

# U.S.S. Marblehead (CL-12)

To contribute photos of  
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## Marblehead Biography David Abernathy

"Larry" David Abernathy was born on 22 MAY 1913 in Pebble, Kerr County, TX to Jessie Fonzo Abernathy, a ranch hand, and Alice Leona Mullins (1893–?), a homemaker. This union also produced Allen Fonzo (1915–1979), also born in Pebble, and Claude, who appears to have been stillborn in 1916.

Once located a few miles west of county seat Kerrville, Pebble is a [ghost town](#) today. When Larry was born, its mail was delivered by two postmen on the backs of their horses, '[Ole Blue](#)' and '[Old Streeter](#)', from a post office from a room at the end of a rancher's porch. The post office closed at the end of 1915, perhaps a sign to Jessie that the family should move on. They did.

It is unclear what happened to Jessie's first wife, Alice, but in 1921, Larry's dad married Vesta Callie May Stapleton (1890–1970), possibly in Lamar, Texas. She bore him James Everette (1922–2013). Jessie's third wife, Alverta "Virdie" Fryar (1904–1992), married him in 1923 in Montgomery County, AR, and bore sons Columbus Eugene (1925–1996), Isaac "Ike" L. (1927–2010), possibly Edward (1931–?) - the records are inconsistent on this, and twins Bobby Gene (1934–1947) and Billy Gene (1934–2019; see Billy's obituary on page 2), all born near Mount Ada, AR.

obtained in Texas and later in Arkansas, but he enlisted in the Navy on 14 SEP 1934 in Little Rock, AR, in the depths of the Great Depression, and re-enlisted 3 DEC 1938. Prior to joining *USS Marblehead (CL-12)*, known to her crew as *Marby*, Larry served on the [USS Parrot \(DD-218\)](#), a Clemson-class destroyer just off the [Yangtze River Patrol](#) in China and then in the Philippines having anti-mine and sound detection gear installed. [Electricians Mate](#) 1<sup>st</sup> Class (EM1c) Larry joined *Marby* 5 MAR 1941 from the U.S. Naval Receiving Station, Cavite, Philippines.

Larry would serve aboard *Marby* almost two years. During that time, he experienced the bombing of the ship on 4 FEB 1942, its subsequent escape to New York, and some its wartime exploits in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, all of which are more fully described in [Marby's own biography](#).

On 11 AUG 1942, while *Marby* was still undergoing post-bombing repairs in Brooklyn, took leave and married Vashti Isabelle Weston (1916 - 2003), daughter of Isabelle Powell (1889-1962) and William Jacob Weston (1883-1975) of Meyers, Garland County, AR, about 37 miles southeast of Oden where the Abernathy family lived. Larry and Vashti may have been high school sweethearts.

Other than the trauma of seeing friends aboard *Marby* die or suffer badly from burns, came through the bombing off Java unhurt. He was aboard *Marby* when, on 15 OCT 1942, her five-and-a-half-month overhaul complete, she redeployed to the mid-Atlantic, operating mainly out of Recife, Brazil and hunting U-boats and blockade runners. She frequented such ports as [Georgetown](#), [Ascension Island](#); [Montevideo](#), [Uruguay](#); [St. Croix](#), [St. Thomas](#), [Trinidad](#), [Cuba](#), [Puerto Rico](#) and other Caribbean nations.

On 26 JAN 1943, Larry left *Marby* for Base Fox (Recife, Brazil) for further transfer to Philadelphia, PA and duty on the *Schuylkill* detail. At the time, the [USS Schuylkill \(AO-76\)](#), a fleet oiler, was in the final stages of construction at Chester, PA. Launched on 16 FEB 1943 and commissioned at Baltimore, MD, on 9 APR 1943, *Schuylkill* completed shakedown operations off the east coast and left Norfolk on 20 MAY 1943. She took on her first cargo of fuel at Baytown, TX, transited the Panama Canal, and sailed to Seattle, WA. Later, at San Pedro, CA, she loaded oil for the Aleutian Islands, arriving at Dutch Harbor, Unalaska, on 5 JUL 1943. Enroute, she completed her first fueling at sea, replenishing *USCG Haida* in the Gulf of Alaska.



