

1LT Alexander Nininger

Nininger X-1130 & Cheaney Classified IDPF

http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/Manila2_RP_X-1130.pdf

http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/Cheaney_Ira_B_DeClass_REORDERED.PDF

Efforts to identify remains were so inept that many files were classified as defense secrets when they actually contained no information warranting such protection. One of the most egregious examples involved the case of 1LT Alexander R. "Sandy" Nininger.

In the early days of 1942, the American public needed a morale boost and it came in the form of the award of the Medal of Honor to a true hero who gave his life for his country. Even disregarding the heroism for which he received the nation's highest award for bravery, 1LT Alexander Nininger was a remarkable young man who is honored at his alma mater, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point by an annual award for valor given in his name; a major building named for him; and, perhaps most fitting, the conference room where the cadet honor society meets is named for him. A veterans home has been named for him and his hometown has erected a life-size statue of him. A true American hero.

On January 11 and 12, 1942, Lt Nininger's unit was engaged in fierce combat near Abucay, Bataan Province, Philippine Islands. Also killed in action during this engagement were Lieutenants Compton, Green, Maynard and Wilson.

As illustrated by the map contained in X-3044, referenced above, most of the American casualties were buried where they fell. However, based on the statement of the town gravedigger, five Americans were buried in the Abucay Town Cemetery. After the war, recovery of remains in this area were lead by Master Sergeant Abie Abraham, who had himself fought in the Abucay area and was subsequently a prisoner of war. Two books published by Sergeant Abraham show that he was well aware of Lt Nininger's celebrity and he specifically set out to recover his remains. Immediately upon recovery of the remains designated X-1130, he designated them as believed to be those of Lt Nininger. Several nearby graves are obviously those of three of the four other officers who fell near the same time as Nininger. This file shows that the initial identification was subsequently confirmed by a board of officers convened to evaluate the evidence and make official determination of the identity of remains.

However, the recommendation to identify X-1130 as Lt Nininger was disapproved by Department of the Army in Washington, DC because of a discrepancy between the estimated height of the remains and the known height of Lt Nininger. The techniques then used to estimate height of skeletal remains were known to be extremely inaccurate and these estimates were normally ignored. In fact, after the war new formulas were published based on the experience gained in identification of American Servicemen that showed major discrepancies in the previously used techniques. However, because of Nininger's celebrity, Department of the Army ordered the field command to reconsider the identification, which they did. It can't be determined from the existing file exactly what evidence of identity was considered by the board of officers, but the local command was so convinced that X-1130 was the remains of Nininger that they reiterated it to Washington an unprecedented five times.

This identification probably would have ultimately been confirmed had it not been for a little quirk of fate that caused the entire investigation to come off the rails. A classified annex to Lt Ira Cheaney's Individual

Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) filled in the rest of the story and explained why the Nininger search shifted to the Abucay Churchyard.

Just prior to Nininger's death, his regimental commander, Colonel George Clarke, was relieved of his command for cowardice in the face of the enemy. He was transferred to the island of Corregidor where he was evacuated on the last submarine to depart. He eventually made his way back to the U.S. where he was contacted by the families of some of his deceased officers. He made some rather self-serving comments perhaps hoping to repair his reputation, but he apparently confused the burial sites as the Abucay Churchyard rather than the Abucay Town Cemetery which was approximately 650 meters to the West of the Church. He also informed the family of Lt Ira Cheaney that his remains were also buried in the Abucay Churchyard. The Cheaney family informed their Congressman, Richard M. Nixon, of these details and he passed them to the Department of the Army which promptly directed the local command in the Philippines to search the Abucay Churchyard for the remains of Nininger and the others. Besides the Maynard family, several of the other families had also contacted their congressional representatives to demand return of the remains of their family members and thereby significantly increasing the pressure on Department of the Army to do something.

Ultimately, to placate Representative Nixon and the Cheaney family, a set of unidentified remains were identified as those of Lt Maynard and buried at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. However, the damage was done and, after three major excavations of the Abucay Churchyard, it was determined that the remains of Nininger and the others were non-recoverable.

However, about 1950, the Department of the Army, Memorial Division decided to investigate further. They determined that Lt Cheaney's remains could not have been buried in the Abucay Churchyard because he was not killed until nearly two weeks after Nininger and the others and by that time the entire town of Abucay was held by the enemy. Therefore, the remains buried as Cheaney at West Point could not be his. It was also discovered that Col Clarke had furnished erroneous information concerning the other burials being located in the Abucay Churchyard.

The remains buried at West Point were disinterred in the Spring of 2019 and determined to be non-Caucasian.

The classified portion of the Cheaney IDPF included a recommendation that all the witnesses be visited to explain the official position. The file classification was then upgraded from CONFIDENTIAL to SECRET.

The Nininger family had requested this file several times as early as 1985 and each time was informed that it did not exist. The government continued to deny the existence of the file even after a lawsuit was filed in Federal Court.

Nininger, Green, Compton and Maynard are associated by DPAA.

See table 2 in para 5 of <http://bataanmissing.com/pattersonVdpaa/73-3.pdf>

** Officers believed lost in Abucay village are included for the sake of thoroughness.

See X1051, X1052, X1063, X1130 (Nininger) - Statement that five Americans buried???

Unclassified IDPF's of five 57th Inf officers KIA January 12/13, 1942 (Compton, Green, Maynard, Nininger, & Wilson)

<http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/ComptonJohnC.pdf>
<http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/GreenArthurW.pdf>
<http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/MaynardDavidW.pdf>
http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/NININGER_ALEXANDER_O23761_IDPF_Complete_266699.pdf
<http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/WILSON,KENNETHL1.pdf>

The following four files (X1051, X1052, X1063, X1130) contain a statement that they are each the remains of five Americans who were recovered from the Abucay Cemetery. The fifth file has not been located.

http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/Manila2_RP_X-1051.pdf
http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/Manila2_RP_X-1052.pdf
http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/Manila2_RP_X-1063.pdf
http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/Manila2_RP_X-1130.pdf

X3536 Manila #2 is BTB (Believed to be) Lt Wilson
http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/Manila2_RP_X-3536.pdf

Court Docket, Patterson v DPAA
<http://bataanmissing.com/pattersonVdpaa/docket.htm>

Academic paper by Trotter - shows that WWII era height estimates were substantially understated.
<http://bataanmissing.com/wpgrave/EstimationofstaturefromlongbonesofAmericanWhitesandNegroes-Trotter1952.pdf>
