

Chapter LXV

USS Brason

January 7, 1980 – November 15, 1980

After the holidays had come and gone, the new year settled back into a normal routine for everyone. January and February seemed to pass rather slowly without anything out of the ordinary, even their anniversary was rather low key. During the construction of the Brason, Sheffield and Ramona received update reports from time to time, including photographs that allowed them to see progress. Other than late 1980, no formal date for her commissioning had been set yet.

On the first Sunday of March, the routine that they had been accustomed to for all the years that they had been members of the Church changed drastically. That Sunday, the Church put in place a new consolidated meeting schedule. Up until then Priesthood meeting was from seven o'clock until eight. That gave the men an hour to go home and get their families for Sunday School while the other ward was in Priesthood meeting. Sunday School was from nine until eleven thirty. Then the other ward had Sunday School from eleven to twelve thirty. During the half hour overlap, the other ward was having their opening exercises in the chapel. Then there was a break until five o'clock when they came back for Sacrament Meeting, which lasted until six thirty. The other ward met at seven and went until eight thirty. So Sunday had always been a rather long, drawn out day, coming and going to the various meetings, with Sunday dinner in between. But that wasn't all, Primary was at three thirty on Tuesday afternoon when the kids got out of school. The other ward had theirs on Wednesday. Relief Society was Thursday morning at ten o'clock while the other ward met at one o'clock in the afternoon. Mutual was Tuesday night at seven, while the other ward had Mutual on Wednesday night.

That had people coming and going all of the time, so to alleviate the burden on families the Church devised a three hour consolidated meeting block. Beginning on March 2nd the Salem Ward met at nine o'clock with Priesthood Meeting, Relief Society, Young Women, the Primary all in session at the same time which lasted until nine fifty. After a ten minute break, Sunday School, with no opening exercises, was held from ten until the ten forty for everyone over twelve years old while the Primary remained in session. There was another ten minute break before Sacrament Meeting which lasted from ten minutes to eleven until noon. Then they were done for the day. The other ward began their block at eleven o'clock while the Salem Ward was in Sacrament Meeting. The idea was that the two wards would switch off on the times every year. That way the rest of the day and week were free, except for Tuesday night when the youth still had Mutual. The new schedule had its advantages and its disadvantages. The advantages were obvious, the disadvantage was that people didn't have as much time to mingle and socialize.

Ramon a still continued to teach the Gospel Doctrine class in Sunday School. She had adopted the

teaching style that she used in teaching first aid to sailors and health to college girls. Rather than stand behind a desk and give a lecture, she preferred to lead a discussion while wandering around among her students. On the weeks when they were out of town, she had permanent substitute lined up. Besides being the Stake Patriarch, Sheffield taught the high priest group once a month.

Ever since being released from the bishopric, Craig had been the Teachers Quorum advisor. Then on Easter Sunday, Craig and Edith were invited into the stake presidents office to meet with their brother in law after their block of meetings. That same weekend was general conference, but since the broadcast still weren't carried in the East, it was pretty much another Sunday.

When Sheffield and Ramona went over for dinner later in the afternoon, Craig looked a little pale and preoccupied. "Dad," he asked, "Before you were called to be the branch president, did you have any inkling?"

"No, none whatsoever. I was caught completely off guard. Why?"

"Well lately I kept getting the feeling that something was up and that I was going to be the next bishop. Everytime the thought entered my mind I quickly tried to get rid of it because I thought I was being presumptuous or aspiring, but it just wouldn't go away. I even began thinking of who to ask for as counselors and clerks."

"I tried to tell him to listen." Edith added. "I told him the Lord was preparing him."

Craig continued, "I can think of a dozen men more qualified than me and besides, I didn't think it would look very good for Rupert to call his own brother in law."

"Where are you going with this?" Ramona asked, cutting to chase.

"We just came from Rupert's office and he called me to be the next bishop." Craig admitted. "He told me that I could tell my immediate family."

"Oh Craig." Ramona boasted, "I'm so proud of you."

"Its just that its such a big responsibility. I'm not sure I'm up to it."

"Let me tell you something about that." Sheffield interrupted. "Any time a calling in the Church or a promotion in the Navy came my way, I wasn't sure I was up to it either. But do you know what I learned? I learned that it always worked out. The ability came from somewhere and the job got done and I found myself made equal to the task. Even though I didn't know it, everything that went before prepared me for the next opportunity to serve. If you look back, you'll see what I mean. After all you were the Elders Quorum President and then Phil's first counselor for five years and you did a great job. You have that and a lot of other things to draw on, and you've got the Lord. After all, this calling is from him. He won't let you fail, unless you try to go it on your own."

"Thanks Dad." Craig replied. "That helps a lot. I do have a lot to think about."

By then Geoff and his family showed up. Craig shared the news with them as well. "So when is this going to happen?" Geoff asked.

"In two weeks on the twentieth." Craig answered.

"Yeah," Edith added, just about the same time that Gean has her baby. I was planning on going out to be with her."

"Not only that, but right after that we need to go to Todd's graduation and bring Tina and him home for the summer." Craig said.

"Don't worry about it." Ramona encouraged. "It'll all work out."

"I suppose you're right, Mom." Craig concluded.

After dinner, he called the kids in Idaho to tell them the news. Then with the afternoon free, Craig did what he had seen Sheffield do on many occasions, he went up in his Bonanza to think and meditate. He had until next Sunday to get the names of those he wanted to serve with him to President Casper and during the week things fell into place, for the most part.

But there was one nagging question that he really struggled with, so he went to Sheffield again to seek his advice. "I know who I want for my clerk." he said. "I've given it a lot of thought and prayer and I feel good about my selection, but I just don't know if I should ask for him."

"If you don't mind me asking, who is it." Sheffield asked.

"He's the most detailed person I know with an uncanny ability to keep track of things, not to mention the fact that he's always got things organized just so."

"It sounds to me like you're talking about Geoff."

"Yeah I am."

"So what's the problem?"

"Wouldn't look like I was showing favoritism by asking for my own son?"

"Not if that's who it's supposed to be. I had the same reservation when I asked for Phil as my clerk and it turned out to be the best thing I could have done. Now look where he is."

"That's a good point. Thanks Dad. I'm going to go ahead and ask for Geoff. If Rupert has a problem with it, I'm sure he'll let me know."

On Sunday morning, when Craig called President Casper with the names, he simply said, "Those are some excellent choices, especially Geoff. We'll get them approved and try to have them called by Tuesday night."

That morning in Sacramento Meeting, it was announced that there would be a change in the bishopric

the next Sunday.

The very next day, Edith flew out to Idaho to be with Gean and on Thursday the 17th she called home with the news that Justin Randall Betts had been born that day.

During the week, Craig got a call from each of the men that he had asked for. None of them were as surprised as was Geoff.

By Sunday, there were all kinds of rumors as speculation ran rampant. Then at Church on Sunday, people were looking around at who had family from out of town with them. One person was overheard saying, "Well I don't think its Brother Brason. His wife isn't even here."

During Sacrament Meeting, President Casper released the outgoing bishopric and asked the men who's names he called out to stand up. When Craig was proposed as the new bishop, there was a hushed buzz of approval as everyone raised their hands to sustain him. Then each of his counselors were sustained followed by Geoff as the ward clerk. Finally the assistant clerks and the executive secretary were sustained.

Following the sustaining, Craig and his counselors were invited to come up and sit on the stand. The outgoing bishopric were each called on to express themselves and Craig was the concluding speaker. After the meeting, he was pressed upon by those who wanted to personally express their support. After the meeting, Craig and the others were set apart, even though Edith wasn't there. Normally, he would have went right to work, but the next day he left town.

Early on Monday morning, the 21st of April, Sheffield , Ramona, and Craig took off from the Two Star Ranch in the Staggerwing and flew to Idaho, with the usual stops in Springfield and McCook. Late in the afternoon the landed at the Betts Farm south of Burley. Edith kept one eye on the sky as she listened for their arrival. Form the air, Sheffield could see their new International Harvest 886 out in the field planting sugar beets and made a low level, head on pass at it, which got Nathan's attention. He continued on over the house, which got Edith's attention. She hopped into Gean's car and drove over to Randall and Susan's house to meet them. As she turned onto the lane, Sheffield had just landed and was taxiing down the lane toward the house as Edith followed.

After being apart for a week, Craig and Edith were reunited when he emerged from the plane. Once the Staggerwing was unloaded, Edith drove them back over to Gean's house where they got to see little Justin for the first time, as each of them took their turn holding him. When Nathan got to the end of the field he called it good for the day and shut off the tractor and got into his pickup and drove back to the house to greet their guests.

Gean was glad to have had her mother with there with her when Justin was born to help out with the other children and to attend to her needs. It was a very busy time on the farm with spring planting for

Nathan. He was able to break away when Gean went to the hospital and waited around for the birth. But as soon as he was sure that everything was alright, he had to get back to work. Gean and Nathan put their additional guests up for the night. The new baby wasn't the only exciting topic of conversation, as Gean and Nathan wanted to know all about Craig's new calling.

After spending the night, they stayed a good share of the next day. Nathan, unfortunately wasn't able to spend much time with them as he still had over one hundred acres of sugar beets to plant. Sheffield and Craig wandered out to the field where he was working just to see what it was all about. They found him at the end of the field emptying fifty pound paper seed bags into the planter. Craig grabbed a bag to help out.

"How do you get your rows so straight? Sheffield asked.

"Like everything else it took years of practice." he answered. "You should see the bobble I got in the rows when you buzzed the tractor."

After visiting for a few minutes the planter was refilled, Nathan had to get back to work. They watched from the end of the field as the tractor slowly moved away, planting twelve rows of beets at a time as it went.

Nathan took a break for lunch and stayed a little longer than he normally would have before he had to get back out to the field. They all said goodbye to Gean and the kids and Nathan took Sheffield, Ramona, Craig, and Edith back over to his dad's house where the Staggerwing was parked.

After stowing their luggage in the storage compartment, they took off, but before leaving, Sheffield buzzed the tractor and the house. He had enough fuel for their next destination and soon landed at the airport in Rexburg, where Norma met them and took them home. Todd, Tina and Wade hadn't come home from the campus yet and Marty was still at the high school. But that didn't mean there wasn't a house full as Samantha, Collin and little Matthew, who was two days shy of being six months old, were staying with them at the time. Collin had graduated from BYU the previous week and had a job lined up in the financial aid office at Ricks College but wouldn't be starting for until the following Monday. They were in the process of finding a place to live.

