

Chapter XLIII

A Trip Down Memory Lane

September 25, 1966 – November 26, 1966

In the week since Sister Summers had been sent home, Sister Clark worked with Sister Rogerson and Sister Handy as a threesome. She knew Sister Rogerson very well, as they had previously been companions for four months in Laie. Being in a threesome, was rather an anticlimactic way to end her mission. Roy had set up a third bed for her in the apartment upstairs. During that time, she had wrapped up any unfinished business in the area.

Now here she was on the eve of going home to Iona, Idaho. It was such a small community that no one had ever heard of, so she simply said that she was from Idaho Falls. Several missionaries who were in transit were at the mission home that evening. After dinner, she along with Elders Hillard, Powell, and Weeks all reported their missions. Elder Hillard had once been the mission secretary.

The next day, after their final interviews with Sheffield, Roy whisked them off to the airport for their flight back to the mainland. When he returned, he had with him three Elders, one Sister, and a senior couple fresh from Salt Lake. Even though Honolulu West, where Sister Clark and Sister Summers had been, had to be closed, the senior couple was a very welcome addition.

Elder and Sister Monroe Giles from Idaho Falls were to have been there a month earlier, but were delayed in coming. Ever since the deaths of Elder Idler and Elder Bancroft, Sheffield had planned to send them to Naalehu and reopen the area. Like the other areas where the senior couples served, Naalehu was well suited for them. They brought the number of senior couple back up to four. This transfer affected twenty missionaries, including Elder Grant Edwards who took over as the financial secretary.

The rest of that week was a routine week at Mililani with the usual business that goes on, such as preparing for the next round of zone conferences to be held during October. On Wednesday of the next week, Sheffield, Ramona, and the assistants flew to Lihue in the chartered Cessna for the first one, then hopped their way across to Maui, then to Hilo, and finished up in Kona on Saturday. The Kona district conference was held on Saturday and Sunday. Once all of their meetings were over, they flew back to Honolulu on Sunday afternoon.

During the second week of October, they had company for a couple of days. Anytime anyone who knew them planned a vacation in Hawaii, they always made it a point to come and see them. They were always gracious and offered to put them up in the guest room and take a little time out to show them around. It was always good to have a visit from old friends. This time it was Jacob and Paula Messner from Norfolk.

Ramona always loved to give Sheffield a hard time about Paula being his girlfriend. Paula always made it so easy by the way she liked to cozy up to him. It was all in fun, because Ramona knew that there never was a romantic connection between them when they were seeing each other way back when.

The Messners arrived on Monday the 10th and Sheffield and Ramona picked them up at the airport and brought them to the mission home and got them settled in the guest room. Later they went out to dinner and showed them around a little, but after a long day of travel all the way from the East Coast, they were tired. They did sit out on the balcony for a while and got caught up. Paula was the only relative who ever expressed any interest in Craig, Norma, and Janet. Likewise, Sheffield was always interested in Paula's kids since he had got to know them when he was seeing her.

On Tuesday, they showed their guests around Honolulu and spent the afternoon with them at Waikiki Beach. Then on Wednesday they took them up to Laie. They attended the temple during the morning, which was treat for the Messners since they didn't get the opportunity that often. The afternoon was spent at the Polynesian Cultural Center, including the luau in the evening.

On Thursday they went off on their own while Sheffield and Ramona resumed their duties at Mililani. There was the next transfer that needed to be worked out already.

Sheffield was also involved in another project that wasn't related to the mission. Sometime earlier they had heard of the preparations for the upcoming reunion of Pearl Harbor survivors being organized by the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association. The organization was founded in 1958 but Sheffield and Ramona has not heard about it until only recently. Needless to say, both of them joined.

Sheffield had contacted the reunion organizing committee and offered the use of one of the chapels in Honolulu for a nondenominational religious memorial service. His offer had been accepted and Sheffield was in the process of making the final arrangements.

The Messners returned on Saturday evening and attended church with the Brasons on Sunday. Sheffield and Ramona saw them off at the airport on Monday morning.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, they finished figuring out the transfers. Because of the additional missionaries that would be arriving, two more areas could be reopened. Then the rest of the week was spent in the Honolulu, Pearl Harbor, and Oahu zone conferences. Since they had just been to Laie with the Messners, this time they just went up for the conference.

The transfers seemed to roll around quickly. Time in general seemed to be going fast as each transfer brought them closer to the end of their mission. Transfers were taken very seriously and a lot of time, thought, and prayer went into them. It was important that the right missionary was at the right place at the right time with the right companion so they could reach the people who the Lord put in their paths.

