

## Chapter XLI

### Halfway Around the World

October 16, 1944 – December 3, 1944

Monday morning, October 16<sup>th</sup>, preparations began in earnest on all of the ships in the task force as they took on fuel, stores, and ammunition. A number of spare planes were hoisted aboard the Reprisal and put in storage.

Sheffield worked with his staff to prepare them for the upcoming deployment. Mace presented two days of instructions that he and Sheffield had put together. The entire staff seemed eager and willing to work together.

On Wednesday morning, Sheffield and the officers of his staff met with the commanders of all of the ships in the task force, including two destroyed escorts that had been added at the last minute to accompany the Willamette.

Admiral Brason asked if they could be ready to sail the next day, rather than on Friday. He explained that the remnants of a powerful hurricane, now a tropical storm, was moving up from the south east and was bearing down on Norfolk. The commanders all agreed, with some reservation. To make up the difference, a day and a half stop in the Azores was figured into the schedule.

Toward late afternoon, he left the ship and had Ensign Gover drive him to the bank to take care of some business before leaving. Upon entering the bank, he scanned the row of tellers, looking for an old friend. Not seeing Paula, he got into the shortest line. After the teller deposited his paycheck and gave some cash back, he inquired, "Does Paula Drussell still work here?"

The teller's eyes got big and leaned through the window and whispered, "Oh no. She quit about three months ago."

"What became of her?" Sheffield asked curiously.

The teller looked from side to side and proceeded to gossip. "She married the branch manager. You see, they started seeing each other while he was separated from his wife but not yet divorced. It caused quite a scandal." The teller put her hand beside her mouth and continued, "But not that his ex didn't deserve it. You see, he found out that she had been cheating on him for years."

"Wow that's all very interesting." Sheffield agreed. "I was hoping she was still here so I could tell her that I have since remarried."

"Oh," the teller guessed, "you must be the captain that she was seeing a year or two back."

"Yeah, that's me."

"Well, too bad you weren't here earlier. She comes in everyday around noon to meet her husband and go out to lunch. If you come by tomorrow about that time, I'm sure that you'd catch her."

"That won't work. I'm sailing tomorrow and I don't know when I'll be back. I'll tell you what." Sheffield

said and he pulled a pen out of his pocket. "Do you have a slip of paper?"

"Oh sure. Here you go." She slid a piece of paper across the counter to him.

Sheffield quickly scrawled out a note.

*Dear Paula,*

*I stopped by to take care of some business and hoped to run into you. I wanted you to know that I remarried back in January. I just found out that you are married again as well. I wish all the best for you and your new husband. Tell Brent, Evelyn, and Gillian hi for me. I'm sailing tomorrow and don't know when I'll be back.*

*Love Sheffield*

"Next time you see her," he asked, "will you give her this for me?"

"Sure thing Admiral Brason."

Sheffield left the bank a little disappointed that he didn't get see her.

That evening he called Ramona from his stateroom and talked briefly because of the high cost of a long distance telephone call. They said their last goodbyes for who knew how long. He could tell that she was still apprehensive, even though she tried to hide it from him. They promised to keep in touch and carry on with a long distance relationship through the mail, as they had done for a year while she was still in Hawaii. Their relationship had come a long, long ways since then.

Thursday morning dawned with overcast skies and a strong breeze. Something was definitely coming their way. Admiral Brason gave the order to sail and one by one the sixteen ships under his command cast off their mooring lines and steamed out into Hampton Roads and out to sea where they formed up. Overhead, a blimp took up station just ahead.

Once well out to sea, they came out from under the storm front and into clear skies and smooth sailing and the air group flew out to ship and came aboard. The night fighter squadron and most of the torpedo squadron were taken below. A combat air patrol of four Hellcats from the Wildcats, and a nine plane search from the Night Hawks was sent on ahead. Four float planes, two each from the Missoula and Seattle assumed the anti-submarine patrol. Daytime air operations continued all through the day and at night, they continued with the night patrols.

Admiral Brason wasted no time in issuing an order that all ships conduct readiness drills. In the meantime on his flag bridge, he and Mace put his staff through a dry run of various scenarios. This crossing

was not a leisure cruise. There was a lot of work to do to be ready for whatever lay ahead.

The next morning, in addition to the regular patrols, two Avengers were sent up with target sleeves. One flew alongside the task force to the south and the other to the north. For several hours that day, the ships conducted gunnery practice. Later in the day a fresh pair of Avengers were sent up with new sleeves for the fighter pilots, both day and night, to practice on. The Avengers conducted practice bombing runs on the task force.

Drills, exercises, and patrols were the order of the every day of the crossing. The only real excitement came on the fourth night at sea when two Avengers on night patrol encountered a surfaced U-boat. On the first pass six rockets were fired into the submarine, punching a hole in the hull so it couldn't dive. On the next pass, four five hundred pound bombs finished the job.

On the afternoon of the 25<sup>th</sup> the task force arrived at Praia da Vitória and dropped anchor in the Bay of Praia. It had been nearly two years since the Reprisal had first visited the island of Terceira. During the intervening months, the facilities had improved considerably. Several other American and British ships were also in the bay which had become a strategic port in the Eastern Atlantic. Its use had contributed greatly to fight against Nazi U-boats that once had a free reign of the ocean.

The next morning, a tanker that was already there, pulled along side to top of the Reprisal's fuel bunkers. A bag of mail was sent across and to Sheffield's delight there was a letter from Ramona that was post marked only three days earlier. It didn't contain a whole lot of news because he had only talked to her a week earlier before sailing. But she did tell him how much she loved him and that she was missing him already.

Later in the morning, news of The Battle of Leyte Gulf was received. It had been a crushing defeat to the remnants of the Japanese fleet. But the victory did not come without a price. The news also told of the devastating Kamikaze attacks on a group of escort carriers. In all, seven escort carriers had been hit, as well as 40 other ships. Five ships, including the escort carrier St. Lo, had been sunk. Twenty three others had been heavily damaged, and twelve more were moderately damaged

As the staff discussed this turn of events, Admiral Brason told them, "This new twist is what we'll be up against once we get to the Pacific. The Japanese are getting desperate and are pulling out all of the stops. I thought the German guided glide bomb that hit us at Salerno was hard to beat. These suicide bombers crashing their planes into ships will be a much worse threat. We'll really have to be on our toes."

The next day, Sheffield had Ensign Gover accompany him into Praia da Vitória to be his interpreter. They happened to find themselves on Estrela Street near Rubio's Tavern, the place that Seaman Pucheskey had busted up two years earlier. At the time, Sheffield had to get some cash from the ship's emergency fund to pay for the damages.

Sheffield wanted to go in and offered to buy Morris a soda. No sooner than they had gone inside, Rubio recognized him and rushed to greet him. “Capitão!” he said as he shook his hand profusely. The rest Ensign Gover had to translate. Rubio had invited them to have a seat and insisted on serving them a drink. He even remembered his like for Coca-Cola.

“Sure.” Sheffield said. “I’ll have a Coke. What will you have Morris?”

“I’m kind of partial to 7Up myself, sir.”

Rubio understood Coke and 7Up and said something that Morris interpreted as “Coming right up.”

A moment later they had their beverages and Sheffield reached into his pocket for some change.

Rubio waved his hands in front of himself emphatically saying “No! No!” and something else.

Ensign Gover explained, “He says that its on the house, sir.”

Sheffield pulled his hand from his pocket, empty and said, “Tell him thanks.”

Rubio pulled up a chair and sat down on it backwards and proceeded to show him all of the new fixtures that he had got with the money to replace the damaged ones. He was obviously very proud of his establishment. He was gratified to hear the sailor who had caused all of the trouble had mended his ways. Rubio convinced them to have lunch and served them up with the house specialty. Again he insisted that it was on the house. As they were ready to leave, Rubio invited them back again some day. While he wasn't looking, Sheffield left a generous tip, in American money, on the table.

