

Chapter XIX

Pacific Bound

January 1, 1943 – February 3, 1943

1943 dawned with hopefulness, unlike the year before. The allies were advancing across North Africa and significant progress had been made on Guadalcanal. There hadn't been any naval action around the island for six weeks. New ships, planes and other military hardware had been rolling out of America's shipyards and factories. The men who swelled the ranks of the armed forces were being trained. Everyone knew that the roads to Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo would be long and arduous.

Sheffield had hope for 1943 as well. He was confident in his ship and his men for whatever they were called on to do, wherever they were called on to go. They had already proven themselves and had become a seasoned crew. He was also confident in his own future as well. It was a new year with a new start. He was determined to make the best of it going forward.

The ship was pretty deserted for most of the day as many of the crew were on leave for the holiday. As the afternoon went on, men began trickling aboard and by five o'clock, when the leaves expired, everyone was back aboard. Plenty of black coffee was available for those nursing a hangover. When roll call was made, everyone had mustered in except for Gunner's Mate 3rd Class Harvey King. No one had seen him since the night before at Copacabana Beach. It was uncertain whether he had gone AWOL or had fallen victim to foul play or some other tragedy. Petty Officer King was a dedicated sailor who had never been troublesome. Captain Brason sent a search party ashore that included Yeoman Gover, in an attempt to track him down. By nightfall there was still no sign of him.

Saturday the 2nd was spent in making preparations for getting underway. The fuel bunkers were topped off, except for the one that had been ruptured. Stores were brought aboard and other details that required attention were taken care of. The search for Gunner's Mate King continued.

In addition, Admiral Weston informed Sheffield that some Brazilian dignitaries wanted to call on the task force prior to sailing and had chosen the Reprisal as to where they wanted to hold a ceremony. The Admiral also sent over detailed instructions and an itinerary.

The next morning when Sheffield got ready for the day, he put on his dress whites. After breakfast he went directly to his ready room for the daily briefing. Commander Owen reported that everything was ready for getting underway and all hands were present and accounted for, except for Petty Officer King. The matter of his disappearance had been turned over to the local police and the American Embassy.

After the briefing, Sheffield reported to the quarterdeck to await the arrival of Admiral Weston. He was piped aboard and his two star flag was struck on the port yard of the foremast. Together they waited for their guests. A few minutes later, the motorcade drove on the pier and stopped at the gangplank. With all of the pomp and ceremony of naval tradition, Admiral Dodsworth Martins the Commander in Chief of the

Brazilian Navy was piped aboard. His flag was struck on the starboard yard of the foremast. He was followed by none other than President Getúlio Dornelles Vargas and the First Lady, Darci Sarmanho Vargas. As he was piped aboard, the Brazilian Presidential Seal was struck to the top of the Foremast. Also coming aboard were Senhor Gilberto Tobias da Silva the Brazilian War Minister and Mr. Jefferson Caffery the U. S. Ambassador to Brazil. Upon greeting the ambassador, Mr. Caffery thanked Sheffield for seeing to it that Mrs. Watson had been taken care of and told him that she had made it home safely. He also assured him that the bureaucrat who had given her difficulty over the air fare home had been reprimanded.

Admiral Weston and Captain Brason greeted each as they came aboard. Acting as the translator was none other than Yeoman 3rd Class Morris Gover. President Vargas complemented him on his command of the Portuguese language and asked how he had become so proficient. He was surprised to learn that it was from living in the country for two and half years. The President assured him that he was aware of the presence of the Mormon missionaries from America who had been in his country. Then he added that they were welcomed to return after the war.

Once the delegation was aboard, Captain Brason gave the order to get underway. The Reprisal slipped her moorings and was pulled away from the pier out into the bay. Moments later she was making way for the anchorage in the bay where she dropped anchor among the the rest of the ships of the task force.

With the dignitaries seated on the stand next to the island structure, the ceremony, which could be heard by the other ships, commenced. Admiral Weston introduced those present and turned the podium over to the Senhor da Silva. In his brief remarks, he praised the United States Navy for their assistance in defending the sovereignty of Brazil against the onslaught of Nazi aggression, particularly the force that had been operating out of Guanabara Bay, making the South Atlantic safer for the free movement of their merchant fleet and those who trade goods with them. He called Admiral Weston forward and said, speaking through Yeoman Gover, "On behalf of President Vargas and the the grateful nation of Brazil, It is with great pleasure that I preset you, representing the ships and men of this force and all American naval vessels and personnel serving in Brazilian waters, past, present, and future so long as the war continues, with the Brazilian Naval Excellence Medal. As he pinned the medal to the Admiral's uniform, he indicated that it would be made available to all mentioned.

He then turned the time over to President Vargas. He expressed his personal appreciation for what had been done and praised the alliance between the two nations. What he said next caught Sheffield off guard. "Capitão Braosn." he said. Morris translated the rest of what he was saying, "Will you please come forward."

Surprised, he stepped in front of the presidnet, who continued, "I undstand that it is beacuse of your

strategic planning and tactical skills that many of our countrymen were rescued from the enemy and safely returned to their homes and families. For your dedication to the preservation of their lives, you are forever after a son of Brazil. I hereby appoint you a knight in the Order of Naval Merit. This order was established to honour Navy personnel, Brazilian and foreign, who have served Brazil in a significant way or who have distinguished themselves during the performance of their duties. In my estimation, you have certainly qualified for this honor.” He then pinned the medal to Sheffield's uniform next to his Purple Heart, his Navy Distinguished Service Medal, his Maritime Administration's Distinguished Service Medal, and all of the other ribbons he had earned during his naval career. Not knowing what else to do, Sheffield saluted. In return, the Presidente shook his hand to a round of cheers and applause from his crew.

That concluded the formal ceremony. Captain Brason took the visiting dignitaries on a tour of the ship which concluded with lunch in the Captain's wardroom. The main item on the menu was swordfish, of course. Speaking through Yeoman Gover, Senhora Vargas commented on how fresh it was and she wanted to know where it came from. Everyone was impressed with the answer. President Vargas made the comment that he hoped that Brazil would one day have such a magnificent vessel. Following lunch, the guests disembarked the ship and were taken ashore by the captain's launch. Admiral Weston was returned to his flagship by his personal launch.

Once the captain's launch had been hoisted aboard, Captain Brason, who had changed into his khakis, gave the order to get under way for the open sea with the rest of the task force, including the faithful Brazilian destroyers as well as the small convoy destined for Trindade. It had been a busy morning and he missed Lieutenant Fellow's services.

Once at sea, Admiral Weston on the Billings along with the Cedar Rapids and the Brazilian ships were detached from the rest of the task force, leaving the Reprisal, Stryacuse, Gunnison, and the five American destroyers were to operate independently. The morning patrols took up their stations and the rest of the air group came aboard.

On that first night at sea, Captain Brason and Commander Owen treated the officers to their catch. Their wasn't enough for the entire crew. The cooks broke out the grills and set them up in the forward hangar bay that had been cleared out for the occasion. The menu included grilled swordfish and grilled Brazilian pineapple, steamed brown rice, mixed vegetables, and tapioca pudding. There was plenty of fish left which was frozen and saved for special occasions later.

Enroute, the long range searches and anti submarine patrols didn't find any German U-boat activity that would challenge or threaten the operation. On the third day, the Brazilians moved in to occupy what was their own island. When the Brazilian Marines went ashore, there was no sign of the survivors of the U-boats that had been caught there unaware by the Reprisal planes on her last patrol. It appeared that they had

repaired the radio in one of the demolished float planes and had called for help. Evidently, a couple of nights later two U-boats slipped into the cove and picked them up. All that remained were the remnants of the planes, the burned out hulk of one submarine on the beach and the top of the milk cow which had sank in shallow water. The third submarine had made it to deeper water where it sank.

With the island secured and the tender at anchor, the Catalinas flew out later in the day. With the six patrol bombers and two submarine chasers stationed there, that area of the South Atlantic had a continuous patrol on station. In the weeks to come, the wreckage would be salvaged and semipermanent facilities would be constructed. With their work done, the Admiral Watson rejoined the rest of the task force and set course farther east for untouched hunting grounds.

The South Atlantic is small compared to the other vast bodies of water on earth, yet there were still areas that couldn't be covered by land based aircraft. That provided a safe shipping lane for cargo ships destined for Nazi occupied Bordeaux. It also provided a safe haven for U-boats. Surface ships were good at what they did, but they couldn't be everywhere. By the time they could reach the location of an enemy sighting, the enemy had done their business and were long gone. During the first week in January, merchant ships were still at their mercy and blockade runners were still getting through. The presence of the Reprisal had made the enemy more weary and cautious of their moves. Even the cover of darkness was no longer safe for them.

On the 7th the task force refueled from the Gunnison. When the operation was complete, the Gunnison was detached along with the Nash to make their way to Recife. That night, the evening Bat Team patrol discovered an unidentified freighter heading south, toward the task force, but didn't attack. When the report was received, Admiral Weston detached himself in the Billings and the Watson to intercept.

The next day a pair of Dauntlesses of the morning search picked up the trail. Having got a good look, they reported the vessel as "suspicious" in that it wasn't flying a flag and all identification markings have been obscured. They stayed with the contact, but did not attack. As they buzzed the ship several times in an effort to identify its nation of origin, the freighter, which was armed with light antiaircraft weapons, did not open fire.

Around noon, the Cedar Rapids and Watson established rendezvous with the suspected blockade runner and formed up with it, matching course and speed. After ignoring hails in both English and German from the Cedar Rapids, a warning shot was fired across the bow. That must have got their attention, for when ordered to stop and prepare to be boarded, the five hundred six foot freighter complied.

With the Watson steaming in a circle around them, three Crusaders on antisubmarine patrol, and two Wildcats overhead, the Cedar Rapids put her whale boats into the water, which quickly filled with armed sailors. As the boarding party set out, a white flag was struck on the main mast. By the time they came

along side, most of the crew were on deck and appeared to be unarmed. The American seamen went aboard with no opposition. Several sailors contained those on deck as the officer in command of the boarding party sought out the captain of the ship. The rest set about to secure the ship.

Four armed sailors entered a compartment in the engineering space just in time to stop a crewman from opening the scuttle cocks. Others searched for explosives but found none. Once the ship was secure and its crew had been detained, the Cedar Rapids came alongside and sent a skeleton crew aboard what turned out to be the MS Regenfels, belonging to the German Steamship Company Hansa, bound for Yokohama by of Singapore with a cargo of industrial equipment.

Once the American crew were aboard and manned the ship, it and the Cedar Rapids set course for Recife with their prize while the Watson rejoined the Reprisal.

Captain Brason was worried that weeks of routine operations and port calls had taken taken its toll on the efficiency of the crew. All day on the 8th and the 9th he had the ship conduct gunnery practice and host of drills, including the call to battle stations. During the afternoon of the 9th, an F4F suffered a mechanical malfunction on take off. The plane began to climb then sputtered and stalled before crashing into sea, directly in the path of the oncoming carrier.

Sheffield saw it go down and ordered the ship to turn out of the way. There wasn't enough time, everyone forward could hear the bow hit the plane that was still half afloat. No one ever knew if the pilot was still in the cockpit or was in the process of getting out. There was no sign of the plane or the pilot.

The patrol ended on the morning of the 10th with the air group being sent ahead to Ibura Field. That Sunday, Sheffield was able to attend services. Later in the afternoon, the task force put in at Recife and dropped anchor where the Cedar Rapids was waiting for them.

Upon arrival, half of the crew was granted a twenty four hour liberty to go ashore. On the return trip of the first launch, a mail bag was brought aboard. There was a letter for Sheffield from Mrs. Watson telling him that she had made it home alright and was in the process of settling her late husband's affairs. Again she thanked him for all that he had done for herself and Molly. She said that she had enrolled Molly in school and that she was doing well. Included with her letter, was one addressed to the entire crew thanking them for the kind treatment she and Molly had received while aboard and for their generous contributions. Sheffield had Yeoman Gover see to it that it was published in the ship's newsletter.

Morris also received a letter from her. She told him that she had finished the book that he had gave her and that his "friends", who happened to be two young women, had called on her and that she was very much interested in what they had to say. She thanked him and Simon for the time that they took with here and the hope they had given her.

Word had arrived from Ambassador Caffery regarding the fate of Gunner's Mate 3rd Class Harvey King. Two days after the Reprisal sailed, his body washed up on the beach. Upon further examination, it was discovered that he had several stab wounds to the chest and abdomen. When news of the discovery of his body was published in the paper, a witness came forward.

According to her story, this young woman, a college student, had gone the beach with her with friends to celebrate New Year's Eve. She said that they met up with a young man whom she knew from one of her classes and the two of them became separated from her friends. He attacked her and was attempting to rape her when out of nowhere an American sailor showed up and pulled the her attacker off of her. Free, she ran home as fast as she could without looking back. She was grateful that he showed up when he did but didn't know what happened to him after that. Upon identifying her attacker, he was brought in for questioning and confessed to the murder of Petty Officer King.

Sheffield asked Yeoman Gover to gather his personal affects and bring them to him. Again he had a letter to write to the parents of a member of his crew to explain why he would not be coming home. In his letter to Mr. and Mrs. Collin King of Abilene, Texas he said that their son had died for a far greater honor than many who had been lost to the war. He had died defending the sacred honor and virtue of a young woman. He praised them for the moral character that they had instilled in him and that God had a special place in heaven for those who sacrifice themselves for such a valiant cause. He put his letter with his belongings and had Morris take to the ship's post office.

On the morning of their second day in port, Sheffield had his staff car loaded into the LCVP and taken ashore. With Morris as his driver, they spent the day exploring the city of Recife. By the time they got back to the ship in the afternoon, the auxiliary aircraft carrier Santee, one of the converted oil tankers, along with the light cruiser Savannah flying the flag of Rear Admiral O. M. Read, and the destroyers Eberle, and Livermore had arrived in the harbor to relieve them. Admiral Read brought with him orders for Admiral Weston that his task force was to sail the following day for Port of Spain, Trinidad and and conduct training operations in the Gulf of Paria between Trinidad and Venezuela. The purpose of the exercise was to determine the feasibility of using it for training grounds for new carriers and air groups on their shakedown cruises. The orders concluded with instructions to put in at Port-of-Spain on the the 19th and await further orders.

When the task force sailed the next day, Tuesday the 12th, Admiral Weston stepped up the training regiment as they patrolled two hundred miles off shore along the north east coast of South America. He had a hunch that the extra training would be put to use in the Pacific. His hunch was based on the proximity of Trinidad to the Panama Canal.

On the second day, they recrossed the equator. Once out of Brazilian waters, Yeoman Gover would

no longer be needed for his ability to speak Portuguese. But that didn't mean that he wasn't needed. Sheffield had come to depend on him for so many things, and he trusted him completely. In fact, to make him more assessable, Captain Brason had him set up his quarters in the office. The stateroom was large enough for both. The back half, with a small bathroom, was sectioned off and a set of bunks and lockers were installed. He was allowed to select his bunkmate to share it with; he chose Seaman Ballard. Sheffield also changed his battle station to the bridge

The next day, the task force refueled from the Gunnison. In the early morning hours of the 16th, the task force transited the Columbus Channel and steamed through the Serpent's Mouth. The Serpent's Mouth is the strait lying between Icacos Point on the southwest tip of Trinidad and the coast of Venezuela leading from the Atlantic Ocean into shallow waters of the inland sea known as the Gulf of Paria.

For the next five days, the ships of the task force, and particularly the Reprisal, conducted intense training that included everything from gunnery practice to damage control. The entire air group was put through nighttime take off and landings. Other than the Bat Team, most of them hadn't had any practice at it for some time. Sheffield wanted all of his pilots proficient in night flying in case the need ever presented itself. The long days and hard work were more strenuous than the typical daily routine of being at sea. For the now seasoned crew, it seemed much easier than the shakedown cruise had been when just the opposite was true.

Halfway through the exercises, the crew was given a refreshing break. With the entire air group aboard, Captain Brason ordered the ship to come to a complete stop and allowed it to drift for swim call. The outboard elevator was lowered to serve as diving platform. Hundreds of men, officers and enlisted men alike took advantage of opportunity to enjoy the refreshing tropical water. Even the Captain. As a precaution, a couple of the ship's launches were put into the water in case anyone got into trouble. A cargo net dangled from the elevator so the men could climb back aboard for another dive.

Meanwhile the grills were setup on the flight deck where hamburgers and hot dogs along with all the trimmings of a beach party were served. After three hours, everyone was ordered out of the water. Still in his swim trunks and the Hawaiian shirt that Geannie had got for him on the SS Lurline four years earlier, Sheffield ordered the ship to get under way and gave the crew one hour to resume their duties.

The Gulf of Paria proved to be an excellent place for training with three thousand square miles to roam about in. The shallow water made it impossible for a submarine to operate successfully, eliminating the threat. Having participated in the shakedown cruises of three carriers, in his report he highly recommended it as an excellent location for wartime shakedown cruises. It wasn't the same as the open sea, but it was a good second best. As scheduled, the ships of the task force dropped anchor off Port of Spain on the afternoon of the 21st. Earlier in the afternoon, the air group had flown into Piarco Field, sixteen

miles east of Port-of-Spain.

Once at anchor the launches were lowered into the water and began carrying the first wave of sailors ashore for liberty in the tropical paradise. Being a colony of the Crown under British rule, English was the official language, so that was not a barrier as it had been in Rio.

The next day, the small task force was joined by two new light cruisers, the Alameda and Bismark. They were Cleveland class cruisers with one obvious difference from their sister ships, they had one thick funnel rather than two thin ones. They also featured a raised bulwark at the bow, as in the Baltimore Class, that their sister ships did not have. Admiral Weston wasted no time in transferring his flag to the Bismark and called for a meeting of the commanding officers of all of the ships in the task force.

Sheffield's launch was lowered over the side and was waiting for him, tied up to the boat ladder. It took him the short distance to the new flagship where he went aboard for the conference. Once all of the captains were present in his ready room, Admiral Weston opened the sealed orders that the cruisers had brought with them.

Sheffield hadn't said anything about his hunch. Every time he had mentioned that he thought they were on their way to the Pacific, he had been wrong. As Admiral Weston read aloud, it sounded like another typical patrol. They were to leave Trinidad and proceeded north to Martinique. Observe the French ships that had been interred there since the fall of France. Conduct an anti-submarine patrol of the Caribbean, then proceed to...

Sheffield was certain that he would finish that sentence with, "Norfolk." He smiled and nodded his approval when the admiral continued, "the Panama Canal and report to Pearl Harbor on or before the 11th of February for two weeks of upkeep and maintenance. Then sail to Nouméa, New Caledonia and report for duty with Vice Admiral William F. Halsey, Commander South Pacific Area where the Reprisal will relieve Enterprise."

The ready room was a buzz when Admiral Weston concluded reading the orders. It had long been anticipated and talked about. Now they were really heading for the Pacific where he thought they were needed along. At the conclusion of the briefing, Admiral Weston's final orders were, "Gentlemen, Be ready to sail on the 25th."

Sheffield lingered and mingled with the other commanders and had the opportunity to talk to Admiral Weston briefly before heading back to his launch. As he boarded, he noticed the mail bags had been brought aboard for the trip back to the Reprisal. Sheffield looked forward to getting mail as much as anyone. He hoped there was a letter for him from Ramona.

When Sheffield returned to the Ship he called for a meeting of the senior officers in his ready room in thirty minutes, at which time he revealed their orders with the understanding that the crew not be informed

until after sailing. There was always the possibility that the information would find its way into ears that weren't supposed to hear. In fact he wanted them to have the notion they were returning to Norfolk so those ears would be misled as to their true destination.

By the time the briefing was over the mail had been sorted and Yeoman Gover had left the Captain's on his desk. Sure enough, there was indeed a letter from Ramona. He sat down at his desk, retrieved his letter opener from his top drawer, sliced the end of the envelope open, removed the hand written letter and began reading.

January 3, 1943

Dear Sheffield

Wow! Christmas in Rio. How do you rate? But I think I have you beat, Christmas in Hawaii for how many years has it been now? By my count, this was my fourteenth. It sounds like you had a nice Christmas. I bet your ship looked pretty spiffy all decked out in Christmas lights.

I got off early on Christmas Eve and hooked up with some other nurses and went Christmas caroling up and down some of the docks. Then I spent a quiet evening alone in my apartment and I worked on Christmas. I covered someone else's shift again. I did have New Years Eve and New Years Day off. I spent it at my beach house, all alone naturally.

That last letter got to me pretty fast. It must have been sent by airmail rather than a slow boat. I got it just yesterday. The mail leaving here always goes by air now days. The trick is getting it delivered to a moving address. I'll be curious to know where you are when you get this and how long it takes to get to you.

That last letter sounded as if it came from a different person. I'll say you have had a lot going on. That must have been some dream. A mermaid, really? I can just see Geannie as a mermaid! I think that was more than a dream.

It is amazing what letting go of something sentimental, like that dress, can do for a person. Isn't it interesting how Debra Watson and you crossed paths just when you needed each other. I'm sure that you were as good for her as she was for you. I can relate to her.

You mentioned how Geannie helped me work through losing Tom. Maybe what you don't realize is how much you helped me through that time. During that time you went out of your way to make sure that the things only a man

can take care of were taken care of. You kept the oil changed in my car and things like that. Before I got transferred here, I probably depended on you too much.

I never really had a brother and my father died when I was quite young. I did have two short lived marriages, but I never really had the influence of a man in my life. You are that influence for me and I love you for it. You always looked out for me and I miss that.

What would I like of Zeannie's? I already have her cross necklace. I wear it all of the time just like she did. I'll have to think about that. None of her clothes would fit me. Perhaps one of her nice hats.

I'm glad that you liked the picture of me. I never thought of myself as being very attractive. I couldn't believe that was me when I got it back. Thanks for the compliment. So, do you really think I was gorgeous?

Well here it is, a new year. I wonder what it will bring. Perhaps it will bring you back to the Islands. I am still waiting for that date, and I would love it if there was second date. A girl can get to feeling jilted with only one date from a fella.

So you want to ask this other lady out too. That's a good sign. I think you should, as long as I get my date too. I'll be willing to bet that I make better pies than she does.

Believe it or not, word of what you have been doing in the South Atlantic has made its way here. It might be a big world, but the Navy is a pretty tight knit community. I had heard about that raider long before I got your letter. But don't let that keep you from telling about what you've been up to. I prefer getting it right from you. I understand that there are certain things that you can't talk about. Please keep writing to me. Better yet would be seeing you. I miss you...

Love Ramona.

Sheffield pulled out a sheet of stationary and wrote back.

January 21, 1943

Port of Spain, Trinidad

Dear Ramona,

I just got your letter today. It caught up to me here in Trinidad

when we rendezvoused with a couple of cruisers fresh from the States.

That's just over two and a half weeks.

It has been nearly a month since I last wrote to you. Lets see, what have been the main things since then. While in Rio, Mace and I went deep sea fishing one day. We each caught a nice swordfish. It was quite an experience. I'm sure that you remember Mace Owen, our next door neighbor when we lived in Hawaii.

I got to meet the President of Brazil when he came aboard the ship. That was a pretty big deal. I did get to spend some time in Rio. My personal secretary speaks frequent Portuguese and knew his way around. He took me to some of the popular attractions as well as some out of the way places. Have I told you about him? Come to think of it, I don't think I don't think I have.

His name is Morris Gover from a little town in Utah. I first met him when we crossed the equator. Since he had only been in the Navy for a short time, no one wanted to believe him when he said that he had crossed the equator. He was brought to me to be judged and I asked him for proof. He produced his passport that showed that he had sailed from New York to Rio de Janeiro. He lived in Brazil for two and a half years as a missionary. That's how he learned the language. Come to find out he had some clerical experience. I promoted him on the spot from Seaman 2nd class to Yeoman 3rd Class, skipping Seaman 1st Class altogether, and assigned him to be my personal secretary. I'll tell you, that was one of the best things I've ever done. In fact, he played an important role in the story about Mrs.

Watson. I have really come to depend on this young man. He's very dependable and trustworthy and he doesn't have any vices as near as I can tell. He's doing such a great job, I don't know what I'd do without him.

I guess I didn't know that I made that much of a difference for you. I just saw that you needed some help, so I helped. After all I felt somewhat responsible for you. Tom was my wingman and it was my plane that he collided with. I was just happy to do what I could for you.

It's kind of funny. My best friend has always been a woman, first Meannie and now I consider you to be my best friend. Even more so than Mace. We have to work together and I'm his boss. Sometimes that gets in the way of our friendship.

I can't begin to tell you how much your friendship means to me. I always look forward to your letters and read about what you have been up to. I'm sorry that you had to spend the holidays alone. I wish we could have spent them together.

Before I close, I have some great news! The only problem is I can't tell you what it is, not in a letter any way. Let me just say this. I'm going to be able to keep that promise to you sooner than I thought. I think you'll know what I mean.

Love Sheffield

Sheffield put it in an envelope and addressed it to Lieutenant Commander Ramona Katmuth, USN – Pearl Harbor Naval Hospital – Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, affixed a postage stamp and had Yeoman Gover take it to the ship's post office and it went out on a Pan Am clipper bound for the States that very afternoon.

After a couple of days in port, Sheffield and Mace left the ship together to spend the day in Port-of-

Spain. Mace wanted to go to the race track and talked Sheffield into going with him. He really wasn't into horse racing but he had always been impressed with a horses since taking care of the Senator's stables when he was young. He and Geannie used to ride and had a few races of their own.

The track was at the Savannah Grand Stand at Queen's Park Savannah. After the first race or two, Mace challenged, " Why don't we put some money down on some horses. What do you say?"

Sheffield answered, "I'm not a gambler. The only gambling I ever did was to drop a nickel in a slot machine while driving across Nevada the back in the summer of twenty nine."

"Oh yeah. What happened?"

"To my amazement and to Geannie's chagrin, I won five dollars."

Mace looked over the posting for the next race as the jockeys put the horses through their paces.. "Here's one that looks good. I'm going to place a bet on it. What about you? Do you see anything interesting?"

"Oh why not. I'm not confident enough to pick a winner, so I'll go with Caribbean Princess for second place. She probably won't even place."

Together they went to the window to place their bets. Mace put five dollars on a particular horse for the win. Sheffield put a dollar on Caribbean Princess to place second.

"Look at it this way Sheffield, If she doesn't place just chalk it up as an entertainment expense."

They returned to their seats in the grandstand to wait for the race to start. The horses were loaded into the gates and waited for the starting signal. They leaped from the starting gate and the crowd leaped to their feet, cheering wildly. It was obvious from the start that Mace hadn't chosen very well. His horse was toward the end of the pack from the start, and stayed there.

On the other hand, Caribbean Princess was in a solid fourth place from the beginning. At the half way point, she had moved into third place. With a burst of speed right at the end, she nosed into second place to finish. Sheffield was amazed. "That's just dumb luck." Mace insisted. "I don't believe it. Are you sure you've never bet on the ponies before?"

"Never."

"Come on, lets go collect your winnings."

As it was his turn at the window, he was even more surprised to have won ten dollars! He had had enough and was bored with the races. Mace wanted to try his luck again to see if he could at least get his five dollars back. He decided to try Sheffield strategy and go for placing rather than winning.

They decided to split up and go their separate ways. Sheffield found Queen's Park Savannah to be a very interesting place and wanted to take a look around. The park sat on two hundred and sixty acres of land which had once been a sugar cane plantation and then later a cow pasture. In the mid nineteenth

century it was established as a park with the race track and several cricket, soccer and rugby playing fields.

After having lunch at an outdoor café Sheffield wandered around taking in the sights. Part of the park featured several old mansions from the Spanish colonial era, some interesting shops of all kinds and street vendors selling their goods. Just north of the park was the Royal Botanic Gardens, one of the oldest botanic gardens in the world dating back to 1818. Sheffield enjoyed walking through the sixty two acre gardens looking at the trees, shrubs, and flower beds. Some of the exhibits were indigenous to the island, while most came from all over the world.

He made his way back to the docks and took his launch back to the ship, then sent the launch back to wait for Mace. When he returned to the ship, Sheffield asked, "So did you get your five bucks back?"

"No. I ended up losing fifteen dollars."

"That was some pretty expensive entertainment, if you ask me. You should have stuck with me. I'd of bought you lunch with my winnings."

The task force left Port of Spain on the 25th and sailed north. Once at sea, Captain Brason revealed their orders to the crew, which were received with enthusiasm. Two Scouts from the afternoon search overflew Martinique and reported that the carrier Bearn, the cruises Jeanne D' Arc and Emile Bertin and the other ships were still at anchor where they had been. With that part of the mission completed, they changed course and steamed west across the Caribbean toward the Panama Canal. That evening, the Bat Team happened on a surfaced U-boat which immediately submerged. The planes dropped their depth charges and returned to the ship without knowing the result of their attack.

Sheffield eased up just a little on the training regiment of the previous week as the crew continued participating in readiness drills and gunnery practice. The lessons from Pacific had proved that readiness was essential, and sometimes it wasn't enough. Not knowing what they would be up against, Sheffield didn't want to cut any corners. Gunnery practice was the order of the day, for both the ship's batteries and the air group. Admiral Weston took the opportunity to have his two new cruisers work on gunnery practice as well.

On the 26th a trio of Avengers working together with the destroyer Archer sunk a U-boat about one hundred miles north of Aruba. Other than those two encounters, the patrols were pretty much routine. That evening the entire air group was kept in the air until after well dark before being brought aboard, before the moon came up.

The next morning entire air group was sent off in the predawn darkness, with a waning three quarter moon to light the way to carry out a mock sunrise attack on the Bismark and Alameda which had been operating independently.

In the early afternoon, after the cruisers rejoined the task force, a PBY Catalina flying boat From the

Coco Solo Naval Air Station approached the task force from the west. It swooped down and made a low pass to the Reprisal's starboard. Then it climbed higher and circled around and made a low pass to port. Once the pilot identified Admiral Weston's flagship he signaled that he had a message to deliver and asked for permission to land.

Admiral Weston then flashed a signal directing the task force to come to stop, except for the destroyers which were to steam in a circle around the task force. While the ships came to stop, the PBY climbed back into the sky and circled back around on its landing approach, landing in the water to the Reprisal's port, between it and the Bismark.

After taxiing up next to the cruiser, sailors in plane tossed a line and the big plane was secured to the ship. A courier went aboard and hand delivered a sealed manila envelope directly to the Admiral. With his message delivered the courier left the ship and reboarded the plane and the lines were cast off. The PBY taxied out into the water between the two ships, revved his engines and took off again.

Sheffield and those on the bridge watched the whole thing play out, wondering what it was all about. A few moments later, while the PBY was still in sight, a signal was flashed from the Bismark to all the ships in the task force which left everyone on the bridge stunned. It said, "New orders. Proceed to Norfolk at once." The message was followed by an order to get under way with the new heading.

Less than a day from the Panama Canal, everyone on the bridge was dumbfounded. Grumbling and even a little cursing ensued as some had forgotten their unspoken commitment to not swear when the Captain was present. Although he too was disappointed, Sheffield tried to reassure them. "Look, we don't see the big picture. There must be something afoot somewhere that requires our presence. We have trained and prepared for whatever task we are given, regardless of where it is. We're a seasoned crew with combat experience. Remember the Bay of Biscay. Remember the Edelweiss. Look at our scoreboard. We've had a lot of success. It doesn't matter which enemy we are fighting, they all must be defeated."

Commander Owen, who had been one of the grumblers, seconded the Captain's comments. "Look fellas, I'm sure there is no one aboard this ship who wants to get a crack at the Japs any worse than Captain Brason. After all look what they did to..." He didn't finish that sentence, he didn't have to. He continued, "What I mean to say is, the Skipper's right. We don't get to pick our fights in this war. We fight where we are sent, against whoever it might be."

Everyone knew they were right and kept their opinions to themselves if they didn't agree. How could they not agree. Again Captain Brason addressed the crew. "May I have your attention. This is the Captain speaking. You have probably noticed that we have changed course to the northeast, away from the Panama Canal. We now have new orders to return to Norfolk." He then went on to give them the same pep talk that he had given the men on the bridge.

Rather than passing through the Panama Canal on the morning of the 28th as planned, late that afternoon they dropped anchor in Port-au-Prince, Haiti for a two day port call. On the 31st the ten ships of the task force left Port-au-Prince bound for Norfolk. During the three day passage, the drills and exercises gave way to routine patrols and operations. Any felling of disappointment was replaced with the satisfaction of going home after a very busy three months and six days.

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President Getúlio Dornelles Vargas, the First Lady Darci Sarmanho Vargas and Mr. Jefferson Caffery the U. S. Ambassador to Brazil were real people. Senhor Gilberto Tobias da Silva the Brazilian War Minister is fictional.

The Order of Naval Merit is a real but the Brazilian Naval Excellence Medal is fictitious.

The occupation of Trindade is a fictional operation.

The MS Regenfels is a fictional ship, however several German blockade runners were captured on the high seas.

The Santee, the light cruiser Savannah flying the flag of Rear Admiral O. M. Read, and the destroyers Eberle, and Livermore did arrive in Recife in early Jnaunary and opereated in the South Atlantic until mid March.

The Gulf of Paria is where most of the new Essex class aircraft carriers conducted their shakedown cruises.

The Alameda and Bismark are fictional ships. A later varient of the Cleveland class did have one broad stack as well as several other design changes.

The French ships at Martinique were a concen to the allies. It was feared that they would attempt to return home to France and fall into the hands of the Germans. They were watched closely to make sure that didn't happen.