



## Marblehead Biography of Walter Jarvis



Walter Everett Jarvis was born on 16 Jul 1907 in Fairbury, IL, about sixty miles due east of Peoria. His parents, Indiana-born Everett Jarvis (1885-1965) and Illinois-born Viola Powell, were farmers. Walter had two siblings: Clifford Jarvis (1912–1974) and Dorothy Mae Jarvis (1914–1996).

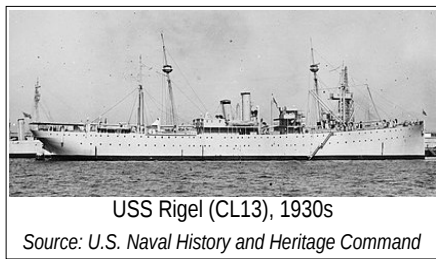
In 1920, his family moved 400 miles northeast to a farm three miles from the tiny village of Capac, St. Clair County, Michigan, about 60 miles north of Detroit and 30 miles west of the Canadian-U.S. border where the St. Clair River empties into Lake Huron. Capac had a population of 791 at the time. In 1925, Walter graduated from Capac High School, and he worked about a year in the automotive industry in Detroit before enlisting in the U.S. Navy on 29 Jul 1927 and he was assigned service number 3108901. He did his basic training at Great Lakes Naval Training Station just north of Chicago, IL.

In 1931, Walter married Anna M. Palmateer (1910-1952), fourth child of Michigan-born Hiram Palmateer (1881-1952) and Canada-born Maude Jane Allen (1881-1931), both farmers from Yale, St. Clair, MI, just fourteen miles northeast of Capac. Anna's siblings were William John (1902-1903), Ethel Hannah (1905-1984), Charles Hiram (1906-1992), Edith Mae (1915-1995), Hazel Irene (1916-2006), and Roberta M (1921-2009), all of whom were born in Michigan. On 8 Sep 1932, in San Diego, CA, Anna bore twin daughters: Charlotte Jane Jarvis (1932–1998) and Shirley Anne Jarvis (1932–1993). Walter appears to have been attached to the San Diego Naval Station or to a ship operating from there.



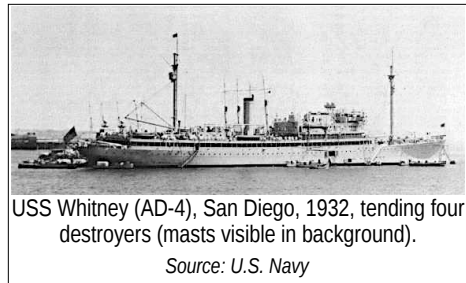
USS Raleigh (CL-7), San Diego, 1933  
Source: Donated to US Naval Historical Center by Franklin Moran

Because ship muster roles prior to 1937 are not available and Walter's service records could not be accessed for this biography, his early duty stations could not be determined with certainty. However, he appears in the 31 Mar 1939 muster roll of the light cruiser, *USS Raleigh (CL-7)*, which lists him as an Electricians Mate 1<sup>st</sup> class and indicates that his most recent enlistment had been on 12 Mar 1938 in San Diego.



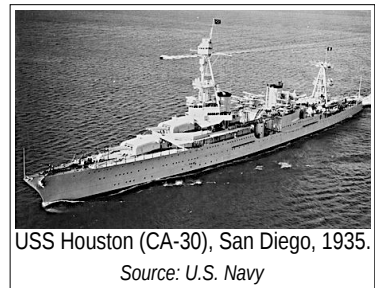
USS Rigel (CL13), 1930s  
Source: U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command

On 30 Jun 1939, Walter was transferred for temporary duty to *USS Rigel (AD-13)*, a destroyer tender. He returned to *Raleigh* on 3 Oct 1939 to resume regular duty, but the next day, he transferred to another tender,



USS Whitney (AD-4), San Diego, 1932, tending four destroyers (masts visible in background).  
Source: U.S. Navy

*USS Whitney (AD-4)*. Duty on these tenders, which serviced multiple destroyers with technical expertise, munitions, and supplies, no doubt gave Walter a wide range of experience. It was aboard *Whitney* on 20 Nov 39 that Walter first achieved the officer rank of Warrant Officer Electrician. Officers rarely appear in ship muster rolls, so this promotion made it more difficult to track Walter's future duty stations. Nevertheless, a 1940 officer's register indicated that he was serving on heavy cruiser *USS Houston (CA-30)*, the flagship of the Hawaiian Detachment which operated out of Pearl Harbor. The 1940 U.S. Census showed Walter, Anna, and their daughters, resident in Honolulu. On 19 Nov 1940, *Houston* arrived in Manila to assume duty as the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet Commander, Admiral Thomas Hart.



