

Chapter X Growing Pains

January 10, 1926 – March 20, 1926

During the second week in January, the Langley and Curly's squadron left with the Battle Fleet for exercises in the Hawaiian Islands and would be gone for six weeks. He hadn't been away that long since his days on the Wadsworth.

The morning came when it was time for him to leave. He had his sea bag all packed and ready to report to the squadron ready room. As he was leaving the apartment he gave Sandy a big hug and a kiss. Then he took his lovely wife into his arms for a long, lingering embrace.

"Now, don't you go chasing after those bare chested native girls," she teased. Then she added. "I'm all the woman you'll ever need. Come back to me and I'll be your hula dancer."

"You know, I only have eyes for you, sweetheart." Curly assured her. "Besides I don't think they do that any more." then he promised, "I'll behave myself."

"I know. You're always the perfect gentleman." Geannie said confidently letting him go. She watched as he left, his sea bag over his shoulder.

Curly turned around and called out, "See you in the funny pages!" He blew her a kiss and walked out the door.

After an hour or so she heard the sound of airplane engines coming from the air station. She stepped outside and watched as Langley's squadrons took to the air. She watched intently and then she saw it; Curly's red scarf blowing in the wind. She waved vigorously as the squadrons formed up overhead. Once they were assembled into formation, she watched as they disappeared in the western sky, out over the ocean.

The fleet sailed west to the tropical waters of Hawaii and dropped anchor in Lahaina Roads, the channel between Maui, and Lanai. There they made preparations for the war games with the Army and Marines. The scenario called for a mock amphibious assault by the Marines on the Kaho'olawe gunnery range.

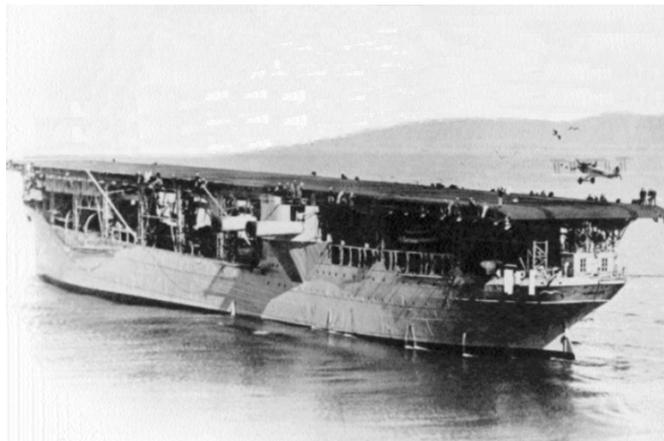
After nearly a week at anchor the Battle Fleet put to sea with the Langley trailing behind. At dawn the next morning the mighty battlewagons opened fire, pouring shell after shell into the gunnery range. One division of fighters flew patrol over battle line while other planes from Langley observed the bombardment.

With no communication with the ships, the observers signaled the accuracy of the gunfire by flying above or below a specified altitude. Flying higher than that altitude meant the shells were going beyond the target. Flying lower meant the shells were falling short. The degree of difference in altitude indicated to the battleships how to adjust their ballistics.

During the bombardment, Army bombers from the Kaanapali Airfield on Maui attacked the

battleships but the fighters drove off the attack, allowing the battleships to continue the bombardment unimpeded.

After the attackers withdrew, the fighters landed aboard the Langley where they remained only briefly. Once again the division was airborne, Curly among them, and took up position over the beach to cover the Marines.



Right on schedule the battleships ceased fire. Four transports loaded with a battalion of Marines had moved into position off shore during the bombardment. As the Marines began

embarking into long diesel powered launches, the Army took up their assigned positions on the beachhead.

As the launches moved toward the shore, the Army opened fire. This was the cue for the fighters to race in, making mock strafing passes at the defenders. The umpires on the ground directed the Army to fall back, confirming the success of the fighter attack.

Curly could see the launches push onto the beachhead as the Marines stormed ashore. While watching the action unfold below, he was surprised when he noticed two Army Air Service MB-3s maneuvering to get into position behind the Navy fighters. Being the left wingman, Curly was the farthest from the intruders. To alert his section leader of the impending danger, Curly pulled up alongside Lieutenant "Shorty" Sharp, motioning towards the approaching aircraft.

