

Interviewer: Okay will you just give us your whole name please?

Eberhart: Warren Robert Eberhart.

Interviewer: And where were you born?

Eberhart: I was born in Chicago August 26, 1926.

Interviewer: 1926 okay so that makes you

Eberhart: Seventy four

Interviewer: Seventy four okay um what branch of the service did you serve in?

Eberhart: I was in the navy because my dad had been in WWI and said that was the branch he thought. So I thought well I'll go along with that he said you always sleep in a clean bed so I went along with that.

Interviewer: Okay do you remember your primary unit that you served with?

Eberhart: Well I only had two duty stations other than the training they gave me when I went in. I went into Great Lakes for boot camp and they sent me to a basic engineering school in Richmond Virginia and then they sent me to a diesel repair school in Richmond Virginia.

Interviewer: Okay

Eberhart: And I went aboard ship and that was my only duty station during WWII was aboard the ship.

Interviewer: Okay just real quick we'll go before WWII. Do you remember your parent's occupation during the time of the depression or before the depression actually?

Eberhart: Okay my mother died when I was about a year and half old and my father turned us over to an orphanage in Chicago. And there were five of us and that orphanage was a Catholic orphanage and they transferred us to an Illinois Children's home and Aid Society after a few months. And I spent about 8 years in the orphanage under the California Children's Home and Aid Society and would go out occasionally to foster homes during the depression. And being the mean person that I am they would soon send us back to the orphanage which delighted us because contrary to public opinion orphanages become a home for people that are there and you hate to leave them.

Interviewer: Right

Eberhart: And we didn't have the terrible person in charge of us that a lot of people think you have. It was very pleasant surrounding for me always somebody to play ball with sit around and have fun. So I didn't mind the orphanage and then I finally ended up with the Eberhart family.

Interviewer: Okay

Eberhart: And when I was about nine years old and that was during the depression and he was a school teacher. And his wife was a college grad also and taught school occasionally she taught Home Ec. And

one of the recollections I have during the early 30s when I went to live with them was the school board wasn't paying him. They were giving him vouchers hopefully for the future when they got some money they would be able to pay him. Because people weren't paying their real estate taxes or anything then and there was no money to pay teachers. And he would take these vouchers down to various grocery stores and they would discount them 15 percent and let him buy groceries and food and stuff during the depression. So he lost 15 percent of nothing but was getting something for it so he was pleased to be able to do that even.

Interviewer: Definitely I'm assuming because both of your parents were educators you were in school until graduation.

Eberhart: Right I went through grade school in ____ Illinois and then went to high school in ____ Illinois and then went in service as soon as I graduated. I volunteered immediately but they said that then I had to wait awhile so I went to Von Summers Institute at Illinois ____ before I went in the service then they called me in.

Interviewer: Okay so you didn't have a job before you went into the service?

Eberhart: Just summer jobs during the depression. My dad having worked for the school board would get me summertime jobs helping around the school. Which sometimes they paid and sometimes they didn't. We lived out in a rural area and I would occasionally work for farmers weeding onions paid 15 cents an hour which we were tickled to get as kids and during the depression. And a lot of time you'd go over and help neighbors because they had no money and you'd work on other farms. And they would just feed you for the things you did to be neighborly.

Interviewer: Well this I don't know how much you remember about this because you were in school and you were kind of young. But before Pearl Harbor how seriously did you take the threat of the powers the Nazi and the Japanese and actually

Eberhart: I have very little recollection of there being any threat of the war. I would vocationally hear on the news items about Chamberlain visiting and selling out England and that sort of thing. But there was I was surprised really when the war started because I didn't really comprehend a lot of the world situation that was going on.

Interviewer: Right do you recall where you were when you heard the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Eberhart: I was at a football game in Chicago with Mr. Eberhart the foster home at the time I wasn't adopted then I just was living with them for many years before I was adopted. And just as we came out of the football field at Chicago field they were yelling Extra Extra Read all About It Pearl Harbor has been bombed. Of course everybody was looking around like what's Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Right

Eberhart: Because nobody had ever heard of the place before. But that was I can remember plain as day when that happened.

Interviewer: Did you happen to listen to FDR's speech the next day?

