Women and War

A One Act Play

by Jack Hilton Cunningham

A Samuel French Acting Edition



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FOUNDED 1830

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WOMEN and WAR: A ONE ACT PLAY was first produced by Owensboro High School and The Rose Curtain Players in Owensboro, KY in 2011. The performance was directed by Carolyn Greer, with sets by David Walker. The production stage manager was JoCarol Bunch. The cast was as follows:

BUDDY . . . . . John Thomas Priar/Jacob Chuter
HELEN . . . . . Helen Merritt
JACK . . . . . Alex Priar/John Flaherty
BETSY . . . . . Grae Greer
JOHNNY . . . . . Isaac Settles
AGNES . . . . . Madison Stuart
VIETNAM NURSE . . . . . Bayleigh Leach
VIETNAM MARINE . . . . . Logan Sapp
DESERT STORM SOLDIER . . . . . Alex Priar/Will Van Winkle
DOUGHNUT GALS . . . . . Korin Cross & Chloe Tyler
WESTERN UNION GIRL . . . . . Grae Greer/Chloe Tyler

CHARACTERS

Casting for the numerous characters are at the discretion of the director/producer. Double casting, depending on available actors, may be desired.

BUDDY & HELEN – a couple in WWII

JACK & BETSY – a couple in the Vietnam War

JOHNNY & AGNES – a couple in the Korean Conflict War

In between the stories of these character's, there are a number of monologues; they are:

DESERT STORM CAPTAIN (HANK)

DOUGHNUT GALS (2)

SPECIALIST 4TH CLASS DELANEY

VIETNAM MARINE

VIETNAM NURSE

WESTERN UNION GIRL

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This one act is designed to be performed at, or under, 40 minutes. If performance time is not an issue, one or more monologues may be added to this script. The three additional character monologues are:

CAMP FOLLOWER
GOLD STAR MOTHER
HELLO GIRL

FOREWORD

When *WOMEN and WAR* began to come together and I married letters with monologues creating a kind of American war history lesson, the furthest thing from my mind—or expectations—was paring down the script to 40 minutes that would be appropriate for High School competitions. My original concept was to create a script that would be performed by professional companies, colleges and universities, and would be appropriate for young audiences from early teens to adulthood. It wasn't until I was contacted by Ms. Carolyn Greer, drama teacher and director at Owensboro High School in Kentucky, that I realized that my play's primary market was going to be high school productions. Teacher Greer asked if she might cut the script to fit into the 40-minute time restriction for her State's Thespian competition. I agreed. I put forth the stipulation that she provide me with her proposed cuts and I would do the same for her. We then compared our desired scripts and came up with this published script.

Reducing the script from 60-minutes running time to 40-minutes running time was no simple task. I insisted that the integrity of the 'history lesson'—if you will—be kept intact. Eliminating letters and monologues in their entirety would not do the job. Of course the first concern was which characters would be cut from the script. Several stand-alone monologues, like **Camp Follower** and **Hello Girl**, seemed to be the easiest to eliminate. The dueling **Mothers Of** … and **Gold Star Mothers** would have to go as well.

Ms. Greer suggested that we split **Doughnut Gal** into two characters and that we add **Desert Storm Captain** to round out the script. Making these changes would allow for better casting and would allow for a more complete development of **Betsy's** character, making her not only Jack's widow, but also the mother of the Desert Storm soldier. I was reluctant at first but I trusted Ms. Greer's instinct, and in the final analysis she was right.

This exercise has been one of joy and satisfaction. Had it been with someone other than Ms. Greer, someone not as much in love with the original script, this process might not have been a success.

My thanks go to Ms. Greer. Also I would like to acknowledge the help and support given me by Amy Marsh and Katy DiSavino, both from Samuel French, Inc.

Jack Hilton Cunningham

Dedicated to

Carolyn Greer
and
The Rose Curtain Players
of
Owensboro High School

PROLOGUE

(As the house lights fade we hear the sound of radio static signifying the passage of time. The radio dial turns into various archival audio footage of broadcast reporting beginning with 9/11, various popular radio shows between the Vietnam, Korea, D-Day and WWI.)

(As the static fades we hear a recording of an instrumental WWII song like Glen Miller's String of Pearls. *Lights up on* **HELEN** *and* **BUDDY**. *The music fades under* **HELEN***'s first letter.)*

[The couples stand together, as **BUDDY** *discusses leaving, the couples say their goodbyes and the soldiers move about. All characters stay onstage throughout the show.]**

HELEN. Brooklyn, New York, April 1944.

