

**Robert 'Bob' Eastment
Veteran**

**Brian McCarty
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Interviewer**

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Hudson Falls High School
Hudson Falls, New York**

Q: When were you born?

RE: I was born November 10, 1923.

Q: So, you grew up in the depression?

RE: I did, yes.

Q: What was it like during that time?

RE: Well, it was not easy. I was just a young child. My father was working in the construction business and he had a pretty good job until one day in I think 1929 or 1930 he came home and the job had ended. He was out of work for two or three years and then the public works administration started up and he got a job working there. He stayed on that for several years. Then when the war broke out, I had left home by then. It was very difficult.

I had a sister who went to college and my grandmother must've had some money because I graduated from high school in 1941, in New Jersey. There wasn't enough money to go to a four-year school, so I went to the New York State Ranger School in Wanakena, New York, which is the SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry College now. I graduated from that in February 1943 and in April I went into the Marine Corps.

Q: What attracted you to the Marine Corps.?

RE: I didn't particularly want to go into the Army or want to go get seasick in the Navy. [Laughter] I didn't think too much about the Coast Guard. So, I decided to try the Marine Corps. And I had no regrets about that.

Q: When you first signed up for the Marine Corps. Where did they send you?

RE: When I went to the Ranger School, I went there in March of 1942. I had a one year deferment, for education. When I graduated from the Ranger School in 1943, I had to report to the draft board and within thirty days I was in the service. I went to Parris Island recruit depot in South Carolina and I have a map here. [Robert begins to show map] Parris Island, South Carolina is there, and from there I was transferred to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. Then I wound up on the west coast in Camp Pendleton and Camp Elliot. From there I went way across to New Caledonia.

Which was a French island and there was a Dutch freighter turned cruise ship. I was on New Caledonia for about a month in a replacement depot waiting to be assigned to a unit. Then after about a month, I was assigned to get on a great big passenger liner in Nourmea,

New Caledonia. There was this replacement depot I was in, it was way back deep in the country and we got down there, to be transferred, and it started at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and at about eight o'clock that night there were about a dozen of us left there. [Laughing] And they said, "What are you guys doing here? You don't have anything to use." So, they had to go all the way back up to the replacement depot and get my records and bring them back down and I finally got on board ship at about ten o'clock at night and I was about 5 decks down below and it was 110 degrees down there. All I wanted to was to get up on the deck and fall asleep up there. Which I did and the next morning I had taken my sea bag down to the bunk, but I didn't know where it was. All of the sudden I ran into a fella that I had known from Parris Island, the boot camp, and he said, "I've been looking all over for you", and I said, "How'd you know I was here?". He said, "Well I saw your sea bag." I said, "Well take me to it and show me where it is, because I don't know how to get there." [Chuckles]

Anyways, I think that trip from New Caledonia to Guadalcanal took about four or five days I think. I was assigned to the first Marine Amphibious Corps. There was a headquarters or service battalion and the commanding general was Roy Geiger. We had a big commissary there, with six or seven huge refrigerators there. I was with a group of fellas that were servicing those refrigerators. Here's a picture of me the day I was sworn into the Marine Corps. [Shows picture to camera] That's another picture of me on Guadalcanal. [Shows picture to camera] This is the refrigeration crew we had on Guadalcanal [Shows picture to camera] I'm the third one from the left.

So, I was on Guadalcanal and there was nothing. The fighting was all over, there was nothing going on there. I think when I first got there, there might have been a few isolated air raids, but nothing that I even knew about. The way this outfit worked, the 1st Marine Amphibious Corps., they would organize Marine divisions and they'd go on operation. When I was on Guadalcanal waiting, they went on the Guam operation and took Guam over. I didn't go on that one, I was back at the base. Finally, in early 1945, I loaded a big refrigerator and put it on board a ship and we were going, the commanding general and his staff, were going on this operation. We didn't know where we were going and we stopped on the way and had a little beer party a place called Ulithi Atoll.

