

Chapter I Coming Home

September 16, 1945 – October 19, 1945

Late in the afternoon of the 16th, Task Force 16 was about two hundred miles northwest of Pearl Harbor, or approximately seventy miles north of Kauai, Sheffield ordered the task force into the wind. The ships swung around into the southwest and the three carriers began launching their air groups. Once the planes were winging their way toward Oahu; the Reprisal's planes to Barbers Point Naval Air Station and the those of the Monterrey and Bataan toward Kaneohe, the task force resumed their course toward Pearl Harbor.

Sunrise on Monday morning found them rounding Barbers Point on the southwest corner of Oahu. About an hour later they were steaming single file up the channel, with the Reprisal in the lead. Rather than proceeding into the harbor, she slowed down just before Hospital Point and was guided by tug boats into Dry Dock Number 4. The rest made their way on into the harbor.

With that part of the voyage home over and with the task force at Pearl Harbor, Task Force 16 was dissolved and Sheffield was relieved of command. However he still had the rest of his orders to fulfill and that was to deliver his carrier division to New York City and retained command of the three carriers.

Once the Reprisal was in position in the dry dock, the gate closed behind her and water began to be pumped out, draining the dock leaving the ship high and dry. The crew was dismissed for liberty and the former POWs were met by staff from the Pearl Harbor Naval Hospital where they were to be checked out before being sent on to the west coast. Sheffield and Mace observed all of this from the flag bridge.

All of a sudden, Mace excitedly slapped Sheffield on the shoulder, "Don't look now, but I think were about to go on liberty ourselves."

"What makes you say that?"

"Nine o'clock off the port beam."

Sheffield turned to see two women standing on street that divided the navy yard from the hospital grounds. "Well, I'll be." he exclaimed. "I wasn't expecting this." The Admiral and his chief of staff stepped outside where they could be seen. Waving, they caught the attention of the two ladies, who waved back vigorously.

A moment later they left the flag bridge and made their way below and down the gangplank to the dock. The two women ran toward them the best they could in heels. The shorter of the two reached down while on the run and took off her shoes. She rushed into Sheffield's arms and nearly clobbered him with her shoes and she threw her arms around his neck as she stood on her tip toes. Before a word could be spoken, she was smothering him with kisses. Mace's reception was equally enthusiastic.

Once she released her hold on him and reseted her frame on her feet, Sheffield asked, "When did

you get here?"

Ramona answered, "Late yesterday afternoon."

"I sure wasn't expecting this. What a pleasant surprise. What prompted you to come all the way out here to see me."

"I got your note that you sent with Harvey and the idea just popped into my head and I thought why not? I made arrangements at work to take a week off so I could come and spend it with you. Then it occurred to me that Pat hadn't seen Mace either so I called her and told her what my plan was and she wanted in. She met me at the San Francisco Airport and I stayed the night with her. Then yesterday we boarded the plane and here we are. We stayed at my place last night."

"And I'm glad that you're here. Gosh its good to see you. It has been a very long eleven months."

"I know, I thought you'd never get home. But now the war is over and here you are, or here we are."

"Yeah, but I won't be home home for a few more weeks."

"This is close enough, I still have my beach house here."

"So where are Mace and Pat going to stay?"

"Oh, Pat arranged to stay at the Royal Hawaiian."

"How are we going to get around?"

"In that." She said pointing to the 1939 Lincoln Continental parked in the far end of the hospital parking lot.

"Well, before I can just up and leave, I need to take care of a couple of things."

All the time, Mace had been talking to Pat. Sheffield interrupted them saying, "Why don't you come aboard while we get some things squared away and pack a few things."

Ramona still had her shoes in her hands and slipped them back onto her feet. With Ramona holding his left hand and his cane in the other, he lead them back to the ship and up the gangplank.

The officer of the deck saluted as the admiral came on deck.

Admiral Brason asked, "Permission to bring guests aboard?"

What was a lieutenant junior grade going to say to an admiral's request but, "Yes sir."

Sheffield took Ramona up to his stateroom on the galley deck and Mace took Pat to his. They asked them to wait for them while they wrapped up some business.

Admiral Brason reported in by telephone and received his orders. His carrier division was to be supplemented by the Enterprise when she arrived from the west coast in a few days. He was to be ready to sail with his division on the 25th to New York City by way of the Panama Canal.

He relayed his orders on the Caption Callister, who assured him that the repairs would be complete and the Reprisal would be ready to sail. He then contacted the commanders of the Monterrey and Bataan

with their orders. They too assured him that they too would be ready to sail.

Lastly he talked to Ensign Gover and told him where he could be contacted. In fact all of the staff were to stay in contact with Morris, in case there were any developments that required their assistance. Then he added, "See what you can do to put together for that staff social we talked about and get back to me."

With his business squared away, Sheffield returned to his stateroom where Ramona was waiting for him. He was surprised to see her clothes draped over the chair and singing coming from the bathroom. He raised his eye brows as a smile came to his face as the moment seemed all too familiar. The bathroom door was open ajar so he opened it and went in to find Ramona in the bathtub mostly concealed by a mountain of bubbles.