Shorty signaled for the section to disperse. He went straight, Freddy went right, and Curly banked left. The Army fliers also split up, one going each way. That should have set Shorty up to come around and engage the Army fliers from abeam; first one and then the other. As Shorty engaged the lead MB-3, the other successfully put Freddy out of action and turned his attention to Curly. He found he had a real hotshot on his tail.

Curly was in trouble and had to find a way out his predicament. Calling on all of his aerobatics experience, he began a series of spectacular maneuvers. The Army MB-3 with its three hundred horsepower engine was faster, and more maneuverable than Curly's VE-7 Bluebird. The only way Curly was able to keep out of the sights of the obviously skilled Army pilot was by quick thinking.

Utilizing sudden banks and jinking up and down, he kept himself out of the sights of his Army counterpart. The two twirled through the sky like a carefully choreographed ballet. After several minutes, Curly got a lucky break when the Army boy slipped up. He sacrificed his altitude advantage in a diving attack, whizzing past Curly. Curly took advantage of the mistake which put himself directly above

and behind the hotshot and he had him in his sights. The umpire observing from a nearby patrol bomber signaled the Army pilot to disengage and return to base. He was out of the game. It was Curly's first confirmed simulated kill. After a similar encounter, Shorty made his escape when his pursuer broke off after his partner was eliminated.

After the aerial battle, Curly wished Geannie could have seen her flyboy in action. With the thought of her, he hollered "Whaaaa Whoooo!"

Turning his attention back to the situation on the beach, Shorty noticed a pocket of marines pinned down the beach. He and Curly made a strafing pass on the soldiers who had them trapped. As he pulled up, Curly looked back to see the umpire raise his red flag indicating that the soldiers were also out of the game. With a second glance he could see the Marines advance on through.

A relief division of fighters took up station over the beachhead, meaning it was time to head back to the ship. Over the next two days he flew more missions over the battle line and the gunnery range until the games were over, with the Marines in control of the of the exercise area.

Having earned a well deserved rest, the Battle Fleet set course for Peal Harbor. Still a hundred miles off shore, the Langley turned into the wind to launch her aircraft. Once they were all aloft and formed up, Fighting Two flew toward Oahu and carried out a mock attack on the Army's Luke Field on Ford Island in the middle of Pearl Harbor before landing. As Curly, still wearing his red scarf, climbed out of the cockpit and hopped to the ground, an Army pilot was waiting for him. He greeted him with a salute, "That was one hell of dogfight!" Then he explained, "I recognized you by your scarf." Allow me to introduce myself. Lieutenant Harvey Morrison, Sixth Pursuit Squadron, at your service."

"I'm Lieutenant Curly Brason, from Fighting Two." Curly responded as he took Harvey's outstretched hand.

"Let me buy you a drink." Harvey invited.

"Sure." Curly responded as the two men walked off the field into a nearby canteen.

"What will you have, Lieutenant?" Harvey asked.

"A Coca-Cola." Curly responded.

"You've got it, pal." Harvey obliged.

For the next half an hour the two men visited about their encounter over the gunnery range. They talked of where they called home and the women in their lives.

Shorty and Freddy came along and broke up their conversation. "There you are, Curly. We've been looking for you." Shorty interrupted. After a round of introductions Curly and his new friend parted company.

But before Curly left, Harvey said, "If we ever get into some real shooting, I'd like to have you as my

wingman.”

“Remember,” Curly reminded him. “I’m the one who shot you down. You can be my wingman! I hope we cross paths again someday.”

“Me too. I’ll see you up there somewhere. So long, pal.”

Curly and his two friends had a whole week of liberty on Oahu. The first thing they did was to check into the Moana Hotel. They spent relaxing hours soaking up the sun on Waikiki Beach wishing their wives were with them. The three of them rented a car and went sightseeing around Honolulu and Oahu. At one point during the week, Curly hooked up again with his new friend Harvey and they spent a day together and the two pilots from different branches of the service got better acquainted. Harvey, a 1st Lieutenant, had been stationed in Hawaii since completing his flight training after moving up from the Calvary two or three years earlier.

