

Chapter XIII

Crossing the Line

November 27, 1942 – December 2, 1942

No sooner than Captain Brason had announced their destination, the ship was a buzz with talk of crossing the line. Being a new ship with a new crew, the vast majority of the crew were polliwogs who had never crossed the equator before. Their anxiety was only heightened by the stories told by the shellbacks of the first time they crossed the equator.

The ceremony dates back hundreds of years and is based on ancient superstitions. Neptune, the Roman god of the seas, would summon storms that left many a mariner shipwrecked. In an attempt to appease Neptune, sailors believed it necessary to perform certain rituals and rites at certain locations, such as crossing the equator. If the ceremony was not performed precisely, it was feared that Neptune would be irritated and conjure up storms that would wipe out the entire crew.

The traditional crossing the line ceremonies had been adopted by navies around the world, including the United States Navy. These rituals became a rite of passage for sailors who cross the equator for the first time. Rank and seniority are set aside, as enlisted men and officers alike endure the arduous yet lively initiation into the mysteries of the deep.

Other than making preparations for crossing the equator, the rest of the day was uneventful. As the sun sank into the ocean, the Bat Team was sent up and the late afternoon patrols were brought aboard.

The pace picked up the next day as the Cutthroat was detached to operate independently in a game of hide and seek. The anti-submarine patrol and the destroyers tried to find it before it found them. Sheffield was aware of the date, November 28th. It was one year to the day since he last saw his family alive and well. The memory stung. He clearly remembered attending Admiral Halsey's party with Geannie the evening before, even what Geannie was wearing.

On that morning one year ago, he was getting ready to sail with the Enterprise on a secret mission to Wake when Geannie came home from her run. He was shaving as she climbed under a thick blanket of bubbles in the bathtub. While she relaxed in the tub, he and the kids had breakfast before they went off to school.

Geannie emerged from her bath and was drying off as he put the last of his things together. She was dry as he was ready to leave. She gave him a kiss and a hug goodbye and teasingly tempted him with her body, "Wouldn't you rather stay and have some of this?"

"As much as I'd love to, I have to go. I'll keep this image of loveliness in mind to remind me of what I'll have to come home to." At that, there was one more hug and kiss goodbye. Geannie sat down on the bed to get dressed as he left.

"I'll be back and take you home." he promised.

Before leaving the house he had hugs for the kids. He told Austin that he was in command and to look after his mother and sister. "I'll see you in the funny pages." he said as he closed the door behind him and walked out to Little Bertha and drove off for he base. He saw Geannie waving from the bedroom window and waved back. He had no idea that would be the very last goodbye, other than getting there in time... The memory was all so vivid. It haunted him all day.

That day and the next, the small task force continued on their southerly course. Every ship was on alert and ready for action. At any moment a German U-boat could appear out of nowhere. They had to be ready, before a spread of torpedoes could be fired. The beefed up anti-submarine patrol stood guard at a distance.

The afternoon search reported three ships, a tanker and two destroyers approaching from the northwest. Late in the afternoon, the tanker Gunnison and the destroyers Nash and Gordon rendezvoused with the task force. Oddly, the Gunnison had four F4F-4 Wildcats, with their wings folded, lashed to her deck. The newly commissioned Nash and Gordon were sister ships with the other four destroyers and made up the rest of their squadron.

The next morning, Sunday November 30th, after the patrols had been launched, the task force slowed down for fueling operations. The Gunnison looked similar to the ill fated Yellowstone, only she was smaller and slower. First to fuel were the destroyers, followed by the cruisers. The Reprisal was the last to fuel and only needed to have her tanks topped off. With the Gunnison alongside and fuel flowing, several bags of long awaited mail were sent across. The planes were too large to transfer at sea and would have to be unloaded in Rio before being hoisted aboard.

After enough time for it to be processed, a package and other mail was brought to Sheffield on the bridge. He left someone in charge and went down to his office to go through his mail which included some official correspondence, a letter from home, and a package from Ramona. He wondered what she had sent him this time. It was too thin to be baked goods.

He opened it to find a framed eight by ten photograph of her. He was stunned as he gazed at it. He had never noticed how attractive she was. She looked like a Hollywood movie star. Ramona always looked ten years younger than she really was, but here she looked even younger. In the lower corner was a small wallet sized picture of her in her uniform. What a difference. He set the picture on his desk and opened the letter that was with it.

Nov 3, 1942

Dear Sheffield

I was verry pleased to receive you last letter. I know that you have been busy and haven't had a lot of time to write. By now you are at sea somewhere.

I trust this letter will catch up to you,

I have enclosed a portrait of myself that I had taken a few weeks ago. There was a new photography studio that opened shop in downtown Honolulu. As promotion, they were offering a glamor package which included a selection of elegant clothing to wear along with a hair dresser and a makeup artist. They were supposedly all brought in from Hollywood just for the occasion.

It had been a long time since I had a picture taken so I decided, "What the heck. Why not?" It was fun being pampered and treated like a star. I was amazed when I got the pictures back. The small picture in the corner was my "before shot". Quite a difference, don't you think? I wanted you to have it to remind you that you still owe me a dinner date. It doesn't sound like that is going to happen anytime soon.

I was pleased to read that you have been getting out more. That's what you needed. Gee, I wish I would have been around. I would have loved to been your dinner companion for the evening. I'm glad that Pat found someone for you. She sounds like someone you could relate to. So are you going to see her again? You should.

I hope you receive encouragement from my letters. I try. I know that you have had a tough time and I want you to know that I am here for you. I think I know you about as well as anyone and have a pretty good idea of what you need. I really care about you and want to help you through this.

As far as my "mystery man" as you call him, I don't think he has a clue as to how I feel about him. I think one day he will come around. When he does, I'll be the happiest woman alive. I'm afraid to say too much just yet for fear of scaring him off. Right now he thinks of me as a good friend in whom he can confide. I think you would approve of him, he's a lot like you.

It has been pretty quiet around here lately. We are now pretty much just a stopover for men and ships heading for the South Pacific. I still wouldn't be surprised to see you passing through one of these days.

I hope you completed your mission without any problems. Even what may seem small and unimportant at the time may prove to have a far reaching affect in the end.

*Write to me when you can. I'll be right here.
Love Ramona.*

He placed the portrait on the end table next to his couch in his stateroom.

The crossing the line ceremony is a two part event, the first part takes place on the evening before actually crossing the line. This portion of the ceremony took place in the forward and mid sections of the hangar. A good share of the air group were parked forward on the flight deck, leaving room for the Bat Team to be recovered at the end of their patrol. The half of the crew at their stations would have the opportunity to get in on their share, for good or ill.

Just after sundown, the portion of the ships company that was available were assembled awaiting the arrival of Davy Jones, King Neptune's personal scribe and other members of the Royal Court. Lieutenant Commander Whithouse, in his dress whites, was the Officer of the Deck. Amidst a backdrop of fog and steam, lit up by spotlights, the auxiliary elevator was brought up from the deck below. When the smoke cleared way, Davy Jones, flanked by the Royal Judge and the Royal Navigator stood before those assembled.

Davy Jones, played by Chief Evans was a sight to behold indeed. He wore a traditional officers cocked hat, with stringy, long white hair flowing from under the hat. He had a patch over one eye with a scar painted across his upper cheek that extended over the bridge of his nose. The rest of his face was covered in a long scraggly white beard. He wore an unbuttoned officer's blue jacket revealing his bare chest and abdomen. Painted on his chest was skull and cross bones. The rank insignia on his sleeve was that of a Master Chief Petty Officer and a ridiculous number of hash marks indicating many, many years of service. On the breast of his coat were medals and ribbons of all kinds, some real and some fake. He wore a pair of white knickers, held up by piece of rope. Long black and white striped stockings reached to his knees where the knickers were tied with piece of gold braid. He wore a pair of buckle shoes on his feet.

The Royal Judge, played by Captain Brason, wore a long black robe and a white wig with a short pigtail tied up with a black ribbon. Typically, the Captain didn't participate in the ceremonies, but he thought it would be interesting to mix things up a bit. Lieutenant Joel Williams, the actual navigation officer, was the Royal Navigator. He wore a flat topped sailors hat, a red and white striped pullover shirt, white trousers, and pair of high top rubber boots with the tops folded over.

In a booming voice, Davy Jones called, "Ship Ahoy! What ship be this?"

Commander Williams responded, "The USS Reprisal, sir."

"Very well. We have been expecting your arrival. You will notify the commanding officer of this vessel that I, Davy Jones, have a message to deliver from His Royal Majesty, Neptunus Rex."

"I'm sorry sir, but it seems that our commanding officer has gone missing."

"What?" Davy Jones roared. "A ship without a captain. His Highness will not be pleased. Then tell me, who be in command?"

“That would be Commander Owen, the executive officer, sir. He awaits you and will receive you now.”

“Take me to him.” Davy Jones ordered.

“Master-at-arms,” Commander Williams said, “if you would show the way for our distinguished visitors.” Then he passed the word, “All hands, fall in and follow.”

Davy Jones was lead to the review stand that had been set up against the curtain at the end of the center section of the hangar. The men who followed took their seats. All of the curtains along the sides of the hangar had also been closed as well in to keep the lighted hangar form giving the ship away.

Once Davy Jones and his entourage reached the review stand, Commander Owen said, “Greetings Davy Jones. Welcome aboard the USS Reprisal.”

“Greetings and salutations to you, Commander Owen. It has been some years since we last met. Now tell me Commander, where be your Captain?”

“No one seems to know sir. He was last seen during the afternoon watch.”

“Hmmm.” Davy Jones muttered. “Me thinks the man a coward. Afraid to face his Majesty, he is. By the authority vested in me by King Neptune, I appoint ye, Commander Owen, acting captain of this fine vessel.”

The crew roared in laughter.

Davy Jones whirled around with a finger leveled at the assembly. “You too should be afraid. Especially them who have never yet crossed into His Majesty's realm.”

He turned back toward Commander Owen. “I have orders for you and summonses from Neptunus Rex for the lowly polliwogs among you.”

To which Commander Owen replied, “I will be glad to receive them.”

Davy Jones, the Royal Judge and the Royal Navigator stepped up onto the review stand. In a loud voice for everyone to hear, he read from a scroll the general orders from King Neptune. “I, Davy Jones come out of the sea this night, November the thirtieth in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred forty and two to bring from his Oceanic Majesty, King Neptune, Ruler of the Seven Seas, all the summonses for the landlubbers, the polliwogs, the sea vermin, the crabs, and the eels who have not entered into the Supreme Order of the Deep.

“We of the Great Neptune's Court bring serious indictments against those who have cow dung on their feet as well as those of the big towns who think themselves to be city slickers. But no matter, all will be shellbacks after receiving your punishment on the marrow. At which time, those summoned will appear before the Royal Judge of his His Imperial Majesty, Neptunus Rex and answer for offenses committed both aboard and ashore.”

Davy Jones looked up from the scroll and continued. "Now Commander. It has come to the attention of the court that a few officers and men have already requested leniency. Be it known that King Neptune has no favorites. All landlubbers since men first went to sea have endured the strict initiation required by the King of the Seas. No! There will be no leniency – all polliwogs, regardless of rank or social status will receive appropriate punishment on the morrow.

"And remember this, sorrow and woe to those who resist or speak in a light or jesting manner of this most solemn of ceremonies, or of His Majesty, the Ruler of the Seven Seas. Or of Queen Amphitrite, or belittle Royal Members of his Supreme Court. So – beware! Beware!"

Commander Owen took the summons and declared, "We will be certain that these are delivered. Now, won't you stay for this evening entertainment?"

"Nay. We must now take our leave of you and conduct our royal business on the other ships of the force. Good-bye Commander. I will see you with the Great Neptune on the morrow. "

Davy Jones and his companions left the stage and as they made their way between the rows of seats, he shouted "Gangway for Davy Jones!" and they disappeared back into the fog and down the auxiliary elevator to the deck below.

When the fog had dissipated, Commander Owen turned the time to Senior Chief Solozar who was the master of ceremonies for the talent show. The acts for the evening naturally came from among the polliwogs. The first number was none other than Lieutenant (jg) Doug Fellows, the ships chaplain who had never had the opportunity to cross the equator. With long pigtails and dressed somewhat like Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, he sang "Somewhere Over The Rainbow."

During his number, Captain Brason entered the hangar from the side and took his seat on the front row next to his good friend, Commander Owen. Before introducing the next number, he declared, "Look who's here everyone. Its our illustrious captain."

Sheffield stood to be acknowledged and asked, "Did I miss that horrible creature?" as if he was fearful of him.

The next number was tango performed by Seaman 2nd Class Jefferson Starr and Seaman Eric Carmel. Seaman Carmel played the female role, complete with a make believe rose between his teeth. Other numbers included Ensign Rick Hartgrove from the Wildcats who performed a piano solo while dressed in drag, Lieutenant Dusty Wakefield did a juggling routine wearing a pair of leotards, and so on. All during the program, that lasted until late in the evening, men were coming and going as some left to stand watch and others who had been relieved joined the festivities. When the show came to an end, the hangar had to be cleared so the planes could be brought below and serviced for the next days patrols.

The day of the crossing began early as the Bat Team was sent up again during the early morning

predawn hours. Aside from standing watches and flying patrols, the shenanigans got off to an early start. Some of the polliwog junior officers had to severe breakfast to the petty officers. All the while enduring insults and jeers. All throughout the ship, suspected polliwogs were rounded up and given their summons.

Just after the mid day patrols had been launched and the morning patrols had been recovered, it was announced over the loud speaker that it was anticipated that the ship would be crossing the equator in approximately one hour. Anticipation on the part of the shellbacks and anxiety for the polliwogs mounted as the time drew near. All of the polliwogs had been identified. Those on duty, both polliwogs and shellbacks, would have to wait for their turn after being relieved by those who had already participated.

The flight deck had been cleared for the afternoon's ceremonies. Those planes not in the air were below in the hangar. At twelve thirty three, it was announced over the intercom, "The ship is on the line! We are at twenty seven degrees, eleven minutes, twenty four second west of the prime meridian."

That was the cue for Chief Evans, a.k.a Davy Jones to come out of the forward galley deck onto the catwalk and up onto the flight deck. He strode to a point on the center line, just aft of the forward elevator, which was in the down position. With a bullhorn in hand, he announced, "Attention all hands, His Majesty, King Neptune and his Royal Court!"

King Neptune's flag, the Jolly Roger, was hoisted to the top of the foremast as the forward elevator was brought up to the fight deck, revealing a whole host of characters. First and foremost was Senior Chief Boatswain's Mate Xavier Solozar as King Neptune. He was adorned in a white robe, white beard, and crown, holding a forked scepter in his hand. He and Queen Amphitrite were seated in the rear of one of the ship's jeeps.

Neptune said, "Well, well, Davy Jones, what a fine ship and what a cargo of landlubbers."

The Officer of the Deck approached the King of the Seas and saluted. "Commander Owen, the executive officer awaits the Royal Party."

"What? Where's the Captain? The king demanded.

"I'm sorry to inform His Majesty that the Captain seems to be missing."

"Well, if he hasn't fallen overboard, I shall pitch him over the side myself. Search the ship and find him and bring him to me." he ordered.

"Now sir, if you will follow the master-at-arms to the review stand."

The driver put the jeep into gear and with the procession following behind made their way to the review stand which had been set up next to the superstructure, complete with a canvas canopy covering it. At King Neptune's side was Queen Amphitrite played by Electricians Mate 1st Class Robin Barrymore. He was a slender man by build with slender features. With some fixing up and some padding in all the right places, he looked like a fairly attractive woman. He filled out the gown that had been custom made for him

by the ship's tailor, just for the occasion. He walked arm in arm with the King as he swayed alongside. He had practiced that walk ever since he was selected for the part three days earlier.

Others in the procession included the Royal Princess, the Royal Baby (the fattest man in the crew, wearing a diaper and bonnet), the Royal Navigator, the Royal Judge, again played by Captain Brason, and the Royal Jury. Others characters included the Royal Barbers, the Royal Police, the Royal Jester, and the Royal Scribe and his assistants.

As Neptune lead his entourage onto the review stand, Commander Owen greeted His Highness, "A sailor's welcome to you, King Neptune. It is certainly a pleasure to have you with us."

To which Neptune responded, "The pleasure is mine, Commander. Allow me to present the Royal Navigator. He will relieve you for the duration of our visit. We are prepared for a busy day in order to make all of your landlubbers fit subjects of my great raging main."

"Your Majesty," Commander Owen responded, "may I invite your attention to the fact that we have many young officers and crewmen who have not been in the Navy long enough to have had the opportunity to visit your domain and become shellbacks. I beg you to be as lenient as possible.

"I am very sorry, Commander, I must be severe, there will be no exceptions."

"Very well Sire. As you command. I regret that our good Captain is not with us. No one seems to know his whereabouts. He must have urgent business that keeps him away. I assure you that Captain Brason is a loyal subject and holds many honors in your domain. He first became a shellback in these very waters many years ago as a young Ensign. In addition he is a member of the Order of the Golden Dragon for having crossed the International Date Line; The Order of the Ditch for passing through the Panama Canal; The Order of the Rock for transiting the Strait of Gibraltar; The Safari to Suez for having passed through the Suez Canal; and finally, the Order of Magellan for circumnavigating the earth."

"Yes, I am very much aware of the Captain's service. I am troubled that he has found occasion to be occupied by something he finds more important than our business here today."

"May I remind His Majesty that we are at war and we have an important mission at hand. Perhaps he is working on his battle plan."

"And may I remind you Commander, all the navies of the earth are under my watchful eye. It is I that hold their fates in my hands. It is I who determine the outcome of battle on the high seas.

"Perhaps you are correct about the good captain's whereabouts. If I do not see him, please give him my regards."

"I will be certain to do that, your Majesty. Now may I present the officers who have crossed the line before. Of the one hundred and five officers assigned to this ship, sixty one have crossed the line. Assembled behind us are some of the senior officers, or their representative. Those on duty will join us when

relieved.”

Neptune and members of his court took the occasion to converse with the officers on the review stand for a moment or so.

When he returned his attention to Commander Owen, Mace said, “King Neptune, I now turn command of this ship over to you for such time as you wish.”

“Very well, Commander, I thank you.” Neptune then turned to the Royal Navigator and ordered, “Proceed to the bridge and direct the ship on its present course.”

Commander Owen escorted Neptune to his royal throne. Solemnly all the members of the Royal Court took their assigned places to witness the ceremonies. The senior officers and others were seated behind the Royal Court. Once everyone was seated, Neptune ordered in a booming voice, “Let the initiations commence!”

Shellbacks, many of them dressed like pirates, began their pleasure starting with the officers. Most of the polliwogs were ordered to strip to their underwear, others to put on their foul weather gear and report to the boiler rooms. The Royal Barbers went to work giving haircuts; shaving or clipping bizarre scalp locks, fringes or tufts. Bodies were painted with dyes concocted from various strange ingredients. Many had brassieres painted on their bare chests. Some were given make believe binoculars fashioned from empty Coca-Cola bottles and ordered to stand watch, looking for mermaids. Some of the pilots were told to strap on a belt with a tail hook attached and run up the flight deck with outstretched arms as if they were coming in for landing. All throughout the initiations, they had to endure jeering, taunting, and insults.

When it came his turn, one seaman protested that he had crossed the equator before enlisting in the Navy. “That’s a likely story! Can you prove it?” one shellback insisted.

“Yes I can.” The seaman insisted. “As a subject of the Realm of the Deep I demand a hearing before the Royal Judge and Jury.”

“Very well.” his would be tormentors relented. “But if they find you guilty, you will have to endure their punishment and then some.” With a shellback on either arm, he was drug before the Royal Judge.

“Your Honor,” one of them began, “This vermin claims to have crossed the line prior to his enlistment.”

The jurors hooted and taunted, challenging his claim.

The Royal Judge called for silence. “What is your rank and name, sailor?”

“Seaman 2nd Morris Gover, Your Honor.”

“And just when and where did this alleged crossing take place, Seaman Gover?”

“In March of 1939, Your Honor, aboard the SS Cassiopeia enroute to Rio de Janerio.”

“Do you have any proof of this, save your word only?”

"I do, Your Honor. I have my passport in my locker which should prove my word."

The jurors and shellbacks leered at the suggestion claiming it to be of no value. However, the Royal Judge demanded, "Bring it to me that I may judge for myself. But I must warn you, If I find it to be inadmissible evidence, I shall turn you over to your accusers and you shall pay your dues."

"Yes, Your Honor."

"Go then and retrieve the said evidence."

He directed that one of the sailors who had him by the arm, "Accompany him, lest it be a ploy to evade initiation."

They left to go retrieve the evidence. The Royal Judge heard other such claims and found them them to be unfounded. Something told Sheffield not to let the character he was playing be so quick to dismiss Seaman Gover. Soon he and his guard returned.

"Here is the evidence I present in my behalf, Your Honor."

The Royal judge took the passport and found that it had been stamped as he boarded the SS Cassiopia in New York on March 2, 1939 and again upon arrival in Rio de Janeiro on March 17th. "It is obvious to me that you did indeed sail across the equator. "Were you subjected to initiation?" he asked.

"Yes sir. When the ship crossed the equator. I was unaware of the significance of such an event. Neptune and his Court came on deck seeking those among the passengers who had never crossed the equator. Not knowing the consequences, I volunteered the fact that I had not. I was rounded up along with others and was escorted to the ships swimming pool. A large burly man wearing trunks was standing in the water up to his stomach. I was the first to be physically tossed into the pool without first being permitted to remove my suit coat. I barely had time to take a breath before the brute held me under the water. At the moment I could hold my breath no longer, I he pulled me out of the water. Gasping and sputtering of air, I heard someone say, "That wasn't good enough, do it again!

"I heard the big man mutter, 'In the name of King Neptune, I baptize thee into into the Solemn Mysteries of the Ancient Order of the Deep.' Again he shoved me under the water for what seemed the longest time. When he let me come up for air again, everyone was cheering and applauding. Someone extend a hand and pulled me out of the pool. Someone else handed me a towel. I was then asked my name and certificate was written out stating that I had crossed the equator. They warned me that if I ever cross again that I may be required to present it in order to avoid such an experience again."

"Do you have the certificate with you?"

"No, Your Honor. I do not."

"Then, where is it?" the judge demanded.

"It's at home sir."

Sheffield looked at him sternly for a moment and proceeded, "From your testimony, the evidence is irrefutable. Be it known that Seaman Gover has indeed paid his dues in crossing the line. I order him to hereby be released."

Rather than returning the passport, Captain Brason said directly to Seaman Gover, "Report to my office at ten hundred hours tomorrow morning."

Meanwhile the ceremonies continued throughout the ship and on the other ships in the task force. One of the elements of the initiation called for the Royal Bath. A trough about five feet deep had been fabricated. It was setup on the aft elevator and filled with seawater. The elevator had been lowered to the hanger below and the polliwogs were brought to the edge of the chasm and told to look down. They were then told that they were to jump in blindfolded. When the polliwogs were led away to be blindfolded, the elevator was raised to where the top of the tank was just below the flight deck.

The scared men were led back to the elevator and stood quivering at the edge, refusing to jump when orderer. Shrieking in terror as they were pushed over the edge, within a fraction of second they found themselves in the tank. Pulling off their blindfolds, most joined in the laughter of those standing a few feet above on the flight deck.

By afternoon, the festivities began to wind down. The flight deck was cleared to make room for flight operations. The last patrol of the day was brought up from the hangar and sent aloft and the midday patrols were recovered. With his duties as the Royal Judge concluded, Sheffield shed his robe and resumed his duties on the bridge.

When Neptune and the Royal Court had completed their business and were ready for their grand departure, Sheffield came to see them off. Upon greeting Neptune he said, "I apologize for being absent during the initiation ceremonies, but I had important business that demanded my attention. I beg His Majesty's pardon."

"You are forgiven Captain. Just don't let it happen the next time you enter my realm." He warned. "We found all well aboard your ship and I thank your officers and crew for their hospitality and cooperation. This day I have added several hundred loyal subjects into the Order of the Mysteries of the Deep. It has been a good day indeed. Good-bye Captain. You may resume command of your ship."

"Thank you, sir." Captain Barson saluted and shook hands with Neptune and each of member of his court, except for the Royal Judge who had mysteriously disappeared. The entourage exited in the same fashion as they had arrived, down the forward elevator. Captain Barson had his ship back.

The next morning, as ordered Seaman Gover reported to the Capitan's office. After the formal exchange of salutes, Captain Brason asked Seaman Gover to have a seat. "You're probably wondering why

I asked you here, aren't you?"

"Yes sir."

"I noticed from your passport that you spent two and a half years Brazil. Do you speak the language?"

"Yes sir. Fluently."

"Where were you while we were in Praia da Vitória? I could have used you then."

"I'm sorry sir. I didn't know that."

"I need you to help me and be my interpreter while in Brazil."

"Yes sir. I could do that."

"Thank you Seaman Gover. May I ask what took you to Brazil for two and half years?"

Without hesitation he answered, "I was a Mormon missionary, sir."

"Really? I don't know much about the Mormon Church, except for what I learned in history about Brigham Young taking your people to the west and the fact that you don't smoke or drink. I'm not sure I have ever known a Mormon. My wife, God rest her soul, used to listen to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on the radio nearly every Sunday when we lived in the Washington area.

"So, I assume your purpose was to convert people to your church. Were you very successful?"

"It was very slow, sir. But yes I was successful with one family in Rio de Janeiro. They made the whole time worthwhile. I hope to look them up when we get there."

"So are you familiar with Rio?"

"Yes sir. I served there twice for total of fifteen months."

"That's interesting. You can be my guide as well. Where else were you?"

"I spent nine months at the mission office in São Paulo."

Captain Brason picked up on that and asked before he could finish answering the previous question,

"What were your responsibilities?"

"Well, sir, I was the personal secretary to the mission president. I was responsible for most all of his correspondence, the mission files and reporting, and I kept his schedule."

"Can you type?"

"Forty words a minute, sir."

"Shorthand?"

"No sir."

"Can you keep confidences?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"Hmmm. This is all very interesting." Sheffield said stroking his chin as his initial idea began to

expand.” To buy some time to think he asked, “Tell me about yourself.”

Well, sir, I am from the little town of Clarkston, Utah in Cache Valley. It is about twenty miles from Logan and ninety miles north of Salt Lake City.”

“Back in twenty nine I took my family on a vacation through the western states. We went through Vernal on our way into Wyoming.”

“Vernal is quite a ways away, sir.”

“Go on.”

“I am the second of seven children in my family and grew up on the farm homesteaded by my great grandfather. I worked on the ranch and graduated from high school. At twenty I went on my mission and came home in September of forty one. My plan was work and save up some money to and return to Utah State University in Logan this fall. After the attack on Pearl Harbor I decided to enlist in the Navy instead.”

“Why did you choose the Navy?”

“Because I really enjoyed being at sea on the trip to and from Brazil.”

“What are your present duties?”

“Pretty much just a deck hand sir. That and a loader on a five inch gun.”

Captain Brason didn't say a word for a moment as he finalized the thought in his head. When he finally spoke he said, “As of now, you are relieved of those duties. I want you to be my personal yeoman with the responsibility for my correspondence, files, reports, and so forth. Pretty much what you were doing in Brazil. Oh and that comes with a promotion to Yeoman Third Class, if you don't mind skipping a rating.”

“Yes, sir!” the newly promoted petty officer responded enthusiastically.

“Good you can begin immediately. We have a ship's secretary who reports to Commander Owen. You will be my personal secretary and will report to me. There is a guest stateroom just around the corner from my suite that I will have converted into an office and I'll have Lieutenant Gates furnish it with everything that you'll need. In the meantime, get with Yeoman Carter to give you an idea of what you can expect. That will be all. Dismissed.”

Yeoman Gover, stood and saluted his new boss. “Thank you sir. I won't let you down.” and turned to leave.

“Yeoman Gover, aren't you forgetting something?” Captain Sheffield called after him as he handed him his passport.

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The dialog with Davy Jones and Neptune are based on the script from the crossing of the USS Augusta in 1936 from Naval Ceremonies, Customs, and Traditions By Royal W. Connell, William P. Mack; Naval Institute Press 2004

