

## Chapter XXXIV

### Back to San Diego

June 5, 1939 – November 23, 1939

The best method for such a cross country move was still by train. With everything, including their car, aboard the train they began the four day trip and arrived back in Coronado on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June and moved into their new home.

Sandy remembered the place but Austin was too little when they left to remember it. Geannie was glad to resume her running routine along the beach. Their old friends Freddy and Susan and Shorty and Wilma were all back in San Diego as well. Curly still had a week before he had to return to duty so they took one more quick family vacation up the coast to Ocean Side.

Curly had traded his Grumman F3F-2 in for a Curtiss SBC-3 because the two seat scout bomber was more suited for a command aircraft. Toward the end June, Curly lead his air group out to the Enterprise for joint fleet exercises with the Army along the coast of California. As the fleet neared San Francisco, Admiral Halsey, flying his flag on the Saratoga, sent his air groups on raids against several Army Air Corps bases. Curly lead elements of the Enterprise Air Group on a raid of an Air Corps base in Reno, Nevada. The base commander didn't think Navy aircraft were capable of flying that far and was caught completely off guard.

During a break in the maneuvers, the fleet sailed into San Francisco Bay on July 1<sup>st</sup> to participate in the Golden Gate International Exposition. Curly had a week of liberty and he and Geannie had planned a rendezvous. Before he left, she had made an airline reservation and the plan was for them to meet at San Francisco Municipal Airport when her flight arrived.

Leaving Sandy and Austin home to fend for themselves, with Susan checking in on them, Geannie took a cab to the San Diego International Airport where she boarded a Boeing 247 for a nonstop flight to San Francisco. It was her first flight on a commercial airliner. Curly was waiting for her and whisked her off to their hotel in a rented car, a 1939 Plymouth P8 Deluxe Coupe. San Francisco had changed a lot since they were last there. The most noticeable changes were the San Francisco Bay and Golden Gate Bridges that had opened in 1936 and 1937 respectively.



They spent the week visiting the attractions of the City by the Bay, some they had been to before, others that were new. The ships in the bay were open to the public and Curly took Geannie for a tour of the Big E. She was very impressed. They spent a lot of time to themselves as well. At the end of his leave, he

took her back to the airport for her flight home. Curly left with the fleet on the 17<sup>th</sup> for further exercises off Los Angeles and returned to San Diego just after the first of August.

Curly was only home for about three weeks before leaving again. He was away on maneuvers off the coast the day of the shocking news that stunned the nation. War had broke out in Europe! Germany had invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 and Great Britain and France had declared war on Germany and Italy. The news greatly concerned Geannie. She feared that Curly would be sent off to this new war, even though the United States was pledged to neutrality.

During the summer, Geannie had acquired a teaching position at the same school where she had taught before and after Labor Day she and the kids returned to school. Curly didn't return until the end of the month. He hoped be able to stay close to home for a while.

A few days later on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October, Curly received a telephone call right at dinnertime. From listening to his end of the conversation, Geannie knew that it wasn't good news. "What was that all about?" Geannie asked with concern after he hung up.

"I've been ordered to Hawaii." He answered.

"When?"

"Tomorrow." Curly answered. He went on to explain, "The Enterprise and several other ships have orders to sail tomorrow for Pearl Harbor where we will be based indefinitely."

"Indefinitely?" Geannie repeated. "It's the war, isn't it?"

"No, were not at war. Not yet anyway. I guess they want to put us there in case Japan makes any sudden moves. After all they are in cahoots with the Germans and Italians." Curly answered.

"What does this mean for us as a family?" Geannie asked.

"Lets just sit tight for a while. I might be back in a few months. If it looks like I'll be there for a while, I guess you'll have to decide if you want to come join me in Hawaii or go home to Roanoke."

"If we'd of known this, the kids and I could have stayed in Roanoke, but as it is, I'm committed to teach at least through the end of the semester. They're used to having teachers come and go around here as much as people get transferred around." Geannie reasoned.

