

## Chapter XLIII

### An Important Job to Do

January 8, 1945 – May 21, 1945

Sheffield reflected on what could have been a disaster much worse than that day off Salerno. The loss of life and damage could have been considerable, but fortunately they weren't. The numbness in his left leg served as a constant reminder of that day. His walking stick reminded him of just how fortunate he was. He should have died. They told him that he was dead for a few minutes, but he had no recollection of that experience or of being with his beloved Geannie during that time.

He was grateful for the new lease on life that he was granted and for the second chance at love. He missed Ramona and longed for the day that he could go home. Oh how he loved her. But, for the foreseeable future he had an important job to do. A job that he was good at.

The same routine continued on the 9<sup>th</sup> aboard the Reprisal as a hundred miles to the east about 68,000 men from the U.S. Sixth Army landed on a twenty mile beachhead in Lingayen Gulf on the island of Luzon, between the towns of Lingayen and San Fabian, meeting no opposition. With the Army securely in place, Admiral Brason withdrew his task force to the west to refuel on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

On the night of January 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, Task Force 38 of Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet passed through the Luzon Strait into the Seventh Fleet area of operation for raids on enemy strongholds in Indochina and China itself. Admiral Halsey had reason to believe that remnants of the Japanese Fleet that had survived the Battle of Leyte Gulf had sought refuge in the harbors along the coastline.

Later in the day the 10<sup>th</sup>, Admiral Brason's Task Force 77.5 rendezvoused with Admiral McCain's the four carrier task forces. Sheffield received a dispatch from from Admiral McCain aboard the Lexington with his orders, it was signed by Captain Fred McGowan, Chief of Staff. A note at the bottom simply read, "Good to have you with us Sheffield and congratulations on your marriage."

"So that's where Freddy got off too. Susan must have got Ramona's letter after all." he thought to himself.

Admiral Brason's task force was to operate alongside Admiral Mat Garner's Task Force 38.5 consisting of Enterprise, Independence, and six destroyers. Together they were to form the spearhead of Admiral Halsey's thrust into the South China Sea. At three o'clock in the morning, Enterprise, Independence and Reprisal began launching radar equipped Avengers in several two-plane search teams into the dark, overcast night sky. The planes fanned out along the coast for hundreds of miles. At the same time, Hellcats from the night carriers flew combat air patrol over the entire force.

The searches revealed nothing except for a large convoy of tankers, escorted by a light cruiser and a few destroyer escorts. A strike group from the three night carriers was sent out in the nasty weather, as they were in the skirt of a typhoon well to the south. When it was all over, one ship had been sunk and two others

were dead in the water and sinking. Two others had been hit and were circling aimlessly while others had been damaged. The next day planes from Task Force 38 finished off the convoy. In all forty four ships, mostly oil tankers, had been sunk, dealing a serious blow to the Empire's oil supply line.

During the day, the Reprisal provided air cover over the two night task forces, as the Enterprise and Independence were strictly night carriers. The Reprisal also contributed some Hellcats and a few Avengers to the strike group that hit Camrahn Bay.

By evening of the 12<sup>th</sup>, the typhoon was now only two hundred miles away causing heavy seas and rain squalls. Nevertheless, planes from the three carries flew night searches and combat air patrols. The next day the entire force retired to the north to escape the typhoon and rendezvous with the tankers and refuel, although conditions were less than desirable. The forty five mile an hour wind caused heavy swells and driving rain. Visibility from the flag bridge was limited to no more than two or three miles under an overcast sky.

Everything, including aircraft, was lashed down as the big ship pitched and rolled in heavy seas. Captain Callister had ordered the ship to be battened down. All watertight hatches were sealed. All openings to the outside, especially in the hangar bay were closed off. All external equipment, including the guns and their directors were wrapped in their custom fit canvas covers.

One unusually high swell hit the ship broadside causing it to roll fifteen degrees to starboard. It hung there for a few seconds before rolling back the other way, passing upright and rolling nine degrees to port before righting itself. An Avenger on the hangar deck broke loose and rolled onto the plane next to it as the ship rolled to starboard. Then as the ship rolled to port, it was tossed against the bulkhead. Both planes were damaged, but repaired later. Throughout the ship men were knocked from their feet and objects that weren't secure were sent flying. Seventeen men were injured as a result.

At times a destroyer to port rode the top of a swell, rising nearly to the level of the flight deck, while a destroyer to starboard was in the bottom of a trough well below the waterline. The larger cruisers had an easier time of riding out the storm than the destroyers, but the carrier, because of its size was affected the least. The destroyers were tossed about as they knifed through the swells, being carried upward until their red hulled underbellies were exposed just before cresting the breaker and plunging down the other side, their propellers and rudder temporarily out of the water.

A few moments after the ship had been rocked by the swell, the bow pitched downward. An oncoming swell broke over the forward end of the flight deck. A torrent of water washed over the side, flooding the catwalks and gun decks before cascading into the turbulent sea. The open forecastle took the brunt of the force, damaging the twin forty millimeter mount at the bow and the starboard anchor handling equipment, particularly chain wheel. Two men standing watch were swept overboard and were lost.

As the task force outdistanced the range of the typhoon, the wind subsided, the heavy seas subsided, and the sky cleared up. Smooth sailing conditions returned and fueling operations were resumed. What damage could be repaired shipboard was taken care of. The main radar had been knocked out which took time to readjust and fine tune. In the meantime, they had to rely on the the Missoula and Seattle to look beyond the horizon.

On the 14<sup>th</sup>, Task Force 77.5 was detached from Task Force 38, which headed north to attack Japanese positions in and around Hong Kong. At the conclusion of the orders, Freddy had added a note to Sheffield, "Hope to see you around again sometime."

With their service with the Third Fleet concluded, Admiral Brason took his ships east, back toward Luzon and covered a second amphibious landing took place on 15<sup>th</sup>, just forty five miles southwest of Manila.

For the next two weeks, Admiral Brason's task force ranged up and down the Philippines, carrying out raids on Japanese positions day and night, taking time out to fuel every few days. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sheffield took time out of his busy schedule to reflect on their first anniversary and felt bad that he wasn't with Ramona to celebrate. On the the 29<sup>th</sup> of January they covered an amphibious assault sixty miles north of the entrance to Manila Bay and another two days later fifteen miles directly south of the entrance to Manila Bay at Nasugbu.

At the conclusion of the landing at Nasugbu, Task Force 77.5 broke off and retired. Six days later they dropped anchor in Seeadler Bay on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February after six weeks at sea for a well deserved rest and replenishing.

The next day, the repair ship USS Briareus pulled along side and moored to the Reprisal. The Seattle then moored to the other side of the Briareus. The damage that Corporal Matsuhara caused was repaired. The corner twenty millimeter battery at the aft end of the flight deck was replaced with new twin mounts. The starboard corner battery was also replaced at the same time. The damage to the flight deck where his propeller chewed up the wood was also repaired. At the same time, the damage to the fo'c'sle as a result of the storm was repaired as well.

The Seattle had her damaged aircraft crane and catapults removed altogether and the hangar planked over. In their place, three additional forty millimeter quad mounts were installed. These modifications changed her profile, making her easily distinguishable from her sister ships.

When the mail was brought aboard, there were two letters from Ramona. The one dated January 1<sup>st</sup> told about her Christmas in Roanoke. He found it interesting that Murry Puchesky and Maxine Austin were engaged to be married. She went on to tell of the quiet New Year's Eve that she and Ruth Ann spent at

home. She also mentioned that she finally got the letter from Trincamolee. He then read the other letter.

January 17, 1945

Dear Sheffield

Well, since I last wrote to you, I received some sad news. A week ago Harvery called me at work to tell me that Grandma Erhart had died. Aunt Susannah and Charlie, the ranch hand, had been out fixing fences and when they came back they saw the gate to the hen house open. Aunt Susannah went to investigate and that is when she discovered Grandma. She had a stroke and died while gathering eggs. She had just celebrated her 86<sup>th</sup> birthday only 5 days earlier.

Two days later I flew down to Dennison with Harvery and Marcella in the same plane that he took us in. At first, Ruth Ann was going to stay home and fend for herself, until she learned that Joseph would be there too. We landed in the pasture just like before. Joseph borrowed a car from a buddy and drove up from the Fort Worth Army Airfield where he is in training with his B-29 squadron.

