

Oral History Interview for Ms. Florence Finch, Ithaca, New York, 2007 (SPAR, Medal of Freedom recipient, worked in Gen. MacArthur's intel division in Philippines)

Segment 1: For the Record

State at the beginning of the interview:

1. Date and exact location of the interview
2. Name of the person being interviewed
3. Interviewee's birth date
4. Names of the people attending the interview (including the interviewer and camera operators)

Segment 2: Early Years & Philippines

1. Can you tell us about your parents and your childhood in the Philippines?
2. What was your educational background and how did you come to work for the army? How old were you when you did?
3. How did you first hear of the attack on Pearl Harbor? What did you do?
4. What are your memories of the Japanese assault on the Philippines, and Manila in particular?
5. Did you receive intelligence training before working for the U.S. Army's chief of intelligence?
6. Where was your office located? Did you work in Manila proper or somewhere else?
7. Given that your boss, LTC Englehart was General MacArthur's chief of intelligence, what role did you play in securing Army intelligence files and codes from the Japanese as Manila was captured?
8. What was Englehart's first name? Did he work for Major General Charles A. Willoughby?
9. Were you aware of any Coast Guard personnel working alongside the Army personnel in intelligence or in any other way?
10. Do you remember how you decided to stay in Manila? What did your husband, Charles, think?
11. When did Englehart leave and what do you remember of that?
12. When you smuggled items to the American POWs, did you work with a larger group or was it just the former office employees? How did you begin the work? How long did it continue?
13. When you were employed at the fuel distribution center, how did you know which Filipinos to issue vouchers to? Did you help sabotage Japanese fuel deliveries and, if so, how?
14. How else did you aid the resistance?
15. In October 1944, on what political grounds were you taken into custody? Do you remember any questions the Japanese police asked you? Why were you imprisoned? Were you interrogated again in Bilibid prison? In your trial what were you charged with and why were you convicted?
16. Do you remember your liberation from the women's prison? What happened? Were you still in contact with Claire Phillips at the time?
17. For what actions did your husband receive his awards? Do you know how he was killed?
18. What are your 3 most vivid memories of the war?

Segment 3: Life in the SPARs

1. What made you decide to enlist in the military once you were in the United States? Why did you choose the Coast Guard?
2. Where did you enlist? Do you remember who swore you in?
3. What did your family or friends think about your joining the military?

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4. Where did you go through recruit training?
5. What was boot camp like? Tell me about your transition to the military life? What was a typical day like?
6. Tell me about your drill instructors? Were they tough old Chief Petty Officers?
7. What was your rating? Did you pick that particular rating or were you assigned a rating due to the needs of the service?
8. Where did you go for your specialized training?
9. Tell me about that training. Was it thorough? In other words, were you sufficiently prepared for service in the Coast Guard?
10. Where were you stationed? Did you work with personnel from cutters, transports, or local stations?
11. What was a typical day for you like? Watch-standing, drills, free time, etc.
12. Tell me about your most memorable experience in the service.
13. What about off duty?
14. What was the food like?
15. How was the pay?
16. Tell me about any liberty you took. Did you typically "hang out" with other Coast Guard men and SPARs or did you have friends from the other services too?
17. How close were you to the other SPARs you served with?
18. What did you think of the uniforms for SPARs?
19. Did you encounter overt sexism? Was there a difference in the way in which male enlisted Coast Guardsmen treated you versus the way officers treated you? Did you feel accepted or appreciated by the men?
20. There are stories that the older chief petty officers and officers did not want women serving in their "beloved Coast Guard." Did you encounter attitudes such as this or were you accepted by the older veterans? How about the attitudes of the more recent enlistees?
21. Captain Dorothy Stratton related that another problem with the older officers' attitudes was that many felt the Navy grabbed all of the qualified women for the WAVEs and let the less qualified join the SPARs. She fought that attitude very hard and fought sexist attitudes. Did you encounter such attitudes?
22. You really were trailblazers in every sense of the word and if you could tell us about the environment and attitudes you faced during your Coast Guard career I'm sure that future generations would like to know about your transition from civilian life to a life in uniform. What were some of the obstacles you faced and overcame?
23. Were there men in the service who reached out to help you?
24. How were you perceived by the general public? Did they accept the idea of women in uniform?
25. Would you have liked to be offered the chance to serve overseas?
26. Do you think that service women should be offered the opportunity to serve in offensive ground combat?
27. What were your officers like? Were there any noticeable differences between reserve officers versus active-duty (Coast Guard Academy) officers? Did you encounter any SPAR officers? If so, what did you think about them? How about SPAR petty officers?
28. Did you have any interaction with service members of races other than your own? If so, what was that interaction like?
29. How were the "relations" between Coast Guardsmen and the other armed services? Were

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there rivalries, animosities, or did you get along well with them?

