

## Chapter IX

### Praia da Vitória

November 2, 1942 – November 17, 1942

The island of Terceira is the third largest island of the Azores Archipelago, hence its name. Terceira (pronounced Tíř-say-ra) means third in Portuguese. The Azores are composed of nine volcanic islands situated in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean about 930 miles west of Lisbon, Portugal.

With the crew manning the rails, the small task group steamed into the Bay of Praia on east side of the island, rounded the seawall and dropped anchor in the north end of the bay off Praia da Vitória (which means Beach of Victory). The eastern side of Terceira has less vegetation than the western side due to the prevailing westerly winds and increased precipitation on the west. Because the bay is protected from the wind, it made an excellent anchorage. For being the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, the weather was quite nice. The average temperature for November ranged between a low of 58° and a high of 67° Fahrenheit.

Although there was a Portuguese Air Force Base at Lajes, just a few miles north of Praia da Vitória, the air group was retained aboard. There were too many uncertainties regarding security to take the risk without further investigation. Portugal was a neutral country, so the possibility of German spies and even Japanese for that matter could not be discounted.

The crews of the seven ships were anxious to go ashore on liberty. Once at anchor, the ship's boats were lowered into the water and were brought alongside the ship's sea ladders. Men waited for their turn to board the launches for the trip ashore as the boats shuttled back and forth. The LCVP came in handy for such a job, since it could carry more men than the launches. Before long Praia da Vitória was crawling with American sailors, checking out what there was in the way amenities, all under the watchful eyes of the Shore Patrol as they drove up and down the streets of the town in one of the ship's jeeps.

Naturally the leaves were granted in shifts as men were required to remain aboard to stand watches and tend to the boilers, as steam was required to generate electrical power while at anchor. Being in a foreign port, security was an issue so armed marines and sailors stood watch on deck keeping an eye out for anything suspicious approaching the ship.

Sheffield was nervous about his meeting with the Portuguese deputy foreign minister later that afternoon. He understood his orders, but in reality he was pilot, not a diplomat. He worried about language being a barrier. He never thought to ask if there was anyone on any of the ships who spoke Portuguese. This assignment had weighed on his mind ever since delivering the bombers. He wished Geannie could be there with him during negotiations, she could talk anybody into anything. She had demonstrated that power of persuasion over presidents, admirals, and salesmen. She called it "that old Austin charm" and she came by it quite naturally through her father.

One of her favorite books in recent years had been Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and

Influence People” which was first published in October of 1936. Sheffield went below to the ship's library to see if they had a copy. They did and he checked it out. Over the the last three days he spent a quite a bit of time studying it, particularly the section on how to win people to your way of thinking. The main points he got from it were: Begin in a friendly way. Start with questions to which the other person will answer yes. Let the other person do a great deal of the talking. Let the other person feel the idea is his or hers. That was pretty much the way Geannie had done things.

Ready or not, it was time for him to leave the ship and go ashore for the meeting. His launch was already in the water waiting for him. He was accompanied by Lieutenant Paul Cameron, the communications officer. By nature of his assignment, he had some background in that sort of thing. Also accompanying him ashore were Colonel Morrison and Commander James. They were to go to the air base at Lajes and see what arrangements could be made for use of the base for both the Army Air Force and the Navy. Commander James was particularly interested in its immediate availability and security arrangements.

It was only a short trip from the ship to the marina where the captain's launch tied up at the dock. Waiting for them were some lower ranking Portuguese government officials with cars standing by to take them to their respective destinations. Sheffield was relieved to be greeted by a young man by the name of Carlos Estéves Andrada, who spoke English fairly well. He and Lieutenant Cameron were taken directly to the Municipal Council Building where the meeting was to take place. The council building was built during the mid fifteenth century when Praia was the capitpl city of the island of Terceira.

Waiting for them in council chamber was Senhor Afonso Delgado Basurto, the Portuguese Deputy Foriegn Minister and Capitão Fernando Mendes Silva of the Portugese Navy. Senhor Delgado was a spry, slender man who apeared to be in his mid to late fifties. He spoke very little English, but nevertheless had a warm welcome for his guests. Capitão Mendes semmed to be cold and austere. Fortunaley he had very little to say.

In 1939, Prime Minister António de Oliveira Salazar, Portugal's authoritarian dictator, had refused the invitation to join the alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan proclaiming its neutrality to avoid military operations in Portuguese territory by the Axis or Allies.

Speaking through Carlos, Senhor Delgado explained that his country was considereing the ieda of allowing the allies to have access to militatry facilities in the Azores beacuse of a Anglo-Portuguese treaty with England dating from fourteenth century. The teantative agreement for a thirty day trial period to allow the Allies use of the facilities on the island of Terceira was put in place when the Americans requested permission for a special operation. During the thirty days, the Americans were free to come and go at will. At the end of that time, the Portuguese would consider making the arragement permanent.

That took a great deal of pressure off of Sheffield. His part was to assure that the Portuguese

placed no restrictions on the operations conducted. He also requested the right to protect US assets using the facilities, which was granted. He in turn promised the presence of the shore patrol to keep the American service men in line while ashore. At the end of the meeting, the agreement was consummated with a round of handshakes and signatures on a document. Sheffield signed on behalf of the United States.

