



## Dorothy Fenner Oral History Interview, March 22, 2014

### **Title**

“Home Economist and World War II Code-Breaker”

### **Date**

March 22, 2014

### **Location**

Fenner residence, Saratoga, California.

### **Summary**

In the interview, Fenner discusses her upbringing in Milton-Freewater, Oregon, her decision to attend Oregon State College and her initial impressions upon arriving on campus. She provides extensive detail in recounting her OSC experience, noting her living situation, her academic progression - including the early years of nutrition instruction at the college - the state of the OSC campus in the 1930s, and important social events, such as the Military Ball. She also shares her memories of membership in the Delta Delta Delta sorority, her involvement with the college choir, and various student traditions.

A secondary focus of the session is Fenner's service as a code-breaker with the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). She describes the process by which she decided to join WAAC, her training in Morse Code, the application of her training to intercepted Japanese signals, and the social environment within WAAC. The interview concludes with Fenner's recollections of post-war life in Corvallis, her continuing involvement with music, and her appreciation of the role that OSU has played in her life.

### **Interviewee**

Dorothy Fenner

### **Interviewer**

Janice Dilg

### **Website**

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/fenner/>

## Transcript

**Dorothy Fenner:** It's just more comfortable for me to be propped up.

**Janice Dilg:** Sure. So, I'm just going to do a little introduction, and then I've got some questions. But anytime that you've got some things that you want to say, feel free to jump in, all right? So, my name is Janice Dilg. I'm the oral historian for the Oregon State University Oral History Project. Today, I am with Dorothy Fenner in her home in Saratoga, California, and her son Tom is here with us, as well. So, good morning, Dorothy.

**DF:** Good morning, Jan.

**JD:** I'd like to begin today by having you talk just a little bit about when you were born, and your growing up, and just a little bit about before you got to Oregon State in your life.

**DF:** I came to Oregon State because of the School of Home Economics. It was extraordinarily well known, and during my senior year at Milton-Freewater, where I was growing up, Dean Ava Milam would come and interview, and spread the word, about the fact that—how well Oregon State was. She had a tremendously important and impressive School of Home Economics, mainly because of the Smith-Hughes. I remember it was the Smith-Hughes Act. It was probably an act that put home economics and—what was it you and Tom had to take?

**Tom Fenner:** Industrial arts.

**DF:** Yes, in high school, one year. Manual training, it was called. What was it?

**TF:** Industrial arts.

**DF:** Industrial arts, he said so. But that was the idea, and because of that, Oregon State and home economics was wonderful. Dean Milam had patterned her curriculum on studying the curriculum at Mount Holyoke, because she wanted her home economists to have a liberal education. And that was the reason why she was so successful. Also, she was successful—and there are many books about her; I'm sure somebody will pick that up—she also was foremost in international education. There was always a student from Korea in Home Economics. And every year, there was someone they gave from Oregon State. In fact, I was interviewed once for it, to go to—as an exchange program, to China, and I'm trying to think where that was, but it was—and a Korean came. There was always a foreign student, which, in 1936 and '37, was very, very unusual. Okay, back up. I was born [laughs] in 1917, in Tacoma, Washington, and the reason I was born in Washington was that my father was playing baseball in Arizona. My father went to dental school in Portland, but he had been with the Cleveland Indians, and had played baseball, and then when he came back—when he decided that he wanted to have a profession, he went to dental school. But the summer that I was to be born, he was in Arizona, so my mother, in September, took the train from Portland to Tacoma [0:05:04], because my father's sisters were both nurses in a hospital there. And also my grandmother, my mother's mother, lived in Tacoma. So this was a good place, and that, so that's why I was born there. But I'm really an Oregonian. [Laughs]

**JD:** So, you were impressed with Dean Milam coming to visit, and that was what made you decide to go to Oregon State?

**DF:** Yes.

**JD:** Well, and it was called something else at that point, correct? It was Oregon Agricultural College.

**DF:** Oh, it was. It was, absolutely. You're right. It was Oregon State Agricultural, OSAC, at that point. And then I think by the time it was '38 or something, it just became Oregon State College. They dropped the "agricultural." You'll have that in there. But I wanted to tell you something about in high school; I did everything but sewing and cooking. I didn't do anything like that. I did music and drama, and studied hard, but by the time I got to my last term of my senior year in high school, I decided I better learn how to sew. So I took sewing spring term of my senior year, and I was just pitiful. I was competing with girls in 4-H who knew how to sew! I didn't even know how to lay out a pattern. Did you ever sew?

