

Chapter XXXIII

Angel of Mercy

September 23, 1943 – December 7, 1943

It was late Thursday afternoon, getting on toward evening, when the Succor nestled into her berth. The Manhattan skyline filled his porthole. He had only been to New York City twice before. Once in 1918 during the last war when he was a cadet aboard the Arizona. Now, this was a new war and the Arizona rested on the bottom of Pearl Harbor. It was obvious that on this visit, he wasn't going to have the opportunity of going into the city.

As the lights on the skyscrapers began coming on, lighting up the city, the medial staff aboard the Succor were busy preparing to discharge their patients. All of the records had to be gathered and put with the corresponding individual. By early evening everyone was ready to be moved. All that stood between that moment and leaving the ship was a good night's sleep.

The next morning began early. Last minute details were worked out and breakfast was served. Several railroad cars were parked on the dock next to the ship. The wounded men were taken off the ship and placed aboard the railroad cars according to their destination.

The majority, consisting of soldiers, were bound for Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington D.C.. Of the Navy personnel, some were going to Chelsea Naval Hospital in Boston, a good number were going to Bethesda, and the rest were going to Portsmouth Naval Hospital in Norfolk.

As Sheffield's bed was wheeled from the ship and onto the dock, Yeoman Gover followed behind, carrying what few things they had. The Red Cross railroad cars were painted olive drab with a large red cross superimposed over a white square. On the outside, they looked like a regular troop transport. Inside it looked like a very narrow hospital ward lined with bunks or spaces for wheeled gurneys. At one end was nurses station.

As Captain Brason was wheeled aboard, he was greeted by a smiling Lieutenant Reed. "Good morning, Captain. I'll be accompanying you to Bethesda today. If there is anything I can do for you, please don't hesitate to let me know."

The orderlies secured his gurney to the floor and side of the car to keep it in place. A chair was provided for his personal assistant. The men who were not confined to bed were brought over in wheel chairs and given one of the bunks. The transfer went quickly and was quite orderly. Finally the nurse responsible for each car checked their lists to make sure they had the right people going to the right places. In addition to the nurse was a pharmacist's mate and four orderlies.

At a minute or two before seven o'clock, the cars were pulled from the dock by a single locomotive and taken to Penn Station where all except those going to Boston were attached to the end of southbound passenger train.

Right on schedule, at two minutes after eight, the train left the station. From his window, Sheffield watched the crowds of people on the platform as they waved the train off. He got a good look at the city as the train rolled out of the station and across the Hudson River into New Jersey. They hadn't gone far when the train stopped at the station in Newark. The stop was timed precisely as were the stops in Trenton, Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore.

The train came to a stop at Union Station in Washington D.C. one minute ahead of schedule at eleven fifty seven. The cars were quickly detached from the train and moved to a siding. From his window, Sheffield saw a number of trucks backed up to the loading dock along side the train. Some of the trucks were olive drab with a white star on the door. Others were a light gray with U.S. Navy on their doors. All of the trucks were covered with canvas sporting red crosses.

Sheffield waited for his turn to be transferred to his truck. Once secured in place, he looked over to see Lieutenant Commander Bashor on the gurney next to him. It was the first time that he had seen him since the staff meeting the morning of the attack. Commander Bashor had bandages covering most of his body. He was barely able to turn his head to return his greeting. He was obviously sedated by morphine to keep him comfortable. The back of truck can be a bumpy ride. Sheffield was grateful that he only had to deal with a broken leg that wouldn't stop tingling. He would however give anything to do something beside lie on his back or half way sit up.

The ten mile trip to the hospital in Bethesda took about twenty minutes. Without being able to see out, he had no way to get his bearings. He figured that they were there when the truck came to complete stop and shut off its engine. The back flap was opened and blinding light flooded the back of the truck. Sheffield waited for his turn to be wheeled down the ramp.

When he came to a stop on the level ground he looked up to see an angel of mercy hovering above him. She was the most beautiful thing that he had seen in the three months that he had been a way. The noonday sun formed a halo around her face as she bent over him. With tears streaming down her cheeks she smothered him with kisses.

"Is this how you greet all of the arriving patients?"

"Just the ones that I'm in love with."

"I brought you a little surprise. Do you remember Gerry?"

Ramona had been so focused on Sheffield that she hadn't seen Lieutenant Reed at his feet. Turning her attention to her former colleague, "Gerry! She shrieked with more tears. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm attached to the hospital ship that brought him back to the states. Over the last eight days I've got to know the Captain pretty well. He's a keeper. If I were you, I'd fix him up and take him home with me."

"That's exactly what I aim to do. So Gerry are you here for long?"

Unfortunately not. As soon as the transfer is complete, I've got to go back to Union Station and catch the afternoon train back to New York."

There was one more hug, Gerry said, "Gee it was good to see you again Mutt."

"You too, Jeff. I wish we could visit longer but I guess we both have to get back to work."

Lieutenant Reed returned to transferring the patients in her charge, Ramona returned her attention to Sheffield.

"I'm sure you remember Yeoman Gover."

"I sure do. How are you Morris. I wasn't expecting you."

"The Captain insisted that I come along. He's kept me busy too."

Ramona took Sheffield's hand as she walked beside him as he was wheeled into the hospital with his traction equipment still attached. "Do you know how worried I was about you? I'm so glad to see you again, although I wish it were under better circumstances. I never it thought that it would be like this."

"I've had a lot of time to think over the last almost two weeks. Do you want to know what I thought about?" With out waiting for a response, he answered his own question. "I have been thinking about us and how much I truly do love you."

Yeoman Gover tagged along behind as they talked all the way to his room. Because of his rank, he was given a private room on the twelfth floor of the twenty story hospital tower that opened on February 5, 1942. The room featured a large picture window facing south, with Washington, D.C. off in the distance.

