

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



Frank Verne Wade  
circa 1936

## Marblehead Biography Frank Verne Wade

Frank Verne Wade was born on 17 AUG 1916 in Sulphur, Calcasieu Parish, LA to Frank Wade (1885 - 1931), a jeweler of Irish extraction from San Antonio, TX, and Margaret Watkins (1891 - 1948), a homemaker who grew up in west Louisiana and whose farmer-parents had immigrated from Wales in 1887. Frank Verne was the 2<sup>nd</sup>-born of four kids. His siblings were: Margret Vella 1915 - 2013, Alwin Glen 1921 - 1943, and William Kenneth 1922 -1989. In Welsh tradition, all were referred to by their middle names. The boys served in the U.S. Navy during WWII.

Verne and Kenneth made careers of the Navy, and Glen may have too had he not been killed on 11 SEP 1943 supporting the invasion of Sicily when his destroyer, [USS Rowan \(DD-405\)](#), was torpedoed by a German E-boat. The ‘fish’ hit an ammunition magazine and “the explosion lit the midnight sky for sixteen miles in every direction.”<sup>1</sup> As a Machinist’s Mate, Glen was probably below deck with little chance of survival. *Rowan* sank in forty seconds, taking 202 of her 273 officers and men with her.

Four months earlier in a letter to Verne, Glen may have unwittingly provided insight as to why *Rowan* was unsuccessful in avoiding the torpedo. He wrote “I’m on a tin can. Really a tin can. It’s going to the dogs because our old man bangs into everything he sees, and I don’t mean with the guns.” Ironically, as the last male in the household in Louisiana, Glen did not have to enlist at all.



Wade siblings with their mother circa 1923; Verne on right

Of Glen his late sister Vella said “Glen had a horse and took in every stray animal that showed up. His favorite was a dog named ‘Bobbie’ and the feelings were mutual. After Glen joined the Navy, Bobbie would go to the end of the drive every evening and wait for him to return. It was so sad since Glen never came home. He had beautiful grey eyes,” she concluded wistfully.

Verne had played football for and graduated from LaGrange H.S. in Sulphur. He joined the Navy in New Orleans on 13 OCT 1936 and was assigned service #2742689. He first served aboard the [USS Balch \(DD-363\)](#). As a [Seaman 1<sup>st</sup> Class](#) (Sea1c) he transferred to transport [USS Henderson \(AP-1\)](#) on 27 MAY 1939 and sailed to [Territory of Hawaii](#), Guam and Manila enroute to [Shanghai, China](#), where on 9 JUL 1939, he joined the crew of the [USS Marblehead \(CL-12\)](#).

Referred to affectionately as ‘*Marby*’ by her crew, the ship would be Frank’s home through nearly all of WWII. Like his brothers, he sent part of his monthly pay to his mother who had been widowed when Frank died in his jewelry shop in 1931. On 16 DEC 1940, Verne was promoted to [Coxswain](#) (Cox) aboard *Marby* as she returned to Cavite, Philippines following a week at sea. He served on the ship through her bombing on 4 FEB 1942, her improbable 90-day, 20,859-mile escape to New York, her interdiction and rescue missions in the mid-Atlantic after her overhaul in Brooklyn, and her participation in Operation Dragoon, the invasion of Southern France. (See [Marby’s own biography](#))

On 6 Apr 45 at New York, NY, after spending 5 years, 8 months, 28 days visiting 53 different ports in 18 countries; after crossing three oceans, many seas, and the equator more than a dozen times; and experiencing almost all of WWII aboard *Marby*, Verne, by then a Chief Boatswain’s Mate, transferred to the Navy’s Training & Distribution Center at Shoemaker, CA. In his final year aboard *Marby* he served as her [Chief Master at Arms](#), a post he would hold at several subsequent duty stations.

<sup>1</sup> [Shipmates](#) by *USS Rowan* survivor Lewis E. Seeley and relative Lorraine Seeley Buell



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Verne's love life in these years remained opaque. For seven decades, his two boys, who did not grow up with their parents, had no idea how their mother, Phyllis, who had emigrated from Winnipeg, Canada in 1925 with her mother, two sisters and a brother, had met their Louisiana-born dad. That changed on 17 JUL 2016 when a military buff and total stranger, sent an email to their son Steve. It read as follows:

*"Hello - I wanted to inform you that I noticed a WWII diary located on eBay written by a Frank V. Wade (I would guess your Father). Are you aware a WWII Diary exists while he was aboard the USS Marblehead? The entries are dated 1941 thru 1942."*

The diary, acquired a few days later, began as the *Marby* left Tarakan, Borneo in NOV 1941 but included only 37 more pages and added little to *Marby's* story. However, it was accompanied by a collection of previously unseen photos of Verne and his shipmates in pre-WWII China and elsewhere in Asia, and most importantly, by eleven letters to Verne from Phyllis, an intelligent, pretty 28-year-old "Rosie-the-Riveter-like" installer of electrical assemblies in Douglas Aircraft's [B-17 Flying Fortress](#) plant in Long Beach, CA. The first letter revealed that the couple had met the previous week, on Sun 24 JUN 1945, in San Francisco while she was on a holiday with her best friend, Fran. By the end of the week, the couple had already decided to marry, and they did so in mid-JUL 1945. At the time, Verne was Chief Master at Arms at the Navy Radio Material School.

