

Renegades in Malaya: Indian volunteers of the Japanese, F. Kikan

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ABSTRACT

Japanese successes at subverting Indian troops during the Malayan campaign (December 1941 to February 1942) have been noted before, but previously under-utilised British Military Intelligence files provide new insights into how such success was achieved. This article examines the recruitment, organisation and use of Indian volunteers by the Japanese, to marshal both the large number of Indian prisoners of war and to subvert front-line British Indian Army formations. It proposes that the assistance provided by such Indian volunteers to the Imperial Japanese Army during the campaign was greater than previously thought. Their contribution would help lay the foundations for the creation of the Indian National Army later in 1942.

Introduction

The British defeat in the Malayan campaign (December 1941 to February 1942) has generated an extensive secondary literature.¹ Among the more than 100,000 British and Commonwealth troops captured were some 55,000 Indian troops.² There has been considerable recent academic interest in the Indian Army and its contribution in World War Two, with publications by authors such as Marston, Barua and Roy.³ The

¹ Including: Louis Allen, *Singapore, 1941-1942* (London: Cass, 1993); Malcolm Murfett, *Between two oceans: a military history of Singapore from first settlement to final British withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Brian Farrell, *The defence and fall of Singapore 1941-1942* (Stroud: Tempus, 2005).

² Farrell, *The defence and fall of Singapore*. p.384.

³ Important examples are: Daniel Marston, *The Indian Army and the end of the Raj: decolonizing the subcontinent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Pradeep Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj: the Indian Army Officer Corps, 1817-1949* (London: Praeger, 2003); David Omissi, *The sepoy and the Raj: the Indian Army, 1860-1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994); *War and society in colonial India, 1807-1945*, ed. by Kaushik Roy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); *The Indian Army, 1939-47:*

controversial subject of the early co-operation between Indian troops and Japanese forces has been relatively neglected in the historiography, with attention focused on the later activities of the Indian National Army (INA) that was formed in mid-1942, and which later fought against British forces.⁴ Of this work, that of Sundaram is noteworthy for concentrating on the military record of the INA rather than its wider political impact.⁵ However one of the most dramatic episodes of cooperation occurred during the Malayan campaign which took place before the INA was formed, with Indian troops who had been captured by the Japanese switching sides and then assisting them. Although this has been noted before the nature and impact of this activity has previously been unclear.⁶ This article describes that activity and assesses its impact, utilising a variety of sources.

The Japanese officer responsible for contacting Indian troops during the Malayan campaign, Major Iwaichi Fujiwara, has provided an interesting account of this aspect of the campaign.⁷ Any memoir needs to be read with caution, particularly one written by an officer who specialised in propaganda, and indeed some aspects of his account have been challenged.⁸ Fujiwara maintained that his personal commitment to the aspirations of Indian nationalists was genuine, comparing his situation to that of Lawrence of Arabia.⁹ There is however an under-utilised primary source which can provide new insights: British military intelligence files, largely created by the 'Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (India)' (CSDIC(I)), either during

experience and development, ed. by Alan Jeffreys and Patrick Rose (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

⁴ An important account is: Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993). For a recent summary of the INA see Marston, 'End of the Raj', Chapter 3. Also see Chapter 4 for a remarkable example of cooperation in a post-war context where the Indian Army fought alongside the Imperial Japanese Army against indigenous forces such as the Viet Minh in French Indo-China.

⁵ Chandar S. Sundaram, 'A Paper Tiger: The Indian National Army in Battle, 1944-1945'. *War & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1995), pp.35-59.

⁶ For example see: Murfett, *Between Two Oceans*. p.240.n.11.

⁷ Iwaichi Fujiwara, *F. Kikan: Japanese Army Intelligence Operations in Southeast Asia during World War II*, trans. by Akashi Yoji (Hong Kong: Heinemann Asia, 1983)

⁸ See: Murfett, *Between Two Oceans*. p.341. and Hugh Toye, 'The First Indian National Army, 1941-42', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1984), p.369.n.10.

⁹ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*. p.227.

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or immediately after World War Two.¹⁰ Generated to investigate the activities of the Indian National Army (INA) throughout the war, these files contain information on the use of Indian volunteers by the Japanese during the Malayan campaign.¹¹ The often heroic portrayal of the Indian volunteers in Fujiwara's account is in sharp contrast to the sometimes scathing verdicts of CSDIC(I), one example being:

‘the aura of infamy and glory that has grown up around the treacherous, yet in the end petty achievements of this party of renegades, is largely a product of rumour and exaggerated accounts of heroism’.¹²

This article advances the argument that the impact of the ‘renegades’ has been previously understated, in that they assisted Japanese operations in Malaya by marshalling the large numbers of Indian Army prisoners, as well as subverting Indian Army units in the front line.

Japanese preparations

Detailed planning by the Imperial Japanese Army for the invasion of Malaya began in January 1941, with its 25th Army being provided with some of Japan's best troops, and in Lieutenant General Yamashita, Japan's ablest field commander.¹³ In contrast, the seeds of later Japanese success with Indian troops in Malaya were only sown in Bangkok in the last few weeks prior to the outbreak of war in December 1941. Major Fujiwara had been transferred to Bangkok in September 1941, working for Colonel Tamura the Japanese military attaché, who introduced him to Pritam Singh of the Indian Independence League (IIL).¹⁴ Fujiwara would later confess that his reaction was disappointment when he first met him. Expecting a ‘well-built revolutionary with a stern look’ what he found was ‘a young turbaned Sikh with a fragile physical appearance’.¹⁵ On Tamura's instructions, Fujiwara drafted a cooperation agreement with the IIL which stated that the Japanese would provide good treatment to Indian prisoners of war (PoWs) and civilians; that the IIL would be

¹⁰ Recent work on similar source material shows its potential, see Chapter 6 of Gajendra Singh, *The testimonies of Indian soldiers and the two world wars: between self and sepoy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)

¹¹ Of particular interest is the F275 document series held in the Asian and African Studies collections at the British Library (hereafter AAS). This contains 26 packs of reports and interrogations relating to the INA. There is also some material at The National Archives at Kew (hereafter TNA).

