

Chapter XI

Regrouping

November 22, 1942 – November 25, 1942

All day and into the night, the Cutthroat continued her dash out of the Bay of Biscay. Commander Halversen maintained a steady course on the surface at fifteen knots. In early afternoon, lookouts spotted a life raft up ahead and to starboard. Commander Halversen altered course and soon brought aboard the pilot and radioman of one of the Scouting Eleven Dauntless that had been shot down the previous afternoon. A couple of hours later, they happened upon the pilot of one of the Wildcats that had also been shot down.

As the Cutthroat cruised through the area where the task force had come under attack, yet another life raft was observed ahead in the distance. Again the submarine altered course to assist. This time it was the four man crew of one of the He-111s. They joined the four soldiers captured on the beach who were under guard in the aft torpedo room.

As evening turned to night, the distance from danger grew greater under clear skies and a nearly full moon. Private McClury laid in his hammock in the forward torpedo room. Try as he did, sleep would not come. In his mind, he went over the events of the last twenty four hours again and again. He had actually survived his first combat mission and was headed home. In a matter of days he would be back at Quantico and well deserved leave. He couldn't wait to go back to Roanoke to see Emmeline and the rest of his family.

The face of the soldier with the grenade was forever etched in his memory. He couldn't help but wonder about him. "Who was he? Where was he from? How old was he? Did he have a wife and kids? Did he really believe all of that Nazi hogwash – or was he simply a German serving his country?" Seth felt bad that the man had to die. But the way he saw it, it was either the German or him and his fellow Marines who had taken cover behind that log.

He remembered something else Walt had told him. "In war, you have to kill or be killed. If you act responsibly in your duties, God won't hold you accountable for the lives that you must take. That goes to those who brought about the war and the killing and the death. Freedom isn't free. It is bought with blood. The blood of those who die defending freedom and the blood of those who seek to destroy it." Walt should know, he was a man of God who had once fought to defend freedom himself. But still...

Seth's thoughts were interrupted by commotion. Over the loudspeaker he heard, "Dive! Dive!" followed by the slamming of hatches. Then everything tilted downward at an angle as the boat sank beneath the surface. Sailors rushed into the torpedo room to man the tubes. In the commotion Seth learned that a surface contact had been picked up on radar.

In the conning tower, Commander Halversen peered through the periscope as he swept the horizon for the contact. Then he saw it. A U-boat, silhouetted in the moonlight, was running on the surface ahead and to port. By its heading, it was obviously returning from a patrol. No doubt it had been ordered to

intercept the allied raiders, whoever they were. It was also apparent that the U-boat had not spotted them.

Commander Halversen had his boat brought into an attack position and waited for the right moment. He had six torpedoes in the forward tubes with no reloads. He decided to fire tubes 1 and 2, holding the rest in reserve. At just the right moment he ordered, "Fire one! Fire two!"

Seth could hear the whoosh of the torpedoes as they left their tubes. The next forty five seconds passed slowly. Then two thunderous explosions shook the boat as the torpedoes hit their target. Cheers went up through out the submarine.

Commander Halversen took the Cutthroat back up to the surface to inspect the damage and to look for survivors. The night sky was lit up by fire on the water. The forward section of the U-boat lay on its side, taking on water. The aft section was nowhere to be seen. A couple of dozen men were in the water, swimming way from the wreckage.

Captain Danpora ordered the men in Seth's platoon to grab their weapons and go topside. Seth emerged into the cool autumn air and beheld the sight for himself. The thought, "I didn't know water could burn." ran through his mind.

With their rifles trained on the helpless swimmers, they stood guard as the Cutthroat maneuvered into center of the cluster of German sailors and stopped. American sailors began pulling their enemy counterparts out of the cold water of the Atlantic Ocean. Others brought blankets for the cold wet men to wrap up in.

When there was no one alive still in the water, twenty three out of a crew of fifty two had been rescued. Among them, three officers including the executive officer. They too were taken to the aft torpedo room to be kept under guard by armed Marines. It was going to be a crowded trip back to Praia da Vitória.

Just as the sun was setting, the Reprisal and her escorts were just emerging from the Bay of Biscay into the open Atlantic. The afternoon patrols and searches had been recovered and the Bat Team was waiting on deck. The order was given and they began taking off. Once airborne, Sheffield retired to his stateroom to get some sleep after a long and eventful day.

