

Chapter XVIII

Army Buddies

July 16, 1943 – July 19, 1943

The Reprisal laid at anchor about a quarter of a mile off shore in Algiers Bay. With the Army Air Force mistaking them for the Italian Navy, Admiral Weston thought it best to suspend operations and clear up the matter. They were lucky yesterday, another encounter might not turn out as well. Captain Brason was fine with the decision to withdraw. Admiral Weston began the process of going through the proper channels to make sure it wouldn't happen again. Inter-service communications was difficult enough as it was and required a flare of diplomacy, lest it degrade into a blame game. Admiral Weston began by making an appointment to see Admiral Hewitt.

Not knowing how long they would be in port, half of the crew was given a twenty four hour liberty. When the launches returned from shore, they brought with them the first mail bags to be brought aboard since leaving Norfolk nearly three weeks earlier. Once it was sorted, Yeoman Gover brought the Captain his mail.

He quickly sorted through the bundle until he found what he was looking for. Setting the rest down on his desk, he opened it and began reading.

July 11, 1943

Dear Sheffield

It didn't take long for me to get your letter at all. It must have come by air. I hope that you get my reply as quickly. I should have written sooner, but settling into my new job has been more hectic than I thought it would be. I think I'm finally getting on top of things.

I have arranged to teach a class to sailors undergoing medical training into my schedule. Most of them have no background and are eager and willing to learn. Sometimes the new nurses we get think they already know it all. I also have scheduled myself for a four hour shift on the hospital floor once a week. Your advice was timely. By being involved in the day to day routine, I have a better idea of what is really going on.

I'm sure that you have your hands full about now. Just this morning we got the news of the invasion of Sicily. Everything the radio and newspapers are reporting on is the Army's involvement. Be careful not to let yourself get hurt, or worse.

Now that things are going well between us, I don't know what I'd do if something happened to you. Sometimes I wonder if I should have waited to tell you how I felt about you. Perhaps I should have waited until I knew that you

wouldn't be going off to war. I have often wished that you had a nice safe desk job in Washington where we could see each other on a regular basis.

But you are doing what you need to be doing and you do it so well. Despite all of that, I'm glad that I told you how I felt. It made my heart much lighter. I'm so happy that you took it so well. I appreciated what you said in your last letter about your deepening feelings towards me.

I have tried to let you have time for it sink in slowly and have resisted throwing it at you all at once. I have told you that I am in love with you. I can't begin to tell you how much I love you. It has been a long time in developing so my love for you sinks deep into my heart.

I long to see you and be with you. I long to hear your voice and be held in your arms. I long for your tender kisses. Now that I have experienced them, I want those things even more. I pray that you long for those things too.

I hope you know how happy you have made me. Happy isn't a strong enough word for how I feel. Try joyful. That's a better word. You have brought me so much joy, and to think that you are beginning to feel the same for me only magnifies the joy in my heart. I'm not the same woman that I used to be and it is all because of you. I didn't know that it was possible for a forty year old woman to feel like an eighteen year old girl again.

Dare I say that I look forward to a long, joyful future together with you. I pray to God night and day that he will preserve your life and bring you home to me. Not only do I want you in my life, I have come to the point where I need you in my life.

With all of my love,
Ramona.

Sheffield was impressed. It didn't take all that long for her to get his letter and even less for him to get hers. He pulled out a sheet of stationery and was about to put his pen to the paper. "Where do I start?" he asked himself. Then he answered himself, "I want to think about this for a couple of days. This is getting pretty deep."

The fact is, Sheffield had been thinking about it; a lot. Ever since yesterday morning when they discontinued combat operations and began heading for port it had been on his mind. And now her letter, it was clear that she loved him deeply. He was falling in love with her too, and it frightened him. He began to doubt himself, "Am I ready for this? Has there been enough time? Can I truly love her completely with out a

ghost getting in the way? If the answer to those questions were 'No' what would it do to Ramona?"

