

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



1941: Brothers Rex and Wid (r) Wise, in Hawaii, when they served on *USS Oklahoma (BB-37)*.

## Marblehead Biography Wid Junior Wise

Wid Junior Wise was born on 17 Sep 1923 in Braman, Kay County, Oklahoma, about seven miles south of the border with Kansas. His parents were homemaker Annabel ‘Belle’ Marlow (1881-1971) from Caldwell, Sumner County, Kansas, and Missouri-born Henry Blaine Wise (1884-1964), who was variously a blacksmith, bricklayer, carpenter, and self-employed farmer.

Previously, in 1900, Belle had married a Frank Stacy (1876 - 1909) with whom she had two children, but Mr. Stacy died in 1909. Belle’s second husband was Henry Wise, with whom she had nine children, the last of which was Wid. Wid’s half-siblings were Bernice ‘Bernie’ Stacy (1903–1983) and Ray Clarence Stacy (1905–1991). His full siblings were Lawrence Everett (1910–1989), an infant son (1911–1911), Marie Isabel (1912–2006), Lelia Frances Elizabet (1915–1997), Eunice Evelyn (1917–2017), Lee Henry (1919–1994), Rex Elwood

(1920–1941), and Ruby Leona (1922–2006).

Wid attended school in Oklahoma and in South Haven, Kansas. He enlisted in the Navy on 27 Dec 40 at Kansas City, MO and trained at Great Lakes Naval Training Station on Lake Michigan north of Chicago. In Feb 41, via commercial transportation, Wid, an Apprentice Seaman (AS) reported to the Naval Receiving Ship at San Diego, CA on 10 Feb 41. He was transferred via the destroyer *USS Kilty (DD-137)* and the oiler *USS Neosho (AO-23)* to the battleship *USS Oklahoma (BB-37)* on 26 Mar 41.



*USS Oklahoma (BB-37)*  
Photo from en.wikipedia.org

From 29 Dec 37, *Oklahoma* had been homeported in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and only twice returned to the U.S. mainland, once to have her anti-aircraft guns and aging superstructure updated. When Wid first came aboard, his brother, Rex, then a Fireman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class (F2c), had already been aboard *Oklahoma* for one year.

Wid would spend eight months aboard *Oklahoma*. On 12 Apr 41, he was promoted from AS to Seaman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class (Sea2c), and on 9 May 41, he was promoted to Fireman 3<sup>rd</sup> Class (F3c). Around that time, Rex achieved the rate of F1c. The photo of the brothers above was probably shot in Hawaii during that period. It was rare, but occasionally brothers in the Navy requested assignment on the same ship or land station. It no doubt made the long absences from home more bearable, but as would soon become clear, it dramatically raised the risk of greater sorrow for the sailors’ family at large.

On 9 Nov 1941, Wid was transferred to the Receiving Ship at Pearl Harbor for further transfer to the Asiatic Station (ASTA), i.e., to the Asiatic Fleet. Historically, the fleet summered in China and wintered in the Philippines, but by late-1940, as the prospect of hostilities between the U.S. and Japan grew, calls on Chinese ports, by then largely controlled by Japan, had ceased. On 29 Nov 41, Wid boarded the veteran transport *USS Chaumont (AP-5)* bound for Manila, Philippines. Rex remained aboard *Oklahoma*!

Eight days later, on 7 Dec 1942, Japan struck Pearl Harbor, and within hours, they attacked the Philippines. To avoid the Japanese invasion of the latter, *USS Chaumont (AP-5)* diverted to Darwin, Australia via Suva, Fiji, and Brisbane, arriving in Darwin on 5 Jan 42. There, among other U.S. Navy ships, was the obsolete light cruiser, *USS Marblehead (CL-12)*.

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*Marby* has arrived from Manila via the Netherlands East Indies (NEI; today's Indonesia) ports of Tarakan, Balikpapan, Makassar, and Surabaya. Enroute from the latter to Darwin, she had escorted the Vichy French (i.e., Nazi) mail ship, *MS Marechal Joffre*, which had been captured in Manila Bay by a band of Navy airmen and ground crews which, with their planes all destroyed, were looking for a way out of the Philippines. *Marechal Joffre's* capture is one of the great stories of [U.S. Navy daring](#) in the dark, early days of WWII.

It is unclear when the *Chaumont's* crew and passengers such as Wid, received details of the death and destruction at Pearl Harbor, but it is likely that by the time the ship reached Darwin, Wid was aware of the fate of his brother Rex (see textbox right). Wid and the rest of the family mourned but persevered.

