

have to fight without adequate air cover. The situation in Malaya led to a disastrous collapse of morale.

British aircraft were obsolete, despite the fact that already in March 1941, Malaya's Command General Staff had issued a booklet, "Japanese Army Memorandum," which listed the capabilities of Japanese fighter and torpedo-bomber aircraft, and acknowledged that the British equivalents were "vastly inferior in performance." In May 1941, a new Japanese Zero fighter plane was shot down in China, and examined by Allied forces. The information that this plane could fly much faster than any of the RAF planes in Malaya, was sent to the London Air Ministry, but to no effect. London refused to give Malaya any new aircraft.

The Empire's armies

The British Empire did not fight with British troops: India was its main source of soldiers. Despite the fact that India had been fighting for its independence from Britain for decades, the Indian Army was expanded rapidly after 1939 to defend the Empire, becoming the largest non-conscript army the world has seen. A picture published in 1991, on the 50th anniversary of the fall of Hongkong, showed a former British officer standing in front of the wall where the names of the defending soldiers were inscribed. There was one name, written over and over: "Singh." The "British" troops who fell in Hongkong were Sikhs.

The Malaya campaign demonstrated the worst aspects of

British imperial military operations. Almost 50% of the troops who fought for the British were Indian; another 20% were Australian. This situation contributed to the collapse. In addition, during wartime, training, equipment, and leadership of these troops were disastrously neglected. Many of the Indian soldiers who arrived in Malaya had never even *seen* a tank before they were attacked by Japanese tanks. (The British forces did not have a single tank in Malaya.) Untrained Indian reinforcement troops, all very young men, were shipped out to the final battles against the victorious Japanese onslaught. During the campaign, more experienced troops were deprived of their officers (who were mostly British, although some Indian officers were being commissioned after the 1920s), who were used to form new battalions for other war theaters. The older battalions were put in the hands of raw officers, most of whom could not even speak Urdu, the language of the Indian Army. Many, of course, were also racists. These bad officers were just thrown into battle in Malaya, with disastrous results.

So bad were conditions that official British documents, released in December 1993, revealed that there was concern "at the highest level" about the "loyalty" of Indian officers and soldiers in East Asia, the Middle East, and in Europe, to the British Raj. The Indian Independence League and Indian National Army both operated in Malaya, with Japanese backing.

Australian troops did not fare much better. As Australia's

Churchill's model: Scipio Africanus

Winston Churchill's incompetent military strategy can best be understood by contrasting his views with those of Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

The opening of the war found MacArthur the military adviser to the colonial government of the Philippines, where he was attempting to create a military establishment which would defend the Philippine nation once it achieved its promised independence. Upon escaping from Corregidor, MacArthur did not declare "I shall return" with the intent of returning as a colonial master, but to liberate a nation that was to become a free republic. Colonies were to become sovereign nations and imperial Japan was to be reformed, its industrial capacity restored, for the economic development of the entire region.

By contrast, Churchill saw himself as the prime minister to His Majesty the King, sovereign of an empire that enslaved one-fourth of this planet. The policies of this

imperial occupation can be compared with those of the Nazi occupation in almost all respects. Churchill's models drew on the imperial traditions of Rome and Venice. One such model was Scipio Africanus, the Roman proconsul who took command of the Roman Empire following the catastrophic defeat at Cannae by the army of the great Carthaginian leader Hannibal. While Rome debated whether to mobilize another army to challenge Hannibal in the field, Scipio chose an opposite course of action—or inaction. Seeing Hannibal as another imperialist general from a rival empire, he allowed the Carthaginian to ravage most of the Italian peninsula, until Hannibal was unable to support his army. In the meantime, Scipio simply renegotiated the terms of subjugation with the people who had been ravaged by the army of Hannibal or simply were in no position to challenge the power of an even weaker Rome.

Thus Churchill saw Japan, as Japan saw itself, as another imperial power, whose occupation held in safekeeping, so to speak, the British king's imperial possessions, until a more appropriate time would come for their reoccupation.—*Dean Andromidas*