

The Alexandra Hospital Massacre, 14-15 February 1942

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One of the most despicable acts of inhumanity committed in the Far East theatre of war occurred on 14-15 September 1942.

Dozens of medical staff serving at the British Military Hospital, known as Alexandra Hospital, in Queenstown, Singapore were massacred, along with their patients. This facility, housed in an imposing white colonial-style 1930s building, had a normal capacity for 550 patients, but recent fighting had swelled this number to 900.



Alexandra Military Hospital, Singapore, taken in the 1970s

On 14 February, the hospital found itself caught between Japanese and British troops advancing towards each other. Due to the rationed supply of water and electricity, men from the 32nd Company of the RAMC were struggling to treat patients and corpses were being wrapped in blankets, remaining unburied.

At 1.00 pm on 14 February, the first Japanese soldier approached the building. Captain J.E. Bartlett RAMC walked out to meet him, his hands in the air, and indicated the Red Cross brassard on his arm. The soldier ignored this and fired at him at point-blank range. Amazingly,

Bartlett survived and ran back into the building. For the next hour, three groups of Japanese soldiers went from ward to ward, shooting, bayoneting and beating up medics and patients indiscriminately, killing about fifty people.

Captain Lance Parkinson, who had been posted to the Alexandra Military Hospital, having lost the toss of a coin with Captain Bill Frankland, was anaesthetising Corporal Holden of the Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire). Holden was bayoneted while on the operating table whilst Parkinson was bayoneted through the abdomen and gravely injured. He escaped to a nearby corridor but collapsed and died less than thirty minutes later.

Captain Tom Smiley, who had been operating on Corporal Vetch – another victim of the Japanese bayoneted on an operating table – was lined up against a wall with several other men. He pointed to his Red Cross brassard and told the Japanese troops that the building was a hospital. In response, one soldier lunged at his chest with a bayonet, striking a cigarette case that had been given to Smiley by his fiancée. This deflected the blow onto his chest. A second soldier bayoneted him through the groin whilst a third attacked him, causing a hand injury. He collapsed onto Corporal Sutton and both men feigned death. Remarkably, both were left alone and survived.



A light and spacious ward at the Alexandra Hospital, December 1941

Around 3.30 pm, 200 men were rounded up, tied into groups of eight and forced to march towards a row of outhouses some distance from the hospital. The gravely injured were not spared and were killed if they fell along the way. Upon reaching their destination the men were divided into groups of fifty to seventy and crammed into three small rooms. Here they were kept without ventilation or water, with no space to sit or lie down, and many died during the night.

The following morning, 15 February, the remaining men were told that they would receive water. By 11.00 am, the Japanese captors allowed the prisoners to leave the rooms in groups of two on the pretext of them fetching water. However, as the screams and cries of those who had left the rooms could be heard by those still inside, it became clear that the Japanese were executing the prisoners when they left the rooms. The death toll numbered approximately 100 prisoners.



Signaller Reggie Holmes, Royal Corps of Signals. One of the many patients bayoneted to death at the hospital

Suddenly, Japanese shelling resumed and a shell struck the building where the prisoners were being held. This interrupted the executions and allowed a handful of men to escape.

Following further cold-blooded murders by his troops, a senior Japanese officer arrived at the hospital at 6.00 pm on Sunday, 15 February and ordered all movement around the hospital to stop. Pointedly, Smiley, having had his wounds dressed by Corporal Sutton, defied the order and carried on tending the wounds of the survivors, and was soon back operating. For this action, he was later awarded the Military Cross.

The stories of RAMC doctors and orderlies who served in the Far East and across the globe during the Second World War are presented in my recent book [Faithful in Adversity: The Royal Army Medical Corps during the Second World War](#)



FAITHFUL IN ADVERSITY

THE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR



JOHN BROOM

THE STRAITS TIMES

"Singapore Must Stand; It SHALL Stand"—H.E. the Governor

SINGAPORE, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 1942.

JAPANESE SUFFER HUGE CASUALTIES IN SINGAPORE

R. A. GUNNERS STICK TO THEIR POSTS

THE Japanese have suffered huge casualties in Singapore, according to W. T. Knox, News Chronicle war correspondent. Our gunners are sticking grimly to their guns, and there have been many cases of whole crews dying at their posts.

CURRENCY NOTES: A WARNING

PEOPLE in the rural areas refusing to accept currency notes issued by the Board of Commissioners of Currency, Malaya, are warned that action will be taken against them and that they are liable to severe penalties.

Air Battle Over Java Sea 4 JAPS DOWN

THE NEI communique issued yesterday was very short and had little news to report.

It read: "Apart from enemy reconnaissance over various parts of the Netherlands Indies area, it may be stated that on the morning of Feb. 11, a Japanese bomber approached Sourabaya but it immediately disappeared when our fighters went up."

"No further reports have been received from various parts of the Archipelago where the fighting against the invaders is still being continued."

"Some days ago, an aerial combat took place over the Java Sea between Allied aircraft and enemy fighters. Four of the numerous Japanese Navy fighters were shot down."

"Discussing how an attack on Japan would work out a Netherlands Indies newspaper said: 'It is not a question here of crossing a narrow strait in gale. Very large transport must be raised to the Java Sea and vulnerable to Allied sea and air attacks.'

"On no account must the enemy be underestimated, but we are still here and if we intend to give our lives, it is necessary that we must have faith in the outcome of this struggle."

"The newspaper continues: 'Now is not the time to be down-hearted but the time to be conscious of the great task which has now been put on our shoulders. We shall fight whatever happens, we shall fight. We are not only going to fight, we are going to win, battered but triumphant we shall emerge from this struggle.'"

ACCOMMODATION FOR VOLUNTEERS' FAMILIES

THE following arrangements have been made for the temporary accommodation of the families of Volunteers of the 1st Battalion of the G.S.V.F.

Families of Chinese volunteers may go to the Garden Club, China Building, Chinua Street, under arrangements made by Mr. Tui Ean Teck.

Families of Malay Volunteers may find shelter at Alimudin Islamic School at Victoria Street, under arrangements made by Capt. M. K. Hashim.

Families of Indian Volunteers desiring accommodation should communicate with the Mr. Paul Sampy, Tel 7411, during office hours, and Tel 2942 after office hours.

Ian Fitchett, official war correspondent with the A.I.F. here, says that if it should be impossible to drive the Japanese out completely, the Japanese will find the fight long and very bloody.

War correspondent for the London Daily Telegraph, H. A. Standish points out that the defenders are holding a long line.

MARSHAL NEY'S REMARK
"The Army in Singapore may well repeat Marshal Ney's remark: 'Well, it seems the wine is drawn and we must drink it,'" says the Daily Sketch, commenting on the situation in Singapore, according to a cable received this morning from the Straits Times correspondent in London.

"Britain is sure," continues the Daily Sketch, "that the Army and civilians of Singapore will make the enemy harden pay bitterly for every gain."

1,000,000 MEN FOR U.S. AIR FORCE

London, Feb. 13

THE United States army has put into train operations to increase its air force personnel to 1,000,000 men in the current year and ultimately to 2,000,000 men.

This was announced by the War Department, which stated that as part of the plan a number of cadets at West Point military academy will be trained as pilots instead of having their year's air training after graduation—Special Cable

CHIANG SEES NEHRU

IN India, next Sunday will be observed in New Delhi as "China Day" in honour of Gen. Chiang Kai-shek.

The General on Wednesday last saw Mr. Nehru, National leader and Congress President. The interview lasted two hours.

He is expected, too, to see Mr. Jinnah, President of the All-India Muslim League.

WHERE TO GET YOUR PAPER

ARRANGEMENTS are being made for the widest possible distribution of the Free Press in the mornings and the Straits Times in the afternoons. For the present the principal distribution to the public will be made by the help and courtesy of the A.R.P. Department. Copies of both papers will be available at all A.R.P. stations free of charge.

LIQUOR BAN NOW IN FORCE

THE public are reminded of the Governor's order, which comes into effect at noon to-day, that the possession of intoxicating liquors in Singapore is prohibited.

The only exception to this ruling is made in the case of intoxicating liquor kept for medicinal purposes in hospitals.

No person may after noon to-day have in his possession or under his control any intoxicating spirit.

Penalties for neglecting to comply with this order are a fine not exceeding \$2,000 or a period of imprisonment not exceeding six months or both.

CHINESE SUCCESS

Chinese units have met with success in an engagement with Thai forces on the Indo-China frontier. The enemy withdrew after suffering casualties.



ALEXANDRA HOSPITAL

In 1938, the British built this as a military hospital. Japanese troops attacked the hospital on 14 February 1942 in retaliation against retreating Allied soldiers who had fired at them from the hospital grounds. They killed an estimated 50 staff and patients. The following morning, the Japanese soldiers killed another 150.

After the war, the hospital reopened as the principal British Military Hospital in Asia. It was handed over to the Singapore Government on 10 September 1971. It reopened as Alexandra Hospital, a civilian hospital, on 15 September 1971. Since April 1997, the hospital also serves as the Alexandra campus of the National University of Singapore's medical school.



NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD