

Chapter XLI

Expect the Unexpected

June 22, 1966 – August 19, 1966

One of the most faithful Elders to served in the Hawaii Mission had to have been Elder Ralph Wren. His dedication and commitment, even in the face of personal tragedy were commendable. After learning of the death of his father, he chose to stay and soldier on. Even when it came time to to go home, he willingly stayed an extra month just to fulfill Sheffield's strategy to keep an area open. On Wednesday the 22nd of June, they saw him off, along with Elder John Ford and Elder and Sister Newton.

In their place, they welcomed two new lady missionaries and a senior couple. The sister missionaries were an unexpected answer to their prayers, otherwise an area would have to have been closed. Instead, they replaced the Elders who had been in Honaunau.

New to the mission home were Elder Ethan Cunningham as an assistant and Elder Aaron Baker who replaced Elder Coggins as the financial secretary. In all, it was an average transfer, affecting about a quarter of the missionaries, including all of the senior couples, who were rotated.

The rest of the week was taken up with conferences in the Honolulu, Pearl Harbor, and Oahu Zones. On Saturday, they attended the temple before the conference and that night they stayed with the Morleys and attended church on Sunday.

As Sheffield and Ramona sat on the stand during sacrament meeting, the thought occurred to Ramona that it had been one year ago the next day since she had been setting in that same seat. She looked around nervously to make sure that there weren't any bees that would be attracted to the gardenia that she wore in her hair. Then she buttoned the top button of her blouse, just in case. The scar from the tracheotomy had healed, leaving a thin line across her throat but her voice never was the same after that. The crackling, smoker's voice eventually went away and left her voice deeper and breathy and didn't sound the same at all. The real lasting damage was her ability to sing. Now, a year later, she could not produce the clear, smooth notes that once came so naturally. Now she sang haltingly and off key. The swelling had literally crushed her vocal cords causing permanent damage. Now rather than sing out, she kept the volume down when she attempted to sing.

The entire next week was free from travel, but not necessarily free from the unexpected things that come up. All of Sheffield's experience in the military taught him to expect the unexpected. On Wednesday he got a call from Elder Perkins and Elder Williams over in Kailua. They were in jail. Sheffield and Ramona drove over to bail them out. They found the police station and went in to find out what the trouble was. He identified himself and asked to speak with the Police Chief.

The Chief said, "We received a report from a witness that two men dressed in white shirts and ties were burglarizing a home. A short time later two men matching the description were picked up just two

streets over. The arresting officer said that they appeared to casing the neighborhood.”

“I assure you that the two men you have had absolutely nothing to do with it.” Sheffield said authoritatively. Then he asked, “How much is their bail?”

“One hundred dollars, each.”

“Will you accept a check.”

“Certainly.”

Sheffield wrote out a mission check for two hundred dollars and handed it over.

“Just one moment, sir.” The Chief said. “And I'll have someone bring them out.”

A few minutes later, the Elders came through the door from the cell block. They looked shaken and scared, but were alright.

“You're free to go.” the Chief said, “But don't leave the area. As soon as the prosecutor can arrange it, you'll be arraigned before the judge.”

“I'll see to it that they are there.” Sheffield concluded before leaving with the missionaries.

Once they got in the car, Elder Perkins protested, “We didn't do it.”

“We know. I'm sure there was some sort of a mix up. It will work out, I promise. But,” he cautioned, “in the meantime just lay low because they'll be watching you. When you go to your appointments take a Seventy, a stake missionary, or someone with you.”

Sheffield and Ramona took the back to their apartment and dropped them off.

On Friday, the 1st of July, Sheffield and Ramona observed their second anniversary in the mission, with one year remaining. The second year seemed to have gone faster than the first. That same day Sheffield went with Elder Perkins and Elder Williams as they went before the judge. He informed them of their right to an attorney and asked how they plead.

“Not guilty, Your Honor.” they each said.

The judge turned to Sheffield and said, “I'm releasing them into your care, Mister Brason. You will be notified of the trial date.”

