

Chapter XIX

Missing and Presumed Dead

December 8, 1928 – January 30, 1929

In December the squadron transitioned from their Boeing F2Bs to the new and improved F3B-1. The new aircraft was slightly larger with improved range and rate of climb. They did come with one non standard feature, however. Bombing Two had the assignment to evaluate the feasibility of radio equipment in single seat aircraft. During the rest of December, the squadron broke in their new mounts.



Since Curly remained close to home all during the rest of the month, they enjoyed the holiday season. At four years old, Sandy was the most excited. The thought of Santa Clause and dreams of new toys had her all wound up like a top. The thing she wanted the most was a baby buggy for her dolly. Austin, on the other hand was still too little at fifteen months old to care one way or the other.

On Christmas morning, Sandy was overjoyed to find a wicker baby buggy under the tree. As for Geannie, Curly gave her a very nice silver brooch. As she had the year before, she placed a long distance telephone call her family back in Virginia.

To welcome in 1929, they got a baby sitter for the kids and went with Ramona and Tom to a New Year's Eve party hosted by the squadron.

During the first two weeks of the new year, the Saratoga and Lexington were off Coronado conducting flight operations. By the middle of the month, the squadron was ready to try out their new planes. The opportunity to do so was Fleet Problem IX. On the 15th, the both ships weighed anchor and put to sea in the company of four destroyers and a light cruiser from San Diego. The air station was a buzz with activity all morning as the squadrons took to the air. Geannie and kids were at the airfield to see Curly off. As he said goodbye, he turned around and waved and called out, "See you in the funny pages!" His trademark farewell. His red scarf made it easy for them to pick him out, that plus the 2-B-10 on the side of his plane.

The squadrons formed up overhead just off shore and set out after their home away from home. Once the the planes were all aboard, the seven ships headed south. On the 23rd, the Saratoga crossed the equator for the first time. It was also the first time of Curly's two wingmen, Tomcat and Scoop. Being a seasoned shellback, Curly had privilege of initiating the two polliwogs.

Steaming up from the south, the Black Force entered the exercise area. The war games got underway with the Saratoga opening fire on a Blue Force destroyer with her eight inch guns. The referees declared that .

the ship was sunk.

Late that evening, Admiral Reeves addressed all of the pilots in a meeting held in the wardroom. He intended to send them up as soon as they were in position.

That occurred at 0500 the next morning while one hundred and forty five miles off the coast of Panama. Most of the air group took off in the pre-dawn darkness, with no moon to light the way. Curly found it to be a challenging idea that impressed him so much that he decided that one day he would like to explore the idea of nighttime operations further.

But right then he didn't have much time to think about it. Forming up in the dark with only the wingtip lights of the other aircraft visible was made much easier with the their newly installed radios. Climbing to fifteen thousand feet, Curly followed the division leader, and his section followed him. As they neared the Panama Canal, the sky was light enough to make out the features of the coastline below.

Achieving complete surprise, Bombing Two swooped down with no opposition and dropped their bean bags and flour sacks. After making their drops, they made a low level strafing run as they headed back out to sea.

Once clear of the target area, the squadron formed up and they headed back to the ship, satisfied with the success of their mission. That is when something went dreadfully wrong. All of a sudden Curly felt a thud and found himself spiraling out of formation. He quickly glanced over his right shoulder and was horrified to see Tomcat's plane upside down with his propeller wedged into the his tail section. The situation was obvious, he had no choice but bail out. Curly quickly removed his scarf so it wouldn't foul his parachute lines. With his harness straps unbuckled, he stood up in the open cockpit. Reaching for the nearest wing strut, he pulled himself out onto the left wing where he could have a clear jump. As the conjoined aircraft hurtled toward the sea below, he let go of the wing strut.

The force of the air rushing past his stricken plane pulled him up and way from the wreckage. As gravity took over he could feel himself in free fall. If it were not for the seriousness of the situation, the sensation would have been thrilling. As he began falling he opened his chute. He felt a jerk as the canopy deployed above him, which slowed his descent. He watched from above as the two planes crashed into the sea.

He looked all around but saw no sign of his friend and wingman. He knew instantly that Tomcat had gone down with his plane. Hopefully he was able to escape before the wreckage sank. From the way he hit the water, that was unlikely. As Curly neared the surface the only thing he could see was a large piece of his upper wing and other small pieces of debris.

As he splashed into the water, he felt something wrong with his right ankle as pain shot up his leg. Once in the water, he unhooked his parachute harness as it was still drifting down behind him. He didn't

want to be hooked to that thing when it filled with water.

He wasn't far from the wing section and figured that would be the best place to be. As he swam toward it, his ankle wouldn't let him kick his foot. He did make to the wing section and after resting a moment as he bobbed in the medium swells, he flipped the wing section over, using its bright chrome yellow upper surface as beacon.

It worked. A moment later, Scoop flew low over the scene. He waved to Curly acknowledging that he saw him. Scoop made another pass and dropped a lighted flare to mark the spot for rescue. Then he pulled up and disappeared in the distance leaving his friend and section leader all alone.

Curly called out for Tomcat but received no response. For the next several hours, Curly clung to the wing as his life jacket kept him afloat.

As Scoop flew away he switched on his radio and called out, "Felix One, this is Felix Twelve, come in. Over."

The receiver crackled to life. Thank God for these new radios. Scoop heard the voice of Lieutenant Commander Davis, the squadron commander, coming through loud and clear. "This is Felix One. What's the situation, Scoop? Over."

Scoop replied, "Commander, there is one man in the water. I couldn't tell which one of them it was. I marked his location with a flare." He then relayed the coordinates. Then he continued, "I'm rejoining the formation. Over"

"Roger, Felix Twelve. I'll relay the information to the ship. Felix One, out."

Once the information had been received aboard the Saratoga, it was relayed on to the Coco Solo Naval Air Station and an amphibious patrol bomber was dispatched to the crash site. All this time the exercises continued. The Saratoga had been taken under fire by a squadron of Blue Force battleships and was declared sunk.

Despite being sunk, the Saratoga launched her remaining aircraft for another strike on the lock facilities of the Panama Canal. As the strike was returning to the ship, the Saratoga was intercepted by planes from the Lexington which was part of the Blue Force. She was sunk for the second time that day. Later in the day, the Saratoga was sunk for the third time by a spread of four torpedoes from a Blue Force submarine.

Meanwhile, the patrol bomber dispatched from Coco Solo spotted the flare and wreckage late in the afternoon. After making several passes over the area and conducting a wider search, the pilot radioed the Saratoga to report no survivors were found. With the grim news in hand, a message was transmitted to the commander of the North Island Naval Air Station. After being relayed several times. It was the middle of the night before he received the news of the loss of Lieutenant Sheffield Brason and Lieutenant (junior grade)

Thomas Katmuth.

Captain Roger Mitchell took it upon himself to personally contact their wives. Enlisting the companionship of the chaplain, Lieutenant Commander Reed Scott, he set out to deliver the bad news.

Gennie was in the middle of a piano lesson when the knock came to the door. She was surprised to see Captain Mitchell and Commander Scott standing on her door step. Her heart sank as Captain Mitchell asked, "Mrs. Brason, may we come in."

Without responding she motioned for them to come in. After swallowing the lump in her throat she finally spoke. "Please sit down, gentleman. Excuse me for one moment please." She dismissed her student, pickled Austin up off the floor and sat down. Sensing something was wrong, Sandy quit playing with her doll and stood quietly by her mother.

The officers waited until she was settled before they said anything more. Then the captain spoke softly and with deep emotion. "Mrs. Brason, it is with my deepest regret that I must inform you that there has been a tragic accident and your husband is missing and presumed dead." He paused and let his words sink into Geannie's consciousness.

As the news registered, her face turned white and she began to tremble.

Captain Mitchell continued. "Yesterday morning about this time, your husband was returning to his ship after successful exercises over the Panama Canal. Eye witness accounts report that the aircraft flown by Lieutenant Katmuth veered over and collided with your husband's. As both planes fell from the sky, only one parachute was observed."

He paused again as he looked into the tear filled eyes of the woman sitting across from him. Geannie did not respond.

"Ensign Herman made two passes over the area and confirmed one survivor in the water. He dropped a flare at the scene and radioed the position. The message was relayed onto Coco Solo and a search was sent out. Once they reached the area late in the afternoon, they conducted an extensive search of the area. They found no survivors."

Geannie through her sobbing asked, "Is there any chance that he may still be alive?"

"It has only been twenty four hours, so yes it is possible that whoever it was that Ensign Herman sighted may still be alive. We can't guarantee that it was your husband. We don't know which one it was. It is most certain that one of them did not survive. The search is still under way. Scout planes from the Saratoga are searching from the air. There is also a destroyer in the area. As soon as more information is available, I will personally inform you."

Geannie realized the full gravity of what she had just been told. She nodded through her tears and sobbing that she understood. "Then there is still hope for whoever it was who may have survived?" she

asked.

“Yes ma'am.” Captain Mitchell answered. “There is still time that he might be found alive but the chance fades with every passing hour.” As the Captain stood up, he added, “Again, let me offer my deepest condolences.”

Commander Scott spoke for the first time. “Is there anything I can do for you, Mrs Brason? I know that your are heavily involved with the Navy Wives. May I have them call on you?”

Geannie nodded her approval.

The chaplain continued, “Would you like me to contact Pastor Warwick at St. Paul's?”

Again, Geannie nodded her approval.

Commander Scott had one last question. “Would you like me to contact any extended family?”

At that Geannie responded, “No, I will do that myself.”

In parting Captain Mitchell said, “If there is anything at all I can do for you, call my office. Here in my number. Tell the yeoman who you are and he will interrupt anything I am doing.” He then concluded. “We have to go over to the Naval Hospital and talk to Ensign Katmuth. I understand that she is a good friend of yours.” He added as he left, “I'll stay in touch, ma'am.

Geannie followed them to the door and closed it behind them. She turned around and braced her back against the door and broke down completely. Slowly she slid down the door until she was sitting on the floor with her legs stretched out before her. With her face in her hands she sobbed uncontrollably.

Sandy, in her childlike way, knew that her mommy was sad but couldn't possibly understand the seriousness of the situation. She threw her arms around Geannie's neck and tried to comfort her grieving mother. Geannie poured out her heart to God for comfort and guidance and most of all, for protection for Curly, if he was still alive somewhere adrift in the ocean.

After regaining a bit of composure, Geannie picked up the telephone as asked to be connected with the Brason residence in Roanoke to give them the news.

Emmett answered on the the other end. “Hello.”

Geannie's composure wasn't quite there. As she identified herself, “This is Geannie.” she chocked back the sobs.

“Geannie, whats wrong?” he asked. Hearing that much of the conversation, Ellen put down what she was doing to listen.

After a long moment, she managed to say, “Its Curly. I just got word that he was involved in an accident.”

Emmett too was speechless. Ellen drew closer with a worried look on her face. Geannie could hear him tell her, “Curly has been in an accident.”

Geannie was barely able to continue, "Apparently there was a mid air collision and both planes went down. Only one parachute was seen but after a search of the area, they found no survivors. They say that he is missing and presumed dead."

There was silence on both ends. Then Geannie heard Emmett talking to Ellen, "His plane and another collided and he is missing and presumed dead."

Finally Emmett responded, "Oh Geannie. That is just terrible." Then he had the compassion to ask, "How are you holding up?"

"I'm in shock. I haven't had time to let it sink in yet."

"Geannie, I'm so sorry. Thanks for letting us know. Be sure to keep us informed, won't you?"

"I will."

"Good bye Geannie, may God be with you and Curly if he is still alive."

Geannie managed to say "Good bye." and put the handset back on its cradle.

The news spread quickly and soon women were busy taking care of things. Someone was keeping Sandy and Austin occupied. Another was straightening up Geannie's already tidy home. Another had brought lunch, even though Geannie found she had no appetite. Before long Pastor Warwick was there too. And so it went on all day and into the evening as the outpouring of love and compassion flowed into her home.

The person whose presence at that time meant the most to her was her friend Ramona. As soon as Captain Michell and Commander Scott had visited with her, she rushed to Geannie's home. The two women comforted each other knowing that at least one of them was undoubtedly a widow. Most likely both of them, and if it were Ramona, this would be the second time.

That night after everyone had left and the kids were asleep, Geannie sat up in her rocking chair. A million thoughts raced through her head. Was that his parachute? Did he die in the crash? Perhaps he drowned. Please God, it wasn't a shark! She had visions of him suffering. Perhaps he was alive and adrift in the ocean and someone will still find him in time. Finally she drifted off to sleep. Around one o'clock she woke up long enough to climb into bed.

The next morning, the horror of it was still there. Ever since getting the news, Geannie's life had been turned completely upside. After taking care of Sandy and Austin, she spent an extra amount of time reading the Bible that morning, looking for comfort and strength. Captain Mitchell called to reassure her that everything was being done to find the survivor.

The kids sensed something was dreadfully wrong and as a result were fussy and whiny. Geannie wasn't sure what to say to them, if anything. Finally Sandy asked, "Mommy, why are you so sad?"

Geannie sat down and took her up into her lap and as simply as she could said, "Daddy's airplane

got broken and nobody can find him.”

“Not fully understanding, she replied, “That’s so sad.”

“Listen Sandy, I need you to help Mommy. Can you play with Austin and make him happy. That will help Mommy not be so sad.”

“Okay, Mommy.” Sandy hopped off her lap to play with Austin.

She called her piano students and suspended her lessons for the time being. More visitors came calling which became overwhelming so she stopped answering the door. After ringing a couple of times, she reluctantly took the telephone receiver off of the hook. She just wanted some peace and quiet. “But what if Captain Mitchell calls?”

After a while she heard a knock on the door. She didn’t feel like answering. Then she heard the knock again and a familiar voice call out, “Geannie, its me. Susan.”

Geannie opened the door for her friend and invited her in.

“Is there anything I can do for you?” Susan asked.

“As a matter of fact, there is.” Geannie answered. Can you watch the kids for a while?” she asked. “I need to get out and get some fresh air and some sunshine.”

“I’d be happy to.” Susan answered. “Take all of the time you need.”

“Thanks.” Geannie responded, “You’re a real sweetheart.” After visiting for a few minutes, Geannie got Sandy and Austin ready and grabbed her handbag and took the kids out to Susan’s car.

“You kids be good for Susan. I’ll come and get you after while, okay.”

“Okay, Mommy.” Sandy answered.

“Thanks again, Susan. I’ll come by and pick them up when I come back. I just need to get out.”

Geannie drove down to the beach. The same spot she went when dealing with being assaulted. Once again she left her shoes in the car and walked along the water’s edge with the water lapping at her feet. A million thoughts and emotions flooded into her mind. They all became so jumbled that it overwhelmed her.

Geannie let out a scream and began to run as fast as she could. She discovered that somehow running relieved the tension. Concentrating on breathing and running, she cleared her mind. Then an obscure thought came into her mind. She heard Curly say, “You run like a girl.” Something he teased her about on more than one occasion. Her response was always, “That’s because I am a girl!”

At the thought, she stopped dead in her tracks, her broken heart pounding, and she collapsed onto the sand with the water washing all around her as she cried. She cried until she could cry no more. Then she laid back letting the sun and water wash over her. As the tide receded, she was left to dry in the sun. Warmth and exhaustion overtook her and she fell asleep.

After twenty minutes or so, she was aroused by the sound of the surf and the squawk of seagulls. She got up and slowly walked back to her car. With her mind somewhat clearer, she began to think about what she needed to do next.

"The first thing I need to do would be to hold a memorial service. Maybe one here and one in Roanoke." she said out loud to her self. "I suppose I'll take the kids and go home. I can probably go back to teaching. After all I will need to make a living.

"What are you talking about?" she scolded herself. "You don't know for sure that he is gone." She couldn't bring herself to use the word "dead." "Give them another day to find him before you start talking like that." she told herself.

She took a deep breath of the fresh sea air. It made her feel better. For the first time since she got the news the day before, she felt hopeful, whichever way things turned out. Geannie walked back to her car and drove home. As she passed the playground, she saw Susan there with Sandy and Austin and her own children. She parked the car and got out and ran to her babies. She realized that she had neglected them in her grief.

Sandy jumped out of the swing and ran to her with open arms calling, "Mommy, Mommy!"

Geannie took her by the hand and walked with her back to swings. "Thanks Susan. I feel much better." she said.

Geannie stayed at the playground playing with her children for the rest of the morning after Susan and her kids had gone home. As it got close to noon, she realized that she was hungry. After all she hadn't eaten anything since breakfast the day before. She loaded Sandy and Austin into the car and drove home. Finding something to eat wasn't difficult. It was choosing between all of the food that had been brought by concerned friends and neighbors.

After lunch, she put Sandy and Austin down for their naps. She picked up the telephone and had the operator put her through to the Brasons in Roanoke to tell them that there was nothing new. Then she telephoned her mother. Later in the afternoon, Ramona came by. She too was naturally having a tough time. They spent the rest afternoon together consoling each other and talking. It helped to talk to someone who really understood what she was going through.

While Ramona was there and the kids were down for their nap, there was another knock at the door. Geannie peeked through the curtain to see Captain Mitchell and Commander Scott standing on the doorstep. Geannie gathered her composure and answered the door. "Won't you please come in gentlemen?" she invited.

Removing their hats they stepped inside. "Oh good. You're here too Ensign Katmuth. I have a message for both of you." He paused, betraying the nature of the news they bore. "I regret to inform you

that after twenty four hours the survivor has not been located and the search has been called off. At this point they are both presumed to have perished. I'm so sorry. They were great men and exceptional pilots. They were of valuable service to their country and their loss will be felt."

Geannie and Ramona sat on the couch holding each other in stunned silence as Captain Mitchell continued, "Now that is all great and wonderful, but they were more than that, they were both loving family men. Your loss is much greater than that of the Navy. I can't begin to imagine how you must feel. I must admit that I am at a loss of words. That's why I brought Commander Scott along."

Commander Scott spoke, "At times such as these, words seem to ring hollow. Let me say how truly sorry I am at the news that we bring. Actions speak louder than words. Is there anything I can do or arrange to have done for either of you. Maybe someone to watch the children for you, Mrs. Brason. As for you Ensign, I could contact the hospital and arrange for an indefinite leave of absence for you, if you wish."

"That would be alright." Ramona responded. "Thank you."

"I need my children with me now, thank you." was Geannie's reply.

Commander Scott continued, "The message we bring is the official statement of the Navy. I'm afraid that it doesn't offer any hope. Don't let that dissuade you from holding on to hope. Beneath this uniform is a man of faith. One who has seen miracles when it was thought that there was no hope. I know that you understand what I'm saying Mrs. Brason, I know that you're a woman of great faith.

"Even though the search has been called off, I believe that there is hope that the survivor, whichever it was may still turn up. I'm speaking for myself of course and not for the Navy, and if he doesn't, there is hope in the fact that life will go on. Hope for healing. Certainly hope in the immortality of the soul."

Geannie finally spoke for both of them, "We have had twenty four hours now to let the reality of this tragedy sink in. We know that one of us is undoubtedly a widow, now most likely both of us.

"I understand what you have just told us and I have to accept the fact that the latter is most likely that case. I also believe you Commander Scott when it comes to hope. As for me, I will go on the assumption that Curly is dead, however I cling to the hope that he may still be found"

"As for me," Ramona said, "I am certain that Tom is the one who never made it out of his plane. You see, this isn't the first time that I have been through this. I lost my first husband in the line of duty after only a few months of marriage. I have always had the gnawing feeling that I would loose Tom too. I have never been one to rely on faith or hope, but Geannie has shown me differently. For her sake and the children, I too hope that Curly may still be found."

"I'm sorry Ensign." Commander Scott replied, "We weren't aware of your first husband. This must be doubly difficult for you."

Captain Mitchell said, "Perhaps the Commander is correct. Nevertheless I have to deal with the

cold hard facts that exist at the moment. We will see to it that whatever either of you need in the immediate future will be met. There will be a memorial service once the squadron returns for either or both. What you decide to do as far as arrangements is up to each of you. Just in case the Commander is correct, you might want to wait. I just wished we had some definitive proof, unfortunately what we know at this point is all that we have to go on.

“Please feel free to contact either myself or Commander Scott if there is anything that we can do for either of you or anything that you might need. If any further word is received, I will personally pass it on.

“Now, Mrs. Brason, Ensign Katmuth, we must leave now.”

His words were an invitation for the two grieving women to stand. Breaking military protocol, Captain Mitchell gave each a tender embrace of sympathy. Commander Scott followed the lead of his superior officer.

“Good day, ladies. We'll be in touch with you to see how you are doing.” the Captain said as he opened the door to leave.

“Thank you, we appreciate your kindness. We will call if we need anything. Good bye gentlemen.” Geannie said and closed the door behind them.

After they left, Geannie placed another telephone call to Curly's parents in Roanoke with the latest news. Emmett was shaken by what seemed to be a tragic ending but he too opted to hold on to hope.

