



**UNITED  
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Alexander Ramsey Nininger, Jr.

1918 - 1942

—  
John Alexander Patterson

Collection

ALEXANDER RAMSEY NININGER, JR.  
OCTOBER 30, 1918 - JANUARY 12, 1942

Alexander Ramsey Nininger, Jr., USMA Class of 1941, was killed on Bataan, January 12, 1942. At the age of 23 he was awarded posthumously the first Medal of Honor of World War II for heroism "above and beyond the call of duty." Nininger was the first of his class at West Point to die in World War II.

When Nininger was killed, his nephew, John Alexander Patterson, was five years old. Other than a dim image of his uniform and the trauma of his death, there was little memory of him as an individual. It did not take long, however, for Patterson to realize that what his uncle had done in the Philippines was quite extraordinary. Over the years boyhood adulation grew to an intense interest in the early days of World War II in the Pacific, especially the battles of Bataan and Corregidor. As Patterson began to study about his Uncle Sandy (some knew him as Alex) in order to learn more about the man and his exploits, a number of things happened. Records, files and letters were researched; books and manuscripts began to accumulate; and contacts were made with former classmates at West Point and comrades-in-arms in the Philippines. Sandy's death marked the beginning of an odyssey for Patterson, culminating in the development of a book and manuscript collection housed today in the Library of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York.

Nininger entered the Academy in 1937 after graduating from a Fort Lauderdale, Florida, high school. By all accounts, he was quiet, mild mannered, studious and a lover of classical music. On the surface he hardly seemed the warrior type. On the other hand, he was persistent and had a determined, even stubborn streak which, together with a thoughtful patriotic bent, undoubtedly accounted for later actions in battle for which he received the nation's highest award for valor.

Nininger's years at West Point were marked by above average grades and active leadership of the cadet lecture series. While Sandy wanted to serve in the Philippines with the Corps of Engineers, his academic standing was not quite high enough. He did make it to

the Islands. However, when he arrived in Manila in November 1941, it was as an Infantryman. Nininger was immediately assigned to 'A' Company of the 57th Infantry Regiment (Philippine Scouts) where he served until his death only two months later.

The 57th was part of the Philippine Division which was also made up of the 31st Infantry (US), 45th Infantry (PS), and various Artillery, Engineering, Quartermaster and other Scout service units. This division of some 10,000 men was the only trained combat unit of its size in the Islands; the 120,000 strong Philippine Army consisted primarily of untrained reservists. In their hands rested the defense of America's westernmost outpost in the Pacific against the Japanese onslaught of late 1941.

One of the great untold stories of the early days of World War II in the Pacific has to do with the Philippine Scouts. They were good and tough; yet, very little has been written about them. After the Spanish-American War of 1898, the Scouts emerged over the years as a part of the regular army charged with the defense of the Philippines. They were led largely by American officers. Thus, Nininger joined a well trained U.S. Army regiment staffed by consummate professionals. Unfortunately, they were too few.

In the early days of the war, the 57th was held in reserve until the movement to Bataan at the very end of 1941. At that time, the regiment was assigned the easternmost sector of the main battle line near the town of Abucay. Although Nininger's company was not engaged when the Japanese struck on January 9, 1942, he volunteered to help meet the pressure exerted by the Japanese on another unit during the crucial period of January 11th and 12th. In the words of the Medal of Honor citation:

This officer, though assigned to another company not then engaged in combat, voluntarily attached himself to Company K, same regiment, while that unit was being attacked by enemy force superior

in fire power. Enemy snipers in trees and fox holes had stopped a counter-attack to regain part of position. In hand-to-hand fighting which followed, Lieutenant Nininger repeatedly forced his way to and into the hostile position. Though exposed to heavy enemy fire, he continued to attack with rifle and hand grenades and succeeded in destroying several enemy groups in fox holes and enemy snipers. Although wounded three times, he continued his attacks until he was killed after pushing alone far within the enemy position. When his body was found after recapture of the position, one enemy officer and two enemy soldiers lay dead around him.

