

Chapter XXXVIII

Trials

May 19, 1952 – May 31, 1952

Sheffield was up early on Monday morning and got ready to leave. He packed what he needed to take with him and took it out to the Staggerwing. By then Ramona had fixed a good breakfast to send him and their house guests off with. After a good meal, Sheffield kissed her goodbye and got into his plane. Waving, they saw him off, knowing that this time he would be back on Friday evening. She then drove Quinn and Sedric to the train station. They made arrangements to stop by on they're back to the ship at the end of their leave.

The sun was up and climbing into the eastern sky when Sheffield took off at a quarter to seven. It was just under two hundred miles from home to Washington National Airport in Arlington, Virginia. With a cruising speed of two hundred miles and hour, it was just over an hour before he landed.

Lieutenant Moncur was waiting for him with a staff car. The things he had brought with him were transferred from the plane to the trunk of the car. Once the Staggewing had been secured, Lieutenant Moncur drove him to the Pentagon, only two miles away. On the way, they approached a fifteen story high rise apartment building on the left.

Phil pointed out the building and said, "That's where I have arranged an apartment for you, sir."

"Very good, Phil. That ought to do. Thank you."

"Incidentally, Anita and I moved into the same building last week. I thought it would be convenient for chauffeuring you to and from work. Besides, we'd like to have you over for dinner from time to time."

"I'd like that very much."

"One of the first things that we did after moving in was to look up the Church in the telephone directory. Yesterday we attended the Arlington Ward. They welcomed us with open arms and everyone thought we were already members of the Church. When we told them that they we were seriously investigating the Church, the missionaries were quick to set up a cottage meeting with us for Thursday. So Anita wanted me to invite you to dinner that night and we'd like you stay for the cottage meeting."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world. Tell Anita that I'll be there. So how was church?"

"Attending an actual ward was a different experience for either of one of us. I have only attended the Serviceman's Group which was quite limited in scope. On the other hand, Anita had been attending the Topeka Branch back in Kansas. We both really enjoyed it and look forward to next week."

Soon they were at the Pentagon. Lieutenant Moncur showed Admiral Brason to their office suite. One of the first things he did was to request that Yeoman Walinsky take his things to his apartment. The second thing he did was to arrange for a transfer and a promotion for Lieutenant Kirk to come and join his small staff, which consisted of himself, Lieutenant Moncur, and Yeoman Walinsky who he held over from

his flag staff.

That first day was mainly spent in getting settled into his office. That evening Sheffield settled into his apartment located at 20th and Fern Street. He was on the eleventh floor, with his front window facing west, looking right down 20th Street. It was an area that he knew well. Twenty years earlier he and Geannine lived just four blocks away at 929 20th Street.

The rest of the week was spent reviewing the project and becoming familiar with what had already been accomplished and what was in the works. The concept of an angled landing area was actually the brainchild of Captain Dennis Campbell of the Royal Navy who first presented the idea at a conference of the Royal Aircraft Establishment in August 1951.

The concept arose from higher landing speeds required by jet aircraft and the need to modify carriers to fit the need. Capitan Campbell proposed angling the landing area five and half degrees to port of the ship's centerline. Hypothetically, an aircraft that missed the arresting cables could throttle up and take off again rather than go into the crash barrier or other aircraft parked forward on the flight deck.

Sheffield had read about the idea only a couple of weeks before that Banshee crashed on the Essex. It was then that he realized the full value of the concept and became an advocate for implementation of an angled landing area. He was as passionate about it as he had been night flying and immediately wrote a letter to the Bureau of Aeronautics in which he strongly endorsed the concept and called for a study to be conducted. Later, when his friend, Lieutenant Kirk, crash landed on the Reprisal, he wrote a second letter. Both of these crashes and so many others could be avoided if the idea were to be implemented.

There was further discussion at a second meeting of the Royal Aircraft Establishment in early February 1952. In mid February the angled flight deck was tested on the HMS Triumph by painting markings angled five and a half degrees to the centerline of the flight deck for touch and go landings. The tests proved the concept and the results were shared with the U.S. Navy. With no one currently heading the project, the Navy turned to Admiral Brason.

