

Chapter LX

Battle Order Number One

November 28, 1941 – December 7, 1941

Curly stopped by his office and gathered up the papers he had been working on to take with him. From there, he left his jeep parked and walked to Ten Ten Dock where the Enterprise was preparing to get underway.

When he boarded the ship, Admiral Halsey, Commander Browning and a couple of others were already there. The rest arrived shortly. The ship was bustling with activity as it made ready to get underway. The same activity was going on aboard all of the ships of Task Force 2, including the battleships Arizona, Oklahoma, and Nevada.

Assisted by three tugboats, the Enterprise edged away from the dock shortly after 7:30 and was soon making her way through the channel. One by one the ships made their way out to sea and formed up. Everything seemed routine, with nothing out of the ordinary. At 9:30 the ship went to flight quarters. A half an hour later, once the task force had sailed out of sight of land, Admiral Halsey split his force into two groups. He detached Enterprise, three cruisers, and nine destroyers from the rest of Task Force 2. There was nothing unusual about that since the exercise plan called for the carrier and cruisers to operate independently. Now designated as Task Force 8 the Enterprise and the cruisers Northampton, Salt Lake City, and Chester and nine destroyers continued into the wind coming out of the southwest.

The first indication to those of Admiral

Halsey's staff that something unusual was up was when the rest of Task Force 2 stood off to the east, they were ordered to conduct their scheduled exercises and return to port in three days. The orders were puzzling to Curly and the rest of the staff, since the exercise plans seemed to have been tossed aside. Neither Admiral Halsey nor Commander Browning showed any sign that anything was unusual as the air group became coming aboard. First were the seventeen F4F-3 Wildcats of Fighting Six plus eleven more from Marine Fighting Two Eleven. They were followed by the thirty six SBD-2 Dauntlesses from Scouting Six and Bombing Six. Last to come aboard were the venerable old TBD-1 Devastators of Torpedo Six. One Fighting Six and one Marine Wildcat were left behind because their engines failed to start. The pilots of the two grounded fighters caught a ride out to the ship with Torpedo Six.

No one was surprised by the arrival of the Marine Corps Wildcats, since Commander Browning had indicated in his telephone call the previous evening that they had been added to the exercise at the last minute.

The real indication that this was not going to be just another exercise came as the task force left Oahu behind when Admiral Halsey ordered the thirteen ships under his immediate command to change course to the west and go to Condition III. Condition III meant that ammunition was to be ready for use.

Then to everyones surprise, the Admiral turned to Lieutenant Dow, the communications officer and ordered, "Send the following to all ships in the Task Force. Current operations involve necessity readiness for instant action."

Next he turned to his chief of staff and simply said, "Commander."

Commander Browning began handing each man on the flag bridge a sheet of paper. Curly took his and began reading. It stated:

U.S.S. ENTERPRISE
At Sea
November 28, 1941

BATTLE ORDER NUMBER ONE

1. The ENTERPRISE is now operating under war conditions.
2. At any time, day or night, we must be ready for instant action.
3. Hostile submarines may be encountered.
4. The importance of every officer and man being specially alert and vigilant while on watch at his battle station must be fully realized by all hands.
5. The failure of one man to carry out his assigned task promptly, particularly the lookouts, those manning the batteries, and all those on watch on the deck, might result in great loss of life and even loss of the ship.
6. The Captain is confident all hands will prove equal to any emergency that may develop.
7. It is part of the tradition of our Navy that, when put to the test, all hands keep cool, keep their heads, and FIGHT.
8. Steady nerves and stout hearts are needed now.

G. D. MURRAY,
Captain, U.S. Navy
Commanding

Approved: November 28, 1941.
W. F. HALSEY,
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy,
Commander Aircraft, Battle Force

The airmen were ordered to report to their respective ready rooms. Once the pilots were seated,

they too were handed a mimeographed sheet of paper. At the same time, the same information was disseminated throughout the carrier. The men who thought they had set sail as part of an emergency sortie drill and a weekend of exercises also read the order with alarm

Until that moment, only four men aboard the Enterprise knew of the secret mission at hand. They were Admiral Halsey, Commander Browning, Captain Murray, and Major Putman, the commander of the Marine fighter squadron. The need for secrecy was so critical that the ruse of an emergency sortie drill was a cover for the true purpose. Not even Admiral Halsey's staff knew of it.

