

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



Jack Abney Jr.  
Photo courtesy of Ancestry.com

## Marblehead Biography John Wesley Abney Jr.

John Wesley “Jack” Abney was born on 17 DEC 1920 in Gregg County, TX, the oldest of the three kids of Roy Wilson Abney (1895-1949), a postal clerk from Alabama, and Josephine Marian Turpin (1902-1992), a homemaker from Texas and the daughter of John Wesley Turpin, Sr. and Louella Welch (1876-1911). His siblings were: Virginia Mellonie (1924–2009) and Wilber Kenneth (1925–1957).

Jack attended Longview High School. Its 1943 yearbook saluted former students then serving in the military. Jack's name was first on the list as he had enlisted in the Navy on 8 DEC 1939 in Dallas, TX. He was assigned service # 356-22-04. On 24 FEB 1940, he was received aboard battleship [USS Nevada BB-36](#) as an Apprentice Seaman (AS) fresh from the Naval Training School in San Diego, CA. He spent most of 1940 aboard Nevada operating out of Pearl Harbor, HI, according to the Longview News Herald. He was promoted to [Fireman](#) 2<sup>nd</sup> Class (F2c) late that year.

The same newspaper cited Jack as still being in Pearl Harbor at the time of the Japanese attack. This was incorrect because three months earlier, on 4 AUG 1941, he was transferred to the [USS West Virginia BB-48](#) for further transfer to the Asiatic Station. On 14 SEP 1941, Jack was received as a F1c on the *USS Marblehead* (the “Marby” to her crew) from Asiatic Fleet veteran [USS Henderson AP-1](#), a transport ship. Both vessels were in Philippine waters at the time, and the exchange probably occurred at Cavite.

Jack would serve 1 ½ years on *Marby*. The events of this period, including the bombing of the ship on 4 FEB 1942, its subsequent escape to New York, and its wartime exploits in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea are more fully described in [Marby's own biography](#). Jack would see much of that action.

Other than the trauma of seeing friends aboard the ship die or suffer badly from burns, Jack came through the action off Java uninjured, and he was aboard Marby when, on 15 OCT 1942, her five-and-a-half-month overhaul complete, she sailed out of New York to rejoin the war effort. She redeployed to the mid-Atlantic, operating mainly out of Recife, Brazil, 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.

Sailors will be sailors, and Jack was no different. He appeared in *Marby's* muster rolls on 31 MAR 1943 with disciplinary action for being AWOL for eight hours. This cost him 15 days of confinement, a \$48 docking of his pay, and six months' probation. Eleven other individuals received similar punishment on that day, two of which had more serious infractions “Creating a disturbance ashore” and “Intoxicated aboard ship.” The ship was in Rio de Janeiro at the time, so one can easily picture a barroom brawl in this quintessential sailor's tale.

*Marby's* 14 APR 1943 entry at Recife, Brazil recorded Jack's transfer to “Fox Base for duty.” He reappears 14 days later, his rank intact, in the muster rolls of the [USS Pollux AKS-4](#), a Castor-class general stores issue ship responsible for delivering and disbursing goods and equipment to locations in war zones. She operated in the Atlantic theater until 24 AUG 1943 when she transited the Panama Canal for duty in the Pacific.

Jack's was the first name on the first muster roll of the [USS Shea DM-30](#) on 30 SEP 1944, the day of the ship's commissioning in New York City. As a [Watertender](#) 1<sup>st</sup> Class (WT1c), he no doubt he had been part of the detail which fitted her out for commissioning. Jack was in Shea's engine room eight months later when, on the morning of 4 MAY 1945, off the coast of Okinawa, a kamikaze Japanese Yokosuka MXY-7 Ohka<sup>1</sup> “closed on *Shea* at an estimated 520 mph and crashed into her bridge structure, entering the sonar room, traversing the chart house, passageway and batch, and exploding on the surface of the water on the

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<sup>1</sup> A purpose-built, rocket-powered human-guided kamikaze attack aircraft employed by Japan against Allied ships towards the end of World War II. Source: Wikipedia

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opposite side of the ship. Fires broke out and Shea lost all communications, two 5-inch gun mounts; and the forward port 20-millimeter guns. The main director jammed, and the gyro and computer were rendered unserviceable. One officer and 34 men were killed, and 91 others were wounded. Jack was unharmed. Shea was later cited for "outstanding heroism in action while attached to an Amphibious Force during operations for the seizure of Japanese-held Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, from 24 MAR to 4 MAY 1945.



USS Shea DM-20  
Photo courtesy of  
[HMS Cavalier Association](#)

On 1 MAR 1946, Jack was transferred to the [USS Foss DE-59](#), a destroyer escort named for the first U.S. service casualty of WWII. The last reliable Navy muster roll entry for Jack was for the [USS Donner LSD-20](#), a Casa Grande-class dock landing ship, named for Donner Pass, in the Sierra Nevada mountains, where the Donner Party became snowbound 1846–47. That entry on 6 OCT 1947 showed Jack being transferred to Norfolk, VA for leave and discharge. The naval units with which he served received tree battle stars during WWII.

On 15 JUL 1949, Jack reenlisted, this time in the Army. He transferred from Oakland, CA to Korea in SEP 1952. There, a month after he arrived, his luck at dodging death, first on the Marby and then on the USS Shea, ran out. On 30 OCT 1952, a letter that his mother had sent him a few weeks before was returned to her in Longview. On the unopened envelope were the words "Killed in Action" written in pencil. She called Jack's wife in Arkansas. She too was totally surprised by the news. Both hoped the information was wrong, as it had been twice before, and they called Washington only to get an inconclusive response. Several hours later, the news was confirmed.

Jack had been killed in Korea on 20 OCT 1952. He was a Sergeant (service # RA 19 335 127) in the U.S. Army Military Police and a Military Police Supervisor with the 8202<sup>nd</sup> Army Unit, Korean Military Assistance Group (KMAG). He was killed while advising the South Koreans in action in North Korea. For his career of service, Jack was awarded the Purple Heart, the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean Presidential Unit Citation and the Republic of Korea War Service Medal. Jack was buried at Grace Hill Cemetery, Longview, Gregg County, TX, about a mile from his parents' home. Jack appears to have married to a woman named Edna (1925-1997) in 1951, but no records were located on where she was from, her maiden name or how they met.

Jack's brother, Wilbur K. Abney, was also served in WWII. He married Tenna Louise Turley on 14 AUG 1944 in Maricopa, AZ. Wilbur, a Major in the US Air Force, died in 1957 at age 34 along with fifteen others when the Boeing KC-97 Stratofreighter, a strategic tanker aircraft, crashed near on a northern Arizona mountain side while on a classified mission. Wilbur is buried in Mesa City Cemetery, Mesa, AZ.

Jack Abney 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 from a multitude of Ancestry.com, Wikipedia.com, Newspapers.com, and other Internet records.*

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