¹² AAS, Mss Eur F275/9, p.274.

¹³ Murfett, *Between Two Oceans*. pp.176-177.

¹⁴ The IIL had its roots in the Sikh revolutionary Ghadar movement that had launched an armed rebellion in India in 1915.

¹⁵ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*. p.27.

allowed to organise an Indian volunteer army; and that the Japanese would support the cause of Indian independence.¹⁶ Despite the wide-ranging nature of the agreement, which secured the wholehearted commitment of Pritam Singh and the IIL, in practice the Japanese perceived Fujiwara's mission as a limited propaganda and contact task.¹⁷ It was only later, when Fujiwara's mission succeeded beyond all expectations, that the gap in expectations would become a problem. A propaganda leaflet written by Pritam Singh includes a line which sums up his view of the British: 'No country has ever done any wrong to India, except these English pirates and thieves in disguise of democratic devils'.¹⁸

Formation of the F. Kikan

Major Fujiwara was transferred to the staff of the 25th Army on 4th December 1941 and began assembling the staff of his *F. Kikan* (agency).¹⁹ With the commencement of hostilities on the 8 December 1941 the Japanese quickly overran Siam and made successful amphibious landings in the South of the country at Patani and Singora, as well as at Kota Bahru in British Malaya, where they initially met stiff resistance.²⁰ It was on 10 December 1941 that Major Fujiwara flew with Pritam Singh from Bangkok to Singora where he received detailed orders at 25th Army Headquarters.²¹ Apart from the six Japanese military officers he had under his command, Fujiwara's personnel were mostly civilian and included former Japanese residents of Malaya to act as interpreters, and the six Indians brought by Pritam Singh.²² The dozen Japanese civilians varied greatly in age and experience with examples being Suzuki, aged 45, a photographer from Penang; Ito, aged 20, from Siam; and Shiba, aged 50, who had been a merchant in Alor Star in Northern Malaya and knew the local Sultan.²³ Their language skills were critical because neither Fujiwara, nor any of his military officers, could speak the local languages. Three of Fujiwara's military officers were assigned to head propaganda and liaison teams which would work with the largely Sikh IIL personnel brought by Pritam Singh, and would accompany the three main thrusts of the 25th Army into Malaya. Of these teams, the one headed by Lieutenant Nakamiya was to support the main Japanese thrust down the West coast. The dangers became

¹⁶ TNA, WO 203/6314: *SEATIC Intelligence Bulletin No. 234*. p.13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.50.

¹⁸ AAS, Mss Eur F275/9, p.281.

¹⁹ TNA, WO 203/6314, p.14.

²⁰ S. Woodburn Kirby, *The war against Japan, Volume 1, The Loss of Singapore* (London: H.M.S.O., 1957), p.188.

²¹ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*. p.64.

²² AAS, Mss Eur D1228: '*Subhas Pasha*' unpublished manuscript. p.48.

²³ TNA, WO 203/6314, p.15.

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apparent early in the campaign when the commander of the team at Kota Bahru, Second Lieutenant Segawa, was killed in action on 14 December.²⁴

At first sight the range of responsibilities assigned to the small F. Kikan organisation was remarkable, for while its primary focus remained ethnic Indians, its responsibilities extended to the local Malay and Chinese communities, and later also to dissident groups in Sumatra.²⁵ However, the mission was conceived as 'strictly limited and tactical in scope' and it would only be after the 'initial outstanding success' with the Indian population that the Japanese War Ministry would take an interest.²⁶ The results achieved by F. Kikan in the campaign were highly variable with, for example, its work with the Chinese being a complete failure,²⁷ while the alleged exploits of the Japanese bandit Tani Yutaka who joined F. Kikan had more to do with Fujiwara's propaganda skills than anything of tangible military value.²⁸ Following his death from malaria, Yutaka would be portrayed in a Japanese wartime propaganda film entitled 'Tiger in Malaya'.²⁹ But despite some setbacks, F. Kikan would enjoy remarkable success in its interactions with Indian troops and civilians.

The road to Kuala Lumpur

By the time F. Kikan was deploying into Southern Siam on the 10 December 1941, the main Japanese thrust was pushing south across the border into British Malaya.³⁰ The unit it was in contact with was the 1/14th Punjab Battalion of 11th Indian Division, which was tasked with delaying the Japanese advance while the rest of the Division completed defences in the area of Jitra.³¹ The commander of its headquarters company was a Captain Mohan Singh who would come to have a pivotal role in the history of the F. Kikan.³² The delaying tactics were effective until the 11 December

²⁴ Ibid., p.16.

²⁵ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*. p.66.

²⁶ AAS, L/W5/2/47: *Interrogation of Colonel Kadomatsu*, p.5.

²⁷ See comments on F. Kikan operative Tashiro in: TNA, WO 203/6314, p.25.

²⁸ For a heroic portrayal of Tani see Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*. p.121. It contrasts with his earlier verdict of 'owing to his lack of general intelligence and ability, his efforts had mostly been in vain' in: TNA, WO 203/6314, p.29.

²⁹ Ken Kotani, *Japanese Intelligence in World War II*, trans. by Chiharu Kotani (Oxford: Osprey, 2009), p.53.

³⁰ Masanobu Tsuji, *Japan's greatest victory: Britain's worst defeat*, trans. by Margaret E. Lake (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1997), p.73.

³¹ Kirby, *The war against Japan, Volume 1*, p.205.

³² Indian officers from this battalion are prominent in the history of the INA. For example, the commander of Mohan Singh's signals platoon that day, Lieutenant Dhillon, would become notorious among Allied PoWs in 1942 as the first commander of the Indian 'Changi Guard' in Singapore.

when at about 4:45pm, while moving to a new position on the road during heavy rain, the 1/14th Punjab was over-run by Japanese tanks, with the survivors scattering into the surrounding rubber plantations, jungle and marsh.³³ Captain Mohan Singh gathered up a few men and found his commander, Lieutenant Colonel Fitzpatrick, who had been wounded, but as night fell they became lost in a marsh.³⁴ Meanwhile the Japanese armoured column had continued down the road and engaged the 2/1st Gurkha Rifles who they also ultimately overwhelmed.³⁵ Within two days the Japanese advanced guard would break through the main British defensive line at Jitra.³⁶ It was among the stranded Indian survivors of these battles, that the F. Kikan contact teams would first go to work.

