

Chapter XXXII

The Consortium

June 2, 1938 – July 17, 1938

Geannie spent most of the next day in her father's study looking up information on real estate transactions to familiarize herself with the rules and terminology. Granted, his library was a few years out of date, but she was able to grasp an understanding of some of the basics. She also went through the estate papers to get all of the details concerning the sale of the property. She called the Craig County Courthouse over in New Castle and found out that the property was still owned by the same individual who had purchased it. She even found out the value that the property was assessed at for tax purposes.

Armed with confidence and little understanding, the next morning Geannie put on her most conservative dark blue dress and pulled her hair back in an attempt to appear businesslike. She drove downtown to the address of the Southwest Virginia Properties Agency that was listed on the sign. She entered the small office to find a big burly man with a half smoked cigar in his mouth sitting behind the desk.

Assuming that he was the Raleigh Matthews whose name appeared on the door beneath name of the agency, she approached the desk. As he looked up, she greeted him, with, "Good day, Mr. Matthews. My name is Gean Brason."

He grunted, "What do y'all want, lady? I'm busy here."

Undeterred by his gruffness Geannie stated the reason for calling on him, "Mr. Matthews, I am here to inquire about a certain piece of property that you have listed."

Irritated, he let her know, "I neveh do business with a whoaman!"

Geannie planted both hands on his desk, leaned forward, and looked him right in the eye. "And may as ask, why not?"

"Because whoamen ain't got no business savvy!" he blurted.

"Well then," Geannie said as she took the seat across from his desk, "I'll try to use big words so I sound intelligent."

Mr. Matthews took the cigar out of his mouth and blew a puff of nasty smelling cigar smoke in her face. "Alright then, little lady, what property awe y'all intrested in?"

Geannie began, "I represent a consortium of investors with interest in the Randson property three miles north of Abbott on Route 311."

"Oh, yes." Mr. Matthews bluffed. "That is hot piece of propehty. A deal fell through just last week because the buyeh's offeh was too low."

"What is the askin price?" Geannie asked.

"Eighty five hundred." he snorted back trying to buffalo the ignorant female who sat across from

him.

“Why, I find that hard to believe, Mr. Matthews.” Geannie challenged.

“Why's that lady?”

Geannie began to systematically destroy his front. “I happen to know that William Randson bought that property for six thousand five hundred and twenty five dollars in February 1932. Since then property values have plummeted by forty percent. I should think that is only worth about four thousand.”

“Well, that property has been improved on considerable since then. I assure you that it most certainly worth the asking price.”

“I was just by there two days ago. I assure that it is in worse shape than it was when it was sold.”

“And just how would y'all know that?” Mr. Matthews demanded.

“I happen to be a former associate of the late Senator Austin. I worked for him on a number of his election campaigns. I have been in that house on numerous occasions up until it was sold to settle his estate.”

Mr. Matthews didn't have an answer to Geannie's challenge so he changed the subject, “Just who is this group of investors that y'all represent?”

“They prefer to remain anonymous at this time.” Geannie answered. “But I can tell you that they are some businessmen, a clergyman, an educator, and even a military officer. We would like to see the property before proposing an offer. Could you arrange for it to be open for us at the earliest convenience of the group?”

“I think something can be arranged. How much are you thinking?” Mr. Matthews asked.

“Judging from the condition of the property, the tax valuation, and its isolated location, I would say something under four thousand dollars.” was Geannie's response.

“I don't think my client would consider such obscenely low offer.”

“Just how long has it been for sale? From the looks of things, I would say three or four years.”

“Well, let's just take a look and see here.” Mr. Matthews responded. He opened a binder and began turning page after page until he reached the back of the binder. “Here it is. It looks like you are about right.”

“May I see the listing?” Geannie asked.

“No, ma'am. That's confidential information.” He bluffed again.

“May I remind you, Mr. Matthews, that according to Virginia State law, full disclosure of all information regarding the pending sale of property is to be provided upon request.” The reason Geannie knew that is because she remembered her father talking about that bill when it was passed in the assembly.

“Very well then.” Mr. Matthews grumbled as he turned the binder around for her to see.

“It says here that it was first listed on February 13, 1933 and has been renewed each year since

then. I see that Mr. Randson wants to sell it because of financial necessity. Instead of an initial asking price, it says, 'best offer'. Oh and this is interesting," Geannie concluded, "There hasn't been an inquiry since July 12, 1935. That was nearly three years ago."

"You got me, lady." he admitted in defeat. "If your consortium, as you call it, would like to see the place, I'll lend you the keys. I don't want to bother with going clear up there just open the gate and unlock the house."

He opened his bottom desk drawer and retrieved a set of keys. "Could I get you to sign for them so I know who has them?" as he slid a form across the desk.

"I'd be happy too," Geannie responded. She signed it "Mrs. Gean Brason" and gave their address and telephone number in Norfolk. She didn't want him to know who she really was just yet. If he knew, he might try to get more out of them.

Mr. Matthews handed her the keys.

"I will definitely get back in touch with you once we have had a chance to meet, visit the property, and come to a consensus. Thank you very much for your time, sir." She stood up and offered her hand.

Mr. Matthews grunted and without bothering to get up and gave her a fishy handshake.

Geannie contained her emotions until she had left the smoke filled office. She gasped in a breath of fresh air and burst out laughing. She got in her car and drove straight to Sarah's house.

"You will never believe what I have been up to." she said with the biggest grin on her face as Sarah invited her in.

Over coffee, Geannie told all about stopping to see the cabin on their trip to the lake and finding the for sale sign, her idea to buy back the cabin, and her visit with Mr. Matthews.

Sarah listened intently as Geannie unfolded the story. When Geannie was done, she said, "Count me in! I'll bet that Charlie, Winslow, and Stirling will all jump at the chance too."

Since Charlie had teamed up with Winslow and Stirling at the saw mill, their business had expanded to include a lumber yard and building supply store. Thanks to President Roosevelt's National Recovery Act, they were one of the main suppliers to contractors in Roanoke County for all of the construction that was going on. Their business was doing very well indeed.

Geannie called Charlie at work, "Hi, Charlie, it's Geannie."

"What are you up to, Sis?"

"Oh you know me, trouble as usual. That's why I called. I want to have a family meeting tonight at Mother's. Do you think you and Winslow, Stirling and your families can come?"

"Let me ask them, I'll get back to you. What's this all about, any way?"

"Let's just say we are meeting as a consortium of investors." Geannie answered.

"I can't wait to see what you've gone and done now." Charlie answered. "I'll call you back. Where I can I reach you?"

"At Mother's."

"Okay. I'll talk to you later, Sis. Bye."

"Bye Charlie."

After hanging up the telephone, Geannie said to Sarah, "Let's go tell Mother."

As Geannie was telling Marie and Curly all about it, Charlie called to say they would all be there. All Marie could say was, "Baby girl, you are certainly your father's daughter."

Curly wasn't surprised. He knew what the woman he was married to could do once she put her mind to something.

That evening the family gathered to hear what Geannie had to say. They were all intrigued at the prospect of getting the cabin back. They decided to go and take a look on Saturday. Geannie warned them that it was in disrepair.

Charlie spoke up, "That shouldn't be a problem, after all we own a building supply store. There are a two or three contractors who owe us favors that we could probably call in."

They all wanted in, even their mother who Geannie hadn't counted on. Geannie asked them each to see what they might be able to come up with. It was decided equal shares wasn't necessary. The important thing was getting the cabin back.

On Saturday, Curly kept his golf date with his father and brothers while Geannie, Maire, and Sarah went up early to get the place opened up. All of the furniture that had been in the house when it was sold was all still there.

