

Chapter XLIII

Little Geannie

March 28, 1953 – June 1, 1953

Sheffield spent the the rest of the week in Washington making the final preparations for the test deployment to the Mediterranean. When he left to come home on Friday afternoon, he brought everything with him and turned in the key to his apartment. Ramona and the girls had supper waiting for him. The familiar sound of the Staggerwing's engine signaled that he was home. Ramona went out to the hangar as he landed and taxied up. He waved to her from inside the cabin as he shut off the engine. A moment later he emerged from the plane and stepped down off the wing and into her arms.

“Welcome home, Babe.”

“Its good to be home.” He said, and then he kissed her.

“Supper's ready.” she said as she released him from her grasp. “I hope you're hungry.”

“Come to think of it, I am.” he said as he retrieved his things from the storage compartment behind the cabin.

By the time he had everything unloaded, the girls had come out to greet him. After a hug from Norma and Janet, the four of them pushed the plane into the hangar. They each took a piece of luggage and walked back to the house together. Ramona took Sheffield by the arm, since he had a bag in one hand and his cane in the other.

Over dinner they told Sheffield's about what had gone on at home during the week. While Ramona and the girls cleaned up, he unpacked and put his things away, even though he'd be packing again in a few days.

The girls both had dates and went out for the evening. After they had left, Ramona took Sheffield by the hand and led him out to her bathhouse. With their clothes hanging neatly on the hooks in the changing area, they showered before stepping down into the relaxing hot water was. They talked about what they wanted to do during the next few days before he had to leave again. They talked until their skin began to wrinkle, and then they talked some more. Finally it was time to either get out, or shrivel up altogether. They dried off and wrapped up in their towels and carried their clothes back inside. They were dressed and ready for bed when Janet came home. She had been to a school dance with Albert Furness. Sometime later, Wade brought Norma home.

On Saturday morning, Sheffield and Ramona attended a track meet over in Lynchburg. Janet had worked hard all year and had reclaimed, if not surpassed her previous abilities. She finished first in the hundred yard dash and second in the four hundred, and she helped the relay team to a first place finish. If she kept it up, she was bound to finish the season with a district or even state trophy. After the meet, they went out for lunch before driving home.

That afternoon, his mother, brothers and their wives came out. And then later in the evening, they picked up Edith and went to the airport to meet Craig. It was the first time that he had been home since Christmas and had two whole weeks before he had to fly back to Alameda. In the time that he was away, Edith had grown until it was difficult for him to reach his arms around her. He and Edith came home with Sheffield and Ramona to stay for the next few days, at least until Sheffield had to leave. After that, they planned on staying with Stirling and Mary Ann, especially after the baby was born.

On Sunday they all attended church together and had a special Sunday dinner with everyone, including Wade, all together for the first time in a long time. It looked like it would be even longer before it would happen again.

During the next few days, Sheffield and Craig spent a lot of time together while Ramona and the girls were at school. They had a lot in common anyway, but now they had even more to talk about. On Monday night, they all went to one of their favorite places, the Pizza Joint and then to a movie at the Grandin Theater. Another evening they all enjoyed a relaxing soak in Ramona's bathhouse.

All too soon, it was time for Sheffield to leave. Ramona was torn between spending time with Craig or seeing Sheffield off. The latter won out because Sheffield would be gone for four months and she would still have another week with Craig before he had to leave.

Ramona arranged for a substitute teacher to cover for her on Friday and Monday. Then after school on Thursday the 2nd, Sheffield said goodbye to the kids and he and Romona headed for Norfolk in his Roadmaster. When they got there, they checked into the Tazewell and had dinner. Sheffield had some business to attend to on Friday aboard the Reprisal. He and Captain Andrew Murray, the Reprisal's new Captain, inspected the modifications and reviewed the test plan for the cruise.

After the meeting, Sheffield had the rest of that day and the weekend free before reporting to the ship on Monday morning. It didn't matter what they did, as long as they were together. Four months wasn't all that long. The last time he was away much longer. That evening they went out for an evening of dinner and dancing. Saturday was spent looking around Virginia Beach. For late March, it was still too cold to really enjoy the ocean, other than a stroll along the beach.