One of those stranded was Lieutenant Pattanayak who was the medical officer of the 2/1st Gurkha Rifles. On the morning of 12 December he and around eighty troops surrendered to Japanese troops accompanied by a Sikh civilian, aged around 40 and from Siam. Pattanayak was soon being asked to help subvert Indian troops himself, but when he refused, had his hands tied and was slapped by a Japanese officer who he learnt was Lieutenant Nakamiya of the F. Kikan.³⁷ In another episode on the same morning, a party of thirteen Gurkhas were captured and taken to see a Sikh civilian who told them that the Japanese were 'friends of the Indian people' and suggested that they should return to their unit to disseminate propaganda. The Gurkhas readily agreed, eager to escape from captivity, only for a Japanese officer to intervene to say that only three should return with the rest staying as hostages. Jemadar Shamsing Thapa, who was the most senior Gurkha soldier present, protested with the result that the Japanese officer beat him unconscious. After that the Gurkhas agreed to go but were told that if they did not return the others would be executed. Given a leaflet to get them through Japanese lines, they returned to their unit but reported the incident to their British officers. They later learned that their colleagues had not been executed.³⁸ While the identity of the Japanese officer in the second incident isn't known the officers associated with the F. Kikan were on occasion willing to use violence towards Indian troops, a fact that stands in stark contrast to the approach

³³ For a vivid description see: G. H. Thompson, *History of the 1st Battalion, 14th Punjab Regiment* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2014), pp.198-199.

³⁴ Mohan Singh, *Soldiers' Contribution to Indian Independence: the epic of the Indian National Army*, (New Delhi: Army Educational Stores, 1974), p.64.

³⁵ Kirby, *The war against Japan, Volume 1*, p.205.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.210.

³⁷ AAS, Mss Eur F275/15: *Interrogation of Lieutenant Pattanayak*, p.214. For another allegation of brutal treatment at the hands of Lieutenant Nakamiya see AAS, Mss Eur F275/6: *Interrogation of Captain Malik Khan*, p.31.

³⁸ AAS, Mss Eur F275/9, p.162.

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claimed by Major Fujiwara for F. Kikan in his own account of the campaign, namely 'not force but moral principle'.³⁹

It was on 13 December that Major Fujiwara, Pritam Singh and others moved south across the border, through the battle area at Jitra, and onto the town of Alor Star some ten miles beyond. Pritam Singh soon heard of a group of Indian troops nearby who were willing to surrender. The approximately sixty soldiers, who had gathered together over several days, were largely from 1/14th Punjab and included Lieutenant Colonel Fitzpatrick, Captain Mohan Singh and his close friend Captain Mohammed Akram.⁴⁰ The following morning Pritam Singh arrived in a car flying the Indian National Congress flag and assured them that 'everything would be well', before introducing them to Major Fujiwara who had initially held back at a safe distance. During the drive back to Alor Star, Mohan Singh and Mohammed Akram were in the same car as Pritam Singh 'whose conversation and aspect was in religious terms tones and gestures' and who said that 'he had certain pacts with the Japanese and wished to raise an Indian Independence Army'.⁴¹ Pritam Singh impressed both officers with his 'blind faith' in the Japanese.⁴² Once in Alor Star at a barracks, Mohan Singh showed the first evidence of his willingness to cooperate with the Japanese by gathering up Indian army stragglers and then organising a detachment, led by Mohammed Akram, which stopped the looting in Alor Star, a feat that both impressed Fujiwara and surprised Japanese troops.⁴³ It was later that evening that the first of a series of late night discussions began between Fujiwara and the two Indian officers, with Pritam Singh also being present but saying little. Through an interpreter, Fujiwara sought to answer Mohan Singh's questions regarding Japanese intentions towards India and despite his vague replies, Fujiwara's charm began to work. Mohan Singh would later remember him as 'an extremely clever man', one who 'with a whisky bottle in front of him could talk all night and be fresh to start again at breakfast time'.⁴⁴ The CSDIC(I) assessment of Mohan Singh's state of mind at that time emphasises the impact of 'hunger, fatigue and the shock of defeat' which 'all combined to accentuate his mental depression' and made him more vulnerable to subversion. Fujiwara ultimately came to his key point: Indian freedom would not come through the non-violent methods of Congress, there needed to be an army which would fight for India's freedom, and as he put it to him, 'what are you going to do about it?'. During these initial discussions Mohan Singh avoided the alcohol, but he was clearly attracted by the prominent role he was being offered. It was at Alor Star

³⁹ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*. p.74.

⁴⁰ Captain Akram was a former VCO of over twenty years' service.

⁴¹ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945: *Interrogation of Mohan Singh*, p.6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁴³ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*. p.79.

