



# The Marby

## Marblehead Biography of William Goggins



William B. Goggins  
USNA 1920

Source: Lucky Bag Yearbook

William ‘Bill’ Bernard Goggins came from a line of Irish men and women who fled to the US following the potato famine in Ireland in the 1840s. Settling successively in New York, Wisconsin, and Washington State. Bill was born on 10 Sep 1898 in the small gold mining town of Republic in northeastern quarter of Washington State, 37 miles south of the Canadian border. His parents were homemaker Amelia May ‘Midge’ McCarter, and William Goggins, an engineer. Republic, founded by gold prospectors two years before Bill’s birth, was at one time the largest gold producer in the county, but that boom was short-lived, and the family moved to another small town, Omak, today about an hour’s drive southwest of Republic. Little is known of Bill’s school days there, except that Omak did have a one-room, multi-grade schoolhouse which he probably attended.

Bill spent one semester at the University of Washington in Seattle before being appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy in 1916. At the latter, his leadership skills quickly became apparent. Bill’s profile in the 1920 edition of *The Lucky Bag*, the Academy’s yearbook, indicated that he had come to Annapolis from a town named Omak in Washington State, that he had little trouble with the school’s academics, that he was fond of electronics, and that he was “a man who has risen by his own efforts and fighting qualities. He is practical, self-reliant, capable, and ever ambitious.” It also noted that he had been on the track team, had captained the Academy’s Swimming Team, been the Swim Champion of his Class, and was the Academy’s overall Swim Champion during his years there. It also added that there was ‘a certain girl’ waiting for him back in Washington state.

During World War I, in the summers of 1917 and 1918, Bill saw service aboard the battleships *USS Arkansas* (BB-33) and *USS Utah* (BB-31). His is the first, and perhaps the only biography on this website that documents a career spanning both world wars. To meet the demand for naval officers caused by World War I, the Navy advanced the graduation of some midshipmen in the Class of 1920. Bill was among those who launched their careers early by graduating with the Class of 1919 on June 6<sup>th</sup> of that year.

Following graduation, Bill, now an Ensign, joined the *USS Idaho* (BB-42), serving aboard her until Dec 1920. After duty on destroyer *USS Meade* (DD-602), in Mar 1921, he reported, for duty as Assistant Communications Officer on the staff of Commander Destroyer Force and Flotilla 4, Pacific Fleet, stationed on heavy cruiser *USS Charleston* (CA-19), the flagship.

In Oct 1921, Bill transferred as Radio Officer to the staff of Destroyer Squadron 12, Pacific Fleet, aboard its flagship, destroyer *USS McDermut* (DD-262), which had been operating in the eastern Pacific between Panama, the Hawaiian Islands, and Canada. In the Fall of 1922, Bill arranged to take leave in Seattle to marry that ‘certain’ (and obviously very patient girl) mentioned in his Lucky Bag profile.

Her name was Henrietta ‘Etta’ Drusilla Elgin, the daughter of Grant Elgin and Emma Retha Neil. Etta was born on 13 Dec 1898 in Pendleton, Oregon and reared on a cattle ranch near Okanogan, a town adjacent to Omak along the Okanogan River where Bill’s parents had settled following their early days in the Republic. It is hard to imagine that Bill and Etta were not schoolmates in Omak’s multi-grade, one-room schoolhouse.

Etta had graduated from the University of Washington in 1921, and she had been teaching school in Monroe, a town 33 miles northeast of Seattle when the couple decided to marry. The wedding had originally been planned for 1 Sep 1922 in Omak, but apparently the *McDermut* made port early and was also scheduled to leave early, so the couple tied the knot on 22 Aug 1922 at St. Anne Church in Seattle. At the time, they intended to settle in San Diego, California. Despite Bill’s frequent and long absences, they would have three children – twins Elizabeth ‘Betty’ May (1924-2005) and Emma Jane (1924-1969), and twelve years later, William Bernard Jr. (1936-?).



Following their wedding, Bill continued with staff duties at the office of the Commander, Battleship Division 4, Battle Fleet, on flagship *USS Arizona (BB-39)* from Jun 1923 to Jun 1924.

Returning to the United States, he studied communication engineering at the Postgraduate School in Annapolis, Maryland, continuing the course at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut until Oct 1926 when he was assigned to the *USS Florida (BB-30)*. Between Oct 1927 and Aug 1929, he was attached to the staff of the Commander, Light Cruiser Divisions and Division 2, Scouting Fleet, as Aide and Radio Officer. Thereafter, he assumed duties in the Radio Division, Bureau of Engineering at the Navy Department in Washington, D.C.