The task group was pretty much out of danger, except from the ever present threat of U-boats. Given the circumstances he probably would have gone to his emergency cabin again that night, except for the fact that the bloody bedding hadn't been changed since the wounded helmsman had laid in it. There were higher priorities than changing bedding. The good news was that Quartermaster First Class Abner Cunningham would recover from his wound.

Sheffield changed out of his uniform and had put on his pajamas and was about ready to crawl into bed when he received a call from the officer of the deck on the bridge, "Sir, the Bat Team reports a radar

contact on the surface about ninety nautical miles northeast of our present position.”

“Thank you Lieutenant Franks. Keep me posted.”

After saying his prayers, Sheffield climbed into bed and picked up Geannie's picture from off the nightstand and said, “It has been quite a day, Sweetheart. We have finally seen our first action. We came out on top, but tomorrow I have to preside over the burial of eight men and write to their families to explain why their loved ones won't be coming home.” He kissed her picture and placed it back on the nightstand and turned out the light.

Sleep wouldn't come. After about a half an hour, he decided to get out of bed. He slipped on his robe and slippers and wandered up to the bridge. No one else had better show up on the bridge in their pajamas, but he was the captain. No one would question him, after all the captain is never off duty.

Lieutenant Franks announced, “Captain's on the Bridge.” Everyone paused and saluted. Sheffield put them at ease and asked, “What's the latest on that surface contact?”

“Sir, it appears to be a U-boat. After several minutes they lost contact. It must have submerged.”

The Captain asked, “What would its position be about now?”

Lieutenant Franks pointed to the chart on the table, “Approximately here, a hundred and ten miles from our position. We're outdistancing it so it won't be a threat to us. However the Congress and her escorts are coming up on it. That section of the Bat Team is still in the vicinity, ready to pounce if it surfaces again.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant. I'll be in my stateroom. If anything develops, let me know. Good night.”

“Aye sir.”

Sheffield went back down below to his stateroom and went back to bed. This time he began to doze off. He was just about asleep, when he got another call from the bridge. “Sir, the Bat Team reports they have reestablished contact with the U-boat on the surface and are commencing their attack. Stand by.”

Seventy miles to the northeast, three Bombing Eleven Dauntlesses dove out of the moonlit sky on the U-boat as it closed in for the kill on the damaged battlecruiser. The German's still hadn't caught on to the fact that the Americans were developing the ability to attack with aircraft at night. They had no idea what was descending upon them until a lookout called “Feindliche Flugzeuge!” out at the last minute. The first Crusader's five hundred pound bomb was a near miss. The second scored a direct hit and the third was another near miss. Right behind the Dauntlesses, two Alleycats made a strafing pass on the U-boat as it began settling in the water. Not sure if it was sinking or diving, the three SBDs came around for another pass with their depth charges. Six huge plumes of water erupted skyward as the planes climbed back into the sky. The two Alleycats made a second pass and reported seeing the U-boat pop to the surface briefly, then roll over on its side and slip below the water for good.

“Sir.” Lieutenant Franks said, “the Bat Team reports that they got it. Both sections are returning to the ship.”

“Thanks Lieutenant. Tell them, job well done.”

Sheffield again tried to go sleep and eventually succeeded. However his sleep was again interrupted by the sound of the planes landing. That was the disadvantage of his stateroom being directly under the flight deck, especially during nighttime flight operations.

He did finally fall asleep and slept until about four o'clock in the morning when the Bat Team took off for their morning patrol. He laid their awake for several minutes before deciding to get up and get ready for the day. By the time he was showered and dressed, Reggie had breakfast ready and brought it into his wardroom. After eating two soft boiled eggs, two slices of toast and a small glass of tomato juice he went up to the bridge.

The order of the day was the burial of those killed the day before and to rendezvous with the Yellowstone later in the afternoon and refuel the destroyers. After the morning briefing with the senior officers, he retired to his office to begin the grim task of writing to the families of the dead. During the briefing he learned that he had two more letters to write than what he had planned on. During the night, two men died from their wounds.

He sat down at his desk and pulled out several sheets of stationary with his letterhead. He had never learned to type. He just couldn't get his fingers to work the keys. Now Geannie, he reflected, was pretty good at it. So good that one year for a birthaversary gift he had given her a typewriter. She used it for a lot of things, especially for her classes. Except she rarely used it for writing letters. She felt that a typewritten letter was too impersonal. “A handwritten letter,” she would say “flowed right from the heart.” The letters he had to write definitely needed to flow from his heart.

He began with the Gunners Mate Third Class Robert Hathaway.

22 November 1942

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hathaway,

It is with my deepest sympathy and regret that I must write to concerning the loss of your son, Gunners Mate Third Class Robert J. Hathaway. He was a valued member of my crew and he will certainly be missed. Unfortunately I didn't know him personally, but I know of his

commitment and dedication to his country. His battery officer assured me that he was a leader among his crew as captain of gun mount number one.

He died at his post, doing his duty in defending our great nation when the ship came under attack from enemy aircraft in the Bay of Biscay. I am told that he died instantly and did not suffer. I'm so sorry that I am unable to return his remains to you for burial, as it is not practical. Later this morning I will preside at the funeral service where he and nine of his shipmates will be committed to the deep. I assure you that it will be dignified and respectful.

It may sound trite coming from someone that you don't know, but I know exactly what you are going through right now and what you will endure during the coming months. I too lost someone very near and dear to me nearly a year ago on the opening day of this war.

I am a man of faith and in my prayer this morning, I asked God to bless you by name, as with the other nine families that I am writing to. I asked that you be comforted in your loss and strengthened in your grief. You might not think the captain of a ship is capable of tears, but this one is. It will be with tear filled eyes that I attend to his service.

You should be proud of your son. I know that I am.

Sincerely and empathetically

Sheffield Brason, Captain U.S.N.

Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Reprisal

The other nine letters were similar yet each personal. He hoped that it would be a while before he had to write anymore letters of that nature. Somehow, he knew that these wouldn't be the last. At the same time, Commander James had the unpleasant task of writing letters to the families of those in the air group

who had perished.

With the letters written, Sheffield went up to the bridge. Mace informed him that everything was on track for the funeral services scheduled for eleven o'clock. The bodies had been cleaned and dressed in their dress whites. Each had been neatly sewed into a canvas wrap with a five inch anti-aircraft round at the feet. The fifty five pound projectile was to insure that the body sank to the ocean floor where it would lay at rest.

Since it was another day at sea, with all of the chores that attended it: this day, repairing damaged aircraft and refueling, there wasn't time for a change of clothes. Therefore the officers wore khakis, the enlisted men wore dungarees. At 1100 those who did not have duties that prevented them from attending gathered on the hangar deck around the outboard elevator, which had been lowered. Captain Brason presided over the service, which was conducted by Lieutenant (jg) Doug Fellows, the chaplain. Traditionally for burials at sea the ship was to come to a complete stop. However, operating in a war zone with U-boats on the prowl, that was impractical. Captain Brason ordered the ship to slow to ten knots and the national ensign on the main mast, behind the stack was lowered to half mast.

The officer of the deck called out "All hands, bury the dead." With the crew standing at ease, in unison the ten bodies, nine crewmen and one from the air group, were brought forward, feet first, on a flat board, a flag draped over each body. The boards were attached to ten individual tilting tables. With the bodies in position, the pall bearers also stood at ease.

Lieutenant Fellows read the following prayer, which is a compilation of various verses of scripture. As he did, the crew removed their covers and bowed their heads. "I AM the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die. I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though this body be destroyed, yet shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger. We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

He then read the names, ranks and hometowns of the ten men being laid rest. In preparation he had collected a bit of information about each from those who knew them best and had a brief remark for each one of them.

Captain Brason then stepped forward and addressed those assembled. "Men and officers of the USS Reprisal, we gather here as fellow crewmen to honor those who have fallen in battle. What is a crew, but a family. A family bound together by this great vessel and our duty to our country. These, our brothers in arms have paid the ultimate sacrifice for freedom and liberty.

"This morning I wrote a letter to each of their families explaining that their loved ones did not die in

vain, their sacrifice dose not go unnoticed. These men worked and lived among us. They fought beside us. They died in our midst. Nothing we can do or say here today will ever be enough to give each their just dues. They will not be forgotten by their families. They will not be forgotten by God. May they not be forgotten by us.”

