

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



Fook Liang toiling as part of a *Marby* post-bombing bailing team

Source: *Where Away*  
Illustrator John J. Floherty,  
Jr. Chief Specialist, USCGR

## Marblehead Biography Fook Liang

On 15 MAR 1904, Fook Liang was born in Hong Kong, China, which was then a British Crown Colony. Little is known of his parents or siblings.

Fook spent his formative years in China and enlisted in the U.S. Navy in Hong Kong on 7 NOV 1923. He would serve the U.S.

Navy continuously from that time through the end of WWII, after which he worked aboard vessels of the U.S. Navy and other U.S. military establishments such as the Military Sea Lift Command (MSC), Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) and the U.S. Coast Guard until mid-1956. He was a “messman”, a category which included cooks and other food service personnel.

The first Internet-based muster roll showing Fook aboard the light cruiser *USS Marblehead* is that ship’s quarter-end muster roll of 31 MAR 1939 which was taken either in Bangkok, Thailand or in Saigon, French Indochina at that time, or on the high seas between those two cities. Fook was shown as a Mattlc (Mess Attendant 1<sup>st</sup> Class), service #5049257, whose latest enlistment had been on 23 NOV 1939 (at Manila, Philippines per subsequent muster rolls).

That earliest muster roll also pinpointed 29 JUL 1938 as Fook’s first day aboard *Marby*, as the ship was affectionately referred to by her crew. *Marby*’s log for 1938 put the ship in Chefoo, China on 15 JUL and in Tsingtao, China on 6 AUG, so he could have joined *Marby* in either of those cities or have been transferred aboard while at sea between those cities. On which ships he served prior to 29 JUL 1938 remains unclear since *Marby* muster rolls before 1939 are not available on the Internet. Over the years, Fook periodically reenlisted aboard *Marby* in ports such as Manila and Miami.

Fook served more than five years aboard *Marby*. The events of that period included the bombing of the ship on 4 FEB 1942 and her subsequent 20,589-mile, 90-day escape to New York, the highlights of which are more fully described in [Marby’s own biography](#). The textbox above describes some of Fook’s actions during the minutes, hours and days during and following the ship’s bombing on 4 FEB 1942.

As with the families of all the sailors aboard *Marby* throughout that perilous period, Fook’s family may have thought him dead or in enemy captivity, but as most of them were “trapped” in either Hong Kong or Shanghai, both of which quickly fell under Japanese control and news censorship, it is more likely they never learned of the bombing of the *Marby* until much later in the war or perhaps after it had ended.

In any case, the last *Marby* muster roll in which Fook appears was dated 24 FEB 1944 when he was transferred in Bayonne, NJ to Brooklyn Navy Hospital for a second time, no doubt for treatment related to physical or other injuries inflicted during the bombing. Based on that date, he spent roughly 5 ½ years on

### Marblehead Heroes Receive First-Ever Silver Stars

Navy Secretary Frank Knox commended two men from light cruiser USS MARBLEHEAD, which is still afloat after being “heavily bombed” in the Java Sea. One medal was awarded posthumously to Clarence J. Aschenbrenner, who first risked his life to help save his ship from a watery grave and later sacrificed it attempting to rescue an unconscious bluejacket from a gas-filled compartment. The other medal went to Fook Liang, 38-year-old Chinese cook currently recovering from shock caused by a bomb hit in his section of the ship. Despite this, he rescued wounded comrades from the blazing area. These are the first awards of the Silver Star, the Navy’s newest heroism decoration and its 3<sup>rd</sup>-highest combat award after the Congressional Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross.

On 6 MAY 1942 the Navy announced that the MARBLEHEAD had been bombed in a running fight from Borneo to Java, but had been brought out of it again by a crew that “didn’t know the meaning of the word ‘abandon’” and sailed her half-way round the world.

