



Marblehead Biography of Michael Maluk



Newly minted Seaman 2nd Class Michael Maluk, 19, on a sandy beach having completed basic training in Newport Rhode Island in early 1940.

Courtesy: Ancestry.com

Michael Maluk was born on 27 Jul 1921 in Benton Harbor, Michigan to homemaker Augusta Shamoska and iron foundry laborer Nicholas 'Nick' Maluk. Both parents were born in Russia. His dad immigrated to America in 1910, and his mom came over in 1911. His siblings were sister Lupka (1912–1980), William (1916–1922), John (1918–1993), and Lillian (1923–1996).

Michael attended Benton Harbor Junior high school graduating on 11 Jun 1937. It seems unlikely that he completed high school given that he enlisted in the Navy on 18 Dec 1939 in Detroit. He was assigned Service # 3113873 and began his Naval career as an Apprentice Seaman (AS) at the Naval Training School in Newport, Rhode Island where he was received on 19 Dec 1939. On 5 Mar 1940, having completed basic training, Michael was transferred to the Receiving Station San Diego, California, and then to Bombing Squadron Two (VB-2) of *USS Lexington (CV-2)*, an aircraft carrier.

On 18 Apr 1940, Michael was promoted to Seaman Second Class (Sea2c). He continued with Bombing Squadron Two aboard *USS Lexington* until 2 Oct 1940 when he was transferred to the Asiatic Station in the Philippines which he traveled as a passenger aboard the *USS Charleston (PG-51)* and the *USS Chaumont (AP-5)*, the latter being one of two transport vessels that routinely kept the Asiatic Fleet supplied with sailors. The other stalwart transport was *USS Henderson (AP-1)*.

On 5 Nov 1940, he reported for duty aboard *USS Marblehead (CL-12)*, a light cruiser affectionately referred to by her crew simply as *Marby*. She was moored in Olongapo, Philippines when Michael first stepped aboard. Thus began one of the most exciting and dangerous periods of Michael's life.

Throughout the rest of 1940, 1941, and the first half of 1942, Michael continued aboard *Marby*. On 16 Feb 1941, he advanced to Seaman First Class (Sea1c), and on 1 Sep 1941 he was promoted to Gunner's Mate Third Class (GM3c) as global tensions escalated and war engulfed the Pacific.

Michael had joined *Marby* late in the ship's history with Asia, which had begun when she joined the Asiatic Fleet in 1938. Normally, she wintered in the Philippines working from Manila and she summered in China, operating primarily from Shanghai. Shanghai was then one of the globe's most cosmopolitan cities, a trading, financial, and artistic powerhouse with a potent mix of opium smuggling, gambling, and prostitution. Unfortunately, China, and Shanghai in particular, were the focus of Japan's strategy to control Asia. Its annexation of China's industrial heartland, Manchuria, in 1932, and its commencement of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, had escalated tension with the United States.

By the time Michael boarded *Marby*, Japan controlled all the ports of China except for Hong Kong, and while *Marby* did spend the summer of 1940 in China, when she sailed from Tsingtao in early Sep that year, it was a final farewell. Except for a cruise to Guam, she spent the remainder of 1940 and most of 1941 in Philippine waters focusing on battle training as war grew increasingly likely in the minds of *Marby's* skipper, Captain A.G. Robinson, and the rest of the ship's leadership and crew.

On 25 Nov 1941, sensing that hostilities were imminent, Admiral Thomas Hart, Commander of the Asiatic Fleet, ordered most of his ships to disperse without fanfare to the southwest and into the Netherlands East Indies (NEI; today's Indonesia). On the night of the 29th, *Marby* anchored off Tarakan Island, East Borneo, NEI to await further orders. The ship was darkened for additional security.

Ten days later, at 0328 hours on 8 Dec 1941, *Marby's* radio receiver crackled with news of the attack on Pearl Harbor and conveyed the order: "The Japanese have commenced hostilities. Act accordingly."



The Marby

Marby's General Quarters alarm blared moments later, and the crew's response foretold the training, discipline and spirit that would later save the ship, i.e., from their deep sleep, the entire 700+ crew was standing at attention at their battle stations within eight minutes.

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.

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 Dec 1941 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 the crew's focus on *Marby'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 Marby 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."*

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 and used to escape the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. Once in Darwin, *Marechal Joffre* sailed on to San Francisco to be inducted into the U.S. Navy (see the [Marechal Joffre Story](#)), and for a few days, *Marby* temporarily became Radio Darwin, a beacon that facilitated the regrouping of remaining Allied warships to slow the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia. In that effort, *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 ships were sunk and another four were damaged.

Marby spent the last week of January 1942 in Surabaya, and by 1 Feb, she was cruising off Madura Strait. On Feb 3rd, a flight of about 40 Japanese planes passed overhead en route 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.

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." 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.