"Hawaii!" she continued. "Ever since you went there, I've wanted to go. It sounds like an exiting place to live! From Ramona's letters, it sounds like living in paradise."

Listening to every word of the conversation, Sandy interrupted, "Yeah, that sounds neat. I want to move to Hawaii."

"Me too!" Austin agreed.

"I'd love to have you all come with me." Curly responded. "Not that I've been around here much lately, as it is. One of these days they're bound to clip my wings and send me somewhere to fly a desk.

Maybe then we can settle down.”

“Until then, you have to pack your bags, Commander. I'm going to see if I can get a substitute for tomorrow so I can see you off. After all, I don't know when I'll see you again. At least here you got to come home every now and then for a week or so.” Geannie remarked. “Hawaii is so far away.”

Curly in turn called his squadron commanders with their orders. The rest of the evening was a rush to get Curly ready to leave the next day.

The next morning, Geannie stayed home from school. Curly left for the air station and called after his briefing to let her know when they would be flying out. After talking to Curly, she went to the beach for her run. She watched as the Enterprise along with a number of other ships headed out to sea. A knot tightened in her stomach, knowing that they would be taking Curly with them.

After her run, she went home and freshened up before going to the air station to see Curly off. She only got to talk to him for a few minutes before he had to leave. He told her, “I'll write as soon as I get there and then we can figure out what to do next.”

“Do me a favor and look up Ramona and tell her hi for me.”

“I think I can do that for you.”

Geannie pressed herself tighter into his arms, “I'm going to miss you.”

“Same here.” Curly answered. They parted after a long, tight embrace and a kiss of farewell. Letting go he said, “See you in the funny pages.”

Geannie said, “Take care of yourself Commander. I love you.” She watched until he disappeared from her sight. She turned her attention to the runway and moments later she watched as he was the first to take off.

She went home and penned a quick letter to her friend Ramona and told her that Curly was on his way to Pearl Harbor. She went on to say that she hoped to join him there after the first of the year and how she looked forward to seeing her again.



Curly lead the air group out to sea and landed aboard the Big E. She was accompanied by by the heavy cruisers Northampton, Pensacola, and Salt Lake City and seven destroyers. Farther out to sea, they rendezvoused with several other ships from San Pedro. In all, the Hawaiian Detachment consisted of the

Enterprise and her air group, two divisions of heavy cruisers consisting of eight ships, a destroyer flotilla comprising of a light cruiser and eighteen destroyers. A destroyer tender and a repair ship were also included.

The Hawaiian detachment was under the Command of Vice Admiral Adolphus Andrews, who had been one of Curly's instructors at the Naval War College. Admiral Andrews, who flew his flag aboard the Enterprise, was a battleship man with no use for aircraft carriers, airplanes or pilots. Being a rather stout individual and because of his attitude, the aviators referred to him as Lord Plushbottom. What really irritated Curly was that he prohibited flight operations during the noon hour because he didn't want his lunch interrupted by airplane noise since his wardroom was directly below the flight deck.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> as the detachment neared Oahu, the air group took off and flew on ahead to Ford Island Naval Air Station, in the middle of Pearl Harbor. Soon after landing, as the pilots were milling around, Curly noticed a navy nurse approaching. He recognized her as Geannie's friend Ramona. Now a lieutenant commander, she saluted Commander Brason. Curly returned the salute. In true Hawaiian tradition, Ramona placed a lei around his neck and gave him an embrace, and breathed in his spirit.

When she put in for a transfer from San Diego, she told everyone that it was to get a fresh start after Tom was killed. That was only part of the story. The secret that she carried with her was that in the months following Tom's death, she found herself falling in love with a man she could never have. And now she held him in an embrace. One that lingered just a moment longer than he was comfortable with.

She thought that she could forget him. But each letter she got from Geannie told of what he was doing. Each letter reminded her of the feelings she tried to suppress. Geannie was her best friend and she could never betray that friendship. So Ramona agonized over a love that could never be expressed, shared, or reciprocated. Keeping her emotions buried was a trait she had learned from being a navy nurse.