They were soon joined by Charlie, Winslow, Stirling and their wives. They all looked through the cabin, remembering all of the good times that they had as a family and with their own families over the years. Winslow took a good look at what it would take to make the needed repairs and came up with an estimate of two hundred and fifty dollars. They all sat around the table to discuss it. Geannie kept a tally of what each one felt they could contribute. Sarah still had her inheritance money from the sale of the saw mill, Geannie had been saving a good portion of her salary from teaching and the brothers' business was doing well.

By the time they were done, they each were willing to contribute seven hundred and fifty dollars for a total of forty five hundred. Less the repairs and closing costs they would have four thousand dollars to work with. The plan was for Geannie to go in on Monday and make an opening offer of thirty five hundred dollars. After the meeting, the consortium lingered a while longer to look around. It seemed to them as if the Senator was very pleased.

When Gennie got home, she found Curly next door at his parents. "How did it go?" He asked her.

Her beaming smile was an indication. "Very well indeed!" Geannie exclaimed. "It looks like we can pull it off. I'll go over the details later." All though the Brasons and the Austins were good friends, this was family business, even though they would probably find out through Curly or Walt.

"How was golf?" Geannie asked.

"You wouldn't believe it!" Emmett burst out laughing. "Curly here got a hole in one."

"Really?" Geannie was surprised. "Did you win?"

"Nope. I lost" Curly answered.

"What about the hole in one?" Geannie asked, not knowing much about golf. She did know what a hole in one was, but that was about all. It was about all that Curly knew too.

"It was the darnedest thing I've ever seen." Emmett answered. "There we were on the seventh hole. Curly here wasn't doing very well. We had lost track of how many balls he had lost by then. It was his turn to tee off. He took a swing and made good contact with the ball. The only problem was, it went sailing off to the left. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. The ball hit a tree and ricocheted off, landing on the green and rolled into hole."

"So I take it you had a good time after all then didn't you Flyboy." Geannie commented.

"We had a good visit, if thats what you mean." Curly answered.

"See you later, Dad." Curly said. "I've got to go see what Geannie has been up to."

As Curly and Geannie walked next door she explained the whole plan to him. "Do we even have that much saved up?" Curly asked. He didn't have a clue as to how much money they had in the bank.

"We've got a little over two thousand dollars." Geannie answered. "What do you say?"

"We have that much?"

"Uh huh."

"Well then," Curly agreed. "I don't see why not. I love that place as much as anyone. I think it would be great. Maybe sometime we can reenact our honeymoon."

"Why I'd like that very much." Geannie winked.

The first thing Monday morning, Geannie went to the local branch office of the Bank of Virginia there in Ronake and withdrew seven hundred and fifty dollars in cash. At the same time her siblings and cousin were doing the same thing around town. She went to each one and collected their cash and returned home. She spread the money out on her fathers desk and counted it out and neatly stacked in piles of one hundred dollars each. She put it in her fathers old attaché case and was off to meet with Mr. Matthews.

He was much more cordial than on their first meeting. "Hello, Mrs. Brason. I wasn't expectin y'all so soon."

"Good day, Mr. Matthews. I have met with the consortium and we have toured the property. They have authorized me to make an offer."

"Please sit down, Mrs. Brason." he invited. "Aftteh you left my office the otheh day, I called William Randson in Richmond and told him that I finally had a serious inquiry on his propeerty." Then Mr. Matthews made the mistake of saying, "He has authorized me to accept any reasonable offeh."

"Well then." Geannie said placing the attaché case on the desk in front of her. "I am authorized to offer three thousand dollars in cash."

To her surprise, Mr. Matthews extend his hand across the desk, "Deal!"

Geannie offered her hand in return which he shook vigorously.

She opened the attaché case so he couldn't see how much was in it. She removed thirty stacks of cash and placed it on the desk. Mr. Matthews counted out each one to make sure he wasn't being cheated.

When he was finished he pulled out a bill of sale and began filling it out. "Who shall I list as the buyeh?" He asked.

"The Estate of Charles Austin III" Geannie answered.

