

Chapter XLII

A Shattered World

December 7, 1941 – December 10, 1941

Curly picked up Geannie's lifeless body in his arms and pressed it against himself, her blood staining his shirt. He totally lost all control as his tears mixed with her blood. The loss was overwhelming. He had lost his playmate and buddy, his best friend, wife, and lover. How could he go on without her? The thought was more than he could bear at that moment. There had never been a time in his life that she was not a part of.

Ramona stood by as she watched her friend die. Her heart broke for the man she loved as he grieved for the only one he had ever loved. It was then that she noticed the two inch piece of metal protruding from behind his left shoulder. "You've been injured, Curly!" She exclaimed as she helped him to his feet.

"It must of happened when the plane I was in was shot down."

"You were shot down?" she shirked. She had him sit back down on the edge of Geannie's bed and had him take off his shirt to examine the wound. Since all of the doctors were overwhelmed with more serious cases, she took care of it herself. It was about a half an inch deep and two inches long.

It hadn't hurt until she swabbed it with alcohol. Using an instrument, she removed the piece of shrapnel. It didn't bleed much as the blood around it had coagulated. She cleansed the wound with alcohol, treated it with antibiotics and iodine and proceeded to stitch it up. Finally, she dressed it with a bandage. He put his shirt back and she slipped the piece of metal into his shirt pocket. "Keep that as a souvenir of this horrible day."

Curly stood back as Ramona pulled the sheet over Geannie face and signaled for a corpsman. Curly stood there stunned and in shock as Geannie was taken away. Ramona lead him by the arm and as they followed Geannie's body to the morgue. Ramona said to the officer in charge, "She goes with the two teenagers and this is her husband."

"I have to go now Curly. As you can see, I have a lot to do. I'll catch up with you later."

"Ramona." he said, his voice still shaking, "Thank you for everything you have done. And thanks for stitching me up."

Ramona turned and waved as she she rushed off.

Lieutenant Commander Parsons, the officer responsible for the morgue, directed the corpsman to place Geannie's body next to Sandy and Austin. "Are these your children?" He asked Curly. "I need you to make a positive identification."

He pulled back the sheet from Sandy. Curly gasped as he gazed on her barely recognizable face. She had been hit it head just above her left ear.

"This is my seventeen year old daughter, Sandy." he said quietly.

Then Commander Parsons uncovered Austin. He had been hit in his neck, the bullet severing an artery as it passed through.

"And this is my fourteen year son, Austin."

"Thank you Commander. I'm so sorry for your loss."

"That is my entire family." Curly said quivering.

"Since they are civilian casualties, I need to transfer them to a mortuary in Honolulu. Do you have a preference, sir?"

"Not really. I was going to take them home on Wednesday. I guess I need to have them ready by then so I can keep my promise."

"Yes, sir. One moment, please." Commander Parsons said as he stepped into his office. Curly pulled down Geannie's cover once more to look into her lifeless face.

Momentarily Commander Parsons returned. "Today is our twentieth anniversary." Curly told him.

Commander Parsons was too preoccupied to respond.

"Someone will be here shortly to transfer them downtown. You can remain here and go with them if you like."

"Yes, please."

"Now if you'll excuse me, I have more fatalities coming in."

After a few minutes two corpsmen showed up and one by one loaded their bodies into a covered truck with red crosses on the canvas cover. As the last one was loaded in, Curly climbed into the back of the truck.

As the truck made its way through the base, Curly was oblivious to the scene of death, destruction, and the commotion going on around him.

He lost all track of time as he rode downtown. The truck arrived at the mortuary and was unloaded. The funeral director took Curly into his office to make arrangements for taking care of his wife and children. He agreed to place a high priority on having them ready by Tuesday so they could be taken to the docks and be loaded aboard the ship. He showed Curly the selection of caskets. Curly numbly picked out the kind that was suggested for shipping. He then asked Curly about burial clothing and recommended the line of white clothing they had. Again Curly consented.

There was nothing more he could do there. He called a cab and went back to the base. Despite his own personal loss, he felt it was his duty as an officer to do what he could. He figured the place to start was at the administration building where he worked. He reported in with Admiral Kimmel's staff and Kimmel's intelligence officer, Captain Michaels, put him to work handling intelligence dispatches.

