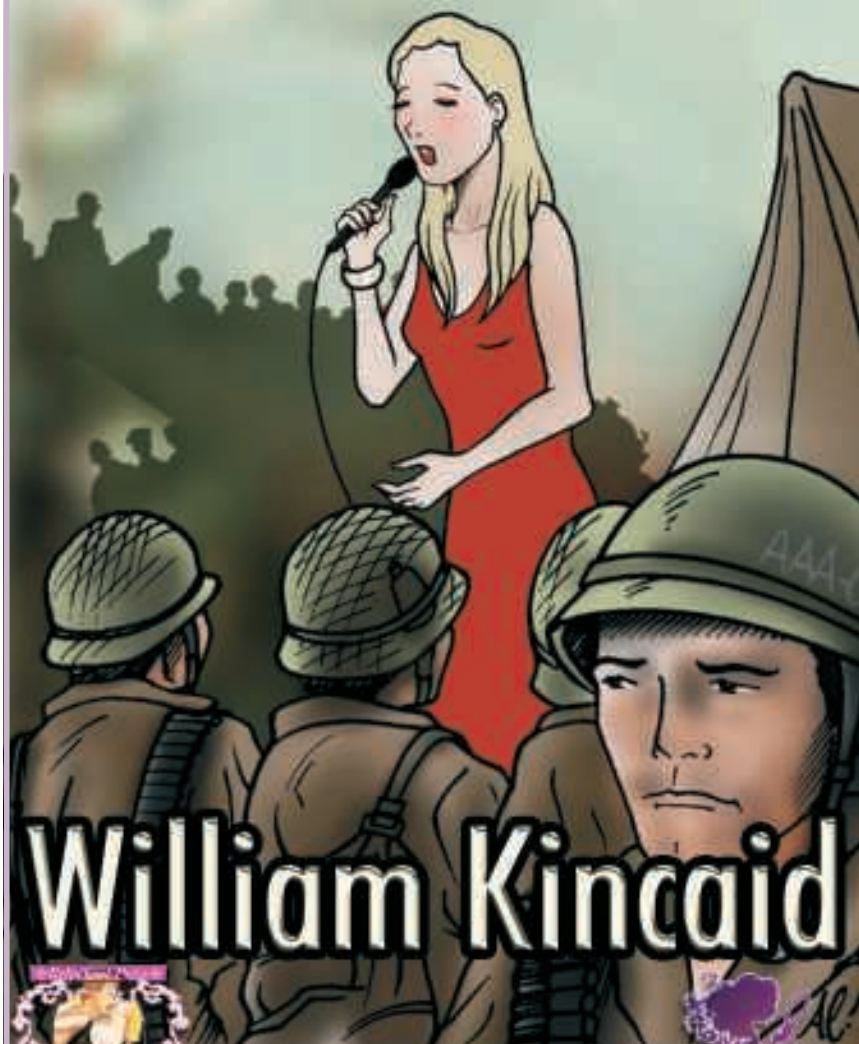


V For Victory



William Kincaid



An "Adult Tv" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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V for Victory

By William Kincaid

Based on True Events.

The wind blew painfully off a frozen Cayuga Lake as an ever-increasing line of men queued up outside the Ithaca, New York recruiting office on the morning of December 8, 1941. The men's breath was visible with every exhalation, and they stuffed their hands deeper into their pockets and stamped their feet on the frozen ground. The frigid air, however, did not dampen the men's spirits; they yelled greetings at each other, or engaged in raucous conversation.

"Just let me at them Japanese. I'll make them pay for Pearl Harbor," the man standing behind Franklin Jensen declared.

Jensen let out a cloudy breath and smiled at the man's patriotism. A Cornell freshman, Jensen hailed from Worcester, Massachusetts, the son of Swedish immigrants. Much to his family's consternation, he had been named after Benjamin Franklin, a great

American, but now he bore the name of the hated socialist who they loudly proclaimed had sold America down the river with the New Deal and social security.

Franklin had a small stature, and a light frame, but had applied himself intensely at his studies, being accepted at Cornell. On Saturday, he had celebrated completing the final exams of his first semester by fly fishing for Landlocked Salmon at Ithaca Falls, but the next day, Sunday, he heard of the bombing of the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor by planes of the Imperial Japanese Navy. Although he had already registered for the draft, Franklin instantly decided to walk away from college and was now offering himself up to Uncle Sam.

Several of the men hovered around a battery-powered radio listening to President Roosevelt's speech about a date that will live in infamy. Franklin heavily breathed in the cold air and studied the aspiring recruits. Many of them fancied themselves tough guys, factory workers, farmers, or mill hands. They boisterously joked and laughed, sure of their manhood and invincibility, and catcalled to passing women, who cheered to the men in the recruiting line.

A disturbing thought entered Franklin's mind, and he sighed, "Even in an army recruiting line trying to go to war, I still wonder how it would be to be a woman for these guys."

"Captain Mark Bancroft reporting as ordered, General."

A tall, ruggedly handsome man with jet black hair tinged by gray and dark eyes came to attention and saluted a smiling general seated at an expansive desk with a scowling aide standing by his side.

The general studied the man in front of him, occasionally glancing down at his service file. Old for a major at forty-three, Mark Bancroft wore the blue star U.S. Army Services patch on his left sleeve, but also the Cross of Lorraine patch of the 79th Infantry Division on his right sleeve and a Distinguished Service Cross with a World War One campaign ribbon on his breast.

Captain Bancroft was a retread from the Great War and had served with distinction in the seizure of Montfaucon, an impregnable bastion on a mountain-top in the Meuse-Argonne region of the Western Front. Enlisting as a private, Max Bazler, a Jewish immigrant from Prague in the Austro-Hungarian Empire had worked his way to Captain by a combination of battlefield savvy, raw courage, and ferocious luck that saw most of his comrades fall on the bleak, muddy slopes of the Mount of the Falcons.

In an attempt to forget the horrors of the Western Front, Bazler hitched his way across country until he arrived in Los Angeles, experiencing a massive boom of sun-drenched real estate sales in the orange groves and a concurrent boom in the fledgling film industry. Bazler changed his name to Mark Bancroft, and started selling real estate, but quickly became drawn to Hollywood. In a few short years, Bancroft had forgotten the trenches along the Meuse in the hustle of Hollywood parties, film screenings, torrid romances, and long days on set in the relentless and ever-present California sun. The tough, battle-hardened war veteran had gained a reputation as a Hollywood fixer, and was sought out by aspiring actors and successful film producers alike. Mark Bancroft was a man that could get things done.

Now with another war enflaming the world, Mark Bancroft sought to revisit its horrors.

“Captain Bancroft, I am tired of these continued requests to transfer to the infantry. I have nothing but respect for your service in the Argonne. It’s damn impressive but I need good men with me and you have proven invaluable.”

“Thank you, General, but I think I can provide more valuable service in the front, where it really matters.”

“Major, I should not have to tell you that we are fighting a war all over the world, and this war will be won in countless battlefields, factories, shipyards, banks, even in movie theaters. The Nazis know this, Christ, our intelligence has them putting out war epics that would shy away Cecil B. DeMille. I would be up a creek without a paddle without you and your connections to Hollywood and as long as I am your commanding officer, I am not going to let you transfer to the infantry.”

“As you wish, General.”

“I do have a special tasking for you though, and you are a man eminently suited for the job.”

“Yes, sir?” Bancroft asked.

“You have worked with the ‘This is the Army’ production?”

“Yes, of course, General. We all have. It’s our showpiece.”

“I would agree. And you know about the female impersonators?”

“Yes, General. They are a big hit. A lot of them look damn good.”

“Again, I would agree. There is one problem with a production like ‘This is the Army’. It’s too big and unwieldy. It will only play stateside or a very secure rear area in which there is considerable time spent in preparation. A show like that will probably never get to the troops who are doing the fighting or when they most need a boost in morale. Most of the attendees will be the rear echelons.”

“You’re probably right, General.”

“All right, enough beating around the bush as we are too old for it. Major, you have highly valuable combat experience but I am keeping you in my command. I want you to form a burlesque show of highly attractive female impersonators to tour as close as possible to the front lines. The soldiers will not only perform as women, they will live and work as women to make the illusion as strong as possible. The British have a group like that already I hear in North Africa, and it is apparently well received.”

“How close to the front, division, regiment, or battalion?”

“I expect them to be at least as far forward as regimental headquarters.”

“Then the man you pick to lead this outfit should at least be a major, able to push back against a full bird, but not make him uncomfortable.”

“Done.”

“I will also need a good NCO, and want the discretion to pick my own.”

“Major Starke here will write the orders.”

“So, I guess the rationale is the Army and the American public won’t stomach their fresh-faced girls putting on a raunchy floor show and striptease to a bunch of horny GIs with mud on their boots and blood on their hands, especially not so far up front that they can get killed.”

“The female impersonators will fill that role nicely in these unique circumstances, and the fairies are expendable.”

“General, those fairies will be the backbone of my command.”

“Yes, of course.”

“And I am to drive up with my girls to a regimental CP and tell the commander we have a show to put on for him.”

“A delicate situation much better understood by a combat veteran. There should be a time and a place for a burlesque show, far forward of London or Hawaii, and we believe the combat troops would appreciate it. It’s up to you to make it happen.”

“I will need vehicles, two deuce-and-a-halves and two peeps, plus full field gear and tents for approximately twelve to fifteen people, half men and half women.”

“Major Starke?” The General turned to his aide.

The Major nodded.

“And travel orders signed by you or somebody higher that I can shove in everybody’s faces.”

“Of course.”

“So how much time do I have?”

“Unofficially, five months.

“By then we should, hopefully, be fighting the Germans.”

“That’s what I was hoping you would say,” the General declared, saluted, pivoted in an about face, and marched out of the office.

“Mark Bancroft,” Charlotte Taylor exclaimed on her phone from her apartment in Santa Monica. “I so miss you. When are you coming back to Hollywood, or are you too busy winning the war?”

Charlotte Taylor, nee Beatrice Taft, was an English and drama major at Barnard College and now a dancer and actress on the fast track to stardom, having recently been photographed on the arms of Clark Gable and William Holden. As her agent, Bancroft had recommended her name change and secured her first acting roles. An exquisite dancer who had spent time on the burlesque circuit in the lean years of the Depression, Taylor had learned acting on the advice of Bancroft, who had her trained under the tutelage of an elder stage actress. Taylor’s vivaciousness and intelligence shone on the silver screen and she was now a hot commodity, being listed well above the title.

“I was hoping you could take a month or two out of your busy schedule, that is if you want to help win the war.”

“Will I be working with you?”

“Yes, I have been put in command of a special unit.”

“Kidnapping Hitler, or at least having compromising pictures taken of him and Blondi, I presume.”

“Remember, hon, loose lips sink ships.”

“Then what is it?”

“I am going to be in charge of an all-male burlesque show that is going to tour as close as we can to the front lines without being a hassle. The performers are going to stay as girls even when not on the show. They will live and work as women in order to appear as legit as possible to the troops. I could use your help training our recruits to be women day in and day out.”

“How delightful. Of course I will help you out. I’m going to get some friends to donate some clothes to help with the wardrobe. I want our girls as glamorous and sexy as possible for the troops.”

“I could also use some help with choreography.”

“But of course. Where are you?”

“Fort Dix, New Jersey.”

“A lovely place, I’m sure. I am sure there are some clubs in the City where we can recruit your talent. Plenty of servicemen will be seeking them out.”

“Is that how you propose recruiting? Hitting people over the head at bars and having them wake up the next morning in a dress?”

“I don’t think you can put a sign up, or ask the Army to just pass the word. Your best potential talent is probably still underground. They would think it’s a trap to have them thrown in prison. Trust me on this,

Mark, do it my way. Besides, it will be fun. I will ask around with my Manhattan contacts.”

“Are you sure?”

“Look, we both know that a lot of the female impersonators in shows like ‘This is the Army’ are divas. They won’t work well overseas, unless they are in a big production, and would otherwise be a big pain in your ass. You need to find the ones who still want to be soldiers at heart, even though they are a woman in a man’s body. Nice girls. The girl the men are fighting for. I took a class on it at Barnard based on studies by a Dr. Hirschfeld in Berlin. God knows where he is now. Fascinating stuff. Besides, if this is going to have the Charlotte Taylor imprimatur, it’s going to be a naughty but classy act and I am going to recruit classy young ladies.”

“Please don’t act so educated in Hollywood. I already told you, nobody there wants a woman who thinks.”

“I am as vacuous as the best of them, darling. That’s why I get the roles. I am an empty vessel for the director to fill.”

“That and your smile, those eyes, that laugh, and that walk.”

“Awww shucks. I’ll see you in a week. I have lots to do.”

The lines of troops kept coming at the Brooklyn Army Base, unloading from trains, assembling in front of the massive army barracks, or boarding the vast array of troop transports, from converted liners like the Queen Mary, to the newly constructed Liberty Ships, to decrepit tramp steamers chartered by

the government. From Brooklyn, the soldiers would steam across the U-Boat-infested Atlantic Ocean, and to a road that led to London, Casablanca, and hopefully Rome, Paris, and Berlin.

Seated at a green-painted table in the expansive lobby of the barracks, Corporal Franklin Jensen would check in the soldiers and assign them to rooms inside the cavernous buildings. The personnel lists were massive, several inches thick for a division, and never correct, so that Jensen would often spend hours reconciling the list. Soldiers were AWOL, on detached duty, or had been transferred to other units. Jensen's work was evidently important, as Brooklyn was the port of embarkation for the entire European Theater of Operations, and the U.S. Army Personnel Branch could get a final verification of who was actually going to war.

Franklin Jensen was not one of the soldiers going to war. He had washed out of Officers Candidate School, no confidence, not forceful enough, and had been assigned to a personnel unit, despite requests to serve in the infantry, artillery, tank destroyers, armor, and Merrill's Marauders. The Army, however, saw his greater talents at paperwork and would not release him from his vital duties. Franklin would look at the other, more fortunate soldiers, straining under the burden of their duffel bags, and often see boys even younger than himself, boys that would soon prove to be men, while he would spend the war safely stateside and in the end, prove nothing to himself, his country, or anybody.

Being stateside did have one advantage. Through the ever-churning GI rumor mill, Franklin had heard of a place, Don't Tell Your Mother, that featured a drag act, and catered to a clientele of crossdressers, even in wartime. With some clandestine research and

a few discrete inquiries, Franklin learned of its location in a dingy section of lower Manhattan, and that it was in a converted speakeasy that had seen its heyday during Prohibition, until its fall left it catering to people like him.

With the checking-in of a small engineer unit completed and with nothing left to lose, Franklin hopped the train to Manhattan, and in an hour, was staring at a nondescript store front, in a block devoid of people.

“There would be an off-limits sign if this place was worth noticing by the MPs,” Franklin laughed to himself.

Franklin entered the building and was greeted with bright lights, laughter, and Glenn Miller.

“Hiya, Corporal,” a bartender cheerfully greeted him, “what will it be tonight?”

Not a sophisticated drinker, Franklin stared dumbly at the bottles of liquor, eliciting an amused chuckle from the bartender.

“Here, kid, Irish whiskey, on the house. I haven’t seen you here before.”

“It’s my first time.”

“Well, welcome to Don’t Tell Your Mother. We were a terrific speakeasy fifteen years ago, and now consider ourselves the best, albeit one of the very few, drag bars in the City.”

“It’s nice to be here.”

“So when does the next convoy leave for Europe?”

“You can tell your pal Adolph that we are sending all the troops to the Pacific to beat the Japanese, so he can breathe easy.”

“I like you, kid, here’s another whiskey. Enjoy your night, and don’t worry about the MPs, they don’t go anywhere near here. They much prefer to break up the good times at Times Square.”

“Thanks.”

Feeling the burn of the whiskey in his chest, Franklin relaxed and studied the establishment. A well-dressed and attractive female impersonator started to sing “The Long and the Short and the Tall” on a small stage to the accompaniment of a piano and a small band, and the crowd immediately joined in the lyrics. Numerous service members were in the crowd, soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen. Some of the cute young crossdressers at the bar Franklin took to be GIs. Franklin looked on the latter with envy. He wished he could wear a flower-print dress and high-heeled pumps like the brunette flirting with an older man.

“She is wearing a cute dress, don’t you think,? You would look adorable in it,” a lady’s voice gleefully announced from behind Franklin.

Franklin pivoted on his bar stool and came face to face with a smiling Charlotte Taylor, star of the silver screen, standing next to a tall Major from services. Shocked and amazed, he eventually recovered his composure enough to be polite.

“Here, Miss Taylor, you can have my seat.”

“What a nice young gentleman. I tell you, Mark, if you want to find a lady, first find a gentleman. I’m getting pretty good at this recruiting thing.”

Charlotte sat at the bar seat and beamed at Franklin. “That is a very nice dress the young lady is wearing.”

Starstruck at the sudden earthly appearance of a Hollywood goddess who knew his darkest secret, Franklin could only nod in confirmation.

“I am pleased to meet you, soldier,” Charlotte smiled, “I am Beatrice, Beatrice Taft.”

Franklin looked even more confused, “but, I thought you were...”

“Charlotte Taylor?”

“Yes.”

“In a place like this?” Charlotte laughed, thoroughly enjoying herself.

“Well, I’m sorry. I guess I mistook you for Charlotte Taylor.”

“Well, technically I am still Beatrice Taft, just another girl from Camden, New Jersey, but I am known as Charlotte Taylor. It takes a lot of courage to show up here, especially in wartime, and Mark here could use someone with courage.”

Franklin stood at attention when turning to face Major Bancroft.

“Yes, sir. Is there anything I can help you with?”

“Well, Corporal, you can first give me your name,” Mark smiled, to put the young corporal at ease.

“Corporal Franklin Jensen, 331st Personnel Command attached to the Brooklyn Army Base.”

“Corporal Jensen, I am recruiting for a special unit that will go overseas and entertain the troops close to the front lines. It will put on a burlesque show of female impersonators and Bea and I think you would be a great fit. You are here for a reason, aren’t you?”

“But I can’t dance or sing and I have never been out in public dressed as a woman.”

“And you will learn all of that from the stunning Charlotte Taylor, who will be working with me until we ship out. In the past two days, I have recruited four soldiers from here and am fast filling up. All I need is your full name, service number, and unit, and I will have your orders cut tomorrow.”

“But I have tried to get into every unit I could, the infantry, paratroopers, armor.”

“You didn’t have a Major General in your court. I do.”

“Look, Franklin,” Charlotte warmly joined in the conversation. “I am certain you have had tremendous difficulty living as the person you are and having such a deep secret that nobody will understand. Do this for yourself and Uncle Sam will benefit. For a time you can live as the person you want to be, and I am positive I will make you a knockout. The GIs will be all over you, you will be so gorgeous.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really.”

“And this is on the level, sir, you are not just trying to trap me?”

“I would have you dead to rights already. Wouldn't I?”

Observing the whole interaction, the bartender grinned, “Go for it, kid.”

Franklin smiled, and breathed a sigh of relief. “Okay, Major, you got me.”

Charlotte hugged Franklin. “I am so proud of you. Thanks for volunteering.”

“I knew you had the stuff from the moment I saw you, kid,” the bartender declared. “That's why I told Miss Taylor here about you. Congratulations and God Bless.”

“Ten-shun,” a voice boomed into the barracks bay at Fort Drum, New York, calling six short and scrawny soldiers to attention.

“I am Sergeant-Major James Calhoun and you are my men, at least until you become women,” the imposing red-headed soldier with stripes up his sleeves, along with the Silver Star and the 79th Infantry Division overseas patch stormed the length of his small command.

“I should not have to tell you that this is a very sensitive operation and that if we all do not want to become laughing stocks at this post by the fighting men, you will work smart and do whatever the Hell I tell you. Your first two month's training will be here. Then the War Department has generously allowed

you to complete your training with Miss Charlotte Taylor in New York City. You will remain as men for these two months and after that you will be women as far as the Army's concerned. When you get to the point that you can get some GI hard, we will send you into action.

“Now listen up, you are going where no other Special Services has gone or intends to go and you may actually get killed or wounded, just like the others in this man's army. If you want to fall out and go back to peeling potatoes, or driving around officers, or spending time in the stockade, see the Major in the morning. This barracks is filthy, I will conduct a white glove inspection in the morning at 0400 followed by a three-mile run. Fall in in your exercise gear.”

For the next two months, Major Bancroft and Sergeant-Major Calhoun pushed their soldiers hard to get them to become a cohesive unit, including close order marching, hikes with full field gear, marksmanship, auto maintenance, and weapons familiarization. In addition to the six future women, Bancroft had recruited John Lang, a grizzled Sergeant with fifteen years in the Army to serve as an auto mechanic and scrounger. A burlesque show needed musicians, and Bancroft had acquired four; Thompson, a bugler, Witkowski, a drummer, Stein, a clarinet player, and Pontelandolfo, an accordion player, as it was the most versatile, and could fill in for a piano, which would have been too unwieldy to load and unload from the back of a deuce-and-a-half truck. Finally, Calhoun had obtained a smart-ass private who his command could not wait to be rid of, David Abrams, a Jewish kid from Brooklyn who was perpetually in trouble.

Calhoun had served as Bancroft's highly effective company Sergeant along the Meuse, but had been gassed and discharged from the Army in 1919. From then he had worked odd jobs in Upstate New York and in the City, but had been hurt by the Depression and joined the Bonus Army that encamped in Washington, D.C. in a protest to receive their war bonuses early. When the new war with Germany broke out, an aging Calhoun thought he would be sidelined to leading scrap metal drives or appearing in parades wearing his old uniform. Bancroft, however, personally sought him out and easily convinced him to join his unit, with a promotion to Sergeant-Major, a gift from the General.

The two months of training quickly passed and Bancroft led the six soon-to-be-women to the train station at Watertown in the dark and cold of a winter evening with a fierce wind blowing off Lake Ontario. Carrying his duffel bag the next morning, Franklin Jensen emerged from the rail platform into the magnificent splendor of the main gallery of Grand Central Station and felt his spirits lift. The six soldiers and Bancroft piled into several taxicabs, a luxury privates usually could not afford. Passing through the bustling city, Jensen thrilled at his decision, but he was not prepared for being dropped off by the cabbie at the Waldorf Astoria, probably the most famous and luxurious hotel in New York.

The awed soldiers made their way through the opulent lobby to the stares of the staff and guests. Army enlisted men should be staying at the USO lodgings, not the Waldorf Astoria, but Charlotte Taylor had booked a suite on her own dime for two months for the boys to become girls. She could readily afford it, as she had just signed on for two new movie roles, one being the wife of a dashing naval fighter pilot played by Van Johnson. The war was good to some.