When Sheffield reported for duty he had already given serious contemplation to idea and came up with some ideas of his own. He remembered when he was the liaison officer from the Bureau of Aeronautics to the Bureau of Construction and Repair of seeing the design for a hybrid cruiser carrier with three triple eight inch gun turrets forward of truncated the flight deck. He thought it was an absurd concept at the time. Looking back, there was one feature incorporated into the design that now had relevance; the flight deck was angled three degrees so planes would clear the gun turrets on take off. When the design was rejected, so was the idea of the angled deck.

Sheffield found that the concept was already slated to be tested on the large carrier Midway, with a

five and a half degree angle. Sheffield had taken it upon himself to superimpose angled decks on drawings of both the Midway and Essex class carriers. He found that it still restricted the available parking area and made other drawings with various angles. He felt that eight degrees would be optimum, freeing up most of the flight deck forward of the outboard midships elevator. Not only that, but there would be room to park several aircraft on the starboard side, aft of the island. Sheffield immediately ordered that the mock angled deck on the Midway be changed to eight degrees.

With an angle of eight degrees, Sheffield discovered the possibility of an added benefit. Not only would the forward flight deck accommodate parked aircraft, it would also be free for simultaneously launching and recovering aircraft. If the Japanese would have had such capabilities at the Battle of Midway, the result could have been entirely different.

On Thursday evening, Sheffield went down stairs to have dinner with the Moncurs. He arrived promptly at six o'clock. He already knew Phil pretty good and this gave him a chance to get to know Anita. Over dinner he asked her to tell him about herself.

"Well I was born and raised in Topeka but Phil and I had attended different schools. I attended a Catholic school where as he attended public schools. We met while we were both were attending the University of Kansas in Lawrence where we were both active in a student group."

"That was the best thing that ever happened to me." Phil clarified. "Even though I was a starter on the basketball team, I couldn't get the girls to notice me."

"Well I sure noticed." Anita continued. "He wasn't like the rest of the athletes. They all seemed so cocky and full of themselves. But not this one. He says he couldn't get the girls to notice him. To tell you the truth, I couldn't get him to notice me. He was a sophomore and I was a freshman."

"So how did you get him to notice you?" Sheffield asked.

"Well, I was in charge of a box lunch picnic where the guys selected a box and then got to share it with the girl who provided it. I noticed that he was holding back, so I held back my box, too. By the time he came through the line, all of the good ones had been picked over. As he was looking them over, I said, 'Oh look, I forgot to set out my own.' It was so good that it would have gone right off the bat. Needless to say, he selected my box. While devouring my cherry pie, he just had to ask me out."

"We dated for three years until he graduated in forty seven with a degree in public administration. At the same time he received his commission in the Navy Reserve. We were married in June and went on our honeymoon."

Phil added, "When we got back, I had to leave for a month for a reservist cruise. When I returned I had a job waiting for me with the Lieutenant Governor as his personal assistant and we rented an apartment near the statehouse."

"I went back to school that fall and commuted back and forth the twenty five miles to the university. Part way through the fall semester, I found out that I was pregnant. By the time I graduated I was eight months along. You should have seen me walk across the stage in my graduation gown with my big belly." Anita paused to laugh at the memory. "Anyway about a month later, Maureen was born."

"We settled in and were enjoying life, until the war broke out in Korea. That was in June and as luck would have it, Phil was one of the first called up for active duty and was sent to San Diego. Rather than moving there with him, I stayed in Kansas. Now I'm glad that I did, because he was away with you for a whole year. Now that he has this assignment, I decided to move here to be with him."

"What made you decide to do that.?" Sheffield asked.

"That's a whole other story." Phil said.

Anita continued. "The fact that I was Catholic and that Phil was baptist was the only major difference that we had. When it came to attending church, we went our separate ways most of the time as neither of us were willing to join the other's church. It was also a source of conflict with our families as well.