After they left the arraignment, Sheffield decided to suspend all missionary activity in Kailua and took them back to the mission home with him. He put them to work assisting the office staff in whatever needed to be done.

Elder Perkins was confident that they would be cleared, but Elder Williams was sure that he was going to jail for something he didn't do. The two only left the mission home to go to church on Sunday.

Monday was the 4th of July, so there was no word from the prosecutor's office. Sheffield was supposed to leave on Wednesday for the off island zone conferences and wasn't quite sure what to do. In the end he decided that he needed to go, but could always come back if he were needed. In the meantime,

an attorney who was a member of the Honolulu Stake stepped forward to take their case. He assured Sheffield that he would handle anything that came up while he was off the island.

On Wednesday, Sheffield, Ramona, Elder Bowers and Elder Cunningham flew to Kauai as planned. Thursday found them in Maui, in Hilo on Friday, and in Kona on Saturday. It was during his interviews with the missionaries in the Kona District that Sheffield encountered another of those unexpected circumstances that he had learned to expect. He had also learned that sometimes you have to deal with more than one at a time

In his interview with Elder Hamblin, he asked how he was doing after his leg had healed.

“My leg is doing fine, President.” then he added with discouragement in his voice, “But I’m not. I wonder if maybe I should go home.”

“Oh, and why’s that Elder. You’ve been doing such a good job.”

“Apparently not. I’ve been out for six months now and I’m not having the spiritual experiences that I should be having.”

“What do you mean? Look at how you were able to reach Brother and Sister Thomas.”

“I’ve only been with Elder Clinton for a couple of weeks now, but according to him, I should be having visions and revelations like he does. He says that its because I’m not worthy. He says that because I’ve been a member of the Church all of my life that I just take it for granted and don’t really have a testimony.”

“Oh really? And just what kind of visions and revelations has he claimed to have had?”

“He says that he often has visitations from the spirit world and sees visions. He says that Joseph Smith came to him and foreordained him to be the prophet at the time of the second coming.”

“Oh, I see. What else can you tell me?”

“He seems to have a greater understanding of doctrine and the mysteries than I ever will. Some of the things he brings up in discussions with our investigators I’ve never heard before, and I attended four years of seminary.”

“Can you give me an example?” Sheffield asked.

“Well, for one thing, he said that Adam and Eve were immortal beings who came from another planet rather than having been created by God. And another thing, he doesn’t think some of the mission rules apply to him.”

“I see. Thank you for telling this Elder Hamblin. I’ll have a talk with him. Let me assure you, you’re doing just fine. Now lets talk about you.”

After visiting with Elder Hamblin and reassuring him, he interviewed Elder Clinton, who seemed to have a lot going for him. He had been out just over a year and had just been moved up to district leader. He

was from Los Angeles and had only been a member of the church for a couple of years before coming on his mission.

Being tipped off by his companion, Sheffield asked some questions that got him to open up to what he had been delving into, which was completely out of harmony with the way things were.

In protest he said, "But President, you're the one always telling us to follow the Spirit and not recite the discussions word for word."

"What I mean by that is when the Spirit dictates, use other words to present the concept so the person your teaching can understand it, not throw in things that don't belong there. Certainly not things that aren't true. I'm in a dilemma here, Elder. On one hand I have a notion to send you home, but on the other hand you've been a good missionary and deserve a chance repent and come back into harmony with the order of things. You tell me, what do you think I should do?"

"To be honest with you, President. I don't recognize your authority. You see, I have been given a higher calling with greater authority than you can possibly imagine."

"Well, that answers my question."

Sheffield went to the door and opened it and summoned the zone leaders into the room. When they entered and had closed the door, he said, "Elders, I need you to accompany Elder Clinton to their apartment so he can gather his things. Hes going home."

After the three missionaries left the office, he called Elder Fullmer, the travel coordinator to schedule a flight back to Los Angeles for Elder Clinton the first thing the next day. Next he called President Kaaola and asked him to fill in for him that evening at the district conference. Finally, he called Ramona and the assistants in and told them to carry on with the conferences in his absence, that he'd be back the next morning for the rest of the district conference. The only explanation he gave was that Elder Clinton was going home. While waiting for Elder Clinton to return with the zone leaders, he conducted the rest of his interviews.

