

"LONG MARCH"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MESSINES, BELGIUM -- NIGHT (1917)

The trench is a scar on the wounded landscape. Jagged, angry and violent by turns.

This land is murdered a thousand times over. A roiling sea of mud and morass.

A VEREY LIGHT

Like a brilliant white flare, soars into the air, shot from some distant position. White light dances across the soulless expanse of No-Man's Land.

Silhouettes of many MEN skitter through the trench, hunched over, head down.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

ENGLISH SOLDIERS

Dressed in dirty Khaki uniforms, lean against the trench wall, nervous and fidgety.

They check their rifles, tighten their harnesses, fix their bayonets, and pray.

A large CLAY JUG is passed down the line.

INSERT: SUBTITLE - "THE MESSINES RIDGE, BELGIUM - JULY 7, 1917"

British 18-pounders THUD staccato in the distance.

An erudite young LIEUTENANT, CEDRIC JEFFREY, 24, wearing small round glasses on a pudgy face, stalks down the trench.

The mud sucks at his feet, walking is a chore. He speaks in hushed tones to the men as he goes, an ENGLISH ACCENT obvious.

He stops at a large TUNNEL leading down from the trench wall into darkness. A SQUIRRELY MAN fidgets with some wire at the entrance.

JEFFREY

We on schedule?

SQUIRRELY MAN

We 'ould be if eye could work in peace.

JEFFREY

It would look bad if this were the only mine that didn't blow.

SQUIRRLEY MAN

Ewe jus' make sure yowr men's heads
is in dere crotches when dis guy
goes off, ewetenant. We're goin' ta
shayke windows in London.

The JUG works its down the file.

The English artillery intensifies, a CRASHING chorus.

The jug meets Jeffrey and he takes swig. The rum burns.

He hands it back to the last SOLDIER in line.

JEFFREY

Never quite enough to do the job,
eh?

SOLDIER

(holds up the jug,
drinks)
Here's to gettin' a blighty one,
sir.

Jeffrey crouches and braces against the trench, giving a
hand signal for the rest of the men to do the same.

JEFFREY

(quietly)
Now say good-bye to all this.

The BOOMING artillery fades to silence.

A NIGHTINGALE sings cheerily from somewhere in No-Man's Land.

EXT. GERMAN SUPPORT LINE -- CONTINUOUS

GERMAN SOLDIERS sleep huddled together in the mud like sheep.

ERNST WINTERSTEIGER, 42, sits cross-legged against the remains
of an old cobblestone wall.

He's a gruff man...an unkempt beard, dull gray eyes, a
permanent scowl. A man alone among thousands.

His dirty uniform shirt is adorned with multiple MEDALS. He
cradles his RIFLE in his lap, a large SCOPE attached to it.

A SENTRY, crouching, creeps down the line past Wintersteiger,
careful to give him a wide berth.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Jeffrey glances at his watch. It's 3:10. He squeezes his
eyes shut.

At once, a great RUMBLE and BLAST. The Earth rocks and heaves.

JEFFREY

Is carried up and down on a turbulent sea of mud. He looks over the parapet in astonishment.

IN NO-MAN'S LAND

A great mass of black earth is carried into the sky on pillars of fire.

It hangs aloft for a long moment as an unnatural red glare expands in all directions.

THE TRENCH WALL

Collapses, sending men hurling backward as

MORE EXPLOSIONS

Erupt across the land. The air vibrates with malignant noise.

BEHIND THE LINE

Artillery pieces FLASH and BOOM, shelling the German line while Vickers Guns spray lead in all directions.

THREE WHISTLE BLASTS pierce the stillness.

JEFFREY

Watches as English soldiers pour over the parapet toward the maelstrom, dark silhouettes against the crimson glare.

He clamors after them.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

A ROLLING ARTILLERY BARRAGE

Pounds the agonized earth several hundred yards before the advancing English. Ahead of them is

A HUGE CRATER

That dents the earth where the German front line trench had been only moments before.

THE SOLDIERS

Sweep across to the opposite rim, yelling fanatically. The BARRAGE marches ahead of them.

JEFFREY

Moves through the crater. MUFFLED YELLS from the mud all around him...Germans buried alive in the explosion.

Here and there, a HAND pokes up through the muck, grasping for help.

He climbs to the opposite rim of the crater where the British soldiers have congregated in celebration.

AN OBSERVATION BALLOON

Floats above the morass. It's passenger waves frantically to those below.

Jeffrey, exhausted by the run, takes a knee.

The barrage dies off. He looks around...disappointed.

EXT. GERMAN LINE -- CONTINUOUS

WINTERSTEIGER

Kneels behind the stone wall, shaken by the explosion. Artillery impacts all around him.

SCATTERED GERMAN SOLDIERS

Run from the smoke to his front, stunned, dazed beyond comprehension by the explosion.

They stagger about like drunkards, blind and deaf.

A CRAZED GERMAN SOLDIER stumbles to Wintersteiger, eyes pleading for help.

Wintersteiger sharply draws up his rifle and slams the man across the face, knocking him away.

A MACHINE GUN POSITION

To his left readies itself. Another to his right,

AND WINTERSTEIGER

Settles in behind his rifle sight and aims carefully, immune to the chaos around him. He squeezes off a round.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

A MACHINE GUN FLASH

Pierces the night. It echoes...TAC-TAC-TAC.

The British are sliced down wholesale.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

A SLENDER MAN

Emerges from a dugout. He has brown hair, hazel eyes etched in dirty wrinkles, and wears CAPTAIN'S BARS on his collar. A white bandage with a RED CROSS on his arm.

His hands are wrapped in DIRTY BROWN CLOTH, like giant mittens. This is NOEL HOBSON, 33.

He is haggard and beaten. The CRIES of dying men in No-Man's Land taunt him. He pulls himself out of the trench.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

HOBSON

Walks unsteadily across the battlefield. Bullets dance about.

The CRASH of a multitude of German Feld-Kanon in the distance. VEREY LIGHTS dance in the sky.

HOBSON

(whispering)

With purity and holiness I will pass
my life and practice my art.

He sees the opposite rim of the crater.

BRITISH SOLDIERS

Fall by the dozen. The rest run back in a panic, leaving writhing comrades in the mud.

HOBSON

Plows forward, faster now.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

(whispering)

I will not cut persons laboring under
the stone.

EXT. GERMAN LINE -- CONTINUOUS

WINTERSTEIGER

Carefully picks his targets and shoots. Every shot is a kill, a khaki-colored figure cut down.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

English soldiers bound about the smoke and mud, retreating. He spies one on a knee and aims.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

JEFFREY

On a knee, waving his arms.

JEFFREY
(shouting)
Stand your ground!

His voice is drowned out by artillery EXPLODING all around.

A BULLET rips through his thigh. He gasps and collapses into the mud, but immediately gets back up.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)
(smiles)
Now that's more like it.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

HOBSON

Reaches a DYING SOLDIER lying in the grime.

His face is smeared in greasy mud, but he stares at Hobson with huge eyes. The soldier has a gaping chest wound.

Hobson reaches into a shoulder-strapped pouch and pulls out a bandage, his wrapped hands fumbling with it.

HOBSON
(whispering)
I abstain from whatever is deleterious
and mischievous. I will give no
deadly medicine.

He struggles to unwind the bandage, growing more furious with each second.

THE OBSERVATION BALLOON

Above bursts into flames as a German biplane buzzes by.

The balloon twists and turns toward the earth as flames engulf it's death throes

AND HOBSON

Fumbles with the bandage, finally unwound. He presses it to the man's stomach, but the wound still bleeds.

EXT. GERMAN LINE -- MOMENTS EARLIER

WINTERSTEIGER

Grunts and blinks his targeting eye.

A BRILLIANT YELLOW LIGHT

Washes over the line. He sees an English OBSERVATION BALLOON explode into flames.

He stares a moment in wonder, then snaps back to reality. He takes aim again, squinting into the reticle.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

HOBSON'S HANDS

Won't allow him to work. The soldier grasps his shirt sleeve, choking.

HOBSON

(whispering)

I keep this oath unviolated, so grant me enjoyment of life. I will do no harm.

He curses and tears the wrappings off his hands.

His hands are completely uninjured underneath.

He presses the bandage down again.

A SHELL

Crashes nearby. The shock wave swims across the men

AND HOBSON

Falls forward onto the soldier.

THE SOLDIER

GASPS hoarsely, his face contorts horribly.

HOBSON

Pulls away. His hands on the boy's bare stomach. The soldier's body tightens.

HOBSON'S POV

He pulls his hands away. On the soldier's stomach, DARK PURPLE-BLACK BRUISES in the shape of hand prints remain.

The soldier contorts, spasms violently and lays still. He is dead.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

I've violated my oath. I've become death.

HOBSON

Sobs as he holds his hands away from himself as though they were diseased.

BULLETS stream around him. A bullet strikes his shoulder, exploding out his back.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

Lord above, it can't be far off now.

EXT. GERMAN LINE -- CONTINUOUS

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

Sees Jeffrey through the reticle, kneeling in the open.

He fires, but misses. Fires again. Misses.

The rifle jams.

WINTERSTEIGER

Curses and throws the rifle down.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

JEFFREY

Waits for the end, eyes closed. But the world grows quiet.

He looks around, all alone.

Exhaling, he gets up and limps back to the English trench.

And a NIGHTINGALE sings merrily.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- HOURS LATER

Amid a mass of English corpses, Hobson lays still. His uniform is covered in blood.

Yet, he opens his eyes, squinting at the morning sun.

Something is tugging at him. He sits up and sees

WINTERSTEIGER

Pulling at his boots, trying to pry them off. The German sees that Hobson is awake and scowls at him.

HOBSON

Recognizes him instantly.

HOBSON

It's you, you Bastard.

WINTERSTEIGER

Stares at Hobson for a long moment.

HOBSON

Stares back, transfixed by the man's scowl.

He passes out.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- MONTHS LATER

Another trench much like before, but this one is filled with six inches of muddy, stagnant water.

It a cold, gray day. Rain slops down in huge drops. Everything is dirty brown. English soldiers huddle against the sides of the trench, soaked to the bone.

INSERT: SUBTITLE - "FLANDERS, NEAR SANCTUARY WOOD - SEPTEMBER 1917."

Private REGINALD JOHNSTON, 19, writes into a small pad he shelters from the rain with a poncho.

JOHNSTON (V.O.)

My Dear Beatrice, Don't worry as I am safe and tucked away here in the fields of Belgium. I won't say I'm 'in the pink', though. I think I'd give a year's salary for a dry uniform or a hot meal. It's hard to complain, though. I'm no worse off than any of the other lads.

Water splashes into Johnston's face.

A stoutly muscled man, SERGEANT SHANKLAND, 46, grins above him, his mangy beard riddled with mud. His face and bare forearms are covered in huge blister-like scars.

A large SWORD hangs at his hip.

SHANKLAND

Ewe kids 'ad your breakfast yet?

JOHNSTON

I've had my fill, Sergeant.

SHANKLAND

We got a wookin' party going to the reserve trench 'is mornin'. It's a bloody lyke down 'ere wit all this water.

(pauses thoughtfully)

Eye' didn't put you on it.

(MORE)

SHANKLAND (CONT'D)

(looks around)

Can' you 'elp me write a letter to my missus, 'stead? I's due fir leave in a mont'.

JOHNSTON

Of course, Sergeant.

SHANKLAND

I think if I hang 'round you edyookite types, I'll be gettin' smarter me-self, eh?

Shankland winks and starts trudging off through the muck.

SHANKLAND (CONT'D)

Alls I got to tell 'er is to 'ave a good look at the floor...'cause she'll only be seein' the ceilin' when I get home!

He roars in laughter at his own joke as he goes off. Johnston keeps writing.

JOHNSTON (V.O.)

Our troops are getting along splendidly. I think the English soldier is one of God's greatest creations. It's only a matter of time before the Huns surrender, and we'll all come home.

Someone else comes trudging down the trench. Johnston pauses as he writes and looks up. It's Lieutenant Jeffrey.

Johnston flashes a toothy smile.

JOHNSTON (CONT'D)

Morning, sir.

JEFFREY

Good morning, Private.

Jeffrey moves away, shoulders sagging.

JOHNSTON (V.O.)

Sorry, Beatrice, that was our officer coming by on his morning walk. He's in a wretched funk from morning till dusk, I swear. Nice enough, though, just a bit grim.

JEFFREY

Reaches a dark tunnel dug into the side of the trench. Sandbags keep some of the water out. A stairway leads down.

He looks glumly around and proceeds down the stairs to his DUGOUT.

JOHNSTON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Good-bye for now, Darling. Keep
 smiling. I'll see you in my dreams.
 Love, Reginald.

INT. JEFFREY'S DUGOUT -- CONTINUOUS

The Dugout is damp, like a dungeon cell. A crude table and chairs in one corner, a bed of filthy straw in another. A lone STOVE gives off an amber glow.

Jeffrey limps in and tears off his helmet. He flops down in one of the chairs.

A young PRIVATE enters, startling Jeffrey awake.

PRIVATE
 Care for some cocoa, sir? I could
 whip it up right fast.

JEFFREY
 That sounds good, Williams. Thank
 you.

The Private mixes the cocoa on the small stove. Jeffrey's eyes lull closed once again.

WILLIAMS
 It'll be just a moment, sir.

JEFFREY
 What do the men say, Williams?

Williams pauses, stirs the cocoa.

WILLIAMS
 The lads talk, sir, but they don't
 say much.

JEFFREY
 But talk is enough.

WILLIAMS
 Don't worry, sir. They just don't
 know you well, yet.

Williams shuffles out. Jeffrey eyes close.

INT. JEFFREY'S DUGOUT -- LATER

He starts awake. The Private is right in front of him.

JEFFREY
 Christ!

WILLIAMS

(putting the cocoa on
the table)

Sorry, sir. It's ready.

Jeffrey nods, and the Private exits. Jeffrey sips the cocoa but it's too hot.

He sets it down to cool, warming his hands on the cup. His eyes close once more.

INT. JEFFREY'S DUGOUT -- LATER

JEFFREY

OWWWW!

He wakes, leaping out of the chair. The hot cocoa is all over his uniform.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

Bloody hell!

He gets up and makes sure no one saw that.

He goes to the stove and stokes the fire, putting another cup of water on top.

He sits down in the chair again, mopping up the cocoa on his uniform with a rag.

INT. JEFFREY'S DUGOUT -- LATER

JEFFREY

Jumps awake again. THE DUGOUT IS ON FIRE! The stove has grown out of control.

Jeffrey bolts up the steps and comes back with a pail of water, dousing the flames.

Amid the smoke, he looks longingly at his empty cup.

JEFFREY

To Hells with it!

INT. JEFFREY'S DUGOUT -- LATER

He senses someone else in the room. His eyes dart open.

JEFFREY'S POV

GENERAL STUART-BAILEY, 59, sits in the corner, silently smoking a pipe. He sits cross-legged, leaning back...a big, playful bull. A silver mustache creeps down his cheeks.

JEFFREY

Jumps to attention and salutes. The General smiles and waves him down.

JEFFREY

Apologies, sir, I wasn't aware of your visit.

STUART-BAILEY

Sometimes I find it better to travel unannounced, Cedric. All the fuss really wears on my nerves.

Jeffrey stands at ease, trying to shake off the sleep.

JEFFREY

Bit of a tough night, sir.

STUART-BAILEY

So I hear. The raiding party?

JEFFREY

They're lying down in No-Man's Land, sir, and most will never stand again.

The General offers a steadying hand on Jeffrey's shoulder.

STUART-BAILEY

Heroes, every one.

JEFFREY

I suppose we're all heroes in death, sir.

STUART-BAILEY

Prisoners?

JEFFREY

Four last night. They're with the interrogators now.

STUART-BAILEY

Good. With luck they'll complete our map of the German reserve trenches. Casualties?

JEFFREY

Eight dead, twelve wounded. Three severely.

Stuart Bailey slumps, as though punched in the gut by an invisible fist.

STUART-BAILEY

God damn this.

Jeffrey hardens.

JEFFREY

We're ready to go at it again.

STUART-BAILEY

(softly)

Don't be too eager for the hero's grave, Cedric. There's a streak of arrogance in you I've seen in too many fallen men. Truly great men never strive to be so.

(stern)

And you've nothing to prove. General Edmunds has told me himself.

Jeffrey stares at him.

JEFFREY

Its not the General I'm worried about, sir. The lads have doubts about me.

STUART-BAILEY

You need to handle those doubts, then.

JEFFREY

I can't help who my father was, sir.

STUART-BAILEY

That will dissipate on its own, Cedric, with the proper leadership. When you doubt yourself...that's when you should be concerned.

Stuart-Bailey is distant for only a second, then hardens.

STUART-BAILEY (CONT'D)

And how are the lads faring?

JEFFREY

Storm ripe, sir, but piss and vinegar.

STUART-BAILEY

That's good. I think the worst is yet to come. General Dorrien has insisted the Germans won't be allowed to hold Passchendaele.

Jeffrey slumps, and Stuart-Bailey notices.

STUART-BAILEY (CONT'D)

Yes, I know. Courage runs free among the men, but has dried up elsewhere. Perhaps in myself as well.

The General trails off, forlorn. He's too quiet.

JEFFREY
Are you ailing, sir?

Stuart-Bailey stares at his own feet a long moment.

STUART-BAILEY
This war can change a man, Cedric.
Sometimes my head hurts, and I can't
think.

There is a long silence. Jeffrey shuffles awkwardly.

Stuart-Bailey beckons Jeffrey up the stairs with him.

STUART-BAILEY (CONT'D)
Walk with me, Cedric.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- MOMENTS LATER

The pair step out into the morning mist. Men mill about in their duties, crouching low to avoid exposing themselves above the trench parapet.

The General stands tall, a head taller than the rest. He doesn't crouch, and his head pokes above the trench.

STUART-BAILEY
Blasted weather! Tailor made for
trench foot. Are your men using
whale-oil on their feet?

JEFFREY
Yes, sir.

STUART-BAILEY
And you, Lieutenant, how are you
holding up? I want the truth.

JEFFREY
I'm not 'arf, sir. The men-

STUART-BAILEY
But you've been on the line for thirty-
nine days. You're not weary?

JEFFREY
We all are, sir, but that's a matter
of discipline.

STUART-BAILEY
And what of your doctor?

