

Finally at rest

Soldier buried in Olney Cemetery seven decades after death overseas



ABOVE: Members of the Oregon National Guard Honors Team fold a U.S. flag that covered the coffin of Staff Sgt. Ray Thompson on Wednesday at Olney Cemetery in Pendleton. **TOP:** Verla Tomlinson wipes a tear from her eye during the funeral service for Thompson, her brother. **BELOW:** A photograph of Thompson sits on a stand near the grave.

Crowd pays final respects to man who died in WWII crash in Papua New Guinea

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

Verla Tomlinson finally got a chance to say goodbye to her big brother Wednesday, 70 years after he died in a Papua New Guinea jungle.

The burial at Pendleton's Olney Cemetery was a long time coming. Army Air Corps Staff Sgt. Ray Thompson, 25, and nine other men vanished from the sky in 1944 after setting out on a bombing mission. Searchers could not locate the wreckage, and two years later the men were declared dead.

In 1973, 2002 and 2008, B-24 wreckage and the remains of the 10 airmen were discovered at three different sites and sent to the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command Central Identification Laboratory in Oahu, Hawaii, to be sorted and identified. Blood from two of Ray's cousins helped investigators match DNA and conclusively identify his remains. On Wednesday, about 65 family members



and others joined Verla at a graveside service. Ringing the site were a couple dozen leather-jacketed Patriot Guard Riders who had ridden motorcycles from La Grande. Each biker held an American flag.

Of all those in attendance, only Verla actually had met the man they honored. Memories played in the 85-year-old's head as the haunting melody of "Taps" swept over her.

"It was very emotional," she said, afterward. "When I heard 'Taps,' it was the breaking point."

She pictured her half-brother, a gentle giant who had feet so large her parents had to special order his shoes. During the Great Depression, when the six Thompson children and parents shared a two-bedroom Pendleton home, Ray often refereed arguments and smoothed ruffled feelings.

"Ray was the mediator," she said. "We respected him."

When Ray enlisted in the Army in 1942, he kept up his big brother role by not telling his siblings and parents that his job involved flying. As far as they knew,

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Senate pla

By **ERICA WERNER**
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan group of senators finalizing a landmark immigration bill has agreed to require greatly increased surveillance of the border and apprehensions of people trying to cross it, a person familiar with the proposals said Wednesday. The legislation, to be released within days, would call for surveillance of 100 percent of the U.S. border with Mexico and apprehension of 90 percent of people trying to cross in certain high-risk areas. People living here illegal-