

# LADY FLORENCE REMEMBERS

SFX: FUMBLING WITH MIC.

LADY FLORENCE MIMSY-POTTINGER:

Red light, does that mean it's on?

MALE VO:

It does.

LADY FLORENCE:

Good. (CLEARS THROAT)

Yes, I remember it well, clear as you're sitting in front of me now. A Saturday afternoon, bright and chilly with a tang of something in the air. Vimto, I think.

I was just a girl of course, slip of a thing, but I can recall all the womenfolk out in the street, standing proud on their freshly lamp-blackened porticoes, waving farewell.

And there were our boys: Arthur and his pals, Johnny St Clare, Bull Hetherington and of course, Tommy Hesketh-Haycock.

There they were ; a great testosterone-fuelled gaggle of handsome, marching men in the prime of life. Absolutely splendid-looking in their green uniforms. Brave smiles on their faces, one and all.

Of course we cheered like Billy-Oh. What else would we do? We were happy for them. Rooting for them. Off on their great adventure. It was the thing to do back then, do you see? So, we never questioned...

We weren't to know of course. (SIGHS) Naturally, we all thought it would be over so quickly.

SFX: CHOKING

MALE VOICE: Do you need...?

LADY FLO: No, no, I'm....(COUGHS)

LADY FLO: Do you know, I can still hear those marching songs as though it were only yesterday?

MALE VO: I have some authentic old recordings here, would you like me to...

If it's not too painful of course?

LADY FLO: By all means. Forty lusty sets of lungs giving voice to those lovely, lovely tunes. And we women, wondering when they'd return...or indeed, if they ever would....

(BEAT)

They always did though. Usually just after the pubs had closed.

SFX: SCRATCHY GRAMAPHONE NEEDLE ON RECORD.

GRAMS: FOOTBALL CHANTS – 'HERE WE GO, HERE WE GO...' ETC. "YOU'RE GONNA GET YOUR FUCKIN" HEAD KICKED IN" ETC.

LADY FLO: Brings back so many memories.

MALE VO: Please continue...

LADY FLO:

It was not until late November of the following year that the actual war broke out and I, myself, was able to do my bit for King and country. I was fortunate enough to secure a commission in the Women's Royal Auxilliary Debutantes, just before the unit shipped out to France. As it happens I was stationed in Le Touquet, which had considerably more cachet back then in the days before it became populated primarily by pimps and queers. Or was it Le Cachet that had considerably more Touquet?

No, no...I think I was right first time.

At Le Touquet our primary function was to administer aspirin, Angostura or cold-compresses to the General Staff, although there was a certain amount of light piano-forte duty in the evenings.

Naturally, we girls were keen as mustard gas to get to the front and see some real action. So, being me (CHUCKLES FRUITILY) I led a sort of petticoat mutiny and a deputation was formed.

MALE VO:

A petticoat mutiny for the benefit of our younger listeners was an uprising of well-bred young ladies. Would I be right in saying that, Lady Florence?

LADY FLO:

In a general sense, I suppose. But in this particular instance, myself and the other ladies mutinied against

petticoats. Absolutely refused to wear 'em. As well as garters, stockings, camisoles, caminickers....And of course, skirts. In all other respects we were punctillious about uniform regulations. (CHUCKLES FRUITILY) After all, we weren't bloody Bolshies.

MALE VO: I see.

LADY FLO: To cut a long story short, I put it to Brigadier Horrocks that he either allowed me and the other fannies a little air or the entire unit was going home on the next boat-train in deshabelle and he could whistle for his hot toddies in future.

MALE VO: Fanyes were of course the F.A.N.Y, the First Aid Nursing yeomanry.

LADY FLO: Well, yes. But that had nothing to do with us.  
Anyway, Bunty...Brigadier Horrocks, that is, capitulated gracefully and ordered a tender to take us Auxilliary Debutantes up the line to the Somme.  
We arrived on Christmas eve. A light snow was falling and what with the flares popping off over the trenches it gave the whole affair an appropriately festive ambiance.  
Of course we'd just arrived but even we could sense that there was an odd feeling about that Christmas night.  
A brittle, tense atmosphere; an air of expectation.

The ladies of the King's Royal Auxilliary Debutantes and I of course had a remarkable view of the field from our privileged position in the tender, and yet no one was more surprised than I when the shrill blast of the whistle shattered the still of the night.

Instead of a full-scale attack our chaps simply popped up over the trenches in footer bags and sweats.

Same on the other side. And in his hand the Hun carried not a helmet, not anti-personel bomb, not a sack of mustard gas, but a leather football. Which he rolled underarm towards our lines.

MALE VO: Goodness.

LADY FLO: Quite. Our boys were a little late to take the field but fortunately the Hun were slow to take advantage and neglected to fully mobilize and create effective penetration up the wings. The Hun were playing a seventy-three, thirty-eight, fifty-three formation if I remember correctly and their deep game was suffering accordingly.

Anyway, not long into the half, Jaeger, the Hun Captain, - or was he a general? I forget now- got behind a fifty-fifty ball and pushed it deep into our defence, giving us all a wobbly moment.

Other than that there was very little to get excited about. A stalemate, I rather thought. Not unlike the Dardenelles preliminary with Johnny Turk two years previously.

The ladies and I were on our chin-straps and frankly, rather bored when suddenly Wessel moved the ball up to Meister, who passed to Hoene, who tapped it on to Bissel who trapped and then made the most incredible lay off to Jaeger who was up front and frankly, goal-hanging, at which point the most extraordinary thing happened.

MALE VO: Indeed?

LADY FLO: (HUSHED TONES) Perhaps it was the miracle of Christmas. Perhaps it was the snowflakes gently falling in the half-light reflecting some indescribable magic in the air that night, who can say?

MALE VO: What happened, Lady Florence?

LADY FLO: Jaeger had the leather sphere at his feet and the defence beaten no question, but one of our lads from the Ridge End took a pot and slotted him right between the eyes with his 303. Down he went, dead as a doornail.

Clearly, the Hun wanted a free kick; actually a penalty shoot out. But naturally it was too late for that sort of nonsense. Our chaps didn't hang about for sending-offs, corners and such, they were straight back at it, quicker

than you can say "knife": Rifle-butts, bullets, bayonets, spud-mashers, Mills Bombs, entrenching tools, anything they could get their hands on. Absolutely splendid show. God, no. sod Christmas, there was now way we were going to lose to the bugging Germans.

(FADE)