**JD:** I did.

**DF:** Well, I didn't even know you had to keep those little things on the patterns, that they were quite important. And I was just a wreck! But I did get through sewing, and I had one—I had my mother, who was just a darling, and so sympathetic for me. And one time, when I went to bed with a miserable-looking collar to take back for the final day, I got up in the morning, and she had fixed it for me. So [laughs] I had a—I got out of Home Ec [laughs], in order to get into Home Ec! [Laughs] And that's the story of my—I did a lot of music, and student government. I was president of what we used to call the Girls' League, in high school, and because of that, you were also one of the student-body officers. And those were funny, wonderful years. Oregon, Milton-Freewater, was a delight—a small town. And my dad had chosen it to start a dental practice. And he had to buy in—someone—and it was when I was five years old. And I think that Milton-Freewater—we were in Freewater for a while—after the war, all the fellows came back, and made sure that it became Milton-Freewater, and it still is like that. But anyway, that's my growing up years, wonderful years. And I don't know what you read in the book about my background, but it was a happy, lively girlhood.

**JD:** So, you made the decision to go to Oregon State. Can you remember what your first impressions were of arriving on campus?

**DF:** Oh, that's a good question. Of course, I remember the adjustment. I lived in Snell Hall, which was—the Snell Hall nowadays is not the Snell Hall where it was then. [0:10:03] But it was across the street from—it may be the north side of Milam Hall now, but that was the Home Ec building at that point. And I do remember that I had a big adjustment about the rain. But I loved my classes, and we were so privileged to get to go to college. It was really something. And four of us came together from Milton-Freewater. One gal—and she later was a student leader, wonderful, and became AWS president—she had stayed out from high school for two years to earn enough money to go to college, and then my roommate had stayed out one year to earn enough to get to college. And then two of us were lucky enough—Marcy Kinnear-Dudley and me—to go right from high school to college. And one of the things I remember about it was that one of the requirements was that we had to keep an account book, and the professor was an Eleanor Spike. She later married a local lawyer by the name of Ayler [?]. But Eleanor Spike was maybe in the Home Ec section—would have been an administrator—I'm trying to think—family relationships part of Oregon State. And we, as freshmen, had to keep account book, everything! That was a requirement. And I remember that my first year was 600 and maybe two dollars. And everything you spent, you kept track of.

**JD:** That sounds like a great idea.

**DF:** And to me, that was—wasn't that smart of Dean Milam, to make sure that people were going to understand about what they were buying for their education?

**JD:** Mm-hm, mm-hm.

**DF:** And I think about your dad, his requirement that you take accounting. Oh, that was his one request, that the family would take accounting, wherever they went to college. And it was a difficult adjustment sometimes, with curriculum. But anyway, that's my freshman year. And I did pretty well. I took the beginning sewing, and learned a few things that I didn't know at all before. But I mainly enjoyed the foods and nutrition—just wonderful!

**JD:** So, can you talk a little more about that? What were those courses like? What were the types of things you were learning?

**DF:** Oh, well, everyone had to take beginning—well, first, the curriculum where I was signed up was called "Curriculum B," and that required a lot of chemistry. And I took a lot of chemistry, and did very well in it. My dad was so proud of me, that I was doing well in chemistry. And then by the time we'd had our full year of chemistry, everybody took it, and it was from—you'll probably be interviewing someone from Bill Caldwell's classes. [0:15:07] I'm not sure who it's going to be, but he was an excellent lecturer in chemistry. But by the time I was a sophomore, then we started on our foods and nutrition classes. And 16 in laboratories, and four or five of my professors were foods teachers. And then there was also a nutrition course that was tremendously vital, and do I have enough time to tell you about how we got nutrition at Oregon State?

**JD:** You absolutely have enough time.

**DF:** Okay. In my sophomore year, a professor came whose name was Margaret Fincke, F-I-N-C-K-E. And she—interesting—had gone to Mount Holyoke as a undergraduate, and then had gone to New York City, and entered what I think was called Katy Gibbs Secretarial School. And that's what she did with her liberal arts degree—and science, of course. And when she finished at Katy Gibbs, her position was for a professor at the university, at Columbia University. And goodness sakes, I hope this name doesn't escape me. The man who wrote the nutrition book from the University, Columbia University, and he had Margaret, Miss Margaret Fincke, come to all his lectures, and transcribe them. There's no video, audio, anything. And so she took all his notes, and he determined that she should work for her doctorate. So by the time she got through Columbia, with a doctor's degree, she was—and I'll have a p.s. for you on this—she was recruited to come by Dean Milam, to come do nutrition. And this was also animal nutrition, because she was qualified to set up the experimental white rabbit labs for all our nutrition classes. What we did in nutrition was, besides studying all the basis of the body and what food did what, and learn all this, and the good chemistry background—we also learned how to run experiments, so that if a rat, your little animal, was deprived of Vitamin C, what would be the effect of this elimination of this vitamin, and/or this one, in D, or this one, in A, and so on and so forth? And then at the end, she took care to anesthetize and kill the animals [0:20:01], so that when we came to our nutrition class for our dissecting, I remember that mine was a Vitamin A. And we look at the kidneys, and the interior of the little white rats, and saw just what we expected. My rat had been deprived of Vitamin A, and there was a great deal of pus around that animal's innards. And I thought that was so advanced, and Dr. Fincke's hope, her main hope, was to get the medical schools to teach nutrition. But the medical schools pooh-poohed it. And that was her crusade. Later, I had a wonderful opportunity to work with her when I was a graduate student. And I just so admired her, that she had done what she had done about nutrition at Oregon State. I think there's probably a lot of books about that. And I don't know if Dr. Fincke ever wrote about—the one thing I do remember about: one year, she went to Thailand for a year, exchange. They used to do that, Thailand. And that's where the Jensens did, too. They went on—Jensens did it. He was later president, and he did it through Rockefeller. But Oregon State sometimes exchanged with them, with the university in Thailand. She said she hoped to get the cooking off the floor. I remember; I thought that was so fun, because it was—we're talking about 60 years ago.

**JD:** Quite different.

**DF:** Anyway, where was I? I'm going to have to remember about the nutrition.

**JD:** Well, you were talking about the courses that you took. The food—you were talking about the food and nutrition courses that you were taking for your Home Ec.

**DF:** Yes. And then, of course, there were so many that were very applicable in home management. And my one friend who went to Oregon State with me, she ended up taking the dietetics route. I didn't. I took—starting in my junior my year, I started taking the education route, thinking that then I would be eligible—because of that wonderful Smith-Hughes, I would be sure and get a position to teach in a high school in Oregon, or a junior high. As it turned out, I went to a junior high. And that was why I—however, romance entered, and John was a year behind me, and so we knew that when he—and he was in ROTC, and we knew that he would be called in for service, or a commitment. And so he was commissioned a reserve second lieutenant [0:25:00], and then he would have to get his life in order, his early life in order. But I didn't get back to my one year in junior high school, because I had been asked to accept a teaching fellowship at Oregon State, and that was for \$500. And I already had 15 graduate degree, because I had gone to summer school at the University of Washington, one summer, but that meant that with my \$500 fellowship, I could teach Home Ec, foods classes, and also do the research that was required for my classes, and that I would have 30 additional credits, so that by the time I would get through with my fellowship, I would have a master's degree. And at that point, I think that in order to be a teacher, you had to have at least 15 graduate credits, at that point. It's probably a whole year now. But that was the background. And I have to tell you a fun fact about that fellowship. There was another student of mine, Margaret West. We vied, first/second, first/second, through our classes, and she was offered that fellowship first. But she didn't accept it, because she was going to be married, and she was going to marry Ken Taylor. Now, he had gone to Wheaton College, and she had gone to Wheaton to make sure that theirs was a romance, and they were going to be married. And so she didn't accept it, and Kenneth Taylor went ahead, and that was Tyndale, and they did the *Living Bible*. That's the complete *Living Bible*, and that was 40 million copies that Tyndale did. And she and I—she's my age. We still communicate at least once or twice a year, and I have to tell you another thing about her. We had a professor in child development by the name of Sarah Prentiss—a very well known Oregon State family. And Sarah Prentiss taught child development, and one time I was sitting in the upstairs balcony of our church in Corvallis, and visiting with her before a wedding that we were at. And I

told her—we talked about Meg, and I said to Ms. Professor Prentiss, "Meg has ten children." And she looked at me, and she said, "That's awful!" [Laughs] You know, and it was! I mean, we were so fortunate to have three, but I think that she was so advanced in thinking about population control, and to have someone, particularly one of her students, have ten children was awful! [Laughs] Anyway.

**JD:** That's great.

**DF:** Let me see.

**JD:** So, just to go back to campus a little, you know, certainly the physical campus has changed a lot over time. [0:29:59] Talk a little about a typical day on campus, or the buildings that you would be in, where you would go to eat.

**DF:** The Home Ec building was close by. Everything was close by in those days, although the Chem building was clear down at the end, and that's now the School of Education building, I think. But that was the furthest building. A lot of the buildings—a lot of my classes were in what we used to call the Commerce building, and that was where I took things like econ and government, just a lot of history. History, yes. We did call it the Commerce building. Yes, the building that had the stand-up—what is the word for the stand-up type of a—where you see the time on the clock? [Pause]

**TF:** Clock tower?

**DF:** No. No, no. The sun determines what the—

**TF:** Sundial.

**JD:** Oh!

**DF:** The sundial! There was a sundial in front of that building, and I don't know if it's still there or not, but of course in Roman numerals, and that was sort of a nice spot to say, "See you by the sundial." Then we were pretty close to going across Monroe to several places where you could go have a break, a cup of coffee or such. The MU—beautiful building. To back up, here I am, our high school was very nice, but to walk up those marble stairways at the Memorial Union is just elegant. That was a beautiful, beautiful building, and its setting was still—and as you know, it's still there. And that really was big, big college. And downstairs was a wonderful ballroom, and that's where bands came, live bands, because they—besides having rally dances, with just a record, or however they did that, they had certain balls through the year: the senior prom, the junior prom, the this and that, in this beautiful place, where you came, and there were no cars, really. But you walked up those stairs, and got up there, and then eventually you walked down again to the beautiful place where we had our balls. Wonderful! It was—this is the late '30s. And the fellows? They didn't have much money, but they had tuxes, and we wore gowns. And it was really privileged, and it was away at—you were away at college.

**JD:** And I believe one of the balls that would happen annually was the Military Ball?

**DF:** Yes, the Military Ball.

**JD:** What recollections do you have about going to a Military Ball? [0:35:00]

**DF:** Well, my recollection is that we didn't go. That was John's senior year, and I was gone. And that's when—I don't know if he had a date or not. He may have.

**JD:** [Laughs]

**DF:** He loved to dance. But the fellows all wore the military garb. I remember Wednesdays were the days that they would have convocations, Wednesday afternoon at one o'clock. And I remember that our freshman year at the convocation, the student-body president always was in his military, because that was the military day, too. So I remember that Jack—his name will come to me, sometime—I remember that he was the first president, my freshman year, and how handsome the military garb was, with the sand-brown belt, and the breeches, or whatever they were called, the pants. But I didn't ever go. But they had junior prom, senior prom, and they had mortar-board proms, too.

**JD:** And you mentioned rally dances a minute ago.

**DF:** Mm-hm.

**JD:** What were rally dances?

**DF:** A rally dance is every Monday afternoon at four o'clock. Anybody could go, and of course, you'd meet someone there and dance. And that was downstairs in Memorial Union. Rally dance was the type of dancing that you don't see nowadays, where you actually touch each other, and give yourself to the rhythm, rather than do your own thing. [Laughs] I'm laughing because—we'll have to tell about Randy's 60th birthday. We'll do that over lunch. But anyway, it was lovely to meet someone and dance, and be asked to dance, too. But it didn't mean you had to have a date. You just went in a cluster. I belonged to a sorority house, and we did things—we tried to do things together, to get places, but it didn't mean that we didn't mingle, because we did, with a lot of—we had a lot of interchange because of our classes. We knew everybody in different—I didn't know many engineers, but I surely knew more of the Ag, and the engineers didn't take chemistry with the Home Ec girls. That was the one exception, and I can understand why. But I took chemistry with the Agriculture and the Forestry students. So we knew a lot of the fellows.

**JD:** And what sorority were you in? Talk a little about that experience.

**DF:** Well, I was in a—called Tri-Delta: Delta Delta Delta. It's still on campus, very active. Different now, because so many of the young juniors and seniors live off-campus. But the deal was, you enjoyed being—and we called it rush—go from house to house and find where you enjoyed, and what you enjoyed particularly, and then you indicated that you would like to join that house, if the bid came. [0:39:58] And then your first year was you were a freshman, and that's when you had to make your grades in order to be initiated. And in our case, all four of us had had a music teacher in high school, and also our principal's wife, were both Tri-Deltas. And there was a Tri-Delt chapter at Whitman College, which was just ten miles away. So we knew about the various houses, and enjoyed it. And so we all decided to pledge together. It worked out best for three of us, but not for my roommate, Edie Monahan, who was so homesick, and she went home. I always felt so bad about that, that she was the smartest of us all, but she missed home most of all. But anyway, there were a lot of things that we did in college. For example, my Tri-Delt pledge class was the biggest on campus, and the SAE was the biggest frat, fraternity rush pledge class. And we all met together in the basement of the—what was it? Corvallis Hotel, at that time, and just to celebrate being—it was a sort of a spontaneous thing, in a way, but you knew it had been planned by some upperclassman. But those were things that happened. And then we had lots of dances, and open houses and such, in our houses. The girls did not go into the fraternity houses at all, unless it was a dance or a formal. And that was nice. And particularly, after John and I were a couple, and he was in the SAE house—those were wonderful friendship years, with lots of other couples of different houses. And the SAE was a very strong campus active group, and lots of fun. I don't remember any drinking problem. Isn't that amazing? And of course, we didn't even know the word "drugs," except the pharmacy students. We didn't. It was sort of a golden time. Maybe it was naïve, and maybe it was because the influence of the East Coast hadn't reached us yet. I'm not sure.

**JD:** So, talk a little more about how the Tri-Delt house ran. What were the things that you did with your sorority sisters, and what kinds of activities did you do?

**DF:** All right. My freshman year we lived in the hall, which was a good thing, and I lived in Snell Hall, and got to know lots of other gals from other houses. And then that—how are we doing?

**JD:** We are doing fine.

**DF:** To get back, we had pledge meetings the first year, and then if we made our grades, which I remember was 2.5, then we were initiated. And our pledge meetings were essentially [0:45:00]—of course, we learned the Greek alphabet, and things like that, but it was essentially you learned how to thoughtfully live with other people. And later years, when I was in the service, I had no problem getting along with no matter who they were, because you did that very thing in your own undergraduate years. There were some—in my house you changed roommates every term. And fortunately, all the—what, let me see what. The drawers, from room to room, were interchangeable. Wasn't that smart, architecturally? Wasn't that?

