

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

# O. Vernice Douglass– Life During WWII

By Orrin Vernice Douglass

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## Box 1 Folder 8

Oral Interview conducted by Beth Douglass

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

BD: Okay . . . just . . .

OD: Don't ask me anything important, I can't remember. (laughs)

BD: Do you remember your name and birth date?

OD: Yeah, I do. Orrin Vernice Douglass. Ninth month, fourth day, twenty-four.

BD: And where were you born?

OD: Glenn's Ferry, Idaho.

BD: How old were you on December 7, 1941?

OD: Seventeen.

BD: Well, what do you remember about that day?

OD: Oh, that was when the war started. We didn't have a radio or electricity or anything and the folks took us kids, me and my sister, into Driggs to go to school. It was on a Sunday. We had to stop at the drug store for some stuff, and that was where everyone was at listening to the radio. It was kind of a gloomy day. And the next day we had an assembly at the high school, and we went in there, and they had the radio in there, and we listened to President Roosevelt declare war on Japan.

BD: So what did you think when you heard about the attack?

OD: I was ready for it. I don't want anybody pushing us around.

BD: Okay, what part of the military did you serve in?

OD: I enlisted in the army air force, and I got transferred to other parts of the air force.

BD: What were your assignments and responsibilities? What did you do?

OD: I was a radio operator and a radar operator.

BD: Where were you stationed at?

OD: Oh, dozen of places. I was stationed in Texas, Illinois, Florida, New York, California, Wisconsin.

BD: You were all over!

OD: And the Philippines.

BD: How did the military train and prepare you for combat?

OD: They really did a good job of it. They showed us how to use a gun and how to aim it, how to shoot the post down there.

BD: All the important stuff. (laughs)

OD: Showed me, when I was in the radar bombardier school how to drop bombs from the airplane.

BD: So did you have to go through boot camp?

OD: Oh, yeah.

BD: How long was that?

OD: Six weeks in Shepardfield, Texas.

BD: Six weeks is all you need, right? Is there anything that you wished that they would have told you?

OD: No.

BD: You think they covered it all. How did your religion, being a Mormon, help you cope with your military experiences, and what kind of effects did it have?

OD: Never had any effects and I got along good.

BD: Did it help you in terms of, I am sure that during war time there are people that need some type of hope, did you feel like you were able to cope better than others?

OD: Sometimes, maybe.

BD: Did you know any young men that did not return from war?

OD: Not with me. We had some here in my high school class.

BD: How did the community cope with that?

OD: It was pretty sad. It was pretty sad 'cause everyone knew everybody.

BD: Did you have memorials for these people?

OD: We had the American Legion give a little program and a rifle salute, and they would play the taps and a little program. And that was it.

BD: Were there a lot of guys from your high school that were either drafted or been enlisted?

OD: Everybody had.

BD: All the boys?

OD: I think all but maybe one or two. There wasn't enough boys left around here to . . .

BD: Do the work?

OD: (Laughs) No, the girls did the work.

BD: What was your image of Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito during the war? What was your image of Hitler?

OD: The devil.

BD: Is that what the government basically portrayed him as at the time?

OD: No, we were getting enough news and one thing and another of the war and that, that nobody liked him.

BD: Was it the same for Mussolini and Hirohito?

OD: Yeah.

BD: Did you have more of a bad taste in your mouth towards Hirohito because of the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

OD: Oh, I don't know, maybe so.

BD: When did you first hear about the German Concentration Camps?

OD: Oh, when I was in the army. When we were at war. I don't know.

BD: Did you see pictures of it?

OD: Yes, we saw pictures of it, and we didn't like it. We were anxious to go to war.

BD: What stage of the war were you involved in the military?

OD: Quite a ways, about the last year or so.

BD: How did your life change as a result of World War II?

OD: Change? I guess I grew up a little bit, I don't know. I became more patriotic.

BD: What do you remember about rationing?

OD: The little books. They had stamps in them, but I only had them for a little while just before I went into the army then I didn't have anymore rations.

BD: I don't know very much about the rations, so could you tell me a little bit about it?

OD: Well, they had so many stamps in them you could buy so much sugar, one pair of shoes, was that one of them?

BD: Sugar, tires, gas, shoes.

OD: Gas didn't bother us people on the farm much because we could get all the gas we wanted. So, our coach would have to take his car to go to football and basketball, so we would pack cans of gas up to him. The rationing board wouldn't give him any more stamps. That was the dirtiest trick.