When they arrived, Teresa came over from next door, with nineteen month old Jeremy, to see her Great Grandpa and Grandma Brason and Uncle Craig and Aunt Edith. Shortly, Todd and Tina came home, followed by Marty, and eventually Wade got home as well. They too all wanted to know about Craig's new calling. After having been a bishop himself, Wade knew all too well what it was all about.

There was all kinds of excitement in the air as the family gathered that evening. First and foremost was Todd's graduation from Ricks on Thursday. But that wasn't all. Marty who had turned nineteen in

February had submitted his mission papers with the anticipation of leaving on his mission soon after graduating from high school. He was anticipating his mission call any day, hopefully while his grandparents were there. Teresa used the occasion of the family gathering to announce that she and Roy had just found out the week before that they were expecting their second child around Thanksgiving. There was more surprise announcement that Todd was withholding until a certain moment.

That occurred the next day when Rachel's family arrived from California for her graduation. Todd had arranged for both families to get together for a pre-graduation celebration. It was clear that in the last few months, their relationship had become much more serious and it shouldn't have been a surprise to anyone, especially Rachel, but she was caught off guard as much as anyone when Todd asked her to marry him and presented her with an engagement ring.

With tears of emotion, she threw her arms around him and accepted his proposal. Both families were excited for them and wanted to know when and where. Although they had discussed the possibility of getting married, they didn't have those answers. It would prove interesting as her plans where to return home to California for the summer before going on to BYU in the fall. As for Todd, his plans were to return home and go to Virginia Tech in the fall to complete his degree in electrical engineering. Her father suggested a number of good engineering schools in Los Angeles, but Todd pointed out the fact of out of state residency, which wouldn't be an issue at Virginia Tech. Besides they had the particular program that he was interested in.

There was time to figure out all of the details, but right now they were focused on their graduation. Sheffield and Ramona accompanied Craig, Edith, and Tina to Todd's graduation in the Hart Auditorium on Thursday the 24th. Rather than fly home on Friday as planned, they stayed in Rexburg so Todd and Rachel could work out the initial wedding plans. The plan was that they would get married in the Los Angeles Temple on August 1st and have a reception in Torrence the next night. After their honeymoon they would have a reception in Salem on a yet to determined date. Then they would find an apartment in Blacksburg so Todd could attend Virginia Tech. Rachel would find a job and perhaps take an art class or two.

While all of that was being hashed out, Marty received his mission call on Friday. With his parents, his sisters and their families, and his Grandpa and Grandma Brason all present he opened it to learn that he had been called to the Brazil Rio de Janeiro Mission and was to enter the Missionary Training Center in Provo on July 30th for three weeks of missionary training and another eight weeks to learn Portuguese.

"Rio is one of my favorite places." his grandpa told him. "I've been there three times, you know." He then preceded to tell him about the beautiful city and his experiences there.

Sheffield and Ramona could see that they were going to have some traveling to do over the next

several months. There was Marty's graduation in May. Then if everything worked out, they could attend Marty's farewell on their way to Todd's wedding, all before going to spend time with Janet and Norma and the family reunion. Sometime in the summer or fall, Wesley would be leaving on his mission as well. Then later in the fall they were to go back to Seattle for the commissioning of the Brason.

With some of the wedding details worked out, Todd said goodbye to Rachel and he and Tina, Craig, and Edith flew back home with Sheffield and Ramona on Saturday. Todd and Tina's Chevy Lauguna was left parked in Norma and Wade's driveway waiting for Tina when she came back in the fall. She had to share it with Todd, but know it would be all hers.

The next day was Craig's first Sunday as the bishop. He had somewhat of an idea as what to expect from having been a counselor. He could tell right from that first day that it was going to be a busy and time consuming job. The day started early and during Sacrament Meeting while he sat on the stand and Geoff was seated at the clerk's desk, Edith sat with Brenda and helped her with Barry and GG. After the meeting block he had a lot of things to attend to and didn't get home until late in the afternoon. That was only the beginning of what was in store for him.

Sheffield and Ramona looked forward to their next trip. It seemed like Craig and his family were getting all of their attention lately This trip was for Norma's family. They flew back out to Idaho on Monday the 19th of May and landed at the Rexburg Airport later in the afternoon. Norma was there waiting for them to take them home with her. The purpose for this trip was Marty's high school graduation on the 22nd. He was already looking beyond graduation to his mission. The day after graduation Sheffield and Ramona accompanied Marty and the rest of the family to the Idaho Falls Temple for his first time through in preparation for his mission. Besides all of that, Ramona got to spend time with her great grandchildren, Jeremy and Matthew.

On Saturday, they flew down to Clarkston to spend a few days Janet and her family since they had been left out lately. Monday was Memorial Day and they went with Janet and Jerry as they went up to the cemetery to put flowers out on Anthony's grave. It was hard to believe that it had been twenty years since he made his brief appearance in mortality. While there, they followed them around as they attended to the graves of others of Jerry's family. Later in the afternoon, they joined in on a gathering of Wayne and Gail's family, including Morris and Sheila. Their three children were all married with children of their own now, as did the rest of Jerry's brothers and sisters.