Ramona had cleared her agenda for the afternoon so she could devote her full attention to Sheffield. It had been several hours since breakfast, so the first thing was to have lunch brought in. She stayed with him as he had x-rays and host of blood tests taken. Later in the afternoon the doctors who were assigned to his his case called on him.

The first was Lieutenant Commander Taylor James who would take care of him in general. After reviewing the x-rays, his assessment was that he would need another four weeks in traction and an additional six weeks in a cast after that. He also said that even though the bruising and swelling on his shin above his ankle had gone down and the tissue damage beneath the skin was healing, but the shinbone was still bruised. His blood pressure was returning to normal as his body was rebuilding his blood supply.

The other doctor was Commander Woodruff Stansfield, a neurosurgeon who would take care of the nerve damage. Commander Stansfield explained, "What you are experiencing with the tingling in you leg is called peripheral neuropathy resulting from damage to nerves of the peripheral nervous system. It is caused either by diseases, the side-effects of systemic illness, or in your case, trauma to the nerve.

"When you broke your leg, the bone put undue pressure on the nerve which nicked the outer protective layer called the epineurium. The process we use to repair the epineurium is called neurorrhaphy

in which torn pieces of the epineurium are sutured together. Because of the minute size of things, we use a binocular microscope to magnify the area concerned. While you're in traction is a good time to do it since your leg will need to be immobilized to allow the nerve to heal and should be healed enough by the time you come out of traction.

"At best, it will completely alleviate the tingling sensation. At worst, it will reduce it somewhat. So what do you say Captain? I can schedule you for next Tuesday if that will work for you."

"First of all, thank you for explaining it in terms that I can understand. I'm not the kind of person that rushes into things. Can I talk it over with Ramona first?"

"Certainly. Commander Katmuth is quite familiar with all of the procedures that we do here."

"Well," Ramona began, "it's not my leg, but I can assure you Sheffield that Doctor Stansfield has performed countless surgeries like this. This kind of injury is common in battlefield wounds and the success rate is very high. I don't see where you have anything to lose."

Sheffield thought about for a moment. "Since I'm already laid up, we might as well take care of it. It won't fix itself will it?"

"No, sir. Not usually. So then Tuesday it is. If you have any questions, just call me. Before the surgery we'll give you a more in depth briefing so you will know fully what to expect."

Commander Stansfield stood to leave and shook hands with both Sheffield and Ramona.

All this time, Morris made himself scarce and sat out in the lounge next to the nurses' station. He kept busy looking at all of the recent magazines. Toward supper time he inquired as to the whereabouts of the cafeteria. One of the nurses directed him to the elevator and told him how to find it on the first floor. After dinner he came back up to visitor's lounge and looked at some more magazines.

The long day and all of travel caught up with him and he began to be very drowsy. It occurred to him that he didn't have a place to stay, so he laid down on the couch to rest until Ramona left. He figured he'd just sleep on the floor in the Captain's room.

In the meanwhile, Sheffield's dinner was brought to him. Ramona nibbled on some of his meal as they talked and got caught up.

At one point she noticed that his hospital gown was quite dirty. "How long have you been wearing that thing?" she asked.

"I don't know, a day or two, I guess."

Ramona got up and went over to the closet and got a fresh one for him. She brought it back and helped him sit up to undo the ties in the back of his gown. What she did next unnerved Sheffield. As she had done with hundreds of patients over the years, she matter-of-factly removed it, leaving him naked and exposed.

“Hey, what are you doing?” Sheffield cried, attempting to cover what he could.

“Oh come on, I've seen thousands of men.”

“Yeah, but you haven't seen me.”

“How many times has a nurse seen you over the years?”

“That's different, they were just nameless faces doing their job. They weren't you.”

“Just relax Sheffield. I'm not going to do anything to you. All I'm going to do is help you change your gown. Say how long has it been since you have been washed down?”

He gave the same answer, “I don't know, a day or two, I guess.”

“Let's get you cleaned up first.”

Sheffield squirmed as she filled a basin and got a sponge and a towel. He really tensed up as she sat down next to him on the bed and began to gently wet down his chest. “Would you rather have someone who loves you do this or would you rather me get a big brawny orderly who could care less?”

“Actually, that's who has been doing it. I guess I would rather have you do it.” At that Sheffield relaxed and let her do her job.

Ramona lovingly cleaned all of the places that she could reach. The whole time she maintained an air of professionalism as she cleansed the body of the man she loved. Although she maintained her professional decorum but whatever may have entertained her thoughts, she kept it to herself. When she was done and he was clean and dry, she helped him on with the clean gown. Then she washed his face. “There now,” she smiled, “That probably feels a lot better doesn't.”

“Yes, it feels good to be clean again.” Sheffield said. “Thank you.”

“How long has been since you shaved?” she asked as she picked up a tube of Barbasol and squeeze some thick shaving cream into her hand.

“About the same.” Sheffield replied as she began lathering his face, chin, and throat.

She picked up straight razor and softly sang as she sat next to him on the bed and gave him a good close shave. When she was finished. She took a hot, damp wash cloth and cleaned off the left over shaving cream.

“Lets see what we have here.” she said as she reached into the shaving kit. “Oh look, Sheffield. Old Spice, your favorite.” She poured some into the palm of her hand. She then lightly rubbed her hand together and applied it to his face. “I just love the fragrance of Old Spice.” She said as she put her face close to his and took a sniff. With her face in such close proximity to his, a kiss naturally followed.

By then he was completely relaxed. Exhaustion from all of the travel set in and he dozed off to sleep. Ramona left him to get his rest. Before turning out the light, she jotted down her home telephone number as well as her office number and left it by the telephone. She closed the blinds and turned out the light.

