

# Syonan years

Singapore was renamed Syonan-To – Light of the South – on Feb 16, 1942 as the Japanese Military Administration Department, or M.A.D in short, assumed rulership of the occupied territories. This marks the start of 44 months of Japanese rule – days of great upheaval for the people of Singapore.

My mum used to take the skin of the tapioca and she would take the hard, brown part off...and then we had to cut it up with a razor blade very thinly and she made mee siam out of that.

MS BARBARA SCHARNHORST, JAPANESE OCCUPATION SURVIVOR, IN AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

## MASS SCREENING – OPERATION SOOK CHING

A directive by Colonel Masanobu Tsuji, who planned the Malayan campaign, and endorsed by General Tomoyuki Yamashita, it was meant to punish the Chinese in Singapore for supporting China's war effort against the Japanese.

**WHAT IS IT?**  
“肃清”  
“Sook Ching” is the transliteration of the Chinese words

It means “to purge through cleansing” the anti-Japanese elements in the local Chinese community. The operation is carried out from Feb 21 to March 4, 1942

**THE TARGET**  
Males aged 18 to 50

Mass screening centres' standards of screening vary and “suspects” are singled out based on:

- Age and occupation
- Physical appearance
- Personal wealth
- Language spoken and educational background

“檢”  
Means “examined”

Only those who receive a stamp with the Chinese word “jian” – on a piece of paper, clothing, face, arm or shoulder – will be let home

### THE PLAN

**Kill 50,000 Chinese**

Half that number is reached when the operation ceased

**40,000 to 50,000**

Estimated number of people killed in the Sook Ching and related mopping-up operations

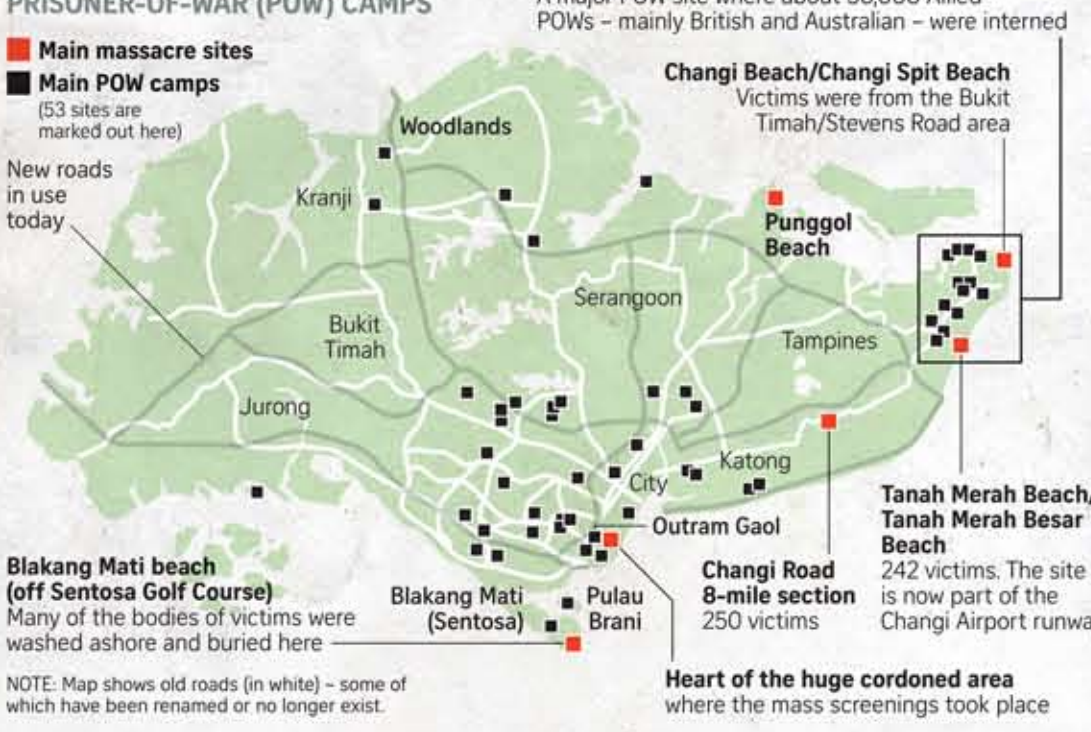
**5,000 killed**

Official figure given by the Japanese



Left: Human remains at a Bedok mass grave are exhumed from the site on June 10, 1966. Above: Many massacre victims are made to dig their own graves before being killed, as depicted in this sketch by pioneering artist Liu Kang.