About that time, Sandy and Austin woke up from their naps. Geannie wasn't ready to attempt to explain the circumstances to them yet. Ramona stayed during the afternoon and the two of them talked about what was, what is, and what might be. Ramona figured that she would stay with what she was doing. Geannie would probably move back to Roanoke and go back to teaching.

There wasn't a lack of something to eat for supper as a plethora of food had been brought to her door. Ramona stayed through the evening as she and Geannie talked more about the circumstances they both found themselves facing.

“You and Commander Scott spoke of hope. Tell me, Geannie, how is it that you are able to cling to it in spite of the facts? I find that nearly impossible. After I lost my first husband, I just figured that it was just life. Things like that happen. But now that it was happened again, I can't help but think that God is punishing me. I haven't been a church goer, but I've always believed in God and tried to treat others as I would like to be treated. You know, the Golden Rule. That comes from the Bible doesn't it? I guess what I'm asking, is why do bad things happen to good people?”

“The way I see it is that God put us here to see how we would respond to the things that happen to us in our lives. Call it a test I guess, to see who would live in such a way for him to claim.” Geannie opened her Bible. “Here, let me read something to you.” she said as she turned to I Corinthians 10:13.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.’

“In my mind I replace the word temptation with trial. In other words, God won't let us endure anymore of the bad things of life than we are able to handle, even to the trying of our faith. I have seen people buckle under the pressure when it was in their power to hold on just a little longer. My Uncle Bill comes to mind. First he lost his wife, then my cousin died in the war. He just wasn't able to bear it. The bearing of it what is required of us.

“I don't know how, but if Curly is dead, through by the grace of God He will make a way for me to somehow see my way through it. I'm not saying that it will be easy because it won't be, but hopefully I'll be stronger for it. He will for you too. You are stronger than you realize or you wouldn't be asked to face it again. Just don't be like my Uncle Bill and give up. Does any of this make any sense?

“I think so. So what you're telling me isn't that God isn't punishing me but rather he is giving me a test to show me what I'm made of.”

“You and me both.” Geannie concluded

Ramona stayed quite late into the evening and helped get Sandy and Austin ready for bed. By the time she went home, she and Geannie had forged a bond would endure throughout their lives.

That evening after putting the kids to bed and Ramona left, Geannie got herself ready for bed. She was used to sleeping alone when Curly was gone on maneuvers. But the thought of sleeping alone on a permanent basis was more than she wanted to think about. As with the night before, sleep wouldn't come. She just lay there in the dark staring at the ceiling. The only sound was the ticking of the clock, which actually made time seem to go slower.

Geannie spent another sleepless night. In the morning as she attempted to have her devotional, the pages of her Bible all seemed to be blank. Her prayer that morning was more fervent.

As the morning progressed, there was no word from Captain Mitchell of any further developments. Perhaps Curly really was dead. Susan stopped by to see how Geannie was doing and made the same offer to watch the kids as the day before. Geannie took her up on it and went to the beach to think. There were so many things to consider and plans to make. After another run along the beach, her mind was clearer and she could think about those things more rationally. The rest of the day was filled with the unpleasant task of considering her options and deciding what she would do.

She placed another call to Roanoke. The mood clear across the country was somber as well. Everyone was aware of Curly's likely fate and was taking it hard. She involved Emmett and Ellen in plans for a memorial in Curly's honor. After talking to the her in-laws, she placed another call to her parents. They

began making plans for Geannie and the kids to come home. They were welcome to live there as long as they wanted.

As the sun began setting, there was still no further word. With the passing of another day, her hope had all but been extinguished. After putting the kids to bed, she got herself ready for bed. Her prayer that night was more for guidance in what she should do than it was for Curly being found safe and sound, although that was certainly mentioned. Geannie climbed into bed for what promised to be another sleepless night.

Sometime after midnight the silence was shattered by the ringing of the telephone. Geannie's heart jumped. On the second ring she sprang from the bed and raced into the front room, hoping that it was good news, bracing for the worst. "Hello." she said as she answered the telephone.

"Mrs. Brason, this is Captain Mitchell. I'm sorry to call you so late, but I have news about your husband."

Geannie didn't say anything, fearing what that news might be.

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Fleet Problem IX was conducted during the last week of January 1929 and went as described in the story. The fictional element is the part about Curly and Tomcat crashing. Admiral Joseph M. Reeves was the actual aircraft commander involved in the exercises.

Captain Roger Mitchell and the chaplain, Lieutenant Commander Reed Scott are fictional characters.