

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



Marblehead Biography Thaddeus Quentin Alexander

Thaddeus Quentin Alexander, “Quinn” to family and close friends, was born 7 Aug 1921 in Columbus, Ohio. He was the second son of Brooklyn, NY-born Edward Valentine Alexander (1887–1962), a career U.S. Army infantry soldier, and homemaker, Octa Sophia Thomas (1892-1980) from Berlin, Ohio, just west of Pittsburgh, PA. Octa’s father was a streetcar motorman.

Octa and her twin brother were the oldest of seven kids. This role provided good training for the brood she would rear as she followed her soldier husband to places like Arlington, VA; Puerto Rico; the Philippines; Hot Springs, AR; Hennepin County, MN; Erie Proving Ground, Ottawa County, OH; and Southern California. Quinn was the second oldest of Edward and Octa’s four children. His siblings included Lawrence Whipple (1917-1998), Elinor V. (1924-2012); and Evelyn V. 1(926-?).

It is not surprising that Quinn thought of joining the Navy. As indicated above, his father’s career had the family traveling widely in Quinn’s early years. For example, he was seven years old when he, his parents and his siblings arrived in San Francisco from Manila aboard the *USAT US Grant* on 30 Jul 1928, and he was fifteen when he, his mom, and his sisters arrived in New York from San Juan, Puerto Rico on 24 Aug 1936 aboard the *SS Coamo*.

World War Two in Europe was just ten weeks old when Quinn joined the Navy on 14 Nov 1939 in Minneapolis, MN. He was allocated service #3286203 and sent to Great Lakes Naval Training Station just north of Chicago for basic training. Following graduation, he traveled to the U.S. west coast where, on 27 Jan 1940, he joined his first ship, *USS Lexington (CA-2)*, or ‘*Lady Lex*’ to her crew. (Originally, *Lady Lex* had been ordered as a battle cruiser, but construction orders evolved in the 1920’s to accommodate naval air warfare, and eventually she was commissioned as America’s second aircraft carrier in 1927 in Quincy, MA. Following her shakedown cruise, she joined the Pacific fleet at San Pedro, California on 7 Apr 1928.)

On 14 Mar 1940, Quinn was advanced to Fireman 3rd Class (F3c) as *Lady Lex* began participation in Fleet Problem XXI, the first Fleet wargames that did not involve all the active fleet. In response to WWII in Europe, the US Navy had been called upon to provide "Neutrality Patrols" in the Atlantic Ocean, and over sixty warships were engaged in those patrols when Fleet Problem XXI began in the Pacific on 1 Apr 1940.

Fleet Problem XXI was preceded in March by mobilization exercises designed to simulate rising tension with Japan, America’s rival in the Pacific. Those exercises allowed the Navy to practice distribution of secret orders, personnel recall, contingency planning, and other aspects of a pre-war crisis. By 3 Apr, opposing fleet units assumed their starting positions, one representing the US, operating out of Hawaii and Guam, and the other playing Japan, but operating out of U.S. West Coast ports. Thus, Quinn and his shipmates got a mock-taste of the Pacific war that would soon materialize.

On May 7, just days after Fleet Problem XXI concluded, the fleet received orders to stay in Hawaii as a deterrent against Japan's growing aggressiveness. That decision was controversial. Admiral James Richardson, U. S. Fleet Commander in Chief, protested that it left the fleet vulnerable to air attack, as had been demonstrated by years of successful simulated air attacks evaluated in previous Fleet Problems. After months of objection, Admiral Richardson was fired, but his views would soon prove correct.

In the interim, Quinn, by then a F2c, was reassigned to ASTA (Asiatic Station), the shifting home of the Asiatic Fleet which was Shanghai, China in summertime, and Manila, Philippines during the winter months. His orders instructed him to get to Manila via *USS Chaumont (AP-1)*, one of two veteran Navy transport ships which kept the Asiatic Fleet supplied with sailors.¹ On 21 Nov 1941, sixteen days before Admiral

¹ The other transport was the *USS Henderson (AP-5)*.

