

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



Photo courtesy of son
Michael Williams Anglin

Marblehead Biography John Morris Anglin

John Morris Anglin was born on 4 Dec 11 in Lazare, TX to John Thaddeus Anglin (1872-1952), a farmer originally from Hickory Flat, Benton County, MS, and Martha "Mattie" Elizabeth Gibson (1886-1968), a homemaker from Cottle County, TX. The 3rd-born of ten children, John grew up on a cotton farm in East Texas, seven miles south of the town of Commerce. His siblings were: Neva Thelma (1908-1991), Travis Lazar (1910-1996), Verda Beatrice (1913-2008), Milbern Franklin (1915-2014), Ara Evelyn (1919-2005), Newt Elliott (1921-2012), Ruby Leigh (1923-1990), Roma Leo (1925-2010), and Martha Lou (1930-present).

The paragraphs in italics throughout this biography are paraphrased from a draft biography of Anglin posted on the internet by his son Michael:¹

On 17 Mar 31, in the depths of the Great Depression, Anglin and his brother Travis joined the Navy in Dalla, TXs and headed for San Diego by train. They reported to boot camp two days later. Travis was the better-behaved of the two and was always having to make excuses for his impetuous brother John. When John was late for morning muster, Travis would answer to his name on the roll call to keep him out of trouble. One morning Travis decided enough was enough and declined to answer for his brother. When the drill sergeant noticed John coming to the morning "colors ceremony" after roll call, he instructed him to run 50 laps around the grind carrying a bunk mattress on his back. Travis said it was funny, except that he was afraid "it came close to killing him." Travis stood on the sidelines cheering him on and encouraging him to "pick up the pace." He was never late again.

Upon boot camp graduation (5 Jun 31), Travis entered the [Naval Air Corps](#), and John reported aboard the battleship [USS Oklahoma \(BB-37\)](#). He arrived in Pearl Harbor, [Territory of Hawaii](#) on 1 July 31, and after further training, he was assigned to a series of old submarines in SubDiv-11, home-ported in Pearl Harbor: the [USS S-42](#) (came aboard 29 Jul 31), shifting five months later to the [USS S-44](#), then to the [USS S-43](#) (came aboard 3 Nov 33), and finally on 7 Sep 34 to the 1926-vintage submarine tender [USS Holland \(AS-3\)](#), the submarine division flagship of then-Captain [Chester W. Nimitz](#). John was honorably discharged and departed the Holland on 16 Mar 35.

Following his 4-year tour of duty in the navy, Anglin returned in California, working first in a doughnut bakery, and then in Stockton, as an usher in a local theater and then purchasing and running an adjacent restaurant with brother Travis until its landlord refused to lower the rent. The boys then moved in with their sister Neva Barnett and her husband Ted in Glendale, and John got a job with Fox West Coast Theatres managing movie houses in Pasadena ("the [Pasadena Playhouse](#)") and Modesto. At the



Farewell from friends at Fox
Photo courtesy of Michael W. Anglin.

Pasadena Playhouse, he once lent 25 cents to a budding actor, [Victor Mature](#), who was two years his junior. During this time, John drove to Texas for a family visit in a new [1936 Plymouth coupe](#), which according to younger brother, Roma, John later sold and used the money to buy a new washing machine for his parents, a new clock for the house, and other gifts for the family.

Missing his adventures at sea, John called his brother Travis and proposed that they re-enlist. Travis, having never developed a love for such adventure, declined, but John re-enlisted on 18 Oct 39. His many friends at Fox threw a great party at the [Coconut Grove nightclub](#) in Los Angeles' Ambassador Hotel to see 'Sailor Johnny'

off and wish him well in the coming storm.

¹ [Draft Biography of John Morris Anglin](#)

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Three months after enlistment, on 18 Jan 1940 while the ship was in [Shanghai, China](#), John first came aboard the light cruiser [USS Marblehead \(CL-12\)](#), affectionately referred to by her crew as ‘*Marby*’ (see [Marby’s biography](#)).

Marby, the third ship to be named after Marblehead, MA, the birthplace of the American Navy, usually wintered in the Philippines and summered in China after joining the [Asiatic Fleet](#) in early-1938. Other exotic locales were frequent stops, such as British-controlled, [Rangoon](#), Burma (today’s [Yangon, Myanmar](#)) and [Hong Kong](#); [Saigon](#), [French Indo-China](#) (today’s [Vietnam](#)), and other ports in [East Asia](#) and [Southeast Asia](#). John, then [Yeoman](#) 3c (Y3c) was aboard on 31 Mar 40 in [Cavite Navy Yard](#) when a [Pan Am China Clipper](#) landed there on one of its several visits to the Philippines before the war. He was aboard her on 30 Sep 40 when the ship was in drydock at [Miraveles](#). However, when in late-Sep 1940, the ship left [Tsingtao](#) (after which the famous beer is named), her long association with China ended as the Empire of the Rising Sun progressively took control of all major Chinese ports except Hong Kong.