He tried to forget his broken heart and aching shoulder as he sorted through the reports of enemy carriers and Japanese invasion forces coming ashore. Nothing made any sense as fear and paranoia reigned. As he worked, he was obviously in pain, both physically and emotionally.

At one point, Captain Michaels stopped by to check on him. "How are you doing here, Commander?"

"About half of these reports are so outlandish that they can't possibly have any validity and the other half are questionable."

"That's why I'm having you sort through them. Commander."

"Take this one for example." Curly said. "It claims that an enemy paratrooper was captured near the Ewa Marine Air Station. That was most likely me.

"Most of these sighting reports are contradictory and unlikely. If you ask me we have everyone out searching in the wrong direction."

"What makes you say that?"

"They have the enemy attack force to the south. Scouting Six patrolled that area this morning before flying in and got caught in the battle."

"So Commander, where do you think they are?"

"North of Oahu, Sir."

"None of our sighting reports substantiate that claim. What makes you say that?"

"Well, sir. For starters as Admiral Halsey's air officer, if I were to plan such an attack, that is what I would do. Secondly there is the report from the Army radar station at Opana Point. It was dismissed as B-17s coming in from the mainland. The bearings were all wrong for it to have been them. Another fact is this report of destroyers shelling Midway. If the fleet was to the south, wouldn't they have gone for Johnston Island?"

At that Captain Michaels became a little indigent, "Do you have any advanced training in intelligence analysis?"

"No sir, nothing beyond practical experience. I tell you, everyone is looking in the wrong direction. Enterprise is too far south to ever find them, but if the Lexington turned around, they might be able to. Granted, they would be vastly outnumbered and wouldn't have a chance."

"I think you have been through enough today, Commander. Everything you have been through is clouding your judgment. Why don't you just go home and I'll assign someone from my staff with more experience to take over."

As it turned out, Curly's hunch was correct.

Curly was relieved of duty and was told to go home. He found Little Bertha parked exactly where he

had left her the morning he sailed. He started it up and made his way home in the darkness as everything was blacked out. When he got home, he collapsed from exhaustion.

The next thing Curly knew, the house was filled with light. A glance at the clock told him that it was just before ten o'clock. "What a nightmare," he thought. Then the soreness of his shoulder and empty, silent house told him that it wasn't. "What am I going to do?"

The first thing was to clean up. He was still wearing the clothes he had on yesterday morning when he flew off the ship. Since then, he had been engaged in aerial combat and shot down two Zeros, he had been wounded and shot down. He lost his entire family, made burial arrangements, and helped sort out dozens of bogus intelligence communications.

He looked out the window and could see thick black smoke billowing into the sky from the harbor. Going through the house, he discovered that Geannie had most everything boxed up and ready to go. He looked through her journal and saw that she had arranged for it all to be picked up at ten o'clock the next morning and taken to Honolulu Harbor. He went back to the day he left and read her entries about what she and kids had been up to.

He then noticed that her Bible was opened to 1st Corinthians chapter 15, a chapter that she had studied in great depth. Nearly the whole chapter was underlined with notes and cross references penciled in the margins. Curly's eyes fell on these words which she had shaded over with a red pencil, "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

After reconstructing the last days of their lives, he bowed his head and wept. It occurred to him that he needed to tell Marie what happened. He picked up the telephone to place the call. When he finally got an operator, he was told that all circuits to the mainland were either busy or out of order.

He was thinking about taking a shower when there was a knock on the door. He opened it to find a very tired and filthy Ramona. "I thought I might find you here," she said as she invited herself in. "I just got relieved and before I went home I wanted to come and check on you and change your bandage."

"What's going on?" Curly asked.

"Turn on your radio. Roosevelt addressed the nation and Congress earlier this morning. He called for a declaration of war. Within an hour, Congress did just that. It doesn't look good. The fleet is in shambles and what's left of it, including the Enterprise, is out looking for the Japanese."

Curly turned on the radio to listen to the grim news.

"Take off your shirt and let me look at your wound."

Curly complied and turned his back to her. "So what are you going to do about Geannie and the kids?" she asked as she removed the bandage.

"I am going to take them home like I had planned." he answered as she cleaned the wound.

"All leaves have been canceled, you know, but under the circumstances you might get an exemption." She said as she dressed it and put on a fresh bandage. "I'll make sure that your commanding officer is notified that you were wounded in action. Now, try not to get this wet when you shower." she said as she finished applying the fresh bandage."

