# Malaya (v2.5) War Game Review
Pat La Pella, June, 2025

One hour before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese launched an attack against the British Colony of Malaya. The Japanese had complete naval and air supremacy for the entire campaign and after 10 weeks of fighting, Japan held the entire Malay Peninsula. A combination of British, Australian, Indian, and Malayan forces sustained over 130,000 casualties vs. just under 10,000 casualties for the Japanese.

A war game designer faced with a completely one-sided battle must find a way to make the game interesting for both players. The designer might opt for a solitaire design, where the player must try to do better than the historical result either as the attacker or as the defender, playing against the game itself. Geoffrey Bohrer, this game's designer, chose instead to make the game interesting for 2 players by severely limiting the number of turns and setting difficult victory conditions for the Japanese.

At the same time, Bohrer chose to make this a postcard game. Malaya is also known as V-Mail Postcard Game #1. Additionally, Thomas Stevenson created a computer version of the game. I got both the board game version and the computer version 1.4 of Malaya at wargamedownloads.com (now defunct) for free. Version 2.5 is currently available at Itch.io: (https://tas1624.itch.io/malaya-v-mail-postcard-game-1). Although this review is for the computer version, both games play the same way. The board game version comes on a single page that includes the map, counters and rules. You can print the map, counters and rules on a full sheet Avery label and attach it to card stock. The counters are 2 sided so you will need to glue the front and back sides of the counters together. Computer version 1.4 runs on earlier versions of Windows, up to Windows 7, while version 2.0 runs on Windows 7 through Windows 11.

Map: The postcard sized map includes the Malay Peninsula and surrounding waters. The Malay Peninsula consists of 45 hexes and 7 of these are impassible. Certain coastal hexes can be used for amphibious movement by the Japanese, allowing those units to move up to 5 hexes instead of the usual, smaller maximum. There are several objective hexes on the coast or inland that determine the victory conditions. There are also several hexes that have roads but these roads do not affect movement. Instead, the Commonwealth player must be able to

Map Detail

trace a route through the road hexes back to Singapore or suffer losses due to insufficient supplies. A handy tab labeled TEC displays the Terrain Effects Chart on the screen. You can also see the hex number, terrain type and units within the hex in a separate display if you point the mouse to a particular hex.
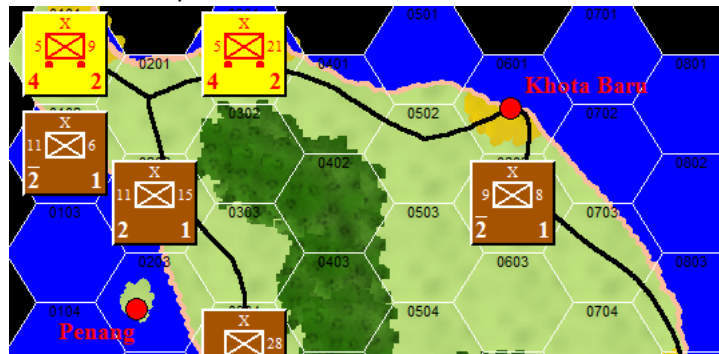
Units: There are counters for the Japanese and for the Commonwealth player. All units are infantry and have a combat value and a movement allowance. If you click the Turn Tab you will see the turn track and the scheduled reinforcements for both sides.

Game Play: Both players need to capture as many of the victory objectives as possible. Although the Commonwealth player has more strength points on the map at the beginning, Japanese reinforcements

quickly change the balance of power. The Commonwealth units are weaker and must guard against being out of supply. In addition to holding the victory objectives, the Commonwealth player must guard the amphibious landing hexes available to the Japanese and stage a slow, orderly withdrawal to Singapore. The game has pre-set locations for each unit. In the alternate scenario, the Commonwealth player may place units freely south of any hex that ends in 02.

The Japanese player may make amphibious movements which is a major advantage. A Japanese unit that starts on a hex eligible for amphibious movement may move up to 5 hexes to reach another amphibious hex. When the Japanese player selects a unit located in a hex eligible for amphibious movement the computer will shade the hexes eligible for movement including distant hexes where the amphibious unit can land. The table below identifies the hexes that are eligible for amphibious movement.

Eligible Origin Hex	Destination Hexes
601	101, 301, 804
804	601
203	507
506	807

War Game Players have their own preferences when it comes to playing a board game or a computer game so it's nice to see that this game has both options. The computer version comes with several advantages. The computer enforces the rules so there will be no errors due to misinterpretation. It keeps track of game turns and phases within game turns. When you click on a unit, the computer shadows the hexes that are in the unit's range for movement. After a player chooses units for combat, the computer will show the odds. Combat results are automatic including the die roll and the reduction or elimination of units. Units will sometimes have their movement values reduced. The computer automatically changes combat and movement values after combat. The final game result appears at the end of the last turn.

File Menu: The game starts automatically when you open the application but you can also use the File Menu as follows:

Choose Game: either Standard or Free Deployment
Message Delay: sets the time that game messages will be visible (0-5 seconds, the default is 2 seconds). 5 seconds would be best but I encountered fatal errors whenever I changed the message delay value in version 1.04. The Message screen is small and 2 seconds is often not enough time to read the entire message. Version 2.5 corrects these problems.
Credits, Rules, Quit: Displays game credits, game rules, or closes the application.