Wid would soon have much else on his mind. On 7 Jan 42, along with 83 other transfers to the ship in anticipation of wartime losses, Wid was received aboard the *USS Marblehead*, or *Marby* as she was affectionately referred to by her crew.

Wid would serve thirteen months on *Marby*. War would prevent him from seeing the exotic East and Southeast Asian ports that the ship had frequented after joining the Asiatic Fleet in early 1938, but all too soon he would see action. The day after he boarded her, *Marby* sailed north to engage an enemy superior in ship size and armament, in available aircraft, and just about every other category, except perhaps speed.

An initial engagement had to be aborted because the targeted enemy concentration had moved to an undetermined location. A second attack was to be directed by the more modern cruiser, *USS Boise (CL-47)*, with Admiral William Glassford aboard in command of the overall attack force. However, *Boise* ripped her bottom on an uncharted coral head and retired to Waworada Bay to return to *Marby* fuel oil that she had provided to *Boise* just before she hit the coral head. Meanwhile Glassford shifted his flag to *Marby* and continued in overall command. *Boise*, escorted by *Pillsbury*, sailed for repairs. Just after midnight on 24 Jan 42, Commander Paul Talbot, aboard *John D. Ford*, led the striking force of four destroyers - *John D. Ford*, *Pope*, *Parrott*, and *Paul Jones* - up Makassar Strait towards the oil port of Balikpapan where a Japanese invasion force was in the process of landing. *Marby* and destroyer *Bulmer* remained at the southern end of the Strait to cover the retreat of Talbot's ships.

Just after dawn on the following day, having not heard of the battle's outcome, *Marby's* Captain Robinson ordered a scout seaplane into the air. Piloted by Lt. E.M. Blessman with 'Tex' Jennings as radioman and gunner, the plane was to locate the returning destroyers and determine whether enemy ships or planes were following them. They soon picked up the wakes of all for destroyers heading south with no one on their tail. They would soon learn of the raid's success - against a light cruiser, ten destroyers, four minesweepers, three submarine chasers, three patrol boats, and sixteen transport ships that left Tarakan for Balikpapan on 21 Jan, the Talbot's destroyers had sunk seven enemy ships and damaged an undetermined number. "*Tojo had been caught with his bloomers adrift!*" one source later said. Task Force 5 retired to Surabaya.

Wid and his shipmates had not been in the heat of that battle, but another attack on Balikpapan was soon ordered. On 1 Feb 42, American, British, Dutch, and Australian (ABDA) commanders received word that a Japanese invasion force at Balikpapan consisting of 20 troop transports, three cruisers, and 10 destroyers, was preparing to sail to capture the cities of Makassar and Banjarmasin and establish control of the Makassar Strait. On 2 Feb, Admiral Thomas Hart, Vice Admiral Conrad Helfrich, Rear Admiral William A. Glassford and Australian Commodore John Collins met at Palembang, South Sumatra, and approved Helfrich's suggestion that a strike force be formed. It was formed the following day under Dutch Rear Admiral Karel Doorman, and began taking on supplies at the Gili Islands, south of Madura. The



Rex Elwood Wise circa 1939

*USS Oklahoma* was one of the first US battleships hit by Japanese torpedoes at Pearl Harbor. It quickly capsized, and 429 of her crew died that day, including Wid's brother, Rex. Originally buried in Hawaii, Rex was re-interred near his birthplace of Braman in 2020, 80 years after his death.

Photo from Ancestry.com member GeorgeWise44

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ABDA force consisted of four cruisers (Dutch cruisers *De Ruyter* (flagship) and *Tromp* plus *Houston* and *Marblehead*, escorted by seven Dutch and American destroyers (*HNLMS Banckert*, *Piet Hein*, and *Van Ghent*, and *USS Barker*, *Bulmer*, *John D. Edwards*, and *Stewart*). Unfortunately, the formation was spotted by Japanese aircraft on 3 Feb. The following morning 37 Japanese bombers attacked, damaging *Marby*, *Houston*, and *De Ruyter*.

*Marby*'s 4 Feb 1942 bombing and her improbable 20,589-mile, 90-day escape to the U.S. East Coast are well described in the 1944 book [Where Away - A Modern Odyssey](#) and in [Marby's own biography](#) and won't be repeated here, however, the Japanese reported *Marby* sunk on multiple occasions, and for security reasons, her voyage home was kept secret, so as was the case for all the parents of the sailors aboard her throughout that perilous voyage, Wid's family thought he too was dead or in enemy captivity. This would have been particularly sad news since they had recently lost Rex in the attack on Pearl Harbor. Their concerns turned to joy when Wid phoned home with the good news the day after arriving in New York.