## SOOK CHING KILLING SITES AND PRISONER-OF-WAR (POW) CAMPS



**Changi**  
A major POW site where about 50,000 Allied POWs – mainly British and Australian – were interned

**Changi Beach/Changi Spit Beach**  
Victims were from the Bukit Timah/Stevens Road area

**Punggol Beach**

**Tanah Merah Beach/Tanah Merah Besar Beach**  
242 victims. The site is now part of the Changi Airport runway

**Changi Road 8-mile section**  
250 victims

**Heart of the huge cordoned area**  
where the mass screenings took place

## SNAPSHOTS OF POW LIFE

**Not all camps have the same regime, with some adopting far stricter rules and controls**

Internees at Outram Gaol sleep on wooden planks, use a wooden block for a pillow and have soiled blankets

**Scabies** – an itchy skin disorder caused by parasitic mites living under the skin – plague many

**About 14,000 prisoners die of dysentery or cholera** due to poor sanitary conditions and insufficient medicines

**Severe shortage of clothing and protective footwear** results in many cases of prisoners suffering cuts and injuries



Rations – consisting of rice, tapioca and salted fish – are given to the POWs based on the amount of work they do

- Heavy duty 1,520 (daily calories)
- Light duty 1,150
- No duty 990

Health Promotion Board's average daily recommended calorie intake for men 2,200

POWs tap into war news abroad by assembling their own handmade radios – such as this small radio hidden in a matchbox (below)



## WHEN DEPRIVATION BECOMES A WAY OF LIFE

The extreme hardships under Japanese rule left a lasting mark on Singaporeans who had lived through it and serve to remind us not to take peace and security for granted. Here are some facts and figures on life during the occupation.

### FOOD RATIONING

Ration cards are issued to control supplies of rice and other essential items

**20 katis of rice** issued per person per month in 1942

**8, 6 and 4 katis** Amounts given to men, women and children respectively in 1944

NOTE: 1 kati is about 600g

### GROWING OWN FOOD

- **Tapioca, sweet potato and yam**  
Hardy tuberous plants that people grow for their carbohydrate intake in place of rice
- **Playgrounds and football fields in schools** are converted into vegetable plots



**Tapioca**  
Grows in poor soil and provides 40 per cent more starch than rice but low in protein

**Sweet potato**  
Highly nutritious and young leaves of sweet potato plants can be eaten

**Yam**  
Rich in dietary fibre, vitamins B6 and C and minerals

### INFLATION

**12-15 times the pre-war level**

The extent to which food prices balloon by the end of 1942

- **“Banana money”**  
Refers to the Japanese-issued currency as its \$10 notes bore the image of a banana tree. Rendered worthless by the end of the war

### HEALTHCARE WOES

	Reasons for diseases/ailments
Beri beri and pellagra	Malnutrition and vitamin deficiency
Typhoid, dysentery and malaria	Poor public health system and lack of proper housing

### BABIES ABANDONED

**50 babies\*** are abandoned on the doorsteps of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus every month

NOTE: \*Average figure; based on a report in The Syonan Times dated Aug 30, 1942

## JAPANISATION

The authorities made the locals embrace the Japanese language, culture, customs and practices

- Teaching of the Japanese language becomes mandatory in schools in July 1942. By the end of 1943, all subjects are taught in Japanese
- Japanese calendars are used and the people are compelled to celebrate festivals and anniversaries, such as the Emperor's birthday, in line with those in Tokyo

### POW-BUILT WAR MEMORIALS

1 Syonan Jinja for the Japanese war dead	MacRitchie Reservoir. Built in June 1942	Remnants of the ruins remain
2 Syonan Chureito for the Japanese war dead	Bukit Batok Hill. Unveiled in September 1942	Only a flight of steps remains
3 Memorial for the Indian National Army	Esplanade. Built in June 1945	Demolished after Japanese surrender



### SYONAN JINJA

The Shinto shrine, dedicated to the worship of the Sun goddess, is built near Sime Road, at the western part of MacRitchie Reservoir.



**Divine bridge**  
This wooden bridge is one of two entrances to the shrine



The area around the shrine was to have been turned into a 1,000-acre park with gardens, promenades, playgrounds and sporting facilities.



NOTE: NParks reminds the public that the Shinto shrine is out of bounds as it is located within a core nature conservation area of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve. Unauthorised entry carries a fine of up to \$2,000. Depicted here is an artist's impression of the shrine.

Sources: NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD, NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE, NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD, REFLECTIONS & MEMORIES OF WAR, THE CHANGI MUSEUM, WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/BEDSANDHERTS  
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