Lunch-with-Ray¶

When word reached the *Marby* at 03:28 on 8 Dec 41 of the disaster at Pearl Harbor, Raymond (Ray) Delos Kester, RM2c, then a 21-year-old off-watch radioman, was catching a few winks on the floor of the *Marby's* transmitter room. Over lunch in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC on 11 Sep 2016, still ambulatory and cracking jokes at 96, Ray recalled the call to general quarters that followed receipt of the historic message 75 years earlier. He said that the entire complement of the *Marblehead*, 725 officers and enlisted men, went from deep sleep to general quarters in a mere eight minutes, an early indication of the discipline and instinct for survival that would soon save the ship.¶

[¶]Lunch with this biography's author¶

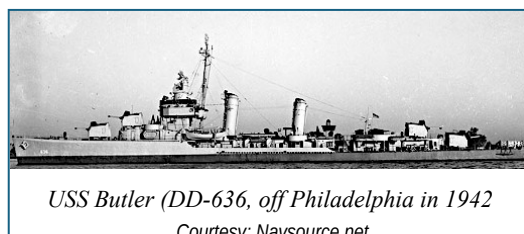


Despite successful evasive actions on three bomb runs, *Marby* eventually suffered two direct hits and a third near-miss “close to her port bow.” The damage was severe – one bomb jammed *Marby*’s rudder causing her to steam in a predictable circle. Another strike knocked out her gyroscope, all electricity and internal communication. Multiple fires soon swept the ship. The near miss ripped a large gash in *Marby*’s bow flooding compartments and causing the ship to begin to sink. Fortunately, the enemy assumed the sea would finish off what their bombs had begun, so they flew off after bigger prey, the heavy cruiser *USS Houston*.

The Japanese would claim several times that they had sunk *Marby*, but they knew nothing of the character of the men to whom she 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 ninety days, they would coax 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 and her escape to New York are described in detail in *Marby*’s [own biography](#) and in the 1944 book *Where Away – A Modern Odyssey*.

Japan claimed several times in the international press that it had sunk *Marby*, but the Navy never contradicted those claims. Instead, for security reasons, they kept her improbable voyage home secret until she arrived in New York on 4 May. The secrecy meant that loved ones back home thought their sailors were either dead or in enemy captivity. On 5 May, phone calls began flooding across the nation, bringing the truth, and considerable joy, to hundreds of families who believed their loved one lost. In one of his fireside chats, President Roosevelt singled out *Marby*’s crew as an inspiration to the nation. Now dubbed a hero, Michael probably took leave to go home during this period.

As of 30 Jun 1942, he was still listed aboard *Marby* as a GM3c, but on 27 Jul 1942, he was transferred to the Receiving Station Philadelphia for duty in the commissioning detail of *USS Butler (DD-636)*, a Gleaves-class destroyer. He was present on *USS Butler* on 15 Aug 1942 during her commissioning at the Boston Navy Yard. Over the next few months, he was temporarily assigned to the Anti-Aircraft Training Center at Price's Neck, RI (on 17 Sep), and was hospitalized briefly at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Philadelphia (on 18 Sep). After short treatment periods aboard the hospital ship *USS Relief (AH-1)* Michael rejoined the *USS Butler* on 27 Oct 1942.



USS Butler (DD-636, off Philadelphia in 1942

Courtesy: Navsource.net

In Jan 1943, Michael was again transferred to the U.S. Naval Hospital in Brooklyn, NY. By this time, he had been promoted to Gunner’s Mate Second Class (GM2c). On 15 Feb, he was moved to St. Albans Naval Hospital in Long Island before returning to the *USS Butler* on 22 Feb. He served actively aboard the *Butler* throughout 1943, including time at Casco Bay, Maine. Muster rolls show him aboard at quarter’s end in Mar, Jun, and Sep. On 5 Oct, he returned to the Brooklyn Naval Hospital for treatment, and on 29 Nov, he was transferred to the Fleet Service School in Norfolk, VA. By the end of 1943, he had earned promotion to Gunner’s Mate First Class (GM1c).

Michael continued training and service into 1944. On 18 Mar 1944, he was transferred from Norfolk back



A repurposed USS Butler (DMS-29), 6 Oct 1942

Courtesy: Navsource.net: Joe Radigan

to Casco Bay, Portland, Maine. He returned to *Butler* on 20 Mar, with another transfer on 21 Mar to Brooklyn and a subsequent final reassignment to *Butler* where he served during all of 1944. By this time, the *USS Butler* had been refitted for high-speed minesweeping operations in preparation for Pacific combat and given a new hull number, (*DMS-29*). By early 1945, Michael was still a GM1c serving aboard the newly converted *USS Butler (DMS-29)*. He was promoted to Chief Gunner’s Mate (AA)(T) on 1 Nov 1945.



As the war ended, *USS Butler (DMS-29)* was decommissioned, and Michael was transferred on 8 Nov 1945 to the Receiving Station at Puget Sound Navy Yard (PSNY), Bremerton, WA, for further assignment. On 12 Dec 1945, he was transferred again to the Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Illinois, under the authority of Commander, 9th Naval District. He arrived there on 17 Dec 1945.

On 27 Dec 1945, Michael engaged with the Naval Personnel Separation Center, Great Lakes, signaling the final phase of his military service. He was honorably discharged as a Chief Gunner's Mate either in late 1945 or early 1946. A 1946 draft registration card he signed shows him as recently discharged, unemployed, and still married to Brooklyn resident Marcie Mae. It is possible that he and Marcie met in 1942 as *Marby* underwent repairs at the Brooklyn Navy Yard following her escape from Java. After WWII, Michael went to work for New York City Sanitation Department from which he retired in 1973.

Michael died at age 79 on Tuesday, 22 Aug 2000 at the Regional Medical Center at Bayonet Point, Pasco County, Florida where he had come to live 27 years earlier following retirement. He was predeceased by his son Dennis Salvarezza, and survived by his wife, Marcie, his sons Michael, Frank, Anthony Salvarezza, and daughters JoAnne and Christine Cloutier. In Michael's 24 Aug 2000 obituary in the Tampa Bay Times, one of his children summed him up as follows: "Pop was a wonderful person who found fault with no one. He was one of a kind, full of love and always there whenever we needed him. He will be missed by all of us. Always in our hearts and memories."

Michael Maluk is listed on page 243 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, Newspapers.com, Anthropic's Claude AI, and other Internet resources.

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