

Chapter XLIV

Crossing Paths

May 21, 1945 – July 1, 1945

Ensign Gover brought Sheffield his mail as soon as it had been sorted after coming aboard. After being at sea for six weeks, there were several pieces of official correspondence with a few letters from home. As always, he made sure anything from Ramona was right on top. This time there were three, one post marked April 16th, one post marked April 26th, and the most recent was post marked May 9th. That letter was the most newsy. It read:

May 8, 1945

Dear Sheffield

I'm sure you got the news too. Isn't fantastic that the war in Europe is over! It was all the buzz on the radio and was plastered all over the front page of the newspaper. There was celebrating at the hospital too. Patients and staff alike joined in on the hoopla. During his address to the nation, President Truman dedicated the victory to the memory of President Roosevelt and wished that he had lived to witness this day.

What a wonderful time of the year. This spring has been very nice. The cherry blossoms were absolutely spectacular this year. They have since faded by now, of course.

It has now been a little over 5 weeks since Ruth Ann had her baby. She is doing well and is getting back into shape. She is pretty close to fitting back into some of her clothes. She has been really good to get plenty of exercise. She hasn't regretted her decision to give Lily up for adoption. I don't know if she thinks about her, but she hasn't mentioned her. She seems anxious to get on with her life.

She is trying to decide what she is going to do next. We're going to Roanoke for Memorial Day later in the month. Since it is on a Wednesday, we'll drive down Tuesday evening after work. I have arranged to take Thursday and Friday off and we'll come back on Sunday the 3rd (my birthday - just so you don't forget). I wouldn't miss the Brason Memorial Day picnic for the world, even if you're not here.

One of two things will happen, either Ruth Ann will go home to stay, or she'll bring the rest of her things back with her and stay here in Washington. She wants to decide once we're there. She wants to see how responsive her mother is to her. She's leaning toward staying here. If she does, she wants to get a job and find a place of her own. I'll miss her, she has kept me company while you're away.

Joseph is here visiting Harvey and Marcella before he ships out. We were invited to Sunday dinner just after he got here. It was the first time we got to see their baby. I did notice how Ruth Ann acted when she held Marcella's baby. She fussed over it and showed some real motherly instincts.

She and Joseph have been seeing a lot of each other this last week. He has one more week before he leaves. If I didn't know better, I'd say something has really clicked with those two.

I haven't heard from you since your letter from the 9th of April. I hope all is well with you. All of the news from the Pacific has been about Okinawa. I haven't heard much about the 7th Fleet in the news, except for the support they have been to the ongoing operations in the Philippines.

Write when you can. I know that you're busy and probably on the move. I love you and miss you. I can't wait to hear back from you. Better yet would be seeing you, or just hearing your voice.

Love, always,

Ramona.

After reading Ramona's letters, he read one from Walt before going through the rest of his mail. By the time he was about through, Reggie informed him that lunch was about ready.

During the afternoon, the repair ship Rigel moored alongside the Reprisal and began repairs from the damage received during the Singapore raid. While the inspections were being made, a steady stream of launches shuttled back and forth from the ship taking men ashore.

The Seabees had been busy constructing a base, complete with recreational facilities, something that was lacking at Seeadler Harbor. It was the first real opportunity for the crews of the ships of the task force to go ashore in months. To avoid congestion at the two Fleet Recreation Centers and give as many men as possible an opportunity to go ashore, liberty parties were scheduled in two shifts. The first arrived at nine a.m. and left the area at noon; the second arrived at one p.m. and left at five o'clock.

Sheffield and his staff were anxious to go ashore as well. He took the officers on his staff to the commissioned officers mess at Macarata, which was still under construction, and treated them to dinner. As he was leaving, he heard someone call out, "Uncle Sheffield. Uncle Sheffield."

He stopped and looked around to see who had called his name. It was obviously one of his nephews, but which one. Then he saw a sailor hurrying in his direction. It was Raymond Austin, Winslow's son. Out of breath he stopped before the admiral and saluted. "Uncle Sheffield, sir, its good to see you."

He turned to his entourage and said, "Why don't you go on without me, except for you Morris. I'd like you to accompany me back."

He then turned to his nephew, "What are you doing here, Ray?"

"I'm helping to build this place. My construction battalion has been here since January. What do you think of it?"

"Its pretty nice indeed. The men can use a place to stretch their legs."

"I heard that your task force came in this morning, I was hoping I'd run into you somewhere."

"I'm glad that you did. I'd like you to meet my aid, Ensign Morris Gover."

The two young men exchanged greetings before Sheffield continued his conversation with Ray, "Say I hear that your sister is getting married."

"Yeah, Max and Murry are getting married on June first. I just wish I knew the guy better. I hear he got thrown out of the Navy for bad behavior. It must have been pretty bad."

"I can tell you all about Murry Puchesky, I'm the one who recommended that he receive a dishonorable discharge."

"What did he do?"

"Well for starters, he tried to set my ship on fire. I gave him plenty of time in the brig to think about things. Then I decided to give him a second chance, only for him to bust up a nice little café in the Azores. I had instructed the crew to be on their best behavior since we were there on a diplomatic mission to try to convince the Portuguese to let us use the island for a base of operations. I threw him back in the brig and sent him home on the first ship heading west.

"I told him to stay out of trouble and recommended that he contact your dad and uncles for a job at the lumber yard. As you know he did and they tell me he is one of their best workers. I had a chance to talk to him before I left the states and I can assure you that he is a changed man. I saw how he treated Maxine and Virginia. They'll be just fine."

"I'm glad to hear that. I was kind of worried."

Sheffield and Raymond visited for several minutes, while Ensign Gover waited near by. After they parted company, Morris escorted the admiral back to the ship. That evening he wrote back to Ramona.

May 21, 1945

Aboard the USS Reprisal, San Pedro Bay, Philippines

Dear Ramona

We just got here after six weeks at sea. The information I have is that we'll be here for while this time. We can use a bit of a break. I don't have any orders other than to wait for further orders.

On our last outing we had a little tangle with the Japanese. They didn't hurt us as bad as our own ships did. Nothing that a two or three days along side a repair ship can't fix. We're also due for some regular upkeep and maintenance. They have everything here, even a some first rate recreational facilities for the men built by the Seabees.

Speaking of which, Raymond Austin is here with the Seabees. I ran into him earlier today today when I went ashore. What a small world it is. He told me that Maxine and Murry are being married on the 1st. Since you'll be there, I'd like you to represent both of us and be sure to give them my love and congratulate them for me. If you feel a little awkward attending a gathering of Geannie's family without me, just tag along with Sarah. Walt will be busy officiating at the wedding anyway. Oh and tell Winslow and Grace that I saw Ray and that he is just fine.

Speaking of couples, it sounds like Ruth Ann and Joseph are getting pretty serious. I'm glad to hear that she is doing well. The kid has been through a lot. Personally I think that she would do better away from her family. In their case, short visits would be more of a healthy relationship. For some reason there has always been a rift there.

Enjoy the annual Brason Memorial Day picnic. I wish I could be there. That is almost a bigger deal than Christmas. Be sure to tell everyone hello for me and give them my regards, especially my folks.

I had three letters from you waiting for me when we got in. I read them as soon as Ensign Glover brought them to me. It's always so good to hear from you and what's going on at home.

The news about victory in Europe was especially welcomed. When we got the word, I told my staffs, "One down and one to go. Then we can all go home." No one wants to go home any more than I do. I'm getting weary of the war. But that doesn't mean that I have lost my resolve to see it through to an end, if takes another year or even two, I'm ready and willing to go wherever they send me..

It has been seven long months now since I have looked into your lovely face. It's a good thing I have your picture. I do miss you and I long to be with you again. It seems that the older I get the more I would rather be at home, with you. Once this war is over, I hope to stay close to home. Maybe I could get another cushy posting in Washington.