BUDDY. Camp Polk, Louisiana, April 1944.

(Music out.)

HELEN. Darling Buddy,

Got your letter this morning. I was waiting on the stoop when the postman came. I can't seem to do much with my day until I see him coming down the block.

BUDDY. My Dearest Darling Helen,

I started this letter three days ago. I can't seem to put down on this piece of paper that we are shipping out…

(Sound cue: sounds of Helicopters then a song from the Vietnam era like Something's Happening Here.*)*

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*Stage directions in brackets denote the staging by Owensboro's Rose Curtain Players.

VIETNAM MARINE. Danang, Vietnam, May 1967

Dear Ma,

Happy Mother's Day from your son. I've just arrived in Nam to the tune of chopper blades and the fireworks and blare of gunfire. It ain't no Fourth of July celebration, but have no fear, I have both feet on the ground and am surrounded by fellow marines – a great bunch of guys here from all over the states – even a few from good old Philly.

I promise to write as often as I can, but please don't expect too much from me. Ma, ya know I wasn't the best student when it came to writing and penmanship; so bear with me.

The chow here is OK, Ma, but I sure miss your lasagna.

Keep smiling, Ma; you'll always be my best girl.

[Insert Camp Follower *Part 1* here.]

(Sound cue: Jet planes.)

JACK. Vietnam, June 1968

Dear Betsy,

I'm writing this letter to say some things because in this flying business you never know when your next flight will be your last. Please don't think I am being morbid, but we all have to recognize what is happening here in Vietnam.

I want to be a comfort to you, but the distance separating us makes it very difficult for me to do so. All I can say is that you are in my thoughts during every sortie I fly.

BETSY. Chicago, June 1968

Dear Jack,

Your words make me cry. I see you in my teacup in the morning, and in the mirror as I get dressed, and in every young man I see on the street. I pick up your picture from my dresser and hold you in my arms. But Jack, I am *so* torn by the constant protests that are

happening against this war – I know you are doing the right thing over there, but every night when I turn on the television news and I see men burning draft cards, and angry crowds shouting horrible things about our service men, I just don't know which way to turn. Help me to understand Jack.

JACK. Now baby, don't get yourself so upset. I know we are trying to do the right thing over here; all I need to hear is that you are with me in this conflicted, unpopular war. I think I'm strong enough to look past these times of uncertainty as well as to accept my mortality. If my plane does not return tomorrow, I will die without regrets.

(Sound cue: Helicopters or a song from the Korean Conflict era.)

JOHNNY. South Korea, May 1953

Dear Aggie,

The heat is unbearable here in Korea. Pork Chop Hill is no place to spend a warm Sunday afternoon, especially if you don't want to be shot at.

AGNES. Atlanta, May 1953

Dear Johnny,

Grandma Johnson is crazy about Johnny Junior. She thinks he's getting to look more and more like you all the time. Your mother insists that he takes after me more.

You would be so proud to see how good Junior is while we say the Rosary after supper.

JOHNNY. I used to dread those Sunday evening Rosaries when I was a boy. Knowing that fresh doughnuts and cold milk would be served afterwards, my impatience always caused some kind of disturbance. Gee, Johnny Junior seems to be following in his dad's footsteps.

*[Insert **Camp Follower Part 2** here.]*

(Sound cue: Radio static, a 911 announcement, perhaps a Rap song.)

SPECIALIST FOURTH CLASS DELANEY. I was seventeen when 9/11 happened. That morning the television in the living room was blaring reports of airplanes crashing into buildings in New York City.

I told my mom and dad that I was going to do my part to help see that this horrible thing never happened again to our country. So I joined my high school's ROTC. After graduating the following May, I joined the Army.

(Sound cue: radio static – 60's tune.)

[The men are seated in chairs and on stools, the women watch over them.]

[Insert Gold Star Mother *Part 1* here.]

VIETNAM NURSE. Ah, you bet'cha. (*She is from Minnesota.*)

I grew up in a large family in a small town south of the twin cities. My dream was to become a nurse, so after graduating high school I attended a nursing program at our junior college. Having many brothers kept us all busy looking out for each other; when one got the measles, we all got the measles; when one brought home the mumps, we all had the mumps. I guess that's why I became a nurse. Then, I became a Vietnam nurse.

My daddy, as I left home, took me in his arms and said, "I raised six kids, five of them boys. Now they are all men, and here I am sending my only little girl off to war." That was the first, and only time, I ever saw my daddy cry.

When I arrived in the war zone all I could hear was…

"*Get down, GET DOWN!*"

[Women grab her to safety.]