**JD:** So you would just take your drawer and move it to another room?

**DF:** Your drawers, yes.

**JD:** [Laughs] That's great.

**DF:** And the closet space wasn't very adequate, really, but the fact that in the Tri-Delt house, someone smart had figured out that you better have interchangeable drawers. So that's about Tri-Delt. And lots of things. We had a lot of music in the Tri-Delts, and a lot of singing. And I played the piano and one of the sorority sisters played the violin, and oftentimes they would have open house, faculty open houses, on a Sunday afternoon, and people would just come. And we'd have music in the corner, and people served tea in the dining room. And we always had chaperones, and there was a—and learned how important it was, how you treated chaperones, and included them when you had dances, or you traded—we had program dances. You always traded with a chaperone, if she or he, or a couple, wanted to dance. And John was a wonderful dancer, so I figured that anybody who got John was just pretty lucky! [Laughs]

**JD:** [Laughs] So, you mentioned your piano playing. Were you also in the OSU choir when you were in college?

**DF:** Yes. Uh-huh. Oh, yes. That was every Wednesday night, I think. And this friend of mine that I mentioned, Marcia Kinnear, she became a soloist for Doc—for Mr. Petrie, and Mrs. Petrie taught piano, and I had some classes in opera and symphony. And everyone in Home Economics had music appreciation. And the other thing that was part of the art part was landscape architecture. That was a requirement my freshman year.

**JD:** And what did that course consist of?

**DF:** And the professor was Dr. Peck. I suppose that most of us were wide-eyed, there was so much. And then were two terms of art, and we learned to draw, and letter. Some of the Portland gals in Home Ec had had art in high school, but we hadn't had it at all in Milton-Freewater. But I certainly enjoyed it. What did you ask me about the—?

**JD:** Well, you were talking about the range of classes, but you were talking about choir.

**DF:** Oh, and the choir, yes. And then I always took that. It was called Glee Club, I guess—must have been. [0:50:03] And one credit each term. And if you, of course, appeared, that was a good way to get a credit easy. And the Petries were old-school musicians, and that was a privilege, too. And at that point, I was beginning to accompany people, and Paul Petrie okayed me, so occasionally I would be accompanying, which I loved to do, from high school on. I could play for some of his students, and not too much about—I'm just trying to think. I don't think I got any other music credits. Most of it was extracurricular.

**JD:** Mm-hm. So would the choir perform at events on campus?

**DF:** Oh, yes, for every occasion. And Marjorie, my friend, was often a soloist. And I had watched over Mr. Petrie, when he was no longer—when he was an old man. And she adored him, and she often came up from Berkeley—no, she came up from Los Angeles, to see Paul Petrie.

**JD:** Mm-hm. You mentioned some of the dances and other activities on campus. Were there kind of regular trips, or types of fun that the students would have off-campus, in Corvallis or beyond?

**DF:** Yes. That worried the administration, because they'd sign up to go to the beach. And like, I went on a SAE party to the beach, and I remember once we found my—I was active later, as an advisor for the Tri-Delta house through the years, occasionally. But we found out that the Tri-Delts were going to have their spring dance at the beach. And we old-timers thought that wouldn't be a good idea, that they'd be off, and they had received an okay from the administration. And so Nancy Truax and Dorothy—these are names that mean something to Tom—Nancy Truax and Dorothy Teeny [?] and I wrote to all the parents, and told them that even though it had been okayed on the campus, that we were reluctant not to let the parents know about this going to be at the beach. And we got almost total response: "When we send our daughter off to campus, we expect her to make her own decisions." But we were of the other school, and that was fine. It made us feel better. Everybody got there; everybody came back. No, and that was a terrible road to the beach, in those days. I'm looking at Tom, because he knows how that road was, so.

**JD:** And so you've mentioned a couple of campus traditions, the rally dances. Were there other events that occurred every year that you were a part of?

**DF:** Yeah, games, of course. The boys and the girls did not sit together. [0:55:02]

**JD:** At, like, football games?

**DF:** That was interesting, wasn't it? I'd go with my group, and the fellows would be seated somewhere else. They didn't intermingle the way they do now.

**JD:** Uh-huh. And was that a requirement of the school, or that was just social convention at the time?

**DF:** Culture. I think probably—there were a few married couples, and they'd sit together. Not very many married couples.

**JD:** Mm-hm. And would you go to the games that were on-campus, or would you travel to some of the games that were elsewhere?

