

Chapter II

Getting Ship Shape

June 5, 1942 – July 1, 1942

As the final details for Reprisal's commissioning were being wrapped up, news reached Norfolk of the decisive Battle of Midway, in which four of the six Japanese aircraft carriers that had launched the attack on Pearl Harbor were sunk. Sheffield couldn't help but wonder if the person responsible for the murders of his family had finally received his just reward. He wasn't a spiteful or vengeful person by nature, but the thought brought with it a great deal of satisfaction. He only wished he could have been there to be in on it. With the gratification derived from the thought, the book entitled "Revenge" was back on the bookshelf in its proper place. The victory did not come without a price. The Yorktown was badly crippled and was slowly limping back to Pearl Harbor under tow.

That morning, the Reprisal got up steam and left Newport News Shipbuilding yard in Newport News and steamed down the James River and tied up at Pier 7 at the Norfolk Naval Station, right across from the Wasp. At the next pier over was the new battleship North Carolina. Both ships were making preparations to get under way. Later in the day they, along with two cruisers and six destroyers, departed for the Pacific. "Before long that will be us." Captain Brason mentioned to those with him on the bridge.

June 7th dawned with more bad news from the Pacific, the Yorktown had taken two torpedoes from a Japanese submarine and had been abandoned for the second time, left to her certain fate. The news made it a bitter sweet day for the carrier community. Another one placed in commission, another one lost. Despite the earlier loss of the Lexington and the inevitable loss of the Yorktown, the crisis in the Pacific had abated, at least for now. The Saratoga had been returned to service following repairs after being torpedoed in January and the Wasp was on the way, making four carriers available in the Pacific. Sheffield and his crew could breathe a little easier as they got their ship ready to join her sisters.

The day of the Reprisal's commissioning had significance for many reasons. It was the six month anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and for Sheffield, six months since Geannie and the kids had been ripped away from him. That morning as he got ready for such an important day, Sheffield found himself missing Geannie terribly. She would not be there to share the occasion with him. With the passage of time he was doing somewhat better emotionally for the most part, depending on the day. As he dressed, he slipped on his wedding band as he always had for the last twenty years and six months. He just wasn't ready to take it off. After shaving that morning he splashed on some Old Spice. Geannie always commented, "I just love the scent of Old Spice. It makes you smell like a man of the sea."

Sheffield made his way to the bridge to check on the last minute details. He then stepped out onto the wing of the bridge into a soft June breeze from where he looked down onto the dock below where a stand decorated with flags and banners had been erected for the ceremony. The crowd had already began

to gather and the VIP and guest sections were beginning to fill up.

Behind the seating area, the ship's company was beginning to assemble. The Reprisal only had about two thirds of her intended complement of 246 officers and 2,179 enlisted men, including the shipboard Marine detachment of 5 officers and 121 men. The marines were also under manned with only two of the three platoons. Not included in the ship's complement is the air group which when fully equipped and manned would consist of approximately 141 officers, including extra pilots and 20 non flying personnel and 710 enlisted men. The number of men on hand was enough to man the ship, but not enough for combat operations. In the weeks ahead the ship's muster roll would grow as more personnel became available. When fully manned the ship's complement and air group would total 3,402 men and officers.

Sheffield, Mace, and a few of the senior officers left the bridge and made their way down to the dock. Once on the VIP stand, Sheffield scanned the guests looking for his family. Although Geannie and the kids were noticeably absent, he found his mother and father, Marie, and Walt and Sarah. As he made his way toward them, they saw him coming and waved. They had a few minutes to visit before he was called away by the arrival of Vice Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll, Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet.

Sheffield took leave of his family to greet Admiral Ingersoll. As they chatted informally, Admiral Earnest J. King, Commander in Chief, United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations arrived. Admiral King came down from Washington to preside over the ceremony. Sheffield had only crossed paths with Admiral King once before. It was when he was Commander, Aircraft Battle Force and Sheffield was the commander of Fighting Six and later the Enterprise Air Group before sailing for the Pacific.

After a formal greeting he and the Admiral visited casually. He mentioned, "I remember the occasion when I presented you with a plaque for becoming an honorary ace after getting your fifth simulated kill during Fleet Problem XIX back in '39."

Sheffield was impressed that he remembered. Taking Mace by the arm, he commented, "And this was my victim. Sir, this is Commander Mason Owen, my executive officer." After the brief exchange, the Admiral excused himself to greet others who were assembled.

