

bullets extracted from his legs. Asking Wassell for a cigarette, the Tommy said he had been hit during an attack on the airfield. The doctor was informed by telephone later that one of the 13 planes had been damaged and there would be no room for his wounded sailors. Again, he hid his disappointment from them.

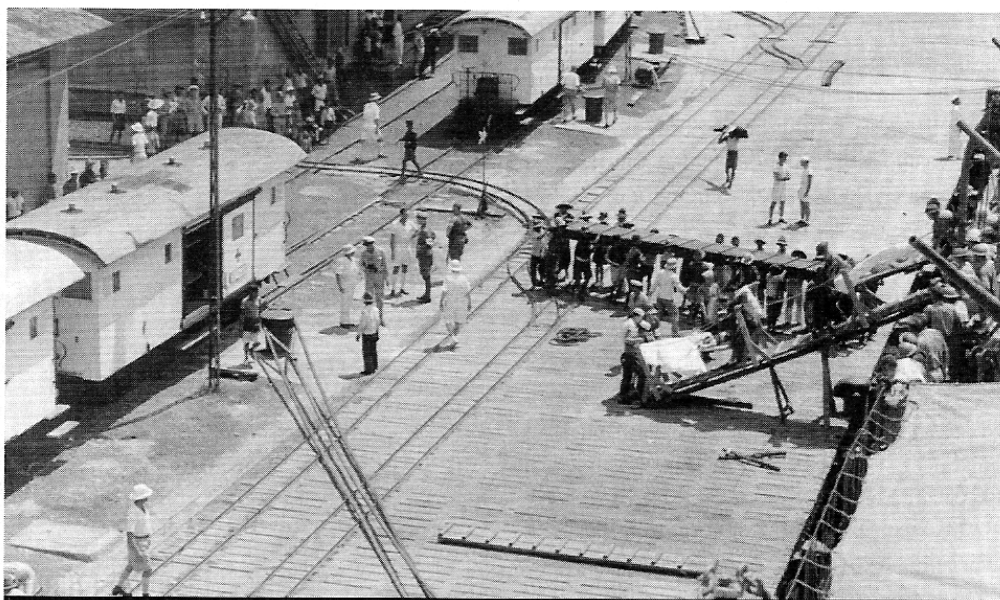
Unable to sleep that night, Wassell heard an urgent knock on the door of his quarters. It was the chief Dutch doctor, who told him, "The enemy has landed on Java!" There was now no time to lose, but what could Wassell do? He tried unsuccessfully for an hour to telephone Tjilatjap, and then, without waking his men, wandered outside. He walked into the nearby town, where crowds were gathering at street corners. He sensed tension in the air.

The American doctor strolled around in the night, his spirits flagging. Just before dawn, several dusty military staff cars and trucks rumbled into the town and drew up in front of the busy Grand Hotel. It was the advance guard of a retreating British Army convoy. Wassell's hopes rose once more. He pursued the commanding officer, an aloof and languid man, who entered the hotel to ask where he could buy food and supplies. Wassell asked if the convoy was bound for Tjilatjap. Told that it was, Wassell asked if he and his nine wounded men could ride along.

The British officer agreed readily and told Wassell to bring his men there within two hours. Dashing back to the hospital, the doctor awakened the sailors and told them that the British convoy was probably their last chance to get out of Java. Meanwhile, he managed to get through by telephone to Tjilatjap and was told that there were still some ships there. The sailors were enthusiastic about returning to the coast. "Good for you, boys," said Wassell. "Let's get going!"

Without delay, the nine sailors and their guardian angel joined the British convoy. The worst cases were loaded into an old Ford car, and the rest rode in a truck. Wassell took the steering wheel of the Ford, although he had not driven for several years. Before the sun was high, the long convoy—staff cars, 200 supply trucks, wheeled antiaircraft guns, field kitchens, and mobile repair trucks—rolled out of the town. This was it. Wassell and his bluejackets were on their way again.

The vehicles were spaced out to minimize the possibility of air attacks, and everyone was told to jump out and take cover if Japanese planes appeared. Wassell wrestled with the old Ford over twisting, narrow country roads, threading his way past Dutch vehicles and Javanese ox carts. When the convoy occasionally made a halt, the British soldiers shared their bully beef,



Wounded Allied servicemen are unloaded from the USS *Marblehead* on the island of Java in 1942.

chocolate bars, and brewed tea with the American sailors.

The convoy rumbled on into the night, easing over bridges that had been mined to hamper the approaching Japanese. The vehicles snaked across a long suspension bridge over a river, and Wassell handed out scotch whiskey to Dutch and Javanese guards as they scrutinized every vehicle and its occupants. Then, in the middle of the night, Wassell and his men found themselves back in Tjilatjap.

The tireless doctor went into a crowded hotel, procured some food and beer for his men, and managed to find a room for them. A Dutch officer told Wassell that he would help him find a ship the following morning. As a dawn sea mist drifted in and enemy planes droned high above the port, Wassell hired a Javanese launch and rode out to one of two ships anchored in the Tjilatjap harbor. She was the *Janssens*, a small inter-island steamer.

The doctor clambered aboard and found that the captain was not eager to ferry wounded American sailors. Wassell pleaded his case emphatically, and the captain reluctantly agreed, although there was no sick bay, and no medical supplies were aboard, the captain warned, and the doctor would be solely responsible for his men.

Rushing back to shore excitedly, Wassell learned that his party had been depleted to seven men. One sailor had gone on ahead with a British evacuation officer, and another had been left at a medical aid station because he was too ill to continue. At dusk and under heavy rain that day, Wassell and some British soldiers carried the seven *Marblehead* sailors piggyback fashion aboard the *Janssens*. She was crowded, but the doctor found space for

his men's mattresses under an awning on the stern deck.

It was dark when the laden little steamer nosed out of the harbor, zigzagging through a minefield to the open sea. Wassell gazed back for the last time toward Tjilatjap, where British troops were setting up antiaircraft batteries on the pier. They had been ordered to make a last stand, and the American doctor felt sad because he knew they had little chance of survival against the superior Japanese forces now pushing across Java.

Into the night, the *Janssens* butted through the sea and the rain. She had been built for 200 passengers but now carried twice that number. Designed for 11 knots, her diesel engine could only labor along at seven and a half.

Wassell and his seven men relaxed for the first time since leaving the Dutch hospital. They were finally on their way to freedom, and the threat of enemy submarines, surface ships, and airplanes did not shake their spirits. The steamer headed due east, through the night and into the next day, which dawned bright and cloudless. The wounded sailors felt better after a night's sleep on the cool deck, and the food aboard the *Janssens* was ample.

Wassell brought beer to the sailors, and some of them took a faltering walk on the deck. The steamer was crammed with refugees of various nationalities—Dutch, Javanese, Australian, British, and American. Some of them offered to give up their cabins to the wounded sailors, but the weather was warm and their doctor felt they were better off on deck—and they were closer to the lifeboats.

The *Janssens* forged on as Dutch sailors manned small guns on the bow and stern and 30-cal. machine guns on each side of the