Mr. Matthews looked up at Geannie with a snarl. "I should have know. Y'all must be his daughteh. Thats the way that old bastahd used to make deals."

"Is there a problem?" Geannie asked.

"No. A deal is a deal." He continued to fill out the form. When he was finished, he had Geannie sign as the authorized representative. "By the way," Geannie said, "I found your for sale sign hidden in the weeds. Its hard to say how long it had been there. Would you like me to return it?"

"No. That won't be necessary. Just toss it." He answered. "Just take this bill of sale to the title company and they will take care of everythin else."

Geannie stood up, picked up her brief case, and extended her hand to Mr. Matthews one last time. "It has certainly been a pleasure doin business with you. Mr. Matthews."

He shook her hand and was glad to have the deal over. He felt smug knowing that Mr. Randson would have accepted twenty five hundred dollars. What he didn't know was that Geannie was prepared to hand over thirty five hundred. As they parted, they both felt they got the better end of the deal.

Geannie went straight to the title company with the bill of sale. They had her sign some papers and pay the required fees. They told her that it had to be sent to the Craig County Courthouse in New Castle to be recorded and that she could expect the deed in about a week or ten days. Since it was a cash deal with the balance paid in full, she was told that they could take immediate possession of the property.

The very next day, Geannie, Marie, and Sandy packed a lunch and loaded the car with cleaning supplies and some of the Senator's tools. They stopped by and picked up Sarah, Emmeline, and Sylvia. The six of them crowded into the car and headed for the cabin. They had an enjoyable ride. It was seldom that Marie had all of her girls to herself like that.

Once they got there, Maire put Sarah to work sweeping the floors, Emmeline and Sylvia to dusting, and Geannie and Sandy to unboarding the windows. Geannie found the step ladder still in the tool shed. Wearing a dress and her hair in scarf tied above her forehead, Geannie climbed the ladder with a small pry bar in hand and began taking off the boards. As she did, light flooded into the cabin for the first time in years. As she tossed the boards to the ground she had Sandy stack them by the tool shed in case some of them could be reused.

With the windows uncovered, Geannie and Sandy went to work washing them while Sarah went to work on the cupboards. It was unbelievable what she found in them. She had to have Marie take break from sweeping cobwebs to scoop up a dead mouse that she found. Emmeline and Sylvia helped Geannie and Sandy with the windows.

About noon, Marie decided it was time for a lunch break. She lead her troop of girls to the lake for their picnic. By the time they got back to the cabin, the power company had been there and turned on the electricity. Now that they had water, she put Sarah and Emmeline to work moping the floors, Sandy and Sylvia washing the walls, while she and Geannie took down the curtains and gathered up the linens to take home to be laundered. There wasn't time to tackle the weeds outside. She would send her sons and grandsons up to take care of the outside later.

When they got home, they found Austin and Curly spread out on the dining room table working on model airplane. They had been in the five and dime store earlier and Austin found a Comet balsa wood model of Stearman just like the one his dad had taken him for a ride in back in Florida. It wasn't hard to talk his dad into letting him get it, after all it was an airplane and it would fulfill a Cub Scout requirement for Austin.

Curly helped Austin lay out the skeleton of the plane and showed him how to glue the pieces together. They got into Marie's sewing closet and found some strait pins to hold them in place while the glue dried. They had the fuselage and wings assembled ready to put together once they were dry. They needed to let them set over night so they cleared away to make the table ready for dinner.

The next morning they got it out again and finished assembling the model. After letting it dry, in the afternoon they used the patterns to cut out the fabric to cover the frame. Once the plane had set up, Curly oversaw Austin as he carefully spread glue along the frame and applied the fabric. It began to look like a

miniature version of the real thing. Once the entire frame was covered, Curly had Austin fill in the seams with a thin bead of glue. Once more they had to set it aside to dry.

On the third day, Austin applied a coat of primer and when that was dry, he painted it yellow. After attaching the wheels and propeller and affixing the decals, it was finished. It wasn't clear who was the most proud of it, Austin or Curly.