On Sunday morning, they crossed the James River Bridge and drove up to Yorktown where the British surrendered to George Washington in 1781, then on up to Colonial Williamsburg, and over to Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in the New World established in 1607. After taking in the sights and having lunch, they recrossed the James River on the Jamestown Ferry and drove down along the south side of the river back to Norfolk. The one hundred twenty mile trip took a little over six hours, including time stopped to look around.

Being Easter Sunday, Sheffield and Ramona wanted to at least attend sacrament meeting. Before

leaving Roanoke they called the mission home to get the address and meeting time of the Norfolk Branch. They wanted to attend a regular meeting instead of the serviceman's group.

They arrived at the meetinghouse a few minutes before the meeting was to start and found a seat in the chapel. After only a moment or two, Sheffield felt a tap on his shoulder and turned around to see Jacob Messner.

"Well hello Sheffield." Jacob said. "Do you remember me? I'm Jacob Messner, Paula's husband."

"Why yes, Jacob. I do remember you." Sheffield answered as he stood up to shake his hand.

A moment later, Paula was at Jacob's side. "Hello Sheffield, Ramona." she greeted. "What are you doing here?"

"I was just going to ask you the same thing." Sheffield said with surprise in his voice.

"Its a long story. Stick around after the meeting and we'll tell you all about it. The meeting is about to start now. Do you mind if we sit with you?"

"No, not at all." Sheffield said as they slid over to make room for them, with Paula sitting on the other side of Sheffield. Ramona leaned in close to Sheffield and whispered in his ear something about his girlfriend.

The Norfolk Branch appeared to be a little smaller than the Roanoke Branch. The meeting was a nice Easter program with music and talks. After the meeting Jacob and Paula invited them to their home where they told their story.

Over desert, Jacob explained, "Something you said to me at Paula's Aunt Martha's funeral last May hit home with me." he began.

"I don't remember what that was." Sheffield admitted.

"I had been wondering whether or not there was an afterlife."

"Now I remember."

"You assured me that there was and went on to say that we can have a connection to our loved ones under certain conditions. Then we got interrupted and I didn't have a chance to ask you about that. It weighed on my mind. A few days later while I happened to be home one morning, two young men in suits approached me while I was out in the front yard.

"They identified themselves as representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I immediately recognized the name because you said that you had joined that church. Then one of them asked me, 'Have you ever considered what the afterlife holds in store in regards to your family.'

"They seemed surprised when I told him it had been weighing heavily on my mind and I told them about my conversation with you. I invited them inside. Paula wasn't home, but they proceeded to tell me all about what they called the Plan of Salvation. I learned where we came from, why we are here, and where

we go after this life and how families come into play. At the end of the lesson, they asked if they could come back and explain how that knowledge had been restored. Because of you, I invited them back and set up an appointment for when Paula would be here.”

Paula added, “When I found out that the Mormon Missionaries were coming over, I first envisioned old men with long beards all dressed in black, with a harem of wives left behind out in Utah. Needless to say I wasn't very excited. Then I remembered that you said that you were Mormon and I decided that maybe it wouldn't be so bad.

“When they came back, we spent a few minutes getting acquainted. One of them asked if we knew any Mormons. We told them about you. As it turned out, one of them had been in Roanoke before coming here. He said that he had spent time in your home and had dinner with you on a number of occasions.”

“What was his name?” Ramona asked. “We have had a lot of missionaries in our home.”

“It was Elder Gummow from Idaho. He spoke very highly of you.”

“Oh yes, we remember him. He's a sharp young man.”

“Yes he is. Anyway they began teaching us the lessons. I was eager to learn more,” Jacob said, “but Paula was quite skeptical.”

“If you remember Sheffield, I never was very keen on religion.”

“Yes, I remember. I think that was one of the reasons that we didn't hit it off.”

“Anyway,” Jacob continued, “we met with them off and on for several weeks but didn't really get very far and eventually told them that we were no longer interested.”

“Obviously something changed.” Ramona said.