While there they celebrated Wesley's nineteenth birthday a day early on the 30th. He had just finished his freshman year at Utah State University over in Logan and had submitted his mission papers the week before. Now he was anxiously anticipating his mission call in the next couple of weeks. When

Sheffield and Ramona said goodbye on Saturday, he promised to call them when he got it.

When Sheffield and Ramona returned home late that afternoon, they looked forward to the next eight weeks at home before they were off again. The following Wednesday Ramona celebrated her seventy seventh birthday. A few days later they received another update and pictures regarding the Brason, which was on track to be commissioned in November. She was virtually complete, but still fitting out, and her crew had been assigned. They also received a brief biographical sketch on her commanding officer, Commander Winston Rubens. As the ship's Sponsor, Ramona wrote a short note to Commander Ruben's congratulating him on his new command.

Towards the end of the second week in June, Sheffield and Ramona got a call from Wesley to tell them that he had been called to the South Dakota Rapid City Mission and was to enter the Missionary Training Center on August 27th. That was convenient since it would be when they were already out west. That would give them two grandsons serving missions at the same time, not to mention Christopher Morley, their surrogate grandson.

On Thursday the 19th Sheffield and Ramona went over to Geoff's house to celebrate his twenty fifth birthday. The next day clear a cross the country Teresa celebrated her twenty fifth birthday. When Ramona called her to wish her a happy birthday, she asked her how she was doing. Teresa told her that she had been growing more than expected with this pregnancy so she made an appointment to see her doctor, which happened to be earlier that very day. The doctor had her go to the hospital to have a sonogram taken so he could get a better idea of what was going on.

"What did he find?" Ramona asked with concern.

"I'm having twins!" was her reply.

"Oh my goodness gracious." Ramona exclaimed. "How about that. Two for the price of one."

During the last part of June, Todd went to California to be with Rachel and work out the details of their wedding. After spending a week there, she came back with him to spend a week in Virginia to work out the details there. While she was there the family got to know her better. She was as sweet as she was pretty, but seemed to be a bit on the spoiled side and would require some extra attention. It was obvious that she was into the latest fashions and styles and was used to having a lot as her father was quite wealthy. It would be interesting to see how she handled the realities of being a newlywed so far from home.

She happened to be there over the 4th of July and joined the Brason's for their usual 4th of July celebration and attended church with them in the Salem Ward on Sunday before going back to California the next day. It would be the last time they would see each other until Todd flew out three and a half weeks later for the wedding.

Later in the month, Sheffield, Ramona, and Tina flew to Rexburg in the Staggerwing to attend Marty's missionary farewell on the 27th. They stayed for a couple of days with Norma and Wade and got to see the grandkids and great grandkids. Teresa looked like she was about to pop already and she still had four months. Early Wednesday morning they said goodbye to Marty and wished him well on his mission when Norma and Wade left to take him to the MTC. After seeing them off, Samantha took Sheffield, Ramona, and Tina back to the airport and they took off on the second leg of their trip. They made a stop in Burley and picked up Gean and her family before continuing on to California. Around noon they landed at Zamperni Field in Torrance, California. Rachel's father, Curt, met them with an fifteen passenger van that he had rented to handle all of their company. He drove them to the Reynolds' home in the affluent Hollywood Riviera neighborhood of Torrance, just a short distance from the airport.

The house was just short of a mansion with a three car garage and a perfectly manicured yard. When they pulled into the driveway, Rachel came out to meet them and took them in the house. She and her mother were busy with some last minute details, but they put it aside and warmly greeted their guests. The large two story house had five bedrooms and three bathrooms. Rachel's older siblings were married and her young brother was serving a mission and only Rachel and her younger sister lived at home. Since they had family from out town there for the wedding, they had a full house. Curt and his wife, Regina, were originally from Ogden, Utah and that is where most of their family still lived. Some drove down for the wedding but others flew. Of their married children, two of them lived in the Los Angeles area while one lived in Washington D.C.

Later in the day, Craig, Edith and Todd arrived with Geoff and his family, who had flown out in his Bonanza and landed at Zamperni Field. Again Curt met them and brought them home. This was the first time that Todd and Rachel had seen each other in more than three weeks. The Reynolds put Todd up in Rachel's brother's room, where he had stayed when he was there earlier in the summer. Since they had a full house, Curt arranged for some rooms at a motel just a half a mile from their home for their guests. Sheffield and Ramona shared a room with Craig and Edith, Geoff's family had their own room as did Gean's family. Some of their other company stayed there as well.

On Friday morning, Craig and Edith accompanied Todd and Rachel and her parents up the temple. Later those who had stayed at the motel piled into the van and made the twenty mile drive up to the temple. Since it was after rush hour, I-405 was smooth sailing and it only took them about forty five minutes to get to the temple.

While the rest of the family went into the temple, Tina got the job of looking after her five nieces and nephews while Rachel's younger sister, Leigh, looked after her nieces and nephews. Leigh was a year

younger than Tina and had just graduated from high school and was planning on attending Ricks in the fall like her sister had done.

After the session, Todd and Rachel were taken to the sealing room where their families had gathered. The Brasons' were somewhat out numbered. Todd had his older brother and sister and their spouses, his Grandpa and Grandma Brason and his two aunts, but his Grandpa and Grandma Austin weren't able to make the trip. On the other hand, Rachel had her older sisters and brother, both sets of her grandparents, and some aunts and uncles there with her.

