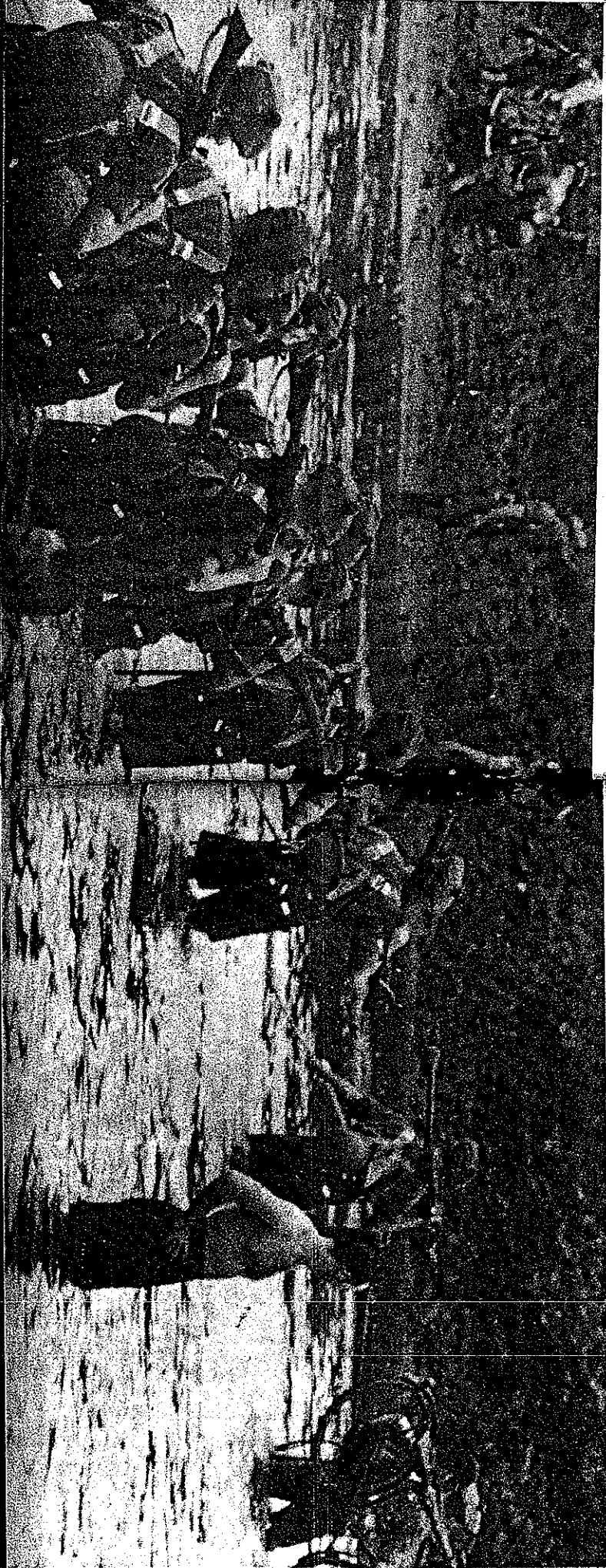




Training: hard if not realistic. Above left: Indian gunners in a rubber plantation. Above: British troops on a coastal exercise. Below: Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders



Postscript and post mortem

Like every other tragedy, the loss of Malaya and Singapore provokes many questions. If 11th Division had been allowed to consolidate at Jitra, instead of being launched into the futile Matador operation. If the aircraft carrier Indomitable had not been beached in Jamaica. . . . if the troops had been led by a good field commander instead of Percival. . . . if the north shore of Singapore Island had been fortified. . . . if the infantry had been supported by even two regiments of tanks. One could go on endlessly but to no purpose. The brutal truth is that the battle was lost years before it started. As Wavell wrote on hearing of the surrender:

