

# The FRENCH DOLL

By WILLIAM FULLER

Kathleen's first war had been a time of gaiety and fulfillment. Now there was a new war, and she would have her exciting suitors back again

KATHLEEN TAYLOR lived with her mother in a small, two-story house on Central Avenue. There was an open porch all the way across the front of the house. There was a hammock at one end of the porch, where Kathleen liked to lie and rest on summer evenings after a long, hot day at the typewriter in Judge Wilson's law office. On the lawn in front of the house there was an iron deer—the only one in town—and there were several pink, plaster-of-Paris flamingos that Freddy Baker had given to Kathleen's mother for Christmas in 1948.

The parlor in the house was dim and cool. The furniture in the parlor was dark and heavy. On one side of this room there were two bookcases with glass doors. On the other side of the room there was a piano that no one in the Taylor family had ever known how to play. On the mantel were several brilliantly colored pottery vases that Mrs. Taylor had bought at a native handicraft mart in the Ozarks in the early thirties, and an engraved walrus tusk that her Uncle Jeff, the black sheep of the family, had sent her from Nome, Alaska, when she had been a little girl, in 1898. The pottery vases were full of old recipes, receipts, addresses, buttons, and rusty keys to no one knew what.

Kathleen often sat sadly alone in the parlor, remembering the war years, when the huge air base just out of town had been in operation and the skies had resounded to the exciting roars of bombers, fighters and trainers, and the streets of the town had been crowded and noisy with throngs of khaki-clad young men, and the parlors of most of the houses in town, the Taylors' included, had been open all day and most of the night to the brave young fliers so far away from their own homes. The air base was still there, beyond the town; empty now, deserted—a stricken, brooding giant. The sight of it—the staring, sagging buildings, the crumbling company streets,

the weed-choked runways—always saddened Kathleen. She went there often.

Kathleen spent a great deal of time in her own room. She was there now, dressing, getting ready to go with Fred Baker to a Merry-makers' Club party at Ruth Trumbull's house. She loved her room; it was, she felt, so much a part of her. It was a very young, very feminine room, with chintz curtains, soft, fuzzy white rugs, and a ruffled bedspread on her bed.

The walls were lined with snapshots. There were several pictures of Kathleen—pictures taken in high school or at the university—in which she looked very sweet, pretty and demure. Many of the pictures were of young men Kathleen had known in high school or at the university. Most of these were inscribed in some manner, such as: *All my love, Baby—Butch*, or simply *XXXXX! Piggy*. On a small chest of drawers, hidden behind the closet door when it was open, was a picture of Fred Baker, looking serious and intent and businesslike,

but slightly bug-eyed behind the thick lenses of his eyeglasses. It was signed: *Faithfully yours always, Fred*.

But all over her dressing table, in the most favorable light, were pictures of the boys she had known at the air base during the war. Many of the pictures were inscribed, also, in this manner: *The next zero is for you, Kat—Sammy*, and *These Italian babes got nothing on you, Sweetie—Roger the Lodger*. And right in the middle of the dressing table was the most prized one of all: a picture of Bill Mason standing beside a B-17 with seven black swastikas painted along its fuselage and her name, KATHLEEN, painted in big letters on the side of its nose. Bill was dead now.

Lying limply across the bedspread on Kathleen's bed was the French doll that Bill had sent her from Paris. The cloth, china and sawdust of the doll had been artfully fashioned in the image of a pertly smiling mademoiselle in her early twenties. The doll was dressed in black velvet slacks and a sheer little blouse.

When it had come to Kathleen, its hair had been black. It had been necessary for Kathleen to experiment several times with various blonde rinses to change the doll's hair to a shade similar to that of her own hair. It was still not the exact shade of her own hair, but it was pretty close.

After all, Kathleen had decided, the doll's hair, though real human hair, was dead, and couldn't be expected to glint and glisten as her own hair did. Kathleen was very proud of her own hair. She was thirty-three, but there wasn't a single gray hair in her head. She looked every night before she went to bed.

Kathleen was all dressed when she heard the doorbell ring. It was exactly seven thirty, so she knew it was Fred Baker. Freddy was never late, never early. He had been dating Kathleen Wednesday and Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons for almost three years now. He had been proposing to her on an average of once a week for the past year and Kathleen was still telling him that she wasn't quite sure.

