

Battle off Malaya 1935 9 December 1941

Background: 1941 saw growing tensions between Japan and Britain. The Japanese were committed to a land campaign in China, and looked on British support of the Chinese as part of a Western conspiracy designed to deprive Japan of her rightful destiny. The British were struggling single-handedly against the Germans and Italians, and viewed Japan as a *de facto* member of the Axis. Relations deteriorated rapidly after the summer of 1941, when the British, Dutch and Americans stopped the export of critical war materials to Japan to protest the Japanese occupation of French Indochina.

Faced with increasing diplomatic pressure and a diminishing stock of supplies (and particularly of oil), Japan either had to abandon her war against China or strike before she strangled. Internal politics, over-estimation of her capabilities and under-estimation of her opponents' will to fight all combined to push Japan to war. She planned a sweeping and multi-pronged campaign, striking at Pearl Harbor, the Philippines and British Malaya, and aimed at capturing the rich natural resources of southern Asia.

The British position in the Far East was anchored by the British naval base at Singapore, located at the tip of the Malayan peninsula. Despite Singapore's supposed fortress status, few British strategic thinkers expected Singapore to hold out for long without major naval reinforcements. Britain's wartime commitments in the Atlantic and Mediterranean meant that these reinforcements were just not available. Singapore's hope of salvation lay with the United States Navy, not the Royal Navy, and this hope was dashed by the results of the Pearl Harbor attack.

While the British did not feel that they could handle the Japanese together with the Germans and the Italians, they did hope that a show of force would keep the Japanese from war. This, and not any hope of military success, caused the Admiralty to order Admiral Tom Phillips to Singapore with the battleship Prince of Wales and the battlecruiser Repulse. They arrived too late to arrest the Japanese march to war, but once there the momentum of events and the need for the Royal Navy to do *something* meant that the ships could not be withdrawn. When the Japanese landed troops on the east coast of the Malayan peninsula, Phillips simply had to act to assist the hard-pressed army and RAF.

Judging that the threat from Japanese air and naval forces was not too great, he took his ships north into the South China Sea to strike at Japanese landing forces. He pressed northward for a dawn strike, even though he knew that his ships had been spotted and that Japanese covering forces might be steaming to intercept him.

Engagement 1:

Forces:

Imperial Japanese Navy: Vice-Admiral Ozawa Jisaburo	Division 1	Chokai Asagiri	(Takao -- flag) (Fubuki)
	Division 2	Kumano Mikuma Mogami Suzuya	(Suzuya -- flag) (Mogami) (Mogami) (Suzuya)
	Division 3	Fubuki Hatsuyuki Shirayuki	(Fubuki -- flag) (Fubuki) (Fubuki)
Royal Navy: Admiral Tom Phillips	Division 1	Prince of Wales Repulse	(King George V --flag) (Repulse)
	Division 2	Express Electra Vampire	("E" Class -- flag) ("E" Class) ("W/V" Class)

Set-up:



Japanese Division 1 begins on a course of 150 degrees with Chokai leading, Japanese Division 2 and Division 3 begin 5 inches north and 6 inches east of Division 1, with the cruisers leading the destroyers in line head, on a course of 150 degrees. Chokai is 15 inches south of the north edge and 39 inches west of the east edge.

British Division 1 begins on a course of 300 degrees in line ahead with Prince of Wales leading, British Division 2 begins on a course of 300 degrees in line abreast with 1 inch separating each ship and the center ship 1 inch directly ahead of Prince of Wales.

Prince of Wales is 33 inches south of the north edge and 21 inches west of the east edge.

Victory Conditions:

- a) 1 point for each destroyer sunk,
- b) 2 points for each cruiser sunk,
- c) 4 points for each battleship or battlecruiser sunk or left dead in the water.

Special Rules:

1. The night is overcast and rainy, with the moon not yet risen. Roll **2D6** each turn and add **3** for the normal sighting range.
2. The IJN sighting and firing number is **4**. The RN sighting and firing number is **3** for ships in formation with a ship with working R10 and **2** otherwise. R10 indicates ship has a radar set with a range of 10 inches.
3. Roll **1D6** at the start of each turn. On a roll of **1**, Japanese aircraft will illuminate 1 division of ships (either Japanese or British) with starshell at the start of the visibility phase. Determine the division by a random die roll.
4. IJN ships repair P hits on **2** or less, and all other hits on a **1**. M hits result in magazine explosions on a roll of **1** and fires on a roll of **2**. S hits result in fires on a roll of **1**.
5. RN ships repair all hits on **2** or less. M hits result in magazine explosions on a roll of **1** and fires on a roll of **2**. S hits result in fires on a roll of **1**.
6. All ships have regular fire control.

Outcome: Historically, Ozawa closed to within 20 miles of the British force but broke off to the north after Phillips turned away to the south. The Japanese had planned a night cruiser action capitalizing on their superior torpedoes, to be followed with daylight airstrikes and intervention by a stronger Japanese covering force lying further north, but Phillips's unwitting turn away convinced Ozawa that only aircraft could catch the British force before it returned to Singapore.

Events proved Ozawa correct. Although the Japanese lost contact with the British force during the night, a Japanese search aircraft found it again while Phillips was investigating a false report of a Japanese landing in southern Malaya. Unaware of the danger posed by the long-ranged Japanese torpedo bombers based in Indochina, Phillips loitered in the area investigating passing shipping. He paid for his ignorance of Japanese capabilities with his life, when Japanese aircraft overwhelmed and sank both Prince of Wales and Repulse. This was a new thing in naval warfare: the first time that unaided aircraft had sunk capital ships that were alert and underway.

Engagement 2:

Background: Assume that:

1. Phillips was able to augment his force with other ships available in the theater before the Japanese landings,
 2. Faced with superior force, Ozawa shadowed Phillips through the night rather than engaging,
 3. Bad weather (typical for the South China Sea monsoon season) interfered with Japanese plans for morning airstrikes.
- Now the Japanese decide to engage Phillips with their heavy forces in a daylight battle.

Forces:

Imperial Japanese Navy: Vice-Admiral Ozawa Jisaburo	Division 1	Chokai Asagiri	(Takao -- flag) (Fubuki)
	Division 2	Kumano Mikuma Mogami Suzuya	(Suzuya -- flag) (Mogami) (Mogami) (Suzuya)
	Division 3	Fubuki Hatsuyuki Shirayuki	(Fubuki -- flag) (Fubuki) (Fubuki)
Admiral Kondo Nobutake	Division 4	Kongo Haruna	(Kongo -- flag) (Kongo)
	Division 5	Takao Atago Maya	(Takao -- flag) (Takao) (Takao)
	Division 6	Murakumo Shinonome Shirakumo	(Fubuki -- flag) (Fubuki) (Fubuki)
	Division 7	Isonami Uranami Shikinami Ayanami	(Fubuki -- flag) (Fubuki) (Fubuki) (Fubuki)

	Division 8	Amagiri Yugiri Sagiri	(Fubuki -- flag) (Fubuki) (Fubuki)
Royal Navy: Admiral Tom Phillips	Division 1	Prince of Wales Repulse	(King George V --flag) (Repulse)
	Division 2	Australia Exeter	(Australia -- flag) (Exeter)
	Division 3	Mauritius Achilles Hobart	(Fiji -- flag) (Leander) (Sydney)
	Division 4	Express Electra Vampire	("E" Class -- flag) ("E" Class) ("W/V" Class)
	Division 5	Jupiter Encounter Isis	("J" Class -- flag) ("E" Class) ("I" Class)

Set-up:



Japanese Division 1 begins on a course of 150 degrees with Chokai leading, Japanese Division 2 and Division 3 begin 5 inches north and 6 inches east of Division 1, with the cruisers leading the destroyers in line head, on a course of 150 degrees. Chokai is 15 inches south of the north edge and 39 inches west of the east edge.

