

Chapter XII Among Angels

June 22, 1957 – October 16, 1957

As nice as the trip was, it was just as nice to be home. It was certainly a vacation to remember; the highlight naturally was Takara's wedding. Now that they were home, there was still a little more than two weeks left of June, with the 4th of July looming just around the corner. After getting unpacked and settled, the next day they attended church and spent the next week unwinding.

Sheffield and Ramona took Ellen up to the cabin for the Austin/Brason 4th of July celebration. Craig and Edith, being from both families were there, but Norma and Wade celebrated with the Roawns and Janet with the Furnesses.

With the trip over and the 4th of July behind them, summertime was filled with taking care of things around the ranch and Ramona's business. The big event of the summer was something that Craig had been talking about for some time and now it was being advertised in the newspaper, on television, on the radio, and on billboards and posters all over. It certainly had Sheffield's attention. So what was all of the excitement about? It was a two day air show at Woodrum field featuring the Navy's Blue Angels on the 27th and 28th of July.

Since the Blue Angels had been formed in 1946, Sheffield had never seen them perform. During that time they had flown the Grumman F6F Hellcat, F8F Bearcat, F9F-6 Panther and F9F-8 Cougar. Part way through the 1957 season, they transitioned to the supersonic F11F Tiger, also a Grumman aircraft.

Sheffield looked forward to the air show with eagerness. He even signed up to put his Staggerwing on display. Then a day or two after the 4th of July he received a letter in the mail from the Blue Angles Flight Demonstration Team Public Affairs Officer addressed to Vice Admiral Sheffield Brason U.S.N (Retired).

Ramona excitedly waited for him to open it as if she knew what it was all about. She anxiously waited while he carefully opened the envelope.

"What does it say?" She beamed.

Sheffield put on his glasses and began reading, "Dear Admiral Brason.

"On behalf of the Blue Angles Flight Demonstration Team, I am pleased to inform you that you have been selected for a promotional demonstration flight with the Blue Angels."

Sheffield paused and looked at Ramona in disbelief. Her smile was even broader. "Go on. What else does it say?"

"Your name was one of two selected from applications submitted to our Public Affairs office by the Roanoke Air Show Organizing Committee."

Sheffield stopped again and said, "I don't recall submitting an application for anything."

"Go on." Ramona encouraged him.

“Typically these flights are reserved for members of the press to promote the appearance of the Blue Angels to the local community. You were selected because of your long career as naval aviator in both pioneering and promoting Naval Aviation.”

Again Sheffield stopped reading. “Did you have something to do with this?” he asked.

“No. But Craig did. He told me sometime back that he had submitted an application on your behalf. Does it say anything else?”

“Yes. It goes on to say, Please complete the enclosed acceptance and waiver forms and return them to the Public Affairs office immediately. The flight will take place one week prior to the air show on twenty July, nineteen fifty seven. Report at the administration office at the Roanoke Regional airport at oh nine hundred for the preflight briefing.

“I look forward to meeting you again and flying with you. Sincerely Lieutenant Commander Wilbur Downs, United States Navy. Blue Angles Flight Demonstration Team Public Affairs Officer.

“Meet me again? Downs? Downs? That name doesn't ring a bell.”

“Evidently, he has met you before.” Ramona reasoned. “Isn't that exciting? You get to fly with the Blue Angels.”

“I'd say. I've never even dreamed of doing such a thing.”

“Maybe he'll let you take the controls.”

“In a jet? Are you kidding? I've never flown a jet before, let alone rode in one.”

“Oh I'm so excited for you.” Ramona said as she threw her arms around him and held him close. “Aren't you excited?”

“Yeah sure. I'm more stunned right now. It hasn't sunk in yet. I'll have to give Craig a call when he gets home from work and thank him.”

By the time he placed that phone call, the shock had worn off and as Sheffield realized what he had the opportunity to do, the excitement set in. For the next two weeks that was all he could talk about. He took the Staggerwing up several times and put it through the maneuvers that he envisioned that would be part of the flight.

