

Episode 6

DOUBLE TROUBLE

ON SEPTEMBER 30, 1945 we received an Admiral aboard. Overnight the USS Cumberland Sound became the flagship of Fleet Air Wing 17 (FAW-17) under the command of Rear Admiral H.M. Martin, known among the brass as "Beauty" Martin. Now in his fifties, tall and still handsome but beginning to jowel up a bit.

Two days before the Admiral was piped aboard I was called to the Captain's cabin. He said I was being appointed Flag Secretary and Admiral's Aid, and that my duties would begin the day the Admiral arrived. Good god, and me a junior grade Lieutenant. These duties ~~always had been traditionally assigned to Lt. Commander rank, or at least Lieutenant.~~ The reason for the choice (aside from my obvious high qualities and abilities) was that reserve officers were being sent home for discharge on a number system based on length of active service, and I had a low number so would be around for several months before I would be due for discharge. Thus I was an ideal choice. So snap to it.

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The Admiral couldn't have been aboard more than an hour when I was called to his quarters where he was in conference with Captain Grant. The Admiral said, "I need my top secret communication facilities. My staff hasn't arrived here yet and no telling when they'll get here. I need my flag publications immediately." The Captain then ordered me to take a small boat ashore and draw out the necessary publications and gave me written orders signed by the Admiral.

We were anchored in Yokosuka harbor where the large Japanese naval shipyard was located. On shore the Navy had set up a Custodian of Publications Center. The request was simple. Our ship carried Class 4 publications, everything up through secret classification. The Commander Fleet Air Wing 17 was entitled to Class 5, so I needed just the additional publications above Class 4. I returned with the Class 5 in a canvas sack and the Admiral was in Business. First day's mission accomplished.

Everything went smoothly. I was assigned a separate stateroom next to the Admiral's quarters, and ate at the Admiral's mess. It wasn't my rank, but my Titles that had the Power, with the Admiral's muscle behind them.

Then one day, four weeks later, the Admiral's whole staff arrived by ship from Clark Field in the Philippines, where FAW-17 had been based. The staff custodian also arrived with his Class 5 publications. Now we had a double set!

The Admiral told me, well, return the extra set. So I went ashore with my bag of Class 5 over Class 4 publications. The Custodian refused to accept them back. He claimed he was authorized to issue publications, but not to receive them back once they were issued.

I must return them directly to Washington, D.C., to the Chief of Naval Operations, Registered Publications Section, he said.

Back aboard ship I looked up the regulations for transfer of classified documents. They must be listed, the list countersigned, placed in a canvas bag with the listed publications and devices. Then the bag must be drawn tight with steel wire, sealed with lead, and the hot lead stamped with the ship's seal.

I made my list, got an officer to check the contents and countersign the list, put everything in a canvas sack and took the sack to the machine shop aboard. A petty officer bound the top of the bag with steel wire and soldered it shut with a chunk of lead. I said, hold it while I go get the ship's seal from the Captain.

The Captain said, "Ship's seal? We don't have one! Just seal it with lead and let it go at that." The Cumberland Sound was built on a C-2 standard cargo hull and was commissioned during wartime in Tacoma in 1943. Fully equipped except for a ship's seal.

Next step was to take the sack ashore to the Officer-Messenger Mail Center with a mail order sheet marked "to be delivered by Officer Messenger" since the contents were top secret. I got my copy of the order sheet signed, and left. That was that.

The bag then was chained to an officer's wrist and he made the flight to Washington, D.C., to return the Admiral's duplicate publication allowance. A rather expensive return trip for a canvas sack of publications issued in Japan a month previously.

(To be continued.)