



Japanese military supremacy: the fall of Malaysia

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Histoire & stratégie

The Empire of the Rising Sun soon took possession of various territories in Southeast Asia, with operations that began on November 10, 1941 with an air raid on Malaysia. The capture of Malaysia, carried out shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor, had been prepared for a long time. Captain (Air)Mourton Jonathan Jay shows how intelligence and influence were indispensable to launch an operation of this magnitude.

The Empire of the Rising Sun quickly took possession of various territories in Southeast Asia, with operations that began on November 10, 1941 with an air raid on Malaysia sinking British ships. In January 1942, Burma, Indonesia, Manila and Kuala Lumpur fell under Japanese military power. The capture of Malaysia, carried out shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor, was first part of a series of attacks at various points, pushing some of the British forces eastward, only to be taken back by the other Japanese forces that would land. The Japanese operation was a success, and on December 8, 1941, it began from the towns of Singora and Pattani in Thailand to the west side of Malaysia, in particular the town of Jitra. A month later, the Japanese arrived in Malacca. The British are surrounded on all sides. The Allied forces withdrawn to Singapore surrender on 15 February 1942. The Japanese now occupy Malaysia.

Intelligence and influence

This military operation had been prepared for a long time, and intelligence was essential to launch an operation of this magnitude. Japan, via land it owned in various locations in Johore and Singapore, was able to obtain real-time intelligence through a view of Singapore's naval bases and the coastal defence system[1]. 1] Japanese intelligence services then used a variety of means, such as fishermen, to survey the coastline and beaches in order to assess their depth and identify potential landing areas. Japanese photo studios also participated in intelligence by taking pictures of lines of communication, roads and railways[2]. But the most spectacular was the action of Colonel

Tsugunori Kadomatsu who worked for nearly six years at the British Officers Club and was able to obtain, in all discretion, information on the British army officers [3]. 3] Japan's efficient intelligence system thus facilitated the successful deployment of its forces.

In order to secure the support and at least the resilience of the population, a great deal of influencing work was undertaken, thus competing with the British Empire. By the late 1930s, Japan had invested in five newspapers published in Singapore. Three of them were in the Japanese language, while the other two used English and Chinese to influence the local population [4].

An illusory British superiority

The Japanese also benefited from a favourable situation for the capture of Malaysia. Since the 1920s, the British had always favoured the defence of Singapore [5], and believed that their defence system was sufficient to repel a Japanese assault. However, the war in Europe was raging, and the idea that the British would be alone against the Japanese was gradually taking hold. In this perspective, it became essential to block the landing of a force. This mission was assigned to the air force and the infantry. But the means available to face the Japanese forces were insufficient to defend the island. 336 aircraft were initially planned, while local officials insisted on a necessary number of 556 [6]. 6] When the Japanese attacked with more than 500 aircraft, only 158 aircraft were actually available.

An economic stake for the Archipelago

Japan's occupation of Malaysian territory was well planned. Their interest in this region was motivated by the acquisition of resources: iron, bauxite, manganese, tin, natural gum and tannins [8]. 8] Both natural gum and tin were exported in large quantities to the United States. In 1930, these exports accounted for almost 54% of the gum and 74% of the tin produced in Malaysia [9]. 9] It became vital for Japan to prevent these resources from reaching the United States.

Malaysia's export-based economy was largely destroyed by Japanese strategy [10]. 10] The treatment of workers differed according to their origins. Chinese workers, perceived as spies or members of anti-Japanese movements, were subjected to violence and rejection. 11] Crimes were committed against this Chinese population, as in the village of Lamping where 200 villagers were killed and their houses burned down. 12] Part of the population was interned in camps or deported to other countries, such as Taiwan, Japan, or Korea.

