

Chapter XL

Two Stars

July 31, 1944 – October 15, 1944

“Boy its good to be home again.” Ramona exhaled as she collapsed onto the bed in their townhouse.

“You can say that again.” Sheffield agreed as he set the two suitcases down that he had just brought in from the car. “I’m beat.” he said as he laid down next to her. “Now I wish we’d of came home yesterday. I don’t want to go back to work tomorrow.” He lamented.

“I know what you mean. At least we had a break between flights instead of coming all the way from Hawaii in one day.” Ramona said. She shifted herself, positioning herself over the top of him. She reached down and gently kissed him. “Thanks for a wonderful honeymoon, even though there was a little work involved.”

“It was my pleasure. I hope you enjoyed yourself.”

“I sure did. I want to go back again someday.” She kissed him again. “Now, lets get up and put this stuff away before I don’t want to.”

“I already don’t want to. I can think of something I’d rather do.” He pulled her back down on top of him and kissed her again.

“Maybe later. As much as I don’t want to do it now, I really don’t want to it later.” She pushed herself up and standing next to the bed, she extended a hand to Sheffield.

“Oh alright. If you insist.” He took her hand and got up off the bed.

While Ramona plopped a suitcase on the bed and opened it, Sheffield went back out the garage and brought in another load. Working together, it didn’t take long before it was all put away. “I’m sure glad that the hotel had a laundry. At least there isn’t a bunch of dirty laundry starring me in the face. Why don’t you take off what you’ve got on so I can add it to what there is.”

“Now you’re talking.” He said as he unbuckled his belt and unzipped his trousers. A moment later he was standing there in his skivvies.

“Why don’t you let me have them too.”

“Alright. You asked for it.” he said as he complied.

Standing there completely undressed, she looked him over good. “Now why don’t you go get in the shower while I sort through this.

Hearing the water running in the shower, she looked at the laundry in the hamper. “What the heck.” she thought and added what she had on to it. She slipped quietly into the bathroom and pulled back to shower curtain just a little and stepped in behind him. After all, it was the last night of their honeymoon.

The next morning, they both woke up groggy when the alarm went off. Not wanting to get out of bed,

Sheffield reached over and shut it off. Rather than getting out of bed, he rolled over and took Ramona into his arms. They just laid their together, until reality took over and forced them to get out of bed. Fortunately, they had showered the night before.

They both put on their uniforms and went downstairs to find something for breakfast. They got out a box of corn flakes but when Romona opened the bottle of milk that had set in the refrigerator for a month, it was obvious that it had gone bad. Sheffield got out a half a loaf of bread to make some toast, but it was moldy.

They looked at each other and laughed. "Why don't we go out for breakfast?" Sheffield suggested.

"Thats a great idea." Ramona agreed. "I'll stop at the market on the way home this afternoon and pick up some things." They left the house together and got into separate cars. Ramona followed Sheffield to a coffee shop around the corner on Wisconsin Avenue. After breakfast, they went their separate ways.

After wading through a pile of correspondence on her desk, which took until after lunch, Ramona presented the findings of her visits to the two hospitals and the hospital ship. She proposed that a navy psychologist be included in the training program, with the specific purpose of educating the trainees on how to cope with the psychological impact that they will face in treating the gruesome combat wounds that they would encounter.

Sheffield too had a pile of correspondence waiting for him. Yeoman Gover had it all sorted and prioritized for him. After going through his mail, he meet with his staff to relate the things that he learned on his trip. The time for gathering information was over. Over the next few weeks their emphasis shifted to a thorough analyses of the data collected. Captain Brason prepared a preliminary report and submitted it to his boss, Admiral Dewitt C. Ramsey, the Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics.

Sheffield and Ramona had Harvey and Marcella over for dinner one night. During the month of June, Harvey was away and then they were in Hawaii all during July. This was the first chance that they had to get together since their trip to Texas. Harvey and Marcella were pleased to announce that they finally got the job accomplished and that Marcella just found out that she was expecting.

In mid August, Sheffield learned that the Reprisal was back in the Mediterranean after participating in the D-Day Invasion in June and had carried out an attack on the German Battleship Tirpitz in conjunction three British carriers. Now that she was back in the Mediterranean, she had participated in the invasion of the South of France providing air cover and attacks on enemy positions. By the 21st, German forces were in retreat and the Reprisal withdrew to Algiers.

Based on the preliminary report that Sheffield and his team had compiled, it was decided to create three dedicated night air groups from existing squadrons. On the 25th of August, Commander Turner Caldwell's Night Fighter Squadron Seventy Nine became Night Air Group Forty One with Night Fighter

Squadron Forty One consisting of fourteen F6F-5N's and five F6F-5's, while Night Torpedo Squadron Forty One had twelve TBM-3D Avengers. At the time they were aboard the Independence at Eniwetok getting ready for the next move against the Japanese.

