



*Bob Tucker*

## **Robert (“Bob”) Garland Tucker A Tribute**

By *Jonathan Tucker*

**Ancestry** – Robert Garland Tucker was born April 3, 1921, in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. His family had been in Portsmouth for five generations, having moved there from York, Maine just prior to the Civil War in the 1860s. It was his 3<sup>rd</sup> great-grandfather Henry Lawrence Tucker Jr. who had married Evaline McIntire in 1831 in York, and brought the Tuckers into the line of Micum McIntire’s descendants. From Micum, Bob’s descent was as follows:

Micum McIntire – Dorothy Pierce



John McIntire – Susannah Young



John McIntire Jr. – Abigail Webber



Joseph McIntire - Lucy Kingsbury



Charles McIntire – Eunice Stover



Evaline McIntire – Henry Lawrence Tucker Jr.



Charles Henry Tucker – Mary Francis Garland



Charles Francis Tucker – Ada Newton Sanborn



Fred Garland Tucker – Dorothy Aldrich Doolittle



Robert Garland Tucker.

**Childhood** - Bob attended primary and secondary schools in Portsmouth, NH, graduating from high school in 1940. He was the oldest of three children—himself and sisters Priscilla and Virginia. Bob grew up on the water, plying a dory on the Piscataqua River. He was a Boy Scout and a trumpet player in school. He was a cadet with the local post of the Civil War veterans' organization the Grand Army of the Republic. After graduating high school, Bob worked as an apprentice machinist at the Portsmouth Naval Yard and drove a truck making deliveries for his grandparent's corner store in Strawberry Banke.

Bob's father Fred had been involved in the Micum McIntire Clan from early on, and brought the family to the annual reunions in York. The ocean and the Piscataqua River drainage defined much of life for Bob and his ancestors.

**A Legacy of Service** - Bob's ancestor John McIntire Jr. (6<sup>th</sup> g-grandfather) had been a shipbuilder in York during the Revolutionary War. Bob's 6<sup>th</sup> g-grandfather in his Tucker line, John Tucker (1732-1800), served as a private in the NH militia until called into the Continental Army in July 1777—he fought at the battle of Saratoga.

Bob's ancestor Charles McIntire (4<sup>th</sup> g-grandfather) served as a private in Sergeant John S. Thompson's detached guard ("Sea Fencibles") during the War of 1812, and was stationed at Fort Edward in York Harbor from July 26 through Sept. 23, 1814. His 4<sup>th</sup> great-grandfather in his Tucker line, Henry Lawrence Tucker Sr., a resident of Kittery, Maine, was a ship's captain and, like Charles McIntire, served as a member of the Seas Fencibles, guarding the coast during the War of 1812.

Bob's ancestors served in the Civil War. Joseph Shepherd Doolittle (Bob's mother's paternal grandfather) served in Company G of the 14<sup>th</sup> NH Regiment. He was wounded at the Third Battle of Winchester (Battle of Opequon), Virginia. Bob's first great-grandfather (grandfather's wife's father), Freeman Foss Sanborn, served in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> NH regiments, and rose to first lieutenant.

Bob's father Fred Garland Tucker, a lawyer, served in the U.S. Navy in WWI, during which Bob's mother Dorothy served as a Navy Yeoman. Dorothy was probably doing war-related clerical work at the Portsmouth Naval Yard, although female yeomen also worked as mechanics, truck drivers, cryptographers, telephone operators, and

munitions makers. Bob's sister Priscilla served in WWII in a similar capacity. Both she and her mother have military headstones.

Bob's Feb. 16, 1942 WWII draft registration card listed him as 20 years old, employed at the Naval Yard, and living on Willard Avenue, Portsmouth, NH. He was 6 feet tall, 180 lbs., with hazel eyes, brown hair, and a ruddy complexion.

## ***World War II***

**Enlistment** - At age 21, two months shy of his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, Bob enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on January 6, 1943 in Manchester, NH, where he was noted as being 71 inches tall with green eyes, brown hair, and a ruddy complexion. He was living on Newcastle Avenue in Portsmouth, and working as a machinist's apprentice at the Portsmouth Naval Yard and a delivery truck driver for a grocery (probably his grandfather's corner grocery store in Strawberry Banke). The Portsmouth City Marshall, Leonard H. Hewitt, submitted paperwork indicating that Bob had no police or juvenile record. He was issued Marine Corps serial number 808114.

**Training and Promotion** - Bob received basic training at Parris Island, NJ, where he received training in hand grenades, rifles, and bayonet, and qualified as an "above average" Rifle Sharpshooter with a score of 296 on Feb, 23, 1943. He was issued a standard Garand M-1 .30 caliber semi-automatic service rifle produced at the Springfield Armory. He received specialized training in New River, North Carolina, and in Florida in electrical systems, radio operation, and radar (for which he received a "very satisfactory" rating). His principal military qualification thereafter was as a Radar Technician (SSN 775K).