“Welcome ladies, I ordered us some sandwiches from a darling, delicatessen, and some tea,” Charlotte beckoned the soldiers to sit in the living room of her suite. The soldiers each would share a room with another, while Major Bancroft stayed at officer’s quarters at the Brooklyn Army base, as the War Department would not pay for a Major to stay at the Waldorf.

“I hope you have had time to choose a woman’s name, as from now on I will not refer to you or treat you as a man. You are women now so embrace it.”

Each of the girls sat in easy chairs, sipped tea, ate pastries and introduced themselves; Daniella, a beautiful, petite Mexican with dark eyes and long lashes who had earned the role of squad leader due to his conscientious and even-tempered nature; Gina, an impetuous Italian from Brooklyn who had already begun dressing as a woman in earnest and was no longer a virgin; Amy, a cute, blonde college student from Cooperstown, New York, Eve, a southern belle with Auburn hair and an unbridled libido, Margaret, the farmer’s daughter from Indiana, and last but not least, Frances, a shy, blonde, OCS wash-out from Worcester, Massachusetts, who now served as assistant squad leader.

After a half-hour encouragement from Major Bancroft and Charlotte, the girls were dismissed to their rooms to shave their bodies and then report back in bras, panties, garter belts, stockings, and silk robes to learn makeup skills at the hands of a Hollywood expert flown in by Charlotte. While a pair of the girls would sit at a makeup mirror and experiment with foundation, contour powder, eye shadow,

mascara, and lipstick, Charlotte took the other four to teach them to walk in heels. She received great assistance from Gina, who could already sashay in four-inch heels well enough to melt the resistance of any man.

Training at the makeup table, Frances gazed at her reflection and was brought to tears; she looked beautiful. Marilyn, the makeup expert, then fetched a blonde wig to crown the young goddess and Frances could no longer speak. Instead, she turned to her new roommate. Amy, who looked equally awestruck at her own reflection. The two hugged as sisters, never in their life feeling so validated.

Charlotte was an inspiring taskmaster. The girls would assemble in their nightgowns and fully made-up at her room at 8:00 in the morning for inspection, as movie stars would not arise from bed any earlier. She would affectionately critique each of the girls on her makeup technique and hairstyle, and send them back to their rooms for refinements. Once complete, the girls would have breakfast and then dress in civilian suit dresses with hats that were stylish a year ago, donations from Charlotte's Hollywood friends.

One rainy autumn morning, Charlotte observed her charges getting in and out of the cabs that took them to the dance studio for training on their routines and for singing lessons. The girls looked pretty good and would withstand all but close scrutiny. None of the passers-by double-taked or commented under their breath as they had two weeks ago about boys dressed as girls, or a group of faggots. The girls were accepting their femininity as their true identity, which Charlotte then understood in an epiphany that it was. She was unlocking and nurturing the girl's true personas. They were not men pretending to

be women, but women forced to live as men. Now, however, the rules had temporarily changed, and Charlotte would give her girls the opportunity to shine brightly while the world had temporarily fallen into darkness.

In the evenings, the girls would gather in Charlotte's room after eating dinner at the Waldorf's restaurant, and would talk about traditional girl things, until one evening, Frances wondered aloud, much to her chagrin, "What is it like to be with a man?"

Charlotte laughed, "It all depends on the man. If he is respectful to you out of bed, he will worship you in bed."

"But why do women like bad boys rather than nice men?"

"For the same reasons men like bad girls, like all of you will become," Charlotte grinned wickedly.

"Isn't it time we get to prove our worth as bad girls?" Amy pressed.

"Yes," Eve piled on. "I want a man."

"Me too," Margaret laughed.

"And me," Amy hopefully offered.

Charlotte looked at the two squad leaders, Daniella and Frances, who both nodded approval.

"Then I guess it's time. I was waiting for you to ask me."

"Welcome to the party," Frances smiled as she welcomed the two gentlemen into Charlotte's suite.

Charlotte had contacted the bartender at Don't Tell Your Mother who solicited the regulars to come to an extravagant party at the Waldorf that catered to their tastes, good food, wine, and women who were once men dancing for them in lingerie. Charlotte knew that she had to ignite the sexuality of the girls if they were to be worth anything as exotic dancers and strippers and get the boys hard.

Frances pivoted gracefully on her heels and minced to the main serving table, featuring a sumptuous buffet of shrimp cocktail, Long Island oysters, chicken legs, and apple and pumpkin pies. Gina and Eve were locking lips with ardent men while sitting in their laps, while Amy was in the corner of the room delicately stroking his groin. Margaret had already retired with a man to her bedroom, and Daniella made small talk with a gentleman at the bar.

Frances shuddered when she felt the man fondle her bare legs above her stocking tops, but recovered and let him continue until he was probing the crack of her ass cheeks, underneath her panties.

"Hmmm," Frances cooed, then turned to face her man. Gazing into his lustful eyes, she embraced him, opened her mouth and allowed him inside in a deep, passionate kiss. Her ass seemed to instinctively know that it would soon be violated as it awakened from dormancy and intensely tingled, sending surges of pleasure up her spine. Frances had never felt more aroused and more natural, offering herself to an amorous man.

"My room is this way," Frances sultrily grunted, leading the man by the hand into her bedroom, where a man was already thrusting into Amy.

The next morning, with the sun pouring into to the hotel room, Frances looked across the nightstand with two open jars of Vaseline left unattended, and caught the joyful eyes of Amy.

“I never, ever want to go back to being a man, not after last night.”

“Me neither, but the two of us have a war to survive, and I suspect the Army has no problem with either of us getting killed.”

Charlotte was thrilled with the transformation she saw in the girls’ demeanor wrought after their night’s debauchery. They carried themselves with a new confidence, and their pulchritude sizzled on stage. The girls now all wanted cock and knew how to get it. They felt affirmed as women when the men around them responded to their sexuality. Charlotte started bringing in men off the street to see the practice routines and they all commented that if the girls were really women they would be taking them back to their place and riding them hard. Given the circumstances, Charlotte and the girls thought it was high praise. Major Bancroft knew the girls were ready.

Straining under her duffel bag and wearing fatigues, Frances marched awkwardly behind Daniella and Sergeant-Major Calhoun. She studied Daniella and then turned to look at her other comrades, all wearing helmets, field jackets, and combat boots with leggings and she smiled. You couldn’t bury the girls’ newly discovered femininity, even under all the military paraphernalia, not even if you issued them M-1 Garands or festooned grenades on their jackets. Frances then switched her gaze skyward, above Daniella’s helmet to the gray sides of the brand-new liberty ship that they would board, the SS John Harvey.

Frances dropped her duffel bag in front of the same green painted table that was once her post and proudly declared, "Entertainment Specialist Frances Jensen, 4096312, of the 566th Special Services Company."

"I have you right here, Miss. Good luck. Hope you come back."

"Thank you, Corporal. I fully intend to come back."

By the time the John Harvey reached Oran, Algeria and discharged its vehicles and soldiers, the war in Africa had been won. The Afrika Korps and the 10th Panzerarmee were in massive POW camps awaiting transport to the United States on the same ship that carried the 566th to the war. The Allies under an up-and-coming General Eisenhower and his subordinates, Generals Patton and Montgomery, had pursued the Germans to the island of Sicily. The Herman Goering Panzer Division nearly drove the Americans back into the sea until it was stopped by determined resistance led by James Gavin and Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and heavily supported by naval gunfire from the cruiser, USS Savannah off Gela.

The Navy in Oran, however, was not cooperative with transporting an army burlesque show to the beachhead. Despite all Bancroft and Calhoun's pleading, cajoling, and attempted bribes, the Navy loading officers would not make room for the 566th. They had no room as the bays in the LSTs were so packed they could not accommodate a bicycle, let alone two trucks and a jeep for a non-combat unit.

The girls made the best of their stay in Oran, buying lunch of lamb kebabs and rice at the souk, and shopping at the bazaar where they obtained harem

pants with matching bras, jewelry, and silk scarves which they jauntily wore on their olive drab fatigues.

After a week of disappointment and irrelevancy, Sergeant-Major Calhoun came into the tent where the unit had bivouacked, little boys on one side of the blanket wall, little girls on the other. Sergeant Lang comfortably slept in the back of one of the deuce-and-a-halves while Bancroft and Calhoun slept in billets in town. "I got us a ride into Sicily, it's a Liberty Ship, the SS John Huntington, brand new like the Harvey. They will crane our vehicles onto the weather deck as they are pretty much packed below. We would just need to clean the salt off when we get there, but it's not that long a trip. There is one catch."

"What is it?" Bancroft asked.

"The first mate and the bo'sun only agreed to it if two of the girls have sex with them in their state-rooms on the way over. Garcia, Jensen, you are the squad leader and assistant squad leaders, that is a job for the two of you. Don't worry, they know the truth and seem very insistent."

"Yes, Sergeant-Major," Daniella and Frances said simultaneously, while choking down their fear.

"You did good, Sergeant-Major," Bancroft complimented his Senior Entertainment Sergeant. "You did very good."

Once firmly established on terra firma in Sicily, Bancroft could flaunt his travel orders to the MPs and move forward in search of a venue for their first gig. He just needed to find an accommodating regiment.

The unit moved painfully slow, up the crowded Sicilian roads in the wake of battle, seeing burned-out Tiger and Sherman tanks, destroyed trucks and jeeps, some still smoldering, and dead bodies lying on the shoulder, Americans covered by blankets with their boots sticking out, Germans uncovered and bloating and blackening in the relentless Sicilian sun. Frances also saw dead civilians, too many dead civilians, with children crying over the bodies of dead parents, and parents crying over the bodies of dead children.

Frances looked at Amy who looked back, both at a loss for words, and with tears in their eyes.

The girls' grieving was broken by a high-pitched engine whine and the rattle of heavy machine gun-fire, both outgoing and incoming.

"We're being strafed," Daniella yelled, even now with her woman's voice. "Off the truck."

The girls jumped down heavily onto the ground and crawled to the ditch alongside the road.

Daniella had ensured that her squad had evacuated the back of the truck before her own leap over the railing. She was too late to make her escape as the Heinkel flew overhead with its machine gun firing, stitching a trail of heavy caliber bullets into the vehicles, and into her.

In her own leap over the vehicle, Frances had painfully sprained her ankle. She limped onto the back of the truck behind the other girls who were crying at the blood-soaked ruins of their friend.

Sergeant-Major Calhoun and Sergeant Lang pushed their way through the crying girls, gathered

up Daniella's body and placed it under a blanket alongside the road. "Jensen, you are now squad leader; have the blood cleaned up now, while the convoy pulls itself back together."

"Yes, Sergeant-Major."

"And have that ankle bandaged."

After two days of travel, the unit started encountering vehicles marked with an unofficial AAA-0, while infantrymen with the same unauthorized markings marched at ten-foot intervals along both sides of the road.

Curious at the blatant flouting of military regulations, Calhoun asked a sweating private, "What is with those markings?"

"Anything, Anytime, Anywhere, Bar Nothing, the 39th Regiment of the 9th Division. Colonel Myles's idea. He doesn't give a damn what his bosses think. He says soon enough the Germans will see this and run."

"Where is Colonel Myles?"

"Paddy? He went up ahead a couple hours ago, setting up his CP I guess."

Sergeant-Major Calhoun sought out the Regimental Sergeant-Major, another Great War veteran who fought with the 42nd Division under General MacArthur to set up an audience of Major Bancroft with Colonel Myles, an older man with intense energy, who always seemed to be laughing. He was a busy man with a war to fight and would only have a brief time to discuss a burlesque show for the troops. "A

burlesque show? For the troops? Up here? Are you crazy, Major?”

“Aren’t we all, Colonel?”

“You are serious about this, aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir. You are an old hand, you know about the shows and houses behind the line in the Great War.”

“I see you fought in that war with the 79th. Were you at Montfaucon?”

“Yes, sir. That’s why I believe in this enterprise. I think your men will, too.”

Quietly observing the interchange between officers, while standing on one foot, Frances impertinently interjected, “Colonel, we are all very serious about this. We already lost one of us down the road.”

“Wounded?”

“A Heinkel blew her head off.”

Colonel Myles blew out a deep breath. These boys dressed as girls were actually soldiers in their own way.

“Please show him, Major, our portfolio,” Frances politely suggested.

In a minute Major Bancroft and Colonel Myles were eying the cheesecake shots of the girls that were taken for just such a purpose.

“Is this you, Specialist...” Colonel Myles asked of Frances, referring to a picture of all six girls in a dance routine, one of the less risqué shots of the newly-minted woman.

“Jensen, sir, yes sir it is,” Frances abashedly answered, while looking at the ground in front of the Colonel.

“You have a lot of guts to be up here.”

“Thank you, Colonel.”

“Then get your helmet painted like the rest of my command, the same with your vehicles. The Germans are fighting harder the tighter we pack them into the eastern part of the island. I am sure the boys will appreciate some good wholesome American fun before they fight.”

In their North African dancing girl costumes, the girls looked decidedly un-American for their first routine, which they had hurriedly put together in their excitement to look so alluring. The AAA-0 men of the 39th whooped and hollered, while Colonel Myles, seated in the front row of the crowd next to Major Bancroft, smiled, confirming his wisdom in taking in the unit.

Her left ankle heavily bandaged, Frances grimaced in pain beneath her veil with each step as she danced to the Fi Yom Wi Leyla with her friends, happily noticing the lustful glances of the GIs of the 39th.

At the conclusion of the belly dance recital, Private Abrams emerged to conduct a comedy routine while the girls changed. Abrams originally had just lifted the routines from “This is the Army,” but after having witnessing war and losing a friend, he felt that its trite humor would no longer be well received by the combat veterans in the crowd. He had racked his brains trying to retool his act when he finally noticed the grim humor of the GIs around him, and started incorporating it into his act. He was well-supported

by Sergeant Lang, who had a perpetual air of optimism and toughness in adversity, and by Sergeant-Major Calhoun whose good nature always had time for the concerns for his troops. Calhoun even performed alongside Abrams as the straight-laced straight man, so essential in burlesque comedy. The sketch lampooned the infantry regiment's own NCOs to the heartfelt laughs of their men.

Amy then emerged in a skimpy rhinestone bra and panties and proceeded to do a sultry fan dance in the style of Sally Rand, and not a word could be heard as she delicately shifted the fans in front of her lithe body. Once Amy bowed, the crowd was on its feet in applause, and she cried as she made her way off stage. She was a woman, anybody could see that now.

Wearing leather flight jackets or infantry windbreakers that revealed their bras, crushed visored hats, aviator sunglasses, the silk scarves from Oran, garter belts stockings, and high-heeled sandals, the remaining four girls did a chair dance to the tune of Moonlight Serenade. Gina had the lead, and while the other girls provocatively posed and flirted with the soldiers, she made her way through the crowd, gently brushing their hair or shoulders, while they strategically fondled her panty-clad ass. Frances appreciated being able to support her ankle with the chair, but was certain the crowd could see her bandages beneath her stocking.

Colonel Myles was then called to address his men. He praised their recent performance and stated he was proud of how the regiment turned itself around, and had become the envy of all the other commands in Sicily and a terror to the Germans.

Margaret then emerged in a maroon sequined evening gown with matching elbow-length gloves and sang the Vera Lynn classic “There will be Bluebirds Over the White Cliffs of Dover” and Kate Smith’s “God Bless America.”

The pain in Frances’s ankle was now excruciating, but wearing a bustier, brassiere, boa, gloves and gartered stocking with high-heeled sandals, she proceeded to strip down until only her bra and panties remained. Holding her arms over her foam falsies and bra, she tried to mince off the stage but limped awkwardly in her heels. Seeing Frances’s pain, Lang helped her off the stage and put her foot up while Gina and Eve then performed a striptease duet in which they wore tuxedo blazers and top hats.

“Please, help me get into my next costume,” Frances pleaded. “I need to do this.”

The next act after the second comedy routine was another chair dance with all the girls in bustiers or corsets and Amy taking lead. In her skimpy outfit, Frances started to flirt with individual soldiers who would smile back and wink. She never felt more special in her life and wished her uptight Swedish parents could see her now.

A proud Major Bancroft then left the crowd and marched on stage, thanking Colonel Myles and the men of the 39th for their incredible hospitality. He concluded his speech with their motto, Anything, Anytime, Anywhere, Bar Nothing, which brought a series of resounding cheers.

Finally, Frances limped out in a deep purple evening gown with sheer sleeves and a ruffled shoulder and sang “Oh Shenandoah”, bringing the men’s thoughts across the wide Atlantic to home. When she



turned to leave the stage in her heels, she could not walk, and two privates lifted her up in a basket and carried her off to a stunned silence.

“Your unit has a place with the 39th all the way to Berlin if you want, Major.”

“Here, let me get that for you,” a young Second Lieutenant asked Frances the next day in the chow line to hold her mess kit filling up with beans and spam.

“I’m William Fletcher, from Winchester, Virginia and I loved hearing you sing last night. It definitely brought me home.”

“So, Lieutenant, do you have a girl waiting for you?”

“I am writing to several girls I knew when I went to college at George Washington University in Washington, DC. I was in the ROTC there.”

“I was a freshman at Cornell when I enlisted. I washed out of OCS and here I am. I am glad you have some girls back home, Lieutenant, as you are very cute and the Army forbids us to date on several counts, what with you being an officer and me being several things off-limits.”

“Touche. I do admire your courage, doing what you are doing.”

“Thank you. Have you been in combat?”

“Not yet. I’m a replacement officer for Charlie Company.”

“Listen to your Sergeant and your troops. It’s going to be far worse than you actually can imagine, so prepare yourself for that.”

“I’ll do that.”

“Good. I do hope to see you again, alive, Lieutenant Fletcher.”

“Me as well, Miss Jensen.”

“What the hell is going on, Paddy? Ted?” Lieutenant General George S. Patton roared at Colonel Myles, and Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., the Assistant Division Commander of the First Infantry Division.

“What do you mean, General?”

“I was up at Troina and visited a hospital where men from both of your units were being treated.” Troina was a town atop a high mountain, ably defended by a German Panzer-Grenadier division and was proving to be a very hard objective to take.

“Yes, sir. I am aware of your visit. I hope you didn’t find any more malingerers in the hospital,” General Roosevelt gravely responded.

“No, it was much worse. I found a unit of fairies, soldiers dressing as women talking to the soldiers, wounded in battle.”

“Yes, sir,” General Roosevelt answered.

“I want them out of there, them and that smart-ass Major of theirs. I want them on the next boat state-side.”

“I saw them too, General,” Roosevelt retorted. “The troops didn’t give a damn who they were at the time. They were talking to them and writing letters. Even the doctors said it was good for their morale and their recovery. I think it was good for their morale.”

“General, that unit can go with my unit anywhere,” Myles added.

“First your damn helmet stunt, then your damn fairy show. What next, Paddy?”

“Troina, then Berlin.”

“You are both fucking idiots.”

“Is that all, General?”

“Just get me Troina.”

Troina fell to the First Infantry Division reinforced by the 39th Infantry Regiment after heavy fighting in which Lieutenant Fletcher distinguished himself. Messina, on the northeastern tip of the island fell shortly thereafter to the Third Infantry Division, commanded by General Truscott. The 39th and the First were then transferred to England, to participate in the invasion of Northern France, leaving the The AAA-0 Burlesque Show without its benefactor as Colonel Myles sailed to England. It quickly became popular, however, with the troops of the Third Infantry and the parachute regiments from the 82nd Airborne that stayed at Messina, awaiting their turn to fight on the Italian mainland.

“The Ancient Romans said about Baia that it was where older men went to become young boys again and where young boys went to become girls,” Lance Corporal Daphne Meadows, a sophisticated and

beautiful brunette female impersonator from a traveling British troupe observed to Amy and Frances while sipping wine and eating gelato on a veranda with a splendid view of the Bay of Naples. The American burlesque show and the British troupe had joined forces at Naples after its capture in the fall of 1944. The British were impressed with the American's wardrobe, especially the plentiful supply of nylons, their risqué performance, adequate transportation, and ability to go up front. The Americans were impressed with the support that the British command gave to their own troupe, flying it in to the Italian theater and billeting it in an exquisite villa that had an impressive wine cellar and a breathtaking vista of the Tyrrhenian Sea. The British troupe also had an extensive repertoire of plays and skits, as well as some beautiful singing voices.

Like true allies, the troupes soon became fully integrated, the Americans taking part in the plays, and the Brits performing striptease, especially Daphne, an Eton graduate and Oxford student, who was the third son of the Earl of Hastings. Now, after an aborted attempt to perform for the units fighting at Cassino in which the troupe encountered bottomless mud and surly, unfamiliar, and unwelcoming units, the girls were back in Naples. The attendance for the Naples shows was disappointing, and revealed the Achilles Heel of a wartime female impersonator show, Once the soldiers could get the real thing, they had little interest in female impersonators.

Naples had been liberated, but its economy was broken and it verged on starvation. The Italian women would do practically anything for the Tommies and GIs to put food on the table. With a banquet of impoverished but defiantly attractive women available, the soldiers of the Fifth Army had no interest in what had become a very professional production un-

der Major Bancroft and Flight Lieutenant Tommy Andrews.

The soldiers of the Fifth Army did not come to the shows, however, the Italian men came in droves, thrilled to watch soldiers from the conquering Army strip on stage for them, and then take them to their bedrooms to introduce them to Italian sausage.

Amy, Frances, and Daphne all had Italian lovers and thrilled to their attentions both in and out of the boudoir. Frances would be thrilled when Antonio called her Francesca and passionately rode her from behind in her room overlooking the bay. Amy's lover, Vittorio, had even gotten on his knee and proposed to her, presenting her with a family heirloom engagement ring and a bouquet of flowers picked from an overgrown and abandoned garden. Amy was thrilled, but advised Vittorio that the war would soon take her away.

"It is truly a wonderful war," Daphne commented while sipping wine, and thinking of her own lover, Marco. "We are living in the new Baia, where women like us can actually be women for awhile. I would have loved to experience life in Baia, what with the exquisite hairstyles, constant parties, and being passed from one patrician to another. But alas, even girls like us back then had an ephemeral existence. Eventually their facial hair would grow, their voices would deepen, and they would be cast aside by their lovers, as we will be once the war is over."

"Do you really think that will happen to us?" Frances asked, not wishing to ever revert back to faking her role as a man.

"Yes, of course it will. At least in England and the United States. They will kick us curbside before the

ink on the peace treaty is signed. The women will be forced out of the factories and war industries and made to be good little guardians of the hearth, and women like us will be rounded up and sent to jail, lest we tempt the men to stray.”