The second air group was Night Air Group Ninety under the command Commander Bill Martin at Barbers Point. The air group consisted of VF(N)-90, which was formed by combining three smaller night squadrons, VF(N)-103, 104, and 106, and VT(N)-90 which was comprised mostly of Torpedo Ten pilots which had just returned from deploying aboard the Enterprise.

The Third squadron was none other than the Bat Team. That same day Night Composite Squadron Seven Three became Night Air Group Seven Three with Commander Ronald "Cowboy" Perry as the air group commander. This air group was different in its make up, allowing for a mix of day and night aircraft. The existing squadron was split into three parts forming Night Fighter Squadron Seven Three, the Alleycats, with twelve radar equipped F56F-5N Hellcats, Fighter Squadron Seven Three, the Wildcats, with twelve standard F6F-5 Hellcats, and Night Torpedo Squadron Seven Three, the Night Hawks, with nine radar equipped TBM-3DAvenges.

The new air group was the reincarnation of the Reprisal Air Group with its core personnel all former Reprisal pilots and crew. The squadrons of this air group were to be expanded with the intent of being deployed on a large carrier, perhaps one of the new Essex Class carriers, for round the clock air operations.

Satisfied with the progress that had been made in just a month since returning from Hawaii, Sheffield and his staff took a break for the Labor Day Weekend. They closed up the shop on Thursday the 31st and went their separate ways. Yeoman Gover had plans to spend some time with Mrs. Watson and Molly, who had virtually adopted him, providing him with a home away from home. The two sailors under him had plans of their own. Lieutenant Flynn and his wife had plans to go out of town, and Sheffield and Ramona were going home to Roanoke.

She also took Friday off and after work on Thursday afternoon, they headed home. It was almost dark by the time they got there and Ellen had a light supper waiting them. Being late, there wasn't much visiting that night and they went to bed.

Now Friday was the big day rather than Monday, since Sheffield and Ramona would have to head for home Monday afternoon. Walt and Sarah had arranged for use of the cabin that day; the Austins were using it on Monday.

Early Friday morning a caravan made its way out of Roanoke and up Route 311 into the mountains. Their arrival was somewhat staged. When Sheffield and Ramona who rode up with Emmett and Ellen arrived, Walt and Sarah along with Emmaline and Carrie were already there. Sylvia and Curtis came up on their own a little later. Tim was still in Morocco.

Shenan's family also arrived in bunches. The first were Joe and Adelle. She was due to have her baby in a couple of weeks. Danny was somewhere in the Pacific, but Melissa, who was expecting in November, and her daughter Christina, who was now two, came up. Wendalynn and Delbert came with Shenan and Emily. The last to show up was Ruth Ann, who brought a sailor with her. Of all the uniforms that she latched onto, she seemed to prefer sailors. Her parents had lost track of how many there had been before this one showed up a couple of weeks earlier. Like all of the others, he was home on leave for thirty days while his ship was being overhauled. Ruth Ann introduced him to everyone as Shelton Marcus, from nearby Salem, Virginia.

By one o'clock, the picnic was ready. Emmett called everyone together and said Grace. There was fried chicken, red potato salad and corn on the cob from Sarah's garden. On the way up, Sheffield had stopped off to buy some watermelon. Ramona and Emmaline had been busy in the kitchen at the cabin that morning baking peach, cherry, and apple pies. The fruit was bought at the same market where Sheffield bought the watermelon. Walt brewed up a big batch of homemade root beer. Everyone brought something.

During lunch, Sheffield got acquainted with Ruth Ann's latest boyfriend. He was a Sonarman Second Class on a destroyer escort that had been on convoy duty in the North Atlantic. He already knew a great deal about Captain Brason, as Ruth Ann loved to brag about him, her brother Danny, and her cousin Tim, all of who where in the navy. Perhaps that is why she was particularly attracted to sailors.

After the picnic, everyone except for Emmett and Ellen, who stayed behind with the two great granddaughters, hiked back to the lake, even Adelle and Melissa being pregnant, went along. On this occasion no one opted for a swim, but there were plenty of skipping rocks added to the bottom of the lake.

Ruth Ann and Shelton had slipped away from the group unbeknown to anyone else and no one seemed to miss them at first. It wasn't long before Shenan noticed that his daughter was missing. Worried, he pulled Sheffield aside and asked him to help him find them. Shenan and Emily decided to follow the trail back to the cabin in case they went back. Sheffield and Ramona took the trail that went on up to Big Rock Spring. It was a place that he and Geannie used to go to and he wanted to show it to Ramona.