At the news of Sandy's death, there was an immediate outpouring of sentiment and support to the grieving family. Reports of Nininger's heroism were carried by newspapers throughout the country and in numerous periodicals. It was a time in which there was little good news from the Asian and Pacific battlefields. In rapid order Guam, Wake, Hong Kong, Malaya, and Singapore had fallen; Burma was almost finished and the Dutch East Indies were under heavy pressure. The Japanese seemed unbeatable. The American stand on Bataan and Corregidor provided almost the only ray of hope although it turned out to be short lived. Bataan fell on April 9, 1942, and Corregidor soon thereafter on May 6. Still, while there was never any possibility of relief, the prolonged and inspirational defense upset the Japanese timetable (the Philippines were to have been conquered in six to eight weeks) and probably had an impact on the War later in New Guinea and Japanese designs on Australia. When General Jonathan Wainwright finally surrendered all U.S. forces in the Philippines in early May 1942, the curtain came down on one of the most difficult and disastrous periods of America's history. However, the overwhelming naval victory at Midway in June, the New Guinea fighting in July and the invasion of Guadalcanal in August marked the beginning of a journey along the road to recovery

from which, despite occasional setback, the allies never looked back until the Japanese surrender on the deck of the battleship Missouri September 2, 1945 -- John Alexander Patterson's ninth birthday.

While Nininger's death and heroism faded from view over the years, there were lasting reminders. Streets at Fort McPherson, Georgia, and in Central Valley, New York, a ship on the West Coast, a park at Fort Knox, Kentucky, a school in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and a Christian Science Reading Room at the Academy were all named after him. Nininger's West Point class also honored his memory in several ways, notably the creation of Nininger Hall in the early 1980's where the Cadet Honor Society today conducts its meetings. Of course, the family never forgot. Nininger's father asked that his son's remains be brought home for burial at West Point; but, despite efforts during the years after the War, they were never found. Today, with new information, renewed efforts are being made to find Nininger's grave on Bataan.

The Bataan and Corregidor Collection is housed in the West Point Room of the USMA Library. It is an extensive compilation that will facilitate Cadet study and general scholarly research. Not only is it a befitting memorial to Alexander Ramsey Nininger, Jr., it is, as well, a very personal tribute to his memory.

The Bataan and Corregidor Collection was donated to the Academy Library in July 1985 and formally dedicated in September 1986 to coincide with the 45th reunion of the USMA Class of 1941. The collection is open to the Corps of Cadets and researchers and interested individuals upon request. A list of the titles contained in the collection may be obtained from the Special Collections Division, USMA Library, West Point, New York 10996.

## NEWS

# Fort Lauderdale honors WW II war hero

By Robert Sims  
Staff Writer

Slain World War Two hero Lt. Alexander "Sandy" Nininger will be remembered this Memorial Day, when a statue dedicated in honor of the one-time Sailboat Bend resident will be erected along Riverwalk.

Nininger was the first Broward County resident to die in the war, and the first ever to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Attending the dedication ceremony on Monday, May 29, will be members of Nininger's family, fellow Class of 1941 West Point graduates and war veterans. Guests include retired Brig. General Joseph McCarthy, U.S.M.C. and United States Ambassador at Large Edward Rowny.

After graduating from West Point in 1941, Nininger served with the Philippine Scouts. When the Japanese invaded the Philippines, Nininger was ordered to lead patrols against advancing enemy snipers.

During one patrol, Nininger and his unit were surrounded by Japanese troops. Sacrificing himself to save his unit, Nininger attacked the Japanese troops using his rifle, bayonet and grenades. Though Nininger was able to kill the Japanese troops, he was left fatally wounded.

The surviving members of Nininger's unit took him to a field hospital near a church, where he later died. Nininger was buried in an unmarked grave in the churchyard.

"I spent a lot of time trying to find his remains," says Nininger's nephew John Patterson, who will be present at the dedication ceremony. "My grandfather always wanted Sandy to be brought home and buried at West Point. I couldn't find him. I kept looking for him, but it was like looking for a needle in a haystack."

Nininger received the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions. Fort Lauderdale paid reverence to him by installing a plaque in his honor at the War Memorial Auditorium and naming Nininger Drive, the road leading to Holiday Park, in his name.

But, half a century after his death, Fort Lauderdale had all but forgotten Nininger.