“It was me that changed.” Paula said. “When my first husband was killed, I took it pretty hard. Sheffield remembers that, he helped me through that time, but it wasn't until my own mother died last fall. That's when what the Elders had taught us finally sank in and I realized that I needed what the Church offered. We had been to church a few times from before. Not knowing how to get in touch with the missionaries, we decided to go to church one Sunday. The ones we had met with had moved on, but the new ones started over from the beginning. This time I was much more open to their message. The first time I had held us back. I wasn't ready or willing to make the necessary changes in my life.”

Jacob continued, “This time we earnestly did everything they asked us to do. I already believed what they taught, but with Paula on board, we progressed quite rapidly and agreed to be baptized, which we were in December, just before Christmas. One of these days we'd like to take a trip out west and go to the temple.”

“We got your Christmas card.” Paula said, “and I had every intention of responding, but one thing after another came up and I never got any cards sent out. We were glad to see you in church because we

have been wanting to tell you how much of a difference it has made in our lives. If it hadn't been for what you said at Aunt Martha's funeral and your example, we probably wouldn't have been inclined to listen."

"How do Brent, Evelyn and Jillian feel about it?" Sheffield asked.

"Brent and Jillian are indifferent." Paula answered. "Evelyn and her husband on the other hand have expressed a slight interest."

"That's mainly because of you, Sheffield." Jacob added.

"Ever since I first met you, you were her hero." Paula concluded. "She just had to see the movies about you." Then she asked, "How are Craig, Norma, and Janet doing?"

"Craig's wife is due any day. We're so excited." Ramona beamed.

"Yeah and I'm going to miss out on all of the excitement." Sheffield bemoaned.

"What about the girls?" Paula wanted to know.

"Well," Ramona went on to explain. "Norma is sophomore at Hollins and is quite serious about a young man, and Janet is a junior in high school."

"I can't get over how you adopted my cousin's children like that." Paula said.

"Now its as if they were always ours." Ramona exulted.

Sheffield and Ramona stayed a visited for a while before returning to the Tazewell. On the way back to the hotel, Ramona said, "I like your girlfriend. She's a nice lady."

Sheffield turned red and and huffed, "I wish you would stop referring to her as my girlfriend."

On Monday morning, Sheffield and Ramona drove to the base and parked near the pier where the Reprisal was tied up. Lieutenant Moncur and Yeoman Walinsky met them on the dock. While Petty Officer Walinsky took Sheffield's luggage his state room, Phil stood back while Sheffield and Ramona said their goodbyes.

With Ramona in his arms, he said, "I'll be back before you know it."

"No matter how long you're away, it seems like a long time. But four months is better than how long you've been gone in the past. And you're not going to war this time."

"The way things are going with the peace talks, perhaps when I get back, it will be for good."

"I like the sound of that. It's too bad you'll miss out on the birth of our first grandchild."

"I know. You'll have to send me some pictures. Take care of yourself. I'll be looking forward to your letters." Sheffield kissed her and let go. "I guess I'd better get aboard, I'm holding things up."

With tears streaming down her face, Ramona said, "Goodbye, Babe."

Sheffield turned as he walked away and said, "See you in the funny pages."

Ramona watched as he walked up the gangplank. After saluting the Officer of the Deck and his flag

was raised on the foremast, he stepped over to the side of the ship and looked down at her. He looked so dashing in his uniform and his cane gave him an air of sophistication. He waved and blew a kiss to her, then he and his trusted aid disappeared into the ship.

Ramona waited with the large crowd that had gathered to see their loved ones off. In the group were Anita and Daphne and their small children. They came down the night before with Phil and Dan. They had already said their goodbyes and were aboard the ship waiting for Admiral Brason to arrive. Bonnie and Jolene had come on the train and spent the weekend in Norfolk and were also there to see Quinn and Seduc off.

The gangplank was removed, the mooring lines securing the carrier to the dock were loosened and cast off. Slowly the big ship began to move away from the pier. Ramona glanced up at the flag bridge on the superstructure hoping for one last glimpse of her man. And then suddenly, there he was standing on the catwalk just outside. He called down to her and waved once more and disappeared back inside.

Ramona waited until the ship was out in Hampton Roads and began the slow passage out to sea, then walked back to the car with Bonnie and Jolene. Since it was parked in the VIP parking section, she was able to get out before the others who had gathered. They had all day to get home so they decided to drive over to the Cape Henry Lighthouse to watch as the ships steamed out of Chesapeake bay and into the Atlantic Ocean.