He then served at the Naval Supply Depot in Oakland, CA, where son Mike was born, before returning to sea on the [USS St. Paul CA 73](#), which was followed by duty on the [USS Manchester CL 83](#) (Chief in Charge of the Flag Division); on [USS LSM 462](#) as Chief in Charge of all Deck Division Personnel; at the Pacific Reserve Fleet in charge of various aspects of maintaining the Mothball Fleet; on the [USS Mansfield DD 728](#) as Chief Master at Arms; at the Naval Petroleum School in Pearl Harbor where he was in training; on the USS Jason AR 8 for three years as Chief in charge of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division; at the US Naval Station in Washington, DC as Chief in charge of the First Lieutenant Division, and later as Brig Warden at that station.

Verne's mom, Margaret died on 16 JUN 1948 in Brookhaven, MS, the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her husband's death. She was buried in Big Woods Cemetery in Edgerly, LA, not far from where she raised her children.

By the early fifties, Phyllis and Frank's whirlwind romance had unwound. Due to the health challenges of their mother and Verne's profession, which required periodic postings at sea, their sons were sent to, to live more or less permanently with Verne's sister, Vella, and her husband in Mississippi, and later Louisiana.

By the mid-fifties, Verne was working at the [U.S. Naval Research Laboratory](#) in Washington, DC, first in a military capacity and as a civil servant after his MAR 1960 retirement from the Navy. During his tenure at the Lab, Verne led a team that secretly outfitted the *USS Mizar*, a research vessel. Working in sub-zero temperatures, they urgently prepped the *Mizar* to hunt for one of four American hydrogen bombs that had fallen on Palomares, Spain on 17 JAN 1966 after a B-52 strategic bomber collided with its refueling tanker. In what went down in history as [The Palomares Incident](#), three of the bombs landed near the village, and the 4<sup>th</sup>, the one the *Mizar* would search for, fell into the sea a few miles offshore. Thankfully, none detonated. Based on 'intel' from a local fisherman nicknamed 'Paco', who saw the 4<sup>th</sup> bomb hit the water, the U.S. Navy salvaged it.

Paco, by then known in the local press as "Paco del la Bomba", later sued Uncle Sam for a portion of the bomb's salvage value. It was customary under maritime law that a person who "identifies the location of a ship to be salvaged has the right to a salvage award, usually 1-2%, if identification leads to recovery." The 4<sup>th</sup> bomb was valued by no less an authority than the U.S. Secretary of Defense at \$2 billion—each percent of which was \$20 million. The U.S. government settled out of court for an undisclosed sum.

Towards the end of his time at the Naval Research Laboratory, Frank purchased a Navy-surplus house, and had it moved to a wooded plot on the Patuxent River in southern Maryland. It was his 'fixer-upper' that



Frank and Phyllis' wedding day, San Francisco, JUL 1945.



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provided an excuse to escape the DC metropolitan area on weekends. He did nearly all the remodeling himself. There he also enjoyed hosting barbecues, playing Christmastime Santa Claus for his grandchildren, and boating on the river.

Following his second retirement, Verne reluctantly moved from Maryland to Florida in the mid-1980s at the request of his second wife, Lois Baily. After nursing her through a long and ultimately unsuccessful fight with lung cancer, Frank eventually married for a third and final time to a Phyllis Otten.

Verne died on 11 SEP 1986 in Volusia County, FL. He was buried at sea with full military honors at coordinates 30 26.1' N, 87 2.7' W, off Jacksonville, FL, 715 miles due east of his hometown in Louisiana. His first wife, Phyllis, died on 4 DEC 1987 in Long Beach, CA, where she spent most of her life. Her ashes were spread in a beautiful location near Prescott, AZ. Both were survived by their sons Mike and Steve.



Santa with his step-grandson, Steve Heid, in 1973

Verne's significant duty stations and citations are listed below:

USS Balch DD 363  
USS Henderson AP 1  
USS Marblehead CL 12  
Naval Training & Distribution Center  
Radio Material School, Treasure Island  
COMSERVPAC Petroleum School  
USS LSM 462  
Pacific Reserve Fleet  
USS Mansfield DD 728  
SERVFORADMIN, COMSERVPAC  
USS Jason ARH 1  
U.S. Naval Research Laboratory  
USS St. Paul CA 73  
USS Manchester CL 83  
NAVAL SUPPLY DEPOT, Oakland, CA  
USS RIGEL ad 13  
Naval Training Station, Norfolk, VA  
USS Lawrence DD 250  
US Naval Station, Washington, DC



Frank, back row, center, with the U.S. Navy Special Police Patrol

American Defense Service Medal  
American Theater Campaign Medal  
Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal  
China Service Medal  
European Theater Campaign Medal  
Korean Presidential Unit Citation  
National Defense Service Medal  
Navy Good Conduct Medal  
Navy Unit Commendation  
  
Philippine Defense Ribbon W/Star  
Philippine Liberation Ribbon  
Purple Heart  
United Nations Service Medal  
World War II Victory Medal

Source: <http://navylog.navy Memorial.org>

Frank Verne Wade 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 substantial contributions from a multitude of records via Ancestry.com.  
Comments, corrections, additions and photos are welcomed by email to [spwade@gmail.com](mailto:spwade@gmail.com).*