Curly's time was quickly coming to an end. At the end of the week, he and Austin went with Walt and his boys and Geannie's brothers and their sons to clean up the the property around the cabin. They scoured the entire three acres gathering up debris and knocking down the weeds. Someone sorted through the boards that Sandy had stacked next to the shed. In the end they had huge bonfire. After it died down, they had a wiener roast before going home.

Curly was only able to stay for two weeks and had to be back to take his squadron aboard the Enterprise for the first time for flight operations in mid June. With Curly scheduled to sail with the ship for her shakedown cruise, Geannie and the kids had planned to stay for the summer. On Monday, they saw him off at the train depot.

During the week after Curly left, a contractor came to make the repairs to the cabin. On Friday, Marie gathered together all of the Austin women: Geannie, Sarah, her daughters-in-law, and granddaughters, for a painting party. When they were done, all there was left to do was to rehang the curtains and stock the shelves.

The inauguration activity was scheduled for the Fourth of July. Once the cabin was ready for use, there was enough money left over for a maintenance fund.

Curly was hoping to come back for a few days over the Fourth of July, but on the evening of the 1st he placed a good news – bad news telephone call to Geannie. When the telephone rang at the Austin home that evening, Marie answered.

“Geannie, its Curly” she called.

A moment later, Geannie picked up the receiver, “Hi Flyboy! I wasn't expectin to hear from you.”

“Its so good to hear your voice, Sweetheart. How have you been?” Curly said.

“Well, everything is set for the Fourth of July. You're still comin tomorrow aren't you?” She asked.

“That's why I called. I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that I won't be be coming.”

“Oh, thats too bad, Commander. Why not?.”

“Well thats the good news. I am no longer a Lieutenant Commander. I'm now Commander Brason.”

“Thats wonderful news, Curly. I wish I was there to give you big congratulatory kiss! And maybe a little something to go with it. So why does that mean you can't come home?”

Curly answered, "That's the rest of the good news. They have consolidated all of the squadrons into one unit and I have been made the Air Group Commander. I have to stay here and get organized. All of a sudden there is a lot for me to do before the shakedown cruise."

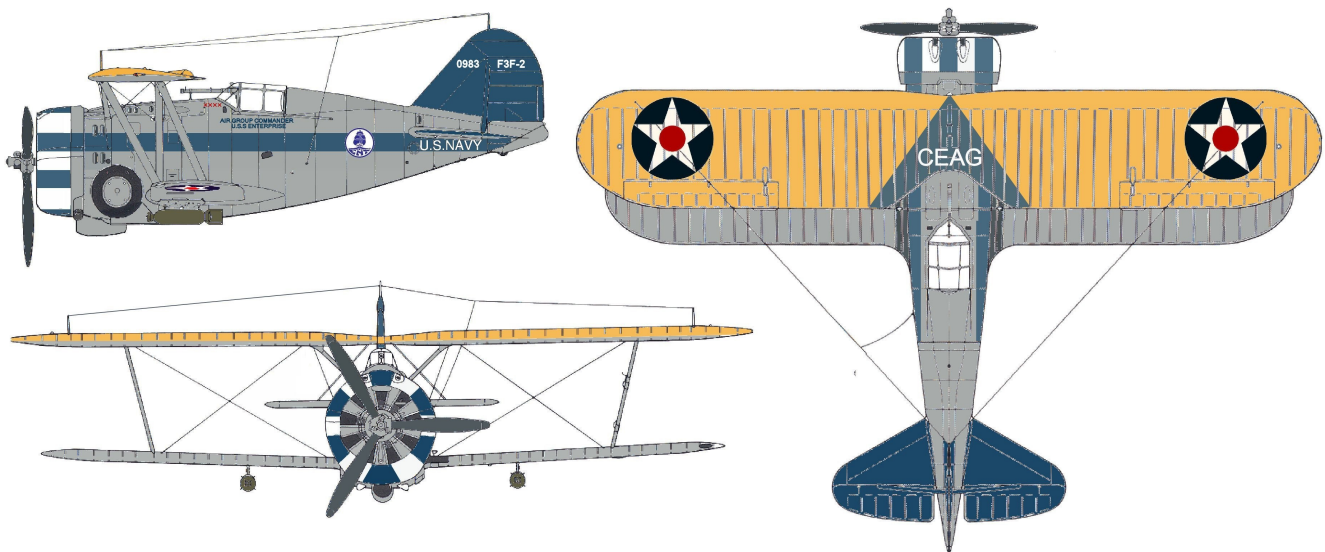
"That's the Navy for you." Geannie answered. "I'm disappointed that you won't be here for the Fourth. You should see the cabin. It looks better than it ever has. But, hey. I'm really excited about your promotion and new job."