As a courtesy from one Captain to another, Sheffield invited Capitão Mendes to come aboard the Reprisal as his special guest. Unfortunately, he had to decline as he and the deputy minister were scheduled to return to Lisbon immediately after the meeting.

Sheffield and Lieutenant Cameron returned to the launch where Harvey and Commander James were already waiting. Their assignment had also gone well. On the way back to the ship Commander James reported that the airfield was suitable for the air group with the appropriate accommodations. The Portuguese Air Force had a number of outdated Gloster Gladiators stationed there. He reported that he would feel a lot better about using the facility with a platoon of marines from the ship's detachment keeping an eye on things.

Colonel Morrison also found things satisfactory for the needs of the Army Air Force. He would be leaving first thing in the morning for London to make arrangements to begin staging long range B-24 bombers through the air base on their way to North Africa.

Once back aboard the ship, Harvey bid Sheffield farewell, "It's been good sailing with you again, pal. Thanks for your hospitality. On behalf of the United States Army Air Force, thank you for a job well done. And on a personal note, thanks for a plane ride I won't soon forget."

"It was my pleasure." Sheffield replied. "I hope we get to work together again sometime. So how long will you be in London?"

"Probably a week or two before I can make my way back across the Atlantic. I better go get my gear and go ashore. Thanks again, pal. I'll be seeing you."

As his friend turned to leave, Sheffield called out, "See you in the funny pages."

With the arrangements made, Captain Brason decided that it was best to send the air group ashore rather than keeping them cooped up aboard the ship. He ordered Major Jerbowski to send one of his platoons ashore and set up camp at the air base. Again the LCVP proved its worth. There was just enough afternoon left to weigh anchor and sail out of the bay to launch the air group for the short flight to Lajes Field. After a three hour cruise, the Reprisal and Kirkman once again dropped anchor off Praia da Vitória.

It didn't take long for the presence of the ships to attract attention. The next morning, lookouts spotted a small boat circling the anchored ships. There were bound to be the curious wanting to get a closer look and that was to be expected. However, the boat began making its way right toward the carrier and word was passed along to Captain Brason. As the boat passed close aboard, two men and woman were

observed. One of the men was taking pictures. Sheffield ordered a burst across the bow from a twenty millimeter cannon.

The boat came to an abrupt stop. With a battery of five machine guns aimed at his boat, the pilot didn't dare move. The captain ordered a boarding party to investigate. Chief Boatswain's Mate Charles O'Malley and a half a dozen men commandeered the launch preparing to go ashore and were soon along side the small boat. The armed sailors boarded the boat and took the three individuals into custody. In the process they confiscated some sophisticated camera equipment.

The three were brought aboard for questioning. The man with the camera spoke only German. The pilot of the boat spoke only Portuguese. The woman, however spoke Portuguese, German, French, and English. She said that she was local school teacher and had been hired by the German to translate for him. The pilot of the boat was a local fisherman who had been hired by the German to take him out to get a closer look at the American ships.

In the meantime the camera had been sent to the photography shop to have the film developed. When the pictures came back, they were close up details of critical equipment on the ship, the kind of pictures that would be useful to intelligence agents.

The school teacher and the fisherman were released, but the photographer was detained and taken to brig under armed guard. Captain Brason had a decision to make. "Do I haul him around with us until we return to US territory, or do I turn him over the Portuguese authorities?" Where Portugal was officially neutral, Germany could exert diplomatic pressure to have their agent returned to them. He could always do as the Germans would and have him executed on the spot, but that is not the way Americans did things. The spy would have to be turned over to the FBI and stand trial. His decision was already made for him, he had to keep the spy in custody aboard the ship, at least until he could get him on his way to the proper authorities.

With the matter taken care of, Sheffield decided to get off the ship for some rest and relaxation as well. Leaving Mason in command, he boarded his launch which took him to the marina docks. On disembarking from his launch, he sent it back to the ship with orders to return for him in twenty four hours. With an overnight bag in hand, he walked to a nearby hotel where he checked in for the night. It was a nice suite in an upscale hotel. The first thing that crossed his mind was that he wished he could be sharing it with Geannine. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea after all.

After squaring away his gear, he went to find someplace to have dinner. There was nice restaurant just down the street. Seated all alone he ordered the Bacalhau à Brás, which was shreds of salted cod, onions and thinly chopped, matchstick sized fried potatoes bound together with scrambled eggs and garnished with black olives and sprinkled with fresh parsley.

After enjoying his meal, he wandered around the town. Again, he wished that Geannie was at his side. It kind of reminded hi of their vacation to Ensenada all those years ago. Everywhere he went was crawling with sailors, a good share of them from the Reprisal. The locals seemed to roll out the red carpet for their American visitors. There seemed to be plenty of entertainment of a variety of sorts. Wandering around on his own watching the men was entertaining enough. Here again, he was all alone in a crowd, longing for companionship. After a while he returned to his room and turned in. As nice as the amenities were, he didn't rest as well as did in his stateroom.