It got to be quite involved because moving just one person caused a ripple effect. For example, on this transfer, Edler Cunningham, one of the assistants, was going home. Elder Ira Baldwin was selected to take his place. That meant someone had to replace him as a zone leader in the Honolulu Zone. One of the district leaders then took his place, which meant a senior companion was transferred to fill that place. Then

a junior companion was moved to fill that place. Finally, one of the new missionaries coming out took his place. In order to fill Elder Cunningham's place, five other missionaries were affected. With three Elders going home, that alone necessitated a lot of transfers.

With the additional new missionaries coming out, two areas, were being reopened, which meant filling the vacancies left by those going to those areas. One of the areas being reopened was Kailua in the Oahu Zone, which was closed after Elder Perkins and Elder Williams had been mistakenly arrested on burglary charges. Even though they were innocent, they were distrusted by the community. Enough time had passed and the incident was mostly forgotten. But to avoid any suspicion, Sheffield sent lady missionaries into the area. The other area being reopened was Nanakuli in the Pearl Harbor Zone which had to be closed in August due to a lack a lack of missionaries.

As a rule, Sheffield liked to leave missionaries in a particular area between four and six months. So when someone reached the end of their time in an area, someone had to replace them. He really was conscientious about not leaving the office staff in the mission home for more than four months. This time around Elder Lorin Mason replaced Elder Ashby as the mission recorder. On average, about a quarter of the mission was affected each transfer, this time twenty four missionaries were being transferred.

On Tuesday the 25th, the missionaries who would be staying overnight began arriving at Mililani, with the Elders bunking in the barracks over the garage while Sister Spears, who came over from Maui, had the lady missionary's dorm room all to herself. After dinner, the three Elders who were going home reported their missions.

On Wednesday Sheffield had his final interview with each before Brother Hanami took them to the airport. When he returned, he brought with him the five new Elders and two Sisters who had just arrived from Salt Lake. Sheffield wasn't sure how the missionary department were able to send so many his way, but he wasn't complaining. They were just glad to send missionaries back into Kailua and Naalehu and looked forwards to the same number or reinforcements in November.

During the rest of the week, there was a lot of items that needed attention. There was the November zone conferences to prepare for. President N. Eldon Tanner and his wife would be in the mission for two weeks for three stake conferences and other business, which included a mission tour. Because of Thanksgiving during the fourth week, the zone conferences for that week had been moved up a week so they were back to back. Rather than a whirlwind tour, the Tanners would accompany them to the regularly scheduled conferences.

And then there was the nondenominational memorial service that Sheffield was working on. The chaplain of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association had asked him to participate as one of the speakers. On Saturday, Sheffield and Ramona flew to Lihue for the Kauai district conference and returned on Sunday.

Monday was Halloween. Earlier in the week, with help from Roy, Ramona dressed up the outside of the mission home to make it ready for trick or treaters. She didn't want to disappoint them. On Monday, she went to the store and bought several bags of candy to hand out that evening. During the afternoon she got herself ready. This time she was Lily Munster and her costume took more preparation. When it came time to greet the trick or treaters, she was ready. When Sheffield refused to be Jed Clampett last time, she didn't even bother to ask him to be Herman Munster. That evening, as with the previous two years, hundreds of trick or treaters came to their door.

That week was spent wrapping up work on the conferences and preparing for President Tanner's visit. Sheffield did give some thought to what he might say at the nondenominational memorial, but he still had time for that. On Saturday and Sunday they attended the Honolulu Stake Conference at the tabernacle and in the general session on Sunday, President Tanner called on him to say a few words. After the conference, Sheffield and Ramona were invited to dinner with the stake presidency and their wives and the Tanners.

President and Sister Tanner arrived at Mililani on Tuesday morning. The first item agenda was a meeting with Sheffield and Ramona and the entire mission staff. Over lunch, Sheffield and Ramona had an opportunity to get better acquainted with them. Both President Tanner and his wife, Sara, were the same age as Sheffield. President Tanner was called as an Assistant to the Twelve in October of 1960, two years later, he was called as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, and a year after that he was sustained as the Second Counselor in the First Presidency. During the afternoon, Ramona entertained Sister Tanner while President Tanner met one on one with Sheffield. After dinner he met with Sheffield and his counselors in their presidency meeting. That night the Tanners stayed in the guest room.

On Wednesday morning, Brother Hanami took Sheffield and Ramona, the Assistants, and President and Sister Tanner to the airport in the mission van. The six of them boarded the chartered Cessna and Sheffield flew them to Lihue for the Kauai zone conference. In addition to their interviews with Sheffield, each missionary was also interviewed by President Tanner. During the meeting, he took most of the time teaching and instructing the missionaries. That evening, he spoke at a special fireside with the members of the district, who had come from all over the island for the rare opportunity to hear from a member of the First Presidency. That evening they stayed with Frank and Olina Alapai.