He went on in and sat down on the edge of the tub while she sang, "Never thought that you would be Standing here so close to me. There's so much I feel that I should say But words can wait until some other day

"Kiss me once, then kiss me twice, Then kiss me once again. It's been a long, long time Haven't felt like this, my dear

"Since I can't remember when It's been a long, long time. You'll never know how many dreams I've dreamed about you

"Or just how empty they all seemed without you. So kiss me once, then kiss me twice, Then kiss me once again. It's been a long, long time.

"Ah, kiss me once, then kiss me twice, Then kiss me once again, It's been a long time. Haven't felt like this my dear

"Since I can't remember when, It's been a long, long time. You'll never know how many dreams I dreamed about you

"Or just how empty they all seemed without you. So kiss me once then kiss me twice, Then kiss me once again. It's been a long, long time."

"That was simply lovely. I've missed hearing your voice." Sheffield said. "I don't believe I've heard that song before."

"You probably haven't. It just came out."

"Really. Who's does it?"

"It's by Harry James and his orchestra with Kitty Kallen doing the vocals." She replied. "I think it's a catchy tune and the lyrics are perfect for a reunion." Then she reached out and took a hold of his shirt and pulled him down close to her and kissed him once and kissed him twice, and kissed him once again.

When she stepped out of the tub onto the mat, he just looked at her for a moment as the bubbles and water dripped down her body. "Now that's something I haven't seen for a long, long time. Sheffield handed her a towel and watched as she dried off. "You know its funny, but we've done this before."

"I remember." Ramona said. "It was the morning after we were married."

"And sometime before that, I had a dream about it."

"That just goes to show you that dreams really do come true, Babe. I know you're my dream come true and now I'm going to make your dream come true, again." Then she proceeded to give him the reception that she had promised him....

"Now, I bet that was something that has never been done on this ship before, has it Babe?."

"No, I'm pretty sure that was the first time." he replied as they both got up to get dressed.

Sheffield began gathering the things that he needed to take ashore with him.

"I even brought some of your civilian clothes with me." She said as he folded some shirts. "I knew that you didn't have any with you."

"Thanks, sweetheart. You thought of everything didn't you?"

"I even brought your swimming trunks."

"So what do you have in mind?"

"Oh nothing special. I just want to spend time together."

"I did tell Morris to put together some sort of a social for my staff. I hope that doesn't interfere with any of your plans."

"Not at all. That sounds fun."

After getting his razor and toiletries together, he said, "That's everything. Shall we go?"

Sheffield escorted her to the gangplank and they left the ship. As they did, his two star flag was taken down. Mace and Pat were waiting for them at the car. Sheffield opened the passenger door for Ramona to get in and he went around to the other side and got in behind the wheel.

"I feel like I should be driving you, Admiral."

"Nonsense. Mace. We're on vacation. And by the way. I'm just plain old Sheffield."

As they drove out the main gate, Sheffield showed Mace and Pat the place where Geannie and the kids were gunned down.

"I can't even imagine how horrible that was." Pat said. When I heard what had happened to them, I was devastated."

"I don't know how you did it, Sheffield." Mace said.

"Did what?"

"How you managed to not become bitter and hateful."

"That's just not in his nature." Ramona assured them.

After leaving the base they drove into Honolulu and dropped Mace and Pat off at the Royal Hawaiian. This was her time back to the Islands in the five years since they moved back to the states.

"Let me have a number where I can reach you, Mace."

"What's our room number, Pat?"

"One seventeen. Just call the hotel and ask to be put through." Pat responded.

"I don't have telephone at my beach house," Ramona answered, "but if you need to get a hold of us, call the Kawaikui Market. They're in the directory. They're only three quarters of a mile up the highway. They've known me for years. Just tell them that you need to contact me and they'll send their daughter over on her bicycle to deliver the message."

"Alright then," Sheffield said. "We'll be in touch. Enjoy your leave, Mace."

"You too, Sheffield."

After dropping them off, Sheffield and Ramona drove out past Diamond Head on Highway 72 to her beach house. There was no schedule. Nothing that had to be done, Ramona had got the place ready the day before. Everything was just as she had left it the year before when they were there last.

Sheffield's idea of relaxing was a lounge chair on the deck looking out over the ocean. Ramona brought him a cold bottle of Coca Cola and joined him in the other lounge chair. They just talked. They talked well into afternoon about a whole host of things that they could only barely mention in their letters. One topic was what to do now the war was over.

Sheffield had a good night's rest that night. It was the first time in eleven months that he hadn't slept aboard the ship. And it was also the first time that he had slept with Ramona in the same amount of time. They held each other close as they talked and eventually drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, Sheffield awoke to the sound of the shower running and got up and got dressed in civilian clothes. He had breakfast set out and waiting when Ramona came out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel. She suggested, "Why don't we take this out on the patio."

So wrapped in her towel, they had breakfast while they enjoyed the ocean view. "I love this place." Ramona sighed. "I miss it here."

"It is nice, that's for sure." Sheffield agreed.

After finishing breakfast, Ramona suggested, "While I get dressed and clear away, why don't go up the market and call Mace and Pat and invite them out."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure why not." she answered. "Oh and here's a list of a few things that I need you to pick up."

Sheffield took the list from her and took her into his arms for a hug and a kiss before leaving. He walked the three quarters of a mile up the highway to the market. Just outside the front door was a telephone booth. He stepped inside and closed the door behind him and picked up the receiver. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a couple of nickels. He dropped one into the slot and instantly heard a dial tone. He dialed the number for the Royal Hawaiian and asked to be put through to room 117. Mace and Pat were more than happy to accept the invitation.