USS Houston (CA-30), San Diego, 1935.  
Source: U.S. Navy



By late 1941, Walter was attached to the 16<sup>th</sup> Naval District headquarters in Manila, Philippines. On 25 Nov, he was transferred to the light cruiser *USS Marblehead (CL-12)*, affectionately known to her crew as *Marby*. On the same day, *Marby* departed Manila, her winter homeport since 1938. It was the last time her crew would see Manila as Admiral Hart, anticipating imminent war with Japan, ordered his ships to quietly disperse south-southwest and into the Netherlands East Indies (NEI; today's Indonesia).

On 27 Nov, *Marby* dropped anchor off Jolo Island, the last significant port at the southern end of the Philippine archipelago. Two days later, she crossed into NEI waters and anchored at Tarakan Island, just off the east coast of Borneo. There she awaited further instructions.

At Tarakan, *Marby* was west of the International Date Line, and at 0328 hours on 8 Dec 41 she received word of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Her General Quarters alarm blared moments later and the [crew's response](#) foretold the spirit and superb training that would later save her. At dawn, the ship sailed farther southwest ahead of the Japanese onslaught which would hit the neighboring Philippines within hours. The following day, she refueled at the Dutch oil port of Balikpapan on the south coast of Borneo. She then proceeded across the strait to the city of Makassar on the southwest coast of the island of Celebes (today's Sulawesi, Indonesia). There she reprovisioned before heading to the sizable Dutch Naval Base at Surabaya, Java, arriving on Christmas Eve.

In the days that followed, details poured in on the Pearl Harbor disaster, particularly on the eight battleships sunk or damaged there. Then, on 10 December came news of the loss of British battleships *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* in the South China Sea east of peninsula Malaya. Previously, battleships had been considered invincible but Japanese naval air superiority had just made quick victims of those British behemoths. These events sharpened *Marby's* crew's focus on the ship's vulnerabilities. *"For if those great British and American battlewagons, with their vast belts of bulges designed to serve as torpedo shock absorbers, couldn't take it from the Japanese fliers, what chance had an old bucket like the Marblehead whose A.A. battery was but a tiny fraction of any of those capital ships and whose slender sides had no such protection? Any torpedo that struck her would strike below her fragile armor belt which was only three inches thick at its heaviest. Her main battery could not be used against planes, and the seven 3-inch A.A.'s plus four .50 calibre machine guns atop the foremast and four more aft amounted to something considerably less than impressive."*<sup>1</sup>

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. Formerly owned by the pro-Nazi Vichy French government, *Marechal Joffre* had been brazenly captured by American naval aviators and ground crews in Manila Bay. They then used her to escape the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, and from Darwin, she sailed on to San Francisco to be recommissioned by in U.S. Navy (see the [Marechal Joffre Story](#)).

However, *Marby* remained in that bleak north Australian frontier town to temporarily become "*Radio Darwin*," the beacon that soon facilitated the regrouping of Allied warships in Southeast Asia to slow the Japanese onslaught. However, she soon sailed north to fight and on 20 Jan 42, 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 which sank five enemy ships and damaged four others.



*USS Marblehead (CL-12)*  
Courtesy: NHHC

*Marby* spent the last week of January 1941 in Surabaya, and by 1 February, she was cruising off Madura Strait. On February 3rd, a flight of 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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<sup>1</sup> [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#), p. 42.



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.”*”<sup>2</sup> By the time the message reached *Marby*’s Capt. Robinson, her 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 third near-miss “close to her port bow.” The damage was severe – one bomb jammed *Marby*’s rudder causing her to steam in a predictable circle. Another strike knocked out her gyroscope, all electricity and internal communication. Multiple fires soon swept the ship. The near miss ripped a large gash in her bow, flooding compartments and causing the ship to slow and to begin to sink.

Fortunately, the enemy assumed the sea would finish what their bombs had begun, so they went after bigger prey, the heavy cruiser *USS Houston*. They had no understanding of the character, competence, and determination of the men for whom *Marby* was home. Eleven sailors were killed that day and another eighty-four were injured, five of whom later died of their wounds, but the remaining able-bodied crew defied the odds, the Japanese, and the Java Sea. After bailing by hand non-stop for more than seventy hours, over the next

### Marby’s Improbably Escape from the Jaws of Death Across 13 Primary Time Zones.



ninety days, they coaxed the crippled cruiser 20,589 miles across the Indian and Atlantic oceans to enter New York harbor on 4 May 42. *Marby*’s bombing in the Battle of Makassar Strait on 4 Feb 1942 and her subsequent escape to New York are well described in [Marby’s own biography](#) and in the 1944 book [Where Away – a Modern Odyssey](#).

