



By Jerry Sowd

Bette Smith Gharing learned the circumstances of her brother Raymond's death more than 60 years after it occurred.

WORLD WAR II: COMING HOME

Memories of brother lost in war surround Oil City woman's life

Raymond Smith was killed in plane crash while on brief respite from war

By JUDITH O. ETZEL
Staff writer

Raymond H. Smith was the type of brother any little girl would delight in having. He was handsome and artistic and social, and he flaunted an "I'll-take-care-of-you-kid" twinkle in his eye.

Even more, Raymond would take his little sister, Bette, four years younger than him, dancing in places her father never would have approved.

"Ray had a three-piece band — he could play the guitar, organ and piano all by ear — and he'd play at different places, mostly taverns. One time he took me to the Willows, a Siverly bar that had peanuts on the floor. Oh my, we had

such fun," said Bette Smith Gharing, now 81, of Oil City.

"I was so close to him and when he died in World War II, it was just devastating," she said.

Gharing said military authorities told her family that Raymond, a 24-year-old Army corporal, was killed in a crash somewhere in the South Pacific on June 14, 1943. No details about his death, other than to acknowledge it was war-related and that he would be buried in Australia, were revealed by the U.S. government.

More than 60 years later, Raymond's sister finally has learned the circumstances surrounding his death.

An Aug. 31 telephone call to her from a retired military man-turned-sleuth revealed her brother was one of 40 World War II soldiers who

perished in a plane crash in Australia while on brief respite from the war front in New Guinea.

The accident, the worst air disaster in Australian history and one of the worst of World War II, had been locked up in classified documents until a group of volunteers, disturbed that American war heroes had been ignored, began search for records, anecdotes and more.

"At first, I was scared to death when this man said he had something to tell me about Raymond. I was sure it was a scam of some sort. And then when he told me they had gathered information about how he died, it was pretty hard to handle. Right away, I could feel the day found out he was killed," said Bette.

Bette, who married to a military man and living in Oregon in 1943, learned of Raymond's death when her brother, Frank, accompanied by a Red Cross representative, knocked on the apartment door. There was to be a memorial service for Raymond back in Oil City.

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Our Family History

Discovering our Ancestors