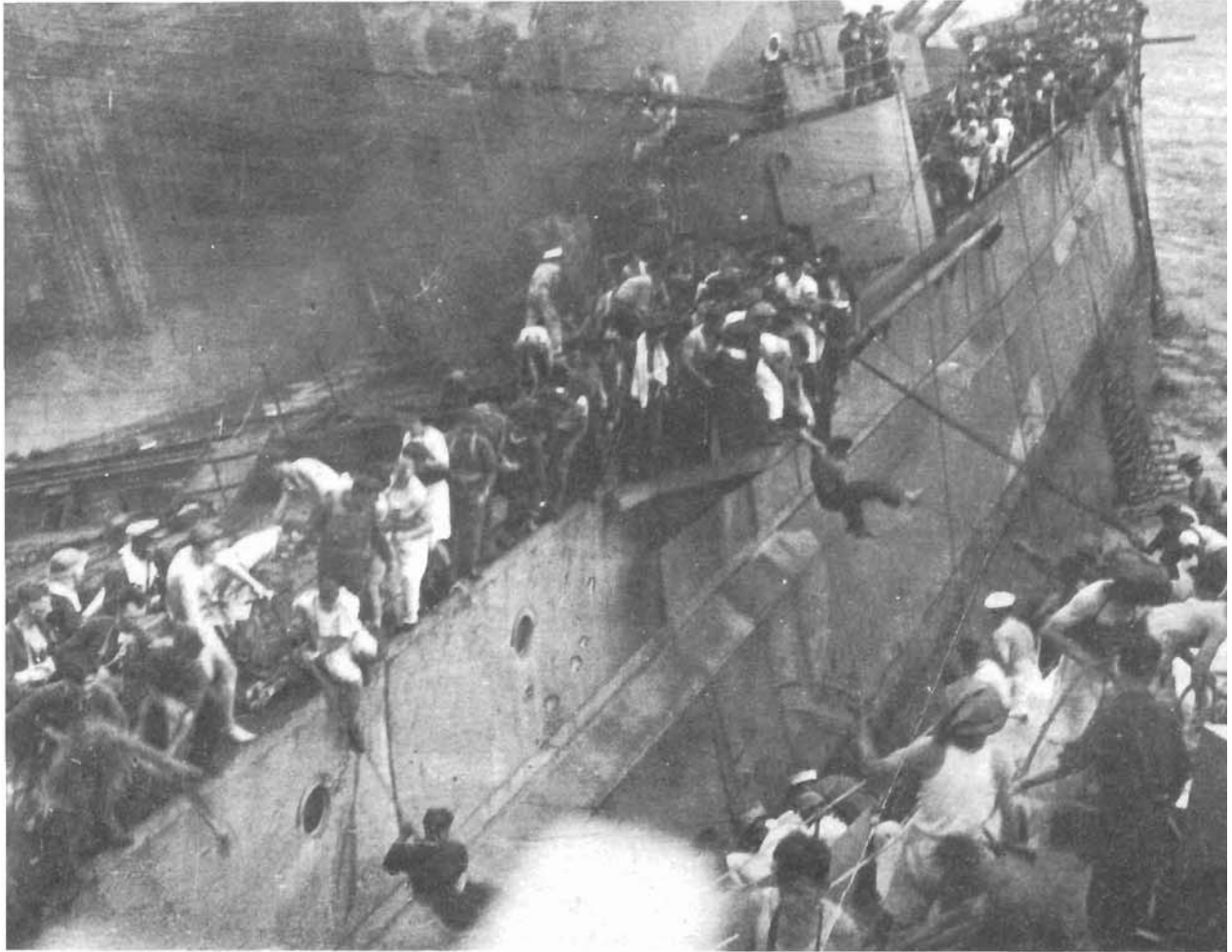


East Indies. Genda too lent his weight to their urgings. Nagumo, a doughty warrior but no Nelson, heard them out and then signified his disagreement. 'Operation Z' had succeeded beyond his and Yamamoto's wildest dreams. The rational course now was to withdraw the fleet from danger – who knew where the American carriers might be steering? – and hold it at safety and in readiness for the next stage of the offensive to the south. The rest of the Japanese navy and naval air force, and one-fifth of the Japanese army, was even then risking itself in perilous initiatives against the British, Dutch and American empires in the south-west Pacific. Who could say when and where the Combined Fleet would next be needed?

### — The tide of Japanese conquest —

The 'southern' operation was already in full swing and the Royal Navy was about to feel the weight of Japanese maritime airpower. British plans to defend its scattered possessions in south-east Asia and the Pacific depended on the timely dispatch of capital ships, with carrier support, to the strongly fortified naval base of Singapore, at the tip of the Malayan peninsula between the two largest islands of the Dutch East Indies, Sumatra and Borneo. As a precautionary measure, the new battleship *Prince of Wales* and the old battlecruiser *Repulse* had been sailed to Singapore at the beginning of December. A carrier should have accompanied them, but casualties among those in home waters and the need to keep the only other uncommitted carrier to watch the German battleship *Tirpitz* in its Norwegian fiord meant that they had to sail unescorted. On 8 December, prompted by news that the Japanese had begun to land troops off the Kra isthmus, which joins southern Thailand to Malaya, *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* with their small escort of destroyers sailed from Singapore to intercept. The Japanese landing troops had already occupied the airfield from which the two capital ships might have been afforded fighter cover, but although their commander, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, was warned that strong Japanese torpedo-bomber forces were stationed in southern Indo-China he held his course. Early on the morning of 10 December the Japanese bombers found him, and both his capital ships were sunk in two hours of relentless attack. The loss of a brand-new battleship and a famous battlecruiser to Japanese shore-based aircraft was a disaster for which no one in Britain was prepared. Not only did it upset all preconceptions about Britain's ability to command distant waters through naval power; it struck cruelly at the nation's maritime pride. 'In all the war', wrote Winston Churchill, who heard the news by telephone from the Chief of the Naval Staff, 'I never received a more direct shock.'

News quite as bad was on its way; on 8 and 10 December the islands of Wake and Guam, American outposts within the great chain of former German islands on which the Japanese were to base their south-western Pacific defensive perimeter, were attacked. Guam fell at once; Wake, heroically defended by its small Marine garrison, succumbed to a second assault on 23 December, after an American relief sortie had timorously retreated. The British territory of Hong Kong resisted siege, which began on 8 December, but



The crew of the battleship Prince of Wales abandon ship, 10 December 1942, after an attack by land-based Japanese bombers and torpedo-bombers of XXII Air Flotilla.

although its Anglo-Canadian garrison fought to the bitter end it capitulated on Christmas Day. The atolls of Tarawa and Makin in the British Gilbert archipelago were captured in December. And on 10 December the Japanese opened amphibious offensives designed to overrun both Malaya and the Philippines.

The collapse of the British defence of Malaya has rightly come to be regarded as one of the most shameful Allied defeats of the war. The Japanese were outnumbered two to one throughout the campaign, which they initiated with only one division and parts of two others against three British divisions and parts of three others. The British were admittedly outnumbered and outclassed in the air, and had no tanks, whereas the Japanese invasion force included fifty-seven tanks. Superior equipment did not, however, explain the whirlwind Japanese success. That victory resulted from the flexibility and dynamism of their methods, akin to those that had characterised the German *Blitzkrieg* in France in 1940. The British were put off their stroke from the outset. Air Chief Marshal Sir

Robert Brooke-Popham, the commander-in-chief, and Percival, his senior general, had intended to forestall a Japanese attack by moving forward across the Thai border to seize the potential landing places in the Kra isthmus, but the same sort of confused warnings that bedevilled American responses to Japan's surprise attacks prevented them from making that move. When the Japanese appeared in their forward defensive zone, they did not contest the advance but fell back to what were deemed better defensive positions further to the rear. The retreat surrendered valuable ground, including the sites of the three northernmost airfields in Malaya, none of which was put out of action and which were soon in use by the Japanese. Much else was left behind which the invaders put to use, including motor vehicles and seagoing vessels. Long columns of Japanese infantrymen with the scent of victory in their nostrils took to the roads in captured cars and trucks, followed by others pedalling southward on commandeered bicycles. Seaborne units embarked in fishing craft began to descend on the coast behind British lines, which were abandoned as rapidly as word of the Japanese appearance in their rear was received. By 14 December northern Malaya had been lost; by 7 January 1942 the Japanese had overrun the Slim river position in central Malaya and were driving the defenders southward to Singapore.

