

Lieutenant Adnan Saidi

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Adnan Saidi (Lieutenant) (b. 1915, Selangor, Malaysia–d. 1942, Singapore) was an officer in C Company of the Malay Regiment's 1st Battalion, during the [Japanese invasion of Singapore](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2013-07-19_113523.html) (https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2013-07-19_113523.html) in February 1942.¹ On 14 February 1942, Adnan and his troops made a brave last stand at [Opium Hill](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_457_2005-01-04.html) (http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_457_2005-01-04.html). (Bukit Chandu), during the battle of [Pasir Panjang](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2016-07-08_143420.html) (http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2016-07-08_143420.html).² Towards the end of the battle, Adnan was taken captive and executed by the Japanese.³ For his courage and loyalty, he is widely considered to be a war hero in both Malaysia and Singapore.⁴

Early life

The eldest of six children, Adnan Saidi was born in 1915 at Kampong Sungei Ramal in Kajang, Selangor. He studied at Pekan Sungei Ramal School in the English medium and was said to be a bright and diligent student.⁵ Upon graduating, he became a trainee teacher and taught at his alma mater for over a year.⁶

In 1933, Adnan left teaching to join the [Malay Regiment](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1748_2011-01-07.html) (http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1748_2011-01-07.html), quickly distinguishing himself as a highly dedicated and disciplined soldier.⁷ In 1934, Adnan was chosen as the Regiment's best recruit, later rising to the rank of sergeant in 1936.⁸ In 1937, Adnan marched in a combined contingent, representing the Federated Malay States at the coronation parade of King George VI, receiving a coronation medal.⁹ Prior to the outbreak of World War II, he came to Singapore to attend an officer conversion course, earning his commission as a 2nd Lieutenant and becoming company officer of the 7th Platoon in C Company of the Malay Regiment's 1st Battalion.¹⁰

When he was 23, Adnan married Sophia Pakih Muda, a school teacher from his village.¹¹ The couple had three children – two sons named Mokhtar and Zainudin, along with a baby daughter who passed away shortly after the fall of Singapore in 1942.¹² As a career soldier and father, Adnan was remembered by his son Mokhtar as “serious and fierce... yet [having] a good heart”.¹³ Time with his sons was spent on walks or rugged games, as Adnan wanted them to grow up tough.¹⁴

World War II

Adnan brought his family along when he was posted to Singapore in late 1941, living together in a large house off Pasir Panjang reserved for the officers of the Malay Regiment.¹⁵ For their safety, Adnan sent his pregnant wife and two sons back to their hometown in Kajang, Selangor, just as war broke out in December 1941.¹⁶ As recalled by his son Mokhtar, Adnan told his sons to take care of themselves and behave.¹⁷ As his family members bade Adnan goodbye, they did not realise this was the last they would see of him.¹⁸

Adnan and the Malay Regiment were responsible for defending Pasir Panjang Ridge.¹⁹ With the loss of [Bukit Timah](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_730_2005-01-25.html) (https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_730_2005-01-25.html), the Pasir Panjang Ridge formed the western end of the final British defensive perimeter around Singapore City.²⁰ The ridge contained the [Alexandra](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2016-06-21_114707.html) (https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2016-06-21_114707.html) area, where important British military infrastructure, like the [British Military Hospital](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_568_2005-01-24.html) (https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_568_2005-01-24.html) (now [Alexandra Hospital](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_154_2005-01-31.html) (https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_154_2005-01-31.html)) and vital ammunition stores, was located.²¹

Deployed at Pasir Panjang Village along Reformatory Road, Adnan and C Company stubbornly resisted the Japanese 18th Division's initial attack on 13 February 1942.²² While C Company held its position firmly, they were badly outnumbered and outflanked.²³ Around midnight of 13 February, C Company was evacuated from Pasir Panjang Village.²⁴ Adnan and C Company then took up a new defensive position at Point 226 on the ridge above the Opium Factory.²⁵

Last Stand on Opium Hill

In the early afternoon on 14 February, some Japanese troops disguised as Punjabi soldiers attempted to infiltrate C Company's position on Opium Hill.²⁶ Together with 2nd Lieutenant Abbas bin Abdul Manan, Adnan detected the ruse because the disguised Japanese troops marched in columns of four and not in threes, the latter being common practice in the British military. Furthermore, the Japanese arrived from an area unlikely to be occupied by Punjabi soldiers.²⁷ C Company then opened fire at close range, killing or wounding 22 Japanese soldiers and forcing the remaining troops to retreat.²⁸

Two hours after this infiltration attempt, the Japanese troops made their final attack on C Company's position in superior numbers.²⁹ This attack completely overwhelmed the C Company defenders, who were completely isolated from an earlier Japanese breakthrough at Buona Vista Village and the burning oil that was flowing from Normanton Oil Depot.³⁰ In the bitter fighting that ensued, Adnan was mortally wounded but encouraged his troops to continue fighting.³¹ According to Dr Mubin Sheppard, a former Federated Malay States Volunteer Force officer and contemporary of Adnan, Adnan's valour and courage in the face of impossible odds stemmed from his strong belief in the Malay saying: “*biar putih tulang, jangan putih mata*”, or death before dishonour.³²

