

Harding was last survivor of 10 POW nurses from Texas

By CARMINA DANINI
EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

Earlyn Black "Blackie" Harding, one of the last surviving "Angels of Bataan," U.S. Army nurses who cared for soldiers and other prisoners of war in the Philippines in World War II, has died of respiratory and heart failure at 88.

Harding, who died Aug. 16 in the Kerrville VA Hospital, was among the 66 Army nurses held in the Santo Tomas Internment Camp in Manila for three years.

She was the last survivor of 10 POW nurses from Texas, said Elizabeth Norman, author of the prize-winning 1999 book "We Band of Angels: The Untold

Story of American Nurses Trapped on Bataan by the Japanese."

Only two other former nurse POWs are still alive — Millie Dalton Manning of Trenton, N.J., and Mary Jo Oberst of Newburg, Ky., Norman said in an e-mail.

A 1938 graduate of the Baylor University School of Nursing, Harding had years of nursing experience before she entered the Army Nurse Corps in 1940.

She arrived on Corregidor, a rocky island fortress at the entrance to Manila Bay, in June 1941. The day after the Japanese bombed the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, she and other nurses established an under-



HARDING

ground field hospital in Malinta Tunnel.

After nearly six months of heavy bombardment, the Americans and Filipinos surrendered to the Japanese.

The POWs were sent to an internment camp the Japanese established at the University of Santo Tomas, a centuries-old institution founded by Spanish

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OBITU

EARLYN BLACK 'BLACKIE' HARDING

Born: Sept. 8, 1918, in Fort Parker

Died: Aug. 16, 2007, in Kerrville

Military: U.S. Army Nurse Corps, 1940-46

Survivors: A son, Jac Harding of San Antonio; a daughter, Sandra Harding, of Santa Fe, N.M.; four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Her husband, retired Army Lt. Col. Harry J. Harding, died in 1987.

Services: A graveside memorial service will be held at 1:15 p.m. today at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery. A memorial service is planned for September in Kerrville.

Memorials: In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation, Dept. 560, Washington, D.C., 20042-0560, or to a charity of one's choice.

Dominican priests.

The nurses were the largest group of American women ever held prisoner, Norman said.

Harding "was typical of the Army nurse-POWs: independent, smart and funny," Norman said.

It was three years before Harding and the other POWs were liberated. Back home, she was chief nurse at Randolph Field Flight Nurse School in San Antonio and was later stationed at Lowry Field in Colorado.

She resigned in 1946 to marry another POW, Harry Harding, whom she had met before the war.

Although prisoners were banned by the Japanese from

writing diaries, Harding, who became an accomplished weaver, and her father both kept journals during their years in captivity, their son Jac Harding said.

"We, as a family, were not aware of the diaries until after my father died," he said. "We still have them."

cdanini@express-news.net