“Well, I never want to go back to living as a man,” Amy declared.

“Then marry Vittorio for Christ’s sake, move back to Italy when the war is over. Adopt an orphan or ten and be their mother; there are enough begging for food on the streets these days who wouldn’t care that you have something extra down there. They would just want any female figure to love and protect them, and by all means we should keep them from the nuns.”

“But, I will grow old too, like the girls at Baia, and eventually look more and more masculine.”

“That can be retarded or even reversed today. Scientists have found a way to synthesize female hormones, estrogens, and administer it to girls like us. It will soften our skin, stop facial hair from growing, shrink our cocks, and give us irresistible curves.”

“And where do we get these hormones?”

“Sweden, from what I hear, also Casablanca. It might as well be the moon from where we sit. In the meantime we just soldier on like the strong girls we are and enjoy our good fortune.”

“Mrs. Vittorio Positano. I kind of like the sound of that,” Amy smiled, dreaming of a wedding dress and being taken on her wedding night.

“I do love impracticable, hasty, and unlikely war-time weddings. It just shows that hope springs eternal.”

The bishop was all too willing to marry the amorous couple, without asking any questions about Amy’s Protestant upbringing or her birth gender. He was instead thrilled to actually be having a wedding again in Naples. He was sure the young, spunky American would be a fine wife to Vittorio Positano and be a wonderful mother to their children.

A month after Amy and Vittorio’s wedding in the Cattedrale de San Gennaro, the Allies landed behind the German lines in the small port town of Anzio, less than thirty miles from Rome, but failed to capitalize on their surprise and were forcefully pinned in by German reinforcements. Soon, the small beachhead was fighting for its very existence where every inch was vulnerable to artillery fire from the massive German railway guns, nicknamed Anzio Express and Anzio Annie.

“Anzio seems like a perfect place for a show, Major. The troops there can’t get a furlough to whore it up in Naples,” Flight Lieutenant Andrews suggested.

“But the transport is tighter than our girl’s asses by a long shot. The Navy would never let us go aboard.”

“But you are on good terms with some of the brass at Anzio, General Truscott or that paratrooper colonel for instance. I don’t think the Navy will mind us going up there by ourselves and seeing if we can get transport orders.”

A week later, with travel orders in hand, a combined British and American drag troupe boarded

LST-349 in Naples Harbor headed for the Anzio beachhead. The navy was immaculately courteous to the girls and the officers were perfect gentlemen, taking them on tours of the ship, and letting them walk on the weather deck where they could observe the mountains of the Italian Coast pass by with the sun rising behind the peaks.

Soon, however, the crews tensed on the anti-aircraft guns and the ship went to general quarters. The Luftwaffe raided the port incessantly. It had damaged several cruisers and sank a familiar Liberty ship, the SS John Huntington, whose burned out superstructure was awash three hundred yards from the breakwater.

“I don’t think you’ll be looking for any more doggy style sex or blow jobs from me there, Bo’sun,” Frances muttered aloud when passing the wreck of the Huntington, much to the puzzlement of the young naval ensign who escorted her.

Major General Gerald Templar of the British 56th Division stormed up a heavily shelled street on the outskirts of Anzio. He had caught wind of a burlesque show in the beachhead and his American counterparts seemed indifferent to that travesty. It would certainly be a mecca for stragglers drifting away from their units when every man needed to be on the line. The Germans were launching a ferocious set of counterattacks on the beach head with elite infantry and panzer formations, including scores of their Tiger tanks, and the Americans and British were just holding on, almost at the water’s edge. Hitler had vowed that the Allies would be driven into the sea, and if the Germans were successful here, the Allied high command would not land in France in the summer.

Expecting to encounter a half-drunken array of soldiers, without weapons or leaders, Templer was shocked at the first set of troops he actually encountered, Tommies from the British First Infantry Division.

“Good day General,” a Lance-corporal said as he smartly saluted his superior. The soldier marched proudly with his head up and his Lee-Enfield rifle down to prevent the drizzling rain from entering the barrel. “It is a lovely day for a war, isn’t it?”

The soldier’s mates were equally confident and smart in their salutes as they passed the General, who dumbly raised his swagger stick to his visor. These were not stragglers, several of them had bloody bandages and were obviously going back into the fight. The General then encountered a group of Americans from the 45th Division, muddy, unshaven stoop shouldered in exhaustion, but quietly determined and smiling with clean faces. The Americans gave a casual salute, which was nothing new for American troops, but one soldier, as muddy as the rest from fighting German panzergrenadiers cheerfully gestured “V for Victory, General.”

The troops laughed and turned to the east, where the vestiges of their command lay.

Templer finally reached the notorious building where the drag troupe had allegedly taken up residence and saw an American tank destroyer crew lounging against the walls.

“You men, don’t you have a job to do?”

A sergeant came forward. “I’m sorry General, our TD got brewed up a few hours ago by a Tiger. We knocked out two but then took an 88. It killed my

driver. I was just giving my guys a couple hours rest before we try and get a new M-10.”

With “Dog Face Soldier,” the fight song of the U.S. Third Infantry Division, playing inside, Templer then entered the abandoned home that had been taken over by the burlesque show. In the main room he saw soldiers respectfully dancing with attractive, well-dressed women, or close facsimiles thereof. In a parlor the soldiers sat next to other girls engaged in conversation, some holding hands, others writing letters with the assistance of the ladies.

One of the bathrooms had been commandeered by the troops to at least wash their face and hands. A buffet table had been set up in the dining room with heaping plates of spaghetti and garlic bread, fish, plus bottles of wine, food items culled from the Naples waterfront before the unit left for Anzio.

“Who is in charge here?” Templer demanded.

Immediately Bancroft and Andrews presented themselves to the General and saluted. Templer did not return the salute, and eventually the humiliated officers dropped their arms to the sides.

“Do you have authority to set up this, this...establishment, Major?”

“Yes, General, from General Truscott himself, and from Colonel Rucker.” Calhoun showed the General the travel orders.

“I don’t believe that General Truscott appreciates the gravity of a brothel so close to the front lines. The Germans are only four hundred yards away.”

“Oh, is that why we have been having stray green tracer rounds fly over us?” Bancroft laconically shot back. “And we are not a brothel, General. God knows the troops would appreciate it if we were, but our girls are under strict orders not to put out. Right now we are an oasis in the fighting.”

“For every straggler that should be fighting.”

“The men here have a two-hour, two glasses of wine limit, and we don’t expect to see them back for a week. It’s too big a beachhead for some GI or Limey to spend more than that time here. A lot of walking wounded come through here, too. I bet if they wanted, they could shirk at the hospitals or unloading the ships.”

“I see. Let me see your orders.”

Calhoun handed Templer the orders.

“Major, the Germans could be here in fifteen minutes and your unit should be in the rear echelon. We don’t need to add to the casualty lists. Besides, Flight Lieutenant, these orders are from American officers, not from the British Army.”

“General if I may,” Flight Lieutenant Andrews challenged Templer.

“Go on, Flight Lieutenant.”

“General, the Americans here were at Sicily, and were strafed and shelled at the battle for Troina. My own unit was in Cairo since February, 1941, and entertained the troops of the Eighth Army when it looked like Rommel would capture us all. We requested numerous times to be allowed to perform at Tobruk but were turned down.”

“That was probably a good thing in the end, wouldn’t you say?”

“Sir, this is a military unit, and every hour of every day we are reminded that we are not fighting men, and usually a lot less. Our girls would prefer to die on this beachhead than run back to Naples. It is our war just as much as it is yours. We have a stake on this beach, too.”

“Did you fly in the Battle of Britain, Flight Lieutenant?”

“Yes, General. Hurricanes, until I got busted up bailing out over London. I still can’t dance.”

“And your people all feel this way.”

Major Bancroft interjected, “Jensen, front and center.”

Wearing her purple evening gown, Frances meekly made her way forward to encounter the haughty General. “Yes, major.”

“The General says the Germans are so close we can smell the sauerkraut on their breath. What say you?”

“It’s time to play ‘Lili Marlene,’ dare them to take this place. May I be dismissed, sir?”

“Lili Marlene it is, until we beat them back or the Germans sing along with us.”

“Flight Lieutenant, in one hour you will report to my command post and receive orders to stay here. You are all bloody fools but maybe that’s just what we need right now.”

“Thank you, General.”

“No, thank you, Flight Lieutenant. This will all be noted very positively.”

The Germans wave crested just shy of the water’s edge and then receded in the face of a counterattack by American armor. In celebration, two and a half glasses of wine were allowed to each guest, and they could extend their stay by an extra half an hour. The beachhead then became a scene of static trench warfare in which both sides dug in and shelled each other with heavy artillery. Bancroft and Andrews sent their units to the beaches during the day to help fill a mountain of sandbags. The girls’ hands blistered and bled from shoveling sand and loading the bags onto the back of trucks, so that they had to wear gloves when dancing or holding hands with the soldiers.

Eventually, any experienced observer could see that the tide of battle had changed and soon enough the Americans and British would break out of the beach head and capture Rome, thus ending the military usefulness of both units.

“Once Rome falls, we are done in Italy,” Bancroft observed to Andrews, “it will be like Naples all over again, but on a much bigger scale.”

“We did well here. I am proud of our girls, but maybe it is time to request orders out. I was thinking the CBI theater. We will never, ever liberate a large city there that will distract the troops from our girls.”

“I was hoping to join the big invasion, in France. At least until we take Paris, then maybe I will request to go to India and join you in the last bastion for female impersonators in a world war.”

“What about the Pacific?”

“Special Services already has three units like ours working over there.”

“Much more conducive to our kind of show.”

“Let’s go see General Truscott and General Templar, before the war passes us by here. We will probably go to England together, before you ship out to Burma.”

“You are a true pleasure to work with, Major. You and your girls. V for Vittorio. It was a lovely wedding.”

“I can’t see a damned thing,” Frances complained to Daphne as they made their way through a blacked-out London. The pair carried small flashlights as they made their way to Hyde Park near Lancaster Gate. Frances ran her fingers against the cast iron railings to keep going in the right direction, until they came to Bayswater Road and crossed into the park.

“Girls like us patrol by the Statue of Achilles.”

“And so does Jack the Ripper,” Frances commented as the two made their way through the darkened paths of the royal park. “Besides, how do you know?”

“It was that way in 1940, and old traditions die hard.”

“Yes, four years a tradition make. So is there any sign and countersign?”

“A woman walking at night in Hyde Park by the Statue of Achilles is only about one thing.”

“Cock. In the ass. Hard and brutal.”

“Quite.”

For over an hour the girls' high heels echoed on the darkened brick pathways of Hyde Park, not encountering a soul. The girls wore their female uniforms in olive drab and khaki with skirts tailored three inches higher than regulations, and accessorized with high heel pumps made by a cobbler in Naples. They were a classic style in the proper brown and black colors and nobody called them out for being out of uniform. Instead, most of the military policemen admired the girls' legs.

“Maybe everybody has been drafted,” Frances laughed.

“Another twenty minutes, please.”

“Okay.”

Frances then sensed two men following them, mostly by the sound of their voices that carried in the empty park. Scotsmen, most certainly soldiers.

Daphne maneuvered herself and her friend along several turns of the sidewalk to ensure the men were interested and not just on a pleasant evening stroll through a lifeless royal park at midnight. Finally, Daphne held up at the Statue of Achilles and waited for the men.

“Hello ladies, fancy meeting you here.”

“So, what brings you out on a night like tonight?” Daphne laughed.