⁴⁴ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.8.

that he first began giving propaganda lectures to Indian PoWs on themes such as the decline of the British Empire, helped on by what his interrogating officer later described as his 'most magnetic and compelling personality'.⁴⁵

Soon there were a thousand Indian troops at the barracks in Alor Star, organised largely by Indian officers with little input required from the Japanese military. One was Lieutenant Pattanayak who arrived on 17 December 1941 and heard some of Mohan Singh's early lectures, in which he claimed that he had always been anti-British and that they 'should join hands with the Japanese to beat the British who were fighting a losing battle'. But in a sign that there were tensions below the surface, Lieutenant Pattanayak heard that an Anglo-Indian officer of the 1/14th Punjab, Captain Stracey, had been moved to a jail with British prisoners after he was 'giving himself airs' and saying he did not want to mix with Indians.⁴⁶ A different version was provided to CSDIC(I) by Captain Malik Khan of the 2/9th Jats, who had been present when Havildar (Sergeant) Sawaran Singh of the 1/14th Punjab had appeared wearing a Lieutenant's pips, and saying that Mohan Singh had promoted him. Stracey, who had challenged Mohan Singh's authority to do this, was quickly transferred.⁴⁷ Despite this incident, Stracey would later go on to become a senior officer in the INA.⁴⁸ As for Mohan Singh, as early as 18 December Fujiwara and Pritam Singh 'were sure of him', and Fujiwara was happy to agree when he demanded control of all Indian PoWs as proof of Japanese sincerity.⁴⁹ His commitment was consolidated when Fujiwara arranged a meeting on 20 December with General Yamashita, the commander of Japanese forces in Malaya, for a delegation of Indians including himself and Pritam Singh.⁵⁰ In his propaganda lectures Mohan Singh started talking of creating an 'Indian National Army' to fight for Indian independence from British rule, and as a first step abolished the traditional Viceroy Commissioned Officer (VCO) ranks of the British Indian Army.⁵¹ By turning VCOs into Captains and Lieutenants, he added the status of commissioned rank as a lure for them to volunteer.⁵² It was in the midst of this activity that Mohan Singh fell ill with malaria, with the medical officer Lieutenant Pattanayak attending to him during the last week of December 1941.⁵³

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.66. His interrogating officer was Major Hugh Toye.

⁴⁶ AAS, Mss Eur F275/15, p.215.

⁴⁷ AAS, Mss Eur F275/6, p.30.

⁴⁸ Stracey would volunteer in August 1942.

⁴⁹ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.9.

⁵⁰ TNA, WO 203/6314, p.18.

⁵¹ VCOs were 'native officers' and functioned as the link between Indian troops and British officers.

⁵² Singh, *Soldiers' Contribution to Indian Independence*. p.82.

⁵³ AAS, Mss Eur F275/15, p.216.

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Throughout December and beyond, the F. Kikan contact teams operated in the wake of the rapid Japanese advance through Malaya. But as well as Indians from the IIL they were also starting to use captured Indian soldiers in front-line work. For example, on 26 December an Indian officer of 5/2nd Punjab heard Indian voices calling out subversive propaganda on the front line, and he had reason to believe that they were men of the 4/19th Hyderabad who had been captured previously.⁵⁴ Other tactics included the deliberate return of Indian soldiers to their units in order to undermine morale from within. One example of this involved a Muslim soldier of the 5/2nd Punjab, who after reporting back to his unit started a whispering campaign about a 'mysterious Sikh "General" who was fighting alongside the Japanese'.⁵⁵ In another case a VCO at Alor Star, Allah Ditta, was asked to lead a group to suborn Indian troops on the front line at Kampar, and although he refused he would soon have a prominent role in the F. Kikan.⁵⁶ When Mohan Singh was well enough at the end of December he travelled to Taiping and gave his full commitment to Fujiwara.⁵⁷ For Mohan Singh there was no turning back.

According to Fujiwara's account, it was from this time that Mohan Singh began to organise contact groups to work in the front line, their first deployment being against the British defensive position at Slim River.⁵⁸ It coincided with a move forward of the F. Kikan headquarters to Ipoh with Mohan Singh following some days later. Whether such groups were organised by Mohan Singh or not, there are reports of Indian troops working with the Japanese in the aftermath of the Japanese attack at Slim River on the 7 January 1942. In one case a Gurkha NCO of the 2/1st Gurkha Rifles was 'rounded up by a squad of Japanese accompanied by a Sikh sepoy', while in the following days he was lectured to by both Pritam Singh, and a 'Muslim Subedar'.⁵⁹ Mohan Singh was also active, with in one case an NCO of the 5/14th Punjab being taken back to Ipoh by truck after his capture 'where Mohan Singh immediately set about suborning the VCOs' and where he and Mohammed Akram 'openly boasted of

⁵⁴ AAS, Mss Eur F275/16: *Interrogation of Captain I.J. Kiani*, p.226. Earlier in the campaign he had encountered Europeans operating with the Japanese (see p.225). Elphick has proposed that they were Germans who had served with the French Foreign Legion in Indo-China, see Peter Elphick, *Singapore, the pregnable fortress: a study in deception, discord and desertion*. (London: Coronet, 1995), p.245.

⁵⁵ *Indian National Army: A Documentary Study, Vol. 1*, ed. by Tilak Raj Sareen (New Delhi: Gyan, 2004), p.52.

⁵⁶ See comment: AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.12.

⁵⁸ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, p.111. This is not mentioned in Mohan Singh's interrogation report.

⁵⁹ AAS, Mss Eur F275/4: *Interrogation of Narainsing Thapa*, p.241.

the way they had surrendered'.⁶⁰ Not everything was going well though as an air drop of leaflets had not been performed properly, with Fujiwara putting down the failure to the pilot being unwilling to risk his life on an 'unworthy' leaflet mission.⁶¹ Nonetheless leaflets played an important role in inducing Indian troops to surrender, with one officer recalling the effect that leaflets issued in the name of Mohan Singh had on isolated troops.⁶² While in another incident on 10 January, two Companies of 2/9th Jat surrendered 'due to enemy propaganda'.⁶³ The decisive Japanese victory at Slim River opened the road to the capital Kuala Lumpur where F. Kikan established itself and started organising the thousands of new Indian PoWs. It would be from this camp that groups of Indian volunteers would be organised to support Japanese forces through the rest of the Malayan campaign as well as for a new campaign in Burma.

