

# Newton Boy <sup>July 12, 1944</sup> Participated in Java Sea Battle

**Gerald Field, Son of Mr. and Mrs. Irl Field of Newton, Was on One of the Destroyers in the Fight**

When the U. S. S. Marblehead, an eighteen year old cruiser, which had been severely damaged by Japanese shells and bombs in the battle of the Java sea and which the Japs had said they had sunk, finally made her way into an eastern United States port last week, the Navy Department released the story of the battle and her long trip home.

A Newton boy, Gerald Field, son of Mr. and Mrs. Irl Field, was a member of the crew of one of the four destroyers which participated in the battle with the Marblehead, and the Navy Department told about how the ship was damaged and then made her way home. Gerald was well the last heard from him.

Here is the story as the Navy Department gave it out:

## **Steamed Home**

"The U. S. S. Marblehead, light cruiser often claimed sunk by the Japanese, has arrived at an east coast port for repairs—damaged and torn by bombs, but very much afloat.

"In refutation of repeated enemy 'announcements' of her sinking, the Marblehead has steamed half way around the world to bring her wounds of war home for healing and to testify to the struggles of captain and crew to keep their badly damaged ship going, even though the water at times poured like a torrent through her sides.

"In keeping with Marblehead tradition—and this one is third of the line—the 555 foot cruiser has done her job. First of the Marbleheads, named after the city in Massachusetts, was launched in 1861 and fought up and down the coast. Second of the line was launched in 1892 and battled the Spaniards at Cienfuegos, Cuba. And now the modern Marblehead, launched in 1923, has added her chapter to the history of United States sea warfare by hotly engaging the Japanese in running combat from Borneo to Java.

## **Bombed to Hell—and Back**

“Her’s is the story of a ship that was bombed to hell, and was brought right out of it again by a crew that doesn’t know the meaning of the word ‘abandon.’

“When the war broke out, the Marblehead and several United States destroyers were at Tarakan, a port in northeast Borneo. The Marblehead forged into action immediately and for the first month of the war was engaged in covering the evacuation of United Nations’ shipping from the Philippines to the southward. Protected by the sweeping guns of the Marblehead and other United States cruisers and destroyers, more than 50 merchant ships were evacuated in these operations without a loss.

“As the Japanese bore down on the Dutch East Indies, a United States striking force consisting of cruisers and destroyers made several attempts to intercept the enemy and halt the advance. Twice the Japanese command of the air frustrated such efforts, but finally, on January 24, an enemy convoy was caught edging southward through Macassar straits. This convoy was lashed and heavily punished in successive attacks by United States and Dutch submarines and aircraft, and a United States naval force consisting of four destroyers, the John D. Ford, Parrott, Pope, and Paul Jones. The night of January 24 proved to be fulfillment of a destroyer commander’s dream. Under cover of darkness and heavy mists, the United States destroyers named above plowed up and down the straits pumping torpedoes and shells into the massed Jap ships. This attack, previously described in communiques and press reports, resulted in a bag by the United States destroyers of at least four large transports damaged.

## **Covered Destroyer’s Get-Away**

“The Marblehead, while not actively participating in the battle, had a share in it, that backed up and covered the destroyer’s entry into the straits and then their get-away.

“Despite the beatings received in Macassar straits, the Japanese continued their advance and succeeded in occupying Balikpapan, in Borneo. From their base at Surabaya, the Marblehead and four accompanying World war destroyers—the Stewart,

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John D. Edwards, Barker, and Bulmer—slipped forth to attempt to stab at the concentration of Jap ships off Balikpapan. At about 9:30 p. m. on February 1, this small force encountered a Japanese fleet consisting of 7 cruisers and 13 destroyers. In the face of such superior opposition, the United States ships retired southward and joined the Houston and three Dutch light cruisers—the Java, De Ruyter, and Tromp — and three Dutch destroyers. On February 4, this combined force was standing by to ambush the Japanese armada in the vicinity of Balikpapan when it was attacked by a large flight of Japanese planes. The Jap aircraft winged high overhead in formations of nine at a time showering bombs. At least 54 aircraft participated in the attack.

## **Marblehead Takes a Beating**

“One of the Japanese planes was hit by anti-aircraft fire from the Houston. As this plane fell, its pilot attempted a suicide dive on the Marblehead, but the cruiser’s gunners poured fire on the falling plane and completed its destruction with hits that sent it crashing into the sea about 30 feet from their ship.

“In this engagement the Houston was hit by one bomb while the Marblehead received two direct hits and was badly damaged under water by a near miss. All three bombs caused serious damage. The Marblehead was rocked by explosion, swept by fire, and threatened with flooding. The crisis was intensified as her steering gear was completely disabled.

“Fifteen men were killed and twenty more wounded during the bombing. The projected attack on the Japanese had to be abandoned, and the Marblehead and her destroyers proceeded to Tjilatjap on the south coast of Java. The feat of seamanship required to negotiate this journey is attested by the fact that the Marblehead had to be steered by her engines. The Marblehead was an old ship, as modern war vessels go, and was lightly armored and protected.

## **Frantically Bail Out Ship**

"The damage caused by the bombs was, indeed, critical. Only through the ability and determination of the Marblehead's personnel was the ship kept afloat.

"At one stage, water was pouring into the Marblehead at such a rate that her pumping equipment proved inadequate to keep up with the rising flood. Marblehead's crew then formed a bucket brigade and, bailing frenziedly for hours, managed to avert a swamping while emergency repairs were being made.

"On February 7, the Marblehead limped into Tjilatjap. The dock was too small to accommodate the entire ship, so only the bow and a portion of the amidships section could be worked upon. Sufficient temporary repairs were accomplished, however, to enable the Marblehead to proceed to a British base on the island of Ceylon. The rudder still could not be used on this portion of the homeward trip.

## **Repaired Again at Ceylon**

"Further repairs were made at Ceylon, putting the Marblehead in condition to make a 4,400 mile trip to the southern coast of Africa. There, still further repairs were made and the Marblehead was able to proceed to the east coast port of the United States.

"There the Marblehead rides today, home at last and triumphant over the overwhelming odds that had prevailed against her ever making it. One of the bomb hits on the Marblehead was made in the forward section of the ship, and one aft. The third fell so close nearby that underwater sections of the hull near the bow were badly damaged. These hits turned this once sleek fighting ship into a shambles of wreckage—a wreck, nevertheless, which the hard headed seamen of the Marblehead persisted in navigating over half of the world's ocean ways."