Other than a cruise to [Guam](#) in January, *Marby* spent nearly all of 1941 in Philippine waters. John was aboard *Marby* when he was promoted to Y2c on 16 Nov 40 at Olongapo Dry Dock, and on 1 Aug 41 when he was promoted to Y1c at sea off Tawi Tawi Island in the Southern Philippines. By then, like many of her sister ships in the Asiatic Fleet, *Marby* was obsolete by naval standards of the early 40s, particularly when compared to Japanese ships in her class.

Anglin was first an engineering room yeoman aboard Marby during 1940 and in 1941, he was selected to be the captain’s yeoman (administrative clerk managing correspondence) and was designated as the “captain’s talker” during general quarters (“battle stations”), meaning that he was assigned to man the voice phone set and stand near the captain during ‘battle stations,’ relaying all of the captains messages and inquiries directed to various sections of the ship (e.g., engineering, main propulsion, damage control, gun batteries, etc.). The “Captain’s yeoman” position placed him at the center of information since he saw most message traffic coming to the captain from other commands and vice versa. Captain Robinson often told Anglin what general message he wanted to convey and leave it to Anglin, who was “good with words”, to draft the replies. Consequently, the crew knew that no one was more aware of the captain’s plans for the ship than Anglin, and they often, innocently and unsuccessfully tried to pry information out of him. For this reason, Anglin found it easier to avoid contact with much of the crew and was occasionally seen as distant, aloof, and uncooperative. This situation is reflected in the [email decades later](#) from shipmate Dale Johnson to John’s son Michael. Nevertheless, Anglin did develop a few close, life-long friendships among fellow sailors, including sailors Joe Fite and Dale Kibby.

As Japan-US tensions mounted in late-Nov 41, [Admiral Thomas Hart](#), commander of the Asiatic Fleet, ordered its dispersal from [Manila, Philippines](#) ahead of anticipated hostilities. By the evening of 27 Nov 41, *Marby* was anchored off [Jolo Island](#) at the southwestern end of the Philippine archipelago near to Borneo. The ship was darkened for increased security.

The 1944 book, [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#), a detailed, compassionate description of the saga of the USS Marblehead, unfolds two days later, on 29 Nov 41, with the *Marby* anchored farther southwest, off [Tarakan Island](#), northeast [Borneo](#), [Dutch East Indies](#) (today’s [Indonesia](#)). At the time, Tarakan’s beaches were lined with cables and pillboxes to discourage enemy landing parties.

Unbeknownst to Admiral Hart and the crews of the ships that comprised it, the Asiatic Fleet’s days were numbered. In the remaining four months of the fleet’s existence, those ships and their crews would play a heroic yet tragic role in delaying the [Japanese conquest of Southeast Asia](#) despite significant disadvantages in numbers, technology, firepower and air cover. Many of those ships would be lost, but the *Marby* would defy the odds and the Japanese propaganda which reported her sunk on multiple occasions.

On 8 Dec 41 (at Tarakan, *Marby* was west of the [international date line](#)), at 03:28 hours, *Marby* received word of the [attack on Pearl Harbor](#). Her [General Quarters](#) alarm blared moments later and the [crew’s](#)

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[response](#) foretold the spirit and training which would later save her. The ship sailed farther southwest ahead of the Japanese onslaught which would hit the neighboring Philippines within hours, and on 9 Dec 41 she was anchored in the oil port of [Balikpapan](#), Borneo.

On 25 Dec 41, in [Surabaya](#), [Java](#), the *Marby's* Captain, [Arthur Granville Robinson](#), granted the crew Christmas leave despite the threat of Japanese air attack. It would be their last break for some time. By 31 Dec 41, *Marby* was in the [Flores Sea](#) between Surabaya and [Darwin](#), [Australia](#), escorting the [MS Maréchal Joffre](#), a [Vichy French](#) (Axis) ship brazenly captured by American naval aviators and crew in the Philippines and used to escape the Japanese invasion, a little known but inspiring episode in American Naval History which resulted in its conversion to the [USS Rochambeau \(AP-63\)](#). By 2 Jan 42, *Marby* had become "[Radio Darwin](#)" in the northern Australian backwater that would serve as base for surviving Allied ships (collectively, the Combined Forces).