Next, Sheffield was approached by Robert Simonson, the President of Newport News Shipbuilding Company and was introduced to him and his entourage, which included Mrs. Grace McKinley the ship's sponsor. He had a delightful visit with Mrs. McKinley, a woman about his age, from Chestertown, Maryland. She was accompanied by her twenty year old daughter, Martha, who was the maid of honor.

Soon, everyone was in place and it was time to commence the ceremony. Admiral Ingersoll first addressed the crew and assembled guests before inviting Pastor Walt Brason to come forward and offer the invocation and a blessing on the ship and her crew. Next Admiral Ingersoll invited Admiral King to podium.

Admiral King first had a few remarks before inviting Captain Brason to join him at his side. In introducing him, the Admiral cited his resume and accomplishments. He went on to say, "As you all know, today marks the six month anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. It is only fitting that today we commission a ship whose name means 'retaliation for damage or loss suffered.' On that day, we as a nation suffered both great loss and damage." What he said next caught Sheffield off guard. "Pardon me, Captain if I got a bit personal. Captain Brason was there that fateful day. He was flying in from the Enterprise as a passenger in an SBD when his flight encountered enemy fighters. Then Commander Brason manned the machine gun and shot down two attackers before being wounded when the plane he was in was in turn shot down. That day was also a day of great loss for Captain Brason personally. While on their way to church, of all things, his wife and two children were caught in the middle of the battle and became victims of that tragedy. Since that day, he has served honorably. And now, Captain, On behalf of the United States Navy, I hereby place the USS Reprisal in commission and you in command of this marvelous vessel. Here are your orders." At that he handed an envelope to Sheffield and stepped aside.

Sheffield stepped to the microphone. "Thank you Admiral King. I accept command. Before I read my orders I would like to address the crew.

"Before there was a United States of America, there once was two masted merchant ship named Molly. Not much is known about the Molly, when or where she was built, where she may have sailed, or what cargo she may have carried. That information is lost to history, but she has a very significant bearing on what we do here today.

"For you see, that insignificant brig went on to play a vital role in this nation's struggle for independence. A little over three months before the Declaration of Independence was signed, on March twenty eighth, seventeen seventy six the Marine Committee of the Continental Congress purchased the Molly. She was subsequently refit as a sixteen gun of brig of war and renamed Reprisal under the command of Captain Lambert Wickes.

Captain Wickes took the Reprisal on her first war cruise into the Caribbean from July third through September thirteenth, seventeen seventy six. During the course of the cruise she captured a number of vessels in the West Indies and escaped an encounter with a British man of war.

The Reprisal's next mission was to conduct Benjamin Franklin to France where he was the American Ambassador. After safely delivering her passenger to Nantes, France on November twenty ninth. The Reprisal sailed again in the middle of January and cruised the Bay of Biscay and to the mouth of the English Channel. Before returning to port on February fourteenth, she had captured five other prizes.

Her most daring mission took place during June, July, and August of seventeen seventy seven when she and the ten gun brigantine Lexington and the ten gun cutter Dolphin sailed along the shores of

the British Isles and into the Irish Sea. During the cruise the gallant trio captured or sank two ships, seven brigs and five other vessels before returning to Nantes.

She sailed for home on September seventeenth, but encountered a storm off the Banks of Newfoundland around the first of October and was lost with one hundred and twenty eight of her crew, including Captain Wickes. Only the cook survived.

“Now one hundred and sixty five years later, we have a daunting challenge ahead of us. Our nation is at war and calls upon us to take this ship into harm's way. Our enemies are ruthless and determined to conquer and destroy freedom and liberty wherever it flourishes. We must and we will stop them. We can not allow them to defeat our beloved country and threaten her citizens, including our hometowns and our families.

“To do so will take discipline on the part of every officer and enlisted man in this crew. I as your captain can not demand it of you. But I can and do expect it of you, as I do of myself. I expect every one of you to know and understand your duty and then fulfill it. I expect you to step up to the plate, to use a baseball term, and do your duty and then some, even in the face of danger and at the peril of your lives. I expect you to do what you must at the instant that it must be done and for you to do it right. Any later may be too late, there may not be a second chance.