On their last night of leave Curly, Freddy, and Shorty attended an authentic Hawaii luau. The next day they returned to the Army airfield. Finding their aircraft serviced and ready, they took off with the rest of squadron and flew out to the Langley. She tagged along behind the battleships as they sailed to Johnston Island for further exercises before setting course for the west coast. As the fleet neared the California coast, the Langley and a plane guard destroyer were detached to proceed to San Diego.

The day came in mid February when the Langley was due back in port. She wouldn’t be in until late afternoon, but the squadrons were due to arrive at the air station earlier. Geannie went about her chores and chasing after Sandy, who was into everything. That afternoon as she was giving piano lessons, she listened intently for the sound of engines above the strains of the piano.

“Stop!” she instructed her student. Dutifully, the child stopped playing. Geannie listened for a split second and confirmed what she thought she had heard. She promptly told the student that that was enough for the day and sent her home.

Geannie grabbed Sandy and put her in her stroller and left the apartment. As they crossed the bridge to the air station they were joined by Susan, Wilma, and several other women and children. By the time they were all assembled in the public area along the runway, the flight had passed overhead. When Geannie saw Curly’s red scarf, her heart leaped.

A few moments later, there was steady string of planes coming up the runway and touching down. Geannie’s sharp eyes again caught sight of Curly’s red scarf as he made his approach. She watched intently as he too touched down and watched as he taxied up to the hangar next to the assembled crowd of spectators.

Once his propeller wound down to a stop, he emerged from the cockpit. Lugging his sea bag out of

the airplane, he slung it over his shoulder and hopped to the ground. He made his way through the crowds of airmen and their families and made a beeline for Geannie and Sandy. Geannie abandoned the stroller and flew into Curly's arms who swept her off her feet.

As he swung her around, she shouted, "Flyboy!"

After one complete revolution, he stood her back on her feet and swooped down and scooped Sandy out of her stroller. Holding Sandy in one arm, he took Geannie into the other.

"Sandy has a surprise for you." Geannie beamed.

"A surprise. For me?" Curly asked.

Geannie stepped away and said, "Set her down."

Now a couple of steps away, Geannie got down on her haunches. "Come to Mommy. Come to Mommy, sweetheart." she coached.

After a moment of grinning, Sandy walked to Geannie.

"Good girl!" she cooed as she picked Sandy up in her arms.

"What do you think of that, Lieutenant?" She asked as she came closer.

"Pretty impressive." Curly declared. "When did she start doing that?"

"Oh, for about three weeks ago." Geannie said. Then she added, "That's not all she can do. Watch this."

Geannie said to Sandy, "Who's that?" pointing at Curly. "Who's that, Sandy?"

Without hesitation Sandy said, "Da da!"

"Well, I'll be." Curly mused. "My baby girl went and grew up on me while I was away."

"There's somethin else." Geannie added.

"My, aren't we full of surprises." Curly said in amazement. "What else can she do?"

"It's what she doesn't do anymore," Geannie said. "She's weaned! A few days ago she just started pushing away when I went to nurse her."

Sandy repeated, "Da da!" as she clapped her hands. Then she reached out her arms toward her daddy.

Curly took her from Geannie back into his own arms. "I sure missed you girls." he said. He gave Sandy a kiss on the cheek and Geannie a kiss on the lips. "Let's go home."

Still holding Sandy in one arm he picked up his sea bag and slung it over his shoulder. Walking side by side, Geannie pushed the empty stroller with one hand and clutched Curly's arm with the other. As they crossed the bridge, the last of the planes touched down. Geannie was telling him what other words Sandy had mastered and of what she had been doing while he was away as they returned to their apartment.

Once inside, Curly set Sandy and his sea bag on the floor. "Gosh, it's good to be home." he

exclaimed as he took Geannie into his arms once more. "I can't wait to tell you all about Hawaii."

"I'll bet you're all tuckered out, aren't you. You can tell me all about it over supper. Now Lieutenant, sit down and rest a spell while I whip somethin up."

"That sounds like a good idea." Curly agreed.