At the conclusion of his remarks, as promised his eyes welled up with tears, as did many in attendance. Even some of the saltiest seamen. For Sheffield this was the first funeral that he had attended since the funerals of Geannie, Sandy, and Austin. Emotions that he had been dealing with for a year now and that he thought he had dealt with sufficiently, resurfaced. The thought occurred to him of how grateful he was to have been able to take them home to Roanoke for burial, rather than leaving them behind in Hawaii.

Lieutenant Fellows stepped forward once more and said, “We now therefore commit the bodies of these men to the deep, looking forward to the general Resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose second coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the sea shall give up her dead; and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in him shall be changed, and made like unto his glorious body; according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself. Amen”

The assembled ship's company came to attention, saluting the men whose bodies lay before them. Lieutenant Fellows nodded his head and a man standing at the head of each table, pulled the locking lever and lifted the end of the table. The canvas wrapped bodies slipped out from under the flags, over the side of the elevator, and splashed into the sea below.

Lieutenant Fellows offered a brief benediction on the service, after which the officer of the deck called the crew to attention, every man rendering a salute as the firing team of seven Marines on command from a gunnery sergeant fired three volleys in unison. With the last volley still ringing in the air, a distant bugler played the mournful strains of Taps, as each flag was carefully folded by two men. When the last note faded away, the Officer of the Deck said, “Ship's company, dismissed!”

The men milled around for a moment before returning to their duties. Captain Brason shook Lieutenant Fellows hand and complimented him for a well conducted service, his first. After shaking hands with some of the officers and men, he returned to the bridge. His first order was, “Resume fifteen knots and set course for the point of rendezvous with the Yellowstone.”

Sheffield only remained on the bridge long enough for Commander Owen to brief him on the operational status of the ship and and work details. It had been a long time since breakfast and he went below to see what Reggie had prepared for lunch. It was some of the cod that came aboard in Praia da Vitória. It had been deep fried and was served with potato wedges, also deep fried. During lunch he could hear the planes of the morning patrols touching down on the deck above his head.

He was nearly finished when the loud speaker in his wardroom came to life, "Captain Brason to the bridge."

The call sounded urgent. He took one last bite and began making his way to the bridge. When he arrived on the bridge he asked, "What's up Mace?"

"It's the Yellowstone, sir." Commander Owen said grimly. "She's been torpedoed."

"When?" Sheffield asked in disbelief.

"We received the distress call from the Yellowstone about five minutes ago. She took two torpedoes amidships and is burning profusely and settling fast. Her captain has ordered her to be abandoned. The Masters is too busy with survivors to look for the U-boat. I have ordered the nearest element of the anti-submarine patrol to the scene."

"Good, Mace. Thanks for being on top of things, as usual. That puts a monkey wrench in our refueling plans. I assume we are in good shape, what about Syracuse and the destroyers?"

"We have more than enough fuel in our bunkers and could provide enough for the destroyers to make it back to Praia da Vitória."

"Very good. Signal the destroyers with the word and direct them to come along side one at a time for fueling. Find out what the Syracuse needs. Oh, and double the anti-submarine patrol around the task group. I don't want that U-boat to catch us playing tanker."

Within fifteen minutes, six Bombing Eleven Dauntlesses and three Avengers were ready for launch. Once the planes were in the air, the Watson was the first to come along side. The fueling lines were passed over and secured. Soon, oil was being pumped from the enormous fuel tanks in the bottom of the ship into the destroyer. With the fueling lines rigged, a highline was also rigged to send over the gunner and the wounded radioman they fished out of the water after the Avenger crashed on its landing approach.

The fueling process continued all afternoon as news of the Yellowstone trickled in. She had gone down. Of crew of three hundred and four, two hundred and thirty six oil soaked, soot covered men crowded the deck of the Masters, which was on its way to join up with the Reprisal. The anti-submarine patrol so far had been unsuccessful in locating the assassin.

One by one, the four destroyers accompanying the Reprisal came along side for fuel. When the Kirkman came along side, the fighter pilot that they recovered also came across on the highline. The Syracuse reported that they had enough to make it.