As she held on to Curly for the brief moment disguised as a greeting, she said, "Aloha, Commander. Welcome to Hawaii. It's so good to see you again Curly." Then she took a deep breath.

"What was that?" Curly asked.

"Hawaiians traditionally exchange breaths as they greet each other. Its called 'ha'."

"It's good to see you too, Ramona. You haven't changed a bit. Except for a good sun tan." Curly responded. "Geannie must have told you that I was coming."

"She did." Ramona answered. "But I had it figured out when they told us that the Enterprise was on its way. Do you have time for something to drink? I'll bet you're parched after your flight."

"Sure." Curly replied.

"The officer's club is this way." she directed, taking him by the arm. Her heart raced as she pretended for just a moment that he was hers.

As they walked Curly commented, "This place has sure changed a lot since I was here fifteen years ago."

"In the ten years that I have been here, I have watched Pearl Harbor grow from what was not more than a refueling station with a few docks and piers and the air station, much like you remember. Now look at it. It has grown into a fledgling naval base with new docks, piers, and repair facilities. I have really grown to love the Islands and all that they afford.

"Here we are." She said as they arrived at a quonset hut that served as the Ford Island officers Club.

Taking a seat at the counter, Ramona said to the attendant behind the counter, "The Commander, here, will have a Coca-Cola and I'll have a glass of draft Oly."

"Right away." the attendant, a young native Hawaiian, replied.

"From what I hear, you're going to be here permanently. Do you have any plans for Geannie and the kids to join you?"

"We were informed that our stay would be 'indefinite' which could mean anything from temporary to permanent."

"Here you are. Enjoy your beverages." the the young man interrupted.

Curly continued. "We have talked about it. They're jazzed about the idea of coming to the islands. We decided to wait until closer to the end of the year to decide for sure."

"I'd sure love to see Geannie again. I have missed her."

"It has only been six days since I have seen her and I sure miss her."

Ramona told Curly what she had been up to recently, and reminisced about the good old days with Freddy and Tomcat.

"So," Curly asked, "with all of these eligible bachelors, you've never remarried."

"Are you kidding. Do you want me to send another poor unsuspecting fellow to his death? I'm jinxed ya know. After loosing two husbands after such a short time, I just don't dare love again."

"Come now. You can't mean that?"

"Well, just look at my track record." Not able to answer him honestly, she ended their conversation, "Well, it has been great to see you again after all of these years. But, I need to get back to the hospital."

"Yeah, it has been good. When I write to Geannie I will tell her that I saw you. I need to go get my gear squared away."

As they parted, Ramona headed to the ferry dock for the trip across the harbor to the hospital. Curly returned to the hangar to collect his gear and get settled.

Later that evening, he jotted down a quick letter to Geannie.

October 11, 1939

Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii

Dear Geannie,

Here I am in beautiful Hawaii. After a six day cruise we flew in earlier this afternoon. The fleet will be coming in tomorrow. This place has changed a lot since I was here several years ago.

I will be staying in the officer's barracks when not at sea. It isn't as nice as my stateroom aboard the ship, but it will do. They tell us that they are building some new duplexes in the officers housing complex which should be ready by the end of the year. I think I will go ahead and reserve one of us. Over the next few weeks I should get a feel for how things are here. So far I don't get a sense of urgency. Ramona met me at the hangar when I flew in. We had a good visit at the officer's club. She didn't indicate anything out of the ordinary.

By the way, Ramona looks about the same except for a good sun tan. She sends her regards and hopes that you will be joining me soon.

On the way over, they briefed us as to the reason for bringing us out here. If Japan were to make any sudden moves, they expect that it would be in the Philippines and the Far East. This simply puts us several days closer in providing a response.

Give my love to the kids. I love you and miss you already.

I hope things will work out so we can be together again.

Love Curly

Several days later, he got a letter from Geannie.