Eberhart: Yes I heard the speech and I've heard it many times repeated also that he declared war on Japan and talked about the disasterly deeds that they had done when they bombed Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Did you approve of the way FDR handled that situation at the beginning of the war?

Eberhart: Yes my these people I was being raised by at the time the Eberharts were stanch republic but they went right along with FDR and thought he did the proper thing by declaring war on them after they had bombed Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: After you enlisted did you go I know you said you went to training you went to one you said in Great Lakes?

Eberhart: Yeah I went through boot camp in Great Lakes.

Interviewer: Okay what training did you receive there?

Eberhart: At that time they gave 12 weeks of boot camp everything from how to take care of your clothing we did our own washing and that sort of thing which they trained you. It was interesting because at that time the navy was still had the old hammocks for men to sleep in even though you never saw one. Other than carrying this thing around in WWII and being trained how to roll your clothes and cover with the hammock and everything. I never saw a hammock used the entire time I was in WWII even though I went aboard various ships and visited when we were in harbors and things.

Interviewer: Okay and did you get tested for skill and IQ levels?

Eberhart: Yes they it was easy for me in boot camp because the summer before I went in there went to University of Illinois at Champagne I took ROTC. Which I was delighted that I did because I was the only one in our entire company that knew how to march or knew their left from their right. Because I was mainly in a group of kids from Deep South and one of the things that really amazed me was that they were always talking about niggers. And it never occurred to me that there was a difference between people at that time until I heard all these kids talking. I kept thinking what are these people why are they refereeing like this because all through high school I played and wrestled on the wrestling team with black boys and never thought there was any difference in color or anything until I got in this big group from the south and heard all of these discouraging remarks. And I thought well these people are weird and till this day I'm still flabbergasted that they came with this attitude because I'd never heard anything like this before.

Interviewer: Did you not were you guys not paired a lot with black soldiers?

Eberhart: We had none in our boot camp. The navy all during WWII about the only job for a navy person was being a mess boy or a steward in the servant officer's mess and that sort of thing. Late in the war we did get one black boy in the engineering group but he had previously been a steward aboard ship and he was finally able to get transferred into a different outfit.

Interviewer: I just interviewed another man a couple of weeks ago and he was a southern guy when he went into the military and he was telling me that they were separating the guys from the north and the guys from the south that ended up getting put together. Like you were just saying they would say things

like this and a lot of you guys probably didn't understand why they were doing that. Do you agree with that was there a separation between people where they were from?

Eberhart: Well there was nothing done by the service with this. But people I tended to hang around with kids that were from the northern part of the country because I agreed with them and we talked a like. Because I had never heard southern talk even before and I thought this is a strange group of people that talk like this. But we didn't there wasn't any animosity though it was really amazing I can't ever recall hearing of a fight or anything between us. And we all pulled together as a group really but going on liberty and that sort of thing we tended to go with I tended to go with guys from the north. And southern guys tend to hang around more with the others too.

Interviewer: Okay did you participate in any maneuvers stateside before going?

Eberhart: No other than the two training schools they sent me to I wasn't in any the navy didn't do much other than you'd go to firing ranges and that sort of thing. Like the navy had a big 40 millimeter group up at Great Lakes over the lake and we would go out and shoot at drones with 40 millimeter cannons. There was a big line of them down along the lake there and they'd periodically run a group of drones over and everybody would try to blow the shoot out here that they pulled. But nobody ever hit it I think they were always out of range personally they didn't want to have to buy another drone. Because here was 100 gun shooting and surely somebody would have hit it.

Interviewer: Yeah how good do you think your training was for the task that lay ahead of you?

Eberhart: I thought it was ample for what we were expected to do when we went aboard ship. In fact it was probably more than necessary because they sent me to basic engineering which taught you how to use hand tools electric tools and that sort of thing. Then they sent me to diesel school and yet out in the South Pacific during WWII I was on a ship that carried 24 landing boats for invasions. We never worked on an engine other than change the oil or change an injector. Anything that needed done we would pull the engine drop it over the side and put in a new one. If we needed to if one of the brass propellers got bent on one of the boats we would instead of saving it would pull it off throw it over the side and put on a new one. Because we had the whole holes of the ship full of diesel engines and brass screws and so nobody ever took the time to work on or fix anything it was very very wasteful. It was really frightening to see the millions of dollars I'm sure were wasted during the war.

