



SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA

CIVILIAN WAR MEMORIAL

IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO PERISHED AFTER THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

CIVILIAN WAR MEMORIAL

1. Located in the midst of Singapore's Business District is The Civilian War Memorial, a monument built in memory of the civilians killed during the Japanese occupation of Singapore. It is a 65 meters tall structure, with four pillars of similar size, symbolising the shared sufferings of the four main ethnic races in Singapore, namely Malay, Chinese, Indian and Eurasian. At the base of the structure bears the inscription "Memorial To The Civilian Victims of the Japanese Occupation – 1942 to 1945", in the four ethnic languages

2. Below the monument lay the remains of victims during the Japanese occupation, exhumed from mass graves found around the island.



INSCRIPTION IN FOUR LANGUAGES





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3. In between the four huge pillars, resting on a pedestal is a large urn with small lion heads on all sides, symbolising the remains of Singaporeans who lost their lives. All 4 sides have inscriptions in the 4 ethnic languages. Surrounding the base of the monument is a shallow pool of water, depicting serenity and tranquility.

Location

4. The monument is sited next to Esplanade MRT Station, in the middle of the busy city, in a serene parkland called the War Memorial Park bounded by Bras Basah Road, Nicoll Highway and Stamford Road. It was sited here to remind Singaporeans, especially the younger generations, of the dark days of our history, and the need to defend our country ourselves.



Malayan Campaign

5. After its Malayan Campaign in November 1941, the Japanese forces crossed the Straits of Johore in darkness, launched an attack on Singapore, and captured it in 8 days. On 15 February 1942 at 1820 hrs, the British forces formally surrendered Singapore to its invaders, the Japanese 25th Army, commanded by General Tomoyuki Yamashita.





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How the People Endured

6. After the surrender by the British, Singapore was under the Japanese occupation for 3 tumultuous years. The people of Singapore suffered under the hands of the Japanese. Japanese soldiers and officers patrolling the streets demanded the people to bow lowly (or kow tow) to them when they passed by, as a show of respect to them. Those who did not obey were slapped, punished, or given a rifle butt stroke, some were imprisoned or faced execution.

7. To eliminate the Western culture, the Japanese set up schools and pressured the people to learn the Japanese language and sing the Japanese national anthem. Food and medication were scarce and the population had to rely on home-grown vegetables, if they had the land. Tapioca, sweet potatoes and yam eventually became the main staple food.



Sook Ching Massacre

8. During this period a purge code named “Sook Ching” took place from 18 February to 4 March 1942. This operation was under the supervision of the Imperial Japanese Army Kempeitai, which was their secret military police. Called Operations Sook Ching, it was aimed at eliminating anti-Japanese elements in Singapore whom the Japanese forces felt were obstacles to their occupation. Males from ages of 18 to 50 were marshalled to many concentration areas on the island. Kempeitai officers used local informers who are hooded to protect their identity, to screen and identify the ‘undesirable’ Japanese elements. Though a description of those targeted was available, survivors reported they were very arbitrarily selected. Those who were excused were stamped on their hands and asked to go home.



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9. The rest were packed into the army trucks and they never returned. They were transported to many remote areas, machine gunned and bayoneted and buried in mass graves. After the war, the Japanese declared 5,000 civilians were purged, but local estimates put it at about 50,000. General Yamashita, the Japanese commander who led the capture of Singapore and ordered the massacre was tried in Philippines and executed in 1946.

10. Our first Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew missed the massacre narrowly. He was saved by a trishaw rider who fetched him and his siblings to and from school every day. Mr Lee was then a youth and about to be screened. He asked for permission from the guards to collect his cloths and was allowed to do so. The rickshaw rider saw the opportunity, pulled him away and hid him for a few days till the screening process ended. It was a blessing Mr Lee Kuan Yew escaped death, otherwise we would not have a prosperous Singapore today.