The units which collapsed so easily before the Japanese onrush were mostly Indian. They were not the first-line regiments of the pre-war Indian army which were currently winning victories against the Italians in the Western Desert, but war-raised units manned by recently enlisted recruits and led by inexperienced British officers most of whom had not learned Urdu, the command language by which the Indian army worked. There was therefore a lack of confidence between ranks, and orders for retreat were too often taken as a pretext for pell-mell withdrawal. However, poor morale was not the only explanation of Malaya Command's collapse. Few of its units had been trained in jungle warfare or had made the effort to train themselves. Even the resolute 8th Australian Division was bewildered and disorganised by the appearance of Japanese infiltrators far to the rear of the positions where they were expected. Yet one unit, the British 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, showed what might have been achieved in defence. In the months before the war its commanding officer had practised his soldiers in extending their flanks into the jungle beyond the roads running through its defensive positions and demonstrated that the enemy's outflanking tactics might thus be nullified. It fought with great success, though at heavy loss, in central Malaya. Had all its fellow units adopted this practice, the Japanese invasion would certainly have been slowed, perhaps checked, before Singapore was brought under threat.

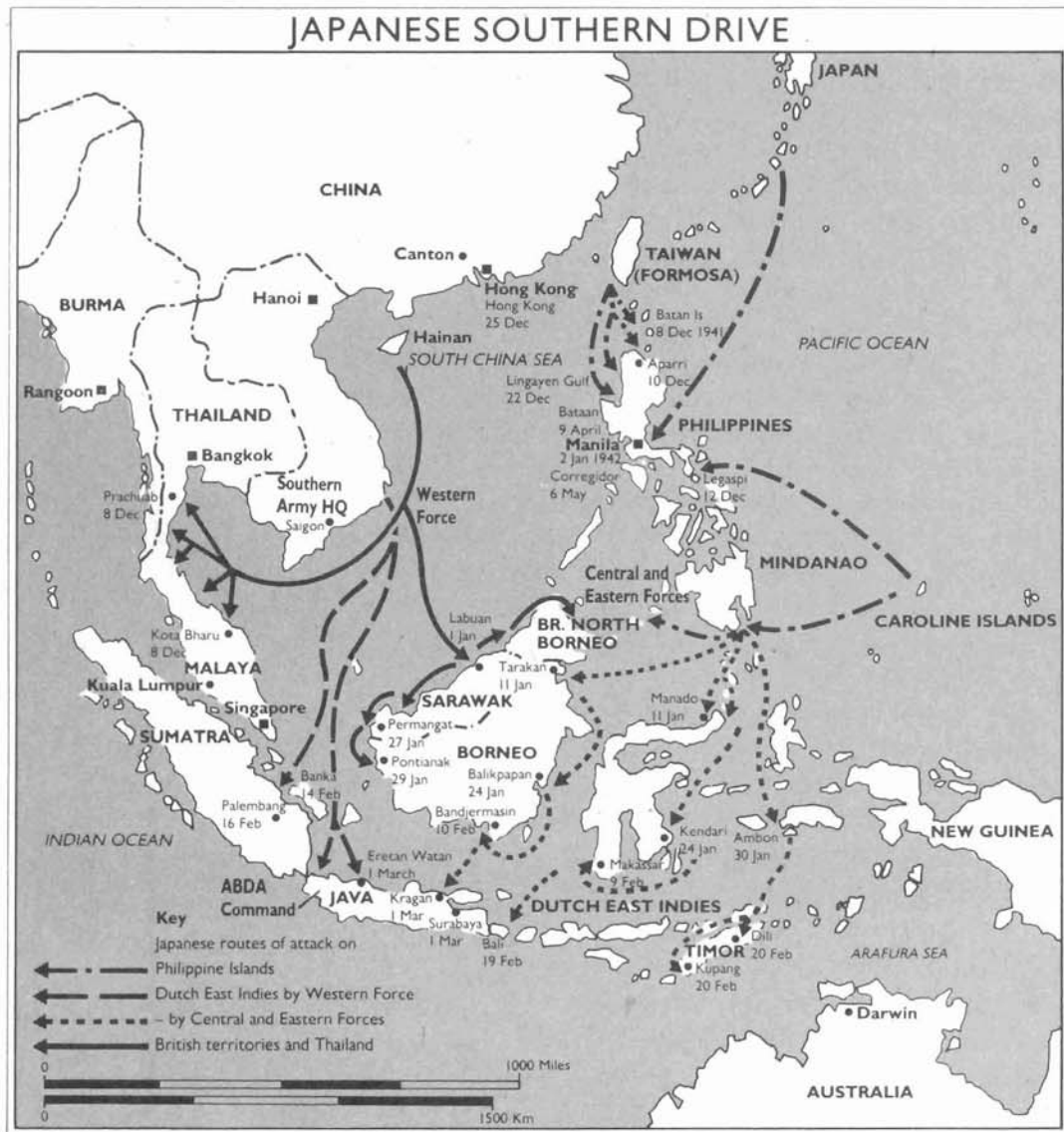
By 15 January, however, the Japanese Twenty-Fifth Army, having advanced 400 miles in five weeks, was only a hundred miles from the island fortress and in heavy fighting over the next ten days drove the Australians and Indians from Singapore's covering positions. On 31 January their rearguards, piped out of Malaya by the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland's two remaining pipers, crossed the causeway linking Singapore to the mainland and retreated to



