

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



Howard Everett Jepson, HMC
Source: Ancestry.com Member SpiritofElijah79

Marblehead Biography Howard Everett Jepson

Howard Everett Jepson was born on 7 MAY 1913 in Red Wing, Goodhue County, Minnesota. Red Wing is situated along the Mississippi River which forms the border with Wisconsin in southeast Minnesota. It was named after a Dakota Sioux chief and grew up around the Mdewakanton Sioux Indian reservation established there in 1889. High grade clay deposits were discovered in the area in 1861 which spawned the local pottery industry in which Howard's dad and his brother Ed worked at one time. Red Wing's population, about 9,000 when Howard was born, hovers around 16,000 today.

Howard's parents were of Danish origin. His dad was Jens Marinus "Jep" Jepson¹ (1872 –1958). Jepson oral history suggests that in the 1880's, the family lived in a small town on the Danish side of the German border at a time of German fervent military expansion under Kaiser Wilhelm. After Jep received a summons in the late 1880's, the family fled to England to avoid his being conscripted into the German army. Jep sailed to New York at age 19 from Liverpool on 18 MAR 1891 aboard the *SS City of Chester*. He gained U.S. citizenship on 29 OCT 1894

Howard's mother was Amelia Hansina 'Emilie' Christiansen (1873–1967) was born in Nakskov, Lolland Municipality, Zealand, Denmark. She immigrated to the U.S. at age 19 arriving in New York



Amelia, upper center, with her parents and sibling probably prior to sailing to America
Source: Ancestry.com

from Copenhagen on 10 APR 1893 aboard the Danish vessel *Hekla*. She appears to have traveled with 21-year-old relative, perhaps her sister. They listed their occupations as "servant", and Amelia said she was heading to Stone City, Iowa, about 250 miles south of Red Wing. It is unclear how Amelia and Jep met but they were married by a Justice of the Peace on 20 MAY 1894 in Pierce County, Wisconsin, which is directly across the Mississippi River from Red Wing.



Danish ship Hekla
Source: marinersmuseum.org

Amelia bore seven children six of whom are pictured with their parents at the right (circa 1914-15). At the top are Edward Niels (1899-1961), who married Evelyn Mable Westerberg in Red Wing in 1933 and ultimately became a butcher,

and Irene Julia (1902-1990), who married James Emerson Stoneback. Below them at the upper center of the photo is Grace Elizabeth (1910-1994) who married Richard F. Hahn. Below Grace is Marion Johanna (1907-1997), who appears to have led the family to Seattle and who married Lawrence Johnson. Flanking Marion on the laps of their parents are Howard (left) and his twin, Helen Evelyn (1913-1996). Helen married Edwin Hendrickson. Not pictured is Douglas Frederick



Howard's parents and siblings circa 1914-15
Source: Ancestry.com Member SpiritofElijah79

¹ Many records show the surname in its original Danish form, Jepsen.

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

Jepson (1916-1966). He became a merchant mariner and never married. Douglas is pictured below at the right. All the kids were born in Red Wing.

Howard attended Red Wing High School at least through eighth grade, but he does not appear in the graduating class of 1933. In the 1930 census, he was listed as living with his 23-year-old sister Marion who had moved to Seattle. Their parents and at



March 1929: Howard in 8th grade at Red Wing HS, probably 1st row, 3rd from right.
Source: [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)

least three siblings were still in Minnesota at the time. Marion was listed as an “artist” in a dry goods store in Seattle and she also had a boarder with the same work title (and probably the same employer). Howard, then 16, was not listed as a student nor was he employed.



Douglas Frederick
Source: Ancestry.com members
Aklaq46 & Jared Bystrom

As the Great Depression began to bite, he may have already been contemplating a career in the Navy and was simply waiting until he was old enough to join.

Howard enlisted on 16 MAR 1936, in Seattle. He was issued service #3856787 and it is highly likely that he went to boot camp on the West Coast. It is unclear what his first duty station was, but an early muster roll dated 31 MAR 1939 shows him at the Naval Hospital on Mare Island, CA, just north of San Francisco. He had been stationed there since 8 MAY 1938 and his rank was Hospital Apprentice 1st Class (HA1c).