24 Oct 1939

Dear Flyboy,

I was happy to receive your letter and am relieved to know that all is well over there. I'm glad that you got to see Ramona. After you, I can't wait to see her. The kids and I are so looking forward to joining you. We talked about it and agreed that wherever you are is where we want to be, regardless the sacrifice. It would mean not being able to go home, until you come back to the States.

I hope you went ahead and reserved a unit for us. I have notified the superintendent that I would most likely be leaving at the end of the semester. He assured me that they would have no problem replacing me as there are others wanting a position. I checked with the Matson Lines and the S.S. Lurline is sailing from San Diego the day after Christmas and will arrive in Honolulu on New Year's Day. Let me know soon, so I can reserve a stateroom and some cargo space. I think it would be best if I sold the car and we bought another one over there. What do you think? But I do want to bring my piano. I don't know what Sandy or I would do without it.

Speaking of Sandy, she will turn 15 a week from tomorrow. Can you believe that. She is quickly becoming a young woman, and she is such a good kid. With me working and you gone, she is such a help to me.

Have you ran into Ramona lately? I hope you don't mind, but I'm asked her to look after you for me. I know how you get tired of Navy chow, so I'm going to suggest that she have you over for a home cooked meal sometime. She'll see to it that you're satisfied. Normally I wouldn't be comfortable with you having dinner with some gal, but I trust you and I trust her. You're always such a gentleman

I need to close now, I would like to get a letter off to Ramona as well.

Don't spend all of your time couped up. Get out and about a little. Then when we get there, you'll know where to take us. Ramona has told me of so many places that I'd like to see.

The thing I'd like to see the most of all is you. That's because of all the things in this world, I love you the most of all. I do miss you, and hope you are well. It sounds so lovely there. Write soon!

With all of love, Seannie and the kids.

A couple of days later, one evening after getting off duty, Curly was alone in his quarters when there was a knock on the door. He opened it to find Ramona standing on his doorstep.

"Ramona, what a surprise. Won't you come in?"

“Yes, thank you.”

“Please have a seat. Can I get you something? I have a some Cokes in the fridge.”

“That would be nice.” She answered as she sat down.

A moment later, Curly returned with a bottle for each of them. “So what brings you to the bachelors quarters?”

“I came to see how you were doing. Geannie asked me to check on you sometime, so here I am.”

“I'm glad that you stopped by. It gets kind of lonely sometimes and its always good to see a friendly face.”

They visited for a while, mostly about Geannie and the kids coming at the first of the year and a little about what they each had going on.

She stayed about a half an hour and as she was leaving she said, “Listen Curly, don't take this the wrong way, but would you like to come over some evening for a home cooked meal?”

“Yeah, I'd like that. I know that Geannie put you up to it.”

“Thats alright. I'd really love to have you. I can use having a friendly face around as well. How would Sunday be?”

“That would be fine. Sunday it is.”

“Alright then. I'll see you then. Lets say around five.”

On Sunday, Curly was off duty and attended services on the base. Then a few minutes before five, he knocked on Ramona's door.

“Come in.” she called out.

He opened the door and went on in. She was in kitchen just taking something out of the oven.

“Please have a seat and make yourself comfortable.”

Rather than doing so, he wandered into the kitchen and asked, “Is there anything I can help you with?”

“No, I've got it. I hope you like mahimahi.”

“Oh that sounds good, I haven't that since the last time I was here.”

Over dinner they visited about a number of topics; Geannie, Tom and bygone days and the current

world situation. Over a German chocolate cake that she had baked and some ice cream she told him how her classes were coming and that she only had two more and would be graduating with her masters degree in the spring. After desert, they went out into the living room and sat on the couch and visited some more. As he sat at one end and she at the other with her legs tucked under herself, they talked about a number of other topics, including some of the places that she wanted to take them when Geannie and the kids came.

As Curly was ready to leave, Ramona put half of the cake on a plate to send home with him. "Thank you for such a wonderful meal, Ramona. I really appreciated it. You're a good friend."

"Thanks for coming over. It was my pleasure. Good night Curly."

