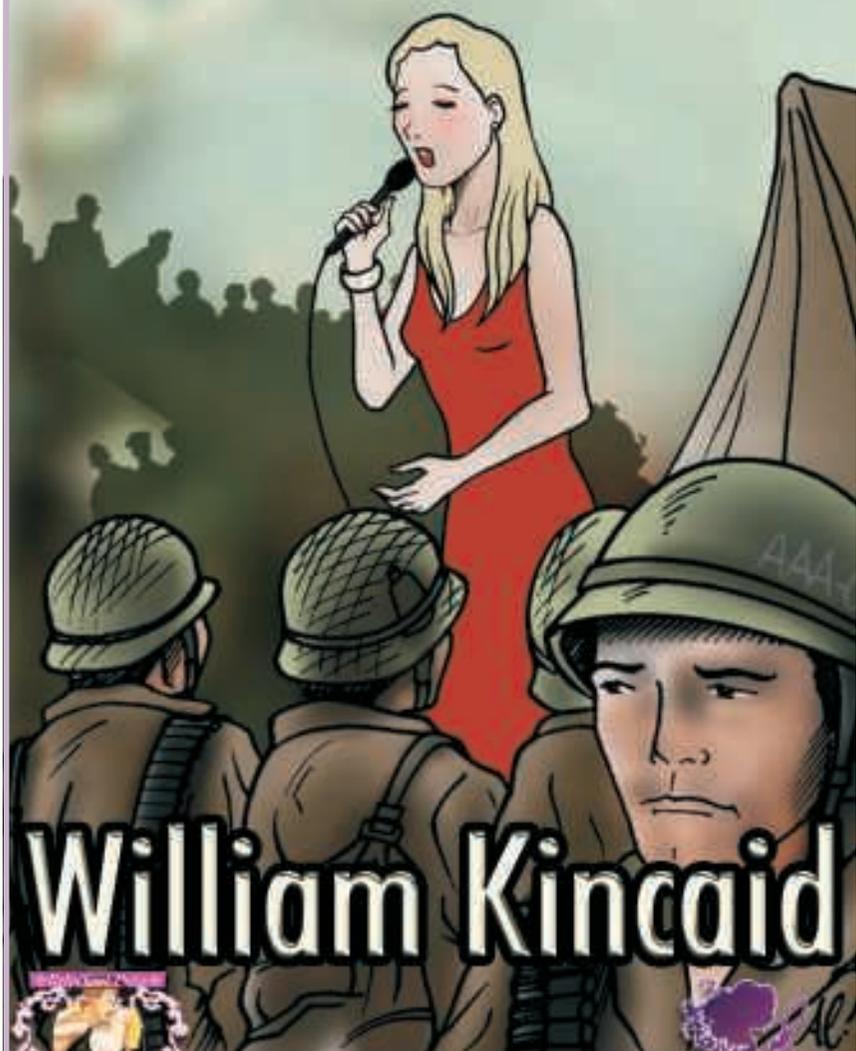


V For Victory



William Kincaid

An "Adult Tv" Novel

Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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For information address
Reluctant Press
P.O. Box 5829
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413
USA

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

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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?”