

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



John Robert Kleyn,
late 1930s

Marblehead Biography John Robert and James Henry Kleyn

John Robert Kleyn was born 1 Mar 1906 in Holland, Ottawa County, MI, the 3rd of six children of Henry Kleyn, a lumber company salesman, and homemaker Mamie Gunst, of Dutch and German descent, respectively. John's younger brother, James Henry, born on 10 APR 1916 in Spokane, WA, overlapped with John on the *USS Marblehead (CL-12)* for 2 ¼ years, and he is also covered by this



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biography. Their siblings were: Mary Ruth (1899–1968), Dorothy (1901–1966), and Beth (1907–1993) and Harold (1910–1937). All except James were born in Michigan. Their father died when James was seven, and John, ten years his senior, probably became James' father figure.

John enlisted in the Navy in 1925 and was assigned service #3853886. The website [Together We Served](#) suggests that he was somehow linked to the *USS Panay*, a Yangtse River patrol craft sunk by the Japanese in a 1937 provocation designed to test America's will to go to war. This may have involved his time on *USS Canopus* in China in 1937.

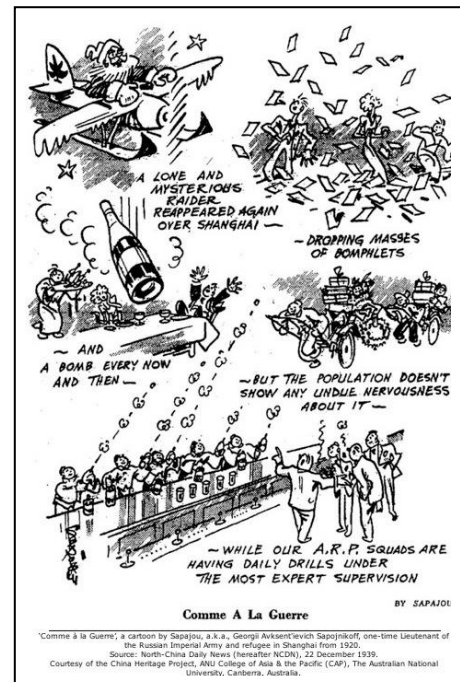
John served on fueler *USS Jason (AC-12)* and battleship *USS Mississippi (BB-41)* prior to boarding *USS Chaumont (AP-5)*, one of two veteran transport ships that kept the Asiatic Fleet stocked with personnel - *USS Henderson (AP-1)* was the other. On 21 MAR 1935, *Chaumont* delivered John to the *USS Marblehead (CL-12)*, affectionately known to her crew as *Marby*. John would serve aboard *Marby* nearly seven years.

In 1935, John also married Heloise Suzaina Mansfield, the daughter of Clarence Lester Mansfield (1876-1927) and Bernice L. Keefe (1891-1966). Heloise was born 11 Feb 1912 in Hoquiam, Grays Harbor County, WA. She would join John in Manila prior to the start of WWII in the Pacific.

John's younger brother James, a manager in the Postal Telegram and Cable Company in Takoma prior to enlisting, followed John into the Navy on 19 AUG 1936 in Seattle, WA. He was issued service #3857016, but it is unclear where he went through basic training or what the names of his first ship(s) were. James joined *Marby* on 4 NOV 1938 at Cavite, Philippines. John was already aboard and they would overlap for 2 ¼ years, James' entire stint on the ship. Most of that time was spent in China and the Philippines and on the high seas between the two countries.

Marby muster rolls are not available online before 1939, but that year, both John and James were aboard her on 31 MAR 1939 in the South China Sea between Bangkok and Saigon; in Tsingtao, China at the end of June that year; on 10 AUG 1939 when John signed a three-year re-enlistment agreement while at sea between Tsingtao and Shanghai, China; on 16 NOV 1939 when John was promoted from Machinist Mate 1st Class (MM1c) to Chief Machinist Mate (CMM) in Manila, Philippines; and on 31 DEC 1939 when *Marby* saw in the new year in Shanghai. As Japan tightened its grip on coastal China, including nearly all the Shanghai area, expatriates and wealthy Chinese in the "Paris of the Orient" continued to live it up despite the impending doom (see the Christmas 1939 North China Daily News cartoon above).

