



SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA

FORMER FORD FACTORY

MUSEUM - FALL OF SINGAPORE

1. The Former Ford Factory, located at 351 Upper Bukit Timah Road, Singapore, is a very significant historical site turned into a museum where visitors can view events on Singapore's history before, during and after the Japanese occupation. It brings a wealth of details in the form of story boards, maps, documents and certificates, artefacts, short videos clips and even live plants are grown to show the staple food the population had to endure when normal staple food was in very short supply during the Japanese occupation, 1942 to 1945.



Why is FORMER FORD FACTORY significant?

2. It was an American car manufacturing factory belonging to Ford Motors built in 1941 to meet the demand for cars in South East Asia. It was also Ford Motor's first assembly plant in South East Asia. The significance of this building is it was the site where the British Forces surrendered Singapore to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. The building was officially gazetted by the Government of Singapore as a national monument on 15 February 2006 and is now a museum with artefacts relating to the Fall of Singapore in 1942, including the events before and after.



SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA

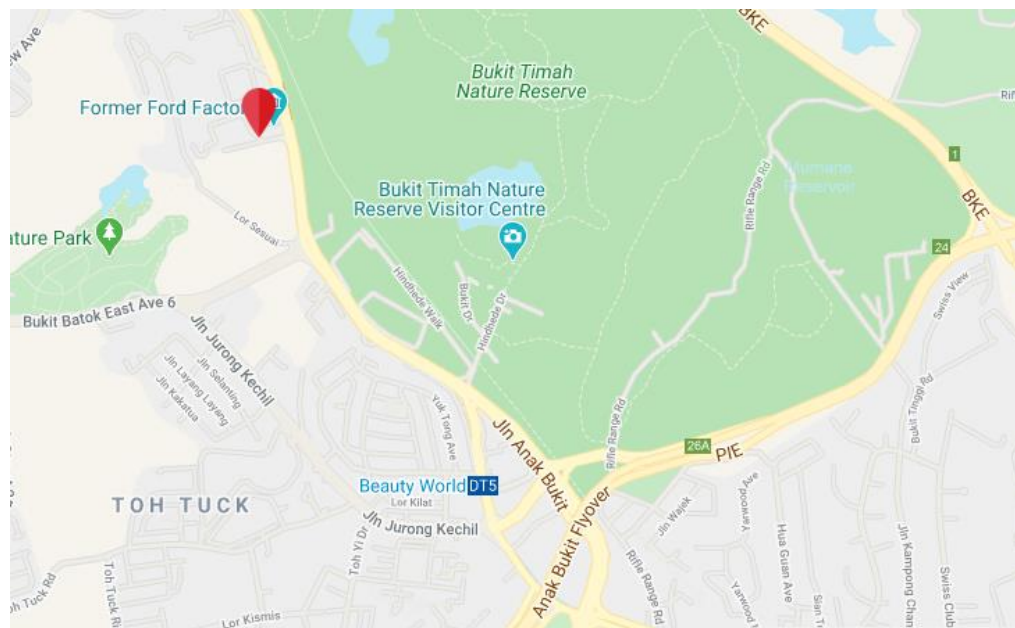
3. Singapore was regarded by the British as the **Fortress of the East** and was key to the British Imperial defence plan for South East Asia. When war broke out, Ford Factory was closed and the British Royal Air Force (RAF) was allowed to assemble fighter aircraft for the region. Fighter aircraft parts were brought in large wooden crates and assembled in this factory. During the Malayan Campaign in December 1941, when the Japanese forces was advancing rapidly across Malaya from the north, the British saw the defence untenable and decided to fly the aircraft out of Singapore in January 1942.



Welcoming Sign



A Replica of the Surrender Table



The Former Ford Factory is easily accessible by public transport



SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA

The Museum

4. The museum comprised two main sections. One section deals with the history of Singapore before and during the Japanese invasion, up to the surrender by the British Forces. The second section shows the events from the Japanese occupation of Singapore, the return of the British when the Japanese surrendered and the British Administration thereafter.

First Section – 1931 to 1942

5. The first section deals with events from 1931 to 1942 and covers the following:

following:

- a. 1931 – War On The Horizon. Japan attacks Manchuria
- b. 1936 – German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact
- c. 1937 - War Between China and Japan
- d. 1941 – Japan Attacks Malaya
- e. 1942 – 31st January 1942. British Blew the Causeway & Retreated
- f. 1942 – 8 February 1942. Japanese Forces Cross Straight of Johore
- g. 1942 – 15 February 1942. British Forces Surrendered Singapore

6. Parallel to the diaries are interesting story lines covering the following aspects of Singapore:

- a. Ford in Singapore
- b. Singapore Before The War
- c. The Singapore Strategy
- d. The British Defence
- e. Britain's "Impregnable Fortress"
- f. The Japanese Empire in Asia
- g. War Comes to Singapore
- h. The Japanese Attack
- h. Civilians Caught up in War
- j. The British Surrender
- k. News of the British Surrender



SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA

7. Impregnable Fortress. The British established and grew Singapore as a free port and became one of its 'jewels'. As part of their strategy to protect this 'jewel', the British carved out a defence plan that included building a strong Naval Base and keeping a sizeable force to make Singapore the 'Impregnable Force' in South East Asia. It was also known as the 'bastion of the British might.' For a strong naval deterrence, a Naval Base with the largest dock in Asia was built in Singapore. Built at the cost of 60 million pounds in 1938, it was considered the most expensive.