When Sheffield got back to the ship, he wrote back to Ramona and told her of their stop over in the Azores. Naturally, he told her how much he loved her and that he missed her too. He had gotten kind of spoiled during the previous year. He said that despite that, it was good to be at sea again as the sea was his second love, after her. He promised to write from his next stop and looked forward to hearing from her again.

The task force sailed from Praia da Vitória on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> and continued their transit of the Atlantic. In light of the revelation of Japanese suicide pilots, Admiral Brason saw to it that the task force stepped up their readiness drills. He wasn't about to lose one his ships to them.

On the evening of October 30<sup>th</sup> they steamed past the Rock of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean and dropped anchor in the Bay of Algiers on the evening of Thursday November 2<sup>nd</sup>. The next morning, Admiral Brason went ashore and reported for duty with Admiral Hewitt, who was still the commander of US Naval forces in the Mediterranean.

Admiral Hewitt had a mission for Sheffield's task force while they were passing through the Mediterranean. There were a number of targets around Genoa, Italy that concerned the Navy. The Army Air Force saw them as insignificant and didn't want to be bothered by them. The biggest was the Italian aircraft carrier, Aquila, that was in German hands. She was virtually complete, although not fully operational. Also of

concern was an E-boat base. The E-boat was Germany's version of the American PT boats and they were a threat to allied shipping in the region. There were also be a few U-boats holed up there. In addition, there were a few targets that the Army wanted taken out that the Air Force had difficulty in hitting. It was believed that a night raid by the Reprisal's air group was just what was needed. After the mission was completed, Admiral Brason's orders were to continue on his way through the Mediterranean and through the Suez Canal into the Indian Ocean and report to the Commander of the British Eastern Fleet at Trincomalee in British Ceylon before proceeding to the Pacific.

Once back aboard the ship, he met with his staff and relayed their orders and put them to work planning the raid. While he was ashore, the mail was brought aboard. To his amazement, he had a letter from Ramona in answer to his letter from the Azores.

*October 30, 1944*

*Dear Sheffield*

*That was a quick response. I didn't expect to hear back from you so soon. I guess I wasn't aware that you would be stopping over in the Azores. From what little I've been around Murry, I wouldn't think that he caused all the trouble he gave you. It just goes to show that people can change. After all, I'm living proof of that.*

*Work is going fine. Not much new there. Thanks to you, the part I enjoy most is getting out and about in the wards and the classes. They are looking at adding some temporary buildings that would give us another 2,500 beds. That must be a sign of what they expect as war pushes closer to Japan.*

*I'm glad that you got to go to sea again. I know that it makes you happy and that makes me happy. I must say that I miss you. Now I know how Geannie felt all of those years. She always had such a good attitude about it. I need to take a lesson from her. I must admit it's not as easy for me.*

*I worry about you, especially where your going. I heard about the kamikaze attacks... well let me just say, I worry about you. I can't dwell on it and I don't want you to worry about me worrying about you. Boy talk about rambling. Anyway, I promise not to mention it again.*

*A lot has happened around here since I last wrote to you. I have a house guest for the next little while.*

*As was feared, Ruth Ann is pregnant. She called me last week in tears and wanted to know if she could come and stay with me. She has no idea who*

the father is. Shenan is upset and Emily won't acknowledge the problem.

Ruth Ann is painfully aware of the consequences of what she was doing, but at the time it didn't dawn on her. She believed that things like this happened to other girls but somehow she could get away with it.

I told her that she could come and stay with me until after the baby is born. In the meantime she can figure out what she is going to do. By then maybe things will settle down at home for her. So what do you think of that?