On 8 Jan, John and his shipmates sailed north as part of an Allied initiative to stall Japanese aggression in Java. On 24 Jan, she covered the retreat of four American destroyers ([Paul Jones](#), [Parrott](#), [Pope](#) and [John D. Ford](#)) after their successful night attack on Japanese forces in the [Battle of Balikpapan](#).

On 4 Feb 42, while enroute to another attack on Japanese forces, *Marby* took two direct bomb hits and a very damaging near-miss from a squadron of Japanese bombers off the north coast of Java in what became known as the [Battle of Makassar Strait](#) (other names have been applied). Thus began, for most of the *Marby's* crew, the "escape from the jaws of death." Ablaze, rapidly taking on water and steaming in an uncontrollable, very predictable circle because her rudder had been jammed by one of the direct hits, *Marby* seemed doomed. Instead of finishing her off, the Japanese assumed the ocean would complete what their bombs had begun, and they went after bigger prey such as the [USS Houston](#). Japan's Imperial high command wasted no time in reporting the *Marby* sunk, however, and in the long tradition of [fake news](#), they got everything wrong – the date, the location and nearest land mass, and even the water-body (it was the Java Sea). Most importantly, they also got the "sunk" part wrong!

In the ensuing 70-hour non-stop toil, John and his mates quelled fires, manned bucket brigades, bailing around the clock, and engineered ingenious repairs which kept *Marby* afloat. The dead were identified, and the wounded treated, and that night, sans rudder control, Captain Robinson used *Marby's* "screws" to steer through the treacherous [Lomboc Strait](#) east of [Bali](#) in darkness and a rainstorm.

Early on the morning of 6 Feb 42, under strict radio silence, *Marby* limped into the Indian Ocean port of Tjilatjap, on Java's south coast (Sir Francis Drake had stopped at this fishing port on his sail through the Dutch East Indies 362 years earlier in 1580; known today as [Cilacap](#), it is a major oil facility for the Indonesia's national oil company, Pertamina). After arrival, *Marby* transferred her seriously wounded to the local Dutch hospital and the care of [Dr. Corydon Wassell](#). She buried her dead and got only rudimentary repairs at the lightly equipped port.

On 10 Feb 42, *Marby* began a long, [perilous journey home](#), the first leg of which involved crossing of the eastern Indian Ocean to the world's second largest natural deep-water port, [Trincomalee](#) in British-held [Ceylon](#) (today's [Sri Lanka](#)). Two British officers watching her depart Tjilatjap wagered that she would break apart before ever seeing port again. In contrast, a Dutch commander ordered his vessel's band to play the *Star-Spangled Banner*.

Marby arrived at Trincomalee on 21 Feb 42 but found little there to improve her seaworthiness. During her stay, in the early hours of the morning of 1 Mar 42, the Asiatic Fleet ceased to exist with the sinking of her flagship, the USS Houston (CA-30), in the [Battle of Sunda Strait](#) (which separates Sumatra from Java). Undaunted, the following day the *Marby* continued westward across the other half of the Indian ocean, now the only substantial vessel remaining of the once renowned Asiatic Fleet. Through superb leadership and the constant toil of her crew, the supposedly sunk *Marby* continued to defy the odds and Japanese propaganda sailing down between Madagascar and Mozambique, and into [Durban](#), South Africa on 15 Mar

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42. This was a moment of relief. The ship was now beyond Japanese reach, in an Allied port, and not yet in the Atlantic, where German U-boats were a realistic threat. Shore leave was granted.

On 19 Mar 42, *Marby* arrived in [Port Elizabeth](#), South Africa to bury shipmates [Bull Aschenbrenner](#) and [Bernard Joseph “Ski” Wardzinski](#) following their untimely deaths the day before while inspecting the ship’s forward hold - Aschenbrenner had gone to Wardzinski’s rescue, but neither survived. The ship then moved on to [Simon’s Town](#), South Africa for extensive repairs, arriving on 24 Mar 42 after traveling 9243 miles from Lombok Straits where she had first entered the Indian Ocean. A [plaque](#) at Selborne dock in Simon’s Town Naval Base still commemorates *Marby*’s arrival (76 years ago at this writing).

From South Africa, *Marby* sailed across the South Atlantic to [Recife](#), Brazil where she met a hostile Allied reception. Having been reported sunk, Allied personnel in port suspected a German ruse to sneak in and destroy the facilities there. The situation was defused when *Marby* personnel correctly answered several “baseball questions” and a Chief aboard the [USS *Milwaukee*](#), then in Recife, who was known to *Marby* Radioman [Ray Delos Kester Sr.](#), confirmed that the ship was really the USS Marblehead.