As she shut the door behind him, a smile came to her lips and a tear to her eye as she had just had the man she loved all to herself for an evening.

The next morning Curly went to sea for three days and when he got back on Wednesday, he wrote back to Geannie.

*November 8, 1939*

*Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii*

*Dear Geannie,*

*By now Sandy has had her birthday. I was thinking of her. I can't believe she is 15 years old already either. I hope she had a nice day and got the card that I sent her.*

*During the time that we have been here, the air group has operated mostly out of Ford Island. We did operate from the Enterprise at sea for a few days on two occasions. In fact I just got back after three days at sea. We are scheduled to go out again for a few days later next week.*

*We have been operating at a normal pace. It's pretty routine actually.*

There is no crisis here and it is safe for you to come. It's down right boring at times without you.

A three bedroom home with a yard became available in the senior officers neighborhood that I was able to get for us, but it won't be ready to occupy for another week. As soon as I can, I'll move in. It is a nice house and has a yard! Something we've never really had before, except for those two years in Arlington. It's really close to the main gate to the base. I'll have to take the ferry across the harbor to get to the air station.

Most of the other officers with families are looking at sending for them as well. If you haven't already done it, go ahead and book your passage. I agree that selling the car would be easier. There are some car dealerships in Honolulu. Things are a little more expensive here as it has to come from the mainland. And by all means, bring your piano.

Being a senior officer has its perks. Since I am the air group commander, they have issued me a jeep of my own so I can get around. I named it Little Bertha. I've done a little exploring, mainly around Honolulu.

Yes as a matter of fact, I have seen Harmona since I first got here. Thanks for suggesting to her that I could use a good home cooked meal. She invited me to her apartment last Sunday evening and fixed dinner for me. It was very good and was so much better than eating at the officers mess. I had forgotten how good her baked goods are. She sent me home with enough to last a few days. We had a good visit and talked a lot about when you and the kids come over. She also told me how she is nearly finished with her masters degree, but I

suppose she already mentioned that to you. I am scheduled for a physical at the hospital when I get back from our next cruise. Maybe I will see her again then.

It will be Thanksgiving soon. What are your plans? It is tradition aboard the ship to hold huge thanksgiving dinner on the hangar deck. I missed it last year when we went home to Roanoke. I would of course much rather spend it at home with you and the kids.

Give them my love and tell them that I look forward to seeing them. How are they doing in school? With a school teacher for a mother, I'm sure they get their homework done. I kind of miss helping them with some of their projects. I'm glad that they are excited about coming. They will love it here.

So will you! We will enjoy it for as long as it lasts. They're bound to move me again sometime. Who knows when that will be. Not for the foreseeable future at least. I want to keep flying as long as they'll let me.

Love Curly

P.S. Do you still have that silly grass skirt?

On Monday of the following week, Curly went to sea with his air group aboard the Enterprise for exercises with the Army off Maui. After returning, he kept his appointment at the hospital for his annual physical. The first part was an eye exam which he passed, much to his relief. That's the one that will ground a pilot quicker than anything else. He was then asked to strip down to his skivvies and wait for the doctor. He hated these exams, especially at the age he was now. They looked at things that they didn't before. Some of it got to be more personal, especially when the doctor asked him to drop his skivvies.

At the conclusion of the exam, the doctor said, "You can pull up your skivvies now, Commander. I'm pleased to give you a clean bill of health. You can keep flying, for another year, at least. I notice that you are due for an inoculation. It's important now that you are in the tropics. Don't get dressed just yet, a nurse will be with you in just a moment." At that the doctor left him alone in the exam room.

The Ramona gulped when she picked up the chart and read the name of the man who needed a shot. Rather than assign it to a subordinate, she decided to take care of it herself. Her heart fluttered as she walked in to see Curly standing there in his skivvies. For a man in his forties, he had the body of a much younger man as a result of the constant physical training required by his profession. Ramona had often fantasized over a moment such as this. She had never seen so much of him before. She was about to see more.