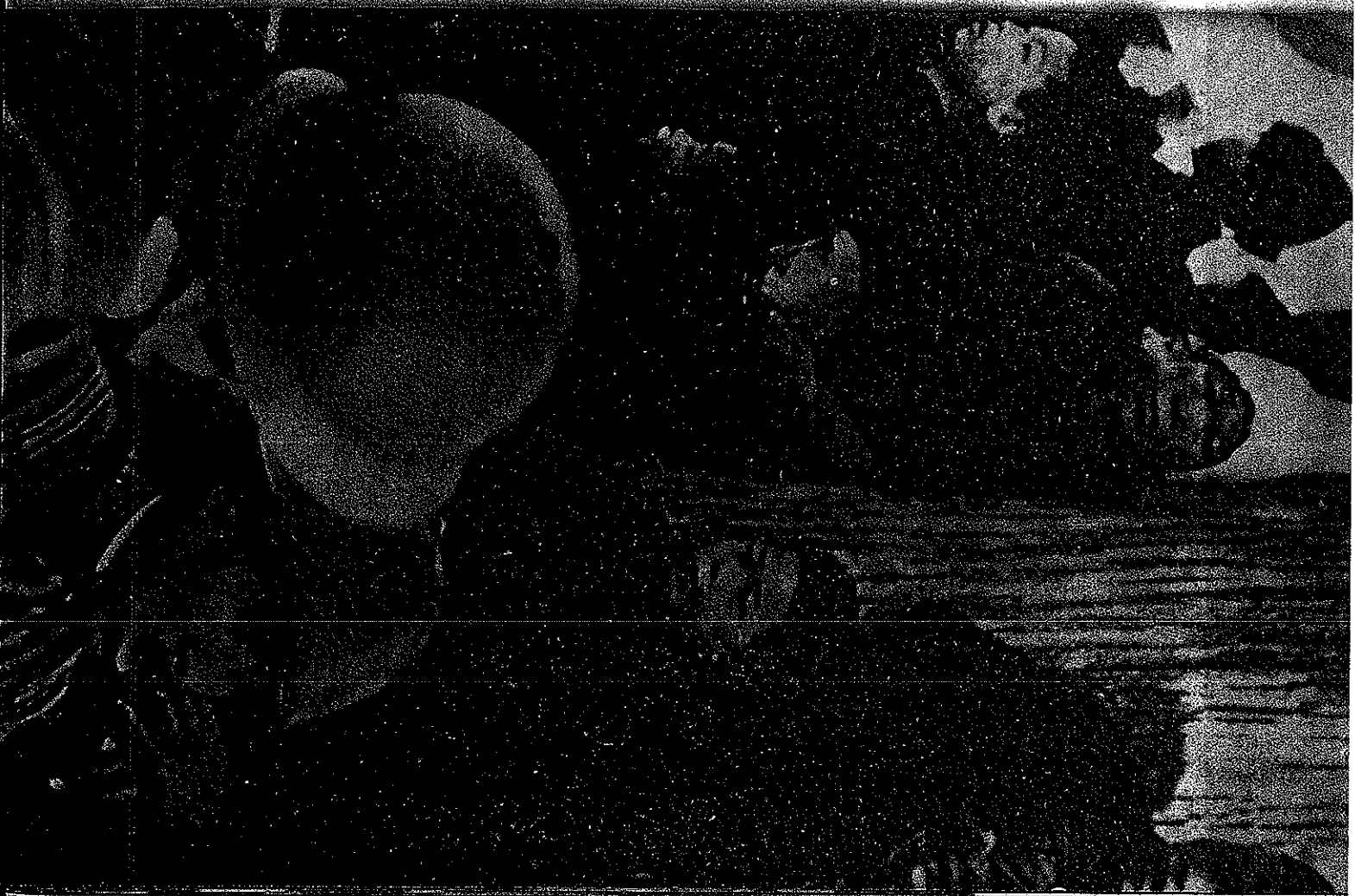
'The trouble goes back a long way: climate, the atmosphere of the country (the whole of Malaya has been asleep for at least two hundred years), lack of vigour in our peacetime training, and cunningness of our tactics and equipment, and the real difficulty of finding an answer to the very skilful and bold tactics of the Japanese in this jungle fighting.'