*I want to close by telling you how much I love you and that you complete my life and fill the emptiness. Thank you for loving me. Have a happy birthday. I'll be thinking of you!
Love Sheffield*

The downtime was as good for Admiral Brason as it was for the crews of the ships under his command. From time to time he got off the ship for some rest and relaxation ashore. Occasionally he and Mace would go ashore together. Other times, it would be he and Hank Terry.

The Rigel remained along side the Reprisal for three days. In addition to the repairs, four more batteries of twenty millimeters were replaced with twin mounts. Once the repairs were complete, she pulled away. While the Reprisal lay at anchor in San Pedro Bay, the air group was at the Samar Naval Air Base at Guiuan on the southern tip of Leyte.

Once the repairs were complete, the Reprisal entered the floating dry dock for routine maintenance to her hull. She hadn't been in dry dock since returning from Salerno in the fall of 1943 and was badly overdue. The floating dry dock, or advanced base sectional dock, was made up of nine individual sections strung together that had been towed from California where they were built.

At 844 feet long, it was wide enough and long enough for the carrier to fit. The ballast tanks were flooded, submerging it enough to clear the Reprisal's keel as she was guided into place by tugboats. Once inside, the dry dock was re-floated, lifting the ship clear out of the water.

After four days, the work was done and the Reprisal came out of dry dock. By then, they had been there for more than a week, and still no orders. The Seattle took her place in dry dock for routine maintenance and more permanent repairs for the damage to her stern and hull from the kamikaze.

On Memorial Day, several of his staff and some of the senior officers from the Reprisal put together a golf tournament and insisted that he come along. Sheffield hated golf and hadn't been since Geannie had talked him into going with his dad and brothers. With Ensign Gover as his caddy, he reluctantly joined in. No one dared laugh at the Admiral with the lousy score. As the round progressed, everyone began throwing off their game so he wouldn't look so bad. He would have much rather been with Ramona in Roanoke at the Brason Memorial Day picnic. In the end it turned out to be a great social event but a poor excuse for a golf tournament.

San Pedro Bay was full of ships of all types and sizes. In the time they had been there, ships came and ships left. On the 1st the Essex arrived and dropped anchor not far from the Reprisal. Three days later, the carrier Randolph dropped anchor between them. The vacation continued as there were still no orders.

Just before four o'clock on Thursday afternoon on June 7th, Sheffield and some of his staff were on the flag bridge shooting the breeze when a pair of Army Air Force P-38 lightnings buzzed the ship at an extremely low altitude. Sheffield and Mace ran out onto the narrow protected platform on the outside of the bridge and watched as the planes continued on over the Randolph and the Essex and out over the bay. They climbed as they turned around for another pass. They came back over the Essex but as they approached the Randolph, one of the pilots misjudged his altitude in a power dive and crashed into the Randolph's flight deck where several sailors were sunbathing. Flames and billowing smoke erupted from the forward flight deck which crowded with men and parked planes.

Eleven sailors and the P-38 pilot were killed instantly and thirteen others were injured, two of them fatally. With the loss of eleven planes, her air group already depleted by combat operations at Okinawa, was now below an effective level to be of further use. There just so happened to be an air group at Saipan without a carrier. While the Randolph underwent repairs, Admiral Brason was ordered to take part of his task force and sail to Saipan to ferry the planes back to San Pedro Bay.

Two days later, Admiral Brason took the Reprisal with handful of planes, the Colorado Springs, and four destroyers to sea and set course for Saipan. A day and a half later, they were in range for Air Group Sixteen to fly out and meet them. To make room, the Reprisal's planes were crowded into the repair hangar before their guests began arriving. Once they were aboard, he turned his ships around for the voyage back to San Pedro Bay.

Once their guests were squared away, Admiral Brason sent Ensign Gover to bring a certain pilot from Fighting Sixteen to his flag office. A few minutes later, there was a knock on his door. "Come in." he called.

The door opened and the pilot stepped inside. Saluting, he said, "Lieutenant Daniel Brason reporting as requested sir."

Sheffield returned the salute and extended his hand and shook it. Then pulling him in close for a hug, he said, "Gosh its good to see you Danny Boy."

"Its good to see you too, Uncle Sheffield."

"Sit down, Danny. How've ya been?"

"Fine thank you. And you."

"Other than this bum leg, I'm great. Its been a long time. When I was home you were out here. I understand you were home for Christmas."

"Yeah, I was. It was good to be home for a couple of weeks. I finally go it to meet Ramona. She's a very nice lady. It still seems strange that Aunt Geannie is gone. I miss her."

"You and me both. So tell me what have you been up to?"

"Well, after the holidays, my squadron reported aboard the Bon Homme Richard for her shakedown cruise. After further training out of Norfolk, we sailed for the Pacific and stopped off at Pearl Harbor for more training. That's when they decided to make the Richard into a night carrier. They took us off and loaded the entire air group onto three escort carriers and ferried us to Saipan. We were kind of wondering what we were doing there. Then we received orders to the Randolph and here we are."

Sheffield and Danny spent the rest of the afternoon visiting and catching up. At dinner time, he had Reggie set an extra plate and prepare enough for two.

The short voyage gave the air group the opportunity for carrier qualification before reporting aboard the Randolph. When they returned to San Pedro Bay, all planes from both air groups were sent off to the Samar Naval Air Base.

It had been three weeks since first arriving and still no orders. It was almost as if there was no war. Sheffield knew better. This was just a chance for everyone to catch their breath before the next big push. The action at Okinawa was winding down. The next logical step would be the home islands of Japan itself. It was bound to be a fierce fight.

The next morning, the 11th of June, the following letter from Ramona was waiting for him.

June 4, 1945

Dear Sheffield

Thank you for remembering my birthday. It was a nice day, even though I had to drive back to Washington. I had a great time in Roanoke, let me tell you all about it. But first, I have to tell you about Ruth Ann and Joseph. They saw a lot of each other while he was here and went out several times. When he left, he asked her to wait for him and she agreed.

Oh, you will be interested to know that Harvey has been promoted to Brigadier General and is working on some top secret project. He has been spending about half of his time here in Washington and the rest of his time somewhere in the Southwest. It just so happened that he was able to be here while his son was visiting.

After work on Tuesday the 29th, Ruth Ann and I drove to Roanoke, getting there by dark. I stayed with your folks and Ruth Ann went home to her parents. Memorial Day was repeat of the year before. It was a blustery morning when we went to the cemetery, but the weather had straightened up in time for the picnic.

There was a great turn out. It would be easier to say who wasn't there. Basically you and Danny were the only ones not there. Even Tim was there, his blimp squadron was back in New Jersey after being deployed to North Africa.

Emmaline has been seeing Willie Casper, Bill and Marge's boy. He had lost his left leg below the knee at Normandy. Naturally he was sent home and discharged from the Army. He has a great attitude and is just grateful to be alive. He gets around pretty good on an artificial leg. Prosthetic limbs have come a long ways in the last couple of years. By the way, he plans on returning to college this fall.

My heaven's, talk about food. You know how it is. There was enough to last the entire weekend. I brought a cake that I had baked the night before we left. We brought some of the leftovers home with us.

Everyone was good to Ruth Ann and were genuinely happy to see her. No one asked her about the baby. I particularly watched as she interacted with Emily. They seemed to have a better relationship. After a long talk, she decided to return to Washington and get a place of her own and find a job. Shenan and Emily were very supportive in her decision.

Then there was the wedding on Friday the 1st. It was very nice and they seem to be a very happy couple. It is obvious that little Virginia adores her new daddy. Now that they are married, Murry is going to start legal proceedings to adopt Virginia.

In an unusual twist contrary to the way things usually go, rather than Maxine taking his last name - he took hers. He explained that he had no family, at least that he wanted anything to do with. He said that he had started a whole new life and what a better way to do it than with a new name. So he is now Murry Austin, and a very welcomed member of the Austin family. Oh and by the way, that naked lady on his arm is now wearing a bathing suit.

