

Prologue

Captain Brason awoke early and was eager to get home for the big day. It was their birthaversary. What made it even more important than any other was that this was their twentieth! Curly showered and shaved and put on in his blue captain's uniform. With his overnight bag in hand, he left his hotel room and had breakfast before being driven to the airport.

The plane was being loaded and fueled, soon it would be time to board the passengers. It was still dark as Curly made his way up the ladder. As he came through the hatch, the stewardess greeted him, "Good morning Captain. Everything is on scheduled."

"Thanks Ramona. How many passengers will he have aboard today?"

"Twenty five, sir. Nearly a full load."

"Thank you, Miss North. I know you will take good care of them."

The copilot was just steps behind him but paused as he gave the stewardess a discreet kiss. As Captain Brason entered the cockpit the navigator was already at his station. "Good morning, Scoop. How does the weather look?"

"It's clear all the way to D.C., sir. We shouldn't have any problems."

"That's good news, I am especially anxious to get home this morning."

"Yea, thats right." Tomcat said he entered the cockpit. "Its the big two – oh for you and Geannie today."

"Not only, that." Curly added. "Its our birthdays too. Say, when are you and Ramona ever going to get married so you can start adding up anniversaries. How many years have you been engaged now?"

After a bit of small talk, Captain Brason and his co-pilot, Thomas Katmuth settled into their seats and began running through the preflight checklist. The fuel truck had pulled away and a tractor with a string of baggage carts had come along side. The sky was beginning to lighten, revealing the outline of the tower and the terminal building. Ramona entered the cockpit with a tray of coffee for the three men. They had been flying together for some time now and made a great team.

Soon the passengers began boarding and taking their seats. Once everyone was settled, the hatch was closed and sealed. Curly flipped the starter switch and the two props began spinning as the engines came to life. After a final check. Curly picked up the radio, "Chicago Tower, American flight two – seven – niner ready for departure."

"Roger, American flight two – seven – niner. You are clear to taxi."

Switching to intercom, Curly greeted the passengers, "Good morning ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. On behalf of the flight crew, welcome aboard American Airlines Fight two – seven –

nine from Chicago to Washington D.C.. We anticipate clear weather which should make for a pleasant flight this morning. We will be departing momentarily, so please listen to the instructions that will be given you and set back and enjoy the flight.”

Curly throttled up the engines and released the brakes and taxied into position at the end of the runway, the tower cleared the flight for take off. Pushing the throttles forward, the engines revved. Once at the specified rpms, Curly let his feet off the breaks. The Douglas DC-3 sprinted down the runway and into the air. As the DC-3 climbed into the sky, the first rays of the morning sun reflected off the silver wings , creating a momentary flash of brilliance.

Curly never got tired of the thrill he got from taking off. He missed his navy days. As thrilling as take offs were, nothing could beat the exhilaration he got from racing down the flight deck of the old Sara as he took to the air. “Why did I ever give that up?” he wondered. The answer to that question was looking up adoringly at him from the photograph attached to the instrument panel.

Once airborne and at cruising altitude, there wasn't much to concentrate on. Curly looked forward to their plans for the day. Geannie and the kids had to leave early for church to practice for a part on the program that the church youth group had during services. Geannie was their accompanist. He would get into Washington in plenty of time to meet them at the church for the service.



After church they were all going out to dinner. Captain Barson reached behind him and opened a compartment and took a quick peek at the package he had stashed in there for safe keeping. He couldn't wait to give it to her. “She is going to look gorgeous in that dress.” he thought to himself. He had purchased it the day before in Chicago while on lay over.

As they neared Washington and began their descent, the Washington- Hoover Airport in Alexandria came into sight and the airliner assumed a standard approach. With the clearance to land, Curly was busy with the business at hand. Tomcat read out speed and altitude as the plane glided down. With a slight bump and screech of the tires, the DC-3 touched down. Curly cut the throttle and the aircraft slowed down. “I wish they would put a tail hook on these things and stretch a cable across the runway.” He thought to himself. After ten years he still missed the excitement of landing aboard a carrier. He wondered where he would be and what he would be doing if he had stayed in the Navy. “Certainly I would have made Commander by now.” He thought to himself

He was too busy with all of the post flight procedures to give it a second thought. The plane taxied up to the terminal and unloaded the passengers while the flight crew finished their check list. When he was

finally able to leave, Curly took his overnight bag and Geannie's present out of the compartment and made his way to the hatch. As he was about to step out onto the ladder Ramona said, "Happy birthday sir, and tell Geannie that I'll call her this evening."

There was a December chill in the air as Curly exited the aircraft and went into the terminal and filed his flight log. He didn't linger as he was eager to leave. He found his car exactly where he had parked it the day before. He stashed his gear in the back seat and hopped behind the wheel and made his way out of the airport parking lot and onto the highway.

As he passed the turnoff to their street, he saw that the road up head was blocked by a stopped train. "Great." he thought. "This is going to slow me down." As he got closer, he could see that a couple of cars had derailed. It wasn't until he came to stop that he saw the mangled car protruding from under a boxcar. In horror he practically ripped the door off the car to get out.

He ran to wreckage where a police officer attempted to hold him back. "What happened?" he demanded.

The officer replied, "The car was stopped for the train when the car behind it failed to stop and rear ended it, sending it into train."

Curly attempted to go around the officer, who again blocked the way. "You don't understand!" he screamed. "That's my wife's car." as he dropped to his knees right there on the highway.

Someone, he didn't know who, helped him up and escorted him to the nearby ambulance. Inside where three stretchers, two of them with the sheet pulled up over the bodies they bore. He found himself kneeling at Geannie's side. His tears mixed with her blood as she was barely able to whisper, "Hey Flyboy. I knew you would come in time for me to say goodbye. Happy birthaversary, Captain. I love you." With that Geannie was gone.

As Curly was consumed in instant and overwhelming grief, he heard one of the police officer's exclaim, "Hey everyone, it just came over the radio, the Japanese are bombing Pearl Harbor!"

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