



ANG MO KIO SECONDARY SCHOOL
SECONDARY 1 HISTORY
CHAPTER 5 – FALL OF SINGAPORE IN WWII (SUMMARY)

Name: _____ () Class: _____ Date: _____

By the end of these chapter, you should know:

- Why Singapore fell to the Japanese during World War II (WWII)

Background

- In the 1920s, the British Empire comprised over a quarter of the world's land, spread across different continents. However, the British had been severely weakened by World War I (WWI) and could no longer maintain a permanent military force in Asia.
- The British decided to construct a large, modern naval base in Asia to defend the British colonies in Asia. The British chose to set up this base in Singapore because of Singapore's strategic geographical location and its importance as a port.
- The British planned to send their naval fleet to the base to protect its overseas empire in the event of a war. While the naval fleet was on its way to Singapore, Singapore would have to rely on the other local defences such as the coastal defence guns. This was known as the **"Singapore Strategy"**.
- Many in Singapore believed that Singapore was an "impregnable fortress" because of the amount of British defences built in Singapore.
- By 1930s, the British faced serious threat from two countries – Germany in Europe, and Japan in Asia-Pacific – as these countries also tried to expand and build up an empire of their own.
- On 15 February 1942, Lieutenant-General Arthur E. Percival signed the surrender documents in front of General Tomoyuki Yamashita at the Ford Motor Factory. Singapore officially fell to the Japanese.





| British Weaknesses |

FACTOR [STATE]	WHAT IS THE FACTOR ABOUT? [DESCRIBE/EXAMPLES]
British priorities in Europe	• <u>When war broke out in Europe, the British needed all its defences to protect itself against Germany.</u> The British <u>could not afford to send the large naval fleet to Singapore as planned.</u> The British could only send Force Z (including 2 battleships named HMS Repulse and HMS Prince of Wales), but it was too weak to fulfil the “Singapore Strategy”.
British overconfidence	• The British <u>did not sufficiently prepare for attacks from the north from Malaya.</u> The British <u>thought that the Malayan forests provided natural protection</u> as it would be too difficult to land troops in Malaya during the monsoons, and for the troops to advance through the thick forest to reach Singapore. • However, with improved equipment, troops were able to land in the wet and windy monsoon season. The construction and improvement of roads and railways also allowed the troops to move through Malaya without going through the thick Malayan jungle.
Poorly-prepared British defence force	• The British troops that were sent to Singapore and Malaya were insufficient in number and quality: ○ The <u>air force was mostly outdated and old</u>, comprising “flying coffins” that could not last long in battles. They were also <u>outnumbered</u> by Japan’s modern “Zero Fighters”. ○ The soldiers came from many different parts of the British Empire (such as Scotland, India, Australia), which made it <u>difficult for the military commanders to understand and work with one another.</u> ○ Many soldiers also feel that it is <u>not worth it</u> to fight hard and sacrifice themselves for the colonies. ○ Most of the British troops were <u>poorly-trained</u> and <u>ill equipped.</u>



Japanese Strengths

FACTOR [STATE]	WHAT IS THE FACTOR ABOUT? [DESCRIBE/EXAMPLES]
Well-prepared Japanese force	• The Japanese troops that were sent to Singapore and Malaya were well-trained and experienced in war: ○ Before the invasion, the Japanese army set up a <u>special research unit</u> to look into the techniques for <u>jungle fighting</u> and training soldiers for the invasion of Malaya. ○ Many of the Japanese troops deployed for the invasion had <u>war-fighting experiences as they fought against China in the Sino-Japanese War</u>. ○ The soldiers were led by young, capable, highly-motivated officers, under a highly regarded commander General Tomoyuki Yamashita. ○ The soldiers were <u>well-supported with weapons, aircrafts, warships and tanks</u>.
Tactical superiority of the Japanese	• Even before the outbreak of WWII, Japanese spies <u>disguised as barbers and tourists to help gather information</u> for the military. • When the Japanese learnt from their spies about Singapore's defences, <u>Colonel Masanobu Tsuji decided that they could not attack it from the sea</u>. Thus, he planned for the invasion to start from the beaches of Southern Thailand, down Malaya and to attack Singapore from the north instead. • During the invasion, even though the <u>Japanese soldiers were outnumbered</u> by the defending British forces, General Yamashita <u>decided to depend on speed and surprise</u> to overcome the British. His plans successfully caught the British off guard and forced the British to retreat in haste, leaving behind large amount of supplies, equipment and weapons which the Japanese then took for their own use.