Well the big election is only nine days away. I know that you voted for Dewey when you mailed in your ballot before leaving. I'm still not sure which way I'm going. Four years ago, Geannie talked me into voting for Willkie. I hate to tell you this but I'm leaning toward FDR. I'm not sure anyone should be elected to fourth term, or even a third, but I do like a lot of what he has done and I'm not sure its wise to change leadership in the middle of a war.

I received a nice card from Pat Owen with belated wishes for a happy marriage. She had no idea that we were married until Mace told her. I'm sure some of our other friends have no idea either. It's too bad that we lost track of Freddy and Susan and Shorty and Wilma. I think I'll see if I can track them down.

Take care of yourself and write when you can. I look forward to hearing from you. In closing, let me just tell you how much I love you. I'm happier than I have ever been in my life. Its ironic that I had to lose my best friend in order to have you.

Love,

Ramona.

Sheffield decided to reply to her letter right then as he was going to be busy before they sailed the next morning.

November 3, 1944

Aboard the USS Reprisal, Algiers

Dear Ramona

That was a fast response. Its amazing how quickly a letter can get across the Atlantic these days. But where we're going from her, it will most likely be different story. It may take weeks for me to get your next letter. So don't be surprised if you don't hear

from me for a while.

We don't have much time in Algiers this time. We dropped anchor last night and sail first thing in the morning and have a quick little matter of business to take care of before we move on. Things are a lot different here since the last time I was here. Since the Italian front has moved further up the "boot" and practically all of the Mediterranean is now in Allied hands, everything has moved on.

There really isn't much for us to do in either the Atlantic or the Mediterranean, so we move on to where we're really needed. I have thought all along that we would end up there, it just took a while. You're just as well off in Washington now because I'm sure we won't be going anywhere near Pearl Harbor. I'll come home once we get the job done.

It gives me some satisfaction to go up against the Japanese. I'm not a vengeful person, but I must admit, I am eager for a little payback. After all, I'm only human. They are the ones that took Geannie and the kids from us.

You mentioned it being ironic that we came together because we both lost her. The irony goes even deeper. I find it ironic that because my friend and wingman lost his life in a collision with my plane, you were there waiting in the wings for me. I have no doubt that this is all part of God's bigger plan.

I have to admit, and you know this, they're isn't a day that goes by that I don't think of her. I really miss Geannie and the kids. I'm sure I always will. But be assured, you, my love, you have filled the void in my heart and make it complete again. You stand just as high on a pedestal in my eyes. They're gone and now its you that fills my life and make it worth living. Its you that I long to be with, Its you that I'll be coming home to. Its you who I love.

That's too bad about Ruth Ann. We all saw it coming. I'm glad that you took her in. She needed to get out of Roanoke. Shenan will eventually settle down, but Emily... Well she is Emily. Has she decided what she is going to do yet?

Yeah, I have often wondered what happened to those guys. I'd love it if you could track them down. It used to be easy to keep track of where people were when they moved

around. Not anymore. There are too many people in too many places now days. The last I knew, Shorty and Wilma were in Alameda and Freddy and Susan were there in Washington. I'm sure they've lost track of me too. As far as that goes, they probably lost track of each other as well. We were quite a team back in the good old days. Then Jormcat came along and joined us. It's sure great to have Mace with me again.

I need to go see what they're coming up with for our next operation and put my two cents worth in. I like to let them lay the groundwork. If I'm there from the beginning, they tend to leave it up to me to get the ball rolling. This way, they put forth their best ideas and I get everyone's input. They're pretty sharp. Sometimes I wonder what they need me for.

I'll write to you again when I can. I just don't know when or where that might be. That won't mean that you aren't in my thoughts. No matter how hectic things get, there is always room for you rattle around up here (tapping my head with the pen) and for sure in hear (holding my hand over my heart).