With the blank faces of his staff looking at him, Admiral Halsey explained that the Marine fliers were being ferried to Wake Island to fortify the garrison stationed there.

Commander Buracker, the Operations Officer, the first to respond, said what was on the mind of every man present. All of the officers on the staff were always permitted to speak freely, since the Admiral valued their input.

"Admiral," he asked, "Did you authorize this battle order?"

"Yes." Admiral Halsey answered.

"Do you realize this means war?"

"Yes." he answered again.

"Dammit, Admiral, you can't start a private war of your own. Who's going to take responsibility?"

"I'll take it." Bill Halsey snapped. Then he added. "Shoot first and we'll argue afterwards. I am go shoot anything that gets in my way. Now are there any other comments?"

No one else spoke up.

"Good. We'll go in, deliver the Marines and get out. If everything goes without any unforeseen complications, I anticipate that we'll be back in Pearl on Saturday the sixth. From here on out we will observe strict radio silence as we are operating under wartime conditions.

"Yesterday afternoon, Admiral Kimmel received a dispatch from the Navy Department with a war warning. Furthermore negotiations with the Japs have broken off and its anticipated that they'll make a move in the next few days, most likely in the Philippines and Indonesia. We have to be on our toes since where we are going is closer to Tokyo than the Pearl."

"Then why aren't we going to the Philippines?" Someone asked.

"That's a good question. I wish we were, but prudence directs otherwise. With Saratoga in the yard and the Yorktown, Wasp, and Ranger in the Atlantic, the Enterprise and Lexington would be no match against the Japs with what we have. They have years of combat experience in China. My guess is once they make their move, Washington will be better able to assess their strength and put together an appropriate response."

Someone else spoke up, "Just like called for in War Plan Orange."

"Exactly." The Admiral replied.

"So if we're no match for them, what chance does a handful of fighters and the defense garrison on Wake have?"

"Not a chance in hell." Halsey answered grimly. "If the Japs come this way, maybe they'll slow them down enough for us to get our act together.

"Now if there's nothing else, we all have a job to do, and I'm confident that you'll do it well. But its not going to get done standing around here so lets get to it."

The impromptu meeting broke up and the men began going about their work. As Curly was about to leave, Admiral Halsey said, "Commander Brason. I have a job for you."

Curly turned around and replied, "Yes sir."

"Curly, I need you to make sure the the Marines have everything they need, including another plane to replace the one left behind. Spare no expense, within our resources."

"Yes sir, Admiral." I'll get right on it. Oh and once the patrols are set, I'll coordinate them with the float planes on the cruisers."

"Good man, Brason. As always, you're right on top of things. Let me know if there is anything you need from me."

"Yes, sir" Curly said as he saluted his old neighbor. We then promptly turned around to leave to go about his business.

His first item of business was to meet with Commander Buraker and others to work out the general search and patrol needs. They pretty much followed standard procedures that had been used in the countless exercises in the previous months, only this time the planes would be carrying live ammunition. Commander Buraker took the operation plan to Commander Browning, who was much too busy to rework it as he typically did, but simply took it to Admiral Halsey for his approval.

Once the Admiral signed off on it, Curly took it to Commander Tom Jeter, the executive officer. It was up to the ship's air department and air group as how to implement it. After handing it off to them, Curly had the orders for the cruiser float planes flashed in Morse code to the commander of Cruiser Scouting Squadron Five on the Northampton.

A combat air patrol had been in the air all along and at 1512 four SBD' were sent aloft on inner anti-submarine patrol and a dozen SBDs were sent out to search one hundred fifty miles ahead of the task force from the southwest to the northwest. In addition to the planes in the air, four Wildcats were held in readiness along with an SBD armed with two depth charges.

With the patrols in the air, Curly turned his attention to the Marines. When he met with them in the

spare ready room, they had just completed a briefing on their mission, which caught them completely off guard. In his meeting with them, Curly learned that they only had between fifteen and twenty hours in their F4F-3s after having just recently transitioned from their F3F-2 biplanes. For most of them, their landing aboard the ship that morning had been their first carrier landing. Since the Marines were ship bound during the passage, rather than see them spend their days playing cards, Curly arranged for a series of lectures from Fighting Six pilots on everything from gunnery to aircraft maintenance.