He gave some more thought to Geannie's letter, wondering who there might be for out there for him. He thought of Paula Drussel, remembering the enjoyable evening that he had with her. He really didn't know her that well. Perhaps he should try to get to know her better. Then he thought of Ramona. They already had a very good relationship and he knew her very well. The problem with her was that she had her heart set on some mystery man. He wondered who he was and why it had never came up before. In the end, he decided he really wasn't ready for any of that just yet.

The next day he got out and wandered around some more. The town was quiet as the shopkeepers opened for another day's business. One thing that would have helped was if he understood the language. The culture was quite fascinating. Geannie would have thoroughly enjoyed it. With the similarities between Portuguese and Spanish, she would have gotten along just fine.

He learned a little of the history of the area. Praia, had been one of the first places settled on the island. The settlement was destroyed by an earthquake in 1614 and the settlements along the coast were lost to the sea. During the 17th century, as the community was being re-constructed, it was hit by several more seismic events. During the Portuguese Civil War, the harbor was the scene of a naval battle in 1829. As a result of this victory, Queen Maria I, after being restored to the throne, acted to recognize the residents of Praia for their heroism by appending "da Vitória" to its name. Consequently, Praia became known as Praia da Vitória. Again in 1841, the town was partially destroyed by another earthquake.

Out in the bay he watched as the fishing fleet got underway and sailed past the ships of the task group as they laid at anchor. He wondered what their next mission would be and where events would take them. He was expecting someone to show up any day now with his orders. Perhaps that would be the day.

It was still a few hours before his launch was to return for him. Running out of things to do in Praia da Vitória, he waved down a cab and asked to be taken up to the Lajes Airfield and have a look for himself. He found Commander James and the air group comfortably situated with room to stretch their legs.

Sheffield made his way back to the ship, glad to be home. The order of the day called for refueling. After tending to the Syracuse and the destroyers, the Yellowstone pulled along side the Reprisal and topped off her tanks. Lieutenant Commander Gates had made the rounds to the various shops in town and had

placed orders to resupply the ship's food stores.

While on the bridge, Sheffield was alerted to a submarine entering the bay on the surface. The concern that it might be a German U-boat coming in for a surface attack was quickly put to rest as it was recognized as an American Gato class submarine. Besides, such an attack would have occurred during the night. As she approached, she signaled her identification. It was the Reprisal's old friend from her shakedown cruise, the Cutthroat. After she joined the rest of the ships at anchor. Captain Brason had the following message flashed to the Cutthroat, "Do you have our orders?"

The Cutthroat signaled back, "Orders arriving tomorrow."

That day was another leisurely day at anchor. Besides the necessary watches, fresh food stores were brought aboard, including cod, chicken, eggs, milk, beans, potatoes, and even pineapple. Lieutenant Gates found the LCVP and one of the ship's jeeps to be quite useful in resupplying the ship. The ship's boats made several trips to the marina during the day, carrying men back and forth from shore leave. By then, everyone had had their turn ashore.

Toward afternoon, one of the launches returned to the ship with two SPs escorting a drunken Aviation Store Keeper First Class who had been hauled out of a tavern after trashing the place during a fight with a sailor from another ship. The SPs escorted him directly to the brig where he was locked up. A report of the incident was filed which made its way to Commander Owen.

Mace, holding the report in his hand said to Sheffield, "I hate to tell you this, but Petty Officer Pucheskey is back in the brig."

Sheffield shook his head and asked, "What did he do now?"

"According to the Shore Patrol report; fighting, destruction of commercial property, disorderly conduct, and public drunkenness. It says that he broke up a couple of tables, several chairs, and some glassware. The tavern owner is asking for a hundred dollars in US currency to cover the damage and other losses. Neither Pucheskey or the other sailor were seriously injured, beyond some good cuts and bruises. He ought to be sore for a while. It says here that he resisted the SPs when they attempted to break up the fight. According to witnesses, he startled it when the other man accidentally spilled his drink on Pucheskey, who was already severely intoxicated. What are you going to do with him, sir?"

"First, I'm going to let him sober up. Then I'm going to have him summoned to Captain's Mast and give him exactly what I promised him. Why couldn't he mind his business after I gave him the benefit of the doubt? Let's schedule the mast for ten hundred hours tomorrow morning. Have the two SPs there and the witnesses who gave statements. Have the ship's clerk bring the money to my office right away and I'll go and see what I can do to smooth things over. Where'd this happen?"

"It's a place called Rubio's Tavern on Estrela, just up the street from the movie theater."

"Thanks. I think I can find it. Oh and I want Pucheskey's personnel file as well. I'll be in my office. You have the bridge, Commander."

Before long Chief Warrant Officer Jonathan Pomroy brought one hundred dollars in cash down to Sheffield's office and had him sign for it. After dismissing Warrant Officer Pomroy, he got up from his desk, put on his hat and left his office, and made his way down to the boat deck.

His staff car was being loaded onto the LCVP when he got there. This was the first test of what he thought was a good idea. It was obvious that once in the cargo well, there wasn't going to be enough room for the driver to open the doors and get out, so it had to be pushed into place. Once secured. It was lowered over the side and began making its way to the marina.

Once the car was unloaded, the coxswain who drove the boat, became the driver. Without understanding any Portuguese, or knowing their way around, a few moments later, Sheffield was standing on the sidewalk in front of the establishment. Immediately upon walking through the door, he saw for himself the damage that had been done.

