

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



Dashing Dale  
Late-1930s  
Source: Janet Pattison

## Marblehead Biography Dale Leighton Johnson

Dale Leighton Johnson was born on 25 JUL 1916 in Thief River Falls, Pennington County, Minnesota to Lewis Edward Johnson, (1871-1954), an Indiana-born farmer, and homemaker Junetta Mae "Genette" Guge (1880-1968) from Indian Creek, Story County, Iowa. The couple had married on 9 Nov 1897. Dale had no siblings.



Dale and his dog, in  
Thief River Falls  
Source: Janet Pattison

Thief River Falls, founded in 1887, was named for the falls at the confluence of Red Lake and Thief rivers and loosely derives from the

Ojibwe phrase *Gimood-akiwi ziibi*, literally, "Stolen-land river", which originated when a band of Dakota secretly camped along the Thief, hence "stealing" the land, before being routed by the Ojibwe. First built around lumber-milling, rich soil and the Great Northern and the Soo Line railroads turned the town into a wheat shipping center.



Lewis Edward and Junetta Mae  
Source: Janet Pattison

Dale enlisted in the Navy in 5 MAY 1936 in Minneapolis and was assigned service #3284282. He did his basic training at the Naval Training Center, Great Lakes, IL. He served as a Fireman and then Machinist's Mate aboard heavy cruiser *USS Louisville (CA-28)* for four years before transferring, via veteran Asiatic Fleet transport ship *USS Chaumont (AP-5)*, to light cruiser *USS*

*Marblehead (CL-12)* on 5 AUG 1940 in China, most likely in Shanghai or Tsingtao.

On 31 MAR 1941, Dale was aboard *Marby*, as the ship was affectionately referred to by her crew, in Cavite Philippines, when the famous Pan Am China Clipper landed there. In late-NOV 1941, *Marby* and the rest of the Asiatic Fleet dispersed from the Philippines in anticipation of Japanese hostilities. *Marby* was nearly 20 years old and nearly obsolete compared to Japanese ships in its class. However, as the Japanese and the rest of the world would soon learn, her leadership and the training and discipline of her crew were superb.

Dale was still aboard *Marby* when she was bombed off the north coast of Java, NEI (today's Indonesia). The following paraphrased excerpts from the 1944 book [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#) illuminate the responses from Johnson and untold others that would help save the ship:

"By this time, she had been away from the States almost four years. Repair and upkeep facilities were usually not to be had. Her men had become, as Machinist's Mate First Class Dale Johnson phrased it, 'a fix-it-yourself outfit.' So, it was not the labor and ingenuity of others, but of her own men, that kept her going and in fighting trim. A part of themselves had, each day, been built into her."<sup>1</sup>

"As the ship was hit, Dale Johnson was at the midships repair station, on the starboard side of the main deck. The first sound he heard after the explosion was someone screaming, 'I'm dying,' over and over again. By this time, he was on his feet and several men were rushing to the sound of the screams. But he got in front of them and told them to start fighting the fire with extinguishers and hoses and to help the wounded later. Another man, forward of Johnson, had been leaning over drinking from a water-fountain. The fountain ... had been blow out from under his drinking mouth across an areaway and through the wall of the post office. When the man stood up, his arm was singed, and his right ear burned off by the sharply stratified flash."

The bomb which hit *Marby's* stern jammed her rudder causing her to steam in an uncontrollable but very predictable circle, an easy target for Japanese bombardiers. Freeing the rudder so she could be steered with her screws was a priority.

"By the time the fantail fires had been brought under some semblance of control, Lt. Frank Blasdel, Dale Johnson, Metalsmith Martin Moran and Quartermaster Lester Barre were on their way down to the ram room, which was the lowest and aftermost compartment on the ship ... they decided that the probable cause of the rudder jam was that the valves and pipe leading to the hydraulic rams [which controlled the rudder] had been destroyed. Drury and the others hoped to remedy this situation by 'bleeding off' the fluid inside the rams."

"Soon, Blasdel, Johnson, Moran, Ritter and Link were ... there, working in oil and water that now reached almost to the overhead, struggling to release the hydraulic pressure on the rams.

