

Joseph Elmer (Smoke) Norris, Sr.

Posted by [Alan Van Wormer](#) On 03/26/2019

Joseph Elmer Norris Sr., 98 of Chaptico, died March 11, 2019 at the St. Mary's Nursing Center, Leonardtown.

Elmer was born July 23, 1920 in Leonardtown, Maryland to Herbert Eugene and Lucille Norris, the fourth of 15 children, two of whom died very young.

He was predeceased by his loving wife of 53 years, Mary Ora Hill Norris, who died May 15, 2000; brothers James, Andrew, Ed, Ernest, Gene, Bob and Benny Norris; sisters Mary Reddehase, Frances Redmond Woodburn, Virginia Boggs and Alice Haley. He is survived by one sister, Agnes Marie Higgs; his children, Joseph Leo (Mary), Kathy (Alan), King, David (Cathy), Joseph Jr., Agnes and Rose Mary (Mel); 12 grandchildren; 19 great-grandchildren; and two great-great-grandchildren due to be born this year.

Elmer Norris enlisted in the Army "Because he was tired of looking at the back end of a mule." This was in June 1939, before the United States involvement in the Second World War. He took basic training at what is now Fort Dix, New Jersey, where he qualified as Sharp Shooter with a Springfield 1903 model. The army sent him to Camp Pickett, Virginia, to attend the military intelligence school, which "didn't agree with him so much," he admitted, so he transferred to the Combat Engineer School at Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, where he was trained on heavy equipment, bridging and demolitions. He served for three years before the war started, then he was assigned to the 808th Engineer Battalion and sent to Australia in May of 1943, to prepare for the invasion of New Guinea, the longest and hardest sustained battle of World War II. He had a disagreement with one of his NCO's, so he walked down the beach and asked an officer for a transfer and since the officer was short a bulldozer operator, he took him on the spot. The 808th was imbedded with the Australian infantry, and through triple canopy jungle where your clothes rotted off in less than a month, they took hill after hill. As soon as they would take one, "I had to get up on that bulldozer and flatten out the top of the hill, so the air force could fly in and out. And I didn't have no armor except for the blade on the front of that thing." They were under constant and sustained sniper fire, and it was somewhere in this time period he earned a Bronze Star with a V for valor. He wouldn't go into the circumstances, but it was not a medal bestowed lightly in World War II. The campaign for New Guinea came to an end, and Mr. Norris, by now the equivalent of a sergeant in rank, thought they would get some leave, but Mac Arthur "Just loaded us up on more ships and we went to the Philippines, so he could return." This campaign was not as hotly contested, because Japanese troops were low on everything, food, ammo and clean water. The war wound down, and in August 1945, Mr. Norris was sent home, where he was discharged at the Ft. Meade separation center under the general demobilization in September of 1945. He received the Bronze Star, with a V for valor; Asiatic Pacific Service Ribbon; The meritorious Service unit Insignia; the Philippine Liberation medal, and the lapel button issued for not missing one day of service.

After wartime, he returned to St. Mary's County where he struggled as a farmer and mechanic before employment with the Pepsi-Cola Company in La Plata, where he worked for 26 years before retiring in 1983. He loved fishing, hunting and gardening, which he enjoyed well into his 80s. He was a fan of the Washington Senators, the Baltimore Orioles and the Washington Redskins.

Visitation will be Tuesday, March 19 at 10 a.m. with a Mass of Christian Burial at 11 a.m. at Our Lady of the Wayside Catholic Church, 37575 Chaptico Road, Chaptico, with Father Michal Sajnog presiding.

Interment will follow at Charles Memorial Gardens, 26325 Point Lookout Road, Leonardtown.

Pallbearers will be David Norris, Joseph Norris, Mel Longfield, Matthew Hennessey, Joey Thompson and Henry Hill. Honorary pallbearer will be Stephen Alexander Norris.

Contributions may be made to Knights of Columbus P.O. Box 152 Leonardtown, MD 20650 and Our Lady of the Wayside Catholic Church 37575 Chaptico Road Chaptico, MD 20621.

To send flowers to the family of Joseph Elmer "Smoke" Norris, Sr. , please visit our Heartfelt Sympathies Store.

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