After hanging up, he dropped the other nickel and dialed the ship and asked to be put through to Ensign Gover. "Hello Morris. How is everything?"

"Pretty quiet. There aren't any messages for you sir. But I did make arrangements for a luau at the Polynesian Renaissance Amphitheater for Thursday night. There wasn't anything available for the weekend anywhere so I settled for Thursday. Will that be alright?"

"That will be great. Go ahead and finalize the arrangements and let everyone know when they check in with you. Oh and Morris, don't stay cooped up on the ship. Get off and go have some fun."

"Yes sir. I plan on it, after all this is my first time in the islands. There is a place up on the northwest shore at Laie that I want to go to."

"Its real pretty up there. I took Geannie and the kids up there once just before the war. Feel free to have one of the yeoman cover for you if you want to spend a night or two ashore. Just let someone know where you can be reached."

"Thank you sir. I'll do that."

"Alright then, I'll be talking to you later. Remember, go have some fun. Thats an order."

After hanging up, he went into the market and got the items on the list and started back down to road. When he got home, Ramona was dressed and ready for the day.

"Well what did they say?" She asked.

"They'll be out in just a little while." he responded.

About forty five minutes later, a taxi cab pulled into the driveway. Sheffield and Ramona went out to greet their guests and invited them in.

"The place looks just the same as I remember it." Mace commented. "I remember the time or two that we came out here with Sheffield and Geanie. We all had some good times back in the day, didn't we."

"We sure did." Pat agreed.

"Why don't we move out onto the patio." Ramona suggested.

For the rest of the morning, they visited and reminisced about the time when they all lived in Hawaii before the war. Of course, Sheffield was gone a lot with the Enterprise. That didn't stop Pat, Ramona, and Geannie from getting together.

Around one o'clock, Pat helped Ramona set out some bread and cold cuts and made lunch, which they enjoyed on the patio. After lunch, they all piled into the car and drove into Honolulu to see what there was to do. Sheffield and Mace tagged along as the girls did a little shopping. Later they passed a bowling alley and Mace suggested that they stop in and bowl a couple of lanes. Then Pat wanted to see the officers housing neighborhood where they had lived next door to Sheffield and Geannie. It still looked pretty much the same.

Toward evening they went out to dinner and took in a movie. Before the featured attraction, a newsreel of the surrender was shown. As the camera panned the row of Admirals and Generals assembled to witness the signing, Ramona clutched Sheffield's arm and blurted, "Look! There you are." loud enough for the people around them to hear her.

The movie "Week-End at the Waldorf" starring Ginger Rogers, Lana Turner, Walter Pidgeon, and Van Johnson, was a comedy that focused on various guests staying at New York City's famed Waldorf=Astoria Hotel. Ramona snuggled up next to Sheffield during the film. At one point she whispered, "I've never been to New York. I'd love to go there sometime and stay at the Waldorf=Astoria."

"Well it just so happens I'll be in New York in a few weeks. Why don't you come up and meet me there and we can stay there."

Ramona turned to him and said, "That sounds like a rendezvous. I'll be there."

After the picture show, they dropped Mace and Pat off at their hotel and went home and went to bed after an enjoyable day. On Wednesday they stayed home and enjoyed their time together. They didn't leave the house again until Thursday afternoon to attend the luau.

This was strictly a casual affair, no uniforms allowed. Before leaving, they changed into the Hawaiian attire that Ramona brought with her. She wore the strapless hula gown that been Sandy's, and of course a white gardenia in her hair. Sheffield wore his blue and white Hawaii print shirt, a pair of white trousers, and wide brim white straw hat.

Ensign Gover was already there when they arrived at the Polynesian Renaissance Amphitheater. He got there early to assure that everything was in order for the gathering. During the afternoon, many of the officers on the staff had treated themselves to a round of golf at the Waialae Golf Course which was adjacent to the Amphitheater.

The Polynesian Renaissance Amphitheater was just on the other side of Diamond head from Honolulu and only five miles from Ramona's beech house. It had been established in the 1922 as a cultural center, featuring native Hawaiian culture and history. It sat on fifteen acres right on the beach which included an authentic Hawaiian village.

Ramona was thrilled when she heard that was were the social was going to be. It was one of her

favorite places, which she had visited often. It was one of the places that she took Sheffield, Geannie and the kids soon after they arrived in the islands. It was also where Sheffield had attended an luau with Shorty and Freddy on his first visit to Hawaii back in 1926.

When Sheffield and Ramona arrived they received the traditional Hawaiian greeting, including the exchange of the ha – the breath of life. They were just in time for the hukilau. It is a way of fishing invented by the Hawaiians where a large number of people, usually family and friends, work together in casting the net from shore and then pulling it back in full of fish.

Within a short time, the rest of Sheffield's staff arrived; officers and enlisted men alike. This was one of those rare occasions in strict navy protocol where the line between them became fuzzy. Besides Ramona and Pat, there were two other women present. A couple of the single members of the staff had found dates for the evening.

The evening began when Ensign Gover took charge and called everyone together for the meal. It was indeed a traditional Hawaiian feast. Between dinner and the entertainment, Admiral Brason addressed his staff.