"Then when Phil told me about you being Mormon and the kind of person you were, he felt that it would be worth looking into hoping that we could find something we could agree on. He wrote to me about meeting with the missionaries and encouraged me to look them up.

"Reluctantly, I contacted them and they made an appointment to come and visit me. I was quite skeptical, being a staunch Catholic, but I did it for the sake of our marriage. Then something I wasn't expecting occurred. As the elders bore their testimonies, I felt something stir within me that I had never experienced before. It was a feeling that compelled me to want to know more.

"After our second meeting, they invited me to attend church. The next Sunday, Maureen and I went to the Topeka Branch. That again was something that I wasn't expecting. The meetinghouse wasn't very impressive and it lacked the ornateness that I was accustomed to. But there was something there that I had never felt in the Catholic Church. The feeling there always seemed cold. I always thought that was the way it was supposed to be. When I attended the Mormon Church for the first time, I felt a completely opposite feeling and I was drawn even more to it.

"The people were friendly and welcomed me right in. They were genuinely interested in me. In the Catholic Church, it always seemed that people went just because they were supposed to but didn't pay much attention to each other or their beliefs during the week. I found the Mormons just the opposite. Phil and I talked about it in our letters back and forth and were both becoming converted but we wanted to wait until we were together again before making a decision. That's why we're having the missionaries over tonight.

"Now to answer your question, Admiral Brason. They reason I decided to join Phil here in

Washington was so we could do this together. Besides, as much as religion had polarized our families, when they found out that we were investigating the Mormon Church, they both ganged up on us. They never agreed about religion, except for anything but Mormonism. They were becoming so antagonistic that the best thing to do was to leave, so here we are.”

“That’s a very interesting story.” Sheffield said.

“Admiral, I’d like for you to tell Anita the story you told me about how you came to join the church.”

Sheffield looked at the clock. “I’ll have to give you the Reader’s Digest condensed version.” He then proceeded to tell her about Geannie and Charles Emmett and what led up to him joining the Church. He concluded with, “I’ll have to tell you the whole story when we have time.”

At seven thirty, the missionaries arrived for their appointment. They were surprised to be introduced to Admiral Brason and even more so to learn that he was a convert of four and half years. He sat in on the cottage meeting in which the Elders assessed where they were in their progress and determined where to begin with their next cottage meeting.

At the end of a very productive first week on the job, Lieutenant Moncur drove Sheffield to the airport on Friday afternoon. In just over an hour, he was home. School let out for the summer on Wednesday for Ramona and Janet. Friday was the last day of school for Norma and Craig would be through the following Wednesday. With Sheffield home, life seemed almost back to normal, except for him being gone in the evenings during the week. Ramona felt it was a much better alternative to the previous year.

On Saturday, after taking care of some chores around the house and ranch, they did something as a family that they hadn’t done for a year. They went out to the Pizza Joint and to the drive in theater. Two new ones had just opened recently. The two hundred fifty car capacity Star Drive-In was south of Roanoke on Franklin Road. The three hundred car Shenandoah Drive in was only three miles away, which was much closer than either the North 11 Drive-In or the Star City Drive-In. Now that Sheffield was back and had a say in what they went to, they saw “Denver and Rio Grande”, a western about the building of the Denver and Rio Grande railway in 1870 and was filmed on location on the actual railway near Durango, Colorado.

On Sunday they attended church as family. Not only was Sheffield glad to be back, but Ramona was happy to have him sit with her in Sunday School and Sacrament Meeting again. Sunday dinner was more homey too now that he was home.

After church, he was approached by the Elders Quorum President. Now that he was back, he called him to be an instructor and teach the lesson in the Elders Quorum on the third Sunday each month. On the

weeks that he might have to be gone, someone else could fill in. Sheffield was happy to have something to do and gladly accepted.