She hated to have to admit it to herself, but she supposed she would have to marry him sometime.



He was a C.P.A., and just about the most substantial C.P.A. in town. But there was nothing very exciting about Freddy. He had been in the war, too, but he had been a finance officer in Atlanta, Georgia, the whole time. Kathleen really didn't consider him good enough for her.

Kathleen decided to keep Freddy waiting downstairs for a while: she wasn't just any girl, all ready and waiting and panting for her date! And besides, she wanted to show her mother that what she had told Kathleen for the umpteenth time earlier that evening had gone right in one ear and out the other.

"I think it's simply awful, the way you treat poor

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Kathleen flung herself on her bed, held her French doll up at arm's length, then kissed its cool cheek. She was ready for the dance

Fred," her mother had said. "Just like the dirt under your feet!"

"It's good for him, Mama," Kathleen had said.

"Well, when are you going to *marry* the poor dear?"

"Perhaps soon, Mama." She had smiled mischievously, just like a little girl. "Perhaps never!" And with a tinkling laugh at her mother's consternation, she had scampered up to her room.

The party at Ruth Trumbull's was informal. Kathleen was dressed in a simple little dress of sheer gingham. Her hair was caught up in a perky little knot at the back with a piece of green ribbon.

She had widened her somewhat thin lips considerably with a heavy application of dark red lipstick and had rouged away the sallowness of her cheeks. Now she backed several yards away from her mirror and assumed a pose she had seen many times in the magazine ads of the New York department stores for dresses for the younger set: feet wide apart, hands on hips, arms akimbo, a pert smile on her lips. As long as she was smiling, the crinkly little lines around her eyes and the corners of her mouth looked quite natural, as if they were only there when she smiled.

She blew a farewell kiss to her French doll—

this was a sort of ritual with her and she never left without doing it—and went downstairs. Her mother and Fred were in the parlor. Kathleen made her entrance: she stood in the doorway in that wide-stanced, arms-akimbo pose she had been practicing upstairs.

Freddy saw her, and the solemn set of his face was transfigured by an immediate, adoring beam. My God, Kathleen thought—he's looking like a spaniel again!

"Hey, Shug," Freddy's voice was a caress.

He always called her Shug. She was *so* sick of it. When they were married, (Continued on page 64)





Crane lowers tank hull into "Queen Elizabeth" machine, which drills 100 holes simultaneously

# HOW TO

From soybean storage to assembly line

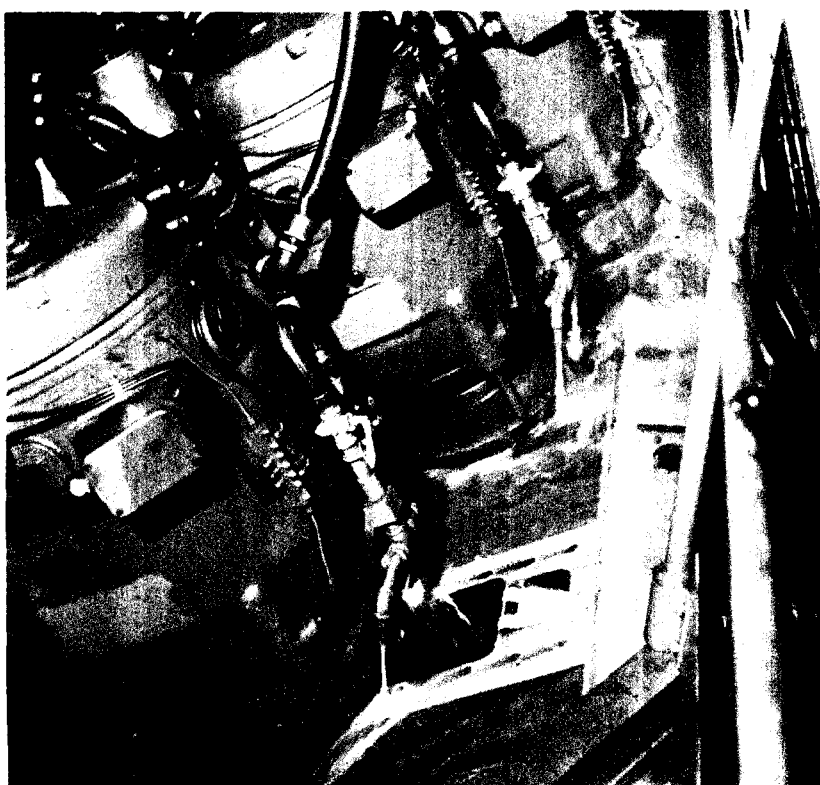
**T**HE chain hooked to the thick underbelly moved the hull of the tank with slow sureness down the assembly line. The heavy frame of the T41-E1 Walker Bulldog looked like an armor-plated scow, dull and thick and gray as it jerked along. The foreman put his hand on the rough metal and looked it over carefully, without haste, tracing each welded seam with his eye. A few feet back, this hull had been a heap of armor plate, brackets and rivets. A dozen covered, gloved and masked figures had put it together, pouring molten streams of homogeneous metal against front, rear and toe plates, the flooring and bulkhead.