In Jun 1931, Bill joined the staff of Commander, Scouting Force, U.S. Fleet, on flagship, *USS Augusta (CA-31)*, as Aide and Force Radio Officer. He remained in that assignment until Jun 1932 when he joined *USS Hamilton (DMS-18)* as Executive Officer, transferring in Jul 1933, in the same capacity to destroyer *USS Noa (DD-343)*.

Following a second tour of duty in the Bureau of Engineering, between Jun 1934 and Jun 1936, he commanded the *USS McCormick (DD-223)*, flagship, Destroyer Division 27, and later served as Navigator on flagship *USS Trenton (CL-11)*, cruiser Division 2, Battle Force. From 1939 to 1941, Bill was on the staff of the Naval Academy at Annapolis.

It is unclear when Bill left Annapolis to begin a six-month assignment as Executive Officer on *USS Marblehead (CL-12)*, or *Marby*, as she was affectionately referred to by her crew. She wintered in the Philippines operating out of Manila, and summered in China, operating from Shanghai. At that time, like today, Shanghai was one of the globe's great cosmopolitan cities - a manufacturing, trading, financial and artistic powerhouse which, in those days, also featured a potent mix of opium, gambling, and prostitution.

Unfortunately for China and for Shanghai in particular, both were key to Japan's ambition to replace Britain, The Netherlands, France, the U.S., and Portugal as the colonial master of east and southeast Asia. Japan's 1932 annexation of China's industrial heartland, Manchuria, and its 1937 commencement of the Second Sino-Japanese War, had set the stage for a dramatic escalation in tension with the United States and its Allies.

Most of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet's capital ships had quit China by the time of *Marby's* final farewell at Tsingtao in September 1940. By then, Japan effectively controlled all of China's seaports except for Hong Kong, and with the possible exception of *USS Houston (CA-30)*, most of those vessels, including *Marby*, were obsolete in comparison with ships in their class in the Japanese Navy.

At that point, in addition to *Marby*, the term "Asiatic Fleet" applied only to heavy cruiser *Houston*, thirteen overaged destroyers of WW I vintage and their tender, *Black Hawk*; 29 submarines and their tenders, *Canopus*, *Holland* and *Otis*, the tanker *Pecos*, a few minesweepers plus some antiquated gunboats, five Yangtze River gunboats, and an air arm consisting of 30 PBVs ([Consolidated Model 28](#)) of Patwing 10, tendered by the *Langley*. The cruiser *Boise* would join the fleet later. Except for a cruise to Guam, *Marby* spent most of 1941 in Philippine waters training hard for battle as war grew increasingly likely in the minds of fleet commander Thomas Hart, *Marby's* Captain A.G. Robinson, and the rest of the ship's crew.

It is unclear exactly when Bill joined *Marby*, but it was at some point in the final quarter of 1941. The ship's Sep 1941 muster roll was signed by him and Capt. Robinson on 3 Oct 1941. Bill's predecessor as the ship's Executive Officer, Cmdr. Tully Shelly, had signed the roles for all previous quarters of that year.

On 23 Nov 1941, sensing from the failure of Japan-U.S. negotiations in Washington that hostilities were imminent, Admiral Thomas Hart, Commander of the Asiatic Fleet, secretly ordered most of his ships to disperse without fanfare to the southwest and into the Netherlands East Indies (NEI; today's Indonesia).

After a stop on 27 Nov at Jolo Island, the last significant port at the southern end of the Philippine archipelago, *Marby* proceeded across the Celebes Sea and 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." *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 before cutting 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. *Marby*'s crew had many friends aboard those ships. 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 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 four more were damaged.

*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 about 40 Japanese planes flew overhead enroute to bomb Surabaya. One plane lingered behind to get reconnaissance on the ships below which now 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."<sup>2</sup> 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 successful evasive action on the first three bomb runs, *Marby* eventually suffered two direct hits and a devastating near-miss "close to her port bow." The damage was severe – one bomb jammed *Marby*'s rudder causing her to steam in a very predictable circle, making her a sitting duck should another bomb run ensue. Another strike knocked out her gyroscope, her electricity, and her internal communications, and caused

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<sup>1</sup> *Where Away* p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> *Where Away* p109.





multiple fires which soon swept the ship. The near miss ripped a large gash in her port bow, flooding compartments, causing her to slow and to begin to sink. Fortunately, the enemy assumed that the sea would complete what their bombs had begun, and so they flew off after bigger prey, the heavy cruiser *USS Houston*.

