



law allows that—but from my reporting I learned she was more aggressive than most state attorneys in pursuing social policy ends. Her work in this area should have interested a generally listless press.

One of Reno's first actions as attorney general was to request the immediate resignations of the nation's ninety-three U.S. attorneys. Again, the press was insufficiently curious. These attorneys are appointed by the president, and can be removed at his discretion. Reno was carrying out a Clinton order. Some of the press duly noted that, as the *New York Times* put it, new administrations traditionally effect this changeover not all at once but gradually. But the *Times* failed to make two points clear.

The first was just what a managerial nightmare could lie ahead for the administration. By law the attorney general can appoint someone for 120 days, whereupon a federal district judge may name someone else for another 120 days. Of course, the president himself at any time may nominate his choices for the ninety-three jobs, who must then be confirmed by the Senate. But given the administration's slow personnel pace, no one should bet that Clinton will fill the vacancies soon. This year, thanks to the president's abrupt decision to clean house, some U.S. attorney offices could have *four* different bosses.

The second point was that Democratic senators had become restless. They wanted to reward their friends by making them U.S. attorneys; historically, senators of the incumbent president's party have looked on these jobs as theirs to give away. They knew that it had taken Bill Clinton a long time to land an attorney general, and were wondering how long it would take him to get around to naming the people they wanted to the U.S. attorney posts. This was the underlying, and underreported, political story: Clinton had to do something emphatic and public to please Senate Democrats.

In New York, incidentally, the famously impatient Sen. Patrick Moynihan moved within a week of Reno's action to announce his choices. "A Woman and a Black Proposed as U.S. Attorneys in New York" was the headline in the diversity-conscious *New York Times*, atop a story that conveniently included photos of both so that readers could see the woman was white and the black was not a woman: no "two-fers" here! □

Club El Malaria

by Ian Forman

I was watching the six o'clock news last night when the president came on. He said he was going to issue an order lifting the ban on homosexuals in the military. Then a lot of generals came on moaning and groaning about it. My first reaction, given all the gay propaganda we've been bombarded with in recent years, was that maybe the generals were right for once.

Then I remembered my own experience with gays in the military, and I wondered. We were off in the mountains of Burma trying to find the Japanese, and they us, and there was sporadic combat when we met. Oh, *that* war, you say—that was ancient, and isn't relevant anymore. Let me tell you: all wars are about your life being in danger. They have been since the beginning of time, and always will be.

Anyway, our base camp was in a Shangri-La valley called Imphal, high in the mountains along the India border. Our unit was housed in a compound of large thatch-roofed mud huts, bought from the natives. We were in a friendly village in a bamboo grove where the large trees were filled with orchid vines and surrounded by gardenia bushes. Except for the war—which we commuted to the surrounding mountains to fight—it was a paradise.

What about the gays?

We didn't think of them that way. They were gentlemen and kept that part to themselves. They had no political agenda. We were all mostly friends and shared a pre-

occupation with danger in the mountains. A pair of them had come to our unit from combat in the Western Desert in North Africa, where they had won the French Croix de Guerre for pulling critically wounded tank crews out of burning vehicles.

The war in the mountains was sporadic and they, bored during a period of inactivity, decided that our mess hall operation—food, menu, and atmosphere—could well be upgraded. So they took over.

The mud walls of the big thatch-roofed hut were soon whitewashed in a civilized way. White sheets were found for tablecloths and, for dinner, a little white-jacketed local native man was hired to stand in the corner waving a large fan. Our turbaned Indian kitchen help waited on tables. For the big breakthrough, they devised twenty-five recipes for bully beef, our staple canned meat, and purchased native delicacies and vegetables.

Tom and Jerry, as we shall call them, had made our humble mess hall into the jungle equivalent of a quality New York (their hometown) restaurant. As a final detail, there were fresh gardenias and orchids in bright brass native bowls on the breakfast table every morning. Nothing like the feminine touch to add a little class to the operation; it was as if we had brought our girlfriends and wives to war with us.

Their next project was Club El Malaria. That became the name of the mud hut next-door—when it was transformed into the best bar east of Calcutta.

Another unit man, who before the war had done stage sets on Broadway, paint-

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ed exotic murals on whitewashed walls and built the long bamboo bar behind which turbaned bartenders served.

Generals and privates alike, from all along the scattered front, ignored military rank to raise a toast to Tom and Jerry for their achievement. Medals would have been bestowed if possible. So famous did Club El Malaria become that a late-evening jeep service had to be laid on to return besotted celebrants safely to their far-flung units.

One day the Japanese came—not, alas, to drink. They overran our compound and we retreated. We saw the smoke rise up from the thatched roofs of Club El Malaria and the mess hall. It was a pathetic sight.

That night the fighting continued. Tom and Jerry were trapped together in a small bunker in front of the defense line about a quarter mile from our compound. A vicious Japanese assault swept by their position, isolating it. Tracer bullets stitched the darkness.

Tom stopped firing for a moment. Jerry dragged nervously on a cigarette.

“Care for a grenade?” Tom asked solicitously.

“No, thanks. Never touch ‘em,” said Jerry, with a feigned faggy flip of his wrist. Tom laughed. It relieved the tension. They were ambulance drivers, not trained for infantry work. But the shot-up ambulances and give-no-quarter desperation on both sides put them in the middle of combat. Two days later, we counterattacked and retook the ruins of Club El Malaria and the compound. A couple of Japanese dead were lying outside the bar.

When we arrived, Tom and Jerry were already there. Jerry held a gardenia blossom to each of his nostrils to cut the smell of the bodies in the hot morning sun. Jerry looked at the torched roof of Club El Malaria and said, “We’ll rebuild.”

“You’re damed right,” said Tom.