The next thing he knew, Geannie was waking him up. "Supper is ready," she said gently as she shook his shoulder.

"I was more tired than I thought," he admitted. "I'm hungry too." he added.

With everything on the table, he helped Geannie with her chair and slid it up to the table. He then took his place. Reaching over Sandy, who was in her highchair between them, Curly took Geannie's hand and said Grace.

During supper, he told Geannie all about Hawaii. He told her about the exercise and all about the hotshot Army pilot that he shot down and how they met up later and became friends. She listened with particular interest as he told her about the beach at Waikiki, the clear blue sky, the afternoon rain showers, the Moana Hotel where he, Shorty, and Freddy stayed during their week long liberty. She longed to one day see it for herself.

After supper, Curly helped clear away and do the dishes. As he dried the dishes, he listened as she talked more about her time while he was away. She told him of the letters from their families and all of the news from home.

By then Sandy was ready for her bath and to be put to bed. Curly sat in on that evening ritual as they visited some more.

"Curly, I've been doin a lot of thinkin about somethin while you were gone."

"What's that sweetheart?"

Well, Sandy is growin up so fast. She's hardly a baby anymore. I want to start workin on havin another one. The way I figure it, by the time I got pregnant and carried it for nine months, Sandy would be at least two, if not more. What do you think?"

"Wow! You have been thinking haven't you? Are you sure?"

"Uh huh."

"Well I don't see why not." Curly agreed. "Nothing could make me happier."

After she was asleep in her crib, Curly and Geannie retired to the front room where they talked into the evening.

"I have to tell you about the authentic Hawaiian luau that Shorty, Freddy, and I went to." Curly continued. "It was about the best food I have ever eaten. We had pork that had been slow roasted in a pit for two days." he explained. "Oh, and the fish! Some of it had names I had never heard of, like mahi mahi."

They had all kinds of fresh fruit, too.”

Geannie listened with great interest as she sat with her legs across his lap. “It sounds like paradise. I would die to go there someday.”

Curly continued, “Then after dinner they put on a show. First there were three guys who came out with torches and danced around with them. It was unbelievable! When they were done, they lit up some torches for the rest of the show. Then some hula dancers came out...”

“Ohhh.” Geannie said slowly. “I’ve got to hear this.”

“At first I wasn’t sure what I was seeing,” Curly admitted. “As my eyes adjusted to the dim light of the torches I could see better. You were right Geannie.”

“About what?” she quizzed.

“The bare chested native girls.” He replied. “They came out in grass skirts and leis. It wasn’t until they started dancing that I realized that that was all! When they said it as an authentic luau, they weren’t kidding.”

“So, what did you do, Lieutenant?” she asked.

“What else? I watched the show.” Curly confessed. “They could sway and move in ways I didn’t know was possible. Then I remembered that you said you’d be my hula girl. So I brought you something.”

She moved her legs from off his lap so he could get up. He went into the other room and returned with a grass skirt, an artificial lei, and a phonograph record of Hawaiian music.

“Oh Curly,” she snickered. “You didn’t.” She took them from him and disappeared into the bedroom for a minute where she changed out of her clothes. Wearing only the grass skirt and lei, she stepped back into the front room and asked, “How do I look, Flyboy?”

“More amazing than any of them could ever be.”

“There is only one thing they have that I don’t.” she sighed.

“I can’t imagine what that might be?” Curly shrugged.

“Bronze skin.” she said. “Look at me. After a year in Florida and a year in California I am still pasty white.”

“I have always loved your ivory skin.” Curly said.

Geannie took the record and put it on the Electrola. As the music began to play she started dancing. “I don’t know the first thing about hula dancing.” she laughed. “I’ll just make it up as I go.”

Curly pulled up a kitchen chair to get a front row seat as Geannie swayed around the room. When the tempo of the drum beat picked up, she began shaking her shoulders. When the music stopped, she planted herself on his lap.

“Wow, that was amazing!” Curly gasped. “Where did you learn to do that?” Curly asked.

“Inside the breast of this proper Christian lady,” she said as she placed his hand over her heart, “beats a heart burning with passion and desire and that heart beats only for you. I love you so much! I really missed you while you were away.”