As they neared the spring, they could hear the obvious sounds of pleasure. Signaling for Ramona to be still, they proceeded quietly off the trail and happened onto a hastily strewn pile of clothes. Hunched down, they crept through some tall grass and came out into clearing where they caught Ruth Ann and the sailor in the act. It was immediately clear that it was consensual.

They were so preoccupied that they didn't see Sheffield and Ramona standing a few feet away until he bellowed, "Attention!"

That got their attention alright. They jumped to their feet, attempting to hide their bodies behind each other. Finally coming to attention, covering themselves the best they could, Ruth Ann plead, "Please Uncle

Sheffield, don't tell my dad.”

“Oh I think he knows what you've been up to, with this one and all of the others.” Then he added, “You should be ashamed of yourself. I know that you know better.”

Rather indignantly, she countered, “I can do what I want, after all, I am twenty one.” Gesturing with her hands, she forgot what she was trying to hide with them. All the time, Petty Officer Marcus stood at attention, wearing nothing but his dog tags, his hands still strategically placed.

“Don't worry. I'm not going to tell him.”

“Oh thank you Uncle Sheffield.”

“No, I'm not going to tell him. You are.”

“Now as for you, mister. How many other young women have you been with?”

Shelton didn't answer.

“I want her to hear it from you, how many girls have you been with? That's an order, son.”

Shelton cleared his throat and said, “Ten or twelve, sir.”

“Just be glad that she's my niece and not my daughter, or I'd do something we'd both regret. As it is, I'm trying very hard to control myself. Its a good thing that it was me who caught you red handed and not my brother. He wouldn't have held back. I'd advise you to make yourself scarce and don't show your face around this family ever again or you'll have me to answer too.”

While Sheffield was lecturing them, Ramona sorted through the pile of clothes and brought Ruth Ann what was hers. She gently put her arm around the young woman, who was then in tears, and lead her to a secluded place to get dressed.

Captain Brason ordered, “Now get your uniform on and high tail it out of here and don't look back, because I'll be right behind you.”

Shelton stumbled over himself as he tried to get dressed on a dead run. He was last seen as he disappeared down the trail.

With the sailor gone, Sheffield turned back toward Ramona and Ruth Ann. She was dressed and sitting on a rock next to Ramona who was trying to comfort her. Sheffield sat down on the other side of her and said, “Listen Ruth Ann, I'm sorry but I was just looking out for you. I have been around these guys long enough to know what they have on their mind. By the time he gets back to his ship to brag to his buddies, he won't even remember your name. You heard him, yourself, he's been with a dozen other girls.”

“I just want to be loved.” Ruth Ann sobbed.

“Take it from me honey,” Ramona said, “that isn't love.”

“What do you know about it?” she snipped rather sarcastically.

“Let me tell you how I know. Many years ago when I was still in my twenties after losing two

husbands, I convinced myself that if I couldn't have love that way, I'd have it another, just like this. After two times, I realized that it wasn't love at all. Those men were just using me, and do you know what? I was using them too."

"Really? You, Aunt Ramona." she asked. "Did you know about this, Uncle Sheffield?"

"Yes, she told me all about it."

"And you married her any way?"

"Yes, you see, it was a long time ago and she realized that what she did was wrong and..."

Ramona took over the conversation, "You see I felt guilty about it for years after that. I wondered if God could ever forgive me. Your Aunt Geannie told me that He would and what to do about it. I know that you've been taught what to do. What you have to do is to take a good long look inside of yourself and decide how you truly feel about this path that you've chosen to follow. Shelton wasn't the first boy was he?"

Still sobbing, she shook her head, "No. there's been others."

Ramona tuned her attention to Sheffield, "Why don't you head back and tell Shenan that we found her. We can find our way back."

"Remember Uncle Sheffield, you promised not to say anything."

"I won't." he said as he stood up. "I'll see you back at the cabin."

They watched as Sheffield disappeared down the trail. Ramona continued, "You know, you really should be talking to your mother about this and not me."

"But my mother is so straight laced, I could never talk to her about..." she choked.

"Sex?"

"Yeah. She has never talked to me about sex."

"Let's go back, okay." She extended her hand and helped her up. She wrapped her arm around the taller young woman as they started down the trail. As they walked, Ramona talked to her as a nurse with a medical understanding, as a woman with a physical understanding, and as friend with an emotional understanding. Nobody at the lake noticed them as they walked past on the trail.

By the time Sheffield got back to the cabin, he had cooled down. Shenan saw him coming and hurried to meet him. "Did you find her?" he asked with desperation.

"Yeah we found her, she's alright. Ramona is with her."

"What about Shelton?"

"Oh I think he decided that she's not his type."

"I wondered why he bolted through here in a flash and speed off in his car."