The weekend passed quickly and on Monday morning he had to leave again. But it would be a short week as he arranged for himself and his staff to have some time off after their long deployment. Monday also happened to be Norma's nineteenth birthday so after breakfast they had cake and ice cream and she opened her gifts. That day also happened to be Craig and Edith's first anniversary. After saying goodbye, he flew off to Norfolk in his Staggerwing.

Lieutenant Moncur met him at the Naval Air Station and drove him to the pier where the Midway was tied up. She was one pier over from the Reprisal. The difference in their size was clearly apparent. Sheffield had seen her once before; at the Navy Day celebration in New York Harbor in October 1945.

As Sheffield was piped aboard, his two star flag was struck on the foremast. Waiting for them on the quarter deck was Lieutenant Commander Daniel Kirk, who had also received a promotion along with the transfer. When Admiral Brason came aboard, Commander Kirk reported for duty.

While his gear was taken to the admiral's stateroom, Sheffield, Lieutenant Moncur, and Commander Kirk went up to the flight deck to inspect the deck markings. They were just as Sheffield had ordered, angled eight degrees to port of the centerline. The two outside lines were dashed with a solid stripe down the middle between them. They were made from a temporary mixture that could be washed away when the test was complete. The white lines had been superimposed over the existing markings and arrestor gear.

Parked on the flight deck were various types of aircraft, both jet and propeller, that would be used in conducting the tests. They ranged in size from a propeller driven SNJ Texan, a carrier capable trainer, to an F3D Skyknight, a twin engined jet fighter that had been hoisted aboard the day before.

While the ship was preparing to sail, Sheffield and his staff met in one of the ready rooms with the pilots who would be participating in the trial. Admiral Brason explained the concept to the pilots and the purpose of the test and what was expected of them.

The pilots and aircraft had been drawn from an experimental and development squadron based at Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland. This was not something new to them, as they had already conducted a similar test on the runway at the air station.

From the briefing, Sheffield, Phil, and Dan went up to the flag bridge to go over some last minute details, such as the weather forecast among other things. Soon the ship pulled away from the dock and made way out into Hampton Roads and stood out to sea, accompanied by a single destroyer.

Once the two ships were fifty miles out to sea, Admiral Brason ordered them to turn into the wind

and commence launching. Sheffield and and Lieutenant Moncur observed the launch from the flag bridge. The first off was Commander Kirk, who was participating as a pilot, in F4U Corsair.

With the planes in the air, Sheffield and Phil went down to Primary Flight Control or "Pri-Fly" in navy jargon. Located on the side of the island structure, it was the center of air operations. The wraparound Plexiglas windows provided a commanding view of the entire flight deck from bow to stern.

After forming up and circling around, Commander Kirk made his approach from astern and slightly to starboard. With his landing gear down and his hook up, he was aligned with the temporary deck markings, with the Landing Signal Officer directed him in. As his wheels touched the deck, he throttled up and took off again to circle around for another pass. Plane after plane, jet and propeller, did the same thing time after time all morning.

Around mid-day, the planes were brought back, aboard, landing in the conventional manner. After lunch, Admiral Brason and Lieutenant Moncur met with them again to get their feedback on how the test had gone thus far.

That afternoon and for the next two and half days, the test continued with various elements thrown in to complicate matters just to see what would happen. At times a pilot was instructed to approach too high or too low; too fast or too slow. Other times, aircraft were left parked forward on the flight deck just to see what affect it had on the simulated landings.

The most difficult test of all came with simultaneous launch and recovery. The starboard catapult didn't present much of a problem, but an aircraft being launched from the port catapult created air turbulence in the landing area. A plane on approach had to be coordinated with the catapult operations in order for the turbulence to dissipate.

At midday on Thursday, Sheffield brought the test an end and had the planes brought aboard and ordered the ships back to Norfolk. On the trip back to port, Admiral Brason, his staff, and the pilots meet to consider what the trial had revealed. It was determined that the concept was definitely feasible on a ship the size of the Midway. The question was, would it work on the smaller Essex Class carriers. At the conclusion of the debriefing, the pilots flew back to Patuxent River.