“Are you enjoying the evening?” He paused for some applause and cheering and a couple of hoots. “Wasn't that some feast?” Again he was interrupted by applause and cheering. “Morris assures me that we are in store for a real treat when the entertainment comes out here in a few minutes.

“But first, you have to endure my ramblings. I wanted to show my appreciation for all that you have done since we came together just a couple of weeks sky of a year ago. A lot has happened since then. We have come nearly all the way around the world. We left Norfolk on the nineteenth of October last year. Crossing the Atlantic we stopped off in the Azores. We passed through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean and stopped off in Algiers. From there we took the fight to the Germans at Genoa, Italy before transiting the Mediterranean and going through the Suez Canal into the Indian Ocean.

“After a few days at Trincomalee in Ceylon, we joined forces with the British for a raid on the Japanese oil refineries on Sumatra. We crossed the equator and continued to take the fight to the Japanese in the East Indies. From there we put in at Kossol Roads at Palau before participating in a number of campaigns in the Philippines.

“At Lingayen we were introduced to the Divine Wind when Corporal Matsuhara payed us a visit. We hit the enemy in Indochina and rode out the fringes of a typhoon. After that we had some more business to attend to in the Philippines. We hit Borneo and paid a visit to Singapore, were we collected some more Japanese aircraft parts.

“From time to time we took a break and licked our wounds at Seeadler Harbor and San Pedro Bay. But then we were right back at it. We joined in on the air strikes against Japan herself. We were there when

they called it is quits, all except for a few who hadn't had enough yet. We lost some more good men that afternoon. We were there when they signed on the dotted line. We had a part in wrapping up this terrible war and bringing it to an end.

“Now here we are tonight in Paradise on our way home, In a few days we sail again. We'll pass through the Panama Canal and then in about a month from now we'll put in at New York Harbor and our voyage around the end will come to an end almost exactly one year since it began. Yes, it has been quite a year, hasn't it.

“There is plenty to think about. In the meantime we have a job to finish. We have to get our ships to New York. Once we get home, I don't know what will be next. Undoubtedly many of us will go our separate ways as we go on to bigger and better things. Perhaps some of us will decide to go home to our home towns and settle back into civilian life. Perhaps others of us will stay in the Navy. We will all take one thing with us, the collective memory of our service together. This time in our lives will always be the common thread that is interwoven into the tapestries of our lives.

“I wish that the rest of you got to spend this week with your wives and sweethearts like Mace and I did. But you'll be seeing them soon.

“Thank you again for your service and all of your hard work. Now let's bring on the entertainment.”

After Admiral Brason's remarks, the entrainment began with authentic Hawaiian dancers. At one point, it was a bit more authentic than Ensign Gover had bargained for. He turned ten shades of red during one number when he realized that the women were covered only by their grass skirts, leis, and long, black hair. The finale at the end of the evening was the traditional fire dancers.

The evening turned out to be what Sheffield hoped it would be. He had an opportunity to express his gratitude. As the party broke up, each man, officer and sailor alike, thanked him for a wonderful evening and told him how much they enjoyed serving with him. Sheffield, Ramona, and Morris were the last ones to leave. Sheffield expressed his sincere appreciation to Morris, who had been with him continually during the last two years and ten months.

The next day, Friday, was their last full day together. Sheffield and Ramona took a drive around the tip of Oahu to Kaneohe on the windward coast and spent the day. It had been a wonderful week together. That evening, they sat out on the deck looking out over the ocean, bathed in the light from the full moon. They stayed up late, basking in the moment. Finally, Sheffield gathered Ramona into his arms and carried her inside and laid her on their bed, but the evening didn't end there. Finally sleep overcame them. Morning found them in one another's arms.

There wasn't much left in the pantry, so Sheffield went to the market to get something for breakfast while Ramona got ready for the day. She was dressed and had her suitcase packed by the time he returned.

After breakfast it was time to leave to get her to the plane for the trip back to the States. Mace and Pat arrived at the airport a few minutes later. It had been a wonderful five days and their parting was bitter sweet. Bitter in the fact that they had to say goodbye in parting, sweet in that it was only for a few short weeks.

Sheffield and Mace watched as their wives boarded the plane. They lingered as it took off and watched as it grew smaller and smaller until it finally disappeared from view. Sheffield drove back to the beech house and put everything away and covered the furniture so it would be ready for the next time they came, whenever that might be. With the shutters securely in place and the doors locked, he drove back into Honolulu and returned the car and paid for its use. From there he took a taxi back to the base.

The Reprisal was now tied up at 1010 Dock. The temporary repairs had been completed and she moved out of dry dock on Thursday afternoon. They would hold her over until she reached the New York Navy Yard where she was scheduled for a complete overhaul and refit. Otherwise she would get by until then. Her navy blue camouflage was weathered and faded and the natural color of the Douglas fir planks was showing through in many places as the blue gray stain had been worn away by flight operations, weather, and sun. The dashed lines on the flight deck were still visible as were the number 44 on the forward flight deck and the letters RPSL at the aft end. The call letters that had long since been abandoned just prior to the war, remained a tradition for the Reprisal.

When Sheffield returned aboard, his two star flag was once more raised to the foremast. On Saturday, he and his staff reassembled to work out the details for carrying out their remaining order, to take Carrier Division Seven to New York. There wasn't a much to figure out. Vice Admiral Frederick C. Sherman would be in command of the entire task force. Admiral Brason concerned himself with providing flight training for the air groups of the four carriers that would be under his command.

On Sunday, the Enterprise arrived from the West Coast where she had been undergoing repairs for damage received in the kamikaze attack off Okinawa in May. On Monday the final preparations were made for getting. Several hundred army cots were brought aboard and stowed along the bulkheads in the hangar, in addition to the bunks in the repair hangar. The Reprisal was to transport more than a thousand servicemen and ex-POWs to the east coast for discharge. In fact all of the ships in the task force were taking aboard as many men as they could for the voyage.

At seven o'clock Tuesday morning, the order was given to get underway. At seven thirty the mooring lines cast off and the Reprisal was pulled away from the dock by three tug boats. Once out in the harbor, she began, making way for the channel. By eight thirty, she was at sea. As the other ships exited the channel, the task force began to form up.

Task Force 11 under the overall command of Admiral Sherman, flying his flag on the Enterprise, was made up of the four carriers of Carrier Division Seven; the battleships Idaho, Mississippi, New Mexico, and North Carolina; the cruisers Portland, Richmond, and Concord; and fifteen destroyers. Once at sea, the air groups coming aboard the four carriers.

While at Barbers Point, Air Group 73 had been brought back up to strength after the combat and operational losses incurred during the final days of the war. In addition, the torpedo squadron received four specially equipped TBM-3W Avengers that were fitted with long range radar. The rotating antenna was housed in a shroud under the belly of the plane, making them look like they were pregnant, as Sheffield put it.

The airborne radar was capable of detecting low flying formations at a range in excess of one hundred miles. The TBM-3W, which entered service in March, had a crew of a pilot and one radar operator who transmitted the radar data to the carrier via a data link. This new capability would allow the commander to see well beyond the range of ship mounted radar and give early warning of potential threats. Sheffield wished he would have had such a capability on numerous occasions during the war.

Three days out, Admiral Sherman divided the task force into two groups. One composed of the carriers, cruisers and nine destroyers under the command of Admiral Brason. The other consisted of the battleships and the rest of the destroyers under the command of the Commander of Battleship Division Three aboard the Idaho. Admiral Sherman aboard the Enterprise retained overall command.

Even though the war was over, they were still fighting men, serving on fighting ships, in a fighting force. To maintain a sharp edge, the two groups conducted war games and exercises against each other and independently. They were reminiscent of the maneuvers that Sheffield had participated in during the peacetime, before the war. Even though the Reprisal and Enterprise were night carriers, flight operations were limited to daylight hours. At night, the planes were kept on the flight deck so the hangar could be used as quarters for the passengers. These exercise were limited in scope so there was still plenty well deserved downtime for the war weary crews.

On the 6th, the formation was joined by the battleship Washington and two more destroyers. Two days later the task force arrived at Balboa, Panama and anchored off shore in the Bay of Panama; the carriers retaining their air groups aboard. It was there that the mail caught up with the ship and with it a letter from Ramona.

September 30, 1945

Dear Sheffield

I've only been home for a week and I'm already looking forward with anticipation to meeting you in New York City when you get in. The day I flew

home was a long day that seemed even longer than it really was because of the difference in time zones. I said goodbye to Pat in San Francisco before catching my next flight. Needless to say, it was quite late when I arrived back in Washington.

It was good seeing them again. It was sure good to be back in the Islands for a few days. I have really missed them. That's why I want to keep my beach house, it will give us a reason to go back from time to time.

Even better was being with you again. It seemed like the day would never come, now it has come and gone and I counting the days until I will see you next.

I have never been to New York and have always wanted to go there. I want to see Central Park. I hear that its spectacular in the fall. I also want to see the Radio City Music Hall and the Empire State Building and so much more. There is so much to see and do that I'm sure we won't get to all of it.

In the short time since the war has been over, there is a different shift of emphasis at the hospital. Rather than receiving men wounded in the fighting, we are now getting a lot of former prisoners of war who are being treated for anything from malnutrition to injuries received from harsh treatment.

Speaking of POWs, I've got a story for you. Ruth Ann's Cousin Peggy Hastings, on Emily's side of the family, is in a real dilemma. Her husband Cal was drafted into the Army in September of '41. After boot camp, he got to come home before being sent to the Philippines and was sent to Bataan. As luck would have it, he arrived there only a week before the war started.

Yeah, I know what you're thinking, "The poor guy." About the same time Peggy learned that she was pregnant, she received a notice from the War Department informing her that he had been killed in action.

Ruth Ann says that Peggy was devastated, as you understand. Not only did she have to deal with the loss of her husband, but she had a difficult pregnancy as well. When her baby was born, it was a little boy who she named after her husband. They had been childhood sweethearts and soul mates, like you and Geannie.

It took her a long time to be able to move on, and when she did, his older brother, Dan, came home on leave and the two of them hit it off and after a short courtship - very short according to Ruth Ann - they were married before he went back to the war. During that short time she became pregnant again and has another child by her second husband, the older brother. Now that the war is over,

he has since returned home.

But guess who else came home. That's right, Cal, her first husband. It turned out that he had actually been captured by the Japanese. He took part in the infamous Bataan Death March and managed to survive that horrible ordeal and spent the rest of the war in various prison camps where he suffered unspeakable atrocities. He said that it was only his love for Peggy that saw him through.