"Thanks, Ramona. You better go home and get some rest. When do you have to go back on duty?"

"I have a four hour break. Let me know what you're going to do." she said as she walked to the door. She paused before she left and said, "Just so you know, I do know what you're going through. I've been through it twice. Granted, each time, it was only after a few months. I can't imagine what it would be like after the lifetime relationship the two of you had and to loose your children too."

"Thanks, Ramona. I appreciate that. I know where to find you. I'll let you know what I'm going to do."

Ramona shut the door behind her as she left.

Curly took a shower, shaved, and got dressed in a fresh khaki uniform. All the time trying to figure out what he was going to do next. He decided the first thing he should do was to call the shipping line and make sure the ship was still going to sail on Wednesday as scheduled and make arrangements for the having the caskets put in cold storage.

They assured him that they were sailing. They were evacuating as many families and wounded as they could take aboard. As for the caskets, he had to negotiate. He told them that they would be in lieu of the car and piano. That made a difference, but what clinched the deal was when he offered to give up his stateroom for a hammock.

It was then that he realized that he hadn't had anything to eat since taking off from the ship. He went to the cupboard and found a box of corn flakes and some milk in the refrigerator. With that and some fruit he sat down to have some breakfast. As he was eating, the radio played a rebroadcast of President Roosevelt's address to the nation.

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, members of the Senate and the House of Representatives:

Yesterday, December 7th, 1941 - a date which will live in infamy - the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at peace with that nation, and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its Emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific.

Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in the American island of Oahu, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to our Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. And, while this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or of armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time the Japanese Government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday the Japanese Government also launched an attack against Malaya.

Last night Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong.

Last night Japanese forces attacked Guam.

Last night Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands.

Last night the Japanese attacked Wake Island.

And this morning the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

Japan has therefore undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday and today speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.

As Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense, that always will our whole nation remember the character of the onslaught against us.

No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people, in their righteous might, will win through to absolute victory.

I believe that I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us.

Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger.

With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph. So help us God.

I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7th, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.

It finally happened. No one imagined that it would begin in such a way. Curly thought that it was ironic that his family were among the first casualties of the war. If anyone, it should have been him. His entire career had been devoted to protecting them. Then it dawned on him that he had already taken out two of those responsible, but it was too little too late.

Being alone in the house was too much for him. He had to leave, but go where? He decided to go to the mortuary first and then to his office. He felt he would be in dereliction of duty if he didn't try to do something. Doing something, anything to occupy his mind. Dwelling on his loss would drive him into depression.

Driving down the road, he saw Geannie's car right where it had been. He decided he had better stop to see if there were any valuables in it before it got towed away. Sure enough, Gennie's handbag was semi tucked under the seat. He retrieved it and looked to see what else there might be.

He retrieved the beach umbrella and blanket from the trunk along with his coveralls and tool box. As he placed them in the jeep, he remembered the time they were living in Norfolk when he came home one day to find Geannie changing the oil in the car. He had bought the oil and filter, but was too busy organizing the air group that he hadn't got around to actually changing the oil. She had watched him do it and decided that it didn't look all that hard and determined that she could do it herself.

There was Geannie with laying under the car with her knees up and spread apart, her house dress folded between her thighs, in an attempt to be somewhat ladylike. She had drained the oil into a bucket and changed the filter and was just tightening the oil plug. When she scooted out from under the car, well lets just say it wasn't very ladylike at all. She had a scarf covering her hair tied in a bow over her forehead and oil and grime covering her face, arms and legs. There were two smeared hand prints across her bottom

where she had wiped her hands.

"Why didn't you put on my coveralls?" He had asked her.

"I tried, but my hips are wider than yours and I couldn't zip them up."

Insistent on finishing the job, she carefully poured the five quarts of oil into the engine and replaced the cap. When she was all done she checked the dipstick.

"Gee, I guess you don't need me around, do you?"

"On the contrary, Commander. I need you to get in the shower with me and scrub me down."

The memory brought a smile to his face as he returned to the car where he found some odds and ends in the glove compartment. What he saw next, was more than he could stomach; it was a piece of Sandy's scalp. He had been trained in handling things like this in the event of a combat situation. But this was different, this was a piece of his own daughter. Unable to hold it, he lost his breakfast along the side of the road.

