

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



Glenn Basinger circa 1938
Source: [Grandnephew Stuart](#)

Marblehead Biography Glenn William Basinger

Glenn William Basinger was born 7 Sep 1906 in Salisbury, Rowan County, North Carolina, a town midway between today's Winston-Salem/Greensboro urban complex and Charlotte. He was the fourth son of William Allison Basinger (1859-1934), a blacksmith and mechanic, and homemaker Susan Frances Barger (1868-1935). His parents had married in 1890. Glenn's siblings were David Lee (1890-1949), Walter Shirley (1894-1953), and Hoke Allen (1899-1953).

It is unclear which schools he and his brothers attended, but in any case, Glenn left school early, enlisting in the Navy on 9 Aug 1922 at Raleigh, North Carolina. His grandnephew, Stuart, described Glenn at the time: "*He was only 15, but he lied about his age saying he was born in July 1904. He was big for his age, and he stole his father's pants to look older when he enlisted.*"

Assigned Service #2612752, Glenn received basic training at the Naval Training Station at Hampton Roads, VA. There he also received his first promotion from Apprentice Seaman (AS) to Seaman 2nd Class (S2c) on 1 Oct 1922. His training included a week aboard the transport, *USS Henderson (AP-1)*, which he would encounter again 17 years later in the Pacific.

On 31 Dec 1922, Glenn assumed his first non-training duties aboard the *USS Beaufort (AK-6)*. Originally a German-owned, steel-hulled collier built in 1909 at Lübeck, she had been operating in the Gulf of Mexico when WWI began, and she took refuge in Pensacola, Florida. She was seized there on 6 Apr 1917 following America's entry into the war, and after refitting in New Orleans, she was renamed *Beaufort* and commissioned as an auxiliary vessel on 20 Sep 1917. On 1 May 1924, while aboard *Beaufort*, Glenn was promoted to Seaman 1st Class (S1c).



USS Beaufort (AK-6) at Norfolk, VA in 1925
Source: [Wikipedia.com](#)

On 23 Dec 1925, Glenn was transferred to the Naval Receiving Station at Washington, DC. He served there until honorably discharged in Aug 1926, following which he commenced an 18-month break from the Navy. Promotions were notoriously slow in coming during peacetime and despite high ratings in conduct and technical proficiency, Glenn had remained a S1c. Since the 1920's were still roaring and the Depression was nowhere in sight, perhaps he was able to easily find work.



USS Tracy (DD-214) in the 1930s
Source: [Wikipedia.com](#)

Regardless, Glenn reenlisted on 26 Jan 1928, again at Raleigh, NC, and fortunately he was able to retain his rank. He was assigned to the Receiving Barracks at Hampton Roads, VA, where he served for six months before assuming duties aboard the *USS Montcalm (AT-39)* on 30 Sep 1928. Named for Montcalm, Michigan, the ship was a fleet tug that primarily operated in the Caribbean Sea out of the Navy Yard at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Annual voyages to Charleston for repairs and service missions to New York in late 1929 and 1931 alternated with

active service in the Caribbean. On 23 Aug 1931, Glenn was commended by *Montcalm's* Commanding Officer for his initiative and exemplary conduct in going to the assistance of a drowning man the previous day. On 27 Nov 1931, Glenn transferred off *Montcalm* and was discharged the following month. He reenlisted for another four years and was assigned to the Navy Yard at Charleston, SC. He took a month's leave at the time and probably visited his family in North Carolina.

Glenn remained attached to the Navy Yard in Charleston until 29 May 1934. Then, after completing the Bureau of Navigation course for the position of Coxswain, he was assigned to destroyer *USS Tracy (DD-214)* at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba on 30 Sep 1934. Three months later, he and his shipmates transited the

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Panama Canal, stopping at Balboa, Canal Zone, before sailing on to San Diego, CA, which would serve as the ship's new homeport.

It was aboard *Tracy* that Glenn completed his twelfth year in the Navy. Shortly thereafter, while participating in Fleet Problem XVII exercises on 20 May 1936, he and many of his shipmates crossed the equator for the first time, at longitude 81 West, 2,476 nautical miles northwest of Cabo Pasado, Ecuador. In the tradition of the U.S. Navy and other navies, this occasioned their participation equator-crossing ceremonies honoring King Neptune. This two-day ritual (evening and day) in which previously inducted crew members, "Trusty Shellbacks", organize into a "Court of Neptune" and induct uninitiated "Slimy Pollywogs" into "the mysteries of the Deep". Physical hardship, in keeping with the spirit of the initiation, is tolerated, and each Pollywog is expected to endure a standard initiation rite in order to become a Shellback. During the ceremony, the Pollywogs undergo several increasingly embarrassing ordeals largely for the entertainment of the Shellbacks.¹ Glenn's certificate of successful completion appears below.