Liang, an Officer’s Cook 3rd Class from Hongkong was in the Chief Petty Officers’ quarters as a member of the After-Ammunition Party when a bomb killed or wounded most of his party. Liang was badly shocked, but despite this he proceeded at great risk to rescue wounded from the blazing area, then assisted in fighting fires and cleaning debris and wreckage amidships, and finally appeared in the improvised sick bay to undertake the vital work of keeping the area clean - all without orders to do so. He continued this work voluntarily in addition to his regular duties without rest until the wounded were landed in port. “By his courage, initiative and tireless energy, coupled with utter disregard of personal safety, Liang undoubtedly contributed much toward the saving of the ship and saving of many lives.”

Source: paraphrased from citation on [www.navy.mil](http://www.navy.mil)

Navy Silver Star





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*Marby*. Later, in his U.S. citizen naturalization petition filed on 22 JAN 1945 with the U.S. District Court in New York City, he lists his residence at the “*USS Marblehead, Miami, Florida*” so he may still have had no land-based address and that may have been his best guess as to where the ship was at the time.

Three years later, on 30 JAN 1948, the *SS Marine Swallow*, a cargo/troop ship operated by the United States Maritime Commission (MARCOM), arrived in

‘Face’ is Important to Chinese

“On the *Marblehead* the mess boys were Chinese. But as the crew plied these men with questions, there was one that they left strictly alone, a sullen lad named Fook Liang. He had been ostracized ever since the day he had been directed to remove hammocks from the crew’s quarters and had refused on the grounds that he had joined the ship to serve officers and that to do anything for enlisted men was beneath him and would amount to a loss of face.”<sup>1</sup> When the bombs began falling, Fook stepped up – big time!

<sup>1</sup>From [Where Away – a Modern Odyssey](#), [page 6](#)

Messman Chronicles

“Despite racial discrimination and second-class status within the enlisted corps, the U.S. Navy’s mess attendants, officer’s cooks, and stewards compiled a proud legacy of combat service in World War II. The heroism of men such as ‘Dorie’ Miller [and Fook Liang] were made known to the American public, but most have long been forgotten.” [The Messman Chronicles](#) by [Richard E. Miller, USNR](#) tells the story of “thousands of unheralded sailors of African descent who served in frontline combat with fellow ‘messmen’ of Filipino, Guamanian, and Chinese ancestry from the first days of war to the last. That story begins with recruit training in the racially segregated confines of Norfolk, Virginia’s Units K-West and B-East during the 1930s and proceeds through the perilous early months of war. Though long disparaged as ‘seagoing chambermaids’ and worse, they gallantly upheld the honor of their race while shedding their blood in full proportion in some of history’s greatest naval battles.... This unexplored perspective of the U.S. Navy puts a face on the ‘greatest generation’s’ last overlooked heroes while making a significant contribution to the operational, social, and cultural history of the U.S. Navy.”

From [The Messman Chronicles](#) by Richard E. Miller, USNR

San Francisco from Shanghai, China. Onboard were Fook’s wife, Pang-Chyn Ying (1908–1952), and their three sons, Lun Hsi ‘William’ Liang (1927–1972), Pao Hwa ‘Frank’ Liang (1931–2004), and Pao Liu ‘Jack’ Liang (1933–1969). According to their immigration papers, all four were born in Shanghai, and the boys were listed as students. Eventually, each became naturalized U.S. citizens and the boys took on their American names – William, Frank, and Jack, respectively.

Fook may have met and married Pang-Chyn during one of *Marby*’s many visits to Shanghai in the late-1930s. Unfortunately, she died young of a hemorrhage at the age of 43 on 3 JAN 1952 in San Francisco.

Fook may have remarried two decades later. In 1973, a Fook Liang married one Chee Chan in Manhattan, NY, but there is insufficient detail on the groom to determine whether he was the China-born sailor decorated for heroism for his actions aboard *Marby* in the 1940s.

If you can share a photo of **Fook Liang**, please do so by email to [spwade@gmail.com](mailto:spwade@gmail.com)

Fook Liang died on 20 DEC 1977 in San Francisco, CA. It is unclear where he is buried.

Fook Liang appears on pages 6, 68, 136, 144, 161, 171 and 242 of the book [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#), and in the book’s illustrations.

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 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).*