The day of the flight arrived and Sheffield, Ramona, and Craig arrived at the airport ahead of time. He checked in with the administration office and they were escorted into a conference room. A few minutes later they were joined by a person they recognized as Bartholomew Wilson, the anchor from WSLN Channel 10 News. He was accompanied by two camera men.

Bart introduced himself, “Hi, I'm Bart Wilson from Channel Ten News.”

Before Sheffield could respond, Bart continued, “If it isn't Admiral Braosn, Roanoke's own war hero. I'm honored to meet you. Are you here for the flight demo too?”

“Yes. I am.

“Oh this is going to be good. Do you mind we use you in the promotion that we put together?”

“I suppose that would be alright. I have been promoting naval aviation all along anyway.”

“I read both of your books when they first came out. I'd say that you have been in the forefront alright.

“And who is this you have with you?”

“Oh, pardon me. This is my wife Ramona and my son Craig.”

Bart exchanged greetings with Ramona and Craig and introduced his cameramen.

The door opened again and in walked a man dressed in a Blue Angels flight uniform. The bronze oak leaf on his collar identified him as a lieutenant commander.

Everyone stood up to greet him.

He walked right up Sheffield and saluted. “Admiral Barson, sir.” he said. Sheffield returned the salute, even though he wasn't in uniform. “I am Lieutenant Commander Wilbur Downs. It's good to see you again sir.”

“Pardon me Commander.” Sheffield said rather embarrassed. “I'm sorry, but I don't believe I know you.”

“I'm not surprised that you don't remember me. When we first met, I was a lieutenant jg flying with VF One Six Two on the Reprisal off Korea. You came to our ready room on a few occasions for a pep talk. Each time you had us all introduce ourselves to you as you shook our hands.”

“I remember doing that, but there were so many of you from all of the squadrons, I couldn't remember who everyone was. It looks like you have done yourself well over the years.”

“Yes sir. I have. I look forward to flying with you sir.”

“Oh, the pleasure is mine.”

Commander Downs then turned his attention to Bart Wilson and exchanged introductions with him and then he greeted the rest gathered there in the conference room. He went onto explain purpose of his visit and what the two men could expect from their experience. His briefing included a short film.

“If either of you want to back out, now's your chance.”

Neither man wanted to.

“All right then if the two of you will follow me we will get you suited up.”

He led them to another room where an assortment of sizes of flight gear was hanging up. One of the cameramen filmed them as they put on their flight suits and helmets. As he put on his helmet, Sheffield said, “This is sure a lot different from the old leather helmet and goggles that we wore back when I was actively flying combat aircraft.”

"How long has that been, sir?" Commander Downs asked.

"Lets see. I was the Commander of the Enterprise Air Group until I became the Big E's executive officer. That would have been in February of nineteen forty."

"Nineteen forty? I was still in junior high." Commander Downs admitted.

"What were you flying, Wildcats?"

"No, the F4F's were just being introduced. We were still flying the old F3F biplanes at the time."

"That has been while back. I know your familiar with the F9F's. Even though there much more advanced, a lot is still the same."

"I used to watch from the flag bridge as they were catapulted off front of the carrier wishing that I could take one up."

"We'll we won't be catapulted, but today is your chance, Admiral. I have a feeling that your going to love it."

Ramona interrupted, "Ever since he got your letter, he has been going through all of the maneuvers he used to do as a fighter pilot in his Staggerwing."

"You'll find the maneuvers pretty much the same to, only faster. A lot faster."

Once they were suited up, he took them out onto the tamarack where the shiny blue Grumman F9F-8T Cougar was parked. The glossy Blue Angels blue was contrasted by the gold lettering and highlights. With its sweep wings, it looked graceful and fast. The only difference between it and the ones that had flown from the Reprisal on Sheffield's last cruise in the Mediterranean was that this aircraft was thirty four inches longer to accommodate the second seat. To compensate for the added weight, two of the four twenty millimeter cannon had been removed.

Bart was to go first. With the news cameras rolling he climbed into the cockpit and was strapped in. Sheffield watched while the jet took off and went through a few basic maneuvers and landed about fifteen minutes later.

Then it was Sheffield's turn. He climbed into the front seat of the cockpit and Commander Downs strapped him in. Being a trainer, the front seat was for the student pilot with the instructor seated in the rear. Both positions had a full set of controls, which could be over ridden from the back seat. Then unlike with Bart, he showed Sheffield the controls and took the time to explain everything. Being an experienced pilot, he knew and understood what everything was. There were just more controls and gauges than what he was accustomed to.

With Sheffield settled in, Commander Downs took the back seat. Once he was settled, the long double canopy slid forward over their heads and closed. "Alright Admiral. Would you you like to start'er up?"

Sheffield found the switch and flipped it and the jet engine roared to life. Commander Downs

throttled up and taxied out into position on the runway. A moment later Sheffield could hear the control tower say, "Blue Angel Number Seven, you're cleared for take off."

Commander Downs hit the throttle and released the breaks. The Cougar screamed down the runway in an exhilarating burst of speed and into the air. The jet made a steep ascent with the force of gravity pulling Sheffield back into his seat like he had never felt before. With a rate of climb of 5,750 feet per minute, in less than two minutes they were at ten thousand feet.

"Do you want to see how fast she'll go, Admiral?"

"You bet!"

"Alright. Hang on."

The sudden burst of speed again pulled Sheffield back into his seat as he watched the air speed indicator as Commander Downs pushed the jet fighter to its maximum speed of 647 miles per hour, just short of the speed of sound.



"Now how about we back off some and put'er through some maneuvers?"

"You bet."

"Alright hang on, sir."

Commander Downs put the jet into a steep high speed dive. Sheffield saw the ground approaching at breath taking speed, then the plane leveled out momentarily and then began a high speed climb. Sheffield looked up to see the earth directly below as they went on over the top and back down.

Just like the first time that he had taken Geannie up in the Jenny, he found himself letting out a "Wahoo!"

"You liked that did you, Admiral?"

"Oh yeah."

"Most people black out on that one. How'd you do?"

"I was with you the whole time, Commander."

"Good. Now how about some spins and rolls?"

For the next several minutes, they went through every maneuver in the book. As they came out of a roll, Commander Downs said, "I bet your old biplanes couldn't do that."

"You'd be surprised what we used to do in those things. I'd bet we could do most everything you can do with this, just not as fast. We could just about make them fly backwards."

I wouldn't want to try that in this as fast as it is. Just wait until next Saturday when they show up in the Tigers. Now they are fast."

“How fast?”

“Faster than the speed of sound. That how fast”

After a few more maneuvers, Commander Downs slowed down and Sheffield figured the ride was about over. After all, they had already been up longer than he had been with Bart. Sheffield was surprised when he heard him say, “How about it, Admiral, would you like to take the controls?”

“Are you sure?”

“Sure, you're an experienced pilot. You can't get us into to much trouble. I can always take over if I need to.”

Sheffield took it at a slower pace where he was comfortable and went through several maneuvers of his own. The more comfortable he got with the plane, he began pushing up the speed.

Finally, Commander Downs said, “Have you had enough? Should we bring'er in?”

“Aw, do we have to? I suppose we'd better. She's all yours, Commander.”

Sheffield relinquished the controls and Commander Downs brought the plane lower and circled the airport in a true carrier landing pattern and lined up with the runway and landed after better than a half and hour. Sheffield was laughing as they taxied over to where Ramona and Craig were waiting.

The plane came to a stop and the jet engine wound down. When the canopy slid back, Sheffield unbuckled the harness and stood up and climbed over the side and down the ladder. Once on the ground, Bart Wilson shoved a microphone in his face and said, “Tell us about it, Admiral. How was the ride.”

With the camera rolling, Sheffield answered, “Holy cow. What a ride. I wish we'd of had something like that back in my day. I have never had a ride like that before.” He went on to tell about taking the controls and talked about how the aircraft handled in comparison to what he was accustomed to.

Before turning off the camera, Bart had him say, “Every one be sure to come out on Saturday and Sunday to the show, it promises to be incredible.”

Sheffield turned to Commander Downs. “Thank you. That was incredible. If I were to die right now, I'd die one happy man.”

“It was my pleasure, sir. After all that you have done for the naval aviation community, you deserved that. That was our way of saying thank you to you.” With that he rendered the Admiral a salute.

Ramona was standing at his side, anxious to throw her arms around him. When she did, she gave him a big kiss.

“Some ride, huh?”

“The best. My old Staggerwing will never seem the same again.”

They went went back inside and Sheffield put the helmet back on the shelf and slipped out of the flight suit and hung it back up. He said goodbye to Commander Downs and said, “If we ever cross paths

again, I'll be sure to remember you next time. Will you be here for the show?"

"Unfortunately no. I'll be doing this somewhere else. But I'll be sure to tell the guys about you."

On the way home, Sheffield couldn't stop talking about it. That evening on the six o'clock news on Channel 10, Bartholomew Wilson filed his report which featured Roanoke's local war hero flying with the Blue Angeles. Later that evening, a television commercial for the air show aired which featured stock footage of the Blue Angels in flight while the details were given. The commercial ended with Sheffield inviting every one to come to the air show. The next day at church, he told any one who asked all about it. It was as if he were still flying high.

On Thursday, Craig invited him to come out the airport to watch as the Blue Angels flew in. A crowd had gathered, including the local media, to watch them come in. The first plane on approach was the Blue Angel Number 8, a Douglas R5D, the equivalent of a DC-4 airliner. It carried all of the maintenance crews and ground personnel and all of their gear. It no sooner touched down, when the six F11F Tigers flew over low and in tight formation. After clearing the end of the runway they climbed as they banked away. After circling around, they broke formation in the classic carrier landing approach and came around and lined up with the runaway. Beginning with Blue Angel Number 1, the short nosed jet fighters landed in precise intervals. Once on the ground, the pilots approached the crowd to meet with the reporters and to shake hands with the onlookers. Sheffield wasn't too far from where Bart Wilson was standing. Bart motioned for Sheffield to come over and join him. He then introduced him to Commander Edwards B "Ed" Holley.

"So you are Admiral Barson. Commander Downs told us all about his time with you last Saturday. I hope you enjoyed the ride."

"Thank you Commander, I did. It was an experience of a lifetime."

"It was the least that we could do for you after all that you have done for naval aviation. Are you planning on attending the show?"

"I sure am, with my family."

"I'll arrange for you to have seats in the VIP section. I look forward to visiting with you further." Then he continued greeting the crowd.

Later that afternoon and all day on Friday the sound of jet engines could be heard all over the valley as the Blue Angels got a feel for the area and practiced their routines. On Friday afternoon, Sheffield's flew his Staggerwing to the airport to put it on display. When Craig got off work, he brought him home.

On Saturday Sheffield and Ramona accompanied by Craig and Edith, Norma and Wade, and Janet and Jerry got to the airport before the gates opened to the public. The grandkids had been farmed out to their other grandparents as the day would have been too hot and too long for them. Once inside the gate, they looked at all of the planes on display. There were some private planes, but the more interesting ones

were the surplus war birds from the Second World War and Korea. There were also various military aircraft from the Navy, Marines, and Air Force on display as well, including one of the Air Force's giant B-52 Stratofortresses.



After looking everything over, they made their way to the VIP stand where, as promised, seats were waiting for them. The show opened with an army parachute team and was followed by numerous flybys and aerobatic routines. As thrilling as all of that was, the main event was the Blue Angels. They took to the air and dazzled and thrilled the crowd with their precision maneuvers of formations, rolls, loops and turns. They were all

a refinement of basic navy combat maneuvers. On a solo pass, Commander Holley in Blue Angel Number 1 broke the sound barrier, creating a thunderous sonic boom.

After the Blue Angels landed, the Brasons waited around for the crowd to thin out before leaving. While waiting they encountered Commander Holley and his pilots and as promised they visited for a few minutes. Before leaving, each one of them autographed their programs.

That was a major highlight of the summer, especially for Sheffield. It ranked right up there with the ship's reunion, the cruise, Takara's wedding and their vacation in Hawaii. The rest of the summer would be quite uneventful after all of that.

One Thursday in early August, Sheffield and Ramona went up to spend a weekend at the cabin while his mother went to stay with Walt and Sarah. The next day they were joined by the kids and grandkids for an overnigher. Janet brought Jerry, who was fast becoming a permanent fixture at family gatherings. Since returning from Takara's wedding in Hawaii, they picked up right where they left off. They had been going steady now for several months and it seemed to be just a matter of time before an engagement would be announced.

The grandkids were getting at the age where they could enjoy it more. Little Geannie was four and Geoffrey and Teresa were both two. Their little legs couldn't make it back to the lake, so they got to ride on the shoulders of their dad's. Later in the evening they all enjoyed sitting around the fire back at the cabin. After spending most of the day on Saturday, they came down off the mountain late that afternoon.

Later in August, Joseph flew up from Denison. The original plan was for him to come and get Anna and Paul at the end of the summer and take them home with him. But that all changed when Rhonda had

her baby. With her own children and now a new baby, she felt that Anna and Paul were too much for her to have to deal with. Joseph called Shenan and Emily and talked it over with them. It was decided to switch the arrangements around and they would stay in Roanoke during the school year and come home for a visit during the summer. Joseph wasn't particularly happy with the arrangement but he felt it was necessary to keep his wife happy. So on this trip, he brought the rest of their things and stayed with them for a couple of days before flying home.

On Labor Day, the entire Brason got together the Two Star Ranch for their semi annual picnic and reunion. At eighty four, Ellen wasn't sure how much longer that she would be around. After her bout with pneumonia, she never did fully recover and frequently required to be on oxygen. For that reason, she was thrilled to have all of the family together, except for the obvious prodigal.

Her fifteen grandchildren had multiplied to include twenty eight great grandchildren, including Wendalynn and Myrle's newest addition who was born earlier that year. Curtis and Georgia were expecting in November which would make it twenty nine. But wait, Norma and Wade announced that they were expecting in April to make it an even thirty. The news was particularly exciting to Sheffield and Ramona. Everyone was wondering if Janet and Jerry would make an announcement of their engagement. Not a word was said about anything of the sort. When asked and pressed for some sort of an indication, all they would say is that they had talked about the possibility someday, with the emphasis on possibility and someday.

School started two days later on the 4th of September. It was early that year because of the way the calendar worked out. Both Sheffield and Ramona returned to their classrooms and Janet began her senior year at Hollins. Sheffield spent the first two and half weeks of school conducting wrestling tryouts. At the end of that period, he and Coach Warfman posted the names of those who had been selected for what promised to be a pretty good team.

By the fourth week of September, the district had to cancel school due to the high rate of absenteeism. An outbreak of the Asian flu had made its way to the United States during the summer and once school started, it began to spread quickly. Infection rates were highest among school children, young adults, pregnant women, and the elderly.

Fortunately, Little Geannie, Geoffrey, and Teresa were not in school and were not infected. On the other hand Norma being pregnant was at risk, but it was Janet and Ellen who came down with it. Janet came home for Ramona to care of her, along with Ellen. For the duration, the grandkids could not come over.

The pandemic was a major news story at the time as it spread across the country. According to the news reports it had originated in China and had spread throughout Asia. It had most likely been brought to the United States by serviceman returning from Korea and Japan.

This wasn't the only major story in the news. The Soviet Union had launched Sputnik into earth orbit on October 4th. President Eisenhower referred to it as the "Sputnik Crisis" although Sputnik was itself harmless. However, the fact that the Soviets had developed the capability to launch a satellite into orbit, demonstrated the fact that had the capability of delivering long range nuclear weapons to the United States by way of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The news was unsettling indeed as the United States was still weeks away from the pending launch of the Vanguard satellite. Of more concern, at least to those affected by it, was flu pandemic. This outbreak on the whole a much milder illness than that of 1918, which nearly claimed Geannie's life at age twenty. The symptoms, like most strains of influenza, included fever, body aches, chills, cough, weakness, and loss of appetite.

Janet became quite ill and was confined to bed. But for Ellen, already weakened by pneumonia, it was particularly bad and she eventually had to be hospitalized. Sheffield gave them both blessings as he did many in the branch who had come down with it, one being Dallas McIntosh. Because of the outbreak, the weekday meetings were canceled as were Priesthood meeting and Sunday School on Sunday. Only Sacrament meeting was held and those who were ill were encouraged to stay home.

After three weeks, Janet showed signs of improvement, although she had lost a lot of weight and was quite weak. Ellen too lost more weight than she could afford to lose in order for her body to fight off the infection, despite the medication that she was on.

By the middle of October, her prognosis looked grave and time was short. Ellen's doctor summoned Sheffield and Ramona, Shenan and Emily, and Walt and Sarah to come to say their goodbyes. The rest of the family were kept away to avoid the risk of becoming infected. With her three sons and their wives gathered around, Ellen was nearly too weak to tell them goodbye. It was difficult enough as it were because of the oxygen mask.

She was satisfied to see them all one last time and closed her eyes. Her vital signs immediately began to falter. She opened her eyes one last time and attempted to sit up, with her arms outstretched as if reaching for someone. She closed her eyes again and settled back into her bed and she was gone.

Her sons stood there in silence, clinging to their wives for comfort. After a moment, Ramona stepped out of the room and summoned a nurse. The nurse came in briefly and then left to find the doctor.

Momentarily Dr. Mendon came into the room and declared the obvious. "I'm so sorry for your loss." he said. "We did everything we could for her. Its just that her age and the lingering complications of pneumonia were just more than she could fight off. This seems to be taking a particularly heavy toll on the aged." he explained.

He visited with the family for a moment and asked where they wanted her body to be taken. They

quickly agreed on the mortuary that had taken care of their father. With nothing more for them to do at the hospital, they all gathered at Walt's home to decide what to about a funeral. Being her Branch President and her ecclesiastical leader, the responsibility fell to Sheffield.

"I haven't had to conduct funeral yet." Sheffield said a bit overwhelmed. "I've officiated at several marriages because for so many a trip out west is out of the question, but this will be my first funeral. I need your advice, Walt. You've done a lot of funerals in the past."

"First, lets just settle on what we want for the service." Walt said. "Once it all comes together, conducting the service won't be much different from conducting any other meeting."

For the next little while they talked and things fell into place rather quickly. For starters, they deiced to have her funeral on Saturday the 19th, in just four days.

Three of her four siblings had proceeded her in death, only her next older sister was still living. Most of her nieces and nephews were concentrated in the area around Harrisonburg, with a few scattered around the state. Shenan took the responsibility to contact the extended family.

Next, they decided on the pall bearers. That was easy, there were six grandsons; Shenan's sons Danny, Joe, and Delbert, Walt's sons Tim and Curtis, and Sheffield's son Craig. Ramona took on the assignment to come up with the music. Shenan offered to give the life sketch. Since Sheffield would give the concluding remarks as the Branch President, that left Walt to be the main speaker.

"See now, little brother. "Walt said when they were finished. "That wasn't so hard was it?"

"Have we left anything out?" Sheffield worried.

"The Relief Society will take care of the luncheon after the service." Ramona added.

"Oh yeah." Sheffield added. "I need to call Sister Gordon."

"Tell Freda that I'd be happy to help her dress the body." Ramona offered.

"Me too." Sarah added, leaving Emily off the hook from having to do something that she wasn't comfortable with.

