

Chapter XXXII

Farewell Emmett

September 16, 1951 – October 24, 1951

Once squared away aboard the Reprisal, Sheffield continued directing the fight against the enemy, although he was short one carrier and her air group. With the Essex retiring toward Japan, from Carrier Division One he still had the Reprisal and Bon Homme Ricard, which had just returned from Japan, and the Boxer from Carrier Division Three at his disposal.

The Reprisal was slightly smaller than the Essex class but carried the same number of aircraft. Her air group, Air Group 16, was also based at Norfolk consisted of three fighter squadrons; VF-161 and VF-162 each had sixteen Grumman F9F-2 Panthers and VF-163 with sixteen Vought F4U-4 Corsairs. The Attack Squadron, VA-164 had fifteen Douglas AD-4 Skyraiders, plus one that belonged to the Air Group Commander, Commander Miles Jarvis.

The rest of the air group consisted of detachments from specialized composite squadrons. There were four F4U-4N night fighters, three AD-4N night attack Skyraiders, three electronic countermeasure AD-4Q Skyraiders for jamming and disrupting enemy communications and radar, three AD-4W airborne radar Skyraiders, three photo equipped F9F-2P Panthers, and one SO3H-1 Dragonfly Helicopter. The Dragonfly was aptly named because that is what they looked like.

In all there were eighty one aircraft aboard the Reprisal. Combined with similar air groups on the other two carriers, Admiral Brason had a powerful strike force under his command. He just wished that he had greater night fighting capabilities like what he had worked so hard to develop during the last war. He used his limited night resources the best he could.

Day after day, the planes flew missions against bridges, highways, railroad facilities, trains, truck convoys, fuel depots, tanks and artillery positions, enemy command headquarters, and whatever targets posed the greatest threat at the time.

A few days after transferring to the Reprisal, he received the letter from Ramona with the news that he had been dreading.

September 16, 1951

Dear Sheffield

I have some bad news for you, Sheffield. Your father passed away this morning at around 4:45. As you know, he had not been doing well lately but last week things really took a turn for the worse. On Monday, he suddenly developed aspiration pneumonia as direct result of Parkinson's Disease.

Because of his slumped forward posture, he had difficulty breathing and swallowing. What happens is that foreign material like food or fluids from the

mouth get into the airways leading to the lungs. Between that and the resulting bacteria that began to grow, he began wheezing and had shortness of breath.

I took him to see Dr. Wallace and he conducted a swallowing test, which he failed. He prescribed antibiotics and sent him home. After a few days it wasn't doing him any good. I took him back to the doctor and he said there was nothing more that could be done and took him off the antibiotics and gave him a shot of morphine to keep him comfortable.

I went over early in the morning before school, during my lunch break, and after the last class to take care of him and help your mother around the house. I knew that he wasn't going to make it and did all I could to keep him comfortable. The doctor had given me a syringe and a vial of morphine to administer to him as I saw fit. Walt and Shenan administered to him and blessed him with comfort in passing. By Friday, he was no longer conscious. Dr. Wallace was kind enough to come to the house to have a look. He confirmed what I already knew; that he didn't have much time left, perhaps a day or two.

Then this morning with Ellen, Shenan and Emily, Walt and Sarah, me and some of the grandchildren gathered around, he struggled for his very last breath and slipped into the next world. It was really quite peaceful and he wasn't suffering. It was a moment of both sadness and relief at the same time. He had been in such a bad way for so long and it took its toll on everyone, especially on your mother.

I called Doctor Wallace to tell him that he had died and he sent someone to pickup the body.

Walt called Roger to tell him and word got out. In between meetings at church today people called or stopped by. Walt also called Pastor Blaine and after services at the Methodist church he and several others also stopped in.

We didn't have to worry about food. There was so much brought in that we'll never be able to eat all of it. As a family, we sat down with Roger to begin planning the funeral. They wanted to know if there was any chance that you could come home. I told them that it would take at least five days for you to even get a letter; besides, the mail won't go out until tomorrow anyway. So the funeral is scheduled for Thursday at 11:00 a.m.

I know that this must be hard for you and that you would be here if you could. He was a good man and at 81 he had lead a good full life.