Howard’s next posting was apparently Shanghai, China. It is unclear when he arrived there or how long he stayed, however he remained in the “Paris of the East” long enough to meet, court and marry a White Russian² woman there in 1940. When and how they met is not known.

Most of the sizable Russian community in Shanghai in the 1930s and early 1940s had fled the Bolshevik Revolution, or their parents had. However, Anna’s parents appear to have already been in Shanghai when that revolt rocked Russia (and ultimately the rest of the world) because Anna was born in Shanghai around 1915. According to Howard, she had been educated at universities in Shanghai and Berlin and spoke English, Russian, German, Spanish, Japanese and some Chinese. Unfortunately, her parents, who appear to have been wealthy, ran afoul of Japanese occupation forces Shanghai and were murdered there in the late 1930s.

Shanghai had been one of the Asiatic Fleet’s most important ports prior to 1941, particularly in the summer months, but as political and military tensions between the U.S. and Japan escalated in 1940, most Fleet activities shifted southward to the Philippines. Howard arrived there on 3 JAN 1940 aboard the veteran Asiatic Fleet transport ship USS Henderson. It is unclear whether Anna was with him on that voyage, but it is more likely that he returned Shanghai for their wedding and she joined him in the Philippines. The newlyweds set up house in a five-room cottage in Caridad, a section of Cavite City that abutted the Cavite Naval Base, just south of Manila. Howard went to work at the base’s Canacao Naval Hospital. He was a Pharmacists Mate 3rd Class (PhM3c) at the time.

Cavite was also home port of the light cruiser *USS Marblehead (CL-12)*, affectionately known to her crew as *Marby*, which Howard joined on 17 Feb 1941. He was progressing well in the ranks and was by then

² White Russians are a subset of the Russian diaspora whose ancestral roots are primarily in the country known today as Belarus, former republic of the Soviet Union.



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

already a PhM2c. Howard would serve an event-filled year and a half on *Marby* and though he missed the exciting ports of Indochina that *Marby* frequented before 1941, he would still witness much aboard the old cruiser. He may have seen the Pan Am China Clipper land on Manila Bay on 31 MAR 1941 and Anna may have seen it with him. Soon, however, the chill of impending war followed them south to the Philippines.

“So long honey, see you this evening,” Howard told Anna, on the morning of 25 NOV 1942 as he left her standing on the doorstep of their home in Caridad. Unbeknownst to either of them, the previous day, Admiral Tommy Hart, Commander of the Asiatic Fleet, had fatefully concluded “that the relations between the United States and Japan had reached such a critical state that movement of men-o-war in support of the basic plan³ was indicated. Accordingly, on Tuesday 25 November 1941, the following ships departed from Manila independently between 0800 and 0915 for what appeared to be ‘Routine weekly operations’:⁴

Black Hawk (AD9), a destroyer tender and eight destroyers – *Paul Jones DD230*, *Whipple DD217*; *Alden DD211*, *John D. Edwards DD216*, *Edsall DD219*, *Stewart DD224*, *Parrott DD218* and *Barker DD213* – to comprise Task Force 5 under the command of Captain A.G. Robinson, *USS Marblehead*.⁵

The ships were to “proceed independently to the southward (Sulu Archipelago) via the Verde Island passage, the DDs to remain within easy visual signaling distance, maintaining the appearance of a ‘routine movement.’ ”

Thus, Howard and his shipmates proceeded out of Manila Bay. No doubt Howard envisioned Anna at home as the ship got underway, but like almost everyone else aboard, he thought they were off on a routine patrol and like some of the others aboard who were leaving loved ones in the Manila area, he thought they would be back in short order. Even if Howard had known the truth and had had a way of reaching Anna, the gravity of the situation dictated silence. Japanese spies were watching and listening.

Two days later, *Marby* anchored in TuTu Bay off Jolo Island, 580 miles south of Cavite. The ship was darkened for security. On 27 NOV 1941, she left the Philippines forever, slipping across the marine border to anchor off Tarakan Island, Eastern Borneo, NEI (Netherland East Indies, today’s Indonesia). The pillboxes and barbed wire that lined the island’s shores suggested that war was imminent. The ship would remain there for nine days.