The Fujiwara Volunteers

The camp at Kuala Lumpur was based in a former British Army barracks and became a striking example of how Indian PoWs were marshalled with little input being required from the Japanese Army. Mohan Singh found that the many of the new prisoners were in shock and exhausted following the recent defeats. After organizing the collection of food and medicines he set about the political indoctrination of the approximately 3000 PoWs. Although there were only a dozen Indian Commissioned officers among the prisoners there were over a hundred VCOs and these were the main focus of his efforts. In speeches lasting a couple of hours at a time, Mohan Singh would play on the typical resentments of the men regarding pay and their perceived low status compared to British officers, and then consolidate the effect with appeals to Indian nationalism. As he later put it, 'One had to be an orator of hatred and a rouser of discontent in such circumstances'.⁶⁴ With what looked like the collapse of the British Empire in Asia underway, it is unsurprising that some were susceptible to his appeals. A later CSDIC(I) assessment of him would note that when 'speaking in Hindustani and when in the mood, is an orator of very high merit', while Lieutenant Pattanayak remembered the compelling nature of his voice.⁶⁵ Mohan Singh would later recall 'I could keep the audience spell-bound for hours'.⁶⁶ Once again the lure of commissioned rank was used to induce VCOs to volunteer. In a clever move, Mohan Singh appointed one of the newly commissioned officers, a former VCO of the 5/14th Punjab Battalion, Onkar Singh, as the camp commander in Kuala Lumpur. One of the

⁶⁰ AAS, Mss Eur F275/4: *Interrogation of Balwant Singh*, p.249.

⁶¹ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, p.117.

⁶² AAS, Mss Eur F275/16, p.226.

⁶³ TNA, WO 106/2590: *Telegram to General Wavell*, p.5.

⁶⁴ Singh, *Soldiers' Contribution to Indian Independence*. p.99.

⁶⁵ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.19.

⁶⁶ Singh, *Soldiers' Contribution to Indian Independence*. p.95.

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oldest of the former VCOs, it meant that actual Indian Commissioned Officers would be subordinate to him. The appointment showed that Mohan Singh understood what mattered to the VCOs, and that he knew how to secure their support.⁶⁷ Pritam Singh and the IIL were also highly active in Kuala Lumpur, organizing conferences and meetings with the civilian Indian community. He would talk 'of God's grace, of the brotherhood of all Asiatics and of the new order to be established soon', and had soon established several new IIL branches.⁶⁸ Despite the tensions that resulted from Mohan Singh insisting on his independence from the IIL, from Fujiwara's perspective they were 'two wheels of an engine', both critical to the success of his mission.⁶⁹ If necessary, Fujiwara would emphasize the symbolic leadership role for both sides, of the Indian revolutionary, Subhas Chandra Bose.⁷⁰

Mohan Singh had previously asked Major Fujiwara for rifles for his most trusted followers, and on 21 or 22 January some 200 were handed over.⁷¹ It was a dramatic demonstration of trust by the Japanese. The man appointed as commander of those who were armed, or the 'Fujiwara Volunteers' as CSDIC(I) called them, was Subedar Allah Ditta who had served for nineteen years in the British Indian Army before he was captured, and would later be described as 'a warm and enthusiastic convert to the traitorous doctrines of Mohan Singh'.⁷² He had already selected 150 personnel from the Ipoh camp and now an additional 50 were chosen and armed on or about the 23rd January. One of the main criteria used by Ditta to select the original 150 had been that they were swimmers 'because he thought they might have to swim the Johore straight' across to Singapore. The volunteers were organised into two companies of three sections based on community, including sections for Sikhs, Jats, Dogras and Gurkhas. As well as having overall command, Allah Ditta commanded the first company, and a Jemadar from the 2/1st Gurkha Rifles the second.⁷³ A list of 13 units supplying men to the volunteers, shows that the largest contributors were 5/14th Punjab providing 70, and 1/14th Punjab, 4/19th Hyderabad, and 2/1st Gurkha Rifles each providing 20.⁷⁴ The estimated total of 45 Gurkhas involved is surprisingly high given the reputation they would later gain for being resistant to recruitment into the INA.⁷⁵ Mohan Singh told them they were 'fighting troops' and even suggested at

⁶⁷ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.16.

⁶⁸ AAS, Mss Eur D1228, p.60.

⁶⁹ AAS, Mss Eur F275/9: *Interrogation of Fujiwara*, p.264.

⁷⁰ At this time based in Berlin.

⁷¹ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.15.

⁷² AAS, Mss Eur F275/16: *Interrogation of Allah Ditta*, p.273.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.269.

⁷⁴ AAS, Mss Eur F275/4: *Interrogation of Balwant Singh*, p.250.

⁷⁵ They included Havildar Ramsing (2/1st Gurkha Rifles) 'the man who later became well-known as a singer, dancer, and broadcaster for the INA', *Ibid.*

one point that he would lead them into battle, although he later said he had no intention of doing so 'as that would have been to give way to Japanese desires to exploit them'.⁷⁶ In fact CSDIC(I) never found any evidence for the Fujiwara Volunteers having used their weapons during the campaign. The group left Kuala Lumpur on the 25 or 26 of January headed for an area of recent heavy fighting near Muar. Before leaving there was a party involving wine and speeches, during which Fujiwara gave Allah Ditta his watch, and Mohan Singh gave him his compass.⁷⁷ They were clearly F. Kikan operatives, wearing white F. Kikan armbands, and working under the direction of Japanese personnel. Near Muar in early February, groups of Fujiwara Volunteers were deployed to collect Indian stragglers left over from the fighting. Each carried a white flag with Japanese characters, and together they collected around 1000 Indian troops whom the Japanese had failed to capture.⁷⁸ They subsequently followed the Japanese advance down to Batu Pahat where they 'trained with arms' before moving to Kota Tinggi in preparation for the Japanese assault on Singapore.⁷⁹

Mohan Singh remained based in Kuala Lumpur 'overwhelmed with administrative work'.⁸⁰ Among the Indian officers there was a Captain Ehsan Qadir who was keen to become involved with propaganda work. Mohan Singh was clearly impressed by his speaking and thought that someone with 'such eloquence and zeal would be very useful'. On his own suggestion, Qadir was soon sent by the Japanese to Saigon to undertake propaganda broadcasts directed at India.⁸¹ But soon the scale of the F. Kikan mission was increased further when Major Fujiwara was ordered to support the Japanese invasion of Burma. With few Japanese staff Fujiwara could only spare four of them, commanded by his second in command Captain Tsuchimochi.⁸² The ILL contributed a few men to the mission but Mohan Singh provided almost sixty, including six former VCOs, and selected Ram Sarup, a former VCO of the 4/19th Hyderabad, to lead them. Their departure was delayed until 10th February 1942.⁸³ CSDIC(I) noted that 'the party was recruited to a large extent from men of high educational qualifications', with half made up of Sikhs and Dogras, with roughly half of those present being from pre-war Indianized units, particularly the 1/14th Punjab,

⁷⁶ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.16.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ AAS, Mss Eur F275/16, p.270. Also, AAS, Mss Eur F275/9, p.162.