8. Coastal Defence of Singapore. As part of the defence plan of the region, Singapore being in the south of the Malayan Peninsula, the British built a number of coastal guns facing the sea, which is to the south of the island. This together with the Malayan hinterland provided an all-round defence. Unfortunately, the Japanese decided to launch their initial landing from the north of Malaya 560km away, advanced and captured Singapore from the north, rendering these coastal positions ineffective.

9. British Military Resources Stretched. When World War I and II broke out in Europe, British military resources were stretched and were pulled out to defend the motherland. They left behind remnants of the British army and lesser trained troops from the Australian and Indian armies, as well as obsolete aircraft. The British naval fleet to occupy the strong Naval Base in Singapore never arrived, except for 2 battleships and 4 destroyers already stationed here.

10. The Japanese Empire. With its rapid industrialisation and strong economy, the Japanese Empire was growing, and was building a strong military force. It annexed Korea and occupied Manchuria and in 1937 started the Sino-Japanese war. When the Japanese were done with China, they swung south and headed for the 'jewel', Singapore.

11. World War II started in 1939 in Europe, and in mid-1940 the British forces were too preoccupied defending motherland, Britain. Lt General Arthur Percival commander of the British garrison in Singapore had with him 4 Divisions, comprising a total of 85,000 troops, held against the Japanese force under the leadership of Japanese Commander, General Tomoyuki Yamashita, with his 36,000 troops from the 25th Army.

12. Japanese Landing in Malaya. The Japanese 25th Army landed in Singora and Patani in Southern Thailand and Kota Bahru the north eastern coast of Malaya on the night of 7 December 1941. General Yamashita's plan of capturing Malaya in 100 days was accomplished in 68 days. The withdrawing British troops blew up the causeway causing a one week's delay for the capture of Singapore, by the Japanese.



SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA

13. Assault on Singapore. The Japanese continued their heavy artillery barrage from across the Straits of Johore. The three airfields, in the north of Singapore, were within reach of the Japanese artillery from Johore. They faced heavy artillery bombardment, enabling air superiority to the Japanese. Air raids were conducted all over Singapore. The only air support remained was ten Hawker Hurricane fighters based in RAF Kallang in the south, but they were overwhelmed by Japanese air cover of 84 fighter planes.

14. First Landing. On 8 February 1942 at 2030 hrs, the first wave of 13,000 Japanese troops crossed the Straits of Johore and invaded Singapore from the north -west, followed by another 10,000 the next morning. They were transported by 150 barges and collapsible boats, as well as fishing boats taken from the villages, with each wave carrying around 4,000 troops. The greatest allied success was staged by the 28th Australian Brigade using mortars and machine gun fire and exploding oil-filled tanks in the water, causing very heavy casualties on the Japanese Imperial Guards. The request to cancel this attack was not approved by General Yamashita, who ordered the Imperial Guards to press on and they managed to defeat the defenders, who suffered heavy casualties. Numerous fierce fighting ensued, and several lines were established. The next most difficult fight the Japanese faced was the Battle of Pasir Panjang. A Malayan Infantry Battalion fought till the very last man inflicting heavy casualties on the Japanese invaders. Notwithstanding, the Japanese forces were gaining ground day by day. They reached the Jurong Line and Bukit Timah Line.

15. Ford Factory – The Japanese Headquarters. On 11 February 1942 General Yamashita arrived at Bukit Timah Line along Upper Bukit Timah Road and made the Ford Factory his headquarters. The main vital water supplies of the island of Singapore were held by the Japanese. The British attempted to recapture Bukit Timah but did not materialize. Very soon it was close quarter fighting in built up areas.

16 Gen Yamashita Called a Bluff. On 11 February 1942, the Japanese supplies were running low. General Yamashita knew his force of 30,000 men was out-numbered. Close quarter fighting in a limited space and street fighting would lengthen the battle putting him in a disastrous position. He was afraid the British would know his weak points. On 12 and 13 February the British troops consolidated and established themselves around the city. General Yamashita then attempted to call a bluff on his adversary Lt General Percival. His plan was to call on Percival to do an unconditional surrender.



SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA

17. The British Decided to Surrender. The Japanese continued to press the British forces perimeter on 14 and 15 February 1942, although the advance was slow. British supplies were deteriorating, water supply system was damaged and continued supply was uncertain, rations and vehicle petrol were low and so were ammunitions. Lt General Percival held a conference with his senior commanders. He proposed two options. Option one was to mount a counter-attack on Bukit Timah a more strategic location, or option two to surrender. After a long discussion, all present agreed that a counter-attack was not possible, and Percival decided to surrender.

