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Florence Ebersole Smith Finch, USCGR (W)

Coast Guard SPAR decorated for combat operations during World War II

Florence Finch was born in the Philippines, the daughter of a Filipino mother and an American father, Charles G. Ebersole, who had come to the Philippines with the U.S. Army during the Spanish-American War and had settled there after the war. After graduating high school she went to work for the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2 (Intelligence), Headquarters, U. S. Army, in Manila under the command of Lieutenant Colonel E. C. Engelhart, AUS. While employed there she met Chief Electrician's Mate Charles Edward Smith, USN, whom she married on 19 August 1941. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor Chief Smith reported to his P.T. boat for duty but was killed in action on 8 February 1942. Manila fell to the Japanese on 2 January 1942 and being half-Filipino Finch was able to convince the occupation forces that she was able to disguise her American connections.



She was given a job with the Japanese-controlled Philippine Liquid Fuel Distributing Union where she was responsible for writing vouchers for the distribution of fuel. Working closely with the Philippine Underground, she was able to divert fuel supplies to the resistance as well as assist in arranging acts of sabotage against the Japanese occupation forces. Meanwhile, her boss, LTCOL Engelhart had been captured. Through the grapevine he let Finch know how badly he and other prisoners of the Japanese were being treated by their captors. She and other former employees of LTCOL Engelhart, along with civilians in Manila, assisted the prisoners as best they could, smuggling food and medicine to them. The Japanese caught and arrested her, though, in October, 1944. She was then imprisoned and tortured regarding her activities with the resistance before being sent to Bilibid Prison. After a sham-trial by the Japanese she was sentenced to three years of hard labor. She was sent to the Women's Correctional Institution in Mandaluog on the outskirts of Manila.

She was liberated by American forces on 10 February 1945. She then decided to move to New York to be with her father's sister and she arrived there in May, 1945. Once in New York she decided to enlist in the Coast Guard Women's Reserve, because, as she noted two weeks after enlisting, "to avenge the death of my husband." She enlisted on 13 July 1945 aboard the USS LST-512 which was tied up in Buffalo Harbor. After her activities in the Philippines became known to her superiors, they awarded her the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Ribbon, the first woman to be so decorated. After the war she was discharged in May, 1946. She was awarded the Medal of Freedom in November, 1947, in no small part because of the testimony of her former boss, LTCOL Engelhart, after he was liberated. Her citation read, in part:

For meritorious service which had aided the United States in the prosecution of the war against the enemy in the Philippine Islands, from June 1942 to February 1945. Upon the Japanese occupation of the Philippine Islands, Mrs. Finch (then Mrs. Florence Ebersole Smith) believing she could be of

more assistance outside the prison camp, refused to disclose her United States citizenship. She displayed outstanding courage and marked resourcefulness in providing vitally needed food, medicine, and supplies for American Prisoners of War and internees, and in sabotaging Japanese stocks of critical items. . .She constantly risked her life in secretly furnishing money and clothing to American Prisoners of War, and in carrying communications for them. In consequence she was apprehended by the Japanese, tortured, and imprisoned until rescued by American troops. Thought her inspiring bravery, resourcefulness, and devotion to the cause of freedom, Mrs. Finch made a distinct contribution to the welfare and morale of American Prisoners of War on Luzon.

She later married an Army veteran and they raised a family in Ithaca, New York. Of her wartime activities she would state: "I fell very humble because my activities in the war effort were trivial compared with those of people who gave their lives for their country." In 1995 the Coast Guard honored her service when it named an administration building on a base on Sand Island, Hawaii, after her.

- [Read her written answers](#) to questions submitted to her regarding her remarkable life and career, first as a resistance fighter in the Philippines and then as a SPAR

Photographs:



Sea1/c Florence Ebersole Smith, USCGR (W), 1945



Florence Ebersole Smith Finch, 1995