

WWII Nurse POW Gets Posthumous Award

by Lyn Kukral

ARLINGTON, Va. (Army News Service, Aug. 21, 2001) -- A World War II Army nurse who endured almost three years as a prisoner of war was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Medal Aug. 20 at the Women's Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery.

Maj. Maude C. Davison, chief nurse of the Army's Philippine Department, led her staff in nursing the sick and wounded of Bataan and Corregidor as U.S. forces fought to defend the Philippines from an overwhelming Japanese invasion. Imprisoned at Manila by the Japanese for three years, she managed the nursing care given to thousands of interned men, women and children.

In recognition of Davison's inspiring leadership while suffering illness and every privation, Lt. Gen. James B. Peake, the Army surgeon general, presented the Army's fourth highest medal to Davison's niece, Velma Willis of Cannington, Ontario, Canada. Davison, a naturalized U.S. citizen, was born and is buried in Cannington.

Captured on Corregidor Island in May 1942 when the American garrison at Corregidor surrendered, Davison and other Americans were moved to Manila's Santo Tomas Internment Camp in August. Davison, age 57 and at that time a captain with more than 20 years service, was the highest ranking nurse. She took command firmly, maintaining the nurses' identity as nurses throughout the hard years of captivity, malnutrition and illness. She insisted that all nurses wear their khaki blouses and skirts while on duty. She maintained a regular schedule of nursing duty, from which nurses were excused only if bedridden.

Called "Ma" by the other nurses because of her authoritative leadership, Davison's drive and spirit inspired even during the bleakest moments, witnesses reported. She placed herself at risk with the Japanese to ensure her nurses' safety in their quarters. Many of the nurses credit her with their survival; all 66 under her command survived to see liberation in February 1945.

At that time, the Army awarded her the Legion of Merit for her service in captivity, although some of her superiors recommended a Distinguished Service Medal. One of those supporting the latter recommendation was Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who wrote:

"Maj. Davison ... was the leader and symbol of the entire nursing corps which so distinguished itself throughout the Philippine Campaign. Her performance was an outstanding example to all. The standards set by her and through her by her corps, established a precedent not only within the gallant forces on Bataan, but for the entire nursing corps in our Army in all theaters."

After her release, Davison was promoted to the rank of major, and she and the nurses imprisoned with her also received the Bronze Star.

Two books detail the hardships that nurses faced while in captivity in the Philippines: "We Band of Angels: The Untold Story of American Nurses Trapped on Bataan by the Japanese," by Elizabeth M. Norman, and "All This Hell: U.S. Nurses Imprisoned by the Japanese," by Evelyn M. Monahan and Rosemary Neidel Greenlee. Davison figures prominently in both.

Davison entered the Army as a general nurse in June 1918 after earning her registered nursing degree at Pasadena, Calif., Hospital Training School for Nurses. She served in nursing assignments at Letterman General Hospital, San Francisco; the Disciplinary Barracks Hospital, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.; U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.; and Walter Reed General Hospital, Washington, D.C. Also

qualified as a dietician, she served in that capacity at William Beaumont General Hospital, Fort Bliss, Texas and overseas at Koblenz, Germany. She went to the Philippines in March 1939.

Davison's health declined as a result of her captivity, and she retired from the Army in 1946 to California. There, she married a family friend, the Rev. Charles Jackson. She died in 1956 at the age of 71.

(Editor's note: Lyn Kukrel is a member of the Army Surgeon General's public affairs team.)