It was mid afternoon when the Midway tied up at the dock. Admiral Brason released Commander Kirk, Lieutenant Moncur, and Yeoman Walinsky for a well deserved break with orders to meet back at their office at the Pentagon on Monday the 9th of June. Sheffield had Yeoman Walinsky drive him to the hangar where the Staggerwing had been parked. It was all checked out and ready for take off. A little after five o'clock that afternoon, Sheffield touched down on the landing strip at the Two Star Ranch.

Ramona heard the Staggerwing as if circled around to make its landing approach and put down

what she was doing and went out to meet him. She was waiting at the hangar when he taxied up and shut off the engine. As he emerged from the cabin, holding his walking stick in one hand, She stepped up behind the wing, "Hi Babe. Welcome home."

"Its good to be home. That's the kind of cruise I like. Out and back and come home. And I have all of next week off to boot. How was your week?" He asked as he stepped off the wing onto the ground and took her into his arms.

"Not as busy as the weekend is going to be."

"Whys that?" He asked still holding on to her.

"Well, we have all of your family coming tomorrow for Memorial Day. Then on Saturday, we need to take the kids to Richmond to their Grandmother Stubbs' funeral."

"Oh really. When did she die?"

"She died on Tuesday. Then on Sunday we need to see Craig off to the Reserves for a month."

"You're right. It's going to be a busy weekend, alright. I saw Craig's car in the driveway when I flew over. When did they get here?"

"Oh an hour or so ago." she said as she let go of him.

Sheffield opened the hatch to the cubby and retrieved his duffel bag. By then he saw Craig and Edith and Norma and Janet walking toward the hangar. He called out to them, "You're just in time to help me push the plane into the hangar."

But first there was a round of welcome home hugs. "I'm sorry to hear about your grandmother." he said.

"It's alright." Norma said. "I guess she was ready to go."

"Yeah." Craig said. But then sarcastically added, "The only time we ever hear from Mom's family is when they want to tell us about someone's funeral."

"You want to go don't you?"

"Of course, we all do." Craig spoke for all of them. "We haven't seen her since before Mom died. She's been gone for five years now, so the last time we saw Grandma was almost a year before that."

"Alright, Ramona, you and Norma and Janet get on the other side. Craig, you and Edith help me. You all know the drill." He waited until everyone had a hold of the wings. "Ready.... Push."

Pushing together, they guided the plane into the hangar. "Thanks." Sheffield said. "That was easy with all of us pushing."

Sheffield took Ramona by the hand, and Craig picked up the duffel bag and they all walked back to the house together. "So what time is the funeral?"

"The viewing is at elven and the service is at noon." Ramona answered. Then she teased, "Maybe

your girlfriend will be there.”

“Who? Oh you mean Paula. Yeah. She'll probably be there.” Changing the subject. He asked, “Whats for supper? I'm starved.”

They all went in the house and Sheffield washed up and put his things away while Ramona and the girls set the table. By the time it was ready, Wade had come over as well. After dinner, they had a relaxing evening at home.

Friday morning looked promising for Memorial Day. Ramona and the girls were out as soon as the sun was up, cutting fresh flowers and blossoms from around the yard and arranged them into quart jars or tin cans. After a quick bite to eat, they were off to the cemetery, with Craig and Edith following behind in their car.

At the cemetery, they met up with the rest of the Brasons. The Austins were there there as well, along with scores of others all putting flowers out on the graves of their loved ones. There were flowers for Geannie and the kids, and for the first time, Emmett. He and his brothers and their mother all stood together over his grave. For Sheffield, it all became final for him as he had missed his passing and didn't get to say goodbye.

Craig and the girls set some flowers on either side of the headstone marking the resting place of their parents. Like Craig said, it had been more than five years since they died. During that time they had literally become part of the Brason family in every way. In fact, they weren't very excited about going to their grandmother's funeral because they just didn't feel apart of the Stubb's family. They never really were very close to them to begin with.