Once they had the preliminaries worked out, Walt called the mortuary. They already had picked the body from the hospital. Walt made an appointment for them to meet with the funeral director the next morning.

With nothing more to do, they went there separate ways. When Sheffield and Ramona got home, they let the kids know that Grandma Brason had passed away. It was sad news for them since she was the only grandmother they really ever had.

The next morning, they all went to funeral home and met with the director to work out the arrangements. The service had come together, including the music and prayers. The service would be held at eleven o'clock on Saturday at the Grandin Chapel. Naturally she would be laid to rest next to Emmett.

With the help of the funeral director her obituary was prepared. After the meeting, they were shown a selection of caskets and picked one out.

Finally, they were asked if they would like to see their mother. They were taken to the room where she was laid out on a gurney, covered with a clean white sheet. The mortician pulled the sheet back uncovering her down to her shoulders. They all gathered around, except for Emily who held back, content to observe over Shenan's shoulder.

Over the next two or three days, everything fell into place for the funeral. The obituary appeared in the newspaper. Those who had a part in the service spent time preparing, whether it was speaking or a musical performance. Ramona had quickly pulled the music together from within the family.

An atmosphere of sadness permeated through the entire Brason family as they grieved the loss of their mother and grandmother. There was an outpouring of love and support from both the Salem and Roanoke Branches. All three families were inundated with food and complete meals. No one had to worry about preparing any meals, but what to do with all of it, as there was more than could be used. As for Sheffield, he saw to it that what they couldn't use went to families in his branch who were really struggling.

On Friday night, there was a viewing at the funeral home. The three sons stood at the head of the open casket as a procession of well wishers passed by. Many of them were their friends from the Methodist Church and neighbors from the old neighborhood. Ellen looked good as she laid in state. Her white hair and her makeup had been fixed up the way that she did them. Her face looked rather gaunt from having been ill and the weight that she lost, causing her eyes to be sunken.

As people passed by, they offered their condolences and visited briefly with the Brason brothers. Scattered about were the daughters in law and the grandchildren as they visited with people. A few of the cousins from Harrisburg had come to pay their respects. Others would make the trip down the next day.

By Saturday, Janet was feeling enough better and was over the worst of it and she too was able to attend the funeral. The scene in the Relief Society room was much like the evening before at the funeral home. This time there were a lot more out of town relatives on the Sheffield side as well as some extended family from the Brason side. Aunt Winnie, who was two years older than Ellen and the only surviving sibling, came down from Harrisonburg with one of her sons and his wife.

Just prior to the beginning of the service, the family gathered around for the tearful moment of the closing of the casket and the family prayer which was offered by Wade. The sons, arm in arm with their wives followed the casket, which was flanked by the grandsons serving as pall bearers, into the chapel. The children and grandchildren and the extended family followed behind them.

The chapel was filled to overflowing with members of both branches as well as many of their friends from the Methodist Church, neighbors and other friends and acquaintances. The grandsons sat on the front

row, directly in front of flower covered casket, while the sons and their wives took their seats on the stand, since they would all be participating in the service in one way or another. Seated behind them were Sheffield's counselors in the branch presidency and the district and mission presidents.

Sheffield was nervous and he approached the pulpit to conduct the service. He took a deep breath and began, "We are gathered today to pay tribute to the life of Ellen Sheffield Brason, born April thirteenth, eighteen seventy three in Harrisonburg, Virginia to Samuel and Mary Ann Bringham Sheffield. She passed away at the Lewis-Gale Hospital in Roanoke, Virginia on Wednesday October sixteenth, nineteen fifty seven at the age of eighty four. These services will go as follows..."

The opening prayer was given by Emmaline's husband, Willie Casper. Next Shenan, who unlike his brothers shied away from public speaking, did a nice job of presenting the life sketch. He was followed by the three daughters in law, Emily, Sarah, and Ramona with a heart felt rendition of "Abide With Me", accompanied by Norma.