They found a place to park and walked down to the waterfront where others had gathered. The first ship to pass by was the cruiser Salem, followed by two destroyers. As the smaller ships passed by, her eyes were fixed on the Reprisal as she and two more destroyers steamed toward the channel. She tried to see through the windows of the flag bridge, but the tinted glass was impenetrable. As it was right out in front of her, she waved enthusiastically until the ship, which was picking up speed, was well past the cape and out to sea.

With the six ships growing smaller and disappearing into the horizon there was nothing to do but get in the car and drive home. After a stop for something to eat along the way, they arrived home around two thirty that afternoon. It gave Ramona a chance to get to know Bonnie and Jolene better. They were obviously very much in love with Quinn and Seduc. It was only a matter of time.

With the Norma and Janet at school, there was no one at home when she got there. However, there was a note from Norma on the table that aroused an extremely ecstatic response. It simply said, "Edith had her baby yesterday."

Ramona left her suitcase right where she had set it down and rushed back out to the garage and got into the car and drove straight to Lewis-Gale Hospital. She stopped at the reception desk and asked for Edith's room number. A moment later she burst through the door into her room. Edith was sitting up in bed

nursing the baby, with Mary Ann and Craig on either side.

"Its a little girl, Mom." Craig proudly announced.

She rushed to Craig's side. "Whats her name? When was she born? How big was she?" she asked all at once without hesitating for an answer.

"Her name is Geannie." Edith announced. "Since no one else in the family has thought to do it, I wanted to name her after Aunt Geannie."

The thought brought tears to Ramona's eyes.

"Oh she's just adorable." she raved.

Edith continued as Ramona listened while her eyes were transfixed on the tiny baby girl. "Her name is Gean Marie Brason. But for now we're calling her Little Geannie. I'm sure when she gets bigger, we'll just call her Geannie."

"Sheffield is going to love her name. I love her name. What a fitting way to carry on Geannie's name. Just thinking of it makes me miss her."

"We thought that it was about time someone was named after her." Mary Ann said. "Stirling and his brothers all agree too."

"I can't wait to tell Sheffield." Ramona said as Edith handed Little Geannie to her. "So tell me all about it."

"Well," Edith began, "she was born yesterday at five thirty seven."

"On Easter Sunday. How about that." Ramona interrupted.

"She weighed seven pounds three ounces and was nineteen inches long."

"How was it on you, Edith?"

"Not too bad."

"She did fabulous." Mary Ann added.

"Oh look, She has Craig's eyes, but she looks like Edith through the nose and mouth. What a beautiful little girl."

She just happened to have her Kodak Tourist II camera in her purse. There where three frames left on the roll after taking pictures of Sheffield and the ship's departure. She took a picture of Craig and Edith with Little Geannie. Craig took one of the Ramona and her granddaughter, and one of the baby with both grandmothers.

Ramona stayed at the hospital until it was about time for the girls to come home from school. Little Geannie had been taken back to the nursery and Edith needed her rest, so Ramona and Mary Ann left while Craig stayed behind. On her way home, Ramona dropped off the roll of film to be developed and requested a rush be placed on the order, which cost extra. It didn't matter that it would cost extra, she wanted to get a

letter off to Sheffield the next day, and it had to include a picture of Little Geannie.

Once the Reprisal was well out to sea, Air Group Sixteen began coming aboard. It was the same air group that sailed with the Reprisal on her previous cruises. Although the air group and the squadrons were the same, it had gone through a lot of changes. It had new leadership and a lot of new personnel and new planes too. The F9F-5 Panthers had been replaced by the new swept wing F9F-6 Cougar. They were much the same plane only with a sleek new wing design. The Corsairs had given way to F2H Banshees, including detachments of their night fighter and photographic derivatives. Even the the Skyraiders had been replaced by the next incarnation of the AD Skyraider. While the Reprisal was being fitted with her angled deck, Air Group Sixteen had trained aboard to Antietam in order to be proficient in the new landing technique for this cruise.

By night fall, the Reprisal was about one hundred fifty miles out to sea and heading east across the Atlantic Ocean. That first day at sea was filled with flight operations and gunnery practice.