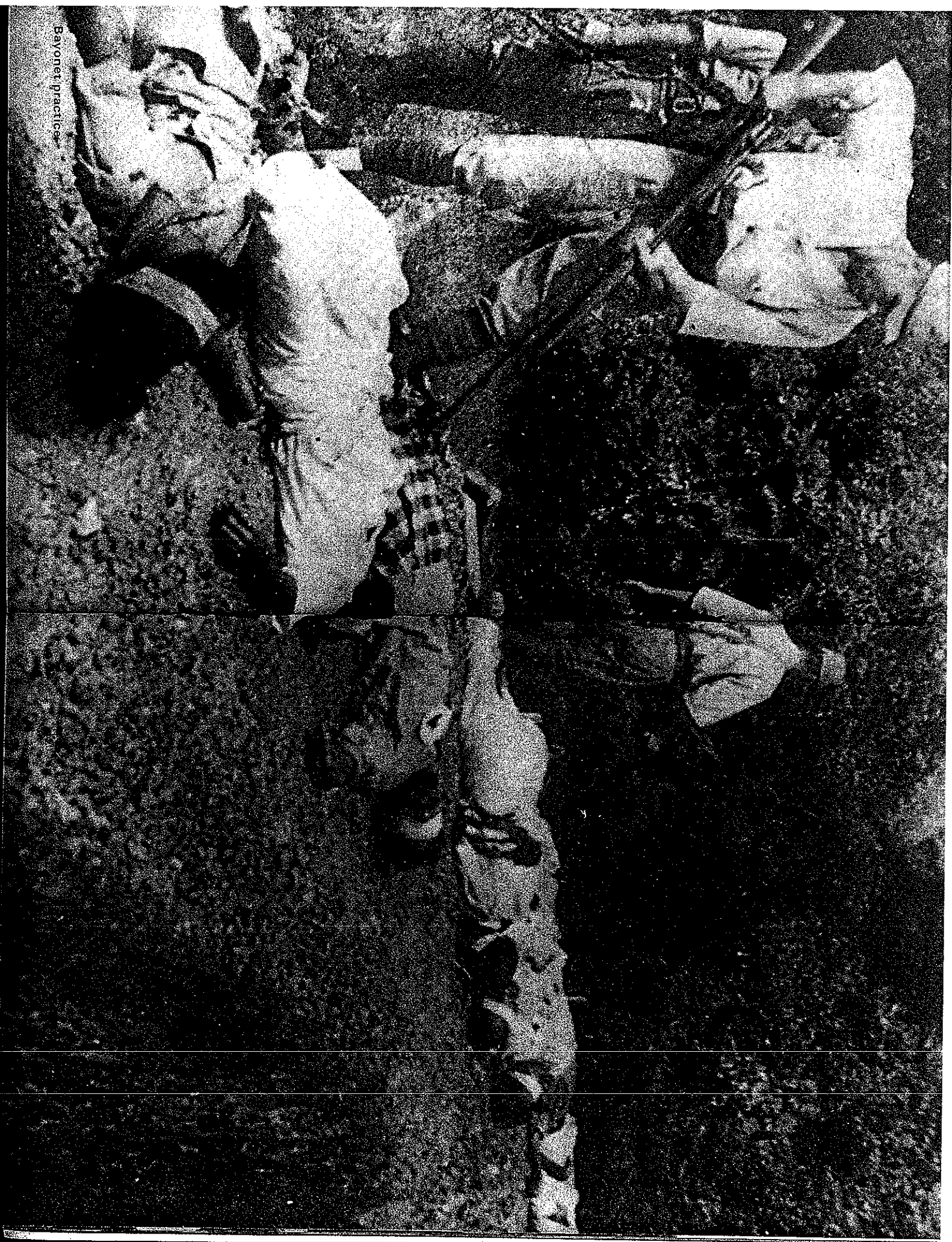
Even good, trained troops are no use without equipment but it is futile

to blame the British government for not sending the tanks and the aircraft. These did not exist. Such slender resources that were available, had to be concentrated for the defence of the homeland, for if England fell to the Germans, all hope of recovery would be lost. So Malaya, and indeed all British possessions in the Far East including Burma, remained at the end of the queue. It is interesting to note that exactly the same situation happened in the Philippines. Even all the vast resources of the United States could not equip these territories in time to face the Japanese invasion.