Love Sheffield

P.S. I hope you vote for Dewey

The ships of the task force were steaming out of the bay of Algiers as the sun was coming up the next morning. Several planes, the air group having remained aboard during their stay, were poised for launch once at sea. That day, the twenty four F6F-5s of the Fighting Seventy Three Wildcats would provide not only the combat air patrol, but also search and anti-submarine patrols. The Hellcats weren't well suited for the latter role but with the risk at a minimum, they would do. Eighteen of the thirty two Hellcats from the Alleycats and the twenty one of the twenty four Avengers were held back for their mission that night.

As the planes for the morning patrols were taking off, the Willamette and the two destroyer escorts were detached with orders to proceed to Malta and wait for the task force there. Free from the slower tanker and destroyer escorts, Admiral Brason lead his task force northeast at twenty four knots. At sunset, around five thirty, they were just east of the Spanish Island of Menora some three hundred seventy five miles from their target.

As the sunset, the last of the patrols were recovered and parked forward on the flight deck, while the strike group were brought up on deck. The night shift went to work fueling and arming the planes for their mission. To clear the deck, the Wildcats were taken below. Four Alleycats were at the ready in case



anything showed up on the radar scope. Nothing did.

At two o'clock Sunday morning, with a three quarter moon, Admiral Brason directed Captain Callister to bring his ship into the wind. A few minutes later, the first of the strike group, three Avengers armed with incendiary bombs, were catapulted into the night sky. There was a fifteen minute pause before the eighteen Hellcats loaded with two five hundred pound bombs, six rockets, and an extra fuel tank took off. Four more were on combat air patrol and the rest were retained aboard in case enemy aircraft showed up. The remaining eighteen Avengers, armed with four five hundred pound bombs were the last to be launched.

Admiral Brason had gone to bed earlier in the afternoon so he could be rested for the activities of the night ahead. He and his staff monitored the radio traffic from the strike group. The first hour or so was quite. It wasn't until three thirty that the first communications came in. The three Avengers had successfully penetrated the German air defenses and dropped their incendiary bombs which started fires to back light the targets.

By the time the Alleycats arrived fifteen minutes later, the German anti aircraft batteries were manned and waiting for them, according to the plan. The tracers rounds from their guns pinpointed the precise location of the gun emplacements. The Alleycats had the advantage because the enemy gunners couldn't see them. At a relatively safe distance, the assigned planes fired their rockets into the anti aircraft batteries and followed up with a strafing pass, silencing most of the resistance. In the process, one Hellcat was lost.

With the anti aircraft batteries taken care of, the rest of the Alleycats and the Nighthawks began attacking their assigned targets with only sporadic enemy fire. It was enough to bring down an Avenger. While the attack was in progress, four Messerschmidt Bf110 night fighters showed up from somewhere. It was thought that there wouldn't be any air opposition, but it was a contingency figured into the plan. There were a number of Hellcats which had already dropped their bombs and were free to engage the heavy, twin engined, radar equipped fighters that had been converted from medium bombers.

The Bf110's accounted for two more Avengers before they were overwhelmed and out numbered by the more maneuverable Hellcats. In the ensuing fight, all four German planes, each with a three man crew, were shot down at the cost of one Hellcat.

In just a matter of a few minutes, the attack was over. As the strike group withdrew, it was difficult to assess the damage in the darkness. The fires burning below gave some indication. The real appraisal would have to wait for an Army Air Force reconnaissance flight the next day. With communications with the Army Air Force as they were, Admiral Brason never did get the report. For those of air group who had never been in combat, the raid proved to be a valuable experience and prepared them for what lay ahead.

The task force was steaming into the wind, which was coming from the southwest, waiting for the

returning strike group. They were steaming south, parallel to and west of Corsica and Sardinia, when the sun came up the next morning.

The routine of regular patrols continued as they made their way toward the island of Malta, located just below of the southern tip of Sicily. It was late morning on Monday when the tanker and her escorts rejoined the task force off Malta. Together they set out across the Eastern Mediterranean, taking time to refuel enroute.