From the bullet holes in the hood, he figured the engine had been hit and didn't bother to see if it would start. He made a note to himself to have it towed away, unless someone else got to it first.

He stashed the items he took from the car under the seat of his jeep and drove on into Honolulu. He was at the mortuary long enough to find out that they would have them ready to be taken to the docks in time to have them loaded onto the ship. They had a few questions for him as to his preferences.

From the mortuary, he decided to stop by the church and go into the sanctuary to seek some sort of peace for his anguished soul. He found the building unlocked but empty. He sat there in the silence of the chapel, trying to sort out the meaning of it all. His mind took him way, way back to a young midshipman secluded in the chapel at the Naval Academy, pleading that the life of his beautiful young fiancée be spared. "Please don't take her from me before we're even married. If you must take her, give us at least twenty years together first. I'll take such good care of her and love her with all of my heart for as long as you will let me have her."

He hadn't thought of that for a very, very long time. Then it occurred to him, "Both ends of the bargain had been kept. She was supposed to have died that day so long ago. In His mercy, God had given me the twenty years I had asked for. It's ironic that it was twenty years to the day that we were married. Why didn't I ask for fifty? What if she had died then and I hadn't had those twenty years with her? What would I be now? Certainly not what I am. I wouldn't of had two great kids. What will I do without her? Without them? I'm now where I would have been if I had lost her then. Alone and without a family. But at least I have their memories. They will always live on with me in my heart."

So many thoughts, feelings, and emotions went through his mind. After several minutes alone, Pastor Robbins came into the chapel and asked him if everything was alright. Curly explained to him what

had happened to Geannie and the kids and about all that had happened to him.

The Pastor was shocked to hear about Geannie and the kids. He asked, "Is there anything I can do?"

Curly told him, "The ever efficient Geannie had already taken care of most everything and had things ready for the move."

Pastor Robbins offered his condolences and offered some words of encouragement. Before Curly left, the Pastor offered a prayer in his behalf.

It was then early afternoon and Curly decided to go to base and see what he could do. After showing his identification at the front gate he drove on in. For the first time he saw the extent of the destruction.

As he unlocked the door to the office suite, he found a pile of papers that had been shoved through the mail slot in the door. He took it upon himself to go through it and sort it out and deliver it to the appropriate desks. He didn't notice that on the top of the stack for Admiral Halsey was a notice from the hospital that Commander Brason had been treated at the hospital for wounds received during the attack.

Once that was taken care of, he went down stairs to Admiral Kimmell's office to see if anyone could tell him when the Enterprise would be back in port. He found out that she was on her way in and was planning to enter the channel at dusk. That was still four hours away.

He decided to set down and type up his action report, detailing his account of that fateful day. He began with being given leave and allowed to fly ahead of the ship. He gave his account of the action that resulted in shooting down two Zeros before having to bail out of the stricken aircraft. He neglected to mention the piece of shrapnel. He described parachuting to the ground and his encounter with the Marines.

He included the part about stopping by his residence to check on his family before reporting in at the base. His narrative included finding his wife's car shot up and abandoned and making his way to the hospital where he learned that his children had been killed and that his wife died soon after his arrival. He explained that he had accompanied their bodies to the mortuary in Honolulu.

He concluded his report with his return to the base and reporting in to CinCPac and being put to work sorting through intelligence reports before being relieved late in the evening. He signed it and placed it on the Admiral's desk. He knew that if he put it on Commander Browning's desk, who knows how long it would set there.

In his shock and his grief, Curly was simply going through the motions of trying to be busy. He was completely oblivious to the commotion still going on around him. No one questioned him about what he was or was not doing. Everyone else was so engrossed in the crisis and just figured a Commander would know what he was doing.

He felt holding down the fort and taking telephone messages was at least something. As the afternoon passed, he couldn't help but think about Geannie and the kids. The discomfort in his shoulder reminded him of his wound. As it got toward dusk, he made his way out to Ford Island to wait for the ship to come in. Before long, he could see it making its way up the channel and was soon moored next to the dock. Admiral Halsey was the first to leave the ship and was in such a rush that he didn't notice Curly standing a little ways down the dock.

Nearby was a group of twenty seamen fresh from boot camp in San Diego. They had arrived about three days before the attack. These men had been introduced to the Navy the hard way.