Sheffield only had Commander Kirk, Lieutenant Moncur and Yeoman Walinsky serving as his staff. Since this was not a formal command, rather than organizing a complete staff for a temporary assignment, Sheffield relied on Captain Murry's senior officers to carry out their duties. He was in overall command but was primarily concerned with overseeing the operational test plan and observing the results, with occasional direction.

For the third time, Sheffield took up residence in the admiral's stateroom. It was much the same as it had been on the other two occasions. A steward was assigned to him from among the ship's company. This time it was Steward Apprentice Ryan Kenniston from Montgomery, Alabama. Petty Officer 2nd Class Kenniston had been in the navy for six years, having re-enlisted. Sheffield found him to be efficient in his work, but rather sullen in his personality.

The angled deck proved its value that first day at sea. On landing, an F2H Banshee hit the deck hard and bounced, causing its tail hook to fail to engage. The jet continued forward, over the crash barrier unable to get airborne. It had enough forward thrust to clear the outboard elevator before going into the sea. The pilot escaped the sinking aircraft only yards from the ship as it rushed past. He was picked up by one of the trailing destroyers and later returned to the ship.

At the time of the accident, the forward flight deck was crowded with parked aircraft. Had it been a conventional deck, the plane would have come down in the midst of the aircraft on deck. The result would have been similar to the crash that Sheffield witnessed on the Essex a year and half earlier. As it was, one plane was lost with no casualties. Sheffield noted the fact in his log. After all, the purpose of this cruise was to prove the concept in actual circumstances.

As Sheffield made his way across the Atlantic, Edith and the baby came home after a few days in the hospital. Norma and Janet were as thrilled to be aunts as Ramona was to be a grandmother. They had to stop by to see them at least every day. When Little Geannie was a week old, Craig had to fly back to Alameda. Several days later, Ramona received a letter from Sheffield.

Wednesday April 15, 1953

Algiers, French Algeria Aboard the USS Reprisal

Dear Ramona and Girls

Here I am back in old Algiers. Its has been almost exactly 10 years since I was here the first time. A lot has changed since then. There is an underlying tension here now that is very apparent everywhere. There is unrest in the native Muslim population and a great deal of animosity toward the French that wasn't here before. I guess it all began immediately after the war. I'm afraid that one day its all going to blow up.

Shanks for the pictures of Little Geannie. How did you get them so fast? She is a beautiful baby. I'm so excited for Craig and Edith. That means I'm a grandpa. I am very pleased that Edith chose to name her after her Aunt Geannie. I think its great that her name will carry on. I can't wait to see her. In the meantime keep those pictures coming. At least Craig got to see her before he had to leave.

The crossing was fairly uneventful. There was one incident which could have proved disastrous, but the angled landing area proved its worth. Although one plane was lost, the pilot was recovered no worse for the wear. It could have been as bad as that crash on the Essex a year and a half ago. The whole purpose of this cruise is to prove the concept in an actual deployment. I am confident that we will do just that. I can envision the day when all carriers have a skaddywhompus landing area.

I have been meeting with the shipboard serviceman's group. I again offered my wardroom as place for them to meet. There is myself, Phil and Dan, and of course Quinn and Sedric, and seven or eight others. Our group leader is Seaman Alma Jrouper from Vernal, Utah. He served a mission to Australia. After he returned he joined the Navy in January of 1951 rather than being drafted into the Army.

Its a little awkward for Quinn and Sedic because they have to maintain proper military protocol and keep their distance from me. Its kind of hard for all of us after all the time that they have spent in our home.

So we're back to writing letters again for the next few months. The mail isn't as efficient in getting to me as it had been in Korea. This is the first chance that I have had to get a letter sent off to you as well.

We'll be here for three days and then we will get underway for exercises with the British and the French. At the conclusion of the exercises we are scheduled to put in at Toulon, France for a four day port call. I know, you're a bit jealous about now, aren't you. I promise I will write from there.

I will tell you all about it. I will also tell you how much I love you and miss you. I need to tell you that I love you and I miss you now too. I will look forward to your next letter.