It will be a busy week and I'll need to get someone to substitute for me

on Thursday. I'll write again and tell you all about the funeral.

Other than that, there hasn't been much else that's new go on around here since I last wrote. The kids are all doing fine and have settled back into school. It's nice to have Craig close by again. Janet has pretty much healed up. She did make the track team and is working to get her speed back.

I hope all is well with you. Take care of yourself and be careful out there. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you. I know that the likelihood of you coming under attack is remote, but it's still a war and a lot could happen. A bad plane crash or something like that could be disastrous. I still worry about you.

*In closing, let me just say that I love you with all of my heart.
Love, Ramona.*

When Ramona wrote that letter, she had no idea what was about to happen half way around the world. As she looked at the newspaper the next morning, the news from the war included a piece about a plane crash on the USS Essex. Ramona's heart sank as she read the account, worried about Sheffield's safety. The story gave an indefinite number of casualties. But the last part of the story made her breathe easy when it mentioned that the Admiral aboard transferred to another carrier.

In the obituary section of the newspaper was a death notice concerning Emmett. The family had written up a full obituary and it was to be printed in the next edition. When Ramona went to school that morning, she stopped in to check on Ellen. While at school, she arranged for someone to substitute for her. Someone thought it odd that the substitute was looking for a substitute. Then after school, she stopped by to see Ellen again. She had had a steady string of visitors all day. Ramona stayed with her until Norma and Janet would be home from school and went home herself. Tuesday and Wednesday were much the same.

On Wednesday evening the family gathered for the public viewing. A continuous string of people came through to pay their respects. Many of them were members of the Green Memorial Methodist Church who came to pay their respects to their former pastor. Most of the out of town family were also there; only a few wouldn't arrive until the next day. Having been a part of the community for so long, a he had a lot of friends and acquaintances; many of them came as well. Naturally, a lot of the members of the Roanoke Branch also came through the line. Sheffield was conspicuously absent and many inquired about him.

Thursday morning the 20th, the day of the funeral, the sun shone bright but there was bit of fall in the breeze. The family gathered in the Relief Society Room at the meetinghouse for yet another viewing prior to the funeral. Again a long line of people filed past, offering their sympathy to Ellen, Shenan and Emliy, Walt and Sarah, and Ramona who represented Sheffield in his absence.

Emmett's surviving siblings were also there. His spinster sister, Virginia who went by Ginny, came down from Washington D.C. His other sister, Catherine and her husband Seth Cummings came down from Fairfax. And his brother Frederick, who went by Rick, and his wife Braquette came from New Orleans. They were all in their mid to upper seventies, being 79, 76, and 74 respectively.

Ramona had meet Sheffield's Aunt Ginny and Aunt Cathy and Uncle Seth when she and Sheffield were living in Washington. But this was the first time that she had met his Uncle Rick and Aunt Bra. Some of Emmett's nieces and nephews who lived in Northern Virginia and elsewhere around the state were also there.

Just before the funeral was to begin, only family and close friends remained for the family prayer and closing of the casket. Of course the Austin's were included as were Bill and Marge Casper. Danny offered the family prayer. Ellen, their children, the grandchildren, and the great grandchildren surrounded the casket and said goodbye as the lid was closed. Roger Rowan lead the family and friends to the chapel where they filled the first several rows. The rest of the chapel was full and spilled over into the overflow.

The mortuary brought their new portable reel to reel tape recorder that they had purchased in order to record the funerals as an added service to their customers. This was only the second time that they had used it. They set the machine on the floor beside the podium with the recorder's microphone attached to the microphone on the pulpit. The service began as Roger, who was officiating, welcomed everyone present and announced the service.

First Shenan gave a brief life sketch, which was pretty much what appeared in the obituary. "Emmett Brason was born March thirty first, eighteen seventy in Fairfax, Virginia to Peter and Nancy Fredrick Brason. He was the second of five children. He was preceded in death by both of his parents and his brother Pete who died at the age of nineteen.

"Rather than following the naval tradition of his father and younger brother, Dad answered another call. He enrolled in the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. from which he graduated in eighteen ninety two. Just a couple of weeks later he married his sweetheart, Ellen Sheffield on the fifteenth of June in her hometown of Harrisonburg, Virginia."