Marby had been summering in China and wintering in the Philippines since joining the Asiatic Fleet in JAN 1938, and this continued into 1940 (e.g., John re-enlisted for two years in Tsingtao on 29 AUG while aboard *Marby*). However, when the ship left Tsingtao on 8 SEP 1940, her long association with China ended as





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tensions between the U.S. and Japan continued to escalate. With the exception of a cruise to Guam in January, *Marby* spent nearly all of 1941 in Philippine waters. John and James was aboard her in Cavite Navy Yard when a Pan Am China Clipper landed there on 31 MAR, and John re-enlisted there for another three years in late-MAY.

On 10 FEB 1941, James transferred off *Marby* to *USS Chaumont* (AP-5) which took him to Hawaii. He was a Fireman 1st class (F1c) at the time. James is next found on 24 MAY 1941 aboard *USS Chester* (CL/CA 27) operating out of Hawaii. While aboard *Chester* at Pearl Harbor on 8 AUG 1941, James was assigned temporary detachment duty at Camp Andrews. This was probably his first contact with the idyllic Camp Andrews, a Navy recreational camp on Oahu (see text box at right). He would return there later.

Launched in 1929 by the New York Shipbuilding Corporation, Camden, New Jersey, *Chester* was a Northampton-class cruiser, the second ship named after Chester, PA. Her predecessor, CL-1 served in English and Mediterranean waters during WWI. *Chester* was one of six ships to receive the new RCA CXAM radar in 1940. She would earn 11 battle stars for its service in WW II.

Homeported at Pearl Harbor from 3 FEB 1940, *Chester*, with James Kleyn aboard, exercised in Hawaiian waters and made a voyage to the West Coast (14 MAY – 18 JUN 1941). He was aboard on 30 Sep 41 “in the Hawaiian operating area”; and from 10 OCT - 13 NOV 1941 when *Chester* escorted two army transports carrying reinforcements to Manila. On that trip, it is highly likely that James contacted with his brother, John, still attached to *Marby*, and his sister-in-law, Heloise, who setup house for John ashore in the Cavite-Manila area.

Upon *Chester*'s return to Hawaii, she joined cruiser *USS Northampton* (CL/CA-26) and carrier *USS Enterprise* (CV-6) for exercises near Wake Island and was returning from Wake when the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor. Meanwhile, the Asiatic Fleet had dispersed from the Philippines in late-NOV 1941 in anticipation of hostilities.

Marby was anchored off Tarakan Island, northeastern Borneo, when she received word of the attack on Pearl Harbor in the wee hours of 8 DEC 1941 (see Lunch with Ray). Given John's lengthy service in Asia, he is likely to have had many friends who suffered in that attack, and he was probably concerned about the whereabouts of the *USS Chester* which had recently departed. As *Marby* moved quickly southwestward ahead of the Japanese onslaught which struck the Philippines that same day, John's main concern was his wife who he had to leave behind in Manila.

After the Pearl Harbor disaster, *Chester* remained on patrol with Task Force 8 in Hawaiian waters, and on 12 DEC 1941, her planes bombed an enemy submarine and then guided [USS Balch \(DD-363\)](#) in a depth charge attack which “continued until contact was lost.” James was still aboard *Chester* at the end of 1941 when her muster roll accepted 103 “men from disabled ships”, presumably from the Pearl Harbor attack.

By 25 DEC 1941, *Marby* and John was in Surabaya, Java, where Captain Robinson granted some of the crew Christmas leave despite the threat of Japanese air attack. It would be their last break for some time. On the last day of 1941, *Marby* was cutting through the Flores Sea escorting *MS Maréchal Joffre* from Java to Australia. The seizure of the Vichy mail ship *Maréchal Joffre* is a little known but inspiring episode in U.S. Navy WWII history (see [Maréchal Joffre story](#)).

By 2 JAN 1942, *Marby* had become “Radio Darwin” in the northern Australian backwater that would serve as the base from which surviving Allied ships would launch several delaying actions against superior Japanese military forces.

Swimming Trunks Were the Only Uniform

On 28 MAR 1917, the Territory of Hawai'i gave the US Government 31.6-acres of agricultural land where Nāhāikapono Elementary School is presently located on the western side of Oahu. They named it 'Camp Andrews' and created a rest and recreation (R&R) area for military personnel, both prior to and during World War II. It was “a place where reveille and general quarters did not exist, and where the official camp uniform was swimming trunks. Black sand Nāhākuli beach (Kalaniana'ole Park) was just across the road. One usually got there from O'ahu Railway station on the little narrow-gauge train –a steam engine pulling five or six open coaches.” From: imagesofoldhawaii.com



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On 18 JAN 1942, *Chester* supported reinforcement landings on Samoa, but James missed this and other *Chester* action as he was transferred to Com 14 Camp Andrews for duty on 7 JAN 1942. Com 14 stood for Commander, 14th Naval District (Pacific Fleet Operational Control) directly under the Navy Department with responsibility for the Hawaiian Naval Coastal Sea Frontier, Pearl Harbor Navy Yard, and other Hawaiian assets, including recreational Camp Andrews. Rear Admiral C.C. Bloch had that unpleasant responsibility on 7 DEC 1941.

