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Pearl Harbor Veteran Identified and to be Reinterred at Punchbowl

HICKAM AFB, Hawaii -- A funeral will be held March 5, 10:30 a.m., at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, for Apprentice Seaman Thomas Hembree, of the U.S. Navy, who was killed in the attack of Pearl Harbor Dec. 7, 1941.

Hembree was disinterred from the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in January 2001 as an unknown and was recently identified by the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii.

On the morning of Dec. 7, 1941 the seaplane tender USS Curtiss was in Pearl Harbor's Middle Loch across the channel from Ford Island. Shortly before 8 a.m. the ship's crew was called to General Quarters in response to a Japanese bombing attack that was then developing over the anchored U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Approximately an hour into the attack, a crippled Japanese dive-bomber crashed into one of the ship's topside cranes. While the collision caused minimal damage, another Japanese aircraft soon succeeded in placing a bomb on the vessel's superstructure. The resulting explosion damaged the main and second decks and ignited intense fires. Twenty-one USS Curtiss crewmen perished in the attack.

Subsequently, all but two of the dead crewmen were accounted for except Seaman First Class Wilson A. Rice, and Hembree. The identification of Hembree was made by examining the remains using state-of-the-art computers, microscopes and radiographic equipment. The analysis of the skeletal remains derived the biological profile consistent with Hembree's age, race, sex, and stature. The dental remains were also consistent with Hembree's dental records.

The CILHI has the largest staff of forensic anthropologists and dentists in the world and is dedicated to achieving the fullest possible accounting of all service members who are still unaccounted-for from our nation's wars.

For media who have Navy related questions or would like to attend the funeral, please contact LCDR Jane Campbell, Commander Navy Region Hawaii Public Affairs Officer at (808) 473-2888 not later than March 4, 4 p.m.

For media interested in obtaining information about the identification process and the capabilities of the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory please contact Ginger Couden, the CILHI Public Affairs Officer, at (808) 448-8903 ext. 109.