

## Chapter XVIII

### Saratoga

August 25, 1927 – December 7, 1928

When Marie came out, she hadn't determined when she would return to Roanoke. Her concern was taking care of her daughter and spending time with her grandchildren who lived so far away. The next six weeks passed quickly and it was now the first of October. It didn't take much convincing to get her to stay another month and go home when Curly and Geannie went home for his thirty day leave.

During the first part of October the navy had all of the apartments in the officer's housing complex wired for telephones. It was as much to the Navy's advantage as it was for the families' convenience. It made contacting personnel much easier. Of course the families had all of the benefits of having such a modern convince in their homes. No more having to go to the playground to use the public telephone.

When the line was installed in the Brason home, they had their telephone hooked up. It was one of the new Western Electric Model 102 desk sets with the transmitter and receiver in the handset, unlike the old candle stick telephones. The handset rested in a cradle perched on top of the base on which the rotary dial was mounted. The ringer was inside of the base. All in all it was a very stylish, modern devise. The Brason's telephone number was Coronado 8-7945. (The first two numbers were 26 represented by the letters C and O.)



Another advancement in the lifestyle of Americans also occurred that month. One Geannie particularly found exciting. The brand new Coronado Theater opened in October and the first picture to play was "The Jazz Singer". Geannie, a real fan of motion pictures, had waited with great anticipation for the evening. Grandma Austin watched both Sandy and Austin so she and Curly could attend. The thing that was so special about this motion picture was that it was the first 'talkie' featuring synchronized dialogue sequences! No longer did the audience have to read the narration and dialog on the screen. The dialog and sound effects were included on Vitaphone phonograph records. My isn't technology and innovation marvelous?

The Jazz Singer was a musical about young Jakie Rabinowitz who defied the traditions of his devout Jewish family by singing popular tunes in a beer hall. Punished by his father, a cantor, Jakie ran away from home. Calling himself Jack Robin, he has become a talented jazz singer and built for himself a career as an entertainer. Some years later his professional ambitions ultimately came into conflict with the demands of his home and heritage.

Again, this picture appealed more to Geannie than it did Curly, although he was very impressed with the new fangled wizardry. Like most men, he preferred action in a picture. He would rather have suspense and a good chase scene anytime.

On Halloween they celebrated Sandy's third birthday a day early. She was at the age when she could really get into the celebration. After opening presents, birthday cake, and a round of happy birthday her Daddy took her trick-or-treating for the first time. She went dressed up as frog, a costume her Grandma had made for her.

The next day, they began the four day train ride to Roanoke. When they stepped off the train there was a definite bite in the air, unlike the unseasonably warm temperatures the year before. Their vacation this year was more laid back without having to go places and do things. It was spent relaxing and just being home with both of their families.

There was one special event that made the visit home special. They had waited until they came home to have Austin baptized. Culry's brother, Pastor Walt, performed the ritual.

Their vacation ended with two Thanksgiving dinners. One on Thanksgiving with the Austins and another the following day with the Brasons. Then it was time to say good-bye and get back on the train. It was particularly hard for Marie to bid them farewell after spending four wonderful months with her daughter and grandchildren.

They returned to Coronado and Curly had one full day before he had to report for duty. Life settled back into their normal routine. After taking four months off, Geannie resumed her piano lessons and eased back into her other activities. She had healed up nicely and was getting back in shape; well on her way to being fit, trim, and as strong as ever.

When Curly reported to the ready room for the morning briefing on his first day back, he learned that his squadron had been assigned to the brand new USS Saratoga which had been commissioned only two weeks earlier. The training routine stepped up in preparation for reporting aboard in the spring.

Curly and Geannie celebrated their birthavesay. As usual Curly went all out. He presented her with a brand new Allen Electric Washing Machine. No longer did she have to pump the handle on her old manual machine. It made her work much easier. Now she could put in a load of wash and go off and leave it, giving her more time with the children and the other things she enjoyed doing with her time. When a load of laundry was finished, she still had to run it through ringer before hanging it up to dry.