“At the end of the flight deck are the letters R P S L which of course stands for Reprisal. I want those letters to mean something else to you as well. R for responsibility. Your responsibility to your country, the navy, your ship and your shipmates. P for pride. Pride in your country, the navy, your ship and your work. S for solidarity. United as a crew, working together with every man doing his part. Fighting among yourselves will not be tolerated. Save your fighting for the enemy. We will face them standing together. And lastly, L for loyalty. Loyalty to yourselves, your shipmates, your superior officers, and to this great country of ours.

“And now I will read my orders.

“By order the President of the United States you are to prepare the USS Reprisal lying at Norfolk, Virginia with all due speed to carry the fight to the enemy wherever you will be sent. It is required that no time be lost in taking on board ammunition, provisions and stores of every kind — completing what work is yet to be done in mustering her complement of Sailors and Marines, and preparing her in every respect to take this ship into harm's way. It is the President's express orders that you employ the most vigorous exertions to accomplish these several objectives and to put your ship as speedily as possible in a situation to sail at the shortest notice.'

“It is now my pleasure to introduce a charming woman, who I only met this morning, Missus Grace McKinley, the ship's sponsor. Missus McKinley has a special connection that ties this great ship to the to

the one I talked about earlier, for she is the great-great-grandniece of Captain Lambert Wickes, the captain of the first USS Reprisal. She is accompanied by her daughter and the maid of honor, Miss Martha McKinley. Missus McKinley is from Chestertown, Maryland and the wife of the honorable Stephen B. McKinley, a member of the Maryland State Senate, who was unfortunately not able to be with us today. Missus McKinley will issue the first order to the crew.”

Mrs. McKinley walked to the podium and with her daughter standing at her side, she had a few remarks about her third great uncle, who had never married, and his life and the role that he played during the revolutionary war as the captain of the first Reprisal. In conclusion, she said, “Now, the first order to you, the men of the USS Reprisal is, man our ship and bring her to life and set the first watch!”

The ship's band began playing the Star Spangled Banner as the ensign of the United States was unfurled at the stern and the commissioning pennant raised to the masthead. At the conclusion of the national anthem, the ship's company literally ran in an orderly manner to the several gangplanks to board the ship. Within a three short minutes they stood at attention manning the rails aboard the ship. Last to go aboard was Captain Brason, Admiral Ingersoll, and Admiral King, each piped aboard in turn by the boatswains mate. The only one remaining on the stand was Commander Owen. After Admiral King had been piped aboard, Mace turned toward the ship and dismissed the crew. He then turned to those assembled on the VIP stand and invited them to come aboard and tour the newest fighting ship in the United States Navy.

Once the fifty or so guests were aboard they were assembled on the hangar deck and Sheffield personally led the tour, his own family right in front. The tour lasted an hour and half as he took them through the main parts of the ship. At the conclusion of the tour, the guests were dismissed. Sheffield took Emmett and Ellen, Marie, and Walt and Sarah to his stateroom to visit. They were impressed at how homey he had made it. After several minutes, Reggie knocked on the door and called, “Dinner is served Cap'an.” Sheffield invited them to follow him to the captain's mess where they were served a meal of fresh Atlantic salmon.

Sheffield noticed his mother's glancing stare at his plate. Without a word spoken, he understood. He made sure he ate his dinner. It's surprising what a mother's influence can have, even on a grown man.

Beaconing the steward to the table, she asked, “What's your name, young man?” Seaman Reginald Jackson, ma'am, but Cap'an calls me Reggie. Can I do something for you ma'am?”

“Yes as a matter of fact Reggie, there is. I need you to make sure that your captain here doesn't skip breakfast and he eats his dinner. If he gives you any lip, just remind him that you are carrying out orders from someone who out ranks him.”

Sheffield turned a bit red from embarrassment while everyone else snickered in an attempt to stifle

laughing.

Reggie simply responded, "Yes, ma'am." and returned to his post.

Ellen glanced at Sheffield and asked, "Did you get that, son? I mean it."

"Aye, aye, ma'am. Message received loud and clear."

After dinner and more visiting, it was time for them to leave to catch the afternoon train back to Roanoke. Sheffield personally escorted them off the ship and down to the dock where his personal car and chauffeur were waiting to take them back to train station. He he had a hug for everyone and a kiss on the cheek for his mother and Marie. "Thank you all for coming." He said in parting. "It meant a lot to me to have you here today. My plans are to be home for the 4th of July. I'll see you all then. Have a safe trip home."