From the cemetery, a whole procession made their way back to the ranch as the annual Brason Memorial Day picnic got under way. Others arrived throughout the morning. By the time it was time to eat, the entire clan was there. As usual there were new faces, including Wade who attended for the first time, and probably not the last.

Shenan's son Danny and his wife Melissa had a new baby boy in January who they named Emmett. Wendalynn and Merl were finally beginning to show some interest in the church. Other than that, Ruth Ann was absent as usual and Delbert was stationed in Germany. From Walt's family, Emmaline and Willie also had a new baby girl that they named Karla. Tim and Vonda were expecting in September, Sylvia and Scott were expecting in August, and Curtis and Georgia were expecting in July.

With all of the new babies and babies on the way, everyone wanted to know when Craig and Edith were going to get on the ball. A lot of them were also speculating on whether or not or when Norma and Wade would get married.

After lunch, some of the men engaged in a game of horseshoes while several others divided into

two short handed teams for game of softball in the pasture. That went well until Janet, who was playing short stop/out fielder took a line drive from Tim that hit her square in the chest. Of course it would have to be Janet who got hurt.

She went down and everyone rushed around her. Ramona who was visiting with Ellen, her sisters-in-law and some of the nieces sprinted out into the pasture and hovered over Janet, who wasn't breathing. After a few seconds she gasped for breath and started breathing on her own. Sheffield left his game of horseshoes and was there a split second later.

"She's alright." Ramona announced. "She just had the wind knocked out of her."

Sheffield and Ramona helped her to feet and walked her into the house and into their bedroom, with Norma on their heels. Ramona told Sheffield to leave the room and had Janet take off her shirt and bare her chest, which revealed a huge welt right in the center of her chest, between her breasts.

"That's going to be a nasty bruise." Ramona announced. "Norma, go wrap some ice in a dish towel and bring it here."

She had Janet, who was still panting heavily, lay down on the bed. When Norma returned with the ice she placed it on her chest over the bruise. "That should keep it from spreading too far. Hold it there for a few minutes."

"That's cold." Janet gasped. "It's giving me goose bumps."

"I know sweetheart, but it will help. Just hold it there for a few minutes, I'll be right back."

Ramona went for her first aid kit and returned and took off the ice pack and began applying an ointment to the bruise. "There." she said, "that should help. I wouldn't wear your bra for a couple of days, because it will irritate it. Put your shirt back on and go up to your room and lay down for a while. I'll be back to check on you in a little while."

"Why do things always happen to me?" Janet sobbed as she buttoned up her shirt. "I mean, if its not one thing, its an other."

Ramona took her in her arms. "I know. It's not fair is it. I guess its just your trial in life."

"Ow!" you're hurting me."

"I'm sorry, was I hugging you to tightly."

"Yeah, just a little."

"You'll have to be careful with hugs for a few days. You may have bruised your sternum too."

Janet went upstairs to rest and Ramona and Norma returned to the picnic. Everyone was concerned for her, but Ramona assured them, "She'll be alright. She just had the wind knocked out of her and has a nasty welt."

While Janet was resting, the activities and visiting continued. Ramona went to check on her after an

hour, only to find her sleeping. After a while Janet came back out to rejoin the party. As the relatives were leaving, she avoided hugs; everyone understood why.

Saturday began early, as they had to get ready to drive to Richmond for the funeral. As Janet got dressed, Ramona took a look at her chest. The black and blue bruise had spread to an area six inches in diameter, and partially covered her breasts and was very tender to the touch as Ramona applied some ointment. Janet picked out a blouse that she could wear with a sweater, hoping that the layers of clothing would conceal the fact that she wasn't wearing a brassiere.

After breakfast, everyone, including Craig and Edith who had stayed overnight, finished getting ready in their Sunday best. They decided to take Sheffield's car since it was more roomy than Ramona's new car and piled in with Craig, Edith, and Norma crowded into the back seat. The front was just as crowded with Ramona sitting next to Sheffield who drove, and Janet on the outside next to the door. That was when Sheffield decided it was time to trade in his car for something more accommodating for a family of adults.