After the wedding, the guests assembled outside and Gean and Brenda relieved Tina of her babysitting responsibilities. They all had to wait for the bride and groom to come out. When they did, a dozen or more cameras captured the moment. It was a perfect day in Los Angeles for pictures on the temple grounds.

By then it was well after noon and the wedding party were all hungry and gathered at the restaurant reserved for the luncheon. Curt and Regina had initially suggested a place in Beverly Hills, but Todd knowing that his dad had to foot the bill had arranged to go to a restaurant in Santa Monica that was owned by some church members who he had known while on his mission. It was a very nice place and they gave him a good discount, but even at that, Craig nearly choked when he got the tab.

The newlyweds were eager to get on with their wedding night and left to be by themselves at a hotel overlooking Santa Monica Beach near the pier. Word had got out where they were staying and her sisters and brother found her car and decorated it all up. While Todd and Rachel were enjoying the benefits of being married, the rest of the family went back to the motel for the rest of the evening.

The next day, they assisted in decorating the cultural hall at the stake center where the Reynolds attended church and getting things ready for the reception. Later in the morning, Todd and Rachel made their way to her parents' home so they could get ready for the reception.

It was a fairly lavish affair and must have cost a bundle, even though they did a lot of the decorating themselves. The bride and groom took their places centered in front of the backdrop. At Todd's side was his brother Geoff and on the other side of him was his brother in law, Nathan. Craig and Edith were at the head of the line. Next to Rachel were her three sisters and Tina. Curt and Regina were at the far end of the line.

From the time the first guest arrived, there was a steady stream of people who came through. The Reynolds were quite well known in the community as well as the church, since he had had recently been released as the second counselor in the stake presidency. Throughout the evening, the family got to meet a lot of people that Todd had known in the various area that he had served in on mission who had come to his reception, including some who he had taught and baptized. All evening, the pile of wedding gifts

grew larger and larger as people came through the line. At the end of the evening, they had to take it all down and clean up. That night Todd and Rachel stayed at her parents' house and the next day, the Brasons attended church with the Reynolds.

On Monday morning the 4th, Todd and and Rachel set out in her car for their honeymoon, which included revisiting his mission and a cross country trip back to Virginia, with a stop at the family reunion. Her mother and father would bring the rest of her things with them when they came for the reception in Virginia.

Sheffield, Ramona, and Gean's family took off in the Staggerwing with Craig, Edith, Tina, and Geoff's family following behind them in the Bonanza. Both planes landed later in the morning on the Betts lane. Sheffield stayed long enough to let off Gean and her family and took off again for Rexburg, while the rest stayed in Burley for a few days.

Once they landed in Rexburg, Wade met them and took Sheffield and Ramona home to spend the next several days with them. As always, Wade took them around to places while they were there. But mostly, Sheffield and Ramona wanted to enjoy their family. After a week at the MTC, they got a letter from Marty. He was excited to be there and was looking forward to learning Portuguese.

On Wednesday the 13th they all headed to Granite Creek with Norma and Wade and all of their family, even Teresa in her condition made the trip. As usual, they were the first to get there. The next ones to arrive were Craig's family who came up from Burley, including the newlyweds. A little later, Takara and Teancum and their two girls arrived. The last ones there was Janet's family. For the next three days they did all of the things that they always did at Granite Creek. It was a new experience for Rachel who had never been camping before. Some of the family, particularly Jerry, wondered how she would get along. She seemed more like the Disneyland type, but to their surprise, she thoroughly enjoyed it and got dirty with the rest of them.

On Saturday, they broke camp. Craig and Edith said goodbye to Tina who was going back Rexburg with Norma and Wade for her sophomore year at Ricks. Todd and Rachel continued on their cross country honeymoon. Craig, Edith, and Geoff's family went back to Burley with Gean and Nathan with plans to fly home on Sunday.

Sheffield and Ramona went back to Rexurg with Norma and Wade and on Monday they flew down to Clarkston to spend the next several days with Janet and Jerry. Jerry didn't have the luxury of taking them around like Wade did, but that was alright. The whole idea was to spend time with the grandkids. During their time with them, Andrea received her patriarchal blessing from her grandfather and on Sunday the 24th, they attended Wesley's missionary farewell. They stayed there a few more days and went with them to take Wesley to the MTC. They didn't have a chance to see Marty who was still there. Then the next day, they

flew home after having been away for an entire month.

By the time Sheffield and Ramona returned home on the 28th, Todd and Rachel had made it across the country and had moved into their apartment in Blacksburg. The following Saturday was their open house. It was a much simpler than their reception had been. Rather than some formal venue, it was at Craig and Edith's home. Rachel's parents and her younger sister had flown out from California and had brought the rest her things with them. Her older sister and her husband had come down from Washington, D.C. as well.

Their open house was well attended by both the Brasons and the Austins as well as friends, neighbors, and members of the Salem Ward. Again they received another pile of gifts to go with the ones that they got in California. As usual they had a good number of duplicates.

Curt and Regina stayed to spend Labor Day weekend to make sure that Rachel was settled. They went to church with them in their Ward in Blacksburg on Sunday and joined the Brason's for their Labor Day picnic. Now that it was only Craig's family that still lived there, he had taken over the Memorial Day and Labor Day picnics from Sheffield, although the stand of trees down in the pasture was still the best place to have them.

