

# SINGAPORE AFIRE BEFORE IT FELL

"Island Was a Blazing Hell of Shell and Bombfire as I Left Just Before Surrender," War Correspondent Writes.

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were women and a few were children.

Most of the rest were Royal Air Force men. I know they were the only fighting men evacuated up to then. They were evacuated because their lives were considered absolutely essential to the Allied cause.

Other of the Royal Air Force have arrived here since my ship sailed in Saturday night.

I MADE MY LAST visit to the front—if it could be called a front a few miles outside Singapore City, last Tuesday afternoon.

Officers and men, infantrymen and artillerymen, all said then that it was all over, that they had no hope of stopping the Japanese.

Ever since the Japanese landed a week ago Sunday on Singapore island they had kept up an incessant attack by artillery and dive bombing planes not only on the fighting lines but on Singapore City.

British Had No Planes

Hundreds of shell and bombs crashed into the heart of the helpless city.

It was a pyrotechnic display of unbelievable grandeur and terror. It kept up like that for 48 hours on end, without a pause.

The thunder of the bursting bombs made one deaf. You could not hear people talking at your side.

Up at the front, the troops were undergoing dive bombing day and night, but all they could do was lie in the mud all day and take it. There were no British planes.

Singing Chinese Lost?

The troops on the northwest island sector when the Japanese made their first landing, on that Sunday night eight days ago, were compelled to leave their positions because it was impossible for anything to live under the Japanese bombardment. They had to leave all their own artillery.

Hundreds of Chinese volunteer troops who had gone singing to the front to meet the hated Japanese, were in this sector. Nothing has been heard of them.

Refugees arriving here described the Japanese landing on the east coast of the island at the Seletar airfield area. (This landing never was officially admitted.)

Last of Air Power

I tried Feb. 7 to report that the airfield had been evacuated. It was under constant artillery and mortar fire, and untenable.

I saw the airfield and its buildings scarred or shattered, but empty.

Royal Air Force men were removing the last remaining stores and preparing to blow up the underground fuel reserves.

Only one airplane was there. It was a derelict Sunderland flying boat, an enormous seaplane which once was the pride of Singapore.

It ended its career in the middle of the airfield, a lone thing, with the Japanese mortar shells popping down all around it and the rest of us.

Almost to "Last Man"

I remember that I wondered what would have happened if a lucky shot from one of the mortars had struck one of the gasoline dumps.

The Tengah airfield on the west side of the island also was evacuated. Its ground staff were among those on the ship in which I left Singapore.

Some people who arrived here yesterday told me that of the 400 soldiers left to defend this airfield three remained alive.

By last Thursday the Imperial forces were holding a line running northeast across the island between the Tanglin barracks, a little outside Singapore City on the northwest side, and the naval base at the northeastern end of the island.

Destroy Oil Storage Tanks

The line was roughly 4½ miles from the center of the city at the nearest point.

That line, from the barracks to the base, was the strongest natural line which could be found.

The barracks are near the botanical gardens and adjoin an estate which the sultan of Johore owns.

The day before I left I saw the last preparations made to destroy all the oil on the island, and the demolition work was doubtlessly effective.

Great Clouds of Smoke

The night on which I left, Singapore was very dark. Great clouds of black smoke rolled over the entire island. The smell of burning oil stung one's nostrils and brought tears to one's eyes.

There was not much food aboard. The captain, looking over the passengers, was somewhat disturbed to find there were only 20 women.

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Every patriotic citizen interested in saving gasoline for Victory will welcome the achievement of a Wisconsin Inventor. Already thousands of car owners are using his invention and they report gas savings of up to 30% as well as more power, quicker pickup and faster acceleration. The device, called the Vacu-matic, operates on the super-charger principle. It is entirely automatic and allows the motor to breathe. The manufacturers, the Vacu-matic Carburetor Co., 7617-185 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, are offering a Vacu-matic free to those who will test it on their own cars and help introduce it to others. Write them today.

## Today's War Moves

By LOUIS F. KEEMBLE

United Press War Analyst

Even before their occupation of Singapore has been consolidated, the Japanese have opened a full scale drive for Sumatra and Java and are attacking with renewed intensity in Burma.

The culminating phase of the battle for the southwestern Pacific now has been reached. The United Nations face a showdown, the supreme test of their ability to maintain a foothold in the Indies.

The test is the turning point of the war. If they lose it, the Allies will have to give up their sole remaining base at Soerabaja on Java and the rich Indies to the enemy.

The nearest Allied base would be Port Darwin on the northern coast of Australia, and that would be subject to bombing from Timor and New Guinea and by planes from carriers.

Should the Japanese make Port Darwin untenable, the Allies would have to operate from thousands of miles away, basing on Sydney and Melbourne.

Java Is Vital Point

It would make the eventual grand assault by the Allies against the Japanese a difficult and slow task. It is so vital to hold Java that it is likely to be the scene of the heaviest fighting of the war, probably very soon. Speed is the essence of Japan's plan of attack and her forces are not likely to pause to reorganize before striking.

Allies Lose Oil Supply

By capturing Singapore, the Japanese have gained control of the Strait of Malacca, with easy access to the Bay of Bengal. They can send unlimited reinforcements to Burma, whose defenders already are hard pressed.

The danger to China's Burma Road becomes very real.

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