*Surrender in Singapore, 15 February 1942, the single most catastrophic defeat in British military history. Over 130,000 troops were taken prisoner.*

lines covering the naval base against attack from the northern shore.

The tragedy of the Malaya campaign was now reaching its climax. Singapore had just been reinforced by the British 18th Division, brought from the Middle East, so that despite the toll of units lost in the retreat from the north Percival commanded forty-five battalions to oppose thirty-one in General Tomoyuku Yamashita's Twenty-Fifth Army. General Sir Archibald Wavell, the victor of the war against Italy in the Middle East and now commander-in-chief in India, also counted on the arrival of air and sea reinforcements to support the troops on the ground and believed that the much-bruited strength of the Singapore naval base defences would assure its resistance for several months. As the most casual reader of the history of the Second World War now knows, however, Singapore's defences 'faced the wrong way'. This legend is false. The island's strongpoints and heavy



Japan's drive into the 'southern region' and to the outer edge of the central Pacific, December 1941 - February 1942.

guns had been positioned to repel an attack from the mainland; but the guns had been supplied with the wrong ammunition, unsuitable for engaging troops. Singapore is separated from Johore by a channel less than a mile wide at its narrowest. The northern shore of the island, moreover, was over thirty miles long, requiring Percival to disperse his battalions - when some had been concentrated in central reserve - at one to the mile.

'Who defends everything', Frederick the Great had written, 'defends nothing.' It is a harsh truth of war. Yamashita concentrated his forces (now reinforced by the Imperial Guards Division) against six Australian battalions on the north-west corner of the island and on 8 February launched them across the narrow waters of the Johore Strait. Under this overwhelming attack the Australian 22nd and 27th Brigades rapidly crumbled. Counter-attacks by the central reserve failed to throw the Japanese back from their footholds into the water. By 15 February the reservoirs in the middle of the island which supplied Singapore city, the population of which had been swollen by the influx of refugees to over a million, had fallen into Japanese hands. Percival faced the prospect of an urban disaster. Late that evening he marched into Japanese lines to offer surrender. He was photographed carrying the Union Jack beside a white flag borne by a staff officer. According to the historian Basil Collier, it was for 'the British the greatest military disaster in their history', entailing the capitulation of more than 130,000 British, Indian, Australian and local volunteer troops to a Japanese force half their number. Most of the captured Indians, seduced by the appeals of the mesmeric Hindu nationalist, Subhas Chandra Bose, would shortly go over to the Japanese to form an Indian National Army which would fight on Japan's side against the British in Burma in the cause of Indian independence. The Indian defection and the white flag incident were two of many reasons why Percival was never forgiven by Churchill's government or its successor for his catastrophic mismanagement of the Malaya campaign. After liberation in 1945 he became a 'non-person', shunned by all in official life and excluded from every commemoration of Britain's belated Asian victory.

