

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



R. D. Kester, CWO4

## Marblehead Biography Raymond Delos Kester

Raymond “Ray” Kester was born on 29 MAY 1920 in Portland, Oregon to Oran and Ella Kester, of California and Oregon, respectively. At that time, the family owned their own home in Milwaukie, Clackamas County, Oregon and Oran was listed as an operator of a street railway in the 1930 Census (and as a bus operator ten years later). Oran’s father was of Canadian-English heritage, and his mother was from Iowa. Ella’s mother and father were from Illinois and Oregon, respectively. Ray was an only child.

Ray joined the Navy on 12 DEC 1938 at Portland, OR, partly for economic reasons resulting from the Great Depression. Assigned service # 4143325, his initial plan was to serve his country for four years and save enough for the first two years of college, intending to study chemical engineering.

A licensed amateur radio operator (‘ham’) as a teenager (call signs W7HFY and W4RUM), Ray was assigned further radio training at Navy Training School, San Pedro, CA. On 29 JUL 1939, he joined the *USS Milwaukee (CL-5)* via the oiler *USS Neches (AO-5)*. During his career, he was also assigned to Cruiser Division 3 FLAG Allowance under Admirals Kimmel, Fletcher, and Theobald, and to *USS Concord (CL-10)* and *USS Cincinnati (CL-6)*, which like *Milwaukee* were Omaha Class light cruisers and sister ships to *USS Marblehead*. Ray entered the Asiatic Fleet aboard *USS Houston (CA-30)*. On 25 NOV 1940 at Olongapo, Philippines, he joined to [USS Marblehead \(CL-12\)](#), affectionately known to her crew as ‘*Marby*’.

While Ray was aboard on 4 FEB 1942, *Marby* was bombed off the north coast of Java, Netherlands East Indies (today’s Indonesia). He was promoted to RM1c on 1 APR 1942 as the ship limped home. En route, he played a key role in *Marby*’s entry into Recife Harbor, Brazil when the ship, which had been widely reported sunk by the Japanese, was challenged by Allied authorities suspecting a German ruse to destroy the port. Via radio, Ray and colleagues answered “baseball” questions posed to verify that they were Americans. Ray, aware that the *USS Milwaukee* was in the port, then requested that Chief Radioman Newell Phelps of that ship be called into the conversation. On his arrival, Phelps quickly verified that the man on the other end of the ‘line’ was his former shipmate Ray Kester. *Marby* was allowed to refuel and reprovision for her last leg home ([see Marby’s own biography](#)).

Leadership, discipline and daring determination enabled *Marby* and her men to survive and sail into the history books. For ninety days following her bombing, the parents and other loved ones of those sailors believed their men were dead or in captivity. On 4 MAY 1942, after three months of radio silence while improbably covering 20,589 miles (per Ray’s post-war calculations) across two oceans in crippled condition, *Marby* cruised into New York harbor and gave American morale a badly needed boost. The next day the surviving crew called home with great news – they were alive!

Later in 1942, while attending radio school in Washington, DC, Ray entered Bethesda Naval Hospital for an appendectomy. During recovery, he went by train to New York with a friend. There, on a blind date, he met Caroline (Carolyn) Rosaire Catanzaro, 19, a receptionist at Mary Immaculate Hospital in Queens. Thus began a life-long friendship highlighted by continued service to others. They married on 3 NOV 1943.

Carolyn was born on 21 SEP 1920 to homemaker Caroline Lombardo (1890-1980) and Rosario Catanzaro (1885-1952). The family lived in Jamaica, Queens where Rosario worked at the borough’s water company. Carolyn was the 8th-born of twelve children. Her siblings were Mary Catherine “Mamie” (1909–1999), Salvatore Francis (1911–1991), Frances Marie (1912–2008), Angela Rose (1914–1994), Seraphina ‘Sarah’ (1917-1918), Julia Theresa (1916–1993), Camella Sarah ‘Millie’ (1919–1980), Margaret Ann (1923–2014), Dominick Rosario ‘Don’ (1925–2017), Henry Oscar ‘Chubby’ (1927–) and Rita Ann (1930–2009). Their mother and father, both from Italy, arrived in the U.S. via Ellis Island in 1899 and 1901, respectively.

