

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



Oliver Holmes Greebon  
Courtesy: Ancestry.com

## Marblehead Biography Oliver Holmes Greebon

Oliver Holmes Greebon was born on 20 Jan 1921 in Eden, Concho County in central Texas, about 43 miles southeast of San Angelo. His parents were William ‘Willie’ Henry Greebon (1893–1960), a farmer from Kyle, TX, and homemaker Lillie Ann Willman (1895–1978), of Dublin, Erath, Texas.

Oliver was the 3<sup>rd</sup>-born of five children. His siblings were Ressie Mae (1916–2000), Sidney James (1918–2001), Frederick ‘Fred’ Daniel (1923–1943), and Myrtle Ethelyn (1933–2016).

Oliver probably attended Millersview High School. He enlisted in the Navy on 18 Jun 1940 in Dallas, TX. He did his basic training at the Naval Training Station, in San Diego, CA. On 6 Sep 1940, as an Apprentice Seaman (AS) with service #3563053, he was received aboard *USS Trinity (AO-13)*, an oiler, on 18 Jun 1940. On 7 Sep 1940, he was received aboard the battleship *USS Pennsylvania (BB-38)*, which delivered him on 16 Sep 1940 to his first duty station, a relatively new light cruiser *USS Honolulu (CL-48)* which was operating out of Pearl Harbor, TH. He advanced to Seaman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class (S2c) on 18 Oct 1940.

On 22 Jan 1941, in Honolulu, Oliver transferred to [USS Chaumont \(AP-5\)](#), which along with the [USS Henderson \(AP-1\)](#), was one of the two primary transports that kept the Asiatic Fleet supplied with personnel in the 1930s and early 1940s. Indeed, Oliver was headed for the Asiatic Fleet. In Guam, on 5 Feb 1941, Oliver joined the [USS Marblehead \(CL-12\)](#), a light cruiser known affectionately to her crew as *Marby*. The ship sailed two days later to Manila, her homeport during winter. On 1 Sep 1941, Oliver was promoted to Seaman 1<sup>st</sup> Class (S1c).

Oliver would serve a year and a half on *Marby*. During this period, *Marby* would remain entirely in Philippine waters since Japan by then controlled all of coastal China except Hong Kong, and tensions between Japan and the U.S. continued to mount. On 25 Nov 1941, aware of the breakdown of negotiations between the two countries, and anticipating hostilities, Admiral Thomas Hart, Commander of the Asiatic Fleet ordered all significant American men-of-war to disperse southward from Manila. *Marby* sailed first to Jolo Island in the southern Philippines, and by 29 Nov, she was anchored off Tarakan Island, East Borneo, in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), today’s Indonesia. The ship was darkened for increased security as the men viewed barbed wire, cables, pillboxes, and other anti-invasion emplacements on the beaches.

This is the scene set in the early pages of the opening chapter of the 1944 book, [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#). It marks the beginning of *Marby*’s WWII saga for it was at Tarakan, nine days later, at 0328 on 8 Dec 1941, that a message arrived carrying news of the disaster at Pearl Harbor. General Quarters was sounded immediately and eight minutes later, the entire crew were standing at attention at their duty stations, an early but clear demonstration of the discipline that would later save the ship. *Marby* sailed the following day for Balikpapan, an oil port on Borneo’s south coast, and by Christmas, she was at the Dutch Naval Base in Surabaya, Java, where Captain Robinson granted limited shore leave despite the threat of Japanese air attacks.

On the last day of 1941, *Marby* was in the Flores Sea escorting French mail ship MS Marechal Joffre, which had been captured by swashbuckling Naval Officer and several accomplices in Manila Bay in late Nov 1941. *Marby* arrived at Darwin, Australia, on 2 Jan 1942. It was not *Marby*’s first visit to Australia – that had occurred in 1925. Soon, *Marby* took on the role as ‘Radio Darwin’, the radio beacon that would for a short time coordinate Allied shipping in the area.

Back in Indonesian waters in late-Jan 1942, *Marby* covered the retirement of Destroyer Division 59 from its successful 24 Jan raid on Japanese troop convoys at Balikpapan. However, on 4 Feb 1942, as part of an attack force heading to strike another Japanese convoy, *Marby* was hit by two bombs and a damaging near miss which all but disabled the ship. With seawater rushing in via a gash below the waterline near her bow,



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

all internal and external communications and lights disabled, fires raging everywhere, and a locked rudder steering her in a very predictable circle, the ship seemed doomed. However, luck would prevail as the Japanese assumed the ocean would finish *Marby* off, and they left her for larger prey like the heavy cruiser *USS Houston*. But *Marby's* superb leadership and disciplined crew defied the odds, saving the ship and sailing her home - 20,589-miles in 90-days - to be repaired and to fight again! See [Marby's biography](#). While enroute, in Durban, South Africa, Oliver was promoted to Shipfitter (SF3c) on 16 Mar 1942.

As with all the parents of the sailors aboard *Marby* throughout that perilous voyage, Oliver's probably thought he was dead or in enemy captivity until he called them with the good news the day after the ship made New York. Around the same time, Oliver probably also called a Miss Lorena Clifton. Lorena was born in Millersview on 12 Aug 1919 to James Thomas Clifton (1876-1961), a farmer, and homemaker Minnie Chandler (1880-1964). Lorena was the last-born of this union. Her siblings were Walter (1905-1996), Arthur (1910-1984), Mildred (1912-2012), Bertha (1915-1989), and Allie (1917-1990).

