

Chapter XXXVII

Executive Officer

February 5, 1940 – November 9, 1940

During the first week of February, Curly was scheduled to leave on a four week cruise to the Central Pacific. The purpose of this cruise was to sail to Wake Island and as far west as Guam to “show the flag” and send a message to the Japanese. The day he was to leave, some events that he had been unaware of had been in play and unfolded in way that he had never expected.

The Enterprise, along with the heavy cruisers Northampton, flying the flag of Rear Admiral John H. Newton, Pensacola, and Salt Lake City, nine destroyers, and a tanker from the Hawaiian Detachment departed Pearl Harbor on the morning of the 5th. That morning, Geannie had a big breakfast ready for him before he left the house. After he left for the base, she had a few things to take care of before going to see him off.

It wasn't as easy as it had been at North Island. She drove to the main gate to the base where she showed her military family identification. From there she drove to Hospital Point and parked. She only had to wait a few minutes for the ferry to return from Ford Island. It was another few minutes before she could board the ferry for the trip to the air station. After making her way to the public viewing area, she waited with some of the other wives.

Curly was able to break away and spend a few minutes with her before it was time to leave. It was like so many other times that she had seen him off. The routine was always pretty much the same. A brief visit, a hug and a kiss and it was time for him to go. Little did they know that this would be the last such farewell. Oh, there would be plenty more, but of a different nature. As Curly walked away, as predictable he turned, waved, and called out, “See you in the funny pages.”

Curly disappeared into the crowd and Geannie waited until it was time for the planes to take off. Curly in his bi-wing Helldiver was the first to taxi into position. As many times as she had watched him take off, she still found it thrilling. She just loved the colorful markings that the aircraft bore. Somehow, it made them seem less threatening than the war machines that they were.

She watched the as the yellow upper wings and blue tail streaked past and climbed into the air. She waved vigorously never knowing if he could see her or not. Once he was airborne she watched as the other seventy two planes took to the air. She knew most of the pilots and more particularly the wives of those who were married, at least those who were there. Geannie was their role model and they looked to her for the strength and courage that they needed to send their men off.

Geannie waved and cheered as each plane took off. Soon they all formed up over the harbor and in formations of V's and headed out to sea. After visiting with some of the wives, she accompanied several of them who had lingered back to the ferry dock for the trip back to Hospital Point. Then she popped into the

hospital to say hi to Romona.

As she went into the house she realized that it would be void of Curly for an entire month. It wasn't as long as other times that they had been apart. Regardless of how long he was gone, she missed him, but life went on. It was just a fact of life in their relationship. It made her appreciate and cherish him all the more when he was home.

Curly lead the air group out to the ship. Once he had landed aboard, he took his gear below to his stateroom. On his way up to report to Captain Powmall on the bridge, he noticed a dozen ton and half military trucks and four jeeps with Navy markings parked along the edge of the hangar deck, taking up precious space needed by the air group.

"Whats this all about?" he asked Lieutenant Pete Shemanski, who was in charge of the hangar.

"We're taking them to Guam," was the answer, "along with a company of blue jackets."

"They sure take up a lot of space." Sheffield murmured.

"Tell me about it." Lieutenant Shenanski added. "You should see how they're crammed in below decks. The cruisers are stuffed with them too."

Curly made his way up to the bridge and reported to Captain Pownall. "Welcome aboard, Curly." he said as he handed him a manila envelope. He opened it to find that it contained orders to assume a new post. To his surprise, his new assignment was to be the executive officer of the Enterprise.

Part of the reason for this cruise was to deliver the current executive officer, Commander Garrett Peck, to his new assignment as the deputy commander of naval forces on Guam. His successor had been nominated, approved, and notified of the assignment. Two days before the ship was to sail, he was killed in an automobile accident in Honolulu. A new executive officer was needed quickly.

Since Curly was already attached to the ship, he was nominated. His name was presented to Admiral Richardson, the Commander in Chief of the US Fleet in the Pacific with a request that it be expiated. The approval was granted and the orders were prepared and delivered to the ship just before it sailed that morning. Lieutenant Commander Edward C. Ewen, an Academy classmate of Curly's, who had been serving in the air department, was to take his place as the Air Group Commander.