British Division 1 begins on a course of 300 degrees in line ahead with Prince of Wales leading, British Division 2 begins in line ahead directly ahead of Prince of Wales. All other Divisions follow Division 2 in numerical order. Prince of Wales is 33 inches south of the north edge and 21 inches west of the east edge.

Victory Conditions:

- a) 1 point for each destroyer sunk,
- b) 2 points for each cruiser sunk,
- c) 4 points for each battleship or battlecruiser sunk or left dead in the water.

Special Rules:

1. The normal sighting range is 20 inches – a hazy day with low overcast.
2. At the start of each turn, roll **2D6**. Japanese Divisions 4 through 8 enter on the north edge on the first turn in which the number rolled on the dice is equal to or less than the turn number. Roll **2D6** and multiply by **4** to determine how many inches from the east edge these forces enter. They enter in line ahead in any order and on any course desired by the Japanese player.
3. IJN ships repair P hits on **2** or less, and all other hits on a **1**. M hits result in magazine explosions on a roll of **1** and fires on a roll of **2**. S hits result in fires on a roll of **1**.
4. RN ships repair all hits on **2** or less. M hits result in magazine explosions on a roll of **1** and fires on a roll of **2**. S hits result in fires on a roll of **1**.
5. All ships have regular fire control.

Action of Malaya -- Weapons Tables

Royal Navy	6"	12"	24"	36"	Power
15"	3	2	1	1	6
14"	3	2	1	1	6
8"	4	3	2	1	4
6"	5	3	1	--	3
4.5", 4.7"	5	2	--	--	2
4"	4	1	--	--	4
21" Torp	3	1	--	--	4
Imperial Japanese Navy	6"	12"	24"	36"	Power
14"	3	2	1	1	6
8"	4	3	2	1	4
6"	4	2	1	--	3
4.7", 5"	4	2	--	--	2
24" Torp	4	2	1	--	5

Action of Malaya -- Ships

	Name	Type	Speed	Armor	Size	Battery	Number
R10	Prince of Wales	BB	4 1/2"	-3	5/6	14"P	2-4-1
						5.25"S	0-4-0
	Repulse	BC	5"	-2	4/6	15"P 4"S	2-3-1 0-2-0
	Australia	CA	5"	-1	3/5	8"P 4"S 21"T	2-4-2 0-2-0 2/2
	Exeter	CA	5"	0	2/4	8"P 4"S 21"T	2-3-1 0-2-0 2/2
R10	Mauritius	CL	5"	0	2/4	6"P	2-5-2
						4"S 21"T	0-2-0 2/2
	Hobart	CL	5"	0	2/4	6"P 4"S 21"T	2-4-2 0-2-0 2/2
	Achilles	CL	5"	0	2/4	6"P 4"S 21"T	2-4-2 0-1-0 2/2
	Jupiter	DD	5 1/2"	+2	1/3	4.7"P 21"T	2-3-1 3
	Express Electra Encounter Isis	DD	5 1/2"	+2	1/3	4.7"P 21"T	1-2-1 2
	Vampire	DD	5"	+2	1/3	4.7"P 21"T	1-2-1 3
	Chokai Takao Atago Maya	CA	5"	-1	4/5	8"P 4.7"S 24"T	2-5-2 0-2-0 2/2
	Kongo Haruna	BC	5"	-2	5/6	14"P 6"S 5"S	2-4-2 0-3-0 0-2-0
	Mogami Mikuma Kumano Suzuya	CA	5"	0	4/5	8"P 5"S 24"T	1-3-1 0-2-0 3/3(6) 2/2
	Asagiri Fubuki Hatsuyuki Shirayuki Murakumo Shinonome Shirakumo Isonami Uranami Shikinami Ayanami Amagiri Yugiri Sagiri	DD	5 1/2"	+2	1/3	5"P 24"T	1-3-2 4(3)