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## THESE GOT AWAY TOO:

*STORIES are being told by those who have arrived in New Zealand from Malaya. Some escaped from boats that were bombed, others made off in yachts, sampans, rowing boats, lifeboats, anything that they could get. Some were wrecked among the treacherous islands to the south of Singapore. Here is the story of a New Zealander in the Malayan Volunteers who did not intend being a prisoner if he could help it.*

WE got the order to cease fire at about 4 p.m. but it was not confirmed by the Malayan command so we decided that it was fifth column activity and we detained the captain who brought the order. However, in due course it was confirmed and gradually the endless noise really came to an end and the order came through to pile up our arms. Most of the chaps were pretty done and they just went off and slept. I and another bloke had determined to get away if we could rather than be taken prisoners. So we made our way back to the water front. The roads were jammed with all sorts of vehicles. We tried to get a car but either there was no petrol or they were locked or unusable in some way or another. A despatch rider however came along on his bike and gave us both a lift on the back as far as the outskirts. Then we were picked up by a huge truck. The streets in the city were lined with cars, sometimes as many as four deep. At one point there was a fine big car slap across the road. I offered to move it but the truck driver just went slap through it. "The more we smash up the better," he said. Then we worked our way to the yacht harbour. We knew it pretty well before, but it was unrecognisable now. Great warehouses were aflame, the whole steel frames a tangle of red hot iron. The waterfront was just a mass of junk and debris. However we found the harbour at last, different as it now looked.

### We Set Sail

Most of the boats had been taken. We found at last two boats, little fourteen-footers that had been pulled up on the side. The seams, as we found out later, were pretty open as the boats had been out of the water for some time; they had no masts, sails, or rudders. It was now midnight and the next four hours were pretty hectic. We fixed up a mast and found the jib of a bigger class boat that we fixed up for a mainsail, lashed on with rope. An oar served for a rudder. At four we were ready to push off and away we went with just the right breeze from the land to take us out.

The waters all around had been mined so we did not let down the centreboard although the mines were supposed to be at least six feet below the surface. The boat scraped over something as we left the harbour and we had an uneasy moment, but we decided afterwards that it must have been the funnel of a sunken vessel that we knew was somewhere near there. It was very still and calm on the water after the last few hectic weeks on land. To the south there was a big glow from some Dutch islands where they had fired the oil. Now and then we heard voices on the water and we lay

still in the bottom of the boat and were careful not to light cigarettes. When daylight came we found the sea dotted with little craft like ourselves making away under sail or oars. Water was pouring in through the opened seams of our boat, but thanks to our tin helmets, which proved excellent for bailing, we kept her from shipping too much.

### Change to a Lifeboat

All that day we sailed south trying to put as much sea as possible between ourselves and Singapore. We had no charts and wasted some time sailing down an estuary that we thought was the strait that we were looking for. That night we pulled up at an island close to a Malayan village. A Malay offered us the shelter of his veranda and we just fell asleep where we were before he had time to bring us out mattresses and covers.

When we woke we saw the sea clear and calm with just the right amount of breeze. Coming up from the beach the night before we noticed a lifeboat under a Chinese house. This looked to us just the sort of craft that we wanted to take us to Batavia. The Chinaman was friendly; he had found it abandoned on the beach and he was delighted to exchange it for our light yacht. So we cut a mast of mangrove and fitted a sail and went up to the village to get supplies. The villagers were at first hostile and shut their doors but they soon came round when they found that we could speak Malay and were prepared to pay for what we took. The Chinaman welcomed us to his table and gave us a good meal and then, fitted out with water and supplies, we pushed off again. Frankly, we both enjoyed ourselves enormously. The strain was gone. No more guns and bombs. No more bailing. Though 'planes flew over us they did not worry about small craft like us and the boat got along in fine style.

### Rowing to Sumatra

I can't go into all the details of our adventures. We had to change our plans and go to Sumatra as we heard that the Japs were attacking Java and were all over the islands that we had hoped to call at. We fell in with another boat something like ours with some British soldiers who had set out to row to Sumatra, and row there they did! We offered to cut them a mast and help them with sailing but no! they felt safer rowing, though they knew nothing about using tides, winds, or anything else. We kept with them all the rest of the way; at least we camped together at night and gave them turns at sailing along with us.

Then we had quite a few experiences with rocks and tidal rips. A rip is all

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