“Just stretching me legs and doing some bird watching, and sure enough we found ourselves a pair of lovelies.”

“It’s dark, we could be two of the witches from MacBeth and you wouldn’t be the wiser.”

The two Scotsmen then shined the flashlights in the faces of the two girls, blinding them for several seconds. “You are bleeding gorgeous,” the man in front of Frances proclaimed.

“Thank you,” she meekly answered.

“And a Yank. It’s my lucky night,” the large Scotsman growled as he felt under Frances’s skirt.

She lifted her leg into his grasp and let him fondle her nylon-clad calf.

“Real nylons, I knew it was my lucky night. I haven’t felt those for five years.”

“Feel away,” Frances smoothly said. “I’m all yours tonight, jock.”

After several minutes of fondling, the man brusquely pushed Frances over to the pedestal of the statue, facing away from him. With Frances bracing against the statue, the man removed her panties, knickers he called them.

“Bend over more and spread your legs, my lovely Yank.”

Frances did as ordered. She had already coated her rosebud liberally from her trusty jar of Vaseline so that the man’s entry was smooth and relatively painless.

“Oohh,” Frances heard herself moan in pleasure, and heard the moan echoed by Daphne, on the other side of the pedestal.

Feeling his way tentatively inside her, the Scotsman started to pick up the pace, thrusting deeper while slapping Frances’s bare bottom that was starting to chill in the night air. Frances was a screamer and could not hold back, sending her shrieks into the darkness while the man assaulted her backside with the same ardor that he would be assaulting Fortress Europe in two months. After wrecking Frances’ defenses, he finally triumphed, pumping his seed deep within her bunker, shouting the Who’s Like Us battle cry from his battalion.

“Hello hello hello, Jock. Out for an evening stroll,” an English bobby emerged from the gloom.

Frances quickly hustled on her panties, while feeling the Scotsman’s seed run down her bare thigh onto her nylons.

“Night reconnaissance, sir. You can never have enough training for patrolling in the dark.”

“Looks like you lot have bagged yourself a pair of lookers. Please, miss. If you are going to shag in the park you can’t scream like a banshee, or Goering himself will hear you.”

“Yes, officer.”

“A Yank? I thought so,” the officer said as he turned away, twirling his night stick.

“V for Victory,” Frances cheerfully called.

“And buy more war bonds,” the officer responded. “You kids have a good night.”

The men of the 39th cheered the girls as their trucks made their way into the barbed wire compound. England had now been cut in two: outside the wire, and inside the wire. Those outside the wire prayed for those inside, who for security purposes could no longer mingle with the citizens. Colonel Myles had arranged for the 566th to stay in a country manor house in Devon, and the unit performed nightly to full audiences, the troops no longer to go to London for knee shakers in the darkness.

Captain William Fletcher, now in command of Love Company in the Third Battalion, sought Frances out. “Frances Jensen, it is great to see you. So how was Anzio? I heard a lot about it.”

“Is that what you came to see me for, Captain, to talk about the Anzio Express?”

The young captain stammered. “Uh no, I just came to see if you were well and tell you how I am happy you are accompanying us into France.”

“Why thank you, sir,” Frances saluted the youthful captain.

“Carry on then, Specialist Jensen.”

“Will do.”

For once, the 566th didn't have to beg or bribe their way onto an invasion force. Colonel Myles and General Roosevelt, now with the Fourth Infantry Division slated for Utah Beach, knew that the unit was very self-sufficient, and a tremendous boost to morale. The men loved the show and when they needed

to be reminded of what they were fighting for, the well-honed femininity of the girls drove it home like nothing other. Dubious of the claims, the Seventh Corps staff attended a performance and were convinced of the unit's value. . If pressed, some of the officers would concede that they had hard-ons during the striptease and choked up on Oh Shenandoah.

In heavy May downpours, the units packed up and made their way to the embarkation points on the English Channel, headed for the coast of Normandy and the Cotentin Peninsula. The 39th was scheduled to land several days after D-Day and the ride across the channel was rough. The girls, however, were used to being on ships, and quietly smirked as some tough-talking GIs made the transit by rail.

Moving quickly off Utah Beach and the causeways over the flooded marshlands, the unit was quickly established in an abandoned German heavy artillery bunker near Saint Mere Eglise and within a day was entertaining service troops building a fighter air strip for P-47s. The veteran 39th regiment soon became known to the local Wehrmacht population for its helmets as it advanced towards Cherbourg with fluid efficiency. Cherbourg fell to a combined force of the 9th Infantry, the 39th's parent division, the 4th Infantry, and to the pride of both Bancroft and Calhoun, the rookie 79th Division, the unit they had served in during the Great War.

Large lines of prisoners marched by, escorted by jubilant GIs of the 79th. Bancroft decided to hold a celebration party for the victors of Cherbourg, featuring a painted wooden shield of the city's crest and the patches of the three divisions. The girls started the show wearing captured German uniforms to the tunes of the "Horst Wessel," which then changed to the "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B". The

girls stripped out of their German attire, to reveal star spangled lingerie in red, white, and blue, to the cheers of the victorious U.S. Army.

The front became static after that, and even the veteran 39th regiment struggled in the hedgerow country where attacks were extremely difficult in the labyrinthine bocage country. The show continued to play, mostly for the service troops, but often for divisions pulled out of the line for rest and reinforcement. Unfortunately, the show came under a cloud, when African-American troops from a transportation company sat in the back of the show, not saying a word. They were not booted out by Bancroft or Calhoun, but politely treated as any other guests. Even Eve, a daughter of the South thought they should see the show. Besides, it was her body on display.

Units started to grumble and Bancroft decided to move the show across the sluggish Vire et Taute Canal to rejoin the 39th Infantry close to the front at a small town called Le Desert.

“It doesn’t seem right, setting up shop in a church. It’s just asking for trouble,” Gina grumbled.

As the squad leader, Frances heard Gina’s words with a feeling of dread that clenched at her heart. Gina was always the most ebullient and unabashed of the girls, that is why she took the lead in the dance routines, mingling through the crowds, seducing the men with her charms. She had offered her charms up readily in Sicily, Naples, and London, so her Catholic religion was not at work here, either. She would have plenty of confessing to do to a priest, if she did not want to seduce him outright as a lark. No, Gina sensed something, something bad. The elite Panzer Lehr Division had moved into the front lines against

the 39th, but most everybody in the know regarded them as a holding force.

In the muggy heat of a Normandy summer night, Frances couldn't sleep and soon she heard intense gun and cannon fire.

“What is it Jensen?” Calhoun sleepily muttered.

“I don't know, Sergeant-Major. There is a lot of firing up ahead, machine guns and tanks, I think we are being attacked.”

“Here, help me up,” Calhoun grimaced as he struggled to rise from the hard stone floor of the nine hundred-year-old Norman church.

Frances and Calhoun made their way outside and listened to the firing. It seemed to be growing closer, and was maintaining its intensity. Typically at night there would be a sudden flare up of firing, punctuated by a few hand grenades, but it would soon die down. Not this time. A flare lit the night sky, and another flare shot low in the fields and lodged in a hedgerow, a German tanker tactic that they had learned in Russia, night-blinding the tank gunners so that they could pick off the enemy tanks at will. During a brief lull in the firing, the two then heard the sound of tank engines which were not American.

“Damn, Jensen, you're right. This is a counterattack from that Panzer division. Wake everybody up. They are trying to mash us all up against that shitty canal.”

In five minutes, Bancroft joined Calhoun at the entrance to the church, and immediately assessed the situation.

“Do we run, Major?” Calhoun asked.

Bancroft had been waiting for a moment like this the entire war. “No, we aren’t running. Gather the men, and give me a hand with the trucks.”

Lang reported to Bancroft, first and the two headed down the darkened Lang in one of the deuce-and-a-half tucks until they were two hundred yards from the church, in a narrow stretch of the road, surrounded by a tall, hedge-lined embankment. Bancroft had Lang maneuver the truck until it stretched lengthwise across the country lane, with its front jammed into the embankment, and only two feet of clearance in the rear. A Panzer would have some difficulty pushing it out of the way.

Calhoun, with the band now armed with carbines, and Abrams, armed with an M-1 Garand, then joined Bancroft with the second truck and positioned the truck similarly, but in the opposite direction, blocking the gap left by the first truck. Now a Panzer would have to push two trucks out of the way simultaneously.

With the road blocked, a German Panzer started clanking towards the trucks blocking its path. Bancroft then took out a Zippo lighter, set fire to a handkerchief, then thrust it into the gas tank. Five seconds later, the truck exploded in a ball of fire that reached thirty feet into the night sky. Ten seconds later, a shell exploded off the lead Panzer, knocking it out. Shortly thereafter, the second Panzer in the column also took a hit and was disabled. American M-10 tank destroyers could see the enemy tank column illuminated by the burning truck and were picking off the German tanks from the churchyard where the girls remained, transfixed by the tank battle.

The remaining German tanks shot back wildly in the direction of the American tank destroyers but hit nothing, as the Americans were still in the night shadows. A Mark IV Panzer then turned its attention to the roadblock and fired HE rounds at the burning truck and stitched the area with green tracer fire from its hull-mounted machine gun. German voices could be heard when the din subsided. A squad of Panzer grenadiers attacked the roadblock, but was stopped by Sergeant Lang, who fired the 50 caliber machine gun mounted on top of the second truck.

“The spotlights,” Gina loudly suggested to Frances.

Frances looked at her puzzled and didn't say anything.

“The spotlights we use in the show, they are battery powered. We can set them up in the church windows and shine them on the road.”

“Not the windows,” Frances countered. “They would light up our tank destroyers. But from the steeple they should be fine.”

The girls felt their way up the steep, winding steps of the Norman steeple in pitch dark, feeling the damp of the walls to keep their bearings. Amy, in the lead, then tripped as she encountered the floor of the bell tower.

Two steps behind her friend, Frances entered the bell platform and scanned the windows, until she saw the burning truck and Lang firing his machine gun. The girls connected the battery leads to two small spotlights and Frances and Amy shined them on the German positions, illuminating a Panther and a halftrack.

“Let’s get out of here, now,” Frances screamed, and the girls rushed for the steps just before a high explosive round from the Panther slammed into the steeple. In the brief period of illumination, an American tank destroyer was able to target the Panther, and hit it with three armor piercing rounds until it caught fire.

Frances, however, was knocked ten steps down the staircase by the force of the explosion, until she was thrown against Amy. Together the girls slid another five steps until they bounced against Margaret who stopped the downward slide. Margaret and Eve helped the very shaken Amy and Frances down the steps, and settled them on a church pew. Gina gave the two girls a swig from her canteen, which contained Calvados, a hard apple cider that was the pride of the Norman orchards.

Feeling the burn of the alcohol, Frances felt herself recover from the tank blast, when a deafening explosion rocked the churchyard. An American tank destroyer had been hit. Frances tumbled to the church door and saw two tank destroyermen emerge from the open turret and scramble off the burning tank, and two more emerge from the hatches, all of them on fire.

“We need to help them,” Frances yelled and stumbled in the direction of the soldiers. The other girls were faster and pinned the soldiers on the ground, pulling off their burning jackets, and extinguishing the flames. One was dead by the time the girls attempted the rescue, but three were screaming in pain. Gina and Amy administered morphine from their first aid pouches, and the girls carried the burned men into the church and set them on the floor.

“I’ll go for a medic,” Eve volunteered, and left the church from the back door.