"Thanks, Sweetheart. I sure appreciate your support. I love you. This is costing so I'd better go now. I'll call again before we sail. Give the kids and everyone my love. Goodbye Love."

"Goodbye Commander, sir. I love you too. I'll miss you, but I'll talk to you soon." The line went dead and Geannie placed the receiver on the hook.

On July 1, 1938 the Bureau of Aeronautics created a new command billet. Up until that time, the squadrons assigned to a carrier were not organized into a cohesive air group. Each squadron commander reported to the ship's air officer. The new directive provided for an air group commander to whom all of the squadrons reported. The air group commander in turn reported directly to the ships commanding officer. The air group became a unit consisting of fighter, dive bomber, scouting, and torpedo squadrons. Curly was the ranking squadron commander and was tapped to be the air group commander and was promoted to Commander.

Having been a fighter pilot throughout his career, he led the air group form an F3F-2. Instead of the colorful section bands, it had a true blue and white striped cowling with a stripe that ran from the cowling and wrapped around the aircraft just below the horizontal stabilizers. Instead of chevron on the upper wing, there was a blue triangle with "CEAG" in white letters. True blue was the color assigned to the Enterprise Air Group. In blue letters just below the cockpit were the words "Air Group Commander" on one line and



"USS Enterprise" on another. In the mid section of the fuselage, the Enterprise insignia was superimposed over the the stripe. The insignia was a blue sailing ship on a white circle, with the the letters ENT below the ship, also in blue. Just ahead of the cockpit were four red xs, one for each of his confirmed simulated victories during sanctioned exercises.

The Enterprise Air Group consisted of Fighting Six with their F3F-2s, Bombing Six in monowing Northrop BT-1s, Scouting Six in SBC-3's, and Torpedo Six in their new monowing Douglas TBD-1s, with folding wings. All of the squadrons had transitioned to new aircraft since being organized and had been brought up to full strength of eighteen planes, except for Fighting Six which had twenty, for a total seventy five aircraft in the air group, including Curly's. In addition, there were a few utility aircraft and a number of replacement aircraft for the squadrons. The two extra planes in Fighting Six were for Curly's wingmen.

Curly was lonely with Geannie and the kids gone. Every night he came home to an empty house. He got an idea of what it must be like for Geannie when he was gone. One evening when he got home there was a letter from Geannie waiting for him in the mailbox.

5 Jul 1938

Dear Commander Flyboy.

You sure missed out on the biggest Austin/Brason bash ever. We had a great time. All of my family where there and we invited your mom and dad and Shenan and his family. Everyone was there, except for you. It was a party Daddy would have been proud of.

Mother, the kids and I went up on Sunday after services to get things ready. On the Fourth everyone showed up during the morning. My brothers had built four picnic tables and hauled them up with their truck so there was plenty of room to seat everyone. We spent most of the morning making fried chicken and potato salad. We had baked beans, and corn on the cob. Walt made homemade root beer. I don't know how many watermelons we went

through. It was one big feast.

In the afternoon we all went up to the lake to go swimming. Some of us changed before hiking back and others changed in the bushes. We probably spent two hours at the lake.

