

THE  
*gallery*  
PLAYERS

The classic wartime drama about a conflict  
of love and duty

# flare path

by terence rattigan



# flare path

by terence rattigan

'Flare Path' is set in 1941/42 at the height of the Second World War. Britain had, in 1940, successfully defended her skies from attacks by German bombers during the Battle of Britain, but the war was still far from over. In the deserts of North Africa, British troops clashed with German ones under their infamous commander, Rommel, and at sea the Royal Navy's Battle of the Atlantic was in full swing, defending our vital supply convoys from German U-boat attack. At home the Blitz was over but the threat of invasion was ever present and rationing was worse than ever before. During these times, the crews of RAF Bomber Command flew out night after night to attack Germany's industrial heartland, the Ruhr, in an attempt to destroy her war effort. Losses were often heavy, and the gains frequently negligible, but the men of Bomber Command stubbornly kept returning to play their vital role in the grand strategy that was playing out not only all over Europe, but indeed the entire world.

This play is dedicated to the bravery of those men, and their wives and sweethearts who remained at home while they were away, never knowing if they would return again.

Sam Clarke





# flare path

by terence rattigan

## Production Team

<b>Director</b>	Pat Taplin
<b>Lighting Design</b>	Philip Rawe
<b>Sound Design</b>	Steve Rowe
<b>Set Design</b>	Dave Borthwick
<b>Stage Manager</b>	Georgie Beard
<b>Front of House</b>	Mike & Judy Wadman, & Members of Gallery Players

An Amateur Production by permission of Samuel French Ltd.

## Khaki Devil

Khaki Devil supply military uniforms, equipment, weapons, props and locations of the period 1899–the present for film, television, theatre, and amateur productions.

We are delighted to support this production of Flare Path.

Khaki Devil Limited  
01473 712723 / 07889 289821  
khakidevil@taffmail.demon.co.uk  
www.khakidevil.co.uk

## Frances Day - The Siren Who Disappeared

The scene was an unpretentious red-brick house in Maidenhead, Berkshire, on a hot August afternoon in 1981.

Apart from the top-floor flat, the building was divided into offices. The owner of the property, *Samta Young Johnson*, stood on the stairs, passing the time of day with a young solicitor, *Howard McBrien*, whose legal firm rented one of the floors in the building.

Mrs Johnson was a woman in her 70s, and a figure of absolute mystery, the subject of intense and feverish local gossip. Yet she blithely ignored every question about her past.

When, three years later, *Samta Young Johnson* died from leukaemia at the age of 75, *Howard McBrien* was amazed to discover that she had left him her house and her entire estate, valued at £162,000.

He was even more amazed to learn that his benefactress had been the fabulous **Frances Day**, Britain's original blonde bombshell and this country's first stage and screen sex symbol.

But she herself had lived in denial of that for almost 20 years.

Her story begins in the U.S. city of East Orange, New Jersey, where *Frances Victoria Schenk*, the daughter of an artist, *Frank Schenk*, of German-Jewish descent, was allegedly born on December 16, 1908. Allegedly, because there is no birth certificate. Like almost everything in her life, even her parentage is shrouded in mystery, and rumours persisted for years that she was really the illegitimate daughter of *Horace Dodge*, the wildly eccentric millionaire American automobile pioneer.

At the age of 16, Frances was to be found dancing the Charleston in the notorious New York speakeasy of nightclub queen *Texas Guinan*, whose invariable greeting to her patrons was "*Hello suckers!*"

There, little *Frankie Schenk* was spotted by an ambitious Australian impresario, *Beaumont Alexander*, who thought she was "*the ultimate in sex appeal*".

He brought her to London, changed her name to **Frances Day**, transformed her into a platinum blonde, which was not her natural colour, and sent her to elocution lessons to eradicate all trace of her New Jersey accent.

Soon, he had masterminded her career as one of London's first exotic - and erotic - cabaret stars, dancing in West End nightclubs, where she created a sensation by performing in a G-string with only an ostrich fan for cover.

When she was 19, she married *Beaumont Alexander*, who was 18 years her senior, at London's Marylebone register office, but within three years they had separated, and she divorced him in 1938. There would be a legion of lovers - of both sexes - but she would never remarry.

**Frances Day** exploded into fully fledged stardom in the West End musical *Out Of The Bottle*, in 1932, aged 23. The following year, her extremely sexual performance as the notorious nightclub singer *La Mume* ("*The Shrimp*") in Alexander Korda's movie *The Girl From Maxim's* rocketed her to the top of the film world, too.

Then, in 1934, came her biggest West End hit, *Jill Darling!*, in which her dancing partner was ballet legend *Frederick* (later *Sir Frederick*) *Ashton*. He would remember Day as "*absolutely incandescent. The word 'star' in the theatrical sense might have been invented to describe her*".

**Frances Day** was the 1930s equivalent of *Marilyn Monroe*: blonde, well-endowed, outrageously sexy and infinitely suggestive

Her lovers had included the *Prince of Wales* (later *King Edward VIII* and *Duke of Windsor*), his brother *Prince George*, their cousin, *Lord Louis Mountbatten*, *Prince Bernhard* of the Netherlands, *Prince Bertil* of Sweden, and Britain's Foreign Secretary and future Prime Minister, *Anthony Eden*.

In 1941, she co-starred with the comedians *Flanagan and Allen* in the revue *Black Vanities*. When Frances arrived at one rehearsal looking decidedly crumpled, *Bud Flanagan* quipped: "*Little Day, you've had a busy man.*"

It was in that production that she introduced the song ***A Pair Of Silver Wings*** as her personal tribute to the Royal Air Force.



## John Pudney (1909-1977)

John Sleigh Pudney was born in Langley, Buckinghamshire. He attended Gresham's School, where he was a contemporary of W.H. Auden. He worked as a radio producer and scriptwriter for the *BBC* and as a war correspondent, before joining the RAF in 1940. Before the war he had written two published books of verse, *Spring Encounter* and *Open the Sky*, two collections of stories and *Jacobson's Ladder*, a novel. During the war he was recruited by the *British Government* to write about the work of air crews in a way that could be understood by the general public. A Squadron Leader, he served in Africa, the Mediterranean and France.

He became a reviewer for the *Daily Express* after the end of the war and Literary Editor of *News Review* from 1948-1950. He then joined the publishers Putnam as a director. He was an extraordinarily prolific writer, producing twenty collections of poetry, dozens of novels, children's books, short stories and two plays. His non-fiction included a history of lavatories, *The Smallest Room*, and an official history of the *Battle of Malta*.

Probably his most famous poem, '**For Johnny**', was written on the back of an envelope during an air raid on London in 1941. This simple, twelve-lined poem seemed to encapsulate the mood of the war taking place in the air at this time. It first appeared in the *News Chronicle* and was read on radio by *Lawrence Olivier* and quoted by *Michael Redgrave* in a war time film, *The Way to The Stars*, and has appeared in numerous anthologies:

### For Johnny

*Do not despair  
For Johnny-head-in-air;  
He sleeps as sound  
As Johnny underground.*

*Fetch out no shroud  
For Johnny-in-the-cloud;  
And keep your tears  
For him in after years.*

*Better by far  
For Johnny-the-bright-star,  
To keep your head,  
And see his children fed.*



Close friends knew, however, that she sang it for one man only: her fiancé, *Squadron Leader Sam Johnson DFC*: "*Although they say he's just a crazy sort of guy, To me he means a million other things, For he's the one who taught this happy heart of mine to fly, He wears a pair of silver wings.*" But during Day's run in the wartime West End musical *Du Barry Was A Lady*, Johnson was killed on active service.

She received the news with outward stoicism, but some said that she was never quite the same person again.

She appeared in numerous West End shows and plays, many of them flops and as her behaviour became more erratic had to move to television to keep working.

In 1965, she starred in one final West End play, *The Gulls*, opposite *Bob Monkhouse*.

Arriving for rehearsals on the back of a motorbike, in skin-tight black leather, sprayed with gold paint, she insisted on being billed as *Frankie Day*, and claimed that *Frances* had been her mother.

Monkhouse commented: "*I think she must have had some sort of emotional experience. She has just entirely thrown out the past. Frances Day, as far as she is concerned, seems to have ceased to exist.*"

When the run ended, she gave up her Mayfair home, retreated to Maidenhead and changed her name by deed poll to *Samta Young Johnson*.

In 1981, one of her Thirties recordings was reissued after featuring in the Donald Sutherland movie *Eye Of The Needle*, but EMI Records had no address to which to send the royalties.

When she died at the age of 75 on April 29, 1984, from chronic myeloid leukaemia, her brief will (leaving everything to *Howard McBrien*, who had known nothing of her glory days) proved to be an extraordinarily poignant document.

It directed that "*there be no notice or information of any kind of my death, except for and if a death certificate is obligatory.*

"*Any persons, private or Press, you shall simply say that I am no longer at this address. "Gone away. Destination unknown', and that is the truth*". It was a sad and bewildering final curtain to the dazzling career of one of the most glamorous show business legends of the 20th century.

*(Frances Day: Golden Girl Of The 1930s (Avid Easy AMSC 926) is available from [www.avidgroup.co.uk](http://www.avidgroup.co.uk))*

# flare path

by terence rattigan



## Cast

(in order of appearance)

**Countess Skriczevinsky**

**Peter Kyle**

**Percy**

**Mrs Oakes**

**Count Skriczevinsky**

**Flight Lieutenant Graham**

**Patricia Graham**

**Sergeant Miller**

**Mrs Miller**

**Squadron Leader Swanson**

Amy Restall

Duncan Broatch

Sam Clarke

Helen Clarke

Ed Crosthwaite

Mike Cook

Sally Scurrall

Richard Lock

Rosie Fuller

Peter Phillips

**'For Johnny'** read by James Hayward

*Incidental Music*

**'In The Mood'** Glenn Miller

**'A Pair of Silver Wings'** Frances Day

*(A personal tribute to the RAF by the Golden Girl of the 30's)*

The action takes place in the Residents Lounge of the Falcon Hotel, Milchester,  
Lincolnshire

**Act 1 Scene 1**

About 6pm Saturday

**Scene 2**

About three hours later.