"Dad and Mom meet when she was a nursing student at George Washington University, also in Washington. She dropped out after her freshman year to marry Dad and they moved here to Roanoke immediately after that when Dad came to Greene Memorial Untied Methodists Church as the assistant pastor.

"After moving to Roanoke, Mom attended one more year of nursing school at Hollins before they began their family. I came along two years after they were married and Walt two years after that. About that time the Pastor that Dad was working under retired and he became the pastor. At that time we moved

into the parsonage, next door to Charles and Marie Austin.

“That is where the friendship between the two families began. Two more years went by and Sheffield was born, completing our family. Not only did Mom and Dad become close friends with the Austins, but Walt, Sheffield and I were the same age as Stirling, Geannie and their cousin Sarah and we all became close friends. Our two families became even closer when Walt and Sheffield married into the Austin Family.

“Over the years, Dad served as the pastor while he and Mom raised us kids. We were a close family and Dad instilled in us the principles of honesty and integrity; principles that he lived by. Dad wasn't a wealthy man monetarily, living off a pastor's salary, but he was wealthy in so many other ways. His wealth came in the form of blessings.

“With time, my brother Walt followed in his shoes and took over as the pastor and Dad was happy to be his assistant. An arrangement was made with the church in that they traded the parsonage for Walt's house so Mom and Dad could stay in the house that had been their home for all of those years.

“Several years ago Dad retired altogether. They had a comfortable retirement but were somewhat limited in the ability to travel as they would have liked. Then a number of years ago, Dad was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. At first it progressed slowly, but with advancing age it began to take its toll.

“It was only four years ago that Dad made a critical decision in his life and left the Methodist Church. Walt will talk more about that later.

“The thing that Dad delighted in the most was his family; Mom and his three sons and our families. He delighted in his sixteen grandchildren and was hurt deeply when Sheffield's three children proceeded him in death. He was delighted as each grandchild joined his family, including the recent additions of Craig, Norma, and Janet when they came into Sheffield and Ramona's family. But it didn't end there, there are also sixteen great grandchildren so far.

“In his final moments in mortality, he was surrounded by those of his family, who could be there. He took his last breath and passed to the other side this last Sunday, September sixteenth, nineteen fifty one.”

Following Shenan's remarks, the daughters-in-law, granddaughters, and granddaughters-in-law, accompanied by Norma, sang “How Great Thou Art” which had always been Emmett's favorite hymn.

Walt then spoke. He had always been a great preacher who could deliver a powerful sermon. He had the ability to make people sit up and listen. Rarely did anyone sleep through one of his sermons. He began by explaining why they left the Methodist Church. He explained that it wasn't out of disillusionment but that they had found something that took what they already believed to a much higher level of understanding. Of course he included how they had been influenced by Geannie and the questions that he couldn't answer for her. What they found answered them all and it was only natural that they embraced the

fullness of the truth when they found it. He went on to preach a sermon on the plan of salvation. He based his talk on Methodist beliefs and built on it from there to explain its full meaning in a way that the Methodists in attendance could relate to.

Finally President Price, the mission president who was presiding, made a few closing remarks. At the conclusion of the service, Emmett's six grandsons came forward as pall bearers and took the casket out to the hearse. The family and friends made the procession the cemetery and back to the church for a luncheon put together by the Relief Society for friends and family. It was especially good to see the aunts, uncles, and cousins.

During the luncheon, Bill and Marge Casper approached Walt. They had been friends for a long time. There were two things in particular that they had in common. First Walt had been their pastor and second, their son Willie was married to Walt's daughter, Emmaline. Not only that, but another of their sons had married into the Austins, both of which had joined the church.

Since talking to Sheffield at the book signing, Bill and Marge had been investigating the church, but hadn't made a lot of progress. That is until Walt's sermon at the funeral. They told him that something that he said had clicked with them and now they understood what they had been missing. Not only that, but that they felt that it was all undeniably true and that they were ready to consider being baptized.

Family and friends lingered for quite some time and eventually migrated out to the the Two Star Ranch, where the gathering lasted well into the evening. With plenty of room, Ramona put some of the out of town relatives, including Rick and Bra, up for the night. Uncle Rick, who had once scoffed at Sheffield's decision to go into aviation, told Ramona how proud he was of him for where his career took him.