⁷⁹ AAS, Mss Eur F275/4: *Interrogation of Durgabhadur Chettri*, p.193.

⁸⁰ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.16.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.17. Also Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, p.204.

⁸² Fujiwara believed that Tsuchimochi was poorly suited to the work of the F. Kikan: TNA, WO 203/6314, p.36.

⁸³ TNA, WO 208/819b.

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4/19th Hyderabad, and 5/2nd Punjab. The VCOs appeared to have been carefully chosen to represent as many of the different classes present as possible, with even a Gurkha VCO to represent the six Gurkhas in the party. The intention had been to send 200 to Burma, but Fujiwara limited the numbers citing transport difficulties.⁸⁴ CSDIC(I) was unclear how many were genuine volunteers and how many were 'given no choice in the matter'.⁸⁵ The verdict on Ram Sarup though was clear, while remarking that he was 'very well educated and intelligent', CSDIC(I) noted the 'zeal which he displayed in the treacherous work he so readily undertook'.⁸⁶ However the conditions in Burma would prove less favourable than Malaya had been, with fewer Indian PoWs, and tensions between the local Indian community and the Burmese population.

Just after Mohan Singh had seen off the men to Burma, he was told by Pritam Singh that at Muar there were many Indian prisoners, including some 150-200 wounded. He went there himself and found that Allah Ditta had organised a camp before moving on.⁸⁷ Some of the worst Japanese atrocities of the Malayan campaign occurred near to Muar in which hundreds of Australian and Indian troops were killed.⁸⁸ There is no evidence to suggest that Mohan Singh was aware of the atrocities at the time, but the incidents illustrate the reality of the gap between the smooth talk of Major Fujiwara and the reality of what the Japanese Army was capable of at its worst.

The assault on Singapore

With the main Japanese assault being launched on Singapore on the night of 8/9 February 1942 the F. Kikan was tasked with supporting the attack. The 'Fujiwara Volunteers' led by Allah Ditta were first deployed on to the island of Pulau Ubin with the Japanese Imperial Guards Division. On 11 February three of the volunteers helped raise the Japanese flag at the eastern end of the island.⁸⁹ The exact movements of the sections over the following days are difficult to establish. One remained on Palau Ubin to carry ammunition for a Japanese artillery unit, while Allah Ditta and four of the sections were deployed in support of the main Imperial Guards attack on Singapore.⁹⁰ Some were on Singapore by 12 February and were used in a

⁸⁴ AAS, Mss Eur F275/6: *Interrogation of Ram Sarup*, p.98.

⁸⁵ TNA, WO 208/819b

⁸⁶ AAS, Mss Eur F275/6, p.103.

⁸⁷ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.18.

⁸⁸ James Bradley, *Cyril Wild: the tall man who never slept*. (Fontwell: Woodfield, 1991), p.121.

⁸⁹ AAS, Mss Eur F275/4: *Interrogation of Balwant Singh*, p.250.

⁹⁰ Sareen, *Indian National Army*. p.54.

concerted effort to subvert Indian troops in the front-line.⁹¹ CSDIC(I) rated the impact of the volunteers 'among the demoralized and dispirited Indian troops' as 'considerable' and believed that they had been responsible for facilitating 'large-scale surrenders', although many of the Indian soldiers involved were reluctant to discuss their experiences with CSDIC(I).⁹² Nonetheless, there are a number of incidents that point towards widespread Japanese attempts to subvert Indian troops.

Morale was certainly low among some of the Indian units defending Singapore.⁹³ In one example from 12 February 1942, a Company of the Kapurthala Infantry deserted while marching to new positions near Buki Tima.⁹⁴ In another incident from the same day, a British patrol from the 1st Cambridgeshire Battalion was near the MacRitchie Reservoir in the middle of Singapore island, when they were 'astonished to see' hundreds of Japanese troops 'relaxing by the water's edge' and noted that there were 'many Indian troops' with them.⁹⁵ It was also on that day that three Companies of 1/8th Punjab 'disappeared'.⁹⁶ There is no known evidence of F. Kikan involvement in these incidents, but the following day on 13 February, according to Fujiwara's own account, Allah Ditta was involved in subverting a British Indian unit. Accompanied by Lieutenant Nakamiya of F. Kikan, Allah Ditta moved up to the Japanese skirmish line within shouting distance of the Indian troops, and spoke to them from behind a large rubber tree.⁹⁷ The result was that the Indian troops were soon discarding weapons and surrendering.⁹⁸ The identity of the Indian unit involved, or the fate of any British officers who may have been with them is unrecorded.⁹⁹

Another incident that occurred on 13 February would lead to the surrender of around 60 Indian troops and involved the 3rd Field Company Bengal Sappers & Miners (S&M). The previous day they had been ordered to occupy a defensive

⁹¹ AAS, Mss Eur F275/4, p.250. Fujiwara crossed to Singapore on 10th February, see Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, p.169.

⁹² Sareen, *Indian National Army*. p.54.

⁹³ Murfett, *Between Two Oceans*, p.345.

⁹⁴ This included its commander Captain Maghar Singh and all his VCOs, see AAS, Mss Eur F275/5: *Interrogation of Kazi Mohd. Sleem*, p.247.

⁹⁵ Elphick, *Singapore, The Pregnable Fortress*, p.343.

⁹⁶ Murfett, *Between Two Oceans*. p.345.

⁹⁷ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, p.172.