“I love you, too. That was a long six weeks to be away from you.” Curly replied.

“I'd say we have some lost time to make up for. Why don't we see what we can do about that baby.”

In the months since Curly joined Fighting Two, he and his section partners, Shorty and Freddy had grown extremely close. Flying together in close formation and being able to maneuver as one without verbal communication, the three men came to know each other very well. They had to know what the others were thinking and anticipate each others moves. They formed a bond and a trust that their very lives depend on.

The one sure thing in life is change and all good things come to an end. As difficult as it is to face, something just as good, if not better, will take its place. Growth and progress can't happen without change.

One evening when Curly came home, Geannie could tell immediately that something had him down in the dumps when he walked through the door.

“Hey, Curly,” she said with concern. “What's the matter?”

“Shorty's been grounded,” Curly responded glumly.

“For heaven's sakes. Why!” Geannie asked with shock.

“He failed an eye exam. They pulled his flight qualifications.” Curly explained.

“That's too bad! How's he takin it?” Geannie asked.

“Better than Freddy and me. We had a good thing going.”

“So what is he going to do?” Geannie wanted to know.

“The only thing he can do now. Fly a desk.” Curly answered. “He is going to be the squadron operations officer.”

“Well then, he's not goin away. He'll still be around.” Geannie said attempting to shed a positive light on things. “So, what will they have him doin?”

“Well, he will be responsible for scheduling pilots and planes and keep tabs on training and pilot qualifications. The chief mechanic will report to him. Oh and he will have a yeoman under him too. Before, all of that was divided among the section leaders. The skipper decided to consolidate all of those functions into one position. He didn't want to loose Shorty's expertise.”

“Everything you have said sounds like a good thing,” Geannie assured him.

“Oh and he is going up to Lieutenant Commander.”

“Well good for him!” Geannie cheered. “What a cushy job. This all sounds like a mighty good thing.”

So tell me Lieutenant,” Geannie asked bluntly, “Are you fellin bad for Shorty or yourself because your world is changin?”

Before Curly could answer she continued, “So, who's going to be the section leader?”

“Freddy.”

“Well then, thats another good thing, isn't it?” Geannie said.

“Yeah. You're right” Curly admitted. His countenance was somewhat brighter. “He's being promoted to Lieutenant.”

“See,” Geannie went on. “Thats another good thing. What's in it for you, Curly?”

“I'm going to right wingman.”

Clapping and bouncing on the balls of her feet, Geannie gave Curly a big hug. “Oh Curly, what a break. You see, you get to grow too.” If things stayed the same, you'd never get ahead, now would you. You should be jazzed. Someday you'll be the section leader or even the squadron commander.”

“Now I'm feeling a lot better. I'd feel even better if you squeezed me tighter.”

“So, who's the new left wingman?” Geannie asked.

“Ensign Thomas Katmuth, he goes by Tomcat.” Curly answered. “He's been in the squadron since he graduated from flight school. He's always been on the extra board because there hasn't been a section slot for him.”

“You see,” Geannie said letting go of Curly. “that was you a year ago. Do you recollect how Shorty and Freddy took you in. Well, now you and Freddy can take him in and bring him along.” Then she added, “And you and Shorty can still be friends. Everybody wins!”

Curly took took a deep breath, “Thanks Geannie, I wasn't seeing it like that. I guess I was just comfortable with the way things were and didn't want them to change.” Then he added, “Don't you ever change sweetheart.”

“Oh but I am changing. I'm getting better everyday and its because I have you.” Geannie went on, “That's how it works, we lift each other up. Tomorrow it might be your turn to lift me up.”

The next morning, Freddy, Curly, and Tomcat took their seats in the briefing room. Shorty, in his new capacity announced the flight assignments for the day. They were scheduled to take off early in the afternoon. The three men spent the morning discussing the intricate workings of the section. Not only was Tomcat flying in a new slot, but so were Freddy and Curly. Curly now flew 2-F-8 as 2-F-9 went to Tomcat. They worked out the logistics of the their positions in the formation. Tomcat was briefed on all of the communication protocols which consisted mostly of hand signals from the section leader.