So here she is with two husbands, who happen to be brothers, with a child from each. The thing is, she is still in love with Cal although she loves Dan too, but not nearly as much. Ruth Ann says she doesn't know what she's going to do. Can you imagine that?

So, what are you going to do now that the war is over. We talked about it in Hawaii; I'm sure you have been giving it a lot of thought on your way home. Whatever you decide will have an affect on what I do. Personally, I'd like for us both to retire and settle in Roanoke near your family. But whatever you decide, I'll support you. If you decide to stay in, I might just retire anyway.

The important thing is that we are together. By me retiring, I'd be free to go wherever you go, whether you're in or out of the Navy. All I want to do is to spend the rest of my life with you, and perhaps forever, if Deannie was right.

Love, always,
Ramona.

Sheffield wrote back.

October 8, 1945

Aboard the USS Reprisal, Balboa, Panama

Dear Ramona

I just got your letter dated September 30th. It was good to hear from you so soon after having spent time with you. I look forward to meeting you in New York in the next several days. We are supposed to arrive on the 17th. I'll do my best to take you to the places that you mentioned and as many others as time will permit.

After you left Hawaii to return home, we were there a few more days and sailed the following Tuesday. Those few days were anticlimactic and a bit of a let down after

seeing you. The rest of the time I stayed pretty close to the ship.

We sailed on the 25th as part a large task force composed of my four carriers, four battleships, three cruisers, and 15 destroyers, all bound for the east coast. It was an impressive sight indeed as we sailed in formation at sixteen knots. That's slower than our carriers are accustomed to, but the old battleships are a lot slower.

The cruise has been uneventful and rather relaxing, more like a pleasure cruise, complete with passengers. We have conducted some readiness drills and gunnery practice, after all, we are fighting men on warships. Just because the war is over, doesn't mean something else can go wrong somewhere in the world so we have to maintain our readiness.

Even though the Russians were our allies, they can't be trusted and most high ranking officers I know don't trust them any further than they can throw them. If they were start pushing their weight around, we just might have to put them in their place. So we have to be ready for whatever, whenever, and wherever.

On the way here, we passed within a hundred miles of where Jomeat and I went down. It caused me to pause and reflect on the tragedy that happened there that day so long ago. That incident haunted me for a long time, especially to see you so heartbroken at his death. I couldn't imagine then what you were going through. Since then I learned for myself all too well.

The last time I was here was in back in the spring of 39 when the Big E was sent to the Pacific. In the early years of my career, I came here several times. There's not much here but banana plantations, jungle, and mesquites - lots of mesquites. Some time while we're here, I plan on going ashore for a day just to have a look around Balboa, which is actually part of Panama City.

Say, that was some story you told about Ruth Ann's cousin. The poor girl. I can't imagine what it would be like for her husband to come back from the dead, as it were. What is she going to do? She can't have both of them.

I've seen some of those guys, as you know we brought a bunch back from Japan and have several aboard that we are taking to East Coast. From the looks of them, they

were about as close to being dead and still be alive as a man could get.

I have been doing a lot of thinking. The way I see it, I have three options. One is to stay in a few more years. In fact that would probably be the easiest thing to do. But I'm not sure I want to. The other two involve retiring and doing something else. One thing I have often thought of is flying for the airlines. Or perhaps I could do something else that I've never considered. I too would like to settle in Roanoke, but it kind of depends on what direction my decision takes me, or should I say us. I appreciate what you said about retiring so you would be free to go wherever I end up. I suppose whatever my next assignment is will have some bearing on my decision. What if it was back in Hawaii? I'm know what you would say to that. There will be plenty of time to talk about it later. We don't need to decide right away.

Never forget that you are my love. I'll see you in New York.

Love Sheffield

The next day, they were joined by the Ranger, which arrived from San Diego. Over the next three or four days, the ships of the task force moved through the Panama Canal one by one and anchored in Limon Bay off Colón on the other side until they all had made the eight to ten hour trip.

While awaiting passage through the Canal, Sheffield and Hank Terry went ashore one day. Even though they had been aboard the Reprisal together for the last year, because of their respective duties, they hadn't spent much time together since leaving Leyte Gulf, other than a few minutes here and there.

Sheffield had his barge made ready and had it take them to ashore. With a strong American influence in the country, it wasn't hard to communicate as a lot of people spoke English. They had no problem hailing a cab and had the driver drop them off in the historic district known as Casco Antiguo with a number of parks, museums, churches, theaters, and lots of little shops all located withing walking distance.

They stopped to have lunch at the Café Coca Cola, the oldest café in Panama City, or so the proprietor boasted. He said that it opened its door way back in 1875. When Sheffield, an avid consumer of Coca Cola, asked how the establishment came to have the name, the answer was "It was because it was one of the first places in the world outside the United States where Coca Cola was served."

After lunch they went across the street to the Parque de Santa Ana to sit and rest while they talked and watched the people go by. Hank had the same question on his mind, "What to do now the war was over?" His answer was more definite. He had signed up to do his part in the war. Now that it was over, there

was nothing left for him to do. He had already contacted United Airlines and he was going back to his old job in Boise. That gave Sheffield cause to consider the airlines more seriously.

