

Chapter LI

Mediterranean Summer Revisited

April 10, 1968 – May 21, 1968

It was late afternoon when the Staggerwing touched down on the landing strip at the Two Star Ranch. Sheffield and Ramona had made good on their plans to travel and had a month to get ready for their next big trip. They had been looking forward to the cruise ever since Hank and Teri invited them to come along. They had plenty of time to get their visas and passports and other things ready. As the time drew near, the anticipation mounted.

Then Thursday the 9th of May, Craig drove them to the airport for their flight to Washington, then on to New York City. After their flight landed, they had to wait for Hank and Teri to arrive. Once their flight from Salt Lake City landed, the two couples had lunch and waited around for their flight to Rome.

Finally around four o'clock the boarding call was announced and they boarded the Pan-Am Boeing 707. This particular aircraft was the 320 series, a larger version of the 707, with greater capacity and range capable of flying from New York to Frankfurt, Rome or Rio de Janeiro. Because it was an eight and half hour, overnight flight they went ahead and paid the extra fare for first class seats. Once they were seated in the roomy, comfortable seats, they settled in; Sheffield and Ramona on the left of row five and Hank and Teri on the right.

The flight took off right on time at four thirty five in the afternoon. For the first couple of hours, they visited about their plans. Two hours into the flight, dinner was served while out over the North Atlantic. Once their trays were taken, even though it was still light, they decided that they better get some rest. They asked the stewardess for some blankets and pillows and tipped their seats back and stretched out. Since they were on the last row of the first class section, there was nobody behind them and they could put the seats back as far as they wanted, without disturbing anyone. It wasn't as comfortable as a bed, but they were able to get some sleep for the most part. From time to time one or another woke up for a little while.

After getting some sleep and a difference of six times zones, the sun came up at six fifteen, local time, while somewhere over France. The flight attendants served breakfast, but there wasn't much time to eat before the airliner began its decent. That was a long time to be cooped up, but their excitement grew. At seven ten, they touched down at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci International Airport.

As they got off the plane, it was obvious that they were in a foreign country; everything was in Italian. Fortunately, there were enough people that spoke English who got them through customs and to the baggage claim area.

Outside of the airport, it was a different story when they hailed a cab. It was obvious that the cab driver didn't speak English. Hank told him, "The Grand."

"Si" he replied, understanding where it was that the American tourists wanted to go.

As they left the airport, they caught a glimpse of the Mediterranean Sea. The driver took them on a wild thirty kilometer ride inland and into and through the heart of Rome. They couldn't understand what the

driver was shouting as he shook his fist at other drivers, but it was obviously wasn't very nice. They were able to catch some of the sights along the way as the cab wove through the traffic and sped through intersections.

When he dropped them off at the hotel in one piece forty five minutes later, they paid they fare in Italian currency, but neither Sheffield nor Hank were willing to give him a tip. He snatched it from Hank's hands and snarling and grumbling, he got back into his cab and sped off.

The four Americans were standing out in front of the Le Grand Hotel, which first opened in 1894. The palatial five story building reflected the price of their stay. Once inside, the hotel lobby was absolutely stunning. Fine art from the various periods of Rome's history decorated the lobby. The hotel desk clerk was attentive and friendly, and better yet, he had a fairly good working knowledge of English.

Once they were checked in, two bellman took them up a grand staircase to the second floor to two Imperial suites, located next to each other. One of the bellmen explained that twenty four hour butler service was available, on demand. Each couple was shown to their respective rooms. They were very regal and tastefully decorated. Each room had its own unique fresco painting over the bed, the finest furnishings, marble bathrooms, precious fabrics, and contemporary art. After making sure their guests were settled, unlike the cabbie, both bellman received a generous tip. The first thing they wanted to do was to rest and freshen up from the long flight. They agreed to meet up at ten o'clock and go exploring.

When Sheffield and Ramona left their room to go next door to meet up with Hank and Teri, they beheld a curious sight; two men dressed in a long white robes and a red and white checkered scarfs on their heads which were held in place by a black band. They were walking down the hall toward them, one walking ahead of the other as if he commanded authority. The man in front smiled and nodded his head as they passed them. Sheffield and Ramona watched them in amazement as they went down the hall and around the corner before they knocked on the Terrys' door.

"Are you ready to go exploring?" Ramona asked as Teri opened the door.

Although there were several places within walking distance of the hotel, with a map and relying on anyone who could speak English, they got on a bus and set out to see what there was to see. Their first stop was the Spanish Steps. The monumental staircases, consisting of one hundred thirty five steps built from 1723 to 1725, ascended the step slope between the Bourbon Spanish Embassy, and the Trinità dei Monti church. The steps were featured in the 1953 movie, "Roman Holiday" starring Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn.

From there, they went to the Trevi Fountains, the largest fountain in the city and one of the most famous fountains in the world. The backdrop for the fountain and its sculptures was the Palazzo Poll, a lavish palace. The fountain was featured in the 1954 movie "Three Coins in the Fountain" and the theme song by the same name. The movie brought to life the legend that if visitors tossed a coin into the fountain, they are ensured a return to Rome. According to tradition a coin is thrown using the right hand over the left shoulder. Naturally Ramona and Teri had to try it.

By then it was early afternoon and time for lunch. The rest of the afternoon was spent visiting Vatican City, including St. Peter's Basilica, the Sistine Chapel.

When they returned to the hotel, they went up to their rooms and changed for dinner. Seated not far from them was the man who they had seen in the hall earlier. With him were two women also dressed in traditional Arabic attire and a few children. As it turned out, he was Saudi prince with two of his four wives and their children.

The Brasons and the Terrys spent Saturday and Sunday touring Rome, taking in as many sites as they could. There was so much to see that three days wasn't enough to take it all in, but they did see the Parthenon, the Coliseum, three or four museums, some cathedrals, the catacombs, and other attractions.. Everywhere they went were statues and architectural marvels. And of course, they they had to indulge in the cuisine.

They had a lot of time to just visit as well. Hank and Teri wanted to know more about their experiences in Hawaii. Sheffield and Ramona were more than happy to tell them all about it. Some of the stories they told led Hank and Teri to ask questions about the church as well. Again, they were more than happy to answer their questions, which led to some good discussions. Over all, Hank and Teri had favorable impressions of Mormons. They had some Mormon neighbors in Boise and new Mormon chapel was being built in their neighborhood.

On Monday morning, Sheffield and Ramona got up and got ready for the day and packed up their luggage before meeting Hank and Teri for breakfast downstairs. There was a little time before they had to leave for the train station so Ramona and Teri, with Sheffield and Hank in tow, did a little last minute shopping near the hotel. They found some bargains on some clothes and bought some souvenirs of Rome to take home to the grandkids.

They returned to the hotel and gathered their luggage and checked out. The desk clerk even went as far as to call a cab for them. A moment later it was waiting at the curb, even before they had finished checking out. A bellman took their things out to the cab and helped the driver put it into the trunk. This driver was a far cry from the one that brought them from the airport. He was friendly and even spoke a little English. It was obvious that he was a much better driver as he took them the one kilometer from the hotel to the train station.

The Rome Termini Central Station was a modern building that opened in 1950, replacing the previous terminal building. The unique building had an extremely long, modernist facade made of travertine and a gravity-defying double curve of the cantilever roof. Being one of the largest railway stations in Europe, it was not only the main hub for public transportation in the city, but also to destinations across Italy and into France, Germany, and Austria.

They found the platform their train left from and waited for the boarding call. When they did board, they took their seats, which faced each other, on the right side of the third car and settled in for the trip. The

electric train pulled out of the station and made its way out of the city, but only traveled a little over four kilometers before making its first stop.

Once out of the city, the four American tourists had a great view of the countryside as the train made its way south, with the mountains to the



left and the Mediterranean to the right; past farms, orchards, and vineyards, through small towns and villas, stopping occasionally. Around noon a light lunch was served to the passengers. Eventually, the tracks bent to the southeast, hugging the mountains, at places through them. Of the two longest tunnels, one was seven and half kilometers or a little more than four and half miles, the other was slightly shorter. After emerging from the last tunnel the train followed the coast the rest of the way into Naples. Then the tracks went underground about about five and half kilometers from Naples Central Station, the end of the line. The one hundred ninety seven kilometer trip (or one hundred twenty two miles) took about three hours.

They got off the train and collected their luggage and proceeded to front entrance of the building. Once outside, a number of taxis were lined up waiting for riders. They found a driver who understood enough English as to communicate to him that they needed to go to the passengers terminal at the port. His taxi was so small that it could only carry two passengers, so he called out to the driver behind him in Italian.

“You go with him.” he said to Sheffield and Ramona.

The other driver approached and said “Buongiorno!” and took their luggage.

They followed him to the car and got into the backseat. He peeled out right behind the first car that had Hank and Teri, then it became a race between the two drivers as to who would get there first. At first it seemed as if they were going in the wrong direction.

“Do they know where they are going?” Ramona asked.

“There probably just going with the traffic flow.” Sheffield reasoned.

After about a mile and half of jockeying for position, they made a sharp right turn at high speed. At least they were now heading toward the harbor. As they got down to the docks, they turned left and sped along the waterfront, passing each other several times. The hair raising ride came to an end at the Italian Line passenger terminal. Thankful to be alive, they got out of the car and waited for the driver to retrieve their luggage. Sheffield paid him his fair, but that was all.

From the parking lot, they could see the SS Leonardo da Vinci tied up to the dock next to the terminal building. The white ship had a thin green green band running the entire length of the seven hundred sixty three foot hull. She was indeed a very handsome, nicely balanced ship.



Excitedly, they went to check in. They found the ticket agent to be able to speak English and very helpful and courteous. They presented their boarding passes and passports and after finding everything in order, he arranged to have their luggage sent directly to their state rooms.

Then he explained, "The ship sails at seven o'clock. You can board now if you'd like, or you can wait until thirty minutes before sailing."

They agreed to board the ship right then and get settled.

"Alright then." the ticket agent said. "Go through those doors to board the ship and enjoy your cruise."

The double doors led to the covered gangway that bridged the gap between the terminal building and the ship. Another set of double doors lead into the elegant foyer of the ship. The oval shaped lobby extended the the entire width of the ship. To their immediate left was the information desk. While the attendant was finishing up with the people ahead of them, it gave them a moment to scan the lobby.

Just passed the information desk was a hallway leading forward. Sandwiched between it and another hallway was a grand staircase. Across the lobby was the purser's office. Directly across from the doorway that they had just come through was another doorway, for when the ship was docked on the starboard side. To the left of that doorway was the ship's bank. Continuing the panorama, opposite of the staircase was the gift shop, with hallways on either side that lead aft. On the wall behind them was a raised relief portrait of the artist, sculpture, and inventor that the ship was named for.

The attendant, an attractive young woman, who had finished with the people ahead of them greeted them in Italian "Benvenuti a bordo della Leonardo da Vinci. Posso aiutarla?"

"I'm sorry." Sheffield apologized. "Do you speak English?"

"Certainly. Welcome aboard the Leonardo da Vinci, may I help you?"

"Yes, we are on the Lido Deck in seventeen and nineteen."

"That is three decks up. You can take the stairs or you can go down the hallway behind you to the elevator. Either way, when you get to the Lido Deck turn to your left and follow the corridor aft and your rooms will be on your right. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No. not at the moment. Thank you for your help."

"Enjoy your cruise."

They choose to go up the staircase and went up three decks as instructed and proceeded down the coordinator. Signs posted along the way, in both Italian and English, directed them to where they were

going.

They found their staterooms and went in, the Terrys were in seventeen and the Brasons in nineteen. The rooms were adjacent to each other and were connected by a door that could be unlocked from either side. Each room was the same, the one a mirror image of the other.

As Sheffield and Ramona entered their room, their luggage was there waiting for them. The room featured a double bed, dresser, a closet, two chairs, and private bathroom. On the far wall were two portholes. Sheffield went over and took a look outside. Over the promenade and the tops of the life boats, which were one deck below, he could see past the breakwater and out into bay.

As he scanned the bay, all of a sudden, he got real excited. "There's a carrier out there." he exclaimed. "If I didn't know better, I'd say its the Reprisal."

Without waiting for a response from Ramona, he opened their half of the door between their rooms and banged on the Terry's door. Teri opened it from the other side.

"Hank." Sheffield said excitedly. "Have you looked out over the bay?"

"No, what's out there."

"Have a look."

"Good Lord, there's a carrier."

"I think its the Reprisal. Lets go get a better look."

Together, they bolted out of the room and dashed down the corridor like two little boys trying to catch the ice cream truck. Just around the corner for the Brasons' room was doorway that led out onto the deck. They rushed to the rail and shading their eyes with their hands they studied the ship in an attempt to identify it.

"Yep, look at the racked stack and mast.." Sheffield deduced correctly. "It's the Reprisal alright, she's too small for the Roosevelt. Lets go see if we can go aboard. Come with me."

They went back inside and announced to their wives, "We're going to go see if we can get a closer look, we'll be back before we sail." Then they were gone before either Ramona or Teri could respond. "Have fun." they called after them.

The ladies finished unpacking and getting their rooms set up and then went exploring the Leonardo. Sheffield and Hank in the meantime made their way to the ferry landing that the US Navy used to shuttle to and from the ships at anchor in the bay. From having been there with the Reprisal fifteen years earlier, Sheffield knew exactly where it was.

When they got there, they identified themselves to the Lieutenant junior grade in charge and showed them their military identification, which showed Sheffield to be a retired Vice Admiral and Hank and retired Commander. They explained to the junior officer that twenty five years earlier they had been the captain and

executive officer of the Reprisal and requested permission to go out to her and go aboard.

The young Lieutenant wasn't in a position to grant the privilege, but made a ship to shore telephone call. After a moment, he returned to say, "You have permission to go aboard, Gentleman."

There just happened to be a launch waiting at the dock. Sheffield and Hank got in and the coxswain shoved off and began making their way out to the carrier. It wasn't very far so it was a short trip before they came along side. Sheffield led the way up the sea ladder with Hank right on his heels. When they reached the quarterdeck, they were greeted by the executive officer.

"Welcome aboard gentlemen," he greeted with a salute. "Its a pleasure to have you aboard. I am Commander Abercrombie."

"Thank you for having us, Commander." Sheffield said. "We are here with our wives for a cruise, we had no idea that the Reprisal was here."

"We're here on a four day port visit."

"Well," Hank added, "we're here to commemorate the twenty fifth year anniversary of when we sailed these waters on the Reprisal back in the summer of forty three."

"Well, she's changed a lot since then. Come with me, and I'll take you on a tour. When we're finished, Captain Readdy wants to meet you."

For the next hour they followed Commander Abercrombie as he showed them around the ship. So much of the interior was the same, even though her outward appearance had changed considerably. The Commander knew all about Sheffield's reputation of having not only been in command of the ship, but that she had been his flagship on two occasions.

When they got up on the flight deck, the entire air group was parked neatly around the perimeter of the deck. The two squadrons of F8 Crusaders, two squadrons of A4 Skyhawks, and a squadron of the trusty old Skyraiders, along with an assortment of a few other specialty aircraft. After Commander Abercrombie explained them, Sheffield told him about his three days aboard the Enterprise a year and a half earlier.

The tour ended on the bridge where they got to visit with the Captain and swap stories. Captain Readdy and Commander Abercrombie were particularly interested in their first hand accounts of their ship's role in the Italian Campaign and especially that day off Salerno.

"Yes sir," Hank added. "Right there is where we thought we had lost Captain Brason." as he pointed to the spot on the deck of the bridge where Sheffield laid unresponsive.

"Thats why I need this." Sheffield said, raising his cane.

"The way you described it in your book, that was quite hit you took that day." Commander Abercrombie said.

“You've read my book?”

“Its required reading for every officer aboard this ship.” he added. “We must have ten or twelve copies in the ship's library.”

It was getting late and they would have liked to stayed longer, but they had to get back to the Leonardo da Vinci before she sailed. “Yeah.” Hank said. “Our wives would never forgive us if we missed it.”

When they left the ship, the coxswain had orders from Captain Readdy to deliver them directly to the Leonardo. With time to spare, they went back aboard and found their wives in their staterooms. “Well, did you get that out of your system?” Ramona asked. “How is the old girl anyway?”

“Well, for coming up on her twenty sixth birthday, she's as modern and capable as any of the older carriers in the fleet. It was good to see her again.” Sheffield replied

Just then, a call came over the intercom for all guests to leave the ship, and that they would be sailing in twenty minutes.

“See.” Sheffield added. “We made it in plenty of time.”

Hank and Teri came and got them to go out on deck for the bon voyage celebration. The ship's band was playing and at the moment the lines were cast off, confetti rained down from above and the ship's fog horn added to celebration. The gangway was removed and below in the water, two tug boats were along side. The passengers cheered and waved as the thirty four thousand ton ship began moving away from the dock. Once out into the harbor, the ship began moving on its own and made its way out into the bay. The Leonardo passed close aboard the Reprisal, giving Sheffield and Hank one more good look at her.

With an hour of daylight left, everyone was sent back to their cabins to participate in the boat drill. When the signal was given, Sheffield, Ramona, and their friends went out into the corridor and joined the flow of people as they made their way to the exit, out along the deck to the stairs that lead down one deck to the boat deck. There, everyone was issued a life preserve and were instructed to get into the nearest lifeboat, which had all been lowered to the deck. The drill went smoothly and only took a few minutes. Once it was over, everyone was was released to go about their activities and the boats were again raised out of the way.

After the boat drill, the sun was settling low in the west. Everyone else seemed to make a mad dash for the various dining rooms. Sheffield suggested they let the crowds die down before going to dinner.

“Besides,” he added, “one of the things that I always enjoyed about being at sea was watching the the sun set and rise.”

They lingered as the western sky became ablaze with gold as the clouds reflected the brilliance of the sun. The lower it got, the faster it dropped. From the moment that the bottom of the sun touched the horizon, it sank quickly. Once it disappeared beneath the sea, the colors in the sky intensified. The four of

them simply watched in silence, amazed at the incredible beauty.

After several minutes, it began to fade. "I think we can go eat now." Sheffield announced.

After all it had been a long time since lunch. Ramona and Teri had got something to eat while Sheffield and Hank were visiting the Reprisal, so the men were particularly hungry. They went inside and made their way down to the Capri dining room on the Foyer Deck for dinner, despite the late hour.

The dining room was a hum with conversation at every table. One had to listen closely to figure out what languages were being spoken. Perhaps the majority were speaking Italian, followed by English. The couple at a nearby table had a definite British accent. There were also a few people speaking French or German. Like all other printed material on the ship, the menu was in both Italian and English. Sheffield ordered broiled snapper while Ramona had the red partridge casserole, and Hank ordered spaghetti with Neapolitan sauce and Teri had the spring chicken with bacon. Over dinner, their own conversation added to the international hum.

After dinner, the Terrys wanted to go to the lounge for a drink. Sheffield and Ramona said goodnight and went back out on deck. Just before ten o'clock, the moon rose above the Italian coastline in the east. The full moon had been a day or two before, nevertheless, it was big and bright. They watched it rise higher into the night sky until it disappeared behind the clouds.

It had been a long day, which began in Rome and the train ride to Naples and ended at sea aboard the Leonardo da Vinci. After a long kiss and embrace at the railing, they went back inside to their stateroom, but before drifting off to sleep, they made use of their "special powder".

Sheffield awoke when it started getting light and went out on deck to watch the sunrise. When Ramona awoke at five forty five to find him not there, she had a good idea where to find him. She went out on deck and found him at the rail just as the sun was rising. Together they watched it come up, its rays warming their faces in the crisp morning sea air. The sunrise that morning was every bit as spectacular as had been the sunset the night before.

Once the sun was up, they went back to their stateroom to get ready for the day. They were just about ready, when there was knock at the door between rooms. Together they went to breakfast, this time in the Tivoli Dining room.

After breakfast, Hank wanted to go up to the Sun Deck to do some skeet shooting. He and Sheffield each checked out a shotgun and some clay pigeons, their wives settled into a couple of lounge chairs to watch.

The first turn went to Hank. The clay disk was launched and leading with his shot gun, he pulled the trigger at just the right moment. The target fragmented into tiny pieces and fell into the sea. Next it was Sheffield turn. He missed. In fact, Hank scored on all of his first three shots, while Sheffield missed all three.

"How do you do that?" Sheffield asked.

"I do a lot of pheasant hunting."

"With shooting like that, I bet you eat a lot of pheasant."

"As a matter of fact, we do. Have you ever tried it?"

"I can't say that I have." Sheffield replied.

"Well, next time you come to see us, I'll have Teri fix up some. We have a freezer full, you know."

After they had used up their clay pigeons, Sheffield still had nothing to show for it, while Hank had only missed three shots. When they turned in their shotguns, Sheffield noticed that they had some handguns and targets behind the counter.

"Okay, you won that one. Lets try our hand with pistols."

"Sure, why not? I know you'll beat me at it." Hank winked.

The attendant set up the targets against the starboard railing and roped off the shooting range. It took two shots for Sheffield to find his mark and hit it consistently after that, while Hank only hit his target on occasion.

"That's some darn good marksmanship." Hank congratulated. "I remember how you used to wear you service revolver aboard the ship."

"I still have it. I always figured that if the ship went down that it might come in handy."

While they indulged themselves, their wives visited over a some magazines. Just before nine o'clock, the Leonardo was preparing to enter Palermo Harbor and at precisely on the hour, the ship tied up at he Italian Lines terminal.

Twenty five years earlier, Palermo and the Island of Sicily had been the target for the Reprisal's air group and under Sheffield's direction, they had been sent on combat missions in support of the Army as they fought to liberate Palermo and Sicily. Now Sheffield and Hank, who was at his side then were preparing to go ashore and visit the city as tourists.

Sheffield didn't know what was going through Hank's mind, but as for him it meant that what they had done there during the summer of forty three had all been worth it. It was similar to his attitude as he visited Japan and Tokyo after having contributed to its defeat. Both Japan and Sicily, and all of Italy for that matter, were free from tyranny and oppression. What he had seen of Italy over the last few days, was a modern, progressive nation. He was excited to go ashore to see what Palermo had to offer.

In company with the Terrys, Sheffield and Ramona left the ship for a day of sightseeing. Downtown Palermo was within walking distance of the pier, but taxis, tour buses, and even horse drawn carriages waited to take the tourists into the city. The four of them opted for a horse drawn carriage. As they approached the line of carriages, the drivers completed for their attention. The one that won out was an

older gentleman who had called out to them in English.

They negotiated the fare for a tour of the city with Damiano, the driver. They secured his services for a four hour tour and climbed into the four seat carriage. It was arranged so that the front seat was facing backwards and had a cover that could be raised to shade the passengers when it got too hot.

Once they were settled, Damiano called out to his team, Giovanni (Jack) and Giuseppe (Joe) in Italian. On the way into the center of the city, Damiano told them that he had lived in the area his entire life and in his younger years had been a farmer. When the island was liberated, his orchards had been destroyed by the German tanks in their retreat. After the battle, he put his wagon and horses to work delivering supplies and material to the Americans, who taught him to speak English. Then when the tourists began returning after the war ended, he put his horses to work by giving tours of the city, which he had been doing ever since.

Four hours didn't afford a lot of time, so Damiano selected some of the more interesting places to take them, explaining the rest in passing. There wasn't much time to actually spend in any one place, so they opted for seeing the sights. The many churches and other building represented various styles of architecture from various periods of history. Some of what had been damaged during the war still hadn't been rebuilt. Damiano took them to the two main squares, each surrounded by cafés and shops. At noon they stopped off for lunch and to buy some souvenirs at Piazza Castelnuovo before continuing their tour of the city. Damiano had them back at the ship by two thirty. They paid him his fare plus a generous tip and had their picture taken with him and his carriage and horses.

They were back aboard in time for it to sail at three o'clock. When they returned to their cabins, they found an invitation from the captain to dine with him that evening at six o'clock in the Capri Dining Room. They had been selected because their passenger profiles indicated that both Sheffield and Hank were retired naval officers. One of the things the passenger profile asked for was prior or current military rank.

In the meantime they took advantage of the swimming pool on the Lido Deck, on the same deck as their staterooms. The pool was filled with heated seawater, which made for a very relaxing soak as the Leonardo steamed north, away from Sicily. After a while, they opted to continue their conversation in some lounge chairs under the covered veranda.

They lounged around the pool until it was time to dress for dinner. To be seated at the Captain's table meant formal dress. As they entered the dining hall, they presented the card that accompanied their invitation to the matradee and were taken to the table at the far end of the hall. A distinguished looking gentleman with a full head of wavy black hair, wearing the uniform of a captain in the Italian Line stood to greet them.

"Captain, may I present Admiral and Commander Brason and Commander and Misses Terry." the

matradee announced.

“Thank you for joining me for dinner.” the Captain said in a heavy Italian accent. “I’m honored by your presence. I am Captain Gaius Mosconi, the captain of the Leonardo da Vinci.”

While they were being seated, the matradee presented Conrad and Catheine Beckham from Portsmouth, England. Captain Mosconi introduced himself to them and then introduced the Brasons and Terrys. Finally, they were joined by Luciano and Carmela Portelli from Genoa Italy, followed by another round of introductions. The one thing the four men had in common was that they were all retired naval officers. Captain Mosconi had personally selected them to be his dinner guests that evening. The Brasons and Terrys were at least ten to fifteen years older than everyone else at the table, who were all in their fifties.

The conversation naturally centered around their respective naval careers. Captain Mosconi himself had been a sub-lieutenant in the Regia Marina when the war ended. With the disbanding of the Italian Navy he went into the Italian Merchant Marine to continue his career that eventually led him to the Italian Line and his current position.

Likewise, Luciano had been a junior officer in the Italian Navy when the war ended. However he remained in the military for another ten years and retired as a corvette captain, which was equivalent to a lieutenant commander. After leaving the service, he took a managerial position at Ansaldo Shipyards in Genoa, the same shipyard that had built the Leonardo, and had worked his way up to become a senior executive with the company.

As for Conrad, he too had been a junior officer in the Royal Navy during the war and later retired with the rank of Commander. He went on to found his own engineering firm that specialized in designing turbines and generators for public utilities and was a member of Parliament.

Hank explained how he had been a commercial pilot for United Airlines and had volunteered for the Naval Transport Service immediately after Pearl Harbor and because of his prior experience received a commission as a Lieutenant Commander and eventually found himself in the air department on the Ranger. Later he was promoted to Commander and became her air officer. When the Reprisal returned from an arctic deployment in the Spring of 1943, she was in desperate need for an executive officer. Although he was ineligible for command, out of desperation he was tapped for the assignment, which he held until he was discharged in January of 1946.

The two Italians naturally had been on the opposing side during the war. As the men swapped stories of their service, it was discovered that Captain Masconi and Conrad Beckham had both been at the Battle of Matapan in which Captain Masconi’s ship had been sunk.

“Have you ever sailed the Mediterranean before, Admiral Brason?” Capitan Masconi asked.

“Actually this is my fifth time. The first was back in twenty two when I was a young Ensign. We passed through on the return leg of a world cruise. The next time was during the summer of forty three when Hank and I participated in the Italian Campaign. We got hit at pretty hard off Salerno. The next time was in November of forty four on our way to the Pacific. We made a slight detour to hit some German targets at Genoa. The fourth time was in May of fifty three. So yes, I'm quite familiar with these waters.”

While the men talked of their naval careers, the women visited among themselves, although Ramona listened in with one ear on Sheffield's conversation with the other men at the table. After dinner, there was a floor show put on by some of ship's entertainers. As Captain Masconi excused himself to return to his duties, he extended an invitation to his dinner guests to tour the bridge, an invitation Sheffield was sure to take him up on.

After dinner, the Brasons and Terrys took a stroll on deck to watch the sunset. At the time, the ship was heading west, directly into it. The best view was from the forward Promenade Deck where it wrapped around the supper structure. After the sun had set, they went inside where the ship's theater was located. A poster displayed in the lobby said that “Yours, Mine, and Ours” starring Henry Fonda and Lucille Ball was playing. Neither couple had seen it yet and decided to attend the nine o'clock showing. With popcorn and soft drinks in hand, they went in and found some good seats in the center of the fourth row. When the movie was over, they returned to the cabins and turned in.

Wednesday promised another day of sightseeing. Sheffield and Ramona got up and got ready for the day and joined the Terrys for breakfast as the Leonardo approached Tunis. After breakfast, they went out on deck to watch as the ship pulled into the North African port and at eight o'clock it was secured to the pier and passengers began leaving the ship. As with the day before in Palermo, they had a few hours, as the ship was scheduled to sail at two in the afternoon.

When they left the ship, a horde of taxi drivers competed with each other to take them into the city to have a look around. This time, they chose to get on a tour bus with several other passengers from the ship. The tour guide who spoke French and English, besides his native Tunisian Arabic, explained that Tunis and Tunisia's history dated back over some three thousand years. During that time it had been occupied by the Phoenicians, Romans, Byzantines, Turks, Spanish and finally the French from whom they gained their independence in 1956. In the early 1960s the government began enticing tourists from Western Europe and North America and in just a few years it had become a popular travel destination.

The city reflected the influence of the various cultures in the rich architecture of the buildings. The guide related the history of some of the more interesting places on the route. Occasionally, the bus stopped long enough to go in and look around before boarding the bus again. One stop included lunch, with selections from a number of restaurants, cafés, and street vendors. There was so much to see, that they

only got a little taste of what the city had to offer before returning to the ship.

Right on schedule, the ship pulled away from the dock and headed northwest through the Mediterranean. That afternoon, Sheffield and Hank took up the Captain's offer for a tour of the bridge while Ramona and Teri kept their appointment at the beauty salon.

Captain Masconi was as gracious as he had been the previous evening at dinner as he personally showed them around and explained more about the ship. She had been built as a replacement for Andrea Doria which had been lost in a collision 1956. The Leonardo was laid down two years later at the Ansaldo Shipyard in Genoa and was completed in 1960. She was very similar to her predecessor, only larger.

Her design and construction included several innovations that made her one of the most advanced ocean liners in the world. There was even space reserved in her engineering compartment for her to be retrofitted with two nuclear reactors. Eight years after her completion, it looked unlikely that it would ever happen. As built, her four steam turbines and twin screws gave her a maximum speed of twenty five and a half knots and a twenty three knot cruising speed.

The Leonardo had a crew of nine hundred, including the waiters, chefs, housekeepers and the ship's company. She had accommodations for 1,326 passengers (413 first class, 342 cabin class, 571 tourist class). Her maiden voyage took place when she sailed from Genoa on the 30th of June 1960 for New York City.

Following the tour of the bridge, Sheffield and Hank were taken below to see the engineering spaces, something most passengers didn't get to see, let alone appreciate. "She's a fine ship, Captain." Sheffield said complementing Captain Masoni at the conclusion of the tour, which took most of the afternoon. By then the ship had entered a storm front. It was raining and sea was quite choppy, but the Leonardo plowed on unaffected by the rough weather.

When they got back to their cabins to get ready for dinner, Sheffield went in to find Ramona all ready. "My don't you look mighty nice."

"Thank you. Do you like it?"

"Oh yes. What did you do?"

"We got the works. Not only did they do our hair, but we got the full spa treatment; facials, manicures, pedicures, massages, the whole works. So get ready for dinner, because afterwards were going dancing."

Toward evening, the storm intensified and the ship had to slow down. During dinner there was some rolling and pitching of the ship which made things a little interesting for some of the passengers who had never encountered those conditions. For Sheffield and Hank, they had seen much worse. It also made dancing interesting as the floor moved up and down. While they were all dressed up, both couples

had their picture taken by the ship's photographer. When it came time to go to bed, the swaying of ship the was actually quite relaxing. It was like being rocked to sleep.

By morning the ship had passed through the front and had smooth sailing. There was no port call that day and the entire day would be spent at sea. They spent the day relaxing at the pool and strolling the deck, visiting and getting acquainted with new friends. They found plenty of people who spoke English and even a few Americans. They even tried their hand at shuffle board. Ramona and Teri attended an Italian cooking class taught by the the chief chef aboard the ship, in which they learned how to make Chicken Piccata.

By late afternoon, the Leonardo was passing just north of Menorca, the northern most of Spain's Balearic Islands. After an enjoyable day at sea, it was time to ready to get ready for dinner.

After dinner that evening, the entertainment was a talent show, with the talent being provided by the passengers. As they were enjoying the show, Teri nudged Hank and said, "You could have done your magic act."

"I didn't know that you were a magician, Hank." Sheffield said with surprise.

"Oh it's not much. Just something I entertain the grandkids with." Hank explained. "Besides their beginning to wise up to me. These folks would see right through me."

"Well, if I still had my sining voice, I'd of signed up." Ramona lamented.

"What happened to your voice?" Teri asked.

"It kind of a long story." Ramona began. "It's all because of bee sting that I got in Hawaii." She went on to relate the story of being stung and the allergic reaction that she had, which led to a tracheotomy. "And so," she concluded, "I can't sing any more."

"That's too bad, Ramona. We're sorry to hear that." Hank said sympathetically.

The show consisted of some pretty good talent, mostly musical. For variety there was a ventriloquist, an impersonator, and a man who could make incredible shadow images of people, animals, and things with his hands. After the show, they returned to their staterooms for a good nights rest.

On Friday Morning, there was plenty of time before the ship docked in Barcelona at ten o'clock for another eight hour port visit. As with the other stops, eight hours wasn't enough to even begin to see what Barcelona had to offer. As in Tunis they opted for the bus tour. However, unlike their tour of Tunis, this one was much more organized.

The tour included, among other attractions, the La Sagrada Família – a cathedral and world-famous architectural masterpiece, Gaudí's Park with its beautiful gardens and views of the city, the Passeig de Gràcia – Barcelona's most luxurious strip where they got to do a little shopping, the Plaza Espanya – the most impressive plaza in Barcelona, the National Palace, Montjuïc Castle – a fortress that overlooked the

port, and the Columbus Monument. At each stop they had anywhere from five minutes to a half an hour to walk around. From just about every where in the city, Montserrat, an incredible multi peaked mountain loomed in the distance. By the time the bus took them back to the ship, they were satisfied that had seen Barcelona.

The ship sailed at six o'clock in time for dinner, the evening entertainment, and another night aboard the ship. At nine o'clock the next morning the Leonardo docked in Toulon, France for a nine hour port call. Although Toulon had a lot to offer, this day was for Teri, who had never been to the beach. Toulon is considered the western end of the famous French Riviera noted for its fabulous beaches. "I haven't come this far not to go swimming in the Mediterranean Sea." she declared.

So a good part of the day was spent at the beach; swimming, soaking in the sun, and watching people. By lunch, Teri was satisfied and they went into the city for the rest of the afternoon. Rather than attempt to see the sights, they just wandered around what was called the old town and saw what they could. There were fountains everywhere as they went up and down the streets and in out of the shops. They did however run across the Tuolon Cathedral and went in to have a look at the art work. It turned out to be a very enjoyable day, free from the rigors of a scheduled tour. They made it back to the ship and were aboard in time to sail at four o'clock.

That evening and night aboard the ship were similar to the others. The next morning at eight the Leonardo docked in Genoa, the last port call of the cruise. Like Palermo, during the war Sheffield had sent an attack against Genoa. Once again, they took a day long bus tour of the city, taking in the sights. As in Barcelona, they had time to actually stop and see the places that they visited. When the ship sailed at five o'clock that evening, a party atmospheric prevailed as it was the last night of the cruise. Dinner was extra special and the best entertainment was saved for the last.

Half of Monday was spent at sea as the Leonard steamed south through the Tyrrhenian Sea, with Corsica and Sardinia to the west and Italy to the east, providing one last chance to take advantage of the shipboard amenities. When it reached a point about one hundred miles west of Naples, Captain Masconi changed course, heading due east for Naples.

They had spent the morning on deck enjoying the sun and the sea. As the ship changed course, Hank observed, "This is probably about the spot where we got hit."

"What makes you saw that?" Sheffield asked.

"Well from the itinerary, we were to change course about one hundred miles east of Naples. That's about where we were."

"Perhaps your right Hank. Thanks for inviting us. This has been great. Its amazing what a difference twenty five years can make. Back then we were here to bring destruction to the enemy, its gratifying to see

that most everything has been patched up and life is good for these people. After all, freeing them from oppression was what it was all about.”

After the Leonardo changed course, it was still a little over our hours before they arrived in port. As the ship approached, the coastline came into view and grew larger. They remained on deck as they slipped past the breakwater and into the harbor. Finally, the ship was right back where it was when they first came aboard.

They went in and gathered their luggage and left the ship that had been their home away from home for the last seven days. “I don't know about you,” Sheffield said to Hank and Teri as they made their way down to the Foyer Deck, “but we're ready to go home.”

“Us too.” Hank agreed. “But we're still a long ways from home.”

“I don't know about the rest of you,” Teri added, “But for me this has been the trip of a lifetime.”

They stopped and took one last look around the grand lobby before stepping through the double doors onto the gangway which led into the terminal where they gathered their luggage. Outside of the terminal building several shuttle buses sat waiting to take passengers to the airport. Their luggage was transferred to the bus and they got on. The twenty minute bus ride took them through the heart of Naples, getting them to the airport at two o'clock.

It took a while to check in and go through customs before they could go to the gate where they had another hour or so before the boarding call was made. Once they boarded and got situated, the plane took off at four twenty. Fifty five minutes later they landed in Rome. Again, there was long wait for their connection to New York which didn't take off until seven fifty five.

The flight back was the same length as the flight over, the difference was that this time they lost six time zones making it two thirty in the morning when they arrived at JFK International Airport. They said goodbye to Hank and Teri, who had to catch their flight to Salt Lake City, before going on to Boise.

In parting, they promised to get together again sometime. The trip had renewed and rekindled their long friendship. Since Sheffield and Ramona would be going to Idaho often to see Norma and Wade, they promised to go see them. And now that Hank was retired, they said they'd come to Virginia sometime.

After saying goodbye, Sheffield and Ramona had a little while before their flight to Washington left. They had gotten some sleep on the flight from Rome, but it wasn't very restful. Neither was what sleep they got while waiting for their boarding call.

Once in Washington, they had another wait for their flight to Roanoke. Finally at six thirty five on Tuesday morning the 21st, they were landed in Roanoke. Craig was there to meet them and take them home before he had to go to work.

They took their luggage into the house and before unpacking, Ramona wanted a relaxing soak in her

bathroom. It wasn't hard to convince Sheffield to join her. It was so relaxing that they were able to get some sleep in their own bed, before unpacking. The best part of the whole trip was coming home.

Other than going to see the kids out west in July, they didn't have any more travel plans. Since returning from Hawaii, they had been out west to see the kids, taken a trip to New England, two more trips out west, and revisited the Mediterranean.

* * * * *

For the background story and introduction of Hank and Teri Terry see *The Business of War*, chapter 26.

The Grand Hotel became the St. Regis Grand in 1999.

The cruise itinerary is based on an actual Western Mediterranean cruise

What they had for dinner the first night at sea are actual items from a 1969 menu from the *Leonardo da Vinci*.

For an account of the action off Palermo, see *The Business of War* chapters 27 and 29