

Chapter XVII

South Atlantic Patrol

December 10, 1942 – December 24, 1942

It had only been ten days since Sheffield first became acquainted with Yeoman Gover. When he came to Captain's mast claiming that he had already crossed the equator, he knew that this wasn't any ordinary sailor. This young man seemed different. In those ten days, he had learned a lot about him simply through observation.

He never once heard Petty Officer Gover cuss or swear, something that sailors seem to come by naturally. He hadn't detected the smell of tobacco or alcohol on him. There were no visible tattoos. There was light in his eyes that radiated from deep within. The fact that he had been a missionary before the war was most unusual.

Many of his assessments of his secretary were confirmed during the time that Mrs. Watson and Molly had been aboard. He saw to it that they were comfortable and their needs were taken care of. And the way he was with Molly was really remarkable. Somehow he was able to lift Debra from despair to hope. He was quite curious about what he told her and the book that he gave her. He couldn't help but wonder if it had something to do with the answers that Geannie had been looking for ever since Charles Emmett died.

But, there are very definite boundaries between officers and enlisted men, even more strict was the boundaries between a commanding officer and his crew. Because of those factors, he couldn't get too personal in his relationship. He certainly had respect and admiration for him and he trusted him completely. Their relationship had to be more that of a master and servant. He had the same dilemma with Reggie, only there was the additional boundaries prescribed by society because of his race.

Sheffield determined that if he was going to move on, he needed to start making his own memories. Geannie had always taken her camera everywhere they went and had lot of photographs to show for it. He decided to bring her camera with him that day to take pictures of the places he would see. He started by having Yeoman Goverf take one of him with Debra and Molly before they boarded the plane.



After seeing them off, Sheffield and Morris set out on a two day sight seeing trip of Rio de Janeiro. Morris certainly knew his way around the city. He drove as Captain Braosn rode in the back seat, as protocol dictated.



He took him to some of the more popular attractions such as Sugar Loaf Mountain with its cable car, the top of Corcovado mountain to the Christ the Redeemer statue, and the historic Imperial Palace in the center of the city which was built in the 18th century and served as the official residence for the governors of colonial Brazil. He also took him to little known, out of the way places that were also very fascinating.

No matter where they went, language was never a problem. Morris not only knew the culture, but he respected it. That gave Sheffield a better insight into the places they visited. He saw and learned more in those two days than he had on his three previous visits combined. Even the food he recommended at the places where they stopped to eat gave Sheffield a true sense for the uniqueness that was Rio.

That night Sheffield got a room for himself and one for his driver, tour guide, and translator at the Santa Teresa Hotel, which was built in 1850, located right downtown.

On Saturday Morris took him to a couple of famous cathedrals, the Municipal Theater, and the National Library building. Morris also took him to some places that tourist rarely go. He saw first hand how so many in that beautiful city lived when Morris drove him through the slum and ghetto neighborhoods. It reminded him of the poverty that they saw when he took Geannie to Ensenada, Mexico all those years ago. He understood why the city had the high crime rate that cost Debra her husband.

On Saturday evening they returned to the ship. Sheffield had an even greater admiration for Yeoman Gover and got little glimpses of insight into what made him tick. He found that he had much of the same upbringing that he and Geannie had. He got the impression that he too came from a very strong and close knit family. He could see that he had many, if not all, of the core values that he had and held fast too. Such things were rare and difficult to hold onto in the in the military. Those two days that they spent together forged a trusting relationship between the two men that was certain to last.

When Sheffield returned to the Reprisal, he hoped to find a letter from Ramona waiting for him. Instead, he was pleasantly surprised to have a reply from Paula.

Dear Sheffield

I was pleased to hear from you. Yes, we did have a nice Thanksgiving and am all ready for Christmas. We all would love to have you come for dinner the next time that you are in Norfolk.

I too have thought about our evening out. I feel like it was I who was the charity case. I too would like to get to know you better, and I would very much like to go out with you, on a real date. I think I'm ready for such an adventure if you are.