"I doubt you'll be seeing him again."

"Maybe not, but it's the next one I'm worried about."

“Talk to her Shenan. Talk to her.”

“I have.”

“No, I said talk to her, not at her.” Sheffield patted his brother on the shoulder and walked on past.

Before long Ramona and Ruth Ann arrived at the cabin. Seeing her mother and father waiting for her with concern all over their faces, she and Ramona stopped in their tracks. “Go to them.” Ramona encouraged.

Ruth Ann hesitated.

“Go on. It'll be alright.”

Ruth Ann looked deep into Ramona's eyes and then faced her parents and ran to them. Later the rest of the family returned from the lake totally unaware of the drama that had played out. During the afternoon there were games, visiting, and more food. Shenan, Emily, and Ruth Ann sat conspicuously off to themselves. It was obvious that they were having a very serious discussion and everyone let them have their space.

That evening when it was time to bed down, cots and sleeping bags were strewn about the living room. All of the bedrooms were full; Sheffield and Ramona shared the room with two double beds with Walt and Sarah. Wendalynn and Delbert, Sylvia and Curtis slept out under the stars.

The next day the gathering continued and lasted until well into the afternoon before some began making their way down off the mountain. Before leaving, Shenan approached Sheffield. “Ruth Ann told us all about what happened yesterday. Thanks for handling it the way you did, I'd of killed him. She also confirmed what we had been a afraid of all along. I'm just glad its out in the open now before things got even more out of hand. Emily and I are worried now that one of those guys might have gotten her pregnant. I think Ruth Ann now understands the seriousness of such reckless behavior. I don't know what Ramona said to her, but she seemed to have gotten through to her. Thanks again.” Shenan gave his brother a rare hug out of appreciation. Later in the afternoon, the rest came down off the mountain as well.

On Sunday morning, the entire family went to services together. As they were leaving the church, Sheffield and Ramona noticed Ruth Ann waiting outside of Walt's office. That afternoon, most of the family got together again at Emmett and Ellen's house. After a lunch on Monday, Sheffield and Ramona got on the road for Washington.

Over the next two weeks, Sheffield and his staff completed their work and submitted their final report to Admiral Ramsey. From there, they turned their attention to closing down the project. The biggest chore was sending all of their records to the archives. To celebrate their accomplishment, Captain Brason hosted a dinner party for his staff in a small dining room at a the historic Willard Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue near

the White House.

The following Monday morning, the 2nd of October, Admiral Ramsey called Sheffield into his office. Sheffield figured it was to receive his next assignment, thinking it would be with Bureau of Aeronautics, he wasn't prepared for the outcome of the meeting.

"First of all," the admiral began, "thanks for all of your hard work. We have reviewed your report and your recommendations."

"Thank you, sir."

"We're going to go in a new direction with our night fighter squadrons. As of today all of the detachments deployed on carriers will be absorbed into the fighter squadrons of the host air groups. In their place, two more night air groups are being organized, Fifty Three and Ninety One. We hope to have them ready for action by the first of the year. Air Group Forty One is meeting with success in the Pacific and Air Group Seventy Three has been hard at work training on Chesapeake Bay and will be deployed later this month."

"That is all very gratifying, sir."

"In addition to the Independence, we have earmarked three other carriers to be designated as night carriers. Enterprise and Saratoga will take on the air groups ninety and fifty three at the the end of the year.'

"What about the third carrier, sir?"

"Well, I was just getting to that. It's your old ship, the Reprisal. As you know she's been home from the Mediterranean for two or three weeks now and will be ready to sail for the Pacific by the end of the month with Air Group Seventy Three."

"That's an excellent choice, sir."

"I'm glad that you approve, Sheffield. You'll be going with her."

"Excuse me sir, in what capacity?"

"As you know, there are very few carrier commanders who are willing to use their night detachments, thats part of the reason were dissolving them. On top of that, there are very few flag officers who are very keen on the idea of night operations. They're too set in their ways to try something new. What we need is new blood."

Admiral Ramsey reached into his drawer and tossed something to Sheffield and continued, "What we need is young blood, like you , Admiral Brason. Congratulations."

Stunned, Sheffield looked down at the two pairs of silver stars in the palm of his hand.

"I don't understand, sir. You're promoting me to Admiral?"

"Oh no, not me. I'd rather keep you around here. No, this comes from higher up. Here's your promotion papers." Admiral Ramsey said as he handed him a manila envelope. "It's only a temporary, mind

you, but nevertheless you will have the rank of Rear Admiral but when this assignment is over, you will revert to Captain.”

“I don't know what to say sir. I wasn't expecting this. There are so many other captains out there with more experience than me who are jumping at the chance for a promotion like this.”