Once the mooring lines were secured and the gangplank was in place, Curly followed the new recruits aboard. They were hastily placed in a corner of the hangar deck out of the way as the crew worked feverishly to prepare the ship to get under way before morning.

Curly made his way to the flag bridge and reported to Commander Browning. Word had gotten back to the ship about him shooting down two Zeros before the plane he was in had been shot down. The pilot had made his way to the Marine air station and had returned to the ship in a spare SBD on loan from the Marines.

The pilot reported seeing his parachute but no one knew what became of Curly. Everyone there listened as he told his story. Even Commander Browning was stunned into silence as Curly told of the fate of his family.

"Then what are you doing here, Commander?" Miles asked. "You're supposed to be on leave."

"I heard that all leaves are canceled. I didn't know what else to do, so in between taking care of the details for getting my wife and kids sent home, I have been at the office. I found out you were coming in this evening and I felt I needed to report in. I was hoping to talk to the Admiral, but I saw him leave in a big hurry."

"He's on his way to report to Kimmell. He will be back later. Were getting ready to sail before dawn." Commander Browning answered.

They proceeded to tell Curly about what had happened after he had taken off and their search for the attack fleet and all of the false contact reports they received. Curly told them about sorting through the to try to weed out the obviously bogus reports. He gave his theory as to where the Japanese fleet was.

While the Admiral was gone, the staff was busy planning their next move. Curly helped map out long range search patterns with the thinking that a second strike and follow up invasion force was on the way. Enemy submarines were a definite threat that had to be accounted for. Anti submarine patrols were figured in to the plan. The ship's air officer and the air group commander were also involved.

The men worked late into the evening and around midnight, Admiral Halsey returned. He was

surprised to see Curly and said, "Commander Brason, can I talk to you in my office?"

Curly followed him, wondering what the Admiral had on his mind, fearing a reprimand.

"Shut the door." He usually left it open when he had people in his office. Then the tone of his voice changed. "I read your action report, Curly." Then with rare emotion in his voice, he said. "I'm so sorry about Geannie and the kids. She was an incredible lady. I intend to track down those dirty bastards that did all of this and make them pay.

"By the way, in your report you didn't mention anything about being wounded. I found a report from the hospital informing me that you had been treated for removal of a piece of shrapnel. Are you alright?"

"Yes sir. It isn't severe."

"I must admit, I was surprised to find you here under the circumstances."

"I felt I needed to be doing something, sir. Besides, I was told that all leaves have been canceled. I was hoping to accompany Geannie and the kids, their bodies that is, back home but I doubt that is still possible."

"As much as I need you here, I'm afraid you will be pretty much worthless to me in your present state of mind. I am overruling the cancellation of your leave. You're relieved of any further responsibility here. Go get your gear together and get some rest. We sail at 0500, be off the ship by then. Report back here in thirty days. I know that isn't enough time to get over something like this, but at least your mind will be clear. I need you sharp and refreshed."

"Yes, sir." Curly saluted.

"Oh and Curly, stop by before you leave, I'll have your written orders ready for you. Just leave an address and telephone number where I can contact you. That will be all."

The Admiral followed Curly out onto the flag bridge to see what his staff had put together. Curly left the bridge and went below to his stateroom. He packed his gear and set his alarm for four o'clock and laid down to get some rest.

It seemed that he had barely closed his eyes when his alarm went off. He showered, shaved and changed his clothes before returning to the flag bridge. Admiral Halsey and the staff were busy going over their plan and making preparations for getting underway. The staff secretary broke away and handed Curly a sealed envelope. Curly left him with his contact information in Roanoke and returned to his stateroom to get his sea bag. That was when he noticed the package in the closet that was to have been Geannie's birthiversary gift. Uncertain as what he should do with it, he left it there and left the ship.

As he rode the ferry across to Hospital Point, smoke was still rising from the harbor. Rescue and recovery operations had continued around the clock. He looked back at the Big E as she cast off her mooring lines in preparation for getting under way. Part of him felt he belonged there.