JEFFREY
(darkens)
He was in a bad way, sir.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

A GERMAN SENTRY hugs the trench parapet facing the English trench. A SPYGLASS in his hand.

SENTRY
I don't believe it!

He slides down the trench wall, kicking the men around him.

SENTRY (CONT'D)
Get up here! There's an English
General bopping around the line!

The men stir quickly, grabbing their rifles.

WINTERSTEIGER

Huddled in a revetment, springs up.

He climbs the fire step and leans into his rifle.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Stuart-Bailey and Jeffrey walk down the trenchline. Soldiers snap to and salute as they pass. Jeffrey crouches but the General does not.

JEFFREY
You should get down, sir, the Germans
are very good shots.

STUART-BAILEY
(ignoring)
Your Doctor is the American, correct?

JEFFREY
Yes, sir. Captain Noel Hobson.

STUART-BAILEY
Good man?

JEFFREY
Every man in the company owes his
life to him, twice over. I didn't
know you were aware of him.

STUART-BAILEY
An American who wins the Victoria
Cross is a rarity. But now he claims
shell-shock?

JEFFREY
In part, sir, but there was more.

STUART-BAILEY
Such as?

JEFFREY

Sir, he believed that...and I stress that Dr. Hobson's record has been stunning up to this point...he believed sir that, well...

STUART-BAILEY

He thinks that everyone he comes in contact with will die. Is that right?

JEFFREY

Sir?

STUART-BAILEY

I saw him at the Casualty clearing station. A wreck of a man.

JEFFREY

I think a squeezed lemon has no value, sir. He's been in the trenches longer than any of us, and perhaps he has been wrung dry.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Wintersteiger looks through the reticle on his rifle. Around him, other GERMAN SOLDIERS take positions to fire.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

Through the reticle, across a foggy No-Man's Land. Stuart-Bailey's head bops just above the trench.

He fingers the trigger.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

STUART-BAILEY

A good officer cares for his men. We'll see about helping the American. Any man who wins the V.C. deserves that.

JEFFREY

Agreed, sir.

STUART-BAILEY

And a good officer cares for his own needs. Without him, the unit will founder. Am I clear?

JEFFREY

Absolutely clear, sir.

STUART-BAILEY

I believe your father would haunt me to my own grave if you fell.

Stuart-Bailey suddenly looks into No-Man's Land and springs onto the Parapet.

STUART-BAILEY (CONT'D)

You there, sentry! Do you not see that man over there?

An ENGLISH SENTRY, obviously on the verge of exhaustion, flinches at the General's voice. He stammers in confusion and looks where the General points.

A lone GERMAN SOLDIER carrying two pails of water walks clumsily beyond the German trench, barely visible.

STUART-BAILEY (CONT'D)

If you were any more useless I'd swear you were a Frenchman! Toss me your rifle!

The sentry tosses his rifle to the General, who snatches it out of the air and cocks it in one smooth motion.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

Through his reticle, Stuart-Bailey is in plain sight.

A rifle SHOT rings out beside him, startling him. The other Germans take pot-shots at this juicy target.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Stuart-Bailey takes aim, oblivious to the BULLETS now whizzing by him at an ever increasing rate.

Jeffrey leaps up from the water-logged trench toward the General, exposing himself.

JEFFREY

General, sir! You must take cover!

Stuart-Bailey ignores him. He squeezes off a round.

STUART-BAILEY

Blast, Cedric, you made me miss him!
Can't I have a moment of peace?

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Wintersteiger nods in disgust as he watches the other Germans shoot. Amateurs.

He peers through the reticle once more, finger on the trigger.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

The crosshairs on Stuart-Bailey's temple. Jeffrey leaps into sight, pulling at the General's shirt.

Wintersteiger eyes Jeffrey a moment, then targets Stuart-Bailey once more.

The reticle begins to shake. He FIRES.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

A BULLET whizzes by Jeffrey's ear.

JEFFREY

General!

Stuart-Bailey fires again.

STUART-BAILEY

Damn! How long has it been since I fired one of these?

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

WINTERSTEIGER'S HAND

Quakes violently. He can't stop it.

He grips the rifle tightly, shaking. He eyes the reticle.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

The reticle jumps about wildly. He FIRES again and again. The rounds go off target harmlessly.

He can't bring the crosshairs back onto target.

WINTERSTEIGER'S FACE

Grows red with rage. Both hands shake. The rifle leaps out of his hands, into the mud.

He collapses, hands buzzing.

The other Germans watch him, amazed.

GERMAN SOLDIER

Sergeant! What the Hell's the matter with you?

A scowl from Wintersteiger shuts them all up. He crawls across the trench, underneath the parados.

His hands clasp tight together, yet they still shake.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Stuart-Bailey fires again. Squinting, a smile breaks across his face.

STUART-BAILEY

Got him!

(turns to Jeffrey)

No thanks to you, I'd say.

He climbs back down into the trench. The FIRING eventually dies off. He hands the sentry back his rifle.

STUART-BAILEY (CONT'D)

Get yourself a strong cup of tea,

Private. That one almost got away.

The General goes off back down the trench line. The English soldiers stare after him, speechless.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- LATER

Wintersteiger sits against the parapets and stares ahead blankly.

German soldiers mill around him, but careful to keep their distance. A GERMAN LIEUTENANT, STUHLMULLER, 27, stops in front of him.

STUHLMULLER

Sergeant, care to explain yourself?

Stuhlmuller, though Wintersteiger's superior, is clearly intimidated by him.

They stare at each other in silence for a long moment.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)

The hell with you.

Stuhlmuller walks away. Wintersteiger is oblivious.

His hands lay at his sides, flat against the ground. He raises one up.

Where his hand was, emerald-green GRASS has sprung up from the mud.

INT. CASUALTY CLEARING STATION (CCS) -- DAY

The CCS is set up in an old, pulverized church. Rickety, mildewed bunks line the walls under dim orange lanterns, and the air is thick with pain and the stench of ether.

Exhausted NURSES mill about the beds, tending to wounded and dying SOLDIERS who moan monotonously.

SHADOW-SILHOUETTES

Of surgeons dance across a wall of sheets at one end, they operate on men who SCREAM in agony and beg for mercy.

From behind the curtain, a RASPING as silver saws grate through bone.

NOEL HOBSON

Lies among this misery on a threadbare mattress.

His eyes are deep set, darkened by gray-blue circles around the sockets. He's strapped down tight by the arms and legs.

He watches a YOUNG NURSE with auburn hair sitting on a bed nearby. She holds the hand of a SOLDIER, speaks to him in a sweet whisper.

YOUNG NURSE

(softly)

So shut your eyes while mother sings
of the wonderful sights that be,
And you shall see the beautiful things
as you rock in the misty sea...

The soldier is covered in welts. His eyes are glued shut by a sticky secretion, and his breath is raspy and fluid-filled.

An ATTENDANT emerges from the sheet curtain holding a basket of HUMAN LIMBS. He hurries through.

Two beds down, a DOCTOR with salt-and-pepper hair wraps a SIKH SOLDIER's head with a bandage.

Hobson looks on, then looks at his own hands, now bandaged once again. He watches the Doctor's hands.

A voice cracks his delirium.

VOICE

What happened to you?

Across from him sits a YOUNG WOMAN. She is filthy, hair matted, slick with sweat. She has a bloody bandage wrapped around her head.

HOBSON

You talking to me?

YOUNG WOMAN

Who else would I be talking to?
Everyone else here is too busy praying
to God or crying themselves to sleep.

Hobson looks around sadly.

HOBSON

They've earned the privilege.

YOUNG WOMAN

How'd you get hurt? Were you burnt?
Pick up a Potato-masher like a damned
fool?

HOBSON

I'm not a soldier. I was a Doctor.

YOUNG WOMAN

A doctor? Strapped down like that?

Hobson rolls onto his side.

HOBSON

I WAS a doctor.

The woman sits on the edge of his bed, regards him.

YOUNG WOMAN

Too bad. Looks like they could use
some help here.

She sits, eyeing Hobson

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

Yep, I heard about you. Crazy as a
loon, they say.

HOBSON

That's what they say.

YOUNG WOMAN

And always under a dark cloud.

The DOCTOR walks up to Hobson's bed, takes no notice of the
Young Woman.

DOCTOR

If I could trust you, Captain Hobson,
would you help us here?

HOBSON

What is it?

DOCTOR

There's going to be an attack
tomorrow. A large one, and we're
going to be getting a lot of
casualties.

HOBSON

Attacking where?

DOCTOR

Two divisions are going to Sanctuary Wood before dawn. We'll get at least a regiment of wounded in return.

HOBSON

Sanctuary Wood? I have to get there. Let me up.

DOCTOR

But, do you still believe that...your hands?

He leans toward Hobson, who jerks furiously against the straps trying to stay away from him.

HOBSON

Christ! Stay away, you idiot!

The Doctor deflates, shakes his head sadly.

DOCTOR

Then I can't let you up. I'm sorry.

He shuffles away.

HOBSON

Let me up! I have to go! Listen, you fucking bastard!

YOUNG WOMAN

(laughing)

He seems a little thick to be a doctor.

HOBSON

Undo these straps.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh, I don't know. They're probably on for a good reason.

Hobson chuckles, shakes his head. The woman leans back, looks as though she's in deep thought.

HOBSON

Let me up, Lady. I have to go.

YOUNG WOMAN

(suddenly serious)

Why? What're you're running from, DOCTOR? What are you so scared of?

Hobson is suddenly interested in her.

HOBSON

I'm not scared.

YOUNG WOMAN

Really? The only man in Europe who isn't?

(scowls)

You can't lie to me, not like them. I know you, Hobson.

HOBSON

You know me?

YOUNG WOMAN

I know what you are. I know what you see.

HOBSON

I've seen things that aren't possible.

ANNA

And you'll see more.

Hobson snaps back to alertness.

HOBSON

Let me up.

The woman looks up to the ceiling, ears perking up at distant RUMBLING artillery.

YOUNG WOMAN

It gets closer all the time.

HOBSON

I'll use a weapon if I have to.

YOUNG WOMAN

But you're a doctor.

She walks over to the bed.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

I'll do this for you, but it's not a favor.

(reaches toward him)

Just don't move. I know what you're capable of.

She undoes the straps. Hobson lies rigid.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

How could God could allow this?

HOBSON

(stands up)

Maybe it was God has cursed me.

YOUNG WOMAN

(lies down)

Then you should go ask him why.

Hobson stumbles out of the CCS.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- DAY

A HUGE RAT

Perches triumphantly on a piece of BREAD. More rats scramble around it, trying to get a bite.

A young red-headed English private, SAPPER BOWLES, 18, freckle-faced, crouches in a cubby hole in the side of the trench a few meters away.

BOWLES (V.O.)

Dere's another war ragin', Elberta.

A war 'gainst da rats.

He brings up his rifle and SHOOTs. The Huge Rat is blown away and the others scattering, disappearing instantly.

BOWLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We bait 'em wit food, den ambush 'em just like the Germans.

He gets up and stretches his legs.

BOWLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

'Tween the rats and da mud, tis place is a bloody 'hit 'ole. I tell ya, Elberta, I ne'er saw such a thing as da mud here. It's nawt solid like ya think.

He trudges over to the fire-step and looks over the trench parapet into No-Man's Land.

BOWLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It's liquid, like a thick, stinky broth. I 'ere of men drownin' in it sometimes. I can't think of a worse way ta go, drownin' in that stinkin' mud.

He takes a seat in the filth.

A few meters down, Shankland meticulously cleans his rifle.

BOWLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But I don't mean ta complain, dear 'sis. 'Tis a good way ta spend da fall. Here wit me mates, we're goin' ta give it to da Hun real nasty.

THUNDER rumbles in the distance, slowly growing louder.

Bowles looks up at the sky, hand on his helmet.

BOWLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Where else should I be when all da
boys is here in da trenches?

The ground QUAKES as the shelling increases.

Next to Shankland, a large piece of trench wall jars loose, exposing the outstretched white ARM of a DEAD SOLDIER.

THE FIST

Of the arm is right in Shankland's face, cursing him.

He lights up his pipe and takes his KNAPSACK from the ground beside him and hangs it on the arm, curling the dead fingers so it holds the shoulder strap.

SHANKLAND
(smiles)
'Ere now, I gots a place ta hang me
'quipment!
(kicks at a rat)
Bloody filthy rats!

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

The SHELLING is louder here. Soldiers squeeze against the trench walls trying to protect themselves.

Private GEFREITER, 19, painfully thin with sharp cheekbones, flattens himself into a hole cut into the trench. He holds a small JOURNAL and a pencil.

He is recognizable as the soldier Stuart-Bailey was shooting at earlier.

He writes, hand shaking violently.

GEFREITER (V.O.)
The shelling is getting worse. I
can't bear it. I can't describe
it...like air full of agonized
passion, pressing against your ears,
penetrating into your bones.

His hand shakes, and he grabs it to keep it still.

GEFREITER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
All I can do is write to calm myself,
to keep connected with other places.

The shelling dies down, growing faint. Gefreiter almost instantly calms.

GEFREITER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The English bombard us constantly,
and as bad as that is, I wait for
one of those shells to come filled
with gas, and that horrible cloud
will come and take the breath from
our bodies.

He reaches down and touches his GAS MASK, lying in the trench
next to him, in reassurance.

GEFREITER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I think the English will attack soon.

The German soldiers emerge from hiding, milling about the
trench. Gefreiter emerges as well.

GEFREITER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I'm scared all the time, from dawn
to dusk and through the night, and I
hate myself for it. Everyone else
here seems insulated against it.
Why aren't I? Am I the one coward
here among these thousands? Or do I
sleep and eat with regiments of liars?

A SOLDIER nearby suddenly stands and BANGS on a shell casing
hanging from the parapet of the trench.

GERMAN SOLDIER

GAS! GAS! GAS! GAS!

All the soldiers scramble for their masks, putting them on
in a flash. Gefreiter looks around frantically for his.

He can't find it, and panics. The other soldiers don their
masks except for a lanky BLOND SOLDIER.

The Blond soldier falls on the ground, clutching at his
throat, choking.

BLOND SOLDIER

Help me! Can't breathe! GAAKK!

He writhes on the ground, eyes rolling into his head. The
others gather around him.

GEFREITER'S

Eyes become saucers, terrified to breathe in.

He dances about, not knowing what to do, insane with fear.

GEFREITER

I can't find my mask! Help me!
Where is it? It's gone!

He's pale, quaking in his boots. The masked soldiers glance at him, and LAUGH.

They all LAUGH. The Blond Soldier laughs, rolling in the mud. The others fall down, completely losing it.

Gefreiter slowly realizes the joke. He still has to calm himself down. He goes back to his hole and sits as before.

The LAUGHTER abruptly stops. Gefreiter looks up.

Wintersteiger stands among the soldiers, staring daggers at the Blond Soldier. The boy shrinks before him.

Wintersteiger harshly grabs Gefreiter's mask from the soldier and tosses it to Gefreiter.

He stands for a long moment, the soldiers frozen, and stalks off.

Gefreiter takes out a piece of PAPER and his pencil.

GEFREITER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Dear Father, all is well at the front. I'm getting along great with the others and I'm feeling fine. It's really not as bad here as the papers say, so don't worry about me. I hope you are well. With Love,
your son Helmut.

A LARGE RAT scurries up to him and peers at him curiously.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Bowles finishes writing his letter.

BOWLES (V.O.)

I hear we're going over da top tomorrow morning, Elberta. Da Germans don't have a prayer!

HOBSON

Weary-eyed and covered in mud, comes trudging down the trench past Bowles.

BOWLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I'll write again when I have a chance. There's a lot of hard work ta do here, though, if we're ta win this. Your Brother in da mud, Sapper.

HOBSON

Walks down the trench, exhausted. A few soldiers rise to greet him, but he ignores them.

He turns down a set of stairs leading to a deep DUGOUT.

INT. JEFFREY'S DUGOUT -- MOMENTS LATER

Jeffrey studies a series of maps on a rickety table under a dim lantern. He sweats heavily.

Hobson comes down the stairs, and Jeffrey glances up at him.

Artillery THUDS overhead.

JEFFREY

Noel! What the hell are you doing here?

HOBSON

Came by to say hi, friend.

Hobson sits down on a chair and rests his hands on his knees. Several large RATS huddle in the corner.

JEFFREY

God, you look like you've been dragged though a hedge backwards.

HOBSON

You're moving out in the morning?

JEFFREY

Yes, there's to be an attack tomorrow.

HOBSON

At Sanctuary Wood?

JEFFREY

That's right.

HOBSON

Then I'm in the right place.

Jeffrey holds a canteen out to Hobson, who flinches back.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

Thanks.

He gingerly takes it in his cloth wrapped hands.

JEFFREY

They released you from the aid station?

HOBSON

I released myself. Staying there was pointless.

JEFFREY

You really didn't need to return,
but I am glad to see you.

HOBSON

(smiles)

God, I hate when you Brits get all
emotional. I'm not staying long,
though, I'm on my way to Poperinge.

JEFFREY

Poperinge? Why?

HOBSON

I need to ask someone a question.

Jeffrey nods, not wanting to get into it. He stares at
Hobson's hands.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

You don't believe me. Guess you
never did.

JEFFREY

It's not that...I just think it's
bad form for an officer to bugger
around like he's daft in the head.
The men see it. It would be better
if you staying in the hospital.

HOBSON

Fuck your Goddamn English manners.
Should I just run around the war
trying to get my head blown off like
you?

Jeffrey is stung by the remark. He bristles.

JEFFREY

At this point, I'm afraid, you're
just a liability.

(kneels down)

I could get you a discharge, Noel.
Honorable, of course. Everyone knows
you've done more than your share
here. You can go back to the states
and rest, recuperate. You know, the
lot.

HOBSON

(angry)

Go back to what?

He spies the rats in the corner and walks toward them. They
rear up angrily at his approach.

HOBSON (CONT'D)
 Going home won't help this.

HOBSON'S POV

He unwraps one of his hands and grabs the biggest RAT, whirling around to face Jeffrey.

The rat writhes furiously in his grasp for only a second.

The creature emits a ear-splitting SQUEAL, it's body wracked by spasms.

The body shrivels and tightens. The fur blackens and the eyes sink into it's skull. The body curls inward and grows still. He drops it.

HOBSON (CONT'D)
 Won't help that.