When they returned, he made a quick call to the mission home and asked that Brother Hanami meet him at the airport in an hour and half. He had the zone leaders take him and Elder Clinton to the airport. Before leaving, he instructed them to take care of Elder Hamblin.

On the flight back to Honolulu Sheffield a better opportunity to find out what was going on with Elder Clinton. He was more than happy to tell Sheffield all about the new found knowledge and authority that he had acquired over the the past two months. In such a short time, he had slipped a long ways into apostasy. Nothing Sheffield said could convince him of the error of his ways.

When they landed at Honolulu, Roy was waiting for them. Without any questions or comments he drove them back to the mission home. When they arrived, he assigned Elder Perkins and Elder Williams,

who were still hanging around the mission home with not much to do, to keep an eye on him.

Sheffield secluded himself in his office and first called the missionary department. He next called Elder Clinton's Stake President in Los Angeles to tell him what was going on and to expect Elder Clinton's return the next day. While he was in the process of solving problems on the telephone, he called to check on the pending case against Elder Perkins and Elder Williams. There was still no word.

Next he called Elder Fullmer and his companion Elder Baker into his office. "Elder Fullmer, I need you to pack your things, you're coming with me back to Kona tomorrow. I'm assigning you to take Elder Clinton's place as the district leader in Kealahou." "Kealahou."

"Alright." was all the dutiful missionary said.

Then Sheffield turned to Elder Baker. "I know that you're new to the mission home and have barely learned the finances and haven't had much of a chance to be cross trained on the travel end of things yet."

"Not really." was all he could say.

"Well don't worry about it. Sister Brason can train you when she gets back. I'll need you to do double duty until we can replace Elder Fullmer."

By then it was dinner time. Having been apprised that President Brason and Elder Clinton were flying back to Honolulu, Sister `Auli`i planned on two more for dinner. That evening, Sheffield called and talked to Ramona at the Kaaola's and filled her in on what he could. She told him that the conference went on according to schedule. There was a lot of speculation as to their abrupt departure.

The next morning, Sheffield had Roy take him, Elder Fullmer, and Elder Clinton back to the airport. After seeing Elder Clinton off, he flew back to Kona with Elder Fullmer. When they landed, they were taken to the chapel in time for the general session of the district conference.

After the meetings, Elder Fullmer went to Kealahou with Elder Hamblin. Sheffield and Ramona had dinner with the Kaaola's and then flew back to Honolulu with Elder Bowers and Elder Cunningham. This trip had certainly been more than Sheffield had expected.

When they returned from the Kona District Conference, he could tell that Elder Perkins and Elder Williams were getting bored because there wasn't enough for them to do. They ended up spending a lot of time studying in the mission library.

Then on Tuesday morning, thirteen days after they were arrested, Sheffield received a telephone call from the police chief in Kailua wanting to know the whereabouts of Elder Perkins and Elder Williams the previous afternoon, because there had been another burglary. Once again witnesses said the suspects were wearing white shirts and ties. Sheffield assured them that they had been at the mission home the whole time.

The Chief said that it was becoming apparent that the missionaries had been arrested as a result of

mistaken identity, but to keep them where they were until the case was solved. That was good news for the Elders.

Then that afternoon, the Chief called back to say that the actual burglars had been taken into custody and the stolen goods had been recovered. He said that all charges against the Elders had been dropped, that the bail money would be refunded and that they were free to return to Kailua and resume their activities. They returned that very afternoon.

With those two unexpected matters resolved, Mililani returned to a normal routine, with a bit of diversion at the end of the week. On Friday, Manti and Iolani came down from Laie to spend the evening. The two couples dined out and then went to the Hawaii Theater to see "Paradise Hawaiian Style" which had finally been released to theaters.

They watched and laughed as they followed the antics of Rick Richards, played by Elvis Presley, as he sang his way deeper and deeper into trouble as he got involved with a number of beautiful women. He made deals with each to drum up business for his flying service by saying, "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine."

