

HOMECOMING

Duty - Honor - Country

[a personal perspective]



If we are fortunate enough during our lifetime, into our lives come the least anticipated experiences which enrich our lives to a far greater extent than any amount of monetary fortune can bring with it. In this regard, I found myself just that fortunate when personally able to play a small part, along with serendipity, the internet, the BentProp Project, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery (and many others to numerous to mention) in a long-awaited “homecoming” for one of our local World War II heroes.

Radioman Arthur Carl Miller’s homecoming was an enriching experience for many and for me, extremely so. For his son born three months before his father was shot down, his nieces and nephews and living extended family, it meant a great deal more. Finally, they were to be able to fit the puzzle pieces together, realize a form of closure and to pay final respects to a family member they had only known through the shroud of long faded pictures and the memories of others. However, all these things were all deeply ingrained in their earlier years and thus in their lives, hearts, souls and minds.



Arthur was born October 16, 1921. A native of Poughkeepsie, he left high school at the age of 17 in his junior year to enlist in the Navy. During World War II he served in the American Defense Area as well as the Atlantic, European and Asiatic-Pacific Theaters as a rear gunner and as a radioman on a Navy Avenger Torpedo Bomber. On September 13, 1944, the Navy Avenger on which he served took off from the USS Enterprise and was shot down over Peleliu in the Palau Islands.

The Monday, October 16, 1944 *Poughkeepsie New Yorker* reported Arthur as missing and the death of his mother, Mrs. Julia Miller of Fairview on October 15, 1944. One year and one day later after his Avenger was shot down, September 14, 1945, Arthur was declared dead but no remains were returned home to the family in order for final respects to be paid and military rites performed.

Jumping Ahead 60 Years

Jumping ahead 60 years, enter Mary Miller (Mrs. William H.) of Windsor, NY. On May 9, 2005, this writer received an e-mail from Mary:

“Hi, I received a call today from Calif. looking for next of kin of Arthur S Miller who was shot down during WW2. They just found his remains and want to find the next of kin. Since my husband is William H. Miller ,they called here. Arthur’s mother lived on Fairview Ave in Poughkeepsie, N.Y so the lady from Calif. said. I put her name in the search and came up with your page. Are you near there? Just a shot in the dark. I understand she is deceased but there might be a family tree in your historical records. Sincerely, Mary Miller”

Serendipity

Little did Mary know that I actually lived in Fairview and that I knew not even an inkling of Arthur’s Family. However, being a local historian with a keen interest in World War II having had two maternal Uncles who also served, I began my search for Arthur Miller’s next of kin. Eventually this would lead to my involvement with the BentProp Project as well as Arthur C. Miller’s family and his “homecoming” 4 ½ years later. If there was a chance that even just one hero could finally have a “homecoming”, I made it my mission to do whatever I could to lend any assistance needed.

Upon receiving Mary’s e-mail, I immediately called my local fellow researcher Judy Wolf. On May 10, 2005, we set off together to Adriance Memorial Library to review Poughkeepsie Newspaper microfilms for the period subsequent to September 13, 1944. Our first find was the October 16 article reporting “*Radioman Miller Missing*” . From there we consulted the library’s obituary indices for those of the Miller name in hopes of tracking down Arthur’s next of kin. We continued our microfilm search and found several obituaries for Radioman Miller’s mother, siblings and extended family. Our hearts sunk when we found his mother’s obituary published the same day as the article reporting her son missing. Julia Miller’s obituary did reveal that her “Burial would be in the Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery”. Alas, knowing the excellent records the cemetery office keeps, I knew where I would be the next day. Intuition told me there would surely be clues in their office records to any living next of kin for Radioman Miller.

A visit to the Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery Office on May 11, 2005 proved my intuition had “hit the nail on the head”. Noted on the office records was local contact information for a niece of Radioman Miller whose parents were interred in the same plot with Radioman Miller’s mother. Her father had been a brother to our hero. This was easily confirmed by the Miller family obituaries Judy and I had researched at the library.

Armed with this information, on May 11, 2005 I was able to make contact via telephone with the person who contacted Mary Miller just two days previous who, at that point, I found out was Diane Steele, genealogist for the BentProp Project. Judy and I have been involved with BentProp ever since in regard to this case as well as others.

BentProp searches the waters and jungles of the western Pacific, in what they hope are intelligent ways, for clues that may lead to the location & identification of wreck sites & remains of men who gave their lives in defense of America. They work closely with The Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) whose motto is "Until They Are Home". JPAC's mission is to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all Americans missing as a result of our nation's previous conflicts.

Jump Ahead to 2009

With the next of kin information provided to them BentProp and JPAC worked closely together in efforts which resulted in Arthur Carl Miller's "homecoming" and final rites at Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery on November 7, 2009. Although the homecoming route was at times circuitous, these efforts, which included collection of a mitochondrial DNA sample from a grandniece of Radioman Miller used to positively identify his remains, the route came to a very meaningful destination.

November 7, 2009 was a gorgeous blue-skied fall day. As the motorcade led by local law enforcement and members of the Patriot Guard Riders and Rolling Thunder entered Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery, it was met by numerous flags waving including several American flags as well as those for the several branches of the service and the POW/MIA flag lining the entrance and around the sundial located in the main drive. At the gravesite, as those of us in the motorcade disembarked from our vehicles, we were met by a naval honor guard which performed the military rites,. With additional flags waving, alongside family members and with members of various other organizations also standing at attention as the Navy honor guard performed military rites, I was filled with goose bumps. These are the life experiences that money can't buy. Sixty-five years later, Radioman Arthur Carl Miller, was home to final rest alongside his mother. A son, who never knew his father, and his immediate and extended family were able to pay final respects. Radioman Arthur C. Miller received his final rites and was home at last.

"Until They are Home" because "it's never too late"

On Memorial Day 2010, the military marker for Arthur Carl Miller Miller, ARM1 US Navy, World War II, is in place. May he long be remembered. Never forgotten.



For more information on the BentProp Project, the work they do and further details on this homecoming as well as others, visit BentProp Project website at <http://www.bentprop.org/>

For more information on the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and their mission visit the JPAC website at <http://www.jpac.pacom.mil/>

Visit this website <http://www.lastflighthome.org/> to view a trailer of a documentary film or purchase your own copy of "Last Flight Home" by Jennifer Powers and Daniel T. O'Brien - BentProp Project team members. This documentary gives further insight into the work of the BentProp Project & Radioman Arthur C. Miller's homecoming.

Prepared for Friends of Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery
by Virginia A. Buechele, September 26, 2010