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MILITARY HISTORY  
CENTER

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April 25, 2018

CITY OF BROKEN ARROW

City of Broken Arrow  
220 S. First Street  
Broken Arrow, OK 74012

MAY 01 2018

CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE

TO: The Mayor, City Manager and City Council

Gentlemen and Ladies,

As a representative of the Military History Center of Broken Arrow, we respectfully request that 1<sup>st</sup> Place from Washington to New Orleans be temporarily changed to: "Oscar Nipps, Jr. Boulevard".

Oscar has been a long time resident of Broken Arrow and has a very good story from his time in World War II (See attached Article from Tim Stanley Tulsa World).

Oscar is a tribute to the City of Broken Arrow where he has spent his entire life and the Military History Center where he currently volunteers as a docent two or three times a week.

Respectfully,

Dennis Hoch, Docent Supervisor  
Military History Center  
112 North Main Street  
Broken Arrow, OK 74012

Cc: Debra Wimpee  
Jennifer Hooks

# World War II veterans remember: Oscar Nipps Jr. helped liberate the Philippines with the 1st Cavalry

• By TIM STANLEY World Staff Writer



WWII Veteran Oscar Nipps Jr. at his home in Broken Arrow, Okla., on Wednesday, February 18, 2016. MATT BARNARD/Tulsa World  
Serving Our Country: Oscar Nipps Jr.

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Sometimes, even a walk in a park is no walk in the park.

Oscar Nipps found that out once in Manila when, cutting through a park on their way to headquarters, he and his unit were set upon by Japanese artillery fire.

But what stood out the most — and why he remembers it so vividly to this day — is who kept walking in spite of it.

As “everybody hit the ground,” Nipps said, he looked up to see Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who was just a few steps ahead of him, still on his feet.

In fact, the general had not missed a stride.

“It made the impression on me that he was either awful brave or awful something else,” Nipps recalled, laughing.

Nipps can actually take credit for helping the legendary leader stay upright.

A short time later, as they approached the hotel where headquarters had been set up, MacArthur “hung his toe on some barbed wire, almost hit the concrete.”

Fortunately, Nipps was right there.

“He reached out and put his hand right on my shoulder,” he said.

Regaining his balance, “he gave me this little ol’ cocky grin,” Nipps added.

“He didn’t say thank you. But I didn’t expect him to.”

### ‘Not a dry run’

A Broken Arrow native and longtime resident, Nipps, known to friends and family as “Junior,” welcomed the Tulsa World to his home recently to talk about his experiences in the war.

A rifleman and company cook with the 1st Cavalry Division, Nipps participated in the bloody, hard-fought campaign to liberate the Philippines from the Japanese, including the islands of Leyte and Luzon, and the Philippine capital city of Manila.

In Manila, Nipps was among the soldiers helping to liberate more than 3,000 internees — most of them American civilians — from Santo Tomas prison camp.

Nipps grew up in Broken Arrow, and attended school there through sixth grade.

“I decided that was as far as I would go. My folks needed more help on the farm,” said Nipps, one of five children.

Later, when his older brother entered the Army, the family pulled up stakes and moved to California to be closer to him. Nipps went to work in the shipyards there.

In 1943, shortly after he turned 18, he was drafted into the Army.

Before he shipped out, during a 10-day furlough, Nipps and his girlfriend, Melza, talked about the future. She wanted to get married. But he thought the right thing to do was to wait.

“I didn’t know if I was coming back,” Nipps said, “and I’d rather leave a sweetheart behind than a widow.”

Reluctantly, Melza agreed and they settled for writing to each other.

Shipping out for the Pacific in July 1944, Nipps' first stop was New Guinea. At his next destination, the Admiralty Islands, he was assigned to the 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division.

Shortly after he arrived, the division moved in to begin the liberation of the Philippines.

The island chain had been overrun by the Japanese early in 1942.

The war for Nipps started for real on Oct. 20. He remembers the captain's voice breaking in over the PA as they sat anchored off Leyte.

They had been practicing beach landings, but this time he "told us this was not a dry run, it was the real McCoy."

The exact time stuck in Nipps' mind: "10:20 a.m., the 10th month, 20th day."

The men had no idea what to expect of the landing, and feared it would be "hot," he said.

Before they could get to the beach, though, the landing crafts had to stop.

The water was too shallow to proceed.

So for the last 100 yards, they were forced to wade through waist-high water carrying 120-pound machine guns and ammo.

Fortunately, the landing didn't attract the attention of the Japanese.

But the fight was not long in coming. Later that afternoon, Nipps said, "the bullets started flying. ... They fired at us, we fired back."