It was just after seven thirty when they got on the road for the three hour trip to Richmond. With only one quick stop, they arrived at the church where the funeral was being held at a quarter to eleven. Upon going inside, Sheffield and Ramona weren't sure whether to hold back or stay with the kids. They decided that they were old enough to conduct themselves and held back, rather than to interject themselves into the family.

It had been since their mother's funeral that the kids had seen any of their relatives. Although they had been invited, none of them came to Craig and Edith's wedding reception. They were friendly as they greeted them, but the warmth of family was missing. Some might have thought that Janet was particularly standoffish as she resisted being hugged.

While they went through the line to pay their last respects to their grandmother, one of the aunts, Samantha's next oldest sister, approached Sheffield and Ramona and thanked them for bringing the kids and praised them for the way in which they had taken them in as their own.

They mingled and visited casually with the family and those who had come to pay their respects. To those not of the immediate family, they had to explain their relationship. That's when an attractive woman made her way to Sheffield and opened her arms to him.

"Sheffield." she said as she took him in her arms. "I was hoping I'd see you."

"Hello Paula. Its good to see you too. You look good."

"Thank you, and so so you." she said as she let go of him.

Turning to Ramona she shook her hand and said, "Hello Ramona."

By then a hansom gentleman was standing at her side. "Sheffield, Ramona, this is my husband, Jacob Messner. We've been married for more than two years now."

Turning to Jacob she said, "Jacob, this is Sheffield Brason and his wife Ramona."

"Pleased to meet you Jacob." Sheffield said.

"No sir. The pleasure is mine Admiral Brason. I have heard so much about you from Paula. She speaks very highly of you. And," he added, "because of what she said about you, I've read both of your books, not to mention we've seen the movie about you."

Sheffield began to turn red from the gushing attention that he was getting. Ramona came to his rescue. "That's my man." she beamed.

In an attempt to turn the attention away from himself, Sheffield asked, "So Paula, are any of your kids here with you? Its been nearly ten years since I saw them last. I probably wouldn't recognize them."

"Yes. As a matter of fact they're all here. That's Brent and his wife and their two children over there." she said pointing in their direction. "And over there is Evelyn and her husband. As you can see, she is expecting in a couple of months. You know, you broke her heart when we called it quits. She really wanted me to marry you. In fact, every man I dated after that she would measure against you."

"I barely passed the test." Jacob laughed.

"And what about Jillian?" Sheffield asked.

"I don't see her right now. She's a sophomore at Norfolk State University.

"I told them you'd probably be here and they'd like to visit with you." Paula concluded, "Listen, I need to go right now, but we'll visit more later."

As she and her husband walked away, Ramona jabbed him in the ribs with her elbow. "See, didn't I told you that your girlfriend would be here?"

Sheffield and Ramona asked the kids if it would be alright if they waited in the chapel and left them with their family. Craig assured them that they'd be just fine. Leaving them there, they found their way to the chapel and took an empty pew immediately behind those reserved for the family. They sat quietly and listened to the prelude music while they waited.

Before long the casket was brought into the chapel, followed by the family. The kids trailed along at the end of the procession and came and sat with them, rather than with the family. During the service, as the names of all of the children and grandchildren were read, their names were included.

The minister conducted a nice service that paid tribute to their Grandmother Stubbs, but there was so much that could have been said that was omitted. Sheffield reflected on how grateful he was for the understanding that he now had as a member of the Church. He hoped that his children also picked up on that notion.

Following the hour long service, Sheffield drove the kids to the cemetery to participate in the graveside services. Being in the Relief Society, Ramona was well aware of all of the work that it took to serve a luncheon after a funeral. She noticed that there was a lot of food but the women in the kitchen were short handed and offered to remain behind and help them get things ready.