Part of him wanted to rush into it with his arms, and heart wide open. Another part of him wanted to turn and run the other way. He cared for her deeply and knew that he was falling for her. He wondered if the long history they had, a history connected by Geannie, would be a detriment or a benefit to their relationship. When it came right down to it, he simply needed more time. Time that this cruise would give him, if he only had time to think about it.

"I've got the next few days in port." he concluded. "That will give me some time to think before I write back to her."

Sheffield remained aboard the ship the rest of the day. Other than taking his turn on the bridge, he spent a fair amount of his time in his office and stateroom. He hadn't spent much time there lately. He did however write two very difficult letters explaining to the families of the two men lost the day before how it was a result of mistaken identity and miscommunication.

That night, he had a rather troubling dream. He dreamed that he was married to both Geannie and Ramona at the same time. The thing that troubled him was that they weren't troubled one bit by the arrangement and were the best friends that they had always been. In his dream he found that they loved him differently and for different reasons, but they both loved him completely. The problem was, he feared that he loved Geannie more.

In his dream, he talked to Geannie about his dilemma. She suggested that she fade away for a while and let him give all of his love and devotion to her dear friend who she loved deeply. She wanted her to have the same joy, it was interesting that she used that word, that she had enjoyed. True to her word, she went away to where she could watch from a distance, but before she left she encouraged him to give his full heart to Ramona because there was enough for both. The next morning, Sheffield pondered the meaning of the dream as he got ready for the day. He concluded that it was Geannie's way of encouraging him to allow himself to fall in love with Ramona.

All during breakfast he began to feel better about things. He determined that he needed to get off the ship and spend Saturday ashore. When Reggie came in to clear away, he gave his faithful steward the next twenty four hours off. As he passed by Yeoman Gover's office, he poked his head in, "Morris, pack an overnight bag and come ashore with me as my driver." Then he added, "You don't happen to speak French do you?"

"No sir, but Seaman Ballard does."

"Let me guess. He was a missionary in France before the war."

"No sir. Eastern Canada."

"Well bring him along, he can be my interpreter."

From there Sheffield went up to the bridge and informed Commander Terry that he was in charge. While on the bridge, he requested that his staff car be placed in the LCVP and be put in the water and for a coxswain to take him ashore. He went back to his stateroom and packed a light overnight bag and took some cash from his safe. When he got to the boat deck, his the LCVP was tied up along side the ship next to the sea ladder. Aboard was his car, his driver and his translator.

The trip to the docks was quite pleasant. It promised to be a warm day in the mid to upper eighties, not extremely hot like in the Sahara Desert just beyond the Atlas Mountains along the Mediterranean Coast. Once on the dock, he sent the LCVP back to the ship and set out to explore Algiers.

The dusty streets were crowded with people, some on foot, others in cars or on bicycles. Street vendors were everywhere selling a host of products and services. It was interesting that a great deal of the vendors seemed to be Algerian children. He had them stop and let him out to look in some of the shops. At one point, he even had a little boy about ten years old shine his shoes.

Every place he looked, he saw couples; young couples in love, couples with children, and couples who were growing old together. He felt incomplete not being part of a couple and missed those days. As he looked around at all of the couples, his thoughts turned to Ramona's letter. "Would we make a good couple?" he wondered. They had spent a lot of time together during those four weeks. Then he remembered the four weeks that he had invested in Paula. There was a big difference as there was no connection with Paula. On the other hand, there was a solid and promising connection with Ramona, one definitely worth pursuing.

By lunchtime, he came back to the car and had Morris take him into the heart of the city where he came across a grand five story hotel with a restaurant on the main floor. It seemed to be close to many attractions that were worth visiting. He had himself let out at the curb, while Morris parked the car.

In the window was posted a menu in English and inside he could see several American and British servicemen. Feeling hunger pains, he decided to go in and see what they had to offer.

No sooner than he had gone inside, he heard someone calling his name, "Sheffield Brason." Looking around he saw a familiar face in that land so far away. Sitting at a booth across the restaurant was none other than Harvey Morrison. Harvey motioned for him to come over.

As he approached the booth he saw another army officer with his back toward him sitting across from Harvey. Harvey got up to meet him with a rousing handshake. "Sit down and join us. Do you remember Jimmy Doolittle?"

At that moment, Sheffield and Doolittle recognized each other. As Sheffield sat down beside Harvey he said, "General Doolittle sir, its good to see you again."

"How have you been Sheffield? Its been, what, over a year now hasn't it."

“Yes sir, since the Tokyo Raid.”

Harvey said, “Were just enjoying a beer here, can I get you a Coke or something?”

“Yeah, that would be great, Harvey.”

Harvey got the attention of a waiter and asked him to bring his friend a bottle of Coca-cola.

General Doolittle said, “We had to fly off the Hornet in such a hurry that morning, I never had a chance to thank you for all that you did for us. Those spare gas cans that you rounded up were a life saver or we'd never of made it.”

“I'm just glad that I was able to help. I happened to know the right people.”

“And another thing I need to thank you for is bringing that deck load of B-25s to me. I had just got here to organize the Twelfth Air Force and they were the first planes to arrive. The rest were staged through the Azores. I guess I have both you and Harvey to thank for that. When I found out that you were the one bringing them to me, I knew that they were in good hands. In fact I still have most of them.”

“I knew you were here, General, but what are you doing here Harvey? The last I knew you were still in Washington.”

“I am. I'm just here for a planning meeting with all of the local brass. When I saw the Reprisal come in yesterday, I wondered if you were still the skipper.”

“Yeah, we just got back from helping out with the landings on Sicily.”

General Doolittle, said, “I'm surprised that you're not out after the Italian fleet. Some of my B-24s happened across them the day before yesterday and sent one of their battleships to the bottom.”

“With all due respects sir, that wasn't the Italians that your planes attacked, that was us.”

“What?” the general asked incredulously.

“Yeah, that was us. We were operating about a hundred miles north of Sicily when our radar picked up a flight of planes heading our way. Our radioman who was monitoring your frequencies assured me that they were a flight of B-24s. We assumed that they were off on a bombing run over Southern Italy.”

“They were heading for Salerno but radioed that they had come across the Italian fleet and where ordered to attack. I heard about it after the fact. What happened?”

“Well, the radioman heard the flight leader pass the word along to the flight to attack. On short notice I ordered evasive maneuvers but it was that much too late. A moment later the sea around us and the other ships in the screen erupted from near misses. Fortunately there weren't any direct hits. The pounding all around us did cause some minor damage and several injuries. Unfortunately I lost two crew members.”

General Doolittle was stunned with by the revelation. “I don't know what to say Captain. I don't know how this happened, but I promise you I'll find out and make sure it doesn't happen again.”

“You can start by training your men in ship identification. The Italians all have red and white diagonal stripes on their bows. Once early in the war, some of their ships were attacked by their own planes. To make sure that didn't happen again, they painted their bows.”

“One of the biggest problems,” the General admitted, “is lack of communication.”

“Tell me about it. On the first day of the landings, the AAF was supposed to provide air cover over the landing zone. They never showed up and the float planes spotting for the shore bombardment were shot down right off the bat. We were asked to provide planes for spotting and then your fighters showed up. One of them took on two of our planes. They had no choice but to shoot it down in self defense.”

“I don't have much to do with the fighters, but its all part of the same problem. Its like were all playing on different teams in the same league competing for the pennant. Hell, we have so many different sub-commands just in the Air Force alone and we hardly talk to each other. Then there is the regular army, the navy, and don't forget the Brits. We should all be on the same team, working together. I'll be sure to bring it up with General Spaaz, the commander of the Mediterranean Air Command.”

“That would be great sir. I have my hands full fighting the Italians and the Germans, without having to fight Americans too.”

“You shouldn't have too. Thanks for brining it to my attention.” General Doolittle paused and then added, “I doubt that anyone bothered to tell the Navy, but we have adopted a theater marking for all allied aircraft operating in the Mediterranean just so something like this wouldn't happen. You might consider painting a yellow band around your wings. I'll have the paint sent to you.”

“That sounds reasonable. I'll have the air group see to it at once.” Sheffield said. Then he added, “I just learned of the new directive for the national insignia yesterday. I'll have them apply both at the same time.”

Colonel Morrison, who had been listing in silence spoke up. “This isn't just a problem here in the Mediterranean but things like this have happened in the Pacific too. There is a mentality in the Air Force and the Army in general that the Navy is insignificant if not non existent altogether. I have worked with the Navy, and you Sheffield, enough to know how valuable the Navy is. There is a lot that we can learn from you. I was so impressed with your dive bombers when I hitched a ride with you. We have our A-36s but they aren't nearly as good as what you guys have.”

“I too have a pretty good appreciation for the Navy.” General Doolittle added. “If it weren't for Admiral Halsey and all the rest of you who were involved, the Tokyo raid would never have happened.” He looked at his watch and said, “Damn, I have a meeting to get to. I'd like to talk more Sheffield, but I promise something will be done about all of this. It was good see you again. Maybe we'll run into each other again somewhere.”

"It was good to see you too General."

General Doolittle left, leaving Sheffield and Harvey to themselves. "Don't you have to leave too, Harvey?"

"No I have the whole afternoon free. What about you?"

"Me too."

"Well old pal, how about I buy lunch for you. I don't know about you, but I'm hungry."

"That would be great, Thanks. And by the way, thanks for any help you can be to us."

"I'm really sorry about all of this. One of these days something like this is going to happen and it isn't going to end well. So what will you have?"

"The French did sandwich sounds good."

"I'll have one too." Harvey said as he called the waiter over.

After placing the order, Harvey asked, "So how have you been otherwise?"

"Pretty good. I've been from one end of the Atlantic to the other since I dropped you off in the Azores. From there we spent some time in the South Atlantic operating out of Rio. Then we were in the North Atlantic operating above Arctic Circle."

"I'd say you've been around. Since I saw you last, I went to London, then back to Washington. After that I've been to Australia and several places throughout the South Pacific."

"It sound's like you've got me beat there." Sheffield said. Then he asked, "How's Marcella? Are you two still honeymooning?"

"She's fine. With all of my traveling I haven't been home much, but she has been pretty understanding. What about you, are you still seeing the woman that accompanied you to the banquet that night? What was her name?"

"Her name is Paula. Yeah, after I got back from the South Atlantic we saw each other a quite a bit. Things just weren't going anywhere so we called it off."

"Too bad, she was quite attractive."

"I did run into her when I got back from up north and she's seeing someone else now."

"What about you Pal, are you seeing any one now?"

Before Sheffield could answer, their food was brought to them.

"As a matter of fact I am. I have been seeing an old friend of my wife's."

"How's that working out?"

"Quite well, actually." Sheffield said. "I'm really falling for her. We've know each other for a long time and I knew her pretty good already. In fact I've known her almost as long as I've known you. She was just transferred from Hawaii to Bethesda, just outside of Washington. She's a Commander in the Navy Nurses

Corps. Before sailing she spent her entire leave with me. I even took her home with me for a week.”

“That sounds pretty serious alright. I think its great. Especially where you already know her so well. It cuts out all of the guessing.”

“The only thing that is getting in the way is my wife.”

“That would be a problem, if she were alive. How long has she been gone now? Over a year and half. It looks to me like you're the only one getting in the way of letting things happen. Take my advice Pal, go for it. Is she crazy about you?”

“Very much so.”

“It sounds to me like you've got it for her too. What are you waiting for man? I had to go hunting to find Marcella, and then after I found her I had to chase her. Here you have a ready made love affair that just fell into your lap. How often dose that happen. I'll tell you, not very often. Let me ask you this, is she pretty?”

“Thats a funny question. She's much more attractive than I ever remembered her to be.”

“I don't know what you're waiting for man. I'll tell you, after my first wife and I split up it didn't take me long to jump right back into the game. I'm sure its different when you lose someone like you did, but its been long enough. Take it from me, life is too short to live it alone. Say this is a good sandwich, thanks for suggesting it.”

“Thanks for your advice, Harv. It has really been on my mind. I got a letter from her yesterday and I wanted to think about things before I right back.”

“When it comes to women, you don't think with your head man, you use your heart. So what are you doing this afternoon?”

“I really don't know?” Sheffield answered.

“Let me ask you something. Have you ever done much horseback riding?”

“When I was kid, I used to take care of my father-in-law's stables and Geannie and I used to ride all the time. I haven't done much since then.”

“Did I ever tell you that I started my career in the army in the Cavalry?”

“I think you mentioned it.”

“I grew up riding horses on my grandfather's cattle ranch near Dennison, Texas. It now belongs to my mother. When I decided to go into the Army, the Cavalry was the place I wanted to be. I suppose I had read too many stories of the glory days of the old west as kid. When I graduated from Westpoint in twenty, my first assignment was with the Seventh Cavalry. That was Custer's old outfit, you know. Anyway I was stationed at Camp Douglas on the Arizona-Mexico border. After patrolling the border for two years they came around asking for volunteers for flight school.

“That's getting off the subject of riding horses. Any way, the reason I asked, is that I found a place

were you can ride camels. That's what I was figuring on doing this afternoon. Are you game?"

"Sure, why not." Sheffield agreed. "I don't have anything better to do. I have a car and driver and an interpreter who speaks French. Tell them where to go and they'll get us there. By the way I am thinking about checking into the hotel here."

"I'm staying here. It's not a bad place at all."

"Thanks for lunch, let me go check in and stow my gear and I'll meet you in the lobby."

"Sounds good. I'll see you in a few minutes."

Captain Brason approached the counter where Petty Officer Gover and Seaman Ballard were waiting. "I'm going to check in to a room. The least I can do is buy you a room for night. Go get our gear and bring it in."

After getting checked in, the Navy Captain and the Army Air Force Colonel, left the hotel together. Morris had the staff car waiting at the curb. Harvey explained to Simon where he wanted to go. Simon in turn asked for directions from someone on the street. Together he and Morris figured out how to get there after stopping once along the way for further directions.

Before long, they arrived at a place in the foothills just south of the city. When they pulled up, Harvey said, "This place reminds me a lot of my mother's ranch. Only instead of horses and cattle, they have camels in the corals."

The Algerian attendants naturally didn't speak English but did speak French. Seaman Ballard explained that the officers with him desired to ride some camels. In the exchange that followed, the attendant wanted to know if they had any riding experience. When he was told that they had ridden horses, that was good enough. A price was negotiated and three camels were brought out to be saddled and harnessed. The third camel was for the attendant who would be their guide.

That's when Sheffield suggested that Simon come along to interpret for them. While he was at it, he invited Morris to join them. After determining that both sailors also had horseback experience, two more camels were bought out and readied for the trek.

To be saddled and harnessed, the camels dutifully got down on the ground while the attendant and his assistants prepared the animals. Once they were ready, the attendant showed them how to mount up. They each climbed onto their respective mounts and pulled back on the reins as instructed. It was quite interesting as camels rose to their feet. Once they were on all fours, the riders were much higher off the ground than on horseback. Not only were the camels taller than a horse, but their humps boosted the rider even higher.

The attendant had the men form a line, with Seaman Ballard right behind the guide so he could pass along information to the others. Next in line was Captain Brason, followed by Colonel Morrison, and

Yeoman Gover brought up the rear. Other than being higher off the ground, riding camel wasn't all that different from riding a horse.

The guide took them higher into the mountains. The Atlas Mountains have a typical Mediterranean climate, warm and dry in the summer. The northern slopes of the mountains were forested with Algerian Fir, Atlas Cedar, pine, and cork oak. The guide explained the various things that they came across. He said that sometimes in the summer a hot, dry wind, known as the Sirocco, blows north from the Sahara across the mountains, causing dusty, dry conditions along the northern coast of Africa.

“This is the kind of outing that Geannie would have loved.” Sheffield thought to himself. “I'm not sure about Ramona. She has a sense of adventure about her too, but that's something I'll have to find out about her.”

The ride took them an hour and half up and the same amount of time coming back. Everyone seemed to have enjoyable time. It proved worthwhile to bring the two sailors along.

That evening Sheffield and Harvey attended a concert of the US Army Band in an amphitheater in a park near the hotel. The band was on an overseas tour of North Africa at the time, having arrived just the previous month. After returning to the hotel, the two friends talked late into the evening. Meanwhile Morris and Simon were free to go off on their own.

Harvey had to be at meeting the first thing in the morning, so he and Sheffield parted company, wondering when and where they would cross paths again. Before returning to the ship, Sheffield wanted to see more of the city. Again Simon's command of French proved just as valuable as Morris's Portuguese had been in Rio. The more he was around these two young men, the more impressed he was with them. They were certainly not your typical sailors. So many sailors became corrupted by the environment they found themselves in, but not these two. They managed to hold to their innocence. They reminded him so much of himself as a young officer thrust into that same world and he too had managed to hold on to the values that his parents had instilled in him. These two must have come from a similar background. It's too bad the order of things wouldn't allow him to get closer to them.

On the way back to the dock, Sheffield had them make one more stop on his self guided tour of the city. They had driven past it before and Sheffield wanted to see the Great Mosque of Algiers, located in the northeastern part of the city next to the harbor. Upon going inside they were greeted by the Ulama who spoke French. He was more than happy to show the Americans around the mosque which he said was originally built in the year 1097. He explained that other additions were added in 1324 and again in 1840.

The cleric also told them about the fundamental beliefs of Islam, including the story of the Prophet Muhammad and the significance of the Koran. Like most Americans, the three men knew very little about Islam. They were surprised to learn the Koran contained an account of many of the people, including

Jesus, and stories found in the Bible although the details varied considerably. After spending a couple of hours with the Ulama, they came away with a better appreciation for their Muslim brothers.

There was still more of Algiers to see, but it would have to wait for another time, after all they were bound to be back. The LCVP was waiting at the dock to take them and the Captain's staff car back to the ship.

Once aboard, Sheffield unpacked before heading to the bridge to check in with Commander Terry and see if there was anything pressing that needed his attention. He found nothing out of the ordinary and relieved Hank so he could have a little time ashore. Being Sunday, Sheffield broke away to attend Lieutenant Fellows afternoon service.

On Monday morning, Captain Brason was summoned to Admiral Weston's flagship. His launch came along side the Bismark and he scrambled up the sea ladder and onto to the quarter deck. After rendering a salute he made his way to the Admiral's ready room as directed.

"You wanted to see me sir?" he asked as he saluted.

"Admiral Weston returned the salute and said, "Have a seat Captain." The Admiral looked at him for a moment and said, "How in the hell did you do it Brason? As soon as we pulled in, I contacted Admiral Hewitt and explained the situation to him. He began attempting to work his way up the chain of command in the AAF only to get the run around or his calls weren't returned. Then this morning all hell broke loose and I understand that you had something to do with it."

"I might have ran into a couple of old army buddies and something may have been said. Sir."

"All I can say is that you have friends in high places. The first thing this morning, Admiral Hewitt got a call from Major General Doolittle the commander Northwest African Strategic Air Force. He apologized profusely for the mistake and promised that steps were being taken that something like that won't happen again.

"No sooner than he got off the phone with him that I got a call from a Colonel Morrison from General Hap Arnold's staff in Washington. He talked about greater cooperation between the AAF commands and the Navy.

"Then the commander of the fighter group stationed at the Maison Blanche Airport called and offered to share their facilities with the air group next time you're in port.

"Lastly, General Eisenhower called. By the way, he wants to see you in his office. Just drop by and they'll get you in as quickly as possible. You managed to do in a few minutes over some beers what would have taken days or even weeks to do by cutting through all of the red tape."

"Like I said sir, I just happened to run into a couple of old Army buddies."

Admiral Weston finished with, "Now that we have that all straightened out, we're to return to Sicily and pick up where we left off. General Patton is pushing on to Palermo and could use our help. We sail in the morning. Be ready."

"We're ready sir. Will there be anything else sir."

"Just keep up the good work, Captain. That will be all. Dismissed."

From the Bismark, Sheffield had the coxswain take him to the docks, where he took a cab to General Eisenhower's headquarters. Upon identifying himself, he was told to have a seat. He only waited about fifteen minutes before he was ushered into the General's office. Sheffield saluted and was invited to have a seat. The General was not what he expected. He was only about eight years older and slightly taller than Sheffield. He had a fair complexion with blue eyes and light brown hair, although he was almost completely bald, much more so than Sheffield. His square shoulders, adorned with four stars, gave him a commanding appearance. When he shook his hand, Sheffield couldn't help but notice how big his hands were. But his most distinctive feature was his broad grin. Sheffield felt instantly at ease in his presence.

"So you're Captain Brason. Its a real pleasure to meet you. I've heard a lot about you in the last the few days."

"I hope it was all good, sir."

"By all means, Sheffield. Do you mind in I call you Sheffield."

"Not at all sir."

"My friends call me lke. Say, thanks for taking the time to come and see me, I just wanted to thank you for all of your hard work during the Sicily operation. I understand that it was your tactical and strategic prowess in how you deployed your air group that made the difference in several instances. From what I've been told, you really had to stretch your resources pretty thing to cover all the bases, but yet you managed."

"With all due respect sir, it was the pilots that made the difference." Sheffield said humbly.

"That's true of all fighting men, but its their commanders who get the credit. Do you want to know why? Its because they have ability to figure out how to best use their resources and then have the guts to give the orders. I think that describes you to a tee. I could use a man just like you. Its just too bad that you're Navy. I'm just kidding Sheffield."

"Army, Navy. We're all on the same side sir. At least I hope we are. I wasn't so sure a fews ago."

"Yes, I know. That was unfortunate."

"That's what I had to tell the families of the two crewmen that I lost."

"I don't know what to say, except these things happen. We sit here in our ivory towers looking at the big picture and sometimes details get over looked. We try to fit all the pieces together but forget to have the pieces talk to each other. The breakdown was in communications. Just like that plane your men were forced

to shoot down. From what I understand, the pilot's just fine and is back in the air.”

“I'm glad to hear that sir.”

“So now that we have some of the problems identified, I've directed Admiral Hewitt to send you back into the game. My friend, George, can use your help as he pushes on to Palermo. Once we've got Sicily secured, I can use your help with the next big operation. You'll be getting more information on that later.”

“That's what we're here for General. I have to admit that at first I was disappointed that we weren't sent to the Pacific where I thought we were needed most. Now I can see that we're needed just as much here.”

“There's one more thing Captain Brason. I have written up a letter of commendation that will be sent Washington to be placed in your personnel file.”

“Thank you for your kindness sir.”

“No, thank you to you and your crew and pilots. You'll have to excuse me now Captain, I have to get to staff meeting. Thank you again for stopping by.” At that, Ike stood up. As Sheffield stood up, General Eisenhower again offered his hand. “Good luck.” he said, shaking his hand. He walked to the door with his hand on Sheffield's shoulder and as they parted, he said, “I hope to meet you again somewhere, sometime.”

“You just never know do you, sir. I didn't expect to run into Harvey and General Doolittle the other day.”

Sheffield made his way back to ship and returned to the bridge and gave the order to prepare for getting under way. Then he went down to his office and wrote the letter that he had been putting off.

July 19, 1943

Aboard the USS Reprisal

Algiers Bay off Algiers, Algeria

Dear Harmona,

The reason the only thing the radio and newspapers reported on was the Army is because they thought that they were the only ones there. It was really kind of frustrating because nobody was talking to anybody else.

First, the ABF didn't show up when they said they would. Consequently the

cruiser float planes were all shot down so we had to provide spotters for the cruisers offshore, then we had to provide planes to keep them from being shot down. That didn't stop the RAF. A couple of our planes had to shoot down one of theirs in self defense.

Then we were bombed by a flight of Army bombers who mistook us for the Italian Fleet. It was pretty hair raising for a few minutes. We weren't hit, but it did cause a little damage and we lost two sailors. We had to hurry and get out there before they came back for us.

We got back on Friday the 16th and will be leaving again tomorrow to return to the waters off Sicily. While at anchor, I did get a chance to go ashore and visit the city. It wasn't quite what I was expecting. I knew that Algeria had been a French colony for that last hundred and some odd years, but I didn't realize how French it is. A good share of the citizens are French. Even the Algerian population have been assimilated into French culture. I was expecting to find the women wearing those long veils but they were also wearing the latest fashions right out of Paris.

We just missed Bastille Day by two days. That is to the French what the Fourth of July is to us. From what I understand they go all out, even here in the French Colonies.

The language wasn't a problem as I had my own interpreter. You remember Yeoman Gover, well his friend, Seaman Ballard speaks French. I took them both along with me, Morris as my driver and Simon as my interpreter. They are incredible young men, a rare breed.

Until just recently, Algeria was under the control of the Vichy French. When the Allies invaded North Africa back in November, most of the local French officials surrendered without a fight and switched allegiance to De Gaulle's Free French government in exile.

Oh I have to tell you, I went for a three hour camel ride. It was quite an adventure. It was the kind of adventure that Geannie would have loved. I know that you're the adventuresome kind and I got to wondering if that's the sort of thing you would enjoy.

In this far away corner of the world, I ran into a couple of old friends, Army buddies I call them. One was my friend Harvey Morrison who I first met in Hawaii back in 1925. Then we crossed paths again when we were both stationed in Washington. Since the war started, we have crossed paths on occasion. The other was Jimmy Doolittle who I got acquainted while working on the Tokyo Raid. They were both here for meetings with the AAF commanders. It really is a small world.

See, I told you that getting involved would make a difference. That is what I did when I was made the executive officer on the Big E. It served me well then and it has ever since. Not only do you have a better idea of what your people are doing, but it gives you a break from the mundane that can result from being in charge.

Now, in response to your letter. I must admit that I got your letter when we first arrived here. I have waited to write back because I wanted to think about how to respond. I have done a lot of thinking and my old friend Harvey had some good advice for me as well.

It occurred to me that the thing that is holding me back was your relationship with Geannie. Harvey reminded me that that only would only be a problem if Geannie were still alive. He's right.

Another conclusion that I have come to is that you and I have a long solid relationship. A ready made love affair, if you would. We already know each other very well and have a solid friendship to build a loving relationship on. I love you and you love me, what more can we ask for?

Me getting past whats holding me back, thats what.

Harvey also said that when it comes to love, you think with your heart, not your head. I'm afraid that I have been doing too much thinking with my head. I'm ready to put my heart into it instead.

I have been trying to decide if I want you or need you. There I go thinking again. The answer is both. Being single and alone leaves a big void in my life that I need filled. I want you to fill it. I know for sure that Geannie would not want me to be alone the rest of my life.

Absence has truly made the heart fonder. I too long to be with you. Geannie and I had a long distance love affair all of the times that I was away. I see no reason why it cant be the same with you. One of these days, this war will be over and I won't be in the Navy forever. I can see us growing old together. We both have a lot of good years ahead of us.

Just so you know where I stand, let me say this. I am falling in love with you and its wonderful. Now that I can see what was holding me back, I think (there I go again) that I can now let go and jump in with both feet.

As a token of my love and affection, I'd like to get something for you the next time we are here. Something French, like a dress or something. Would it be too ungentlemanly of me to ask you your size? I wouldn't want to guess because it would be rather difficult to return.

I suppose that I have gone on long enough. You'll grow old just reading this. I don't know when I'll see you again. I sure hope its not another thirteen months. But we could be here for a while. From what I understand the next operation is in the planning stages and it involves us. However long it takes will be too long. But when I do return it will a joy, to use your word, to take you into my arms and kiss your tender lips.

Love, in the true sence of the word, Sheffield

Then Brigadier General James H. Doolittle, of the Tokyo Raid in April 1942, assumed command of the Twelfth Air Force in September 1942 and arrived in Algiers after being liberated during operation Torch. Later promoted to Major General, he commanded the Northwest African Strategic Air Force during Operation Husky.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower was the supreme allied commander of the Mediterranean Theater of Operations during Operation Husky and Operation Avalanche with his headquarters in Constantine, Algeria.