It was the 19-year-old's first experience of combat.

"I don't know how to explain how it felt," said Nipps. "We fought them all over the island. Every day for a few weeks. Out in the fields hunting them down. They were still putting up pretty good resistance."

## Santo Tomas

When they moved on to Luzon, the fighting would only get more intense.

From the time he arrived in early 1945, Nipps would be on the front lines for 63 days "with no relief and very little food," he said.

The hardest part was losing your friends.

"It was pretty rough to stand there and see those guys (die) who you had been with almost a year," Nipps said. "You was just like brothers. That's how it felt — like you'd lost a brother."

Some of the fiercest fighting took place in the capital, Manila.

"We were 88 miles from Manila when MacArthur sent the trucks to get us," Nipps recalled. "He wanted the 1st Cavalry Division to be the first ones in Manila. We made 88 miles in 66 hours, driving through a combat zone."

One of the first orders of business in Manila was to liberate Santo Tomas internment camp.

Santo Tomas, set up on the campus of the University of Santo Tomas, was the largest of several prison camps in the Philippines where the Japanese held enemy civilians.

At the time, there were more than 3,000 prisoners confined there, many of whom had been there since the camp opened in January 1942. Conditions had deteriorated as the war went on, and many internees were near death from starvation.

Japanese soldiers in the camp fired on the liberators, Nipps said, "but we went in behind the tanks so they couldn't hit us. The tanks tore down the (fences). It didn't take much fighting to get them out of there."

The prisoners "were in very poor shape. Really, more or less skin and bones."

Nevertheless, he added, there was much "hollering and screaming and yelling for joy that they were finally freed. ... It made you feel real good and feel real bad at the same time — that they had gone through so much misery."

## High cost

The brutal fight to clear Manila took almost a month.

Nipps recalls one particular night when the fighting was at its most furious.

At one point, after relieving a machine gunner, he gave the gun back to the man, only to see him take a hit just seconds later.

"It blew his bottom jaw off," he said.

Later a friend of Nipps' was killed when the "back of his head was blown off."

It was that kind of night.

Another thing about combat zones, he said, was you couldn't get mail.

So, his letters would often pile up, and he'd receive several at a time.

Not all mail brought good news.

While he was in Manila a letter arrived from his mother informing him that his 5-year-old brother, Ervin, the family's youngest, had died. By the time Nipps received the letter, weeks had passed since the funeral.

"That was tough to find out," he said.

Nipps was sitting in a foxhole, and had to read the words more than once.

He remembers the day well. Later the same evening, he said, a rocket shell landed next to his foxhole but thankfully, it didn't go off.

Another shell hit next to a nearby foxhole and exploded, killing both of the soldiers in the foxhole.

Once again, Nipps said, "the good Lord was looking after me."

The cost of liberating Luzon was high: 10,640 American troops were killed. But it wasn't anywhere near the number of soldiers the Japanese lost: 205,535 troops.

Luzon was the largest American campaign of the Pacific war, involving more troops than had been used in North Africa, Italy or southern France.

At the time, though, Nipps and his fellow soldiers thought the worst was yet to come. Shipping out in August for Japan "loaded with ammo, weapons and everything," they fully expected to have to invade the island.

Then, en route, they heard about the atomic bombs.

There was a lot of celebrating on the ship, Nipps said.

## Witness to history

On Sept. 2, 1945, Nipps was on board a ship in Tokyo Bay. It was anchored alongside the USS Missouri where Japan would officially surrender, ending WWII.

Nipps watched from the deck as the Japanese officials arrived.

He was able to see the entire ceremony, he said.

"I was close enough I could almost see the pen they were using."

Not lost on Nipps was the significance of the moment to him personally.

"I knew if they didn't (surrender) I was going to be one of the first ones to go in."

Historians have estimated that more than 1 million American lives would've been lost had an invasion of Japan been undertaken.

After finishing his overseas service, Nipps, who reached the rank of sergeant, shipped back to the states, arriving on Jan. 31, 1946.

"Did it ever feel good," he said of coming home to Broken Arrow.

He and Melza married, and raised three children together, while he worked at various jobs, including many years in construction, hanging drywall and wiring houses.

At the time of Melza's death in 2003, the couple had been married 57 years.

After the surrender, Nipps stayed several months in Japan as part of the occupying forces.

He said while there he could have visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where the atomic bombs had been dropped.

"A lot of guys did. But I chose not to," he said, adding that his reason kind of sums up his feelings in general about the war.

"I'm kind of a soft-hearted guy. And I'd already seen all I wanted to."