After leaving the park, they wandered around some more before catching another cab to take them into the heart of Panama City, which was crowded with American sailors on liberty. The Panamanians were gracious hosts, providing all of the wine, women, and song that the sailors could consume, all for price – American currency welcome.

They had the driver let them off at the Hotel Istmo in an upscale part of the city where they met up with the rest of Sheffield's senior staff and the senior officers from the four ships in the carrier division. The Hotel Istmo featured one of the premier night clubs in the city and catered to an exclusive clientèle, which included high ranking American military officers.

After a prime rib dinner, the entertainment consisted of some of the finest talent that Panama had to offer. The main attraction was Consuelo de la Vega Ortiz, with a full orchestra and backup singers. The Latin bombshell, who was in her late twenties or early thirties, wore a strapless black satin gown fitted to her shapely figure. Individual, overlapping pleats came to the floor, revealing her long legs as she moved. Her arms, shoulders, and upper chest were bare, with just enough cleavage showing to entice the imagination. Her silky smooth brown skin was accentuated by her dark flashing eyes. Her long, thick, black hair was done up in a pile, with ringlets dangling beside her long neck.

Miss de la Vega was known as the Peggy Lee of Panama and performed several popular American hits, with some Latin numbers thrown in. Like Peggy Lee, she was a true contralto, the lowest of the female singing voices. She had an excellent command of English, with a typical Spanish accent, however when she sang the accent disappeared. And like Peggy Lee, she had a smoky, seductive voice. She performed a number of older songs such as "Stormy Weather", "On Moonlight Bay", and "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" along with newer songs like "It's been a long, long time", and "Sentimental Journey" and some songs from the movies and Broadway.

When the dinner show was over, Sheffield and Mace made their way back to the ship, while Hank and others tried their luck in the casino.

As they were leaving the night club, Sheffield and Mace were approached by two very attractive, well dressed women, but who didn't speak English very well. It didn't take the two men long to figure that they were being propositioned. Their appearance was deceiving, for they didn't look like the stereotypical prostitutes. But the Istmo was a classy night club that catered to a high class clientèle. Sheffield and Mace had no trouble ignoring their seductive flirtations. They simply displayed their wedding bands and walked away. While standing on the curb waiting for a cab, they noticed that the women snagged the two men behind them.

Early on the morning of the 11th, the Reprisal weighed anchor and got underway, slowly making her way toward the Miraflores Locks eight miles inland from the Port of Balboa. As she approached, the canal pilot took over. A launch delivered the line handlers to the ship, who boarded the the ship to attach the tow cables. Once the cables were secured, six locomotives called mules slowly guided the carrier into the first set of locks. The locomotives were referred to as mules because in former times, teams of mules were used to pull barges up and down the canals of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. The locomotives operated from a set of railroad tracks on either side of the locks.

The Panama Canal consists of six sets of locks, each with two transit lanes, so ships could go in either direction or in the case of a mass crossing such as this, two could go the same direction at the same time. Each lock chamber is 1,000 feet long and 110 feet wide. Being 847½ feet long and 88 feet wide at the water line, the Reprisal fit with eleven feet to spare on either side. Her extreme width at the flight was 147 feet, with the outboard elevator in place; 118 feet with it in the stowed position. Even with the elevator stowed vertically against the outer hull, the flight deck overhung the sides of the locks.

Once inside the chamber, the two huge double doors were closed behind it and water from from Gatun Lake rushed through three enormous culverts, raising the water level inside the chamber to that of next lock, which only took eight minutes. Once the chamber was filled, the front gates were opened and the locomotives towed the ship into the second chamber. Then the gates were closed behind it, the process was repeated. Again the gates are opened and the ship came out into Lake Miraflores, fifty four feet above sea level. The ship then steamed slowly just over a mile through the lake to the Pedro Miguel Locks, where she was lifted another thirty four feet in the same manner as before.

Now eighty five feet above sea level the Reprisal entered the Gaillard Cut, an artificial valley cut through the mountain connecting the Pedro Miguel Locks with the Chagres River which flows into Gatun Lake. The lake was created by the construction of the Gatun Dam on the Chagres River when the Panama Canal was built, thus creating Gatun Lake as an integral part of canal.

Once in the open water of the lake, the ship slowly made her way on her power at eight knots through the twenty eight mile scenic waterway, with jungle and mountains on either side, to the Gatun Locks. After being moved into the first chamber, once again the gate was closed and water was drained from the chamber, lowering the ship to the level of the second chamber. The ship moved through two more chambers in succession until she was once again at sea level and exited the loch into Limon Bay and steamed a short distance into the bay where she dropped anchor off the Coco Solo Naval Station at Colon among the other ships that had already transited the canal. The entire forty eight mile trip took ten hours.

Once the entire task force had transited the canal, on the 12th they departed Limon Bay and set out

into the Caribbean Sea, now designated Task Force 62. Once underway again, limited flight operations resumed. Later in the day, the Ranger and Mississippi were detached to proceed to New Orleans. After a leisurely voyage through the Caribbean Sea the ships entered the Gulf of Mexico.