There was some incredible scenery as he flew around the islands. Much the same scenery that Sheffield and Ramona had seen as they flew around the islands. Some of the beautiful scenery included girls in bikinis. For that reason, it wouldn't be appropriate for the missionaries to see.

Finally, in the last ten minutes they got to see what they went for, the scenes shot at the Polynesian Cultural Center. It began with Elvis singing "The Drums of the Islands" as he floated the lagoon in a canoe past the dancers of the various Polynesian villages. At the end of the song, he got off and went into the dining hall where his trouble with his cohorts all came to a head.

As Rick took Judy, played by Suzanna Leigh, to the buffet, Sheffield and Ramona could be seen clearly a few rows of tables over. Manti and Iolani had their backs to the camera. Then when little Jan Kohona, played by Donna Butterfield, sang her way down the isle right behind where Ramona and Sheffield were sitting, they again flashed across the screen. By the way, in the end, Rick not only solved his problem with the women, but he got to keep his pilot's license.

On the following Monday, which happened to be the 18th, Sheffield had the rare opportunity to watch live on the television as Gemini X blasted off on its mission into space. The launch was preceded by the successful launch of the Agena target Vehicle. Five and half hours into the flight the two astronauts maneuvered their spacecraft into position and docked with the Agena. Then using the Agena's engine, they rocketed to a record orbit of 458 miles above the earth. The two spacecraft remained docked for thirty nine hours. During the mission, there was also two space walks. Unlike the recent disappointments, this mission was a near perfect success and lasted for just under three days.

Sheffield watched a report of the splash down on the ten o'clock news on Thursday after attending the Honolulu Zone conference. The rest of the week was spent in zone conferences, including spending all day Saturday in Laie.

On Tuesday afternoon the 26th of July, Mililani began to fill up with missionaries in transient. This proved to be a big transfer, involving a third of the mission. That evening after dinner, the three Elders and one Sister who were going home reported their missions. The reality of how long Sheffield and Ramona had been there hit home as two of the Elders going home had been among the very first new missionaries that they had welcomed to the mission shortly after they arrived themselves.

Sheffield's strategy of extending one missionary for one month each month had paid off, but the inevitable finally caught up with them. With three elders going home plus Elder Clinton who had to be sent home earlier and with only two new Elders coming out, someplace had to be closed. Sheffield thought long and hard about the decision, but the obvious choice was to close Kailua. Ever since Elder Perkins and Elder Williams had been wrongly arrested on burglary charges, the people in the area came to be suspicious of them and the area had faltered. Someday, after the area had rested for a while, he wanted to reopen the area, perhaps with lady missionaries.

In addition to the two new Elders, there was also a new Sister to take the place of the one who went home. The only change to the mission home was the addition of Elder Lowell Brower from Shelley, Idaho as the travel coordinator to fill the vacancy left by Elder Fullmer after his unexpected transfer.

The rest of the month of July was fairly routine. At the end of the last week, they flew to Lihue for the Kauai District Conference on the 30th and 31st. August, however, began a little out of the ordinary. Being in a popular vacation destination, they had their share of visits from friends and family. During the first week of August, Roger and Chantell Rowan spent a couple of days with Sheffield and Ramona. They took them around to some their favorite places, which always included a day trip to Laie. The kids always kept them up to date with the news from home, but the Rowans had some tidbits that hadn't been passed along to them. Roger and Chantell went about the remainder of their vacation, which they took in conjunction to their annual trip to Idaho to see her family.

The second week of August was taken up with zone conferences off the island and concluded with the Maui district conference.

Although the Hawaiian Islands are at the same latitude as the Northern Caribbean, Hawaii gets far fewer hurricanes and tropical storms. The waters of the Eastern Pacific are not as warm as the Caribbean and Western Atlantic at the same latitude. Therefore there isn't the same energy to produce the tropical depressions that cause such storms. Another factor is the fact that the upper atmosphere winds come from a different direction than the surface winds. The combination of the upper atmosphere and surface winds

tend to prevent tropical storms from developing. With that said, the Hawaiian Islands are not immune from hurricanes. There had been six tropical storms over the last fifteen years, which had high winds and produced a significant amount of rain, but not the destruction associated with Atlantic and Caribbean storms.

On August 7th, Tropical Storm Connie developed southwest of Baja Californian and moved west for three days before turning northwest into the Central Pacific. On the 13th it became a hurricane when its winds reached eighty five miles an hour.

Late on the 15th while four hundred miles southeast of Hilo, Hurricane Connie lost intensity and once again was classified as a tropical storm with winds clocked at forty five knots as it continued westward. The storm passed about one hundred twenty miles south of the southern tip of the island of Hawaii on the 17th, bringing heavy rain to the Big Island and Maui, without making landfall and degenerated into a tropical depression about two hundred seventy miles south of Oahu.

Around ten o'clock on the night of the 17th the telephone rang in Sheffield and Ramona's apartment. It was Elder Fagen, one of the zone leaders in Hilo, reporting that the Elders in Naalehu, at the southern tip of Hawaii, were unaccounted for. Elder Merrill Idler, who had just been transferred there, and Elder Jerald Bancroft were the missionaries assigned to Naalehu.

With the incident with Elder Mortensen and Elder Hamblin still fresh in his mind, Sheffield's initial reaction was, "They had probably stayed with someone rather than attempt to return home in the storm."

But then the feeling came over him that something was terribly wrong. After talking to Elder Fagen, he called Elliot Mahunau, the Branch President in Naalehu and asked him to check on them.

Naalehu was fairly isolated and the area they covered was quite spread out. Pahala, where the branch president lived, was thirteen miles northeast of Naalehu. He told Sheffield that he would call around and see if he could locate the missing Elders. He too thought that maybe they had stayed where they were rather than attempt to go back back to their apartment in the heavy rain.

That gave Sheffield some encouragement, but he couldn't shake the uneasy feeling that persisted. In their prayer before going to bed, Sheffield and Ramona asked a blessing on them in particular. Sheffield had a difficult time going to sleep as he worried about the two Elders. When he did get to sleep, it wasn't very sound.

Early the next morning he was awakened by the continuing uneasiness, so he got up to do some reading. A little before six o'clock the telephone rang. Anxious for word about the two Elders, he sprang to his feet and dashed to the telephone. It was President Mahunau.

"President Brason," he said, "After calling around last night and again this morning, we haven't been able to find any trace of them. But there was traffic accident last night on the Mamalahoa Highway a little northeast of Naalehu where the highway goes along the top of the cliff above Honuapo Bay. I don't know

any details, but I am trying to contact the Sheriff's Office to see what I can find out about it.”

Sheffield's heart sank when he mentioned a traffic accident. “Let me see how soon I can get there. Keep trying to see what you can find out.”

The storm had moved on during the night and the weather was clearing up. His first thought was to see if he could get the Cessna for the day, but the air service that chartered the plane wouldn't be open until eight.

By then Ramona came wandering out of the bedroom. Sheffield informed her that the Elders were still missing and the news of the accident. “You don't think that it was them, do you?”

“I'm afraid that it might be. No one knows where they are. I'm going to fly over there and see what I can do.”

“Let me get ready. I'm coming with you.”

While Ramona showered, Sheffield's called Hawaiian Airlines and was able to get two seats on the seven fifteen flight to Kona. Next he called Roy and asked if he could come in early and take them to the airport. Then he called Dick Kaaola and told him what was going on and asked him to meet them at the airport when their flight came in. Ramona was just getting out of the shower when he came in to tell her of the arrangements that he had made. “Lets pack an overnight bag, just in case.” he said.

It was a rush, but they got to the airport just in time for their flight. When they landed in Kona, Dick was there to meet them. He took them to his home where Sheffield called President Mahunau for an update.

“The news isn't good.” He said. “According to Sheriff's office, a semi had jackknifed, knocking a late model Chevy Nova through the guard rail and over the cliff.”

“A Chevy Nova, thats got to be them.” Sheffield said in anguish.