Of course, the Japanese knew nothing of the character and competency 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 would soon defy the odds, the Japanese, and the Java Sea. After bailing by hand non-stop for more than seventy hours to keep her afloat, over the next ninety days, they coaxed the crippled cruiser 20,589 miles across the Indian and Atlantic oceans to enter New York harbor on 4 May 1942. *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](#).

On several occasions, Japan stated in the international press that it had sunk the *Marblehead*, but the Navy never contradicted that bogus news. Instead, for security reasons, they kept *Marby's* survival and her improbable trip home a secret until she arrived in New York on 4 May 1942. 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, and making *Marby's* crew instant heroes wherever they went. In one of his fireside chats, President Roosevelt singled out the crew as an inspiration to the nation and its allies at a time when they were in retreat in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere.

Such was not the case for Bill Goggins and his family. He had little choice but to take a different but equally dangerous and unpredictable route home, but eventually he too would be dubbed a hero. Verifying all of the details of his actual route was not possible for this biography, however the following excerpts from [Where Away](#) describe the circumstances of his wounding and the initial steps that brought Bill home.

"The amidships blast caught Commander Goggins in the wardroom where he was watching an ammunition party to see that they kept in order. Blood ran from an egg-sized hole in the back of his



Admiral Goggins  
Source: Ancestry  
Member [elliengj](#)

neck and flash burns had seared his flesh wherever it was exposed. Picking himself up, he started on the first lap of an inspection that was to cover the whole ship before he reported the extent of the damage to the bridge. As he walked, his skin began turning from a pale tan to bright lobster-red and then began to drop off in patches. Smoke and steam and flame reached out from the No.1 hatch' but he managed to crawl aft. Wherever he turned, debris was piled high .... He reached Battle Two but could raise no one there, then climbed down again to No. 3 hatch to see if anything could be done about the steering.



Purple Heart

"By now he was in a state of profound shock; his knees were beginning to sag but he continued to make his way to the bridge. The captain was in danger, perhaps already dead. If that was true, it was his, Goggins', duty to take command of the ship, and some way, somehow, no matter what his own condition, to fight her and save her. But when he reached the bridge, he found to his vast relief that the captain was as yet unharmed.

"Captain Robinson looked with horror upon his old friend. 'Go into the conning tower, Bill, and lie down,' he said. Turning to Hawkins, whose battle duty was to act as "talker" on one of the J.V. phones, all of which were not out of commission, the captain said, 'Go and look after him, Hawkins, till we can get a doctor there.

"By the time Dr. Wildebush reached the conning tower, Hawkins had already managed to get the commander to lie down and had rigged two lines from the overhead which he'd attached to Goggins' hands ... to prevent them from touching his body. It was only now, relieved for a moment from his driving sense of duty, that Commander Goggins became fully aware of the torment of his own body. Dr. Wildebush administered morphine, but the pain was still so unbearable that Commander Goggins asked for more.



“The doctor looked sorrowfully at his shipmate; of whose agony he was so acutely aware. ‘I’m afraid to, Bill,’ he said. ‘Any more might pass you out. We may have to abandon ship. If you were unconscious, you wouldn’t have a chance at all.’<sup>3</sup>

Of course, this was just the beginning of considerable pain and uncertainty for Goggins! Two days later, he left *Marby* on a stretcher bound for a hospital in the interior of the island of Java. There, under the fine care of Dutch doctors and Javanese nurses, he and others began their recoveries. Unfortunately, three weeks later, on 28 Feb 1942, the Japanese began invading Java. By that time, the U.S. Navy had assigned Dr. Corydon Wassell to shepherd the wounded sailors from *Marby* and the *U.S.S. Houston* to safety. He had already gotten the ambulatory wounded off the island and onto ships bound for Australia, but fleeing ships would take only ambulatory passengers. Goggins and seven others had been refused passage because they were unfit to fend for themselves should their vessel be sunk. So Wassell, Goggins, and seven others remained trapped on Java.