Sheffield went back aboard where he was greeted by a reporter and a photographer from Life Magazine who had been patiently waiting for an opportunity for an interview. The reporter, Miss Stephanie Hyres, picked up on Admiral King's remarks about his family and asked him a lot about them and how was managing with the loss. She also asked him questions about his naval career. Sheffield kept wanting to direct her attention to the ship.

She replied, "Oh I have enough about the ship. Our readers will like a human interest story to go with the main article. Your's is story everyone will relate to."

At the end of the interview, the photographer took a few pictures and they were finished. Miss Hyers, a charming young woman, thanked him for his time and took his arm as he escorted her to the gangplank and bid farewell.

With all of the fanfare and pomp and ceremony over, Sheffield invited the senior officers to the captains mess for a little socializing. He had Reggie bring in a carton of ice cream. After serving the officers, there was about a serving left in the carton. "Here Reggie, this is for you." He invited the young seaman who had been standing at attention against the bulkhead.

"Thank you Cap'an, sir." he said as he stepped forward and scooped it into a bowl and returned to his station to enjoy his treat.

It was getting on toward evening and nearly all them were anxious to get off duty and leave the ship to go home to their families. At the end of the busy day, Sheffield returned to his stateroom. He slipped off his jacket and loosened his tie and sat down on the bed. He picked up the picture of Geannie on the nightstand and proceeded to tell her all about his day.

The next morning as Sheffield was getting ready for the day Reggie asked, "What would you like me to bring you for breakfast, sir?"

Without thinking, he responded, "No, thanks. Reggie. Coffee is fine."

The young seaman gathered his courage and protested, "But Cap'an, sir. You heard what your mama said. I don't want to go getting her upset with me 'cause you won't eat your breakfast."

Sheffield didn't want to admit it, but he knew that she was right. Then it occurred to him that Geannie would expect the same of him. "Alright, alright. Would you bring me some scrambled eggs and some toast, please." An officer of his rank didn't have to ask please to a steward, especially a colored one, but that is not how his mother had taught him. Sheffield resolved to take better care of himself from that day on. With Reggie's help, he was able to make good on the promise he made to his mother.

After breakfast, Sheffield made his way to the bridge. He was handed a dispatch with news that the fate of the Yorktown had been sealed during the night on the east coast, which was late in the afternoon local time when she rolled over and sank. The news came as a blow. She was a great ship.

Now that the Reprisal was in commission, the focus turned to getting her operational. The first step was loading the storerooms with everything from spare parts to sacks of beans. A couple of days later, a locomotive pulled a string of boxcars onto the dock. Lieutenant Gates, the supply officer called upon the deck divisions to begin the tedious chore of transferring the goods to the ship. Sheffield could see the activity going on from the bridge. Seamen pushing hand trucks or toting items hefted onto their shoulders looked like an army of ants as they lined their way from the railroad cars to the ship and back. Storekeeper petty officers stood with their clipboards and checked items off their lists as they were brought aboard.

One morning a few days later, Sheffield came into his office to find a copy of the June 15, 1942 Life Magazine on his desk. He was surprised and a little embarrassed to see himself looking up from the cover. He had no idea. He never liked to call attention to himself and now there he was for the whole country to see. The article about the ship was very well done and the story about him was accurate. Miss Hyres had gone into more detail than he had anticipated. Now he wished that he hadn't granted the interview.

The fact that the ship was dockside wasn't any reason not to begin preparing the crew for action. Drills of various sorts were conducted. Deep inside the ship, smoke generators filled compartments as firefighting teams moved in. Compartments were flooded just so damage control teams could pump them out. At any given moment the call to general quarters summoned men from their work to man their battle stations. The first drill took two minutes and seven minutes for all stations to report "manned and ready for action."

These drills provided a beginning point from which to hone their skills. Sheffield authorized Mason to offer incentives to the various departments who meet prescribed objectives. For example, forty eight hour passes to the first battery to be manned in under a minute and forty five seconds; a Coca Cola break in mid afternoon for the deckhands who were loading the ship. Once refreshed they were more willing to work late into the evening. Sheffield's call for discipline was enthusiastically embraced as the crew began

pulling together. A feeling of comradely and solidarity had began to set in even before going to sea for the first time.

Three weeks and one day after being placed in commission, at 0700 on Monday the 29th the mooring lines were slipped and three tugboats began pulling Reprisal away from the dock. Moments later she was out in the middle of Hampton Rhoads with her bow pointed seaward. Captain Brason gave the order and the propellers began churning the water beneath the stern. A slight vibration could be felt in decks as the ship got underway. Soon she was out into the Atlantic Ocean where she was joined by two destroyers.