JEFFREY

Stares at the dead rat, disgusted.

JEFFREY
 Noel, what the hell are you doing here?

HOBSON
 Goddammit. I feel like hell.

Jeffrey's scowl softens.

JEFFREY
 What can I do?

HOBSON
 How about a place to sleep tonight?

JEFFREY
 Take my cot.

Hobson curls up on the floor. The other rats keep their distance from him. His eyes become heavy and he drifts to sleep. Jeffrey looks on, eyes piercing him.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)
 More's the pity, my friend.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- EVENING

The sky grows dark. Jeffrey emerges from the dugout stairway to get a breath of fresh air.

Most of the soldiers in the trench are asleep. Every few meters, a SENTRY peers studiously over the parapet into

NO MAN'S LAND

LOUD BUZZING comes a great swarm of FLIES in No-Man's Land, floating from corpse to corpse.

A VEREY LIGHT shoots up from the trench to his right, scouts looking for interlopers in the morass.

EXT. GERMAN LINE -- CONTINUOUS

WINTERSTEIGER

Looks up as the Verrey light washes across the trench. His eyes stare into the light.

INT. LEONRODSTRASSE MILITARY PRISON, BAVARIA, GERMANY
(1897) -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

A BRIGHT LANTERN

Shines down into a dank cell. Wintersteiger lies in a heap on the floor, his clothes filthy.

Two men are in the cell, large CLUBS in their hands.

Wintersteiger's body is broken, his face mottled with bruises and gashes.

GUARD

Hold him up. I want to see his face.

Wintersteiger is lifted, his head pulled back by his hair.

GUARD (CONT'D)

Happy tenth anniversary, Ernst.
Where have all the years gone?

He SLAMS his club into Wintersteiger's stomach. Wintersteiger vomits all over the floor.

GUARD (CONT'D)

I never get tired of that.

Wintersteiger looks up at a large man, mouth open, pleading.

The man looks down in disdain, raises his club.

CRACK!

BACK TO SCENE

Some GERMAN SOLDIERS, distracted by the light, play a small game of skat nearby.

GERMAN SOLDIER

Join us, Sergeant?

Wintersteiger snaps to reality, looks at them for a moment, then rolls over on his side.

GERMAN SOLDIER (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Just as well.

(scowls at him)

When's that eight pounder going to come and rid us of that bastard?

Gefreiter walks carefully down the trench and sits beside Wintersteiger. The soldiers stare.

GEFREITER

Sorry to bother you, Sergeant. Just got some chocolates from home.

Thought you might want one.

He holds a small box out to Wintersteiger.

Wintersteiger ignores him for a long moment, then glances at the small box.

The chocolates are wrapped in bright tin foil with tiny red bows. They glint brightly in the glare of the Verey light.

He takes one, unwraps it with a filthy hand and timidly bites it.

Gefreiter watches, eyes wide.

Wintersteiger smiles, nods almost imperceptibly.

Gefreiter smiles widely and gobbles one down for himself.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- MORNING

VEREY LIGHTS

Float across the irritated land.

A drenching rain pours down.

ENGLISH SOLDIERS

Charge across the mud, HOWLING like demons. In the distance, WHISTLE BLASTS echo repeatedly.

Far to the rear, English 12-inch SIEGE HOWITZERS throw monstrous shells at the German line. A Dull, booming DRUMMING reverberates from the front..

NO-MAN'S LAND

Is saturated. An endless series of craters and churned mud coagulating at all angles.

The English soldiers trudge forward, slowing as the mud becomes liquefied.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

JEFFREY

Watches through a spyglass, his men poised beneath the parapet, anxious.

SHANKLAND

Munches solemnly on a stale biscuit, water dripping down his beard. He winks at Johnston squatting beside him.

SHANKLAND

Nawt really the weather for killin' people.

JEFFREY

Wipes his eyes and peers through the spyglass.

JEFFREY'S POV

The Englishmen charge doggedly across the blasted landscape toward the German lines.

The figures head toward a conflagration of crawling fire.

The ground beneath them becomes more and more liquid. The mud more like molasses than anything remotely solid.

They slow, stumbling, their formation crumbles apart.

Verey lights arc from both sides, the highlighted figures massing and swirling in No-Man's Land while German artillery begins to fall among them.

English soldiers begin to fall into the muck.

JOHNSTON

Peers over the parapet at the attacking soldiers, seeing the maelstrom into which he's headed.

JOHNSTON (V.O.)

I try to compose myself in the face of death. It's so easy to say...but my God, it's hard to do.

(he wipes his face)

It's just before the attack, and I'm alive. I'm myself. My blood circulates. My skin is intact. I see with my eyes. I have all my limbs. I don't bleed.

(MORE)

JOHNSTON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(pauses)

But a few moments from now, I'll probably die.

He glances around at the other soldiers.

JOHNSTON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

God, if I could go to sleep thinking that it's all finished! That I'll wake up afterwards, and it'll be over, and I will live.

JEFFREY

Can see the attack crumbling.

He looks up and down the line. Hundreds more men prepared to go to the slaughter. Shankland elbows him.

SHANKLAND

How're the lads makin' it, sir?

JEFFREY

I think they're marching straight to Valhalla.

SHANKLAND

Den it's up to us, eh? We'll follow you, sir.

Jeffrey looks at the sky.

JEFFREY

Appears so, Sergeant.

A distant TAC-TAC-TAC. Jeffrey looks through his glass.

JEFFREY'S POV

A scene from Hades. Amid the torrential rain, strewn corpses hang tangled amid chaotic barbed wire.

German ARTILLERY falls among them. The mud is too deep...it sucks at the poor soul's legs and traps them.

Machine guns strafe the lines, men die by the score.

JEFFREY

Drops the glass, unable to look anymore.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

Damn, the party's passing us by.

Shankland glances sideways at him.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

Let's make our grand entrance.

He bolts out of the trench. Shankland watches in surprise.

A figure to his right bolts up and out of the trench.

He glances at the disappearing man. It's BOWLES.

SHANKLAND

Private! Wait for the signal!

Too late. Bowles has gone over by himself.

SHANKLAND (CONT'D)

Nawt witout me!

A WHISTLE-BLAST erupts down the trench. Down the line, men stand erect.

He stands, grabbing his rifle.

SHANKLAND (CONT'D)

(waves his arms)

C'mon, lads! For King, for God, for
Country!

He leaps over the parapet. The men follow with a great ROAR.

ENGLISH SOLDIERS

Pour out of the trenches.

JEFFREY

Is consumed with battle-frenzy. He holds his rifle aloft like a spear as he charges forward.

SHANKLAND

Close behind, stumbling over the mud.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

GEFRETIER peers over the parapet at the scene. The German trench is still pounded by artillery.

A MACHINE GUN near him RATTLES with action.

STUHLMULLER squats next to the machine-gunners.

STUHLMULLER

(shouts)

Fire until the barrel bursts!

GEFREITER'S POV

English dead everywhere. Khaki corpses lay almost end to end. Shells fall and they're blown skyward.

GEFRETIER

Watches in horror.

GEFREITER

Please stop coming. Please.

Through the rain and smoke, he sees yet another line of khaki-uniformed men advancing over the dead.

A LONE ENGLISH SOLDIER

Hit in the chest by machine gun fire, struggles to his knees and tosses a MILLS BOMB as the last act of his life.

The magnificent toss lands in the trench directly behind Gefreiter.

He stares at it, frozen.

STUHMULLER

Jumps into view, throwing the CORPSE of a dead German soldier onto the bomb and pulling Gefreiter away.

The bomb explodes, the blast muffled by the dead man.

STUHMULLER

Blasted idiot! Wake up before you get someone killed!

WINTERSTEIGER

Stands erect in the water-logged trench, the only man not huddling down for protection from shell fire.

An artillery shell EXPLODES directly in the trench.

He holds his rifle tightly to his chest, eyes fixed toward the parapet.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

HOBSON

Climbs out of the dugout into the almost deserted trench.

He climbs the parapet and looks over the top.

HOBSON

Oh God, it can't be far off, now.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

JEFFREY

Runs across the muck, slowing as the ground gives way to porridge mud.

Shells burst around him. He turns to the men behind him.

JEFFREY

Down! Down! Into the mud!

The English soldiers dive in unison to the ground. Shells continue to burst. Jeffrey drives his head into the slime.

A LARGE BLAST rings his ears. He shakes his head and gets up, covered thick in muck.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

Onward, boys! Come on!

He looks back. Most of the men on the ground do not get up.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

Get up! Move or we're all dead!

Shankland appears beside him.

SHANKLAND

They're dead already, sir! We 'ave ta go back!

Jeffrey tears from him, slogging doggedly forward.

JEFFREY

Then you were never an Englishman!

Shells fall to his front. He hears the WHISTLE of the incoming shell and hits the deck, but there's no blast.

A few English soldiers, the survivors, have gotten up and follow Jeffrey forward.

Jeffrey pulls his head from the mud. He smiles.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

But I am an Englishman.

He squints his eyes, and his smile quickly fades.

A faint YELLOWISH MIST is enveloping him.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

GAS! GAS! GAS!

He fumbles for his mask, already choking. The others instantly stop and go for theirs.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

WINTERSTEIGER

Watches the attacking English.

The machine guns have stopped, maybe out of compassion.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

The writhing English amid clouds of gas. A chorus of agony.

He looks on intently. Sad.

Stuhlmuller appears beside him.

STUHLMULLER

Once again, Sergeant, I can't help
but notice you don't fight.

(grabs him)

What's gotten into you?

Wintersteiger's body droops. He lets his rifle fall into
the muck. Stuhlmuller only gets more angry.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)

You were only good for one thing,
Sergeant. Put them in the goddamn
crosshairs and fire. And now you're
not even good for that.

Wintersteiger scowls. The two glare at each other.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)

What are you thinking of doing?

He throws down his rifle and takes off his helmet.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)

I don't care how many you've killed,
even before the war. Your past means
as much to me as a pile of shit.

(pulls in close)

If it were up to me, you'd still be
rotting in prison. I'd just as soon
see you in front of that Maxim as
behind it.

He SLAPS Wintersteiger hard across the face. He waits for a
reaction, but Wintersteiger just slumps further.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)

Just remember that you're amnesty
applies only so long as I find you
useful to the Kaiser's army. When
that usefulness ends, you'll go back
to Leonrodstrasse, I promise you.

Wintersteiger explodes, slugging Stuhlmuller across the jaw and sending him sprawling.

The other German soldiers pounce on Wintersteiger, who fights them in a frenzy, lashing out with his fists.

WINTERSTEIGER

Fuming, a gasping, a pumping ball of muscle. He struggles.

They subdue him.

STUHLMULLER

Rubs his aching jaw, stands and punches him hard in the stomach.

Wintersteiger cries.

Sobbing softly at first, then BAWLING loudly.

They're all shocked. Stuhlmuller hesitates.

The German soldiers release Wintersteiger, who brings his hands to his face, crying.

Stuhlmuller, disgusted, puts his helmet on and walks off without a word.

WINTERSTEIGER

Gets up and looks out into No-Man's Land once more. Watches the men dying. And sobs even louder.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

JEFFREY

Gasps and chokes, spitting out mud and gas. His mask is caked in mud.

He sinks into the mud, coughing spasmodically.

A HAND

Grabs him and pulls him up. A GAS MASK is forced over his face.

Through watery eyes, Jeffrey sees

JOHNSTON

In his mask, smiling. He drags Jeffrey back toward the English line.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Soldiers pour over the parapet and down into the trench.
Hobson watches as the wounded pile up.

Everywhere are bleeding, burned, slashed men crying for help.
Hobson dances about with his bandaged hands.

So many wounded...that he can't help. He barks orders to
anyone who will listen, trying to organize a triage of the
wounded.

Shankland comes over the parapet, crashing down into the
slurry at the trench bottom.

HOBSON

Where's the Lieutenant?

Shankland tears off his mask, coughing violently.

SHANKLAND

I din know, sir. He 'ept goin' when
the gas came.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

JOHNSTON pulls Jeffrey through the mud. Jeffrey, with the
mask on, struggles to regain his breath.

A RUMBLE, the ground shakes.

SHELLS fall again, exploding across the mud.

Johnston hurries onward, dragging the lieutenant.

BOWLES

Appears, darting among the ruins like a pixie. He jumps
from crater to crater with astounding agility.

The shells fall all around him, yet he shows no hesitation.

He finds a WOUNDED CORPORAL, crying out with a large gash
across his belly. Bowles whips out a field dressing and
bandages the man crudely.

JOHNSTON

Is thrown from his feet by a shell burst.

Jeffrey lies ten feet away. Half covered in slime, he doesn't
move. Blood covers most of his body.

Johnston adjusts his mask. He pauses for only a second and
keeps going toward the trench. A shell lands very near,
shredding two corpses and sending body parts flying.

BOWLES

Pulls the wounded man toward the trench, as

JOHNSTON

Goes past him toward another wounded man.

A shell hits between them. Johnston is sent flying into a large water-filled crater.

He disappears into the rancid water and re-emerges gasping for breath.

A FACELESS CORPSE bobs in the water next to him. He screams.

The mud sucks at him even as more shells rain down. He's being pulled underneath the water.

Now he's scared. More than scared. Panic.

He thrashes about, but the mud and water are like quicksand. The corpse bobs near him like a tormentor.

His face sinks beneath the water, arms thrashing helplessly.

BOWLES

Reaches in and grabs him, pulling him out. Johnston is drained white, shaking.

The shells burst all around. Bowles roughly shoves Johnston toward the English trench.

BOWLES

Go on! Get back!

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Hobson floats among the wounded, giving instructions to those able to move.

JOHNSTON

Crawls over the parapet and crashes into the trench. He looks around and goes straight into the dugout.

Shankland sees him and tries to follow.

He looks up and sees a TRAIL OF SPARKS in the sky above.

SHANKLAND

Incomin'! Get down!

The battered men flatten themselves as a TREMENDOUS EXPLOSION rocks the trench.

SHANKLAND (CONT'D)
Mortars! Moanin' Minnies!

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

Bowles leaps into a deep crater. A trembling young SOLDIER is there.

Bowles grabs him by the shoulder. The soldier looks wildly around, scared to death.

BOWLES
You dere! You're in a nasty place.
What ya say we move on?

He shakes the boy, who snaps into reality.

BOWLES (CONT'D)
Jus' do what I do. Understand?

The boy nods blankly.

BOWLES (CONT'D)
No shittin' me. Do what I do! Ready?

Bowles nods to him and leaps from the crater. The boy follows.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

The mortar explosions have ceased. Shankland gets up wearily, looking for Johnston.

SHANKLAND
The dugout's hit!

He goes to where the dugout stairs were. They've collapsed, now just a wall of mud.

He grabs an entrenching tool and digs. Others join in.

SHANKLAND (CONT'D)
Johnston's down 'ere. Hang on, boy.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

BOWLES

And the young Soldier bounce across the waves of mud.

A near-miss churns the mud before Bowles, spraying the remains of a long-rotting CORPSE into his face.

He gags and throws it off, glancing behind him for the boy. The boy lies across a tangle of BARBED-WIRE, his legs torn to ribbons.

Bowles rushes to him and works the wire with a small pair of CUTTERS.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

SHANKLAND

Digs furiously. A muffled SCREAMING is heard from the demolished dugout.

He pulls a large piece of clay away to reveal a PAIR OF BOOTS sticking out of the mud.

Shankland gives a mighty heave and pulls Johnston from the mud, gasping desperately for breath.

Mud flows from his ears, his mouth, his nose. He thrashes about in panic.

Water comes and pours the mud away.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

BOWLES

Hobbles along, carrying the young Soldier in a fireman-carry.

TAC-TAC-TAC

The German machine guns come to life once again.

A round slices through Bowles' calf, spraying blood.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

JOHNSTON

Curled up into a ball, shakes furiously and holds his head.

Another BOMBARDMENT starts. Shells fall around the trench, spewing thick mud geysers.

Johnston screams and tries to get up and run. Shankland leaps on top of him, keeping him down with his own bulk.

A BODY tumbles over the parapet

It's the young Soldier, alive but mangled. Bowles falls over beside him.

Hobson looks over, seeing the wounded men.

YOUNG SOLDIER

(to Bowles)

I did everything you did.

BOWLES

Really? Did ya shit yer'self in dat
last hole?

Hobson comes over, trying to look at the young soldier's
legs.

HOBSON

Use your field dressing, Private.
I'll tell you what to do.

The boy nods. Bowles appears smiling beside them, holding
his leg and looking pale.

BOWLES

(smiles)

Dat's a blighty one, that is! We're
both in for some leave, I'd say.

A MORTAR SHELL hits the parapet, rocking the ground violently.

The ground heaves. Bowles is thrown INTO HOBSON.

Hobson tries to scramble away. They come face to face.

Bowles' smile fades. His eyes glaze over.

Hobson looks down. Bowles has GRABBED HOBSON'S ARM to steady
himself.

HOBSON'S POV

As Bowles' hand turns gray. Bowles' whole body quivers
unnaturally.

He gurgles...looks into Hobson's face in confusion and shock.

His face drains to gray, frozen, and Bowles' corpse falls
into the rancid water of the trench like a stiff board.

HOBSON

Looks around, but no one else seems to have witnessed what's
happened. The young soldier is unconscious.

At once there's horror in his eyes, but it slowly fades to
another emotion. Pleasure.

He hastily climbs up the back of the trench and rolls over
the parados, disappearing.

SHANKLAND

Appears, magically unhurt.

SHANKLAND

(shouts)

Git the men ta th' reserve trenches!
We're fallin' back!

The soldiers scramble over the parados, retreating.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Gefreiter watches over the parapet as the English flood from their trench.

A great CHEER erupts down the German line.

Gefretier sits down and pukes.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

JEFFREY

Lies amid the wreckage. Bodies...and bits of bodies, are everywhere. Some no more than skeletons.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE REGIMENTAL AID POST - THAT NIGHT

The Aid Post is a series of cellars under bombed out houses, connected by hand-dug tunnels.

A makeshift hospital operates under lantern light.

HOBSON

Stands outside a crumbling villa. He's dressed head to toe in a long woolen overcoat and wears mittens over his hands. A thick scarf covers his face.

He watches as dozens of wounded, bleeding soldiers hobble into the shelter.

Far off, the RUMBLE of pounding artillery.