Richard Winer, a Sailboat Bend resident, had never heard of Nininger until two years ago, when he read a newspaper article commemorating the 50th anniversary of Nininger's untimely death. Winer was so incensed that Fort Lauderdale had forsaken this war hero that he set to work raising funds to have Nininger immortalized in bronze.

"Any other town in America would have put up a statue of Sandy Nininger 50 years ago," says Winer.

Raising the necessary \$60,000 for the statue was hard work for Winer and the other members of the Lt. Alexander "Sandy" Nininger State Committee. Small sums of money, mainly from Nininger's former classmates and widows of war veteran, were easy to come by, but the committee had a harder time convincing some of the county's most wealthiest citizens to make contributions toward the cost of statue. By late February, the committee had only secured \$20,000, and urgently needed to raise additional \$20,000 to receive a matching \$20,000 grant from the county.

Thanks to help from Fort Lauderdale socialite Victoria Williamson, and donations from such prominent local businessmen as H. Wayne Huizenga, the committee was able to raise the outstanding \$20,000 and get the \$20,000 grant from the county.

The statue by Hallandale sculptor Enzo Gallo depicts Nininger, rifle in hand, leading his men into



Staff photo by VERONICA COSTELLO

Artist Enzo Gallo works on a clay sculpture of "Sandy" Nininger. The bronzed version will be erected along Riverwalk. U.S. Army Col. Thomas Cleary, a classmate of Nininger's at West Point, looks on.

### Parade information

The Lt. Alexander "Sandy" Nininger statue dedication ceremony will be held Memorial Day, Monday, May 30.

The parade begins 10 a.m. at the corner of Southwest Second Street and Southwest 2nd Street, Fort Lauderdale and proceeds west along Southwest 2nd Street to Southwest 9th Ave.; south on Southwest 9th Ave. to West Las Olas Boulevard; east on West Las Olas Boulevard to the statue dedication site on Riverwalk.

The statue dedication ceremony is scheduled to commence at 11 a.m.

Veterans and veteran organizations are encouraged to participate in the parade and statue dedication ceremony.

Call (305) 462-007 or (305) 467-1770 for further information.

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**HONOR ROLL**  
**57th INFANTRY (PS)**  
**CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR**

**NISPEROS, JOSE.** Rank and organization: Private, 34th Company, Philippine Scouts. Place and Date: At Lapurap, Basilan, Philippine Islands, 24 Sept. 1911. Entered Service at: San Fernando Union, P. I. Birth: San Fernandos Union, P. I. Citation: Having been badly wounded (left arm broken and lacerated and he had received several spear wounds in the body so that he could not stand, continued to fire his rifle with one hand until the enemy was repulsed, thereby aiding materially in preventing the annihilation of his party and the mutilation of their bodies.

**MOSHER, LOUIS C.** Rank and organization: 2nd Lt., Philippine Scouts. Place and Date: Gagsak Mountain, Jolo, P. I., 11 June 1913. Entered Service: Brockton, Mass. Birth: Westpot, Mass. Citation: Voluntarily entered a cleared space within about 20 yards of the Moro trenches under a furious fire from them and carried a wounded soldier of his company to safety at the risk of his own life.

**NININGER, ALEXANDER R., JR.** Rank and organization: Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army, 57th Infantry, Philippine Scouts. Place and date: Near Abucay, Bataan, Philippine Islands, 12 January 1942. Entered Service at: Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Birth: Gainesville, Ga. G. O. No.: 9, 5 February 1942. Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy near Abucay, Bataan, Philippine Islands, on 12 January 1942. This officer, though assigned to another company not then engaged in combat, voluntarily attached himself to Company K, same regiment, while that unit was being attacked by enemy force superior in firepower. Enemy snipers in trees and foxholes had stopped a counterattack to regain part of position. In hand-to-hand fighting which followed, 2d Lt. Nininger repeatedly forced his way to and into the hostile position. Though exposed to heavy enemy fire, he continued to attack with rifle and handgrenades and succeeded in destroying several enemy groups in foxholes and enemy snipers. Although wounded 3 times, he continued his attacks until he was killed after pushing alone far within the enemy position. When his body was found after recapture of the position, 1 enemy officer and 2 enemy soldiers lay dead around him.



Alexander Ramsey Nininger, Jr. (USMA '41),  
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