One of the fighter pilots shot down over Genoa came aboard by highline while the Reprisal was refueling from the Willamette. After bailing out of his stricken Hellcat, Lieutenant (jg) Gerald Moffat parachuted to safety and fell into the hands of the Germans, only to be rescued by Italian resistance fighters who smuggled him out of Nazi occupied Italy under the cover of darkness and took him by speedboat to Naples where he was turned over to the US Navy. He was hurried to Malta where he went aboard the Willamette. The fate of the other missing airman was unknown.

Late afternoon on Wednesday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, the ships arrived at Port Said, Egypt and entered into the Suez Canal, in single file. The passage took about fifteen hours at eight knots. (The low speed helped prevent erosion of the canal banks by ships' wakes.) Emerging into the Gulf of Suez after sunrise the next morning, they continued the rest of that day through the Gulf of Suez and into the Red Sea that evening. The air group was retained aboard during the transit and flight operations resumed again in the Red Sea. Three days later they came out into the Gulf of Aden. The task force refueled as they passed along the Horn of Africa and out into the Arabian Sea. Eleven days after leaving Algiers, they dropped anchor in Trincomalee Harbor on the east coast of Ceylon on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Trincomalee was the headquarters for the British Pacific Fleet and at the time, most of the fleet was in the harbor. The ships present included the battle cruiser Renown, the battleship Howe and the carriers Illustrious and Indomitable as well a number of cruisers and several destroyers. While the Reprisal was at anchor, the air group was at the Royal Navy Air Station at China Bay.

Trincomalee Harbor, the second largest natural harbor in the world, is overlooked by terraced highlands, and its entrance is guarded by two headlands. After the fall of Singapore, the British Eastern Fleet moved to Trincomalee, which had been occupied by the British since 1796. The Reprisal wasn't the first American carrier in those waters, as the Saratoga had operated with the British earlier in the year from March through May.

Upon arrival, Sheffield had his launch readied and made the trip across the harbor to the HMS Howe, the flagship of Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, to report in. The launch came along side the battleship and Sheffield went aboard and was escorted to the Admiral's ready room. Sheffield had actually met Admiral Fraser a year and half earlier at Scapa Flow just before returning the States with the Reprisal. At the time,

Admiral Fraser was the newly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet.

In meeting with Admiral Howe and his staff, Sheffield requested that his task force be provided with fuel and provisions before continuing on their way. The request was granted and a favor was asked of him in return. Sheffield was invited to assist the British carriers in an up coming raid on the oil fields of Japanese occupied Sumatra. Sheffield welcomed it as another opportunity to give the air group some combat experience before they arrived in the Pacific.

From the Howe, Sheffield took his launch over to the HMS Illustrious, the flagship of Vice Admiral Sir Philip Vain, the Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Carrier Squadron. In his meeting with Admiral Vian, Sheffield was briefed on the upcoming operation. It turned out that Admiral Vian had been in command of division of escort carriers at Salerno. After the Reprisal had been hit and was forced to withdraw, he was asked remain on station longer than planned, despite being low on fuel.

Sheffield told him, "Then I guess I owe you one, Admiral."

Over the next two days, the ships were replenished, while the crews were allowed shore leave in two waves of twenty four hours each. Sheffield and Mace took the opportunity to go ashore for a half a day.

When he returned to the ship Sheffield wrote to Ramona. but being such a remote part of the world, with no American presence, he doubted that the letter would ever reach her.

*November 17, 1944*

*Aboard the USS Reprisal, Trincomalee Harbor, Ceylon*

*Dear Ramona,*

*Being in such a remote part of the world with no American presence, I don't know if this letter will reach you or not, but here it goes.*

*Since I last wrote, we hit the Germans one last time as we passed through the Mediterranean. Later we transited the Suez Canal. It was during the night so I really didn't see anything to tell you about. Then a few days later we dropped anchor here in Trincomalee and have been guests of the Royal Navy.*

*They agreed to provide provision for our ships and in return, we are going to help them out on a little operation on our way to the Pacific. While here I got to go aboard one of their battleships and a carrier.*

*I found the British carrier to be small and cramped in comparison to ours. I also found the Royal Navy's tropic uniforms to be amusing with their*

white shorts and white calf high socks.

Mace and I spent the afternoon ashore. Like many of the sailors, we were drawn to the beach. Trincomalee has some of the most picturesque and scenic beaches in Ceylon that are pretty much unspoiled. They are ideal for bathing and swimming, due to the relative shallowness of the sea. I was able to walk out over a hundred yards into the ocean without the water reaching my chest.

Thanksgiving is coming up next week. Do you have any plans? I know my folks would love to have you. I suppose wherever we are, we'll have something that will resemble a Thanksgiving dinner.

Its times like that that make it hard to be so far away from home. I'll miss you for sure and be sure that I'll be thinking of you. Hopefully we will be together next year for Thanksgiving.

I think of you often, particularly when I have a moment to myself. While on this cruise, there has been a few times like that.

While we're in transit, I have ordered as many drills and exercises as possible. I want us in tip top shape when we get to where we are going. I have a feeling we'll be pretty busy when we get there.

Get me reassurance of something else. I know how much you worry about me, but I'll be fine. Trust me, I will come back to you. I just don't know when. I'm afraid that it could be a while. The reason that I am so confident is because I know that you are praying for me and all of my family is praying for me as well. With that many prayers, in addition to my own, I'll make it through.

Get me reassurance of another thing. I love you. You are the best thing in my life right now and I am grateful to have you, or should I say that you'd have me..

I hope you get this letter sometime. I look forward to your next letter. Hopefully it will be waiting for me when we get to where we are going. We sail in the morning and it will take us a couple of weeks to get there.

*I hope all is well with you. How is Ruth Ann getting along? I hope she can figure out what she's going to do. I'm glad that she has you to rely on. She's a good kid, just pretty messed up.*

*I'd better say goodbye now, I have a busy day tomorrow and for the next several days. Until later...*

*Love Sheffield*

After the ships of the task force had taken on stores during their brief stay, two days later, they sailed along with the British task force made up of the carriers *Illustrious* and *Indomitable*, three cruisers, and five destroyers under the tactical command of Vice Admiral Vian. Once at sea, Air Group Seventy Three flew out to the *Reprisal*.

The two task forces steamed on a parallel course, followed by the *Willamette* and her escorts and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Wave King* and her two destroyers. Together they steamed east through the Indian Ocean toward the Japanese occupied island of Sumatra. Their mission was to attack the strategic oil refinery at Pangkalan Brandan in northern Sumatra.

Three days later on the 20<sup>th</sup>, the three carriers arrived at the launch point. The two British carriers sent off twenty seven Avengers and as many Hellcats and Corsairs. The *Reprisal* contributed eighteen Avengers from Night Torpedo Squadron Seventy Three and twenty four Hellcats from Night Fighter Squadron Seventy Three. The day squadron provided the combat air patrol, the rest were held in reserve.

Weather conditions over the target made it impossible for the British to proceed with their attack and diverted their attention to refineries at Belawan Deli with subsequent raids made on airfields near Sabang. The radar equipped American strike group proceeded to attack the primary target, despite low clouds and rain. In the end, the attacks only caused light damage and no aircraft were lost. At the conclusion of the attack, all planes returned to their respective carriers. The British retired to Trincomalee, while Admiral Brason took his task force south to refuel.

As the last plane was securely aboard, the crew of the several ships turned their attention to crossing the equator the next day. That evening Davey Jones, in the person of Chief Evans, came aboard the *Reprisal* to serve notice to the pollywogs who were about to enter into the domain of His Majesty, Neptunus Rex. Again Sheffield played the role the magistrate judge of the the Royal Court as he did the last time the ship crossed the equator nearly two years earlier.