The tavern owner looked up and shouted, "No americanos! No americanos!" waving his hands across his chest.

Sheffield smiled and walked toward the angry man, extended his right hand, pointed to himself with the other and said, "Capitão." He understood that word only from meeting Capitão Mendes a couple of days earlier.

Rubio was disarmed by the captain's greeting and reached out and shook Sheffield's hand with great enthusiasm. Apparently honored that the capitão would come in person.

Sheffield pulled out his billfold and took out the five twenty dollar bills that the ship's clerk had given him and handed them to Rubio.

Rubio's eyes got big as he snatched the money from Captain Brason. For not knowing any English, he sure knew how to count one hundred American dollars. "Vinte, quarenta, sessenta, oitenta, cem." he called out as he thumbed through the five bills. He looked at Sheffield and cried "Obrigado Capitão, obrigado!" as tears welled up in his eyes.

Sheffield assumed that obrigado must have meant "thank you" or some equivalent. Then to show his sincerity, he grabbed a broom and began sweeping up broken glass.

Rubio took the broom from him and asked, "Deseja algo para beber?" jestering as if he had a glass in his hand, put it to his mouth and tipped his head back.

"I'll have a Coca Cola."

Rubio replied, "Ah, sim. Coca Cola." He set the broom aside and went behind the counter, opened

the cooler and retrieved an nice cold bottle of Coca Cola. He opened it and sat it down on the bar.

Sheffield reached into his pocket and pulled out a nickel and placed it on the counter and slid it toward Rubio.

Rubio waved his hands emphatically, "No! No!" and pushed the nickel back toward the American.

Sheffield enjoyed his Coca Cola while a much happier Rubio went about cleaning up. When he finished he set the empty bottle down on the bar and went to leave. Rubio intercepted him and took his hand in both of his, shaking it enthusiastically. He let go and said, "Americanos." and gestered with his hands that they were welcome to come back.

Satisfied that he had accomplished his mission, the driver took him back down to the marina where the LCVP was waiting to take him back to the ship. The idea seemed to have worked pretty good, actually.

At 1000 the next morning, everyone that Captain Brason had requested to be in attendance were waiting in his ready room. He had been in his office reviewing Petty Officer Puchesky's personnel file and the Shore Patrol report. Upon entering his ready room, everyone assembled arose and stood at attention, and saluted. Sheffield retuned the salute and said, "At ease. Please be seated."

Everyone waited until he sat down before taking their seats.

Sheffield set the papers in his hand down on the table in front of him. He looked at Petty Officer Puchesky, who was seated directly opposite of him at the other end of the table, and sighed. He began, "I really went out of way to give you the benefit of the doubt, Petty Officer Puchesky. You gave me your word that you would keep your nose clean. You know, I was really looking forward to giving you your stripe back, and look at where we are today. Do you remember what I told you?"

"Yes, sir." responded a very sober sailor.

"Before I render my ruling, out of fairness I want to hear form the witnesses."

Over the next forty five minutes, the Captain listened to and asked questions of the witnesses. Finally he asked Petty Officer Puchesky if he had anything to say.

The sailor rose to his feet and said, "I told you I was a bad seed. I really wanted to prove to you and myself that its not true. I'm sorry that I let you down, sir. I'm sorry that I let myself down. I do want to thank you for giving me a chance. When you came to see me in the brig and brought me a plate from the barbecue, well sir, that really meant a lot to me. You didn't have to do that. Maybe if I'd of had someone like you for a father, I wouldn't have turned out this way.

"I was too drunk to remember everything that happened yesterday, but I'm sure what everyone has said is pretty much the way it went. I know better than to stand here and make excuses. I take full responsibility for my actions. I think I have a good idea of what the outcome will be. There is really nothing

more for me to say, sir.” At that he sat down.

Captain Brason paused for a moment before he spoke. “I have thought a lot about this ever since I received the shore patrol report. What I have heard here today confirms my initial thoughts. Now, as promised, you are hereby demoted to seaman. You will spend the rest of your time aboard this ship confined to the brig until such time as we return to a US base, or you can be transferred to a ship or aircraft bound for a US base. Once you are turned over to the proper navy authorities, it is my recommendation that you receive a dishonorable discharge for disorderly conduct. The shore patrol report and the proceedings of this hearing will be included in your personnel file, which is pretty incriminating as it is.

“Furthermore, your wages will be garnered to the amount of one hundred dollars to pay for the damages to Rubio's Tavern. I went there in person yesterday afternoon and paid him the hundred dollars. You know, we are here to convince these people to allow us to use their facilities. They are a little reluctant as it is. This little episode could have set things back. I hope my damage control efforts were sufficient. That is all. This matter is adjourned. Dismissed.”

Everyone stood at attention as the Captain left the ready room. Instead of leaving immediately, he came around and shook Seaman Puchesky's hand and said, “Good luck to you once you're discharged. Take however long you will be confined to think about things. I'd really like to see you make something of yourself in civilian life. Don't keep down the path you have been on, it will only lead you to trouble and most likely prison. Remember what I said to you, When trouble comes looking for you, walk away.”