He knew he had a difficult task ahead. He had to get Geannie and the kids home as he had promised. He still needed to get a message to the family back home. "What do I tell them?" While crossing on the ferry, he formulated several messages. He didn't like any of them. Once the ferry docked, he returned to the Administration Building and went to the communications office and had the following message wired to Geannie's mother:

PATRONS ARE REQUESTED TO FAVOR THE COMPANY BY CRITICISM AND SUGGESTION CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">CLASS OF SERVICE</p> <hr style="width: 20%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable sign above or preceding the address.</p>	<h1 style="margin: 0;">WESTERN UNION</h1>	<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">SIGNS</p> <hr style="width: 90%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">DL=Day Letter</p> <hr style="width: 90%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">NM=Night Message</p> <hr style="width: 90%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">NL=Night Letter</p> <hr style="width: 90%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">LCO=Deferred Cable</p> <hr style="width: 90%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">NLT=Cable Night Letter</p> <hr style="width: 90%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">WLT=Week-End Letter</p>
NEWCOMB CARLTON, PRESIDENT	J.C.WELLEVER, FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT	

The filing time as shown in the date line on full-rate telegrams and day letters, and the time of receipt at destination as shown on all messages, is STANDARD TIME.

Received at

1941 DEC 09 AM 08 35
 MRS MARIE AUSTIN
 125 FRANKLIN RD ROANOKE VIRGINA

GEANNIE AND KIDS ARE GONE STOP AM BRINGING THEM HOME STOP

CMDR SHEFFIELD BRASON USN
 COMAIRBATFOR STAFF
 PEARL HARBOR TERRITORY OF HAWAII

Curly went back upstairs to his office to straighten things up before leaving. He sat down at his desk and opened the envelope from Admiral Halsey. Inside were two sheets of paper and fifty dollars in cash.

The first one read:

- To whom it may concern:
- 1) Commander Sheffield Brason is hereby exempted from the emergency cancellation of leave order until 9 January 1942.
 - 2) To all military personnel below the rank of three stars, under my authority you are authorized and requested to provide any resources or assistants necessary in transporting the bodies of his wife and two children killed in the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December

1941.

Approved: 9 December 1941.

W. F. HALSEY,
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy,
Commander Aircraft, Battle Force

The second one read:

From: Commander Aircraft, Battle Force
To: Sheffield Brason, Commander U.S. Navy

- 1) ComAirBatFor takes great pleasure in commending you for your performance during hostilities on 7 December 1941 during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Although officially on leave, as a passenger aboard a Scouting Six aircraft you engaged enemy aircraft and succeeding in destroying two attackers.
- 2) You will be awarded the purple heart for the wound received while engaging the enemy in said action.
- 3) Furthermore in the face of the loss of your family during the said attack, while under great personal duress you faithfully manned your post and attended to your duty until relieved.
- 4) I have recommended that you be awarded the Navy Distinguished Service Medal for said actions.
- 5) A copy of this letter will be filed with your service record and suitable notation will be made therein.

W.F. Halsey
Vice Admiral U.S. Navy

Curly put the papers back in the envelope and stuffed them into his briefcase. He wrote a quick thank you note and left it on the Admiral's desk before leaving. It was getting light as he left the Administration Building. The Big E was making her way down the channel on her way out to sea.

Before leaving the base, he went over to the hospital to find Ramona to tell her that he was definitely going to be able to take Geannie and the kids home. He found her but she was busy and

couldn't talk just then. She promised to come by the house when she got off duty.

Curly climbed into his jeep and left the base. There just outside the gate, Geannie's abandoned car sat as a reminder of the tragedy that occurred in that very spot. When he got home, he almost couldn't bear the thought of going into that empty house. He took a deep breath and went in.

The first thing he did was to find something to eat. Then he set about boxing up the last of their belongings. He figured he would take it home and put it in storage. It was difficult for him to want to part with anything that belonged to Geannie and the kids.

After a while, Romona stopped by. She brought the things she needed to change the dressing on his wound. As she did, he told her about how Admiral Halsey had authorized his leave and overrode the national order in his behalf. As they were visiting, the movers showed up to load up their belongings. Before they began hauling it out to the truck, he asked Ramona, "Is there was anything of Geannie's that you want as a memento?"

Ramona thought for a moment and then asked, "Can I have the cross necklace that she was wearing when she died? I know what it meant to her and I would like to have it to remind me to become the person she showed me that I can become."

That was one of the items he had right on top as he had brought it home from the mortuary. He handed it to her and she put it on. "It looks good on you." Curly complimented.