By 0900 she was well off shore and headed into the wind. The air group approached from the west and formed up into the landing pattern. First to catch a wire was Commander James in his Devastator. The plane handlers sprang into action as plane after plane came aboard and were struck below only to be brought back up to the flight deck and spotted for take off and sent aloft again.

After observing flight operations from the wing of the bridge for a while, Captain Brason, Commander James and Commander Whithouse retired to Sheffield's office. "Not bad for their first flight operations." Sheffield said to his air officer. "It's obvious they know what their supposed to do. They just need plenty of practice and they'll get the hang of it."

"Thanks Captain. I thought you would be disappointed at how slow they are."

"Now if their still at that pace a week into our shake down cruise, then I'll be disappointed. I can see that your men have their hearts in it."

"My troops have been anxious to get a feel for the ship." Commander James remarked. "They're not used to a flight deck this long. It should be a dream for them after flying from the Ranger and Wasp, and especially the auxiliary carriers."

"Have you given any thought to my suggestion, Orlando?"

"Do you mean nighttime operations?" He answered. "Yes, I have and I have discussed it with the squadron commanders. Here's what we propose. Rather than exposing the entire air group to it at once, we have called for volunteers and have selected three men each form the Wildcats, Scouts, and Seahawks. The Crusaders didn't feel they had anyone with the confidence to attempt it just yet."

"That's quite alright." Sheffield answered. "This is something that we can't rush into."

"The Wildcats don't either." Seymour observed.

"That's true." Orlando agreed, "But they have three men who feel their up to the challenge

"Anyway, these sections have been working on take offs and landings at dawn and at dusk. They're hoping to give it a try this evening, if its alright with you skipper."

“What do think, Seymour? Do think your men will be up to it?”

The air officer responded, “We can give it a try. I'll pull some off my men back this afternoon to give them a break so they will be sharp this evening. We can give it a try. Do you think we dare turn on the landing lights?”

“As long as there aren't any submarine contacts throughout the day, I think we are close enough to shore that we'll be alright, especially if we keep them dimmed. Alright then, lets see what happens. We'd better get back to the operations at hand and make sure everything flows smoothly. Dismissed gentlemen.”

Flight operations continued throughout the day with only minor glitches and delays. They were to be expected. Late in the afternoon all but nine planes were launched for the last time and winged their way back to Norfolk Naval Air Station.

As the sun sank into the western sky, the three Wildcats Three Dauntlesses and three Devastators were spotted on the flight deck for launch. In the semi-darkness they began rolling down the deck and one by one took to the air. After forming up in a landing pattern, they were brought back aboard a few minutes later. By the time they were re-spotted for launch, it was nearly completely dark. The deck lights showed the way as one by one they were launched into the night sky, illuminated by a full moon as it hung low in the eastern sky. With only the moonlight to show the way, the nine planes formed up. With the flight deck lit up to guide them in, they made their approach and were all recovered without incident. Calling it a night, the planes were struck below and the lights were turned off.

The three officers, nine pilots, and several of the plane handlers met in the spare ready room to discuss the exercise. First they talked about how the day went over all. They agreed that things went reasonably well for their first outing. Granted, there was a lot of room for improvement but they felt that it would come quickly. As far as the night operations went, they agreed to give it another shot in the morning before it got light. The general consensus that the concept was worth pursuing but that it would be months before they would be ready for realistic simulated combat exercises at night.

Early the next morning, as the moon was setting and it was still dark, the lights were turned on and the nine aircraft were launched. As the night before, they landed immediately and were launched one more time in the light of dawn, just before the sun came up. They again returned to the ship and were taken below to clear the deck for the arrival of the rest of the air group.

Things were going smoothly as the plane handlers were getting the routine down. Then while recovering the third flight of the day, an SBD from Scouting Eleven hit the deck particularly hard and bounced in such a manner as to nose over. Splinters of wood were sent flying as the propeller bit into the flight deck. Two men had to be treated for non life threatening injuries. Flight operations had to be suspended while the deck was cleared and the damaged plane taken below for repairs. Needless to say, it

didn't fly for the rest of the day. Operations resumed and all went well for the rest of the day. In mid afternoon the entire air group, except for the damaged Dauntless were launched one last time and shaped a course for Norfolk Naval Air Station.