“Yes, but none of them have the kind of experience that you have and that's what's needed here. So are you going to take the job or what?”

“Yes sir, of course. It's just that I didn't think that I was fit for sea duty with this bum leg.”

“Now where did you get a cockamamie notion like that? You'll do great. You will command the task force and direct operations. Your specific orders are forth coming. From your record, I see that you have pretty much done that already in the South Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Admiral Weston was smart to let you operate on your own.

“You know, I went from being the skipper of the Sara to having her as my flagship. Let me give you a little advise Sheffield, it's not the same. You have to remember that you're not the captain any more.”

“Yes sir, I'll keep that in mind.”

“Now, who do you want on your staff?”

“For starters the men I have right now.”

“What about a chief of staff?”

“That's an easy one sir. I want Captain Mace Owen.”

“That shouldn't be a problem. His ship is currently in Alameda taking on a shipment of planes to be ferried to the fleet. We can have him here the day after tomorrow. Anyone else?”

“I'd like to confer with Mace on that sir. Would I be out of line to request promotions for my current staff, sir?”

“Not at all. Consider it done. Anything else.”

“There is just one other thing. If Ship's Serviceman Jackson is still aboard the Reprisal, I'd like to have him as my steward. If so, I'd like a promotion for him as well.”

“If he's still there, you've got him and if not, we'll find him for you.”

“When do I report for duty sir?”

“How about the day after tomorrow. You and your staff can report aboard the Reprisal Wednesday morning. We'll have Captain Owen there as well. Now, why don't you take the rest of the day off, and take care of any personal business you may have. Admiral Ingersoll will hold the official pinning ceremony that afternoon, but feel free to put those on now. You're dismissed, Admiral Brason.”

Admiral Ramsey stood up, and extended his hand to Sheffield. Sheffield shook his hand, saluted and left the Admiral's office. He returned to his office in disbelief at what had just taken place. He sat behind his

desk, turning the stars over in his hand. A smile of satisfaction came over his face as he put them into his pocket. He decided to wait for the formal ceremony.

Sheffield called his staff together and gave them the news and instructed Yeoman Gover to arrange for a flight to Norfolk first thing Wednesday morning for all of them, including Ramona and Lieutenant Flynn's wife. "And by the way," he told them, "There is a promotion in this for each of you as well."

He left his office for the day and drove up to Bethesda and popped in on Ramona. "What are you doing here?" she quizzed. "Aren't you supposed to be at work?"

"Nope. They let me go this morning so I thought I'd come by and pester you."

"What do you mean, 'they let you go?'"

"I've got new orders."

"Really?" she said with excitement, then her countenance fell, "Is this good news or bad news?"

"A little of both, I suppose. Which do you want first?"

"Give me the good news first I guess."

"Alright, can you fly down to Norfolk with me on Wednesday to pin a couple of stars on my collar?"

"They're making you an admiral?" she asked with excitement as she got up from he desk. She came around where he was standing and threw her arms around him.

"Well, temporarily at least. Once this assignment is over, I'll go back to being a Captain."

"Why only temporarily?" Ramona asked.

"Because there aren't many flag officers with experience in night operations."

"Wait a minute, why Norfolk?" she asked. "Why not here in Washington?"

"Because thats where my flagship is. I'll be commanding a task force centered around the Reprisal. Can you believe that?"

Ramona pushed Sheffield away and sat on the edge of her desk, with her head hung low.

"Whats the matter? I thought that you'd be excited."

With a tear slowly making its way down her cheek, she said. "That means you'll be going back to the war. Call me silly but I still feel like I have that curse hanging over my head. I almost lost you last year." With steady stream now running, she continued, "I'm so afraid that you won't come back and I'll be left a widow for the third time. I just cant bear the thought of it."

Sheffield took her hand and pulled her back into an his arms. "Hey, it will be alright. I promise, I'll be fine. Nothing is going to happen to me."

"How can you be so sure. War isn't selective."

"I have a reason to come home. I have you. Love is a powerful thing. Besides, the tide is turning. Its not the same as it was even a year ago."

“That may be true, but there are men dieing every day, and they're just as dead as those killed a year ago or two years ago.”

“I know. Remember I've seen it first hand. It ripped my heart out with every letter I had to write home to the families of my crewmen who were killed, that is after dumping their bodies overboard in what we call burial at sea. I know how close I came to it being my turn, but I cheated death. Sure I have this bum leg to show for it, but I took an oath to defend this nation against all enemies. I'm not going to set that aside because of what might or might not happen. I'm committed to winning this war even if it costs me my life. Once our enemies are defeated, I'll consider hanging up my uniform, but until then, I have a job to do.”

