a reputation as did the great naval base and fortress of Singapore. When Japan went to war, it had to conquer the fortress and drive the Royal Navy from the seas. They did this, and so great was the victory, that the myth of European superiority was shattered, and paved the way for various Asian independence movements after the war. What the Japanese did was invade Malaya in the north and drive south down to the fortress city of Singapore. Even though the invaders were greatly outnumbered by the defenders, they were unstoppable. Their light tanks often led the way, and if stopped by a roadblock or ambush, the accompanying infantry, many of whom rode on bicycles, dismounted and outflanked the enemy by infiltrating through the jungle. In the air, the British Buffalo fighters were outclassed by the more maneuverable Japanese Ki-27 "Nate" and Ki-43 "Oscar" fighters. Besides being shot out of the sky, their airfields were overrun on the ground. At sea the Royal Navy suffered a blow as devastating as the loss of the fortress itself. Flying at long distance, the twin engine torpedo bombers sank the battleship 'HMS Prince of Wales' and the battlecruiser 'HMS Repulse.' Besides creating the new myth of Japanese mastery of jungle warfare, they showed themselves to be prone to atrocities. They murdered wounded enemy soldiers and their doctors in hospitals and rounded up and killed maybe as many as 50,000 Chinese in Singapore. The ironic thing was that the weapons of war and the tactics that made victory possible were to work against them later at Guadalcanal and Impal. My only gripe about this neat little book with maps, photos and color plates were the huge maps spread over two pages. You can't see important detail without breaking the spine of the book, and why would I want to do that?"

Ebook Tops Reader, "A good, quick overview. The fall of Malay and Singapore was a nail in the coffin of the British Empire, but it draws little attention now. The Japanese won, and then they lost. Who writes that history? This is a good introduction to the battle. It misses a few things, like the airfields being built on the wrong side of defensible rivers and how the Japanese Imperial Ordnance Maps ended up being more informative than the same maps the British were using, but I'd recommend this to anyone curious about this fight where the Japanese fought outnumbered two to one and beat the Brits."

Mikko57, "Great historical resource. This has been a great resource in researching family history and understanding the fall of Malaya and Singapore. Easy to follow yet comprehensive so very useful."

desmond middleton, "Detail excellent. incredibly well researched"

Brian J. Sweeney, "Four Stars. good informative"

Prehistoric\_Sounds, "Sehr Detailtreu. Und wieder ein hervorragender Band des Brit. Osprey-Verlags. Wer sich wie ich für die zeitgeschichtlichen Konflikte interessiert, für den sind die unzähligen Bände des Osprey-Verlags einfach ein muß...!! Auch in diesem Band, der den Konflikt

der Briten mit den Japanern, Anfang der 40er Jahre in Malaysia und Singapur intensiv beschreibt, bleiben keine Fragen offen. Auf reichlichen Bebildnerungen und Kartenskizzen werden die entscheidenden Kämpfe dieses Konfliktes hervorragend und minutiös wiedergegeben. Die Befehlshaber beider Seiten sowie die militärischen Ressourcen werden wie gewohnt gegenübergestellt und vermitteln einen sehr guten Überblick. Für Militärhistoriker ein weiterer empfehlenswerter Band."

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