Enemies from within

As soon as it was installed, Japan eliminated the political opponents of the Kuomintang (linked to China), and other organizations such as the Central Indian Association (linked to England). Conversely, the Japanese strengthened the pro-Japanese Kesatuan-Melayu Muda (KMM) association, which lasted no more than six months, before disappearing in its turn. [14]

One movement, however, survived the Japanese hunt, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), whose purpose, as its name suggests, was to fight against the Japanese invader. The Japanese, after September 1, 1942, succeeded in undermining the operational capacity of the resistance movements by eliminating the main leaders of the Movement Communist Party (MCP). This operation was made possible thanks to the

assistance of a Japanese agent, Lai Tek, secretary general of the MCP. Thanks to the latter, their nuisance capabilities were real, but nevertheless remained limited[15].

The emergence of nationalist militias

During this period, we are witnessing, among the Malaysian population, the emergence of an assertive nationalism that Japan wants to use to support its operations on this territory by creating armies of volunteers, the Giyûgun [16]. [16] They were, however, difficult to establish because of the lack of strong nationalist movements, unlike the situation in Indonesia. The objective of these nationalist troops was to strengthen the coastal defences to avoid a landing of allied forces [17]. [17] They were never considered full-fledged soldiers, and not a single Malaysian received training at a Japanese military academy, unlike 56 Filipinos or 17 Indonesians.

The training of the Giyugun was done through Japanese officers, within a structure called DokuritsuShubitai, then commanded by Major General ShiratakiKishiro [19]. This unit, 5,000 strong in 1944, carried out missions of maintaining order, as well as building defensive elements in order to prevent a future Allied landing. The training was elementary: walking, running, surveillance [20]. [20] Some of them would receive military training in Singapore for military intelligence, weapons handling - particularly those in British armoury - espionage, counter-intelligence, as well as sabotage [21]. The Japanese military objective was to create local military units to ensure stability, law and order for and by the people of the various Southeast Asian countries under their control. This objective relieved the Japanese forces of a number of tasks so that they could concentrate on the war effort against the West.

Conclusion

Japan, after having been invincible until 1942, will accumulate successive defeats, not succeeding in reversing the trend, although it still has the means to succeed militarily in 1943. The extent of the territory, the multiplicity of combat zones, the Allied bombardments on Japanese territory made possible in 1942 (following the defeat of Midway), will undermine the military production and Japan's ability to react. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will have overcome the last wishes of a part of the partisans of the war ready to continue the fight even if it would lead to the total annihilation of Japan and its population. The Emperor's cabinet will choose surrender, leading to the occupation of the Empire of the Rising Sun by the American army with General MacArthur at its head.

A researcher specializing in Asia, the work of Air Force Captain (R) Jonathan Jay MOURTONT focuses on defence issues (aerospace, technology and robotics, I.A, Increased Soldier...), security issues in East Asia, as well as regional stability issues related to terrorism in South-East Asia.

1] Paul H. Kratoska, "The Japanese occupation of Malaya", Hurst and Co. Ltd, First edition, (1998) p.28.

2] Ibid. p.28.

3] Ibid.

[4] Paul. H. Kratoska, "The Japanese occupation of Malaya", Hurst and Co. Ltd. First Edition (1998) p.27.

5] Ibid. p.34.

6] Ibid, p.35.

[7] Ibid.

8] Yôji Akashi, Mako Yoshimura, "New perspectives on the Japanese occupation in Malaya and Singapore.1941-1945", **Singapore University Press, Singapore, June 2009, p.115.**

9] Ibid.

10] Ibid. p.117.

[11] Ibid. p.128

12] Ibid.

13] Ibid.

14] **Boon Kheng Cheah**, "Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation" , **Singapore University Press, Singapore, 2003, p.56.**

15] **Paul H. Kratoska**, "The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: A Social and Economic History", C. **Hurst&Co.Publishers, London, 1998, p.292.**

16] **Founded in 1944**

17] **Joyce Lebra**, "Japanese trained armies in Southeast Asia", p.114.

18] Ibid, p.115.

[19] Ibid, p.117.

20] Ibid, p.118.

21] Ibid.

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