

New book on the men who lost S'pore

Much has been written about the military disaster the fall of Singapore in 1942 was. A new book by retired British army colonel Ronald McCrum, *The Men Who Lost Singapore*, examines the less-explored role the colonial government played in the build-up to war.

"People are more fascinated by the military aspect, who was fighting whom, how did they fight that battle. But the civilians have never been subject to the same close scrutiny as the military commanders," he said. In his book, Mr McCrum, 80, says the civilian authorities led by Straits Settlements Governor Shenton Thomas had tense relations with the British military and failed to coordinate efforts to deal with the growing Japanese threat.

They clashed over the allocation of manpower. While the armed forces wanted more people to help construct defences to impede a Japanese offensive, Governor Thomas diverted labour to producing more rubber and tin for the war effort in Europe. The authorities also neglected civil defence, failing to construct sufficient air-raid shelters. Neither did they come up with a plan for managing the evacuation of civilians.

Mr McCrum spent about five years researching the book in archives in London, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. He spent a few years of his youth in Singapore when his soldier father was stationed here after the war. Mr McCrum himself joined the army, and was assistant defence attache in Singapore from 1970 to 1972.

Asked for the key message of his book, he said it is that in times of crisis, someone needs to take ultimate responsibility.

"They need to impose a supremo. A person who is totally in command of both sides, military and civilian," he said.

The Men Who Lost Singapore, published by NUS Press, is available in major bookstores later this month at \$36.

Chong Zi Liang