⁹⁸ There is no mention of this incident in Allah Ditta's CSDIC(I) interrogation, although his interrogator noted that he 'has been most un-cooperative under interrogation particularly in regard to his activities before 15 Feb 42', see AAS, Mss Eur F275/16, p.271.

⁹⁹ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, p.173.

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position on a hill near Nee Soon village. The British with the party were Captain Poyser the commander, a Lieutenant Austin and a British Sergeant, while the senior Indian officer present was Second Lieutenant Baktawar Singh. At around 10:30hrs a ration party went forward by truck to the position and were witness to the surrender of the group. They saw a Japanese officer and two Japanese soldiers, with an Indian VCO directing the surrender, and Baktawar Singh marshalling the other Indian troops towards them. It was then that the British officers noticed what was occurring, with Captain Poyser opening fire and wounding the Japanese officer in the hand, although in the ensuing fight both he and the British Sergeant were killed and Lieutenant Austin surrendered. Lieutenant Austin would soon be dead, shot by the Japanese allegedly with the encouragement of Baktawar Singh so as to cover up his role in the surrender.¹⁰⁰ Baktawar Singh was subsequently seen wearing an F. Kikan armband.¹⁰¹ By the evening of 13 February F. Kikan was managing around one thousand Indian soldiers.¹⁰²

The best-known example of the premature surrender of Indian troops in the final stages of the battle for Singapore, occurred early on 14 February, and involved the 2/10th Baluch, which while in position near Nee Soon was the target of infiltration and subversion by F. Kikan and Japanese troops. Its British commander, Colonel Parker, had concerns regarding one of his Indian Company commanders, Captain Burhan-ud-Din (the younger brother of the ruler of the Indian Princely State of Chitral), who in his view had underperformed in action against the Japanese on 12 February.¹⁰³ Much worse was to follow, for on the morning of the 14 February the Captain was subverted by a 'Sikh in British uniform' sporting an F. Kikan armband, while in command of one of the forward Companies of the Battalion. The Sikh was a VCO from the 3rd Field Company Bengal S&M.¹⁰⁴ At one point the men of Burhan-ud-Din's Company were observed standing up with Japanese troops in their positions and 'a lot of talk going on', while Japanese infiltration continued into the battalion positions.¹⁰⁵ Another Indian Company commander, Captain Sahgal, would claim in Fay's book that he was tricked into surrendering after responding to what he thought was a request to confer from the British Company commander ahead of him. His men also became prisoners including an Australian, Lieutenant Hilder, who was his second in command. Soon after, the Australian officer was forced to kneel

¹⁰⁰ His date of death is listed as 13th February 1942. He was aged 23.

¹⁰¹ AAS, Mss Eur F275/9, p.177.

¹⁰² Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, p.173.

¹⁰³ For a lengthy extract of Colonel Parker's account see: Elphick, *Singapore, The Pregnable Fortress*. pp.339-341.

¹⁰⁴ Note that Burhan-ud-Din claimed he was sent forward by Parker and was then captured, see: AAS, Mss Eur F275/5: *Interrogation of Captain Burhan-ud-Din*, p.122.

¹⁰⁵ Elphick, *Singapore, The Pregnable Fortress*. p.341.

and was then decapitated with a sword by a Japanese NCO. After a tense interrogation, in which Sahgal confirmed he was Indian by mentioning that Gandhi was a family friend, it became apparent that Indians were regarded as friends and he was taken to meet a Japanese Colonel who, while eating his own breakfast, poured Sahgal a large cognac.¹⁰⁶ However, Sahgal's claim that he was tricked is contradicted by Colonel Parker's account which states that Lieutenant Hilder was in telephone contact with battalion headquarters at around 7:30am and was describing how Japanese troops were entering the battalion positions, and that Sahgal could be heard shouting.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the details, three companies of the 2/10th Baluch disappeared from their positions that morning leaving their weapons and equipment behind them, while the British officers who were with them were killed.¹⁰⁸ Most of the Indian officers of 2/10th Baluch would ultimately have prominent roles in the INA, Sahgal foremost among them.¹⁰⁹ But, perhaps surprisingly, Indian soldiers of the battalion would be amongst the staunchest non-volunteers over the following years.¹¹⁰

When Allah Ditta had crossed to Singapore Island the previous day there had been around 50 'Fujiwara Volunteers' with the party, but during 14 February the group split into a group of 30 who headed towards Singapore town and the remainder, under Ditta's command, who made their way down the Man Dai road under the direction of Lieutenant Nakamiya. It was here that Ditta encountered a party of about 400 Indian prisoners from 1/8th Punjab and 3rd Field Company Bengal S&M, all commanded by Bakhtawar Singh, whom Nakamiya ordered to proceed towards Kranji.¹¹¹ There were some British officers with this party, including one from the Bengal S&M who told Ditta that they expected to be killed by the Japanese.¹¹² It had been in the early hours of 14 February that Mohan Singh and Pritam Singh had arrived on Singapore Island, having been summoned the previous day by Major

¹⁰⁶ Fay, *The Forgotten Army*. p.70.

¹⁰⁷ Elphick, *Singapore, The Pregnable Fortress*. p.340.

¹⁰⁸ The British commander of 'A' Company was found dead in his company position along with a number of Indian troops. *Ibid.* p.341.

¹⁰⁹ Captain Sahgal joined the INA later in 1942 and became a senior INA commander. He was one of three defendants in the first Red Fort trial in late 1945 where the defense counsel included Jawaharlal Nehru, and was released in January 1946.

¹¹⁰ AAS, L/WVS/2/45, p.13.

¹¹¹ After the fall of Singapore, Bakhtawar Singh commanded the Serangoon Road camp, which housed around 150 of the Fujiwara Volunteers. AAS, Mss Eur F275/16, p.271.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.270.