Sheffield's feelings covered the full range of emotions as he had a lot to think about ever since the war ended. Unable to sleep he went up on deck, where a warm breeze washed over the flight deck. He wasn't alone as many of the crew and passengers were gathered in groups, some in the catwalks, others huddled in amongst the parked planes, or out in the open at the forward end of the flight deck. A waxing moon back lit the low scattered clouds in the western sky. His thoughts turned to the future and the possibility of retiring. There was a lot to think about as he looked out across the water. At times the moon came out from behind the clouds and he could clearly see the other ships in the formation steaming along at sixteen knots through five foot swells. He didn't need to make a decision right away but if he were to retire, it wouldn't be for several more months. He just wanted to consider his options and talk them over with Ramona.

After passing through the Florida Keys into the calm Atlantic Ocean the next day, the task force sailed up the East Coast. While steaming north, with Grand Bahama abeam to starboard, on the afternoon of October 14th the destroyers MeKee, Grayson, Kendrick, and Mullany were detached from the Task Force to proceed to Charleston, South Carolina.

The next afternoon the task force dwindled in numbers as two group of ships were detached to proceed to various ports. The Idaho, Richmond, and four destroyers were destined for Norfolk, while the North Carolina, New Mexico, Concord, and two destroyers were bound for Boston.

On the 16th, the task force was nearing New York City. The Washington and one destroyer bound for Philadelphia were detached. A little farther up the coast, the eleven remaining ships turned into the wind for the carries to launch their panes. As the one hundred and eighty planes droned in formation over the skyscrapers of New York City, everyone stopped what they were doing to watch; some rushed out onto the streets, others crowded around windows to get a glimpse of the dark blue planes. The flyover set the tone for the next several days leading up to the Navy Day celebration. After flying over the city, they landed at Floyd Bennett Naval Air Station in Brooklyn.

During the night the remainder of Task Force 62 passed within twenty two miles, bearing 267 degrees off the Barnegat Inlet Lighthouse on the barrier islands off New Jersey at 0200. At 0315, the Admiral Sherman gave the order to form up in single file to enter port. Then at 0430 the Reprisal passed the Navesink Twin Lights ten miles off the port beam. The lighthouses built in 1862 overlooks Sandy Hook Bay, the entrance to Lower New York Bay.

Early in the morning just before sunrise on the 17th, Carrier Division Seven, escorted by the cruiser

Portland and the destroyers Foote, Young, Zellars, Aulick, Douglas H. Fox, and Sterrett steamed through the Narrows into New York Harbor and at six o'clock, lead by the Monterrey, followed by the Enterprise, Reprisal, Bataan, and rest. The cool morning air created a mist as the ships steamed into New York Harbor with their crews manning the rails. Sheffield and his staff were on the flag bridge and had an excellent view as the Statue of Liberty came into view. For these men who had been fighting a war to preserve the very liberty that the Lady in the Harbor represented, their hearts were swollen with pride and their throats choked with emotion. More than one tear was discreetly wiped away with the flick of a finger. For Sheffield, this was not the first time that he had sailed into New York Harbor. Much had transpired since that first time as a midshipman aboard the Arizona back in the summer of 1918. The second time was aboard the Saratoga in the spring of 1927.

As they slipped past Battery Park on the southern tip of Manhattan Island and up the Hudson River, two PT boats ran circles around the slow moving ships while two blimps lumbered overhead. The harbor resounded with the shriek of whistles, the clanging of bells, the blowing of horns, and the shouts of the crowds who had come out early on a Thursday morning to watch the ships come in. The newspapers had been running stories all week pertaining to the Navy Day festivities and had published the time the ships would be arriving. Naturally, the focus of the crowd was on the unparalleled Big E.

The Reprisal went as far as 50th Street and was eased into Pier 90 by three tug boats. Her one year and one day around the world voyage had come to an end. They were home. Once the ship was secured and the telephone lines were connected, Sheffield called Ramona at her office to let her know that he was home.

Once the gang plank was in place, the Reprisal began disembarking her passengers. After they had all left the ship, the crew was dismissed for liberty. The next day, the ship was opened to the public for tours. Several sightseers came aboard the first day, but the ship that everyone wanted to see was the Big E.

Over the next few days, thirty seven other ships arrived to participate in the Navy Day celebration. They included the brand new carrier Midway and the two newly commissioned heavy cruisers Macon and Columbus. Others included the veteran battleships Missouri and New York, the cruisers Augusta and Boise, and a host of destroyers and auxiliaries.

* * * * *

“Its Been a Long, Long Time” was released sometime around the end of the war and went to number 1 on the Billboard Charts by early November

“Week-End at the Waldorf” didn't actually open until October 4, 1945, a little more than two weeks after the story time line.

The Polynesian Renaissance Amphitheater is fictional. In the story it was located where the Kahala Hotel & Resort now stands. It was built in the 1960s. The Waiialae Country Club next to it

was established in 1927.

The historic district of Panama City is as described. The Hotel Istmo and Consuelo Vega Ortiz are fictional.

Admiral Sherman's task force that sailed from Pearl Harbor on September 25, 1945 for the Panama Canal and on to New York on October 17th was constituted as described, except the Reprisal's role is fictional. The exercises conducted in the story are only conjecture. The details of the voyage come from the Days In The Life of The Foote found at <http://ussfoote.blogspot.com/2007/05/great-circle-route-september-1945.html> and <http://ussfoote.blogspot.com/2007/06/from-panama-to-new-york-october-1945.html>.