18. The Surrender. A British team was sent to discuss the surrender process. The team came back with orders for Lt General Percival to proceed with his staff officers to the *Ford Motor Factory* to conduct the surrender. On 15 February 1942 at 1820 hrs, Lt General Percival went to the Japanese Headquarters at the Ford Factory and formally surrendered to the Japanese invaders under the command of General Yamashita. A video clip on the surrender is available at the museum. One can see the body language of General Percival looking very nervous and General Yamashita looking very intimidating as he demanded an unconditional surrender.



The British surrender party



The Surrender at Ford Factory

19. Worst Disaster in History. The Malayan Campaign and Fall of Singapore was recorded as the largest British surrender, with 80,000 troops taken as prisoners of war in Singapore, joining another 50,000 troops taken earlier as prisoners of war in the Malayan Campaign. Winston Churchill, the war-time Prime Minister of Great Britain then, acknowledged it as:

“The worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history”.



SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA

The Second Section of the Museum

20. The second section touches on the following areas after the Fall of Singapore till its independence from the British:

- a. The Sook Ching Operations
- b. The Struggle to Survive
- c. Japanese Surrender
- c. The British Administration
- d. Housing and Education for the Population
- e. Towards Independence

21. The Sook Ching Operations. Immediately after the capture of Singapore the Japanese conducted a two-week operation called Sook Ching in Chinese, or the “purge”. From 18 February 1942, men between the ages of 18 and 50 were told to report to concentration areas for registration by Kempeitai (Japanese military police). Together with local informers, they identified men whom they think were likely anti-Japanese elements. Those who cleared the inspection were allowed to go home. The rest were hauled into trucks, brought away to remote areas to be shot and bayoneted, and were buried in mass graves. The Japanese claimed only 5,000 were executed but it was estimated between 30,000 and 50,000 were massacred.



Mass Screening



Remains from mass graves

22. The Struggle to Survive. Singapore relied mainly on imports which came to a halt after the Japanese took over. Eventually food and commodities were in short supply and had to be rationed. The people had to depend on food they could grow locally and tapioca, yam and sweet potatoes became the staple food to replace rice. Living and sanitary conditions were bad and people were suffering and dying from diseases like beri-beri, pneumonia, malaria and diarrhea. At the museum, tapioca, yam and sweet potatoes are planted on site to show the younger generation how the people survived on them as staple food.



SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA



Tapioca



Sweet Potato

23. The Japanese Surrender. Two atomic bombs were detonated over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6th and 9th August 1945. These forced the Japanese to surrender many territories it had captured including Singapore. On 12nd September 1945 after the return of the British, a surrender ceremony took place at the Singapore City Hall. A short live video on this surrender ceremony can be viewed at the Ford Factory.



Japanese Surrender



The Surrender Ceremony

24. The British Administration. The British were surprised by the sudden surrender and had to introduce their plan quickly. The British Administration took charge, and quickly put in place transport, postal and broadcasting services. Cash relief and welfare assistance were also introduced by the British. Due to worldwide shortages of food and supplies after the wars, prices remained high for a considerable period of time. In 1946 self-government was introduced in Malaya. Singapore became a separate Crown Colony due to its strategic location and the island's free port status, as well as the presence of the Naval Base and airfields on the island. The objective was to redevelop Singapore for British interest in the near future.



SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA

25. Housing and Education for the Population. During the war, many homes were destroyed. Many people were cramped into small sleeping areas resulting in overcrowding. Illegal homes sprung up with unhealthy and unsanitary living conditions. Public housing schemes were then introduced to improve such conditions. Eventually more housing estates were developed. Many children did not attend school as they had to work to support the family. The colonial government recognised the need and started a 10-year education programme, with 6 years in primary school and 4 years in secondary school which exists till today.

26. Towards Independence. Since the Japanese surrender many European powers in the region started decolonising and gradually Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines and Burma became independent. In 1948 the British saw it fit and planned to decolonise Singapore gradually. Six locals were elected to the Legislative Council and in 1953 a constitution was drawn up for greater local participation in politics. In 1955 the first local general election took place to vote in a 32-seat Legislative Assembly. And from thereon Singapore became independent.

SAF Veterans' League's Initiative

27. SAF Veterans' League has a specially selected group of Veterans who conduct talks at this museum. They are called Commitment to Defence Ambassadors (C2DA). The C2DAs using the artefacts give talks to three major groups as follows:

- a. Foreign Military and Civilian dignitaries, to familiarise them on events that took place.
- b. SAF advanced leadership training courses and senior officers' training courses on the lessons learnt.
- c. SAF units and school students, to imbue in them the need to defend their country.

SAF VETERANS' LEAGUE – C2D Ambassadors in Action





SAF Veterans' League

Sharing Experiences, Inspiring Generations

A Branch of SAFRA

VISIT BY FOREIGN DIGNITARIES

Led by SAFVL Veterans



YOUNGER GENERATION VIEWING THE STAPLE FOOD DURING THE OCCUPATION