In the seven months between enlisting in January 1943 and August 1943, Bob advanced in rank from Private First Class to Corporal to Sergeant. He was stationed at Camp Legeune, New River, North Carolina from August 21, to September 30, 1943, awaiting assignment, and was assigned to Company F, Signal Battalion of the Training Center. On January 10, 1943, Bob was relieved from Communication Personnel and assigned as Aviation Personnel.

At some point during his service (perhaps before he shipped overseas or on the Solomon Islands), Bob played trumpet and cornet with some grouping of the Marine Corps Band. For a time, the actor MacDonald Carey was in his unit.

**The South Pacific** - On January 24, 1944, Bob was reassigned to Marine Air Warning Squadron Three (MAW 3). He left for the Pacific Theater on March 3, 1944 from Miramar, California, on the ship *USS Kadashan Bay* bound for Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, and arrived there on March 22, 1944.



**Espiritu Santo** - Espiritu Santo was held by the Australians and served as a staging area for Allied troops. When Bob arrived, there was active fighting in the Solomon Islands to the north and west. American troops had invaded and thereafter held the perimeter around a beachhead at Torokina on Bougainville. There was a determined Japanese counter-attack in March 1944 around the time Bob arrived at Espiritu Santo. The Japanese were driven off on March 27<sup>th</sup> and retreated into the center and north of the island.

While on Espiritu Santo, on June 1, 1944, Bob was promoted from sergeant to staff sergeant (temporary aviation duty), and from staff sergeant to technical sergeant in Marine Air Wing (MAW) 3 on July 21, 1945. Bob was in charge of a radio and reconnaissance squad that go in with the infantry, set up, receive frontline reports by radio, and relay targeting information about enemy positions to the artillery on the ships, to mobile ground artillery units, and to Marine fighter planes providing close air support—bombing and strafing runs—for the infantry. All while defending themselves as necessary. He and his squad were involved in several campaigns, the first of which was to ‘consolidate’ control of the Solomon Islands.

**The Solomon Islands** - On November 19, 1944, Bob embarked on *LST 224* from Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, to Bougainville, Solomon Islands, arriving on November 23, 1944 and disembarking the next day. He and his men were part of a larger Allied invasion led by Australia II Corps intended to mop up remaining Japanese resistance and consolidate control of the northern Solomon Islands. The Marine fighter squadrons for which Bob provided targeting information provided close air support for allied ground troops.

While in the Solomon Islands, during ‘down time’, Bob sometimes worked as a machinist at the Marine base’s machine shop. For participating in the Consolidation of the Northern Solomon Islands, Bob was eligible to wear a bronze star on an Asiatic-Pacific Area ribbon.

**The Mindoro Campaign** - On March 4, 1945, Bob and his men embarked from Bougainville, Solomon Islands on board the ship *Jean P. Chouteau* for the Philippine island of Mindoro, arriving March 18, 1945 and disembarking on March 20, 1945. The initial invasion of Mindoro had occurred on December 15, 1945, and Bob’s unit was again involved in support of “mopping up” operations.

**The Malabang Operation (Mindanao)** - On April 9, 1945, Bob left Mindoro on board *LST 806* for Mindanao, Philippine Islands. He arrived April 17, 1945. From April 17 through August 10, 1945, Bob participated in the Malabang Operation on Mindanao, making him eligible to wear a bronze star on an Asiatic Pacific Campaign ribbon, and a bronze star on the Philippine Liberation Ribbon.

**Direct Combat** - Like many WWII veterans, Bob tried to move on past his wartime experiences, and re-engage with civilian life. He did not talk about his experience in the war. As a result, little is known of his direct combat experience--he only ever spoke of one such experience.

On Mindoro or Mindanao, he and his squad were travelling on foot up along a sizeable river as part of the invasion. They had bivouacked for the night on a small sandy beach—part of a delta formed by a smaller tributary joining the main river. As squad leader, his own tent was right next to the tent in which the radio and radar equipment was set up.

During the night, someone crept into camp and planted a coconut bomb against the radio tent. When it went off, he was awakened by the blast and the sand passing through the tent wall and embedding itself in one side of his face. He grabbed his M-1 Garand and went outside. Others from his squad were already up and firing into the dark, upriver along the beach. He couldn't see what they had seen and were shooting at, but he joined in. No damage was done to the radio/radar equipment by the blast, which was relatively small and ineffective. Nothing else happened that night, but few men slept.

When the squad broke camp and struck out on foot upriver again the next morning, a short distance along the bank they came on the shot-up body of a 13-14 year old boy, possibly a Moro tribesman. The boy was dressed all in black and during the night his body had become half-buried in the sand along the water's edge from the incessant wakes of military boats going up and downriver. The dead boy was still clutching another coconut bomb.