Following re-provisioning at Recife, *Marby* embarked on the final leg home. On 4 May 42, after sailing in crippled condition nearly 20,589 miles (per Radioman Kester’s [deck log analysis](#)), she received a hero’s welcome in New York harbor and entered [Brooklyn Navy Yard](#) for a massive overhaul. As with all the parents of the sailors on board *Marby*, throughout the long voyage, John’s family thought he was dead until he called them with the good news the day after the ship made New York.

About a month after *Marby*’s return, in Jun 42, John visited his family’s farm near Commerce, Texas, for several weeks, and returned the following month to the ship which was still in overhaul in Brooklyn Navy Yard. On 30 Jul 42, he was transferred from *Marby* to the Navy Receiving Station in Norfolk, VA for further transfer to [USS *Birmingham* \(CL-62\)](#), a spanking-new Cleveland-class light cruiser named for the city of Birmingham, AL. Launched a little more than three months earlier, the ship was still being fitted out (for eventual commissioning on 29 Jan 43).

John arrived at Norfolk Naval Base on 3 Aug 42, “the ‘Summer of ‘42’, while visiting Newport News Shipyards on business, he met a young girl “fresh off a North Carolina tobacco farm named Lillian Rogene (Jeanie) Williams, who worked as a clerk stenographer in the Office of the Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Newport News, Virginia, a job which was earning her the considerable sum of \$1,800 per year as a recent high school graduate.” Thus, began a lifelong relationship.

The *Marby* returned to the fight when she left New York on 15 Oct 42 after a five-and-a-half-month overhaul. She was redeployed to the mid-Atlantic, operating out of Recife. From there they hunted U-boats and blockade runners and rescued downed Allied flyers and enemy sailors. John sailed on with the *USS Birmingham* to fight other battles, to wit:

- *The Birmingham departed Norfolk on 2 Jun 43 for the Mediterranean where she supported the Allied invasion of Sicily (10 – 26 Jul 43). During that summer, the ship docked once in Algiers, Algeria, and John traveled to an American airfield about 18 miles away hoping to locate his younger brother Milburn who flew bombing runs over Italy at that time. Unfortunately, the two never met up, since Milburn was stationed at that time in Telergma, eastern Algeria. Still, John later described his trip through the Algerian countryside as one his most memorable. Returning to the United States on 8 Aug 43, the Birmingham was reassigned to the Pacific Fleet and arrived at Pearl Harbor 6 Sep 43. She took part in raids on Tarawa (18 Sep 43); Wake Island (5 Oct 43); and*



Marblehead sailors on shore leave in Durban, South Africa, 15-17 Mar 42

Photo courtesy of Michael W. Anglin, whose father is on the right in the Zulu-drawn rickshaw.

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Empress Augusta Bay, Solomon Islands (8 Nov 43). During the latter, she destroyed the Japanese plane which had hit her with two bombs and torpedo, and then retired to Mare Island Navy Yard, San Francisco, CA for repairs.

- *On 1 Feb 44, John left the Birmingham, attended training in San Francisco for ten days, and then served at Navy yards in the New York area from 4 Mar to 15 Sep 44. During this time, John rekindled his romance with North Carolinian Jeanie Williams, daughter of Walter Edward Williams (1889-1961) and Emma Lillian Clapp (1889-1977). The couple married on 19 Mar 44 in Newport News and the newlyweds set up housekeeping in an apartment on Long Island.*



John and Jeanie on wedding day
Photo courtesy of Michael W. Anglin

- *On 15 Sep 44, John reported aboard the [USS Antheodon \(AS-24\)](#), a large submarine tender undergoing military outfitting at Todd Shipbuilding Company in Hoboken, New Jersey in preparation for her entry into the war in the Pacific. On 21 Sep 44, the evening before Jean returned to her home in North Carolina, Jean wrote in her diary that “they were two of the sweetest hours I’ve ever experienced, and even then, we couldn’t realize we were saying ‘so-long’ for such a long time.” On 1 Oct 44, the “shiny new” Antheodon put to sea to join the war in the Western Pacific, transiting the Panama Canal on 17 Oct 44, bound for Australia. It was on this trans-Pacific transit onboard the Antheodon, as a newly promoted Lieutenant JG, that Anglin became known as “the man who saved the ship.” At sea in late Oct 44, while standing as assistant officer of the watch, Anglin suddenly yelled “Left Full Rudder - Call the captain - Torpedo wake on the port bow!” This effect of heeling the Antheodon around to port (to the left) and parallel to the two torpedo wakes which seconds later zoomed past the Antheodon’s starboard (right-hand) side, a narrow miss made possible by quick action. The Antheodon arrived safely at the port of Fremantle, Australia, on 7 Nov 44, where it spent three months carrying out refits and voyage repairs on various submarines returning from war patrols. The tender Antheodon departed Fremantle on 12 Feb 45; and made stops at Brisbane, Australia, and Hollandia, New Guinea, to pick up building material. She reached Subic Bay, Philippines, on 13 Mar 45, and remained there during the rest of the war, servicing submarines and destroyer escorts operating from Subic Bay.*

