

Case 10

Private Lucretia McFiggie startled awake in her tent from another nightmare, images of blasted buildings and body parts searing her brain. She could hear mortars bursting in the distance. She sat on the edge of her cot, trembling and drenched in sweat. She reached for her computer, put on her headphones, and slipped a DVD into the drive. In a moment, the harrowing images of destruction plaguing her mind were replaced by glittering visions of 1930's Hollywood. Lucretia's pulse rate slowed as she touched a little bit of home and calmed herself with the charming distraction of *The Artist*.

Hyman "Big Hy" Strachman is one the world's busiest bootleggers of pirated movies. Over the past nine years, he has copied and distributed over 300,000 DVDs of newly released Hollywood movies from master copies that had been made illegally in theaters or leaked from studios.

Big Hy is not the typical back-alley bootlegger. He is a 93-year old, widowed, World War II veteran who served in the Pacific. He began his "nefarious" project after discovering a website that lists care package requests from soldiers. Many requests were for recently released movies. This Big Hy began copying and sending DVDs to American troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. After copying a movie in his Long Island apartment, Big Hy destroys the master disk, keeping no copies for himself. He makes no money from his efforts; in fact, he has personally paid shipping costs of tens of thousands of dollars over the years.

Movie studios do send movies to troops overseas, but only reel-to-reel versions. Service personnel are able to see these movies only at specifically scheduled times, which may conflict with their assigned duties. The free disks Mr. Strachman sends to soldiers can be viewed anytime at the soldiers' convenience on their personal computers.

Mr. Strachman admits he is violating copyright law. "It's not the right thing to do, but I did it," Mr. Strachman said in a *New York Times* article published April 26, 2012.

Although movie studios vociferously condemn movie piracy, Motion Picture Association of America spokesperson Howard Gantman graciously commented on Big Hy's gifts to the troops: "We are grateful that the entertainment we produce can bring some enjoyment to them while they are away from home" (ibid).

In December 2011, another New York movie bootlegger, Gilberto Sanchez, was sentenced to a year in federal prison for uploading a pre-release copy of *Wolverine* to megaupload.com. Immediately following Sanchez's sentencing, the United States Attorney's Office of the Central District of California issued a press release, which quoted United States Attorney André Birotte Jr.: "The Justice Department will pursue and prosecute persons who seek to steal the intellectual property of this nation".

There do not seem to be any plans to bring charges against Mr. Strachman.

To thousands of soldiers, Big Hy is an All-American hero.