Curt and Regina left on Tuesday to take there youngest daughter to Rexburg to get her settled into her freshman year. After they left, Rachel made what everyone thought was an unusual comment coming from her. She said, "Boy am I glad they're gone. Now maybe I can breath." She went onto explain what everyone had already figured out. "My parents, and more particularly my mother hover over me too much. Going away to Ricks College had been the best thing that I had done up until now, but getting married and moving clear across the country will be even better."

Now that Labor Day was over, Tina began her sophomore year at Ricks College and Todd began his junior year at Virginia Tech. He found a part time job and Rachel was working full time and taking an art class on the side. Rachel wasn't the only part time student. The hospital paid for Geoff to finish his degree and reduced his hours to part time so he could go to school full time, while paying his full salary. In return, he had to commit to work for them for an additional two years. Andrea was a senior in high school and Pearl was in the eight grade.

On the 17th Wesley left the MTC and flew to Rapid City. A few days later, Sheffield and Ramoan got a letter from him telling that he had been sent to Chadron, Nebraska to serve in the branch there. Marty still had another four weeks in the MTC. After initially struggling with Portuguese he wrote to say that he was beginning to get the hang of it, once he figured out the verb conjugations.

Teresa was having some difficulty with her pregnancy and had to stay down as much as possible.

Her doctor told her that she would most likely have them four weeks ahead of her due date. Since they still lived in the HUD trailer, Norma was able to keep a close eye on her and look after Jeremy who turned two on on the 16th.

Towards the end of the month, Sheffield and Ramona were informed that the Brason was ready for sea trials at the end of the month and that her commissioning date had been set for November 15th. They began making plans for going back to Seattle and deciding what to do about Thanksgiving. When the Brason returned from her sea trials, there were only a few things for the builder to do to have her completed in time for the commissioning. Then it would be up the Navy and her crew to make her fully operational.

When Wesley finished his time in the MTC in the middle of October, he felt confident with the language, but because of delays in getting his visa he was sent to the Massachusetts Boston Mission until his visa could be resolved. As it turned out, the Boston area had a surprising number of Brazilian and Portuguese immigrants. Once he had a chance to speak Portuguese in the real world, he discovered that he still had a long ways to go.

Ramona was concerned for Teresa as her pregnancy progressed. She had to stay in bed and Norma took care of things for her. Then on Halloween morning, Norma called to report the early arrival of a couple of little trick or treaters. Identical twins Britney was born just before midnight on the 30th and Whitney was born just after midnight on the 31st. To tell them apart, a delivery room nurse tied a yellow ribbon around Britney's ankle and green ribbon around Whitney's ankle. Being four weeks early, they would both needed to be kept in an incubator for at least the next two or three weeks. Somehow, Ramona had to work a visit to Rexburg into their trip to Seattle.

Because Norma was preoccupied with Teresa and the twins, she decided that it was best is she didn't go to Seattle, but she did agree to host Thanksgiving dinner. Janet, however, was excited to go and to fill her role as the matron of honor at the commissioning of the Brason, and Pearl got to be the flower girl again. It was a good time for Jerry since things on the ranch weren't demanding at that time of the year, and he too wanted to go. Several days before they were to leave, their airline tickets, compliments of the Department of the Navy arrived in the mail. Jerry had to pay for his and Andrea's tickets.

The 1980 presidential campaign came to head on election day, November 4th. This was one of the rare elections when Sheffield and Ramona actually agreed on who to vote for. Ramona, like so many Americans was disillusioned with President Carter after voting for him four years earlier. The fresh approach they thought they were getting proved to be a great disappointment. Election day marked the one year anniversary of the Iran hostage crisis with no resolution in sight and fifty two Americans were still being held captive. Added to the disappointment was a worsening economy with rising unemployment and inflation.

Besides, how could Ramona not vote for the man who played the role of her husband on the big screen, not once but twice.

Sheffield and Ramona settled in for the evening to watch the election results as they came in. At eight o'clock when the polls closed on the east coast, Walter Cronkite was able to project a commanding lead for Governor Reagan with only four states and the District of Columbia going to Carter. As they watched the rest of the evening, Carter picked up only one more state. It was an obvious landslide in Reagan's favor. They waited until after eleven o'clock when the polls closed on the west coast before going to bed.

When it was all over, the only other state that went to Carter was Hawaii. The final tally in electoral votes was four hundred eighty nine for Reagan with, forty nine for Carter, and none for John Anderson, the independent candidate. Not only was it a presidential victory for the Republican party, but they picked up twelve seats in the Senate giving them a fifty three to forty six majority, the first time they had control of the Senate since 1954. Even though they picked up thirty four seats in the House of Representatives, the Democrats still had a two hundred forty three seat advantage over the Republicans with one hundred ninety two. When everything was all said and done, Sheffield and Ramona were confident that the nation was in better hands and that things would turn around for the best.

Ten days after the election, on the morning of November 14th, which was a Friday, Craig swung by and picked up Sheffield and Ramona and took them to the airport when he went to work. Before going to his office, he saw them off on their flight to Washington D.C.. Rather than fly directly to Seattle as they had done the last time, they flew to Salt Lake City instead, where they met up with Janet, Jerry, Andrea, and Pearl and continued on to their destination together.