Love Sheffield

After four days in Algiers, the Reprisal sailed with other elements of the Sixth Fleet under the command of Vice Admiral John. H. Cassady aboard the heavy cruiser Salem. Admiral Cassady was a year behind Sheffield at Annapolis and received his wings three years after Sheffield. But because Sheffield had been retired for five years, Admiral Cassady had surpassed him in rank.

The Reprisal, Salem, the heavy cruiser Albany, and several destroyers joined forces with elements of the Royal Navy Mediterranean Fleet, including the carrier HMS Eagle, with her squadrons of Supermarine Attackers, Hawker Sea Hawks, Grumman Avengers, and the early warning variant of the Douglas Skyraider. The Attackers and Sea Hawks were both jets. The French Navy's Mediterranean Squadron included the carrier Arromanches, which was just back from combat operations off French Indochina. Her air group consisted of American built Grumman Hellcats and Curtiss Helldivers. The combined force operated together over the next four days in joint NATO exercises west of Corsica. During the exercises, British and French pilots conducted touch and go landings on the Reprisal's angled deck.

At the conclusion of the exercises, the British retired to Gibraltar while the Americans proceeded to Toulon, France in company with the French Navy for a four day port call. While anchored in the harbor, the French Minister of Defense, René Pleven, came aboard for a special ceremony to belatedly recognize the Reprisal and the other ships that participated in the raid on Bordeaux in November 1942. Minister Pleven

pinned the French Resistance Medal on Sheffield in behalf of all of the American servicemen who had participated in the raid and the subsequent Battle of the Bay of Biscay.

While in Toulon, Sheffield received another letter from Ramona with news from home.

April 18, 1953

Dear Sheffield

I still haven't heard from you. If you have written, our letters probably crossed in the mail. I'm sure a letter will be coming any day now. I understand how slow the mail can be when your nearly half way around the world.

You should see Little Geannie. Its amazing how much she has grown in two weeks. See for yourself. The enclosed photograph was take the day before yesterday. She is such a good natured baby.

Last night was the State wrestling tournament and you'll be pleased to know that the Magicians did very well by coming in second. Even at that, some of our boys took the title in their weight classes.

The real exciting news is that Janet did very well at her last track meet. She took first place in not only the one hundred yard dash but also the four hundred. Her coach is confident that she will do well at both the upcoming district and state championship meets.

Speaking of Janet, she was asked to the prom by Mike Rowan, Tom and Eve's boy. She was asked by two or three other, but he asked her first. The boys seem to clamor for her attention but she doesn't seem to gravitate to anyone in particular. Then there are all of her guy pen pals. If there is anyone in particular, I think she is kind of sweet on Gerry Dover. I've said this before but he is clear across the country so not much is happening there.

I'll have you know that your government class is going well. We just finished the unit on foreign government systems and had the unit test yesterday. On Monday we will begin the final unit on state and local government.

I just sold another house that I made a tidy profit on. As always, I'm on the look out for something. There is a house in Salem that I'm going to go look at this afternoon. This is the easiest and most profitable job I've ever had.

We had a bit of a rainy spell but it has dried up now. It sure did green things up though. Wade came over and worked up the garden for me and girls and I have planted the potatoes, peas, onions, and carrots. He has been so good to make sure things are taken care of around here. Most of the time I don't have to say anything. He sees something that needs done and does it and dose a good job of

it. Of course, he has ulterior motives for coming over. I can see that he and Norma are falling deeper in love, but they are taking their time. I predict an engagement by the end of the year. I really like Wade. He is always such a gentleman and so polite and courteous. He would definitely be a great catch.

Relief Society keeps me busy too. There is always someone needing something. We have had a birth, a wedding, and a funeral in the branch in the last month. Bertie King passed away unexpectedly. She had been quite healthy and active for her age, but out of nowhere she had a massive stroke that took her. Victor and Martha Davis had a baby girl. This makes three for them. And Francis Brown married a young man from Lynchburg. And that doesn't include all of the things going on.

Your mother had a touch of the something last week. I suspect it may have been something that she ate, but she is doing fine now. Everyone seems to be doing fine. I haven't heard from Craig lately, but Edith keeps me posted.

Everything is just fine here at home, so don't worry about us. 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 still worry about you. In closing, let me just say that I love you with all of my heart.