Enroute home, on 31 Mar 42, while the ship was getting additional repairs at the Royal Naval Base at Simonstown, South Africa, Wid had been promoted to Fireman 2nd class (F2c). On 20 May 42, he was transferred to the Naval Hospital in Brooklyn, NY. It is unclear whether this had to do with an injury sustained during the bombing or was some other ailment. He returned to the ship eight days later.

During his time in New York, Wid met Marjorie Lorraine Gordon (1923–1994). They married on 25 Sep 1942 in New York City. Their daughter, Catherine Diane Wise (1945-2018), was born on in New Haven, Connecticut on 10 Dec 1945. As was typical of whirlwind marriages during and after the war, the couple later divorced.

Wid remained aboard *Marby* after her six-month overhaul in Brooklyn Navy Yard was completed, redeploying on 15 Oct 42 to the South Atlantic to operate out of Recife, Brazil in search of enemy subs and blockade runners, and occasionally rescuing downed Allied airmen and enemy sailors in life rafts after their vessels had been sunk.

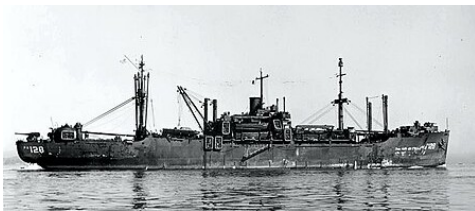
On 8 Feb 1943, Wid was transferred to U.S. Naval base at Bahia, Brazil for further forwarding to the Receiving Ship at Philadelphia, PA for duty on *USS Belleau Wood (CVL-24)*, a new light aircraft carrier which would go on to earn 12 battle stars during WWII. Wid was aboard her for the Gilbert Islands & Marshall Islands Campaign, the Mariana Islands and Palau Islands Campaigns, and during the Battle of the Philippine Sea.



USS Belleau Wood (CVL-24) on 22 Dec 1943

Source: NH\_97269

Wid's final ship was the *USS Arenac (APA-128)*, an attack transport ship which he joined on the day of her commission, 8 Jan 1945, in Oakland, CA. Named for Arenac County, Michigan, she was a Haskell-class. After a shakedown cruise and amphibious training off San Diego, *Arenac* took on cargo and left for Hawaii. On 3 Feb 1945, she was designated the flagship for the Combat Transport Division 68. She arrived at Pearl Harbor on 17 Mar 1945. During the next two months, she carried personnel and cargo to Eniwetok and Guam.



USS Arenac (APA-128), San Francisco Bay, 1945

Source: NH\_987

On 12 May 1945, *Arenac* arrived at Ulithi, Caroline Islands, and took on troops and supplies to support the invasion of Okinawa. She sailed for Okinawa on 23 May 1945 and anchored there on 27 May. While awaiting clearance to hit the beaches to unload, *Arenac* underwent



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several enemy air attack alerts. On 3-5 Jun 1945, she offloaded troops and cargo onto Hagushi Beach and embarked personnel for evacuation. She left for Saipan on 6 Jun, pausing there to discharge passengers, and then continued to Guam. She returned to Saipan on 20 Jun, stopping at Ulithi en route, and arriving in Okinawa on 5 Jul.

On 8 Jul 1945, *Arenac* sailed for Saipan, Guam, and San Francisco, and then underwent maintenance in a Richmond, CA shipyard. She sailed for Pearl Harbor on 11 Aug 1945, and en route, she received word of Japan's surrender. Arriving in Hawaii on 17 Aug, she took on personnel destined for the western Pacific. She set sail for Eniwetok on 20 Aug, and after a brief pause there, she rendezvoused with a convoy bound for Ulithi reaching there on 31 Aug.

*Arenac* sailed to the Philippines four days later, arriving at Manila on 9 Sep 1945. There, on 16 Sep, Wid was transferred to the Naval Receiving Ship at Cavite for forwarding to the U.S. mainland for discharge.

After WWII, Wid settled in Everett, Washington and went to work as a sawmill worker for Snohomish Pallet Company and Everett Lumber Company, retiring in 1982. He remarried twice, first to Virginia Mary Lee, who passed away in 1959, and finally in 1985 to Virginia G. Steele (1927-2010), but they divorced in 1987.

Wid died on 13 Jun 1992 in Grays Harbor Community Hospital, Westport, Washington. He was survived by son Gary, daughters Catherine and JoAnn, brother Lee, sisters Marie, Lelia, Eunice, and Ruby, and six grandchildren.

Wid Junior Wise is listed on page 247 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 contributions from Ancestry.com members Linda L. Nelson and GeorgeWise44, Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, and other Internet records.*

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