Mass Graves Discovered

11. In 1962, during the development of the island the first five mass graves were discovered in a village called Siglap. Following this, a call for more information led to the discovery of more such mass graves. Subsequently more than 40 mass graves were found all over the island. It was decided the victims should be given a proper burial and at a place we can remember. The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry lobbied the Singapore Government to request for Japan to pay compensation. On 25 August 1963, 100,000 people gathered at the City Hall to demand compensation from the Japanese for their atrocities. On 25 October 1966 the Japanese agreed and made compensation.

SCCCI Build the Monument

12. The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCCI) undertook the task to exhume the graves and build a monument to place the remains to commemorate the civilians who lost their lives during the Japanese occupation. The SCCCI raised funds for the construction of the monument with the Singapore Government paying half, on a dollar for dollar matching basis.

13. Ground-Breaking Ceremony. The Singapore Government then allocated a piece of ground in the heart of the city along Beach Road, to build a monument where the remains would be placed. On 15 June 1963 then Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew did a ground-breaking ceremony. Representatives from the Inter-Religious Organisations were there to give their blessings. In conjunction with the ground-breaking ceremony a one-week exhibition was held with a competition to select from 25 designs put up for the monument.



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14. The monument was completed in January 1967. Before it was completed a ceremony was held on 1 November 1966 in which more than 600 urns containing the remains were placed. The monument was unveiled by then Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew on 15 February 1967 – which was the 25th anniversary of the day Singapore surrendered to the Japanese forces. Thereafter, on 15th February each year a commemoration ceremony is conducted to remind us of our darker days. 15th February is also designated as our Total Defence Day to lend its significance.

15. Many families of those who lost their lives were present to offer their prayers. Prayers were also given by leaders of the Inter-Religious Organisations. In his speech, Mr Lee said: “We meet not to rekindle old fires of hatred, nor to seek settlements for blood debts. We meet to remember the men and women who were the hapless victims of one of the fires of history. This monument will remind those of us who were here 25 years ago, of what was in store for them. It will help our children understand and remember, what we have told them of this lesson we paid so bitterly to learn.”

Commemorative Ceremony Organised by SAFVL & SCCC!

16. Every year, on 15th February, SAFVL together with SCCC jointly organise the commemorative ceremony. Members of the Inter Religious Organisation of Singapore representing all religious groups in Singapore are invited to bless the occasion. Family members of the victims also join the ceremony to offer prayers and the burning of joss sticks and joss papers. Each year, the SAFVL would invite 200 students from the various uniformed groups, to the ceremony. A SAFVL veteran would talk to the students on the fall of Singapore, the atrocities of war and imbue in them the need for us to defend our nation.

CEREMONIES AT CIVILIAN WAR MEMORIAL



SAFVL Members



Prayers by Members of Inter Religious Organisations



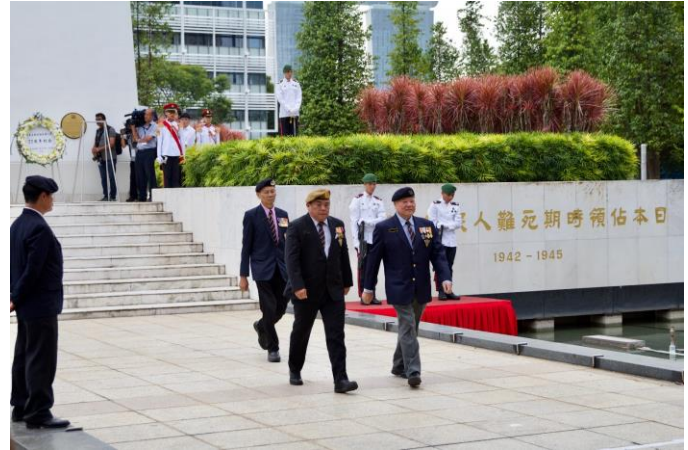
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SCCCI President and members



SAFVL President & Vice-President



Students and Uniformed Groups



School Cadet Band in attendance



School students at a talk



School cadets providing Ceremonial Guards and buglers