BD: (Laughs) So, apparently you continued to do sports?

OD: Uh-huh. Quite a few of them were cut out.

BD: (Referring to a book of ration stamps) What are these for? Are these like currency?

Dorothy Douglass: No, you use them with currency. If you wanted a pair of shoes you had to give them so many stamps or a bag of sugar or a gallon of gas.

BD: How many did you get?

DD: Each person got one book. I don't know how often. Mother took care of it.

BD: So when you saw each person, do you mean you and each kid?

DD: Yes, but mother took care of it all. When we needed shoes she would just give us our stamps.

BD: How did the war effect the community?

OD: It united us, 100%.

BD: Did you do activities? When you say you were united did that mean you did more things together?

OD: Well, I'll tell you what when they played the "Star Spangled Banner" or blew taps everyone sat up and paid attention.

BD: Do you remember any of the propaganda used during the war?

OD: No.

BD: You didn't see the pictures of even Rosie the Riveter?

OD: Oh, yeah! I saw her. She wasn't propaganda, she was a riveter. (laughs)

BD: No, they tried to use her to get women out into the work force.

OD: There was that Japanese girl, what was her name? I can't remember. . .

DD: We all bought saving stamps at our schools. We would get so many books of stamps and then turn them in for a bond. That was a regular thing to buy these stamps, and then you would get a war bond.

BD: What other ways did the government try to involve the regular people in the war effort, beside the war bonds?

OD: Well, everything was rationed. And I think everyone honored their rations. I was stationed in Illinois. We had to take turns every so often working KB and this day was mine. So that night was on a Saturday, and 90% of the guys went to town. But they still cooked the same amount of food. I threw out eight dripping pans of meatloaf. They had to cook it, but nobody was there to eat it. And the friends I had met in St. Louis they were just a begging for food or a ration stamp to buy anything with, and we threw out eight pans of food. I know 'cause I threw them out.

BD: What are some of the vivid World War II experiences that stand out in your mind? Why don't you tell me some good stories?

OD: I got on the train down in Florida, and I headed up towards Chicago. I changed trains up there in Georgia somewhere, and there were just so many service men and people trying to get on the train. And this lady came up to me and asked, "Would you take me on this train as your wife?" "Sure." So she sat on there as my wife for, I don't know how far she went. But that wasn't uncommon. They didn't have any choice. They couldn't get on the train unless they were somebody's wife. So, they were all "married." This woman was old enough to be my mother!

BD: (Laughs) So, when did you meet grandma?

OD: I never met her until I got out of the Army.

BD: About what time did you start dating?

DD: 1946.

OD: I don't know. That's over my head.

BD: You are still involved with the American Legion. What kind of activities do you do?

OD: Our main thing now, all we do, we hold our meetings and our banquets, and we take care of the dead people. If somebody dies we have to have a military funeral for them.

DD: The ceremony. On Veteran's day they give speeches.

BD: Are the people in the American Legion veterans just from World War II?

OD: There are some from WWII, but they're dying. Aren't any of them left now? Then, see, there is Vietnam and all those types.

Ryan Douglass: Do you remember the day the war ended?

OD: I sure do. I was stationed down in Florida. They announced it over the speaker system that the war had ended, and we could all have the day off and the weekend off. I said to my buddy, "What do you want to do?" and he said, "I don't want to go into town with that drunken mess, we'll stay here." And we stayed at the base. And the next morning, it was funny. I looked out the window at the barracks, and here comes these guys. They had hauled them back up from Miami to our base and dumped them out. And they had all traded their uniforms off, and here comes one guy with a pair of bib overalls and a straw hat. (Laughs) I can still see that. He looked so funny coming up the street. All of them had different clothes on.

DD: Did they have to have new ones issued to them?

OD: Oh, sure they did.

RD: (Laughs) They were probably too drunk to realize what they were doing.

OD: (Laughs) They didn't care.

BD: So, if they said you had the weekend off, that meant you were supposed to come back and what? Finish your duty?

OD: Yeah. You weren't discharged. See from there I finished the radar school I was going to, and they sent me up to New Jersey and from New Jersey I went to California. They put me on a ship, and I ran the radar and the radio on this ship on the way over to the Philippines. So, it was a good experience.

DD: Tell them why you went there.

OD: 'Cause I was told to. The ship we were on was a Dutch ship, and they had escaped from the Germans just as the war started and sailed this new ship out into the harbor of

the English channel and brought to the United States and converted it to a troop ship. We took about a hundred young kids over there, and the next morning they started unloading this ship and there was thousands of mail sacks in there. And anyway they got them all unloaded and the next day they started loading up the troops from the Philippines, and they brought them back to California, 1800 of them. So, that was my experience.