After lunch, their section took to the air. Since Freddy and Curly were each flying in a new slot and

Tomcat was new to the section. They began by flying in a loose formation, keeping their distance. After a about a week or ten days they had tightened up their formation and were flying in standard section formation.

Freddy and Curly were also getting to know Tomcat as well. Tom was eager to fit in and was easy to get along with. Freddy decided it was time for social gathering for the section and hosted a barbecue at his place. He had initially invited Shorty, but he graciously declined. He thought it was better that they bond with Tomcat. He felt his attendance would detract from that.

When Tomcat showed up alone, Geannie and Susan took it upon themselves to determine why. They bombarded him questions like, "Are you married?" and "Do you have a girlfriend?" To both of which he answered, "No". He declared himself to be a confirmed bachelor.

Geannie and Susan could tell by his polite manners and the way he interacted with their children that he would make a wonderful husband and father, so they set about to change his marital status. Susan knew a girl that she thought would be perfect for him and she convinced him to consent to a blind date. It was a big flop.

Geannie took a different approach. She invited Tomcat to dinner with them. She was upfront with him and told him she had also invited someone that she wanted him to meet. She told him that she was a young widow with no children. Her husband had been a fireman and died in the line of duty only months after they were married. It had now been about two years.

The evening of the dinner date Tomcat showed up a bit early. He and Curly were visiting in the front front room while Geannie put the finishing touches on dinner. There was a knock at the door and Geannie rushed to answer it before the two men could get up.

She invited her guest to come in and introduced Curly and Ensign Katmuth to her friend, Ramona North. Geannie had become acquainted with Ramona through her volunteer work with the Red Cross. Romona was actually Ensign Ramona North, a Navy nurse stationed at the U.S. Naval Hospital across the bay in San Diego. Geannie was sure she saw a spark generated between Tomcat and Ramona the moment she introduced them.

She was a petite woman of five feet two inches and had a rather straight figure. She was blond and wore her hair short and wavy. The style seemed to go well with her pixie face. Although Geannie didn't care for the flapper fashion look, she thought it looked good on Ramona, given her figure.

As previously arranged, Curly assisted Geannie in the kitchen while leaving their guests alone in the front room. Even though everything was ready, Geannie delayed her return to the front room to invite them to dinner.

She directed that Tomcat and Ramona sit across from each other while she and Curly sat at either

end. Sandy had already been fed and was contently playing on the floor near Geannie.

Also as previously arranged, Geannie guided the conversation based on what she knew about her guests. Curly had been instructed to avoid airplane talk. The conversation actually went quite well and flowed naturally.

Geannie had prepared a roast chicken with backed potatoes. For desert they had the cherry pie that Ramona had brought. When Ramona asked if she could bring anything, Geannie suggested a desert. Knowing that the way to man's heart was through his stomach, Geannie made sure that Tom knew where the pie came from. The pie was so good that it nearly won Curly's heart. He joked, "If I wasn't already happily married and madly in love with Geannie, would you marry me?"

After dinner, they sat around the table visiting. Seeing that Ramona and Tom where connecting very well with each other, she suggested that they retire to the front room while Geannie and Curly cleared away.

When they rejoined their guests, Tom and Ramona announced that they were going out for coffee and politely excused themselves. Not trying to rush them out the door, Geannie thanked them for coming. Tom and Ramona thanked their hosts and disappeared into the night.

Geannie waited a moment after closing the door before she burst out laughing. She was very pleased indeed with the way the evening went. Curly marveled at the spell his dear wife had just cast on the unsuspecting couple.

The next morning as the pilots of Fighting Two gathered in the ready room for their morning briefing, Tomcat was particularly chipper. He thanked Curly for introducing him to Ramona. Curly asked him if he was going to see her again. That night Geannie was ecstatic to learn that Tom and Ramona had a date for Saturday night.

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The exercises around Hawaii described in this chapter are fictional. However, the Langley did operate with the fleet in Hawaiian waters that year.

The 6th Pursuit Squadron of the 5th Composite Group flew Thomas Morse MB-3s from Luke Field on Ford Island during this time period.