<sup>1</sup> [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#), p. 34

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Meanwhile, after *Marby* had escaped the immediate battle area, Captain Robinson was trying to coax her through the treacherous Lombok Strait to the south side of Java and beyond, at least for a while, the Japanese air threat. "... the struggle to keep her afloat and a few of her most vital functions in operation never slacked. Men in the bucket brigades worked without pause. Dale Johnson and Martin Moran undertook another huge and seemingly impossible job. Johnson had discovered a steam line forward which, with some repairs, might carry enough steam to drive a pump. He knew, moreover, that there was a huge pump in the engine rooms which was, at the moment, serving not vital purpose. He asked permission from Mr. Camp [Engineering Officer F.C. Camp] to undertake the Herculean job of raising this three-and-a-half-ton piece of machinery to the main deck, and to try to move it along the broken, oil-covered passageways to a position up forward where it could effectively work against the flooding. ... 'fire away,'" was Camp's response.

"At once Johnson and Moran began rigging chain falls, lashing them to beams they hoped would hold, and easing pressures and counter pressures against the pump. Slowly the huge pump began to move. Outside, night had fallen. ... only the stars, the vague, shadowy shorelines ..., and the subdued wink of lights from destroyers to warm the Marblehead when she was careening into danger.

"Men inside the ship never knew when dawn came. There was too much work to do, although they were greatly helped by the fact that Johnson and Moran and the dozens who were on the job with them had finally got the big pump installed up forward and it was working. But to the men on deck dawn was both a relief and a menace. At least they wouldn't sink in the night. Yet they were again naked of cover and open to attack by Japanese planes." <sup>2</sup>

Dale's initiative during and after the battle earned him the Navy Cross, the Navy's second highest honor:

"The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Machinist's Mate First Class Dale Leighton Johnson, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty in action during the attack on the Light Cruiser U.S.S. MARBLEHEAD (CL-12), by Japanese enemy bombers on 4 February 1942. After assisting in the task of fighting fires, clearing wreckage and rescuing the wounded, Johnson proceeded aft to the wrecked steering engine room which was flooded shoulder deep with oil and water. There, in a space congested with machinery, the air foul with smoke and chlorine gas from shorted steering battery leads and surrounded by electrical fires, he worked tirelessly and unflinchingly freeing the jammed rudder and locking it amidships. His skill, tenacity and endurance together with an utter disregard for his own personal safety, contributed greatly to the saving of the ship for further war service and the saving of many lives." <sup>3</sup>

As with most loved one of sailors aboard *Marby*, throughout her long voyage home, Dale's family thought he was dead or in captivity. He called home with the good news the day after the ship made New York.

Dale remained aboard *Marby* when she left Brooklyn Navy Yard on 15 OCT 1942 after her overhaul. She redeployed to the mid-Atlantic, operating out of Recife, Brazil. In that balmy port on 26 DEC 1942, Dale, then a CMM(AA), transferred to Fox Base (code for Recife) for further forwarding to Diesel Engine School, Norfolk, VA. The remainder of Dale's career in the Navy is listed in the table on the next page.

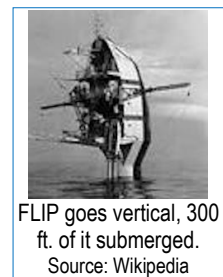


Masako and Dale  
Source: Janet Pattison

After retiring as a Chief Petty Officer E-7 on 25 JUL 1958, Dale worked as a boiler estimator for National Steel and Shipbuilding Company at its San Diego shipyard, and later, in the same capacity for Fraser's Boiler Service Inc. He also worked on [Flip](#), (FLoating Instrument Platform), a unique oceanographic vessel owned by the U.S. Office of Naval Research and operated by Scripps Institution of Oceanography. In his spare time, he enjoyed

hunting, gambling, bare-knuckle boxing, and riding his motorcycle.

In the late 1960's, then 53, Dale met artist Masako Katayama in San Diego and they married on 9 AUG 1969. She was born in Kobe, Japan on 10 JUN 1928 to Mitsuji and Toshi Katayama. Toshi's mother's family was from Northern Japan and her dad was a Buddhist priest. They later moved to farm in Kobe. Mitsuji's dad's family were farmers too, but Mitsuji left farming to teach ballroom dancing in Kobe City. While still in high school, Toshi took one of his classes. They married after she finished high school. Masako, the first of three children, was followed by a brother, Usuke, and a sister, Shoko.