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Fujiwara.¹¹³ Mohan Singh spent the day mixing with Indian prisoners collected by F. Kikan at the Kranji Police barracks, meeting Bakhtawar Singh for the first time, and also Allah Ditta 'who was in very good heart', before giving a speech to the prisoners.¹¹⁴ On either 14 or 15 February the F. Kikan attempted to contact Indian troops in the final stages of the battle with Major Fujiwara and Lieutenant Nakamiya dispatching four Indian contact teams into the front line, although apparently without success.¹¹⁵ For example when Jemadar Fateh Khan later returned and reported that the units in his area were British not Indian he was slapped by Nakamiya and told that he would be reported to Mohan Singh 'for his failure'.¹¹⁶ Around this time British forces captured one of the Indian F. Kikan volunteers, although he would soon be released.¹¹⁷ It was on the afternoon of 15 February that news of surrender negotiations swept through the Japanese forces. When Mohan Singh returned to F. Kikan headquarters an hour or two later he was told by a Japanese officer that he had been wanted at the negotiations so that he could appear on the Japanese side, but that the meeting was already over. Obviously just a propaganda stunt, it was an opportunity Mohan Singh seems to have been relieved to miss.¹¹⁸

Aftermath

The surrender of British forces in Singapore on 15 February 1942 set the scene for a remarkable event two days later; the formal handover of the 45,000 Indian troops in Singapore to the Japanese at Farrer Park by F. Kikan. In a carefully choreographed event, that displayed Major Fujiwara's skills as a propagandist, the seeds were sown for the later creation of the INA.¹¹⁹

The 'outstanding success' achieved by Major Fujiwara and his F. Kikan in their contact mission with the Indian troops and community in Malaya, took the Japanese military

¹¹³ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.18. One of Pritam Singh's companions was the distinctive Hari Singh Rathore, a Hindu who styled himself "prince" and wore 'Jodhpur breeches, a Rajput turban, a dagger and a revolver', see AAS, Mss Eur F275/5: *Interrogation of Sayad Munawar Hussain*, p.342.

¹¹⁴ One source stated that he 'was worried lest some senior officer should supplant him'. AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.18.

¹¹⁵ Fujiwara and Ditta give different dates for this infiltration attempt, with Fujiwara saying it occurred on the 14th. See Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, p.174.

¹¹⁶ AAS, Mss Eur F275/16, p.271. Ditta stayed in Singapore for the rest of the war.

¹¹⁷ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, p.176.

¹¹⁸ Singh, *Soldiers' Contribution to Indian Independence*. p.106.

¹¹⁹ There are many accounts of this event, including: Shah Nawaz Khan, *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji* (Delhi: Rajkamal Publications, 1946), p.18; Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, pp.183-186.

authorities by surprise.¹²⁰ The early capture of Captain Mohan Singh was an important factor in that success, as he acted as a catalyst for the involvement of others and proved adept at motivating potential volunteers, one example being the way he encouraged the involvement of VCOs through the use of promotions. Mohan Singh would later identify a variety of factors for his success including: 'the overwhelming and totally unexpected defeat of Britain'; the 'good treatment by the Japanese' of Indian troops; 'dormant nationalism'; and the effect of his own oratory.¹²¹ And through the IIL organisation of Pritam Singh, Fujiwara had an equally successful impact on the Indian civilian population.¹²² But Fujiwara's success in his Indian mission came at a cost: in order to achieve his tactical goals he had over-promised at a strategic level in terms of what Japan was willing to support when it came to the Indian Independence movement.¹²³ Was his later comparison of himself with Lawrence of Arabia a smokescreen for a necessary duplicity?¹²⁴ Despite its successes, the F. Kikan was rapidly dissolved in April 1942 and Fujiwara assigned to a propaganda role based in Saigon, an outcome he later attributed to the fact that 'the military Administration was opposed to the work of the kikan'.¹²⁵ In the longer term, the contribution of the Indian volunteers to the Japanese victory in Malaya laid the foundations for the creation of the INA in mid-1942, under the command of Mohan Singh. But the gap in INA expectations would ultimately trigger a crisis towards the end of 1942, in which Mohan Singh would seek to disband the force.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ AAS, L/WVS/2/47: *Interrogation of Colonel Kadomatsu*.

¹²¹ AAS, Mss Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, p.20.

¹²² Pritam Singh was killed in a plane crash in March 1942 while on the way to Tokyo. Another victim was Captain Mohammed Akram. Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*, p.207.

¹²³ The gap is apparent in his account of discussions with his superiors, including Kadomatsu. *Ibid.*, p.206.

¹²⁴ See: Louis Allen, 'Fujiwara and Suzuki: the Lawrence of Arabia syndrome' in *Themes and theories in modern Japanese history*, ed. by Sue Henry and Jean-Pierre Lehmann (London: Athlone Press, 1987), pp.230-242. Note that Allen, who had met Fujiwara, regarded him as sincere.

¹²⁵ TNA. WO 203/6314, p.42. Fujiwara later held senior staff appointments in Burma, and ended the war as a Lieutenant Colonel. Post-war he became a Lieutenant General in the Japanese Ground Self-Defence Force. He maintained links with ex-INA personnel in India.

¹²⁶ The rise and fall of Mohan Singh through 1942 is examined in detail in his CSDIC(I) interrogation. He spent the remainder of the war in Japanese custody. He was released from post-war British custody in May 1946. In later life, he served two terms in the Indian parliament.

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Conclusions

The CSDIC(I) reports and interrogations relating to the Malayan campaign, combined with other sources, suggest that the assistance provided to the Japanese Army by Indian volunteers of the F. Kikan has previously been understated. The volunteers provided a vital service by marshalling the large numbers of Indian troops taken prisoner, establishing administration centres, and actively collecting Indian prisoners in the aftermath of battles, thereby freeing the Japanese of those tasks. In the later stages of the campaign, the volunteers succeeded in orchestrating the premature surrender of a number of Indian Army units, although the behaviour of such units needs to be placed in the broader context of declining morale in the army as a whole.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the contribution of the Indian volunteers to the Japanese victory in Malaya was significant in its impact and needs to be acknowledged.

¹²⁷ See assessment in: Murfett, *Between Two Oceans*. p.345.