General Stuart-Bailey walks amongst the wounded, patting backs, trying to smile.

The General takes a place just in front of Hobson, trying to congratulate the men as they go by.

HOBSON

Are we winning this war, General?

Stuart-Bailey pauses, then turns toward him.

STUART-BAILEY

If we're winning, I'd hate to see the losers.

(eyes him)

You're American?

Hobson carefully uncovers his face.

HOBSON
Captain Noel Hobson.

STUART-BAILEY
Captain Hobson. Lieutenant Jeffrey
speaks very highly of you.

HOBSON
Sorry if I don't shake hands.

STUART-BAILEY
(nods)
This was a disaster.

Stuart looks at the walking wounded.

STUART-BAILEY (CONT'D)
We've sent so many to the furnace.
I fear I've become callous to it
all. The cold in Ypres has chilled
my humanity.
(peers at Hobson)
But then at some point...we all become
demons.

Hobson ponders this. Nods.

HOBSON
Or worse.

Hobson begins walking away.

STUART-BAILEY
At least for them, the hell of
Passchendaele is over.

Hobson stops.

HOBSON
Tell me, sir. When will this war
end?

Stuart-Bailey glares at him.

STUART-BAILEY
Personally, I see nothing to keep it
from going on forever.
(scowls)
Europe is mad. The whole world is
mad.

Hobson walks off. Stuart-Bailey, melancholy, watches him.

A HORSE gallops up beside the column of men. On the horse
is a regal man.

His uniform is spotless, a long curled moustache beneath a sharp nose.

GENERAL DORRIEN dismounts his horse. His boots are shined to mirrors. Stuart-Bailey finally sees him and bolts up straight, saluting smartly.

Dorrien returns it and stands with his hands folded behind his back. He exudes authority from every pore.

DORRIEN

The offensive is going well, General.
That's the news I hear from the front.

STUART-BAILEY

I'm afraid your sources are in error,
sir.

DORRIEN

Really?

STUART-BAILEY

Our attack has failed, sir, and with
heavy casualties. That is the bald
and unpleasant fact.

DORRIEN

(shocked)
Failed? English soldiers do not
fail.

STUART-BAILEY

The assault failed only because dead
men can advance no farther.

DORRIEN

Walk with me, General.

They turn their backs to the miserable men.

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

I fear your confidence is waning,
General. You see these wounded men
and feel regret. We all do, and
that's how it should be. My heart
weeps for each one of them.

(grabs his arm)

But one must always remember that
the individual here counts for
nothing. It is England, England,
England once and always. We make
sacrifice for her, no matter the
cost. We didn't bring this war, the
Hun did. But by God, we will end
it.

STUART-BAILEY

I know my duty, sir. But to send these men into the slaughter. They are not making a sacrifice...they are the sacrifice.

(shakes his head)

This can't be the way to peace.

DORRIEN

(grunts)

Peace will come...but a furious slaughter will precede it.

Dorrien stops to look around.

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

This land shall be renewed when it's over. Free of the Boche plague.

He inhales deeply.

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

Already the wind turns with us. The enemy is staggering, surely to buckle soon once and for all.

(turns to Stuart-Bailey)

Where is your headquarters?

STUART-BAILEY

Zillebeck, sir.

DORRIEN

Zillebeck? I passed that way in 1914 on my first tour. A charming little town.

STUART-BAILEY

(weakly)

Now it's ashes.

Dorrien starts for his horse, he has a terrible limp.

DORRIEN

I'll visit your headquarters tomorrow, General. One setback cannot deter us. We've still a long march to go.

He gallops off. Stuart-Bailey gazes around the scene, lost in his own head.

Across the milling soldiers and medics, he sees a CANVAS TENT rocking gently in the breeze.

He's drawn to it, trance-like.

It's set away from the bustle of men, the flaps closed tight.

A MEDIC stops him just before he reaches the tent.

MEDIC
 (saluting hastily)
 Begging your pardon, General, but
 you might not want to go in there.

Stuart-Bailey brushes him gently aside and goes to the tent.

INT. TENT -- MOMENTS LATER

STUART-BAILEY enters, and is riveted by what he sees.

A STACK OF HUMAN APPENDAGES, as tall as a man, sits in the center of the tent. Arms and legs twisted together, grasping at each other.

Flies buzz around the amputated limbs, feasting on dead flesh.

He recoils and stumbles outside.

EXT. REGIMENTAL AID POST -- CONTINUOUS

Stuart-Bailey falls to his knees and retches violently.

The medic stands nearby, shaking his head.

MEDIC
 I told you, sir.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- DAY

An usually sunny day. German soldiers sweep through the site of the previous day's catastrophic battle.

Bodies are everywhere. Some whole, most asunder. Rats already begin to gnaw on the corpses.

WINTERSTEIGER

Walks amongst the dead, treading lightly. No longer does he carry a rifle. He daydreams.

A LARGE RAT

Stops it's feast and regards him.

EXT. LEONRODSTRASSE MILITARY PRISON, (1892) -- NIGHT

THE RAT

Cowers in the corner, screeching.

WINTERSTEIGER

On all fours, animal-like, about to pounce on it. He leaps, but it scuttles away.

Wintersteiger crashes into the wall, banging his head hard.

He collapses in a heap. A long beard, wild, matted hair.
His clothes are disgusting rags.

He grumbles to himself, a combination of gibberish and
guttural grunts.

A SMALL SLOT

In the door opens, pouring in light, and a small tin of food
is roughly pushed in.

Wintersteiger leaps for the door, wailing.

The slot shuts and blackness engulfs the room.

VOICE

Just die, you coward.

He slams his fists into the door and screams.

BACK TO SCENE

WINTERSTEIGER

Scowls, shuts his eyes and shakes his head. Glances behind...

At every step, small green SPROUTS OF GRASS bud in his
footprints.

INT. GERMAN LINE -- NIGHT

Wintersteiger sits on the firestep of the parapet. The night
is still.

A soft WAIL drifts to his ears, and he perks up. It dies,
then comes back again. Louder, it's a cry for help.

Most of the other soldiers are sleeping. A lone SENTINEL
leans against the parapet down the trench.

The CRY fades in and out, each time like a dagger to his
ears. He tries to cover his ears, shut his eyes.

The CRY turns to a long MOAN, low and monotonous.

He stands up, unable to bear it. On his tiptoes, he glances
over the parapet.

The MOAN turns into a halting SOB.

He sees movement. Several yards away, an ENGLISH SOLDIER
clutches at the mud, trying to pull himself along.

He CRIES out for help, so loud it seems to Wintersteiger
like a physical blow.

Wintersteiger climbs over the parapet.

DOWN THE TRENCH

Stuhlmuller watches Wintersteiger go over the top. He stalks down the trench to watch him.

WINTERSTEIGER

Makes his way methodically toward the wounded man, slogging through the mud.

He gets to him. The English soldier babbles incoherently, half out of his mind with thirst and pain.

Wintersteiger holds him down. The man has a large wound in his chest.

STUHLMULLER

Watches from the parapet, barely able to see.

WINTERSTEIGER

Hugs the man, engulfing him in his huge arms.

The Soldier stops struggling, lies still. His breathing evens out.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

The soldier's eyes are closed but he breathes as though in a deep sleep.

WINTERSTEIGER

Drags him back toward the German trench.

He gets to the parapet and jumps over, landing square at the feet of Stuhlmuller.

STUHLMULLER

Whatever are you doing, Sergeant?

He gets on the firestep and sees the English soldier.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)

Are you aiding the enemy? I certainly hope not.

He looks at the English soldier, feels his pulse.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)

There are enough people here who dislike you, Sergeant. If you were caught aiding the enemy...well, I don't think I could protect you.

Wintersteiger watches him nervously.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)
 Are we trying to win this war or
 aren't we?

He takes out his pistol and aims it at the Soldier's head.
 Wintersteiger steps forward, horror on his face.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)
 The only thing I hate worse than the
 English are disloyal Germans.

He pulls the trigger, killing the soldier. Wintersteiger
 cries out like an animal.

The sound of the SHOT brings two sentries scrambling down
 the trench. Stuhlmuller waves them down.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)
 It's all right. Take the sergeant
 into custody.

Wintersteiger is a heap on the ground, sobbing.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)
 The sight of him makes me ill.

He turns sharply and nods to the sentries. They grab
 Wintersteiger and drag him into a nearby dugout.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)
 Be quick about it.

INT. DUGOUT, GERMAN TRENCH -- MOMENTS LATER

The soldiers come down the steps. Wintersteiger slowly opens
 his eyes once again.

They take off their helmets. Wintersteiger looks at them.

LARGE SOLDIER
 (chuckling)
 So this is the terror of the
 Brandenburg Grenadiers?

The soldier hurls Wintersteiger against the wall.

A loud CRACK as the stock of a rifle impacts Wintersteiger's
 face.

The soldiers are on him, punching, kicking, beating him.

Wintersteiger disappears under a mass of flailing limbs.

INT. DUGOUT, GERMAN TRENCH -- LATER

Wintersteiger lays on the floor in a bloody mess. His entire body is swollen, black and blue.

Large pools of blood have formed around him.

He doesn't move, nor does he breathe. He appears dead.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- NIGHT

The dugout entrance is deeply black, empty. German soldiers mill about, but keep their distance.

From deep within the darkness, something moves.

An almost imperceptible golden light frames the doorway, weak and fading.

It disappears, and the darkness shifts.

Wintersteiger emerges. Beaten, bloody. But alive.

Another LONG SOB comes from No Man's Land. Animal-like, dripping with misery.

Wintersteiger hears it, stumbles forward, over the parapets.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- MOMENTS LATER

A mess of barbed wire and mud. Blackness engulfs, but Wintersteiger pushes ahead.

He comes upon a British soldier lying face up in a water filled shell crater. The man is mangled, bloody.

He kneels beside him, looking intently. The British soldier doesn't move. Wintersteiger watches him.

A TEAR seeps from the English soldier's eye. Slowly trails down his face. This is Jeffrey.

JEFFREY'S POV

Brilliant white light, warm and inviting. He looks around

JEFFREY

Is floating across a GREEN FIELD, yellow flowers bouncing in the wind.

The sky is azure blue, fluffy white clouds linger. The sun beams a brilliant yellow.

He smiles, wider and more genuine than he's ever smiled before.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

Wintersteiger reaches a dirty hand to Jeffrey's mud-encrusted body. He touches Jeffrey's exposed cheek.

JEFFREY'S POV

The sky FADES TO GRAY. The field melts away, the grass turns to ugly brown-black MUD. The flowers wilt and vaporize.

JEFFREY

Frowns. His mouth opens into a scream.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

Jeffrey's eyes open slightly. The pupils constrict tight.

JEFFREY'S POV

A hazy view of Wintersteiger looking down at him.

A SHOT rings out.

WINTERSTIEGER

Whips his head around, suddenly looking very guilty.

He gets up and scuttles away.

Jeffrey's eyes open. He blinks, then is fully awake.

JEFFREY

No.

He lies still and closes his eyes.

STUHLMULLER (V.O.)

I know you hate me.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- DAY

Stuhlmuller paces down the captured English trench.

STUHLMULLER (V.O.)

And you look at me, dear sister, and see someone filled with hate.

Stuhlmuller walks erect, proud. He is greeted by sharp salutes from exhausted men.

STUHLMULLER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And the truth is that I do kill English. And I slaughter French, at any opportunity.

Two English bi-planes BUZZ over. All heads turn up toward them. They swoop and dive like graceful larks.

STUHLMULLER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

You see, Annemarie, that a terrible night is on us. I've seen so many horrible things all at once. When I sleep...I smell the smoking ruins, I hear the horrible howling of wounded cattle, I feel the deadly chorus of the cannons.

The bi-planes dive, releasing two BOMBS at the occupied trench.

Two terrific BLASTS rock the ground. German soldiers SCREAM as the shrapnel tears through flesh.

STUHLMULLER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We did not want this war! We are only defending ourselves and our Germany against a world of enemies who have banded together against us. The past is gone. I long for the days in my classroom. Sometime my mind still swims in the works of Euclid and Fournier, those numbers and theorems take me away from this place.

A GERMAN SOLDIER, horribly burned, screams in pain.

STUHLMULLER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But now I'm responsible for my men. I can't afford to daydream about how things once were. We are at war. Do I stand by, idly, while these monsters destroy my home and kill my family?

The bi-planes barrel roll together in victory.

STUHLMULLER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I had one wish when I left home, Annemarie. That you forgive me for the horrible things my hands must do.

The planes swoop one last time and speed west into the setting sun.

STUHLMULLER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I don't think that's unreasonable for me to ask, especially from my own sister.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- NIGHT

Jeffrey inches across the carrion in the battlefield.

STUHLMULLER (V.O.)

I swear, pity for the English must be left to the angels! We live in cruel times, and they force us to be killers. My life before is dead, as I am. Forgive me, Sister. I don't mean to be so harsh on paper to you. Please read these words and shudder, but then try to forget. Spare yourself these images. I am here, in this Hell, so you'll never have to be. With love, Manfred.

The night is quiet. The occasional MOAN, or weak cry for help drifts across the mud.

Jeffrey moves slowly, methodically. The mud clings to him as he crawls over the corpses of his men.

The scene is staggering. Dead English lie everywhere.

He crawls over the body of a RED-HAIRED soldier, and the corpse moves. Jeffrey also yelps in surprise.

RED-HAIRED SOLIDER

Please help me, sir! I can't feel me legs at all.

Jeffrey looks at him. He has no legs.

Jeffrey knows the boy is doomed, and tries to move on, but the soldier grabs his ankles.

RED-HAIRED SOLIDER (CONT'D)

Sir, please! I don't want to die here! I want to see home one more time!

The soldier is getting loud. Jeffrey looks around nervously.

JEFFREY

Be quiet! You'll bring the Boche down on both of us!

RED-HAIRED SOLIDER

Sir, sir, I...

The soldier fades out, delirious. His head ticks from side to side.

Jeffrey crawls on, and sees nothing but carnage...

A shock of BLOND HAIR sticking out of a water filled crater.
The water slowly turns a deep crimson.

A mouthless, mangled FACE beneath an English helmet.

An errant ARM, still grasping it's rifle.

RATS feasting on the exposed ribs of a deceased English
sergeant, steam rising from the corpse.

Jeffrey's face hardens as sadness turns to anger.

And he crawls on.

EXT. DIRT ROAD -- NIGHT

A long file of men. Most are walking wounded, bandaged in
the head, arms in slings, or limping along.

Shankland, one of the rare unwounded, walks beside a LORRY
putting along beside the column.

IN THE LORRY

Four severely wounded men lie on stretchers. Johnston sits
between them, curled up. His eyes fixed on the floor of the
truck.

He mumbles quiet, unintelligible words.

HOBSON

Moves along like a stragglng specter, a safe distance from
the last man in the file.

Another column of men passes, going the other direction.
They're still clean, and wear bright plaid KILTS.

Many of them smile as they pass, one man blows gently on a
set of BAGPIPES.

SCOTTISH SOLDIER

Buck up, boys! We'll take it from
here!

The soldier smiles, a smile of half-lunacy.

He makes direct eye contact with Hobson.

SCOTTISH SOLDIER (CONT'D)

(yelling)

So long! I'll see you again in Hell!

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL, POPERINGE -- DAY

The hospital is a tent city in an open field on the outskirts
of the town of Poperinge.

INT. TRIAGE TENT -- CONTINUOUS

A haggard but pretty nurse, CORDELIA, 27, works among the wounded.

CORDELIA (V.O.)
 Day by day I fight the queer,
 frightening sensation that even
 through years of nursing I've never
 become accustomed to.

A new batch of wounded comes in, still forms lying on stretchers.

CORDELIA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Covered stretchers coming in, one
 after another, and not knowing what
 fearful sight or sound or stench,
 what problem of agony or imminent
 death, each brown blanket hides.

She goes to one such stretcher, timidly pulls back the blanket and recoils.

CORDELIA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Until I remove it with a pounding
 heart and trembling hands.

She quickly recovers and sets to work on the hapless man.

The tent is a beehive of activity as new wounded are continuously rotated in and out. The staff is exhausted.

CORDELIA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I think there's nothing horrible I
 haven't seen yet, and there must
 come a point when I'm no longer
 surprised by anything. No horror
 can move me anymore.

HOBSON

Comes in the tent, a scarf over his face. His eyes dart back and forth. He removes the scarf, and he looks bad.

He moves over to a lonely corner and watches the doctors and nurses work. The wounded MOAN horribly.

Cordelia eyes him a second but is taken by more pressing matters.

Hobson looks around. Next to him, a soldier lies on a cot between two saw-horses. Their eyes meet.

The man is burnt around the face. He has great suppurating blisters on his neck and arms, his eyes can barely open.

The BURNT MAN tries to talk, but only manages a gasp. Hobson edges away from him as the man reaches out.

BURNT MAN
...the end...sir....

Hobson moves away, spooked. Cordelia is in front of him.

CORDELIA
Unless you're wounded, you'll have
to leave.

Hobson jumps back. For a moment he's stunned. Cordelia bears a striking resemblance to the Young Woman from the CCS.

HOBSON
Where's the nearest chapel?

Cordelia eyes him, now curious.

CORDELIA
You're not English. Are you wounded?

HOBSON
I need help finding the nearest
chapel. Do you know where it is?

CORDELIA
In town, I imagine, but the Talbot
house may be the only one still
standing.

HOBSON
The Talbot house?

CORDELIA
That's right. Toc-H as the men call
it.

Hobson eases around her...careful not to touch, and scurries out the tent.

CORDELIA (CONT'D)
Can we do anything?

Hobson examines her intensely for a long moment, then exits.

EXT. MILITARY HOSPITAL -- CONTINUOUS

Hobson moves quickly among the milling people outside. He looks toward the north and sees Poperinge on the hill.

He makes a beeline for it, passing a tent with a large wooden sign on it, "SHOCK THROMBOSIS WARD."

INT. SHOCK THROMBOSIS WARD -- CONTINUOUS

A mostly empty tent right now, only a few "shell shock" sufferers occupying beds.

JOHNSTON

Sits in a small cot, rocking back and forth. His eyes are closed.

Shankland sits next to him. The tent is loud with other shell-shock victims reliving nightmares in waking reality.

SHANKLAND

We'll 'et ewe outta 'ere right off,
Johnston.

(looks around)

'Is place 'ives me the shivers.

