

Sufferin' Suffragette

By Caleb Echterling

A cloudy day in northern France. The drumbeat of artillery rattled the Royal Glaswegian Fishmonger Fusiliers Air Squadron briefing tent. The pilots slumped on benches and smoked a cigarette in each hand. No one moved when the commanding officer walked in.

“Aren’t you ladies going to salute?”

“Not until you get us planes as good as the men fly. These fourth-hand Sopwiths are flying coffins.”

“Yeah, when they fly,” another pilot said. “Those things are rust and wood chips held together with glue. And would it kill you to assign us some mechanics?”

“Tut, tut,” the commanding officer said. He lit three cigarettes and pulled a long drag off all three. “The range of your planes is perfectly suited to your mission, namely retrieving cricket balls that the officers have whacked into no-man’s-land.”

A pilot stubbed out two cigarettes and lit two more. “We want to fly real missions, not your suicide crap-work.”

“Don’t worry your precious heads. The War Office has a plan to solve your little problem. Here to tell us about it is my old chum, Major General Fussypants, who, thanks to your brave sacrifice, will join me on the pitch after this meeting to bowl a few wrong’uns like he did when we were at Eton.”

The Major General strode into the tent smoking five cigarettes. An ostrich plume wagged from his pith helmet. “Ladies, the War Office has developed a plane to fit the specific needs of the female body and flying style. As you can see, it’s thinner and more angular than our other planes. A three dimensional rectangle, if you will.”

“It’s a coffin with wings.”

“Yes, well, we had a surplus, and this was cheaper than designing a real plane.” He clapped his hands. “Now then, who here can keep wicket?”