On 4 FEB 1942, as part of Allied forces efforts to stall Japanese aggression in Java, the *Marby* took two direct hits and a very damaging near miss from Japanese bombers in Makassar Strait, northeast of Java. John died in that attack. He and other fallen comrades were buried on the morning of 7 FEB at Tjilatjap (today's Cilacap), a port on Java's south coast into which the *Marby* limped on the morning after the bombings.

In a 10 FEB 1942 letter from *Marby's* Capt. A.G. Robinson, James was notified of John's death in the line of duty. Captain Robinson's 10 MAR 1942 letter to John's brother James read as follows:

"A military funeral was held with escorts from both the American and Netherlands forces, and both Protestant and Catholic services were conducted by Chaplain Rentz of the *USS Houston* and Father Widenbusche of Tjilatjap. Kleyn had served in this ship for nearly seven years, and consequently he was well known to me. During the strained months that preceded the outbreak of hostilities and in the difficult periods of war service that followed, his courage, cheerfulness and resolute performance of duty were constantly observed and admired by all his shipmates, among whom he had a great number of very close friends. As his Captain, I deeply share your sense of sorrow and loss."

John's passing left James as the only remaining male in the family as their dad had passed on decades earlier and their other brother, Harold, a clerk in Grand Rapids, MI, had committed suicide on 24 APR 37 following divorce from his wife of five years. After 18 JAN 1942, James could not be found in any ship muster roll, so the circumstances remain unclear as to what led to his death at age 27 on 4 FEB 1944 at the Naval Hospital in Oakland, Alameda Co., CA, exactly two years after John was killed. James was buried in Oakwood Hill Cemetery, Tacoma, Washington.

It is also unclear when John's wife, Heloise, received the news of his death. Captain Robinson mentioned in his letter to James that he had been unable to reach Heloise with the news. Capt. Robinson's difficulty in reaching Heloise Kleyn was because, unlike John, she did not make it out of the Philippines ahead of the Japanese invasion. As reported in the Oakland, CA Tribune on 30 MAR 42, she was imprisoned at Camp Santo Tomás along with more than 4,000 other internees. The camp, formerly the University of Santo Tomás, was a fenced compound where mostly Americans and British internees, including many children, "staked out living and sleeping quarters for themselves and their families in the buildings of the University. The Japanese mostly let them fend for themselves."

The food supply at Santo Tomás, never abundant, declined steadily throughout 1944. Weight loss, weakness, edema, paresthesia and beriberi were experienced by most adults. Internees ate insects and wild plants. These privations could have been reduced had the Japanese allowed food donations from local charities or permitted those working outside the camp to find food elsewhere. In JAN 1945, a doctor estimated the average internee weight loss to be a third of their weight on incarceration.

As American troops closed in on the camp, the Japanese confiscated much of the remaining food for their soldiers. In addition, four camp leaders were executed on suspicion that they were in contact with guerrilla forces. Liberation was a protracted affair because the Japanese took 200 hostages when American forces

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arrived. Nevertheless, internees began leaving on 11 FEB 1945, and Heloise returned to America on 2 May 45 aboard *SS Admiral E W Eberle*. She took up residence in Everett, WA, and appears to have remarried twice, first taking the surname Christenson and remarrying again on 16 JUL 1962 in Riverside, CA at age 50 to a William H. Mawhinney.

After the war, John's remains were reinterred in the Manila American Cemetery, Taguig City, Philippines, Plot A Row 4 Grave 2. During his service in the Navy, John was awarded the Purple Heart, Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon Bar, American Defense Service Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, Honorable Service Lapel Button (WWII), Good Conduct Medal, and the Good Conduct Pin.

John Robert Kleyn appears on page 242 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 substantial contributions from Mrs. Shirley McLellan Rishel, niece of John and James, and from Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, Wikipedia, FindaGrave.com and other Internet records.

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