Admiral H. E. Kimmel, the Pearl Harbor commander, was to suffer much the same official oblivion, though with less justification. As the coming turn of events in the Dutch East Indies was to demonstrate, no Western commander who stood in the path of Japan's surprise attack of December 1941 could preserve his professional honour, in a theatre hopelessly unprepared for the conduct of modern war, except by death in the face of the enemy. Admiral Karel Doorman, the senior Dutch naval officer in the East Indies, has gone down in history a hero – but only because he died on the bridge of his sinking cruiser in battle against fearful odds with the Japanese fleet. The Dutch East Indies were even less ready to resist attack than Hawaii or Pearl Harbor; Doorman may have regarded death as a merciful release from catastrophe, for which he bore no more responsibility in his sector of the 'Southern Area' than Percival and Kimmel in theirs.

### — Unlocking the East Indies treasure-house —

Japanese attacks against the East Indies had opened on the British enclave in Borneo on 16 December. It was clear that they would shortly be extended to the whole of the island chain which stretches eastward from Malaya through New Guinea to the northern coast of Australia. In 1941 Australia was almost without defences, since the bulk of its army had been shipped overseas to fight with the British in the Middle East and south-east Asia. A

frantic effort ensued to concentrate such Australian, Dutch, British and American forces as existed in the region into a coherent command. It was dubbed ABDA (American–British–Dutch–Australian) and placed under the authority of General Wavell. The strength at his disposal consisted of the small United States Asiatic Fleet, the Royal Australian Navy and the home defence elements of the Australian army, the remnants of the British Eastern Fleet, the units of the Dutch navy in East Indian waters and the Dutch East Indies Army. The latter numbered some 140,000, the vast majority locals, unequipped and untrained for modern war; unlike the best of Britain's highly professional Indian army, it had never even fought a war. ABDA's naval force included eleven cruisers, twenty-seven destroyers and forty submarines. The United States hastily rushed a hundred modern aircraft to Java; the Dutch had only obsolescent models, and the British air component was wholly engaged in – and did not survive – the fighting in Malaya.

The Japanese strategy for the conquest of the East Indies – for them a treasure-house of oil, rubber and non-ferrous metal production, as well as rice and timber – was excellently conceived. They planned to use their plentiful naval and amphibious forces to attack in close succession at widely separated points across the 2000-mile length of the archipelago: Borneo and the Celebes in January, Timor and Sumatra in February, Java in March. An important subordinate aim of the attack on Timor, which lies only 300 miles from Australia's northernmost port of Darwin, was to cut the air link between Australia and Java. All forces were eventually to combine for the capture of Batavia (today Jakarta) on Java, the capital of the East Indies.

The Japanese landing troops found little difficulty in overcoming the Dutch local forces (which the population showed little inclination to support) wherever they were met. The Australians – whose will to fight was stiffened further by an air raid on Darwin, mounted from four of the carriers which had attacked Pearl Harbor, on 19 February – proved a tougher case. However, they were too few to check the trend of events. The only substantial counter in ABDA's hands was its fleet, a formidable force as long as the Japanese did not employ airpower against it. It enjoyed some early successes. On 24 January American destroyers and a Dutch submarine sank transports off Borneo and on 19 February Dutch and American destroyers engaged others off Bali. Admiral Doorman's test came on 27 February, when the ABDA command launched a Combined Striking Force against the Japanese invasion fleet approaching Java. Doorman's ships included two heavy and three light cruisers and nine destroyers, drawn from the Dutch, British, Australian and American navies. Admiral Takeo Takagi, his Japanese opponent, commanded two heavy and two light cruisers and fourteen destroyers. Numerically the encounter looked an even match; and in resolution, as Doorman was to display, the Japanese had no edge at all. However, they possessed a superior item of equipment, their 24-inch 'long-lance' torpedo which was a far more advanced weapon than its Allied equivalents.