"Thank you Curly. I will cherish it always. I'll think of her when I wear it."

"That was my wedding gift to her."

"I knew." Ramona replied. She turned and read the worn inscription, "December 7, 1921."

While the movers were taking things out to the truck, the mortuary called and told him that they had the bodies prepared. They asked if he could bring some of Geannie's makeup so they could fix her up the way she naturally looked. They also asked him to bring anything else he wanted them buried with.

Ramona told Curly, "I would be happy to help with doing her makeup. I know just what Geannie used and how she applied it."

That too was all close to the top of the boxes as it was something that Geannie had held back until she was ready to leave. Ramona picked out what she needed and helped Curly pick out some jewelery for her and Sandy. He picked Geannie's pearl necklace.

It only took a few minutes to load their belonging into the truck. It all fit on three pallets. Other than the items the house was furnished with, the only thing that remained was the piano. "Do you know anyone who could use it?" Curly asked. "I have to leave it since the caskets will take up its space."

“As a matter of fact I do. The hospital could use it in the activities center.”

“I’ll leave you a key to the house and you can have someone come and get it.”

With the truck on its way to the docks, Ramona took Curly to the mortuary in her car. After talking to the director, they were taken into the room where the three caskets were set up side by side. They were opened and Geannie, Sandy, and Austin were each laid out dressed in white. Geannie and Sandy were dressed in matching long dresses with capped sleeves and white slippers. Austin was dressed in white trousers, a white shirt and a white tie. He too had white slippers on.

They were able to do a pretty good job with the cuts on Geannie's forehead. However, the damage to Sandy's head and face was so severe that they couldn't do much. Austin's face was swollen and they did their best to cover up the entry point of the bullet that had struck him in the neck.

Ramona held on to Curly while he stood there shaking as he gazed on his dear family's remains. After a moment he settled down somewhat. Ramona lovingly applied Geannie's makeup and brushed her auburn hair. As an afterthought, she took the white gardenia from her own hair and put it in Geannie's, above her left ear.

“Could you cut a lock of her hair for me?” Curly asked.

The attendant handed Ramona a pair of scissors and lifted Geannie's head while she clipped a long lock from the back of her head. She handed it to Curly and he held it to his cheek.

With her makeup on and her hair brushed, Ramona put the jewelry they had brought on Geannie. “They are genuine Caribbean pearls.” Curly explained as Ramona put it on Geannie. “I got them for her in Barbados about eleven years ago.” The attendant tilted Geannie's head one way and then the other so Ramona could put on the ear rings. Then she did the same for Sandy.

Once she was finished, the attendant gave them some time alone. Curly was seated at the head of Geannie's casket with Sandy and Austin on either side. Ramona pulled up a chair and sat beside him. She held his hand tightly while he wept. At one point he turned to her and buried his head into her shoulder and sobbed. Ramona stroked the hair around the back of his head in comfort. This was not the time for her to think about how she felt for him. She grieved with him for his loved ones. She grieved herself as well. These people were very dear to her.

After a long while, the director returned and interrupted them. “I'm sorry,” he said “but we need to get them down the dock. I have spoken with the shipping line and they will be expecting us.”

He continued with, “Like I explained, these are special caskets designed for shipping. As long as they are in cold storage and the seal is not broken enroute, it should be alright to open them for viewing at the other end. The receiving mortuary will know what to do and will have to make the final determination to whether or not they are fit for viewing.”

Curly and Ramona stood up, her arm around him in support as the lining was neatly tucked in around each of them and the caskets were closed. Geannie's was last. On impulse, Curly bent down and kissed his beloved Geannie on her cold, still lips. Ramona quickly touched up her lipstick before the lid was closed and sealed. One by one, they were wheeled out and loaded onto the waiting truck.

The two naval officers stepped out into a downpour that was moving across. They dashed to Ramona's car to get out of the rain. "I have a couple of hours. Why don't I take you to lunch." Ramona suggested.

By the time they got out of the car at a diner, it had quit raining. As they ate lunch, they talked of the fond memories of Geannie. For the first time in two days, Curly laughed.

