Fall of Singapore – Media Backgrounder

Before December 1941 the Second World War was fought mainly by the great European powers and soldiers from their respective empires. Japan’s entry into the war changed the situation dramatically. The Malayan Campaign, including the fall of Singapore, led to the capture of more Australians than in any campaign before or since.

Battle of Singapore

Singapore was reputed to be an ‘island fortress’. The island’s defences were concentrated on the naval base at Changi and were designed to protect that base and harbour from attacks from the sea. This left the northern shore, facing Malaya, vulnerable. On 8 February 1942 this was where the Japanese landed.

Fall of Singapore

On the morning of 8 February 1942 the Japanese opened a massive artillery bombardment on Singapore, followed that evening by landings across the Johore Strait. The following morning a second wave of Japanese troops made the crossing from the mainland and by the evening of 10 February the western part of the island was lost. Soon Japanese troops had taken many of Singapore’s key facilities including all but one airfield and the island’s water reservoirs.

After Japan entered the Second World War the RAN quickly became involved in efforts to meet the new threat. HMAS Vampire was involved in escorting HM Ships Prince of Wales and Repulse and her crew rescued more than 200 British sailors when both ships were sunk near Singapore in December 1941. Australian ships were then engaged in bringing reinforcements to Singapore and were often attacked by Japanese aircraft. During the final days of Allied resistance on the island the RAN carried out patrol and evacuation duties before going on to participate in the naval defence of the Netherlands East Indies.

As fighting continued the water supply began to give out and with no water, dwindling stocks of ammunition, almost no petrol and a civilian population suffering terrible casualties, the senior British commander, General Percival, decided he had no other option but to surrender.

All Allied troops were ordered to lay down their arms at 8:30pm on 15 February 1942. Some 15,000 Australians were now prisoners of war and around 1800 had been killed or were listed as missing in action.

Those captured at the fall of Singapore were held as prisoners, firstly at Changi and as the war continued in locations across Southeast and East Asia, including Japan. By the end of the war some 8000 Australian prisoners of the Japanese, including those captured in places other than Singapore, had died in captivity.
Fast Facts

_Australians who served_
• More than 20,000 Australians served in the Malayan Campaign and the Battle for Singapore

_Major Units_
• 8th Division AIF
• No 1, 8, 21 and 453 Squadrons RAAF

_Key Dates_
• 8 – 15 February – Battle of Singapore
• 15 February – fall of Singapore

_Casualties_
• Around 1,800 Australians died during Malayan Campaign and the Battle for Singapore
• More than 1,300 Australians were wounded
• More than 15,000 Australians became Prisoners of War with the fall of Singapore

_Specific Medals_
• Lieutenant Colonel Charles Anderson was awarded the first Victoria Cross to an Australian during the war in the Pacific for his role in the Battle of Muar River

_Cemeteries_
• More than 4400 Commonwealth and Allied soldiers are buried at Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore
• More than 850 remain unidentified in unmarked graves
• More than 2500 Australian soldiers are buried at Kranji, or remembered on the Singapore Memorial to the Missing

_More information_
• [Australia’s War 1939 – 1945](#)