For the next three months the 15th, 31st, and 33rd Japanese Divisions surrounded the beleaguered defense perimeter of the Imphal base. But the airfield was operating. Supplies got in and the wounded out.

Club El Malaria was soon restored. The clientèle returned. Tom, a wealthy young man of independent means, made sure that scotch, gin, olives and club

soda came in on the transport planes along with the food, ammunition, and field bandages. No one knew how he did it or asked.

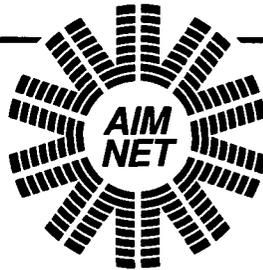
One thing was sure. Club El Malaria was now a citadel to be defended to the death. The Japanese gave up the siege eventually and faded away over the mountains back into Burma.

Now back to the main question: should there be gays—openly and officially accepted—in the military? Should the longstanding ban be lifted?

Personally, I put the issue to the Tom-and-Jerry test.

Tom and Jerry knew that, ban or no ban, gays have to make it on their own. No Military Code stamp of approval can help in the end. In the deadly business of the military, in peace or war, the only approval that counts is the respect and protection your comrades can give you.

Tom and Jerry made it on merit—and furthermore, on courage. To say they gave us something extra to fight for would be stretching things a bit. But they did make that oddball stretch of the war a bit more civilized. □



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Innocents and Broads

by James Bowman

When he was, for a week or so in March, the owner of the *New York Post*, Abraham Hirschfeld was represented by his enemies (i.e., the entire staff of the *Post*) as unfit to own a newspaper partly on the basis of the following "insensitive" or "sexist" joke he was said to have told: A man sees an attractive woman in a bar and, favoring the direct approach—no doubt like Mr. Hirschfeld himself—asks her if she would like to sleep with him. "Not for a million dollars!" replies the woman. "Good," replies the man, "we're already talking price!"

What is crass in the mouth of Honest Abe Hirschfeld comes out looking almost like class at the hands of Adrian Lyne in *Indecent Proposal*. Like Lyne's earlier success, *Fatal Attraction*, this is what they call in Hollywood a "high-concept" movie. Its premise can be summed up in the question: Would you consent to your wife's sleeping with another man for one night for \$1 million? Or, if you are a woman, would you do it if your husband consented? Everybody has an opinion. Most people, in fact, have two—one public and one very private. That hypocrisy is amusingly caught by the film's sleazy lawyer (Oliver Platt), who tries to cheer up Woody Harrelson for having sold Demi Moore for a night to Robert Redford by saying: "You're lucky. I couldn't have gotten \$500 for my girlfriend—not that I would do that!"

The intrinsic interest of the question is such that you almost forget the absurdity of Robert Redford as a subtle and sensitive and romantic (to say nothing of handsome!) billionaire. In reality, the

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kind of guy likely to make such an offer would have the subtlety, sensitivity, and romantic good looks of Ross Perot—or Abe Hirschfeld. But we can forgive the movie this implausibility as well as the superficiality of its characters because it raises an issue that Hollywood would not dare to raise otherwise, which is the issue of how far, in spite of the sexual revolution, sex and fidelity are still bound up with money and power and traditional male/female roles.

This issue is treated with a certain hard-eyed realism by Adrian Lyne up until the point at which, I presume, the money men told him he had to tack on a soppy, love-over-lucre ending. The oafish Harrelson says to Demi: "I was afraid you wanted him. I was afraid you were right to want him. I thought he was the better man. I know now he's not; he's just got more money." But we don't know he's not. As between the handsome and chivalrous billionaire and the jerk who gambled away what little money they had and so got them into this mess in the first place, there's not much doubt in my mind which one most women would think is the better man. Maybe not in Lyne's either.

I liked that he made Demi Moore pretend that she was doing it for her husband—and that he put that together with Redford's paradoxical assurance that "nothing's going to happen you don't choose." I liked the interesting reversal by which it was the husband who felt the more violated by the transaction, ostensibly contracted for his benefit, while the wife, otherwise a very nineties-type working woman, found herself gravitating back, willy-nilly, to the man who could fulfill the role of masculine protector when her husband had made such a botch of it. Also, the theme of power over sex

was repeated in Demi Moore's boss's forcing her to meet her billionaire again for his own economic benefit: "I would never dream of forcing you to do anything against your will—except this one time. Now move your ass or you're fired."

It's okay, though. She and Woody patch it up. Hollywood can never believe that innocence is lost for good. That may be one reason why it is so regularly transformed into mere cuteness, as in such movies recently doing the rounds as *The Sandlot*, *Cop and a Half*, *Jack the Bear*, and the latest truly repellent and Disneyfied version of *Huckleberry Finn* called, way over-familiarly, *The Adventures of Huck Finn*. They're all awful, but the combination of Elijah Wood as a too young, too clean, too goody-goody, suburban-soft Huck and Courtney B. Vance as a moralizing Jim ("Just because you're taught something's right and everybody believes it's right don't make it right") gives Disney the prize once again for crass sentimentalizing.

One reason to hate cuteness is that real innocence needs to be taken seriously. It is part of the great American mythology of youth and the fresh start. Fascination with it is even what lies behind the story of the amoral waif who gets a government-sponsored makeover as an assassin in *Point of No Return*. This is a remake of Luc Besson's *La Femme Nikita*, which was itself a parody of American girl-cop flicks that was half-funny and half-serious. With typical obtuseness, Hollywood didn't realize it was being sent up and cast Bridget Fonda as the beautiful young killer for whom are repealed not only the laws of biology but also those of physics, as she regularly takes out men twice her size with a single blow of her deadly fist.