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Back in San Diego on 23 Jun 1936, Glenn transferred off *Tracy* to Battle Force Torpedo School in San Diego, where, given his extended stay, he may well have been an instructor. At this school, on 15 May 1938, he was promoted to Coxswain (Cox), and the following day, he was transferred to the Destroyer Tender *USS Melville (AD-2)*.

At the Naval Yard, Mare Island, CA, northeast of San Francisco, on 8 Dec 1938, that Glenn reenlisted for another four years. This would be his final enlistment.

On the same date, Glenn joined the San Diego-based Destroyer Tender *USS Melville (AD-2)* which was at the time at Mare Island, near San Francisco. Already in the Navy sixteen years at that point, he re-upped for another four years on the same day. We have no record of his rank at that time, but on 31 Mar 1939, Glenn appeared in *Melville's* muster rolls as a Coxswain (Cox). Looming war would lead to faster promotion.

¹ Wikipedia.com

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Melville spent most of the inter-war period operating out of San Diego, and it was there on 8 May 1939 that Glenn transferred once more to the veteran transport, *USS Henderson*. This time it was not a training run or a long-term assignment. He was bound for the Asiatic Fleet. On 9 Jul 1939, via *Henderson*, Glenn was



Destroyer Tender, USS Melville (AD-2)

delivered to the obsolescent *USS Marblehead (CL-12)* which was anchored in the Huang-po River just off the Bund, the colonial commercial center of Shanghai, China. Referred to as the ‘Paris of the Orient’, Shanghai was then one of the world’s most cosmopolitan cities. At the time, *Marblehead* was undergoing a major crew change, and among the other sailors joining her that day was another coxswain, the father of the author of this autobiography.

Glenn would spend slightly more than 2 ½ years aboard *Marby*, as the light cruiser was affectionately referred to by her crew. During that time, Glenn would visit many of the exotic ports of China (e.g., Hong Kong, Tsingtao, and Chinwangtao), the Philippines, French Indochina (today’s Vietnam), and the Netherlands East Indies (today’s Indonesia). On 29 Feb 1940, while the ship was in Manila, Glenn was promoted to Boatswain’s Mate 2nd Class (BM2c).

As tension mounted between Japan and the U.S., in early-September 1940, *Marby* left Tsingtao for Manila, and it was the last time she would see China. On 30 Nov 1940, while *Marby* was in Cavite Navy Yard, Philippines, Glenn was promoted to Boatswain’s Mate First Class (BM1c). For the remainder of that year and most of 1941, *Marby* operated primarily in Philippine waters, and she made one trip to Guam. Intense battle training at sea became the prime focus of *Marby*’s skipper, Captain A.G. Robinson, and the rest of the ship’s leadership.

Sensing that hostilities were imminent, on 25 Nov 1941, Admiral Thomas Hart, Commander of the Asiatic Fleet, secretly ordered his ships to disperse from Manila without fanfare and head southwest into the Netherlands East Indies (NEI). On the night of the 29th, *Marby* dropped anchor off Tarakan Island, East Borneo. The ship was darkened, and the crew settled in to await further orders.

Ten days later, at 0328 hours on 8 Dec 1941, as the crew slept east of the International Date Line, *Marby*’s radio receiver crackled with news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The ship’s General Quarters alarm blared moments later, and her crew’s response foretold the training, discipline and spirit that would later save the ship – i.e., from deep slumber, within eight minutes the entire 700+ crew was standing at attention at their battle stations. Over the public address system, the men then heard the following: “The Japanese have commenced hostilities. Act accordingly.”

At dawn, *Marby* weighed anchor and headed for Balikpapan, an oil port on the south coast of Borneo, where she refueled. She then cut across the strait to Makassar, South Celebes Island to reprovision. By Christmas, she was at the Dutch Naval Base at Surabaya, Java, where Capt. Robinson granted his men limited shore leave despite the risk of Japanese air attack.

On the last days of 1941, *Marby* was cutting across the Flores Sea, escorting the French mail ship, *MS Marechal Joffre* from Surabaya to Darwin, Australia. There, for a few days, *Marby* would temporarily become Radio Darwin to facilitate regrouping of the remaining Allied warships to slow the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia.

Marby soon headed north, and on 20 Jan 1942, she covered Destroyer Division 59 (USS John D. Ford, USS Parrott, USS Paul Jones, and USS Pope) in its retirement from a raid on a Japanese convoy at Balikpapan in which five enemy vessels were sunk, two more were badly damaged, and another two slightly damaged.

Marby spent the final week of January 1941 in Surabaya, and by 1 February, she was cruising off Madura Strait. On the afternoon of February 3rd, a flight of about 40 Japanese planes passed overhead enroute to bomb Surabaya. One plane lingered behind to get reconnaissance on the ships below which also included heavy cruiser *USS Houston*, the smaller Dutch cruisers, *De Ruyter* and *Tromp*, and seven Dutch and American destroyers.