Curly always new that the day would come when his active flying career would come to an end. He had always assumed it would be to another desk job, not to the bridge of a carrier. This advancement was quite a leap for him and it all came about out of happenstance. He happened to be senior to anyone else who was available at the last minute. This was going to agitate a lot of aspiring Commanders with more seniority above him who compete for billets like this. The senior ranks can be particularly competitive where ego and agenda come into play.

Curly was not one to play those games. He was one who did the very best of any job that was given him and worked hard. Of course he was thrilled with the advancement and wished he could share it with Geannie but it would be several days before he could even get a letter off of the ship.

His appointment was to take affect immediately. Fortunately, Commander Peck was there to show him the ropes, at least until they reached Guam. As Executive officer, he was the second in command of the ship. It really wasn't considered a command billet, but rather a staff position.

He went straight to work while a steward moved his gear into the executive officer's stateroom, as Commander Peck had temporarily moved into another available stateroom. Commander Peck reviewed with him the current status of the ship and the plan for the day. Next he was taken around to all of the division officers, who he already knew, to let them know of his new assignment. Since he had the luxury of time, Curly asked if he could spend a day in each department to not only observe, but to participate in their functions so he would have a better understanding of what they did.

Captain Pownall agreed to his request. The very next day, he visited the air department. He thought he was already familiar with their responsibilities. That day he gained a new appreciation for what went on behind the scenes to get and keep the planes in the air. The day he spent with the navigation department took him way back to his days at the helm of the Wadsworth.

Likewise, he spent a day in each of the other departments: operations, supply, and engineering. He got acquainted with the ship's staff and their duties. These included the chaplain, personnel officer, master at arms, the ship's band, and the ship's secretary, all of whom reported to him.

Over the next several days, Curly learned a lot about his new duties and eased into them. During this time, the task force arrived off Midway on the 8th and spent a couple of days operating in the waters south of Midway. The exercises and drills simulated defending Midway from an invasion force. Curly missed being in the air already.

Although, both Midway and Wake were strategically important, neither one had any real developed military facilities. Beginning in 1935, Pan American Airlines used the islands as fueling stops for their China Clipper flying boats as they island-hopped from San Francisco to China. It was the fastest and most luxurious route to the Orient. Before leaving Midway and steaming to Wake, Curly got a letter off to Geannie with his exiting news.

February 9, 1940

At sea near Midway Island

Aboard the USS Enterprise

Dear Geannie,

You won't believe what has taken place since we said good-bye the other morning. What began as just another cruise has taken on a whole new dimension for me and my career.

When I landed aboard, I reported to the captain as usual. He handed me an envelope containing new orders. You are married to the Big E's new executive officer! Can you believe that? However it does mean my flying career is over. I have mixed emotions about that.

I'm still trying to figure out what all my new job entails. Here's what I do know. I will be responsible for the management of the day-to-day activities aboard the ship, such as maintenance and logistics, freeing the captain to concentrate on tactical planning and execution. I will be supervising the everyday activity and functioning of combat units, service units, and command units of the ship. All of the division officers will report to me.

The Executive Officer controls the process of preparing for getting underway. Before setting sail, I will have to personally make sure that: the ship's supplies are replenished, all the officers and sailors are accounted for, and that no unauthorized individuals are on board. Of course I don't actually do it myself, those who are responsible for those areas will report to me.

Then ten minutes before getting underway, I am to report the ship's readiness to the captain.

I still have a lot to learn. I sure wasn't expecting anything like this. It means that I will be pretty much married to the ship from here on.

Where she goes, I go. Along with the job comes a new stateroom that I've already moved into. It is considerably larger than the one I had.

So what do you think of that? So whats new with you? Knowing you, you will find plenty to do to keep busy.

I can't close without telling you how much I love you. Give my love to the kids. Write back. I'm sure it will catch to me somewhere along the way. I'm anxious to hear from you, as always.

Love Curly.

After leaving Midway, the task force arrived in the vicinity of Wake on the 13th spent two days conducting exercises around Wake. This time the Enterprise provided air cover while the Marine detachments and the sailors bound for Guam on the three cruisers went ashore and took up positions. Their every move was being watched by Japanese submarines and patrol planes from the Marshal Islands, Admiral Newton wanted to make sure that they understood that these were American possessions and that the U.S. had the determination and ability to defend them.

The task force did more than just show the flag. As the Kawanishi Mavis flying boats shadowed the the ships, they were intercepted by the Grumman fighters but were not disturbed. They were allowed to freely observe the live fire exercises and other maneuvers. Likewise, the Japanese submarine contacts were actively prosecuted, again undisturbed. They too had a front row seat to observe the Americans flexing their muscles. Hopefully the Japanese got the message. At the conclusion of the exercises, the landing parties returned to the ships and the task force moved on.

Four days after leaving Wake, the task force dropped anchor on the the 18th in Agana Bay, Territory of Guam. Curly's first order of business was to see that the men and vehicles were off loaded and taken ashore. The tucks were lowered by the boat crane into the barges that came along side. As for the sailors of the landing force, they assembled on the hangar deck in their whites, each man with his sea bag and M-1 rifle, with fixed bayonet. They departed the ship by way of the sea ladder into the ship's boats to be taken ashore. At the same time men were similarly disembarking from the three cruisers.

When the mail was brought aboard, there was a letter for him from Geannie in answer to the letter that he mailed from Midway.

Sunday 11 Feb 1940

Dear Curly

That is great news! I'm not exactly sure what it all entails, but it sounds like you will be busy, not that you wasn't as the air group commander. How do feel about not flying anymore?

Personally I am relieved. After that incident off Panama several years ago I worried each time I sent you off. I always tried to put it out of my mind and not worry about it.

The kids are proud of you. Austin has been bragging to everyone who will listen to him. Before we were married, Mother told me that you would go far. Now just look at where you are.

After seeing you off, I decided to pop into the hospital to see if Ramona had a minute to visit. She was just finishing her rounds and was ready to take a break. We visited at the hospital's soda fountain over some Coca-Cola for a few minutes. Then it was time for her to resume her duties and I went on home. Ramona, Sandy, and I have a girl date this Saturday. We're going shopping!

I have some exciting news for you too. I am teaching eighth grade history at the King David Kalakaua Intermediate School where Austin will be attending in the fall. The regular teacher had become gravely ill and is unable to teach for the rest of the year.

I am the permanent substitute and it may work into a full time position.

Other than that, since you left, things have been pretty much the same around here. Each day is just another day in paradise. I hope this catches up with you at Wake. Sometimes I never know when or where you might get my letters. I look forward to hearing back from you.

I love you, Grannie

X O By the way, that stands for hugs and hisses, not executive officer.

The ship lay at anchor in Agana Bay for three days. During that time Sheffield had an opportunity to go ashore to have a look around. Before sailing again, Curly wrote back to Geannie and sent off a packet to Geannie with a letter and some picture post cards of Guam.

February 21, 1940

Agana, Territory of Guam

Dear Geannie

Say, congratulations on your new job! When I get back we really need to celebrate since we both have new jobs. For the most part, I am pretty much fully functional with mine. Sure there are still little details that come up from time to time. The ship's operation manual tells me everything I need to know. I have to tell you that I feel a little out of my element. This is different from anything I've done before. I miss flying, but I also look forward to the new challenges this job has to offer.

With all of the exercises and drills we've been conducting, I have had my baptism by fire, so to speak, since I am responsible for the readiness of the ship. The call to stations can come anytime, day or night, and the circumstances of the drills vary.

After each exercise, I get with the department heads and evaluate the results of the drill to see where we can improve so we will be ready not if but when war comes.

So now here we are in Guam. Since you are an eighth grade history

teacher, I'm sure I don't need to tell you that Guam became a territory of the United States the year we were born. It is only 1,500 miles southeast of Tokyo, you know. We are here to show the flag and let the Japanese know that this is U.S. territory, in case they get any big ideas.