For the rest of the night each of the girls held the charred hands of the wounded soldiers, imploring them to keep living, until, with the breaking dawn, Eve led a medic into the church, followed by a stream of wounded infantrymen who dripped blood on the ancient flagstones.

“The Major and the rest should be back by now,” Frances thought and made her way to the roadblock with Amy and Gina. The first truck was a burned-out hulk, and the second truck was riddled with shrapnel and bullet holes,. So were the bodies of Major Bancroft and the musicians. After a thorough search of the area, the girls found a wounded Lang, hiding deep within a hedgerow, but found no trace of Calhoun or Abrams, other than Abrams’ dog tags, dropped in the undergrowth.

“He didn’t want the German to see that he was Jewish,” Frances observed, certain that Calhoun and Abrams had been taken prisoner. “I hope he can explain to the Germans why he doesn’t have any dog tags, but I guess it’s better than having the Hebrew H single you out.”

“I am sure he is calling himself Harvey Andrews, a good Christian boy from DesMoines, Iowa,” Amy answered.

“Let’s hope whatever he is selling, the German buy it,” Frances hoped for the safety of David.

“David could sell sand to the Arabs,” Gina added.

The three girls got a quiet chuckle and went back to the church. Frances then knelt next to Lang, who

was now under the influence of morphine, and had several gunshot wounds on his arms. Lang smiled when he saw Frances.

“You’re going stateside, you hero. That’s a million dollar wound.”

“I don’t want to go stateside. I like touring with you ladies. I’m going to miss all the fun. Miss Frances, you are one incredible woman. I hope you stay this way.”

Choked up by Lang’s words. Frances started to tear up.

“You have treated us with nothing but kindness and respect, Sergeant, when a lot of men didn’t, so I’m going to give you something to remember us by.”

Frances stood up from the floor and went over to her pack, retrieving a tube of lipstick in fire red and a compact. She held the compact with one hand and heavily applied the lipstick, and then smacked her lips to even the coverage. Frances then walked back to a recumbent Lang, and positioned herself at his feet.

“What are you doing, Miss Frances?”

“Don’t tell your wife, but this is a parting gift from the 566th. I doubt the Army will give you a medal.”

Frances delicately spread Lang’s legs and unbuttoned his fly.

The medical orderlies and the other girls tried to turn away but were mesmerized by Frances’s actions, as she took Lang’s cock in her mouth and gently started to suck on it, until it became hard. She

then licked the shaft and sucked on the dirty, sweaty testicles. Lang started to chuckle when Frances deep throated him, and brought him to climax.

“That’s just what the doctor ordered,” Lang grinned, and brought a smile to Frances’s cum-stained lips.

“Ahem, excuse me miss,” a wounded Infantry Sergeant lying next to Lang coughed. “A lot of guys here could use that kind of medical treatment, if you are giving it away.” The sergeant gestured to four wounded men that were in his platoon, and not too seriously injured.

With a wicked smile and a wink, Frances renewed her lipstick and proceeded to suck the cocks of four surprised but very grateful dogfaces. The last of the men, however, had a smooth, fresh look about him, a replacement. Frances wondered whether he had ever had his cock sucked before when she went down on him. When he came in her mouth, the replacement showered her with thanks. When she arose from her duties, the girls and the medics gave Frances a thunderous applause, much louder than anything from her striptease.

The 566th, however, was completely combat ineffective. Its commander was dead, its senior Entertainment Sergeant and comedian were prisoners of war, and the musicians were interred in the rapidly growing cemetery at Saint Mere Eglise, soon to be joined by the unit’s chief benefactor. Colonel Paddy Myles was killed by a sniper while advancing at the very front of his regiment, leading the breakout from Normandy. The 39th and 566th felt deeply his loss, but would wear the AAA-0 into Germany.

To add insult to injury, Paris was liberated a month after Colonel Myles's death, opening up a source of competition to an all-male burlesque show of much greater magnitude than the liberation of Naples. After four years of wartime privations, Paris swarmed with prostitutes, while the glamorous floor shows such as the Folies Bergere continued to play, now just to a different clientele. The shows went on in the German occupation, and would now play for the liberators, and complain about their less polished ways.

Mourning the death of Colonel Myles, the 39th took the survivors of the 566th under its wing, letting them ride with the headquarters staff, until the unit reached the picturesque town of Dinant, Belgium and took residence in the 12th century castle overlooking the River Meuse.

One afternoon, Frances and Captain Fletcher were walking the battlements of the castle and talking about knights in shining armor and fair ladies when Frances heard a familiar voice behind her.

"Well if it isn't Second Lieutenant Frances Jensen of the 566th Special Service Company," Charlotte Taylor proudly announced.

Frances turned and saw a smiling Charlotte in an Army Major's uniform and high-heeled pumps.

"Ma'am," Frances saluted. "It is so good to see you." Frances then teared up and Charlotte embraced her.

"I am so proud of you, young lady. I heard everything about the battle."

"Why did you call me Lieutenant, Ma'am?"

“Because I requested that you be promoted. I am now the unit’s commanding officer and I could use a good junior officer underneath me. I carried your uniform all the way from Paris. I do hope you are still a size eight, but looking at you now, we may have to take it in a little. The Army keeps you thin and sexy.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

“Please call me Charlotte, at least in private.”

“Well, Charlotte, I think you came at a bad time. I don’t think there will be much interest in us now that we liberated Paris. All I hear talk of now in this regiment is how they all want to get drunk and screw the whores.”

“So why would it affect your show?” Captain Fletcher interrupted.

Charlotte Taylor looked at the earnest young man and explained, “Because, Captain, my girls here can only exist on the margins. In wartime, that means close to the fighting. They cannot compete with women like the ones in Paris. All the taboos of being with one of my girls come right back as soon as the alternative is available. The Army could indulge us for awhile, but our days in the sun are almost over.”

“That sounds like bullshit to me. Frances, I mean Lieutenant Jensen, is adorable. The same with the rest of the girls.”

“She is adorable, even now that, as an officer, you could date her. But you won’t, will you, Captain, because of the stigma she carries. You can be on friendly, affectionate terms with her, like she is your own sister, but when you go back to the States, you will marry the girl next door, won’t you, Captain?”

“But, but.”

“But nothing. I am already working on this unit being transferred to the CBI Theater where they will be attached with the British unit under Flight Lieutenant Andrews. There is absolutely no danger of them being upstaged over there by the liberation of some major city. But, Lieutenant, in the meantime we will do what we can to entertain the troops over here. I suspect this war still has some longevity and some unit is going to need cheering up.”

From their headquarters in Dinant, Major Taylor and Lieutenant Jensen started to reconstitute the unit, and discovered a windfall in the African-American transportation unit that they had hosted in the bunker near Saint Mere Eglise. Two condemned trucks and a jeep that had been in an accident were transferred to the unit, after being meticulously repaired. The transportation unit could not transfer an auto mechanic, but told Lieutenant Jensen that they would supply one on temporary duty anytime the vehicles needed repairs. They also offered to supply a first rate band of musicians that had played at the Cotton Club in Harlem with three days notice.

Obtaining the drivers for the unit and a senior NCO was relatively easy once Lieutenant Jensen suggested to Major Taylor that they visit a combat exhaustion center at Eupen, Belgium. Men whose unraveled nerves precluded them from returning to combat could still drive a truck and help set up a stage close to the front.

Not surprisingly, the first unit that needed a substantial morale boost was the AAA-0. It had entered the Hurtgen Forest on an ill-defined mission to clear it of Germans and suffered horrendous casualties as they advanced through the green hell. The girls

waited in Margraten, Holland for the trucks to discharge the troops after they had been relieved and were horrified by what they saw. Companies had been reduced to 40 or 50 men where there should have been 250, and the men themselves all had the thousand-yard stare.

“Where is Love Company?” Lieutenant Jensen pushed her way through the groups of milling soldiers until finally she came upon a dirty and dazed Captain Fletcher, who looked at her with lifeless eyes that began to spark again. She ran to him and the two embraced for fifteen minutes without saying a word, instead just listening to the sound of each other’s breathing and the beating of their hearts.

Cheering up units that had been turned to hamburger in the Hurtgen Forest had become the show’s bread and butter as not everybody got to go to Paris, and even a three-day pass could not fully wash away the horrors of the fighting. The girls played for the First Infantry Division and visited their wounded at an evacuation hospital, this time not hounded by an irate General Patton. They then traveled into a quiet sector, the Ardennes Forest, where it was deemed safe enough for Charlotte Taylor. Even Marlene Dietrich herself had passed through the region a few days earlier.

The show established itself in Clervaux Castle, having learned their lesson about setting up shop in churches. Clervaux was a charming, storybook village on a mountain stream that the friendly locals swore hold large brown trout, and was surrounded by fir lined ridges. The exhausted men of the 28th Infantry Division went to nightly shows, and talked about Christmas with the girls when they weren’t performing. The girls went out of their way and gathered evergreen boughs with the troops and the local

children. They decorated the town, toasting the season with local beer and feasting on wild boar and red deer. The Germans were gone and the Americans were here and Christmas could properly be celebrated once more.

The next morning, Frances was awakened by intense shelling that was landing a mile away on the forward positions. Charlotte asked her whether they should be worried, but Frances dismissed it as nothing significant. They should stay here to show the troops and the townspeople that they were serious.

By the next morning, the gunfire had advanced almost to the outskirts of the village, and Frances became concerned. Major Taylor was relying on her experience, and at Anzio and LeDesert they had defiantly remained although the war came to their doorstep. She then consulted her best friend, Amy, who had been with her through thick and thin, and Sergeant Williams, who had served with the Third Armored from Normandy to the German border, until he couldn't bring himself out a halftrack one day and advance on a position.

"I took the jeep to the next town," Sergeant Williams reported, "and I could see a whole column of Tigers on the ridge road. We need to leave, and fast. I know you want to stay here with the troops, Lieutenant, and I know how important it is for you and the girls, but they aren't going to be stopped here. But if you want to stay, I'll be right with you, even if it means a POW camp."

Frances looked to Amy, and her friend's eyes said everything. "It's time to go. Now. Before it's too late."

Panzer tanks on the ridge above Clervaux shelled the retreating burlesque show as it attempted to

evacuate the town, but luckily, the trucks weren't put out of commission. For the next three days the unit drove through blinding fog and driving snowstorms, avoiding will of the wisp German armored columns that the rumor mill stated were everywhere. It was not until Frances saw the familiar outline of the castle at Dinant, overlooking the Meuse River, could the unit relax. The small column joined a flood of vehicles crossing to safety across the dark flowing river that the Germans planned to have already crossed if they were to have won the war.

The war in Burma was far different than the war in Europe, but the girls never felt more welcome when they reunited with their British counterparts.

"First Lieutenant Frances Jensen," Daphne saluted proudly, then embraced her companion of night trysts in Hyde Park. "I am so proud of you."

"I'm sorry about Major Bancroft and the rest of your unit," Flight Lieutenant Andrews said to Frances and Charlotte. "But we are so glad to see you."

"I have brought an extra supply of dresses and lingerie donated by my friends in Hollywood for your girls, Flight lieutenant Andrews. I'm sure they will be delighted with them."

After nine months in the heat and rain of the China-Burma-India Theater, most of the girls' wardrobes had been worn out, despite loving attempts at prolonging the lives of dresses and gowns that had been proudly donned from Cairo to Karachi. The girls had now almost all gone native, wearing exquisite silk saris or harem pants and bolero jackets. Con-

fronted with Hollywood caliber fashion, the girls attacked the steamer trunks with reckless abandon.