Turn Sequence:

Japanese 1st Move: Move your units and reinforcements, including amphibious movement
Japanese Combat: Choose the order of combat and the units that will attack
Japanese 2nd Move: Move units that still have a movement allowance in this phase
UK 1st Move: Move your units and reinforcements
UK Combat: Choose the order of combat and the units that will attack

UK Check Supply: Reduce or eliminate Commonwealth units out of supply
UK 2ⁿᵈ Move: Move units that still have a movement allowance in this phase

Turns pass quickly as some phases might have no action pending and resolution is swift for the active phases each turn. Allow about 15 minutes to play, more if you are using the game to recruit a new player.

Minor Problems: The game rules do leave some room for interpretation but that doesn't apply to the computer version of the game. There are several display problems, however in version 1.04. The game always starts in the upper left corner of your screen with the top 2 hexes cutoff. Scroll bars are available to view all the hexes fully. If you drag the game window to another location on your screen before you start playing, the game window retains its size. If you drag the game to another location after you start play then the game window shrinks and you will have to manually resize the window to see the entire map. The Message screen does not move from its original location if you move the game screen making it harder to see the messages. There are also a few typographical errors. Version 2.5 corrects all of these errors.

My Game Results: I played v 1.04 of Malaya 17 times acting for both sides. The results were not historic but they did demonstrate that the designer has created a well-balanced game.

| Victory Level	UK Objectives Held	Number of Games
Japanese Decisive	0	1
Japanese Tactical	1	6
Draw	2	2
UK Tactical	3	7
UK Strategic	4	1

Note that there are only 6 objectives on the map and only 6 turns in the game. It was common to see that there were more UK units than Japanese units eliminated but the UK forces were able to hold the objectives. At the end of turn 6, the computer version of the game displays a message to announce the game results but players may continue to play. When I continued to play after the end of turn 6, I found that the final result always reduced the number of UK objectives held (except for the Japanese Decisive victory and the UK Strategic victory).

I got similar results playing computer version 2.5.

Victory Level	UK Objectives Held	Number of Games
Japanese Decisive	0	1
Japanese Tactical	1	6
Draw	2	3
UK Tactical	3	6
UK Strategic	4	1
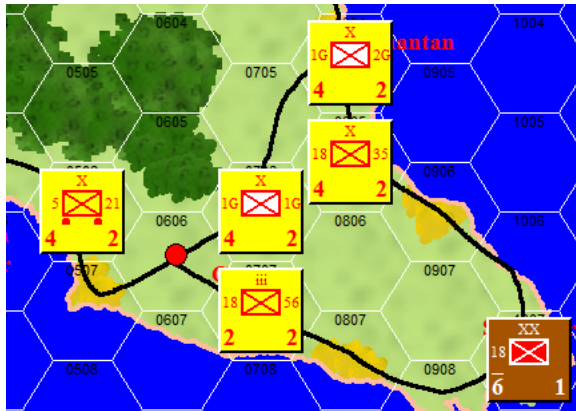
Japanese Tactical Victory – UK holds Singapore
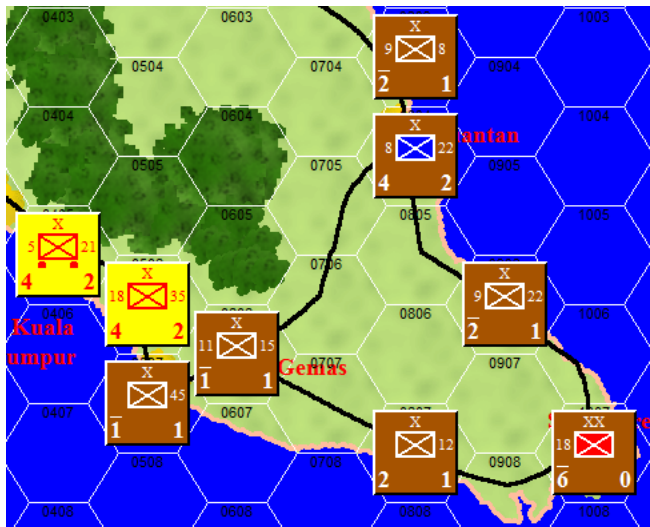
UK Tactical Victory- UK holds Singapore, Gemas, and Kuantan

Rating Introductory War Games: I would classify this game as borderline between being an introductory level game and an easy war game. While most introductory war games get average or below average ratings, I believe it is best to rate them based on their usefulness to recruit new players. An introductory war game should have short, easy to understand rules, a small map, a small number of units with different combat or movement capabilities, and be fast and easy to play. While one might rate this as an easy war game with a 5 or 6 on a scale of 10, I rate this introductory war game as a 9 on a scale of 10. It is an excellent introductory game for new war game players. The only problem with this game is that the rules need some clarification if you play the postcard version. Although the game is a two-player game, it is also highly suitable for solitaire play where the player represents both sides of the conflict.