The crew has been granted liberty in two shifts for seventy hours each. I have been ashore a few times myself. I have enclosed some picture post cards and other mementos for you and the kids.

From here we are sailing into the Philippine Sea to conduct exercises with the U.S. Asiatic Fleet based in Manila. We are hoping the Japanese enjoy the show we plan to put on for them. From there we will return to Guam for a short layover and then retrace our route to ensure our visibility and we should return to Pearl Harbor around the end of the first week in March. When I get home we'll have that big party.

I trust all is well with everything. Knowing you, if it wasn't you wouldn't tell me until I got home anyway. I appreciate the way you take care of everything while I'm away. Shoot, you take care of everything when I'm home too. You're a keeper! I don't know what I would ever do without you.

I love you and can't wait to come home. Give my best to the kids.

Love Curly

After the exercise in the Philippine Sea, the task force retraced their route to the east. At one point, scout planes from the Enterprise encountered a Japanese carrier task force, consisting of the Soryu and Hiryu, doing a little muscle flexing of their own. As the ships steamed east toward Wake, they were constantly under the watchful eyes of the Japanese.

On the 4th of March, the task force rendezvoused with the cruisers Indianapolis, flying the flag of Vice Admiral Adolphus Andrews, New Orleans, and Astoria, and five destroyers from the Hawaiian Detachment and conducted joint maneuvers in the vicinity of Johnston Island eight hundred twenty miles southwest of Pearl Harbor. The exercises also included the submarines Plunger and Pollack, and Mace's patrol squadron of PBY Catalinas operating from the lagoon and the seaplane tender Childs. At the conclusion of this round of exercises, the combined task force sailed for Pearl Harbor and arrived on Friday the 8th of March.

The day that Curly returned from Guam, Geannie had a big welcome home/promotion celebration planned for him. She was in school when the Enterprise steamed into Pearl Harbor and was not there to greet him. Besides, he had business to attend to aboard the ship before he could come home. Once everything was secure, Curly was free to leave the ship.

He got home in time to clean up as Geannie, Ramona, and Pat put the finishing touches on the meal. While waiting, Curly and Mace, who had returned a couple of days earlier, discussed the exercises that they both had just participated in.

The Owens and Ramona were pretty much their circle of friends at the time. He found being the executive officer was much different from the associations he had in the various squadrons he had served in. In addition, the other officers and their families in the neighborhood seemed aloof and difficult to get acquainted with.

During the middle of each week throughout March, the Enterprise went to sea for two or three days at a time. During those brief cruises, Curly wanted to improve the time it took for the crew to man their battle stations. The average amount of time from the time general quarters was sounded to the final report of all stations manned and ready was just over two minutes. He felt that they could and should shave thirty seconds off that time. With the consent of Captain Pownall, he set about to do just that. In order to get the full cooperation of the crew, he made it a competition between departments. The crew took it as a challenge and were eager to prove themselves up to it. Sometimes it was twice a day, some days not at all. Occasionally it was in the middle of the night. During that first month, the time was improved by ten seconds.

Ramona again offered them the use of her beach house. They took her up on it and left the kids home to fend for themselves and had a weekend get a way, just the two of them. It was a lot like the times they went to the cabin back home.

Even though the property was right on the main highway, it was hidden by the natural tall brush that grew along the road. The nearest beach house was good ways away so it afforded a great deal of privacy. Geannie finally got to perform her hula dance that she had planned ever since coming over on the ship. It

was the little intimate things like that kept the romance and their love alive. After all the years, they were still playmates, buddies, best friends, and most importantly, lovers. It was the times like that, that made up for the times when he had to be gone for long periods of time.

The Enterprise took Curly away again on what would have been Charles Emmett's tenth birthday. In April the Enterprise sailed back to the west coast for her first overhaul since she had been commissioned. She stopped off in San Diego to off load the air group before sailing up the coast to Bremerton, Washington.