For supper there were plenty of leftovers from the picnic. In the evening we had the biggest bonfire ever. When they brought the picnic tables, they also brought a bunch of scrap lumber. The fire was so high we couldn't make s'mores until it died down late in the evening.

Winslow brought his guitar and we sat around singing songs for a while. Then we began telling stories about Daddy, which turned into telling stories on each other. It was hoot and everyone had a great time.

I took our tent and set it up out in the yard for the younger kids. Some of the older kids slept out under the stars. All of the bedrooms were full and the front room was wall to wall people as well.

The next morning Shenan had to leave early because he had to go to work. Everyone else stayed until after lunch before going home. I don't know how many cars we had up there, but it was probably the most traffic Route 311 had seen in a long time.

I sure wish you could have been there. I missed you. Next time you're here with me, I'm going to kidnap you and take you up

there and hold you prisoner. I bet you can't imagine what I'm going to do to you!

I look forward to talking to you by telephone before you sail. Everyone sends their love. Especially me!

Your ever loving lover, Me!

While in Roanoke, Geannie got involved with the Methodist Women's Auxiliary during the summer, severing on a committee charged with planning for a church rummage sale scheduled later in the summer. The committee started out with three ladies, but one dropped out after their first meeting, leaving Geannie and Samantha Taylor to plan the whole thing.

Samantha was about nine years younger than Geannie, but despite the age difference the two of them became good friends. Having been away from Roanoke for so long, Geannie only knew who Samantha was from the times when they had come home.

Samantha and her husband, Mike had three young children. Their son, Craig who was just turning seven, was one of the boys who looked to Curly as his hero. He loved airplanes and just about anything with an engine. When Geannie and Samantha got together to work on the rummage sale, Craig and Austin who was just turning eleven would pretend that they were pilots and run around with their arms out stretched, as if they were airplanes. Once when Samantha had come over to the Austin Mansion to meet with Geannie, Austin proudly showed Craig the model of the Stearman that he and his dad had built.

On one occasion, Samantha hired Sandy to babysit for them when she and Mike went out of the evening. In addition to Craig, they had two little girls, Norma who was five and Janet who was two and half. She was so good that Samantha asked her to babysit several times that summer. The Taylor children always looked forward to Sandy coming over because she would bring games and stories to keep them entertained.

"I don't know what I'm going to do for a babysitter when you go back to Norfolk at the end of the summer." Samantha lamented while they were sorting items that had been donated for the sale.

Curly called to talk to Geannie the night before he went to sea aboard the Enterprise for her shakedown cruise. They couldn't talk long as it was long distances. Geannie and the kids were having a good time, but they missed him. They were busy and involved with the family and enjoying their summer break. He told her that he had been busy working on getting the air group ready for the cruise. They had

been to sea a couple more times getting all of the new pilots qualified. There wasn't much more to say about what he had been doing, other than he missed them and would have liked to be there for the Fourth of July. Even though he would be away for a couple of months, he was looking forward to the cruise and that he would see them in September. He promised to write to them.

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The only time I ever attempted golf, I hit the ball and it went sailing off in the wrong direction. It bounced off of a fence post and onto the green. It took me countless shots after that to get the silly ball in the hole.

The first Carrier Air Groups (as they were then called) were activated in 1938. Initially, the commander of the air group (known as the "CAG") was the most senior commanding officer of the embarked squadrons and was expected to personally lead all major strike operations, co-ordinating the attacks of the carrier's fighter, bomber, and torpedo planes in combat. The CAG was a department head of the ship reporting to the carrier's commanding officer. From July 1938 to mid-1942 Carrier Air Groups were permanently assigned to and identified by their parent aircraft carrier, and group squadrons were numbered according to the carrier's hull number. For example, the Enterprise Air Group, assigned to USS Enterprise (CV-6), were all numbered "6": Fighting Squadron (VF) 6, Bombing Squadron (VB) 6, etc.

