through. Once, he did make a connection but was yelled at and told not to ask questions to which no one knew the answer. Unperturbed, he regularly toured the hospital wards and told the sailors to be patient. Things would turn out all right, somehow.

Then, the headquarters called Wassell and told him to get his less seriously wounded cases ready for evacuation. He was ordered to bring everyone who could stand a rough sea passage. There was urgency in the voice on the other end of the line. Wassell did not tell the men that night because he felt they would be too excited to sleep. An eight-hour train ride to the Java coast would be arduous enough.

Soon after dawn, Wassell informed the sailors. Until 10 AM, he rushed around preparing for their departure. Each patient had to be officially released by the methodical Dutch doctors. When the 41 bluejackets were loaded aboard ambulances to head for the local railway station, the entire hospital staff stood and waved. The chief Dutch doctor wished them bon voyage, and Wassell declared that he would never forget the kindness of the Dutch and Javanese.

The American doctor and his charges then began the journey back to Tjilatjap, the port to which the sailors had come after their ordeal in the Makassar Strait. The 50-mile journey was slow, and the stifling heat became more intense as the train chugged down to the coastal plain. During its frequent stops, Wassell dashed outside to buy food and drinks for his men. The train was delayed for an hour at one station because of an air raid alert.

When the train finally rolled into the Tjilatjap terminal, Wassell tried to reassure the sailors, exhausted from their journey. He told them to try and appear to be in better condition than they actually were. If they looked too sick, they would not be taken aboard ship because they would be too much of a burden if the vessel were attacked at sea.

Tjilatjap was a mass of humanity. The railway station and the town swarmed with Dutch and British troops, refugees from the interior, and local officials trying to keep order. There was confusion, but no panic.

Wassell assembled his men on a hotel terrace and went to find a ship that would accommodate them. He located the navy headquarters on the crowded dock and was told to bring his sailors there immediately. He did so, shepherding them to the waterfront, where several Dutch steamers waited to sail at nightfall. Most of them were already crammed with passengers. The wounded sailors waited patiently near one of the largest vessels, the *Breskens*. The sun

National Archives

Commander Corydon Wassell addresses NAS personnel after returning home to the United States.

blazed down, and there was no shade on the dock for the stretcher cases. A Dutch officer standing on the gangway of the *Breskens* demanded a permit, which Wassell did not have. His navy papers were waved aside, and he was told to talk to a captain in one of the dock offices.

Struggling through the crowds, the doctor bumped into a high-ranking U.S. naval officer – the one he had talked to by telephone the previous night. He offered to help Wassell get his men aboard the *Breskens* until he saw the pathetic looking sailors on stretchers. The officer told the doctor that he would have to take them back to the hospital in the interior because they would have no chance if the steamer were torpedoed. But he did help the walking wounded get aboard the *Breskens*.

Wassell was downcast, but he had no alternative. Waving farewell to his walking wounded, he had the stretcher cases reloaded on the ambulances for the return to the railway station. The hospital train had already left, but the resourceful Arkansan persuaded the Javanese authorities to couple an extra boxcar to another train that was about to depart for the interior. The stretcher cases were loaded aboard, and the train puffed out of the station, rattling through the countryside on a cool night.

It was a sad journey, and the sailors did little talking. Wassell was discouraged, but he refused to show his feelings to them. During a brief delay at a junction, he telephoned the hospital and told the chief doctor that he was returning with nine sailors – eight on stretchers and one of the walking wounded who had wandered off in Tjilatjap for a few beers and a tryst with a pretty Javanese girl.

The train rolled on. Puffing a cigarette in a long white holder, Wassell watched the sleeping sailors and realized that they were his men now, and not just a few stragglers. They mattered to him, and he pledged to get them to safety whatever the odds. Corydon Wassell mused about his earlier life and what had brought him all the way to Java.

The doctor was born on July 4, 1884, in Little Rock, the son of Albert and Leona (McAlmont) Wassell. The family had immigrated from Kidderminster in the English Midlands. After earning a medical degree from the University of Arkansas in 1909 and completing postgraduate courses in internal medicine at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, young Corydon started practicing as a doctor in the village of Tillar in Drew County, Ark. It was a hard life with few material rewards, but that did not matter to the young idealist whose singular purpose in life was to help others. He worked among poor tenant farmers and sharecroppers, and organized a group medicine plan for black field workers. Wassell married a young village teacher.

One day in 1913, the country doctor went to the Tillar Episcopal Church to hear the president of Suchow University in China speak about the needs of his countrymen. Wassell felt a compulsion to go to China. His wife supported him, and a few months later they were on their way to the Far East as medical missionaries. They set up home in Wuchang on the Yangtze River. Wassell worked there in the Boone University Hospital, studied Chinese, and became a father. His medical skills and compassionate approach were soon well known, and by 1918 he was in charge of the Chinese National Red Cross. The Wassells' fourth child was born in Little Rock during a brief leave in 1919.

In 1921, Wassell found himself heading International Red Cross relief efforts after the Han River levee break and during the subsequent famine. He studied neurology, served as a professor of parasitology in Changsha, published articles on encephalitis, and did pioneering research on amoebic dysentery. Through tireless field work in some of the most remote and backward areas of China, he discovered the source of a plague that was ravaging the people. From 1923 through 1927, he served as the port medical officer and maritime medical officer at Kiukiang and also found time to run a private practice and consult at a Roman Catholic hospital. His wife died, and Wassell later married a missionary nurse, Madeline Day, of Englewood, N.J.

Meanwhile, the energetic doctor had been appointed a lieutenant junior grade in the U.S. Naval Reserve Medical Corps in 1924. He was promoted to lieutenant two years later. During 1927, he was on unpaid active duty with the gunboats of the famed Yangtze River Patrol,