As the fueling operations were wrapping up, the Masters joined up. From the bridge, Sheffield could see the deck crowded with survivors. He commented out loud, "We can't leave all of those men on deck like that all the way back."

Commander Owen was quick to point out, "It would take forever to bring them all across by highline."

“Yes, you're right Mace.” Sheffield paused and then got an idea.

He picked up the phone and called Lieutenant Gates, the supply officer, “Melvin, this is the Captain. Do we have any cargo nets aboard.” He paused while Lieutenant Gates replied, then continued, “How accessible is it?” Again he paused. “Good, have some men bring it up to the hangar deck to the outboard elevator.”

“What are you up to, Sheffield?” Mace asked with great curiosity.

“Just watch and see.” he replied with a twinkle in his eye.

Next he called Commander Whithouse, “Seymour, this is the Captain. I need you to lower the outboard elevator.” He listened as Commander Whithouse responded. Sheffield said, “Thanks Commander. Stand by.” and hung up.

From the bridge Sheffield looked across the flight deck and watched as the elevator began its descent along the outer hull of the ship.

What he did next amazed everyone. He called Lieutenant Cameron, the communications officer. “Hello Lieutenant Cameron, this is the Captain. Can you patch me through to the skipper of the Masters?”

He paused for the response. “Commander Rockford, this is Captain Brason. How are you set for fuel?” Pause. “So you're in good shape then. I can see that you have quite a crowd on deck. How'd you like me to take them off your hands for you?” Pause. “Here's what I want you to do. Drop back and come around on my port side.”

While waiting until he could see the Masters coming up from behind to port, he called Commander Gates back, “Mel, this is the Captain again. Have the storeroom ready to issue clean clothes and personnel kits to about two hundred and fifty men. I also need you to break out the hammocks you have them set them up down in the repair hangar.”

Commander Cameron left the radio room and came onto the bridge to see what was going on. Captain Brason asked him to see if he could raise a westbound transport in the vicinity that could go out of its way and meet them in Praia da Vitória and take on the Yellowstone survivors.

Then he called Commander Whithouse again. “Seymour, whats the status of the repair hanger?” ... “Can you bring it up to the main hangar without any trouble? I need the commandeer the repair hangar.” ... “Were going to use it for temporary quarters for the Yellowstone survivors.” ... “Thanks. Someone will be there soon to set up some hammocks.”

He resumed his instructions to Lieutenant Commander Rockford, “Do you see my outboard elevator?” ... “Good. I want you to match my course and speed exactly and nose your bow just under the outside edge of the elevator, just as if you were coming alongside for fueling. There should be several feet clearance for you to slip in underneath it. Then hold your course. When you're in position, we'll let down a

cargo net. Have them stand by to come aboard.”

Commander Owen listened in amazement. When Sheffield hung up the receiver, Mace said with a grin on his face, “That’s a pretty damn clever move, Skipper. Gutsy but clever. Where on earth did you come up with that notion.”

Sheffield winked, “That’s why I’m the Captain.” he said as he pointed to the eagle on the collar of his shirt.

Slowly the Masters came into position. From the wing of the bridge he and Mace watched as the cargo net was let over the side. A moment later, men began scrambling onto the elevator and disappeared into the hangar. As the last man came aboard, Commander Rockford waved from his bridge. The Masters fell behind and took up station in the screen. After steaming at ten knots for the last several hours, Sheffield ordered up eighteen knots as the seven ships sailed into the setting sun.

Below decks the survivors were given clean clothes and fresh towels. After much needed showers and a hot meal, they settled into their makeshift quarters. Commander Chappin, the Yellowstone’s commanding officer found Sheffield on the bridge and thanked him for the lift. Sheffield offered the use of the Admiral’s staff cabins to him and his officers. He graciously declined by saying, “We have been through a lot together today. I think we’ll stay together.” He went on to describe the harrowing events of the morning.

During the remainder of the voyage back to Praia da Vitória, things returned to the normal routine. The ever vigilant patrols didn’t come across anything out of the ordinary, except for a Spanish cruiser and four destroyers on maneuvers. Most of the damaged aircraft had been repaired and returned to service and the planes that had been lost were replaced from the spares and the rest were dismantled and stored away. The squadron commanders reorganized their squadrons, replacing the men who were lost with replacement pilots. Except for the Wildcats, each squadron was up to strength for the next time. The fighter squadron now had thirty two aircraft rather than thirty six, with three spares.