Q: Where is that?

RE: I have a map right here, let's see. [Begins searching map for Ulithi Atoll] It's only a small little place. It doesn't show it here. We were going to Okinawa and we got there and went ashore the first day and it was fairly quiet and the weather was awful. It rained, and rained, and rained. We didn't have any tents we were just living in fox holes and shelter halves and it was a miserable experience. I was there and they finally secured the island. I didn't participate in that at all really, I was just keeping the general's food from spoiling. I think it was back in July 1945, we landed on Okinawa on April 1st, 1945, which happened to be Easter Sunday. When I left there, it was in June or July and we went to Guam. I've never been to Guam. After being there for about a month, we had VJ day. The Japanese surrendered.

The 3rd Marine Division was camped right down the road from where the Headquarters and Service Battalion was. They started to take a lot of their equipment out on lighters out into the ocean and just sink it. A lot of the equipment had been there for three or four years. It

was all shot. The next couple days after that, we loaded our equipment onto an LSM, Landing Ship Medium, and we took all of our equipment and personal belongings with us. We left Guam and the next day we thought we were headed towards the states but we found out we were going west, not east. So, we didn't know where we were going. We were going to China.

Q: Do you remember anything you were doing or thinking when you found out the Japanese surrendered?

RE: We were thrilled, you know? We were on Okinawa when Germany surrendered and then just shortly after we got to Guam. Maybe three weeks or so, VJ day came. So, we figured that the next stop was home. We're going home. But, instead we got on this LSM, Landing Ship Medium, and we took off, going over night and then the next morning we weren't going east, we were going west. So, we wound up in China.

Q: Do you know why you went to China?

RE: Yeah, we went to take the surrender of the Japanese troops. There were a lot of Japanese troops in China.

Q: Were they unwilling to surrender?

RE: No, they didn't give us hassle. We were in Tientsin, China. Which was a big city in North China it was about fifty or sixty miles from Beijing as we know it today. They were fine. In fact, we had to keep them busy. Before the war, the Marine Corps. Had an establishment in Tientsin. They had a whole city block or compound and then they had a utility plant off adjacent to that. That's where the group that I was in was staying. We had Chinese cooks there and everyday we'd have the Japanese prisoners come in and wash the windows. Not once a week, every day, they'd wash the windows. They'd do some of the work we were supposed to be doing and they were perfectly content and we didn't have any trouble with any of them. We had been in the tropics for two and a half years, or two years I have been anyhow. Then it started to turn cold in October and November. It really, really got cold. We didn't have any equipment or clothing. Then we finally did get some heavy coats and some wool pants and uniforms.

They were discharging the marines by the number of points you had, and at first, I didn't have enough points to qualify for discharge. As time went by, I accrued points and I left China in either January or February of 1946. When we arrived in China, Tientsin was on a big river. So, these LSM's we were in, there were six or seven LSM's, which are probably about 200 feet long about that. It was a landing craft so you could open up the bow and drive out of them. They were going to go up there to Tientsin, but were on a tremendous big flat plain and the river was wide but it started to narrow up as we went up stream. The wind was blowing ferociously. The Navy crews were pretty good in the deep water but we hit two other LSM's on the way up and they decided to abandon that and drove them up the shore and we unloaded them. Then we drove up to Tientsin. We still didn't know where we were going. Somebody was leading the way and we got there about just before sunset. We could see this tremendous city in the near distance.

As we approached it, we saw a lot of Chinese but we could also see a lot of white people, not Orientals. We thought that they might be English people, but what they turned out to be, and they were very nice people. They were what they call White Russians. They had left

Russia in 1917 during the revolution and they were mostly Jewish people and they were very nice people. I got to know quite a few of them. They'd been in Tientsin for a long time. They had restaurants and taverns and bars and things like that. I think everybody, including myself, when we found out we were not going home when we left Guam we were very disappointed. Once we got to China, it was a good experience, we weren't there very long, it was still awfully nice to get home. It was a pretty good experience.