Walt, in his gifted way, talked of the life's lessons that he and his brothers had learned from their mother. He told of her challenge of trying to teach three rambunctious little boys how to sit still in church, after all the minister's family had to set the proper example. He described how she would sit with them on the sofa and practice sitting still, with their arms folded.

Ellen and Emmett were as near of perfect example of how to get along in a marriage as could be found anywhere. He remembered hearing them raising their voices to each other only once, and that was over a grease fire on the kitchen stove.

"All of those years that Dad was a minister," he said, "he was in the forefront of serving his congregation. I tried to emulate him when I took his place and which Sheffield does do admirably as the branch president. But it was our mother's quiet and unreorganized service behind the scenes that had the greater influence on us. It was through her that we learned to truly serve others."

By the time he was done, hopefully the lessons that they had learned from her resonated in the grandchildren as the very things that he and his brothers had tried to teach them. Evidently they had in all but the one who wasn't there, for all but that one, who wasn't mentioned by name, had lived their lives in such away that their grandmother was proud of them. Everyone knew that he was referring to Ruth Ann.

There was another musical number by the granddaughters, Wendalynn, Emmaline, Sylvia, and Janet, who were also accompanied by Norma. Then Sheffield returned to the pulpit and picked up where Walt had left off. Leaving the Methodist Church and joining the Mormon Church was not as difficult as it may have seemed for them, for she and Emmett recognized it's truthfulness when they were touched by the Holy Ghost. They believed him and Ramona when they told of how Geannie had come to them to prepare them for what they were about stumble across, the very thing that Geannie had been searching for after

loosing Charles Emmett.

He went on to teach the principles of life after death and the spirit world and the resurrection. "Our mother has passed through the veil and has rejoined her husband, her parents, siblings, and other loved ones who had preceded her. I am certain that there was great rejoicing at that reunion. She and they are no doubt with us here today. Whether you sense their presence or not, we are among angels." He went on to close with his testimony and the benediction was offered by Sylvia's husband, Scott Rowan.

The funeral procession made the drive to the cemetery and again Sheffield conducted the graveside service and spoke further of the resurrection. Then the dedication of the grave was offered by Wedalynn's husband, Myrle Karns.

The family and extended family returned to the church for the luncheon hosted by the Salem Branch Relief Society. The somberness of the service had given way to the air of a family reunion. The extended family had been puzzled and a little upset by their mass exodus from the Methodist Church. This was their first real exposure to the beliefs of the Latter-day Saints that the entire family had embraced. Most of them went away with a better understanding and a more favorable attitude.

As everyone went their own ways, Sheffield and Ramona returned to a house that was empty once again, except for just the two of them. It had been nice to have her live with them during the very latter end of her life. They were sure to miss the meals with her and the evening conversations and just having her there.

* * * * *

The 1957 Blue Angels team was lead by Commander Edward B. "Ed" Holley and transitioned from the F9F-8 Cougar to the F11F Tiger after the season began. They did retain the two seat F9F-8T for public relation flight demonstrations, such as the one Sheffield took with Lieutenant Commander Wilbur Downs. Commander Downs and newsman Bartholomew Wilson are fictional characters. The Roanoke air show is also a fictional event.

The 1957 "Asian Flu" was a category 2 flu pandemic outbreak of avian influenza that originated in China in early 1956 lasting until 1958. It originated from mutation in wild ducks combining with a pre-existing human strain. The virus was first identified in Guizhou. It spread to Shanghai in February 1957, reached Hong Kong by April, and US by June.

The virus came to the US quietly, with a series of small outbreaks over the summer of 1957. When US children went back to school in the fall, they spread the disease in classrooms and brought it home to their families. Infection rates were highest among school children, young adults, and pregnant women in October 1957.

Most influenza-and pneumonia-related deaths occurred between September 1957 and March 1958. The death toll in the US was approximately 69,800. The elderly were particularly vulnerable. Estimates of worldwide deaths vary widely depending on source, ranging from 1 million to 4 million.