Seaman Puchesky replied, “Thank you sir. You really haven't given up on me yet have you?”

“No son. I haven't” At that Sheffield exited through the door at the far end of the ready room and made his way to the Captain's mess where Reggie had a grilled cheese sandwich and bowl of tomato soup waiting for him.

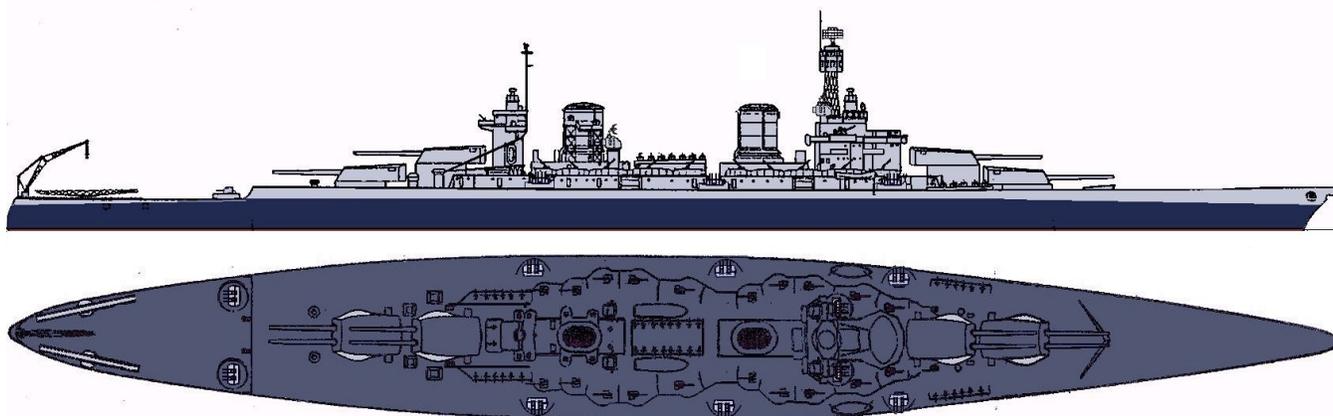
As for Seaman Puchesky, he was escorted back to the brig to keep company with the German spy.

After lunch, Sheffield made his way back up to the bridge. He hadn't been there long when a lookout reported, “Ships entering the harbor.” Sheffield and the others picked up their binoculars to have a look. They saw the unmistakable shape of the battlecruiser USS Congress followed by the scout cruisers Billings and Cedar Rapids, the large destroyer Moody and the destroyers Irving, Masters, Armstrong and Glen as they rounded the seawall and made way to the anchorage at the north end of the bay. Flying from the Congress' foremast was the flag of a two star admiral. As soon the eight ships had dropped anchor, Captain Brason was summoned to the flag office aboard the battlecruiser in one hour.

As Sheffield's launch approached the 847 foot, 45,000 ton battlecruiser, he marveled that she was actually a sister ship of the Saratoga that he had been associated with during so much of his early career.

The Congress was one of four Constellation Class battlecruisers, originally known as the Lexington Class. Two of the ships, Lexington and Saratoga were converted into aircraft carriers.

These ships were a hybrid; part battleship, part cruiser. They had the armament of a battleship with eight sixteen inch guns. Refit after Pearl Harbor, they retained the eight six inch 53 caliber guns in casements on the main deck. The ones on the upper deck were replaced by eight five inch 38 caliber dual purpose guns in splinter shields, ten quad 40 Millimeter mounts and twenty four 20 Millimeter guns. They were lightly armored and fast, like a cruiser. Easily capable of thirty three knots and could keep up with a carrier. With that combination, they were an ideal escort for a carrier, particularly when there was a possibility of coming into contact with heavy capital ships.



The launch eased along side the sea ladder at the quarterdeck where it tied up. Sheffield went aboard and was escorted to the flag office by a member of the Admiral's staff. Upon entering the room, he was introduced to Rear Admiral Carlton Weston. Also present were Lieutenant Commander Harold Halvesten, the commander of the Cutthroat, and Captain Guy Danpora, USMC the commander of Company A of the Fifth Marine Raider Battalion. After a round of introductions, Admiral Weston got down to business.

"I understand that you and your ship are anxious to get into the fight, Captain." he addressed Sheffield. "What I am going to present will give you that opportunity. How would you like to take a crack at the Germans on the European Continent? Your orders are to carry out air raids on the submarine pens under construction at Bordeaux, France and a nearby air base.

"As you can see from the map behind me, Bordeaux in thirty five miles from the coast. The Gironde, a navigable estuary opens into the Atlantic some fifty miles northwest of the city. From the ocean, ships pass through the Gironde Estuary until the mouth of the Garonne River. The Garonne remains navigable for larger vessels upstream to the Stone Bridge in Bordeaux.

"Because of strong tidal currents, the submarine pens are inside a tidal basin cordoned off by a set of locks. At the time of the attack, it will be low tide. Any ships in port won't be able navigate the estuary,

except for small craft.