Once the last plane had cleared the deck, Captain Brason ordered a change of course that would take them home. Not long after that, an airship was seen lumbering off to the north east on its way back to Lakehurst, New Jersey from its patrol.

Lieutenant Cameron, the communications officer called the bridge "Captain, we just got a call from that airship requesting permission to land aboard. They're losing oil pressure in one engine and aren't sure they can make it back to base."

Sheffield thought about it for a moment and remembered that one had landed aboard the Saratoga once upon a time before he was associated with her. He glanced at Commander Whithouse and asked, "What do you think, Seymour?"

Commander Whithouse grinned and replied, "That sounds kind of fun. I think we can help them out."

Sheffield said to Lieutenant Cameron, "Tell them the welcome mat is out for them." He then turned to the helmsman and said, "Change course toward our friends out there."

Before long the two hundred and fifty foot long airship was hovering just behind the ship a little above the flight deck. With one engine producing blue smoke, it descended slowly as it approached until it was just a few feet above the flight deck. Ever so gently, its only wheel touched the deck as it hovered in place. The mobile crane that had been used earlier in the day had been brought back up from the hangar and was pressed into service as a mooring mast. While the crane was moved into position, the gondola was secured to the deck. Once the nose of the airship was secured to the crane, the engines were shut down.

Sheffield had left the bridge to watch the recovery up close. As the crew emerged from the gondola, Lieutenant LeGrand Linmann introduced himself and thanked Captain Brason for a dry place to land. As the nine man crew emerged from the gondola, Sheffield noticed Seaman 2nd Class Tim Brason. "Well well, Tim. I didn't expect to see you again so soon."

Lieutenant Linmann asked Tim with a puzzled look, "You know the good captain?"

"I sure do. He's my uncle." He went to give Uncle Sheffield a hug, but Navy protocol intervened and they shook hands instead.

"I'll tell you what. Lieutenant, Chief Evans here will have his men take a look. Why don't you all join me for dinner."

"Why thank you, sir." Lieutenant Linmann answered for all of them. "We'd be honored."

“As late as it is, it looks like you’ll be spending the night with us. Since we’re undermanned, we have plenty of officers cabins available and there are empty bunks in the enlisted men’s quarters.” He then turned to an Ensign and said to him, “Take these men below and find them a place for the night.”

The ensign answered, “Aye, aye, sir.” He then turned to their unexpected house guests and said, “Follow me gentlemen.”

Sheffield returned to bridge as things were being taken care of. He told Reggie that he would be having dinner guests and asked him to squeeze in two chairs and place settings. With the airship secured, a course change was ordered that would put them back on course to Norfolk.

When dinner was ready, orderlies were sent below to escort the crew of the airship to the captain’s mess. Typically enlisted men were not invited to the Captains mess, except for on rare occasion. Since his nephew was among them, he made an exception.

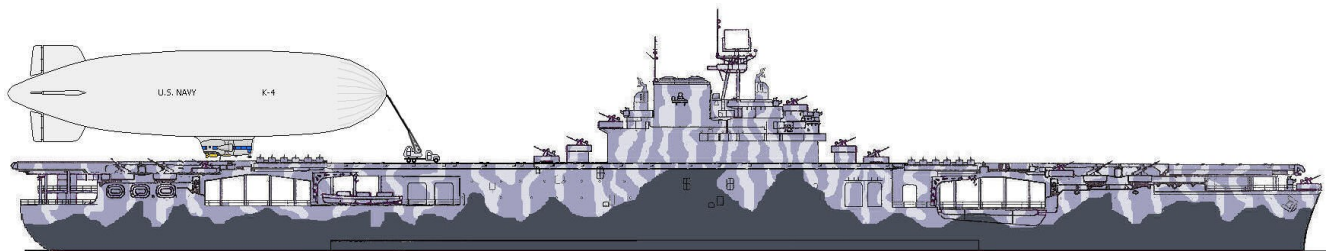
Once seated at the table, Sheffield announced, “Chief Evans and his mechanics found your problem. It’s a ruptured oil seal. The problem is that we don’t have the parts aboard to get you fixed up. Besides we’ll be back in Norfolk in a few hours any way. After dinner why don’t you radio your base and have them send one down tomorrow. We can fix you up and then you can be on your way. Chief Evans said that the engine would have seized up completely in a few more minutes.”

“Thank you Captain, we really appreciate your hospitality.” Lieutenant Linmann spoke for his entire crew.