I lowered my head and ran as fast as I could – I was there – I was in it – I was a part of it, and it was, and is, a part of me.

[Spoken as the actor is pulled upstage by the other women. The actors moved about to represent the images of an O.R. The men lift their heads and look out.]

VIETNAM NURSE. *(cont.)* My first day in the O.R. I looked around at a room filled with rows of beds. Chaos – the smell – the smell, the yelling – nurses yelling, doctors yelling, G.I.'s yelling.

[The **VIETNAM NURSE** *moves about, bumped by the other women as she speaks.]*

A body was plopped down on a table in front of me – a boy no more than 18 years old – a bloody sheet over his abdomen and I was ordered to "prep" him – that meant clean his wounds, shave him, if necessary, and "Oh, yeah! While you are at it, remove his arm that's just hanging by a piece of loose skin."

When I received my orders to transfer back to the States, I got up, put on a fresh uniform, packed my bags and went over to the O.R. to say "goodbye." The ventilators were popping – it was hot and smelled of blood, yelling filled the air – it was exactly as it was the day I arrived.

[The **VIETNAM NURSE** *moves about, moves through the chaos created by the other women as she speaks.]*

Nothing had changed.

[The men lift their heads and then stand.]

(Sound cue: a song like If A Man Loves A Woman.*)*

BETSY. Chicago, July, 1968

Dear Jack:

Well, the boys are off in every direction these days. Hank is finally old enough to be a Cub Scout, Bruce is playing Little League, and Paul has taken an interest in girls. Paul got his drivers license yesterday, so now I have another reason to worry. My men; they will be the death of me yet!

JACK. Vietnam, August 1968

Betsy dear,

I have been thinking, if anything happens to me, don't let the memories of me keep you from marrying again. I just don't want you to be alone. Life should be lived to the fullest. Go for it girl – live life, that's what it is for.

BETSY. Now Jack, there is no need to talk like that. I believe that you will be resuming your fatherly and husbandly duties before long.

JACK. Keep on smiling, put on some makeup, buy yourself a new dress, give the boys a hug, some discipline when needed, and pave the road of your life for new adventures. As long as I'm remembered, I'll not really be dead. I'll still be around in Paul, Bruce, and Hank.

BETSY. Now Jack, you shouldn't go on and on like that. You *will* come home Jack, I know you will. I do plan on buying a new dress, and I'll have the boys all starched and ironed and standing at attention when you walk up that walk and into my arms.

The boys send their love,

Betsy

JACK. Love you Betsy,

Jack

[Insert Gold Star Mother *Part 2* here.]

(Sound Cue: a song like Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy.*)*

DOUGHNUT GALS. (*Note:* **DOUGHNUT GALS** *can be played by one or two actors.*)

ALICE. I know you've heard of the U.S.O. Girls who toured behind the lines to entertain the troops.

MOLLY. Well, we were Doughnut Gals, the gals that drove two-ton army trucks and served doughnuts…

ALICE. …and hot steaming coffee to the men.

MOLLY. Well, we called ourselves Doughnut Gals. Molly is my name. From down south, Alabama.

ALICE. I'm Alice from Cal-I-forn-I-A. (*Delete line if played by one actor.*)

MOLLY. Alice, my doughnut companion, and me…

ALICE. …ended up somewhere in France to serve our boys hot coffee and doughnuts.

MOLLY. So, me and Alice would load our old truck with sacks of flour, sugar and coffee…

ALICE. …and cans of cooking oil…

MOLLY. …and hit the road by five every morning.

ALICE & MOLLY. *What a bumpy ride*!

ALICE. Did you know that a greater percentage of Doughnut Gals were killed in action in the European Theater than gals from any of the other women's services?

MOLLY. *Put that in your record book, Uncle Sam!* In 1945 Alice and I split up…

ALICE. …I (Alice) was sent to Le Harve…

MOLLY. …and well lucky me, I was sent to England where my doughnut days continued and my jitterbugging days began.

[Actors partner up, with different time periods mingling. U.S.O. gals, flirting with the boys.]

There was this very large, empty warehouse building where the boys assembled for their next assignments. There was lots of music, and the boys loved to jitterbug, and since I knew a few steps – *move over English gals* – I went from being just a 'Doughnut Gal' to a 'jitterbug gal'. Give 'em some hot coffee and doughnuts, and jitter they would. And oh boy, could those boys jitterbug.