“The target area is within range of the Army Air Force's B-seventeens but it is too deep inside of Occupied France for them to penetrate. It is felt by Washington that this is a prime target for carrier aircraft. In addition to the submarine pens, there is a large concentration of commercial shipping there along with several German and Italian submarines. What do you say, Captain? Are you up to it?”

“Yes sir. Tell me more.”

“There's more. You're probably wondering why Commander Halversten and Captain Danpora are here, aren't you. They have a special part in this mission. They have been training off the East Coast for this mission. The Cutthroat will take the raiders in by night. The French Resistance will transport them the thirty five files to Bordeaux, except for the Weapons Platoon which will hold the beachhead. The 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon will take out the power plant and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon will silence the radio station during the early morning hours. With their mission complete, they will make their way back to the beach and to the Cutthroat, which can cover their retreat with their deck gun if necessary. The city will be without power and communications when your air group strikes just before sunrise. I understand some of your pilots are proficient in flying at night.

“To weaken the effectiveness of the Germans stationed there, Jean Laroche, a key figure in the local resistance organization has a role in the plan. He is the proprietor of a popular casino frequented by German occupation forces and has won their confidence by feigning loyalty to the powers that be. On the evening of Friday the twentieth he is hosting a gala in honor of the Germans. Strong alcohol and seductive women will be available for the taking. The plan is that come dawn the next morning, the Germans, particularly the officers, will be sleeping off some mighty severe hangovers and won't be able to respond effectively. That should also help the Raiders make their escape.

“Captain, the planing and execution of the air raid is up to you. I understand that you have some expertise in that area. I'm a cruiser man and don't know the first thing about air operations. My job is to get you in and out in one piece.

“The folder in front of you contains photographs and maps that should be useful to you. Do you have any comments or questions?”

Captain Brason responded, “It sounds like a well thought out operation, if everything goes as planned. I need you to get us within a hundred and fifty miles of the target. With a good escort we should be able to fight off what might be thrown at us. My pilots are certainly up to a dawn attack. My first thought was to send in what we call the Bat Team in the early morning hours for a preliminary raid, but as I thought about it, that would diminish the element of surprise for the dawn attack.

“I do have one question. What about German maritime reconnaissance?”

“That is a very good question. There are a number of Focke-Wulf 200 Condors at the Bordeaux-Mérignac Air Base, which is included in the attack. The Germans also have some Junkers Ju-88 long range fighters that also operate from the base. If your boys do their job, they should be in and out before they can get in the air, if there is anyone sober enough to fly.

“As for the Condors, they have a range of eleven hundred miles, but only patrol as far as five hundred miles, covering the Bay of Biscay. The task force won't enter that range until sunset, giving us all night to get you into a launch position. Your aircraft should be back from the raid before they can report your position the next morning. Any aircraft capable of mounting a counter strike against us would come from further up the coast. We should be just about out of their range before they could make contact. U-boats will be a definite threat and we know the Germans have a couple of M class cruisers and a number of torpedo boats at Brest. The Billings and Cedar Rapids will be dispatched to intercept them if they come out to challenge us.

“There is one special request from the Resistance. They have two British airman in their care. They are survivors of a plane that had been shot down while on a reconnaissance flight from England. One of the airman was badly injured and the underground had requested assistance in evacuating the fliers. There is a makeshift airfield in a pasture at Léongan, about fifteen kilometers south of Bordeaux that has been abandoned but is still usable. During the commotion of the raid, could one of your Avengers land there long enough to evacuate them?”

Sheffield told him, “Let me see what we can do about that and I'll get back to you.”

“I need to know before we sail. After that we will be out of communication with the Resistance. Oh and keep this under wraps as much as possible before we sail. Only include those who you need to, this place is crawling with German spies. Of course the Raiders know of their pending mission, but no one else, not even the crew of the Cutthroat. They'll figure it out when they start offloading all unnecessary men and supplies and the Marines come aboard, but they will have no idea where they're going.”

“Tell me about the spies. We have one in the brig aboard the Reprisal.

“May I make a suggestion sir, regarding our departure. Let's let our Portuguese hosts and any German spies among them think we are heading south, perhaps toward North Africa. Once we are out of sight of land, we can change course toward our objective.”

“Good thinking, Captain.”

Commander Halvesten spoke for the first time, “I have a request of you Captain Brason. Could you teach your fliers the difference between an American Gato Class and a Nazi U-boat. Here is our projected course so you will have a good idea where we will be at any given time. We don't want to be listed as a statistic for another U-boat sinking. And here is the homing frequency that we will be transmitting on.”

"I'll be sure to pass that along."

Captain Danpora also had a couple of requests, "Could your fighters keep an eye out for us to provide air cover if needed during our retreat. Also, could you provide us with their radio frequency so my radio operator can contact them if we need a little help."

"Yes, we can do that. Lieutenant Cameron is our communications officer, get with him after the briefing."

Admiral Weston concluded the briefing by asking, "Is there anything else at this time? If not, you are dismissed. Feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions. We will meet once more before we sail."

The meeting adjourned and Sheffield began making his way to his launch. He had a lot on his mind and hardly noticed the line of Marines waiting to go ashore. His concentration was broken when he heard someone call out, "Captain Brason!" He stopped in his tracks and turned to see who had called his name. A young Marine private who he immediately recognized as Seth McClury approached him and stopped to salute.