This new machine featured a full quarter horsepower motor and an all aluminum cylinder with no wear and tear on clothes, and it could be rolled out of the way when not in use. He had to save up his mad money for quite sometime to come up with the seventy nine dollars that the machine cost him.

This was their seventh anniversary and their twenty ninth birthdays. That evening they went out on a double date with Tom and Ramona. Their usual baby sitter watched Sandy and Austin while the two couples went out for dinner and to a picture show. This time Curly got to pick. They went to see "Open Range", a silent western based on a Zane Grey novel.

The story was about an itinerant cowboy named Tex Smith who was falsely accused of rustling. For the sake of his sweetheart, the hero took it upon himself to track down the real culprits, an outlaw gang headed by a half-breed Indian. The odyssey took Tex to the Indian encampment where the outlaw was hiding, leading to a spectacular battle between cowboys and Indians. The story was resolved when Tex stampeded the stolen cattle, dispersing the Indians and saving the settlers from destruction. The picture ended with Tex rescuing his sweetheart and her family from their blazing farmhouse.

Christmas was particularly enjoyable as Sandy was enthralled with all of the magic that went with the season. Geannie began a new Christmas tradition. Now that she had a telephone, she called home to talk to her family.

In January 1928, the motion picture company was back in town. They had rented the Coronado Theater for the premier showings of "Wounded Dragon" one Saturday afternoon. Curly, Geannie, Sandy, and Austin were seated in the center of the fifth row and had great view.

The picture started out kind of slow with diplomatic attempts to curb the spread of the dragon's grip on the far east and the islands of the Pacific. The United States ambassador negotiated for a peaceful resolution to the conflict before American interests in the region were threatened.

The Emperor pretended to make peaceful overtures, all the time planning to eliminate the American outpost on Bombora that stood in his way of conquering the region. It was pretty boring. After suffering through the first part of the picture, the audience finally got to the part they came to see.

From out over the ocean, a hoard of dark airplanes appeared on the screen as they sped in for their attack. The scene changed to show the American pilots in their ready room being briefed by the squadron commander, who happened to have a dark scarf around his neck. In between scenes the narration showed on the screen.

A cheer went up from all of the Fighting Six B pilots as they raced across the screen to man their planes. In the next scene the enemy loomed closer as the Americans were taking off.

The scene switched to a view of North Island from the enemy aircraft as the American fighters charged in. During the ensuing dogfights, there were a couple of shots of Curly in 6-F-8 with his scarf blowing in the wind.

The scene switched back to a view from the bombers crossing the shoreline. The picture zoomed in on a pregnant woman observing from a playground. Then there appeared an oriental looking man seated in a bomber firing a machine gun. A scene from the ground showed the woman collapsing to the ground, dead. A little girl hopped out the swing and knelt next to the dead woman, patting her arm. The narration on the screen read, "Mommy! Mommy!"

The next scenes, both from the air and on the ground showed people running from their homes.

The action switched back to the air battle as Curly and 6-F-8 shot down a bomber. A mass of fire and explosions on the ground erupted onto the screen as the airfield was bombed. The next instant, the enemy was seen moving off.

Again the narration appeared on the screen followed by the torpedo bombers taking off through pillars of smoke. The narration and scenes that followed lead to an attack on the invasion force. Once again, 6-F-8 flashed across the screen as it strafed a troopship. The battle scene went on to victorious defenders returning to base.

The picture went on to depict more diplomatic scenes and narration as the diplomats and military commanders formulated their response. The emperor was still bent on conquest. The failure to neutralize the American outpost at Bombora bought the Americans enough time to draw upon the might of their battleships. In the wind up scenes there was footage of a massive battleship dual. The empire was forced back to their own shores and relinquished their conquered territory.

After the show, Curly, Geannie, and kids went out for something to eat. They were all pleased with their Hollywood debut. But in the end they decided they liked their lives much better as they were without the silver screen. As for the success of the picture after its release, it was pretty much a flop.

Geannie found a new endeavor to involve herself in. During her last pregnancy she took advantage of her time by brushing up on her Spanish. She felt confident enough with it to put it to use. She volunteered one day a week at a Catholic school working with the children of migrant laborers from Mexico as well as Mexican children from the local area. She would take Sandy and Austin with her and they got to play with the children she was working with.

This was in addition to her occasional involvement with the Red Cross, the Methodist Women's Auxiliary, the Navy Wives Organization, and the Republican Women. When spring came she anticipated rejoining the Navy Wives baseball team. They missed her pitching arm the previous season.

During February the North Island Naval Air Station hosted a cultural exchange with six Japanese naval officers. The delegation was led by Captain Isaroko Yamamoto, the naval attaché to the Japanese embassy in Washington, D.C.. Captain Yamamoto was a charming man who spoke excellent English, something he picked up while a student at Harvard.

Captain Yamamoto was very interested in developing naval aviation within the Imperial Japanese Navy and was particularly interested in having a first hand look at progress the U.S. Navy had made in that area, since the Japanese were somewhat behind.

The air station hosted a banquet for their guests which included all of the pilots stationed there and their wives. Curly and Geannie had the opportunity of being introduced to the delegation. Curly chatted

with Captain Yamamoto about his visit to Tokyo a few years earlier. Captain Yamamoto recalled the visit as he was serving as the executive officer aboard the the light cruiser Kitakami which was also anchored in Tokyo Bay at the time.

That night as they were getting ready for bed, Geannie commented to Curly, "The Japanese are such charming people, aren't they."

"Charming, yes." Curly agreed but then added, "I'm leery of their intentions. You do know that all of our war games are planned with them in mind, don't you? There are a lot of the top brass who think one day we will be at war with them."

"That's such a dreadful thought." Geannie replied. "They seem so nice. I have a hard time believing that."

"Who do you think it was that gunned you down in the park last summer?" Curly asked. Then he answered his own question. "In that movie, the Empire of the Dragon was really depicting Japan, you know."

"Well, if we ever do have to go to war with them, I have you to protect me." Geannie said confidently.

"You have my promise on that. I will never let them or any other potential enemy hurt you and the children." Curly promised.

"That's why I sleep secure at night, Lieutenant. I now you'll protect us."



Fighting Six B traded their F6Cs in for the new air cooled Boeing F2B-1 fighter planes. The F2B-1 was the next step in the evolution of the development of dive bombing which the squadron was working to perfect. This aircraft was mounted with two forward firing thirty caliber machine guns and could carry five twenty five pound bombs. It could fly faster and higher than the F6C. Curly

stayed close to home through the winter while the squadron worked up in their new aircraft, only taking day trips out to the Langley to work on carrier landings and take offs.

One day around the middle of March, the squadron flew their new planes from North Island up the coast to San Pedro and landed aboard their new home away from home for the first time. The brand new Saratoga had arrived in San Pedro about three weeks earlier and began preparing for flight operations.

With Fighting Six B on board, the Saratoga stood out of San Pedro just before noon on the 22<sup>nd</sup> accompanied by the destroyers Farquar and Thompson. As the three ships streamed south, the Sara conducted flight operations. Curly and the other pilots found her to be a dream compared to the cramped

Langley. She could easily operate up to ninety aircraft. The massive ship was eight hundred and eighty feet long. She was fast too, capable of thirty three knots, or thirty eight miles and hour; much faster than the battleships were capable of. The Saratoga was part aircraft carrier and part cruiser. She carried eight eight inch guns and was capable of defending herself from surface ships.

That afternoon she dropped anchor offshore from Coronado. Geannie and the kids went down to the beach to see what all of this talk of the Saratoga that she was hearing from Curly was all about. Compared to the Langley, she was impressed with its size. Everything he had been training for was now parked off shore. She knew that once the giant ship was fully operational that Curly would be spending more time away from home and that they would have to make the most of his time at home. But that was still going to be a little while.

The next day the Saratoga put to sea for more flight operations and returned again in the afternoon. The day after that, there was an impressive sight just off shore. During the night, the Saratoga had been joined by over sixty ships of all kinds.

During the morning hours the beach was crowded with onlookers as the fleet got underway. The Saratoga conducted exercises with the fleet that day. She parted company with the fleet, which was bound for exercises in the Hawaiian Islands. That night she again dropped anchor off Coronado. The next day Curly and the rest of the Squadron flew into North Island and the Saratoga sailed up north. She was still far from being fully operational. For the next few days, all Curly could talk about was the Sara. She returned in May, but this time it was Torpedo Two's turn to get acquainted with her.

Curly remained close to home on into the summer. During June the Austins and Brasons made the cross country trip to spend a week with Curly and Geannie. Curly's parents were getting by on a retired pastors pension which didn't allow for a lot of extras. Their generous friend, Senator Austin, invited them to come with he and Marie to go to California. Curly got a weeks leave to coincide with their visit.

They stayed at Hotel del Coronado, hardly the luxuries Emmett and Ellen were accustomed to. As he did the last time they visited, Senator Austin chartered a yacht for a day that took them all on a splendid cruise up the California coast. Curly arranged for the use of an airplane at the San Diego Municipal Airfield and one at a time took them all for short ride. When it was Geannie's turn he had Sandy sit on her lap and strapped them in together. They spent all of an entire day at the beach complete with a bonfire in the evening. An entire afternoon was spent at the Mission Bay Amusement Park. Pastor Brason wanted to attend services at St. Paul's United Methodist Church on Sunday. Naturally, Sandy and Austin had the



devoted affection of their adoring grandparents lavished up on them.

Curly and Geannie had been saving up for a new car for sometime, knowing that theirs was getting old. After all, they had owned it for five years. Geannie talked to her father about the idea and sought his advise. They had saved three hundred dollars but were still a little short. One morning Curly, Geannie and her father went over to San Diego to look at cars. They had been very pleased with their Chevy and wanted another one. They drove into the Chevrolet dealership to have a look.

Curly and particularly Geannie since she would drive it the most, really liked the new 1928 Chevrolet National AB Convertible Sport Cabriolet Sedan. Chevrolet intentionally targeted that particular model towards women drivers. After a test drive, she was very impressed with it. Curly was okay with it too. She told him that if they ever bought an airplane, she would let him pick it out.



The asking price was five hundred fifty five dollars. The salesman offered them two hundred dollars for their 1923 Chevrolet Superior Series B. That is when the fast talking banker/politician stepped in. He told the salesman that as a banker he new that their car had a much higher resale value and was still in high demand. He convinced the salesman to offer them another fifty dollars.

Then he turned his attention to the price of the new car. After wheeling and dealing, he talked the salesman down by fifty dollars because the four cylinder model had just been dropped in favor of the new six cylinder engine. That made the difference only three hundred and five dollars.

The salesman wasn't ready to deal until Geannie pulled out her three hundred dollars in cash. A cash deal certainly peaked his interest. However he wouldn't budge on the five dollar difference. Neither Curly or Geannie had any other money with them. That is when Senator Austin pulled out his bill fold and waved a five dollar bill under the salesman's nose. He didn't hesitate to snatch it out of his hand and replied, "Deal!"

Geannie watched and learned from the master and realized that she could get away with buying things for less than the asking price. That day a haggler was born. If she could con a doctor into discharging her from the hospital, she could certainly handle a salesman!

After taking care of the paperwork, they drove home in their brand new car.

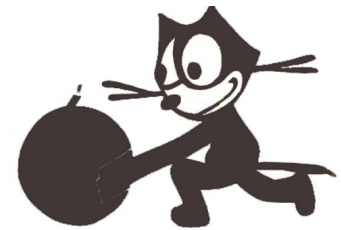
A week goes by so quickly and it was time for their parents to go home. For Emmett and Ellen, it was the trip of a life time.

In July there were a lot of changes in the squadron in preparation for the Saratoga becoming operational. For starters, Fighting Six B became Bombing Two B as they formally became a dive bombing squadron. Many of the pilots were transferred to other squadrons that were formed to not only operate from the Saratoga but also her sister the Lexington which was also nearing completion.

Freddy was transferred to the new Scouting Two B and Curly moved up to section leader. Tomcat became his right wingman and received a promotion to Lieutenant (junior grade). Ensign Mark "Scoop" Herman, who had only been with the squadron for a few months, joined the section as the left wingman.

The shakeup resulted in the formation of the Saratoga Air Group which included Fighting One B, Bombing Two B, Scouting Two B, and Torpedo Two B. Each squadron commander reported to the air officer while aboard ship.

Each squadron was to come up with a mascot. One of Curly's fellow pilots had the assignment to come up with something. Drawing a blank, he couldn't think of anything. One morning his eight year old daughter was reading the comics and suggested, "Why don't you use Felix the Cat, Daddy?" The idea stuck with him. The next day he showed up at the briefing in the ready room with a drawing of Felix the Cat with a bomb. Ever after the squadron was referred to as the Felix Squadron.



Fighting One B's mascot was a top hat and they were known as the High Hats. Scouting Two B adopted a Pointer bird dog and and Torpedo Two B had a red dragon clutching a torpedo.

In the tradition of Freddy and Shorty before him, Curly held a barbecue to welcome Scoop into the section. It was held at the playground in the officers housing complex. Tom brought Romona, but Scoop showed up alone. The story he told was similar to Tom's. Geannie began racking her brain to come up with a girl to introduce him to. No one came to mind immediately. After all, could she be as successful a second time?

Romona had been sporting her engagement ring for a year now, but nothing was ever said about a wedding date. A couple of months earlier, the subject had come up in conversation while Geannie and Ramona were visiting.

"You know, Ramona." Geannie said. "Maybe the reason Tom is stringin you along about a weddin date is because he's thinkin, 'Why should I buy the cow when I'm gettin the milk for free?'"

"I know what you're getting at, Geannie. But its as much me as it is him." Ramona admitted. "A lot of the time its me who leads him on."

"Its none of my business, but all I'm saying is that if you stopped sleepin with him, he'd realize what he was missin out on and get on the ball and marry you."



“Maybe you're right, but I don't know if I can give it up, I really enjoy it. But on the other hand, I really want to get married. It sounds like a small price to pay, maybe I'll give it a try.”

Geannie didn't know whether Ramona took her advice or not, but at the barbecue Tom and Romona announced that they were going to be married on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, one year to the day that they became engaged. Before that, it had been a year and half since Geannie introduced them. They asked Curly and Geannie to be their witnesses at a private ceremony to be performed by the hospital chaplain in the hospital chapel.

On the day of their wedding, which was also Austin's first birthday, the Saratoga and the Lexington showed up offshore. They were there to participate in the dedication of San Diego's new Lindbergh Field, formerly the San Diego Municipal Airfield. To commemorate the opening of the airfield, the Navy put on an air show in which every squadron participated as over one hundred and thirty five airplanes passed in review.

But first, that morning Ramona and Tom were married as planned. The only people there were Ramona's mother who came down from Tacoma and Tom's parents who made the trip from Bakersfield, California. Both the bride and groom wore their dress white uniforms. The only accessory that Ramona had was a bouquet of white roses.