The foreman stepped back. "Okay. It's ready for the queens," he called.

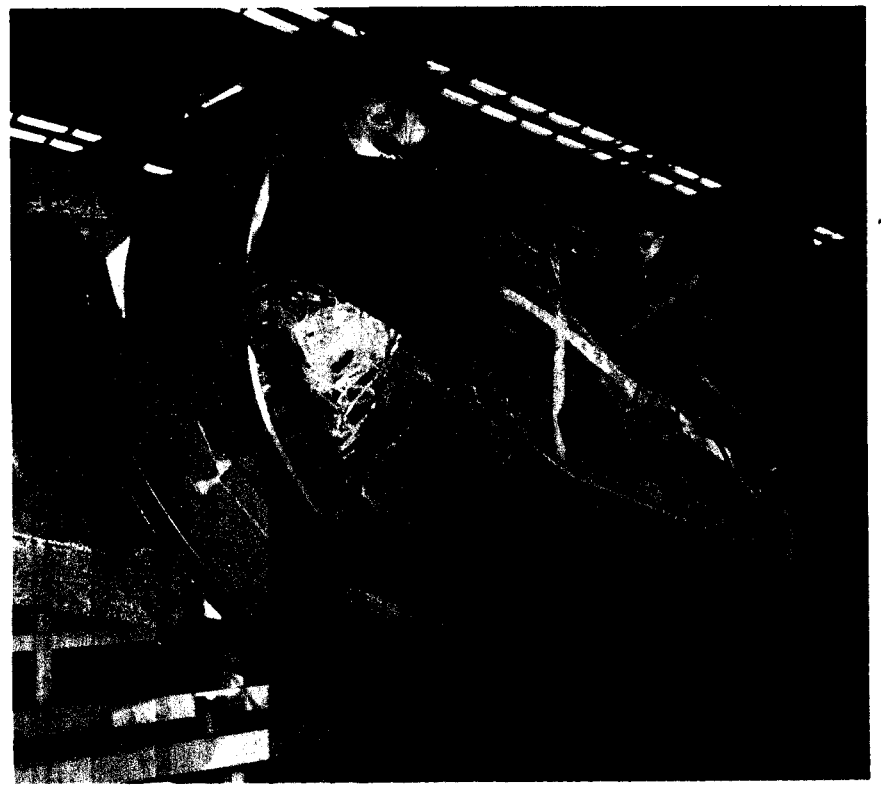
Twenty feet above him, operators stepped back from catwalks on a piece of machinery half as big as a good-sized supermarket. The catwalks swung upward, leaving an open maw. The tank was raised up and then lowered down into the maw by a huge crane. The catwalks settled back. The operators mounted the catwalks again, adjusted levels, studied gauges, threw levers, and the 10 grinding heads of the 350-ton "Queen Mary" started revolving.

In the olden days of tank building, back in World War II, 10 operations would have been required to grind the 10 surfaces on the hull, to which wheel assemblies would be added. The purpose of the grinding is to smooth the surfaces and to achieve the thickness necessary for other parts to be attached to the frames. The mammoth "Mary" did it swiftly in one operation, and as the operators stepped off the safety-conditioned catwalks, which will not move as long as a man stands on them, the

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY RALPH ROYLE



Like drilling, which once required many machines, the grinding of big hull areas is now done by one mechanical giant, called "Queen Mary"



Welder and grinder work on turret. The conception of assembly line as beehive of activity is false; instead, the pace is steady and efficient

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