The next day they went onto Kona which was a repeat of the previous day, as was Friday in Hilo, and Saturday in Maui. Except for immediately after the meeting on Saturday in Maui, President and Sister Tanner flew back to Honolulu where President Morley met them and took them to Laie for the Oahu Stake Conference while Sheffield and Ramona remained in Kahului for the Maui District Conference.

On Monday morning they returned to Honolulu and had two days to finish up the November

transfers. While they were gone, Sheffield was unable to follow the flight of Gemini XII, the final space flight of Project Gemini. It had blasted off on Friday but he didn't find out anything about the progress of the mission until he read about it in the newspaper on Monday. The flight had been a success, except for the failure of the Agena Target vehicle to boost them into a higher orbit. On Tuesday morning while getting ready for the day, Sheffield was able to watch the coverage of the splashdown.

On Thursday, Sheffield and Ramona drove up to Laie for the Oahu Zone Conference. It was typically held on Saturday but for logistical purposes the schedule was rearranged. That morning, Sheffield and Ramona made their monthly visit to the temple before meeting up once more with the Tanners. In the meantime, President Tanner had business with the college, the temple and the Polynesian Cultural Center in Laie. The Zone conference in Laie followed the same format as the others, except for the fireside with President Tanner, since he had just met with them over the weekend. That evening they returned to the mission home with Sheffield and Ramona. Likewise Friday and Saturday were spent in the Honolulu and Pearl Harbor zones. Following the meeting on Saturday, they went right into the Pearl Harbor Stake Conference, which Sheffield and Ramona attended. During the Saturday evening session, President Tanner called on Ramona to say a few words.

It had been a busy two weeks. Sheffield and Ramona had Monday to shift gears and prepare for transfer day, looking forward to a slower paced week, with Thanksgiving on Thursday. But first there was all of the hub bub of transfer day. This one was a bit more involved, affecting thirty one missionaries with five going home. Among them was Elder Todd, one of the assistants who was replaced by Elder Oscar Wild, and Elder Jay Bryant, who earlier had to go home for three months to recuperate and had those three months added to the end of his mission.

On Tuesday afternoon, Mililani filled up with transient missionaries. Both the barracks and the lady missionary's dorm rooms were clear full. That evening after dinner they heard from the five Elders who were going home. The meeting went a little over, which delayed Sheffield's presidency meeting

On Wednesday morning while getting ready for the day, an article on the front page of the Honolulu Advertiser caught his attention. "Hey, Look at this." he said to Ramona.

"What is it Babe?" she asked as she walked around behind him to see what he was referring to.

"The New Enterprise will be arriving in Pearl Harbor this afternoon."

"Oh Really. I suppose you want to go see her."

"You bet I do. I've only seen her once. Do you remember that time we went to Norfolk for a conference and when we flew out, we saw her fitting out at Newport News."

"I remember. As I recall you had to circle around a couple of times to get a better look."

"So how about it.? Do you want to come with me?"

“Sure why not.”

After breakfast, they went downstairs to the office. The place was wall to wall missionaries as they came and went with new companions to new areas. One by one, Sheffield took those going home into his office for their final interviews before Roy took them to the airport. Then a short time later, he returned with seven new Elders and two new sisters. With a net increase of two Elders and two Sisters it allowed Sheffield to reopen Honolulu West, with lady missionaries, and to open a new area in the Kona Zone.

While waiting for the new arrivals, Sheffield was in his office and happened to see the carrier come into view after rounding Diamond Head and clearing the point of the mountain to the east. He bolted upstairs to their apartment and grabbed his binoculars and went out onto the patio to get a better look. She was in view for only a few minutes as she slowly steamed past Honolulu Harbor before disappearing behind the mountain to the west. Satisfied at getting a glimpse, he went back downstairs to his office to wait for Roy to return with the new missionaries.

As always, he interviewed each of the new arrivals before sending them off to their new areas, which meant another trip to the airport for Roy with some of them. For those going to Kona, Dick Kaaola gave them ride back in his boat.

Once the mission home had cleared out and they had lunch, Sheffield and Ramona drove over to Pearl Harbor. They were still a ways outside the base when they got a glimpse of the supper carrier. As they turned off to enter the base, they drove right past the place where Sheffield found Geannie's bullet riddled red '37 Buick convertible. Every time he went past there, he saw the haunting image from that dark day in his mind's eye.

They proceeded past that tragic spot and up to the main gate. When they stopped at the checkpoint, both Sheffield and Ramona showed their credentials and were permitted in the base. They drove to Pier H where the the Big E was tied up. As they got out of the car, the giant ship loomed above them. Ramona took Sheffield's arm as they made their way up the gangplank to the quarterdeck. They both faced aft and rendered a salute to the flag by placing their hands over their hearts.

“May I help you?” the young Lieutenant jg, flanked by two armed marines, asked.

“Yes.” Sheffield said as they handed him their credentials. “We respectfully ask permission to come aboard.”