Interviewer: How good were the living conditions in your camps?

Eberhart: In the aboard ship or on the shore?

Interviewer: On shore just on shore

Eberhart: On shore we were just in wooded barrack at Great Lakes. And then before I went overseas we were over at Camp Shoemaker over near San Francisco and the living quarters at that time consisted of wooded buildings with a wood or coal stove at each end two story. And I know one night we set the building on fire trying to get warm because this little stove at one end just got red hot and apparently set the rook on fire. So we had an interesting evening that evening and got moved to another building the next day because there was a big hole burned in the roof where the fire.

Interviewer: Okay and where did you guys depart from in North America?

Eberhart: Well initially I shipped out of Seattle. There was a big shipyard up at Everett Washington and we went up there and this ship was in for repairs it had just come back from an invasion. And they were in for repairs and I went aboard ship while it was still in the shipyard in a dry dock and spent about oh two or three weeks while they were finishing up work that they had work orders to do and then we shipped out of there for the South Pacific at Anawekuck.

Interviewer: Do you remember when you departed about?

Eberhart: Yes probably February or March in 1945.

Interviewer: Okay and how long was the voyage do you remember?

Eberhart: I'll never forget it, it took us 33 days to get to Anawekuck Island and for some reason or other there was a mass of confusion in the South Pacific at the time. And we waited 60 days for orders sitting at anchor at Anawetuck which was like a Caribbean cruise at the time because here's this beautiful island about a foot and a half above sea level with a few palm trees on it and nothing to do except swim. So every day we would have swimming parties and that sort of thing while we waited for orders to go to a different island.

Interviewer: Like a big vacation.

Eberhart: It was I couldn't believe it I thought now if this is navy life I'm shifting over.

Interviewer: Okay do you remember how many soldiers were onboard with you?

Eberhart: We had no troops on board at that time. We were supposed to pick up troops and at different islands and deliver them. We made many trips to Guam we made many trips to well we went down to the Philippines to different ports in the Philippines and picked up people and would transport them mainly to other areas. We couldn't hold too many troops because we weren't actually a troop ship we were more something that was used mainly when an invasion came. We had several big holes where we carried a lot of freight to these islands too and we always would have to go along side of the dock because we would have massive timbers that they used whatever construction purpose. They were like two foot square and we were always were carrying these huge timbers everywhere out of the West Coast when we would go and take a load of stuff to these. And I never saw them used anywhere but I know we always carried them out there and would drop them off.

Interviewer: Did you so is that what your unit was for was basically like transport?

Eberhart: Well we were mainly the ship was designed for invasion. It was called an attack cargo amphibious.

Interviewer: Okay

Eberhart: And we had 12 LCMs which were they would actually carry a tank plus personnel jammed around it. Or the LCBPs which were the little Higgins boats they called them which would just carry troops

Interviewer: Right

Eberhart: Or very light equipment if they wanted to. They were the ones who raced up on the beach and dropped the ramp and raised it and went back to the ship for another load.

Interviewer: Right did you ever see combat personally?

Eberhart: Not as far as an invasion was concerned. We were shot at by Japanese planes occasionally they would make a run past us. And we were always in convoy or we didn't travel in convoy, this is one of those weird things about the war also I thought. We never traveled in a convoy we were always sent someplace by ourselves and I kept seeing all of these pictures and newsreels and everything about the ships in convoys zig zagging together and everything. We were never in a convoy they would say just go here or go there and we would go there and we would zig zag on our own but we were never with another ship in a convoy and never had another ship to protect us a destroyer or anything. And until the war was over once peace was signed we were constantly in a convoy and zig zagging with that convoy with protection which made no sense.

Interviewer: Why now

Eberhart: The barn door is now closed now that the war was over and I couldn't figure this out. It was just one of the dumb things about war I guess.

Interviewer: Right do you remember who your commanding general was?

Eberhart: In the navy we have admirals.

Interviewer: Oh sorry.