Sheffield and the kids were among the first to return to church and sat at the table at the far end of the hall. Ramona saw them come in and sit down and joined them briefly, explaining that she was going to help serve. As the family began to return, some of the aunts and uncles and cousins stopped by and thanked them for coming and went on to sit elsewhere. Then Paula and her husband and kids came in and asked if they could sit with them.

Jacob struck up a conversation with Sheffield and Paula mostly listened in. Sheffield learned that he was a history professor at Norfolk State University and that lead to the topic of Sheffield being a high school government teacher and wrestling coach, except for the fact that he had been recalled to active duty. Jacob was eager to discuss with Sheffield the historic aspect of his books. Meanwhile the kids were engaged in conversation with their second cousins.

As their conversation continued while the meal was served, Paula observed, "That was sure a fitting tribute to Aunt Martha and her ninety one years."

"Personally I felt as if something was lacking." Jacob said. "The minister said nothing of the afterlife and what it holds in store. Ever since my own mother passed away almost a year ago, I have been wondering about that."

"I can assure you," Sheffield said, "there is an afterlife. I have always believed in that, but since we joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints a few years back, I have come to understand those things so much more."

"What church is that?" Paula asked. "I've never heard of it."

"We're commonly referred to as Mormons."

"Oh?" Paula questioned in a tone of uncertainty. "You're Mormon?"

Before she could say anymore, Jacob asked, "So what is your understanding?"

"Well, I know for a fact that life goes on. My late wife is proof of that. I can tell you that one day we will all be resurrected with a perfect body to go on to whatever kingdom of glory that God has in store for us, according to our faith and obedience. Most of all, I can tell you that in the highest realms of glory we can and will be with our families for ever."

"Really?" Jacob asked. "Your church teaches that?"

Just then they were interrupted by someone and the conversation never got back to the subject. Ramona finally came and sat down next to Sheffield with her plate and joined in on the topic of

conversation at the moment.

Sheffield finally had a chance to visit with Brent, Evelyn, and Jillian. They all still fondly remembered him and the things that he had done with them during his brief relationship with their mother.

When Ramona had finished eating, they needed to leave and get started on the three hour trip back home. As they were leaving, hardly any of the family noticed them and only one of their aunts said goodbye.

For the first several miles, it was pretty quiet in the car. The kids particularly seemed to be in a reflective mood. Finally Craig spoke up. "Mom, Dad." he began. "I'm sure that I speak for Norma and Janet as well, but I'm sure glad that we're in your family now. I can't imagine my life anywhere else. I just wanted to say thank you for taking us in and making us yours."

What he said brought Ramona to tears.

With a bit of emotion, Sheffield answered, "Thank you Craig. I can't image in my life without any of you either."

That made Ramona cry all the more.

"The same goes for me too." Norma added. "I love you as much if not more than I ever did our natural parents. I know they loved us, but I feel even more love from you. Its as if we were supposed to be your children all along."

That was more than Ramona could bear. With tears streaming down her checks and a quivering lip, she asked, "Do you really feel that way?"

Janet, who hadn't said anything yet, put her hand on Ramona's knee and said through tears of he own, "Yes mom we do. We all do. We have talked about it lots of times among ourselves."

"You're the family I always wanted but never thought I'd have. And that includes you too, Babe."

"I'd say we all make a pretty good family." Sheffield said. "You kids haven't given us one bit of trouble since you came to live with us. Most families can't say that."

"That's because we don't know where we'd be without you." Norma admitted. "We're just so thankful to have a home and still be together."

"Yeah," Janet said, "and now we can all be together forever. I'm so glad that we found the Church and could go to the temple to be sealed together."

"Me too." Sheffield said. "I think it is interesting how God brought us all together after all the trials that we all went through and what we had lost along the way."

"As for me," Ramona added, "I firmly believe that things have worked out the way they were supposed to."

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The information about angled flight decks is from *Aircraft Carriers: A History of Carrier Aviation and Its Influence on World Events: Vol. II, 1946-2006* by Norman Polmar page 117
“Denver and Rio Grande” starring Edmond O'Brien was released by Paramount Pictures on May 16, 1952.