It had been such a busy day that no one had a chance to check the mail box until the next morning when Ramona left for school. There was a letter from Sheffield but she had to wait until her lunch break to read it. He told how badly he felt about not being there when his father passed away and his regret in not being able to be there for the funeral. She still had time before her last class and wrote back, telling him all about the funeral. She put it in a package which included a copy of the tape recording and dropped it off at the post office before going back to school.

With the marvel of airmail, it didn't take long for her letter to find it's way to the Seventh Fleet Post Office in Japan and then on to the Reprisal. When Lieutenant Moncur brought Sheffield's mail to him, there was a small package from Ramona. He opened it to find a seven and half inch reel of magnetic tape and a letter. He opened the letter and read about his father's funeral. Once again, he felt bad that he had missed out on being there. He wasn't there when he died, and he wasn't able to attend the funeral. At least he got to say a goodbye to him before he shipped out, knowing that he would probably never see him again in this

life.

After reading Ramona's letter, he went to Commander Harriman, his communications officer, and borrowed their tape machine and took it to his office where he sequestered himself with instructions not to be disturbed, and listened to the recording of the funeral. When it was finished, he whipped his eyes dry and wrote back.

Wednesday September 26, 1951

The Sea of Japan Aboard the USS Reprisal

Dear Ramona and Girls

I wish I could have been there, I felt really bad that I missed the funeral. Thanks for sending the tape recording of the service. It wasn't quite the same as being there but it was the next best thing. I really appreciated it. It sounds like it was a fitting tribute the great man that he was.

The song that you ladies sang was wonderful. I haven't heard such sweet voices in a long time. And Walt's sermon was outstanding. He has always had a way of saying things so they make sense. From what you said, it sounds like he was able to get through to Bill. When I talked to him, I felt like I was stumbling over my words.

I'm glad that you had a chance to get acquainted with Uncle Rick and Aunt Bra. I never had a chance to spend much time around them over the years. Some day, we'll have to go to New Orleans just to see them.

Back to the funeral, I think I might share your song and Walt's talk with the group next Sunday. Last week I attended sacrament meeting with the Reprisal's Serviceman's Group. They are similar to the group on the Essex.

The group leader is Seaman Wilbur Carter from Logan, Utah. I asked him if he knew the Govers, but he didn't. Before enlisting in the Navy, he had served a mission in the New England States Mission.

There are three or four other returned missionaries aboard as well. Then there are four or five younger men, who like Craig, either weren't old enough or not able to go because of the draft. I met most of them, but there were one or two who were on duty

and weren't able to attend. In fact one of them had been on the Ricks College wrestling team with Craig. What a small world.

There is an officer who is investigated the church and is attending the group. He is Lieutenant Daniel Kirk from Iowa, a Corsair pilot in VF 163. He had been a fighter pilot in the Pacific War. After the war he was discharged and got married and started a family. Like me he was recalled into active duty.

He and his wife moved to Norfolk where he joined the squadron. Soon after deploying on the Reprisal, his wife was introduced to the missionaries by an acquaintance and began taking the lessons. She wrote to him and told him what she was doing and encouraged him to look into it as well. He contacted the Chaplain and he put him in touch with Seaman Carter and they began teaching him the lessons here aboard the ship. I had chance to talk to him and told him a little of my story. It will be interesting to see how it goes with him.

Thanks for the update from Coach Karrington. If you see him at school, tell him that it looks like he will have an excellent team this year. Most of them were on the team last year. Keep me posted as to how they do when the season gets started. Technically I am still the coach, I think I'll send them a pep talk in a letter.

I also need to write to my mother. I'm sure there is an element of relief on her part after watching him suffer and deteriorate like that. I know she'll miss him. I'm also going to include a short note to each of the kids as well. I love you all and I miss you. I'll write again soon and I look forward to your next letter. As always, I'll close with telling you that I love you.

Love Sheffield

After closing the letter, he wrote the other letters that he needed to write. He called Lieutenant Moncur into his office and had him take the letters to the ship's post office and return the tape recorder to Commander Harriman. He then returned to the flag bridge where he directed his attention to the matters at hand.