Next Curly turned his attention to providing what they needed from what was available aboard the ship. Under authority from Admiral Halsey, Curly arranged for an F4F-3 to be transferred from Fighting Six to bring them up to their intended strength of twelve aircraft, one for each pilot. His next stop was the aviation storeroom with a request to provide as many spare parts as they could feasibly take with them.

With this accomplished, Curly returned to the flag bridge. The only thing out of the ordinary that had turned up during the day was a possible mine spotted by the destroyer McCall. Not taking any chances, it was destroyed by machine gun fire. As it turned out, it was most likely just something that had fallen off a ship sometime and was adrift with the current.

After dinner, Curly added his contribution to operations plan for the next day. Late in the evening, Curly retired to his stateroom. After making an entry into his log book he got ready for bed and said his prayers. In light of the events of the day, his prayers were more fervent than normal. As he climbed into his bunk, his thoughts were of the family that he left behind that morning. At least things were now in place for him to take them home to the safety of Roanoke and he would be home for their birthaversary.

He thought of leaving Geannie that morning as he drifted off to sleep. The vision of her was what dreams were made of. That night in his dreams he relived that moment, only this time he yielded to her enticings.

The next morning Curly was up early, but not as early as the fliers assigned to the dawn patrol. He got up and got dressed as was at his post on the flag bridge when the planes began taking off into the dawn sky with the eastern horizon behind them showing the tale tale signs of the impending sunrise. The question on everyone's mind was, "What would they find out there today?"

After the last plane left the deck, the task force resumed its westerly course. Sheffield went down to the officers wardroom for breakfast before going to the flag ready room for the morning briefing. When it was his turn, he reported on what he had done for the Marines the day before and his plans for the day. Again, Admiral Halsey stressed importance of the mission at hand and insisted on vigilance in performing their duties.

Curly's first stop after the staff briefing was to check in on the Marnie's planes parked on the hangar deck. Since they hadn't brought their ground crews with them, he wanted to make sure they were properly

serviced before they arrived off Wake. He was pleased to find that Fighting Six's chief mechanic already had his men going over them with a fine toothed comb. He told the chief to spare no expense.

The planes, still in their outdated overfall light gray camouflage, which stood out against the planes of the Big E's air group. The blue gray over light gray scheme seemed much more affective so Curly made his way up to Pri Fly to talk to Commander Alvin Malstrom, his counterpart on the Enterprise, and asked if he could assign a detail to repaint the planes to bring them up to standard. Knowing that Admiral Halsey had given Curly a blank check, he readily complied, but with the explanation that it would be the next day before anyone could get to them.

Curly spent most of the rest of the day siting in on the lectures and training films being presented to the Marine fliers. The pilots of Fighting six willing gave up their off duty time to impart their knowledge and wisdom. They were just glad that they weren't going with them.

Late in the afternoon, Curly attended the afternoon staff briefing and reported on all he had done that day. At the end of his report Admiral Halsey commented, "Good work, as always Commander. Thanks for looking after our guests. By the way, that was a good idea to repaint their planes."

The second day at sea went without incident and no enemy sightings, but as the Admiral reminded everyone, "That doesn't mean their not out there."

The third day at sea was much the same as the first and second days as the task force continued west under partly cloudy skies at readiness Condition III with the combat air patrol over head and the inner anti-submarine patrol on lookout in the area immediately around the task force. According to the search plan, fourteen SBDs fanned out ahead from south-southeast to north-northwest with areas of reduced visibility ahead.

It wasn't long before one of the search planes spotted a submarine on the surface heading east, towards Pearl Harbor. About a half an hour later the same pilot spotted a second submarine also on the surface headed east. On closer investigation, he found them to be the Narwhal and Dolphin who were returning to Pearl Harbor after simulated war patrols in the vicinity of Wake. Rather than break radio silence, he returned and reported the sighting by dropping a hand written message attached to a beanbag onto the flight deck.

The fact that it was Sunday had no affect the daily activities. The air department began repainting the Marine Wildcats as Curly had requested. He sat in on what had been dubbed "Wildcat School" as Fighting Six pilots continued to tutor their Marine counterparts. One segment was on Japanese aircraft recognition. The silhouettes that were used were somewhat outdated causing one Marine pilot to say, "They don't look too hot."

That lead to more comments form both the Marines and Fighting Six pilots about how their Wildcats

could easily take on the fixed wheel, open cockpit Mitsubishi A5M Claudes.

That's when Commander Brason interrupted. "You've got to remember what you're looking at here is outdated material. We have intelligence reports of the latest aircraft that the Japanese have been using in China. No one has seen them or knows what they are actually capable of. Something else you're forgetting is that these guys have four years of combat experience. So gentlemen, and I'm talking to all of you, don't get too confident or you'll find yourselves going down in flames. Sure, our Wildcats are a vast improvement over the old flying barrel biplane we were flying only six months ago, but we honestly don't know what we're up against. If we're going to beat them, we've got to outsmart them."

His little speech brought the lesson on aircraft recognition to an end. As the men filed out of the ready room, they were in a more somber mood.

The last three days of operating under wartime conditions had put everyone in a somber mood. For many, it must have put the fear of God in them, because when Curly attended Sunday services on the hangar deck, they had to bring in more chairs. Men who most likely hadn't attended church since their youth, if at all, suddenly felt aware of their own mortality and uncertain futures.

While sitting through the service, Curly's thoughts turned to Geannie and the kids. He knew that they too had gone to church that day. Sandy and Austin were practicing for a number that the youth would be presenting the following Sunday and he would be there to see it. Even more than that, he was anxious to take them home to Roanoke before the clouds of war were unleashed.

After the services, Curly returned to his duties for the rest of the day. He was on the flag bridge late in the afternoon when a radar contact was reported. Two planes were at eighteen and twenty eight miles away at 2,500 feet. The report was of no alarm since it was known that PBY patrol bombers were operating temporarily out of Wake to cover the approach of the task force. Nevertheless the combat air patrol was dispatched to verify the contact. After twenty five minutes contact was lost.

Monday the 1st was fueling day. After sending the patrols aloft, the task force slowed down to seven knots while over the next several hours the Enterprise and the three cruises fueled the nine destroyers. When the fueling operation was over in mid afternoon, the Northampton reported that some of the fueling rig had fouled one of her propellers and that it would take about two hours to clear it.

Admiral Halsey ordered the Benham to remain behind with her, while the rest of the task force went on their way at eighteen knots.

At midnight the task force crossed the International Date Line and they went from December 1st to the 3rd, skipping the 2nd altogether. Before dawn the Northampton and Benham caught up and rejoined the formation. Just before dawn, the morning patrols took to the air. Flying conditions were good with partly cloudy skies and an unlimited ceiling. On the surface there were moderate winds, calm seas and good

visibility with slight haze. The only contact that day was a PBY from the Wake Patrol spotted to port shortly after noon.

Being the final day before arriving off Wake, it was a busy day getting the twelve airplanes ready. By the end of the day, they had all been repainted and tuned up and in excellent working condition. The planes were brought up on deck and parked along the starboard edge of the flight deck, facing outward so their guns could be test fired and trained. After any necessary adjustments, they were struck below.

As many spare parts as possible were crammed into every nook and cranny. The fliers received more instructions and by the end of the day they had been given so much information during the course of the cruise that their heads were swimming. They were as prepared as was possible, given their mission.

That evening they were treated to a special dinner prepared in their honor, hosted by the Admiral Halsey. In his remarks, Major Putnam said, among other things, "Thank you Admiral Halsey for not only getting us here but for seeing to it that we are in as fine of condition as possible. At the direction of Commander Brason, everyone had made it a competition to see who could do the most for us. I don't know about the rest of my men, but I feel a bit like a fatted calf being groomed for whatever it is that happens to fatted calves."

Curly wasn't sure how well the Marines slept that night, but he laid awake worrying about them. In his prayers he asked a blessing upon them as they carried out an impossible mission. Their faces and names rolled around in his mind as we wondered what would become of them with Admiral Halsey's comment about them not standing a chance ringing in his ears. Even if the war was to start in the Philippines, Wake stood directly between Japan and their bases in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands, which were within range of land based bombers. If they wanted it, there wasn't much a dozen planes and a garrison of five hundred Marines could do to stop them.