**Occupation** - On August 14, 1945, Japan surrendered, ending the war in the Pacific. Bob was involved in the Allied occupation of the Philippines for only about two weeks--an experience he later said that he hated, because he thought the victorious occupying Allied troops treated the Filipino with casual contempt. In the South Pacific, Bob picked up the paired habits of cigarettes and alcohol, along with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) with which he struggled for the rest of his life.

**Going Home** - On August 30, 1945, Bob left from Samar, Philippine Islands via the aircraft carrier *USS Prince William*, arriving in San Diego, California on September 21, 1945. He travelled east by train, arriving at the Aviation Separation Unit at Cherry Point, North Carolina on November 23, 1945. He was discharged from there on November 29, 1945 as a Technical Sergeant.

Bob was issued a Certificate of Satisfactory Service, two khaki and two green patches for honorable service, and a USMC honorable discharge button. His character of service was designated “excellent.” He took no wartime souvenirs, and did not keep any of his service equipment or weapons, turning them in. The only

item he kept was his service-issue duffel bag, which he needed to carry his personal items home. His pay upon discharge was \$333.83, including \$100 mustering out pay, and a \$43.50 travel allowance to get him from North Carolina back home to Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

About his combat experience helping to direct artillery fire and strafing runs at enemy soldiers, Bob later wrote a single poem:

***Semper Fidelis***

***Cannon quakes shudder my spit of sand,***

***And overhead the heavy shuttle goes***

***Spinning arcs to the soft, the distant explosions,***

***Binding me accomplice to an aim***

***True as Cain's and surer than erosion's.***

**Coming Home & Marriage** - In 1945, after returning home, Bob attended the North Congregational Church in Portsmouth of which he had been a member before the war. There he was introduced to Nebraska native Mary Jean Knorr, the church's new choir director and organist, a recent graduate of Union Seminary, New York City. Bob himself had been a temporary organist for the church before the war.

Bob and Jean courted, and on July 26, 1946 they married in the First Presbyterian Church in Plattsmouth, Nebraska. In the early summer of 1946, Bob travelled out to Plattsmouth where Jean's parents lived and got a job working on the railroad there, to demonstrate to his prospective in-laws his ability and willingness to work hard to provide for their daughter. In the process, he nearly ruined his back carrying railroad ties, but it worked.

**Education** - Using the GI Bill, Bob pursued and obtained over a period of years first a B.A. in English from Amherst College (where he studied under Robert Frost and Bob and Jean later settled), an M.A. from Harvard University, and finally a Ph.D. from the Iowa Writer's workshop at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA. In each case, Jean and Bob (and later their children) would move to the community and Jean would get a job at one or more local churches while Bob completed his studies.

**Settling Down** - The 1948 Amherst, MA directory shows Robert, a student, and wife Jean living at North Pleasant Street in Amherst while Bob was getting his B.A. at Amherst College. After he completed his M.A. at Harvard, Bob was hired as an instructor in the English Department at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Early in his career at UMass, Bob obtained work in West Springfield, MA as a part-time machinist to supplement the family's income. He served as a deacon for the First Congregational Church of Amherst, where Jean eventually served as organist for 47 years.



Bob and Jean had three children: Jonathan (June 1952); Timothy, (August 1954), and; Ellen Jean (August 1957). They lived in four different places in Amherst, moving in response to the need to accommodate their growing family: 1) a second floor apartment of an 1850 Greek Revival building on North Pleasant Street in downtown Amherst; 2) an apartment in a 1770 saltbox on South East Street in South Amherst; 3) a second floor apartment in a gambrel-roofed 1872 house on North Prospect Street just west of downtown Amherst, and; 4) their fourth and final move (1957) was to a 1910 farmhouse on 7 1/2 acres they had purchased on West Street in South Amherst, a homestead where they remained for the rest of their lives, raising their children and innumerable dogs and cats.

**Teaching** - At UMass/Amherst, Bob taught creative writing in the English Department, advancing over the years from instructor to assistant professor to an associate professor, and then to tenured full professor. He was a managing editor of the literary magazine *The Massachusetts Review*. In 1962, together with three other colleagues (Stanley Koehler, Leon Barron, and David Clark) Bob published a book of poetry, *A Curious Quire* (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA, 1962). Bob lived, worked among, and was friends with many of the extended community of writers and poets living in and associated with the town of Amherst, the University of Massachusetts, and Amherst College. These included Robert Frost, Robert Francis, Archibald MacLeish, Edmund Skellings, Richard Wilbur, e.e. cummings, Joseph Langland, James Tate, and many others.