Sheffield returned the salute and extended his hand. "I never expected to see you here, Seth. Are you with the Raiders?"

"Yes, sir, Captain Brason."

"We never got a chance to visit at Joe's reception. Now would be a good time." Sheffield gestured to a secluded section of railing where they could be alone.

As they walked, Seth said, "When I learned that your ship would be part of this mission, I wondered if I'd run across you."

Sheffield asked, "Have you been home since Joe's wedding?"

"No, but Emmeline was able to come to Quantico to spend a couple of days before we shipped out. Of course, I couldn't tell her where I was going. So what do you think of our mission, Captain?"

"Look, Seth. Where we're alone like this, call me Uncle Sheffield. After all you are married to my niece. As far as the mission, it's daring, but I think the risks are acceptable. I see you're wearing the Distinguished Marksmanship Ribbon. That ought to come in handy."

"Yeah, all of the times Joe and I and our friends went hunting in the hills west of Roanoke helped a lot. I don't want to brag but I could hit anything at a thousand yards with my Springfield thirty-aught-six. It's basically the same thing as our M1's."

"How was your cruise over on the Congress? She's a fine ship."

"It took me a couple of days to get used to being at sea, but then I was alright. I never got seasick or anything. Not like some of the guys."

"That's good, because being in the Marines you're likely to spend a lot of time at sea."

"I really didn't care for being on the submarine during our training. I don't like the idea of being under water like that. I'm not looking forward to the trip to Bordeaux."

"It's not all that bad," Sheffield said, "I spent three days on a submarine once. It took some getting used to at first."

"I don't know." Seth confided. "It's going to be pretty crowded with the whole company crammed into every available space. That's another sixty men in addition to the crew."

"From what I hear," Sheffield assured him, "they are going to offload as much material and men as they can to make room for you all. Still it will be close quarters, I hope you all get along."

"During the training, they weeded out the troublemakers. We do have a few guys who actually speak German. They were recruited just for this mission. One of them is a kid from Minnesota who immigrated to the United States from Germany with his family a few years ago."

At that point in their conversation they were approached by Captain Danpora. "Is there a problem here, Captain Brason?"

To which he answered, "Oh, not at all Captain. We're just having a little family reunion here. Private McClury is married to my niece. We're just catching up on things. Carry on Captain."

Captain Danpora saluted and turned to leave them alone. (A captain in the other branches of service is three ranks below a captain in the navy.) Sheffield and Seth went on to talk about the family back home. After a while, Sheffield said, "Well, Seth it was good to talk to you. I need to get back to my ship, I've got a lot of details to work out for this mission. Enjoy your time ashore. I hope to see you when this is behind us. Good luck to you."

"You too, sir." They shook hands and parted company.

On his way back to the Reprisal, Sheffield began mulling over the formation of a plan in his head. As his launch made its way back to the Ship, a flight of B-24's from England bound for North Africa circled around the bay on their landing approach to Lajes Field. Harvey's work had paid off. Once back aboard, he called a meeting in his ready room for 0800 the next morning with the senior officers and the air group and squadron commanders.

He dined alone that evening. The orders were not what he was expecting, but at least they had opportunity to finally do something. He spent the evening alone going back and forth between his stateroom and his office as a plan began to fall into place. It was very similar to the raids that he had helped craft during the first months of the war at Kwajalein, Marcus, and Wake. This one presented the same element of danger and uncertainty. He felt confident that his crew and the air group were up to the challenge. This is

what they had been training for. Now it was time to make it pay off. With a basic plan in place, he wanted to sleep on it and not develop it any farther without the input of the men he had come to know and trust; the men who would have to carry it out.

The planning meeting in the Captain's ready room convened as scheduled. With only a break for lunch, they worked all day. With some tweaks and adjustments here and there, a well thought out plan emerged. Commander James escorted by two Wildcats undertake the rescue mission. The Seahawks, each armed with four five hundred pound bombs, would take care of the air base. The Crusaders each packing a one thousand pound armor piercing bombs would work over the submarine pens. The Scouts with two five hundred pound bombs would take on targets of opportunity such as the locks to the tidal basin and any submarines, merchant ships, and patrol craft that might be present in the river along with the shore facilities. The Wildcats would provide air cover and strafing attacks. An initial sweep would take down the barrage balloons above the harbor facilities. Beside the two that accompanied Commander James, one section of four planes would take up station over the beachhead to cover the retreating marines.

There was some concern on the part of Lieutenant Commander Lovelace of the Wildcats regarding the potential for encountering the legendary Messerschmidt Me-109s. They were faster and more maneuverable than the F4F's. Sheffield explained that they were comparable to the Japanese Zero with the similar strengths and weaknesses. He told him that if any Me-109s made an appearance to take advantage of the same tactics that had proved successful against the Zeros, namely the now famous Thatch Weave. The Germans wouldn't be expecting it. The main advantage that the Wildcat had over the Messerschmidts was its durability and firepower.