30. How many other SPARs served with you in your unit?

31. Were SPARs permitted to date or were such questions even considered? If so, were you permitted to see a service member or were you limited to civilians?

32. Please relate any experience you had of working with the British, Canadians, Free French and other allies, if any. Was there a good working relationship with our allies?

33. How did you feel about the people you were fighting (i.e., animosity, hatred, respect)?

34. Did you ever meet the head of the SPARs, Dorothy Stratton? Tell me about your impressions of the Coast Guard's leadership and how they handled the Coast Guard and the integration of women in the service.

35. How did you stay in touch with your family?

36. What was the food like?

37. Did you have plenty of supplies?

38. Did you feel pressure or stress?

39. Was there something special you did for "good luck"?

40. How did people entertain themselves? Were there entertainers?

41. What did you do when on leave?

42. Where did you travel while in the service?

43. Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual event? What were some of the pranks that you or others would pull?

44. Do you have photographs? Who are the people in the photographs?

45. Did you keep a personal diary?

Segment 4: After Service & Later Years

1. Do you recall the day your service ended?

2. Where were you?

3. What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?

4. Did you work or go back to school?

5. Was your education supported by the G.I. Bill?

6. Did you make any close friendships while in the service?

7. Did you continue any of those relationships? For how long?

8. Did you join a veterans organization?

9. What sort of career did you have after the war?

10. Did your military experience influence your thinking about war or about the military in general?

11. If you're a member of a veterans organization, what kinds of activities does your post or association have?

12. Do you attend reunions?

13. How did your service and experiences affect your life?

14. Would you have been interested in a career in the Coast Guard?

15. How did you feel about receiving the Medal of Freedom? Please discuss the events that took place in relation to receiving that honor.

16. What comments, impressions, or thoughts would you like to share; areas that I have missed and that you think are important for future generations to know.

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17. What do you think about today's Coast Guard?

18. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered in this interview?

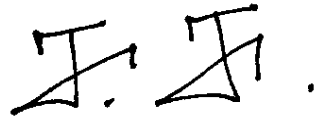
January 28, 2008

Dear Mr. Thiesen,

Enclosed is the questionnaire you sent in August. I am sorry it has taken so long to get it back to you. Since August my health has not been good and I am now in the hospicare residence of Ithaca with osteoporosis and spinal stenosis. I hope this has not caused you any inconvenience.

With best wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. E. Finch". The signature is stylized with sharp angles and a dot at the end.

Florence E. Finch

Segment 1: For the Record

1. ---
2. Florence Ebersole Smith Finch
3. October 11, 1915, Santiago, Isabela Province, Philippines
4. ---

Segment 2: Early Years and the Philippines

1. See my write-up dates 8/5/89 attached.
2. " "
3. " "
4. " "
5. I did not receive any intelligence training before being hired.
Correction: I did not work for the Chief of Army intelligence. See attached write-up dated 8/5/89.
6. Our offices were located in Fort Santiago, Manila, just outside Manila, near the Walled City, Intramuros.
7. My immediate boss was Major E. Carl Engelhart, U.S. Army Intelligence (G-2), Hq. Philippine Dept., U.S. Army, assigned to the office of the Assistant Chief of Staff. Note that Major Engelhart was not Gen. MacArthur's Chief of Intelligence.
8. See #7. No, he did not work for Major Gen. Charles A. Willoughby. His immediate boss was Col. ? O'Rear.
9. No, I was not aware of any Coast Guard personnel working alongside the Army personnel. (I'd never heard of the Coast Guard.)
10. I had no choice but to remain Manila. I had a 16 - year old - sister for whom I was responsible. She had been living with me before I got married. We had no options whatsoever.
11. I believe Major Engelhart left for Corregidor on Christmas Eve Day as ALL MILITARY PERSONNEL were instructed to do so. (Maybe you'd be interested in letter to Cox dated April 25, 1991.)
12. I myself did not smuggle items to the American POWs; a courier picked them up for me at my house, I never knew his name. He specified a day when he would pick up items; I did not know any others whom he had picked up items. One had to be very careful.
13. I did not actually issue fuel coupons. I merely wrote the names on the coupon books for those whose applications had been approved, I was told that one reason I was hired was because my handwriting was neat and legible.
14. A Filipino man asked for my help in falsifying documents to enable guerillas to obtain fuel to operate their trucks and then wrote names on coupons to enable them to pick up their fuel supplies. Col. Engelhart wrote about this in the recommendation for me to receive the Medal of Freedom. (See Medal of Freedom citation). I also brought food and did

laundry for the American internees in Santo Tomas until the gates were closed in October 1944, after General MacArthur had begun his efforts to liberate the Philippines in Leyte Gulf. Then the Japanese put the internees on starvation diets. As I have written elsewhere, the Filipinos – all of us outside – were very loyal to the Americans; we shared with them our own meager foods. All ships had stopped coming from the U.S., also food was very scarce, many foods being sold on the black market, especially cigarettes.