FLIP goes vertical, 300 ft. of it submerged.  
Source: Wikipedia

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 128, 140, 151, 165, 166, and 171

<sup>3</sup> Veterantributes.org

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World War II started just after Masako began high school. She was sent to live with relatives in China, but fell ill there, returned to Japan, survived the war, and then married a U.S. sailor who had been a member of America's wrestling team at the 1924 Paris Olympics, the Games immortalized in the 1981 Oscar-winning film "Chariots of Fire". They moved to Honolulu in the 1950s where Masako was a designer/dressmaker for five years, but they divorced in the early-1960s. Masako then moved to California and became an instructor and featured artist at the Coronado Art Association. She also owned Masako's Arts and Crafts from 1982-1988. Inspired by the beauty of the natural world, Masako is accomplished in *Sumi-e* brush painting (Japanese watercolor), silk powder techniques, oil, acrylic, pen and ink, and pastels. At this writing, she was living in Mississippi near her daughter Janet and son-in-law, Ted.



Kitten in a Box  
By Masako K. Johnson



Masako and Janet  
Source: Janet Pattison

Dale and Masako's daughter Janet graduated from Coronado High School with an Air Force scholarship to University of California, San Diego. As an Air Force officer, she earned an MBA from the Air Force Institute of Technology and spent most of her career in Air Force Space Command, though her favorite job was Commander, 81st Training Support Squadron in Mississippi. She rose to the rank of Lt. Colonel. Retiring in 2013, she started businesses in nutrition, fitness and skin care; in arts and crafts; and with, Ted, T&J Island Cruises of the Biloxi. A certified Holistic Health Coach, Janet supports charities such as St. Jude Walk/Run to End Childhood Cancer.

Dale was active in the Masons, Shriners and with Janet, in Jobs Daughters International, a youth organization building leadership, charity, and character in young women. In his 70s, Dale suffered from emphysema and took up jewelry making. Through Masako, Dale became involved in the Coronado Art Association and was one of its past presidents. Dale died on 27 NOV 2002 in Colorado Springs, Colorado shortly after he and Masako followed Janet to her new posting there. On 9 JUN 2003, Dale was buried in Arlington National Cemetery (Section 54 Site 4158).

USS Louisville (CA-28) 1936 - 1940  
USS Chaumont (AP-5) 1940 - 1940  
USS Marblehead (CL-12) 1940 - 1942  
Diesel Engineering School 1942 - 1943  
USS No Name (PCE-868) 1943 - 1944  
Naval Base San Diego 1944 - 1946  
USS Samar (PG-41) 1946 - 1947  
USS Pasig (AO-91) 1948 - 1948  
Service Craft Unit 1 (SCU-1) 1952 - 1953  
USS Sperry (AS-12) 1953 - 1953  
USS Pivot (AM-463) 1954 - 1954  
USS Inflict (AM-456) 1954 - 1955  
USS Cormorant (MSC-122) 1956 - 1957  
USS Gallant (MSO-489) 1957 - 1958

Source: navy.togetherweserved.com



American Campaign Medal  
American Defense Service Medal  
Asiatic/Pacific Campaign Medal  
China Service Medal  
Combat Action Ribbon  
Europe/African/Middle Eastern Campaign  
National Defense Service Medal (1950-1954)  
Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal  
Navy Cross  
Navy Good Conduct Medal  
Navy Unit Commendation (NUC)  
Philippine Defense Medal  
Philippine Independence Medal  
Philippine Liberation Medal  
World War II Victory Medal

Dale Leighton Johnson appears on pages 34, 52, 110, 128, 140-142, 151, 165-166, 171 and 241 of the 1944 book [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#).

Also, don't forget to read [Marby's own biography](#).

*Biography by Steve Wade, son of Frank V. Wade, BM2c, USS Marblehead 1939-1945, with substantial contributions from Dale's wife Masako Katayama Johnson and his daughter Janet Johnson Pattison and from Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, FindaGrave.com and other Internet records.*

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