**Civic Engagement** - Whether as a result of having grown up in the long-integrated and historically abolitionist city of Portsmouth, NH (one of George Washington's escaped slaves settled there) or because of his war-time experiences, or both, after returning from WWII, Bob became an activist for civil rights, economic justice, and in opposition to militarism in general. Much of his work as an activist was not always apparent to his family but only discovered after the fact. As a former Marine, Bob sought to shelter them from any consequences that might result from his activism.

While living in Iowa City, Iowa (1958-1960) obtaining his Ph.D., Bob worked successfully with the local University Unitarian church to help desegregate downtown barber shops, restaurants, and hotels. Dr. Martin Luther King was briefly involved in that effort.

Following the 1963 bombing of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama that killed four little girls, Bob was involved in providing relief and support to the congregation.

During the national strikes during the Vietnam War, Bob helped to organize faculty and student self-governance of the UMass/Amherst campus.

Bob served as a long-time draft counsellor at the Valley Peace Center in Amherst, and as a member of a local Sunday morning breakfast group of activists—efforts in which he involved his eldest son Jonathan. The breakfast group, which included local clergy, developed a successful proposal for a Citizen’s Review Commission, created and funded by Amherst Town Meeting on March 11, 1970. It was the first human rights commission for the Town of Amherst, and one of the first in the state.

**Death & Legacy** - Bob died, age 62, on December 13, 1982, at Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton, MA from congestive heart failure, in part a legacy of the habit of cigarettes to which he had been introduced in the South Pacific and the alcohol with which he had long self-medicated his PTSD.

Bob was much beloved as a teacher of creative writing. After he died, letters filled with grief continued to arrive at the South Amherst homestead for years, as the news of his passing rippled out through the network of former colleagues and students who had scattered across the world.

Those responses included three that well describe Bob’s legacy. The first is a tribute from former student Al Lupo, who wrote in 1985 about finding a letter that Bob had written him:

***It has been some time now since Bob Tucker died, and I was going to write something about him when I heard of his death, oh yes, something meaningful and undoubtedly something maudlin. I was very good at being maudlin in his class, and have rarely lagged on that score ever since.***

***He would disagree. He would smile and speak gently not of my faults but of whatever virtues he might have found in me, for that’s how he dealt with all of us. Few can do that. Few have the self-confidence to be gentle.***

***The second [shove to write something] was not gentle, certainly not subtle. Rather it resembled a hokey scene in an unremarkable movie. I had picked up a book and, inside, found an envelope, addressed to me at a Laurel, Maryland address in 1965. . . .***

***The letter was from Tucker. He had written it on January 27 of that year, four sheets of lined paper, full, but for eight lines at the bottom, of gentility, courtesy, compliments, constructive criticism. . . .***

***Once again, in the letter this time, he became teacher. Once again, he did so without being overbearing or pretentious, without hurting the feelings of a young writer.***



***Once again, I soared, because this voice from my past was telling me that some of these newspaper pieces were good. And now in 1985, as I re-read this old letter, I glow unabashedly again. . . .***

***In the letter, Tucker wrote of perspective, of how newspapers, radio and television really don't deliver a proper perspective. He went on to describe those who see the world as a whole, who see the good with the bad. "They with the grace of God," he wrote, "get us the hell out of Egypt. They write the good news—that it's never too gruesome (they face all the worst) for the most important thing, human love and compassion, to begin rebuilding with whatever fragments seem to be at hand."***

The second was a poem sent to Bob's family by Ed Skellings (Poet Laureate of Florida) Bob's former University of Iowa classmate, fellow poet, and longtime friend:

***Loving Memory***

***I see it white tonight. I see Robert***

***At his door. I see the yellow flames***

***Of the tall candles burning haloes***

***In the frosted windows. Robert Tucker,***


***Teacher at the door, you are New***

***England, all welcome from the cold.***

The third arrived first, in March 1983, three months after Bob's passing. His sister Priscilla sent a reminiscing letter and a small packet of Bob's things. In the packet was an old round ivory and blue badge with a cellotane window in it, behind which was part of a business card on which my father had printed his name in childish letters. The badge read "Micum McIntire Clan" and displayed an old version of the MacIntyre chief's coat of arms. Priscilla's letter explained:

***Enclosed is your dad's badge he wore (& printed on, bless his young boy heart) at one of the McIntire reunions we attended as children—clam chowder, sunshine, beautiful meadows in York, Maine. Lovely, lovely, lovely. And it was because of our father that we were there.***

Bob Tucker's legacy is composed of his inheritance of character from his McIntire ancestors and others, what he made of himself, and what he passed on to others. A family tradition of centuries of service. A persistent but unswervingly gentle intelligence and empathy. The ability to endure and pass through difficulty (Per Ardua) to the other side, while working ferociously and tirelessly to protect, defend, and advance the most important things life offers us—family, friends, and our



responsibility to leave the world around us better than we found it. And, through it all, to remain New England at the door “all welcome from the cold.”