

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



## Marblehead Biography Elmer Ward Howard

Elmer Ward Howard was born 2 Aug 1921 in Hampton, Franklin County, Iowa. His parents were Rolla DeWitt Howard (1893-1975), initially a farmer, then a repairman for the Des Moines City Railway, and finally a polisher for an aircraft manufacturer, and homemaker Alice Dorothy Landaker (1998-1975). Both of his parents were from Ankeny, just north of Des Moines.

Elmer was the 3<sup>rd</sup>-born of three children. His siblings were Rolla Ivan Howard (1916–1987) and Grace Maxine Howard (1920–1998).

Choosing to forego his final year of high school, Elmer enlisted in the U.S. Navy on 19 Feb 1940 and was assigned service # 3213908. He was sent to the Great Lakes Naval Training School at Illinois just east of Chicago. He was present there for the 1940 U.S. Census on 1 May.



USS Nashville (CL 43)  
Showing off in  
Philadelphia, 1938  
Source: [navsource.org/](http://navsource.org/)

His first ship was light cruiser *USS Nashville (CL 43)* which he joined as an Apprentice Seaman (AS) on 25 May 1940 in San Francisco. He remained on *Nashville* for 8 ½ months as the ship operated mostly along the West Coast of the U.S. with occasional trips to the Territory of Hawaii. On one such trip, Elmer transferred to the veteran Asiatic Fleet transport *USS Chaumont (AP 5)* which took him to Guam where, ON 5 FEB 1941, he first came aboard the *USS Marblehead (CL 12)*, a light cruiser affectionately referred to by her crew as *Marby*. He remained aboard *Marby* for nearly three years during which time he experienced the ship's bombing off Java's north coast and her improbable 20,589-mile, 90-day voyage home escape to New York in crippled condition, events more fully described in [Marby's own biography](#).



USS Marblehead (CL 12)  
Bombed-out fantail,  
Tjilatjap, Java, 1938  
Source: [navsource.org/](http://navsource.org/)

On 29 Sep 1942, Elmer was admitted to the Brooklyn Naval Hospital for treatment and consequently missed *Marby's* 15 Oct 1942 departure to rejoin the war effort, this time in the Atlantic operating out of Recife, Brazil. However, following completion of his treatment, he caught a ride on the *USS Munargo (AP 20)*, another transport, and after stopping in Trinidad, he rejoined *Marby* in Bahia, Brazil.



USS Sierra (AD 18)  
Source: [navsource.org/](http://navsource.org/)

On 5 Jul 1943, Elmer was promoted to Torpedoman's Mate 3<sup>rd</sup> Class (TM3c) aboard *Marby* and six months later, on 27 Dec 1943 he was transferred to

Torpedo School in Newport, RI (see textbox at right). This training essentially dictated the nature of his work for the rest of WWII and his final two duty stations – *USS Sierra* and *USS Maddox*.



USS Maddox (DD 731)  
Source: [navsource.org/](http://navsource.org/)

After three months in torpedo training, on 2 Apr 1944 in Tampa, Florida, he joined the *USS Sierra (AD 18)*, a destroyer tender and remained aboard that ship for about thirteen months. On 6

May 1945, he transferred to his final duty station, *USS Maddox (DD 731)*, a destroyer on which he served for eight months.

### Naval Torpedo Station, Goat Island, Newport, Rhode Island

The Torpedo Station was established in 1869 as an experimental station for the development of torpedoes, explosives, and related equipment. This action confirmed the Navy's increasing interest in the torpedo as an important naval weapon, one destined to affect drastically naval strategy and tactics.

The Station's production proved of vital importance in the Navy's WWII offensive record, producing nearly a third of roughly 62,000 torpedoes manufactured for the Navy between 1 Jan 1939 and 1 Jun 1946. During its full operational history, it was instrumental in evolving the torpedo from the immobile explosive mine of the Civil War period into today's highly mobile weapon.

In 1970, the Station's designation changed to Naval Underwater Systems Center (NUSC), Newport, when its operations were merged with the Naval Underwater Laboratory, New London, Connecticut. Today, NUSC is tasked with a range of complex technological research and development programs in furtherance of its mission as the principal Navy research, development, test, and evaluation center for submarine weapon systems.

Source: Robert Loys Sminkey, CDR, USN Retired

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Elmer was honorably discharged from the Navy on 9 Feb 1946 in California. More mature six years on, he immediately re-enrolled in a high school completion program and in June 1946 graduated with 32 other veterans receiving diplomas from North High School in Des Moines. Marriage was also on Elmer's mind.

It is unclear how he met Maxine Louise Burt who was born to Louis Lloyd Burt (1905–1964) and Alta Iola Allen (1907–1988) on 26 Apr 1926 in Rowan, Wright County, Iowa, USA, a tiny farming community 87 miles directly north of Des Moines, IA, and 25 miles southwest of Hampton, IA, where Elmer had been born. Maxine had a younger brother James Louis "Jim" Burt (1933–2001), also born in Rowan.

It is highly possible that the two families knew each other through early interactions in those farming communities. However, because the Howards moved to Des Moines around 1927, just a year after Maxine's birth, and because Maxine was five years junior to Elmer and graduated from Rowan High School, it seems unlikely that the two met in school. Regardless, they married in Rowan on the last day of June 1946, the same month Elmer belatedly acquired his high school diploma.



Maxine Louise Burt  
Source: FindaGrave.com

The couple set up house in Des Moines. Their daughter, Linda, was born in 1947 and son Michael followed in 1948. A May 1949 Des Moines residential directory listed Elmer as an Apprentice Assistant Pressman at Des Moines-based Meredith Publishing, which from humble beginnings in 1902 with its Successful Farming magazine would grow in a publishing and broadcasting giant valued at \$2.4 billion in 2016. However, Elmer had left them well before that and made a career at Midwest Gas from which he retired.

Elmer and Maxine spent the rest of their years together in Des Moines, and eventually had three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. A freemason, Elmer was a member of Acanthus Masonic Lodge, the Des Moines Consistory, and Za-Ga-Zig Shrine. Maxine worked for Principal Financial Group for 25 years and retired in 1988. She was an active member of Glen Echo Christian Church, a member of the Eastern Star, Za-Ga-Zig Shrine Women's Auxiliary, the Shrine women's widowed lunch group, The Nobelle's and the Merle Hay Mall Walkers. She enjoyed golf, walking and volunteering at Iowa Methodist Medical Center.

Elmer died on 29 Apr 1994. He was three months short of 73. Maxine passed away 1 Feb 2017 at 90 years of age at Kavanagh House, a hospice in Des Moines. They are buried side by side at Des Moines' Masonic Cemetery.

Elmer Ward Howard is listed on page 241 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).*