Many of those with minor wounds were allowed to return to duty. The shattered windows on the bridge had been repaired and the score board on the port bridge wing was updated. The survivors from the Yellowstone pitched in with work details just to stay busy. They were just grateful to be dry.

The RAF captain who had been rescued had stayed to himself at the beginning. He never ventured very far from his comrade, who was responding to the treatment he was receiving for his wounds. Captain Brookes accepted an invitation to dine with Captain Brason one evening, along with Commander Chappin and some of the officers from the Yellowstone. Captain Brookes was the copilot on that RAF reconnaissance plane shot down over Bordeaux. He and the navigator were the only survivors. One other man had survived initially but was later killed by the Germans.

Capitan Brookes found the air operations aboard a carrier at sea quite fascinating. Captain Brason made the same offer to him that he had made to Colonel Morrison earlier, an offer that he was delighted to accept.

On the return voyage, Sheffield couldn't help but wonder what was next. He probably wouldn't have to wait long to find out. He was hesitant to venture a guess because every time he had, he was wrong. He found himself wondering about a lot of things, all of them future possibilities. He thought about the possibility of another woman in his life. This thought was crossing his mind more and more. "Would there be children in his life again? I'm getting kind of old for that, after all my forty fourth birthday is about two weeks away." He could never think of his birthday without thinking about their anniversary. That reminded him, "What am I going to do with Geannie's gift that I still have stashed in my closet?"

On the morning of the 24th the task group was nearing the island of Terceira. The majority of the air group was sent on ahead to Lajes Field, except for the four Wildcats on combat air patrol and the six Avengers on anti-submarine patrol. When the air group landed, they were pleasantly surprised to find three missing airmen waiting for them. The pilot and gunner from one of the Dauntlesses and a Wildcat pilot had been picked up by a Spanish fishing trawler and brought ashore. They were turned over to US Embassy and sent onto Portugal and eventually Praia da Vitória.

Late that afternoon, the Reprisal, Syracuse and the five destroyers returned to Praia da Vitória and dropped anchor in the north end of the bay. It was still early enough to send a wave a sailors ashore on leave. A platoon of Marines was also sent Lajes to keep an eye on the airfield.

That evening at dinner, an idea came to Sheffield. "Thanksgiving is the day after tomorrow. On the Enterprise we always had a big thanksgiving dinner for the crew. We're in port, why don't I continue that tradition on the Reprisal." The more he thought about it, the more he wanted to do it. "The barbecue had done a lot for morale, after all we have just returned from battle. Here it is Thanksgiving and we are so far from home. The men deserve it. I'll bring it up in the morning briefing."

The next morning at the briefing, Sheffield still liked idea. He sat impatiently through the boring stuff so he could bring it up. Even though it seemed boring, it was important. Commander Gates had arranged to purchase fuel from the Portuguese. Fuel barges were already fueling the destroyers. Commander Cameron had received word that a transport enroute to the United States had responded to his call and had altered course and would be arriving the next day. Lieutenant Bashor reported on the conditions of the wounded still in sick bay. Commander Whithouse gave the status of the aircraft repairs. Even at anchor the ship was a very busy place.

Finally, Sheffield had the opportunity to present his thoughts about Thanksgiving. It seemed like a

good idea. The ever practical Commander Gates brought up a good point, "I don't have access to any turkeys."

"That might be true, Mel. But have you looked around this island? There are chickens everywhere. The locals always seem willing to sell them. Figure out how many you will need and send someone ashore to purchase them."

"Excuse me sir, but just doing some rough math in my head, it would take six or seven hundred chickens to feed everyone. May I suggest pork instead? I know its not traditional, but it is practical and we have it on hand. I can tell you that we do have several cases of canned pumpkin that were procured just for Thanksgiving."

"That sounds reasonable, have your men put together a list of what you need. If you don't have it aboard, go ashore and get it.

"The weather looks a bit unsettled to have it on the flight deck like we did the barbecue. We can have the deck divisions set up tables and chairs in the hangar."

As the discussion went on, everyone in the ready room seemed to think it was great idea. It was short notice but it could be pulled off. After all, the men need to be fed anyway.

Later in the morning, the Cutthroat made her way into the bay. As she approached, she signaled a request for permission to come alongside to transfer personnel aboard. Permission was granted, as they did have that Scouting Eleven Dauntless crew aboard.

The submarine eased up to the boat ladder and secured a line to the ship. Several men were standing on deck, which gave Sheffield another idea. Those pour devils, locked inside that steal pipe like that. Why don't I invite them to Thanksgiving dinner, whats another eighty men. Then he remembered the Raiders. If anyone deserved it, it was them. Thats another sixty men. We can do that. He called Commander Gates and told him to figure on guests.

Sheffield made his way down to the quarterdeck to welcome the returning airmen. He was pleasantly surprised to find the missing crew of the other Bombing Eleven Dauntless that was lost and another Wildcat pilot. After greeting the missing men, he descended the boat ladder and requested permission to come aboard the Cutthroat and asked to see Commander Halversen. He was lead to the bridge where he found Commander Halversen. After an exchange of salutes he extended the invitation, which was gladly accepted.

It reminded him of the S-42 that he had spent three days aboard back in January of 1929, only the Gato class was much bigger than the old S-boats, as they were called. He mentioned the experience to Commander Halversen. "That's very interesting, Captain. The S-42 was my first boat. You see not long after that, I reported aboard the S-42 as a brand new Ensign right out of submarine school after graduating from

the Academy in twenty eight.”

Sheffield then asked him about his part of the mission. That's when he learned about the thirty one German prisoners that he had aboard. “Where are you keeping them?”

“Locked up under guard in the aft torpedo room.” was the answer.

“Why don't you transfer them to the Reprisal. I have good sized brig. All I have in there is a spy that we caught snooping around. Oh and a disorderly sailor.”

“Would you do that? I'd sure like to get my boat back.”

“Sure. What are friends for.”

Commander Halversen got on the intercom and called Captain Danpora to the bridge.

A moment later he poked his head through the hatch, surprised to see Captain Brason. After another exchange of salutes, he was told to instruct his men to prepare the prisoners to be transferred to the carrier. Then Captain Brason invited the Raiders to Thanksgiving dinner as well. Another invitation gladly accepted.

Then Sheffield asked him the question that had been on his mind. “How's Private McClury?”

“He's now a seasoned veteran. He did real good. You should be proud of him.”

The two skippers and the Marine captain stepped out on deck as the Germans were brought up from below, guarded by a detail of Marines; Seth among them. Captain Brason lead the way followed by Captain Danpora, the prisoners, and the guard detail. He approached the officer of the deck and directed him to have someone show them to the brig. As he and Captain Danpora watched them be marched away, he looked around the empty cavernous hangar deck and suggested, “Say Captain, why don't you and your men camp out here until your ride home shows up?”

“I don't know about the rest of the men, but I'm about to go stir crazy on that tub. Yeah, that would be great.”

Sheffield walked over to the telephone by the officer of the deck's station and made a couple of calls, one to Commander Whithouse to tell him that the Raiders were taking over the forward hangar section. He then called Commander Gates and asked him to round up some more cots and have them set up in the forward hangar.

Then he turned to Captain Danpora and said, “It's all taken care of. You and your men can have the forward hangar all to yourselves. We'll close it off so you're not rattling around like loose bbs in here. Besides we need the rest of it to prepare for dinner tomorrow.”

Again Captain Danpora graciously accepted. He went back down to the Cutthroat and told his men about the new arrangement.

Once the marines came aboard with all of their gear Commander Halversen came aboard to speak with Captain Brason once more. The huge carrier was a different world from what he was used to. “Thank

you again for your hospitality and generosity, Captain. Now I can gather up the rest of my crew and the things that we left behind." He left the ship and returned to his boat and cast off. The sub made its way to the dock and tied up by the warehouse and began bringing it all back aboard.

Later in the day, the Congress limped into the bay accompanied by the Billings, Cedar Rapids, and the three destroyers who had remained behind with her. After dropping anchor Admiral Weston summoned Captain Brason to the flagship. As his launch approached the battlecruiser, the torpedo damage was obvious. She was bound for drydock for sure.