I told Winslow and Grace that you had seen Ray. They had already received a letter from him telling them all about your chance encounter.

I told everyone in both families hello for you and passed along your love. They all missed you and wished you could have been there. The Brasons at the picnic and the Austins at the wedding.

You will be interested to know that the Austin Mansion has been sold to the government for a convalescent home serving wounded servicemen from Roanoke where they can recover close to home. Charlie's daughter Eluria and her family had been living there but they have just built a new home and had

moved out.

On Saturday morning, Sarah hosted a birthday party for me and invited the family and some of the people I know like Samantha and Michael Taylor. I still get overwhelmed by all of the attention. I'm still not used to it. But I guess I had better since I'm now a Brason and the Brasons love to fuss over their own. I'm so in love with your family. They're my family now too.

Then that afternoon, I went with everyone over to Radford to attend Walt's graduation. That was some accomplishment, going to school like that to get a master's degree while providing for his family and taking care of his congregation.

When I got my master's degree from the University of Hawaii, I did it by attending night classes. I didn't have anyone but me to worry about. It took me a while, but I had the time.

On Sunday we attended services, had lunch, loaded up the rest of Ruth Ann's things and came home. It was after dark when we got here. We unpacked and went straight to bed.

This morning I took the bus and let Ruth Ann take my car so she could start looking for a job and an apartment of her own. She didn't come home until after I got home and had a few leads on both that she shared with me. I'm going to miss her when she moves out, but she really needs to be out on her own. After all, she turns 22 later this month.

So, as you can see it has been a busy few days. I sure missed you. I hope that you are well. I am anxious for this to all be over too so you can come home. I like your idea of a cushy job in Washington.

Let me close by telling you how much I have loved you. I have loved you for such a long time. I'm glad that I no longer have to suppress it or feel guilty for being in love with you. When the time was right, I'm so happy that you fell in love with me too. I know that you still love Geannie. We both do. I'm glad that I was there for you and to step into your life after she was so abruptly taken.

I look forward to hearing from you again real soon. Take care of yourself.

*Love, always,
Ramona.*

That same day the Randolph's repairs were complete, the storm battered elements of Task Force 38 limped into San Pedro Bay. The carriers Hornet and Bennington had their forward flight decks buckled and

warped in a Typhoon off Okinawa. Over the next few days, the number of ships in the bay swelled considerably as the rest of the Third Fleet arrived on the 12th and 13th. The next day the carriers Bon Homme Richard and Ticonderoga also arrived.

With the bulk of the fleet riding at anchor in San Pedro Bay, it was obvious that they were regrouping for the next big move. Sheffield was summoned to report Admiral Halsey, the commander of the Third Fleet aboard his flagship, the battleship Missouri.

Upon being ushered into the Admiral's office, Sheffield saluted his former boss. Admiral Halsey looked up through his bushy eyebrows and snarled, "Damn it, Brason. Didn't I tell you to get yourself and that carrier of yours here as soon as possible?" Then he grinned and asked, "What the hell took you so long? It's good to see you again Sheffield, have a seat."

"Thank you, sir." Sheffield said as he sat across the desk from the venerable admiral. "I wanted to, but the powers that be kept finding work for us in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. We were on our way once, only to be recalled a day short the Panama."

"From what I hear, you did a hell of a job. Say, whats with the cane. You're not getting old and feeble on me now, are you?"

"Oh no sir, its just a little reminder of Salerno."

"Yeah I heard you got hit hard, but I didn't know that you actually got hurt."

"I'm alright now. Its just some permanent nerve damage but nothing to hold me back."

"Good, good. Damn, its good to see you again. We had some good times back in the good old days before the Japs decided to turn the world upside down. Whenever December 7th crosses my mind, I can't help but remember what happened to your lovely wife and kids. How are you doing, any way?"

"It took me a good year to work through that before I could begin to move on. You'll be pleased to know that I have since remarried. Do you remember the nurse who escorted me to the farewell party that you you threw for me?"

"Yeah, I do. A pretty little blond but her name escapes me. But she did tend to me when I was in the hospital at Pearl."

"Thank you, sir. Her name is Ramona. Anyway were were married about a year and a half ago."

"Well then, congratulations. I'm glad to hear that you're at the top of your game because I have a job for you. I'm sure you heard what happened to the Big E?"

"Yes, sir. I did."

"Its a damn shame too, she was the toughest ship in the fleet. I have always been partial to her. Anyway, that left the Reprisal as the only night carrier and I've been trying to get my hands on it. Well I finally succeeded. You're relieved of duty with the Seventh Fleet effective immediately. You're with me now.

I don't know if you knew that the Bon Homme Richard got in today, but she's now a night carrier too. I'm putting her with the Reprisal as Night Carrier Division Seven, with you in command. And by the way I'm also making those two stars on your collar permanent, + effective immediately."

"Thank you for your confidence in me, sir."

"You just did it again Brason. These things just come your way without asking for them. That's what I always liked about you. I hated to lose you from my staff, but I knew that you had a lot more potential than just riding around in my back pocket. Anyway we'll be pulling out in a couple of weeks for strikes against the Japs on their home islands and you and your night carriers will play an important role. I need you to report to Admiral McCain for your specific orders."

"Yes sir. I assure you that the Reprisal is ready. The Richard will be too."

"It was good to see you again Sheffield. Oh and thanks for coming to see me while I was in Richmond recuperating from that skin problem. It meant a lot to me. Only a true friend would have done that for an ornery old codger like me."

"You'll never know what an inspiration you were to me sir. I have always tried to imagine how you would go about things and then tried to do what I thought you'd do."

"That'll get you into trouble. You know me, shoot first and ask questions later. Hell, I'm in real fix right now. I have to explain myself out of taking the fleet into the middle of a storm for second time. They just might can me over this."

"They can't do that to you sir. You're too big of hero to the folks back home."

"Yea, well heroes can fall from grace too you know. You'll have to excuse me now, Sheffield, I have to begin preparing for the inquisition tomorrow. Good luck to you with your new command. I know you'll make me proud."

"Yes, sir. Thank you sir. Oh and good luck to you with the hearing."

Sheffield left the Admiral Halsey's office and boarded his launch and had it take him next to the Shangri La, Admiral McCain's flagship. Upon going aboard, he was directed to the flag office where he was greeted by none other than his old friend, Captain Freddy McGowan.

"Sheffield, you old son of a gun. Say, what's with the cane?"

"Oh, it's just a reminder of a run in we had with the Germans off Salerno."

I guess I hadn't heard about that, What happened?"

"They hit us with one of their guided bombs. It really wrecked havoc with us. I'm lucky that I didn't lose my leg. I guess I was dead there for a few minutes."

"Really?" I'm glad that you're alright."

"Yeah me too. I was out of commission for several months. Then they had me working in Washington for a while. Last fall, they pinned these stars on me and sent me back out for another round."

"I was wondering how you managed to outrank me. Remember, you used to be my wingman, along with Tomcat."

"It's just the way things went I guess. I'd be happy to trade jobs with you."

"Not on your life. The title looks good on paper, but there's a lot that goes along with it."

"Oh I'm sure they'll tap you for something and pin a couple of stars on your collar too. Believe me, I didn't go looking for this job."

"Gosh it's good to see you again."

"Same here Freddy. I was glad that Ramona was able to track Susan down so we could get back in touch with you. With the war and all, people get moved around and it's easy to lose touch with someone. I appreciated the personal note with my orders back in January. I was hoping to cross paths with you some time. I understand Shorty is out here too."

"Yeah, he's in command of a division of escort carriers operating off Okinawa. I haven't seen him for a few months myself. We sure had some good times back in the day, didn't we? Those were the days; me and Susan, Shorty and Wilma, you and Geannie, and Tomcat and Ramona. I was happy to learn that you and Ramona got together. You needed each other. Personally I think you're a good match."