“I told them about the missing missionaries and that they drove a Nova. They're bringing in a team to try to get at the wreckage. The car is mostly submerged and held by the underwater rocks. They say thats the only thing that keep it from being washed out to sea.”

“We're at Dick Kaaola's right now. It will take us an hour and a half to get there. Where shall we meet you?”

“Do you know where the cliff is?”

“Yes, I've been by there and know right where it is.”

Dick wasn't able to go with them, but let them take his Suburban, the same one that he had let them use before. Without waiting around, they set out on the sixty mile drive. When they pulled up to the scene of the accident, Elliot Mahunau came over to meet them and took them to the deputy in charge of the investigation and introduced them.

“Oh yes, Mister Brason. Elliot tells me that you may be responsible for the vehicle and its

occupants.”

“Perhaps. We're missing two of our missionaries who happen to drive a Chevy Nova.”

“The car involved is a definitely a late model Chevy Nova, but we haven't got a license plate number to identify it yet. We've just sent two men over the side to repel down the face of the cliff. When they reach the bottom, we should be getting some information.”

As Sheffield and Ramona walked with the Deputy over to edge of the cliff where the car crashed through the guardrail and over the side, Sheffield said, “Have someone call the mission office and ask for Elder Bauer. He's the travel coordinator and has a record of all of the license plate numbers. Here's my card with the telephone number.” They peered over the side to the ocean two hundred sixty feet below. They could make out the trunk of a car as the water churned around the rocks that held it in place.

“What happened?” Sheffield asked.

“Last night around eight forty five, a semi jackknifed. As the trailer came around, it hit an oncoming car and knocked it over the side. It was raining heavily and the highway had good amount of water on it, making conditions slippery. We were able to clear away the semi last night, but we couldn't do anything about the car down there until it got light this morning. Fortunately the storm has cleared out so we could send some men down there.”

While the deputy radioed the dispatcher to call the mission home, a tow truck backed up against the side of the cliff and got into position to hoist up the wreck. The water below was too shallow and too rocky to reach by boat. The tow truck was the only way.

They could see the two men as they reached the bottom. They secured themselves with ropes and began making their way to the wrecked car. In a few minutes, they reached the car and one of them peered inside.

A moment later, the Deputy's walkie talkie cracked to life. “There are two bodies pinned inside.” The knot in the bottom of Sheffield's stomach tightened. “Both of them male.”

“Roger.” The Deputy replied. “Can you make out a license plate number?”

“Stand by.”

A moment later, “Hawaii two – baker – three – seven – zero – four.”

Ramona held on tightly to Sheffield's hand as it appeared that they had found the missing elders.

The men below signaled that they were ready for the tow truck to begin lowering the cable. The electric motor whirred eerily as the cable began descending down the side of the cliff. When it was about half way down, the dispatcher radioed the Deputy. “We reached the office and have that license number. It is Hawaii two – baker – three – seven – zero – four.”

Ramona looked at Sheffield with tears streaming down her cheeks. Sheffield just looked down at the

bottom of the cliff with a stone face, as if he had just received a battle casualty report. Only it was so much more. Most of the men who died aboard the ship, he didn't know. These two he knew intimately, especially Elder Idler. The thought crossed his mind, "How is his father going to react?"

The cable reached the bottom and one of the men retrieved the hook and took it over to the car. In a couple of minutes, they had it secured and radioed that they were ready.

Again the winch whirred. It groaned when the slack had been taken up and it strained against the weight of the car. Ever so slowly, it emerged from the water until the entire car could be seen. Carefully and slowly it inched its way up the sheer slope of the cliff. It seemed to take forever as Sheffield and Ramona stood there in silence, gripping tightly to one another's hand.

As it neared the top, the Deputy had them stand back out of the way. Eventually the rear of car appeared over the side of cliff. Two more cables from the tow truck's boom were attached. In a moment, the entire car was dangling in the air, suspended above the precipice. The truck moved forward until the car was above solid ground.

Then slowly, they began lowering it until it sat on the ground on all four tires. For the first time, Sheffield and Ramona could see the damage to the front of the car. They held back as the deputy approached the car and looked inside.