“Forgive me for being selfish, but I worry about you. I am proud of you, and I am thrilled about your promotion. I prayed you home once, I can do it again.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I am. I'm in the Navy too, you know. I have the same commitment. I can't let my personal feelings get in the way, but that doesn't mean I can't worry.

“Absolutely, I'll go to your pinning. If anyone gives me any grief about it, I'll tell them that I am under orders from Admiral Brason!”

“Can you get away. Since all of a sudden our time is limited, lets make the most of it and go out to dinner or something.”

“How about dinner *and* something.”

On Tuesday, Sheffield and his staff wrapped up what they could. There were still several boxes that needed indexed and sent to the archives. Sheffield made arrangements to have someone else finish up. At the end of the day, he turned in his staff car and caught a taxi home.

He was a little late getting home and Ramona was already there and was working on dinner. By the time he had changed and washed up, it was pretty much ready. They talked over dinner about their unexpected separation and hoped that it wouldn't be too terribly long. Still worried, Ramona forced herself to have a positive attitude. It had been an entire year since he returned from Salerno, she counted herself fortunate to have had him around for that long. When they were married in back in January, she knew that this time would come.

After helping clean up from dinner, Romona helped him select what to take with him as he packed his bags. By the time he was finished, his suit case was bulging and his side of the closet was bare. That night as they went to bed, she wondered how long she would have to sleep alone. She had gotten used to having him next to her. It was going to be lonely. One last time for who knew how how long, she showed him how much she was going to miss him and gave him something to remember her by.

On Wednesday morning, Sheffield and his staff meet at the Anacostia Naval Air Station for the flight to Norfolk. Waiting for them was the nine passenger Beech JRB-4 that Yeoman Gover had chartered. Sheffield and Ramona were seated across from each other in the front seats, Lieutenant Flynn and his wife, Lynette sat behind them. Their three year old daughter, Melanie, squeezed in beside her. Being seven months pregnant, it was a tight fit. Yeoman Gover and the two seamen were seated in the rear of the plane.

At first Melanie was quite well behaved, but not long after getting airborne, she became fidgety and was climbing all over her mother. Morris took her and sat her on his lap and kept her entertained for the rest of the relatively short flight.

As the plane approached the Naval Air Station at Norfolk, it made a pass over the base where the Reprisal was tied up to Pier 7. This time the surprise was Sheffield's. Marshalled on deck was the crew, spelling out, "WELCOME BACK SIR". Sheffield smiled and called over his shoulder to Yeoman Gover, "Did you have something to do with this?"

"It was actually Captain Callister's idea, sir."

A moment later, the plane landed and taxied up to the Air Transport Service terminal where three cars were waiting to take them to the ship. She had returned from her last deployment on the 11th of September, one year to the day after being hit off Salerno. Since then she had spent time in the Navy Yard for upkeep, which included a new paint job. The colorful dazzle camouflage pattern that she wore the last time Sheffield had seen her, had been painted over with a fresh coat of navy blue to minimize detection and identification by enemy aircraft, ideal for night operations.

Waiting on the quarter deck at the top of the gangplank were Captain Callister, Commander Terry, and Captain Mace Owen, who had arrived the night before. The greeting was both formal, with salutes, and personal, with handshakes. It was an especially warm greeting from Mace. They hadn't seen each other since he left the Reprisal for the west coast back in February of 1943.

"Gosh, its good to see you again, Sheffield. How've ya been? You look good."

"Thanks Mace. Its good to see you too. It's been too long. I'm glad you could come and join me."

"Oh me too. Anything to get off that glorified ferryboat. Did you know that all I've been doing since left here is to haul planes back and forth across the Pacific? Talk about dull. I understand things were anything but dull for you at Salerno. They told me all about it last night. I'm glad you're alright."

"I am, thanks to my nurse." Sheffield said, "You remember Ramona don't you, Mace?"

"Of course. How are you Commander Katmuth?" he asked shaking her hand.

"Haven't you heard Mace? My name is now Brason. We were married back in January."

"No, I didn't know that. Congratulations to the both of you. I can't wait to tell Pat."

"Where is Pat?" Sheffield asked.

“She had to stay behind in Oakland.”

After the brief reunion, the party was escorted to the flag ready room where the ceremony was to take place. Another brief reunion took place when Reggie came into the room. While waiting for Admiral Ingersoll, Sheffield took Ramona across the corridor to show her his state room. Someone had already unpacked his luggage and put it away. His uniform jackets had already been replaced with ones bearing the appropriate stripes.

After about twenty minutes the Admiral arrived. After the salutes, there was another round of greetings and introductions. He apologized for running late as he called the ceremony to order. After his brief remarks, he had Sheffield raise his right hand and take the oath of office. He then said to Ramona, “Commander Brason, would you please assist me in pinning these stars on your husband's collar?”