During the continuous operations, the air groups under his command suffered from attrition due to

combat losses and operational accidents. When the Essex returned in early October after being repaired, her air group had been brought back up to full strength and brought replacement air craft for the other three carriers.

Before releasing the Boxer to return to the United States, Admiral Brason wanted to take advantage of the full power of his task force. Guerrilla fighters inside North Korea had reported a major gathering of North Korean and Chinese military commanders at a compound near Pungsan. It was a ripe target that Allied commanders from General Ridgway all the way down wanted taken out. The assignment was handed to Admiral Brason.

Having had tremendous success with night operations in the Second World War, he thought this would be the best approach to accomplishing this mission. He and his staff poured over the details and came up with a plan. During the day on October 5th, he summoned all of the night fighter and night attack detachments aboard the four carriers to the Reprisal.

Admiral Brason commandeered VF-161's ready room for a briefing in which, Commander Ross Fendwick, his operations officer presented the plan of attack. Rather than operating as individual units, the detachments would conduct this mission as coordinated tactical unit under the command of Lieutenant Commander George Bean, the ranking officer among the night detachments.

After being briefed on the mission and working out the logistics and communications, the pilots flew back to their respective carriers to rest up for the night's work ahead of them. One hour after sunset, their planes were armed, fueled, and spotted for launch. Admiral Brason ordered the carriers to turn into the wind and commence launching. The strike group which consisted of two AD-4Q Skyraiders equipped for electronic countermeasures, nine AD-4N night attack Skyraiders, and twelve F4U-5N radar equipped Corsairs all loaded with a maximum ordnance load and extra fuel took off into the moonless, sky.

Sheffield and his staff monitored the attack from the flag bridge. During the flight to the target, the planes observed strict radio silence. As they approached the area, the two AD-4Q's began jamming enemy radar and communications. As the attack began, the commands and orders from the senior pilots were heard over the intercom as they pressed their attack.

What followed was a mass of unintelligible communications as the individual pilots called out the results of their drops amid sporadic bursts of anti-aircraft fire. Commander Bean ordered the planes to regroup for a strafing pass before returning to the carriers. During the pass, anti-aircraft fire was more concentrated and cost two Skyraiders and one Corsair.

On the return flight, one damaged Corsair went down at sea. The pilot was later located and rescued. As soon as Commander Bean landed aboard the Reprisal, he was summoned to the flag bridge to make his report. His initial report called the mission a complete success.

Exactly how successful it was wasn't known until the next day when reports from the guerrillas placed the casualties at over five hundred senior communist officials killed. North Korean radio called the attack a war crime and labeled those involved as murders. They went so far as to place a bounty on the head of the commander of Task Force 77 for orchestrating the atrocity, naming Admiral Sheffield Brason by name.

Having accomplished his objective, Admiral Brason detached the Boxer the next day to return to the United States and the Bon Homme Richard to Japan for a well deserved rest. For the next week, Sheffield continued directing attacks against the enemy with just the Reprisal and Essex at his disposal. When the Bon Homme Ricard returned to the task force, it was the Reprisal's turn for a rest.

Sheffield turned temporary command of Task Force 77 over to the Commander of Carrier Division Three who now flew his flag from the Essex. The Reprisal, a heavy cruiser and three destroyers dropped out of formation and set course for Tokyo Bay.

Enroute, Sheffield ordered the Reprisal and her escorts to stand down from the combat readiness level that they had been operating under and assumed a much more leisurely posture. With the break, Sheffield had time to answer the letters that had piled up, especially the one from Ramona that he had received about four days earlier.

On Sunday morning with the demands of combat operations relaxed, all of those who regularly participate the Serviceman's Group were able to attend. That day Sheffield's assignment was to pass the sacrament. Following their sacrament meeting, Sheffield sat in on the cottage meeting as Seaman Carter and Airman Ned Call from Salmon, Idaho taught another discussion to Lieutenant Kirk. Sheffield found himself participating in the lesson by contributing his thoughts and comments. Dan listened intently to what Sheffield had to say because he knew that not very many years earlier he himself was in the same situation.