After lunch, Ramona asked if there was any place else he wanted to go. He asked her to take him by the church so he could sit in the quiet of the sanctuary. She obliged and went in with him. After setting in silence for while she spoke up. "I wasn't raised in a church going family but I was taught to believe in God and Jesus. Geannie showed me what it was to truly believe. Her every action showed what she believed. I have never known anyone with more faith than she had. She was true example of a believer. I have always tried to act like a good person but she showed me how to be a good person. She was never afraid to talk about her faith and she did it in a way that wasn't preachy. She got me thinking that I should start going to church. To honor her memory, I think I will do just that."

"That's the way we were both brought up. It is just who we are." Curly said. "She was always more devoted than me. Being around Navy men isn't the best environment, but she made it easier for me to always be who I am. I just kept her in mind before I did or said anything. That way I never had any regrets.

"Thanks for bringing me here. I think we can go now?"

"Is there anywhere else you want to go?"

Curly had her take him by their schools. He thought they ought to know what happened. He also stopped by the bank and withdrew some money for the trip home. By then Ramona was needing to get home so she could get a few hours sleep before reporting for duty. Before being dropped off, Curly arranged to meet her the next day. He needed to leave his jeep at the base and have her take him to the dock.

He sat down on the couch and closed his eyes for a moment. Without much of a struggle, he succumbed to physical and mental exhaustion. He was awakened by a knock on the door. He answered it to find Sandy's boyfriend, Chip on the doorstep.

"Good evening Commander Brason," he politely greeted. "I'm here for Sandy. We have a date this evening."

"She's not here, Chip. You had better come in and sit down."

Expecting a short wait, Chip came in and sat down.

After a pause, Curly began, "Evidently you haven't heard, have you?"

"Heard what?" Chip asked.

Curly paused again, trying to gather enough composure. "Chip, I know that Sandy liked you a lot and she was looking forward to your date tonight."

Chip hung on his every word trying to understand why he was speaking in the past tense.

Curly paused again. "Look Chip, this isn't easy for me to tell you, but Sandy, Austin and their mother all died on Sunday during the battle."

Chip was in shock.

"They were gunned down in the car just down the road on their way to church."

After a long silence, Chip finally spoke up, "I'm so sorry Commander Brason. I had no idea. I feel just awful. I really don't know what to say."

"Neither do I, Chip. Neither do I. You really liked Sandy, didn't you?"

"Whats there not to like about her, sir"

"I know what you mean. She was so much like her mother in so many ways."

"I cant believe she's... they're all dead."

"You know, I was going to take them all home tomorrow. Well, I still am, just not like we had planned."

"Ever since Sunday I have been seriously thinking about enlisting as soon as I graduated from high school in the spring. I'll be eighteen in March." Chip determined, "Now I am going to for sure. I think I'm going to go know, I have a lot to think about. You know, come to think about it, I was beginning to fall in love with your daughter, sir."

Chip got up and walked to the door. Curly stood up and followed him. The two of them stepped out onto the doorstep. Curly put his hand on Chip's shoulder, "I'm glad that we had this talk, Chip. Good luck to you, son."

"Thank you, Commander. Good night sir."

Curly had a lot to think about too. He sat out on the patio late into the evening before going to bed.

On Wednesday morning, Curly packed the rest of his things and got in his jeep and drove to the base and and parked in his usual spot. Ramona was already waiting there to drive him to Honolulu Harbor. She went with him to the terminal where he was told that his three pallets of cargo had been brought aboard and the caskets had been secured in cold storage. All there was left for him was to go aboard.

Ramona took his arm and walked with him to the gangplank. "Well," Curly said "Thanks for all of

your help. You've been a real sweetheart.”

“It was the least I could do for Geannie. I remember all that she did for me when I lost Tom. I never thought I would return the favor like this. I wish I could go with you. To her funeral I mean.”

“Its going to be a long trip. Six days by ship and another four by train.” Curly said. “No wonder we haven't been home for two years. The last time we were there, I promised her mother that I would bring Geannie and the kids home to her. This sure wasn't what I had in mind. I guess I'd better get started. Goodbye, Ramona. I'll let you know when I get back.”

Still holing on to Curly's arm, she pulled him close. Reaching up on her toes she gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Goodbye, Curly. I'll see you when you get back.”

* * * * *

Captain Michaels, the intellegence officer is fictional, though his post in not.

My father was one of those twenty new seman fresh from boot camp that Curly followed aboard the ship went it returned to Pearl Harbor after the attack.