With Ramona on his right and Admiral Ingersoll on his left, together they removed the captain device and pinned on the two stars of a Rear Admiral. When they were done, Admiral Ingersoll exchanged salutes, followed by a handshake. Sheffield then exchanged salutes with Ramona followed by a hug and kiss.

“Now Admiral Brason, I understand there are some more promotions in order. Would you now take care of that.”

In a similar fashion Sheffield and Lynette pinned the double bars of a lieutenant on Lieutenant Flynn.

Next Admiral Ingersoll came to Yeoman Gover. “Admiral Brason has requested that you stay on as his personal assistant. As you know, the flag lieutenant position is for officers, so I have to over rule the Admiral. He had requested that you be promoted to Petty Officer 1st Class, but I'm not going to do that. Your record shows that you have been doing an excellent job in this role ever since December of forty two and that you had six months of experience in the same area in civilian life.”

Yeoman Gover's countenance fell and Admiral Brason wasn't sure what to think. Admiral Ingersoll continued. “The only course of action that I can see is to make you an officer.”

“Commander Brason, can I enlist your assistance once more in pinning a bar on Ensign Gover?”

Before he knew it, they had pinned on a gold bar on each collar. He was speechless. Admiral Ingersoll said, “Congratulations Ensign. Know, you must know you are only a limited duty officer. You can only function in this role and are ineligible for command. However, you can progress through the ranks but only as far as Lieutenant Commander.”

Beaming, Ensign Gover said, “Thank you sir.” and saluted. The admiral returned the salute followed by a hand shake. Morris next saluted Commander Brason. After returning the salute, she had a hug for him as well. Finally Admiral Brason, who was as surprised as anyone congratulated his assistant. “Those bars don't go with that uniform, you'd better go get a proper one as soon as we're finished here.”

“Aye, aye sir.”

Lastly, Sheffield announced that Seaman 1st Class Williams was being promoted to Yeoman Second class, Seaman 2nd Class Carlburg to Seaman 1st Class, and Petty Officer 3rd Class Reggie Jackson to Petty Officer 2nd Class. Yeoman Williams was to be the flag secretary with Seaman Carlburg as his assistant.

At the conclusion, Admiral Ingersoll asked for the remaining staff positions as soon as possible in order to have the men in place.

Once Admiral Ingersoll left the ship, the two star flag of Admiral Sheffield Brason was struck on the foremast. After he and his staff were served lunch in the Admiral's wardroom, Ramona, Lynette and Melanie were escorted to the quarter deck where a car was waiting on the dock to return them to the air station for the flight home. There was another hug and kiss for Ramona as he opened the car door for her. They agreed that she would meet him in Norfolk the weekend after next.

Sheffield, Mace, and Artell met together for the purpose of identifying the other staff positions that needed filled. The most crucial were the air office and operations officer; they needed to be men with night experience. For the operations officer, they decided on Lieutenant Commander Cyrus Frankman from the Night Attack and Combat Training Unit at the Charlestown Auxiliary Air Station. Lieutenant Flynn would be the assistant operations officer. For the air officer they turned to a familiar face, Commander Seymour Whitouse, the former air officer on the Reprisal. He was presently attached to the training facility at Corpus Christi. As for the rest, they would take whoever was available.

The next morning, Sheffield called Admiral Ingersoll with his requests. Since they were willing to take whoever was available, he would be able to expedite the process. He assured Sheffield that men should start arriving by Monday morning.

With the staffing issues addressed, Sheffield turned his attention to taking the task force out for a couple of days during the middle of the next week. He felt there were three reasons for the exercises, First, the air group had not yet been operated from the Reprisal, except for the veterans of the old air group. The second reason was to give his staff the opportunity to work together in order to work out the kinks. The third reason was to allow the various commands composing the task force to work together.

The cruisers of the task force were the new light cruisers Missoula, Seattle, and the anti aircraft cruiser Colorado Springs, under the command of Rear Admiral Harold Hyde. The Missoula and Seattle were the same variant of the Cleveland Class as were the Bismark and Alameda. The Colorado Springs was the sister ship of the Syracuse. Like Sheffield, Admiral Hyde was had recently been promoted and given command of the Cruiser Division. Although his promotion proceeded Sheffield's, he was class behind Sheffield, making Sheffield the senior flag officer. The rest of the task force included nine brand new Gearing class destroyers. In addition, the tanker Willamette, a sister ship to the Yellowstone, would tag along.

Sheffield still hadn't received specific orders, so they could only speculate where they might be sent.

Given the situation in the European Theater, the Pacific was the only logical destination. Sheffield had thought that before and was wrong, although he did have orders once, only to have them canceled.