Love, Ramona.

The Reprisal left Toulon on the 26th and spent the next week operating in the Western Mediterranean before calling on Barcelona, Spain for a few days, and then another week at sea before anchoring in the Bay of Villefranche at Nice, France; the headquarters of the Sixth Fleet.

While at Nice, Sheffield stayed in the home of his longtime friends, Mace and Pat Owen. Mace was stationed there as the Deputy Commander of Naval Air Forces in the Mediterranean over all patrol aircraft in the Sixth Fleet Area of responsibility. Mace took him aboard his flagship, the USS Long Island Sound, a seaplane tender, to show me around.

In return, Sheffield invited Admiral Owen to come aboard the Reprisal for a tour in which he pointed out all of the modifications that had been made since Mace had been aboard her last as Sheffield's chief of staff in 1945. Mace was particularly fascinated by the innovative angled deck.

Mace and Pat showed Sheffield around the city, which included a day at the beach on the French Riviera and a day in Monaco. In addition to site seeing, they spent a lot of time visiting and catching up. Mace wanted to know how the ship's reunion went, so Sheffield told him all about it.

Mace was planning on retiring from the Navy when his current assignment was up in another year. In all of their years they were married, they never had a place to call home and wondered where they could

settle down. Sheffield suggested, "Why not Roanoke." They agreed to consider it.

Meanwhile back home, May was passing quickly and school would be out soon. The letters from Sheffield sounded like a travelogue from a pleasure cruise as he told of his time ashore in Algiers, Toulon, Barcelona, and spending time with Mace and Pat and enjoying the French Riviera and a day in Monaco. She was jealous. His latest letter told of an upcoming joint operation with the Italians which was to include a mock amphibious landing at La Maddalena in Northern Sardinia. After that, they were scheduled to spend ten days anchored at Naples, Italy during the the first part of June.

Ramona decided to give herself a birthday present; a plane ticket to Italy. She wrote and told Sheffield of her plans, rather than surprise him as she had when she took the girls to Tokyo for Christmas. She told him when she was to arrive in Naples. In her letter, she told him how much Little Geannie had grown and sent another photograph. Janet came away from the district track meet with first place finishes in both the one hundred yard dash and the four hundred, as well as the team relay. In closing she said how excited she was to see him.

During the week, Janet went to Richmond to participate in the state track tournament. She brought home the first place trophy for the one hundred yard dash and the team relay, and the second place trophy for the four hundred yard dash. She was quite pleased with for performance for the season.

The last day of school was on Friday the 22nd and Sunday was Norma's twentieth birthday. Ramona had all of the next week to prepare for her trip. Sheffield wrote back and told her that he'd love to have her meet him for a rendezvous. He told her that so far the cruise had been a success. It was much less demanding than a combat tour off Korea because he wasn't ordering men off on missions from which they might not return. He had been so anxious to get into the fight during the last war right after the Reprisal had been commissioned. But now the years of war had made him weary of it.

On Memorial Day, the Brason's used the Two Star Ranch as the setting of their annual picnic. Ramona provided the location, but Shenan and Emily took care of everything else. As always a good share of the Brason family were there. Sheffield and Craig were missing as were a few others. Everyone made such a fuss over Little Geannie as everyone had to hold her as she was passed around from one aunt or cousin to another.

The next morning, which was Sunday, Ramona said goodbye to the girls as they dropped her off at the airport in Roanoke for her flight to Washington. At the Washington National Airport she boarded a TWA L-749 Constellation for the transatlantic flight to London. At the end of her long journey Sheffield, who had arrived in Naples on Saturday, met her at the airport in Naples on Monday, the 1st of June.

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The Salem didn't actually sail for the Mediterranean until April 17th. On arrival she became the flagship of Vice Admiral John H. Cassady who was then the commander of the Sixth fleet.

The HMS Eagle was in the Mediterranean at the time participating in exercises.

The Arromanches had just returned to Toulon from French Indochina at that time.

René Pleve was the French Minister of Defense at the time and the French Resistance Medal was an actual medal for those who participated in the French Resistance during World War 2.

Mace's flagship, the USS Long Island Sound is fictional.