So the truth is that given a Montgomery instead of a Percival, the result would have been the same in the end, even if delayed. The British army simply had not learned the art of operating in thick country and would not do so for another two years. It was March 1944 before XV Indian Corps in the Arakan showed how the Japanese tactics could be

The plight of civilians: the Japanese had many scores to settle





overcome, with the use of aircraft. But before these tactics could be employed, air superiority had to be wrested from the Japanese. The air, in fact, held the key to the whole situation.

Yamashita's guarantees for the safety of soldiers and civilians were not observed. Hundreds of Chinese were driven to the east coast of Singapore Island, made to dig their own graves, and then were mown down in lines. Mutaguchi's 18th Division ran amok among the wounded, and later thousands of prisoners of war were to meet their fate on 'the Death Railway'. When the *Kempai* (Tojo's Secret Police) arrived in Singapore, there were to be more arrests and killings and many people disappeared. To what extent the brutalities were the responsibility of Yamashita himself it is hard to say; the task facing him was a formidable one, and he had to ask British firemen, doctors, nurses, engineers, and sanitary workers to remain where they were until their jobs could be taken over by Japanese.

He certainly denied himself the bombast of a conqueror, and when Terauchi signalled asking when the triumphal entry into Singapore would take place his reply was: 'Twenty-fifth Army will not hold parade but funeral ceremony is fixed for 20th February'. A few days later Terauchi signalled that he would be moving into Singapore with Southern Army Headquarters and Twenty-fifth Army would have to move to Indonesia.

What was to be Yamashita's next role? Would he lead his army against Australia, as he wished, or would he head west for Burma and then India? In July he learned that the post selected for him was that of 1st Area Commander in Manchukuo, the puppet state set up by the Japanese army in Manchuria. His task would be to defend the eastern region of this country against Russia, and in the event of war, to attack the Siberian port of Vladivostok. Though a post of some importance, this could only be regarded by Yamashita as an insult. After a great victory he was to be shunted away to a remote non-operational area, where most of his time would be taken up with training

troops. However, he accepted the order and made no complaint. All he wanted now was to appear before the Emperor to ask forgiveness for his part in the bloody incident of February 1936. Confident that permission would be given, he prepared a document to read before the Emperor, giving his account of the Malaya campaign. But then there came two shattering blows. First he learned that Tojo had sent orders that he was to proceed to his new command direct. And next he was informed that the Emperor had by no means forgotten the events of February 1936, and re-

fused to grant an interview, either now or in the foreseeable future.

On 17th July, the conqueror of Singapore set out on the bleak journey to Manchukuo. Here he was to remain till 25th September 1944, when he received a summons to take over the Japanese forces in the Philippines, now awaiting attack from the avenging armies of General Douglas MacArthur. There is no need to trace the course of the subsequent campaign. On 1st September, when the remains of his army were trapped in the mountains of Luzon he decided that he must obey the Emperor's

orders and surrender himself.

Percival had been held as a prisoner of war, first in Singapore and then on Formosa and in Manchuria, and was half-starved like most of his men. With the Japanese surrender, he received the glad news that with General Wainwright (the Americans' gallant commander on Bataan), he had been invited by MacArthur to attend the surrender ceremony in Tokyo Bay. Afterwards he went on to the Philippines, where again he was to sit

The road to Changi prison camp: it was to be a hard sentence



opposite Yamashita, but in very different circumstances. Later he wrote:

'As Yamashita entered the room I saw one eye brow lifted and a look of surprise cross his face - but only for a moment. His face quickly resumed the sphinx-like mask common to all Japanese, and he showed no further interest.'