The plan called for the entire air group to participate in the raid, except for one section of Wildcats to be retained for combat air patrol. Sheffield realized that there was a risk of losing a certain number of aircraft. In that case, the spares carried aboard would have to be pressed into service. He recommended making them ready and put them and the extra pilots to use in defending the task force. That would give them an additional eight Wildcats for combat air patrol and thirteen Dauntlesses and three Avengers for anti-submarine patrol.

While plans for the air raid were being drawn up, the Cutthroat had moved to the pier and offloaded all of her torpedoes, except for what the torpedo tubes held, and other equipment that would not be needed on the mission. Ten ten-man LCRLs, large rubber landing craft, and two seven-man LCRSs, small rubber landing craft, were brought aboard and stowed away. They were to be inflated just prior to disembarking the Marines. In addition, thirty members of the crew were to remain behind to make room for the sixty one Marines. The forward and aft torpedo rooms became temporary quarters for some of the Marines by stringing hammocks where the torpedoes were normally stored. Late in the afternoon, the Cutthroat quietly

got underway.

When the Congress arrived, she brought with her a bag of mail for the Reprisal. After the postal clerks aboard the ship had a chance to sort it all out, a letter from Ramona, among other items, was delivered to Sheffield's office.

*Nov 7, 1942*

*Dear Sheffield*

*I guess I'll have to take that rain check. There's no telling when I'll see you again. That's the nature of war. I do hope your mission goes well. Just this morning I heard the news about the invasion of North Africa. I can only assume that it had something to do with that.*

*I'm happy to hear that you have been getting out more. That's just what you need. I learned along time ago about being an individual and doing things alone. I have become accustomed to it. I agree, it is much better to share those things with someone, like your officers appreciation banquet. I would have loved to have been there to share that with you. I'm glad that you found someone to accompany you.*

*At least I can be here for you in letters. I always look forward to getting one from you. With each one I can see that you are making progress. My advise to you is not to rush things. You'll be ready when you're ready. It will only set you back if you try to run before you can walk.*

*As far as my mystery man goes, I think one of these days I'll get up the courage to tell him how I feel about him. I have to be careful as to not scare him off. He obviously has no idea how I feel. Like you, he's not ready for something like that just yet. So I'll just have to take it slow and easy. Waiting is difficult, but in the process I am growing to love him more and more all the time. When I'm not busy, I find myself thinking about him and what I hope might be.*

*But enough about me. I do hope wherever this letter catches up to you that all is well. Write when you can. I still anticipate that you will be coming to the rescue in the South Pacific. The word is the the Japaneses are gearing up for another big push to hold on to Guadalcanal. Perhaps that is this mission of yours. You know how in the movies the calvary always shows up at the last minute.*

*I need to close now so I can drop it off at the post office on my way to work. Oh my goodness, look at the time! I have to hurry.*

Love Ramona.

On the final day before sailing, Sheffield had some last minute details to attend to regarding the Bordeaux raid before Admiral Weston came over from the Congress later in the day. Commander Owen assured him that everything was on schedule for departure the following day. He took a moment and sat down at his desk, pulled out a sheet of stationary with his letterhead and began writing.

November 16, 1942

At anchor board the USS Reprisal

Praia da Vitória in the Azores

Dear Ramona,

I got your letter late yesterday afternoon. It caught up with me in the Azores, of all places. You were correct in your assumption about North Africa. After launching the army planes that we were ferrying, we set course for the Island of Jerceira where we arrived on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November.

Even though Portugal is neutral, they have agreed to allow us to use the island facilities for thirty days. I had to negotiate the terms of what our usage would be. During that time we are free to come and go as we please and our operations are unrestricted.

We are getting ready to sail tomorrow on a another mission. Of course I can't say anything about it just yet. I can tell you that it will result in contact with the enemy.

The other day I did have to smooth things over with the owner of a local establishment. A member of my crew busted up the joint. The kid had been in trouble before. After giving him the benefit of the doubt once, I had no choice but to throw him in the brig for good. I did take a twenty four hour leave for myself and got out and enjoyed the immediate area.

*After this mission is over, I have no idea where we'll go next. I don't have a clue. Every time I venture a guess, I'm wrong. I do promise you that when we cross paths again I will take you out to dinner. That is if you haven't got together with this mystery man of yours. Who is he anyway? Do I know him?  
Love Sheffield*

In the afternoon, Admiral Weston came aboard to be briefed on the final plans for the air raid. Pleased that all of the bases had been covered, including the rescue, The Admiral returned to the Congress and sent the coded confirmation message to the the French Resistance forces in Bordeaux by way of London.

During the wee hours of the morning of Tuesday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, the Task Force made preparations for getting under way.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Congress is a fictional ship. The battlecruisers, with the exception of the Lexington and Saratoga, were scrapped in accordance with an arms reduction treaty before they could be completed. These ships were named Constitution, Constellation, United States, and Ranger. For the purpose of my story, I took the liberty to rename the Ranger to Congress, since the aircraft carrier Ranger bore that name and to bring it into conformity to the other three as all four were namesakes of four of the originate six frigate built by the United States in 1799.

All other ships mentioned are also fictional, including the proposed M class cruisers as none were built.

The Fifth Marine Raider Battalion is also a fictional unit.

Admiral Weston and Captain Danpora fictional characters as are the Portuguese officials, as is Rubio and his tavern.