Once aboard, he made his way to the Admiral's ready room where he was joined by the commanders of the cruisers, the destroyer squadron, and the division commander that included destroyers, Percival, Watson, Kirkman, and Archer and their commanding officers, along with Commander Halversen from the Cutthroat. After all of the commanders had assembled, Admiral Weston and his chief of staff joined them.

"Gentlemen," the Admiral began, "first off let me congratulate you for a job well done on the Bordeaux mission. It was a tremendous success even though we got roughed up a bit in the scuffle. As you can see, the Congress will be out of action for a while. That was too bad about the Yellowstone. How many survivors were there?"

Captain Brason, the senior commander, answered, "Two hundred and thirty six, sir. They are aboard the Reprisal. We put out a call for a westbound transport to stop by and pick them up. A ship will be here for them tomorrow. I've also got thirty one German prisoners compliments of Commander Halversen and the Raiders, plus the spy that we caught snooping around aboard. I'm going send them and the Raiders along with them."

"That's good. The Congress lost some of her crew quarters from the torpedo. It would be quite crowded to try to accommodate everyone. Thanks for taking the initiative Captain. That shows exceptional leadership. So where did all of these prisoners come from?"

Commander Halversen answered, "The Raiders brought four of them back from Bordeaux with them. We picked up twenty three from a U-boat that we nabbed, and four more survivors from one of the planes that carried out the torpedo attack."

"Anyway, gentlemen, Bordeaux is behind us. I have our orders for our next mission. The Congress and her destroyers are headed back to the States. The rest of us are heading for the South..."

Sheffield's ears picked up. Was he about to say what he had been waiting to hear? Are we finally headed for the South Pacific?"

"...Atlantic. I'll be leaving the Congress and going with you."

Sheffield felt a little deflated at the news, but didn't show it. "Would you like to bring your flag aboard the Reprisal, sir?"

“No, thank you. Like I told you before, I'm a cruiser man. If its alright with Commander Dillon, I'd like to ride along on the Billings. I don't want to get in your way Captain. Here again my job is to get you there so you can do your job. This mission will include all of you that are here, even the Cutthroat. You've been a valuable member of this team, Commander.”

“Just what does this mission entail, sir?” Sheffield asked on behalf of all of them.

“There's a German raider on the loose in the South Atlantic that no one has been able to catch. She's fast and heavily armed. Washington thinks that carrier air power is the only way to find her and stop her reign of terror. The British refer to her as Raider M, otherwise known as the Edelweiss. Unlike other German raiders, she is armed with modern weapons, radar, and several float planes. The details are all in the packets in front of you.

“We sail the day after tomorrow. In three or four days time we will be met by a tanker enroute. The Cutthroat will accompany the task force as far south as Recife, Brazil. At that point you will be detached to conduct independent operations in looking for the Edelweiss. At Recife we will come under the operational command of Vice Admiral Jonas Ingram's South Atlantic Force.

“So there you have it. Our orders are to sail to the South Atlantic, take care of the Edelweiss, and conduct other operations out of Rio de Janeiro until further ordered. In keeping with standard security precautions, don't reveal our destination and mission until we are at sea. Are there any questions?”

There were a few questions and general discussion about the upcoming mission as well some more comments and follow up on the Bordeaux mission. Sheffield listened as he thumbed through the information in the packet. It wasn't the South Pacific, but at least it was an important mission.

The latest news from the South Pacific was that there had been a huge naval battle earlier in the month that prevented a major attempt by the Japanese to retake Guadalcanal. In fact the word was that things were actually looking up. Maybe the Reprisal wasn't needed quite as badly now. From the sound of things, the old Sara had completed her repairs and was on the way to join the Enterprise. Sheffield was satisfied with his orders. He, his crew, and his ship were doing their part.

When Sheffield returned to the ship, he called meeting of the senior officers in his ready room. He told them what he could of their orders. They were received with eagerness. After having seen action, they knew what the crew was capable of. Each officer reported that their respective areas of responsibility would be ready to sail.

Commander Gates reported that the bakery had been baking pies and rolls all day. The pork roasts would go in the ovens in the morning. The hangar was setup with enough tables and chairs for everyone, including their guests. Work details had been arranged so everyone would be able to get in on the feast.

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