The Battle of the Java Sea opened late in the afternoon of 27 February, with little daylight left. The initial stage of the largest naval engagement since Jutland took the form of

a gunnery duel at long range. When the Japanese closed to launch torpedoes, however, they quickly scored hits, and Doorman was forced to turn away to protect his casualties. As darkness fell he lost contact with the Japanese and shortly afterwards had to detach most of his destroyers to refuel. He nevertheless remained determined to prevent the Japanese fleet putting its troops ashore and so turned back in darkness to where he judged it to be. His force was now reduced to one heavy and three light cruisers and one destroyer, and the moon was bright. At 10.30 pm he found the Japanese again; more accurately, the Japanese found him. While he engaged one part of their fleet, another approached unseen and launched the deadly torpedoes. Both surviving Dutch cruisers went down almost at once, *De Ruyter* taking *Doorman* with her. The *USS Houston* and *HMAS Perth* escaped, only to be sunk the following night after a heroic fight; misaimed Japanese torpedoes sank four of the transports they had been trying to intercept. All the major units of the force on which ABDA ultimately counted to repel the Japanese from the southern Pacific and the approaches to Australia had ceased to exist.

Beaten at sea, the Dutch were also quickly forced to surrender on land. On 12 March a formal Allied capitulation was signed at Bandung, on Java; the Imperial Guards Division, which had taken Singapore, landed the same day in Sumatra, the last of the large Dutch islands remaining outside Japanese control. The Japanese were by no means unwelcome in the East Indies: the Dutch, unlike the French, had never found the knack of tempering colonial rule by offering cultural and intellectual equality to a subject people's educated class. Educated young Indonesians – as they were shortly to call themselves – responded readily to the message that the Japanese brought 'co-prosperity', as they certainly brought liberation from Dutch subjection, and were to prove among the most enthusiastic of collaborators in Japan's New Order.

Another people who had always resented colonial subjection were the Burmese, whose intractability was at odds with the much more complex mixture of love and hate their Indian neighbours felt for the British Empire. Britain had always had difficulty in ruling Burma, which they had finally conquered only in 1886 (the young Rudyard Kipling's Tommies, drawn from life, had marched on the road to Mandalay). Few Burmese had ever accepted the outcome of the war and conquest and in early 1941 a group of young dissidents, later to become famous as 'the Thirty', had gone to Japan, under the leadership of Aung San, to be trained in fomenting resistance to British rule. Their opportunity was to come sooner than they had expected. During December the Japanese Fifteenth Army, which had entered Thailand at the beginning of the month, crossed the Burmese border to seize the airfields at Tenasserim. It was clear that a major offensive would follow shortly.

Burma was defended by a single locally enlisted division; part of the 17th Indian Division joined it in January. The only other Allied forces to hand were Chiang Kai-shek's Sixty-Sixth Army, based on the Burma Road and (like most Chinese formations) of doubtful value, and two Chinese divisions commanded by the redoubtable American 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell on the Burma–China border. The commander of the Fifteenth Army,



General Shojira Iida, had only two divisions, the 33rd and 55th, but they were well trained and supported by 300 aircraft; the British troops were not well trained and had almost no air support at all.

The campaign went wrong for the British from the start. Required to defend a wide front with few troops, the 17th Indian Division soon lost its forward defensive line on the Salween river on 14 February, pulled back to the Sittang river, guarding the capital, Rangoon, held there briefly and then, through a misunderstanding, blew the only bridge across it while most of the fighting troops were on the wrong side.

Things quickly went from bad to worse. General Alexander, who had arrived from Britain to stop the rot on 5 March, decided that the remnants of 'Burcorps', as his force was called, would have to retreat to the Irrawaddy valley in the centre of the country if a stand were to be made. The Japanese Fifteenth Army, now reinforced by the 18th and 56th Divisions and 100 aircraft, followed on his heels. Alexander hoped to hold south of Mandalay, Burma's second city, on a line between Prome and Toungoo, where a Chinese division had arrived; but he was pushed out of it on 21 March and forced into further retreat. His British and Indian troops were now short of supplies and exhausted, his Burmese troops had started to desert *en masse*. He was threatened with being outflanked both to the west and to the east, where the Japanese were driving the Chinese back towards the mountains of the China border. Faced with the dilemma of following the Chinese Sixty-Sixth Army (in reality about a division strong) along the Burma Road, which led from north-east Burma into China, where he had no assurance of supply, or of embarking on a trek across the roadless mountains of north-west Burma into India, he opted for the latter course. On 21 April he agreed with Chiang Kai-shek's liaison officer in Burma that their two beaten armies should go their separate ways and set off to lead his troops, accompanied by thousands of civilian refugees, on 'the longest retreat in British military history'. On 19 May, having traversed 600 miles of Burma in nine weeks, the survivors of 'Burcorps' crossed the Indian frontier at Tamu, in the Chin Hills, just as the arrival of the monsoon made further retreat impossible – but also, fortunately, denied the Japanese the possibility of pushing their pursuit into India itself.

