

Chapter XLV

Victory

July 1, 1945 – August 15, 1945

On Sunday July 1st, San Pedro Bay began to empty out as the Third Fleet and Task Force 38 got underway. In addition to Admiral Brason's two night carriers in Task Force 38.2, there were eight fleet carriers, six light carriers and all of their escorts. In all, five carrier task forces scattered out across the Philippine Sea, each steaming northeast toward Japan.

Their mission was to eliminate the remnants of the Japanese navy, their merchant fleet, their air power and cripple Japan's manufacturing capabilities and communication infrastructure. The carrier planes were to strike targets inland while the big guns of the battleships bombarded targets along the coast. The first area of concentration was to be Tokyo itself.

As the Sheffield's task force sailed north, he took advantage of the time to conduct drills and exercises of every conceivable nature. His force was well rested and sharp but he wanted to make sure that they were ready for anything that they might encounter. The other groups were doing the same.

On the 6th, Task Force 38.2 took a break from training to refuel. When the tanker pulled along side the Reprisal, several bags of mail were sent across. A little while later, Ensign Gover brought Sheffield his mail. Sure enough, a letter from Ramona had caught up with him. He eagerly opened it and read it.

June 30, 1945

Dear Sheffield

My it is a small world, after all. I guess it was bound to happen sometime, but to cross paths with so many, so far away, all at the same time is unbelievable. I'm glad that you were finally reunited with Shorty and Freddy. Ruth Ann was excited that you saw her brother. She called her dad and Shenan said that they had received a letter from Danny telling them about seeing you.

Ruth Ann has found both a job and an apartment. She is working as a switchboard operator at the capital building and has an apartment nearby. I helped her get moved in and set up with some things that she needed. I'm going to miss her company, but I'm happy for her. She'll be just fine.

I tried to call Harvey but Marcella said that he's gone and she doesn't know where he is or when he'll be back. All she knows is that it has something to do with that secret project he has been working on.

I found something you said in your last letter very interesting. Talk about paths that cross. I believe that you and me were on a path that was bound to cross in the way that it did. First, you meet Harvey and have had a long

friendship with him. Unbeknown to me, he's my cousin. A coincidence? Maybe.

Then Tom joined your section and you became good friends. A little before that I met Deannie and we became friends, best friends I might add. You and Tom were involved in that accident, he was killed and you survived. Years later, Deannie was killed. By that time, you and I were already good friends. Since then our paths diverged and become one. A coincidence? I don't think so. It was how it was meant to be, wouldn't you say. God knows what he is doing.

Anyway, since Ruth Ann moved out I have a lot more time to myself and I've been thinking about these things. I began reading through Deannie's bible. I found all of the notes that she had jotted down in the margins and the little notes on slips of paper that she has tucked into the pages. Oh and then there is her list of questions.

I don't know what she was on to, but it is all very fascinating. I'd like to know the answers to her questions myself. Some of the insights that she had, I have never heard preached from the pulpit. Granted, I've only been going to church for about three years now.

It was fun just reading her notes and seeing her beautiful penmanship again. She was quite a lady. I really do miss her. But like I said earlier, all of our paths were being directed by God for a reason and now we have each other.

In my last letter I mentioned all of those years of having to suppress my feelings for you. There were times I really felt guilty, almost as if I was cheating on her or something. After all being in love with your best friend's husband isn't exactly a good thing.

But looking back, if I hadn't of been in love with you, I doubt I would have been there for you like I was when you needed me like you did after she died. Does any of this make sense to you? It is beginning to come quite clear to me. As tragic as losing Tom and then Deannie were, it was all part of a greater plan, and so is our being together.

I'd really like to know more about this notion she seemed to be obsessed with about being married forever. Who knows, in some way perhaps it can be the three of us. I know that sounds strange but even though I was married twice before, I have been married to you longer that I was to Oliver and Tom put together and we will have many more years together. I love you more than I ever could have imagined loving either of them. Its you I would want to spend forever with.

On the other hand, Deannie was your entire life, from the moment that

the two of you were born. If you had to choose, I'm sure you would want her forever, and it is preferably understandable. But from her notes and reasoning it out on my own, somehow in God's wisdom, I think we can both have you. Heaven wouldn't be heaven any other way. Pretty wild, huh.

Come what may, I have you now and I love you and I'm going to keep you for as long as God will let me have you.

Love, always, and forever too

Ramona.

While the tanker was still along side, he quickly wrote back in response.

July 6, 1945

At sea aboard the USS Reprisal

Dear Ramona

I just got your letter and have a minute while we're refueling to write back.

Wow! That is some pretty deep stuff. I know that Geannie had a great deal of insight into the matter and we used to talk about it. She went as far as discussing it with Walt. He didn't have any answers for her.

I do find your analogy of our paths diverging very interesting. I agree, God's hand is in our lives. As far as what you suggest, I don't know how heaven will be and I'm in no hurry to get there to find out, but having my cake and my ice cream together does sound heavenly. I'm sure the cake wouldn't mind either, that's just the way she was, and undoubtedly still is.

I'm glad that you got Ruth Ann squared away. I can tell by the way that you have been a mother hen to her that you would have been a great mother. In the absence of kids, you can mother me all you want. You've done a good job of it so far.

Harvey must be involved in something really big if not even Marcella knows where he is or when he'll be back. We're about to get into the thick of things ourselves. We don't know what the enemy has left to throw at us. One thing is for sure, we have an awful lot to throw at them and in two or three days, we're going to go in slugging.

The first time I was in Japan was long before the war. It was actually a very pleasant experience. The last time I was this close to Japan, we feared for our lives. Harvey can tell you, he was with me that time. This time it is them who should fear for their lives. If they were smart, when they see us show up offshore, they would give up and call it quits. We have no choice but to pound them until they do. Unfortunately, these people don't know the meaning of unconditional surrender. We don't know what all they have left, but they'll be sure to throw it at us. This could take a while.

Get me assure you that all is well with me. Keep up those prayers in my behalf, in behalf of all of us for that matter. It is your love that keeps me going. It is what makes it worthwhile. It is what makes me want to get this over and come home to you.

I wish I had more time, but that tanker will be pulling away soon and I want this letter in the mail bag that it takes with it. I look forward to hearing from you again whenever or wherever your next letter may find me..

Love Sheffield

The Third Fleet made its approach to the launch point on the night of July 9th under the protective cover of Admiral Brason's air groups. The next day, air fields in and around Tokyo were attacked in force. The fact that there was no enemy opposition in the air lead to concern that they were holding their planes back for one massive kamikaze attack on the fleet.

From Tokyo the fleet sailed north. The planned attack on Southern Hokkaido and Northern Honshu on the 13th was prevented by bad weather. But for the next two days air strikes caused considerable disruption to Japan's coal supply for their factories. The Reprisal and Bon Homme Richard conducted a dusk to dawn combat air patrol over the carriers as well as the cruiser group making a night bombardment of Southern Hokkaido. The night air groups kept up the pressure with nighttime attacks on the same targets.

Following the attacks on Hokkaido and Northern Honshu Task Force 38 sailed south, refueling along the way. The fleet was reinforced by the main body of the British Pacific Fleet, which included four fleet carriers. On the 17th bad weather hampered further attacks on Tokyo but the next day the Yokosuka naval base was attacked resulting in damage to the battleship Nagato and four other warships were sunk.

From the 19th to the 23rd, the task force refueled and then commenced a high speed run-in for strikes against Northern Kyushu and Western Honshu, to be conducted the following day.

On the 24th and 25th the Allied fleet attacked Kure and the Inland Sea and sank the aircraft carrier Amagi and three battleships, as well as two heavy cruisers, a light cruiser and several other warships. In addition to contributing to these attacks, Admiral Brason's planes conducted dawn, dusk and night CAP over the bombardment group operating off Kyushu, as well as conducting heckler, anti-shipping missions, and routine patrols. After a break for fueling, the strikes resumed on the 28th. A force of seventy nine Army Air Force B-24 Liberators from Okinawa participated in this attack. That day, allied casualties were particularly heavy as 126 aircraft were lost. Between the Reprisal and the Bon Homme Richard, Admiral Brason lost eleven planes.

Then on the 29th of July, carrier aircraft struck at Maizuru, sinking three small warships and twelve merchant vessels. Planes from Admiral Brason's task force supported the night bombardment of the Hamamatsu area by the battleships South Dakota, Indiana, and Massachusetts. The following day, the Tokyo area was similarly attacked. On 31 July the task force retired to refuel and replenish.

When the tanker pulled along side the Reprisal three days later, a mail bag was sent across. After the mail was sorted, Ensign Gover brought Sheffield his mail. He was disappointed that there wasn't a letter from Ramona. There was however a letter from his parents, which he was happy to receive. While his task force was refueling, it gave them a brief break from the continual operations. Other than that, gunnery exercises and routine patrols were the order of business. With fueling complete, Admiral Halsey took his fleet northeast, parallel to the coast with orders to destroy a concentration of enemy aircraft at the northern end of Honshu. On the August 6th, the fleet passing opposite of Tokyo.

Harvey met his son, Joseph, for breakfast at the officers mess in a makeshift quonset hut at North Field on the Island of Tinian in the Northern Marianas. Joseph had been there since the end of May when his crew and their Boeing B-29 Superfortress arrived and joined the rest of the 482nd Bombardment Squadron, which was assigned to the 505th Bombardment Group.

In the two months that he had been there, Joseph had flown eight combat missions over Japan as the co-pilot of the plane dubbed "Sweet Annie" by her captain. The nose of the bomber was decorated with a naked woman partially covered by her long hair, sitting on a bomb bearing the name Sweet Annie. Annie was the wife of Captain Thomas Westfield and the caricature bore a striking resemblance to the photograph of her that he proudly displayed on the instrument panel. Before leaving the states, he had talked her into posing for the revealing photograph, which was the inspiration for the artwork he had painted on the plane.

Joseph was the only one from back home who knew the whereabouts of General Morrison, and was sworn not to tell any one. Not his mother or brother, not Marcella, not his grandmother, and not Ruth Ann. If it where he was was known, the nature of his assignment could be compromised. As an officer in the US

Army Air Force, he was bound to keep the information to himself.

Joseph had been writing to Ruth Ann on a regular basis since he last saw her. Their long distance relationship had developed into something more serious with each letter. He saw beyond the foolishness of her past behavior and saw the sweet, loving young woman that was Ruth Ann. He had a much more appropriate photo of her attached to his side of the instrument panel.

At breakfast that morning he confessed to his father that he was falling in love with her and could see himself marrying her someday. Harvey assured him that if her family was anything like her Uncle Sheffield, he couldn't go wrong. Joseph wasn't too concerned that she had a baby. The fact that she was strong enough to give it up, showed real character, strength, and courage. The lessons that she had learned the hard way had brought about deeper maturity.

As the father and son parted company, Joseph went to his plane which was scheduled for a training mission that day.

Harvey arrived on Tinian ten days earlier aboard the cruiser USS Indianapolis, which left San Francisco on the 16th of July. Prior to that he had been at a secret location in the New Mexico desert. His role in the top secret project was doing what Harvey did best, coordinate efforts between the Army Air Force, the Army, and the Navy. He was there representing General Arnold making sure the Air Force did their part and had the resources they needed to do it, much as he had done on the Doolittle mission more than three years earlier.

Since arriving on Tinian, his job was much the same and included working with the air crews who would be involved. As he left the officers mess, he got in his jeep and drove to a remote corner of the base and up to a hangar heavily guarded by US Marines. No one was allowed within a quarter of a mile of the hangar, unless they had the proper credentials. Harvey showed his to the guards on duty and was allowed in.

Six of the enormous Superfortresses were parked near the hangar. One of them was about to have its payload loaded aboard. It was parked directly over the bomb pit containing a single bomb, ten feet in length, twenty eight inches in diameter, and weighed nine thousand seven hundred pounds. The sight of the device was impressive, but it did not convey the reality of its full destructive power. Only three men of the twelve man crew knew the purpose of the mission that day; the pilot, the bombardier, and the weapons officer, who happened to be a Navy Captain.

Harvey watched as it was hoisted into the bombers cavernous bomb bay, secured in place, and the bomb bay doors closed. The crews boarded the six planes and made the final checks before the four large propellers on each plane spun to life. One by one, they taxied to the runway and waited for the order to take off. There was no need for Harvey to accompany them, he had done his job and now it was up to the

bomber crews, just like on the Doolittle Raid.

First to take off were the three Superfortresses loaded with specialized weather instruments. After a pause of several minutes, the other three bombers were given the go ahead. Next to take off was one loaded with specialized measurement equipment, then one carrying observers, and finally, the Enola Gay carrying the loan weapon.

As Harvey watched the planes disappear to the north toward Japan, he felt an awful gnawing in pit of his stomach. Early in the morning of the day he left New Mexico and flew to San Francisco to board the Indianapolis, he had personally observed the destructive power of what was about to be unleashed. That was known as the day the sun rose twice.

At precisely 05:29:45 local time, a similar device was detonated in the New Mexico desert that exploded with the energy equivalent to around twenty kilotons of TNT. Watching from a safe distance, it was a sight that Harvey was never to forget. The explosion illuminated the surrounding mountains "brighter than daytime" for a few seconds. The heat generated by the blast was felt miles away.

Harvey tried not to think of the citizens of Hiroshima who would soon would experience the terror about to be unleashed on them. He rationalized that he was simply following orders, an order directly from President Truman. If it brought the war to an abrupt end, perhaps it would be worth it. "After all, they started it." If not, Nagasaki would suffer the same terrible fate. The tens of thousands who would die that day was a small number compared to the millions who who die if the war continued to the planned invasion of Japan in October. Harvey gathered with others in the command center to listen to the radio and wait for "all hell to break loose."

The Third Fleet, including Task Force 38.2 sailed along the coast far out to sea completely unaware of the devastating attack carried out earlier that day by a single plane carrying only one bomb. After sunset, Sheffield was putting his carriers through their paces by launching and recovering aircraft in rapid succession through out the night. He was monitoring the operations from his flag bridge on the Reprisal when just before one 'clock in the morning, his communications officer, Lieutenant Commander Oscar Needles, brought him a copy of a statement from President Truman that had just come over the radio.

Sheffield didn't know what to make of it. He was not a demolitions expert, but twenty thousand tons of TNT was certainly enough to level an entire city. The scope of the destruction was beyond his comprehension, especially when it came to the potential of atomic power.

Sheffield was never very good at science, but he remembered Geannie preparing a science lesson about a process called fission that she had read about in Popular Science. A few years earlier a scientist had discovered the neutron. The theory was that if the atom could be split, a self sustaining nuclear chain

reaction would occur, releasing a large amount of energy. In the relatively short time since then, scientists had succeeded in proving the theory. What all of this had to do with this new weapon, no one really understood.

All day on the 7th, the Third Fleet steamed toward the launch position for the following day for attacks against Northern Honshu and Hokkaido. Bad weather and fog caused the cancellation of these strikes. Aircraft from TF 38 struck Northern Honshu on both 9th and 10th at a build up of Japanese aircraft which were believed to be used to conduct a commando raid against the B-29 bases in the Marianas. The naval aviators claimed to have destroyed 251 aircraft and damaged a further 141.

Task Force 38.2 contributed in their customary manner. At one time, Admiral Brason was informed that enemy planes had been picked up on radar. As it turned out, only one would be kamikaze penetrated the combat air patrol only to be shot down by gunfire from within the task force.

While the Third Fleet was working over Northern Honshu on the 9th, the Army Air Force dropped another atomic bomb on Nagasaki, some twelve hundred miles to the southwest. That same day, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and invaded Manchuria.

At the conclusion of the Northern Honshu operation, the fleet withdrew to refuel. On the evening of the 10th, Admiral Brason received a communique from Admiral Halsey, which he sent to the task force commanders under his command. First, it contained more detailed information regarding the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He also indicated that Japan was willing to accept the surrender ultimatum, provided they could keep their emperor.

Admiral Brason had adopted the opinion of several senior commanders, that Japan was near the end of their resources and that they would have no choice but to surrender. He felt that an invasion and the atomic bombs were unnecessary since the Navy had such a strangle hold on Japan that they would ultimately surrender in a few days anyway. The fact that they offered no opposition was proof that they had nothing left. There was no need for so many to die who had nothing to do with the war. Unlike so many, Sheffield had not been hardened by the war, even though it took his family from him. Hatred was not in his nature.

On the 11th, the fleet steamed away from Japan. Admiral Halsey's initial intentions were to retire to Ulithi. With missed signals coming from the enemy he decided to remain on station and prepared for another strike on Tokyo, however bad weather delayed the operation by one day.

Regardless of the possibility that Japanese were willing to consider surrender, Sheffield's orders were to remain vigilant and nighttime patrols were maintained over the fleet. On the 13th the planned attacks were carried out and the Reprisal contributed her day squadron to the fighter sweep of enemy airfields which destroyed more than two hundred and fifty aircraft on the ground. Throughout the day and into the night, a

number of enemy planes attempted attacks on the various elements of Task Force 38. Twenty two enemy planes were shot down, eight of them by the night fighters from the Reprisal and Bon Homme Richard.

After a day of refueling and replenishing, The fleet moved back toward Tokyo. The Reprisal and the Bon Homme Richard provided air cover for their approach. As usual no enemy aircraft came out to challenge the fleet. The four carrier groups took up station about one hundred twenty five miles off shore and a strike was launched against the Tokyo area on the morning of August 15th. Admiral Brason's task force was on the western end of the string of ships, operating in the vicinity of 33° 30' N 138° 45' E, just west of the Izu archipelago extending south of Tokyo Bay. The Bon Homme Richard had ceased operations for the day, but the Reprisal contributed a number of Hellcats and several Avengers that morning.

About mid morning, approximately twenty enemy planes approached Task Force 38.3. They were met by the combat air patrol which denied them the opportunity of penetrating their defenses to attack. In the ensuing dogfights, Lieutenant Danny Brason from Fighting Sixteen aboard the Randolph became an ace plus one.

When he began his current deployment, he had four kills to his credit. In the weeks that followed he had flown combat missions over Japan, bombing and strafing planes on the ground but seemed to be denied that coveted fifth kill.

This morning was his chance. He and his division had been assigned to combat air patrol. More times than not, the Japanese chose not to approach the heavily defended carriers. But this morning, they seemed desperate. A hand full of Zeros escorting about a dozen Judys on what was an apparent kamikaze mission were encountered. The eight Hellcats went to work and took on the Zeros. Danny and his wingman took on the pair on right flank. They each scored on their first pass, making Danny an ace. The young and inexperienced Japanese pilots were no match for the more experienced Americans and were thoroughly mauled.

Having broke through the fighter escort, Danny selected a Judy and soon put it in his sights. He had no hesitation in squeezing the trigger. It was either shoot it down or not have a place to land his plane. If he hesitated and this one got through, it would have most certainly gone for one of the carriers, maybe his. Danny watched his tracers pour into the enemy plane, slicing off a wing and setting the plane on fire. As it went down in flames, there were no parachutes. Both the pilot and his radioman/gunner went to meet their ancestors with honor. Only five planes broke through to engage the task force and were unmercifully blasted out of the sky by the ships gunners.

About fifty miles to the west, Sheffield's task force was heading into the wind, away from Japan to recover the planes from the morning strike. Once the last plane had landed aboard and had been taken below, the next strike group of comparable size was brought up on deck and spotted for launch. Admiral

Brason directed Capitan Callister to "Launch when ready."

Sheffield stepped outside of his flag bridge into the fresh sea air to watch the planes take off. He lingered for a moment, wondering how many more strikes it would take for the stubborn Japanese to give up. "Haven't they had enough?" he wondered. "The have nothing left. I suppose they figure they have nothing else to lose but their honor. These people would rather die than lose their honor." he reasoned. Just like every man under his command, he wanted to go home.

After a few minutes he stepped back inside and ordered the task force to come about on a course back toward the Tokyo. In unison, the ships made a sweeping turn in formation and headed back in the opposite direction. About forty five minutes later with the planes about half way to their assigned target, Commander Needles handed Admiral Brason an urgent dispatch from Admiral Halsey to all commanders throughout the fleet. "On orders from the President of the United States, cease all offensive operations against Japan. The war is over. Recall all strike aircraft immediately. Maintain a combat air patrol lest some kamikaze make a last minute attack in honor of their ancestors. Investigate and shoot down all snoopers – not vindictively, but in a friendly sort of way."

Sheffield had to read it twice. "This is it. It's over, it's over!" he shouted. "Mace, get that strike group turned around."

Mace rushed to his side and Sheffield handed him the paper, "It's finally over. Thank God! It's really over."

Ensign Gover and other's on the flag bridge crowded around and had to read the note for themselves. There was a spontaneous round of hand shakes and pats on the back as they congratulated each other. The same scene played out one deck above on the bridge as Captain Callister had received the same message. After the jubilation settled down, Captain Callister passed the word to the crew. Men dropped what they were doing and cheered, many of them left their posts and rushed out onto the flight deck.

Following Admiral Halsey's lead, the largest flag they had aboard was raised on the mainmast and the ship's whistle blasted for a solid minute. The same scene was playing out on the Bon Homme Richard and every other ship in the Task Force 38.2 and every ship in the Third Fleet.

Admiral Brason had Commander Needles patch him through to the ships of his task force. "The war is over. We have no further orders so we will hold tight right here until we receive further instructions. Celebration is certainly in order, but I urge you to remain at your duty stations and do your jobs. These ships don't run themselves. Let me remind you we must remain vigilant. We are still within range of shore based aircraft. There may be some who refuse to accept the order to lay down their arms and attack us on their own volition. The chances are slim, but nevertheless a real possibility. I want to make sure that when we go

home, we go home in one piece. I will keep you apprised as further instructions are received. That is all.”

Ramona had just got to work that morning and was sitting at her desk in her office when President Truman's announcement was patched through the hospital's intercom. With her elbows on her desk, she put her face in her hands and burst into tears. A moment later she stepped out of her office into a spontaneous celebration of victory. Pandemonium ruled. Patients who were able to get out of their beds were dancing around. Doctors, nurses, orderlies and patients mingled in celebration. Indeed, the same scene played out in major cities and small towns across the country.

In Roanoke, Walt and Sarah rushed over to his parents house as they listened to the radio broadcasts with news and commentary regarding the end of the war. Shenan and Emily soon joined them. Ellen turned the gathering into a celebratory picnic and an afternoon of rejoicing as the grandchildren and their families came over. When Emmett said Grace, he thanked the Lord that the war was finally over and asked for the safe return of Sheffield and Danny, who they knew to have been involved in the recent fighting around Japan.

In Japan, a recording of the Emperor's announcement regarding the surrender was broadcast to the nation. Many went on with their lives as best they could, while some Army and Navy officers chose suicide over surrender. As the talk of surrender progressed over the last few days, a military coup was thwarted. As a nation, they were humiliated and shamed by defeat. Some outright refused to accept surrender.

Four hundred and fifty miles west of Task Force 38.2 at an air base at Oita on the island of Kyushu, Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki the commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy Fifth Air Fleet was one who refused to surrender. He ordered three aircraft armed and readied for take off. When he arrived at the airfield, eleven *Judy*s and twenty two airmen stood by. He stepped up to a small podium and addressed the men, “This is, indeed, a touching thing. Are you willing to die with me?”

Every hand shot up as they shouted in response. Admiral Ugaki led the men to their planes and he himself climbed into the rear seat of one of the planes, sharing it with the young man whose seat it was. The eleven dive bombers taxied into position and took off and headed for the American fleet to die with honor.

At one o'clock, Admiral Halsey addressed the fleet, “Men of the Third Fleet, the war is ended. You, in conjunction with our brothers in arms, of all branches of service, have contributed inestimably to this final result. You have brought an implacable, treacherous, and barbaric foe to his knees in abject surrender. This is the first time in the recorded history of the misbegotten Japanese race that they as a nation have been forced to submit to this humiliation. I said in 1942 the Nips were no superman. You have helped write *finis*

on that estimate in 1945.

“Your names are writ in golden letters on the pages of history – your fame is and shall be immortal. Whenever you have met the foe, on the sea, on the land, in the air, or under the water, you have been supreme. Whether in the early days, when fighting with a very frayed shoestring, or at the finish, when fighting with the mightiest combined fleet the world has ever seen, the results have been the same – victory has crowned your efforts. The forces of righteousness and decency have triumphed. Victory is not the end – rather, it is just the beginning. We must establish peace – a firm, a just, and an enduring peace.

“At this moment our thoughts turn to our happy and fortunate homeland, to our loved ones. Deeply rooted in each and every heart is a desire, now that the tumult and glory of war has ceased and victory – absolute and unconditional victory – has crowned our efforts – to return to our homes. . . .”

The jubilation continued into the afternoon aboard the Sheffield's flagship and the rest of the task force as far as that goes. Despite orders to remain vigilant, there was only a perfunctory attempt. The men posted at their battle stations halfheartedly attended to their duties as they reveled in the victory. No one was really paying attention to the radar scopes as a blip appeared. Those standing watch did not see the approaching danger as it was obscured by cloud cover. The combat air patrol was deployed to the north and east, between the task force and Tokyo, where any potential threat would come from.