The news is a little sketchy, but I try to watch for anything pertaining to your

ship. I'm sorry to hear that you lost a few men in action. Wherever you are, be careful and take care of yourself.

Since sailors like to get mail, even captains, Brent, Evelyn, & Jillian all say hello and have each written to you as well. Since you might end up on the other side of the world, maybe we can be pen pals, if nothing else. I'd love to hear from you again sometime.

Sincerely, Paula

Brent, Evelyn, and Jillian each enclosed a brief note as well. Brent wanted to know all about the battles he had been in. In Evelyn's note, she was bold enough to tell him that she thought that her mom would be a good catch. Jillian told him all about her cat. After reading their letters, Sheffield wrote a short letter telling them about Rio, and promised to stay in touch.

On Sunday, the ship was pretty much deserted as so many of the officers and men were still on liberty. Sheffield attended Lieutenant Fellows services, but there weren't very many there that day. Sheffield knew that Yeoman Gover, his friend Seaman Ballard, and six or seven other enlisted men conducted their own services in the ship's library. That day however, Morris took Simon and went to visit a family that he knew as a missionary and attended services with the congregation that he served in.

With the not much going on, Sheffield had some time to himself for the first time in quite a while. He was refreshed to find that during this time he wasn't dwelling on what was and what was lost. He felt a strange sense of freedom. He sat down and wrote a long letter to Walt detailing the chain of events over the last few weeks and the impact that it had on him. He made particular mention of his encounter with Debra Watson. He also used the time to catch up on his personal log book, the one that Geannie had given him.

On Monday and Tuesday, the ship was mostly manned with only a few men still on leave. The order of the business was preparing to get underway for another patrol. While they had been in port, there had been two merchant ships sunk by U-boats farther north and one U-boat had been sunk by a US Destroyer. In addition, an Italian freighter had been sunk by the Cutthroat. Now there were reports that the U-boat activity was moving south. Their job was to go out do something about it. All of the ships of the task force were making the same preparations. The ships refueled and took on fresh stores, including fresh oranges grown locally.

At seven thirty on Tuesday morning the 15th, Commander Owen reported that the ship was ready to

sail. The Reprisal slipped her moorings and was pulled away from the pier by three tugboats. Soon she was under way and steamed in column with the other ships leaving the bay, all except for the Gunnison. The area was deemed unsafe for fueling operations and the slower tanker would be too vulnerable to attack. It would have to be short patrol, having to return to port for fueling. Once out into the open Atlantic they assumed an anti submarine cruising disposition. The air group took off from the air base and those not part of the morning patrols began coming aboard. Fighting Eleven was once again up to full strength, thanks to the four Wildcats that the Gunnison had brought with her.

All that day, the task force continued steaming east. Late in the afternoon, Admiral Weston divided his force as he had done before. Taking the four Brazilian destroyers with him, he detached the Reprisal along with the six American destroyers to operate independently under the command of Captain Brason. All that day nothing was sighted, until well after dark when a section of Bat Team Dauntlesses forced a U-boat to crash dive. The submarine escaped untouched. During the night, Admiral Weston's force, reported a sonar contact. The area was obviously infested with U-boats. Extra caution had to be taken.

The situation became more obvious the next morning on Wednesday the 16th during the morning patrols. Captain Brason had just ordered a course change as his force were steaming in a zig zag pattern. Typically a zig zag pattern will throw off a stalking submarine as to the actual course of its prey and is a standard and effective operating procedure. As with the loss of the Wasp back in September, this time the course change brought the Reprisal and her escorts right into the path of an undetected U-boat. It must have been a real treat for the submarine captain to find a big fat carrier in his scope. Patiently waiting for the right opportunity, he was ready. At just the right moment, he gave the order to fire torpedoes and then took his boat down deep.

Without waring, four torpedo wakes were reported off the starboard bow. A moment later, the Percival, seven thousand yards out, came between the carrier and the closest torpedo. A tremendous water spout shot up into the sky as it hit the just aft of the bow.