[A holiday tune plays, like Irving Berlin's White Christmas*, couples return to their original partner, forming a happy family image.* **HELEN** *walks past each couple as she listens to* **BUDDY***'s letter.]*

BUDDY. France, Christmas Eve, 1944

Helen, my darling,

My days are bluer than ever, and when I think of you, I have to fight back the tears so my buddies won't see. All of us guys left in Company B sit around in our dirty uniforms, heavy boots, and heavy hearts, and sing "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men".

HELEN. Brooklyn, Christmas Day, 1944

Sweet, sweet Buddy,

Mr. Berlin hit it right this year. We don't have to dream; we have a white Christmas. I woke up this morning and looked outside to a glorious day. I was elated, but only for a moment, and then I prayed this will be the last Christmas we spend apart.

(Sound cue: a song like I'll Be Seeing You.*)*

HELEN. Buddy, I love you.

BUDDY. I love you, Helen.

BETSY. I love you, Jack.

JACK. I love you, Betsy.

AGNES. I love you, Johnny.

JOHNNY. I love you, Agnes.

[The couples walk upstage hand and hand, except for **JACK** *and* **BETSY**. **JACK** *walks away, leaving* **BETSY** *alone for a beat.]*

[Insert Hello Girl *Part 1* here.]

SPECIALIST FOURTH CLASS DELANEY. After my basic training I served a tour in Afghanistan in a non-combat situation. Women weren't allowed in combat roles, and still ain't. I was serving over there when my truck was hit. Three soldiers were killed and I was seriously wounded. When I woke up I discovered that my legs was so badly damaged that both of 'em had to be amputated just under the knees. I survived, as you can see, and with my prosthesis I can walk as normal as any of you here. Well, the downer is that I can't dance no more, can't wear skirts or dresses, just pants for me now – but that's cool – I can deal with that.

*[***DELANEY** *turns upstage, all of the soldiers stand to pay their respects.]*

(Sound cue: a song like Near You.*)*

JOHNNY. Korea, April 1954

Dear Aggie and Little Johnny,

I can't explain why I have not been writing more. But you see, here in this mess, there is not a solider with a rifle that knows which way to point. We hear the enemy fire, we see the tracers light up the sky, and some times we are just lucky, like the other day when we captured those North Koreans.

AGNES. Atlanta, April 1954

Dear Johnny,

[She approaches **JOHNNY***, runs her fingers through what used to be hair.]*

I let your mom and dad read your letter. You should have seen your dad's face when he read about the 28 prisoners you captured. That was something else for him to brag about.

You're so thoughtful, honey. That's one of the many, many things I love so much about you, Johnny darling. There isn't any more news so I'll close for now.

JOHNNY. This morning we encountered, face-to-face, a team of North Koreans. They were lobbing grenades and firing at us, and as they charged toward us I fired and hit one in the face. I watched as he fell silent and died almost instantly.

*[***AGNES** *turns away, dropping her head. When he turns to see her, she is looking away.]*

Agnes, I can't tell you how awful I feel to have killed another man. I immediately asked God to forgive me, and I will go to confession the first chance I get. I am so confused. Oh, Agnes, please forgive me as well.

*[***AGNES** *rises, looks at* **JOHNNY,** *and then calmly sits in his chair.]*

AGNES. We put little Johnny in Kindergarten this week. I do believe it was harder on me to leave him, than it was for him on the first day. He seems to be having a wonderful time with the other boys and girls and is learning his numbers and alphabet so fast.

Oh, Johnny, I pray that when this war is over there will be no more wars, so little Johnny and all the boys and girls can grow up in a world of peace and freedom. I know that day will come, Johnny, and I am doing my part to see that it does.

[He kneels by her chair and she rests her head on his shoulder.]

[Insert Hello Girl *Part 2* here.]

(Sound cue: a song like Long and Winding Road.*)*

BETSY. Chicago, September 1968
Dear Jack,

*[***JACK** *comes forward, standing just behind* **BETSY**.*]*

It has been a week since your last letter. I hope and pray that you are just so busy flying sorties that you haven't had the time to write. Bruce had his first date last night; I dropped them off at Bloomfields for ice cream sodas, and finished my turn as chauffeur by driving Bruce's girl home. Bruce walked her to her door – you would have been proud.

[He places his arms on her shoulder, she does not feel his touch and steps out of his embrace.]

I guess our boys are growing up. Time for bed. I'll write again soon.

Betsy.

(Sound cue: a song like Wanted Dead or Alive.*)*

DESERT STORM CAPTAIN (HANK). Kuwait, February 25, 1991
Dear Mom,

There is sand everywhere – they are calling it Desert Storm. I'm OK Mom, but some of my buddies are dead.