Despite a restless night, Curly was up early to see if there were any last minute needs the Marines had before sending them off. If they were apprehensive they didn't show it when Curly attended their final briefing.

At dawn on the 4th of December the task force was one hundred seventy four miles north of Wake when they turned into the wind. At 0530 the Enterprise began flight operations by sending off four Fighting Six F4F's for combat air patrol, followed by a section of three SBDs to serve as the inner anti-submarine patrol, and fourteen SBDs from Scouting Six to search out to a distance of two hundred twenty five miles, from south to northwest.

With the morning patrols in the air, the Marine Wildcats were brought up to the flight deck and spotted for launch along with the air group commander's SBD and six others to serve as an escort. Admiral Halsey instructed Curly to ride along in the rear seat of the lead escort SBD flown by Commander Harold

Young, the air group commander.

Just after 0700, lookouts spotted a PBY orbiting the task force that was sent out from Wake to guide the Marines in. That was the signal to begin launching. Once airborne, the Marines and their escort winged their way to Wake Island through partly cloudy skies with good visibility. Once the Island was in sight, the escorts waved farewell and turned back and the Marines went on ahead.

When the escorts reached the task force, it was already heading back to Pearl Harbor. As soon as the escort flight landed aboard around 1145, Curly returned to the flag bridge and reported to Admiral Halsey that Marines had been delivered.

On the flight back to the carrier, one of the pilots observed what he said was a column of three ships eighty miles east-northeast of Wake. Upon further investigation nothing was found. Other than a couple of emergency landings, the rest of the day was uneventful.

During the night the task force entered a rain squall. At one point a lookout reported lights to the southeast and the destroyer McCall was detached in investigate. Around 0900 the McCall returned to report that lights observed during the night belonged to the fleet tug Sonoma, towing two barges enroute from Wake to Pearl Harbor. They were the column of three ships reported the day before. Although the task force was on the homeward leg of their mission, they continued to operate under wartime conditions. Flight operations resumed before dawn and continued through out the day.

The 5th was repeated after recrossing the International Date Line during the night.

The only excitement second 5th was a couple of emergency landings. When the tail hook Wildcat failed to deploy, the flight deck was cleared and the carrier worked up to twenty knots into a twenty seven knot wind. The plane plane landed safely. However in the afternoon as SBD crash landed and had to be repaired. As the afternoon wore on, the weather worsened with the wind and sea increasing in intensity to a moderate gale.

That evening, for the first time since leaving Pearl Harbor, the crew was treated to a movie on the hangar deck. Curly and others from the Admiral's staff joined the officers and crew in watching "A Yank in the R.A.F." starring Tyrone Power and Betty Grable.

During the night the storm intensified and the task force slowed to fifteen knots. The smaller destroyers particularly had rough going in the heavy seas that were more like the North Atlantic. On the morning of the 6th, the day they were to return to port, flight operations were canceled as they plodded on through stormy seas. By early afternoon the weather moderated enough to resume flight operations and the for the larger ships to refuel the destroyers as the task force slowed to seven knots in heavy seas. Again that night, a movie was shown on the hangar deck. This time it was "Sergent York" starring Gary Cooper, another war movie. It was and if someone was trying to tell them something.

On Sunday morning Curly arose and got ready for the day. It was their birthaversary and he was anxious to get back so he could take his family home to safety. As the sun began to rise in a clear sky, the combat patrol was spotted the flight deck along with the eighteen Dautlesses of Scouting Six with orders to search ahead of the task force before landing at Ford Island.

On the flag bridge, Admiral Halsey met with his staff. He directed the Tactical Officer, Lieutenant Nichol to go with Scouting Six and report in person too Admiral Kimmell that the Marines had been delivered. The secrecy of the mission was to important to call in by radio.

Then Admiral Halsey turned to Curly. "Why don't you go along with them so you can get home to Geannie and celebrate your anniversary and get started on your leave. The only thing I ask is that you check in with me before you leave."

Curly saluted and said, "Thank you, sir."

He and Lieutenant Nichol headed for Scouting Six's ready room and were each issued the necessary flight gear. Two of the rear seat gunners were bumped from the flight to make room for the officers. He decided to leave Geannie's birthaversary gift in the closet in his stateroom and get it and the rest of his gear later that afternoon after the ship came into port.