“Now.” Sheffield continued, “At our last family gathering on Memorial Day, Seaman Brason told me a little about the wonderful world of airships. I’d love to here more.”

The conversation started out about airships but they were more interested in the wonderful world of carriers. Sheffield told a couple of embarrassing stories about his nephew, but Tim was smart enough to not tell any on his uncle.

After dinner, the men were given a tour of the ship before retuning to their temporary quarters. Sometime after midnight the Reprisal dropped anchor in Hampton Roads. It was a curious sight the next morning when everyone saw the Reprisal with an airship taking up a third of her flight deck. Once it was



light, she made her way to her berth at Pier 7 where she was eased up to dock by three tugboats.

It was mid afternoon before the part arrived and the repairs on the airship could begin. In the meantime Sheffield had another visitor. From just outside the bridge, he heard a familiar voice say, "I thought this was supposed to be an aircraft carrier, not a blimp tender."

Sheffield turned around to see Lieutenant Commander Bill Ashford standing out in the passageway. Commander Ashford had been Admiral Halsey's flag lieutenant while Sheffield served on his staff. "Bill, what are you doing here?" he asked as he stepped out into the passageway. As he extended his hand he asked, "I thought you'd be in the Pacific tagging along with Halsey. Step into my office and tell me what's up."

As the two men sat down, Bill went on to explain, "After you left, we sailed to the South Pacific where the old man came down with a nasty case of dermatitis. When we got back to Pearl, he was beached. He was not very happy about being slapped in the hospital, either. Anyway Spruance took his place and assumed our staff. Everyone except for me, I stayed with the Admiral as his personal aid. He spent about a week in the hospital at Pearl and wasn't getting any better. By the way, that pretty little gal that you brought to your going away party was the nurse who attended him. Anyway, he wasn't getting any better so we loaded him onto a cruiser and brought him back to the states for treatment. He was flown to Richmond, Virginia where he spent another week in the hospital. Since then, he has been convalescing there in Richmond. So I have been staying with family over in Virginia Beach. I check in with the Admiral once a day, if he hasn't already called me two or three times, and take care of business for him. I had business here on base this morning and when I saw that blimp aboard, I thought I'd pop in."

"I hadn't heard anything about him being out of commission."

"Yeah, we've been trying to keep it under wraps. We want the Japs to think that it's him that did them in at Midway."

"Do you think he'd mind if I stopped in to see him. I'll be going right through Richmond on Friday on my way home to Roanoke for the Fourth of July."

"He'd love to see you. He's pretty isolated there. I'll phone ahead to the place where he's staying and tell them to let you see him. By the way he's at the Jefferson Hotel there in Richmond at 101 W Franklin Street."

"I know the place." Sheffield interjected.

"He'll probably be there for about another month. I'm sure it would lift his spirits to see you. He's been taking it better than anyone thought the would."

Changing the subject, Commander Ashford asked, "So how's your ship coming along? We can sure use you in the Pacific." For the next forty five minutes or so they two men talked about the Reprisal, the war, and reminisced about their service together.

When the part for the airship arrived, Chief Evans and his men already had the engine torn apart. It had taken them two hours to take things apart, two minutes to install the part, and two hours to put it back together. After engine had been reassembled, they tested it to make sure it worked. Sheffield came down to see them off. After a round of hand shakes, when he came to Tim he asked, "Will you be going home for the holiday?"

"I'm afraid not. We'll be on patrol. How about you Uncle Sheffield? I mean Captain, sir."

"As a matter of fact I will be there. I'll tell your folks and grandma that I saw you and that you are doing well."

"Thanks, Capt...."

"Uncle Sheffield is just fine."

Tim didn't know whether to salute him, shake his hand or just what. Sheffield solved the dilemma for him by pulling him in for a hug. "Take care of yourself, Tim. If you still want to be a rear seatman come on back."

Lieutenant Limann and his crew boarded their craft, the ropes that had it secured to the tie down strips in the deck were removed and the crane was moved back. Slowly the giant airship lifted off the deck and maneuvered off the port side before getting under way.

"That was an interesting adventure." Captain Brason said to whoever was listing as he headed back up to the bridge.

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Admiral Ingersoll, Admiral King, Captain Lambert Wickes, and Lieutenant Ashford are the only actual people mentioned in this chapter. The first Reprisal was an actual ship and the events surrounding her occurred as described.