- *On 16 Apr 45, John and Jeanie’s first son, John Morris “Duke” Anglin Jr., was born in North Carolina, and two months later, on 8 Jun 45, John’s tour of duty on the Antheodon ended with his transfer to shore duty at the ComSubRON 26 Staff in [Fremantle](#). During this tour, on 26 Sep 45, John (second from left in photo at right) and several other friends from the Antheodon were issued guns, ammunition, food and a lorry to conduct a trip into the interior to hunt kangaroo near Boystown, [Bindoon, Western Australia](#).*



- *Shortly thereafter, John left Australia aboard the [USS Pamina](#) bound for the States, probably via Hawaii. On 11 Nov 45, the Pamina arrived at Seattle, WA from which John traveled by train to the East Coast to reunite with his wife and meet his 7-month-old son, Duke, thus ending his 14-year exploration across the globe. During that period, he circumnavigated once, east to west, and crossed the equator both northbound and southbound in the Atlantic, Pacific and the Indian oceans. He would never again leave the American mainland.*

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- After the war, John spent three years at First Fleet Headquarters in Boston. His second son, Michael Williams Anglin, was born there at Chelsea Naval Hospital. Thereafter, he was assigned for six months to the Naval Air Station, Quonset Point, RI.
- From 1949 to 1953 John served with VU-4, a small naval air station located across the narrow bay from the island of Chincoteague, VA, where sons Ronny and Mark were born.
- In Feb 53, John was transferred to the [USS Orion \(AS-18\)](#), a submarine tender home-ported in Norfolk, VA. This assignment was perfect for his wife Jean because it permitted her to spend much quality time with her three sisters who lived in Norfolk and neighboring Newport News and was within relatively easy driving distance to her parents' home near Rocky Mount, NC.
- In the summer of 1955 John was assigned to recruiting duty in his "home city" of Dallas, working in the same office where he had enlisted in 1939, and in 1957, they moved to a large brick home on Meadow Lake Blvd. in Dallas, near White Rock Lake.
- In the late summer of 1958, John retired from the navy and moved the family to his hometown of Commerce, TX, where, at the age of 46, he entered as a freshman at [East Texas State College](#), a lifelong goal. His fifth child, Angela, was born about six months after the family's arrival in Commerce. He graduated four years later with a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Sciences and began his second career as a farm labor and employment specialist for the State of Texas Employment Commission.



John and Jeanie with John Jr. "Duke" and Michael about 1948
Photo courtesy of Michael W. Anglin

"Through the navy I've been to parts of every continent," John once told a news reporter. "I've crossed the Equator in both directions in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans ... literally traveling and making many fine friends while being paid, schooled, fed, clothed and housed by the navy, and at the same time advancing toward retirement and college under the G.I. Bill. My only objection to the navy is that there are not enough Texans in it!"

John's dad, John T. died on 7 Jun 52 in Commerce TX where he and his wife spent most of their retirement years. John's mother, Mattie, died on 3 Oct 68 in Sulphur Springs, TX. Both are buried in Stewart Cemetery in Commerce.

John and Jeanie died together in a tragic automobile accident on 20 Oct 74 near Fate, TX, about forty miles southwest of Commerce ending two lives distinguished by service to others. Both are buried in Stewart Cemetery in Commerce. They were survived by daughter Angela, and sons Ronny, John Jr., Michael, and Mark, the latter three of which also saw service in the U.S. Navy.

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

Biography by Steve Wade, son of Frank V. Wade, BM2c, USS Marblehead 1939-1945, with huge contributions from the draft biography and photos of the Anglins from their son Michael and 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.

To save space, months in all dates are truncated to the first three letters. Except when standing alone, years in the 20th century (only) are truncated to the last two digits; e.g., 7 December 1941 is 7 Dec 41 and April 1945 is Apr 45.