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The following morning “broke red, burnishing the bottoms of clouds that floated across the sky before a mild westerly breeze. The lookouts could see the high mountains of Bali looming in the distance. ... A little after 0900, Admiral Doorman on *De Ruyter* received a dispatch which he then flashed to all ships: “37 bombers to Surabaya, course SSW.”² By the time the message reached *Marby*’s Capt. Robinson, the ship’s lookouts had spotted the planes approaching from the east at 17,000 feet. Each had the red sun of Japan painted on its tail and wings. All hell soon broke loose.

Despite its successful evasive action on the first three bomb runs, *Marby* eventually suffered two direct hits and a highly damaging third near miss “close aboard her port bow.” The damage was severe – one of the direct hits jammed *Marby*’s rudder causing her to steam in a very predictable circle, and along with the other direct strike, knocked out her gyroscope, all electricity and internal communication, and caused multiple fires that soon swept the ship. The near miss opened a large gash in *Marby*’s bow which flooded several compartments and caused the ship to begin to sink. The enemy assumed the sea would finish her off, so they went after bigger prey, the *Houston*.

The Japanese would later claim on several occasions that they had sunk *Marby*, but they nothing of the character of the men for whom she was home. Eleven sailors were killed that morning, including Glen William Basinger. Another eighty-four were injured, five of whom would later die of their wounds. But the remaining able-bodied crew would defy the odds, the Japanese, and the Java Sea. After bailing by hand non-stop for more than seventy hours, they would coax the crippled cruiser 20,589 miles over the next ninety days, crossing the Indian and Atlantic oceans to enter New York harbor on 4 May. Following a six-month overhaul, *Marby* would fight again in the south-central Atlantic and in the Mediterranean Sea supporting the invasion of southern France. In one of his fireside chats, President Franklin D. Roosevelt would later single out the crew of the *Marblehead* as an inspiration to their compatriots.

The *Marblehead*’s bombing in the Battle of Makassar Strait on 4 Feb 1942 and her subsequent escape to New York are described in *Marby*’s own biography and in the 1944 book *Where Away – A Modern Odyssey*. Though Japan wasted little time in proclaiming to the international press that it had sunk the *Marblehead*, the ship’s improbable voyage home was kept secret until after *Marby*’s arrival in New York. The secrecy had meant that loved ones back home thought their sailors were either dead or in enemy captivity until phone calls home began flooding across the nation on 5 May.

But such was not the case for the eleven who died on the day of the bombing and the five who later succumbed to their wounds. In these cases, notice arrived more swiftly in the form of Western Union telegrams like the one Glenn’s brother Walter received. Glenn had died instantly, without a scratch, the victim of the concussion from one of the direct bomb strikes, most likely the one that struck amidships. At the time, Glenn and others were below deck moving ammunition out of harm’s way.

Glenn and his fallen shipmates were initially buried on 6 Feb 1942 at Tjilatjap (today’s Cilacap on the south coast of Java, Indonesia). It was the first port that *Marby* made following the bombing. Glenn’s parents had died seven years before the bombing, so on 10 Mar 1942, *Marby*’s skipper, Captain A.G. Robinson wrote a letter to Glenn’s brother Walter. In it, Robinson conveyed the following:

“He was buried, with other shipmates who were killed in action, in the European Cemetery at Tjilatjap, Java, Netherlands East Indies. Here in a quiet section of this beautiful island, the Netherlands Government has set aside an area for the internment of our heroic dead so that they may lie together in beautiful surroundings, in a sense under American soil and as a memorial to their high courage and ideals.

“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 U.S.S. Houston and Father Widennbusche of Tjilatjap. His grave is clearly and appropriately marked.

² From [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#), page 108.

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“We had served together in this ship for twenty-two months, and consequently he was well known to me. During the strained months that preceded the outbreak of hostilities and in the difficult period 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. Please be assured that, as his Captain, I deeply share your sorrow and sense of loss.”

In 1950, Glen was reinterred at Arlington National Cemetery across the Potomac from Washington, DC.



Grandnephew Stuart's Memorial Day 2022 collage honoring Glenn

Glenn William Basinger is listed on pages 234 and 238 of the 1944 book [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#). Don't forget to read it and [Marby's own biography](#)

Biography by Steve Wade, son of Frank V. Wade, BM2c, USS Marblehead 1939-1945, with huge, invaluable contributions, including all of the family photos above, from Glenn's grandnephew, Stuart, who related the following: “The only photos I have come from a hotel manager in San Diego where Glenn had a room whenever he was in port. He left some personal belongings at this hotel and after a few years the manager assumed he was killed and contacted my grandfather and mailed the photos of Glenn and this woman. If it were not for this manager, Glenn's image would have been lost to the ages.” Other important sources include Wikipedia.com (the source of the ship photos), Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, and other Internet records.

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