Hello, Commander.” she greeted him as she gathered up all of the professionalism that she could muster.

“Ramona!” Curly nearly gasped. “I wasn't expecting you.” Over the years of his career he had on many occasions had a female nurse give him shots or some other such thing. Before it was always a nameless face he would never see again. This one was a close personal friend.

“Okay Curly,” she said casually, “I need you to turn around and drop your drawers.”

Curly complied and pulled them down just a little.

“Come on Curly, you've got to give me a little more than that.”

He pulled them down further, exposing most of his buttocks. It was all she could do to stifle a snicker as she looked at his hairy posterior. Typically such a sight didn't affect her professional demeanor, but this was Curly. The man she loved and admired, but could never have.

As Ramona swabbed the area with alcohol she asked, “Have you heard from Geannie lately?”

“I'm expecting a letter any day now.” was his reply.

“This may sting a little, Commander.” she said as she stuck him the needle and injected the vaccine.

“It did, just a little. We're making plans for her and the kids to join me here at the beginning of January.” Curly said as he pulled his shorts up and turned around.

“You may put your uniform back on now.” She said professionally. She lingered just a moment to chat about Geannie coming and in so doing soaked in the sight of his broad shoulders and hairy chest. She wanted so much to touch him but knew that she must not – ever. He could never know how she felt – no one could.

“Say, would you like to come over for a home cooked meal again sometime?” she asked as he got dressed.

“Yeah. That would be great, I'd like that.” Curly said as he pulled up his trousers.

“How about Sunday, would that work for you?”

“Sunday it is then. I'll look forward to it” he said as he zipped up his pants. “Are you doing anything special for Thanksgiving?”

“No, I'm on duty that day. What about you?”

“The ship is hosting Thanksgiving dinner.” he said as he put on his shirt.

“Thats good that you have someplace to go.”

As he finished buttoning up his shirt he said, “I'll be sure to tell Geannie that you saw me. I mean that I saw you.”

Keeping her composure she opened the door and said, “Thank you, Commander. That will be all.” and saluted.

Curly thanked her and returned the salute, glad that that awkward moment was over.

As Romona left the room, she covered her mouth with her hand as she laughed out loud to herself.

Since the ship remained in port that week, Curly and his air group operated from For Island, taking a break on Thursday for the Thanksgiving feast aboard the Enterprise. As he enjoyed the meal in the company of his comrades, his thoughts were of Geannie and kids in San Diego and his family back home in Roanoke.

\* \* \* \* \*

The order to send the fleet back to the Pacific six weeks early was as described and a reason was never explained.

The exercises that with the Army in California were real, including the raid on the air field in Reno, Nevada. It not known if planes from the Enterprise were involved.

The Golden Gate International Exposition (1939 and 1940), held at San Francisco, California's Treasure Island, was a World's Fair that celebrated, among other things, the city's two newly-built bridges. The San Francisco – Oakland Bay Bridge was dedicated in 1936 and the Golden Gate Bridge was dedicated in 1937. The exposition was opened initially from February 18, 1939 through October 29, 1939. It opened again from May 25, 1940 through September 29, 1940.

The Exposition included a fleet review in July 1939 in which the ships were open for public tours.

The Boeing 247 was an early United States airliner, considered the first such aircraft to fully incorporate advances such as all-metal construction, a beam supported wing and retractable

landing gear. The 247 entered service on May 22, 1933 and was capable of crossing the United States from east to west eight hours faster than their predecessors. Contemporary with the Boeing 247 was the newer Douglas DC-3.

The Hawaiian Detachment, under the command of Vice Admiral Adolphus Andrews, was a hastily organized element of the the US Fleet based on the west coast that was sent to its new operating base, Pearl Harbor, T.H. in October 1939. The detachment consisted of the carrier Enterprise (flagship), two heavy cruiser divisions, two destroyer squadrons and a light cruiser flagship, a destroyer tender and a proportionate number of small auxiliaries make up the force.

The information about Admiral Anrews is from Enterprise by Barrett Tillman. Page 21.

