

Robert Edward Ennis Biography

Pre-WSC Experience

Robert Edward Ennis was born on October 13, 1915 to Matthew and Elizabeth Copeland Ennis in Walla Walla, Washington.¹ He was the third of four children; he had an older brother, John; older sister, Mary; and one younger brother, Matt.² His father worked as a farmer during Ennis's early childhood, and at some point during the 1920's the family relocated to Lewistown, Montana, the county seat of Fergus County, where the elder Ennis worked as a manager in a real estate office.³ Ennis graduated from Fergus County High School in Lewistown in 1934.⁴

WSC Experience

Ennis attended Washington State College (WSC) from 1934 through 1939 as a General Studies major.⁵ He was a member of the Montezuma Club, the WSC Senate, Associated Engineers, the Newman Club (for Catholic students), and Scabbard and Blade.⁶ Ennis also

¹ C. James Quann, *WSU Military Veterans: Heroes and Legends*, Spokane, Washington: Tornado Creek Publications, 2005), 179; "Robert Edward Ennis in the Washington, Birth Records, 1870-1935," *Ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=1209&h=417984&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh842&_phstart=successSource (Accessed August 1, 2019).

² "Robert E Ennis in the 1930 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=6224&h=106155773&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh844&_phstart=successSource (Accessed August 1, 2019).

³ "1930 Federal Census for Robert E Ennis," *Ancestry.com*, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/6224/4610687_00601?pid=106155773&backurl=https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv%3D1%26dbid%3D6224%26h%3D106155773%26tid%3D%26pid%3D%26usePUB%3Dtrue%26_phsrc%3Dixh848%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh848&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&_ga=2.262061197.18504031.1565326267-934170779.1561481608 (Accessed August 1, 2019).

⁴ Quann, *WSU Military Veterans*, 179.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Chinook*, 1935, 1937, 1938, & 1939, WSU 46, WSU Publications – Chinooks at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

served as a Cadet in the WSC R.O.T.C., attaining the rank of Captain.⁷ Ennis married Patria Johnson, but the date is unknown.⁸

Wartime Service and Death

Following his graduation from WSC, Ennis was commissioned an officer in the United States Army Reserves. He was assigned to the 101st Philippine Division, 103rd Infantry Regiment.⁹ The Philippine Division engaged in security missions at Manila, Fort McKinley, and Bataan prior to the declaration of war in the Pacific. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, they endured two days of bombings before moving to the field “to cover the withdrawal of troops to Bataan and to resist the enemy in the Subic Bay area.”¹⁰ On December 23, 1941, the Division was assigned to the Bataan Defense Forces.

Due to the successful Japanese landings in the Philippines in the early days of the war, resupply of the Bataan and Corregidor strongholds was essentially impossible, resulting in food, ammunition, weapons, and medical supply shortages.¹¹ Despite this, American and Filipino forces were able to hold off successive Japanese attacks between January 22 and February 2, 1942, in what became known as the Battle of the Points.¹² Despite this, the Bataan jungle and lack of supplies led to American and Filipino soldiers facing a minimal food rations and the devastation of malaria due to the absence of quinine. MacArthur left Corregidor for Australia via

⁷ *Chinook*, 1939, WSU 46, WSU Publications – Chinooks at Washington State University Libraries’ Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

⁸ Letter from E.O. Holland to Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Ennis, March 18, 1945, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries’ Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc_

⁹ “Robert E Ennis,” *Honorstates.org*, <https://www.honorstates.org/index.php?id=75227> (Accessed June 10, 2019).

¹⁰ “US Army Divisions: Philippine Division,” *armydivs.com*, <https://www.armydivs.com/philippine-division> (Accessed August 9, 2019).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

submarine on March 12, 1942, at the order of President Franklin Roosevelt. After a sustained aerial and artillery bombardment, the Japanese attack on Bataan began in earnest on April 3, 1942.¹³ After the fall of Bataan, the Japanese set their sights on Corregidor.

While troops on Corregidor were in better health than their peers on Bataan, they were still vulnerable after having lived through the effects of a prolonged siege. The Japanese began their assault on Corregidor on May 1, 1942, and by June 9, almost all American and Filipino forces had surrendered.¹⁴ Some units had at first refused to surrender and some individuals escaped to fight as guerrillas.

It is unknown where or when Ennis was taken as a prisoner of war by the Japanese, but he was listed as such beginning May 7, 1942.¹⁵ Given where his division was stationed, it is likely that he survived the Bataan Death March and/or siege of Corregidor and entered the Davao Penal Colony on Mindanao on November 7, 1942, with 969 American prisoners of war.¹⁶ Davao was created in 1932 but was used by the Japanese during their occupation of the Philippine from 1942 onward. Roughly 2,000 Americans were held at Davao during the war, and prisoners were subjected to brutal treatment.¹⁷

Japanese forces routinely moved prisoners of war onto cargo ships, at times due to decisions to move them to a new location, and at other times to use them as decoys for Allied

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Robert E Ennis in the World War II Prisoners of War, 1941-1946," *Ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=8919&h=45624&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh858&_phstart=successSource (Accessed August 9, 2019).

¹⁶ John D. Lukacs, "The Davao Escape," *World War II Database*, https://ww2db.com/battle_spec.php?battle_id=338 (Accessed July 23, 2019).

¹⁷ "Davao Penal Colony," *World War II Database*, https://ww2db.com/facility/Davao_Penal_Colony/ (Accessed July 23, 2019).

attacks. On August 20, 1944, 750 American prisoners from the Davao Penal Colony boarded the *Shinyo Maru*. For nearly three weeks they remained within the hold, suffering from unbearable heat and darkness, as Allied forces trailed the cargo ships every move.¹⁸ On September 7, 1944 the American submarine *USS Paddle* fired two torpedoes at *Shinyo Maru*, killing 150 Japanese Army personnel as well as 688 American prisoners.¹⁹ As the boat was sinking, American prisoners who tried to climb up from the cargo holds were shot by some of the Japanese guards.²⁰ Robert Ennis was on board the *Shinyo Maru*, and he was killed.

Postwar Legacy

Ennis is memorialized at Tablets of the Missing at Manila American Cemetery, Manila, Philippines.²¹ He posthumously received the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. Ennis's older brother, John, an officer in the U.S. Navy, also died during World War II in a plane crash.²²

¹⁸ C. Peter Chen, "Shinyo Maru," *World War II Database*, https://ww2db.com/ship_spec.php?ship_id=530 (Accessed August 9, 2019).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Robert E Ennis," *Honorstates.org*, <https://www.honorstates.org/index.php?id=75227> (Accessed June 10, 2019).

²² Letter from E.O. Holland to Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Ennis, March 18, 1945, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc_