

Human Stories of the U.S. Coast Guard

FLORENCE (EBERSOLE) SMITH FINCH



Of the thousands of women who have served with honor in the United States Coast Guard, one stands out for her bravery and devotion to duty. Florence (Ebersole) Smith Finch, the daughter of a U.S. Army veteran and a Filipino mother, was born on the island of Luzon, north of Manila, in Santiago City. She married navy PT boat crewman Charles E. Smith while working for General Douglas MacArthur's army intelligence unit located in Manila.

In 1942, after the Japanese invaded the Philippines, her husband died trying to re-supply American and Filipino troops trapped on Corregidor and the Bataan Peninsula. Mrs. Finch avoided Japanese internment by claiming her Philippine citizenship. After receiving a note from her imprisoned army intelligence boss, she smuggled food and medicine to American POWs and helped provide fuel to Filipino guerrillas. In October 1944, the Japanese arrested Finch, beating, torturing and interrogating her during her initial confinement. Through it all, she never revealed information regarding her fellow resisters.

When American forces liberated her prison camp in February 1945, Finch weighed only eighty pounds. She boarded a Coast Guard manned transport returning to the United States and traveled to her father's hometown of Buffalo, New York. In July 1945, she enlisted in the Coast Guard and eager to continue the struggle against an enemy that had killed many of her loved ones. Mrs. Finch served through the end of the war and became the first SPAR to receive the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Ribbon. After the war, she met New York army veteran Robert Finch, married him and moved to Ithaca, New York. In November 1947, she received the U.S. Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian medal awarded to American citizens living abroad who aided in the war effort. Today, Mrs. Finch's name graces the multi-million dollar facility housing the Coast Guard's Group Honolulu Headquarters in Hawaii.

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