

## Chapter XXXVI

### Long Lost Cousin

January 24, 1943 – May 11, 1943

The first thing that Ramona noticed when she went back to work on Monday morning was the new nameplate on the door to her office. Naturally it read, "Commander Ramona Brason". She stopped to look at it. It sounded good. She smiled and reached up to touch it as she walked through the door. Once back at work, she got right back into the routine of her busy job.

As for Sheffield, he went to his therapy sessions on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. After his sessions, he stopped in to pester Ramona for minute before going home. When he could, he'd go for a long walk. A couple of times that week he called Morris, who was busy gathering records from a host of sources, to see how things were going. One day he went into Washington to have a look at the progress first hand. While there, he picked up a couple of files to take home with him.

When Ramona got home in the evening, he would have dinner ready. They were always simple meals. One night it was pork chops and fried red potatoes and a can of green beans; another night baked chicken breast, baked red potatoes, and a can of corn. One night, out of desperation it was a can of chili and some soda crackers.

Even though they were back in the real world during the day, the honeymoon continued every evening. On Friday when Ramona came home from work, dinner wasn't waiting. "Tonight," Sheffield announced, "its dinner out and dancing. I asked my therapist if my leg was up to a little dancing. He said that it would be alright as long as I didn't get carried away."

The week had seemed to go rather slow. After an evening of dinner and dancing on Friday night, the honeymoon continued into Saturday with the day spent in Washington. On Sunday they attended services together at the nearby Wesley United Methodist Church where they had been attending. This time, as husband and wife.

As the congregation began singing the opening hymn, Ramona timidly held back, like always. Sheffield, singing out as he always did, nudged her with is elbow. She got the message. She was quite familiar with that particular hymn, so she too sang out for all she was worth. The clarity of her tone and the crispness of the notes drew approving smiles from those around her. After that she never did hold back again.

She attributed Sheffield's love and encouragement as the key that unlocked the talent that she knew that had, but was afraid to use. The pastor's sermon that day just happened to be on the parable of the talents. She decided that if God gave it to her, she had better use it and not bury it. She found herself singing to herself at work, or to the radio around the house or in the car. Not only did she pick up on the hymns at church, but especially the popular music on the radio.

During the first few weeks they had to learn to live together as well. Some things they had talked about before, like finances. Rather than combining their resources like he and Geannie had done, they felt that under the circumstances that it would be better to keep their money separate, as they each had a fair amount stashed away.

Ramona received a sizable settlement from the government after Tom was killed. She was fortunate in the way that she had invested it that it didn't take a significant loss during the depression. She had used part of it to purchase her beach house in Hawaii. At that time it was a distressed piece of property and she got it for a very low price. It was now worth much more than she had paid for it. In addition, she saved the better part of her salary over the years. After President Roosevelt created savings bonds in 1935, she had put most of it away in savings bonds with the rest going in the bank. When she moved to Washington, D.C. she used some of her savings to make a down payment on her townhouse.

As for Sheffield, he had the money from the life insurance on Geannie and the kids. Before she was killed, they had managed to save a good deal of money as well. He still owned her share in the Austin cabin. Since then he had saved virtually all of his salary since the war began. He had been faithful in the pattern that he and Geannie had observed and consistently gave one tenth of his salary to the church, a habit that Ramona was beginning to pick up. All of his money was in the Bank of Virginia.

The arrangement was that they would split the cost of their living expenses. Sheffield matched her down payment and put it toward the mortgage so their home was theirs, not just hers. This meant that Sheffield would have to start keeping track of his own money and balancing his checkbook, something he dreaded. Geannie had always taken care of it.

Sheffield found that Ramona didn't run the tight ship that he was accustomed to, thanks to Geannie. After all, she had her own career and was not the homemaker that Geannie had been. There were no children and would not be any so the solution was a shared approach to the household chores. Even at that, Geannie had trained him to do things a certain way, Ramona had a different way of doing things that he had to get used to.

As they went along they found little things that had to be negotiated. They usually arrived at a suitable compromise. It didn't take long to get a good system worked out. Things were sure to run a lot more smoothly once he returned to duty.

Around the middle of February, Ramona came home with some news. "You'll never guess who called me today." She began.

"Let me guess. President Roosevelt."

"No silly. You make me laugh."

So who called?"

"Your old army buddy."

"Harvey?"