“Just one moment, Admiral Brason.” he said and then stepped over to a telephone mounted on the bulkhead.

A moment later he returned and said, “Just one moment and someone will be here to escort you.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant.” Sheffield said. “This is a nice ship you have here.”

“Thank you, sir. We're very proud of her.”

"I served on the Old Enterprise from the time she was commissioned until the end of April of forty two. Then I went on to command my own carrier."

"Oh really? Which one?"

"The Reprisal."

"I've seen her. She's a fine ship too, sir. She's still going strong."

Just then an officer stepped out onto the hangar deck and began making his way toward them. He came up to them and said, "Welcome aboard Admiral Brason." he extended his hand. "Its a pleasure to meet you. I'm Commander Linder, the Executive Officer."

"Than you Commander Linder."

He then turned to Ramona and extended his hand to her. "Commander Brason, its a pleasure to have you."

"Commander." Ramona responded.

"Please follow me. Capitan Holloway asked me to escort you to the bridge."

As he led them across the hangar and up to the bridge he told them about the ship and its features.

"At nearly eighty six thousand tons and eleven hundred twenty three feet long, she's the largest ship in the world." he bragged. He continued to describe other notable attributes of the ship as they went.

"Do you mean to tell me it has no defensive armament." Sheffield said in disbelief when the fact was pointed out.

"No, sir."

"What would you do if you ever came under attack?"

"We'd have to depend on our escorts and our combat air patrol."

By the time they reached the bridge, Commander Linder had pointed out several facts about the ship. In return, Sheffield told him about his time as the executive office aboard the Old Enterprise before the war.

When they reached the bridge, Captain Holloway greeted them, "Welcome aboard, Admiral and Commander Brason. Its a pleasure to meet you, sir. You're reputation precedes you."

"I hope its a good one." Sheffield replied modestly.

"Nearly everyone knows about your accomplishments, from night flying to angled decks. It's a pleasure to finally meet you. We sort of crossed paths once. It was during Korea on my second war tour. I was a with VF Fifty Two on the Boxer when we relieved the Reprisal."

"Thank you Captain. It's a pleasure to meet you too. I was just telling Commander Linder about my time aboard the Old Enterprise."

"Oh really. I didn't know that you served on her. When?"

"I was the air group commander when she was commissioned. Later I was the executive officer for a while and then I was on Admiral Halsey's staff until I left just after the Doolittle Raid to assume command of the Reprisal."

"Well anyone who served aboard the Old Enterprise is an honorary member of this ship's crew."

"When I read in the paper this morning that you were arriving today, I had to come and have a look."

"So do you live here in Hawaii now?"

"So to speak. Were here on a three year church assignment, until the end of next June."

"I see," he acknowledged. "Well, I'd be happy to give you a tour of the bridge. Then Commander Linder can take you on a tour of the ship. It's pretty quite right now with nearly the entire crew ashore."

"Thank you. We'd like that very much."

After being shown the bridge, Commander Linden took them through a good share of the ship, including a tour of the flight deck, which had a most of her air group parked around the edges. After nearly two hours, Commander Linder returned them to the quarterdeck and they were about to leave the ship.

"Excuse me, Admiral Brason, the officer of the deck said, "But Admiral Rogers would like to see you in his flag office. Corporal Ortega will show you the way."

A few moments later they were usher into the flag office off Rear Admiral Meryl Rogers. A slender man of medium height who appeared to be about fifteen years younger than Sheffield stepped toward him with his hand outstretched and said, "Its good to see you again, Admiral Brason."

The puzzlement on Sheffield's face was oblivious as he tried to remember the man who's hand he was shaking.

"You don't remember me, do you? I'm not surprised since I haven't seen you for nearly twenty five years."

"I'm sorry." Sheffield apologized. "I can't place you."

"I was a pilot with Bombing Six when you were the air group commander." Admiral Rogers explained. "I was fresh out of flight school when I joined the squadron in San Diego in the summer of thirty nine, just before the Enterprise sailed for Hawaii."

That limited the number of faces that Sheffield had to identify, but he still couldn't place him.

The admiral narrowed it down further. "Do you remember just before the war when we took that Marine fighter squadron to Wake?"

"Yes, of course."

"You rode in my back seat when we flew off the ship to escort them in."

"Flaps! Yeah sure. Now I remember you."

"Flaps?" Ramona asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Admiral Rogers this is my wife, Ramona."

"I'm pleased to meet you Missus Brason."

"Likewise, Admiral." Ramona replied. "I'm curious. How did you ever get a name like Flaps?"

"I remember." Sheffield volunteered. "On our way from San Diego out here, the air group was having gunnery practice. This young dive bomber pilot nearly put his plane in the drink because he forgot to extend his dive flaps."

"It took me a long time to live that one down. By then the name stuck."