"Ramona and I do have a good thing going. Say maybe we can get together and go ashore sometime before we sail again."

"Speaking of sailing, it's good to have you come along with us. Admiral McCain isn't feeling well and asked me to convey your orders to you. As the commander of Night Carrier Division Seven not only will you be in command of the Reprisal and the Bon Homme Richard, but you will also command Task Force 38.2 which will include your original task force, less the tanker and her escorts, but in addition it will include the battlecruiser Constitution, the light cruisers Cheyenne and Charlotte, and two more destroyers. Rear Admiral George Choles on the Constitution will command the screen. You will report directly to Admiral McCain. You know the routine, provide a combat air patrol at night for the fleet, scouting patrols, and night raids."

"Yeah, I know the drill pretty well by now, with two carriers, there ought to be a lot of planes to go around."

"The Old Man is worried about having to divert planes to cover you during the day."

"With the Reprisal's day squadron, we can take care of ourselves and still have planes to contribute to daylight strikes as well. When we get going, we go nonstop around the clock. I just wish the Richard and a day squadron too, but they're not set up like we are for day and night operations."

"That's good to know. We're scheduled to sail on the 1st for strikes on the Japs on their home

islands.”

That's what Admiral Halsey told me too. The first huh? That should let me take my task force out for three or four days for some training and get everyone working together. And sometime in there, lets get together and forget about the war for a few hours, and you can for get that I out rank you.”

“That sounds like a plan. I'll get back to you now that I know where you are now. I need to go now, the Admiral has some other things that he wants me to attend to for him. But I will be in touch.”

“Thanks Freddy. Lets go get this war over with so you can go home to Susan and I can go home to Ramona. I'm looking forward to a little recreation. Anything but golf. See you soon Freddy.”

After leaving the Shangri La, Admiral Brason made his way back to the Reprisal and met with his staff to convey their orders. He also had Commander Frankman, the operations officer, call a meeting of all of the commanders in the task force, including those just assigned.

By coincidence, the very next day, four escort carries and their escorts came into San Pedro Bay. One of them happened to be the Chesapeake Bay with a night air group of thirty three planes aboard. Sheffield wasn't aware that it was even in the Pacific, let alone that she had been allocated as night carrier. Even more of a coincidence was that she was part of the carrier division commanded by Rear Admiral Wallace Short.

A few days later, Sheffield wrote a letter to Ramona in answer to one that he got from her a few days earlier.

June 15, 1945

Aboard the USS Reprisal, San Pedro Bay, Philippines

Dear Ramona

I got your letter a few days ago and its about time that I got around to writing back to you. There has been a lot go on here the last few days that you'll be interested in.

It sounds like you had a nice time in Roanoke. I wish I could have been there. I would have loved to have been at the picnic and Murry and Maxine's wedding. My, he is serious about a new lease on life if he went as far as to change his name to hers.

That's not something that you hear about everyday.

I'm glad things are working out with Ruth Ann. I hope that she can find a place of her own and get a good job. I think that is just what she needs. Who knows maybe

things will work out with her and Harvey's boy.

Next time you happen to see Harv, tell him hello for me. And tell him congratulations on his promotion, but remind him that I still out rank him. I wonder what his secret mission is all about.

That's too bad that the Austin Mansion was sold. That place holds a lot of fond memories for me. I guess it is just as well. It was falling in to disrepair and would have taken too much to fix it up. The government has the money to fix it up and turn it into something nice. That sounds like a worthy thing to put it to use for.

Do you remember when I told you what a small world it is and that I had crossed paths with Ray Austin. Well since then I crossed paths with Shenan's son Danny. We ferried his air group from the Marianas back here to the Philippines. We had a good visit and got caught up with each other. It had been quite some time since I had seen him.

Next, I crossed paths with my old boss, Admiral Halsey. When the Third Fleet pulled in a few days ago he summoned me to his flagship. I had been wondering what our orders would be. Well, he informed me that we had been incorporated into his fleet. It was good to see him again. Of all the men I've been associated with during my career, he has probably had more of an impact on me than anyone else. I learned a lot from him.