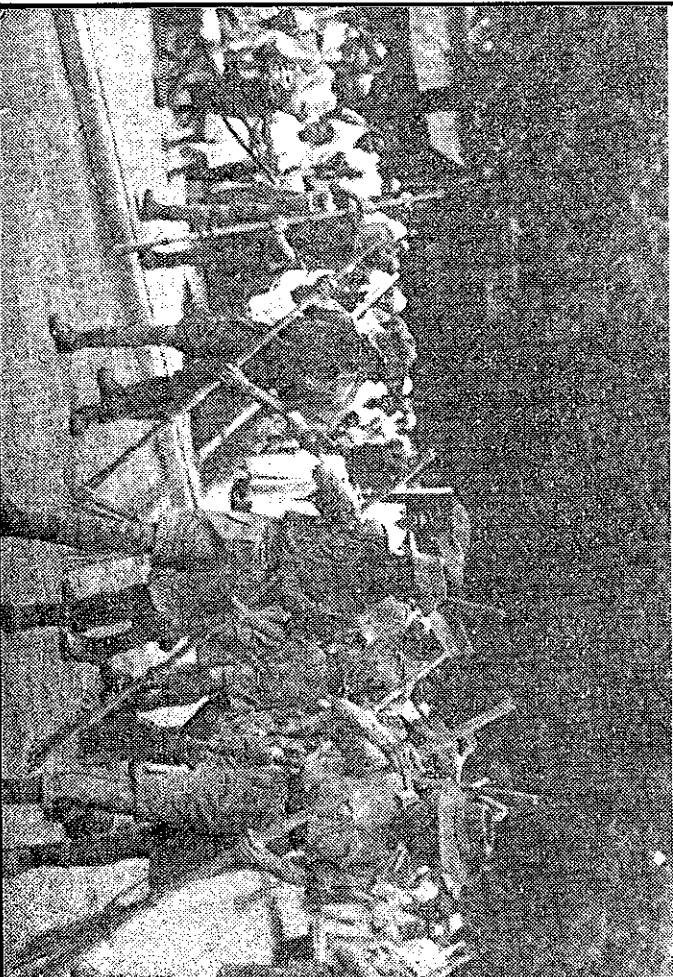
Later on Yamashita was tried by a United States Military Commission for 'brutal atrocities and other high crimes against the people of the United States and its allies and dependencies', chiefly committed in Manila. He was found guilty and was hanged on 23rd February 1946.