"I see we've come a long ways since those days." Sheffield observed. "The jets you have now days are something else."

Sheffield and Flaps, who insisted they call him Meryl, spent the next few minutes catching up. "I stayed with Bombing Six until after the Battle of Midway when the squadron was disestablished. We returned to the States and I helped form the core of the new Bombing Six when it was established. We went sea aboard the Enterprise in November of forty three and took part in the invasion of Makin. Shortly after that, we were on the Intrepid until she was torpedoed. When we made it back to the States in March of forty four, the squadron was disestablished and I went on to yet another new squadron, VB Eighty Five, this time flying Helldivers. I made it back to the war aboard the Shangri La just in time for Iwo Jima.

"After the war I was shuffled around various air stations until I took command of a squadron of Skyraiders and did a tour in the Mediterranean aboard your old ship, the Reprisal, in forty seven. From there I had various assignments in air operations. Eventually was I was made the exec on the Kearsarge when she recommissioned and went to Korea aboard her.

When she returned to the States I was put behind a desk for a while. Eventually I was promoted to Captain and served on the staff of Admiral Dudley Smith as the air officer for a while. Then I had another desk job in Washington before taking command of the Crown Point. Then about two years ago, they pinned these stars on me and here I am today."

"Thats quite a career." Sheffield acknowledged.

"Did you ever marry?" Ramona wanted to know.

"Humph." Meryl snorted. "Three times. Got burned every time."

"Thats too bad." Ramona consoled.

"Naw. Its better this way. Its kind of hard to share the navy with a woman."

"I don't know about that." she challenged. "Sheffield managed."

"Thats because he's a much better man than me. You had quite a career yourself, Admiral, I know all about you; I've read both of your books. So what have you been up to since you retired from the Navy?"

"I coached wrestling and taught government at a high school in Roanoke until I retired a for good a

couple years ago. “

“So what are you doing here in Hawaii?”

“We're serving a three year church assignment supervising missionaries for the Mormon Church.”

“Really? I hate to say it but I haven't any room for church in my life over the years.”

“I always found the room for it and it has served me well.”

“Well, its like I said, you're a better man than me.”

“You're a good man too, Myrle. One of my favorite quotes is 'The purpose of the church is to make good men better.’”

“I'm to old and crusty to change, now. Save it for other men for who there is still hope for.” Then he changed the subject. “How did it go for you when you retired from the navy. I'm looking at retiring next year. That will make thirty years.”

“I've kept busy with my other career, and I have a plane. That's kept my flying itch satisfied. But I do miss being at sea. It's been thirteen years know.”

“Where going to sea tomorrow for three days and will be back on Saturday. Why don't you come with us, as an observer.”

“Oh I don't know.” Sheffield said. “Tomorrow is Thanksgiving.”

Thats when Ramona spoke up. “I think thats a great idea. I think it will be good for you, Babe. I've seen that longing in your eyes every time you watch a ship coming in or heading out to sea. Besides you probably won't get another offer like this.”

“You wouldn't mind? But what about Thanksgiving?”

“No, I won't mind, besides it will just be us and the mission home staff. I think you should go.”

Sheffield looked away from Ramona and turned to Meryl and asked, “We're you going.”

“Oh just south of here, we'll be using the bombing range on Kahoolawe.”

“Thats still in the mission boundaries.” Sheffield muttered to himself.

He looked back at Ramona's encouraging face, then he turned back to Meryl and said, “I'll take you up on that.”

“Good. We sail at oh eight hundred. Report aboard at oh seven thirty.”

“I'll be here.” Sheffield said enthusiastically. “I'd better get back to the office and take care of a thing or two and get my gear together. Thanks, Meryl. It was sure good to run into you again.”

“I'm glad that I got to see you, Admiral Brason. You were like a mentor to me in those early days. I've always looked up to you. I'll see you in the morning.”

Sheffield and Ramona left Admiral Rogers' office and made their way off the ship. On the way back to Mililani, Sheffield had a grin that stretched from ear to ear. “Thanks a lot sweetheart. This means a lot to

me.”

“It will do you some good to get away for a couple of days. The sea air will clear your mind, besides you can use a break.”

When they returned to the mission home, all was quiet as the last of the missionaries had cleared out hours earlier. Sheffield called the assistants into his office and told them that he would be gone until Saturday and couldn't be reached. He instructed them to hold down the fort in his absence and that if they needed anything, to call either President Kaaola or President Galloway.

The next morning, Sheffield got up and got ready for his adventure. He felt a little guilty about skipping out on Thanksgiving, but Ramona assured him that it would be alright and to go enjoy himself. With his bag packed she accompanied him to the base. Again his credentials got them in. They drove to pier and got out of the car. At the base of the gangplank she threw her arms around him and said, “This is just like old times, only it's not for real and it's only for three days.”