Johnston seems oblivious to him. Shankland notices and lays a hand on his shoulder.

SHANKLAND (CONT'D)

How 'bout we switch and I'll write a
letter 'ome to your gal? Be'trice,
right?

He gets out a piece of paper and a pencil.

SHANKLAND (CONT'D)

'Ourse we'll write a proper letter,
eh? A fine girl deserves 'at, eh?

Johnston looks at him, his face hollow.

JOHNSTON

Sergeant, I don't think I can go
back.

SHANKLAND

'Ew know it's bad now, lad. It'll
get 'etter. I know 'ere a tough
lad. Le's write 'er a letter.

JOHNSTON

I couldn't breathe.

SHANKLAND

'Ive it a few days. You'll be 'not
'arf in no time.

Johnston nods, but isn't convinced.

SHANKLAND (CONT'D)

'Ow you'll 'ave to 'elp me. How's
it spelled, 'Beatrice'?

JOHNSTON

Beatrice.

SHANKLAND

B...E...E...'....then what?

EXT. GERMAN LINE -- DAY

Gefreiter works hard against a shovel to shore up the wall of the trench. Other soldiers toil under the bright sun.

STUHMULLER

Private Gefretier!

Gefretier turns around to see Stuhlmuller standing a few meters away.

GEFREITER

Sir!

STUHMULLER

You're trained on the Maschinengewehr 8, aren't you?

GEFREITER

Yes, sir.

STUHMULLER

Go to 'C' Company and find Corporal Kulbart. He's forming a sentry detail. Double time it.

Gefreiter throws down his shovel, glad to be rid of it.

GEFREITER

Right away, sir.

He picks up his gear and trots down the trench in the other direction.

He passes the entrance to a dugout. It's recognizable as Jeffrey's old dugout. Williams lies dead at it's entrance.

WINTERSTEIGER goes down the stairs.

INT. JEFFREY'S DUGOUT -- CONTINUOUS

Now a shelter for wounded, four stretchers lay on the straw-covered floor. Three of the stretchers are occupied by unmoving figures.

Wintersteiger comes down the stairs.

He eases in and sees the wounded men. One SOLDIER, with a bandage almost completely covering his face, MOANS softly.

EXT. LEONRODSTRASSE MILITARY PRISON, (1887) -- DAY
(FLASHBACK)

The road is wet and cracked, snaking to the yawning mouth that is the gated entrance to Leonrodstrasse.

Gothic, grey stone, damp with fog and dew.

WINTERSTEIGER

Is led from a horse-drawn carriage toward the gate. His appearance is striking.

He is dressed in an impeccable suit, tie, starched white shirt and shined leather loafers.

His face is smoother, younger, more vibrant, but the grey eyes are the same.

Shackled by the arms and legs, he is led harshly into the gaping maw of the prison.

A ferocious looking GUARD waits for him, his lower lip cracked with dried blood and flaking skin.

GUARD

Welcome to Leondronstrasse, Herr Wintersteiger. This is your new home, till the day you die.

He eyes the other two guards.

GUARD (CONT'D)

And that day can't come too soon.

BACK TO SCENE

Wintersteiger goes to the MOANING soldier, kneels, and takes the soldier's hand.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

The MOANING fades. The man's pale skin flushes gently with a warm pink, healthy flesh tone.

WINTERSTEIGER

Lets him go and goes to the next man. This man has a gaping stomach wound and his bandage is soaked in blood.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

He places his hands on the man's stomach. The man jerks then lays still. The wound is gone.

THE THIRD MAN

Is burnt very badly. The man's face, and neck are blackened.

WINTERSTEIGER

Caresses his face, fingers gliding over the wound.

WINTERSTEIGER'S POV

The black, crusty skin evaporates under his touch, totally rejuvenated. The boys glow softly.

WINTERSTEIGER

Stands up and looks around.

For the first time in years, a smile cracks across his face.

EXT. POPERINGE -- DAY

Poperinge was a quaint town before the war. Now, hordes of British, Canadian, Australian, and Indian troops mill about it's streets.

This is a resting point for soldiers going to and from the Ypres Salient and bloody Passchendaele.

Hobson walks down the main drag, tripping on the cobblestones. The once elegant architecture of the town has been shelled to ruin, now replaced by dozens of small vendors.

An AUSTRALIAN barter with a weasely vendor over a wristwatch.

AUSTRALIAN

I'd trust a German whore sooner than
that watch!

BUT HOBSON

Is keen on finding only one thing. He passes a estaminet where a kindly looking OLD WOMAN serves a plate of boiled vegetables to a group of ENGLISH SOLDIERS.

He passes a brooding whorehouse where ragged looking PROSTITUTES pull in young soldiers off the street.

Hobson arrives at the town square. It's an unending morass of troops, lorries, and mules.

Off to the left, he sees it. A large wooden sign hanging before a simple looking brick building declares: "Talbot House - Every Man's Club." He goes to it.

Another wooden sign by the entrance declares, "Abandon Ye Rank, all who enter."

INT. THE TALBOT HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

The interior is warm and inviting. A fireplace against one wall, several cushioned chairs.

Soldiers lounge around, smoking and playing cards.

No sooner is Hobson inside than a fat, round little man with black rimmed glasses strides boldly up to him. He has a kindly face and wears a CROSS around his neck.

This is REVEREND CLAYTON, mid 40's, known to all as "TUBBY."

TUBBY

Welcome! Welcome, my friend! I could see your troubles coming through the door five minutes before you!

He extends his hand and Hobson back steps.

HOBSON

Sorry if I don't shake hands.

TUBBY

(unfazed)

Yes, well, lice are rampant I'm afraid. My proper name is Clayton but you may call me Tubby. It's not a flattering name, I know, but who am I to deny the obvious!

(he laughs)

Welcome to Toc-H, dear fellow. What can I call you?

Hobson is taken aback by this man's forwardness.

HOBSON

Captain Noel Hobson.

TUBBY

(shakes his head)

Tsk! Tsk! No rank exists here, Noel Hobson. You've been demoted to human being, I'm afraid.

Hobson grins.

TUBBY (CONT'D)

Well, what can we do for you? Don't be intimidated by the collar, Noel, just because I'm a man of God it doesn't mean I don't like to have fun. Try a flagon of beer! We've got a brewer here thats-

HOBSON

Actually, um, Tubby, I wanted to visit your chapel.

TUBBY

It's not much, I'm afraid, but a simple place to be at peace with God. Please feel free, though, you may have to wait a little while. We've a memorial service going on right now.

(smiles widely)

How about a beer! I know a man coming off the line needs a beer, eh?

A mousy looking Private skulks up beside Tubby. He has a thin mustache and beady black eyes. He's lugging a large ROLLED CARPET in the door, struggling with the weight.

TUBBY (CONT'D)

And this fellow is Pettifer, but we all call him the General.

(quizzical)

I don't really know why.

PETTIFER

'Ave scrounged ewe yer kerpet, sir.

Tubby brightens up.

TUBBY

Wonderful! Let me have a look.

(unfurls part, whistles)

Magnificent. This will do well for the chapel. Where on Earth did you find this, General?

PETTIFER

Not far, sir. 'Ame from next door.

TUBBY

What?

PETTIFER

The empty hous over der.

TUBBY

(shocked)

General, I cannot say my prayers kneeling on a stolen carpet!

PETTIFER

They won't be wanting it, sir, they do say the family are in the 'sou of France.

Tubby glares at him, there a long moment of silence.

PETTIFER (CONT'D)

Well, if yer won't ave it in the church, it'll do lovely for yer sitting room.

TUBBY

You will return that carpet to it's owner, General. Immediately.

PETTIFER

If aye put it back, someone else'll jus' take it!

Tubby is stoic, scowling at him.

Resigned, Pettifer drags the carpet back out the door. He notices Hobson. A look of fear flashes across his face.

PETTIFER (CONT'D)

'Ello, Sir. Ewe gettin' along nicely now, Lieutenant?

HOBSON

Fine. And it's Captain, not Lieutenant.

PETTIFER

(with a knowing look)

Oh, right. Keptin it is. Congrats on that.

(glances at Tubby)

I'll be goin' now, if ewe please.

Pettifer hurriedly drags out the carpet, eyes on Hobson.

TUBBY

He means well, Noel. The product of poor London upbringing, though. But as I said, please make yourself at home. Our excellent beer is available in the back. Let this be your home, Noel!

Tubby scampers off, greeting the card playing soldiers.

Hobson goes toward the back of the house. Several soldiers snooze on couches in an adjacent room. Others quietly drink beer and write letters home.

EXT. TALBOT HOUSE COURTYARD -- CONTINUOUS

The courtyard is an oasis of green in this mud covered world. Two large oak trees dominate the scene, but emerald grass covers the ground, where soldiers sunbathe.

Several wrought iron benches lay about the perimeter, and a small gazebo is in the center. It is serene.

Hobson breathes in deeply, forgetting all for just a moment.

One SOLDIER sketches in a tiny notebook on a bench.

SOLDIER

Excuse me, but you're blocking my view.

Hobson steps aside. The soldier is a young man, late 20s. He has bright blond hair and brown eyes.

HOBSON

Sorry.

SOLDIER

It's all right.

(eyes his drawing)

No bloody good, anyway. I'm just trying to kill time, you know.

He motions Hobson to sit down. Hobson doesn't accept.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Well, for formalities sake I'll introduce myself. Philip Addison, 12th Highlanders.

HOBSON

Noel Hobson. On your way to the front?

ADDISON nods matter of factly.

ADDISON

Statistically I can expect to be alive for another ten weeks.

(pauses)

You've been there?

Hobson nods, takes a seat in the grass.

HOBSON

I forgot what grass feels like.

ADDISON

How long have you been in it?

HOBSON

Boy, I've forgotten. Seems like a long time, though.

ADDISON

Your accent. You're not English.

HOBSON

American.

ADDISON

So what's an American doing here in Belgium among all us blokes?

HOBSON

(smiles)

I came for the beer.

ADDISON

And you're an officer? In the British army?

HOBSON

Yeah. There's ways around the restrictions.

Addison sets his notebook down, nodding.

ADDISON

'Spose it wouldn't help to say thank you, eh?

Hobson smiles.

HOBSON

You just got here?

ADDISON

Took the lorry in last night. We're moving out by train toward Poelcapelle tomorrow.

(lowers his voice)

So what's it like up there? Really like, I mean?

HOBSON

Enjoy ignorance while you can, Addison.

ADDISON

(looks around)

It's a long way from Manchester.

HOBSON

Yeah, Manchester is nice.

Addison pulls a picture from the book he was writing in.

ADDISON

Seeing how you know Manchester, then, and I think I would like to call you a friend...

(shifts toward him)

I'm not a fool, Noel. I know what will happen to me.

(hands him the picture)

If you could do me this favor.

Hobson takes the picture. Addison and a young woman with a fresh face and brown hair in a bun. They're standing on a train platform. Addison is in uniform.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

Her name is Vera. We married two days before I shipped out. I was in college, you see, and we studied together.

HOBSON

College? And you were drafted?

ADDISON

No, I volunteered. I couldn't sit in the library while so many blokes were over here fighting.

HOBSON

And how did she like that?

ADDISON

She didn't like it at all. Terribly afraid for me. But there are some things more important than ourselves, I think. Don't you agree?

HOBSON

I remember thinking like that.

Addison pulls a small tin from his pack.

ADDISON

Try one of these. Biscuits from home, walnut and butterscotch.

Hobson timidly takes one, tries it. It's delicious.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

A good biscuit can really make your day, eh? Vera makes the best.

(chews on a biscuit)

I'd like you to see her if you can. Tell her you saw me, and I was all right. Give her my love, but tell her duty called and called me to obey.

Hobson looks hard at the picture.

HOBSON

I'll try, Addison.

Addison gets up and brushes off his uniform. He stands erect, proud.

ADDISON

I'm grateful.
(extends his hand)

HOBSON

Sorry, I've got...a skin condition.

ADDISON

(nods)
Buck up, Noel. You know as well as I this won't go on forever.

He starts out, then pauses.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

I can tell you're a good man. Don't lose yourself out here, Mate.

Hobson watches, moved to silence. He glances at the picture.

PICTURE OF VERA

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

My Darling Husband, another day and night has passed, and I spend all my waking time thinking of you.

EXT. TROOP TRAIN -- DAY (FLASH FORWARD)

Addison on a crowded troop train, CLANKING away from Poperinge's main station. He watches the landscape pass.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

My friend Polly and I decided we should get jobs in the munition factory at Chilwell. Her husband died last year in France, and she's supporting two small children.

EXT. TRENCHLINE -- NIGHT

Now pouring rain, Addison is assembling a party of men in the sopping mud.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

We work twelve hour shifts, and I was quite intimidated at first by the size of the place. The twelve inch shells come up to my waste, and there are thousands of them sitting row upon row. It is hard work, and the factory smells horribly, but I'm so glad to be doing something for the war effort. If I have to sweat a little, wear worn shoes and come home with aching legs, I can do that.

(MORE)

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

All I do is think of you, and where
you are, and I am new again.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- NIGHT

Addison leads the party on their stomach out into No-Man's Land. They reach a thick wall of BARBED-WIRE which has been cut by artillery and set to mending it.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Please let me know how you are getting along, and if you need anything. I keep sending you toffee and condensed milk, but please let me know what else you're lacking. If the weather gets too cold there, wrap yourself up and keep warm. You musn't worry for me, my darling, as I am quite able to look after myself. Things may be unhappy now, but I know they will get better.

From out of the darkness appears a GERMAN PATROL. Surprised, all men immediately start firing.

Grenades EXPLODE. A machine gun TAC-TAC-TAC rips the darkness.

The Germans retreat, dragging their fallen comrades.

ADDISON

Lies face up in the mud, a surprised look on his face. He's been shot in the chest.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Let's hope that this time of our lives is like a storm of great dark clouds that pass away, so that afterwards the sun shines more brightly than ever before.

A SOLDIER bandages him, but only in vain. Addison dies.

INT. TALBOT HOUSE COURTYARD -- DAY (THE PRESENT)

Addison smiles and waves as he walks away. Hobson clutches the picture, as though peering into the man's future.

INT. TALBOT HOUSE COURTYARD -- EVENING

Hobson wakes with a start. The courtyard has emptied. A bright moon shines down. He stands.

HOBSON'S POV

The grass where he was sitting is BROWN and DESICCATED.

INT. THE TALBOT HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Two older soldiers smoke pipes by the fire. They take no notice of Hobson as he comes in and goes toward the stairway leading up to the chapel.

INT. TALBOT HOUSE CHAPEL -- MOMENTS LATER

The chapel is empty and quiet. Though simple, the chapel exudes a quaintness and comforting warmth.

An old CARPENTER'S BENCH serves as the altar. Rows of pews on either side face in toward to the center aisle. A large WOODEN CROSS hangs from the gable roof.

Hobson takes a knee at the altar and folds his hands.

He timidly bows his head. A long moment of silence.

Something sharp pokes his shoulder. Hobson jumps and sees

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Sitting in the pew beside him, coddling a rusty bayonet.

YOUNG WOMAN

So you came.

HOBSON

What the hell are you doing here?

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm surprised you came here.

HOBSON

You followed me.

YOUNG WOMAN

I guess you could say that.

Hobson eases away from her, cautious.

HOBSON

You told me to come here.

YOUNG WOMAN

I didn't make you do anything.

HOBSON

Leave me alone, Anna.

She perks up at the name, smiles wryly.

ANNA

I knew you remembered. I could always see through you. You may look different, Noel Hobson, you may call yourself "doctor" now, but you're the same goddamn bastard you always were.

HOBSON

I'm not.

ANNA

You've had your fun. You pretended for a little while.
(smiles)
But I'm still here.

Hobson stands silent.

ANNA (CONT'D)

You're pathetic.

Hobson, angered, begins to remove the wrappings of one of his hands.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Are you going to kill me just like that soldier?

Hobson freezes.

HOBSON

That was an accident.

ANNA

It wasn't an accident. You are what you've always been.

HOBSON

And what is that?

ANNA

You know damned well the answer to that.

Hobson gets up.

HOBSON

Anna, I didn't want-

ANNA

You goddamned liar.

He grabs Anna harshly by the throat. Anna only laughs.

Hobson tries to squeeze, but she just giggles.

He drops her, backs away and re-wraps his hand.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Don't blame God for your trouble,
Noel.

HOBSON
No, it's not him.

ANNA
No, it's not.

She perks up once again, ears poised. Somewhere far off, a dull reverberating BOOMING.

ANNA (CONT'D)
This won't end, not until the noise
stops.

HOBSON
Wintersteiger. The sniper.

ANNA
You think that will help?

HOBSON
This all started with him.

ANNA
(grabs her bloody
bandage)
It didn't start with him. He just
woke you from your little nap.

HOBSON
He did this.

Hobson lurches down the aisle, away from her.

ANNA
(yelling)
You're a liar, Noel Hobson! It
started with me!

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL, POPERINGE -- LATER

Hobson enters a large tent filled with cots holding wounded men. This ward is for those beyond medical help.

He's shaking, sweating, gasping for breath. He collapses on a bed.

Next to him lies a BURNT MAN, laboring to breathe.

As if sensing Hobson, the man opens his charred eyelids.

Hobson kneels beside the bed.

HOBSON

Does it hurt?

A tear streams from the Burnt Man's eye. He stares at Hobson, trying to form words.

BURNT MAN

Please...sir.

(inhales painfully)

Give...me...a...gun.

Hobson watches the miserable man. He unwraps one of his hands.

BURNT MAN (CONT'D)

Please...sir...please...

He frees one hand, extending the white appendage, now a horrible weapon.

BURNT MAN (CONT'D)

...sir...please...

He takes the man's hand and squeezes tightly. Hobson closes his eyes.

The Burnt Man's eyes close. His body relaxes, then goes limp. A look of peace spreads across his face.

Hobson slowly opens his eyes and lets go. The man is still.

Cordelia is at the foot of the bed.

CORDELIA

I'm afraid there was nothing that could save him.

Hobson is startled.

HOBSON

Dammit, Anna-

CORDELIA

What?

He catches himself, stammers.

HOBSON

Nothing.

CORDELIA

Your color isn't good at all. You should lie down.

INT. AMBULATORY TENT -- LATER

Hobson stiffly lies down on a cot. Cordelia moves to help him but he sharply waves her away.