But that's not all. You'll never guess who I went ashore with yesterday. Non other than Shorty and Freddy. I crossed paths with Freddy when I reported to Admiral McCain for further orders. I ended up getting bumped up the chain of command another link as I now command a carrier division, along with my task force. They gave me another night carrier to work with. Oh and by the way, my rank is now permanent.

Then after that, Shorty arrived here. Any way, Shorty, Freddy and I got together and went a shore and into the city of Jacloban for the day. The three of us found a spot on the beach where we could stretch out in the sun. We talked about old times and how we wished our wives were with us. It was just like when we went to Hawaii for the first time with the old Gangley nearly twenty years ago.

It was just after that when Shorty became the squadron operations officer and Jomcat joined the section. That was also the time when I met Harvey for the first time. Its ironic how you are connected to both of them. You went on to marry Jomcat and come to find out, Harvey is your cousin. Talk about crossing paths!

You can only sit out in the sun so long and after we had had enough, we commandeered a jeep and went exploring. Before going our separate ways, we had dinner at the officers' club. We were able to pretty much get caught up on the time since we had lost track of each other..

It was sure good to see those guys again. Who knows when we'll be able to get together again like that. We'll be heading back to the war soon. It has been good to have a break. Before we sail, I want to take my task force out to sea for two or three days for some training before we go back to work. I just want to make sure we are in fighting shape and working as a team.

With all of the time I've had on my hands, I've thought about you a lot, which reminded me of how much I have miss you.. I hope all is well with you. Please remember us in your prayers, where we're going, were going to need all the help we can get. I know of no better source of help than from prayer. I don't know about other admirals, but this one relies on it quite heavily.

When I can, I always attend Sunday services. I find that with Divine help, I am able to do what I wouldn't be able to do without it. I just wish I had more time to devote to spiritual things.

Again, let me close by telling you how much I love you and how much you mean to me. One day this will all be over and we'll be together again. It can't be soon enough for me. The thought gives me focus and purpose in what I do. Out here, there are so many that have a role in the progress of the war. I just want to make sure that my contribution to the business of war counts towards getting the job done.

Write to me soon. I love getting your letters. Sometimes they get to me quickly and other times they have to catch up to me. Sometimes I get two or three at once.

Letters will have to do until I can once again look into your lovely face and hear your sweet voice.

Love Sheffield

Five days later, Sheffield took his task force out into the Philippine Sea and gave them a good workout. When they returned to San Pedro Bay on the 23rd, they were ready. With one more week in port, the ships took on fuel and stores of every kind, including spare parts and spare planes. Task Force 38.2 went to sea with the rest of the Third Fleet on Sunday the 1st of July.

* * * * *

The Rigel was one of three repair ships in San Pedro Bay at the time.

The first sections of the floating dry dock actually began arriving in June and wasn't complete until the end of July 1945.

The incident with the Randolph and the P-38 is from "USS Randolph – CV/CVA/ CVS 15 by Philip St. John

The part about Air Group 16 and the Bon Homme Richard is from "The Last CVA" by Lt. Pete Clayton, USN from The Tailhook Winter Issue 1998. How Air Group 16 got to Saipan and then Leyte is simply conjecture.

The reference to Admiral Halsey at Leyte and the inquiry into the storm are from "Bull Halsey" by E.B. Potter

Rear Admiral John J. Ballentine was the actual commander of Night Carrier Division Seven with the Bon Homme Richard from June 27 to August 19, 1945. The Bon Homme Richard was the only ship in the division and operated as part of another task force.

The light cruisers Cheyenne and Charlotte are fictional and are sister ships to the Missoula and Seattle.

The battlecruiser Constitution has the same background as the Congress and United States mentioned in earlier chapters.

Rear Admiral George Choles is a fictional character.

The time in Hawaii referred to is found in Missing Geannie Chapter X Growing Pains.