“Like an after-Christmas sale at Harrods,” Daphne joked, holding a deep blue sequined evening gown and a long, black, flower print dress with one hand, and two pairs of high heels in the other, while wrapping a marabou boa over her shoulders.

The China-Burma-India Theater was known as the forgotten war. The press made very little of the accomplishments of the Allied forces, especially compared with the campaign in Northern Europe that appeared to be on the verge of victory once the Germans had been beaten back in the Battle of the Bulge.

Moreover, the troops had rarely seen an American or British woman in their theater and were more than willing to embrace the girls from the show, both on and off the stage. Frances lost count of the admirers that sought her out backstage bringing wild flowers and booze to soften her up for a moonlit tumble. Knowing of her girls’ unbridled escapades, Charlotte felt a bittersweet happiness for them. Eventually the war would be over, and everybody would go home, and the only home that accepted any of the girls so far was Vittorio Positano’s in Naples, waiting for Amy to come marching past his threshold.

The combined troupe first made a tour of the airfields whose cargo planes were flying over the Hump, the air route that crossed from India to China that transited over the Himalayas, and was as dangerous as flying bombing missions into Germany. Charlotte was free to accompany her girls as the Japanese were far enough away not to risk the embarrassing loss or capture of an American movie starlet and Army officer. During the visits, Charlotte’s counterpart, Flight Lieutenant Andrews, would talk at length with the

American transport pilots, and made tentative arrangements to start flying commercially after the war, ferrying goods and passengers throughout Asia.

Charlotte, however, had to wave goodbye to her girls when they started following in the wake of the British Fourteenth Army, now on the offensive in Burma after their epic stands at Imphal and Kohima, where vastly outnumbered, they inflicted a resounding defeat on the Japanese soldiers, who showed cracks in their indomitable morale for the first time.

“I know the girls are in good hands with you, Frances,” Charlotte said kindly to her junior officer, who would now assume command. Because of her gender, Frances could readily be endangered in the Burmese jungle, where isolated pockets of Japanese troops would lash out at the convoys and rear area bivouacs.

“Thank you,” Frances smiled, wearing an Australian bush hat and U.S. Army coveralls unbuttoned low over the front to flaunt a red and black brassiere. A girl always needed to look her best, even in the jungle.

“And I am so certain of your abilities that I want to offer you a position when the war is over. I want you to be my personal secretary in Hollywood. It will be one of the few places in the States where you can be a woman. I would be proud to have you work for me. You are quite a woman, Frances Jensen.”

The irresistible Allied advance in Burma was stopped in a single day, not by the Japanese, but by the deluge of the monsoon, which created rivers and lakes out of nowhere and drowned the road to Rangoon. The girls laid up in a series of huts near Mandalay, and waited for the war to continue.

With the war on temporary hiatus, the girls were treated to a female impersonator show that had been a tradition in the British military since before the Sepoy Mutiny. The Nepalese Gurkha regiments would have their youngest soldiers dress as women in saris and veils and dance for the older soldiers. They would then be dined at a banquet, and usually some soldiers would leave the festivities arm in arm with a soldier for a night's lovemaking. The Gurkhas spared no expense and treated the troupe to heaping dishes of rice and lamb. Not since the days of being with the 39th had the girls felt so welcome by a military unit. The Colonel even made them honorary members and presented them with a Kukri, the bent, fighting knife which was their signature.

"If a man gets too frisky," Eve laughed.

One day in May, with the girls still hunkered down in the monsoon, an excited British officer, stupid enough to walk around in the downpour and soaking wet barged into the girl's hut. "The war in Europe is over. The Nazis surrendered, and Hitler killed himself."

A month later, the mail caught up with the girls, and was delivered by Flight Lieutenant Andrews. He gave a package to Frances from the company commander of King Company in the 39th Regiment.

"William Fletcher is dead," Frances croaked, tears welling in her eyes. "He was killed at some town called Remagen, on the Rhine River."

Enclosed in the package was a blood-stained letter, unmailed, and written to Frances from William, that Flight Lieutenant Andrews read to the crying American lieutenant.

Dear Frances;

It is an old saying that wars change things. I have grown and learned a lot since I met you back in Sicily, and have seen many things good and bad. The best thing I have ever seen is the beautiful blonde with the shy smile singing about the Shenandoah River. It has been hard for me to say how much I feel for you, as I could never envisage a future for us, once the war is over. You have given me strength and love already that has gotten me through this war so far, and I want to see where the love I feel for you can lead. If Amy and Vittorio Positano can find happiness in Naples, maybe there is a place in this world where we can too. Our Shenandoah doesn't have to be in Virginia. We can find it anywhere.

Love:

William Fletcher

Andrews teared at reading the letter and felt a deep pain in his heart that only one thing could cure.

Alongside the mail came numerous newspapers, British and American. Daphne read a copy of the London Times after spending a day consoling Frances. She came to an article about the concentration camps in Germany and felt her chest tighten, and her breath fail. The Nazis had arrested women like her and Frances, denoting them with a pink triangle, and killed them along with the rest of the European population that didn't meet their vision of a master Aryan race.

"They hate us, the world hates us," she cried to Andrews after showing him the article. "When this war is over, we will be nothing more than a twisted joke, told over a pint in some pub. They will throw us in

prison in Britain and America. They will try so hard to forget the war and their own failings that they will erase us.”

“That may be so, Meadows, that may be so. But, I doubt the Indians or the Chinese will give a farthing for what a British couple does or who they really are. I’m going to start flying again with some of the Yanks from Air Transport Command in India. I can’t marry you now, what with me being an officer and you being enlisted, but this war will end eventually. It’s like the rain. It will pass. When it does, I want you to marry me, Meadows.”

“How will I know you won’t back out, sir? When the time comes.”

Andrews then embraced Daphne and gave her an intense kiss that made her tingle throughout.

“Is that a sufficient promise?”

“It is sir, it is,” Daphne shouted for joy.

Eventually, the monsoons broke, and the troupe continued the march towards Rangoon when on a sunny August afternoon, the word buzzed along the convoy that the Americans had used a super bomb on a Japanese city. Speculation ran high that the Japanese would soon surrender, which they did within the month.

The troupe finally rolled into Rangoon, the capital of Burma, and decided to put on one final show before it was disbanded. The show planned to be a grand finale, lasting half a day with a full play, numerous stripteases by the girls, both British and American, lavish floor routines, and songs throughout the performance. While preparing for the extrav-

agant show, a group of scarecrows in ragged British and American uniforms came to visit the troupe. They looked almost skeletal, Frances thought to herself, prisoners of war who must have been on the Burma railway.

The prisoners had suffered immensely at the hands of their Japanese captors and by the brutal jungle and starvation diet. Thousands had died and were left to rot alongside the trails, or been dumped in unmarked graves. The rest who did not die, had died on the inside. Now with freedom, they were starting to recover their humanity.

“Excuse me, Miss, is this the drag show?” A former prisoner asked the sharply-dressed American Lieutenant in the skirt and high heels.

“Yes,” Frances said, “yes it is.”

“We are what’s left of a drag troupe that performed on the Burma Railway. About half of us are gone now, but we would love to help you with the show.”

“By all means, of course. It will be an honor.”

Frances introduced the former prisoners to the girls in the show, who brought them bottles of wine, bourbon, and mountains of Spam, beans, scrambled eggs, canned peaches and pears, and chocolate bars. In between filling themselves with the bountiful food, the prisoners described their experiences as one of several female impersonator shows in Burma. They described how difficult it was to find any women’s apparel or make realistic looking wigs, but they had persisted and the men cherished them for appearing so feminine. They had provided the men, lost to the world with a vision of what home looked like, and reminded them of lust and love. Several of the girls fell

in love with soldiers, who promised to fulfill the role of husbands once they returned home.

The girls were intensely moved by the story of their fellow women who had used their femininity as a powerful tool of survival. Frances and Daphne then conferred. "We would like you girls to put on the show. We have a tremendous wardrobe, straight from Hollywood, and can scrounge up some very nice wigs. It will be an honor to perform with you all."

The show was a terrific hit, and the former prisoners basked in the attention given to them. The spotlights, however, went out. The crowd departed and the glamorous evening wear was replaced with female military uniforms that would only be worn a few months more. Soon, the world would be back to normal, and girls like Frances would only be able to live in urban enclaves, like Paris, where she seriously considered becoming a showgirl at one of their drag revues.

In the end, though, Frances returned to her own country, and took the job as secretary with Charlotte Taylor in Hollywood. Hormones were available in Mexico. For a while, Howard Hughes enthusiastically pursued her, promising to pay for her sex change, a new possibility in a new world.

Mr. Hughes was no William Fletcher, Antonio Grimaldi, or even the anonymous Scotsman in Hyde Park, despite his immense wealth and obvious infatuation with Frances. In the end, Frances didn't fall for his advances. There were plenty of men in Hollywood who enjoyed her company, and thought her ass was a superior orifice to that found exclusively on women.



One gloriously sunny day, Charlotte and Frances were sipping cocktails on the verandah of a restaurant overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Santa Monica when a young man shyly approached the pair.

“Miss Taylor and Miss Jensen, I was told I could find you here,” the man politely said to the glamorous women.

“Can we help you?” Charlotte politely asked.

“Yes Ma’am, I am here to see Miss Jensen. You don’t probably don’t remember me, Miss Jensen, but I have never stopped thinking of you since the war.”

“The war? That was two years ago.”

“Ma’am, I was with the 39th Infantry at LeDesert, Colonel Myles outfit.”

“Yes, I am very sorry about Colonel Myles.”

“I was wounded during the German counterattack along with my squad leader and a couple other guys from my squad. The medics put us up in the church and. well, you entertained us, made us feel terrific while we waited for the ambulance.”

“Entertained?”

“I gave this young man here, Lang, and some of his squad bow jobs while they were wounded and laying on the floor of the church. It just felt like the right thing to do at the time.”

“It was the damnedest thing to ever happen to me. I couldn’t stop thinking about it. I’m sure it helped me recover faster. I ended up getting sent back to the

line and still thought about it on nights when I was in a foxhole trying to stay awake.”

“Oral sex? In a church? In front of his buddies? You two are practically married already. Oh, how marvelous,” Charlotte broadly grinned.

“You know what kind of woman I am.”

“A truly amazing one, but yes I know the score. Everybody in the 39th knew the score.”

“Please don’t be a bum, please don’t be a bum,” Frances thought to herself.

“What brings you to California?”

“The GI Bill. I’m studying at Stanford University, starting next semester. I came down to Santa Monica to see if I could find you. I knew Miss Taylor was your commanding officer. I hoped she would know where you were and what you were doing. It seems I was even luckier than I hoped for.”

“So, what is your name?”

“Thomas, Thomas Manwaring, of Port Royal, Virginia.”

Frances held out her hand with well-manicured red fingernails. “I’m pleased to meet you, Thomas. We were hardly formally introduced the last time. Port Royal, the Shenandoah River flows through there, doesn’t it?”

“I went fishing there all the time. I really miss fishing now that I’m out here.”

“There are places out here. Maybe I could show you some time.”

At that juncture, Charlotte made an exuberantly obvious exit from the verandah.

“You two kids have a good evening, and Thomas, don’t expect any blow jobs from Frances for at least three dates. She’s a good girl now, and she could use a good young man to make her a good woman.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

THE END