**DF:** Sometimes—oh, I should tell you. Yes, because they used to have a train that went from Corvallis to Portland for the —there used to be at least one Oregon State game in Portland every year. And it was usually University of Washington, usually. And Tom will remember this. We were [unclear], and then later—but that was when we would take the train, and the Home Ec Club always sold, for 50 cents, the big mums to wear, because everybody could afford 50 cents for a mum for an away game. But I remember that later, when we were driving up to go to games as a married couple, that one of the times we were going was the day after the big storm, the Columbus Day storm. And then we saw all the damage. And we did get to the game, but it was quite—they didn't postpone it, but we—are you thinking? [Laughs] You can tell what you did.

**TF:** We'll do that at lunch.

**DF:** [Laughs] At lunch, yes. I worried—John and I had been to a memorial service in Albany the day before, and it started that afternoon. And that's what we'll tell you about, because we were gone and the kids were home alone, so.

**JD:** I would like to take a little break.

**DF:** October 12th.

**JD:** I'm going to take a little break here.

**DF:** All right.

**JD:** I'm going to stop thing. [Pause in recording] Okay, so we took a little break, and so you graduated from college in 1939?

**DF:** And I received my master of science in absentia in '42, although I finished in '41.

**JD:** Okay. And so World War II was looming. It had already sort of begun, but the U.S. joined the war in 1941. Talk about your experiences. You and John both were active in service during World War II. Talk about that a little bit.

**DF:** Well, what did you read about those years?

**JD:** I did.

**DF:** I'm so glad that we—I have to tell you, first, George Edmonston retired as the editor of the *Oregon Stater* in 2005, and we went to his—I think it was probably April or May—retirement party, and it was in the Memorial Union. And we had known him through the years because of alumni gatherings. And I went up to George, and I said, "George, when you don't have another thing to think about, would you be interested in interviewing John for his war years?" I'd been thinking about doing this, but, and so he came back within a couple, three. [0:59:59] Later, I found out that he didn't come back right away because he was having some heart difficulty, and had to get himself squared away before. But then he came



back about in 2005, the fall of 2005. And John had his own office building, and at that point John, of course, was retired and had an office upstairs, and he also had this little room next, where George could just come and interview. And he came at least once a week until it was published. And he was so organized! At first, somewhere along the line, George had been—he never talked about Vietnam. That was the misery of that thing. But he was in the Navy, and he knew code. And something came up, and he said, "Well, Dorothy, that's just too good not for us to combine this," and that was—he came up with the idea. And for a while, I did—and I had quite a few pictures and letters that my parents had saved. And so that's why he came up with the idea of *Double Duty*, which I thought was a perfect title. And we treasure George. With John's son's help, he wrote the obituary for us.

**JD:** Mm-hm, mm-hm. And so, talk a bit more about your role in the Second World War. You joined the WAACs.

**DF:** Yes, well, after John left, at the beginning—I hope you read the beginning—after he left, not knowing where he was headed, except he thought North Africa, I went home, and it was in late October, and went home, talking about my parents' home. And it was just comforting to come back to my parents'. My sister was in college, and my brother was in the Army as a dental student. He was going to follow my dad's career. And so we were all together at Christmas time, and then I started to think about what I might do. I had had some awfully good offers, particularly someone to take over somebody's Home Ec thing, because the teacher wanted to be with her husband, and the other was from the Red Cross. I would have been a good person to be in the Red Cross, they thought. And so I had that opportunity. But then I thought, "Well, here I am with a master's degree in foods and nutrition, and I'm well. Why don't I just give this, my education, as John is giving his, to the country?" This was a patriotic time. I don't think we were brainwashed. We had watched what had happened from '39 on in Europe, and watched what was happening in London, and knew that eventually, certainly, we would be in it, also and eventually, as it turned out. [1:04:59] And I put that out here for you. I wanted you to have—well, it's the story about the—did I put it out there? Well, it's the one about the Rose Bowl, the transplanted Rose Bowl.

**JD:** Oh, sure. We'll get it later.

**DF:** Yeah. But I got that out. I got a copy for you.

**JD:** Oh, thank you.

**DF:** That was in that magazine. I put it here somewhere. So, there was a recruiting office in Walla Walla, and I went over on my own. I told my mother and dad about it, but I didn't tell John. At this point, I knew he was in Morocco, at that point, but I didn't tell him. And I just decided that I could be a help. And I was WAAC-oriented. That was W-A-A-C. It was an auxiliary at that point. And I thought, "I can do that. And maybe I'll be able to use my background, and that would be a big help." So that's the background. I went to Fort Des Moines. I went through basic, just—oh, I should back up just a bit, and tell you, my dad would always come home from the office and say, "Now, Dottie, you're not going to do that, are you?" And my mother thought it would be a great idea. She was the adventurous one with me. So I did it anyway, and I think that's—I think I said, and maybe—