It is likely that Oliver had attended Millersview High School with Lorena, though he was two years her junior. Oliver's dad's name appeared on Lorena's high school graduation certificate in his role as secretary of the local school board. She graduated in 1937 and Oliver likely graduated there in 1939. Both of their families owned farms in the area. In any case, seven weeks after *Marby* arrived in New York, Oliver headed home and on 22 Jun 1942, the couple were married in Millersview.

By 30 June, Oliver was back aboard *Marby* in Brooklyn Navy Yard, involved in the ship's overhaul. However, on 27 Jul 1942 he was ordered to New Orleans for duty on the *USS Token (AM-126)*, a minesweeper that would be commissioned on 31 Dec 1942. After shakedown cruises off the Florida coast and in the Gulf of Mexico, the new minesweeper steamed for the Panama Canal on 2 April 1943 and arrived at San Francisco, on 1 May. Lorena and Oliver's son Randal was born 9 Sep 1943. Oliver was in the South Pacific at the time.

On 29 Oct 1943, Oliver transferred off *USS Token* to the receiving station at Noumea, New Caledonia, and it appears that he was assigned to a soon to be commissioned destroyer *USS Shelton (DE-407)* that had been built in Houston, TX. On 4 Apr 1944, he was aboard *USS Shelton (DE-407)* on the day of her commissioning in Houston, and this appears to have afforded him the opportunity to visit Lorena and Oliver Randal around the time the picture at the right was taken.



Oliver, Lorena and  
Oliver Randal in 1944  
Source: Ancestry.com

By 30 Sep 1944, he had attained the rank of SF1c aboard *Shelton*, and the ship was soon assigned to Task Force 57 (TF 57) and routed to Seeadler Harbor, Admiralty Island. The following month, she was assigned to the Morotai Attack Force (TF 77). While off Morotai Island on 3 Oct, in the screen for the escort carriers *Fanshaw Bay* and *Midway*, *Shelton* was hit aft on its starboard screw by a torpedo, causing severe damage and flooding. Sadly, the strike was near Oliver's duty station, and he was killed instantly. In a letter to Lorena dated 30 November 1944, *Shelton's* commanding officer offered the following explanation:

*"It is with the deepest sympathy and regret that I write you concerning the circumstances of Oliver's death. Although he was previously reported missing all facts now have been brought to light and I regret that I must assure you that there is no room for doubt.*

*During the action in which he lost his life, Oliver was at his usual station aft. His ship, the Shelton, was assigned the duty of supporting the landing troops in the invasion of Morotai in the Amari group and was sunk by the enemy action on the morning of October 3rd, 1944.*

*Oliver died valiantly and instantly when an explosion took place at 8:08 AM. He felt no pain whatsoever, for everything was mercifully all too sudden. He died doing his job with the highest degree*



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

*of loyalty to his country, and his last resting place is in his ship. Military services were held on October 9, 1944, with all surviving members of the ship's company attending."*



Fredrick Daniel Greebon  
Courtesy: Ancestry.com

Although he never served on the *USS Marblehead*, another sailor in this family also paid the ultimate price and should also be remembered here. He was Oliver's kid brother, Frederick "Fred" Daniel Greebon. Fred enlisted at age 17 on 12 Dec 1940 in Dallas, TX. He was assigned Service # 3564526, and did his basic training in San Diego, CA.

His early ships or stations after "basic" are unclear, but on 30 Dec 1942, Fred was on the deck of the *USS Rixey (APH-3)* for her commissioning in Oakland, CA, as a hospital ship. Fred was a Pharmacist Mate 2c and on *Rixey*, he would see much action in the Pacific theater. Unlike many hospital ships, *Rixey* was armed with defensive weapons that allowed her to operate just off the beaches where U.S. Marines engaged the Japanese. This gave wounded troops more expedient access to medical care.

After conversion work in Oakland, *Rixey* shifted to San Diego in February 1943 and on the 19<sup>th</sup>, she left for the South Pacific. Assigned to Service Squadron 8, *Rixey* arrived at Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, in early March. Through the remaining battles for the Solomons, including the New Georgia campaign in July and August 1943, she evacuated casualties from field hospitals to mobile and base hospitals at Noumea, New Caledonia, and Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand. It was in Auckland, on 14 May 1943, that Fred transferred to the light cruiser *USS Helena (CL-50)*.

Early on July 6, 1943, in the Battle of Kula Gulf, as *Helena* fought Japanese destroyers, enemy torpedoes split the cruiser into three parts.



Lorena Clifton Greebon  
Courtesy: Ancestry.com

She sank near Kolombangara Island in the Solomon chain. Of a crew of nearly 1,200, 168 were killed during the battle or die while adrift after abandoning ship. Fred was among them.

Oliver's wife, Lorena, remarried five years after his death. She and her second husband, Robert Burns, had a daughter, Barbara Alice, Oliver Randal's half-sister. Lorena passed away on 14 Jun 2007 in Houston, TX.



Where the Greebon brothers' ships sank:  
X is where Oliver escaped injury during *Marby's* 4 Feb 1942 bombing.  
☀ is where he died aboard *Shelton*.  
📍 is where Fred died aboard *Helena*.  
Map Courtesy: Google.com

Oliver Holmes Greebon is listed on page 239 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 contributions from Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, and other Internet records.*

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