"Mister Brason, can you come and identify the bodies?"

Sheffield let go of Ramona's hand and stepped up the car. Ramona was right behind him. He bent down and looked inside. Seeing the bodies of the two elders was more difficult than all of the battle casualties he saw during the war. Slowly he raised his head and said, "The one behind the steering wheel is Elder Merrill Idler from Wendell, Idaho. The passenger is Elder Jerald Bancroft from Sandy, Utah."

"Do you have telephone numbers so their families can be contacted?"

"Actually, the Church will contact them." Sheffield said.

"We'll still need the families contact information so the bodies can be shipped home."

"I can provide that for you. So Whats next?"

"First we need to extricate them from the car. Then they'll be taken to the coroner in Hilo to determine the exact cause of death. Once that is done, they will be prepared to be sent to their families."

"Will you keep me informed each step of the way?"

"Certainly. Thanks for all of your help, Mister Brason."

"I wish I could do more. It looks like theres not much more I can do here. If you'll excuse me, I have to go make some telephone calls."

Sheffield turned to President Mahunau and asked, "Can you let me into the meetinghouse? I need to use your telephone and make some phone calls."

Sheffield and Ramona got back into the Suburban and followed President Mahunau into Naalehu. A profound sense of sadness had come over them at the deaths of two of their missionaries. Each of them were lost in their own thoughts and didn't say much on the way into town. A few minutes later, they pulled up in front of the church and got out and followed the branch president inside. He led them to his office and they waited while he unlocked the door.

“Feel free to use whatever you need. Just make sure things are locked up when you leave.”

“Thanks for all of your help, President. I'm sure there are other things that you need to be doing.”

“I'm glad to have helped. Just let me know if there is anything else I can do for you.”

Elliot left and Sheffield walked over to the desk and sat down. Ramona held back to give him some privacy.

“Come in a be with me sweetheart. I really need you right now.”

She pulled a chair around behind the desk and sat beside him as Sheffield picked up the telephone and dialed a number that he knew by heart, because he had dialed it many times over the last two years. The person who answered informed him that Elder Hinckley was out of town on an assignment.

Sheffield then dialed another number that he knew by heart, the number for the Missionary Department. He identified himself and explained the purpose of his call. A moment later he was speaking with Monty Haroldson.

Monty was very understanding and very helpful. He explained to Sheffield all of the information that he needed, such as the police report of the accident, the coroners report, and a form that Sheffield hoped that he would never have to fill out.

He went on to explain that when the bodies were ready to come home, that he would fly to Honolulu and take charge of them and escort them back to Salt Lake City and on to their families. As far as contacting the families with the news, a general authority, most likely one of the First Council of Seventy or an Assistant to the Twelve would call them. He asked Sheffield to hold off on calling them until the initial contact had been made.

By then, it was well past noon. Although they didn't have much of an appetite, they went to a little diner in town and got something to eat.

Their next stop was where the Elders had lived. When they arrived at the home of Brother and Sister David Hara, the older couple who they lived with, they had already heard the news. They took Sheffield and Ramona to the room the Elders shared so they could begin collecting their personal effects and packing them up so they could be sent home with the bodies. Once it was all loaded into the back of the Suburban, they began the drive back to Kona.

On the way, they finally found the words to express to each other how they how they were feeling.

They talked about the two missionaries and what they remembered about them and what they had accomplished while in the mission field. Of particular, they talked about Elder Idler's father and how much he had changed from the first time that they had met him and when he came to be baptized by his son. What a blessing that had been for him. Sheffield still worried about how he would take the news.

When they got back to Kona, it was late afternoon, which meant it was late evening in Idaho and Utah. Certainly their families had received the news by then. Sheffield decided to wait until in the morning before making the dreaded phone calls. For Sheffield, they would be by far much harder than any letter that he ever had to write to the families of the crewmen who had been killed in action while under his command. Sheffield and Ramona spent the evening talking to Dick and Connie about what had happened. Eventually they went off to bed, but not necessarily to sleep.