That afternoon when they were within range of the Naval Air Station at Atsugi, the air group was sent ashore and the next morning, the 15th of October, the Reprisal was eased into her berth at the Yokosuka Naval Base. At the next pier over was the Antietam which had arrived from the United States a couple of days earlier and was scheduled to sail on Thursday.

Once in port, the crew was given seventy hour leaves, with a third of the crew ashore at the time. Just because they were in port didn't necessarily mean they were on vacation. The ship needed to be replenished and repairs made. It was a time when little details that went ignored could be addressed. Sheffield used the time to write up his operational report for Carrier Division One during the last six weeks of operations, making special note of the successful night attack.

On Friday he took the opportunity to go into Tokyo, thirty five miles away. Unlike his brief visit when

they first arrived, he checked into a hotel had a chance to really look around the city. Naturally he wished that Ramona was with him. She loved experiencing other cultures.

On Saturday night, he hosted another of those appreciation banquets for his staff. As soon as they made port, he had Lieutenant Moncur make the arrangements. That night they met in one of the dining rooms in the hotel where he was staying. They were served tempura, which is a dish of shrimp and vegetables that have been battered and deep fried.

When it came to speeches, Sheffield expressed his appreciation for all of their hard work over the past six weeks, but their work was not done and they'd be going right back out for another six weeks or so, and then again after that, and again until they had orders to return to the United States or when the war was over, whichever ever came first.

On Sunday Sheffield attended Tokyo Serviceman's Branch. The branch functioned under the direction of the Japanese Mission and was attended by servicemen from all four branches of service. The meeting was held in the mission home located in the prestigious Azabu district of Tokyo.

The building was a mansion that had been damaged by fire during the air raids on Tokyo during the war. When the Japanese Mission was reopened in 1948, the building was purchased by the Church and remodeled and was ready for use by November of that year.

For once Sheffield wasn't the only high ranking officer in attendance. An Army Colonel introduced himself to Sheffield. He said that he was Mark Fleetwood from Salt Lake City and was on General Ridgway's staff. He was the branch president. He in turn introduced Sheffield to the Mission President, Vinel G. Mauss who was originally from Murray, Utah but most recently from Oakland, California.

There was also an Air Force Major along with a number of junior officers, including Lieutenant Kirk. Of course the bulk of the congregation was made up of young enlisted men. Also in attendance were several missionaries who were assigned to work with the American servicemen.

Sheffield felt a tap on his shoulder and was surprised when he turned around to see Elder Wade Rowan. "It's good to see you again Coach. Welcome to Japan."

"My goodness, Wade. How are you? I knew that you were here in Japan but I had no idea that I'd run into you."

"I've been assigned to the branch and supervise the missionaries who work with the servicemen. My Dad told me in one of his letters that you had been recalled to active duty and had been sent to Korea. As often as ships come and go, I figured you'd show up sometime. And here you are."

"Yes I am. How about that. Listen, I have a fellow I need to introduce to you. He's on the same ship and has been investigating the church since his wife back home was contacted by the missionaries. Follow me."

Sheffield led Elder Rowan over to Lieutenant Kirk and introduced them to each other. The meeting was about to start and Sheffield, Dan, Elder Rowan and his companion all sat down together.

After the meeting, Sheffield had a good conversation with his former wrestler, Elder Rowan. It was good to see a face from home so far away. He was invited to have dinner at the mission home where he got better acquainted with President Mauss and Colonel Fleetwood. Later in the afternoon, he sat in on another cottage meeting for Lieutenant Kirk and others that the elders were teaching. Later in the evening he returned to the hotel.

On Monday morning, Sheffield returned to the ship to prepare for the next phase of operations. During the remaining time in port, he took the time to write some letters, including one to Ramona telling her all about his time in Tokyo and running into Elder Rowan. Then on Wednesday morning the 24th of October, the Reprisal and her escorts put to sea

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Lieutenant Daniel Kirk is a fictional character based on Elder Hartman Rector Jr.

The night attack on the compound at Pungsan is based on a day attack on senior communist military leaders at Kapsan with similar results on October 29, 1951 which was carried out by 8 Corsairs and 8 Skyriders from the Essex.

The part about the Japanese Mission is true, except the Tokyo Serviceman's Branch which is a fictional representation.