At the instant the sighting was reported, Sheffield ordered a hard turn to port. Already making twenty knots, the ship heeled to port, sending anything that wasn't secured flying. A sailor at his battle station on the forward port 20 millimeter battery was sent over the side and into the water. As the ship continued its turn, the three remaining torpedoes sped ever closer. Had the Reprisal's luck ran out? Seconds seemed like hours during the turn. It was an exciting time on the Kirkman as well. All of a sudden the flattop was heading right for her on a collision course.

Seeing the danger, the speedy destroyer went to emergency speed and surged ahead at thirty five knots. As the Reprisal continued her turn, she barely missed the stern of her much smaller escort. Anyone on the bow of the carrier could have easily leaped onto the fantail of the destroyer.

Still the torpedoes kept coming. With yards to spare they were in the clear of the first torpedo. Then came the thud. The jar was felt throughout the ship. Those who saw it coming had braced for the impact but there was no explosion. The third torpedo struck the ship just aft of the island structure but due to the angle that it hit, it was deflected. The torpedo was seen breaching the surface and was reported to have broken in two before sinking.

The first impact left a dent in the hull, ruptured a fuel bunker and caused some minor flooding in Engine Room Number Two. That was a close one! The damage was not sufficient to slow the ship down or hamper her ability to operate. There were a few minor injuries among some crew members who were hurt either by falling or being struck by flying objects, plus one man overboard.

Capitan Brason ordered the ship to resume their previous course and the escorts regrouped and took up their assigned stations, all except for the Percival. She had lost forward twenty five feet of her bow in the explosion. She was not in danger of sinking and was still able to make way, but with damage that she sustained, she could only make nine knots, maximum. Sheffield detached the Watson to escort her back to Rio. He also detached the Archer to look for the prime suspect.

In the meantime while the escorts were regrouping, the Gordon happened across the man who had been pitched into the sea. He was fished out of the water, unhurt. He would have to remain aboard the destroyer indefinitely, until it was safe to transfer him back aboard.

With the emergency over, the Reprisal continued on with half of her escorts. Aboard the carrier, everyone's nerves were jittery from their brush with disaster. The flooding in the engine room was quickly contained, but the ruptured fuel tank caused a big problem. The oil leaking into water could not be contained leaving a long oil slick as a trail everywhere she went, making her easy to follow. Fortunately her speed would allow her to outrun any pursuer.

Lieutenant Gates and his men went to work moving fuel around in order to make room in an adjacent fuel bunker so the fuel remaining in the ruptured bunker could be pumped out. Once that was done, the trail of oil would cease. To fix the damage permanently would require a dry dock, but that could wait for as long as it took.

The Archer was unsuccessful in locating the the U-boat after searching for hours. The cunning captain had taken his boat well below the safe operating depth. Without making a sound, he was determined to keep her there, waiting in silence until after dark. The Archer was forced to give up the search and speed off to rejoin the Reprisal.

The rest of the day went smoothly with the normal routine, except for a beefed up watch. They were definitely sailing in hostile water. In preparing the plan for the Bat Teams evening patrol, Sheffield had a hunch. "My guess," he said to the flight leader, "is that the skipper of that boat that attacked us took it deep

to avoid detection. I'm not a submariner, but if it were me, I'd stay there without making a sound for the rest of the day, making sure that we had moved on, which we have.

“After dark, his batteries will be depleted and their air will be getting pretty foul. They'll have to surface to recharge. But first he'll take a good look around to make sure the coast is clear. Then they'll surface. He probably doesn't know about our night attack capabilities so he'll feel pretty secure. So here is what I want. I want at least six planes sent back to the scene of the attack and just orbit the area until they surface. Then swoop in and nail their coffin shut.”

It was a reasonable plan that just might work. The six Avengers belonging to the Bat Team were selected for the mission. The air crews were briefed on the plan. At dusk they were sent up as usual and assumed their patrols, except for the six with their special assignment.

Sheffield remained on the bridge long after he normally retired for the night. The Avengers reported that they were on station but nothing was on the surface. This was a game of cat and mouse. Just as a cat sits patiently for a mouse to reappear from his hole, once he thinks the danger is past, the Avengers circled patiently. About forty five minutes later. The division commander reported a radar contact on the surface that came out of nowhere. Aided by the light of a waxing half moon, they spotted their target and swooped in.

In listening to the radio chatter, it seemed that the attack went as planned, each plane bracketing the sub with four – five hundred pound bombs in rapid succession. The U-boat didn't have a chance to react. The division leader circled around and made another pass. He reported that the sub was on fire and sinking. The crew was in the process of abandoning ship. Two life boats were in the water and several men were in the water.

Satisfied with the news, Sheffield turned to bridge over to the officer of the deck and as with the night before, he retired to his emergency sea cabin just off the bridge. The Bat Team returned to the ship after their patrol and the ship was secured for the night.

After few hours of rest the Bat team was back in the air for the pre-dawn patrol and it all started over again. Just before sunrise the morning patrols were sent out and the Bat Team was brought aboard and the crews settled in for a well deserved days rest. Soon after sun came up, Admiral Weston and his task group happened on the scene of the night action and found twenty two survivors, who were taken aboard the Billings.

It wasn't long before Wednesday the 17th began shaping up as an exciting day as well. An hour and half after launching the morning search, a Dauntless from the Scouts reported what looked like three U-boats secluded in a cove on the south end of Trindade Island, one hundred and eighty miles west of the task force. Trindade and Martim Vaz is an archipelago located about seven hundred fifty miles east of

Vitória Brazil. Two appeared to be in the process of resupplying from the third. The location was far enough out that the Germans were safe to use until early afternoon when shore based search planes reached the extent of their search range. Then they simply submerged until the coast was clear. They weren't counting on carrier based aircraft. Immediately upon word of the sighting, fifteen Dauntlesses from Bombing Eleven began arming for a strike mission.

Trindade (Portuguese for "Trinity Island") is a tiny uninhabited island of just under four square miles nine hundred miles east by north east of Rio da Janerio. The volcanic island is largely barren, except for the southern tip. The summit, near the center of the island rises two thousand thirty feet above sea level.

The Island had been the scene of two previous confrontations with the Germans, The first was in August of 1914 when the Imperial German Navy established a supply base for its warships at Trindade. On September 14, 1914 the Royal Navy auxiliary cruiser HMS Carmania fought the German Navy's SMS Cap Trafalgar off Trindade in the Battle of Trindade in which the Cap Trafalgar was sunk and the Carmania was damaged. The second encounter was in July 1940 between the Armed Merchant Cruiser HMS Alcantara which came under fire from the German commerce raider Thor. When the Alcantara returned fire, the Thor disengaged and turned away.

Once the Dauntlesses were ready, they were sent off with an escort of eight Wildcats. They approached unseen from the northwest hidden by the island, and dove in on the unsuspecting Germans. One after another the Dauntlesses pushed over from ten thousand feet and dropped their bombs. As the first bombs fell, the crews of the two U-boats being resupplied scurried to cast off their moorings from the milk cow. One began making its way to the open sea on the surface and was plastered with near misses and at least three direct hits. It sank in fairly shallow water.

The milk cow, in the precarious position of having its fuel lines opened erupted into a giant fireball as tons of diesel fuel ignited. It settled in the shallow water spilling burning fuel into the bay. The other U-boat damaged by a direct hit, opted for the beach where it was pounded to pieces. As the last Dauntless pulled out of its dive, all three U-boats had been destroyed.

As the fighters came in for a strafing pass, two or three dozen survivors scrambled for cover among the rocks. Two Ar 196s that had been orphaned when the Edelweisses was sunk, were tied up to some rocks. Most likely out of fuel, they sought refuge at Trindade. The strafing pass left them riddled wrecks. Lieutenant Commander Elder, the squadron commander reported, "Mission accomplished, returning to the roost."

The rest of that day and the next two were routine and uneventful. On Sunday the 20th while setting through Lieutenant Fellows sermon, Captain Brason was summoned to the bridge. "What's up?" he asked as he reported to the bridge.

“Sir, one of the Scouts has spotted a blockade runner heading north about a hundred and twenty miles southeast of our current position. Upon making a pass alongside the pilot, reported it to be an armed merchant ship with Japanese markings and flying the national flag. He made a second pass and dropped his bombs but missed.”

“I wouldn't have expected a Japanese ship here in the South Atlantic. It must be carrying a load of rubber from the Dutch East Indies to Bordeaux for the Germans.” Sheffield guessed. Then he ordered. “Have nine Avengers armed with torpedoes and send them after it. Send four Wildcats with them.” Then he added, “Dispatch the Gordon to the location to search for survivors.”

Twelve days earlier, the Fujiyama Maru had indeed sailed from the Port of Palembang on the Indian Ocean side of the Island of Sumatra with a cargo of rubber. Previously she had sailed from Yokohama with six additional crated Nakajima B5N2 carrier based torpedo bombers known by the allies as Kate along with extra engines and spare parts. These planes were the last of three shipments destined for Germany's recently completed aircraft carrier, the Graf Zeppelin. Accompanying the aircraft was Commander Noboru Itsakara who was to be an advisor in carrier operations.

The Fujiyama Maru had successfully transited the Indian Ocean and had made it this far without incident. That morning she had evaded the Cutthroat, and now she had been spotted by an American carrier aircraft. The captain of the Fujiyama Maru was equally surprised to find an American carrier operating in the South Atlantic. Captain Yugi Matsuhara didn't allow the plane to be fired on with the hopes that his ship had not been correctly identified. Shooting would have definitely drawn attention to who they were.

About two hours later his worst fears were realized when nine torpedo bombers bore in for the attack. The strafing attack by the four stubby fighters cleared the decks of anyone who could have fired on the approaching planes. A moment later torpedoes were in the water. Captain Matsuhara was a merchant sailor not a naval officer trained in how to handle such situations. He called Commander Itsakara to the bridge for assistance. But he was an aviator and was not well versed in ship handling.

Finally Captain Matsuhara gave the order for a turn to port, but it was too late. Three torpedoes had found their mark. Immediately the four hundred seventy nine foot freighter began listing and settled low in the water. The captain ordered the ship to be abandoned. There was hardly time to lower any life boats and men began leaping into the sea and swimming away from the ship that was engulfed in flames.

Lieutenant Jack Timberwood, the commander of the Seahawks radioed that the blockade runner was going down and that survivors were seen in the water. With their mission accomplished, the Avengers, some with their torpedoes still in the bomb bay, and the Wildcats headed back to the Reprisal.

Early the next morning, the Gordon rejoined the Reprisal, her deck crowded with eighty seven

Japanese seamen, including Captain Matsuhara and Commander Itsakara. The rather routine Brason Maneuver was again employed to transfer the the prisoners aboard. Since that was more than the brig would hold, a detention center was again set up in the repair hangar. The idea of work parties had not worked before so it wasn't even attempted, although the POWs were brought up on deck in small groups for exercise and fresh air.

It had been a very productive patrol thus far. The rest of of the patrol was fairly routine, with one major exception. On the 21st Storekeeper 2nd Class Michale Bennett was killed when a pallet of canned goods toppled over on him in the dry stores compartment. Sheffield had another letter to right and another burial at sea.

On the 22nd, the first day of summer in the southern hemisphere, the Reprisal task group rejoined Admiral Weston's group and set a course for Rio. First thing the next morning, the entire air group was sent on to the Galeão Air Force Base.

At about one hundred miles out, the task force began encountering the fishing fleet operating out of Guanabara Bay and the surrounding coastal region. At first it was just a few large commercial fishing trawlers. At around fifty miles out, smaller fishing boats could be see seen for as far as the eye could see. As the Reprisal sailed past one up close, Sheffield commented to his executive officer, "You know Mace, I've always wanted to go deep sea fishing."

Mace replied, "Well, why don't we. I'll bet we could charter a boat to take us out for the day."

"Now, that's a great idea, my friend. We haven't spent much time together lately, It's been all business."

"Yeah, and when you're not around, I have to take over. I don't know why we can't leave someone else in charge for a day while we're in port."

"I'll tell you what, I'll send Yeoman Gover ashore and have him set something up. We'll probably want to take him with us so he can interpret for us.

Late in the afternoon, the task force steamed into Guanabara Bay. When they arrived they found the Cutthroat already there along with the Percival and Watson. They had arrived three days earlier and the Percival was in dry dock getting a temporary bow for the trip back to the States for permanent repairs. Unfortunately, the dry dock was too short to accommodate the Reprisal. The dented hull and ruptured fuel bunker would have to wait until the ship could be dry docked. It wasn't a critical matter and it wasn't necessary to return to the States for such a minor repair.

The Reprisal remained at anchor that night and moved to the pier at Snake Island the next morning, the day before Christmas. Later in the morning there was an interesting sight as twelve PBY-5 Catalina flying boat patrol bombers with Brazilian Air Force Markings landed in the bay on the same runway used by

the commercial seaplanes. One by one, they touched down not far from the Reprisal. They had flown in from the States and brought with them several bags of mail for the ships in the task force. It took a while before the mail destined for the Reprisal was brought aboard, and then it had to be sorted.

In the meantime, the Japanese POWs were taken off the ship and moved to a temporary detention camp where they were would be kept by the Brazilians until a ship arrived to take them to the United States.

The scoreboard on the inboard bridge wing had been updated with the Reprisal's latest victories. Four more U-boat silhouettes superimposed over Kriegsmarine flags and the silhouette of a freighter superimposed the rising sun ensign of Japan were added to what was already there.

It was just after lunch when Yeoman Gover brought the captain his mail. He was pleased to see a letter from Ramona. There were several Christmas cards that he opened first, some were from his family. He was pleased to see one from Shorty and Wilma and one from Freddy and Susan. It had been a while since he had heard from them. Shorty was still at the Alameda Naval Air Station and Freddy was still in Washington, D. C, with the Bureau of Aeronautics. Then he opened Ramona's letter which included a birthday card and a Christmas card. Her letter and read:

December 7, 1942

Dear Sheffield

First of all, happy birthday. I got your letter from Thanksgiving a couple of days ago. That sounds like a different Thanksgiving dinner alright. Me, I just had dinner in the hospital cafeteria. It was the traditional turkey and dressing affair. It was kind of lonely with no one in particular to share it with, just whoever happened to be on break. With the seniority I have around here, I could have had it off, but there wasn't any point. So I let a younger nurse have it off to spend with her boyfriend who just happened to be in port.

It has been more than a month since I have written to you, Not a lot has happened around here. I did spend a long weekend at my beach house. I'm glad that I have it. It makes a nice get away.

Today must be a difficult day for you. This morning a memorial service was held commemorating the one year anniversary. Naturally I thought of Deannie and the kids. I'm sure they were on your mind, wherever you are.

I also thought of you and wondered how you are doing. From the tone of your recent letters, I get the notion that you are doing much better. You're going to be alright.

I did hear about your visit to Bordeaux. Good job! I have no idea where you might be now, but wherever you are, I hope all is well.

So wherever you are, are you doing anything about your birthday? You should, you know. A person's birthday should be there very own private national holiday.

Speaking of holidays it will be Christmastime by the time you get this, so Mele Kalikimaka. (After all the years that you lived in Hawaii, I'm sure that you know what that means.) Wherever you are, I hope you can have a break and can enjoy the holidays. Thanks to you and Geannie, I have a much better appreciation for Christmas than I ever had before. Now I more fully understand the great significance of it.

Every year, except for last year of course, they go all out around here and decorate the hospital with lights and everything. There is always a lovely Christmas tree in the main lobby. It does a lot for our patients, not to mention the staff. Everyone is so far from home and lonely, especially at Christmas. It just helps to make it feel a little more like Christmas and home.

I have been here so long that this is home for me. Of all the places I've lived in my life, I don't ever remember having a white Christmas like that new song from Bing Crosby. It sounds lovely, but it's foreign to me.

I'll be thinking of you on Christmas. Even though this is home, I have no one to share it with. I could sure enjoy seeing a familiar face. I haven't seen you since you left at the end of April. I do keep that copy of Life Magazine with your picture on the cover right out on top of my coffee table in my apartment where I can see it.

I trust that you received the picture of me that I sent to you. If it didn't arrive, let me know and I'll send you another one. You know how the mail can be, particularly when it has to go half way around the world and catch up with a ship that is constantly on the move. I wanted you to have it so maybe you'd think of me from time to time.

I really miss you and look forward to the day when our paths cross again. I'm still waiting for that date you promised me. I'll tell you what, since you liked my pineapple coconut cream pie so well, if I make another one for you, would you marry me? Just kidding, and then again maybe I'm not. Anyway, that'll give you something to think about.

Love Ramona.

Something she said gave him an idea. He went down to the aviation storeroom on the fourth deck to

see Lieutenant Ronelli. Surprised to see the captain enter his office, he stood to salute. "What brings you clear down here, sir?" he asked.

"I was wondering, how many of those red and green running lights do you have in inventory?"

"Oh, I'd say several hundred of each. Why?"

"I just had a bright idea, excuse the pun, to make it look a little more like Christmas around here. Can I borrow them? At least for while we're in port."

"You're the Captain. I don't see why not."

"Great! I'll send someone to get them. Thanks Lieutenant."

Sheffield left the aviation storeroom and went up the electricians shop on the second deck. Again, Chief Electricians Mate Jess Sparks was surprised to see the Captain enter his shop. He too saluted and asked, "What brings you to my humble abode, Captain?"

"I was wondering Sparky, could you rig a string of lights from the aircraft running lights?"

"Of course I can, sir. How many do you need strung together?"

"Several hundred. I want a string of red and green Christmas lights from the forward flight deck up to the foremast, and back to the aft end of the flight deck."

Chief Sparks got a twinkle in his eye and winked. "Well it's the day before Christmas. I guess Santa's helpers better get busy."

"Thanks Sparky. I knew that I could count on you."

When the Captain left, Chief Sparks had his men drop what they were doing and devoted all of his resources to the Captain's request. By dusk, a string of red and green lights extended the entire length of the ship. There was even enough to fashion a wreath that hung on the inboard side of the stack. When they were turned on, it lightened not only the ship but even the heart of the crustiest seaman.

Sheffield retrieved Geannie's Christmas records and had them put on the ship's phonograph player and broadcast throughout the ship. Someone had Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" and loaned it out for the occasion. Now, if that didn't bring a tear or two to any sailors in that tropical port thousands of miles from home that Christmas eve, nothing could.

That evening, with the flight deck bathed in the glow of makeshift Christmas lights, Lieutenant Fellows conducted Christmas Eve services. Nearly all of the crew attended. Among other parts on the program, Captain Brason read from the Book of Luke in Geannie's Bible the story of the Babe of Bethlehem. Yeoman Gover, Seaman Ballard and two of their friends formed a quartet and sang "Oh Holy Night" while another of their friends accompanied them on the piano which had been brought up from the officer's wardroom. Sheffield never ceased to be amazed by his personal secretary. Among his many talents and abilities, he could sing too. Senior Chief Solozar, who had played the role of King Neptune only three weeks

earlier, made a great Santa Clause. He even used the same long white beard that he had worn as Neptunus Rex. At the conclusion of Lieutenant Fellows' sermon, Morris' friend accompanied while he directed as the crew, officers and enlisted men alike, sang together a number of familiar Christmas carols. After the benediction, everyone lingered as they shook hands and wished one another a Merry Christmas.

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