On Saturday, Harvery brought the old car out of the barn, this was one of those special occasions that it was used for. Harvery drove Marcella, Aunt Susannah, and I into town, Ruth Ann rode with Joseph, and Charlie went in the old pickup truck.

It was a simple service at the funeral home with several other ranchers and a number of towns people in attendance. After the funeral, six cowboys carried her casket out to the pickup for her final ride home. She was buried in the small family plot there on the ranch next to her husband and her daughter. She would be pleased to know that they buried her with her boots on.

Ruth Ann sure seems to like Joseph. I'm not sure how he feels about her, but he sure treated her good. He has been good to promptly answer her every letter.

It was a short visit as we had to come home on Sunday. I'm so grateful that I found her and had the two occasions to be around her. She was an interesting and special woman.

Speaking of Ruth Ann, she is doing well and has two and half months until the baby is born. She keeps busy with a couple of correspondence courses that she is taking. That was one of the things that came out of the meeting with her folks and Walt. They encouraged her to work toward finishing her education.

You'll be pleased to know that I finally heard back from both Wilma and Susan. They're doing well and were pleased to know that you and I got together. Neither one of them had a clue. They both expressed that they wondered where you had gotten off to. As for Shorty, he is now an admiral and commands a division of escort carriers in the Pacific. Freddy is a captain and is on the staff of Admiral McCain, who commands a large carrier task force. Maybe sometime you'll cross paths with one of them.

I have been following the news regarding the progress of the war in the Philippines, since I know you're involved. I dug out Geannie's big globe, the one she used to use in her class rooms, and have found the places that they talk about as well was the places that you have mentioned. You are a long ways from home aren't you, but I won't go into that. I also won't go into this business about the suicide planes. Just be careful, won't you.

Our anniversary is coming right up, next Monday in fact. I wish you were here so we could celebrate it together. I miss you and think of you often. Despite my personal concerns, I am very proud of you for your effort in brining this war to an end one day. It can't be soon enough. I think of you often and wonder where you are and what you are doing, and yes you are in my every prayer. Often, you even come to me in my dreams at night.

Love, always,

Ramona.

Happy Anniversary!

Sheffield wrote back to her and told her what he could.

February 6, 1945

Aboard the USS Reprisal, Seeadler Bay, Admiralty Islands

Dear Ramona

We just returned from our latest cruise earlier today and are safe and sound at Manus Island after an eventful six weeks at sea. When got here, there were two letters from you waiting for me. I missed spending New Years Eve with you. We rang in the new year by hitting the Japanese that were in range of our planes. And I did think of you especially on our first anniversary.

I'm glad that you heard back from Wilma and Susan. Its good to know where they are. I don't know how much of chance I'll have to cross paths with Shorty and Freddy since I'm

with the Seventh Fleet. However I did sort of run into Freddy. We operated with Admiral McCain's task force for a few days. Freddy sent us our orders with a short personal note attached that congratulated us on our marriage.

I'm glad to hear that Ruth Ann is doing well. Thanks for taking such good care of her. She really is a good kid, I guess I should say young woman. Who knows, maybe something will work out between her and Harvey's boy, Joseph.

It's about time you got that letter. It makes you wonder were all it had been before it finally made it to you. I'm not surprised that it took so long, considering where I sent it from.

Without going into details, I will tell you that we had a close call when a young Japanese airman sought glory in our demise. He did very little damage to us but took a few good men with him and injured a few others. I just can't understand their way of thinking. If they throw themselves at us like that, there won't be any of them left. Although, they can cause a lot of damage in the process. I'm sure that you have heard about it in the news.

As bad as they can be, at least we can defend ourselves against them. Mother Nature is another story. He got caught in a pretty bad storm that banged us up a little. I got a good bump on my head when the ship rolled in a swell. I was thrown out of my chair into the bulkhead.

I'm not surprised to hear about Murry and Maxine. When are they getting married? When I talked to them the last time I was home, they told me that they were talking about marriage. Little Virginia could sure use a father in her life.