At 3:28 AM on 8 DEC 1941 (the ship was west of the International Date Line), *Marby*’s radio room received news of the disaster at Pearl Harbor. Moments later a call to General Quarters blared across the ship’s public address system, and in the ensuing eight minutes *Marby*’s entire complement of more than seven hundred men went from deep slumber to standing at attention at their duty stations, a early indication of the discipline that would soon save the ship. Howard must have thought of Anna and wondered how they would ever find each other again. Sadly, they wouldn’t.

The following day, *Marby* sailed for the oil port of Balikpapan on Borneo’s south coast. There she refueled and was stripped of all non-essential items. Next, she sailed south for the major Dutch Naval base at Surabaya on Java’s east coast. Despite some risk of Japanese attack, Captain Robinson granted liberty there on Christmas Day. On the final day of 1941, *Marby* was escorting the captured Vichy-French mail ship *MS Marechal Joffre*⁶ across the Flores Sea enroute to Darwin, Australia.

³ Standing U.S. Navy orders in preparation for or in the event of hostilities.

⁴ USS Marblehead War Diary entry dated Tuesday, 25 NOV 1941.

⁵ All these ships except *Edsall* survived WWII though *Stewart* was scuttled in Surabaya as the Japanese invaded. Later raised by the Japanese and put to war against the Allies, she was reacquired by the U.S. at the end of the war.

⁶ Captured in Manila Bay on in DEC 1942 by a Navy lieutenant brandishing a sword and a pistol and with a handful of stranded Navy airmen from Patrol Wing 10 to back him up, the ship was used to escape the Philippines. After Darwin and a stop in New Zealand, she arrived at San Francisco with a cargo of wool and zircon sand on 19 APR 1942. She was converted into a hospital ship named *USS Rochambeau* after the French general who led 7,000 French

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

For two days *Marby* served as “Radio Darwin” to coordinate assembly of remaining Allied naval forces, but soon she headed north again with the remnants of the American, Dutch, and Australian fleets to take on the Japanese juggernaut sweeping across Southeast Asia. Howard had advanced to PhM1c by the time the ship was bombed on 4 FEB 1942 in the Battle of Makassar Strait. While Howard himself appears to have escaped injury, his role as part of the ship’s medical staff meant that he would experience the death and suffering of others directly. He may well have accompanied the more seriously wounded when they were off-loaded into the care of Dr. Wassell at the Dutch military hospital at Tjilatjap on the south coast of Java and he was probably among those standing in silence as *Marby*’s dead were buried in that sleepy Indian Ocean port. But he was back aboard *Marby* when she left Tjilatjap to begin her 20,589-mile journey home. En route, at Trincomalee, Ceylon (today’s Sri Lanka) on 28 FEB 1942, he reenlisted for another four years.

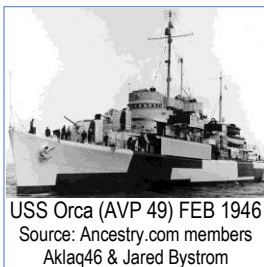
The events of *Marby*’s long journey home are more fully described in [Marby’s own biography](#). As with all the loved ones of the sailors aboard *Marby* throughout that perilous 90-day voyage, Howard’s family probably thought he was dead or in enemy captivity until he called them with the good news the day after the ship made New York.

However, Howard was not aboard *Marby* in mid-OCT 1942 when, following her overhaul in Brooklyn, she rejoined the war effort, redeploying to the Atlantic Ocean. In July 1942, he was transferred to NRA Base Memphis, TN, which was located at nearby Millington, TN.⁷

Howard visited his family in Seattle prior to 19 APR 1943 when he arrived at his next post, Hutchinson Naval Air Station 13 miles south of Hutchinson, Kansas. In August of that year, Howard was interviewed by a reporter from the Jefferson City Post Tribune and he spoke of Anna who he had to leave behind in the Philippines. He was still unaware of her whereabouts or her fate.