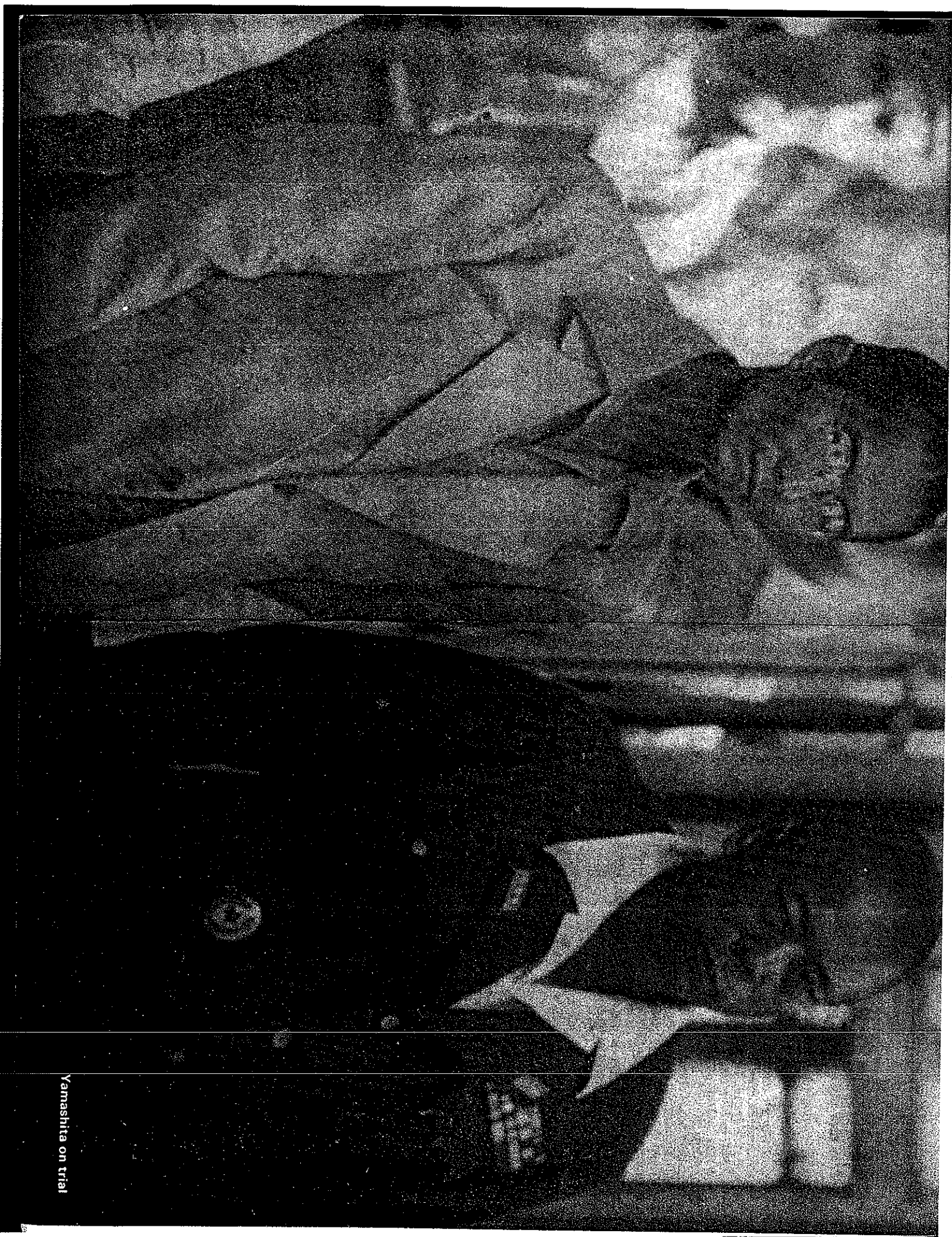
Yamashita's story has been told in detail elsewhere and there is no need to repeat it here. Sufficient to say that between the time he left Singapore and the time he died the fortunes of Japan had run full circle. After Singapore they had gone on to capture the Philippines and the East Indies, they had swept through Burma and by the summer of 1942 stood on the frontiers of India. But they went no further. The Australians outfought them in New Guinea. The Americans

counterattacked in the Pacific. Then, in 1944, after Mutaguchi's 'March on Delhi' the British, who had now found two great commanders in Admiral Lord Mountbatten and General Slim, struck back and within twelve months won the greatest land victory ever achieved against Japan in her entire history. Three entire armies, the Fifteenth, Twenty-eighth and Thirty-third, were irretrievably smashed. 190,000 men lay dead on the battlefield and, before the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima, the whole of Burma was clear of the enemy. Happily to relate the Indian troops, which Yamashita had so much despised, played a major part in this victory; properly trained and equipped they demonstrated their superiority.

But the Allied victory over Japan could not alter one thing which Singapore had demonstrated beyond all doubt. That the place of the white man in the east would never be the same again. Singapore and the Malay States would gain their freedom, just like the Philippines and Indonesia. Happily one can report that at the moment they are at peace.

Below: Humiliation: Asians watch Australian prisoners of war sweep the streets. Right: For many the Allies returned to Singapore almost too late: men released from Changi prison camp





Yamashita on trial