15. I was apprehended for the above, long after I had left the fuel union because I had had to move – the Japanese had commandeered our homes to make room for new arrivals of Japanese officers and I had no transportation. The two Japanese soldiers who apprehended me in our home in Tondo took me to a small military substation. I was held there for about a week. I didn't have a chance to bring any clothes with me. In my write-up memoirs, I write about my interrogations and the use of electrical devices when the Japanese interrogator did not like my replies. From here we were taken, blindfolded, in a truck and found ourselves in the national prison, Bilibid. I am not sure of the exact dates. I was interrogated here again, with no defense lawyer, by Japanese interrogators; Whose English was excellent and sentenced to three years hard labor. Then we were blindfolded again, taken in a truck, to the national women's prison, in Mandaluyong, in the outskirts of Manila. I don't recall the exact date but recall celebrating Christmas in the women's prison. Again I go into detail about all this in my memoirs.

16. Yes, I remember well the day we were liberated. Here again all this is related in my memoirs.

Claire Pillips was in Bilibid with me and then in the women's prison in Mandaluyong. From the day we were liberated, I never recall seeing Claire Pillips again. I'm not even sure we were on the same ship that brought us to the States (the USS Coast Guard Eberle, on her maiden voyage.) I received Claire's book, Manila Espionage, autographed to me, her cellmate she wrote, but have never heard from again.

17. See official documents he wrote of the award.

18. Monday, December 9, 1941 when Manila was bombed –strategic – places Clarke Field, Nichols Field, Cavite Naval Base. The day Smitty left to report to Corregidor, Christmas Eve, December 24, 1941. The day two Japanese Officers called on me showing me a brief note from Col. Engelhart notifying me that Smitty had been killed in action.

Segment 3: Life in the SPARs

1. See write-up 8/5/89. I was sworn in by Lt. Pearl Kheel.

2. " "

3. " "
4. Manhattan Beach Training Station, Brooklyn, NY. (MBTS)
5. See Harpoon issues, attached, and SPAR letters to Buffalo relatives.
6. I don't remember much about my drill instructors. See SPAR Letters.
7. S1C USCG WR. That was the rank of all recruits. When I was discharged, I had obtained a rank of S2C.
8. Remained in 'MBTS' for another 8 weeks (See SPAR Letters.)
9. After the second 8 weeks, was assigned to the Coast Guard League Office in Washington D.C..
10. My boss was Commander Ceballos. See SPAR letters and Memoirs.
11. I had no experience or contacts with personnel from cutters, transports and local stations.
12. When I was awarded the Medals I had been awarded and those of my deceased (husbands). When I was chosen to represent the SPARS at the NY Herald Tribune Forum held in the Waldorf Astoria, and when I was chosen SPAR of the Week and had been instructed to go to Washington D.C. and meet Commander Stratton.
13. See Memoirs.
14. " "
15. " "
16. My memory about liberty is vague. Went to Manhattan with other SPARS (see pictures). Much of this is covered in Memoirs with supporting pictures. I did not have any contact with any Coast Guard men. Only contact was weekly dances – Friday nights – in Escanaba Hall, the SPAR barracks.
17. Saw many of them at drills, mess hall, at the MBTS and in Washington in the Escanaba Spar barracks. No other friends from other services.
18. I didn't give much thought to the SPAR uniforms. Seersucker summer was very comfortable; the winter (Navy Blue) required me to wear light girdle. I was not able to enjoy the white summer suit because of our discharge in May.
19. I encountered no overt sexism, as I was about the oldest SPAR and coming from another culture in the Philippines. I did not have much contact with Coast Guard men.
20. I was in Washington D.C. and was in the Escanaba to be honored as SPAR of the Week, there was some curiosity of what I was doing there.
21. I knew nothing about that.
22. ---
23. ---
24. I think, that women in the service were well received and respected. After all they were serving their country in the country and assisted greatly in the war effort. The men had to go to the front line.
25. I never thought about that.