The task force turned into the wind two hundred fifty miles due west of pearl Harbor and at 0615 commenced launching the planes with orders to fly out on search legs to one hundred fifty miles and land at Ford Island.

Curly's anticipation grew as they neared Oahu. He had missed this day both of the last two years. This, being their twentieth anniversary, was a special day.

At 0825, the two plane section approached Barbers Point on the southwest tip of Oahu from the southwest at an altitude fifteen hundred feet, Curly and the pilot, Lieutenant (jg) Grant Ewbank, noticed numerous shell splashes in the water at the entrance to Pearl Harbor. They looked for the source and saw one cruiser and three destroyers about three miles off the entrance but they were not firing. Upon looking up, they saw numerous anti-aircraft bursts above Pearl Harbor. The Marine Corps Air Station at Ewa Field was on fire with dense smoke rising as high as five thousand feet above Barbers Point. Smoke was also rising above the harbor to the east. The two pilots started climbing and leveled off at four thousand feet off over Barbers Point.

As they headed towards Pearl Harbor, the plane Curly was in and the lead plane were jumped by two fighters which concentrated on the other plane. Curly didn't recognize them, but the markings on the sleek smart looking planes were definitely Japanese. "These must be their new fighters." he reckoned to himself.

Without time to process what was happening, Curly immediately deployed the flexible thirty caliber

machine gun and began firing at the enemy planes while Lieutenant Ewbank began jinking up and down and swerving back and forth in an attempt to shake of their attacker.

As they went down to one thousand feet, four other Zeros joined the foray. At that time the other SBD caught on fire on the right side of the engine and the right main fuel tank. It lost speed and dropped back about fifty yards astern and to the left. It was still attempting to fight as it slowly circled to the left losing altitude. Only one parachute opened at about two hundred feet before the plane struck the ground. Curly was too busy fighting off the Zeros that now turned their attention on them to notice.

Curly hit one of the Zeros. As it caught fire and lost altitude, Curly didn't see whether it hit the ground or not. He quickly turned his attention to next closet Zero and continued firing. As Curly poured his remaining ammunition into the Zero, the plane he was in was hit and the left wing caught on fire. The pilot called back that his and controls had been shot away. He told Curly to jump. As he bailed out of the stricken plane at a thousand feet, it went into a right spin. Curly's parachute had already opened when he saw the pilot bail out.

As he floated downward, Curly saw the pilot's parachute open some distance away from him. He watched as the plane he had been riding in crashed into a sugarcane field and explode. He also noticed three other pillars of smoke nearby. He wondered if they were from the planes he had taken under fire. Off to the west he had a bird's eye view of the carnage that had rained down on Pearl Harbor. His reaction was to get there as quickly as possible and do what he could to help. Then the thought occurred to him to first stop by the house on his way to the base and make sure Geannie and the kids were alright.

As he neared the ground he noticed a jeep racing toward the point where he was about to touch down, just a little northeast of the Marine Air Station. As his feet hit the ground in tall grass, he went into a roll and a stood back on his feet. As he was unhooking his parachute harness he found himself surrounded by a squad of four Marines. Their bayoneted M1 rifles leveled on him.

Instinctively he raised his hands above his head and stood still. As the Marines approached he called out, "I am Commander Sheffield Brason, United States Navy. My plane was just shot down."

The Marines raised their guns and the squad leader asked, "Are you the one that just shot down those two Jap bastards?"

"I know I hit two of them, but I didn't see them go down." Curly politely asked, "Can I commandeer your jeep. I've got to get back Pearl Harbor as quickly as possible."

"Yes, sir." the squad leader replied as he saluted. "Go get 'em."

Curly hopped in the jeep and made his way to the main highway and headed back toward the harbor. It took him better than a half an hour to make the fifteen mile trip around the north end of the harbor. It was nine thirty when he pulled into his driveway and rushed into the house.

Nobody was home. He noticed Geannie's journal open on the table. It already had an entry for the day. It read:

Sunday December 7, 1941.