HOBSON
Don't come too close.

She watches him a moment.

HOBSON (CONT'D)
What was your name again?

CORDELIA
Cordelia.

HOBSON
Cordelia. Its a nice name.

CORDELIA
Is there anything I can get you?
Something to eat?

Hobson shakes his head, very tired.

CORDELIA (CONT'D)
Are you wounded?

HOBSON
(yawns)
No, but keep away. For your own
sake. Keep everyone away.

His eyes close, asleep.

EXT. "SHINKLES" IN POPERINGE -- EVENING

SHANKLAND

Walks out of a shoddy looking building with a large sign saying "Shinkles! Company for the Common Soldier."

He has a broad smile on his face. Breathes deeply.

There's a long LINE of soldiers outside the establishment, leading to the door. A well-seasoned looking BLOND WHORE in a tight girdle comes out.

BLOND WHORE
That's seven shillings.

The first soldier in line eagerly produces the money.

BLOND WHORE (CONT'D)
(takes the money)
Come on.

Shankland elbows a CORPORAL standing near him and give a long WHISTLE at the ever growing line.

SHANKLAND

Aye saw we ought ta give her a medal
for dat effort, eh?

He laughs and toddles off.

INT. SHOCK THROMBOSIS WARD -- NIGHT

CORDELIA

Sits beside the red-haired Soldier, talking to him. He doesn't even acknowledge her presence.

JOHNSTON

Sits up in bed, staring at the canvas wall of the tent. He is surprised when Shankland appears next to him.

SHANKLAND

'Ow ewe doin', Johnston?

JOHNSTON

Fine, Sergeant. Where have you been?

SHANKLAND

Aww, jus' gettin rid a some stress,
ya know?

JOHNSTON

Those whores will be the death of
you.

SHANKLAND

Ere's worse ways ta die. I got ta
tell ya, 'an I don' want ta.

JOHNSTON

Tell me what?

SHANKLAND

'Da word's been comin' down since
'tis mornin'. Da Gen'ral means to
move out 'gainst Pass'chendel soon.

JOHNSTON

More blood for the bull, then.

SHANKLAND

'An he don' want the head cases left
behind.

JOHNSTON

What are you saying?

SHANKLAND

'Witout a wound, ewe have ta go back
to the front.

JOHNSTON

I can't go, Sergeant. I already
told you. I can't.

Shankland shrugs.

SHANKLAND

I'll be dere with ewe.

Johnston just keeps shaking his head.

JOHNSTON

No, no. I told them, it's just that
I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't-

SHANKLAND

Go ta sleep, boy. Maybe ewe feel
better later.

JOHNSTON

No, I can't. I won't.

Shankland leaves as Johnston babbles on.

EXT. ROAD -- NIGHT

A LORRY chugs down the road cautiously. Artillery rumbles
in the distance.

A FIGURE leaps out in front of it. Brakes SQUEAL.

Two men jump from the back, rifles drawn.

The Figure raises his hands. The headlights flash on. He's
holding up a UNION JACK.

Jeffrey, his clothes torn to shreds and covered in mud,
smiles.

JEFFREY

Can I trouble you for a ride?

EXT. WOODS -- NIGHT

GEFREITER

And two other GERMAN SOLDIERS move quietly through a shattered
wood.

Gefreiter is lugging a large MACHINE GUN over his shoulders,
stooping with the effort.

The men reach a small pocket of trees on the edge of the wood. CORPORAL KULBART, with a scruffy goatee, is clearly in charge.

They don't talk, but communicate with hand signals.

Gefreiter sets up the machine gun, pointing to an open field beyond.

Kulbart eyes the field, an expanse of pulverized mud. He arcs his arm from right to left, signaling to Gefreiter.

Gefreiter nods and YAWNS wearily. Kuhlbart smacks him on the side of the head.

The other soldier lays prone with his rifle. They all settle down and almost disappear into the surroundings.

INT. AMBULATORY TENT -- MORNING

Hobson wakes. There is a sheet covering him. Disoriented, he sits up.

Cordelia is nearby and notices him.

CORDELIA
Good morning, Captain.

Hobson glances around, scared.

HOBSON
Who put this sheet on me?

CORDELIA
(laughs)
I did. Don't worry, I didn't touch you.

She pulls a chair up to his bed, he scoots away from her.

CORDELIA (CONT'D)
You are so skittish! I promise I won't come too close, okay?

HOBSON
I have to go.

CORDELIA
Just a moment, Captain. I don't even know who you are.

HOBSON
It's better that way.

CORDELIA
Please? I would like to know at least your first name.

HOBSON

Noel.

CORDELIA

(smiles)

Noel.

(she waits, but he
says nothing)

I wanted to thank you for what you
did for that poor soldier.

Hobson is startled.

HOBSON

You saw that?

CORDELIA

Those are the cases I hate the most,
the ones we can't help.

HOBSON

He was in pain.

CORDELIA

Unbearable pain. He inhaled some
mustard gas and it burnt his lungs.

HOBSON

Then it's good it finally ended,
wasn't it?

CORDELIA

I think somewhere the Choosers of
the Slain are touching with invisible
hands those poor chaps who will die.

HOBSON

(looks at his hands)

Or hands of flesh.

Cordelia studies him closely, leaning on her elbows.

CORDELIA

You've been at the front a long time,
haven't you?

Hobson nods.

CORDELIA (CONT'D)

Then this kind of suffering is
familiar to you, I suppose.

HOBSON

I always hoped it never became too
familiar.

CORDELIA

I've heard stories of the front.
How a man could survive that and
remain sane...

HOBSON

No one stays sane up there.

Hobson is uncomfortable with the talk.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

I haven't seen many women so near
the fighting.

Cordelia nods.

CORDELIA

Bodily wounds are one thing. But
the poor lads I see who have lost
their minds, I can't bear. Bodies
are young and can heal, but when a
mind is lost...

(she stiffens)

But I insisted on being here. You
see...I lost my fiancée last year.

HOBSON

I'm sorry.

CORDELIA

(shakes her head)

No, please. Don't do that. There
isn't a woman in Britain who hasn't
lost someone she loves. I was working
as a nurse in London at the time. I
received a note from him shortly
before Christmas saying, I'll be
home on leave from 24th December to
31st December. Landing on Christmas
Day.' God, I was so excited. We
hadn't seen each other in over a
year.

(she fights back tears)

I waited all Christmas day to hear
from him. I heard nothing. Then
night came, and still no word. I
imagined his boat was late or
something. The next morning I awoke
to the phone, but the voice I heard
wasn't his. It was a member of the
war department informing me that
Roland had died two days before...died
of wounds in a casualty clearing
station in Salonica.

(MORE)

CORDELIA (CONT'D)

(she starts weeping)

He should have survived, but they were understaffed and he lay there, in pain, and died. Died alone in a strange land, while I fiddled away the time. I decided that instant that nursing post-operatives back to health in London wasn't enough.

(she starts weeping)

The next day I put in for a transfer as far to the front as I could go. I don't want anyone else to die like Roland.

She wipes her eyes on her shirt.

CORDELIA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm sure the last thing in the world you need now is a strange woman crying all over you.

HOBSON

It's all right.

CORDELIA

But you must have someone back in the States waiting for you.

HOBSON

I think I've lost her, actually.

CORDELIA

Well, you'll find her someday.

HOBSON

(smiles at her)

This won't go on forever.

CORDELIA

I wish I had your optimism. I think I've just seen too much.

He reaches into a pocket.

HOBSON

Do me one favor, Cordelia. I friend of mine died recently. He wanted me to write his widow...but I don't have the words. Write her for me.

CORDELIA

(takes the photo)

She's lovely. Who is she?

HOBSON

I've never met her. But I made a promise to a good man that I won't be able to keep.

Cordelia smiles. She reaches as if to take Hobson's hand, and he jumps back.

Cordelia is startled and embarrassed.

CORDELIA

I'm sorry! I...maybe I should go.

She gets up and scoots away. Hobson settles into the bed, head down.

HOBSON

Dammit.

INT. SHOCK THROMBOSIS WARD -- DAY

A weary DOCTOR with silver hair walks down the line of bunks, clipboard in hand.

He comes to Johnston, who eyes him with fear.

DOCTOR

How are you feeling today, Private?

JOHNSTON

I've got rather bad pains in my back, sir.

DOCTOR

(flipping pages)

I don't see any back injury listed here.

JOHNSTON

It came on quite sudden.

DOCTOR

(scribbling on paper)

There's a parade going up to the line tomorrow.

Johnston talks fast.

JOHNSTON

There's been this sharp pain in my side as well, sir. It comes and goes, but lately it's been the devil. I'm worried-

DOCTOR

There's nothing I can do.

He moves on. Shankland appears in his place.

SHANKLAND

Ya lookin' beta' all da time.
(nods toward the Doctor)
Wad' he say?

JOHNSTON

It appears I'm well enough to move on.

SHANKLAND

Oh. Well, ids time we all got off our rears, den? We'll go together.

Johnston looks around. Except for him and Shankland, there are only two other nearly comatose occupants of the tent.

The Doctor leaves, a man in an exhausted stupor.

JOHNSTON

I'm famished, Sergeant. Could you get me something from the cooker? I'd kill for just a tin of bully beef.

SHANKLAND

Eye, sure. Good ya gots yer appetite back. I'll be back in jus a minute.

Shankland smiles wide and leaves at a trot.

EXT. SHOCK THROMBOSIS WARD -- CONTINUOUS

Shankland emerges, still smiling and trots toward a distant tent with smoke curling up from a small stovepipe.

He passes a LORRY, just pulling into the hospital. It creaks to a halt.

Jeffrey climbs out of the back. Worn and filthy, he stretches and looks around.

A passing MEDIC sees him.

MEDIC

Are you injured, sir?

JEFFREY

My wounds are more decorative than lethal, I think.

MEDIC

They'll clean you up in the triage tent, sir. Third down on the right.

JEFFREY
Thank you, Corporal.

INT. TRIAGE TENT -- MOMENTS LATER

Jeffrey enters the tent. It's mostly empty, except for a few men lying quietly in their cots.

Cordelia approaches him.

CORDELIA
Are you hurt, Lieutenant?

Jeffrey removes his helmet at the sight of a woman.

JEFFREY
(smiles)
No, not so much. Actually, I was
looking for someone.

INT. DUGOUT, GERMAN TRENCH -- DAY

Wintersteiger is huddled in one corner. The only light comes from a flickering lantern.

His eyes are half-closed, hands folded in his lap.

FOOTSTEPS come down the stairs. Stuhlmuller enters, a shaming cast on his brow.

STUHLMULLER
You're a stubborn man, you know that?
I'm to inform you that you're going
to be tried for treason.
(moves closer)
And lending aid and comfort to the
enemy. Do you understand?

Wintersteiger's eyes slowly open. He fixes a look on Stuhlmuller.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)
Say something you sack of shit.

Wintersteiger stares at him, without a hint of malice. His silence enrages Stuhlmuller.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)
I don't know if you're a coward,
Winterstieger, but I know that for
some reason you refuse to fight.
(kneels)
We're all doomed here, Sergeant.
But I'll die here defending my country
like an honorable man. You're going
to hang in Leondronstrasse like the
scum that you are.

He beams at Winterstieger, whose gaze doesn't falter.
Disgusted, he gets up.

STUHLMULLER (CONT'D)

And you'll have no more protection
from me.

He turns and storms out. Wintersteiger lays his head back
against the wall, closes his eyes.

Three LARGE SOLDIERS come down the stairs, scowling at him.

They remove their helmets.

INT. MUNICH HOUSE (1887) -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

WINTERSTEIGER

Dressed in an immaculate suit and tie. He fidgets with the
knot, tugging at it absently.

He's standing in a formal dressing room, obviously well
appointed.

There's a rough KNOCK from a distant door.

He sighs heavily, stares into the mirror for a moment and
turns away.

EXT. MUNICH HOUSE (1887) -- MOMENTS LATER

Wintersteiger is led down a immaculately trimmed path toward
a waiting PRISON WAGON. He is in shackles.

There are POLICEMEN everywhere.

A man exits the house holding a large HUNTING RIFLE wrapped
in a blanket.

A aged DETECTIVE nods curtly.

DETECTIVE

Well, then. We have the weapon.

A CROWD has gathered. Flashbulbs POP and HISS.

Wintersteiger shuffles toward the wagon and lumbers into it.
An OLD WOMAN stares at him in disdain.

His shoulder droops and he melts into the seat, defeated.
The Detective eyes him in disgust.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

That's the last time he'll see
daylight, by God.

BACK TO SCENE

THE SOLDIERS

Put their helmets back on, pick up their rifles.

WINTERSTEIGER

Lays in the corner in a pool of blood. His face is a swollen, darkened mass.

He sits up with effort, looks at his red and scrapped hands. He tries to make a fist.

But the hand won't close. Neither hand will. He can't even make a fist anymore.

He grunts, trying to force his hand closed. It won't.

He glances at the men, and smiles.

THE SOLDIERS

Glance at each other in puzzlement.

INT. SHOCK THROMBOSIS WARD -- DAY

Shankland comes into the tent with a tray full of steaming food and a wide smile on his face.

Johnston's bed is empty. His clothes are gone.

Shankland looks around the tent. A NURSE is on duty at the end of the tent, falling asleep at a small desk.

He startles her. She flinches at the sight of him.

SHANKLAND

'Ave ewe seen Johnston? Fourth bed on da right?

NURSE

Oh. He's gone, isn't he?

SHANKLAND

Yes, 'he's gone!

NURSE

He must've slipped out while I was...working. I'll notify the Doctor.

Shankland drops the tray on her desk.

SHANKLAND

(running out)

Blast it! He's not safe on 'is own!

The nurse eyes the tray of food, then picks out a chicken leg and munches on it.

INT. AMBULATORY TENT -- LATER

Hobson lies in bed. Cordelia enters with Jeffrey in tow.

CORDELIA

That's him.

Jeffrey smiles when he sees Hobson.

CORDELIA (CONT'D)

Do you know him well?

JEFFREY

We have served together for nearly two years. But I suppose I don't.

CORDELIA

He's such a distant man. I think he has secrets he's afraid to tell.

JEFFREY

(mumbles)

We all have secrets. You haven't touched him, have you?

CORDELIA

You too? No, I haven't. He's been very specific about that.

JEFFREY

Good. I know it sounds a bit peculiar, but just for his sake, okay?

CORDELIA

I understand very well.

Jeffrey walks over to him. Hobson sees him and brightens instantly.

HOBSON

Cedric! Jesus, aren't you dead yet?

JEFFREY

I swallowed some gas, but I'm getting along better now.

(turns to Cordelia)

I don't mean to be rude, but might we have a moment alone? Two old war chaps to catch up?

Cordelia smiles and moves off.

Jeffrey turns deadly serious.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

I was dead, Noel. My soul was treading the Elysian Fields, but I was pulled back.

HOBSON

By what?

JEFFREY

A German. This ugly grey-eyed bastard brought me back.

HOBSON

Grey eyes? Where was this?

JEFFREY

Near Sanctuary Wood, the last attack.

HOBSON

I knew it. He's there.

JEFFREY

You know him?

HOBSON

Yeah. And I'm going to kill him.

INT. GENERAL HEADQUARTERS -- EVENING

A well kept farmhouse packed with busy officers and plastered with huge maps.

Stuart-Bailey stands idly off to the side as he watches Dorrien confer with two STAFF OFFICERS.

Dorrien is angry, face reddened, arms waving dramatically.

The officers flee. Dorrien moves to Stuart-Bailey.

DORRIEN

Blast Lloyd George! That man will destroy what remains of the British army to help the goddamn French!

Stuart-Bailey nods agreement, not knowing what else to say.

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

(calming down)

These staff officers...they're all mouth and trousers! Sometimes I think most of them would be afraid to ride a bicycle!

(smiles)

That's something we at least can agree with, Alexander. A General should be at the front, with the lads.

STUART-BAILEY

I think reality falls apart somewhere
between there and here, sir.

Dorrien grunts agreement, motioning Stuart-Bailey to follow
him outside.

EXT. GENERAL HEADQUARTERS -- CONTINUOUS

It's dusk. Darkness approaches rapidly.

DORRIEN

Myself, I never developed a taste
for personal comfort. It was a crutch
in the Boer War, and even more so
here.

He lights a pipe and takes a deep drag.

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

The weather is good. There's to be
an attack on the fourth, before it
breaks again.

STUART-BAILEY

An attack? General, I...

DORRIEN

Please, Alexander, I don't want to
hear it. I have all my Generals
telling me every reason why it
shouldn't happen, but we must re-
take Broodseinde while the rain is
away. The high ground there is the
key to Passchendaele.

STUART-BAILEY

With the coming rain, sir, the going
there will be sluggish. The Germans
could withdrawal their artillery and
reposition it to the east-

DORRIEN

We have reinforcements coming. Four
divisions from the Canadian Corps.
They fight as well as the Australians,
but with more discipline.

STUART-BAILEY

And how long will all this take?

DORRIEN

They're moving up already. The attack
will go off as planned.

Stuart-Bailey shakes his head.

STUART-BAILEY

Sir, I must object.

DORRIEN

(ignoring)

We shall go to Zonnebeke to observe.

STUART-BAILEY

Sir, my division has been on the line for over fifty days.

DORRIEN

I realize that, and they will be relieved AFTER the attack. If we succeed, then we'll all go home that much sooner.

STUART-BAILEY

That ground is like a bog, sir. Covering just a half-mile in that mud will require at least several hours.

DORRIEN

I would never undermine your authority, Alexander, but I fear we have some general officers who have neither the experience, the energy, nor the aggressive spirit to prepare their units or handle them under battle conditions.

(eyes him sharply)

I know you have the courage they lack, but you are, as they say, a dying breed.

(pauses thoughtfully)

I know you wouldn't have so little confidence in British soldiers, Alexander, because you know if that were so, that would be a poor reflection on your command. Grounds for dismissal, even.

STUART-BAILEY

I have every confidence in them, sir, but all men have limits. Courage cannot stop a bullet.

DORRIEN

Nonsense. Battles are won by iron hearts in wooden ships.

Stuart-Bailey stiffens, angry.

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

I don't know if we'll make history that day, but we'll certainly change geography.

Dorrien laughs at his own joke, looks at Stuart-Bailey, who is stony.