Eberhart: I'm just tormenting you. Yeah in the I don't we had very little connection with anything other than our own captain of our ship. We very seldom saw orders or anything we didn't know what was going on a large part of the time because the navy wasn't really good about posting news or anything like that. I remember that when Admiral Nimitz was promoted and he was head of the ships in the South Pacific quite a bit of the time. But other than that there were so many different admirals and we were always attached to some group that we were never with so we never got to see anybody or do anything with any big group where there was anybody higher than a captain where four stripes were present.

Interviewer: Okay what was your impression of captain you had or captains if there was more than one.

Eberhart: Well everybody was kind of pleased with them because they were kind of lenient. Being a working ship we didn't have much formality aboard we didn't have to wear shirts when we weren't in port we didn't have to wear our hats out in the sun. And everybody was getting terrible sun burns and everything because nobody again said stay out of the sun there was no sun block. One thing that I've noticed not I'm fighting with the VA a little bit this time because I was attached aboard ship even though I was the diesel mechanic on a landing boat underway they always gave you a different job. And since I was with the engineering group they would put me on watching the engine room watching we were a steam propelled ship with huge boilers and we would work with all these pumps and everything. And it was noisy you couldn't even hear we would have to write to each other because of the noise in the engine room. Because you've got pumps and generators and these big pistons pounding and everything going on in the room and the shaft turning and everything. And when I contacted the VA you know I said I'd like to get hearing aids which they eventually gave me and because I said you know I said two years

of working in an engine room during WWII and then I was called back in during the Korean War and I said then I was on an LST in the engine room for a year and a half. And I said with just constant noise like this I said it has damaged my hearing and the VA said well what type of hearing protection did you use? There was no hearing protection during WWII and our ship was lined it was outfitted for cold weather also. And we had like two inches of asbestos lining the ship and when we had nothing to do we were waiting in our bunks for our next watch we would pick at the asbestos because it's very soft. And you can just poke your fingers in it and everybody carved their initials in it and everything and of course this asbestos was flying all over the compartment. You try to talk to the VA about you know like I have scares in my lungs and they have no idea where they came from and so I'm trying to convince the VA it possible could have been due to the asbestos flying around because we would sit there carving our initials in it. And they say that they won't even let you remove a roof tile from a building now you know if it has asbestos imbedded in it.

Interviewer: Right

Eberhart: This wasn't imbedded in anything it was flying around in the air so. It's just one of these things about ships.

Interviewer: How did it feel to be shot at by the planes?

Eberhart: Well you don't really worry at the time about it because you're too usually you have a battle station my battle station was in the five inch 38 gun which was the big five inch gun on the fantail. And you'd always dash up in there and so unless they would drop a bomb and hit the ship which the Japanese weren't too good at they were better at torpedoing and that. They their shells from their machine guns wouldn't penetrate so I felt rather safe even though going to and from you would worry about it some. Because usually you wouldn't know it was there until it was already shooting because the watch was usually asleep because you know day after day sitting there staring out some binoculars they tend to see nothing after a while so.

Interviewer: Right

Eberhart: It was just it dint' really scare you until it was all over and you thought geese somebody could have been hurt with this going on.

Interviewer: Do you recall how you felt about the Japanese Komokozzies?

Eberhart: Everybody feared them because you never knew when one of them was gonna come diving at your plane. And if they hit near you they always had bombs and everything aboard plus you know the fire department always can tell you just how terrible just one gallon of gasoline can blow up and these things were always loaded with gas. And it was just like one big bomb hitting your ship when they would try to hit you so everybody feared the Komokozzie because you never knew when one was gonna turn and instead of just staffing you was gonna try and go down your smoke stack.

Interviewer: Right

Eberhart: When we went to we went into Guam right after the invasion in there we left the coast and went into Guam. And there were dead bodies on the beach and I know what we would you could take a head, this was gruesome but we did it, you could take a head and bury it in the sand and the sand crabs

would pick it clean and then we would make lamps of Japanese head skulls. Just for something to do not to be malicious but you run out of things to do after a few months of doing nothing aboard ship so that was one of the things that we did. We'd paint them blue and green and everything and the light would come out through the eyes and the nose because they were all gone then.