Today is our birthaversary! I have been married to my wonderful husband now for twenty marvelous years. Still no word from him after nine days. I had heard that they were supposed to have been home yesterday. I sure hope he comes home toady. We have been apart for our last two birthaversaries. I can't wait to see what he got me this time. We're running late. The kids have a practice for a part the youth group is in at church services today. I have to hurry.

"At least they are in town at the church." Curly concluded to himself. He rushed back out to the jeep to hurry back to the base to see what he could do. The last of the enemy planes had cleared the sky as he got back onto the highway. Thick black smoke was billowing into the sky as explosions continued.

Four thousand seven hundred miles to the east in Roanoke, Virginia, Marie woke up at six thirty in the morning on December 7, 1941 when it was midnight in Hawaii. She went about her usual Sunday morning routine. She thought of Geannie and Curly and it being their birthdays. "How did my baby girl get to be forty three years old?" she asked herself. "Where has the time gone? Today is their twentieth anniversary. Why it seems like only yesterday."

At eleven o'clock she was seated in the center of the third row with Sarah and her children on one side of her and Stirling and his family on the other side. The row directly behind them was taken up by Charlie and Winslow and their families. The fourth row was taken by the Brasons. Walt and Emmett were seated on the rostrum. Walt began the service with his usual welcome. He then offered the invocation which included a plea that the negotiations in Washington between the United States and the Empire of Japan might reach a peaceful solution.

At just after two o'clock in the afternoon in Roanoke, Marie, Sarah, and Sylvia were putting on the finishing touches for Sunday dinner at three. In the background they were listing to the NBC Radio Network's broadcast of Sammy Kaye's Sunday Serenade with Sammy and his Orchestra, Tommy Ryan,

Alan Foster, and the Three Kaydettes. The day's broadcast was just about finished and next up at two thirty was the rather dull University of Chicago Round Table. The topic for the day was "Canada: A Neighbor at War."

They weren't interested in listening to it so Marie went to tune to another station. Just as the NBC network program changeover was to take place, NBC news writer Robert Eisenbach interrupted the regularly scheduled programming with the following bulletin:

"From the NBC News Room in New York. President Roosevelt said in a statement today that the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii from the air. I'll repeat that. President Roosevelt says that Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii from the air. This bulletin has come to you from the NBC News Room in New York."

At the conclusion of the bulletin, NBC returned to their regularly scheduled broadcast. Marie froze in stunned silence, her trembling hand to her open mouth. The ashen tone of the skin on her wrinkled face betrayed the terror that gripped her heart. Also hearing the announcement, Sarah rushed to her aunt's side and helped the speechless woman into the wingback chair next to the radio.

At that moment, there was a frantic knock on the door. Sarah answered the door to find her shaken mother-in-law on the door step. Ellen entered the house and asked, "Did you just hear the bulletin that came over the radio?"

"Yes, we did!" Sarah answered.

Marie finally spoke, "I pray that Geannie, Curly and the kids are alright. The last letter I got from her said that Curly was at sea and she didn't know when he would be back."

Ellen said, "With any luck, he is still at sea and his ship is not there."

"Sarah, dear." Marie asked, "Why don't you see if you can get through to them on the telephone? I know it would be costly, but I have to know that they are alright."

Marie and Ellen comforted each other while Sarah picked up the telephone, "Hello operator. Can you patch me through to PH5-3274 in Hawaii?"

After a pause she was heard to say, "Thank you, operator. I'll try again later." She hung up the telephone and reported, "All of the circuits are busy. I couldn't get through."

Gathering her composure, Marie stood up and said, "We'll just have to hope for the best, won't we." Turning to her long time friend, she asked, "Ellen, would you and Emmett like to join us for dinner? I have a fine Virginia ham and some baked potatoes about ready to come out of the oven."

"Well, I suppose that will be alright. I have a peach pie that I was just about to put in the oven. Can I contribute it to the cause?"

"Sylvia, will you run next door and bring it over. We can put it in when the ham comes out."

Just then their attention was again turned to the radio:

“We interrupt this program to take you to the NBC News Room.”

“From the NBC News Room in New York. The White House also announced today an air attack, a simultaneous air attack, on Army and Navy bases in Manila. This report follows the President's summation that all Army and Navy bases on Oahu in Hawaii are now under air attack. This bulletin came to you from the NBC News Room.”

