

## Major Eula Fails Borneman (1908-1986)

Episode 29: Jan. 24, 2008

Adapted and read, by permission of the Walker County Historical Commission, from: Woman Recalls Days Spent as Prisoner During WWII. (1986). In Walker County Historical Commission (Ed.), *Walker County, Texas: A History* (pp. 883-884). Dallas: Curtis Media.

Read by Cheryl Spencer, Library Associate in Special Collections.

Major Eula Fails Borneman was on the island of Corregidor when the Imperial Army overran it in 1942. Borneman, who was born and raised in Huntsville, was one of 69 nurses taken as prisoner of war. Among those 69 were American and Filipino military and civilian nurses.

Borneman graduated from Sam Houston State Teacher's College, but unlike most women of her time, she wanted a career teaching psychology. She taught one year before moving to Houston, where she enrolled in the Hermann Hospital Nursing School.

Later, after nursing at a small Huntsville hospital, Borneman joined the army in 1936. She was 28 years old. "I wanted to go overseas and do something different," she said of her reason for joining. While Borneman was stationed in San Francisco, the United States became involved in World War II. Borneman received her assignment—a base hospital on the Island of Corregidor in the Philippines.

At Corregidor, Borneman was an anesthetist and also was put in charge of a 12-bed officers' wing. Borneman, who in her younger days looked remarkably like movie star Bette Davis, said "the officers and doctors used to call me Bette."

When she was at the hospital, Borneman met a pilot named John Lackey. They planned to marry, but after they were captured, he was killed when a Japanese ship carrying hundreds of POWs was torpedoed.

As fighting became fierce and General Douglas MacArthur was ordered out of the Philippines, Borneman and the other nurses were taken to Manila in May of 1942 and imprisoned at Santo Thomas, a university campus. These prisoners were lucky. They were not in the "death march" of Americans and Filipinos across the island.

On February 4, 1945, the prisoners were freed from Santo Thomas. Borneman remembers being outside and hearing the shooting.

She was flown back to San Francisco and hospitalized; she had beriberi—a thiamine deficiency marked by inflammation or degenerative changes of the nerves—and tuberculosis. Borneman was later flown to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. Later, she met and married an Army chaplain, Colonel John Borneman, who had also been a POW.

In 1954, Borneman retired because of a disability, no longer able to practice nursing. Late in life, she resided at Fair Park Nursing Home, where her walls were covered with photos and memorabilia documenting her years of military service, including her uniform, which was decorated with medals.

Major Eula Fails Borneman died on November 14, 1986, and was buried with military honors in the Houston National Cemetery in Houston, Texas. She was a member of the VFW, the American Legion, and the Disabled American Veterans. Information, photos, and memorabilia from her and many other U.S. veterans and POWs can be seen at the [H.E.A.R.T.S. Veterans Museum of Texas](#) in Huntsville, Texas.