**JD:** So, despite your father's concerns—

**DF:** Yes.

**JD:** —you did go off?

**DF:** Yeah, and I had basic at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, and that's in that book, and I just got along fine. And I had some leadership opportunities. I did quite a bit of accounting for some talented people. I was interviewed for OCS when I signed up, because I wanted to go to Cooks and Bakers. I wanted that assignment because I thought I needed that, to find out about the Army. But everyone laughs about Dorothy deciding what she'd like to do in the Army. I took that international code test, and here I am, a musician. And I was assigned to Signal Corps for 20 months, to learn international code, in Kansas City, Missouri. And that's in that book. My, what an experience that was! And I kept thinking, "Here I am, having a hard time learning the code." We called it "quacking." Instead of saying "de-dah, de-dah, de-dah," they called it "quacking." For example, my name in code, "Fenner," was wonderful. [Voices Morse code] That was "Fenner." That was very rhythmic, wasn't it? And after a while we knew the code, and we thought, "Okay, now where are we going?" And we went to a staging area in Oglethorpe, in Tennessee; I think it's in Tennessee, and then were sent to Camp

Crowder. And all the time, I'd been the section leader, in radio class I was the section leader. [1:10:02] So here I am, still wondering, "Am I ever going to get to help in my field?" And my field seems to be in international code. So eventually, we were told—there's a part in the book that tells about code-breaking. There's a good background in that, and who was responsible for it. So some of the people at Kansas City went to Bent Hill, in Arlington, and did the same thing for the European theater, and the rest of us were sent west to a place called Two Rock Ranch. It was seven ranches that had been combined, because the Signal Corps needed it for an international station. And what they were secretly doing was they were intercepting the Katakana code.

**JD:** And that was the Japanese code?

**DF:** The problem was, we have how many? Twenty-six, I think, sounds in the international code, plus more, because we have things like question mark, [voices code], and things like that, that were—like, and periods and so on. But when we got to Two Rock Ranch, our group had to go back to school, because the Katakana Morse was 71 symbols, which meant that international wasn't enough. And so everybody went back to school, and we learned it on a tape. And what had happened was that the code had been broken, but the Japanese didn't know that. And so we at Two Rock, secretly—because it was an off-base place—we were intercepting. And for example, if I had continued forever, I would be sitting there with my earphones, and there was a certain prescribed form for all the messages. And then you would take that down, and sign off and everything, and then you'd take your page and pass it over your head. And there were some fellows who had been trained to recognize what was important and what wasn't, and then they would send that down to the teletype room. Those things would go back to Arlington Hall. That was the way. Well here I am, learning something more, still wondering why I wasn't in a mess hall somewhere, running something, and I started—and I think if you read this, I wasn't very successful. I did beautifully, and learned it all, but it was on a tape, but when I got on the air with my assigned ship—because they were all ships that were intercepting—there was all this static, and it just drove me wild. And I just had a hard time. I could do all things that was international code [1:14:58], but I just—some of the gals that just could sail right through and do it, and I was sort of a big disaster. It wasn't only that. I worried, because I was afraid that I would be missing something that was terribly important, and so I was in it. I found out that there was a Captain Caldwell in charge of all the radios, because the radio intercept—radios had to be kept in perfect condition. And he needed a secretary, and then I could still—I could still do international code in numbers that were taped, and I could do that just without even thinking about it. So I got this nice position with Captain Caldwell, and felt bad about it though, because there were some girls who just could sail through, and I just couldn't. But I knew it all. And then I did end up working double-shifts, because one of my friends had pneumonia, and was in a hospital at Hamilton Field for three weeks, Rosemary Clark. And so I did double-shifts, and then they didn't ever worry about me going back to doing something in that way. In fact, I felt like I made a [unclear]. But I certainly wasn't a code-breaker with a capital C. I got an F or a D. I'd say I was probably a D.

**JD:** Well, there were other ways to contribute, and you certainly contributed to the effort.

**DF:** Mm-hm. But the WAAC—they were wonderful, wonderful, wonderful people I served with. And a lot of musicians. And of course, there were a lot of musicians in the Signal Corps, because they had tested us, the same way I had. And I played for the church services, and I did a lot of accompanying. And also there was a hospitality house in Petaluma where we could go, and there was always a piano there, and I could play. That was part of the USO, because that's what John was in on, if you read about his experience. Wasn't that amazing that he was in on the beginning? Well, this was the USO. Then also, I would go down—some of us, because we were on days. At that point, I could go on a bus to San Francisco, and there was Pepsi-Cola Center for enlisted people. And I'd play the piano there a lot, too, and that's in the book. So it was an amazing—I do have to tell you about being in Petaluma. It was a wonderful small town. They knew something was going on. So at Christmas time, the appeal had been out to invite some of the WAACs for Christmas. And I hadn't signed up because I thought, "Oh, well, I'll just stay on the post," and we had had a Christmas party that I had participated in. And so I just said I'd stay. Well, the day before Christmas [1:19:59], one of the officers came to me and said that we have had a request for a couple of WAACs in Petaluma, and, "I wish you would accept, because they specified they wanted a pianist," because they had a new piano for their ten-year-old daughter. And so the company clerk, who hadn't signed up for anything, and I, went to this wonderful family, and it was a Petaluma physician and his wife. And so we were there for—and it was a beautiful home on a hill, looking out over Petaluma Valley. The piano was lovely. I played. I could play practically anything they wanted way back to my parents' music, and that pleased Dr. and Mrs. Nielson so much. They were wonderful people, and they became close friends from then on. But that was what music did for me.