The Japanese claimed several times in the international press that they had sunk the *Marblehead*, but they got nearly everything wrong – the date, the location, the nearest land mass, and even the water-body (the Java Sea). Most importantly, they got the “sunk” part wrong too, but U.S. Navy never corrected them. Instead, for security reasons, *Marby*’s voyage home was kept secret until she made New York, but the secrecy meant that loved ones back home thought their sailors were either dead or in enemy captivity. That all changed on 5 May 42 when phone calls began flooding across America, bringing truth and joy to hundreds of families. In one of

<sup>2</sup> [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#), p. 108-109



# The Marby

his fireside chats, President Roosevelt singled out *Marby's* crew as an inspiration to the nation and her Allies which at that point were in retreat in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere.

Now dubbed heroes, Walter and his shipmates took leave to go home. On 21 May 42, in an interview for the Port Huron Times Harold newspaper, Walter described in detail the battle, the damage to the ship, and the innovative approaches that the crew employed to save her from a watery grave.

Walter was promoted to Lieutenant on 1 Jul 1944, and on 1 Jan 1949 he was promoted to Lieutenant Commander, but his duty stations at the time of those promotions were not available for this biography.

Walter's wife, Anna, died young at the age of 42 on 8 Nov 1952 at the Great Lakes Naval Hospital. At the time, Walter and Anna were living in Mundelein, IL, just twelve miles from Great Lakes Naval Station, so it is probable that Walter, still a Lt. Commander, was stationed there.

Anna was buried at Elmwood Cemetery in Yale, MI, the town in which they had married. Walter retired the following year, on 1 Aug 1953, after 27 years in the Navy. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Mountain Home, Arkansas. What brought him there is unclear.

On 17 Jul 1955, he remarried in Mundelein, IL, this time to Ms. Esther Anderson nee Anthony. How they met is unclear, but Esther may have been a family friend from the time Walter and Anna lived in Mundelein. It was the second marriage for both. In 1974, perhaps in search of warmer weather, Walter and Esther moved to Leesburg, Florida, a town of about 11,000 just north of Orlando.

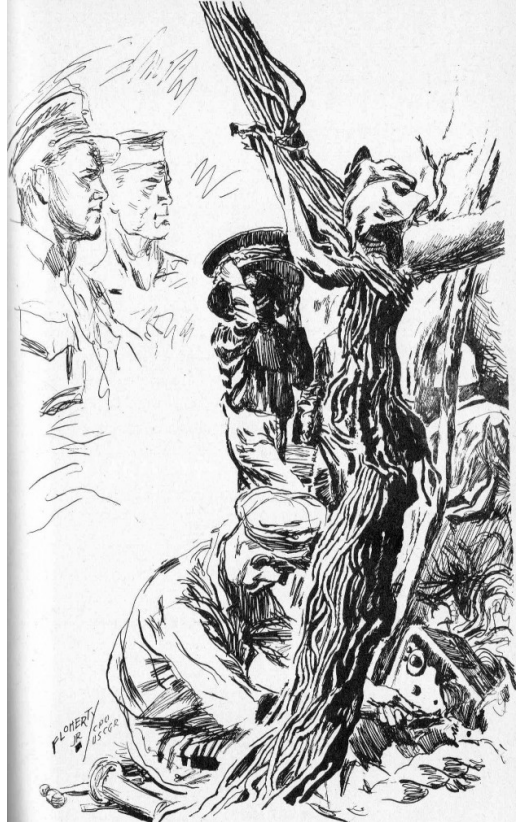
On 19 Sep 1975, Walter died of a heart attack at home in Leesburg. He was sixty-eight. In addition to Esther, he left behind his daughters, two stepdaughters, Lynda and Pamela, a stepson, Lonnie, his sister Dorothy, seven grandchildren, a great grandson, and a step-granddaughter.

Walter was a member of the Presbyterian Church; the Retired Officers Association of the U.S. Navy, Austin, TX; King Hiram Masonic Lodge, No. 578; Order of Easter Star, Cotter, AR; the American Legion Post and the Disabled American Veterans Post, Mountain Home, AR; High Twelve Lodge of Leesburg, FL; and the Medinah Shriners Temple of Chicago, IL. He was buried alongside Anna in Elmwood Cemetery, Yale, MI, with military honors by the Yale American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Walter Everett Jarvis is listed on pages viii, 15, 16, 17, 45, 109, 117, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 169, 171, 172, 197, 199, 200, and 234 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, Wikipedia.org, Newspapers.com, and other Internet records. Corrections, additions, and photos are welcomed by email to [spwade@gmail.com](mailto:spwade@gmail.com).*



Jarvis and his gang installing emergency electrical rigging.  
Illustration by John J. Floherty, Jr., Chief Specialist, U.S.C.G. from the 1944 book [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#)