They were met at the Seattle Tacoma Airport by a limousine and driver provided by Todd Pacific Shipbuilding, who took them directly to the Executive Hotel Pacific, the same hotel where they stayed the last time. It had been a longer trip for Sheffield and Ramona than it had for the rest. They were tired and wanted to rest while Janet and Jerry and the girls went and did a little exploring downtown, When they returned, Sheffield and Ramona were rested and ready to go to dinner.

The next morning, the same limousine and driver met them at the hotel and drove them the shipyard. They were greeted there by Mr. Arthur W. Stout Jr., the President of Todd Shipyards Corporation, who they had met before. He escorted them to the Brason, which was tied up to the dock on starboard side. She was all dressed for the occasion with red white and blue banners lining the railing and streamers and bright signal flags flying from her rigging.

The ship was complete with all of her weapon and electronic systems installed. Her primary

weapons were the missile launcher situated prominently forward of the the superstructure and the automatic, rapid fire 76 millimeter gun setting oddly atop the superstructure, between the mast and the stubby stack. The single arm MK-13 missile launcher was capable of firing either the SM-1MR anti-aircraft missile or the Harpoon anti-ship missile. Directly below the launcher was a forty round magazine. Her other weapons included two triple launchers for antisubmarine torpedoes and an automatic rapid fire 20 millimeter cannon controlled by radar for defending against low flying aircraft and anti-ship missiles. Finally, there was a hangar to accommodate two helicopters at the rear of the superstructure and a landing pad at the stern. She was a smart looking ship, opposed to the ruffed in hull they saw the last time they saw her the day she was launched nearly two and half years earlier.

Unlike the summer day that was, the weather this day was overcast with a light drizzle. Sheffield and Ramona again wore their dress uniforms, this time their winter blues. As they approached the ship, chairs lined the dock for the spectators who witnessed the ceremony, some of whom were already in their seats shielded from the light rain by umbrellas.

Mr. Stout escorted the family aboard the ship, passing an honor guard at the foot of the gangway. As they stepped aboard, the arrival of Admiral Brason and the Ship's Sponsor, Commander Brason, and their family was announced over the public address system. The officers and men assembled on helicopter flight deck on the stern came to attention and rendered a salute. It was covered with a canvas canopy which provided protection from the elements for those participating in the ceremony. He introduced them to Commander Winston A. Rubens, the commanding officer, with who they had corresponded but had never met. Commander Rubens in turn introduced them to Lieutenant Commander Harold C. Huish, the executive officer.

The final dignitary to arrive was Rear Admiral Conrad Sylvester, the Deputy Commander of Naval Surface Forces of the Pacific Fleet, who had come from San Diego to accept the ship on behalf of the Navy. His arrival was also announced as he was piped aboard. After the formalities and salutes, he was introduced to the ship's namesake and her sponsor and their family which accompanied them.

With everyone in place, the ceremony began with the Navy band striking up "The Naval Order March". A Naval Honor Guard, bearing flags, rounded the corner onto to the pier, followed by the ship's company organized by divisions, being led by their respective division officers. The Crew marched into position directly behind the spectator section and and stood at attention. The color guard went aboard and posted the colors on either side of the podium. When the music stopped, the ship's company assumed the parade rest stance upon command.

Mr. Stout. went to the podium and addressed those aboard the frigate and those on the dock, stating

the purpose of the gathering and called upon Ensign C. Taylor Jamison, the ship's career counselor and acting chaplain to deliver the invocation. Following the prayer, Mr. Stout returned to the podium to introduce the distinguished guests seated on the stand.

He had some brief remarks, then invited Admiral Sylvester to join him at the podium. With the Admiral at his side, he said, "On behalf of Todd Pacific Shipbuilding, I am proud to turn over this vessel to the United States Navy."

After the applause subsided, Admiral Sylvester stepped behind the microphone and said, "On behalf of the Chief of Naval Operations, I am pleased to accept this fine vessel." He went on to discuss the long naval tradition of the role of frigates in the Navy, from those early sailing vessels of the Continental Navy up to the present guided missile frigates, such as the Brason and her nineteen sister ships already in commission and several more under construction. At the end of his remarks, he concluded, "I now place the USS Brason, FFG seventeen in commission."

The band began playing the National Anthem and the commissioning pennant, a six foot long streamer with a blue field containing seven stars and two longitudinal red and white stripes, was hoisted to the top of the main mast. Next the Stars and Strips were raised and the Brason was officially a United States Ship, the USS Brason.

At the conclusion of the National Anthem, Admiral Sylvester said. "It is now my pleasure to present Commander Winston A. Rubens, the captain of the USS Brason and present him with his orders."

Captain Rubens stepped forward and addressed those assembled. "Thank you, Admiral Sylvester. I accept command." He went on with his prepared remarks that he read from a piece of paper. At the end of his remarks, he concluded with, "I shall now read my orders.

"By order the President of the United States you are to prepare the USS Brason lying at Seattle Washington for duty. When ready, take on board ammunition, provisions and stores of every kind and take the ship to sea. It is the President's express orders that you expend every effort to accomplish these objects and report for duty with the Mid Pacific Naval Surface Group at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii."

Admiral Sylvester returned to the podium and introduced Sheffield as the ship's namesake and invited him to come forward.

Taking the podium he said, "Thank you Admiral Sylvester. It is a great honor for me to be here today and have this ship that bears my name placed into commission. May she serve with distinction.