USS Schuylkill off Norfolk, VA, Apr '43  
Source: NavSource.org

# U.S.S. Marblehead (CL-12)



USS Sitkoh Bay delivering both aircraft and boats  
Source: NavSource.org

In early-1944 in Astoria, OR, Larry from *Schuylkill* [USS Sitkoh Bay \(CVE-86\)](#), an escort aircraft carrier, then being completed in Astoria, OR. Larry no doubt was involved in the fitting out of the vessel prior to her commissioning on 28 MAR 1944, at which time he appeared as the first name in her inaugural muster roll. By then he was a Chief Electricians Mate (CEM). Following shakedown cruises off the Pacific Northwest, *Sitkoh Bay* took on cargo and passengers at Alameda, CA and sailed on 30 APR 1944 for Pearl Harbor, the first of many voyages shuttling planes, pilots, and aircrews between the front line and rear areas in the Pacific,

venturing in late-44 to the Marshall and Admiralty Islands. In JAN 1945, she focused on replenishing the 3rd Fleet in the Central Pacific at ports such as [Apra Harbor, Guam](#), Roi Island, and Eniwetok in the [Marshalls](#); and [Ulithi Atoll](#) in the Western Caroline Islands, missions supported Allied campaigns in the Philippines, [Iwo Jima](#), and [Okinawa](#). *Sitkoh Bay's* only action came on 7 APR 1945 while she was delivering Marine Air Group 31 to Okinawa and her anti-aircraft gunners 'splashed' a would-be kamikaze 100 yards off her port side. Thereafter, she resumed replenishment duties. accepted a promotion to Warrant Electrician while aboard the [USS Sitkoh Bay \(CVE-86\)](#), while at Pearl Harbor. He was discharged on 20 NOV 1945.

Larry and Vashti were listed, respectively, as a serviceman for Sears & Roebuck and as a teacher at Gardner School in Hot Springs, AR directory in 1949. Larry was listed as an electrician in a San Diego, CA residential directory in 1959. Perhaps he was working for the Navy in a civilian capacity at that time.

Larry died on 1 DEC 1985. Vashti later remarried to Garland Milholen. She died on 6 DEC 2003. Larry and Vashti are buried in Peak Cemetery, Royal, Garland County, AR, about 20 miles east of where they spent much of their time after WWII.



Vashti in her later years  
Source: www.legacy.com

## Larry's Brother Bill – Star Athlete, Educator and Civic Leader

Larry's brother, Billy G. Abernathy passed away in 23 MAY 2019. "Bill" was a basketball star at Oden High School leading State Runner-up and State Champion teams in 1953 and 1954, respectively. Marrying childhood sweetheart, Mary Jo Maddox, in 1954, Bill attended Arkansas Tech University on a scholarship, obtaining a degree in physical education in 1957 (and later a Master's in Administration from the University of Arkansas).

Convinced that education was key to improving one's life, Larry became a teacher and school administrator for 60 years in California and Arkansas. He worked in the administration of Conway and Greenbrier public schools before becoming Superintendent of the Mena School District in 1972 and President of Rich Mountain Community College in 1987. Elected to Arkansas' House of Representatives for three terms, he Chaired its Education Committee. He received the Champion of Rural Arkansas Lifetime Achievement Award of the Arkansas Rural Community Alliance in 2014 and served as Executive Director of the Rural Arkansas Education Association until 2017.

Family was his greatest joy - Mary Jo and their three children and spouses, seven grandchildren, one great grandchild, nieces and nephews, extended family, and friends. He was happiest spending time with them at Lake Ouachita, where he taught many a youngster to water ski. An avid deer and quail hunter and fisherman, his fish-fries were legendary. Source: FindaGrave.com

Larry is listed on *page 234* of the book [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#).

Don't forget to read the biography of the ship at [Marby's Biography](#).

*Biography by Steve Wade, son of Frank V. Wade, BM2c, USS Marblehead 1939-1945, with help from Ancestry.com members foglpap and MK de Medici Chiarini, and from Ancestry.com, Wikipedia.com, and Newspapers.com.*

*Corrections, additions and new photos are welcomed by email to [spwade@gmail.com](mailto:spwade@gmail.com).*