"No, General Eisenhower. Of course it was Harvey. Since he didn't know how to get a hold of you, he called the hospital and got a hold of me. He wanted to know how you were doing. I told him that you were out of the hospital, out of your cast, and happily married. You are happily married, aren't you, Babe?"

"So happy that I'm delirious."

"Anyway, when I told him that we got married, he invited us to dinner at their home over in Arlington this Saturday. I told him that we'd love to come. I told him that I'd bring desert. What do you think of that?"

"That sounds great. I've always enjoyed being around Harv."

On Saturday they arrived at Harvey and Marcella's home at six thirty. Ramona brought a chocolate cake that she baked and a half gallon of ice cream that they picked up on the way over. Being a Texas cowboy, Harvey had prepared prime rib with baked potatoes. After the usual before dinner visiting, they sat down to eat. The prime rib was succulent and the conversation was delightful.

Harvey asked Sheffield about his recovery and told him about his latest trip the European Theater. "We sure could have used you and that carrier of yours at Anzio last month." he said.

Sheffield told him a little about his new assignment, but didn't have a chance to go into very much detail. While they visited, Ramona and Marcella got better acquainted. This was only the second time that they had met.

After dinner, Ramona found her way to the bathroom and on her way back, she passed by a wall covered with family photographs. One caught her eye and stopped her dead in her tracks. She stood there studying one particular photograph. Seeing her intense interest, Harvey approached her.

"Who are the people in this picture?" she asked.

"Well the little fellow here," he said pointing, "is me when I was about eight. That would have been in about nineteen oh six. The woman standing next to me is my mother and that is my sister. The woman in the center is my grandmother. The man next to her is my mother's brother and that's his wife and daughter and their new baby. That was the only time I ever saw them. Why do you ask?"

Ramona pointed the three year old girl in the photograph, "Because that little girl is me. And these are my parents and that's my baby brother."

Harvey stood there dumbfounded. He looked at Ramona and then at the picture and back at Ramona. "What was your maiden name?"

"Erhart." She answered. "My father was Cyrus Valoy Erhart. He grew up on a ranch near Denison, Texas. One day his father sent him to track down some stags. Well, he got thrown off his horse when it got

spooked by a rattle snake, which ended up biting him.”

“And,” Harvey finished the story, “he was nursed back to health by a halfbreed Indian girl who he eventually married. My grandfather was so furious that he told him to keep the cows and not to bother coming home.”

They just looked at each other, not knowing what to say. Finally Harvey broke the tears. “If your father and my mother were brother and sister, that make you and I cousins.”

Tears began streaming down Ramona's cheeks. “Cousins?” she gasped. “All of my life I didn't think I had any family.” she sobbed. “I have a cousin!” She threw her arms around Harvey and held him tightly. In tears, they embraced one another.

From the dinning room, Sheffield and Marcella saw the spectacle and rushed to investigate. “What's going on here?” Marcella demanded with suspension in her voice.

Ramona and Harvey released each other from their embrace. Harvey answered, “Its alright. We just discovered that we are cousins.”

“What?” Sheffield asked in disbelief.

“Look at this picture.” Ramona explained, pointing at the people in the photograph. “This is me and my parents, and this is Harvey and his mother, sister, and grandmother. We're cousins.”

“But I didn't think you had any family.”

“None that I knew of, but here's the proof.”

Harvey took the picture down from off the wall and the two couples returned to the dinning room table where he explained the photograph. He began, “After Grandpa had disowned uncle Cyrus, Grandma secretly stayed in touch with him through the mail. Over the next few years they exchanged letters on occasion.

“Then in nineteen oh six while Grandpa and my dad were away with a train load of cattle, Grandma loaded my mother, my sister, and I in to a buggy and drove us the ten miles across the Red River to where Uncle Cyrus was living near Colbert, Oklahoma.

“I remember it well. She took them to town and bought them some new clothes, as they were really struggling. We were walking down the boardwalk and passed a photography studio and Grandma decided to have a picture taken. This picture.

“It wasn't long after that we lost track of them altogether. Grandpa came to his senses and regretted what he had done. He went to his grave trying to find the son that he had turned away. Grandma never gave up. To this day she is hoping to find them.”

“Stop right there.” Ramona insisted. “Are you telling me my grandmother is still alive.”

“Very much so. After Grandpa died, my father managed the ranch for Grandma. We all lived together

in the ranch house. After I went into the army, my father died also and now its just Grandma and my mother. They still operate the ranch, with hired help. Grandma is pretty spry and quite active for being eighty five.”