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

Richardson's concerns flashed into infamy, Quinn was received aboard *Chaumont* from the Naval Receiving Station at Pearl Harbor for further forwarding to ASTA.

Chaumont left Pearl Harbor on 29 Nov 41 as part of the *Pensacola Convoy*². Unbeknownst to the convoy's crews and passengers three events would soon render their orders impossible to comply with:

- First, on 25 Nov 41, Admiral Thomas Hart, the farsighted commander of the smaller, largely obsolete, Asiatic Fleet, met with his senior officers and, in anticipation of hostilities, ordered them to depart Manila immediately, quietly, and without fanfare, and to disperse southward into the Dutch East Indies (NEI; today's Indonesia). Thus, these ships, such as the light cruiser *USS Marblehead (CL-12)*, and their crews, would live to fight another day.
- Second, the Pacific Fleet, which had remained in Hawaii throughout the escalating crisis with the Japanese, was attacked there on 7 Dec 41. Fortunately, American carriers like *Lady Lex*, and other capital ships such as heavy cruiser *USS Pensacola (CA-24)*, which had departed Pearl Harbor on 29 Nov 41, were at sea and avoided the attack.
- Third, within hours of the disaster at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese hit the Philippines with a sustained invasion that would culminate with the fall of Corregidor on 6 May 1942.

Because of these events, *Pensacola*, *Chaumont*, and other ships diverted to Brisbane, on Australia's east coast. Following that stop, *Chaumont* continued to Port Darwin on Australia's north coast where many of the Asiatic Fleet remnants had also gathered. There, on 7 Jan 42, Quinn and eighty-three other sailors transferred to *USS Marblehead*, or *Marby* as she was lovingly referred to by her crew. At the time, *Marby* was serving as *Radio Darwin* to coordinate the regrouping of surviving Allied ships from Southeast Asia.

On 15 Jan 42, the American-British-Dutch-Australian (ABDA) Command was activated. It included the remnants of the Asiatic Fleet. Its main objective was controlling the "Malay Barrier", a notional line running down the Malay Peninsula through Singapore and the southernmost islands of the NEI. ABDA was all that stood in the way of the Japanese. British Field Marshall



3 May 41 - Pearl Harbor from 17,000 feet - *Sitting Ducks in the Pacific*

Source: U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command

The Asiatic Fleet, Nov 1942

"On November 25, the MARBLEHEAD sailed out of Manila Bay for Dutch North Borneo. Only two days before Admiral Hart called a conference of his senior officers. There weren't too many as the 'Asiatic Fleet' actually applied only to the MARBLEHEAD and HOUSTON, thirteen overaged destroyers of World War I vintage, and their tender BLACK HAWK, twenty-nine submarines with their tenders, the CANOPUS, HOLLAND and OTIS, the tanker PECOS, a few minesweepers plus some antiquated gun boats and the five Yangtze River gun boats. The air arm consisted of 30 PBYS of PATWING 10 tendered by the LANGLEY. The BOISE joined later... 'Gentlemen,' Hart began, 'the negotiations going on in Washington have reached a critical stage and I have come to the conclusion that the time has come to put the initial phase of our basic plan into effect at once, that is the deployment of our surface craft to the southward so they will not be trapped in Manila Bay if hostilities actually begin. Robinson, I want you to take command of a detachment consisting of the Marblehead and the Black Hawk and the destroyers, then proceed to Dutch North Borneo and await developments. I have secretly informed the Dutch Admiral of this move but no one else so you should make your visit appear as much as possible to be of a routine nature. ... If everything goes well in Washington, I will call you back in a couple of weeks. Otherwise, goodbye, good luck and God bless you!"

Excerpts from the Diary of Admiral A.G. Robinson, then Captain, and *Marby's* skipper. Robinson willed his diary to John P. Bracken, then a Lt. Jg. and his Aide. Source: Bracken's 1993 book *The Call of the Siren*.