“Yeah.” Sheffield agreed, compared to the way it used to be, this is nothing.” Then he teased, “This is hardly enough time to miss you.”

“Well, you'd better go aboard. I'll come and get you when you get back.” She reached up and gave him a kiss.

“I'll see you in the funny papers.” Sheffield said as he turned to go up the gangplank.

“I don't think he has said that since the last time I saw him off to go to sea.” Ramona thought to herself as she walked back to the car. She got in and drove back to the mission home to help Sister `Auli`i with Thanksgiving dinner.

When Sheffield reached the top of the gangplank, he stepped onto the quarterdeck and rendered a salute aft. This time they were expecting him. Admiral Rogers' personal aid, Lieutenant jg Carter Hastings greeted him, took his duffel bag and led him to his state room to drop it off his taking him directly to the flag bridge.

Meryl greeted him with a hand shake and introduced him to his staff. Some of them knew him by his reputation and the work that he had done to advance naval aviation. “Gentleman,” he said. “Admiral Brason will be accompanying us as an observer during these exercises.”

From that vantage point in the boxy superstructure, Sheffield could look down on preparations for getting underway. At precisely eight o'clock, the sailors on the dock cast off the mooring lines and four tugboats began pulling the huge carrier away from the dock.

“This reminds me of old times.” Sheffield said. “Thanks for inviting me to come along, Meryl.”

Several minutes later, the Big E was making her way down the channel toward the open sea. Sheffield couldn't help but let his mind race back to a point in time just four days short of twenty five years

earlier, when he stood on the flag bridge of another carrier named Enterprise as she steamed down the same channel.

That morning was the last time he saw Geannie alive and well. As the ship passed Hospital Point, in his mind he was in their bedroom packing his bag. Geannie had just come out of the shower as he was ready to leave. "Wouldn't you rather stay and have some of this?" she tempted him.

He could still remember every curve and feature of her body all of these years later. "As much as I'd love to, I have to go." he said and he gave her a hug and a kiss instead and said goodbye, leaving her standing there in all of her glory.

"What a fool I was." Sheffield thought. "What would a few more minutes have mattered.

Once out in the open sea, the Enterprise joined up with her escorts, the guided missile frigates Bainbridge and Gridley, and the destroyers Turner Joy and McKean. Like the Enterprise, the Bainbridge was also nuclear powered. The five ships set course to due south.

Admiral Rogers announced, "I can't have a civilian running around. Lieutenant Hastings, why don't you take our guest down to the ship's store and get him some khakis. After you get changed, I'd like you to join us in the briefing room."



Sheffield followed Lieutenant Hastings below to the store and picked up two pair of trousers and two shirts. He got an extra set so he would have a some clean clothes to change into. He also bought a wind breaker and a baseball cap with the name Enterprise embossed on them. Now that he looked like he belonged there, he accompanied his escort to the flag briefing room.

As he stepped into the room, Admiral Rogers said, "Thats better. Now all you need are these." as he tossed him a set of three stars, connected by a thin bar.

Sheffield caught them in his hand and looked down at what had been tossed his way. "You know, I never actually wore three stars."

"That's alright, you earned them. Go ahead and put them on."

Now that he looked the part, Sheffield sat through the briefing as Meryl and his staff discussed the final details of the exercises. It all sounded so familiar to Sheffield. The meeting was short, and when it was over, the signal went out to for the exercises to commence.

It may have been Thanksgiving, but any thoughts of turkey and all of the trimmings were squelched

by the reality of the operational readiness exercises. General quarters was sounded, sending the crews of the five ships scurrying to their stations.

From the flag bridge, Sheffield watched with fascination as the planes that were aboard were catapulted into the air from all four catapults, two on the bow and two in the angled deck. The concept that he had worked on and tested all those years ago had been perfected beyond what even he could imagine.

The sleek F-4B Phantom IIs and RA-5C Vigilantes were particularly impressive. The stubby little A-4C Skyhawks could carry more payload than their size suggested. Sheffield thought that the A-6A Intruders were just plain homely. In just a matter of minutes the deck was clear, but not for long. The jets that had been ashore began coming aboard one after another. It was all so familiar. The planes were different, yet the scene playing out on the flight deck was the same. Sheffield had always enjoyed watching the flight operations, when he wasn't occupied with other business. This time he was simply there to observe. He took advantage of it and watched, mesmerized by it all. While planes were still coming aboard, others were brought up on the two forward elevators and readied for launch.

Two Phantoms were moved into location on the bow catapults and launched.

Sheffield heard himself say, "I'd give anything to fly off this thing just once in one of those." It was intended to be a private thought but it just slipped out.

"I think I can arrange that for you, Admiral." Meryl said.

"Oh I don't want to be a bother. I'm just here to observe, remember."

Meryl just winked and said, "Just let me see what I can do."