“Now back to our regularly scheduled program.”

Another moment of stunned silence. Sarah was the first to say something. “It looks like it has started.”

Ellen lent a hand as the three women set about getting ready for dinner. Their conversation centered on what the news meant.

Just then Walt and Curtis came in. Sensing the serious tone, Walt asked, “Whats going on?”

They all paused and looked at him blankly. Marie answered his inquiry, “It just came over the radio, the Japanese are bombing Pearl Harbor.”

“What?” Walt asked incredulously. Have you tried to get through to Curly and Geannie?”

Sarah answered, “Yes. I just tried. All of the circuits are busy.”

“This can't be happening.” Walt stated numbly. “Why, just this morning they were talking about the peace negotiations on the news. It sounded hopeful.”

“The news doesn't sound good. Manila is being bombed too.” Sarah added. Then turning to Curtris, “Go next door and get Grandpa Brason. Tell him dinner is ready.”

Everyone was just getting seated when Curtis returned with Emmett. “Have you been hearing what's going on?” he asked.

Before anyone could answer him, the telephone rang. It was Charlie.

Finally they were all seated at the table. Marie asked Walt to say Grace.

“Dear, gracious Lord. We thank thee for this meal and ask thy blessings upon it to our nourishment and strength. We are mindful Lord, of the events unfolding. We ask thy protecting hand on Geannie, Curly and the kids and anyone caught up in these events. Bless our nation at this time of crisis. In the name of thy Son, Jesus. Amen”

No sooner had Grace been said that the telephone rang again. This time it was Winslow. The telephone rang several times during dinner. Each time, Marie hoped it was Geannie calling to tell them that they were all safe.

In case there was more news, the radio was left on. The conversation was one of worry and concern for Geannie, Curly, and the kids. At one point in the conversation, Marie literally shuddered as if

shiver ran down her back. It caused her to utter, "I fear something is dreadfully wrong."

At four o'clock as they sat around the table still visiting after dinner, "We interrupt this program..."

"Quick! Turn it up." Marie asked.

"... to bring you this special broadcast." Curtis went into the other room to turn up the radio.

"Here's the bulletin. Washington. The President decided today after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and Manila to call an extraordinary meeting of the cabinet for eight thirty p.m. tonight and have congressional leaders of both parties join the conference at nine p.m. We now take you to Hawaii."

"One, two, three, four. Hello NBC, Hello NBC. This is KGU in Honolulu, Hawaii. I am speaking from the roof of the Advertiser Publishing Company building. We have witnessed this morning from a distance, a view of a brief full battle of Pearl Harbor and a severe bombing of Pearl Harbor by enemy planes, undoubtedly Japanese. The city of Honolulu has also been attacked and considerable damage done. This battle has been going on for nearly three hours. One of the bombs dropped within fifty feet of KGU tower. It is no joke, it is a real war.

"The public of Honolulu has been advised to keep in their homes and await results from the Army and Navy. There has been fierce fighting going on in the air and on the sea. The heavy shooting seems to be... One, two, three, four, just a moment, we'll interrupt here.

"We cannot estimate yet how much damage has been done, but it has been a very severe attack. The Navy and Army appear now to have the air and the sea under control."

At that point in his report, a telephone switchboard operator interrupted, "Uh, just a minute. May I interrupt for just a second please? This is the telephone company. This is the operator. We are trying to get through an emergency call. Could you..." The rest of her comment was unintelligible.

The reporter replied "Well, we are talking to New York now. (Static) One, two, three, four. Hello NBC. One, two,..." At that point his transmission ended.

The NBC announcer returned to the regular programming. Needless to say, the Austins and Brasons along with the rest of the nation spent an uneasy evening, gleaning what news they could.

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Battle Order Number One and the response to it by Admiral Halsey's staff are actual. All of the staff members named are actual people and the roles they play are as they were except for Lieutenant (jg) Grant Ewbank. The bulk of this chapter comes from "Steady Nerves and Stout Hearts" by Robert J. Cressman, J. Michael Wenger, and John F. Divirgillo

The engagement Curly finds him self in is based off actual action reports files by Scouting Six pilots detailing their encounters with the enemy.

The radio broadcast is the transcript of the actual NBC radio network reports.