Early the next morning, he called Monty Haroldson in Salt Lake to verify that the families had been contacted. They had. Next Sheffield called the mission home and had Elder Stanley pull the files for Elder Idler and Elder Bancroft and asked for their home telephone numbers. He told Elder Stanley what had happened and asked him to leave the files on his desk for him and that they would be returning shortly.

Sheffield took a deep breath, and dialed the number for the Idler's in Wendall, Idaho. He found them to be holding up after receiving the news of the sudden death of their son. Sheffield got to talk to Harold who said that he was ever so grateful that they got to go see him only two months earlier and have the privilege of having Merrill perform his baptism. He said that his new found faith was helping him cope.

Next, Sheffield called the Bancrofts and talked to them. They expressed disbelief at what had happened. They said that they had just got his last letter only to receive the phone call a little later the same day. His father recalled telling him when he left that he would rather have him come home in a casket than in dishonor. He had no idea that would be the way it would be. Sheffield assured them that he had been an excellent missionary in the nine months that he had been in the mission and that he was going to make him a senior companion on the next transfer at the end of the month.

Sheffield felt that his words were inadequate to express to either family the profound sorrow that he and Ramona felt over the deaths of these two missionaries. His trite comments and words of comfort rang hollow in his own ears as he spoke to them. In both cases, the families were extremely grateful for his call and that it meant so much to them that he would reach out to them in their moment of grief.

After making the phone calls and having breakfast, Dick and Connie took them to the airport for their flight back to Honolulu. They were met at the airport by Brother Hanami who took them back to Mililani. Sheffield directed two of the office staff Elders to go unload the things that they had brought back and store in the garage until it could be sent home.

A glum atmosphere hung over Mililani which was always such a happy place. Word spread quickly

throughout the mission about the tragedy. It affected not only the missionaries, but all of the members of the church in the islands.

The first thing Sheffield did when he got back was to place a call to the Deputy in Hilo for an update on the case. He said that the missionaries had been cleared of any blame in the accident. The driver of the semi, who survived unhurt was cited for driving too fast for the conditions. The coroners report stated that Elder Idler had died instantly in the crash, but, Elder Bancroft had survived the initial crash, although he was badly injured. He died from drowning. The bodies were being prepared to be shipped home and were scheduled to be flown to Honolulu the next morning. Sheffield asked for a copy of all the documentation to be sent along with the bodies so he could give it to Monty Haroldson. Next Sheffield called Brother Haroldson with the information that he had so far. He said that he would be on the next flight to Honolulu.

Sheffield began filling out his own report. It reminded him of all of the casualty reports that had to fill out while he was the captain of the Reprisal. It never was a pleasant task, but this one was even more difficult for him. In most cases, he never personally knew those men, he knew these young men very well. He was about half way through his report when he was called to lunch.

During the afternoon, he finished his report before he needed to leave for the airport. He and Ramona went personally to meet Brother Haroldson. They found him to be as kind and sincere in person as he had been on the telephone. His sympathetic nature was well matched to the task that he had been assigned. They learned that this was one of his main responsibilities with the missionary department. Although it didn't happen often, he said that it did from time to time. He said that six weeks earlier he had a missionary in Central America who contacted a deadly virus.

Before taking him back to the mission home, Brother Haroldson made arrangements with the airlines for the arrival, transfer, and departure of the bodies. With his business there complete, they took Monty back to the mission home put him up in the guest room. Before dinner, they had time to meet and go over Sheffield's report. Then they spent the evening visiting casually as they got to know him.

The next morning, Sheffield and Ramona accompanied him to the airport and stayed with him while he took care of receiving the caskets. He found all of the documentation that came with them to be in order. The caskets were then taken to the plane that was to take them back to their families. Brother Haroldson said goodbye and boarded the plane himself. As nice and pleasant as he was, Sheffield didn't want to have to ever do business with him again.

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Hurricane Connie was an actual storm, as described. No significant wind or damage was reported for any of the Hawaiian Islands for the period when Connie passed to the south of the chain, although moderate to locally heavy rainfall was observed on the Big Island and Maui.