"Commander Rubens, I congratulate you on your new command. I know somewhat of the task ahead of you in getting this ship operational. Thirty eight years and almost six months ago I too had the opportunity to accept command of a vessel upon her commissioning and prepare her for service.

“At the time we were six months into a war that wasn't going well. It was up to us to get her ready and go and do our part. In addressing my crew that day I presented them with a motto for our ship to live by. At the end of her flight deck were the letters R P S L which stood for Reprisal, the name of the ship. I told the men that those letters also stood for something else. May I suggest they be the motto for this ship and her crew . R for responsibility. Your responsibility to your country, the navy, your ship and your shipmates. P for pride. Pride in your country, the navy, your ship and your work. S for solidarity. United as a crew, working together with every man doing his part. And lastly, L for loyalty. Loyalty to yourselves, your shipmates, your superior officers, and to this great country of ours.”

Sheffield kept his remarks brief as he talked about the great ship the Reprisal was and the other great ships that he had the honor of being associated with during his long naval career and what made them great, the very motto that he had just described and challenged her crew to make her a great ship.

After Sheffield sat down, Admiral Sylvester again returned to podium. “It is now my privilege to present the ship's Sponsor, Commander Ramona Brason, the wife of Admiral Brason.”

Ramona removed a small package from her handbag and stepped forward. “As my husband said, it is a great honor for us to be associated with such a fine vessel and her crew. I have had the privilege of corresponding with Captain Reubens ever since he assumed responsibility for her. We feel as if we are a part of this ship in more than name only as he has kept us informed of the progress of her construction and fitting out. We hope to have a long connection with her in the years to come. During that time, captains and crewmen will come and go and they all shall be a part of the Brason Family.

“Now, Commander Reubens, will you please come and join me.”

She waited while he stood and approached the podium and stood by her side.

“I would like to present a gift to the ship upon her commissioning. Please accept it on her behalf.”

“I'd be honored to.” he said as he took the package from Ramona.

Standing in front of everyone he carefully unwrapped it and held up two books.”

“These books,” Ramona said, “Reprisal: The Forgotten Carrier” and “In the Right Place” written by my husband are to be placed in the ship's library so that every member of the crew may have access to them and know the legacy passed on to them in the form of the service that he rendered to this nation.”

“Thank you Commander Brason. I shall be the first to read them.”

“Now Captain, as the ship's Sponsor, tradition gives me the honor of issuing the first order. To the officers and crew of the USS Brason, man our ship and bring her to life!”

The band began playing and the crew, who had been standing in formation, began running in an orderly manner in either direction around the spectators and up the gangway aboard the ship and took their

positions along the ships rail. Once the last man was in place, the band ceased playing.

Commander Reubens gave the order, "Set the first watch." and the crew dispersed. He then invited those on the dock to come aboard to have a look around.

Commander Ruebens and Lieutenant Commander Huish personally took Sheffield and Ramoan, Janet and her family, and Admiral Sylvester on a tour of the ship, explaining things as he went. For example, while passing through the engineering spaces, he explained that the two General Electric LM2500-30 gas turbines delivered enough horsepower to propel the 3,710 ton ship through the water at a sustained speed of twenty eight knots with a single shaft with a variable pitch propeller.

The tour concluded with a luncheon the captain's wardroom, complete with a cake that had been baked for the occasion. On that occasion they met the rest of the ship's senior officers; Lieutenant Oscar C. Heinmann the Combat Systems Officer, Lieutenant Frederick G. Simpson the Engineering Officer, Lieutenant Antonio D. Larusso the Supply Officer, and Lieutenant Jaxon P. Williston the Operations Officer.

After the luncheon a reception was held in honor of Sheffield and Ramona for the crew to meet their ship's namesake and sponsor. At that time they met the remaining six junior officers; Lieutenant jg Oscar C. Rosenblaugh the Administration Officer, Lieutenant jg Lionel R. Kunzler the Damage Control Officer, Lieutenant jg Robert C. Vintonelli the Navigation Officer, Ensign Raymond L. Hampton the Medical Officer, Ensign George F. Bartholomew the Ordinance Officer, and finally Ensign C. Taylor Jamison the Ship's Career Counselor who also doubled as the Chaplain.

As capable as the officers were, the backbone of the crew were the fifteen Chief Petty officers. The three most senior being; Master Chief Radioman James D. Alturus the Communications Officer, Senior Chief Storekeeper Timothy H. Gilbert the Procurement Officer, and Senior Chief Gunners Mate Wallace P. Rivers the Gunnery officer. They met the rest of the Chiefs as well and a good number of the enlisted men. In all the crew numbered one hundred eighty officers and enlisted men. Andrea, the pretty seventeen year old high school senior, turned more than one head as the sailors, some not much older than her, while she was aboard. But hardly anyone payed attention to her skinny thirteen year old little sister, Pearl, who looked so pretty herself.

After spending a good portion of the day, late in the afternoon the limousine returned them to the hotel and picked them up again for the flight back to Salt Lake City on Sunday. Rather than continue on home, Sheffield and Ramona went home with Janet an Jerry to spend a week with them.

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All individuals mentioned in connection with the commissioning ceremony are fictional. The ceremony ityself is derived form various examples of a commissioning ceremony.