With the Japanese capture of Opium Hill, Adnan was taken captive and executed by Japanese soldiers.³³ As recounted by Corporal Yaakob, who survived the massacre by feigning death, Adnan was forced into a gunny sack before being hung upside down from a tree and bayoneted to death.³⁴ The Japanese then forbade work parties from cutting down his mutilated body for burial.³⁵ Upon learning of her husband's death in Kajang, a devastated Sophia forbade her sons from asking about their father.³⁶ Sophia survived the war but died of illness in 1949.³⁷

Legacy

After the fall of Singapore, Adnan's belongings were disposed of by his family, who feared reprisals from the Japanese.³⁸ Consequently, the few surviving keepsakes

~ Recommendations ~

Pasir Panjang

Named after a long stretch of sandy beach along the southwestern coastline of Singapore, the Pasir Panjang area developed ...

Battle of Singapore

The Battle of Singapore was fought from 8 to 15 February 1942 between Allied (mainly British Commonwealth) and Japanese ...

Battle of Bukit Timah

The battle of Bukit Timah (10–12 February 1942) took place during the Japanese invasion of Singapore. On the night of ...

Battle of Opium Hill

The battle of Opium Hill took place on 14 February 1942 during the Japanese invasion of Singapore. Part of the wider ...

Kent Ridge Park

Kent Ridge Park is a 47-hectare public park located in southwestern Singapore, on Vigilante Drive off South Buona Vista ...

Malay Regiment

The Malay Regiment was an all-Malay military force formed at Port Dickson, Malaya, on 1 March 1933 under the command ...

First Previous Next Last

https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_456_2005-

retained by his family were the three campaign medals posthumously awarded to Adnan by the British government – the 1939–1945 Star, Defence Medal and War Medal – for his service during World War II.³⁹ In recognition of his gallant defence of Opium Hill, Adnan was mentioned in despatches by the British, published in the Supplement to the London Gazette on 1 August 1946.⁴⁰ Among his family members, Adnan was one of two brothers to be killed during the war. His brother Ahmad Saidi died when the HMS *Pelanduk* was sunk en route to Australia by the Japanese.⁴¹

Today, Adnan is widely considered to be a war hero in both Malaysia and Singapore.⁴² In 1982, Adnan's alma mater in Kajang was renamed Sekolah Kebangsaan Leftenan Adnan in his honour.⁴³ In 2001, Adnan was posthumously awarded with the Dato' Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah award by the Sultan of Selangor, who conferred the title of Datuk on him.⁴⁴ The Malaysian Army announced in 2002 that their new armoured combat vehicle, the ACV 300, would be named after Adnan.⁴⁵ The first of these 211 ACVs bore the registration number ZV 90, referencing Adnan's service number in the Malay Regiment.⁴⁶

In Singapore, Adnan's name is etched on the main memorial column wall of the [Kranji War Memorial](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_183_2004-12-27.html) (https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_183_2004-12-27.html) under column number 385.⁴⁷ In 1995, a war memorial plaque in [Kent Ridge Park](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1587_2009-10-26.html) (https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1587_2009-10-26.html) was unveiled to commemorate the battle of Pasir Panjang and the Malay Regiment.⁴⁸ In 2002, a pre-war colonial bungalow at 31-K Pepys Road on Opium Hill was redeveloped as Reflections at Bukit Chandu, a World War II interpretative centre and museum dedicated to Adnan and the Malay Regiment.⁴⁹ This came about after several members of the Singaporean Malay community called for the bungalow to be preserved and converted into a museum in 1992.⁵⁰ A bust of Adnan made by local sculptor Yeo Chee Kiong was commissioned by the [National Archives of Singapore](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_52_2005-02-02.html) (https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_52_2005-02-02.html) and was later displayed prominently in the museum.⁵¹

Adnan is portrayed by actor Aaron Aziz on a permanent two-storey vertical banner installed at the Pasir Panjang [Mass Rapid Transit](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2013-11-05_131443.html) (https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2013-11-05_131443.html) station in 2011.⁵² In 2017, the Adnan Award was created by the Singapore Muslim Education Fund to recognise tertiary students who excelled in their studies against the odds or demonstrated strong leadership qualities in school uniformed groups.⁵³ In 2019, it was announced that Adnan would appear alongside eight other pioneers on the new S\$20 Singapore Bicentennial commemorative note for his "patriotism, determination and bravery".⁵⁴

Adnan has also been the subject of several films and even an animated feature. In 2000, he was portrayed by Harie Othman in *Leftenan Adnan*, a Malaysian production directed by Aziz M. Osman.⁵⁵ In 2001, a telemovie about Adnan's life and the battle of Opium Hill, titled *Bukit Chandu*, was aired on Suria.⁵⁶ In 2005, students from Nanyang Polytechnic's School of Design created an animated film called *The Battle of Bukit Chandu*, featuring Adnan and the Malay Regiment. The film won a merit award for 2D & 3D animation at Comgraph and the Animation (Best of Show) Award at the Crowbar Awards.⁵⁷

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