

# MAJOR-GENERAL BENNETT DESCRIBES ESCAPE FROM SINGAPORE

## PLAN ALMOST BROKE DOWN

BATAVIA, Thursday.

Australians fought gallantly right to the last at Singapore, which was "a living hell," said Major-General Gordon Bennett in a talk with Dutch officers at Padang to-day, after his escape from Singapore.

Major-General Bennett added that he was convinced that with American help, the British, Dutch and Chinese would defeat Japan.

Australians in Singapore held three different positions, the strength of each position being two battalions, explained General Bennett, who said that shortage of water, continuous heavy bombardment and a great Japanese numerical superiority, were the cause of surrender. Water was so short that two hospitals had only 24 hours supply. Bombing and shelling were so severe that after three days only 14 men remained out of one group of 400 Australians.

Before Singapore surrendered, he had ordered each Digger to be issued with a new uniform and two days' supply of food.

The British and Australians in Malaya were proud of the Dutch and grateful for their military achievements.

After the surrender of Singapore, Major-General Bennett endeavoured to escape with several staff officers. On arriving at a point on the coast where it had been arranged that a Chinese with a boat should await them, the plan broke down. There was no boat, but two Praus with stern sweeps swinging were seen drifting some distance out.

Staff Officer Lieutenant Walker swam out and brought them in. In these the party reached Johore. They then tramped through the jungle eating fruits to quench thirst and appease hunger. Their months in Malaya had trained them for a stealthy passage through the jungle and they were able to find their way unobserved behind the Japanese lines.

### Lucky Escape of Party

They finally reached the West Coast near Batupshat and found a Chinaman's junk. The Chinaman agreed to take them to Sumatra for adequate payment and the party took

adequate payment and the party took turns at the sweeps. However, the Chinese steered a wrong course and nearly landed them on an island which was in Japanese hands.

The Chinaman then became scared and wanted to put back to Singapore, but the officers firmly persuaded him that he had a wrong idea, though, finally, they had to take over control of the junk themselves.

They were suffering greatly from thirst and heat. After four days they were sighted by a Dutch launch, to which they transferred and, on reaching Sumatra coast, they located a

Dutch civil servant who provided a guide for the jungle trek across Sumatra to Padang.

Major-General Bennett praised the assistance and hospitality of the Dutch. "I shall never forget what Sumatra did for us," he said.

Major C. J. A. Moses, general manager of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, was included in the party who escaped with Major-General Gordon Bennett.