

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



Tony posing with teammates on the 1934 Los Gatos Wildcats football team
Courtesy: Ancestry.com

Marblehead Biography

Anthony 'Tony' Belillo

Anthony 'Tony' Belillo was born on 17 OCT 1916 in Temple, Bell County, Texas to Paul Belillo (1887–1983), a salesman and landscaping entrepreneur, and Rose 'Rosie' Fiarello (1894–1946), a homemaker and later an employee in a fruit canning business. Both of his parents were born in Italy - they immigrated to the U.S. in 1899 and 1895, respectively. Tony was the last of four children.. His siblings were Nancy Marie (1911–2004), Sally 'Sallie' Lucy (1912–2000), and Vincent 'Vince' (1914–1982). All four of the kids were born in Texas, but in the 1920s, the family moved to Los Gatos, Santa Clara County, CA around 1924.

Tony was in the backfield of the Los Gatos High School football team when they tied Santa Clara High for the Santa Clara Valley championship in the fall of 1934. Tony graduated the following Spring. What he did during the five years immediately after high school is unclear, but he enlisted in the Navy on 9 FEB 40 in San Francisco and was assigned service # 3760230.

Tony had still been resident in Los Gatos in 1935, but the 1940 U.S. Census enumerated on 2 APR listed him as an Apprentice Seaman (AS) and resident in the barracks of the U.S. Navy Training Station in San Diego, CA. Following boot camp graduation, on 30 APR 1940 he transferred to the Receiving Station in San Diego and from there he was transferred to the Asiatic Station via the veteran transport *USS Chaumont (AP-5)*.

Roughly six months later, on 5 AUG 40, Tony first boarded light cruiser *USS Marblehead (CL-12)*, better known to her crew as *Marby*. The ship was then at sea on patrol between Tsingtao and Shanghai, China. Except for a few training programs elsewhere, Tony would spend slightly more than five years aboard *Marby* eventually becoming a mainstay in the ship's small aviation unit.

While Tony was aboard *Marby*, on 4 FEB 42 she was bombed off the north coast of Java in the Netherlands East Indies (today's Indonesia), and it was reported sunk on multiple occasions in the international press. However, the leadership, discipline and determination of her crew enabled *Marby* to avoid destruction and sail into the history books. For the ninety days following her bombing, the parents and other loved ones of the sailors aboard the ship believed their men were dead or in captivity. On 4 MAY 1942, after three months of radio silence while improbably covering 20,589 miles across two oceans in crippled condition, *Marby* cruised into New York harbor. The following day the sailors called home with the good news and *Marby* slipped into [Brooklyn Navy Yard](#) for a massive overhaul. (read [Marby's biography](#)).

Prior to the bombing, however, Tony had been promoted to Seaman 2nd Class (Sea 2c) on 30 SEP 1940 while the ship was in Manila, Philippines. He was aboard the ship in Cavite the following March when the Pan Am Clipper landed there on one of its many trips to the Far East before WWII. At the end of AUG 1941, at sea off Tu Tu Bay, southern Philippines, Tony advanced to Seaman 1st Class (Sea 1c). He was still aboard *Marby* after she left the Philippines ahead of the Japanese onslaught which began within hours of the Pearl Harbor attack, and by the end of 1941, he was sailing through the Flores Sea as *Marby* escorted the captured Vichy French mail ship MS Marechal Joffre from Surabaya, Java, NEI (today's Indonesia) to Darwin, Australia.

After the 4 FEB 1942 bombing of the ship, Tony remained aboard and sailed with the ship on its escape to New York via Java, Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka), South Africa and Brazil. In mid-1942, he was transferred to Naval Air Station, NY for temporary duty and training) and in SEP 1942 was promoted to Aviation Ordnanceman 3rd Class (AMO3c), thus beginning his link to the ship's small aviation unit. Tony would soon redeploy with the ship to continue the war in the mid- and south-Atlantic, and later in the Mediterranean.



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In JAN 1944, he was transferred from *Marby* at Bahia, Brazil and sent to the Navy Technical Training Center at Jacksonville, FL where he would undergo a course of instruction for about six months. At the end of Aug that year, he rejoined the ship in Oran, Algeria. By JUL 1945, as an AOM1c he was the most tenured member of *Marby's* aviation unit. On 11 AUG 1945, while the ship was in New York, he was transferred from *Marby* to Receiving Ship at Shoemaker, CA for further assignment. He appears to have been discharged shortly thereafter.

Tony returned to Los Gatos after the war. Together with his brother, Vince, who had enlisted in the U.S. Army in San Francisco in 1941 and served until 1945, Tony purchased the local Union Ice Delivery Company from the Shore family. For more than three decades the Belillo brothers would service Los Gatos, Saratoga and Campbell, California with their ice-delivery truck. Vince later moved to Oregon. In addition to the ice delivery business, Tony also worked as a clerk for the U.S. Postal Service.

At the Catholic Church in Los Gatos on Sunday, 6 OCT 1946 Tony married Lorraine Romitti. Lorraine was born in Novato, CA, but her family had moved to Los Gatos in 1929. Lorraine was a medical assistant. Her father, Luigi (1885-1965), was from Gavorrano, a mountain-side commune in the Province of Grosseto in the western Italian region of Tuscany, located about 70 miles southwest of Florence. He sailed to New York from Genoa aboard the *SS Konig Albert* arriving in 1 JUN 1916. Lorraine's mother, Costantina 'Christina' Bertucci (1903-1963) came to America in 1911 from Barga, Lucca, Toscana, Italy. She married Luigi in 1922.



Lorraine Romitti, Los Gatos
HS Class of 1943
Courtesy: Ancestry.com

Tony and Loraine would have one son, Donald Paul (b. 1951). Don served as a Navy medic in the early 1970s and continues to work in the medical field for the U.S. Department of Defense in California.

Tony died on 15 FEB 1998 in Los Gatos where he and Lorraine spent most of their lives. She passed away there on 20 JUN 1984. They are buried side by side in Los Gatos Memorial Park, San Jose, Santa Clara County.

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

Don't forget to read [Marby's biography](#)

Biography by Steve Wade, son of Frank V. Wade, BM2c, USS Marblehead 1939-1945, with great contributions from Tony and Loraine's son, Don, and from Ancestry.com, Wikipedia.com, Newspapers.com, and other Internet records.

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