BD: Do you remember much about the Japanese Internment Camps?

OD: No, I just saw pictures and that's all I saw.

BD: Was that on purpose? Were you kept from knowing much about it?

OD: see her cousin and my dad's brother were POWs.

RD: The internment camps, there were some in Idaho, were where they took the Japanese that were here in America.

OD: Oh, that. That was a little different deal.

BD: Now, after the war, after they liberated some of these concentration camps there was supposedly a lot of Jewish immigration. Did you notice any of that?

OD: I don't know.

BD: Well, do you have any other good stories you would like to have in the archive?

OD: (Laughs) No, I don't think so. I don't know any.

DD: (Inaudible)

OD: Uncle Fred was a big man, and he was 200 some pounds, and he went down to 140. He is dead now, had cancer. I remember your cousin, Ralph Wilson (a POW), telling me about the one thing that turned him out more than anything. It was when he opened the refrigerator and the light came on. Remember that Dorothy. You know I guess I shouldn't say it, but even to this day I hate a Japanese.

BD: That's is fairly common. When I was at the hospital we had a gentleman come in, and he had all of his WWII pins, and he really got after us saying, "if there is a Jap back there I won't come to this hospital."

DD: You can't hold those grudges. It wasn't their fault.

OD: We played football against Sugar City, and they always had some Japanese guys on their team when I was a senior. And I still remember our coach when we were down in the dressing room before we went out to play. He says, "Now, there's going to be some



Japs on that team today, and I don't want to hear one word against them Japs. But if you can get them in a pile, hit them a bunch." (laughs)

DD: And it wasn't their fault. They were here as Americans. I felt sorry for them personally.

BD: So, obviously it was a common sentiment?

DD: It took a while to get over.

OD: We were pretty lucky in the valley, there wasn't any Japanese that lived here. If they did they would probably have gotten killed or had to get out.

DD: No they wouldn't. People are more broad minded than that.

OD: Maybe now days, but not back then. You were a Jap, you was a Jap. That is all there is to it.

BD: I have heard a lot of these things throughout class.

OD: I saw this guy in California. Because all the Japs were getting fought with and punched around and he had a sign around his neck, "Me, Chinese" it said.

BD: (Laughs) Smart fellow, huh.

RD: It's not surprising 'cause it happens even today with Muslims.

DD: They are discriminated against because of their race, and it has nothing to do with it. But you don't know that.

BD: It's human nature.

OD: One thing that was really interesting when I was in the Army was no matter where we went there was plenty of recreation for service men. They had dance halls and service clubs and the people really treated you nice.

BD: What is a service club?

OD: Oh, it was just a place service men went.

BD: Like a bar?

OD: Sometimes they had beer in there, but it was usually a place for dancing.

BD: A moral booster. Now, would girls just show up to dance?

OD: There were a lot of service girls and some that weren't, and everyone went and had a good time.

RD: When I was in England the girls would tell me about WWII and how the girls really liked the panty hose with the line down them, but they couldn't buy them so they would just draw the line up the back. Did they do that here?

DD: We would use an eye pencil to draw the line up the back.

BD: How come you couldn't get them? Was that part of rationing too?

DD: They weren't rationed there just weren't any in stores.

BD: Because the boys were gone were there jobs in town that you had to start taking care of? How did it effect the economy?

OD: You had to work the potato compound.

DD: Oh, yes. We had to do the paper routes.

RD: Do you remember what the church taught during WWII? What were some of the things they said?

DD: They didn't criticize as much as you would think they would. They didn't criticize the Japanese or the Germans or anything. They just taught to be patriotic and that your duty is to go to war.

BD: I am sure that your attitudes changed as you started working in the fields and doing the male jobs, so how was it when the boys came home? A lot of literature, it seems, the boys came home, and they wanted the girls back in the kitchen. Was it hard for you to say, "Okay, my lot in life is to get back in the kitchen and start baking stuff, or did you want to. . .

DD: (inaudible)

BD: (Laughing) You were sick of doing potatoes!

RD: Was it a good day when you got released from the service?

OD: Yes it was.

RD: What was that like?