² Pensacola Convoy consisted of heavy cruiser USS Pensacola, gunboat USS Niagara, Navy transports USS Republic and USS Chaumont; Army transports USAT Willard A. Holbrook and USAT Meigs, U.S. merchant ships SS Admiral Halstead and SS Coast Farmer, and Dutch merchantman MS Bloemfontein. The convoy was sent to reinforce the U.S. Army Forces Far East (USAFFE) in the Philippines but Japanese attacks on the Philippines caused it to divert to Brisbane, Australia. Sources: en.wikipedia.org; monumentaustralia.org.au, and liquisearch.com.



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

Archibald Wavell was given overall command of ABDA, and initially, Asiatic Fleet commander Admiral Thomas Hart led its naval forces.

Quinn would serve one-and-a-third-years on *Marby*, which departed Darwin the day after he joined the ship. While Quinn and his new shipmates had been spared the bombings at Pearl Harbor, within a month, the war would become a “hot” one for them too beginning with *Marby*'s coverage of the retirement of four destroyers comprising DesDiv 59 following their successful 24 Jan 41 raid on invading Japanese forces at the south Borneo oil port of Balikpapan. However, eleven days later, on 4 Feb 1942, *Marby*'s luck took a turn for the worse in the Bali Sea south of Makassar Strait which runs north-south between the massive tropical islands of Borneo and Celebes. Superb teamwork by all hands from *Marby*'s bridge to its bilges had enabled the ship to avoid damage from Japanese bombs on two successive bomb runs, but on the third attempt, the enemy scored two direct bomb hits and a very crippling near-miss. Eleven of *Marby*'s best were killed immediately, and four others would later die of their wounds.

The strike on *Marby*'s stern jammed her rudder causing her to steam more slowly and in a predictable circle making her a sitting duck for the next wave of bombers. The direct hit amidship knocked out her communications, electricity, and gyroscope. The near miss a few feet off her bow blew a 27-square-foot gash in her port side which, together with the jammed rudder, causing her to rapidly take on water and slow further. Fires soon raged from stem to stern. Fortunately, however, such were the extent of her damages, the attackers concluded that the Java Sea would soon finish what they had begun, so they reported *Marby* sunk, and diverted to engage bigger prey, the *USS Houston (CA-30)*.

In the moment, the idea of *Marby* escaping a watery grave, much less undertaking a 90-day, 20,589-mile escape to New York City, seemed preposterous, but the Japanese had little clue of the leadership, ingenuity, dedication, and heroism that was kicking in on that blazing hulk that the left below. For months to come, the ship's improbable escape, more fully described in [Marby's own biography](#), and in the 1944 book [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#), would provide much-needed morale boosts across America and her Allies who, until then, had had little to cheer about.

Quinn was aboard *Marby* during the bombing and for the whole trip home, but since the escape was kept secret, his loved ones and those of all the sailors aboard *Marby* for that perilous voyage thought their men were either dead or in enemy captivity until phone calls home and newspaper articles across America began spreading the news following *Marby*'s arrival in New York. Later, in one of his fireside chats, President Roosevelt praised the crew's courage and determination in saving their ship to fight another day.

Though no record has been found documenting it, Quinn took leave to see his family at some point during *Marby*'s subsequent six-month overhaul in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. He remained with the ship when she redeployed on 15 Oct 1942 to rejoin the war effort, this time in the Atlantic Ocean homeported at Recife, Brazil from which it hunted Nazi subs and blockade runners, and occasionally rescued downed Allied flyers and enemy sailors in lifeboats after their ships had been sunk.