26. I have mixed feelings about this. With specific regard to the war in Iraq, I sometimes feel women should not serve in offensive combat, and especially if they happen to be the head of household. With women's liberation, women feel they should be treated equally and women feel they have more opportunities for advancement in the military of services.
27. I did not come in contact with many SPAR officers. Therefore I have no way of observing this.
28. No, I did not, and was, after all, of a "mixed race" (American-Filipina) or Ameri-Asian as they have been referred to since the Vietnam War. I used to have to check "other" in the ethnic box.
29. I don't know.
30. A quick count (from I a picture I have).
31. I think SPARS were permitted to date. The "visitors" room (can't think of the right term) was always full. I don't think there were any restrictions.
32. None whatsoever.
33. Of course I was hateful of the Japanese because of all they'd done. Look at what they'd done to the U.S. (pearl Harbor), the Philippines; I lost my husband, my job, and all my belongings. My older sister in Laguna Province lost her husband and I had to help support her and her six-month-old son.
34. Yes, I did. See Memoirs or Pictures.
35. My older sister lived with me and my half-sister who was living with me before the war and a short while in the early stages of the war went to live with her full sister somewhere – I never saw her again. She married a Cornell alumnus in Engineering, married in China, and settled in CA where I have visited her a few times.
36. Food (sugar, coffee) rationing was imposed, but prices high and lots of "black market" trading.
37. But as stated earlier, we shared with the American internees.
38. Yes, I finally had to let my cook and houseboy go. No money was coming in and I could no longer afford them.
39. "Good Luck?" "Prayers?" To this day I continue to be puzzled by that – that my memory falls me. I've spoken of myself as having been very lucky' after all I've been through I survived. I'm alive I'm here. Certainly, I say, I must have prayed.
40. By going to visit friends when it became safe. Schools were closed, as were churches, movie houses. No entertainers.
41. I was never on leave.
42. While still in MBTS I traveled to Pequannock, NJ to visit some friends who had been in the Philippines. I traveled to Richmond Hill, Queens to spend my first Thanksgiving in the Sates with Col. Engelhart's family – his mother, and his sister and her husband, Nelaon and Lottie Friz. Col. Engelhart was on his way home after his liberation from prison on Japan, after his formal visit to Washington, D.C. and reporting to the Chief of

Intelligence in the Pentagon. He asked me to accompany him to Richmond Hill. It was there that I met my husband to be, Robert Finch, who was about to be discharged for medical reasons. I traveled again to Richmond Hill to spend Christmas with Mrs. Engelhart and the Frizes instead of spending Christmas with my folks in Buffalo because they had had a severe blizzard. I traveled to Washington, D.C. for the SPAR of the Week award.

43. No, I do not recall any particularly humorous or unusual events. We did not pull off any pranks.

44. I have a lot of photographs that would verify all the many events mentioned. Many copies of these photographs were sent to WIMSA (Women in Military Services in America) when they were planning to build the WIMSA Memorial in Washington, D.C.

45. No, I did not keep a diary. It never occurred to me to do so I wish I had! In retrospect, now, perhaps it was a good thing I didn't, in light of the fact that Japanese soldiers visited us twice. Had I had a diary and had the Japanese discovered it, things might have been different, who knows. Perhaps I wouldn't be here writing up all these things that I experienced.

Segment 4: After Service & Later Years

1. —

2. —

3. —

4. I decided to take advantage of my GI/School Benefits. I was entitled to eleven months of school since I had served eleven months. So I decided to enroll in The Packard School, Lexington and 34th Street in New York City. I realized that I would have to return to the work force and it would be to my benefit to refresh my secretarial skills. I had realized that I could not expect my folks in Buffalo to continue to support me. So I decided not to return to Buffalo and enrolled in the Packard School. I qualified for the Advanced Secretarial Class, starting in July 1946. I had to find a place to live, and fortunately, was offered a job with Dr. George Fernlund, and ENT doctor, good friends of Nelson and Lottie Friz and Mrs. Engelhart.

5. Yes.

6. Yes I did with only two or three of them, but the relationship lessened as the years went by.

7. I have a continuing relationship with only one now, Ena Slaughter (Ena's maiden name in the SPARS escapes me). She married John Slaughter, and Army veteran who served in the Philippines, incidentally, was able to visit my sister Norma. After his visit he composed a poem on the Philippines, a copy of which I have.

8. No, I did not know of any CG veterans' organization.

9. After I graduated from the Packard School (May 1947) I got a job with the National Office of the YMCA, 346 Madison Ave., NY, NY. The job was with the World Youth Fund.

10. No, not rally.

11. I did not join any veterans' organizations.

12. No, I have never attended any reunions.

13. My service as a SPAR did not affect my life so much as my experiences in the Philippines during the war.

14. The CG SPARS were the first branch of the Services to be disbanded, so no possibility of a career in the CG.

15. The telephone call that I received concerning the Medal of Freedom came so unexpectedly. I had been out of the service and had married. It really took me by surprise, is putting it mildly. I didn't know anything about the Medals of freedom. I only knew about the Congressional Medal of Freedom.

16. Now sixty years later I still marvel at the things that have happened to me as a result of having enlisted in the Coast Guard; how that has changed all my life. I can't believe I experienced all those things!

17. I am very proud of today's Coast Guard and all the rescue assistance they rendered following the aftermath of the Katrina Disaster. Makes me proud to have been a Coast Guard SPAR.

18. I would like to bring attention to WIMSA (Women in Military Service in America). You make no mention of it in your questionnaire. It is from WIMSA that the Coast Guard got on to me.