OD: Well, it was different. I was glad to, but I almost reenlisted again. If I could have got my buddy to go with me we would have reenlisted. 'Cause I knew I really didn't have much to come home to. When we got off that ship, he had been sick all the way

over and all the way back. What happened is that the merchant marines came to us in the barracks one night, and it was a naval traveling outfit, and they were putting a crew together to go on a ship from California down around through the canal and clear around the world in about a year. And I could have went and made quite a lot of money and saved it, but he was sick all the time on the ship so he didn't want to go, so I didn't.

BD: Brother Inama tells the story of his two buddies in the war and how their time had to come to leave, and the one guy in particular had hated the army and was so glad he was done. So, him and his friend went and got drunk that night, and his friend talked him into reenlisting 'cause they were both drunk. And the two went to reenlist and the one guy who wanted to reenlist couldn't pass because of medical issue, and the one who didn't want to ended up passing, and he was in it for another four years or however long. The other guy went home.

OD: You know we were around so many people and so many buddies all the time that you were never lonesome, and you were always with somebody. It was kind of a big change, but it was alright.

BD: Apparently you made a lot of friends, are you still in contact?

OD: I sure did. No, we quit writing a few years ago. I had a good buddy from New Hampshire that we wrote for quite awhile, and we finally quit.

BD: Did you have a lot of LDS people?

OD: When I went to basic training down in Texas that was about 99% LDS people. But from then on where ever I was never with any LDS people.

BD: Did that make it harder?

OD: No, not really.

BD: There were others that had high standards also?

OD: They had standards, not high standards. This one buddy of mine from New Hampshire, he was Catholic, and we got along good there. We talked a little religion once in awhile, and I don't even know what he was talking about. But I went to church with him a time or two, and I didn't know what they were talking about. He did tell me one time that I wouldn't make a good Catholic. He said, "You're too curious, you want to know too much about it." I just want to know what they're talking about.

BD: So, what kind of Church services did you have?

OD: Protestant it was called. There was always a Protestant church around there someplace. Never was a Mormon Church.

BD: So does that mean you didn't have a sacrament meeting for however long you were in the war?

OD: No. huh uh. When I got on that ship to go overseas, the chaplain, I don't know what faith he is, he came up to me and asked if I would help him with the sacrament. I didn't know what he wanted, but I knew what the sacrament was. Anyway, I passed out the wine glass and the little wafers, and that was my responsibility on the ship.

BD: So you did that every Sunday or just one time?

OD: Every Sunday.

BD: How long were you on the ship?

OD: Two months.

BD: Did he know you were Mormon?

OD: I don't know.

BD: Did you have to dock a bunch on your trip?

OD: Just in Manila. It took a month to get over there, and we were there a week and about a month back.

BD: That was when you picked up the 1800 servicemen?

OD: Yes.

DD: Tell her about the Christmas tree.

OD: When we got over to the Philippine islands it was just before Christmas, and they decided we were going to have a Christmas party for us guys that night, Christmas Eve. And we went up to this big room, and there was a Christmas tree they had brought from the United States and had it all decorated and it added quite a lot to it. So the next day I asked them what they were going to do with the tree, and they said, "Oh, just it away." My buddy and I took the tree down the gang plank and walked down the edge of the dock. And about the first Filipino that we came to, his eyes just glistened. We said, "Would you like a good Christmas tree?" "Yes, Yes," and we gave it to him, and he took off down the road.

BD: Now, you said something about the mail when you went over to the Philippines. How was the mail for you guys? Did it take along time?

OD: We didn't get any. But after we got back to California that mail came back from the Philippines, and I had about a whole mail sack full.

BD: One of the galls had interviewed someone who had the letters he had written and when whoever he had sent them to received them there were black lines through different portions of the mail. Did the same thing happen? Did the government go through and censor?

OD: Some of them did, but people just knew what to write and what not to.

BD: Did you have anyone in the war?

DD: A brother.

BD: Did you get letters from Albert?

DD: Not personally, but mother did. He never went overseas.

BD: Where did he go to?

DD: He went to Texas. He was stationed in Pocatello for awhile.

OD: What they did in Pocatello was, they took those big guns that they fired and bring them back to realign the barrel.

DD: So he got to come home some weekends.

BD: I bet that made it easier.

DD: His birthday was in February. The year he was a senior he went into the service, and he wasn't there for his graduation. But he had filled all the requirements so mother picked up his diploma.

BD: So as soon as guys were eighteen they went off to war?

OD: When I was a senior in high school a certain day came along, I don't remember what it was, anyway, all of us boys that age had to go down to the draft board and sign up for the draft. Oh, we thought we were big and important I signed up for the draft and in the mean time

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