Q: You mentioned something about getting discharged by how many points you had. Can you explain the point system?

RE: Well, that's kind of a dim picture right now, but I'm sure it had to do with how long you had been in service and also how long you had been overseas. I had been overseas for about two years. Because there were fellas who were coming over, I left before they left. It was based pretty much on the time that you were overseas. Then we left Tientsin. They took us down the river on an LSM. They finally got them up stream. It was about fifty or sixty miles down to tide water. We got down there late one afternoon and we slept in a pretty big warehouse. There were not blankets but a lot of mattresses. It was cold, oh boy it was cold. We just used mattresses as blankets. The next day we didn't know what kind of ship we were getting on, we were getting on an aircraft carrier. It was a baby flat top they called them. They used to use them for transporting aircraft overseas. From there we got on the aircraft carrier at the mouth of the river Tientsin was on, and we went from there to Honolulu. We spent about twelve hours there while they refueled the aircraft carrier. From there we went to San Diego, California. Spent a night or two there, then got on a troop train the next day and wound up four five days later in Bethesda Naval Station in Maryland and that's when I was discharged.

Q: When did you get home? When did you arrive back and see your family for the first time?

RE: Well, I'll never forget that because I got home and the house is on a bus route and I got off in Nutley, New Jersey. I had called, so my mother and father were expecting me. So, I got off the bus right across from the house. I went and knocked on the door. I noticed a man behind me, walking up the sidewalk, and my father opened up the door. And they hadn't seen me in two and a half years. My mother was all upset and they were very emotional. The fella that was behind me was from the Red Cross he was coming to see if he could collect some money. He didn't get a very warm reception. Anyhow, they were certainly glad to see me and I was more than glad to see them. After I got through boot camp, I had about a week's leave and I hadn't been home since then. It was wonderful to get home.

Q: Were you married after?

RE: Yeah well, I had been to the Ranger School before that, before I went in the Marine Corps. I applied for job for the International Paper Company, it was hiring people up for northern Maine. They were doing a big timber crew party up there. So, I got a job with them and I applied to Syracuse College of forestry. Here is my diploma from Ranger School. [Shows Diploma to Interviewer] That was in 1943. Then I was accepted at Syracuse. So, I enrolled there as a sophomore. I got a year's credit for the Ranger School. I enrolled in September of 1946 at the College of Forestry in Syracuse. Then went back to work for IP

for the next summer. I worked for IP for three summers then I graduated from Syracuse in 1949. I was on the verge of getting married. I had met my wife in Syracuse. We were planning to get married and I could've gone back to work for IP but I would've been in the woods all the time and I just didn't work out for me. I took a job down in Arkansas. I was down there for three years and came back. I didn't like Arkansas too much and my wife didn't like it there. Our oldest child was born there and then I got a job with the state of Rhode Island as a forester. I stayed there for a couple of months and that was an awful outfit. So, I went back to IP, International Paper Company and was with them for thirty-five years. We lived in Arkansas, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Maine, Speculator, and New York, moved to Glens Falls twice. Moved to Glens Falls in 1963 from Speculator then moved back here again in 1975 from Maine. I've seen quite a bit of the country.

Q: How did the war affect you?

RE: Well, it didn't really affect me much. I supposed the biggest affect was that I got a college education because of the G.I. Bill of Rights. I don't know where the money came to put me through the Ranger School. Actually, I had a thousand dollars saved up when I went to the Ranger School planning to spend it but then somehow my mother and father found the thousand dollars and I still had it when I got out of the Marine Corps. Then I had the G.I. Bill of Rights, which payed for all of my college education.

Q: Alright then, thank you very much!

RE: That it? I don't know if anyone is going to appreciate it or enjoy it, but I'm glad I helped you out. I hope it works out, I'd like to see it sometime, or I think maybe I wouldn't. [Chuckles]