In the course of their invasion of the Philippines, the Japanese heavily bombed Cavite City and Cavite Naval Base, including Canacao Hospital where Howard had worked prior to joining *Marby*. Anna may have been killed in that aerial onslaught, however, if she survived, Howard was certain that the Japanese would never take her alive. He told the reporter that the following: “She knew what to expect. She was a crack shot with a .45. If they killed her, she would make it costly for them.”

By 23 JAN 1944, Howard was standing, probably in dress whites, on deck with the rest of the crew for the commissioning of the *USS Orca (AVP 49)*, a brand-new seaplane tender built in Lake Washington Shipyard in Houghton, just across the lake from Seattle. He was by then a Chief Pharmacists Mate CPhM(AA). Soon he would be back in Southeast Asia and seeing plenty of new action.



After her shakedown off San Diego, California, *Orca* sailed for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and as part of the Seventh Fleet, on to Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea (in the northeast corner of what is now Irian Jaya, Indonesia’s half of the island of New Guinea). There on 26 May 1944 and over the ensuing five months, her seaplane squadrons carried out highly effective night bombing and recon missions against the Japanese, earning the ship and her squadrons a Presidential Unit Citation and her captain, Commander Fleming, the Legion of Merit.

In early NOV 1944, *Orca* moved into Leyte Gulf, Philippines, as the American campaign there was reaching a critical stage. Under the noses of the Japanese at Ormoc Bay on 3 DEC

troops under George Washington’s Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War. He and his men contributed materially to the British defeat. The ship was returned to a free France after WWII ended.

⁷ This may be relevant to an inscription on a bracelet that was left to Howard’s nephew, Bob, which has an inscription on it referring to the “Battle of Millington”. The battle is believed to be a humorous reference to the rigors of some training course that may have occurred at the Naval Base in Millington. Anyone familiar with the WWII-era phrase may contact spwade@gmail.com with additional information on the subject which may be added to this biography.



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

1944, *Orca*'s seaplanes daringly rescued 167 survivors off the sunken destroyer *USS Cooper (DD-695)*. The planes were so heavily loaded that their take-off runs across the bay approached three miles in length.

Throughout 1944, in her supporting roles, *Orca* was frequently attacked by enemy planes, but her guns usually managed to drive them off or destroy them. She sustained slight damage in a kamikaze attack on 2 JAN 1945. On at least two occasions, her successes drew the ire of Japanese radio propagandist Tokyo Rose who repainted the reality with fake reports of Japanese triumphs.

Orca continued to service seaplane squadrons and carry out rescue missions until the end of the war. She and her crews earned three battle stars for their service and a special commendation from 6th Army commander General Walter Krueger whose troops received stellar support from *Orca* and her squadrons. Howard remained aboard *Orca* until at least JAN 1946, but he does not appear as part of her 31 MAR 1946 quarter's end muster. Perhaps he had already begun the series of transfers that would take him to fateful shore duty at the Naval Hospital on Terminal Island, Los Angeles County, CA.

Howard was a Hospital Corpsman Chief Petty Officer (HMC) at that hospital on 3 APR 1948 when a recently dishonorably discharged sailor turned petty thief was brought into the dispensary in the custody of an MP for a medical exam. Howard had just gone off duty but had not yet left the building. As the thief was being escorted to the brig, he seized the MP's pistol and attempted to escape. Howard came to the MP's assistance unaware that the thief was armed. When the MP warned him away, the thief turned and shot Howard in the chest at point blank range. He died moments later.



Howard's parents are buried in Evergreen-Washelli Memorial Park, Seattle, WA. At the time of Amelia's death, they had 14 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren, and two great-great grandchildren. Howard and his brothers are buried there too.

Howard served aboard ships that earned a combined four battle stars in the Far East in World War II. He circled the globe serving his sick, wounded and dying countrymen in the heat of war and in peace time, even when off-duty with no obligation to do so. In honoring those responsibilities, he lost his wife and his own life. What more could one man do for his country?

Howard Everett Jepson 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 very helpful contributions of family oral history and photos from Howard's nephew, Bob Hendrickson and his wife Jane, and from records on Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, and other Internet sources.

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