During the storm, I thought about him. The first time I encountered him was when his still nearly set the ship on a fire during a storm. It's remarkable how far he has come. The Austin Brothers say he is one of their best employees. I wonder what Maxine thinks of the naked lady that he has tattooed on his upper arm?

*I thought about getting a tattoo when I was a young Ensign just after returning from my world cruise. I'm sure glad that Geannie talked me out of it. As I recall she was very adamant about it. She was flattered that it was going to be a simple heart with her name across it. But she wouldn't have it, so I obeyed. If I had, I'd had to of had your name added to it.*

*I don't need your name tattooed across a heart on my arm because it written on the heart that beats within my breast. This is the part were I get all mushy and tell you how much I love you and how I couldn't live without you. This is were I say that I have you to come home to and hope that that day will be sooner than later. This is where I tell you how much you mean to me and that I thank God above that you are mine. This is where I sign it Love Sheffield.*

In a couple of days, the repairs to the Reprisal were completed and she moved away from the Briareus and two destroyers took he place for repairs for storm damage. By the end of the second week of February the Briareus had completed all of the repairs required by Admiral Brason's ships. The rest of the time was spent taking on stores and fuel in preparations for sailing.

The day before sailing, February 19<sup>th</sup>, the Marines landed on Iwo Jima. Sheffield felt they should be there. It seemed that he always felt that he was needed elsewhere, but just as important as being the only fleet carrier in the Atlantic and Mediterranean was, being the only fleet carrier in the Seventh Fleet was just as important.

Sheffield and his task force had been a piece in a chess game between General McArthur and Admiral Nimitz. McArthur desired that the Seventh Fleet maintain a strong naval presence in the Philippines but lost out to Nimitz who needed all the strength that could be mustered for the invasion of Iwo Jima. Consequently, the four remaining battleships, the six escort carriers, and all but four cruisers and a number of destroyers were withdrawn from the Seventh Fleet. Aside from Sheffield's task force, all that remained were the four cruisers, several destroyers, and a number of auxiliaries including those required for amphibious operations. After taking so much, Nimitz agreed to leave Sheffield with the Seventh Fleet, which was now simply Task Force 77.

With less than two weeks in port, Task Force 77 put to sea once more on the 20<sup>th</sup>. The very next day the Saratoga, which had replaced Independence as a night carrier, was conducting around the clock operations off Iwo Jima when she was hit by a kamikaze and several bombs and had to return to the States

for repairs. Sheffield wondered if they might receive orders to take her place in the dangerous waters off Iwo Jima. Since the Enterprise was still there, no such orders were received. On the 26<sup>th</sup> and the Reprisal joined in on two days of punitive air strikes in combination with a fierce naval bombardment from three Seventh Fleet cruisers prior to the Invasion of Palawan on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

For the next month, planes from the Reprisal attacked enemy positions throughout the Philippines. Occasionally, Admiral Hyde was detached to operate independently with the Missoula, Seattle, and Destroyer Division 118 to bombard shore installations or make anti shipping sweeps, leaving Sheffield with the Colorado Springs and five destroyers as escorts.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March the task force participated in the landings made at Zamboanga on the southwest tip of Mindanao. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March a similar assault force landed at Iloilo on the island of Panay. After the landing at Cebu on 26<sup>th</sup>, Task Force 77 broke off and retired. Six days later they dropped anchor in Seeadler Bay on April Fools Day for a ten day stay.

It wasn't an April Fools joke when Ruth Ann wasn't feeling well while Ramona got ready to go to church that morning. Ramona was a little nervous about the services that Easter Sunday as she was to sing with the church choir for the first time. Several weeks earlier she had been approached with an invitation to join the choir because of the richness and clarity of her voice.

Singing in the choir was always something she had secretly desired so she gladly accepted the invitation. She had not anticipated being asked to perform a solo of the refrain. She nervously accepted and spent weeks singing the words to the refrain of Christ is risen, Alleluia!

*Christ is risen! alleluia!*

*Risen our victorious head;*

*Sing his praises; alleluia!*

*Christ is risen from the dead.*

She felt confident and was looking forward to it. However, it didn't take long to realize that Ruth Ann was in labor. All thoughts of attending church, let alone singing with the choir, went out the window. There would be no solo this time.

With Ruth Ann in terrible discomfort, Ramona quickly packed a suitcase for her, including something for her to wear home. Before leaving, she called the doctor to tell him that they were on their way. Had she called just a couple of minutes later, she would have missed him as he was just leaving for a Sunday morning round of golf.

Moaning and wincing, Ramona helped Ruth Ann to the car and drove her the eight miles to the Providence Hospital located near the Capital Building. She had taken her there because of her connections



with the hospital staff.

Providence Hospital was founded by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent DePaul in 1861 at the invitation of President Abraham Lincoln. It became a teaching hospital when other hospitals in the District of Columbia were flooded with war wounded during the Civil War. It was through their nursing school that Ramona had established a relationship with the hospital.

Doctor Eldon St. John arrived first and was ready and waiting to examine Ruth Ann. He determined that she was still a couple of hours away from delivery and had Ramona go ahead and check her into the hospital. Once she had her settled, she changed into her nurses uniform so she could assist with the birth.

Ruth Ann was fit and in shape which helped to contribute to a routine labor and delivery because Ramona had insisted that she eat healthy and get adequate exercise during her pregnancy. As her labor progressed, she was taken to the delivery room and at three minutes after eleven, she gave birth to a healthy six pound twelve ounce baby girl.

After cleaning the baby off, Ramona asked, "Would you like to hold her for a minute before I have to take her away?"

Ruth Ann was hesitant. Ever since deciding to give the baby up for adoption, she was careful not to establish an emotional bond the the child that she was carrying. That would only make a difficult situation even harder.

"She's adorable." Ramona encouraged. "She has your eyes."

"I guess, I'll hold her for a just moment."

As Ramona placed the baby in her arms, Ruth Ann took one look at her and burst into tears. "I didn't know a newborn could be so beautiful. I just wish that the time and circumstances were different."

"I know that you have avoided coming up with a name, but is there something that you would like call her, for the birth certificate?"

Ruth Ann thought for a moment as she gazed around the room. She noticed a lovely potted easter lily and said, "Yes. Tell them to call her Lily, since it's Easter and all."

"That's a nice name." Ramona agreed. "Say good bye to Lily, honey. I need to take her down to the nursery now."

Ruth Ann felt the wieght of the world on her shoulders as he held Lily close a moment longer; crying profusely at the reality of the separation. Lily must have sensed it too, for she began wailing, as only a newborn can.

"Here." Ruth Ann sobbed. "You'd better take her now."

As Ramona took Lily from Ruth Ann, it was as is she had ripped her heart out. Despite all of the emotional precautions, she wasn't prepared for the moment of finality. The emotion of the moment engulfed

Ramona as well. Again the thought crossed her mind that she wished this child could be hers. She knew that Sheffield was right, "Not this child and not this time."

She pressed her cheek next to Lily's tiny face as she turned to leave. She left the room and walked down to the nursery where she told the attending nurse, "This is the Brason baby."

"Lets have a look." the nurse said as she took Lily from Ramona. "Oh how sweet. What's her name."

"Lily."

"What an appropriate name for an Easter baby." she said. "I understand that District Adoption Agency has already found parents for sweet little Lily. I need to call them and have them come in to see their baby so they can start the bonding process."

"Well I need to get back to the mother. I'll come back and check on Lily later."

The whole experience was almost as difficult for Ramona as it was for Ruth Ann. She had worked hard to prepare Ruth Ann for giving up the baby, but she had failed to do the same herself. It hadn't occurred to her that it would be this difficult. During the months that Ruth Ann had lived with her she had developed a very deep bond with the young woman who was three weeks more than twenty years younger than she was. She was practically old enough to be Ruth Ann's mother.

Ramona cried all the way back to Ruth Ann. As she passed the lavatory, she stepped in to wash her face and gather her emotions. When she got back, Ruth Ann had already regained her composure.

"What a brave young woman you are." Ramona told her. "All of my life I wanted to experience what you just went through. I don't know if I could have done what you did. It was the right thing, you know."

"I know, Aunt Ramona. If there is one thing I've learned through all of this, it is that I want to do it again some day, the right way, with the right guy. Who knows, maybe it will be with Joseph."