About 4000 of the 30,000 British troops who had begun the campaign had perished; some 9000 were missing, most of them Burmese who had left the ranks. Only one Burmese battalion, largely recruited from one of the country's ethnic minorities, arrived in India. Many of the fugitives accepted Aung San's call to arms and joined his Burma National Army, which under Japanese colours briefly fought on Japan's side in 1944 and after the war provided the nucleus of his successful independence movement. There were other survivors of the rout. 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell trekked back into China, whence he sallied into Burma again in 1944. General Bill Slim, Alexander's subordinate, reached India; he too returned to Burma in 1944, at the head of the victorious Fourteenth Army, which he rebuilt from the debris of the rout. Among its units were the 4th Burma Rifles, the sole surviving element of the original 1st Burma Division.

The victory in Burma almost completed the first stage of Japan's offensive into the 'Southern Area'. It had profited brilliantly from its occupation of a central strategic position – in Indo-China, Formosa, the Marianas, Marshalls and Carolines – to strike east, south and west against the scattered colonial possessions of its chosen enemies and their divided forces and to overwhelm them one by one. On 22 April, when Alexander accepted defeat and set out across the mountains into India, only one Allied stronghold still resisted the Japanese inside the 'Southern Area'. It was the American foothold in the Philippines.

### — The fall of the Philippines —

America's presence in the Philippines, which were never an American colony and in 1941 not quite yet a sovereign state, had come about through victory over Spain in the war of 1898 (the Philippines had been Spanish since the sixteenth century). America had extended a protectorate over the islands, introduced a democratic form of government, raised a Filipino army – in 1941 commanded by the old Filipino hand, General Douglas MacArthur – and put the archipelago under the shelter of the Pacific Fleet. In December 1941 American forces in the island numbered 16,000 combat troops, but only two formed regiments, about 150 operational aircraft, sixteen surface ships and twenty-nine submarines. On 26 July 1941 the Filipino army had been taken into the service of the United States, under the terms of the 1934 Act of Congress granting provisional independence; but its ten embryo divisions were as yet unfit for operations. The only combat-ready Filipino force was the Philippine Scouts Division, American-trained but only 12,000 strong.

Against these troops, which MacArthur had concentrated near the capital, Manila, in the northern island of Luzon, the Japanese intended to deploy the Fourteenth Army from Formosa (Taiwan). It consisted of two very strong divisions, the 16th and 48th, which had fought in China, and was supported by the Third Fleet, which included five cruisers and fourteen destroyers, the Second Fleet of two battleships, three cruisers and four destroyers, and a force of two carriers, five cruisers and thirteen destroyers. The air groups of the carriers were to be supplemented by the land-based Eleventh Air Fleet and the 5th Air Division.

The first disaster suffered by the Americans came from the air. As at Hawaii, they were provided with radar but failed to act on the warning it gave; as at Hawaii, their aircraft were packed wing-to-wing as a protection against sabotage and were destroyed almost to the last machine in the first Japanese air strike, which fell at noon on 8 December. On 12 December Admiral Thomas Hart, commanding the Asiatic Fleet in Filipino waters, felt compelled by lack of air cover to dispatch his surface ships for safety to the Dutch East Indies, where, under ABDA's command, they were to be destroyed in the Battle of the Java Sea.

By that date the Fourteenth Army's landings had already begun. Scorning an indirect

approach through any other of the 7000 Filipino islands, General Masaharu Homma put his troops ashore on Luzon on 10 December and began an advance directly on the capital. He had hoped, by landing at separate points, to draw MacArthur's units away from Manila; when the defenders declined to respond, he put in another large-scale landing close to the capital on 22 December and forced MacArthur to fall back into a strong position on the Bataan peninsula covering Manila Bay and its offshore island of Corregidor.