Finally, the radarman glanced at his scope. In horror, he cried out, “Bogies bearing two-five-five. Distance twenty miles.” Already within range of the five inch guns. There was no time to reprimand the inattentiveness to duty. Captain Callister sounded general quarters and flashed the warning to the rest of the task force.

Admiral Brason, was wary of a possible attack, but didn't really think one would materialize. He was jolted into action at the sound of the alarm but was uncertain of the threat. Mace called up to bridge to find out what was going on. He hung up and told Sheffield what he had just learned. In the eighty seconds that it took to man the ship, the eleven planes had come out of the clouds and were in visual range.

As the gun mounts on the ships were manned and ready, they opened fire at will, filling the air with bursts of flak, creating a steel curtain in the air between the ships and the enemy that hadn't given up. Four planes fell from the sky almost immediately. The remaining seven continued at high altitude as they approached the push over point.

Two targeted the Reprisal, two the Bon Homme Richard, and two the Constitution. One held back as if he was waiting to see what the others might miss. Down they came from twelve thousand feet. Three planes were blown out of sky, leaving one targeting each ship. Then the second plane headed for the Constitution went down in flames. The last of the seven chose her as his target.

So much for the war being over. The task force faced more danger at that moment, after the

surrender, than they had in the six weeks since they left San Pedro Bay. Another was shot down and the Bon Homme Richard was in the clear. Every gun in the task force came to bear on the two that remained intact and unscathed.

Lieutenant Hiromitsu Kobayashi was by far the most experienced pilot in his squadron, although he had only been flying for two years. The rest were only eighteen or nineteen years old and had only been flying for a few months. One by one the young pilots that Hiromitsu had trained were blasted from the sky before they could sacrifice themselves.

Hiromitsu himself was only twenty four years old. Three years earlier he had graduated from Senshu University in Tokyo with a degree in political science and had been fully indoctrinated in mindset of the regime in power. Upon graduating, he enlisted in the Imperial Japanese Navy in the Twelfth Class of Reserve Students and received intensive flight training. Upon completion of his flight training, he was commissioned as an Ensign and was assigned to a squadron stationed on Guam. Before he had the opportunity to see combat, he was promoted to Lieutenant (junior grade) and was reassigned to train newly enlisted pilots. With the high attrition rate among pilots, he was promoted to Lieutenant and was assigned to form a new squadron built around his trainees in Admiral Ugaki's Fifth Air Fleet based in Kyūshū.

When Admiral Ugaki requested three aircraft be readied for one last kamikaze mission that morning, Lieutenant Kobayashi called for volunteers. Every pilot in squadron and their radiomen stepped forward, including himself.

Once they had made contact with an American task force consisting of only two carriers and a battleship. Hiromitsu assigned targets to each plane. Not knowing the identity of the farthest of the two carriers, he selected it as his target. The plane that Admiral Ugaki rode along in held back to see how the attack went before selecting his target.

It was odd that the American's had not responded to their presence as they approached. Lieutenant Kobayashi was confident that their mission would meet with success. All of that changed when the American ships finally opened fire. Now only he and one other plane remained, hoping to die in glory.

As he continued his dive, his left wing was riddled with bullets. As he continued down, he drew more anti-aircraft fire and took more hits, which killed his radioman. The carrier turned and twisted wildly in an attempt to shake him off, but Hiromitsu was determined to stay with it. His entire life had lead up to this very moment. True to his training, he didn't flinch. His concentration was riveted on his target. There was no thought of his mother and father back home, nor of the impending glory that he was about to receive.

As he drew closer and was about to make his final plunge, he yelled "Hissatsu" at the top of his lungs. In an instant his plane was hit again and he felt a deep burning on the right side of his body, but he

remained on course. At the last minute the ship turned out from under him, leaving him headed straight for the water.

With all he had in him, he pulled up and rolled his plane over onto its back and flopped onto the deck of the carrier. A smile of satisfaction came over his pain grimaced face as his plane exploded on contact, only then did his thoughts turn to the glory he was about to receive. He died before his body was engulfed in flames.

In a scene reminiscent of that fateful day off Salerno nearly two years earlier, Captain Callister watched from the wing bridge as the plane dove out of the sky. From there he shouted orders to the helmsman that sent the speeding carrier careening every which way in an effort to evade the determined pilot who was bent of crashing his plane into the ship.