*Interval*

**Act 2 Scene 1**

About 5.30am the following morning.

**Scene 2**

About 12 noon the same day



# Terence Rattigan

Terence Rattigan was born on June 10th, 1911. His father Frank was a diplomat and his grandfather a knight. He enjoyed a youth marked by travel, and yet while the family was seemingly upscale, the Rattigans were never wealthy. More significantly, his father's lowbrow background and behaviour barred them from mingling with high society. Eventually, Frank would lose his diplomatic post, and the money and prestige that went with it.

Rattigan attended Harrow, but unlike most boys there, Rattigan attended on scholarship. While at school, he was open about his newly found

homosexuality. At the time and in his circles, it was quite fashionable to do so. (Later on, as he became known, he would take great pains to hide his sexual preference.) Trinity College at Oxford was his next stop. There, Rattigan moved into a theatre crowd to develop his growing talent. His first play was written while at Trinity and was produced in 1934. Fittingly titled "First Episode," his introduction to the theatre community moved quickly from Surrey to London's fashionable West End Theatre District.

Terence's father did not encourage his son's gift. Frank Rattigan constantly suggested that his son find "respectable" work, and went so far as to set Terence up with a job as a screenwriter at Warner Brothers so that he could earn a steady salary. Terence did not want such a compromise and came up with a plan that would give him the time he knew he needed to become a success. He persuaded his father to give him 200 pounds a year for two years to try his hand at writing. If he could not make a career of writing, he would enter a more secure profession. It took Rattigan only months to secure his position as a playwright.

Rattigan followed his initial success with perhaps one of his most popular works, "French Without Tears" in 1936. This show brought Rattigan rave reviews and a considerable amount of wealth. Rattigan soon began to live a life of pleasure, indulging freely in drinking and gambling. But just as Rattigan appeared to be self-destructing, he joined the Royal Air Force in 1940 after Hitler invaded Denmark and Norway.

For the first time in Rattigan's life, he found himself surrounded by men who came from all walks of life, and he was captivated by them. He wrote a play (produced in 1942) while in the service entitled "Flare Path" about his experiences. This play solidified the view that many already had of Rattigan: "his was the acceptable voice of protest that would not embarrass or annoy those who dictated what was politically or artistically acceptable." Rattigan took to this voice, the voice of the common theatregoer, and he even gave it a name; he called it Aunt Edna.

Aunt Edna became Terence Rattigan's best known character, the singular personality of "the great audience." Rattigan described her as a "nice, respectable, middle-class, middle-aged, maiden lady, with time on her hands and money to help her pass it, who resides in a West Kensington hotel." He learned to listen to her and he always respected her opinion.

Rattigan enjoyed uninterrupted success from 1936 until 1956. With a string of hits including "French Without Tears," "While the Sun Shines," "Love in Idleness," "The Browning Version," "Separate Tables," "The Winslow Boy" and others, it seemed as though Rattigan could not miss. He even began a successful film career, which would bring him further acclaim. He was nominated for Academy Awards for David Lean's "Breaking The Sound Barrier" (1953) and for "Separate Tables" (1959), which received seven nominations including Best Picture, winning a Best Actor statuette for David Niven and Best Supporting Actress award for Wendy Hiller. In 1959, he won the Best Screenplay Award at the Cannes Film Festival for "The Browning Version."

However, Rattigan's charmed existence was soon to change. When John Osborne revolutionized the theatre world in 1956 with his play "Look Back In Anger," the attention he and other "angry young men" playwrights received caused Rattigan and his meticulous craftsmanship to be seen as hopelessly out-dated, in direct contrast with everything these young writers stood for. Rattigan was reviled in the press and turned increasingly towards movies for his livelihood.

In 1957, Rattigan wrote "Variation on a Theme," the first play in which he addressed his homosexuality openly. Sadly, this play, which held the most truth and told the most personal story Rattigan presented, was both a critical and box office flop. However, the play enabled Rattigan to become more public with his private life and learn to accept himself.

In 1962, Terence Rattigan was diagnosed with leukemia. After two years of doing little more than waiting for his eminent death, Rattigan rather unexpectedly recovered. When Rattigan began taking part in life again, his life was not as he remembered. He found himself completely out of touch with the Swinging Britain of the sixties, and he fell ill again in 1968.

Out of touch and no longer revered in his homeland, coupled with his failing health, Rattigan made the decision to leave Britain and live abroad. He chose Bermuda, which is quite far from England, yet still tied to Great Britain. He lived out the rest of his days there, rarely returning to England.



However, he lived to see the successful revivals of his plays and new, deeper readings of his often subversive texts. Rattigan achieved the acceptance he long searched for when he was knighted in 1971, like his grandfather.

Terence Rattigan died on Wednesday, November 30th, 1977. In death, Rattigan became a national figure, revered as he was in his youth, at the height of his popularity, by the press and public alike.