Bataan, some thirty miles long and fifteen wide, is dominated by two high jungle-covered mountains. Properly defended, it should have resisted attack indefinitely, even though the garrison was short of supplies. In forming their line on the first mountain position, however, MacArthur's troops made the same mistake as the British were simultaneously making in Malaya. They failed to extend their flanks into the jungle on the mountain's slopes; in consequence their flanks were quickly turned by Japanese infiltrators. Retiring to the second mountain position, they avoided that error; but they had surrendered half their territory and were now crowded into an area ten miles square. In addition to the 83,000 soldiers within the lines, moreover, there were 26,000 civilian refugees, many of whom had fled from Manila, which the Japanese had heavily bombed, even though it had been declared an open city. All were placed on half-rations, but these rapidly dwindled, despite occasional blockade running by American submarines. By 12 March, when MacArthur left for Australia on Roosevelt's orders (with the famous promise, 'I shall return'), the garrison was on one-third rations. On 3 April, when Homma opened a final offensive, most of the Americans and Filipinos within the Bataan pocket were suffering from beriberi or other deficiency diseases and rations had been reduced to one-quarter. Five days later General Edward King, MacArthur's successor, offered his surrender. About 9300 Americans and 45,000 Filipinos arrived in prison camp after a notorious 'death march'. Some 25,000 had died of wounds, disease or mistreatment. The last survivors of the Philippines garrison, who occupied the island of Corregidor, were shelled into surrender between 14 April and 6 May; on 4 May alone more than 16,000 Japanese shells fell on the tiny outpost, making further resistance impossible. With the island's capitulation the whole of the Philippines fell into Japanese hands. The population, however, unlike those of the Dutch East Indies and Burma, were not disposed to regard the Japanese victory as cause for satisfaction. They had trusted, rightly, in America's promise to bring them to full independence and rightly also feared that Japanese occupation presaged oppression and exploitation. The Philippines Commonwealth was to be the only component of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in which Japan would encounter popular resistance to its rule.

The prospect of Filipino resistance was, however, at best an irrelevance to the Japanese at the moment Corregidor fell on 6 May 1942. Their strategic horizon now ran around the whole western Pacific and deep into China and south-east Asia too. The historic European empires of the East – Burma, Malaya, the East Indies, the Philippines and effectively French Indo-China also – had been drawn into their sphere. To the Chinese

dependencies in which they had established rights of occupation between 1895 and 1931 – Formosa, Korea and Manchuria – they had added since 1937 vast swathes of conquered land in China proper. All the oceanic archipelagos north of the equator were theirs, and they had made inroads into those to the south. Between the west coast of the United States and the British dominions of Australia and New Zealand lay largely empty ocean, dotted by a few islands too remote or too tiny to provide their enemies with bases for a strategic riposte. From the perimeter of the 'Southern Area' the Japanese fleet and naval air forces were poised to strike deep into the Indian Ocean, towards the British Andaman and Nicobar islands (captured in March 1942), towards Ceylon (raided in April, at the cost of a British aircraft carrier), perhaps even as far away as the coast of East Africa (the appearance of a Japanese submarine off Madagascar in May would, in fact, prompt the British to occupy the island later in the year). Above all, their great amphibious – better, triphibious – fleet remained intact. Not one of their eleven battleships, ten carriers or eighteen heavy and twenty light cruisers had been even seriously damaged in the war thus far; while the United States Pacific and Asiatic Fleets had lost – or lost the use of – all its battleships and large numbers of its cruisers and destroyers, the British and Dutch Far Eastern fleets had been destroyed and the Royal Australian Navy had been driven back to port.

All that remained to the Allies to set in the strategic balance against Japan's astonishing triumph and overpowering strategic position was the surviving naval base of Hawaii, with its remote dependency of Midway Island, and the US Pacific Fleet's handful of carriers, three, perhaps four at most. Little wonder that hubris gripped even such doubters as Yamamoto; at the beginning of May 1942, the consummation of victory, a prospect he had long warned hovered at the very margin of possibility, seemed to lie only one battle away.