An only child, Ray must have found the Catanzaro brood very interesting. His son, Ray Douglas, related that “When mom and dad were dating, dad would have drinks with her father and talk. Our grandfather was very strict, but liked my father and they got along well. Dad had to be overwhelmed by the drama of

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the large urban Italian family, but seemed to fit right in with my uncles when they hung out together. Mom had shocks of her own when she traveled by train alone across the country and stayed with dad's parents in Oregon for about a year while he was overseas. Now THAT was an education! Chasing pigs, and being embarrassed at having the family dog follow her into church. New thing for the dog!"

Ray later served on the *USS Leedstown (APA-56)*, *USS Midway (CVB-41)*, *USS Cambria (APA-36)*, *USS Oregon City (CA-122)*, and at the US Naval Communications System Command, among other stations. Turning down a commission as Lieutenant, Ray retired from the Navy in AUG 1962 as a Chief Warrant Officer 4 after 24 years of service. He then worked for various firms in the Washington, DC area applying his firsthand knowledge and experience to modernizing shipboard communications.

Retiring again in 1999, Ray began a third career as president, treasurer, and reunion organizer for *USS Leedstown*, *USS Houston*, *USS Marblehead* and ultimately, the Asiatic Fleet, while also writing their newsletters. He supervised dedication of the Asiatic Fleet conference room in the Navy Memorial's Naval Heritage Center in Washington DC which honors those who served in fleet's battles, and he assisted in the long campaign to have 1 March designated as Asiatic Fleet Memorial Day 59 years after the fleet's demise.



Carolyn and Ray in Portland, OR in 1945

Carolyn began a career with the Girl Scouts of America in 1952 in San Francisco when she became a leader of daughter Lori's Brownie troop during Ray's posting there. Serving in many positions in Puerto Rico and the Washington, DC area, she ultimately rose to First Vice President and Board Member of the Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital. She chaired the Council's 1981 cookie drive which raised \$1 million, the first such drive in America to reach that goal. She was a recipient of the Thanks Badge, the Girl Scouts of America's highest award, the Knox Award, the highest honor of the Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital, and the St. Anne's Medal, awarded to Catholics in Girl Scouting.<sup>1</sup>



Sailing to Puerto Rico  
2 AUG 1956.

Following her death on 20 MAY 1992, The Carolyn Kester Award was created to honor adult Girl Scouts who evidence the unswerving loyalty, devotion and dedication that Carolyn did over 39 years of service. She was a member of the parish of St. Bernadette's Catholic Church and the Women's Club of Springfield, VA, where she and Ray spent most of their 48+ years together. They were very proud of their children, Lori, Karen, Ramona, and Raymond Douglas, and their seven grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Radioman Ray passed away on 9 OCT 2018. He was buried with full military honors alongside Carolyn in Arlington National Cemetery on 6 JUN 2019, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day's Normandy invasion. Following a 21-gun salute, the Navy chaplin in attendance referenced Ray's motto, "Be Happy", several times in eloquently describing a life well-lived. Although we will not know for certain until all of the *Marby's* crew biographies are done, Ray was likely the last to go of the sailors aboard *Marby* when she was bombed off Java's north coast on 4 FEB 1942.



Ray at 97  
"Be Happy!"

Ray appears on page 241 of [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#). He received the following military awards: Combat Action Ribbon, Naval Unit Commendation, Good Conduct, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign, American Defense, American Campaign, European-African-Middle East Campaign, WWII Victory, and Philippine Defense.

*Biography and photos from Ray's daughters Lori, Karen, and Ramona and son Ray Douglas.*

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

<sup>1</sup> The top photo on the right shows the whole family (Carolyn was pregnant with Raymond Douglas at the time) in New York boarding the *USNS Pvt. William H. Thomas*, named for an Arkansas-born soldier and Medal of Honor winner whose heroics in an attack on a Japanese position in the Philippines led to his death in 1945. Eight days earlier, the ship aided the sinking Italian liner *SS Andrea Doria* off Nantucket, MA and rescued 159 of the 1660 survivors. For its actions, the *William H. Thomas* received the Galant Ship Award (see [citation and story](#)). Ray had a knack for choosing the right ships!