“So,” Ramona asked, wanting to make sure that she understood? “I have a cousin and a grandmother and an aunt?” What about your sister?”

“Sadly she died from the influenza in nineteen nineteen.”

“I never in my wildest dreams ever thought I had a family. I suspected that my father had a family but he never talked much about them. I know for sure that I don't have any family on my mother's side.”

“Tell me, Ramona, whatever became of your family?”

She explained that about a year after that picture was taken, her father loaded up the his family and what they had into a wagon and set out for the gold fields of Arizona. She told of how her brother died while going across New Mexico and later when she was nine how her father was murdered right before her eyes by a claim jumper. Then she told how she and her mother were taken in by the banker and moved to Sacramento. She went onto tell how they were forced to leave and eventually made it to Tacoma, Washington after years of drifting.

“So is Aunt Paloma still alive?”

“No, she was killed when she was hit by a car in nineteen thirty.”

“Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. It's sad that you went all of those years not knowing that you had a family. What are the odds that we'd figure it out like this. I've known Sheffield all of these years and so have you and now he has brought you and me together.”

“Its nothing more than a miracle.” Marcella, who had listened intently to the story, said.

“I can't wait to tell Grandma.” Harvey said with excitement. “What the hell, its only eight o'clock back home. I'm going to call them right now. Would you like to talk to her?”

Not waiting for an answer, Harvey picked up the telephone and asked the operator to put him through. Ramona listened with nervousness to one end of the conversation, “Hello Ma, its Harv.” ... “No nothing is wrong. I actually called to talk to Grandma. Can I talk to her?” ... “Hi Grandma, it's Harv.” ... “Yes, its good to hear your voice too.” ... “We're just fine Grandma.” ... “Listen, the reason I called is because I have someone here who I know you'll want to talk to.”

He handed the telephone to Ramona. She nervously took it from him with a trembling hand. She took a deep breath and timidly said, “Grandma?”

“Who is this?”

“Its Ramona.”

“Ramona?”

“I'm Cyrus' daughter.”

There was silence on the other end of the line for long moment. ““Oh my dear, is it really you?”

“Yes Grandma. It's really me.”

“I must know, where's Cyrus?”

“He died a long, long time ago.”

“I was afraid of that. Tell me all about you and how you found Harv.”

Ramona went on to give a brief account of her family and the circumstances as to how she came to be in Harvey's home that evening and how she had noticed the photograph on the wall.

“I'm so happy that he found you. I have wondered all of these years what happened to my son and his family. I remember ever so well the day that picture was taken. You were such a sweet child. That's the only time I ever laid eyes on you. I'd love it if you came to see me sometime.”

“I'd love to. I'll be certain to do that.”

“Don't wait too long, I'm an old woman you know. Time isn't something I have a lot of left. It was so wonderful to hear from you. Can you put Harv back on the phone, please.”

Ramona handed the telephone back to her long lost cousin. Before hanging up, he promised to bring Ramona to see her.

After he hung up the telephone, he said to Ramona, “I have something I want to show you.” He went to the closet and brought back a big book. “This is a scrapbook that my mother made for me, there are some things in here that I think you will find interesting.”

He sat the book on the table and began showing her pictures of the family that she had just discovered. There were pictures of her father when he was a young cowboy. There were pictures of her grandparents and their ranch, and of course pictures of Harvey and his family.

After a long, rewarding evening of discovering her heritage, it was finally time to go home. She and Harvey promised to get together again. Among other things, they wanted to figure out a time when he could take her home with him to meet her grandmother and aunt. All the way home, Ramona was overwhelmed by the revelation. She kept saying, “I can't believe I actually have a family.”

That night, she was sure to thank God for being connected with her long lost family. Sheffield had fallen asleep almost immediately after going to bed. Ramona just laid there next to him for the longest time reflecting on the evening and what it meant. Eventually, she too fell asleep.

Later in the month, a major change in the Navy Nurses Corps was announced. Although generally treated as officers socially and professionally, and wore uniform stripes similar to those for the officer ranks, Ramona's rank of Commander was only relative to that of an actual commissioned officer with the rank of Commander. On February 26<sup>th</sup>, navy nurses were given actual officer ranks, although they were not

commissioned officers. New uniforms were in the works to reflect the change.

Sheffield only had a couple more therapy sessions scheduled. He could tell that his strength was back, but the numbness continued. He figured it was something he was just going to have to live with. It wasn't anything to cause problems, more of an annoyance than anything. He found that his walking stick really did make a difference. He got over the stigma of using it.

Finally on Monday the 28<sup>th</sup> Ramona got Sheffield out of her hair. He was more than ready to report for duty at the Navy Building at 18th Street and Constitution Avenue. His office was all set up and Morris had been working on collecting records for several weeks. He had already reviewed many of the files.

His job was to collect information on night flying operations, which had been undertaken by various independent squadrons and air groups. He was to then analyze the data and make recommendations for consideration and implementation so the Navy could take a unified approach to night carrier operations, rather than each squadron doing things their own way.

The Night Attack and Combat Training Unit had been established to provide training for night flying and had been expanded to encompass night carrier landing training. The facility provided training for the several night fighter squadrons that had been organized in the last few months, with four plane detachments assigned to the carriers operating in the Pacific. Sheffield flew up Charlestown, Rhode Island to observe the activities there. It was the first night that he and Ramona had spent apart since they were married.

At sundown, activities came into full bloom. The entire station remained blacked-out through the night. Runway lights, aircraft wing tip lights, control tower illumination, ready rooms, and even the lavatories were dimly lit to preserve pilots' night vision adaptation. Nothing was overlooked in the effort to duplicate the atmosphere of realistic carrier operations. A runway was converted into a close approximation of a carrier at sea. A catapult for night launchings and deck arresting gear for recoveries was installed on one runway.

After completing training at Charlestown, Night Composite Squadron Seventy Three embarked on the escort carrier Chesapeake Bay for further training out of Norfolk. In late March they were scheduled for week of training in the Caribbean and Sheffield invited himself to go along for the ride.

When he got home from his trip, he was excited to tell Ramona, "I'll be going to to sea for a few days at the end of the month."

"That will be good for you. Whats the deal?" She asked, excited for him.

"The old Bat Team is going to be conducting some night training off Puerto Rico and I'm going along as an observer."

"Well thats just swell, at least you're not going back to the war. I think I can manage to let you out of



*New Navy Nurses Corps Uniform in 1944*

my sight for that long.”

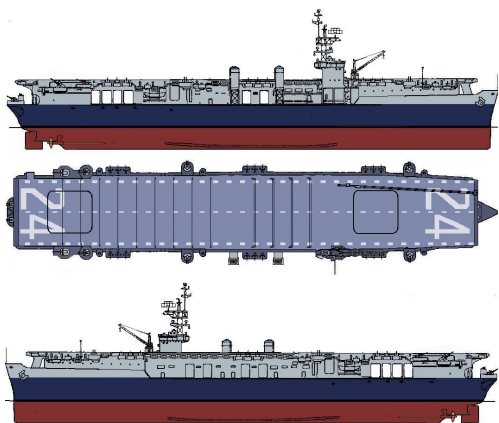
For the next couple of weeks, it was all Sheffield could talk about.

The day that he was to leave was a Sunday. After attending services that morning, they came home so Sheffield could pack for his trip. He was so preoccupied with it that he wasn't paying much attention to Ramona while he packed his bag. While she changed her clothes, rather than put on what she had gotten out to wear, she took everything off. That got his attention. After a send off like he had not had in a very long time, Ramona drove him to the Anacostia Naval Air Station.

He flew down to Norfolk on Sunday afternoon the 26<sup>th</sup> of March. Morris, who had gone down a few days earlier, met him at the air station and took to the dock where the Chesapeake Bay was tied up across from the Reprisal and reported aboard and stowed his gear. Once he was squared away, he was invited to the bridge where he met Captain Jim Jefferies.

With plenty of afternoon left, he went over to the Reprisal where Captain Callister was more than happy to show him around. The repairs and refit at the shipyard had been completed only the week before and she moved back to Pier 7 at the navy base. The refit was very similar to that which the Enterprise received in Bremeton the previous fall. She even sported a new dazzle camouflage scheme.

The entire flight deck had been strengthened and two new more powerful catapults had been fitted at front end of the flight deck. Additional forty millimeter mounts had been added and she sported a new updated radar set. All of the internal damage had been repaired and rebuilt. The admiral's staff cabins had been replaced by a new combat information center. Over all, Sheffield was pleased with what they had done to her. It would still be weeks before she would be ready to sail. In the meantime her new air group was working up and getting ready for deployment in late May.



Sheffield went back across the dock to the Chesapeake Bay.

By contrast she was much smaller; five hundred and thirty three feet long. Unlike all other escort carriers, she had not been converted from a mercantile hull. The only ship of her class, she had been laid down as a Curtiss Class seaplane tender on November 24, 1940 by New York Shipbuilding at Camden, New Jersey. She was launched on January 5, 1942 and ten days later was reordered as an auxiliary aircraft carrier, the same day the light cruiser Amsterdam was reordered as a light aircraft carrier and

renamed Independence. As a seaplane tender, the Chesapeake Bay was built with aviation fuel storage tanks and handling equipment. After being reclassified, everything above the main deck was removed and rebuilt after the same manner as the Independence Class, since they were both built at the same shipyard.



The Chesapeake Bay was commissioned on November 18, 1942.

The next morning the Chesapeake Bay put to sea accompanied by the destroyer escorts Woodbury and Joseph P. Lee. Sheffield was glad to be at sea again, if only briefly. During his months of recuperation he had missed it. Once at sea, the squadron began coming aboard. She was a very efficient and capable ship for her small size and slower speed. Once aboard, flight operations were suspended until dusk. Sheffield met with the squadron in their darkened ready room.

He knew many of the pilots from the Reprisal, especially the squadron commander, Lieutenant Commander Ronald "Cowboy" Perry, who had once been his wingman back in the days of Bombing Two on the Saratoga. It was Cowboy who had taken Tomcat's place.

Composite Squadron Seven Three had been organized when the the Reprisal Air Group was disbanded. It was made up from the pilots and aircraft that had been the Bat Team; in fact the squadron continued the use of the name. In the weeks following the creation of the squadron, it was augmented by new aircraft and personnel and at the time composed of twelve F6F-3N radar equipped Hellcats, nine SBD-4E Dauntlesses and nine TBF-1E Avengers, also equipped with radar.

Sheffield watched from the narrow wing bridge on the small superstructure as the planes were launched, some by way of the catapult while others took off on their own power. With a sliver of the waxing moon setting in the west, it was going to be a very dark night. Rather than recover them after the evening patrol and then launch again for the pre-dawn patrol, they were coming and going all night.

Sheffield was impressed with how much more capable the squadron had become since leaving the Reprisal back in October. They were exactly where he had hoped to have them. The real test would come during the next three nights.

On Tuesday afternoon the Chesapeake Bay and her escorts transited into the Caribbean Sea between Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Dusk found the ship operating about sixty miles south of Vieques Island, which is a small island just east of Puerto Rico. As darkness was gathering, the planes were launched, carrying a full load of live ammunition. The target was the Navy bombing range on the east end of the island. The planes made several sorties all during the night.

The next day, the observers on the ground evaluated the accuracy of their work the night before and reported it to be satisfactory. New targets of obsolete or damaged equipment were put in place for the next night, which was a repeat of the night before. The evaluation the next day showed marked improvement over the previous night.

New targets were set up for the third night, including the derelict hull of a freighter that set was adrift in deep water a few miles off shore. That night rather than observing the flight operations from the

superstructure, Sheffield donned a flight suit and rode along in the radioman's seat in Cowboy's Avenger.

He was totally thrilled with the take off and being in the air again. He really missed the exhilaration that he used to get from a carrier take off. Accompanied by Cowboys two wingmen and two Hellcats, they set out to find the drifting freighter. With no moonlight to guide them, the hunt was conducted solely by radar.

Once they located their prey, the two Hellcats made a strafing pass which started a fire on deck. With the light from the fire, and their powerful spotlights, the Avengers, each carrying four five hundred pound bombs commenced their attack. Sheffield was free to watch the whole thing as the planes dove in and released their bombs. Many of the twelve bombs hit their target as he watched the hapless ship erupt from multiple explosions. As the planes circled around for another pass, the ship was on fire and sinking by the stern. Satisfied, they turned back to the carrier. Again it was a thrill for Sheffield as the Avenger made its approach and swooped down grabbing the arrester cable and coming to an abrupt stop; all in complete darkness. Oh to be younger and still flying!

With the exercise a success, the Chesapeake Bay set a course for Norfolk, and arrived on the afternoon of April 5<sup>th</sup>. That evening he was back home in Washington. With excitement, he told Ramona all about his adventure, particularly flying, even if he was only going along for the ride. In the same manner that Ramona had sent him off, she welcomed him home. After that experience, going to the office on Thursday morning was a let down.

During the rest of that week and the following, Captain Brason and Yeoman Gover reviewed the exercises from the previous week and took a look at what they had accomplished up to that point and what there was to still be done. Sheffield decided that it was time increase his staff and requested additional personnel. He quickly received two seamen that he put Morris in charge of. The other person he requested was a little more difficult to come by. The criteria he set forth was simply a pilot with night flying experience.

In the midst of all of that, Sheffield and Ramona made a quick trip to Roanoke for Easter, which was on 9<sup>th</sup> of April that year. They drove down early Saturday morning and came back late Sunday evening after attending services and had dinner with his family. On Monday morning they both went back to work. The following weekend they had Harvey and Marcella over for dinner. That evening Ramona got to know more about her father's family. Harvey again mentioned the idea of taking her to Texas sometime to meet her grandmother.

In the middle of April, Lieutenant (jg) Artell Flynn reported for duty on Sheffield's staff. Lieutenant Flynn had been a fighter pilot assigned to one of the night detachments flying from the Essex, but had been grounded for failing to pass his latest eye exam. Artell was just who Sheffield was looking for and he fit right into the project. He was ambitious and willing to work. The thing that made him the perfect fit is that he had a

passion for what he was no longer able to do. Like Captain Brason, this was his way to contribute.

After Lieutenant Flynn reported for duty, it occurred to Sheffield that the Army Air Force no doubt had some experience in the field. He called his old friend and Ramona's newfound cousin to see what information he might be able to provide.

Harvey was still the unofficial liaison to the Navy from General Arnold's staff and was more than willing to see what he could do. After the business end of their conversation, Harvey asked about Ramona. "Remember how I promised to take the two of you to Texas to meet her grandmother? Well I've been thinking about that. Do you think the two of you could get away for the Friday and Monday of Mother's day weekend?"

"I think I can now that I have some extra help around here, but I'm not sure about Ramona. I'd have to ask her. What do you have in mind?"

"You see, I have access to a Cessna Bobcat. It is about a seven hour flight, including an hour stop over at the half way point. I was thinking that the four of us could buzz down on Friday, spend the weekend and buzz back on Monday. I've talked to my mother a couple of times since then and all my grandmother has been talking about is getting to meet Ramona."

"That sounds like a good idea. I know that Ramona still hasn't come down from the clouds after discovering that she has a family. Let me talk to her and I'll see what we can do. I'll get back to you tomorrow, alright."

"You got it. I'll talk to you tomorrow, pal. Maybe by then I'll have some information for you as well."

Rather than wait until he got home, he dialed Ramona's office. "Commander Brason." she answered.

"Hi sweetheart, its Captain Brason. How's your day going?"

"A little hectic but I'm on top of things. Whats up."

"I just got of the phone with Harvey about some army/navy business. He asked about you. He wants to know if we can get away the twelfth through the fifteenth of next month, thats a Friday through Monday."

"Let me look at my calendar.... Lets see.... I've got a review meeting on the twelfth. Why, what does he have in mind?"

"He wants to fly you down to Texas to meet your grandmother for Mother's Day."

"Really? I can have someone else cover for me that day. I don't want to miss an opportunity like this. What about you?"

"Lieutenant Flynn can handle things around here for a couple of days. Isn't it nice being the boss?"

"I don't know. Some days I wish I were back on the floor making the rounds."

"I hear you, I'd give anything to be junior wingman again and be happy to be just be following along."

"We can talk about it this evening. Say who's turn is it fix dinner tonight anyway?"

"I thought it was yours."

"I was thinking it was yours, Babe."

"Who needs dinner when you can live on love? I'll see you tonight."

"Bye babe."

That evening after figuring out dinner, they made plans for the trip to Texas. To say that Ramona was excited would be an understatement. The next day Sheffield called Harvey back to tell him the trip was a go. As far as Sheffield's request, Harvey didn't have any good news for him, no one wanted to share Army Air Force business with the Navy. He promised to get what he could.

Just as Sheffield had anticipated his adventure on the Chesapeake Bay, for the next couple of weeks, that was all Ramona could talk about. She still couldn't believe that she had an extended family after all of those years. She was particularly excited to return to the place where she was born and lived her early childhood. She finally had a family. First, she became part of Sheffield's family, now she learned that she had a family of her own. She actually had a cousin, and she looked forward to meeting her grandmother and her aunt. The night before they were to leave, she was so excited that she had a hard time going to sleep.

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The Night Attack and Combat Training Unit at Charlestown, Rhode Island was actual.  
The Chesapeake Bay is a fictional ship as are the Woodbury and Samuel P. Lee.