Sheffield watched the launch of the rest of the flight and then went with Admiral Rogers down to his wardroom for lunch.

"So what do you think?" Meryl asked.

"Very impressive. Things have come a long way in the last thirteen years. I can't believe this ship. She's everything you'd need."

"With her eight nuclear reactors, she can go for years, but of course we still need to replenish our ship's stores and take on aviation fuel."

"I'm sure impressed with how quickly you can conduct flight operations."

Meryl was more than happy to brag about his flagship. Then their conversation turned to good old days on the Old Enterprise before the war.

Sheffield spent the afternoon as he had the morning. He was enthralled to take it all in and the best part was that he didn't have to give any orders or make any decisions. For him, this was a pleasure cruise. By afternoon the ships had taken up station about one hundred fifty miles south of Oahu. In addition to flight operations, drills of all kinds were conducted to test the readiness of the ship and the crew.

At one point, Sheffield watched as the Bainbridge, which was to starboard launched one of her Terrier anti-aircraft missiles from her forward launcher. In a cloud of smoke and streak of light, the missile was out of sight in a matter of seconds. "One of those would have stopped the Germans from hitting us off Salerno." Sheffield thought to himself.

That evening, Sheffield dined with Admiral Rogers and his staff in the wardroom. He had almost forgot that it was Thanksgiving, until dinner was served. It was a complete Thanksgiving feast with all of the trimmings. Over dinner, he got better acquainted with the officers on Meryl's staff. During the course of the day he had watched them carry out their duties. He judged them all to be very capable officers.

That evening when Sheffield returned to his stateroom, he thought about Ramona and wondered how her day had gone. Before going to bed, he worked on his remarks for the upcoming memorial service. Once during the evening, his thoughts were interrupted by the call to stations as yet another drill was being conducted. Twice during the night, he was similarly interrupted. The first time, his natural reaction was jump out of bed and throw on his clothes and race up to the flag bridge. Then he realized that it wasn't necessary. During the night, Geannie came to him in his dreams, this time he didn't leave her standing there.

He was up early the next morning and went up to the flag bridge to find Meryl and his staff already busy at work, getting ready for the days activities. When Sheffield stepped on the bridge, Meryl greeted him, "Good morning Admiral." Sheffield had told him to call him Sheffield, but he had refused out of respect to his former commanding officer from earlier days. "How'd you like to go for a ride?" He said, gesturing up.

"Really? I'd love to."

"This is your lucky day. I have arranged for you to ride along in the back seat of one of VF Ninety Two's Phantoms on an air defense sortie over the target area on Kahoolawe. The mission is scheduled for eleven hundred."

"Gosh, Meryl, I don't know what to say, except thanks."

Sheffield joined Meryl for breakfast, then attended the briefing with his staff. Later in the morning, he was escorted to the ready room of VF-92, known as the Silver Kings. There Sheffield was introduced to Lieutenant Commander Michael Bagoavich, the squadron commander and Lieutenant Wally Pugmire, the pilot that he would be riding along with. They warmly greeted him and spent a few minutes getting acquainted before briefing him on the mission and more particularly the capabilities of the McDonnell Douglas F-4B Phantom II. It was a large fighter with a top speed of over Mach 2.2. It could carry over 18,000 pounds of ordnance on nine external hardpoints, including air-to-air missiles, air-to-ground missiles, and various bombs. The F-4, like other interceptors of its time, was designed without an internal cannon. The rear seat was for the radar operator, but on this mission, the pilot would be on his own. The aircraft they were flying would be armed with air to air missiles.

When the briefing was over, Sheffield was given a flight suit that he changed into. Dressed to fly, he hung around the ready room until it was time for the flight briefing with the pilots and radar operators from the squadron who would be flying on this mission. Commander Bagoavich introduced Admiral Brason and explained that he would be riding along as an observer.

After getting their instructions, Sheffield accompanied Lieutenant Pugmire to their plane. The flight deck crew probably wondered who the older gentlemen with the cane was. Sheffield handed the plane captain his cane before he climbed the steps to the cockpit. Once in his seat, the plane captain helped strap him in.

“Are you all set?” Lieutenant Pugmire asked after checking his instruments.

“All set.”



The jet engines whirred to life and momentarily they were directed to the forward starboard catapult. Once the aircraft was attached to the catapult gear, and the final checks were made, the catapult officer gave the signal. The jet fighter lunged forward at one hundred seventy five miles an hour, pulling Sheffield back into his seat with nearly three times the force of gravity.

In just a few seconds, the jet was airborne. It was a thrilling rush of adrenaline as they climbed to altitude. Shortly, they were joined by Lieutenant Pugmire's wingman and formed up with the rest of the flight as they departed for the target area.