For a large number of the men on the *Reprisal* and the other ships, this was their first crossing and faced the initiations into the Mysterious Order of the Deep. For the men on Admiral Brason's staff, it was the first time for Lieutenant Flynn, Yeoman Williams, Seaman Carlburg and most of the rest of the enlisted men.

The festivities were much the same as on her first crossing into the South Atlantic. By the time it was over, several hundred more men were had become shellbacks.

The next two days were spent refueling the ships of the task force. The second day, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, was Thanksgiving. Aboard the Reprisal, Thanksgiving dinner was served to the crew on the flight deck as they steamed along at ten knots, with the Willamette alongside. As the men filled up on turkey and stuffing, the Reprisal's fuel bunkers were filled with oil.

That evening, Admiral Brason ordered the task force to steam due east, just below the equator, back toward Sumatra. At two o'clock on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>, the Reprisal resumed air operations which went around the clock for the next six days as the task force sailed along the southern coast of Sumatra, Java and the Lesser Sunda Islands, as far as Timor, a distance of two thousand two hundred twenty five nautical miles, all the while carrying out attacks on Japanese military targets and the oil fields and refineries in the former Dutch Colonies, taking time to refuel from time to time. At times, the Missoula and Seattle would take some destroyers and leave the formation to bombard shore installations. The raids gave the pilots and air crews some valuable experience, better than any exercise or drill could provide. This was the about as real as it gets. In the process two Hellcats and three Avengers were lost to enemy anti aircraft fire and another Avenger when it crashed on take off. Fortunately that crew was rescued. The losses were made up from spare aircraft that had been brought along and the pilots from the extra boards of the respective squadrons.

The oil fields of Indonesia were one of the principle reasons that Japan went to war. They needed the oil fuel their industry. The attack on Pearl Harbor was to keep the United States from interfering with plans of seizing the islands of Java and Sumatra. Now here was the Reprisal, attempting to deny the Empire of Japan of that very oil; fuel for their declining war machine.

On the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> the task force began winding through the islands and passages off the western tip of New Guinea, which in recent months had been recaptured by the Allies. On the afternoon of the 1<sup>st</sup> of December they recrossed the equator at the point where they came out into the Philippine Sea.

Their original destination was Seeadler Bay at Manus Island, north of New Guinea, but Admiral Brason received a dispatch from the Seventh Fleet headquarters with a new destination. A day and a half later on Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup>, they dropped anchor in the reef-enclosed waters of Kossol Roads at the northern end of the Palau Islands.

In just over six weeks from the time that he left Norfolk on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, Sheffield found himself halfway around the world.

\* \* \* \* \*

The 1944 Cuba–Florida hurricane was a large, intense Category 3 hurricane that affected western Cuba and Florida. On October 20, the diminishing tropical storm moved ashore north of Savannah with winds near 50 mph. It moved inland over eastern South Carolina and North Carolina. On October 21, it became extratropical, and it passed into the Atlantic Ocean near Norfolk.

The Aquila was damaged during an Army Air Force air attack on Genoa on June 16, 1944.

The British raid on the oil refinery on Sumatra actually happened as described, except for the Reprisal's role, and was the first of many over the next three months. Some sources say it took place on December 20, 1944. The British task force included the carriers *Illustrious* (1830 Squadron: 18 Corsair II's; 1833 Squadron: 18 Corsair II's; 845 Squadron; 21 Avenger I's) and *Indomitable* (1839 Squadron: 15 Hellcat I's; 1844 Squadron; 14 Hellcat I's; 857 Squadron; 21 Avenger I/II's), escorted by the cruisers *Newcastle*, *Argonaut* and *Black Prince* screened by the destroyers *Kempfenfelt* (ii), *Whirlwind*, *Wrangler*, *Wessex* and *Wakeful*. The British Admirals were the actual commanders and were as described.

