

# Journey home



Jim (left) and Earl Miller, of Joplin, are all smiles Monday as they talk about their uncle, Norman Miller, who was killed in action more than 70 years ago in New Guinea during World War II. The U.S. Army has remains for which it does not have identification, and the brothers say DNA tests might soon suggest otherwise.

GLOBE | ROGER NOMER



This photograph of Norman Miller was taken during his service in World War II.

COURTESY | MILLER FAMILY

## Relatives of missing WWII soldier hope his remains finally found

BY WALLY KENNEDY  
wkennedy@joplinglobe.com

An unusual name could lead to the identification of the remains of a World War II soldier, Norman Lloyd Miller, who was killed in action more than 70 years ago in New Guinea.

Earl Miller and Jim Miller, nephews of the soldier, and other members of the Miller family in the Joplin area learned of the development a couple of days before Thanksgiving. That's when their

brother, Elzy Miller, of Tahlequah, Okla., was contacted by a federally funded search firm that was looking

**'We hope it turns out to be him so he can finally be put to rest.'**

Earl Miller, nephew of Norman Miller

## The JPAC wait

**THE MILLER FAMILY** could wait years before it knows the results of the DNA testing. An internal report on the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, or JPAC, obtained by The Associated Press in July, said that JPAC is "acutely dysfunctional."

**THE REPORT ACCUSED JPAC** of maintaining inadequate databases of missing personnel, using unreliable maps, wasting money on unnecessary travel, and failing to meet targets set by Congress, which launched investigations into JPAC after the report was released.

**THE REPORT REVEALED** that the average length of time for the JPAC laboratory to identify remains increased from four years in 2005 to 11 years in 2011.

SEE **SOLDIER**, 8A

# SOLDIER

FROM 1A

for surviving members of Norman Miller's family.

"What a Thanksgiving this has been for our family," said Earl Miller, of Joplin. "We hope it turns out to be him so he can finally be put to rest."

When Norman Miller enlisted in the Army, he listed his father, Elzie Miller, of Lake City, Mich., as next of kin. The Miller family had always presumed that the soldier, age 25 at the time of his death, had been killed in action in 1942 in New Guinea. Some in the family speculated that he could have been a victim of cannibalism by one of the Stone Age tribes that inhabited the island's tropical rain forests.

Elzie Miller was notified of his son's death. The Army said Norman Miller was "presumed dead or missing in action." Official records show

the last contact the Army had with the family was in 1947.

## TURNING POINT

The turning point in the search for surviving members of Norman Miller's family can be traced to 2007 and the death of Garnett Greninger, of Joplin. Greninger had married one of Norman Miller's brothers, Eugene. She had named one of her sons, Elzy, after his grandfather, Elzie. Michael Strauss, a research genealogist with SNA International in Virginia Beach, Va., recently came across her obituary in The Joplin Globe, and the name Elzy Miller triggered a question in his mind.

"Norman Miller was an unmarried soldier who enlisted in 1942," Strauss said. "He was a single man with no children. He listed his parents as nearest next of kin. That's all we had to go on. But could this family in Joplin be linked to his father, Elzie Miller, of Lake City, Mich.?"



**Norman Miller was 25 when he was killed in action in 1942 in New Guinea.**

COURTESY | MILLER FAMILY

"A surname of Miller — well, it's like a surname of Smith, it's a common surname. But it was the odd first

name that provided the connection."

After reading the obituary, Strauss contacted Elzy Miller in Tahlequah, Okla., and would learn in that first call that Miller had a couple of cousins living in Michigan.

The Department of the Army uses the services of SNA International to conduct genealogy research in an effort to identify the primary next of kin and closest DNA living relatives for soldiers who remain "unaccounted for" from World War II, and the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Now that contact with the family has been re-established, male and female members of the family, including some in Michigan, will be asked to give DNA samples — both Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA — to determine whether the Army has the remains of Norman Miller in its possession.

"Our role in this program is to be the initial conduit be-

tween the Army and the families," Strauss said. "In essence we are the researchers hired to locate family members so that, once identified and located, the Army can reach out to them."

Strauss said there are thousands of cases to be researched.

## WAIT AND SEE

There are, in fact, 83,000 cases to be researched, according to Cherril Lawless, with the Army Past Conflict Repatriations Branch.

How many cases are resolved annually?

"That happens about 85 times a year," Lawless said. Lawless said representatives of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, or JPAC, are in Papua, New Guinea. Teams also are working in Vietnam, Laos and Corsica.

"They have been there several weeks now doing recoveries in Papua," she said. "They don't know who they are re-

covering. They look at who was lost in that area. When the remains come back, the DNA from those who were lost in that area will be compared to the DNA of the families."

Strauss said: "The Army will have the remains, and they could have Norman Miller's, but they don't have a clue about who they are.

That's why they need DNA samples from the family, including the oldest living male and three from the mother's side, to determine if the Army has the remains."

In the meantime, Jim Miller, of Joplin, keeps a photo of his missing uncle, Norman Miller, with a group of family photos that pay tribute to veterans in the family.

"I was amazed that after all of these years they are still looking, and that we could be hearing that they have the remains of our uncle," he said. "But, it's kind of regretful that none of his brothers and sisters are alive to realize this has taken place."