That evening Curly, Geannie, Sandy, and Austin celebrated Austin's birthday. Sandy was much more into it than he was. Austin had grown so much during his first year and began taking on a personality of his own. He was crawling and was into everything. Sandy was usually willing to share with her brother. There were certain toys she was protective of and she would get upset when he interrupted her when she was playing with them.

The following day another areal demonstration put over two hundred planes in the air over San Diego. The Saratoga and Lexington were made available for public public tour while anchored offshore. Geannie got to see the Sara for herself. That evening, the two ships left for their home port in San Pedro. The Sara returned three weeks later for a day of tactical training with her air group. After that she sailed to Bremerton, Washington for further fitting out.

Curly and Geannie decided that since they had recently been visited by their parents, they would forgo a trip to Roanoke in November. They began making plans for a different adventure. Since they were clear across the country, they decided they wanted to see what the west had to offer with their new car. Curly delayed his leave until the following July. With the money they would save by not going home and what they could save before then, they could afford such an adventure. Over the next several months they discussed what they wanted to do and began making plans.

Consequently, Curly wasn't as elaborate with a birthaversay gift for Geannie. But that doesn't mean he wasn't full of surprises. For their thirtieth birthdays and seventh wedding anniversary, which was on a Friday, he did take her out for an early dinner with intentions of taking in a movie afterwards.

As they got ready to go out, he feigned not feeling well but insisted on going through with it. When their babysitter arrived, they left for the evening. All during dinner he acted as if he wasn't feeling well. The more Geannie felt they should go home, the more he resisted. The more he resisted, the more concern she showed. Then at the prescribed time, he relented and they went home. He kept up the act all the way home.

As they walked up the front door, the gentleman he always was, he opened the door for her. As she stepped inside she was nearly startled to death by the shouts of, "Surprise!" in unison. All of a sudden Curly had a miraculous recovery as he too joined the chorus.

Geannie, with one hand over her pounding heart and the other over her mouth, was speechless. There in their front room where their closest friends, Shorty and Wilma, Freddy and Susan, and Tomcat and Ramona. The babysitter had taken Sandy and Austin to her home. Curly would liked to have invited more, but there just wasn't room for them.

The four couples played a round of parlor games before having birthaversary cake and ice cream. Susan made the cake. As the evening wore on, they pushed back the furniture and cranked up the Electrola and danced. It was a good thing the neighbors in the adjoining duplex were away for the evening. When the party finally broke up. Curly and Geannie went to pick up Sandy and Austin and brought them home.

At thirty, Curly and Geannie were in the prime of life. After having two children, Geannie still had her hourglass figure. Curly had the physique demanded by his profession. His hairline had receded somewhat and his hair was beginning to thin on the top of his head. His black curly hair now had just a few white hairs interspersed.

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The Jazz Singer and Open Range were both actual motion pictures as described.

The Allen Electric Washing Machine was as described.

Isaroko Yamamoto was actually the naval attaché to the Japanese embassy in Washington, D.C and made a visit to North Island Naval Air Station in 1928. The banquet is fictional, but he was the executive officer of the light cruiser Kitakami which was also anchored in Tokyo Bay at the time of Curly's fictional world cruise. He went on to commander in chief of the Imperial Japanes Navy and

was responsible for planning the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The USS Saratoga was commissioned on November 16, 1927 after conversion from a battlecruiser

Felix the Cat is a cartoon character created in the silent film era. His black body, white eyes, and giant grin make Felix one of the most recognized cartoon characters in film history. The U.S. Navy's Bombing Squadron Two (VB-2B) adopted a unit insignia consisting of Felix happily carrying a bomb with a burning fuse.

I discovered a historical inaccuracy after the fact. Unfortunately correcting it would undue some key elements of the story line so I left it alone. As a member of the Navy Nurse Corps, Ramona would have been forced to resign when she married Tomcat. It wasn't until January 1945 when the policy was changed to allow nurses to be married.