As the executive officer, Curly followed the progress of the work and reported to the Captain on a regular basis. He was as busy as if they were at sea during that time. With the first part of the work completed, another yard period was planned for November when additional modifications would be carried out. The Enterprise sailed back to San Diego in June and collected her air group and spent the 19th and 20th conducting flight operations and training off San Clemente Island. At the conclusion of the exercises she returned to San Diego and took on an assortment of other planes, including six brand new OS2U Kingfisher float planes and other cargo before sailing on the 25th in the company of six destroyers.

While he was away, life went on as usual for Geannie and kids. In early June they attended Ramona's graduation when she received her masters degree and celebrated with her at her beach house.

The celebrating continued on Tuesday the eleventh, which was a public holiday in the Territory of Hawaii honoring Kamehameha the Great, who first established the unified Kingdom of Hawaii. Geannie and the kids made their way downtown early to find a good spot near Kapiolani Park to watch the Kamehameha Day Parade which started at the Iolani Palace and ended at Kapiolani Park. The floral parade featured local marching bands, including the Royal Hawaiian Band which was formed in 1836, and artistically designed floats using native flowers and plants sponsored by local organizations and businesses.

A favorite parade entry featured the traditional royal *pau* riders led by the festival queen on horseback, followed by princesses representing the eight major Hawaiian islands. Each princess was attended by *pau* ladies in waiting. The riders, all women, wore long, colorful, elegant 19th century riding gowns, accented with leis and other floral arrangements, and characteristically rode astride, rather than sidesaddle. This equestrian tradition dates from the early 19th century, when horses were introduced to Hawaii and women of royal heritage dressed up to go riding on formal occasions.

After the parade, they attended the Hoolaulea in the park with all of its food, music and cultural exhibits — including arts and crafts, games, sports, and other events. Aside from an enjoyable outing, they came away with a better appreciation for Hawaiian history and culture.

By the time he got back on July 2nd, Geannie and the kids were out of school for the summer and

were there to meet him when the ship tied up at the dock. Once the ship was secure and his business wrapped up, he was free to leave the ship and go home with his family. To celebrate his return, they had a big backyard barbecue with Ramona and the Rowans.

Pearl Harbor had become a crowded and bustling place. At the end of Fleet Problem XXI in May, which the Enterprise had missed, the decision was made to base the entire fleet at Pearl Harbor. The move was in direct response to the growing threat of war in Europe and in Asia as the clouds of war grew ever more ominous. In Europe, France had fallen to Nazis in June and now they were waging a brutal aerial campaign against England, known as the Battle of Brittan. In Asia, Japan had conquered the coastal regions of northeast China and had occupied French Indochina after the fall of France.

Now that the Enterprise had returned, she rejoined by her sister ship, the Yorktown as well as the Lexington and Saratoga, all under the command of Vice Admiral William F. Halsey. During the next several months the repair and support facilities were being increased to meet the needs of the fleet.

During July the Enterprise resumed her operation schedule of two or three days a week at sea. On occasion she would be out all week. It was fleet policy to conduct maneuvers during the week and bring the fleet in on the weekends and holidays. It proved to be a great boost to moral. Curly benefited from it as much as everyone else.

The time at sea was leisurely by no means as rigors training exercises and drills were the order of business. It was obvious they were training for war. With so many new men fresh from boot camp and officer training, who had no experience whatsoever, it was imperative that they quickly learned the ropes; a nautical term from the days of sailing ships when new recruits had to learn how to tie knots and which rope hauled up which sail. As the Executive Officer, it was Curly's responsibility to oversee the training on the Enterprise.

Curly and his family took advantage of the time he had at home during the summer and into the fall. The logistics of living in Hawaii made a trip home to Roanoke unfeasible that summer. It would take six days by ship and two days by airplane just to get there, not to mention the cost. Of course their families were disappointed, especially Marie.

Curly scheduled his leave time in increments around the Big E's at sea periods that summer. They usually made a day trip somewhere close by, taking in all the attractions. They did get to the summit of Diamond Head, and the other places that Ramona had showed them. They found other places of interest as well. On occasion they would use Ramona's beech house, sometimes while when she was there. They and Owens had several backyard barbecues in one backyard or the other, to which Ramona was always invited.