STUART-BAILEY

I cannot support this attack, sir. This is madness.

Dorrien is shocked, clearly not used to differing opinions.

DORRIEN

I don't believe I heard you correctly.

STUART-BAILEY

More than madness, it's bare stupidity.

Dorrien is on the edge of rage, but calms himself.

DORRIEN

Rest tonight, Alexander. Let me show you tomorrow how ready the men are. Then you'll agree with me. But there's another matter that requires your effort. It has come to my attention that there may be a problem with an officer in your command.

STUART-BAILEY

I've heard nothing of any problems, General.

DORRIEN

Quite right, I would expect you to say that, as I suspect you may have some personal connection or loyalty to his family. Nevertheless, we cannot have an officer in His Majesty's Army bear arms under false pretense. I will not tolerate it.

Stuart-Bailey shuffles nervously.

STUART-BAILEY

You're talking of Lieutenant Jeffrey. Yes, his father is German. It's irrelevant.

DORRIEN

Very relevant, Alexander. Hun blood is in his veins.

(MORE)

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

I can't blame a man for his heritage,
but neither can I allow a possible
subversive to command troops in my
army.

STUART-BAILEY

What then, is to become of him?

DORRIEN

As a favor, I'll leave that up to
you. But don't disappoint me,
Alexander.

Dorrien walks off, pipe glowing in the growing darkness.

INT. AMBULATORY TENT -- NIGHT

The patients all doze. Jeffrey lies awake, studying a map
under a dim lantern. Hobson is in the next bed.

Cordelia enters quietly. She tip-toes to Jeffrey's bed.

CORDELIA

All the men are moving out. There's
to be an attack.

JEFFREY

I know.

CORDELIA

(looks at Hobson)
Will you be going?

JEFFREY

Yes. Both of us.

CORDELIA

Tell me about him.

JEFFREY

What do you want to know?

She huddles close to him.

CORDELIA

What kind of man he is. I think
after tomorrow, I'll never see him
again, and I want to know.

Jeffrey puts down the map.

JEFFREY

I've seen two men in him over the
years. Very different than now.

CORDELIA

Really?

JEFFREY

He would always say, "It can't be far off now," and it meant that good things will happen soon, and the war would end soon.

Cordelia smiles.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

(smiles)

He even got me saying it after a while.

(looks right at her)

He's also one of the bravest men I've ever known. He won the Victoria cross, you know.

Her eyes widen.

CORDELIA

I didn't know! He never mentioned it.

JEFFREY

It was some time back, on the Somme.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND, THE SOMME -- NIGHT (1916) (FLASHBACK)

The now familiar sight of No-Man's Land. Endless boiled, muddy earth.

ARTILLERY BOOMS in the background. English soldiers stagger back into a trench after an attack, hollow eyed.

Jeffrey is among them, covered in mud, gasping for breath.

JEFFREY (V.O.)

We'd attacked three times against a village called Guillemont, but the Hun held it. Our battalion lost ten of twenty officers, over a hundred men.

IN THE TRENCH

Noel Hobson, looking much more vital, holds a FLASHLIGHT and talks hurriedly to a group of three SOLDIERS.

He climbs up out of the trench, leading them into No-Man's Land.

JEFFREY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

When a man is dead, his family at least knows what happened to him. When he is classified as 'missing', they never know what happened to him, and must live forever with empty hope. It's always better to cut down the number of missing, and that's what Noel did that day.

HOBSON

Walks erect about the battlefield, calling out to the wounded. The soldiers duck down low and are left behind.

SNIPERS

Take pot-shots at Hobson as he goes about, calling out, flashlight glaring like a beacon.

He finds a man, still alive, and picks him up. He carries him back to the English trench and drops him off, immediately going back.

JEFFREY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He was totally ignorant of the German snipers trying to kill him. He just went about his work.

Hobson trundles about, calling out. Bullets whiz by him.

JEFFREY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

For hours, he went on with his work.

Hobson finds another man, picks him up.

HOBSON

Jonathon! I thought for sure I'd lost you!

JONATHON

It's nuthin' but a blighty one. Don't git your hopes up, Old Man.

Hobson laughs.

JEFFREY (V.O.)

After nine hours, he rescued four men and found thirteen others and retrieved their tags. He was hit twice, in the thigh and the chest.

Hobson looks up from tending to Jonathon, glances toward the German lines. He sees a dark figure there.

He squints. Sees him. The grey eyes. Wintersteiger.

A bullet shreds Jonathon's head, it explodes in Hobson's hands.

Hobson is stunned, covered in his friend's remains.

Rage flashes across his face. He glowers at Wintersteiger.

A muzzle flash and sharp CRACK. He's hit hard in the chest, falls back.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND, THE SOMME -- LATER

Hobson crawls through the muck.

He comes upon a wounded GERMAN SOLDIER. A boy really, a huge shrapnel wound across his abdomen.

Hobson glances around, draws a KNIFE.

The boy's eye fill with fear. Hobson lunges and savagely plunges the knife into the boy's chest.

Blood geyser's upward, across Hobson's face. The boy squirms horribly and dies. Hobson glances around again, face covered in crimson.

He smiles. Passes out.

JEFFREY (V.O.)

Dehydrated and exhausted. It took him two months in the hospital to recover. He wasn't supposed to live.

INT. AMBULATORY TENT -- CONTINUOUS (PRESENT)

Jeffrey is moved by his own story.

JEFFREY

I recommended him immediately for the Victoria Cross. I'd never seen a man act with so little regard for his own life.

Cordelia listens intently. She seems to have heard what she wanted to hear.

CORDELIA

I knew it.

JEFFREY

He has been in it for a long time. I think he's been crushed by too many horrible memories.

Cordelia gets up.

CORDELIA

I'm sorry to have bothered you.

JEFFREY

Not at all. The company of a woman
is no bother.

She smiles politely and moves off.

INT. AMBULATORY TENT -- NIGHT

The tent is darkened, everyone asleep. Cordelia slips in
without a sound and quietly makes her way to Hobson's side.

He sleeps heavily, breathing deep.

She kneels and studies him for a moment, then carefully peels
away the scarf covering his face.

His skin is whitish. She leans in, closer and closer.

She takes his HANDS in hers, then pauses just inches from
his face.

Her lips touch his cheek in a light, lingering kiss.

She pulls away, replaces the scarf.

EXT. MILITARY HOSPITAL -- MORNING

Troops mill about. Jeffrey emerges from the ambulatory tent
and looks around. He sees Shankland talking to another
soldier.

JEFFREY

Sergeant Shankland!

Shankland's head cocks sideways. He smiles widely.

SHANKLAND

Ay sir! Ain't you 'upposed ta be
dead?

He comes over and salutes sharply.

JEFFREY

Close as I've ever been, Sergeant.
How long have you been here?

SHANKLAND

A couple a' days, sir. I 'ame wit
Johnston. He 'ad a bit o' shell
shock.

JEFFREY

Really. And where is he now?

SHANKLAND

'Ats just da ting, sir. He's up and gone off.

JEFFREY

Deserted?

SHANKLAND

Jus' gone, sir.

Jeffrey motions Shankland to walk with him.

JEFFREY

I'm glad I've run into you, Sergeant. There's an attack the day after tomorrow as I'm sure you're aware. The division is assaulting Broodseinde. General Stuart-Bailey, with some convincing, has given me the honor of leading the probe tomorrow.

(Shankland nods)

I'm leaving shortly for the front, and you need to come with me. The company is being reconstituted. We're to conduct a raid before the attack, tomorrow night.

SHANKLAND

Yes, sir. And where will we be goin'?

JEFFREY

To Zonnebeke. The remnants of the unit are there.

SHANKLAND

'Eye feel bad leavin' Johnston 'ere.

JEFFREY

Nevermind him.

Shankland scowls at this, but retains composure.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

We're leaving in one hour with the next column.

An anxious looking PRIVATE gallops up to Jeffrey, out of breath.

PRIVATE

Sir, I've been looking for you high and low!

JEFFREY

You found me, now what is it?

PRIVATE
 General Stuart-Bailey, sir, sends
 this message. Confidential.

He hands Jeffrey a folded piece of paper. Jeffrey reads it,
 his eyes grow large.

JEFFREY
 Did you read this?

PRIVATE
 No, sir, I swear it.

Jeffrey crumples the paper and puts it in his pocket.

JEFFREY
 Thank you. That'll be all.

The Private salutes and runs off.

EXT. AMBULATORY TENT -- MOMENTS LATER

Hobson waits outside the tent, wrapped head to toe.

JEFFREY
 You're a shade lighter every time I
 see you.

HOBSON
 I feel like Hell.

Hobson watches another lorry arrive, brimming with bloodied,
 wounded men.

JEFFREY
 You need rest, Noel.

HOBSON
 I'm not feeling like myself today.
 And it feels right.

JEFFREY
 I think realities are going to change
 for all of us very soon.

HOBSON
 And how much more of this for you?

JEFFREY
 I'd thought I'd been stormed enough
 to be storm-ripe.
 (laughs)
 But I've developed a taste for war.

HOBSON
 (takes a deep breath)
 God, I know it's not far off now.

EXT. MILITARY HOSPITAL -- DAY

Jeffrey, Hobson, and Shankland are reunited. A long column of men and lorries are starting to move out.

Cordelia is standing in front of the triage tent. She watches them.

Hobson sees her and waves a cloth-wrapped hand. She looks on and slowly raises her hand, blows him a kiss. He goes to her.

HOBSON

You'll take care of that letter?

CORDELIA

Yes.

Hobson stands for a long moment.

HOBSON

Thank you for everything.

CORDELIA

You too, Captain. I mean that.

Hobson grows dark. Cordelia pauses, wanting.

CORDELIA (CONT'D)

Tell me her name, Captain.

Hobson hesitates.

HOBSON

Who?

CORDELIA

The one you lost. I just want to know.

HOBSON

Her...name was Anna. But something bad happened, and she's gone.

He turns slowly to leave.

CORDELIA

You don't mean to return, do you?

HOBSON

Good bye, Cordelia.

They look a long moment at each other, and Hobson turns away.

The column is moving, and the trio joins in.

They walk out of Poperinge, toward the front.

EXT. DIRT ROAD -- DAY

The column is long, stretching as far as the eye can see. Men, lorries, mules, wagons, artillery pieces moving along.

Hobson moves with them, stumbling occasionally and wracked by coughing spasms.

Jeffrey walks behind him, steely eyed.

EXT. DUCKBOARD ROAD -- NIGHT

The column marches in the darkness. Closer to the front, there are no roads. Duckboard planks, laid side by side for miles, must suffice, cutting through the endless mud.

Artillery FLASHES on the horizon, the low BOOM reverberating over and over.

A shell lands close to the column, throwing a WAGON off the road and into the mud.

It sinks unbelievably fast. A MULE kicks violently as it sinks below the surface.

Rain pours down, the wind kicks up. Men slip and fall constantly.

Hobson slogs stubbornly forward, pale as a ghost. His tattered rags flap madly in the wind.

Jeffrey looks at the bobbing heads of the young soldiers around him. His men.

He looks out over the boiled landscape. Even here, rotting skeletal hands grasp desperately out of the mud, clutching in vain for help.

EXT. DIRT ROAD -- NIGHT

Dorrien and Stuart-Bailey sit astride their steeds, trotting down a dirt road. Its not raining here, yet.

Far off, the BOOMING artillery is seen and heard. The road winds past a small, shattered wood.

DORRIEN

I smell rain in the air.

STUART-BAILEY

It'll make the advance impossible.

Dorrien huffs loudly, shrugs.

DORRIEN

The men can manage it.

STUART-BAILEY

I hope you're prepared for massive casualties, sir, for that's what we face.

DORRIEN

These are cruel times. We must become cruel with them.

STUART-BAILEY

You go to the front, General, but you won't go to the hospitals. I think you're afraid to face the results of your failures, because if you did, you wouldn't have the strength to keep ordering these absurd attacks.

Dorrien stops his horse, glaring at Stuart-Bailey.

DORRIEN

Don't address me about loss. I lost my own son at Loos. My brother lies beneath the sands of Gallipoli. My wife wastes away to nothing while I fight the Hun. Loss is familiar to me because I have nothing left to lose.

Stuart-Bailey deflates a little, not knowing what to say.

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

I know I won't return from this war. There is no afterwards for any of us.

Dorrien trots on, leaving him. Stuart-Bailey gallops up to him.

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

I'll show you the magnificence of British soldiers.

Stuart Bailey gallops in front of him, blocking him.

STUART-BAILEY

You can show me the whole of Europe from Belgium to France and I won't approve of this attack. I hold the ear of General Edmonds, and he'll hear what you refuse to.

Dorrien glares at him.

DORRIEN

I see I was wrong about you, Alexander.

(MORE)

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

You've clearly lost your nerve. You won't stop this attack and you won't protect your Boche friend, either.

Stuart-Bailey snaps to attention, eyes riveted on Dorrien.

DORRIEN (CONT'D)

Yes, I am well aware of your inaction on his part.

STUART-BAILEY

I have been unable to locate him yet, General, that is all.

DORRIEN

A convenient excuse, but flimsy and undeserving a man of your rank. Lieutenant Jeffrey is a German citizen and an enemy of our country. I will have you both court martialed-

STUART-BAILEY

His father was German, but he is a loyal subject, I swear to you. He only wants to serve England.

DORRIEN

Your loyalties, as usual, are misplaced, Alexander, and it pains me to have to do this to you.

(he stiffens)

But this is war, goddammit.

He rears his horse around to leave.

A machine gun BLAST erupts from the woods.

Both men are cut down, thrown from their horses. In an instant, they are dead.

EXT. WOODS -- CONTINUOUS

GEFREITER

Looks up from the smoking machine gun.

Kuhlbart slaps him on the back.

KUHLBART

Crack job, Private! Damn, they might have been Generals! Let's get out of here!

They hastily pack up and trot off into the darkness.

EXT. ENGLISH RESERVE TRENCH -- NIGHT

The trench is bursting with men. Jeffrey hunches over a map with a dim flashlight.

Hobson sits atop the trench, gazing out toward the front line. Far off, the FLASH of artillery and a low BOOM.

Shankland organizes a small team of men, his sword gleaming.

Jeffrey climbs up to Hobson.

JEFFREY

We'll go off in about two hours.

HOBSON

That bastard's here. I just know it. When's the attack?

JEFFREY

The barrage starts at 4 a.m. The attack follows. We move up at 2 a.m. for the raid.

HOBSON

Raid?

JEFFREY

There's a shortage of officers in times like these, so I volunteered.

HOBSON

A raid into that? Are they-

He looks at Jeffrey, who stares back at him with dead eyes.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

You aren't coming back.

JEFFREY

Like I said, realities have changed of late.

(stern)

There's no going home now. You come with us, and I'll try to get you to your man. Tell me, though, why you're looking for him.

Hobson smiles.

HOBSON

Nothing complicated, Cedric. I want to kill him.

JEFFREY

Why him?

HOBSON

On the Somme, when-

JEFFREY

When you won the Victoria's Cross?

HOBSON

Yeah, well I wasn't trying to win a medal. I was looking for my friend. And I found him with a bullet right between the eyes. Then I saw him, and he shot me.

(inhales deeply)

Two months in the hospital, and this starts. Long months. And too much time to think.

(holds up his hands)

It started with him.

JEFFREY

How in the world did you find out who he is?

HOBSON

It's amazing what you can find out with a little money, a sharp bayonet and some Hun prisoners.

JEFFREY

Since when-

HOBSON

We can't deny who we are, Cedric. It's high time I stopped.

Jeffrey demurs, nods.

JEFFREY

Yes, you're right. Its time we both stopped.

Shankland scurries up, smiling.

SHANKLAND

Nice noit, sir. They's givin' dem a poundin' up front.

A LORRY chugs up to the line, squealing to a halt. They all look in it's direction.

Two men get out of the front and walk around to the back, pulling a smaller figure out.

They approach in the darkness. Jeffrey shines his light toward them.

The stooped figure of JOHNSTON appears between the two men. His face is bruised. A SERGEANT pushes him roughly.

Shankland jumps up.

SHANKLAND (CONT'D)

Johnston! We're ewe been?

Johnston doesn't look up.

SERGEANT

He was picked up outside Poperinge in a supply lorry, trying to make his way to the coast. You know him, sir?

JEFFREY

Yes, he's one of mine.

SERGEANT

The General's specific about desertion, sir.

JEFFREY

Not without a court martial.

SERGEANT

I have the orders with me, sir. Now step aside or I'll do it myself.

Jeffrey turns red with rage, grabs the man by his collar.

JEFFREY

You'll not address me like that, Sergeant, or you'll be up before the squad, too! I believe we're still in the British Army. I'll make the arrangements.

The Sergeant backs off, scowling.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

He's just a damned deserter, anyway.

EXT. ENGLISH RESERVE TRENCH -- LATER

Five soldiers stand in line holding their rifles. Johnston stands before them, hands bound behind his back.

Shankland stands to the side, his unhappy duty to supervise.

A red haired CORPORAL gives the command, and the shooters take aim.

Johnston looks pleadingly to Shankland, tears running down his cheeks. He's scared to death.

Shankland raises his hand to halt the shooters. They lower their rifles across their chests.

Shankland walks to Johnston, who chokes back tears.

JOHNSTON

Lie to Beatrice about this. I want her to think I was brave.

SHANKLAND

Eye will.

JOHNSTON

I tried to be brave, Sergeant.

SHANKLAND

Ewe were brave, lad.

JOHNSTON

My life is passing before my eyes. It doesn't end this way.

Shankland's icy face breaks at the words. He grabs Johnston's head, ruffling his dirty hair.

Jeffrey appears and pulls Shankland away roughly.

Jeffrey comes in close to Johnston.

JEFFREY

You're a coward, Johnston. But at least you're an honest coward. I admire you.

He puts a hand on his shoulder, squeezes and strides away.

The shooters aim their rifles.

Shankland shuts his eyes as the fire command is given. SHOTS ring out.

EXT. GERMAN DUGOUT -- NIGHT

Wintersteiger sits in the corner. He stares blankly ahead.

Gefreiter comes down the stairs, hauling a bucket of water. He puts it down and squats in front of Wintersteiger, smiling.

GEFREITER

Sergeant! We killed two Generals tonight! I mean, I did. I was on the gun!

Wintersteiger fixes his eyes on him, but says nothing.