Sheffield felt right at home aboard the Reprisal, although it wasn't the same. Rather than being in command, he was was a guest, as it were. His responsibilities were for the entire task force, and the Reprisal was host to he and his staff. Many of the faces he had known were gone, yet some remained. On Sunday he attended services conducted by now Lieutenant Commander Fellows. About a third of the air group was made up of familiar faces as well. A lot had changed in the year that he had been absent from front line service. So many advancements and innovations had been introduced.

On Monday and Tuesday the men making up his staff arrived. The rest of the officers were; Operations Officer: Lieutenant Commander Cyrus Frankman, Communications Officer: Lieutenant Commander Oscar Needles, Tactical Officer: Lieutenant Commander Oxford Wildemann, Navigation Officer: Lieutenant Commander Eugene Marroni, Intelligence Officer: Lieutenant Commander Ira Daily, and as the Meteorological Officer: Lieutenant Gabriel Forester. A number of enlisted men of various specialties were also included. Once again, Mace was looking out for his friend and made sure that there would be no smoking or swearing on the flag bridge or in the ready room.

With little time to get acquainted, On Wednesday the task force, less the Willamette, sailed for two days of exercises. One deck below the bridge, Sheffield watched from the flag bridge as the preparations were made for getting away. One by one the ships of the task force made their way into Hampton Roads and out to sea where he directed the three cruisers and eight destroyers to form up around the carrier and led them out to sea.

He already knew what the air group could do, he wanted to know what his staff could do and forge the task force into a cohesive team. Sheffield wanted to model his leadership style after what he had learned from Admiral Halsey when he served on his staff. He listened to and welcomed all ideas and suggestion and found his men to be knowledgeable and experienced. As when he was captain, he also continued to seek divine guidance.

The men got to know each other quickly by working together as Sheffield put the task force through a number of maneuvers and exercises. In the process it was discovered that the Tactical Officer, Commander Wildemann had a bit of an ego and things got a little heated. Sheffield didn't have to say a word because Mace called a time out so everyone could cool down. That's why Sheffield wanted to test his staff before taking them into action. Mace took Commander Wildemann aside and explained to him that everyone was to leave their ego in their quarters. He was professional enough to agree to cooperate.

The tempo of the exercises continued after dusk as air operations continued around the clock. Sheffield had learned his lesson during the exercises on the Chesapeake Bay earlier. He retired to his

stateroom around ten o'clock to get some rest. When the galley deck was rebuilt after Salerno, sound proofing was added to considerably reduce the noise from the flight deck directly overhead. During the middle of the night, Sheffield went up to the flag bridge for a few minutes to see how things were going. After being at sea for thirty six hours with continuous air operations, the task force steamed back into Hampton Roads on Thursday evening and returned to their berths at the navy base.

On Friday morning, Sheffield received their orders. They were to sail the following Friday for the Pacific via the Mediterranean. They were to put in at Algiers and report to Admiral Hewitt, who would have further orders. That rest of the day was spent with his staff, evaluating the exercise and the lessons they learned as how to function more efficiently as a team for their upcoming deployment.

That afternoon, Ramona flew down from Washington to spend the weekend. Sheffield had Morris take him to meet her plane when she landed and take them to the Tazwell. They wanted to make the most of the weekend they had, not knowing when they would see each other again. They began with dinner and dancing in the hotel ballroom.

On Saturday morning they arranged for the use of a car and drove over to Virginia Beach where they spent the entire day taking in the attractions along the oceanfront. After Dinner at the Tazwell, they took in a movie; Arsenic and Old Lace starring Carey Grant. All day Ramona had tried to hide the apprehension that griped her heart, particularly knowing that he was heading to the Pacific. That night after retiring to their room, she unleashed all of the passion and affection she had as if it was all there would ever be.

It was well past two when they finally went to sleep. With the heavy drapes drawn it was still dark in their room when they woke up sometime around ten thirty. With less than four hours remaining before her flight, they laid in bed holding each other as they talked. Rather than go down for breakfast, they wanted every moment possible to themselves and had room service bring it up to them.

Finally, it was time for her to leave. Ramona felt quite pensive about the separation, fearful that she would never see him again. When Sheffield saw her off on Sunday afternoon, it was a tearful farewell. Sheffield assured her that he would be back, he didn't know when, three months, six months, a year, maybe more, he couldn't say, but he would be back. They had had an entire year together. During that year, she had nursed him back to health. Their relationship had matured and they were married. Now they would be apart for the foreseeable future.

After seeing her off, Sheffield returned to the ship that had been his home for so long. Now it would be again. As difficult as it was to send Ramona home, he turned his attention to the job that he had to do.

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Rear Admiral Dewitt C. Ramsey was the Chiefs of the Bureau of Aeronautics from August 7, 1943 to June 1, 1945.