Up head, Sheffield could see Kahoolawe, with Maui beyond it. Off to his left he could see Lanai and Molokai. As they crossed the shoreline, Sheffield saw the training mock-ups of aircraft, radar installations, gun mounts, and surface-to-air missile sites situated across this island. It reminded him of the first time he flew over Kahoolawe on maneuvers more than forty years ago on a very similar training mission. Only then he took off from the old Langley in a VE-7 Bluebird.

Sheffield instinctively scanned the sky ahead, expecting the Army Air Corps P1 Hawks to arrive that had disrupted his strafing run on the opposing forces. That was how he met Harvey. As Sheffield relived that moment, he heard the call of fighter pilots of all ages, “Bandits!”

Coming straight for them were four Marine F-8 Crusaders based at the Marine Air Station at Kaneohe. Lieutenant Pugmire and his wingman took on the lead pair while another team took on the other two. A mock dogfight ensued, giving him a better thrill ride than he got while riding along with the Blue

Angels that time. That was demonstration flight, this was as close to the real thing as you could get. Climbs, dives, rolls, banks, twists, turns. The old biplanes that he used to fly, as maneuverable as they were, didn't have that kind of speed. In the end Lieutenant Pugmire flew away victorious, his wingman did not.

After the dogfight, the wingman rejoined them for the flight back to the Enterprise. Again, Sheffield's mind went back to all of the training missions that he led his air group on from the Old Enterprise. Ironically, one of the last training mission he flew before becoming the executive officer, was also over Kahoolawe on a mission similar to his first, and similar to this one.



Up in the distance he could see the carrier and her four escorts. It was much, much larger than anything he had ever landed aboard before. The plane was flying much faster too. The approach was the same. Some things don't change. The ship grew larger until they were just behind and above it.

Then, in an instant the jet touched the deck and its tail hook caught the wire, the harness held him from continuing his forward momentum as the plane came to an abrupt stop.

In almost an instant, a deck crewman disengaged the hook from the cable and the Lieutenant Pugmire was directed to taxi his Phantom forward. Once parked, the engines were shut down and the cockpit canopies were raised. Sheffield unbuckled himself, climbed out of seat, and over the side. When he stepped onto the flight deck, he took off his helmet. The plane captain handed his cane back to him and he accompanied Lieutenant Pugmire back to the squadron ready room.

Upon parting, Sheffield thanked his pilot for what he called "the ride of his life." He changed out of his flight suit and made his way back up Admiral Rogers wardroom, where over lunch, he told Meryl all about the experience and thanked him profusely for the opportunity.

The exercises continued into the afternoon. During a lull, Captain Holloway invited him to join in a short celebration of the five year anniversary of the commissioning of the Big E. The ten remaining plank owners from the ship's company and one from the air group who were still aboard were recognized. In addition Captain Holloway recognized Sheffield as a plank owner of the Old Enterprise. Following the ceremony, the Captain invited Sheffield to dine with him in his wardroom. Because of the busy schedule he hadn't had time to devote to their guest.

That night, the exercises called for night air operations. Sheffield stayed up to observe the activity

from the flag bridge as aircraft were launched and recovered in the darkness. The exercises concluded at two o'clock on Saturday morning and Admiral Rogers ordered the five ships to set course for Pearl Harbor.

The next morning, while still three ours from port, Sheffield joined his host for breakfast, then attended a briefing to review to the exercises. As a courtesy, Admiral Rogers asked for his opinion. When the scores were tallied up, the training had paid off. The over all score for the Enterprise far exceeded any other Pacific Fleet carrier.

At mid morning, the ships entered the channel and steamed single file into the harbor. When the Enterprise tied up at the pier, Sheffield thanked Meryl for the opportunity to sail with them. He went down to his state room to change his clothes and collect his duffel bag. He had no need for the uniforms and left them hanging in the closet, but he kept the jacket and cap that he had bought. With his things in hand he made his way to the quarterdeck and left the ship.

Ramona who was waiting for him on the pier asked, "So How was it. Babe?"

"It was a real trip down memory lane." Then he asked, "Did I miss anything, besides Thanksgiving dinner?"

"No, everything went smoothly. You can tell me all about your cruise on the way home."

* * * * *

The Enterprise arrived in Pearl Harbor on November 23rd and departed the next day for training exercises and returned again on the 26th and sailed for Vietnam on the 28th. The account comes from the official ship's log. Captain Holloway Commander Linder were the actual captain and executive officer at the time.

Admiral Meryl Rogers is fictional, but is based on Rear Admiral Roger W. Mehle who was commander of Carrier Division One aboard the Enterprise in the Gulf of Tonkin from February to April 1967. He joined Fighting Six in of the Enterprise Air Group in the fall of 1940

The photograph of the Enterprise is from the Summer of 1966.

See Chapter 10 of Remembering Geanine for the story of Sheffield's first training exercise over Kahoolawe.