"You really like him don't you?"

"Oh yes, Aunt Ramona. Very much so. I hope he likes me too. Now that this is over, maybe something can come of it. He'll be coming to see his dad in about a month for a couple of weeks before he ships out to Guam and has promised to spend some time with me."

"That will be nice, sweetheart. Now get some rest. I'm going to go have some lunch. I'll be back to check on you later."

Coming back from the cafeteria, Ramona stopped by the nursery to take a peek at Lily, but she wasn't in her bassinet. She inquired of the attending nurse, who was still on duty. If she would have known who Ramona really was, she wouldn't have said what she did next. "She's with her adoptive parents. Would you like to meet them?"

Ramona knew that she should have declined, but said yes instead. A moment later she was

introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Max Blander, a young couple in their late twenties or early thirties. She was simply introduced as Ramona, the nurse who had attended the birth. That was all they needed to know.

Max was an attorney who worked in the Senate offices at the Capital Building. His wife Jaquelin, like Ramona, was unable to have children of her own in the eight years that they had been married. They were thrilled to finally have the child that they had longed for and instantly fell in love with Lily, a name they decided to keep.

Ramona visited with them briefly and congratulated them and wished them well with their new little girl. She excused herself, content that Lily would have a good life with a loving family. She knew that it was the way things were meant to be. When she returned to Ruth Ann, she never told her about the chance encounter. She never spoke of it to anyone, except for to Sheffield who also kept her secret.

Later in the evening while Ruth Ann rested, Ramona wrote to Sheffield to tell him about the eventful Easter Sunday. Five days later she brought Ruth Ann home, and she began to consider her next step in life.

When Sheffield arrived back at Seward Bay there was a letter from Ramona waiting for him, which he promptly responded to. Then, just before sailing again on the 10<sup>th</sup> he received her Easter letter and got a reply off to her before leaving on another cruise to the Philippines.

After two days at sea, Admiral Brason received news of the death of President Roosevelt. He passed the information on to each ship under his command along with the instructions that flags were to be flown at half mast. There was uncertainty in Sheffield's mind about the new Commander in chief, President Harry S. Truman. Nobody really knew anything about him and how he would lead the war effort. He had only been Vice President for three months.

Enroute to the Philippines, gunnery practice and drills were the order of business. Sheffield believed that they were essential to keep his command in top fighting shape. Once on station, the Reprisal began continuous combat operations as the air group participated in air strikes on Mindanao in conjunction with a naval bombardment from the cruisers of the Seventh Fleet in preparation for the assault on the beaches near Malabang on the 17<sup>th</sup> and at Parang on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Following the successful landings, Task Force 77 kept up the pressure on the Japanese with attacks on enemy positions on both Mindanao and Borneo prior to the landing on the small island of Tarakan, off the north east coast of Borneo on 1 May 1945.

The focus shifted back to Mindanao for the landing at Macajalar Bay on the 10<sup>th</sup>. During that time, news was received that Germany had surrendered on the 8<sup>th</sup>. The news was greeted with cheers through out the ship. Sheffield commented to his staff, "One down, and one to go before the war will finally be over and we all can go home. No one wants that more than me."

After the Macajalar Bay operation, Admiral Brason was ordered to take his task force into the South China Sea for raids on Borneo in anticipation of amphibious operations in June. During an interlude in the raids, news was received on the 14<sup>th</sup> that the only other night carrier, Enterprise, had been hit by a kamikaze off Okinawa and would have to return to the States for repairs. Again Sheffield wondered if that would have an affect on further orders for his task force.

They had been fortunate in all of their recent operations to have escaped enemy air attacks and had only suffered minimal losses to the air group. On the 15<sup>th</sup> they carried out a nighttime raid on Japanese held Singapore which was last bombed by the Army Air Force at the end of March.

Task Force 77 approached Singapore from the east undetected under overcast skies and was in launch position by midnight. Eight Alleycats were on combat air patrol with four more in reserve. The remainder, along with eighteen Avengers were sent in. They were met by moderately heavy but inaccurate anti-aircraft fire, which cost the air group two Hellcats and three Avengers. From the fires left burning, it was apparent that the targeted command and communication facilities had been destroyed.