**JD:** Mm-hm. So, are there any other wartime memories that you want to share, before we start on a new topic? I want to make sure I'm not missing something.

**DF:** Well, I mentioned the Pepsi-Cola Center. I have a wonderful story in there. There was a grand piano at the entrance, and I sat down one time and started playing, and someone asked me, a sailor asked me, if I could play, "Welcome Sweet Springtime." And I knew what it was, because it was from Rubenstein's. It was music that I had known. And so I played it, and I looked up at him, this young sailor, and he was crying. And he said, "My ten-year-old sister played that, and I was sick of it, and now I'd give anything to be home and be with her and listen to her." So I'm telling you that story, and I told it, and that why George included that. He said that's so important, that the memories that music made for people during—when they were not in their usual environment. So for me, it was a privilege that I could be there.

**JD:** Mm-hm. That's a lovely story. So at some point, the war did come to an end. You and John moved back to Corvallis. And at some point, you did get to use your training at OSU.

**DF:** [Laughs] Oh, my, yeah! There was a dean called Dan Poling. He taught government at Oregon State, and he was—there's a lot of history about the Polings in Oregon State, and he was maybe a grandson, or a son. Anyway, he became the man who always led the "Alma Mater" for the 50th reunions. And I became—I had often helped him when he was in a retirement home, but that was later. But I often helped him, and I found out about the "Alma Mater," and it was printed in this higher key, and so I was able to—that's one of the things I could do. And I transposed it down two tones, and it made a world of difference for all the Alma Mater singers who came back for their 50th, you see, and of course, Dan Poling just liked that so much. [1:25:00] Later, when I knew that I wouldn't be around forever, I had it transposed and gave the copies to the Alumni Center, or to someone; someone's got it in a file. We've seen one of those today. He helped me go through some music. So anyway, that's the kind of music that I did, plus when a lot of people—I have to set the stage. All these men who went all over the world had danced to the music in the late '30s and early '40s. And we, on college campuses—and it was nostalgic music, and very loving. Most of them are loving, and some toe-tapping, later, but mostly loving. And John and I discovered that our parties after World War II—particularly after we were in our house in Corvallis and the kids were down, and we had had a dinner party—then they gathered around the piano, and the men remembered all the words that they hadn't sung for at least—and so this is where I just started to find what songs people wanted to listen to. And I just took requests. Years later, I did the same thing for the Rotary Club, and there was a military table that kept me busy with going way back to a lot of things that maybe they had danced to in Vienna. And it was lovely! It was a lovely eight or nine years that I had with the Rotaries, playing their music. They would come in at 11:30, and I would play until 12. And then they would have their meeting, and always ending—and the leader of the singers for the Rotary Club was Jim Douglas, who directed the Oregon State Band. And boy, did I play up the tempo for him, because—and we always did "God Bless America." And that was fun, too. So that's my musical life.

**JD:** So Dorothy, I want to give you a chance to just kind of offer one last set of final thoughts for anyone who might be watching this interview with you, about Oregon State or just any final recollections you'd like to close with.

**DF:** Well you know, John received a lot of honors through the years, and the last one we received together was the Jean Graham, their honor, that they had set up for couples. And so we won that together, and I remember saying—I can't remember what John did, but I remember being up there, and saying how precious it was to go to Oregon State in the years that we did, and how uplifting it was to get to go to college in the first place. And I know I've used that word, "privileged," but it was so true! We were so lucky! And people would say, "Why, you're the generation that lost all those lives, and has those dismantled schedules for five years." [1:30:06] But in a way, if we survived it, I think we came back loving it more, because of Oregon State. And I just had a note, just this last week, from Mike Goodwin, and he told me—did you go to the Scottsdale thing, or not? You should see this, because it tells—oh, here. No. I put it out for you.

**JD:** That's okay. We can read that after lunch, perhaps.

**DF:** Yeah, okay. It's a wonderful thing, because he said the same thing about the music, and what they did. And the present-day head of the Music Department had made a video, or something, for everybody to sing, and they did it at Scottsdale. And Mike wanted me to know about that. But John was—after Dan Poling no longer was living, John did the meeting of the alma mater.

**JD:** Well, Dorothy, it's been lovely to hear your recollections. Thank you so much for taking the time to make this recording.

**DF:** I enjoyed it. I certainly rattled along. [Laughs]

**JD:** It was wonderful. Thank you. [1:32:04]