During this time, *Marby* also escorted convoys to England and Ireland. In Aug 44, she made several stops along the Mediterranean Sea coasts supporting the invasions of Sicily and mainland Italy. On 15-17 Aug 44, along with cruiser Brooklyn and Omaha, from positions off Saint Raphael, France, *Marby* fired 157 rounds into Nazi shore defenses during *Operation Dragoon*, also known as the Invasion of Southern France. One of the most successful Allied operations of WWII in Europe, *Dragoon* liberated most of southern France in four weeks, inflicting heavy German casualties, taking 131,250 prisoners, and capturing the ports of Marseille and Toulon, from which, in Oct 1944 alone, 524,894 tons of supplies were unloaded, more than a third of the Allied cargo shipped to the Western front that month.³

On 14 May 43, Quinn transferred off *Marby* at Base Fox (code for Recife, Brazil) for further transfer to the Naval Training School at the Fleet Classification Center in Norfolk, VA.

³ [Operation Dragoon](#)

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

On 12 Jul 43, Quinn married Edna Jeane Rice of Long Beach, CA. How they met is unclear.

On 27 Jul 44, Quinn arrived at the Naval Receiving Station, San Diego, CA, and shortly thereafter he joined ATR 36, a rescue tug that would receive several campaign medals during the war. On 26 Jul 44, he again transferred to the Naval Receiving Station, San Diego, CA, and by the end of the year, he was aboard ARD-5, an auxiliary repair dock which would serve the Navy for another 53 years. Quinn, by then a CMM (Chief Machinists Mate), finished the war on this ship. He was honorably discharged on 25 Nov 45.

After the war, Quinn pursued several professions including, in the end, working as a private investigator. His son, Thad, related the following on Quinn as a PI.

"I loved my dad. He was a very good father, helpful to others. We both never had any problems. He was just a good man. Among other things, my father worked with two American Indian tribes on a reservation near here. The two tribes fought all the time over water, land, etc. The first time I went with him, the two chiefs' sons got into it, and one got shot. He survived but only because his heart was not in its normal location, otherwise he would have been dead. Another time, we drove up there and there was a large brawl going in a field. My dad got a shotgun out of our car's trunk and let off a round stopping the fight. It surprised me, but as both tribes knew him, they settled down. I did not know that he had been mediating with those tribes for some time. They treated us like royalty and argued about which one would have us spend the night with them, give us dinner, or take us hunting. My father was a hunter. Anyway, everything got fixed and we stayed for three or four days. I went back to hunt with them twice afterwards. Unfortunately, after all these decades, I cannot remember the name of the reservation or the tribe or their location. I shall see what I can find. I have always wanted to go back there.



Uncle Quinn
near the time of his
discharge in 1945
Courtesy: Son Thad and niece
MaryAnnW167



Edna Jeane, Quinn, daughter
Ronna Rae, and son, Thad.

A lot of the P.I. work was, as you may know, surveillance, serving warrants, etc. I remember him staying up late at night playing solitaire. I could hear him shuffle the cards all night until a call came in, or an hour passed when he could find someone. The good ones were the corporate spying. Occasionally, I would help him sweep an office or board room for listening devices, etc."

Quinn's first marriage ended in divorce, and on 23 Apr 71, he married Betty Lee Lukehart (29 Nov 24 – 7 Mar 96). Both marriages appear to have produced two children, although Quinn's first child, Joy Dawn, was stillborn in Jan 52.

Quinn died on 30 Jan 83, age 62, in Anaheim, CA, and is buried in Riverside National Cemetery in Riverside, CA. Edna Jeane, who had spent the better part of her professional life as a computer tape librarian in the data processing industry, passed away at age 92 in the home of her son Thad and daughter-in-law, Jeanine, in Cypress, California on 28 Apr 2015.

Quinn Alexander is listed on page 281⁴ of the electronic version of the 1944 book Where Away – A Modern Odyssey.

Don't forget to read Marby's own biography.

Biography by Steve Wade, son of Frank V. Wade, BM2c, USS Marblehead 1939-1945, with input from Quinn's son, Thad; Ancestry member MaryAnnW167 (Quinn's niece); and from Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, Wikipedia, and other Internet sources.

Corrections, additions, and photos are welcomed by email to spwade@gmail.com.

⁴ Page 234 in the original print version.