In response, the Japanese counterattacked by sending out twelve Mitsubishi Ki-67 Hiryu twin-engine heavy bombers, known to the allies as Peggy, armed with torpedoes. They were intercepted by the combat air patrol which accounted for six bombers. The remaining six got through, only to meet the fury of the anti-aircraft guns of the ships of the task force. Admiral Brason ordered the Captain Callister to not let the Reprisal open fire, except in a last ditch defense. He didn't want the precious carrier lit up, making it an easy target.

At the outer range of the five inch guns, two more bombers light up the night sky as they trailed fire all the way to the sea. Tracers lit up the strings of anti-aircraft fire, pointing to where the radar controlled fire control equipment pinpointed the enemy bombers to be.

As the bombers closed in, one more went down in flames. The remaining three groped on in the dark, unable to identify the blacked out carrier in the dark.

They weren't the only ones who couldn't see the Reprisal. The escorts in her screen also had difficulty seeing her in the darkness. As the bombers past over the inner screen, tracers were seen coming toward the Reprisal at low angle.

A two pound forty millimeter shell, probably from the Missoula, slammed into the hull just below the forward five inch gun deck, punching a hole. The shell detonated inside an unoccupied cabin, peppering the interior with shrapnel. A split second later, another shell landed in the gun platform between the two mounts. The explosion sent shrapnel flying in every direction, killing seven men and wounding eleven others and damaged both guns in the battery. A third shell hit the forward elevator, penetrating the wood, but was stopped by the steel underneath where it detonated, jamming the elevator equipment rendering it unusable.

As the bombers closed in, Captain Callister gave the order to open fire at the last moment. The Reprisal opened fire on the low flying bombers at close range and two of them pulled up and hopped over the flight deck, clearing it only by several feet. As they pulled away, one more was shot down, and the remaining bomber was later shot down by the combat air patrol as it attempted to get away.

Sheffield, on the flag bridge, saw the third bomber take a direct hit and burst into flames only one hundred fifty yards to port. The torpedo slung under the plane's belly fell from the plane and flaming debris showered down into the sea on its forward trajectory. The pilot attempted to gain enough altitude to crash his crippled plane into the carrier.

Captain Callister ordered a sharp turn, but before the helmsman could respond, the bomber skimmed across the flight deck, the right wing dipped and hit the deck, ripping it from the engine nacelle. The wing spun around as it slid down the deck and came to a stop when it slammed into the superstructure.

The burning fuselage of the crippled bomber scrapped the starboard side of the flight deck, just aft of the forward five gun platform, drenching the deck with burning gasoline from a ruptured fuel tank before it careened over the side and crashed into the sea fifty yards away. The plane sank as the ship sped past.

A stream of burning aviation fuel poured over the side and started another fire in the forward hangar bay. The curtain was quickly brought down to keep the fire from spreading to the aft hangar bay where the Hellcats of the day squadron were parked.

As the firefighters and damage control teams fought the fires, the flames served as beacon to returning strike group and hopefully not any more enemy bombers. The air group had to circle for forty minutes while the flames were brought under control. Fortunately, there were no casualties from the would be kamikaze. Ironically the only casualties were from American guns.

The deck was still smoldering as the planes, critically low on fuel, came aboard. They were doused by fire hoses to keep them from igniting as they taxied to the forward end of the flight deck. As the deck began to fill up, planes had to be taken down the outboard elevator to the center hangar bay, as the forward elevator and hangar bay were unusable.

The next day, things were cleaned up and flight operations resumed, without use of the forward elevator. As they steamed back along the coast of Borneo, more raids were made on enemy positions. Rather than sail back to Seeadler Harbor, Admiral Brason had orders to take his task force to the newly established operating base at San Pedro Bay in Leyte Gulf where they dropped anchor on May 21<sup>st</sup>.

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The part about the raids on French Indochina and the typhoon came from The Big E: The story of the USS Enterprise by Edward P. Stafford.

The draw down of the Seventh Fleet is documentation in Volume 13 of the History of United

States Naval Operations in World War 2.

The original Providence Hospital was torn down in 1961 after moving to its current location in 1956. The location became a Providence Park.