Interviewer: Right

Eberhart: Just one of the gruesome things of war I guess I would no more think of doing that now I'd say that persons sick. But that was just the type of thing guys did in the service that's all.

Interviewer: What else did you guys do in your free time besides make that?

Eberhart: Well as soon as the war was over we would travel we'd get off the ship every chance we had naturally. And go tromp around in land and they allowed us to take cameras with us. I actually had a baby Browning in WWII and I took pictures of everything I've since given them away or lost them whatever I have practically nothing left. We went into Nagasaki right after the war we were in the first convoy that went in after the bomb and I took pictures of the pile of the box because that was about all that was there and chimneys. And it got traveling and seeing different countries and to this day we travel every chance we get. We've been almost in every country in Europe and Asia in fact we've got five more trips lined up between now and March that we're going to take because we just we love to travel. And that was one of the things the war actually helped us start doing.

Interviewer: Right do you receive and write a lot of letters from friends and family?

Eberhart: No I didn't write much because I didn't feel close to anybody because having been in an orphanage all my life I was pretty much self-contained. And these people that were raising me didn't adopt me until I was 16 because it really was very unusual during the depression there was no records of our birth and that sort of thing. So in order to get adopted I had to select my own birthday and my own name because I didn't know when I was born and they didn't know when I was born. And none of my family would agree when I was born so I selected my own birthday and I selected my own name and I have gone by during my lifetime I have gone by five different names. And I finally just selected Warren Robert as a name to be adopted by at that time so it's kind of weird. But one other thing I'd like to make sure that I don't forget something that I've never run into anybody else that was involved in this. The Chinese Communist were running all over China expanding and Mile was chasing Chang Tse-chung who was the Chinese General of the Republican Army and he was in charge of the Mile was in charge of the communist and he was chasing Chang Tse-chung down toward the south. And so we would go to Kalonahouch which is right across the harbor from Hong Kong we would load up with five to six hundred men how many they could jam in the ship Chinese soldiers and we would take them up the coast all the way to Northern China and drop them off at SanTowel. And then this was after the main part of the war was over and we were doing this so the nationalist troops didn't get tracked by a mile down in the south.

Interviewer: Right

Eberhart: And we probably made four trips with at least 600 people onboard and they kept no track of their soldiers whatsoever. We would count them when they went aboard and we would count them when they would leave and we never got there with the same number we left with. So we don't know if they threw each other overboard at night or what but we always lost some Chinese Nationalist Troops

on this trip up north which was kind of weird to me. And they cooked their food on the main deck which was mainly rice with anything from dried beetles on down. They would cook it in big 50 gallon drums that we kept up on the main deck because as part of the deal they had their own mess and that's what they would do they would cook their own food on the deck like that. And the Chinese army if your big you're an officer and so the Chinese troops would come up to me thinking I was the captain because I was the biggest person on the ship and they would start asking me for permission to do things and I'm going no no you know. And here the captain was about five foot six you know that's plenty big over there and they could not comprehend that they had to get permission from him. That was just something else apparently size has something to do with how fast you get ahead in the Chinese Army.

Interviewer: Wow

Eberhart: At least at that time.

Interviewer: Right did you ever feel sleep deprived or over worked?

Eberhart: Yes the navy's kind of goofy from the standpoint we stood four hours on eight hours off for up to 60 days at a time. And during the daytime you weren't allowed to go to sleep in your bunk because they wanted to make it look nice and they would insist that nobody laid down during the daytime you could only sleep during the night hours. Well if you're spending your night hours on watch it's kind of hard to get a good days sleep. So everybody was walking around like they were drugged half the time aboard ship and we would find ingenious places to sleep like I found that I had a buddy that was a cockson on one of the small boats. And so I would go up in the boat whenever I was tired and lay down along side of the diesel engine in the engine compartment and sleep during the day. And everybody had secret little hiding places like this because you couldn't sleep in your bunk.

Interviewer: Were you promoted during your service time?

Eberhart: Yes I went all the way up to, my wife is laughing, I ended up being a third class mortar machinist mate which was one stripe. And I was so proud of that stripe but after I got out of the navy after the Korean War between WWII and the Korean War I went to college and got my master's degree. There's the red light there (tape ended).