As she neared the nurses' station, she saw Morris sacked out on the couch. She gently woke him and said, "Come on Morris, why don't you come home with me. I have an extra room that you can stay in until we find some quarters for you."

Morris sleepily grabbed his sea bag and briefcase full of the papers that he had been working on and followed her to the elevator. Once outside, the cool fall evening air woke him up. At Ramona's, they stayed up late and Morris, having been at the Captain's side the whole time, unfolded to her the tale of all that had happened. That night, Morris was glad to sleep in a real bed rather than a bunk.

The next morning, being a Saturday, Ramona didn't have to be at work. She let Morris sleep in and figured that Sheffield was doing the same. The first thing she did was to call the Brasons to relate everything that she knew about Sheffield's condition and the ordeal that he had been through.

Naturally Emmett and Ellen wanted to come and see him right away. Ramona suggested they wait until after his surgery. They decided on Wednesday. Walt and Sarah wanted to come as well and the middle of the week worked best for Walt's schedule. Ramona offered to put them up in her two spare bedrooms, an invitation they gladly accepted.

She had already had her breakfast by the time Morris woke up. Being a farm boy, he wasn't accustomed to sleeping in. Ramona fixed him some breakfast while he cleaned up and got ready for the day. After he had something to eat, they went back to the hospital.

Since Ramona was off duty Saturday and Sunday, she spent every waking moment at Sheffield's side. He was thrilled that his family was coming to see him. Using her connections, Ramona arranged for quarters and office space for Morris. He was given a bunk in the barracks for the enlisted personnel assigned to the hospital. As for an office, he was given a storage room not far from Captain Brason's room. Some surplus office equipment were provided along with the supplies that he needed. Once his office was set up on Monday morning, he went to work on the commendations and recognitions that the Captain wanted to award. Another of his assignments was to collect a report on the conditions of Reprisal crewman at the hospital and keep the Captain apprised of their conditions.

Ramona had to return to her duties on Monday morning as well. She went early to see Sheffield before going to her office. She assigned herself to make two nursing calls on the patient in room 1256 each day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. She timed her afternoon visit that day to be there when Commander Stansfield met with Sheffield to explain more of the details of the surgery to him. That evening, she lingered long after she was finished for the day.

After he had his dinner, she kicked off her shoes and laid down on the bed next to Sheffield and they talked about a host of things.

At one point, Sheffield asked, "What if we didn't wait until after the war to get married?"

"I'd marry you whenever you wanted." Ramona replied without hesitation.

"But what about your career? Wouldn't you have to resign from the Nurse's Corp like you did when you married Tom?"

"Yes, but being married to you is worth it. I'd do it in heart beat." she replied without hesitation.

"You'd do that for me?"

"Yes, but there is a chance I can have my cake and eat it too."

"How's that? I thought they were pretty strict about that."

"They are, but there is a well guarded secret that lately they have made case by case exceptions, but its very rare. They have been loosing dozens of nurses every month because of the restriction. But in my case, where I am in the position that I am, they just might make an exception for me. Not that I'm irreplaceable or anything, but I am well established and they would be hard pressed to find someone to take my place. Besides, they're not likely to put me on a hospital ship or send me to a field hospital somewhere. It won't hurt to ask?"

"But what if they deny your request?"

"Then I'll resign. Look, there are plenty of hospitals here in Washington. I have some connections at George Washington. I'll bet they could make a place for me." Then she concluded, "I'm not too worried about it. Something will work out."

"So when will you ask?"

"When you ask me to marry you."

"Fair enough."

They went on to talk for quite a while before she went home for the evening.

The same pattern was to become part of her schedule for the next several weeks. Having Sheffield there with her rather than in the hostile waters of the Mediterranean gave her great comfort. She felt as if she could undo what the enemy had done to him. She also realized that once he had mended, that he would most likely be sent back into the fight somewhere in the war that filled the entire world.

On Tuesday morning she left her office on the first floor and went up to the twelfth floor in time for Sheffield to be taken to surgery. She and Yeoman Gover got to see him for a few minutes before they took him away to prepare for the operation.

She tried to focus on her work, knowing that he was on the operating table. Even though she knew that there was minimal risk involved, she still worried about him. She directed her secretary to put through any calls regarding Sheffield immediately. Each time the phone rang, her heart jumped. Finally she got the call that she was waiting for. Sheffield was out of surgery and everything went well. She would be able to see him in about an hour.

Sheffield was still groggy and incoherent from the anesthesia when Ramona came into his room. A rather comical and nonsensical conversation ensued. Rather than attempt to engage him in conversation at that time, she simply sat next to him, holding his hand. When he was finally in complete control of his faculties, Commander Stansfield came into the room to talk to him about how the surgery went and what was to follow. Once he was out of his cast, he would need some therapy. After the doctor left, Ramona finally got to talk to him before she had to go back to work. Again that evening, she stayed after work and spent the evening with Sheffield before going home. Once again, she called the Brasons to tell them how the surgery went.

Right at seven o'clock in the morning on Wednesday September 29th, twelve minutes before sunrise, Walt and Sarah and Emmett and Ellen pulled out of the senior Brasons' driveway and got on the road for the much anticipated reunion. Including a brief stop in Charlottesville, the two hundred thirty five mile trip took just over five hours. Arriving right at noon, they opted to have lunch before going to the hospital.

They entered the impressive twenty story tower and took elevator up to the twelfth floor. The nurse on duty at the nurses' station directed them to room 1256. Ellen burst through the door without knocking, the rest followed.

Sheffield had anticipated their arrival and gladly received them. They gathered around his bed, all talking at once, expressing how good it was to see them. Finally Emmett had to bring order to the chaos

"Its so good to see all of you, thanks for coming." Sheffield said. "When I last saw you, I had no idea that our next meeting would be like this."

"We just thank God that your going to be alright." Emmett said on behalf of all of them.

"So little brother," Walt began. "tell us how you came to be in this fix."

Sheffield began at the beginning and told the story of that fateful September 11th. Ellen cringed as she listened to what her baby boy had to endure. He went on to tell about being on the hospital ship and his voyage home, up to the point that he first saw Ramona looking like an angel of mercy.

At that point Ellen interrupted, "Where is Ramona anyway?"

"She's probably back from lunch now. Let me call her."

Sheffield picked up the telephone on the stand next to his bed and dialed her extension. "Hi Ramona, they're here."

He listened to her response and said, "I'll see you in a minute."

Turning back to his guests he said, "She'll be right up."

Walt wanted to know about his surgery and prognosis. Sheffield was explaining it when Ramona came into the room. Again there was another round of hugs and greetings. Ramona had come to feel that

she was now part of these sweet, wonderful people and longed for the day when she was invited to join their family. According to Sheffield, perhaps that day wouldn't be too far off. Ramona was able to stay only for a few minuets before she had to get back to a pressing issue that required her attention. As she left, she directed that an orderly bring some more chairs into his room so there would be seating for all four of them.

The reunion continued into the afternoon. At his usual time, Yeoman Gover brought some commendations for him to sign. There was a round of introductions as Yeoman 2nd Class Morris Gover meet the Captain's family. They had already heard so much about him on Sheffield's previous visits home.

Ellen interjected, "My granddaughter, Ruth Ann, would love to meet you. She just turned twenty in June." Then she boldly asked, "And how old are you, Morris?"

"I just turned twenty three, ma'am." he answered.

"Why that's just perfect." Ellen exclaimed. "I'd love for you to meet her sometime. She is such a lovely girl and very pretty too. See here's he picture." she said as she unfolded her wallet.

Morris blushed at the attempt of match making. "She is quite pretty, ma'am."

Ellen continued, "Ever since Sheffield told us about you, she has talked of wanting to meet you someday and hopefully go out with you. You see, there aren't any young men left in town, they're all off in the service. The poor girl hasn't had a young man call on her in months."

Not knowing what else to say, Morris said, "That would be nice."

Finally Emmet came to the rescue. "For heaven's sake Ellen, stop pestering the young man. A handsome chap like him probably has girl waiting for him back home."

Ellen wouldn't stop. "Well, do you? Where is home anyway?" she persisted.

"I'm from Utah, ma'am. And no, no one is waiting for me, exactly. However, there is this girl that I've been writing to."

"I've never been to Utah. I hear the mountains are something else. Well if you ever get to Roanoke, be sure to come and see us. I'd love to fix you up with Ruth Ann."

"Ellen, leave the poor man alone!" Emmett demanded.

"Well it was certainly nice to meet all of you." Morris said. "Now if you'll excuse me, I need to get back to work." Captain Brason handed him the papers that he had just signed. Morris took them and left the room.

Sheffield's family stayed and visited all after noon. They filled him in on what had been going on back home and what all of the family members were up to. After all, there is only so much you can say in letters. As they visited, they were interrupted a couple of times by nurses who came to check on him. At mid afternoon Commander Stansfield also stopped in on his rounds.

After Ramona got off work, she came back upstairs and the three couples sat around a visited late

into the evening. Ramona fit right in with them as if she belonged there. Looking ahead, tentative plans were made for Sheffield and Ramona to go home for Thanksgiving, providing Sheffield was out of traction by then. That evening, Walt and Sarah and Emmett and Ellen followed Ramona home and spent the night. With two spare rooms and an extra bathroom, it worked out just fine. The next morning Walt and Sarah and Emmett and Ellen spent a few hours with Sheffield before they had to start for home. Before they left, Ramona broke away from what she was doing to see them off.

Their visit had been a great boost to Sheffield. In the days that followed, routine set in as he continued to heal. The only thing that kept boredom away was Ramona. Each and every day she stayed long into the evening. It was during those long talks that they drew closer and deepened their relationship. They each learned things about one another that they had not known. The following weekend, Shenan and Emily came to see him as well.

A couple of weeks later, Commander Terry flew up to see him. The Reprisal returned to Norfolk on the 12th of October and went straight to the Navy Yard for permanent repairs. After the ship had been inspected, plans were drawn up for the repairs along with a number of modifications and upgrades. Hank brought the plans for Captain Brason to review along with the paperwork for him to sign authorizing the work to begin. It was estimated that it would take at least four months.

Hank brought him up to date with what took place since he left the ship in Algiers, including the time in dry dock in Gibraltar and cruise home. After Sheffield left on the Succor, Admiral Weston took the rest of his task force back to Salerno to provide fire support. The Reprisal sailed for Gibraltar on the 20th and spent eleven days in dry dock. It took longer than anticipated as some parts had to be flown in from the United States. The ship remained at Gibraltar until she sailed for home on 6th with the rest of Admiral Weston's task force. Before leaving, the air group was hoisted aboard, as the flight deck was unsuited for flight operations.

Upon their return, the Reprisal Air Group and squadrons were disbanded. The Bat Team detachments were reorganized into a specialized night composite squadron of their own consisting of twelve F6F-3Ns still known as the Alleycats, nine SBD-4E Dauntlesses , and nine TBM-1Ds. Designated Night Composite Squadron Seventy Three under the command of Lieutenant Commander Perry, they were conducting training out of Norfolk from the escort carrier USS Chesapeake Bay (formerly classified as an auxiliary carrier). In addition, a quarter of the crew had been transferred to new assignments. In parting, Commander Terry assured Captain Brason the ship and crew anxiously awaited his return.

Yeoman Gover had completed the work on the recognitions. As a result, several medals were awarded along with a host of commendations and a few promotions. There was still plenty of work for him to do. By this time, many of crewmen had been released from the hospital and returned to duty or discharged from the navy altogether. The later group included Commander Bashor.

Now that the ship was back, Morris' focus changed to being the Captain's intermediary and messenger. His job now was to follow the progress of the repairs and report to Captain Brason. He made a few courier trips to Norfolk by train to convey orders or to bring back documents for the Captain's review and signature. Most of the information was exchanged without him having to actually travel to Norfolk. Captain Brason was still very much in command, albeit by long distance. It gave him something constructive to do while he lay in bed day after day with a weight hanging from a cable attached to his leg.

As October was fading away, he received a surprise visit from Debra Watson and Molly. She was wearing the dress that he had given her the day that he had rescued them. They lived in the Washington D.C. area and had stayed in touch with Yeoman Gover. One Sunday, soon after arriving in Bethesda, Morris had gone to see them. She explained to Sheffield that she had wanted to come and see him sooner, but things kept coming up. She actually did come once, but he was asleep at the time and didn't want to disturb him.

Sheffield asked how she was doing. It had now been ten months since her husband had been killed and all that they went through to get home. She said that she could now see the light at the end of the tunnel. While she was there, Sheffield called Ramona and had her come up to his room so she could meet them.

During the first part of November, he had another surprise visitor. This time from Harvey and Marcella Morrison who also still lived in the Washington area. Again, Sheffield called Ramona and she broke away from her work to come up to visit. The Colonel was still on General Arnold's staff, a position that he figured he'd have as long as the General was in that position. After returning from an assignment to the South Pacific, Harv had heard what happened to the Reprisal and inquired as to Sheffield's whereabouts. They invited Sheffield and Ramona to their home for dinner once Sheffield was released from the hospital.

Then came the long awaited day. Lieutenant Commander James and Commander Stansfield agreed that it was time that he could be taken out of traction. Both his bone and nerve had healed sufficiently. The wound from where the bone broke through the skin had healed prior to this time, as had the incision from the surgery. The tingling in his leg had subsided only slightly and still persisted. Doctor Stansfield hoped that it would continue to diminish as the nerve continued to heal. There always the chance that it would continue to be problem, more of an annoyance actually.

The day was Friday, November 19th, after just over two months in traction. The cable was removed and a cast was put on his leg. For the first time he was able to get out of bed and with the crutches, stand up. The best part was that he could finally get dressed! With the cables attached to his leg, there was no way to pull a pair of pants or his skivvies up over it.

He needed a completely new wardrobe as his had been lost in the fire that destroyed his stateroom. For starters he got a few sets of khakis and a set of dress blues with a modified pant leg so it would fit over his cast. A couple pairs of pajamas were also acquired.

For the next few days he mastered walking on crutches sufficiently enough to be allowed to leave the hospital for short amounts of time. Arrangements were made for quarters adjacent to the hospital so he could be close enough to begin therapy. With Thanksgiving approaching, he wanted badly to go home for a few days. Since Ramona would be accompanying him, permission was granted. As an after thought, Yeoman Gover was invited to join them since he had no where to go.

Rather than being cramped up in Ramona's car, they went by train where he could have room to stretch out his leg. They arrived in Roanoke around noon on Wednesday, where they were met at the train station and brought home. Sheffield stayed with his mother and father, while Ramona stayed with Walt and Sarah again. As for Morris, Marie put him up in Austin's old room.

Most of the Brason family were able to gather that year. Of Walt's family; Tim was able to come home on leave. He was still stationed in New Jersey with the blimps. Emmaline and he five month old daughter, Carrie, lived in an apartment nearby. The last word from Seth was that he was shipping out somewhere. She hadn't seen him for over a year. Sylvia was also living nearby in a dorm on campus at Hollins with her cousins, Ruth Ann and Wendalynn. Curtis was the only one still living at home.

Besides Ruth Ann and Wendalynn, Shenan's family were all home as well. Danny had completed his advanced flight training and had orders to report to his squadron. He and Melissa and their daughter Christina were all home as well. Like Curtis, Delbert was the only one of Shenan's children still living at home.

With so many people, Thanksgiving dinner was at Shenan and Emily's house since they had the most room. The question on everyone's mind was when were Sheffield and Ramona getting married. Ramona's answer was, "When he asks me." Sheffield's answer was, "When she says yes." It was obvious that the time wouldn't be long in coming. Whenever it would be, Ramona had already been welcomed into the family with open arms.

Morris was made to feel as equally welcome. Everyone wanted to know all about him and his family back in Utah. Ruth Ann managed to arrange things so she could sit by "the cutest sailor that she had ever seen". She couldn't take her eyes off of him. Morris seemed to take it in stride and seemed to enjoy the attention.

On Friday, Sheffield and Walt had one of their frequent visits in the seclusion of Walt's office at the church. This time Walt's concern wasn't for so much for how he was dealing with the deaths of Geannie and the kids, although it did come up, as it was for how he was coping mentally and emotionally with being

wounded. From his experience as a chaplain's assistant in the Army during the First World War, he knew first hand the toll it could take on men. He found that Sheffield was handling it fairly well, thanks to Ramona.

From there, their discussion turned to Ramona. Walt told him that as far as he was concerned, Sheffield was ready to marry again. Sheffield told him that he was just waiting for the right moment, preferably as soon as he was discharged from the hospital and had his cast off so he could get down on one knee. He told Walt that he wanted him to marry them right there in the church.

The Thanksgiving festivities continued into Friday with another family gathering and plenty of left overs. All of Sheffield's nieces ganged up on him and decorated his cast flowers, hearts, butterflies, and other art work. Before the evening was over, everyone had signed it. Ramona's name was across a big heart that one of the girls had painted.

Ellen, Sarah, Emily, and the married girls got Ramona off in a corner and pressed her further about when they might be getting married. When Ramona told them about giving him sponge baths, they all got a big kick out of that. "I can just see him squirm." Sarah laughed. Ramona told them that it was either her or some brawny orderly who didn't want the job very bad. Ellen, having been a nurse herself in her younger days, particularly appreciated the humor in that. She said, "As a young nurse, after about the second or third sponge bath that I had to give to a man, they all looked the same after that."

That evening, Ruth Ann had arranged for double date. Of course she got Morris and arranged for one of her friends from Hollins to go with her cousin, Tim. As the two girls and the two sailors went to the movie, the girls clung tightly to their escorts, as much out of show as it was affection. They wanted all of their friends to see that they had a guy, if nothing more than for the evening.

On Saturday Walt and Shenan's families did their own things which let Sheffield and Ramona have the day to themselves. They took the opportunity to go and see Marie. Her health had not been well for some time and now she had cancer and only had a matter of months to live. Between Sarah, Ellen, and her boys, she was being taken care of. In addition to Marie's poor shape, the Austin mansion was in disrepair and was beginning to fall apart.

As for Morris, he ended up spending the day with Shenan's family as Ruth Ann's guest.

Sunday found the entire Brason Clan attending services together. Rather than finding a meeting of his own church, Morris attended with the Brasons. Afterwards, Sheffield, Ramona, and Morris caught the train back to Bethesda.

The very next day, Sheffield unexpectedly received new orders. As of December 7, 1943 he was to be relieved of command of the Reprisal and that his presence was requested at the change of command ceremony that day aboard the Reprisal. His new orders were with the Bureau of Aeronautics commencing

after being released to return to duty by the doctors who were taking care of him. His new assignment was to gather, catalog, and analyze information regarding night flying operations. The information was to be used to prepare, train, and implement future night flying units. The orders stated that he could employ as many people as needed.

He already had one person. He intended to put Morris to work gathering information immediately after the change of command took effect. In the meantime, he sent Morris to Norfolk to put together the information that needed to be passed along to the new commanding officer.

That evening to celebrate, Ramona took Sheffield home with her and prepared dinner for him. She had been anxious to show him her home ever since he arrived at the hospital.

Ramona's townhouse was located at 4110 Military Road Northwest in Washington, D.C.. It had three bedrooms and two and a half bathrooms in 1,855 square feet on two stories which was built in 1918. It had recently been remodeled to include modern features.

There was a small yard in front facing north along the tree lined street. The sidewalk leading from the street stepped up onto a covered entry way supported by columns. Behind the townhouse was an attached one car garage and a small backyard that included an additional parking space that was accessed from the alley.

On the first floor were the living room, a small kitchen, dining room, and combination bathroom/laundry room, all with hardwood floors.

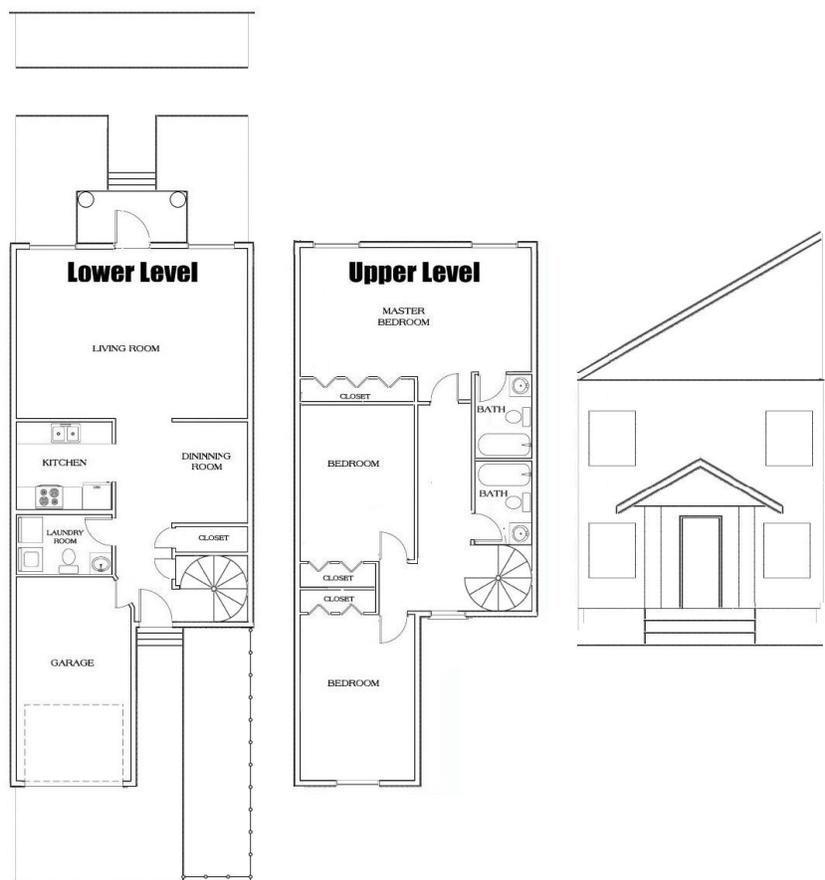
A spiral staircase lead to the three bedrooms and two bathrooms on the second floor. The master bedroom was across the front with a large closet and bathroom.

After the tour of her home, Sheffield said, "This will be perfect for when we're married. Its close to the hospital for you, and its not that much farther to the Navy Building for me."

"So when are you going to get around to asking me, ya big lug?"

"I'm working on it." was all that he would say.

While upstairs, Ramona



had him wait while she went into her bedroom to slip into the dress that she had sent her form Algiers. It was the first chance that she had to try it on for him, since she was required to be in uniform while at the hospital. When she came out of the bedroom, Sheffield was stunned at how beautiful she looked in it. It was much more than he had imagined it to be. Not even Céline, the young French girl who had modeled it for him, looked that terrific in it. Not only was it stylish, but it was very flattering to her figure.

Not wanting to get it dirty, she returned to the bedroom and changed into something more casual for the rest of the evening. While Ramona fixed dinner, he used her telephone to call home to tell his folks about his new orders.

After dinner they talked at great length of being married now that his new orders changed everything.

“Sheffield, do you remember when I told you in a letter that there was something that you needed to know about me?”

“Yeah, I remember.”

“I think now is the time that I should tell you because what I have say might change your mind about me.”

That got Sheffield's attention.

“The only other person I have ever told this to was Geannie, the night before she died. You know that the reason I asked to be transferred from San Diego all those years ago was because I was in love with another woman's husband. Geannie's husband.

“After being widowed twice I felt that I was jinxed and then I found myself in love with a man that I could never have. After going to Hawaii, I fooled myself into thinking that if I couldn't have a meaningful longterm relationship, I'd settle for short term and meaningless. Consequently I had a couple of those kinds of encounters. I knew it was a sin, but at the time I didn't care. It ended up leaving me feeling even more empty. I realized that I was using those men just like they were using me for what I was becoming. So, I just gave up on having any kind of a relationship with men. I have been as celibate as a nun ever since.

“I asked Geannie if God could ever forgive me. She told me that of course he would and told me how to go about it. I took her advise and confessed everything to God after all of those years.

“Do you remember when I had you go with me to church for the first time there in Hawaii before you left and how I went up to take communion? After that, I felt completely free from the guilt that I had carried around with me for all those years.”

Sheffield answered, “You really didn't have to tell me that. If you felt forgiven by God then it doesn't matter any more. It doesn't matter to him then it doesn't matter to me either.”

“Then it doesn't matter to you that I slept with Tom before were married either?”

“That was a long time ago. I know that you have made a lot of changes in you life since then. You have brought your life in to line with how He wants us to live. So again, if He has forgiven you, it really doesn't matter. I really appreciate you telling me this. It shows that you have have been completely open and honest with me in everything; just as I have been with you.”

“There is just one more thing that I haven't repented of.”

“Oh, and what is that?”

“Do you remember when I gave you that first sponge bath?”

“Yes. That made me a bit uncomfortable, but you were so professional about it.”

“No I wasn't. I hadn't desired a man all of those years, but at that moment, I was desiring you.”

“Well then, someday after we get all of our ducks in a row, we'll have to do something about that.”

They talked about many other things after that. Later in the evening she took him back to his quarters next to the hospital.

The next ten days passed quickly. Sheffield had mixed emotions about leaving the Reprisal and turning her over to someone else. At the same time he looked forward to perpetuating the concept of nighttime carrier operations. A passion that he had pursued whenever permitted during his career.

The following Saturday, Sheffield was spending the day with Ramona at her place. She got a call from Ellen wanting to know how to contact Sheffield. Ramona told her, “He's right here. Just a moment.”

She said to Sheffield, “Its your mother. She sounds upset.”

Sheffield took the telephone, only to be given the sad news that Emmaline's husband, Corporal Seth McCurry had been killed in action two weeks earlier on the Island of Tawara. His mother said that the whole family was taking pretty hard and asked that he pray for Emmaline.

The news dampened the rest of what was already a rainy day. Ramona could empathize with Emmaline. She knew all too well what it was to be a young widow, only Emmaline had a small baby.

On the morning of Tuesday the 7th, a plane was waiting at the near by College Park Airport to take Sheffield and Ramona to Norfolk for the change of command ceremony. It was a day filled with great significance for Sheffield. For starters it was his forty fifth birthday, it would have been his and Geannie's twenty second wedding anniversary. It was the second anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the day that he lost Geannie and the kids. It was exactly a year and half since the Reprisal has been commissioned. Lastly, it was going to be a day of new beginnings.

Together Sheffield and Ramona, both in their dress blues, boarded the Beech JRB-4, the Navy's version of the twin tailed, twin engined Beechcraft Model 18 eight passenger transport. For this flight, they were the only passengers for the one hundred fifty five mile trip to Norfolk.

In just under an hour, the plane was on approach to the Norfolk Naval Air Station. As requested, the pilot made a pass around the navy yard to get a good look at the ship from the air. The entire ship's company, in dress blues, were in formation on the flight deck. Sheffield made sure that Ramona could see them plainly. As they were directly over the ship, she gasped and put her hand to her mouth. The men standing on deck spelled out the words, "WILL YOU MARRY ME?"

Ramona's eyes grew wide and she threw her arms around his neck shouting, "Yes! Yes!"

Sheffield had the pilot make a second pass, only to his surprise the formation had changed. This time they spelled out the words, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY SIR!"

When the plane landed at the Naval Air Station, Petty Officer 2nd Class Morris Gover was waiting with the Captain's staff car. There was plenty of room in the backseat for him to stretch out his cast. Morris drove them to the Norfolk Navy Yard in Portsmouth where the Reprisal was still undergoing repairs. He came to a stop at the gangplank and got out to open the door for Captain Brason and Commander Katmuth and helped him out of the car.

On crutches and with Ramona at his side, he boarded the ship that had been his for the last year and a half. On the quarter deck, he was received by his friend and executive officer, Commander Terry. After rendering salutes, he and Ramona were escorted across the newly repaired hangar deck to the new outboard elevator, which brought them up to flight deck.

With the official delegation, including Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll, Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, in place and the crew at attention, Captain Brason accompanied by Commander Katmuth and his personal assistant, Petty Officer 2nd Class Gover took his place on the stand. Once on the stand, he was introduced to his successor, Captain Mitchell Callister. Captain Callister had commanded an auxiliary aircraft carrier in the South Pacific for the last year.

As the ship's band played the national anthem, those in uniform stood at attention and saluted while the civilians present assumed a patriotic stance. Included among the civilians were Emmett and Ellen and Walt and Sarah who had taken the train to Norfolk the day before. At the conclusion of the national anthem, Lieutenant Commander Fellows, the ship's chaplain, offered the invocation. After the Amen, the guests and official party took their seats and the crew stood at parade rest.

Admiral Ingersoll took the podium and made a few remarks concerning the tradition behind a change in command. He went on to briefly cite Captain Brason's accomplishments and service record, with particular emphasis on his time as the commanding officer of the Reprisal.

He said, "Change is the only thing in life that is certain. In my experience it has always been for the best. Captain Brason has served this ship well. His boldness in pushing the limits of Naval Aviation into the night sky has laid the foundation for the future of warfare. Now his expertise in this new frontier is needed to

broaden this concept as we take the the next step in taking the fight to our enemies. I'm certain that his efforts will continue to affect the effectiveness of this great ship.

“Now may I present to you Captain Sheffield Brason, escorted today by Commander Ramona Katmuth of the Navy Nurses Corps.”

As Captain Brason hobbled to the podium, with Ramona at his side, the crew erupted in a round of “Hip, hip , hoorays!” Once they settled down, Admiral Ingersoll continued. “Captain Brason, On behalf of the United States Navy and for the extraordinary act of courage that you displayed on September 11, 1943 while engaged in action against an enemy of the United States, it is my honor to award you with the Navy Cross, the the highest decoration that may be bestowed by the Department of the Navy. On the said date, you put yourself out in the open, exposing yourself to an oncoming weapon never before encountered in an attempt to maneuver your ship out of harms way. The nature of this new weapon is such that it followed your every move, nevertheless you remained exposed up to very moment of impact, which caused great destruction and loss of life. Many others were wounded, including yourself. For that, I award you with a gold star for the Purple Heart that you already wear to signify the second time this has been awarded to you.”

Admiral Ingersoll presented the awards, rendered a salute and shook his hand before he took his seat and Captain Brason took the podium. “Thank you Admiral Ingersoll, sir. It is with great humility that I accept the recognition bestowed upon me. I have never been one to like recognition directed toward myself. As far as I am concerned, I was simply doing what needed to be done. I only regret that I wasn't able stay behind and bring the ship home.”

Then addressing the crew he said, “Its good to be back, even if it is to say good bye. Thank you for your service, and thank you for one last act of service this morning as we flew in.

“In case you're wondering she said, 'Yes.' Now to make it official...” He took Ramona by the left hand and slipped off her glove. He reached into his pocket and retrieved a diamond ring and slipped it onto her finger. The crew cheered and applauded.

Then he continued, “And by the way, thank you for the birthday greeting. I wasn't expecting that. As I got ready for the day, I reflected on the significance of the date. Not only is it my birthday and would have been my wedding anniversary, but today marks the second anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor which brought us into this war, and brought me a great personal tragedy. And thanks to your assistance, this day opens the door to the rest of my life.

“For the last two months or so, this angel of mercy has been hovering over me, nursing me back to health. She has been a true friend for many years and now she will be at my side for the rest of my life. I want to publicly say, Ramona, I love you with all of my heart.

“In regard to our purposes here today, this day marks exactly a year and half since this ship was

placed in commission. In those eighteen months we have taken her to the Gulf of Mexico, the Bay of Biscay, Across the equator into the South Atlantic, across the Arctic Circle into the Arctic Ocean, and lastly through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea.

“In each of these great bodies of water, he have engaged the enemy, even on our shakedown cruise in the Gulf of Mexico. We have made a difference. One day because or the efforts of this ship and crew, the world will once again be at peace. But there is much more yet to do. I am confident that this ship and crew, under the command of Captain Callister will continue to make a difference.

“I have been proud to call this ship my home and its crew my family. I love you all. Unfortunately many of our family are not here with us today. So many have contributed the ultimate sacrifice. Many others have gone on to other duties. Today it is my turn. One day each of you will also leave this the great ship. Speaking for myself, I'm sure the same will also be true for every other man who walks these decks, my time on the Reprisal will always be a big part of my life and she will hold a special place in my heart.

“There is no finer ship, there is no finer crew. I say to you, carry on. Your service has not gone unnoticed. There are so may examples that I would cite if time permitted. There are two however I feel I must acknowledge. For the last twelve months he has been my right arm, keeping me in line and on top of things. During my recuperation he has been at my side, acting as my intermediary, allowing me to still function in a limited way as your commanding officer. Thank you Yeoman Second Class Morris Gover, who I am fortunate enough to take him with me to my new assignment.

“The other is Ships Steward Third Class Reggie Jackson who has taken such care good care of me from the beginning. Reggie, not only is your Mama proud of you, but so am I. I wish that I could take you with me too. Capitan Callister, I know that he will take as good of care you as he has me.

“In closing, I say to you old girl, good bye. To Captain Callister and the crew of the USS Reprisal, I say God speed.

“Now, Captain Callister, I'm sorry to turn her over to you in such shape, but we've been fighting a war. I'm sure that by the time you are through with her, she'll have more scrapes and dents. She's a tough old girl and can take it. Now sir, I am ready for you to relieve me of command. The ship is yours”

* * * * *

The townhouses located at 4110 Military Road Northwest in Washington, D.C. were built actually in 1918