Sandy's driving lessons progressed and she was becoming confident with a driver's license within

her grasp. Austin's wish was coming true too. Curly took him to the John Rodgers Airport on several occasions where he checked out a Stearman and took him up for flying lessons. He was eager to learn and did all that his father asked him to do. The idea was to have him ready to solo when he turned sixteen.

There was a two week period when the Enterprise was not scheduled to go to sea at all. For much less than what it would have cost to have gone home, Curly rented a twenty seven foot sailboat complete with a cabin that slept four in two sets of bunk beds, a galley, a lavatory complete with a shower, and a gasoline engine. Curly assigned specific tasks to Geannie and the kids in operating the boat. For the next ten days they sailed among the islands, spending time on Kauai, Moloka'i, Maui, and Hawaii and exploring what they had to offer. While at sea, they observed a host of marine life, including a pair of humpback whales. Each night, wherever they were, they slept on the boat. Working and playing together made it one of the best vacations ever.

As the summer progressed, Geannie received an offer to teach that eighth grade class permanently. It was truly a summer in paradise! The summer concluded with a labor day barbecue and picnic with Ramona and the Owens before Gennie and the kids went back to school.

During the fall, Curly was scheduled to return to the West Coast with the Enterprise for three months. "I feel bad leaving you here while I go back to the States." he lamented to Geannie.

"Yeah." she said, "You'll miss out on everything again this year. But we can make it up when you get back."

"Do you sometimes wish you'd of gone home to Roanoke?" he asked apologetically.

"Heck no." Geannie answered enthusiastically. "It's not everybody who gets to live in Paradise and the kids and I want to take advantage of it while we can, until war breaks out that is. Then we'll most likely go home, because who knows where you might end up. But until then, we're stayin."

Curly was satisfied with her answer and didn't worry about them, they were happy. During the next six weeks, it was pretty much routine with two or three days at sea, sometimes more, but he was most always in port on the weekends.

Then in mid October, Curly sailed again for the west coast with the Enterprise. He was with the ship in dry dock in San Diego on Sandy's sixteenth birthday. Later in the month the Enterprise sailed back up to Bremerton for additional upkeep and refit. Her modifications included a newly developed top secret device called radar that allowed for the detection of ships and aircraft at greater distances. If there was going to be a war, she would be ready.

All the while he was away, they stayed in touch through the mail. Sandy had her sixteen birthday while he was away. Before he left, he declared that she was ready to get her drivers license on her birthday. Geannie held a sweet sixteen birthday party for her and invited all of her friends from school and

church. Sixteen was the magic age when Curly and Geannie said that she not only get her drivers license but when she could start dating. On her birthday, Geannie took her downtown after school to the Department of Motor Vehicles to take her drivers tests and she drove home with her license in hand. Her first date was not long in coming, as she was asked to the Harvest Ball at the high school. Curly missed all of the excitement of all of these occasions.

* * * * *

Commander Garrett Peck is a fictional character. The actual executive officer prior to this time was Commander Van Ragsdale. Around this time (at least prior to June 1940) Commander Felix B. Stump became the executive officer.

Lieutenant Commander Edward C. Ewen was actually the commander of the Enterprise Air Group in 1940 and was a 1921 graduate of the US Naval Academy. He later became the Captain of the USS Independence from July 1944 to February 1945 and rose to the rank of Vice Admiral during the Korean War.

The Central Pacific cruise is hypothetical. There is mention of the Enterprise sailing as far west as Guam some time in 1940 or 1941. The cruisers Northampton, Pensacola, and Salt Lake City did carry men to Guam in September 1940. The exercises at Johnston Island are also fictional.

The time the Enterprise spent on the West Coast is factual.

The OS2U Kingfisher were actually first delivered in August rather than July, with six of the first delivery going to the Battle Force at Pearl Harbor.

Kamehameha Day, the parade, Royal Hawaiian Band, pau riders, and the Hoolaulea are all as described and are still a part of the Kamehameha Day festivities

