

Chapter XXVII
Miscommunication
June 28, 1943 – July 16, 1943

July 7, 1943

Aboard the USS Reprisal

Algiers Bay off Algiers, Algeria

Dear Ramona,

As scheduled, we got underway on Monday morning the 28th. We were loaded for bear too. Everyplace we could possibly stuff things was crammed. Our storerooms and magazines were full, there were spare planes lashed to the overhead in the hangar, and spare parts were stashed in a number of odd places. We have enough to keep us at sea for a long time. This could prove to be a long cruise.

It was a quick trip across the Atlantic, we made it in eight days since we weren't slowed down by having a tanker tagging along with us. Instead we meet up with one in the mid Atlantic. Having an idea what's in store, I had the men run drills and exercise every day, except for Sunday. They did a good job, they're as ready as can be possible.

Of course we kept patrols in the air the whole way. The Atlantic Ocean is still a dangerous place. That's why we were in a hurry to get across. Fortunately we didn't run into any trouble. Not even a contact report.

This is the first time I have been in the Mediterranean in twenty one years, since my world cruise back in 1922. There is something about the Rock of Gibraltar that is inspiring. No matter how mixed up

things get in this old world, there are some things that are constant and unchanging. Those are the things worth fighting for.

We dropped anchor here in Bay of Algiers just after noon local time today. We won't be here long, just overnight as we sail on our first mission of this campaign first thing in the morning. I have a feeling that we'll be in out of here over the next few months. It's not the most developed base of operations, but it will do.

When I have quiet moments, my thoughts turn to you. It dawned on me how difficult that it must have been for you to tell me how you felt. I'm glad that you had the courage to tell me, or I might not have figured it out. Look at what I would have missed out on.

I'm really glad that you got to go home with me. I knew that my family would take you in like that. They really like you and would like to have you come again. I can't imagine what your life must have been like without the love and support of a strong, close knit family.

I really wish that I wasn't so far away from you right now. Things were just beginning to blossom with us. I trust that we can pick up where we left off. Do you remember what I said about absence makes the heart grow fonder? I can tell you that it is true. My feelings toward you have deepened, that's for sure. It would be nice to at least be on the same continent as the woman that I am falling in love with.

I need to get this in the mail so it can at least be taken off the ship. I have no idea when it will be picked up to be taken back to the states. It might be a while before you get it as everything is heading this

way. From the looks of the bay, they're already here.

I do hope all is going well with you and your new job. I look forward to hearing from you. I'd love to hear all about what you're doing.

With deepening love, Sheffield

Once Sheffield finished his letter, he returned to the matters at hand; planning the attack that would be carried out the next night. The main thrust of the campaign was the invasion of Sicily. As a diversion, the Allies had allowed bogus documents to fall into the hands of the Germans giving them reason to believe that it would be Sardinia instead. The Reprisal's mission was to give credence to the ruse.

The next morning, the Reprisal sailed with the task force into the Mediterranean Sea, heading north toward the Balearic Islands. After dark the task force moved into position and reached the launch point in the middle of the night.

The cruisers went on ahead to be off shore when the Bat Team arrived over their targets. A coordinated bombardment and aerial attack from offshore naval forces was to give the enemy reason to believe that an invasion was imminent.

Captain Brason was in his emergency cabin just off the bridge getting a little rest. As they arrived at the launch point, someone came to inform him that they were there. He came out onto the bridge for a status update. The entire Bat Team was on deck and ready for the order to take off. After looking things over and finding them in order, he gave the word. As he stepped out onto the inboard wing bridge, the engines of the planes on the darkened flight deck sputtered to life. A moment later the roar of the engines of the twenty six aircraft was deafening.

When they were ready, the deck lights came on ever so dimly, lighting the path to the end of the flight deck. The first to take off were the eight Alleycats. The first one lifted into the cloudy, moonless night. Soon the deck was clear and there was nothing to do but wait.

Sheffield stepped back inside the bridge and poured himself a cup of coffee and took his seat in the captain's chair. Lit only by the light from the instrument consoles, there was enough light to see around the bridge and make out the faces of the men on duty at the time.

An hour later the speakers mounted to the bulkhead squaked to life as the first reports of the attack began coming in. The target was the air base five miles north northwest of the city of Alghero on the northwestern tip of Sardinia. Other targets in the area included various other military installations.

As Admiral Weston's two cruisers opened fire with their six inch guns, the Alleycats strafed the airfield with incendiary bullets. The night sky erupted in fire as planes and fuel tanks burned,

lighting the way for the Crusaders to see their targets as they dove out of the night sky.

The reaction on the ground was slow, and amounted to sparse and inaccurate anti-aircraft fire. Once the Crusaders had finished their work, the Seahawks flew over in formation, each with four – five hundred pound bombs raining down on the enemy below.

And then, it was over. The flight regrouped and swung around back out to sea and toward home. Admiral Weston's cruisers ceased fire and retired from the area to rejoin the task force.

Aboard the Reprisal, plane handlers were busy preparing the rest of the airgroup for their dawn attack. While their planes were being armed, the pilots were having breakfast and being briefed in their ready rooms.

Captain Brason watched the activity on the flight deck below, amazed at how well the men did their jobs in complete darkness. Checking his watch every few minutes, Sheffield wanted to make sure the timing was right. Then at the prescribed moment, the rest of the airgroup began taking off into the first hint of the light of dawn. As they were taking off, radar picked up the returning Bat Team. Once the deck was clear, the work on the flight deck switched from launching aircraft to recovering aircraft. Soon they were all aboard.

Again, there was nothing to do but wait.

About a half an hour before sunrise, came word of the attack on the naval base at La Madalena and other military installations in the area. Again the response was slow, but more intense. The Wildcats silenced the anti-aircraft batteries so the Crusaders and Seahawks could do their jobs.

From listening to the chatter over the intercom, there was an Italian cruiser and a handful of destroyers along with a number of merchant ships in the harbor. Commander Elder directed half of his squadron to focus on the ships, while the rest contributed to the destruction being wreaked by Lieutenant Commander Timbewood's Seahawks.

In the commotion, someone called out that they had been hit. He was heard telling his rear-seat gunner to bail out. Two parachutes were observed, one reportedly landed in the water and the other on shore. The stricken Dauntless crashed just outside of the town.

With the second and final attack of the morning over, Sheffield went below to his wardroom to have breakfast and await the return of the airgroup.

By the time they had been recovered, Admiral Weston and his cruisers had also returned. Together the task force retired from the area. About midmorning, radar picked up an incoming flight about sixty miles to the northwest. The fighter director sent four Wildcats to investigate. At the same time, eight more that had been ready and waiting on the flight deck were launched.

The incoming aircraft were eighteen Savoia-Marchetti SM.79 Sparviero (Italian for "Sparrowhawk")

three-engined medium bombers, each carrying two torpedos. They were escorted by eight Reggiane Re.2000 Falco I fighters.

The fact that Italians had an American naval aviator and his gunner in custody and the wreckage of a carrier based dive bomber told them that the attack came from an aircraft carrier and not the Army Air Force. A fishing trawler had reported the direction the retiring strike group was headed. With that information, the Regia Aeronautica put together a hasty counter attack.

The Re.2000s were outclassed by the Wildcats and were swept from the sky. The hay day continued as they took on the bombers. By the time they reached the task force, only five planes remained in the air. Those were shot down by anti-aircraft fire from the ships in the task force. That morning, three more Wildcats became aces.

All the rest of the day, the task force steamed away from Sardinia toward the south to provide cover for the convoys carrying the invasion troops to Sicily. Once in position south of Sicily, the Bat Team carried out early morning raids on the 10th on installations in the target area.

Sheffield was on the wing bridge as they began returning aboard the ship. To the north, the transports and fire support ships were moving into position. Once the last of the Bat Team had been recovered, planes were moved into position and readied for launch. It was going to be a busy day for the air group. The first into the air were the eight Wildcats who had the first combat air patrol over the ships of the invasion force. The Army Air Force had flat out refused to provide any air cover for the Navy. Those eight were followed by four more for the combat air patrol over the Reprisal and her escorts.

Several Dauntlesses were launched next, their orders were to look for targets of opportunity ashore in support of the ground troops. Finally, six Avengers of the anti-submarine patrol were launched. The rest of the air group were held in reserve for whatever may develop as the day went on. It was hoped that what was left of the Italian fleet would make a move to break up the invasion.

Once the planes were in the air, Sheffield looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to five. The first of the landing craft would be hitting the beach at any moment. With his job done for the time being, he went below to his wardroom for breakfast.

Knowing that he had been up since the early morning hours, Reggie had a fresh pot of coffee waiting for him. While the Captain was savouring his first cup, Reggie brought in a plate full of hotcakes, sausage and eggs. Before he had an opportunity to finish breakfast, he was summoned to the bridge.

Commander Seymour Whithouse greeted him with the news, "Sir, the cruisers in the fire support group are requesting that we provide aircraft to spot for them."

"What happened to their float planes?" Captain Brason inquired.

"Evidently they were all shot down right off the bat."

"I thought the AAF was supposed to provide air cover over the beachhead." Sheffield snarled.

"Evidently they didn't show up, sir."

"Well lets put our heads together and see what we can come up with. This will stretch the air group pretty thin, but we could send the ship's utility aircraft to spot for the cruisers and reallocate four Wildcats from the reserve combat air patrol to provide cover for them."

"Exuse me, sir." Lieutenant Commander Paul Cameron, the communications officer, interrupted.

"What is it Paul?"

"The CAP over the invasion force have engaged enemy aircraft. They're requesting reinforcements."

"Well gentlemen, the sun has just barely come up and its started. Its going to be a long day." Turning his attention to Commander Whithouse he ordered, "Send them four of the standbys and while you're at it, put four more up over us. I doubt that we'll escape their attention for long."

Expressing his frustration to no one in particular, he muttered, "I don't like being confined to such a small area of operations." He was referring to the one hundred mile long and fifty mile wide area of the Mediterranean between Tunisa and Malta that Admril Hewitt, the overall commander of the Naval forces invoved in the operation had limited him to.

While the eight Wildcats were launched, four more were readied along with six Dauntlesses, fitted with extra fuel tanks and a five hundred pound bomb tucked under their bellies. Once they were launched, all that remained aboard were the Bat Team and few other planes.

"Let the pilots and crews of the Bat Team rest a while, and figure them into the roatation. We're going to need everyone we've got." Captain Brason told his air officer.

Commander Cameron reported, "The forces on the ground have requested air support from us. Evidently the AAF aren't responding."

"Give our boys their frequency and turn them lose." Then he asked, "What is the AAF up to anyway?"

"They're bombing the hell out targets all over Sicily, Sardinia, and Southern Italy, sir."

"It seems they have their own agenda going on here. I'll tell you what Paul. Put one of your men on their frequency to monitor what their up to. If they come across something that we should know about, I want to know about it. I doubt they'd ever tell us. For all we know they could spot the Italian fleet and we'd never know about it."

"Yes, sir." Commander Cameron responded as he left the bridge on his way to the radio room.

Captain Brason looked around the bridge. Everyone was busy carrying out their tasks with profesionalism and exactness. "I couldn't ask for a better crew." he thought to himself. He stepped out onto the wing brigde to observe the planes on the flight deck being readied for launch. He looked up and down

the length of the ship. The gun mounts were all manned. Lookouts were scanning the sky. The radar antenna was continuously searching the sky for the enemy.

Wanting to be sure that he was contributing everything he had, he stepped back inside the bridge and asked Yeoman Gover, "Morris, find Commander Lovejoy and have him report to me."

While the cogs in his mind were churning, Yeoman Gover got on the phone and soon located the air group commander in the air group ready room. Within a few minutes, he reported to the bridge.

"You wanted to see me sir."

"Yeah, Stew. I have a job for you. I want to know what is going on ashore so I can stay on top of things and deploy our planes to the greatest advantage. I want you to take your command aircraft with its radar up and keep an eye on everything that's going on. Have a bomb bay fuel tank loaded and you and your crew pack a lunch, because you'll be up there all day.

"Take two fighters with you to stand guard. When they run low on fuel, I'll send someone to relieve them. Any questions?"

"No sir. I know what to do, I'll take it from here."

"Thanks Stew. Keep me posted. Dismissed."

Commander Lovejoy left the bridge. A few minutes later Sheffield saw his Avenger and two more Wildcats brought up on deck. They were being readied for launch while the two SOC-3A Seagulls, a J2F Duck and an SNJ trainer of the utility detachment and four Wildcats were taking off. The number of reserve aircraft aboard were dwindling.

Commander Cameron brought a report to the Captain. "The air attack on the invasion force is over, sir. One of our destroyers has been sunk. The combat air patrol managed to shoot down nine enemy aircraft, including three German planes."

"Any casualties on our part?"

"No sir, but one fighter took a few bullets through a wing, but the pilot reports that he can stay on station."

"What about the ground support missions? How are they doing?"

"Some of our Dauntlesses successfully stopped a column of six Panzer tanks and another took out a pillbox that had some GIs pinned down on the beach."

"Good. And what about the spotters?"

"With their help, the cruisers are engaging enemy field artillery."

"Thanks Paul. Keep me posted."

Once he had received the report he went out onto the wing bridge in time to see Commander Lovejoy and his two escorts take off. As the sounds of their engines faded in the distance, all was quiet and the flight

deck was completely empty.

He gazed out over the sea. Several hundred yards across the way, Admiral Weston's flagship, the Bismark was on station. Looking straight up the flight deck and beyond, the faithful old Syracuse led the formation. Within the panorama of his view to port included three destroyers. If he stepped out onto the outboard wing bridge, he would see a similar sight. "I'm glad they're here," he thought. "Before this day is over, we might need them."

His thoughts were interrupted. "Sir. Radar has enemy aircraft coming our way. They appear to be high level bombers. The fighter director has already directed the CAP to intercept."

"What is their range?"

"Fifty miles at twenty thousand feet and closing fast."

Captain Brason stepped back on the bridge. He calmly said, "Sound General quarters. Ahead at thirty knots." As the half of the crew not already at their stations ran to their places, Sheffield and those with him on the bridge put on their Kapk life jackets and strapped on their steel helmets. In just under a minute and half, Commander Terry reported that the ship was manned and ready for action.

Six minutes later, the combat air patrol engaged the eighteen Italian Piaggio P.108 bombers. They were large four engined aircraft quite similar to Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses. Armed with five 7.7 and two 12.7 millimeter machine guns, the Wildcats would have to watch themselves.

From the ship, first one and then another bomber were seen falling from the sky at a distance. As they drew closer, six more were observed going down. Once the enemy bombers were within range, the host of five inch guns of the task force opened up, the Wildcats held back as the bombers flew through a wall of flak. Three more bombers didn't make it. Soon the forty millimeter guns opened fire. The bombers remained at twenty thousand feet, well out of range of the twenty millimeters.

Out of the eighteen bombers that approached the task force, only five remained. From twenty thousand feet, they each dropped seven thousand seven hundred pounds of bombs. They bombardiers did not take into account that in the time that it took their payload to fall twenty thousand feet, their target would no longer be in the same position. Tons of water erupted into the air well behind the Reprisal as the bombs fell harmlessly into the sea.

As the remaining bombers flew on. Two more fell the anti-aircraft fire and the remainder to the combat air patrol. The Regia Aeronautica had sacrificed eighteen heavy bombers that they couldn't afford to lose. Once clear of danger, Captain Brason gave the order to secure from General Quarters. Work on preparing the next flight of planes commenced. With a break in the action, Captain Brason went below to have lunch.

When he returned, the planes were launched, clearing the deck to begin recovering those who had

been in the air all morning. As they came aboard, the pilots went directly to their ready rooms to be debriefed. Once their reports had been received, it was obvious that the Reprisal Air Group had contributed significantly to the opening moves of Operation Husky.

In the process one Wildcat, and two Dauntlesses had been lost to enemy action. The pilot and rearseat gunner of one Dauntless were both killed, the other Dauntless made a crash landing in a pasture. The pilot and rearseat gunner walked away only to be pinned down by Italian machine gun fire. Another Dauntless seeing their plight, silenced the enemy guns and a squad of American GIs dashed in and brought them to safety. As for the Wildcat, it went down in the sea. The pilot had enough time to deploy his liferaft before his plane sank. He was later picked up by a destroyer.

During the afternoon and for the rest of the day, the contribution of the air group was equally important. There was one event out of the ordinary that was quite unfortunate involving a pair of Dauntlesses.

The incident played out over the loud speaker on the bridge.

"I've got a bandit on my tail!" one of the pilots called out. "Jimmy," he said to his rearseatman, "try to fight him off."

The wingman, who had a good look at the attacker, shouted, "It's a _____ AAF P-47. Don't those _____ know an American plane when they see one?"

As the plane sped past after its first firing pass, the pilot who had been shot at, got a good look at his attacker. "Would you look at that, he has a naked lady painted on his plane. How come we can't do that?"

"Because we're professionals," the wingman answered. "We're better than them."

"Do you think he figured out who we are?"

"I don't think so. He's lining up for a second pass."

"What do we do?"

"We defend ourselves. Do you know how to do the Thach Weave like the fighter pilots use all of the time."

"Yeah, I think so."

"Get ready, here he comes again. When I give the word, turn toward me.... Ready, Now!"

"He's right behind me!"

"Steady. I'll have him in my sights in just a few seconds."

"Keep trying to distract him Jimmy, but don't hit him."

"There I've got him, I'll try to scare him off." The sound of his nose mounted fifty calibre machine guns was heard.

"_____, you hit him! You hit him!"

"I was trying not to. _____ he's going down. Come on buddy, bail out, bail out."

After a pause that seemed like forever, "There he goes. He's free of the plane. Open your chute. There it goes. Lets circle around and make sure he gets down alright."

"Wait until they hear about this when we get get back to the ship. You shot down one of our own planes."

"It was either him or you. Would you rather the tables have been turned."

"No I guess not. Say I owe you one don't I."

"Big time, pal. Hey look he's lanindg behind our lines. He'll be alright. Lets get back to work."

After listing to the scene play out, Captain Brason shook his head in disbelief. "What's the matter with those AAF boys? Do they think they own the sky or something? You'd think that he'd of seen the the white star in the big blue circle around it."

The rest of the afternoon was filled with routine combat air operations, if you can call combat routine. It was routine in the fact that everyone returned safely after successfully completeing their missions. After a rest, the Bat Team had been sent back up for the evening patrol.

The Wildcats hosted a party in the officers wardroom for their friends, the Cusaders. The guest of honor was Lieutenant Glenn Koeford, the pilot who had shot down the Army Air Force P-47 Thunderbolt. The bakrey had made a special cake for the occasion. The icing on the cake read USN – 1 USAAF – 0. While Lieutenant Koeford was being made an honorary Wildcat, the plane captain was having a small American flag painted on the side of plane just under the canopy in honor of his victory.

During the night, the Bat Team kept busy. The Alleycats engaged a number of twin engined German bombers over the ships of the invasion force, which still had cargo to offload. The Alleycats accounted for five bombers. Meanwhile, the dive bombers found an artillery battery firing on allied positions light up the landscape, making a perfect target. The nine Dauntlesses pummeled the postion, putting it completely out of action. The six Seahawks made themselves useful by destroying a railroad train. It was a short but highly productive night for the Bat Team.

The next day was much the same. Again Commander Lovejoy flew an all day command mission over the area while the Wildcats provided combat air patrol. An air attack on the invasion fleet resulted in a libtery ship going up in horrendous explosion. The troops on the ground were making considerable progress. The Dauntlesses got to be pretty good at taking on Panzers. The only excitement aboard the Reprisal on the second day was a deck crash involving a Wildcat that had been shot up while engaging enemy aircraft over the invasion fleet.

The third day was much the same, only with less air opposition. One Avenger was severley damaged by anti-aircraft fire. On its return flight, it was forced to ditch. The piolt and both crewmen were

rescued by a destroyer and returned to the ship. Finally on the fourth day, the Reprisal and her escorts were relieved of duty and were permitted to operate independently. Admiral Weston brought his task force around into the Tyrrhenian Sea where they could strike targets on the north side of Sicily as well as in Sardinia.

On the 15th while operating about one hundred miles off the northern coast of Sicily, the air group was carrying out strikes on enemy positions in and around Palermo. Captain Brason, who hadn't had much sleep since the operation began, was on the bridge. He had only went below once a couple days previous to freshen up. His khakis were wrinkled and he had two days growth on his face. There were more white whiskers mixed in than there used to be. At forty four what was left of his black hair was quickly turning white. The same was true with the mustache that he had sported for nearly twenty years.

In the days since arriving in the waters around Sicily, he hadn't had much time to think. This morning was a rare exception. He found himself thinking about Ramona and how far their relationship had come. He couldn't help but wonder what Geannie might think of the idea. He reflected back on the letter that he found in her Bible and the bizarre dream where she turned into a mermaid. If they were any indications, he came to the conclusion that she was pleased.

He was wondering how things with Ramona might progress when he was suddenly brought back into the present moment. "Sir," Commander Williams interrupted his thoughts, "Radar has picked up a formation of aircraft at twenty five thousand feet approaching from the south about sixty miles out."

"I'll bet they're AAF bombers out of Tunisia heading for targets in Southern Italy." He answered. "Just to be sure, I'm going to wander down to the radio room to see what Commander Cameron can tell me about them. You have the bridge Joel."

Sheffield left and took the short stroll aft on the same level of the superstructure to the radio room. As he entered Commander Cameron came to attention and saluted. The other men in the compartment had their backs to the hatch and had headphones on and were unaware of the Captain's presence.

"What have you heard from the AAF lately?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary, why?"

"Radar has just picked up a formation about sixty miles out heading this way. I suspect that they are army bombers heading toward Italy but I want to be sure."

"Just a minute let me ask."

Commander Cameron tapped a sailor on the shoulder. Radioman 1st Class Milton Rugder was startled to see the captain hovering over him. He pulled off his headphones and went to stand up. "It's alright Petty Officer Rugder, remain seated. I was just wanting to know the latest gossip from our friends in the AAF. What have you heard?"

“Nothing out of the ordinary sir. Just typical bombing and ground support missions.”

“What can you tell me about a flight of high flying aircraft about sixty miles southwest of here?”

“Oh, that is a flight of sixteen B-24 Liberators out of Ariana, Tunisia.”

“Do you have any idea where they are heading?”

“No sir.”

“Well now at least I know who they are. Thanks for your good work, men. Carry on.” Satisfied with his answer, he headed back to bridge.

Radioman Ruder put his headphones back on and went back to monitoring the frequency used by the Army Air Force. It felt a little like he was spying on them. He paid particular attention to the flight of Liberators to see if he could answer the Captain's question as to where they were heading. A few minutes later he heard something electrifying.

“Enemy ships in sight. There appears to be one battleship sized, three medium sized and six smaller ones. Commencing bombing run. Squadron leader to squadron, open bomb bay doors.”

Radioman Ruder jumped out of his chair as if it were on fire. “Holy _____!” he shouted. “Sir, they're after us. Those bombers, the Captain asked about they're...”

Commander Cameron didn't wait for him to finish his sentence. He sprinted down the passageway hollering, “Make way! Make way!” as he nearly ran down anyone in his way. Breathlessly, he burst into the bridge. “Those Liberators are going to bomb us, Captain!”

Without hesitation or question, Captain Brason ordered, “All ahead full! Sound General quarters.”

Radioman Ruder attempted to raise the bombers to warn them of the mistake that they were about to make, but got no response. He was doubtful that he even got through to them.

As the big carrier responded and surged forward, Captain Brason ran out onto the wing bridge and looked up to see sixteen dots almost directly over head. He dashed back onto the bridge and ordered evasive maneuvers, not only to avoid the bombers, but the Syracuse which was directly ahead. Then he added, “Get the word to the rest of the task force that we're about to be bombed.” Someone in the radioroom alerted Admiral Weston on the Bismark and the entire task force followed suit and went to General Quarters, with orders not to open fire.

Just then the sea began erupting all around the carrier and the other ships in the screen. Water from a near miss crashed down onto the outboard wing bridge and in through the open hatch, flooding the bridge. Simultaneously, there were too many near misses all around the ship to count. The explosions in the water jarred the hull, causing the ship to buck up and down and from side to side. Shrapnel severed a fuel line, starting a fire on the aft port boat deck. Before fire fighters on the Reprisal could respond, another near miss drenched the boat deck and extinguished the fire. In a matter of seconds it was over.

The ships in the screen had similar experiences but no real damage had been done. Fortunately, bombing moving ships from high altitude had never proved to be successful and in this case there were no direct hits. Damage reports began coming in from all over the ship. Planes on the hangar deck were tossed around, receiving damage. Most of the damage came from things that weren't secured. One man in the machine shop was pinned between the bulkhead and a heavy tool chest. He suffered a couple of broken ribs.

The most alarming report was that of three men who had been washed overboard. The Gordon and Archer, bringing up the rear, were ordered to search the sea for them. One man was pulled out of the water alive but dazed. The body of another was recovered, but the third man was never found.

While still assessing the damage, Admiral Weston called over from the Bismark for a report of the situation. Since the attack was a result of mistaken identity, he directed that all aircraft on combat missions be recalled and that the task force retire from the area of operations. Captain Brason was more than happy to comply.

While still cleaning up the mess, the planes began returning from their missions and began coming aboard. One Wildcat was lost that day to enemy anti-aircraft fire. The pilot bailed out and parachuted to safety and came down in friendly territory. The combat air patrol and the anti-submarine patrol were alerted to the change of orders and followed along as the ships headed west at twenty knots. Later in the day, Radioman Rudder picked up a broadcast from Army Air Force headquarters in Tunisia for all units to be on the look out for the Italian fleet which was out in force. The report also boasted of sinking a battleship. For the rest of the day, flight operations included a beefed up combat air patrol as now they apparently not only had to watch out for enemy aircraft, but friendly aircraft as well.

The Reprisal wasn't the only carrier involved in the operation. The British carriers Formidable and Indomitable were operating to the east of Sicily. That same day they came under attack by Italian torpedo bombers. During the attack, the Indomitable was torpedoed and had to withdraw for repairs.

Into the night, under the watchful eyes of the Alleycats, the task force steamed west. Just after noon the next day, the task force steamed into the Bay of Algiers amongst a backdrop of a couple of burning liberty ships, the result of a German air raid earlier that morning. Because of the uncertain relations with the Army Air Force, the air group remained aboard until arrangements could be made with one of the air bases. Under those conditions, the ships of the task force dropped anchor in the bay filled with a host of other ships.

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An actual example of the Army Air Force mistakenly attacking American forces in Sicily occurred on August 11th when seven A-36 Apache dive bombers attacked an Army command post and artillery battery. The attack was blamed on non-existent communications. (History of the United

States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume IX page 205.)
The part about the British carriers is as it was.