**MV Janssens**

*Hauling Bombs, Bullets, and Beer!*

Refusing to give up, the good doctor from Arkansas hounded the skippers of the remaining ships in Tjilatjap’s port. Finally, he convinced a skeptical Captain Gerrit N. Prass, skipper of the Dutch merchant ship *MV Janssens*, to allow his men aboard. *Janssens*, already wildly overloaded with evacuees, seemed to be the only option left. They sailed for Fremantle harbor in Western Australia on the evening of 3 Mar 1942.

The following day, as they crept long the south coast of Java, Japanese fighters appeared and strafed the ship. Casualties were minimal, but after the planes ran out of bullets and flew off, some 200 of *Janssens*’ 450 passengers, and many of her Javanese crew, asked to be put ashore, fearing they would drown should another attack ensue. Prass honored their requests and then promptly put *Janssens* back to sea.

As they proceeded southward, *Janssens*’ only engine periodically acted up, but each time, the ship’s Chief Engineer, Jos van Klaveren, devised ‘fixes’ that kept *Janssens* on course. They arrived on Friday, the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 1942.

#### The Three Men Who Saved Bill Goggins’ Life



Dr. Corydon Wassell Capt. Capt. Prass & Engineer van Klaveren

Unbeknownst to Wassell and his wounded men, far across the broad expanse of the southern Indian Ocean, their shipmates aboard *Marby* were just two days out of Durban, South Africa, nearly halfway home and well beyond the reach of the Japanese, though they still faced the risk of German subs and raiders in the Atlantic. However, with a few exceptions, all of those remaining men would make it home.

The routes and vessels by which Bill Goggins got home from Australia were not available for this biography, but he did not rejoin *Marby*. While *Marby* was being overhauled in Brooklyn Navy Yard, Bill completed his recovery and was reassigned to the oiler, *USS Ramapo (AO-12)*. He was subsequently attached to the Office of the Commander in Chief, Pacific areas.

Bill assumed command of the battleship *USS Alabama (BB-60)* on 18 Jan 1945 while she was in overhaul at Puget Sound Navy



Battleship USS Alabama (BB-60),  
Casco Bay, Maine in 1942

Source: U.S. Navy Naval History & Heritage Command

<sup>3</sup> Where Away, A Modern Odyssey, pages 130-131



Yard in his home state. Following training exercises, she returned to action in May 1945 working from first from Ulithi Atoll as the Allies began the final campaigns to end WWII. Bill was particularly pleased by the performance of his gun crews, which shot down kamikaze planes over Okinawa and Kyushu and took out industrial plants and other facilities from Honshu to Hokkaido. So accurate was their fire on a sprawling engineering works fifty miles north of Tokyo, that it was obliterated by fifteen hundred tons of explosives. "A handsome job" was his response when he learned of the details. He, and presumably the crew of *Alabama*, were awarded a Gold Star and received a special commendation from the Unit Commander for their exemplary performance in these actions.

After returning to the United States, Bill reported for duty in January 1946 in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations at the Navy Department in Washington, D.C., serving there until May 1947, when he assumed duty as Commanding Officer, Naval Administrative Command, Central Intelligence Group in the same city. From July 1947 to May 1949, when he was relieved of all active duty pending retirement, he served as Chief of Staff and Aide to the commandant, Fifteenth Naval District, Balboa, Canal Zone. On June 30, 1949, he was transferred to the Retired List of the U.S. Navy.

In addition to the Legion of Merit and Gold Star, the Purple Heart Medal and the Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon (*USS Marblehead*), Rear Admiral Goggins also received the World War I Victory Medal, Atlantic Fleet Clasp; the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; the American Campaign Medal; the World War II Victory Medal; the Philippine Defense Ribbon with one bronze star; the Philippine Liberation Ribbon, and the Navy Occupation Service Medal, Asia Clasp.

Following his retirement, Admiral Goggins conducted research at Johns Hopkins University, was a staff consultant to the Army Research Association, and ran his own firm, the General Kinetics Institute, a computer and communications company.

Their daughter Elizabeth 'Betty' May passed away in 1969. Bill's wife of 59 years, Etta, passed away on 1 Nov 81 at almost 84. Admiral Goggins died on 27 Dec 1985 at the age of 88 in Falls Church, Virginia. They share a headstone in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA. Survivors included son Lt. Col. William B. Goggins, Jr., US Air Force (retired) of Bedford, MA, daughter, Emma Jane G. Ryan of Alexandria, VA; and Bill's sister, Beatrice Taber of Tumwater, WA, and six grandchildren.

William Bernard Goggins appears on pages 4, 56, 105, 130, 131 and 233 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, and other Internet records.*

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