Despite being hit repeatedly as it drew nearer, it kept coming. With seconds to spare, the D4Y Judy's left wing caught fire. Captain Callister gave one final order and the ship veered out of the path of the doomed plane.

Everyone watching was certain that they had dodged certain disaster. Then to everyone's disbelief, the plane pulled out its dive and rolled over onto its back and came down on the the flight deck between the center line and the forty millimeter gun tubs just aft of the superstructure.

The instantaneous explosion suggested that considerable damage had been done. The fuel tank erupted, sending a fire ball high into the air, hurtling debris in every direction. The force of the blast sent the bomb the plane was carrying arching over the side. It detonated on impact with the surface and sent water into the air and pounded the hull with the shock wave from the blast.

The three forty millimeter gun tubs aft of the superstructure and the twenty millimeter gun crews in the deck edge battery just aft of the gun tubs took the brunt of explosion. Men were either mowed down where they stood or were blown over the side.

The blast blew out a chunk of the flight deck five feet in diameter, demolishing the ready room on the galley deck immediately below the crater. Fires erupted on the flight deck and the galley deck below. Thick smoke poured into the air.

A moment later, the final plane plunged into the Constitution between her stacks. The weight and momentum of the plane broke through the deck and exploded inside the ship, destroying the forward boiler rooms. The blast ruptured the hull causing serious flooding. Fires broke out on the upper decks and quickly spread.

The war was over, yet two great ships were damaged and on fire. The Reprisal remained on course and maintained speed. On the other hand the battlecruiser slowed to a stop and began listing. The

Cheyenne pulled alongside the stricken Constitution to assist in fighting the fires.

Firefighters on the Reprisal gallantly fought back at the blazes. The strike group was approaching on their return from their aborted mission. With the Reprisal's deck ablaze, the Bon Homme Richard turned into the wind to recover the planes. While they were being recovered, progress was made in fighting the fires on the Reprisal. Within forty five minutes they had been brought under control and put out. The fight still went on aboard the Constitution.

Admiral Halsey was outraged when he was informed of the attack, although he wasn't surprised that something like this had happened. He was even more upset that they were allowed to get through without being stopped first. He demanded that the inattentive radar operator be put on report. News of the attack on Task Force 38.2 served as reminder to the rest of the fleet to be on alert, which paid off. A few other planes attempted unsuccessfully to carry out last minute attacks on the fleet as well.

Two hours after the attack, the flight deck had been patched up and ready to resume flight operations. Admiral Brason consulted with Captain Callister, who had determined that the ship was capable of remaining on station. The damage wasn't nearly as bad as had been expected. When the kamikaze pulled up and rolled over, it lost the momentum of its dive which lessened the force of the impact. That and the fact that the bomb it was carrying did not impact the deck since the plane was inverted. Fortunately, the flight deck was empty, with the strike group in the air and the rest in the hangar. The galley deck absorbed the force of the explosion preventing any damage to the hangar and the planes below. The flight deck and the aft end of superstructure was scorched from the flames and the three forty millimeter mounts and the twenty millimeter battery were destroyed, but with the war over, they shouldn't be needed.

Satisfied with Captain Callister's assessment, Sheffield ordered the task force to turn into the wind and the strike group was launched from the Bon Homme Richard and circled around and began landing aboard the Reprisal. Rather than celebrating the end of the war, the crew of the Reprisal identified the dead and missing, tended to the wounded, cleaned up the mess, and patched up the damage.

By night fall, the Constitution was limping back to Ulithi for repairs under her own power at nine knots. The flight decks of the two carriers came to life as the night combat air patrol was launched to provide cover for the entire fleet.

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The movements of the Admiral Brason's task force mirror those of the Third Fleet as described in Bull Halsey by E.B. Potter and particularly those of the Bon Homme Richard from History of Carrier Division Seven found at CV6.org.

The story of Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki is from The Divine Wind by Tadashi Nakajima, Rikihei Inoguchi, and Roger Pineau. Lieutenant Hiromitsu Kobayashi and his squadron are fictional.

In actuality, the eleven planes set out to attack the fleet at Okinawa. Four planes returned with engine trouble. There is no account of the fate of the other seven. No allied ships were damaged by kamikazes on August 15, 1945.