GEFREITER (CONT'D)

What a feeling! It was...I don't know. Good.

Wintersteiger frowns, scowls at him.

WINTERSTEIGER

Felt good to kill a man?

Gefreiter is shocked to hear his voice.

GEFREITER

Well...they were British.

WINTERSTEIGER

Maybe they were good men, too.

GEFREITER

Wh-What? I thought you'd be proud of me.

WINTERSTEIGER

Killing won't make it right. Whatever's wrong.

GEFREITER

But you...you've killed-

WINTERSTEIGER

Many. So many. But not any more.

Gefreiter, confused, stands. He's hesitant.

GEFREITER

What did you do, Sergeant? The men talk a lot, but I don't believe them.

WINTERSTEIGER

What do they say?

GEFREITER

That you killed a lot of people. Children. Women.

WINTERSTEIGER

(nods)

Yes. I killed them all. And I don't know why.

GEFREITER

...And that's why you're here?

Wintersteiger thinks for a moment, shakes his head and stares at his hands.

WINTERSTEIGER

I'm here because my life was a waste.

Gefreiter edges toward the door.

WINTERSTEIGER (CONT'D)

But I got another chance.

He closes his eyes.

EXT. ENGLISH RESERVE TRENCH -- NIGHT

The wet dark of the early morning. Jeffrey and twenty ENGLISH RAIDERS, including Shankland and Hobson, prowl down a long communication trench connecting the reserve trench to the front lines.

They go single file down the narrow trench. Jeffrey glances at his watch. It's 4 a.m.

On cue, English guns behind the reserve trench thunder into life. The sky flashes yellow as shells soar toward the German lines.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCH -- LATER

The Raiders strip off all their equipment. Water bottles, haversacks, collar flashes, and personal items fall to the trench floor.

They've shed their steel helmets as well, replacing them with black woolen caps.

Jeffrey glances over the men and smears black grease paint all over his face.

Hobson, leans against the trench wall, arms crossed against his chest.

JEFFREY

(to Shankland)

Two more minutes. Follow me down the sap and over the top from there. Tell the lads to keep low and quiet.

(pauses)

There's an old German pillbox two hundred yards in front of the German line. We keep to the left of it to find the cut in the wire. Be sure the men have their bayonets and plenty of bombs.

(pauses)

Remember, we need intelligence. Maps, documents, papers of any kind. I want to get at least two prisoners, alive and unharmed.

Shankland nods, the whites of his eyes brilliant against his blackened face. He places a hand on the sheath of his sword, hanging at his side.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

(pulls Hobson aside)

A word, Captain. If we get separated, make your way to the dugout.

(he sniffs the air)

I won't be joining you. I have an appointment at Agincourt, and this time some Hun bastard won't stop me.

HOBSON

You said he saved you.

JEFFREY

He gave me life. But he damn sure didn't save me.

HOBSON

Then this is it. The truth finally.

He shakes Jeffrey's hand.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

You were always an Englishman to me.

EXT. SAP -- MOMENTS LATER

Jeffrey at the head of the file of men crawls over the sap head into No Man's land. Artillery continues to fall on the German lines.

The men belly crawl, bodies slurring through the mud.

They remain in single file, Hobson is the last man.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- MOMENTS LATER

Jeffrey comes to the English wire, a long tangle of barbed wire extending as far as the eye can see in both directions.

It has been pre-cut at precisely this location, allowing enough space for a single man to get through.

He feels his way through, leading the file.

JEFFREY

Crawls forward, more quickly now as he looks at his watch. The file of soldiers picks their way through the wire.

THE RAIDERS

Move doggedly ahead, heads down. Each Verrey light makes the whole line freeze momentarily before driving on.

AND HOBSON

At the rear, weaponless, follows.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- LATER

JEFFREY

Crawls across a crater of stagnant water. Amid the flashes of artillery, he sees a large PILLBOX to his right.

He looks back to SHANKLAND, pointing. Shankland nods.

ARTILLERY

Bursts in front of them, impacting the barely visible German barbed wire tangle.

The bombardment intensifies, shaking the ground. The line halts, hands over their heads.

SHANKLAND

Looks around, sensing something wrong.

THE SHELLS

Fall closer.

AND SHANKLAND'S

Eyes widen. He looks back to the men, signaling for cover.

JEFFREY

Oblivious, watches the shells fall. The ground shakes.

A SHELL falls only yards in front of him. He is lifted and thrown through the air, crashing heavily in a crater.

More shells fall short of their mark, the English artillery hitting it's own troops.

SHANKLAND

Burrows into the mud.

The bombardment shifts, the EXPLOSIONS float forward, toward the German lines.

SHANKLAND looks around, sure that they have been spotted, but the night grows quiet.

A Verrey light shoots up, lighting the area. Shankland sees Jeffrey lying still some yards away. He crawls over.

JEFFREY

Is on his back, unconscious. Shankland checks his pulse.

He crawls back to the men, signals them to continue on.

HOBSON

Far back, watches the Verey lights in fascination. He is jolted back to reality as the line begins to move again.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND, GERMAN WIRE -- LATER

Shankland comes to the German wire. It's been pulverized by the artillery.

He picks at the wire carefully. Barely on the other side, he can see the German trench.

Verey lights shoot up at regular intervals. The Germans know something is up.

Shankland, with a pair of wire cutters, separates a path through the wire. He eases through, Raiders following.

Artillery POUNDS the German line directly in front of them.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH, SAP HEAD -- LATER

Artillery CRASHES down all around. Two SENTRIES crouch down into the sap, hands over their heads. The din is furious.

But then, it fades.

They smile at each other, happy to have survived. One stands up to stretch his aching legs.

A BAYONET

Pierces his throat, gushing blood from the wound.

The other is stunned, but only for a moment. A dark figure leaps over the sap and plunges a bayonet into his heart, a dirty hand over his mouth. He falls dead.

SHANKLAND

Withdraws his bayonet, wiping it on his pants. Five more English raiders crawl into the sap behind him.

He nods to them, pulling a MILLS BOMB from his skeleton webbing. The raiders do the same.

Shankland pulls his sword from it's sheath.

He crouches and moves down the sap toward the German trench.

HOBSON

Just inside the German wire, watches the Raiders go into the sap. He crawls forward quickly.

SHANKLAND

Hears GERMANS talking just in front of him. He pulls a pin on the mills bomb, holding his breath.

He tosses it and ducks.

The bomb EXPLODES, followed quickly by five more as the Raiders toss their own bombs.

THE GERMAN TRENCH

Comes alive, soldiers jump up and grab their rifles, yelling at one another trying to determine what's happening.

MACHINE GUNNERS

Along the trench walls fire into the darkness, firing at nothing.

THE RAIDERS

Pour into the trench, tossing bombs, firing with amazing accuracy.

They move down both directions of the trench, fanning out.

The Germans are caught unaware. They fall amid the smoke and flame.

HOBSON

Watches the scene leap into life. Screams, shots, explosions grow along the trench. He scrambles forward.

Far to the right and left, the English artillery erects two furious walls of flame, cutting off a small section of the trench from reinforcements.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND, PILL BOX -- CONTINUOUS

The eruption of sound jolts Jeffrey awake. He looks around, disoriented. He's alone, but German machine gun fire is spraying the area.

A shot grazes him and he jumps toward the pill box.

There is a small entry way into the pill box. Only a waist high opening, the three foot thick concrete walls of the pillbox make it more like a small tunnel.

Jeffrey crawls in.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Fierce hand to hand combat. Rifles are useless here, the soldiers tear at each other with bayonets and bare fists.

SHANKLAND

Brandishes his sword like a Byzantine warrior, slashing through German soldiers.

HOBSON

In front of the German trenches, stands up and skulks forward.

THE TRENCH

Is a mass of fighting men. The Raiders tear at the Germans, but they are outnumbered.

A RAIDER

Throws a Mills bomb, but it bounces off the trench wall and lands back among the English. He throws himself on it.

SHANKLAND

Blood in his eyes, hacks at a German machine gunner, when

A GERMAN

Sticks him in the side with his bayonet.

SHANKLAND

Reels away and swings behind him with a long stroke, catching the man across the chest.

INT. GERMAN PILLBOX -- CONTINUOUS

Jeffrey crawls inside. It's cold, pitch black. He pulls out a flashlight and shines the light around.

A GHOSTLY WHITE FACE greets him.

He jumps, pulling his pistol out.

The face is a YOUNG GERMAN, blond haired, blue eyed. He's deathly pale, bleeding from a chest wound.

But still alive. He whispers something in German that could only be a plea for help.

Jeffrey keeps the pistol on him, crouching at the ready.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

Hobson slides over the parapet into the German trench. A GERMAN SOLDIER lunges at him with a fixed bayonet.

HOBSON

Sidesteps the man and places a BARE HAND on his neck.

HOBSON'S POV

The man quivers and dies, turning ashen gray.

HOBSON

Smiles wickedly, fire boiling in his eyes. He flashes his hand before him like a rapier.

HOBSON'S POV

As his hand grabs the outstretched wrist of a GERMAN OFFICER. Shock registers in the man's eyes as his skin grows ashen.

HOBSON

Is losing himself in the fight, becoming feral.

GERMAN SOLDIERS

Crowding the trench before him scramble to get out of his way, terrified.

A BLACK LIGHT

Emanates from Hobson, a living vision of death. He bears forward, and

GERMAN SOLDIERS

Are cut down by the score. Screaming.

HOBSON smiles maliciously, enjoying this for just a brief second, then he sees a

A DUGOUT ENTRANCE

Nearby, and is drawn to it.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH, NEAR THE RAIDERS -- CONTINUOUS

THE RAIDERS

Are being pushed back. German soldiers keep coming.

SHANKLAND

Looks around. Only a few Raiders left. He waves his sword in the air.

SHANKLAND

Back ta th' trenches!

He waves his sword as he goes toward the sap head, the Raiders forming around him, throwing Mills bombs to cover their retreat.

HOBSON

Is in the dugout entrance, quickly being left behind.

A TRAIL OF GERMAN CORPSES

Betray his path.

INT. GERMAN PILLBOX -- CONTINUOUS

Jeffrey watches the young German. With a shaking hand, the boy pulls a small bundle of papers from his uniform.

Letters. He holds them out to Jeffrey.

Jeffrey takes the letters. Even in German, it's clear they are addressed to the boy's parents in Germany.

Jeffrey examines them and looks at the boy.

He drops the letters into the mud and smashes them with his boot.

The German looks on, horrified. Jeffrey raises his pistol and SHOOTS.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

SHANKLAND

Leads the Raiders over the top of the German parapet. They bolt across No-Man's land, Germans close behind.

INT. GERMAN DUGOUT -- CONTINUOUS

Hobson reaches the bottom of the stairs.

HOBSON'S POV

An orange light bathes everything.

Across the room is a large man sitting on a pile of straw.

It's Wintersteiger, his body giving off a soft orange glow.

His drooping head looks up immediately as Hobson enters.

INT. GERMAN PILLBOX -- CONTINUOUS

English and German SHOUTS reach Jeffrey's ears. He listens intently.

Verey lights burst again and again, creating the brilliant shaft of white light through the dugout.

Jeffrey checks his pistol, caked with mud. He shakes it, but mud has rendered the weapon useless.

The light fades, plunging the pillbox into blackness.

JEFFREY

Breathing in deep gasps, throws down his pistol and pulls out his bayonet.

WHITE LIGHT

Cuts through the entrance, sizzling.

JEFFREY

Watches intently from the shadows, gripping the bayonet.

WHITE LIGHT

Fades. Blackness.

JEFFREY

Exhales.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND -- CONTINUOUS

SHANKLAND

Waves the four remaining Raiders through the barbed wire. Bullets zing past him.

THE RAIDERS

Scramble across the wire, barbs cutting through flesh.

A POTATO MASHER

Lands nearby and explodes, punching Shankland in the back. He grunts and falls to his knees.

INT. GERMAN PILLBOX -- CONTINUOUS

WHITE LIGHT

Crackles inside and

JEFFREY

Watches, waiting.

WHITE LIGHT

Fizzles to blackness.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND, GERMAN WIRE -- CONTINUOUS

The Raiders through the wire, run across No-Man's land toward the English trench.

Bombs explode all around, the Germans in pursuit.

Shankland is the last of them.

INT. GERMAN PILLBOX -- CONTINUOUS

DARKNESS.

A SLOSHING OF MUD from the tunnel.

WHITE LIGHT cuts a shaft.

JEFFREY

Watches, sweating rivulets.

A SHADOW

In the entrance. Someone coming in. SLOSHING.

Jeffrey tightens. A German helmet? Coming closer.

WHITE LIGHT fades. Blackness.

SLOSHING.

Someone coming in.

WHITE LIGHT sizzles in.

A PALE FACE

Like an apparition, beneath a German helmet. Hollow, circular eyes stare into Jeffrey's.

JEFFREY

Pounces, tearing into him with his bayonet. Stabbing, stabbing. Blood sprays.

The mangled corpse lays still. Darkness fades.

Jeffrey breathes, gasping for air. It's quiet.

WHITE LIGHT comes through.

The pale face still stares him in the eye.

SLOSHING.

Another shadow in the entrance.

SLOSHING of mud. Someone coming.

BLACKNESS

Jeffrey scrambles into the corner. Shaking.

JEFFREY

I'm not afraid.

Quiet. The SLOSHING abruptly stops.

Jeffrey's halting BREATHS. A tear crawls down his face.

WHITE LIGHT

A large shadow, beastly. Jeffrey's breath escapes him.

A MILLS BOMB plops into the dugout.

JEFFREY

Sees it for only a second. The shadow disappears.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

I am an Englishman.

The bomb explodes.

EXT. GERMAN PILLBOX -- CONTINUOUS

SHANKLAND

Presses against the outside wall as the blast escapes the entrance.

He plows inside, sword ready.

WHITE LIGHT cuts through

And he sees three bodies. A dead German with blond hair.

The corpse of Lieutenant Jeffrey.

And the mangled, stabbed body of the English Raider who was in front of Shankland.

INT. GERMAN DUGOUT -- CONTINUOUS

HOBSON

Calm, walks toward Wintersteiger.

WINTERSTEIGER

Shudders, pressing against the wall, body glowing brighter.

HOBSON'S POV

This figure before him is nothing like what he expected. A terrified, wrecked shell of a once good man.

HOBSON

Softens,

HOBSON'S HAND

Reaches out, ghostly white.

WINTERSTEIGER

Stiffens, reaches for it.

HOBSON

I'm sorry...

MONTAGE

EXT. FIELD HOSPITAL -- DAY

Hobson, in civilian clothes somewhere in France, stands over a fallen soldier.

He drops a PIECE OF WIRE and begins undressing him. The man is a MEDIC.

EXT. POPERINGE -- NIGHT

Hobson and Pettifer meet on a cold night outside Shinkles.

Pettifer hands Hobson a set of PAPERS and a MILITARY ID CARD, and Hobson hands Pettifer a wad of MONEY.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, THE MESSINES -- MORNING

The first battle at Messines. Hobson tears off the bandages around his hands and presses down on the injured soldier's bandaged stomach.

HOBSON'S POV

The "cursed" hands hold the bandage on tightly.

An EXPLOSION, he is rocked. And now,

HIS HANDS ARE AROUND THE BOY'S NECK, squeezing.

The boy gasps, gags, but

HOBSON squeezes harder, a blank, dead look on his face.

EXT. TRENCHLINE, SANCTUARY WOOD -- DAY

A MORTAR throws Hobson against SAPPER BOWLES.

They both squirm, Hobson falling back.

A KNIFE protrudes from Bowles' abdomen, blood running free from the wound.

He looks in shock at Hobson.

HOBSON

Stares back.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL, POPERINGE -- EVENING

The BURNT MAN looks up pleadingly at Hobson.

HOBSON

Wooden, picks up a pillow and gently puts it over the man's face.

His dead eyes look on.

INT. HOUSE -- DAY

A very cozy living room, somewhere in the States.

And finally, Anna. Radiant, beautiful at first. On her knees, weeping.

But bruised, beaten...bloodied. Hobson stands over her, menacing.

END MONTAGE

HOBSON

Eyes huge, watery. Knowing.

HOBSON

I'm a monster.

He slumps to his knees.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

I always have been.

The hands meet, gripping tightly.

Hobson's eyes close. Face supremely placid. He falls to his knees.

Winterstieger goes with him, eyes transfixed, glazing. His body emits a soft golden glow, warm and inviting.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

How can this be?

HOBSON

Collapses. Wintersteiger kneels over him.

The EXPLOSIONS outside are reverberate over and over.

WINTERSTEIGER'S FACE

Aged, heavy with despair, but he SMILES.

HOBSON

Gasps for breath. There is a huge WOUND in his stomach that bleeds heavily.

His eyes fix on Wintersteiger, who smiles warmly at him.

HOBSON (CONT'D)

I'm a liar, and a murderer.

HOBSON

A tear runs down his cheek. His eyes close. He's dead.

WINTERSTEIGER

Stands, looks at Hobson's body a long moment. He touches it, and the horrible wounds on the body close and disappear.

Hobson lies tranquil, almost as if sleeping.

WINTERSTEIGER

And I'm not.

He walks out of the dugout.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH -- CONTINUOUS

The battle still rages. Germans line the parapet firestep firing at the retreating English.

Siege howitzers belch fire behind the line. The air vibrates with NOISE.

STUHLMULLER

Lies in a bloody mess against the parapet, his body slashed from a large sword.

WINTERSTEIGER

Emerges from the dugout. He looks around, then climbs the parapet.

Bullets fly around him as German soldiers watch him in curiosity.

He stands high on the parapet and looks over the battlefield.

WINTERSTEIGER

It's not far off, now.

BODIES

Are everywhere, both English and German.

The artillery RUMBLES in the distance.

Germans scream at him to get down, to return fire.

BUT WINTERSTEIGER

Makes no notice of them. Face supremely serene, he turns his back to them. Away from it all.

Standing erect against the flashes of artillery and Verey lights, he walks away from the fighting.

THE GERMANS

Look at him, puzzled. They fall still.

WINTERSTEIGER

Walks away. The GUNSHOTS fade to silence.

And he walks.

The ARTILLERY booms lower and lower, until it recedes completely.

And he walks.

The front behind him, he walks away.

And SILENCE follows him.

FADE OUT: