

P R O P A G A N D A

By

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Based on

"How I Filmed the Great War"

by Geoffrey Malins.

*In 1914 a terrorist attack sparked a new type of war.*

*Its flames consumed the world and left nothing unchanged.*

*This is the story of news that made the war what it was.*

*And the men who made the news what it is.*

Chyron: **Part I: The Photographer**

CLOSE ON a POSTER of **LORD KITCHENER** (60), a ferocious British General with a ferocious Victorian mustache.

Kitchener's likeness points directly at the audience. The poster reads: "**ENLIST TODAY!**"

*He's England's own Uncle Sam.*

**EXT. CITY STREET - LONDON - DAY**

Kitchener posters line the street, the lamp posts, the doorways. Torn and ripped flyers litter the ground.

**War is everywhere.**

We float upwards and get a sense of our surroundings...

Busy street traffic - pedestrians, horse drawn carriages and early motor cars.

The tone is very somber. Men bustle about in waistcoats, women in dresses. Everyone wears hats.

Chyron: **London, 1916**

**INT. SHOWROOM - GAUMONT PICTURE CO. - DAY**

A charming shop with large windows overlooking the street. Plenty of natural light.

Cordoned off with velvet ropes, a selection of CAMERAS stand on display in the center of the floor.

**GEOFFREY MALINS** (28, large nosed and tight lipped, sleeves rolled up) sits behind a desk, cleaning his PRISTINE X-5, a boxy and large, still-frame camera.

If the office is a temple to film, the X-5 is Malins' bible.

Malins oils the gears and polishes the machinery inside the camera box until he can catch his reflection in its shine.

He smiles at himself. *Not bad.*

Satisfied with the shine, Malins peers through the viewfinder... the lens through which he sees the world.

The front door of the store CHIMES open. A SOLDIER enters, carrying an envelope.

SOLDIER  
Thomas Darling?

THOMAS DARLING (52), very short and meek as a field mouse, steps out of the office in the back of the shop.

DARLING  
Yes?

SOLDIER  
Please sign, sir.

The soldier hands Darling a PACKET of papers. Darling inspects them.

DARLING  
Non disclosure agreements?

SOLDIER  
(To Malins) You sign as well.

Darling hands one to Malins and they both read it over.

MALINS  
Something you haven't told me,  
Thomas?

DARLING  
What haven't I told you?

The Soldier just stands there. Darling fumbles with his spectacles, so he can read it.

DARLING (CONT'D)  
Ah, yes. A request for proposal.  
(To Malins) They sometimes include  
Non-Disclosures with these. Rarely  
enforced.

Darling waves Malins to follow his lead. They both sign. The Soldier takes the papers and leaves to stand guard outside the front door.

DARLING (CONT'D)  
Well that's odd. Normally they  
stick around to give you a pitch -

But then a DOZEN MORE SOLDIERS come running. They line up outside the windows, facing the street, blocking any view into the room.

Then the front door opens and CHANCELLOR MASTERMAN (44) enters coolly. He's pudgy, ruddy and every inch the aristocrat in a half cape and top hat.

MASTERMAN

Good day.

DARLING

Good day, sir.

Masterman stops to take off his gloves, one finger at a time.

MASTERMAN

Do you know who I am?

DARLING

No, sir.

MASTERMAN

That is probably just as well. My name is Charles Masterman. You may remember me as the former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

DARLING

An honor to meet you, sir. My name is -

MASTERMAN

Thomas Darling. Yes, Mr. Darling. A pleasure to meet you. I've been following your work for quite a while and you've left me substantially impressed.

DARLING

Thank you.

Masterman turns his sights to Malins.

MASTERMAN

And you must be Geoffrey Malins, the apprentice.

MALINS

Yes, sir. It's an honor, sir.

MASTERMAN

Have either of you ever heard of the Bureau of Propaganda?

MALINS

No.

DARLING

Afraid not.

MASTERMAN

It is a ministry of the government created by Lord Kitchener to control every aspect of how the Great War is presented in the news. Our existence is secret. Our work is public.

DARLING

Well that would be 'news' to me!

Beat.

MASTERMAN

Yes, well.

Masterman ignores the attempt at humor. He opens a FILE with Darling's name on it and slides a PAPER across the table.

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

It may surprise you to learn Gaumont has been the subject of frequent discussion amongst my staff. And, well, you're so popular, old boy, that we would like to hire you for the war effort.

DARLING

I'm afraid I don't understand.

MASTERMAN

I want you to be a combat cinematographer for the Bureau of Propaganda. We send you to the front lines. You take pictures and bring them back. We choose the best ones and then we dole them out to the newspapers for publication. Your pictures would be the face of the war. Its official record.

DARLING

A combat cinematographer... who ever heard of such a thing?

MASTERMAN

It is an entirely new dimension of warfare.

DARLING

I am flattered. Truly. But I am positively ancient by military standards.

Malins is too interested to let the opportunity pass.

MALINS

Wait, our work would -

Darling STAMPS his foot to stop his apprentice from talking.

DARLING

Please excuse my apprentice. He has a great eye but his business acumen is lacking.

Masterman recognizes though: **Malins is interested.** So he plays it coy.

MASTERMAN

No need to answer now. Think it over. And know it would do the world a great service if we could enlist your help.

Masterman hands Darling a printed INVITATION. Then he makes to leave but takes a moment to single out Malins.

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

In fact, a strapping lad like you? Why haven't you enlisted already?

MALINS

I have a hole in my heart, sir. The stress could kill me.

MASTERMAN

Hell, the enemy could kill you my boy. Are you going to let *that* stop you too?

Masterman winks and taps Malins playfully on the shoulder. Malins smiles. *He's in.*

BLACK.

Chyron: **Part II: The Distributor**

**EXT. DAILY MAIL HEADQUARTERS - DAY**

Establishing. A beautiful office building, with a grand staircase that opens onto the street.

It's the headquarters of **The Daily Mail** and their sign is out front.

VOICE (O.S.)  
(Pre-lap) It is an insane request.  
I don't know how we even do it -

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAILY MAIL - MORNING**

A naturally well lit board room. It is surrounded on three sides by a news room bustling with REPORTERS. The fourth wall looks out over the street entrance.

In the room an editor, MECKEL (45) looks disheveled in a wrinkled shirt, loosened tie, and rolled up sleeves. He's irritable from staying up all night. He was the VOICE.

On the other side of the table is another editor RAFFERTY (60) buttoned up, far more put together, his hair meticulously coiffed.

RAFFERTY  
We have three hours 'til deadline.  
We simply *print* the damn thing.

MECKEL  
You would establish a precedent  
that flouts -

A cane RAPS on the floor and silences Meckel mid-sentence.

NORTHCLIFFE (O.S.)  
Gentlemen.

In the doorway stands **LORD NORTHCLIFFE** (51), owner of the Daily Mail. His style outclasses everyone else but he's pudgy and sour in the face.

Once he has everyone's attention, Northcliffe walks to the head of the table, cane CLICKING as he goes.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)  
There is no need to raise your  
voices in here.

MECKEL  
Good morning, sir.

RAFFERTY  
Good morning.

MECKEL  
We received a very odd request  
today, sir.

RAFFERTY

Not *that* odd -

NORTHCLIFFE

What is it?

Rafferty hands over a piece of paper. It's a **REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**, signed by Chancellor Masterman, embossed by the Bureau of Propaganda.

RAFFERTY

Chancellor Masterman requested to advertise in the evening paper, sir.

NORTHCLIFFE

What's odd about that?

RAFFERTY

*Today's* evening paper.

NORTHCLIFFE

Let's see.

Northcliffe flips through the request for proposal to find a mock up of the ad they want printed:

**"To the Young Women of London:**

**Is your "Best Boy" wearing Khaki? If not, don't YOU THINK he should be?**

**If he does not think that you and your country are worth fighting for - do you think he is WORTHY of you?**

**Tell him to join the army TO-DAY!"**

Below the text is a very distinct drawing of a **WHITE FEATHER**.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)

Seems straight forward enough.  
Standard print ad. We can push back the advertisements for lime juice and give them a fifteen percent refund to compensate for the breach of contract. Then charge the Bureau our rush printing rate.

MECKEL

No, but sir, you don't understand. Chancellor Masterman hasn't *paid*.

RAFFERTY

Yet.

This confuses Northcliffe.

NORTHCLIFFE  
We've received no funds?

MECKEL  
Correct.

NORTHCLIFFE  
That *is* odd.

RAFFERTY  
The Bureau will pay.

NORTHCLIFFE  
Have either of you visited business affairs? This could all be a simple clerical error.

RAFFERTY  
We rang them and they said they hadn't seen anything.

NORTHCLIFFE  
And have either of you contacted the Chancellor?

MECKEL  
We were waiting for you.

Northcliffe nods, considering both sides.

NORTHCLIFFE  
Well... it's time we pay a visit. The message may be important but we aren't their lackey. And I won't be treated as such.

MECKEL  
We should telephone them immediately.

NORTHCLIFFE  
You are going to the exchequer, Meckel. Make sure nothing has slipped through the cracks and draft up an invoice for rush printing. And Rafferty, you go to layout. Put together a mock up to make space for the advert. Leave Masterman to me. I will send word to you both before deadline on how to proceed.

(MORE)

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)  
Just get all the pieces ready. If  
they don't pay, we don't print.

They scamper out. Northcliffe walks to a phone on a corner  
desk, picks it up and dials.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)  
(Into the phone) Operator? 2L-4N  
please.

RINGING until a BUTLER answers the phone.

BUTLER (O.S.)  
Masterman residence.

NORTHCLIFFE  
Chancellor Masterman, please.

Northcliffe starts thumbing with the grip of his cane,  
nervously.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)  
Yes, this is Alfred Harmsworth.

Masterman's voice chirps through the phone.

MASTERMAN (O.S.)  
Lord Viscount Northcliffe?

NORTHCLIFFE  
Yes, hello Charles.

MASTERMAN (O.S.)  
To what do I owe the pleasure?

NORTHCLIFFE  
Did you send over a request for  
proposal? For an advert to run in  
the paper this evening?

MASTERMAN (O.S.)  
Yes, that's right.

NORTHCLIFFE  
Yes, well it seems there's a bit of  
a mixup with the payment.

Static CRACKLES in the wait for Masterman's response.

MASTERMAN (O.S.)  
Why don't you come by? We can  
discuss the matter in person.

**EXT. DRIVEWAY - MASTERMAN'S HOME - DAY**

Northcliffe is driven down a long driveway, tall rows of oak trees on either side. Ahead of him awaits a true English manor.

The trees reflect on the window over Northcliffe's face like prison bars.

**INT. DRAWING ROOM - MASTERMAN'S HOME - DAY**

Northcliffe is escorted in by a VALET to find a welcoming Charles Masterman.

MASTERMAN

Good afternoon, my Lord!

NORTHCLIFFE

Chancellor.

MASTERMAN

May I offer you a brandy, old boy?

NORTHCLIFFE

Nothing of the sort for me, thank you. I came as a matter business.

MASTERMAN

Of course.

NORTHCLIFFE

I must be brief. And I am afraid I must speak plainly.

Masterman waves his Valets out of the room. They abide instantaneously.

MASTERMAN

The business with the advert.

NORTHCLIFFE

Precisely.

MASTERMAN

We would appreciate deeply your accommodation.

NORTHCLIFFE

Yes. Well, there is only an hour before deadline. If you just draw up a check, I have the men standing by. We can still make the press.

MASTERMAN

You see, I am afraid that just won't do on this one, old boy.

NORTHCLIFFE

What won't?

MASTERMAN

It's a terrible pickle. I know. I would pay it myself but it wouldn't be appropriate with my position as a public figure and all, you know.

NORTHCLIFFE

I'm sorry, I misunderstood. You can't pay *at all*?

Masterman blushes. He goes to his bar and pours himself a drink to diffuse the tension.

MASTERMAN

Not quite. You see, this war effort has forced us to take on staggering amounts of debt - almost overnight. If I were to show you the balance sheet - well, the issue is... Lord Kitchener needs more men. For his offensive.

NORTHCLIFFE

We just had an offensive! Another?

MASTERMAN

It's a second wave if you will. But our resources are stretched quite thin, you see. And the purse strings have been tightened. So Kitchener ordered a full budgetary review. Until it's completed, our funds are frozen.

Northcliffe isn't liking where this is going.

NORTHCLIFFE

I see.

MASTERMAN

Yes, but the thing is: your paper is vital to the recruitment effort. And we really do need to get the presses rolling. So in order to "fight on" as it were, we must make certain sacrifices.

NORTHCLIFFE

I must sacrifice revenue?

MASTERMAN

Our soldiers sacrifice their lives.

NORTHCLIFFE

I cannot say I think this is a good idea.

MASTERMAN

Well, I am afraid we don't stand a chance without you. We have lost - I cannot tell you how many good men we've lost in this war. Not to mention the first wave of the offensive. We need to replace them. We need to rebuild.

NORTHCLIFFE

How many will it take to rebuild?

MASTERMAN

Yes. To make any real progress? My god, we need another hundred thousand! But in order to recruit those men, we need your presses to advertise the campaign. Now is the time or else all those lives were for naught. Your country needs you.

Northcliffe looks skeptical but he starts to come around.

NORTHCLIFFE

I am not blind to the reality of the situation but it's not exactly my responsibility, as a newsman, is it? Sounds like a military matter.

Masterman's looks to Northcliffe, *pleading in his eyes*.

MASTERMAN

Your lot is in with ours too.

Northcliffe has to wonder if the situation is worse than he realizes...

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

You will be repaid in full as soon as the review is complete. Just another day or two.

NORTHCLIFFE

So I pay from my own coffers?

MASTERMAN

It is a trying time for us all.

Northcliffe scrutinizes Masterman. *Is Masterman trying to take advantage of him? Or are things really that bad?*

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

Please. If we do not act now, it will have all been for nothing.

NORTHCLIFFE

And you can't just print tomorrow?  
Or whenever the review is done?

MASTERMAN

There isn't any time to spare.

Masterman approaches Northcliffe in a heartfelt manner.

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

If we don't get one hundred  
thousand more soldiers immediately  
our security is in serious danger.

Northcliffe nods. *He's in.*

NORTHCLIFFE

I will make an allowance this one  
time. But if you wish to deal in  
business, then come to me properly.  
I will have to breach multiple  
contracts for this. It is a blemish  
upon my reputation.

MASTERMAN

Of course. I understand.

NORTHCLIFFE

And I expect full reimbursement the  
minute this review is complete.

MASTERMAN

Absolutely.

NORTHCLIFFE

We will keep a running tab of your  
expenditures. And I would have you  
know, rush printing does cost more.

MASTERMAN

But it will go out today?

NORTHCLIFFE

It will go out today.

Lightning **KRACKS** O.S. and RAIN begins pouring down from the sky.

BLACK.

Chyron: **Part III: The Recruit**

**EXT. SAVILE ROW - EVENING**

OLLIE, (17) fair complexion, blonde hair, and BARNEY, (17) freckled and brown hair, wearing book bags, walk past the fanciest clothiers in London, walking home from school.

From down the road, MELISSA (18, an attractive girl with great hair) waves at Ollie, beckoning him towards her.

BARNEY

Do you think she fancies you?

OLLIE

I certainly hope so.

They meet each other on the street.

OLLIE (CONT'D)

Hello Melissa!

MELISSA

Ollie! What a joy to find you.

OLLIE

How are you this morning?

Melissa beckons Ollie a little closer, as if she's sharing a secret. She leads him into an alcove, until he's cornered between her and the bay window of a store.

MELISSA

I meant to ask you something. Both of you, actually.

OLLIE

Of course.

MELISSA

Why aren't you in the army?

OLLIE

I must say, I haven't considered it very deeply. I figured I would finish school -

Melissa STOMPS her foot and raises her voice.

MELISSA  
Are you a coward?

OLLIE  
I am no coward.

MELISSA  
Prove it.

OLLIE  
What?

MELISSA  
Show me.

OLLIE  
This is ludicrous.

Ollie turns to walk away. He doesn't understand what on earth has just happened until - THUD! Melissa throws a rolled up NEWSPAPER that hits him in the back.

OLLIE (CONT'D)  
What did -

MELISSA  
Look.

Ollie unrolls it and sees the WHITE FEATHER ADVERT on the front page.

OLLIE  
What are you saying?

Ollie looks back to Melissa as she slowly draws a WHISTLE out of her pocket. Ollie's eyes go wide with fear.

OLLIE (CONT'D)  
No, don't do that. This is mad. I'm going to enlist. I am. Just let me wait until school is over -

MELISSA  
One way or another, it's happening today.

OLLIE  
Please, Melissa...

Melissa moves the whistle to her lips...

Ollie is petrified, his feet planted. Stuck between a rock and a hard place.

OLLIE (CONT'D)

Please, don't make a scene.

He's helpless, trying to scan for a way out, anything to avoid this god awful situation in front of him.

OLLIE (CONT'D)

Let's just talk about this.

Meanwhile, Barney has started backing away slowly from the confrontation. Once he's a full few feet behind Ollie, he BOLTS for it. Ollie sees him go.

*There's nothing he can do.*

OLLIE (CONT'D)

Crap.

Melissa **TWEETS** the whistle. Immediately all the onlookers turn and stop.

MELISSA

**Cowards!** You are cowards! Both of you.

Ollie starts backing away as Melissa brandishes **a white feather...**

She runs at him, grabs his lapel and sticks the feather roughly into it. Ollie starts to tear up quietly.

OLLIE

Stop, get off me. Melissa, no.

MELISSA

Your classmates are out there dying for you and you're content to stay at home?!

Barney meanwhile walks quickly away down the street, putting his head down trying to skirt all attention.

He reaches the corner and a DOZEN TEENAGE GIRLS step forward from the street. They're synchronized. **It's an ambush.**

WHISTLES abound.

BARNEY

(Under his breath) Shit.

The girls encircle both Ollie and Barney, TACKING both of them with feathers. The whole street stops to look up at their escalating confrontation.

More onlookers stop to stare. A LADY peers over her spectacles and pulls her YOUNG DAUGHTER away from the ruckus.

GIRL #3

What on earth do you have to say  
for yourself?

GIRL #4

You do nothing for your Crown or  
your country!

GIRL #5

Coward!

An OLD MAN lifts his top hat and HA-RUMPHS as the chorus of chanting continues to build -

MELISSA

Your parents would be ashamed of  
you!

Ollie is horrified. Overwhelmed. The SHOUTING rains down on him. It evolves into sing-song TAUNTING -

ALL GIRLS

Coward, coward, coward, coward!

Their voices SWELL until -

#### **INT. RECRUITMENT DEPOT - EVENING**

A bell JINGLES as a door swings wildly open. It's Ollie. And he's booking it inside.

As the door shuts, a poster bearing Kitchener's face swings into the fore. **"Enlist Now!"**

Soldiers and clerks all look up to notice as Ollie dashes through the open layout of the depot and sprints to the first desk he can find the first free desk.

CLERK (50), somber dressed, middle aged woman, receives him.

CLERK

You're in a hurry aren't you?

OLLIE

Yes, please. I need to enlist.

CLERK

Well, I assumed so. Let's start it  
all out. What's your name, sonny?

OLLIE  
Oliver Northcliffe.

CLERK  
Date of birth?

OLLIE  
July eighth, eighteen ninety nine.

The clerk pauses, looks up from her paper.

CLERK  
The law requires you to be  
eighteen.

OLLIE  
Can you make an exception? Please?

CLERK  
I'm afraid rules wouldn't be rules  
if they didn't have any enforcing.

OLLIE  
Please, ma'am, I have dozens of  
classmates who have signed up  
underage. I've just been chased  
here in the most insufferable  
fashion. A dozen girls are waiting  
outside like a pack of wolves. It's  
the most humiliating thing. Is  
there really nothing you can do?

Ollie silently pleads with her. The clerk softens.

CLERK  
(Whispering) I cannot control what  
you write on the form. But the law  
requires you to be eighteen.

She holds the form up for Ollie to take.

Ollie takes a moment to look around. He wistfully regards his  
school books in his backpack... then he notices, a broken  
white feather that's stuck onto the bag.

He turns his attention to the form and writes his birth year:  
**1898**. Then he signs his name.

CLERK (CONT'D)  
Welcome to the British  
Expeditionary Force.

**INT. SHOW ROOM - GAUMONT PICTURE CO. - EVENING**

Malins tidies up the shop before closing. Darling walks out of his office in his jacket, scarf and hat, headed towards the door. As he closes up...

DARLING

See you tomorrow, my boy.

MALINS

Before you go, sir. I was hoping you would reconsider the offer from Charles Masterman.

Darling keeps walking towards the door undeterred.

DARLING

I'm too old.

MALINS

I'm not.

DARLING

They weren't asking you. They were asking me.

MALINS

They were asking the Gaumont Picture Company. And I am either a part of that company or I am not.

Darling stops. *This won't be a fast exit.* He turns back to speak more respectfully.

DARLING

You are part of the company. Of course, you are. But I cannot ask such a dangerous assignment of you.

MALINS

I accept *all* the risk.

DARLING

It's not even about risk. It's practically certain death for the soldiers, let alone a man unfit to serve.

MALINS

Masterman didn't seem to think it was a problem.

DARLING

You need to accept the reality of your condition.

Malins' "condition" is his sore spot.

MALINS

We can let the Bureau of Propaganda be the judge of that.

DARLING

You let the army be the judge of it and they rejected you how many times? You could up and die in a moment. Think of your mother, alright? She already lost one son. She doesn't need you getting swallowed up too.

Malins seethes.

MALINS

My brother gave his life for our country. He died for honor and if he were here today, he would do it all again. All my friends have marched off to war. Do you know how many times I've tried to enlist? Five, Thomas. Do you know how humiliating it is each time to be labeled "unfit" for service?

DARLING

I don't mean to be harsh. I just don't want you to lose sight of reality.

MALINS

No, no. Let's talk about reality. They keep lowering the height requirements - five foot eight, five foot six, five foot four. Do you know how humiliating it is to be rejected for men half your size?

DARLING

Alright, settle down. I understand you. I was young once too. But with your heart... how long can you realistically last up there?

Malins throws up his hands.

MALINS

I don't know. My condition is the type where it will either kill me right away or I'll go on living just fine. So there's really no way to tell. It's not a good condition if I'm manning my post on guard but for a cinematographer? I don't think it would be an issue.

DARLING

It would be an issue if you die.

MALINS

For the work, maybe. But it wouldn't pose a risk to anyone else.

Darling SIGHS.

DARLING

I suppose it wouldn't.

Malins steps forward, perhaps a little too aggressively.

MALINS

It's my chance to finally *do* something. I mean, think. Our work would be spread across the empire!

DARLING

Hmmm...

MALINS

What?

DARLING

Well, there wasn't a war on in my day, but I remember before I was published, I would have done anything to make the cover of some magazine or some newspaper, let alone a campaign like this. I used to stay in the field for months on end. I didn't turn down a job until I was twenty nine years old.

Malins CHUCKLES. *He can relate.*

Darling slowly unfolds a piece of paper from his pocket. It's the invitation from the Bureau of Propaganda.

DARLING (CONT'D)

And do you know what I realized?  
People want to see 'amazing' up  
close. They want to see lightning  
but they don't want to stand in the  
rain. Well, that's the job. We  
stand in the rain. All so we can  
capture lightning or whatever magic  
this world has in it. But when it  
rains, it pours.

MALINS

I am aware of the risks.

Malins reaches for the invitation. Darling withdraws it at  
the last second.

DARLING

Alright. That's fine. I won't  
preach. But answer me this. Is it  
for your honor or is it for your  
career?

Malins takes a moment to think and answer seriously.

MALINS

Can it be a little bit of both?

DARLING

Very well. But be careful.

Malins GRASPS the invitation in Darling's hand.

DARLING (CONT'D)

The hard part isn't going to the  
underworld. The hard part is coming  
back.

#### **INT. NORTHCLIFFE'S STUDY - NIGHT**

Northcliffe has a drink with his wife, BETH NORTHCLIFFE (50),  
tall and graceful. They're mulling over the day.

NORTHCLIFFE

We must be in very dire straits if  
they are leaning on us so heavily.

BETH

But we just had an offensive. And  
now they resort to antagonizing  
cowardice? It makes no sense.

A contemplative moment. In the silence, Ollie peeks his head in the door.

OLLIE  
Father? I have to tell you  
something.

Ollie has the white feather in his hand behind his back.

NORTHCLIFFE  
Yes?

Ollie enters. Northcliffe turns his attention as Ollie musters up his courage.

OLLIE  
I took it upon myself today to  
enlist in the British Expeditionary  
Force.

Beth shoots up in outrage.

BETH  
No, my boy, no! Oh, Lord... this  
war is taking everyone.

Northcliffe sits, hit by a ton of bricks.

OLLIE  
I... was walking down the street  
and I...

Ollie fumbles the white feather in his hands. *He's too embarrassed to tell his parents about it.* So he stuffs it back into his pocket.

OLLIE (CONT'D)  
I... wanted to serve. I think it  
will prove the right thing to do.

BETH  
How did they even let you in?

OLLIE  
I lied. To get in. I want to serve.  
It's the honorable thing to do.

Northcliffe turns to wax, his stare goes hollow.

OLLIE (CONT'D)  
Father?

NORTHCLIFFE

It's brave of you to serve but this conflict is a vicious sort of madness.

He puts his arm on Ollie's shoulder.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)

Vicious far more than you know.

BETH

It was a selfish thing to do, Ollie.

OLLIE

Why?

BETH

Your actions have consequences on other people. Look out the window for god's sakes. Every candle on this street.

Beth HURLS open the curtains. The homes that lost a child has a candle in the window... *it's every one.*

BETH (CONT'D)

Each one may be lit for a million souls. This war won't stop until it's sunk the world.

OLLIE

So you're mad I've fallen into this mess?

BETH

No. I'm mad you jumped.

**EXT. FRONT DOOR - WELLINGTON HOUSE - DAY**

A large brick building on a metropolitan street corner. It could be a doctor's office, it could be a posh mansion. Either way, it's entirely unassuming.

Malins double checks the address on the invitation against the building before him. *Yup, he's in the right place.*

He walks down the long brick walkway to the front door and KNOCKS.

The door cracks open, a MILITARY POLICEMAN in uniform peeks out, blocking any glimpse inside.

MALINS

I came to serve.

They open the door and Malins steps into the dark house.

**INT. MASTERMAN'S OFFICE - LATER**

Masterman clasps Malins by the shoulders proudly.

MASTERMAN

Malins, old boy, this is excellent news. Just excellent. Let's see... Honorary Lieutenant ought to do. We have a little paper work and then we can send you on your way.

Masterman presents Malins with an CONTRACT.

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

This will make you a full fledged soldier in the British Expeditionary Force. It will also give you authority to access certain confidential materials and the independence to move across the front as you please.

Malins flips through a long contract initialing paragraph after paragraph, page after page...

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

The entire operation will take place over the next four weeks, as we gear up for the big push. Lord Kitchener wants quality images not only to know better our state of affairs but also to show our citizens the glorious progress we're making. We will use the images not only for news but for all our marketing campaigns for recruitment in the future as well.

MALINS

A marketing campaign, sir?

MASTERMAN

Oh yes, we unveil a full page advert in the papers. Then we start pumping out flyers as fast as we can.

(MORE)

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

Then we expand the outreach from newspapers to magazines, flyers, pamphlets, periodicals... every publication of note.

MALINS

All featuring my photos?

MASTERMAN

Yes of course. We need every bit of exposure we can get. Now, our production timeline is four weeks. Can you honor that?

Malins is practically salivating. *It's a dream come true.*

MALINS

What do you need me to shoot?

Masterman pulls out from a file cabinet an itemized SHOT LIST. It's also marked, "**CONFIDENTIAL.**"

MASTERMAN

This is your shot list.

Malins looks over the shot list sheet at five items:

**1. Loading Docks**

**2. Road to the Front**

**3. Trenches**

**4. No Man's Land**

**5. Field Command**

Malins seems skeptical...

MALINS

It's rather short.

MASTERMAN

Time is of the essence.

MALINS

Yes, sir.

MASTERMAN

Now, once you're done you will return home. We will develop the pictures and send our selects to the papers. Am I wrong to presume you have your own equipment?

MALINS

Not at all, sir. I have a Belle and Howell for moving pictures, and a Pristine X-5 for the stills. Then I also like to bring a Kodak Vest Pocket Camera to use on the run. A little lower quality but a little easier to use in a pinch.

MASTERMAN

And you know these cameras well?

MALINS

Very.

MASTERMAN

You've used them before?

MALINS

Many times.

MASTERMAN

Very well. Also, there are to be no pictures taken for personal keepsake. Everything comes back to the Bureau. You must understand, we require the utmost secrecy.

Malins reaches final page of the contract where he has to sign his name. He pauses.

MALINS

Will my name be credited with the photos, sir?

MASTERMAN

May I suggest you focus on the work first?

MALINS

The work will be excellent. That is why you hired me.

MASTERMAN

Yes. We will give you credit.

MALINS

Just wanted to make sure, sir.

Malins flourishes the signature and hands it back.

MASTERMAN

Then, that's all. We will provide transport to the docks and someone will pick you up in Belgium.

Masterman examines schedules and personnel lists.

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

Let me see... yes. John McDowell is his name. He will be your orderly. Although, he has a rap sheet a mile long, the cheeky brat. Needs a serious soldier to perk him up. Are you a prepared to be a serious soldier, Malins?

Malins hesitates.

MALINS

Yes, sir.

MASTERMAN

Are you prepared to go into combat? How's that heart condition of yours?

MALINS

Good as it's ever been. Only time will tell, sir.

MASTERMAN

Are you afraid?

MALINS

No, sir.

MASTERMAN

Then you aren't thinking.

**EXT. DAILY MAIL HEADQUARTERS - MORNING**

Northcliffe approaches, through busy street traffic, to find Meckel waiting on the steps for him.

Northcliffe shudders at the sight of him. *This isn't going to be a pleasant conversation.*

MECKEL

A word, sir?

NORTHCLIFFE

I had the feeling you would react unfavorably.

Northcliffe tries walking past him but Meckel follows close behind

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)  
Much in this way.

MECKEL  
I do not think it appropriate.

NORTHCLIFFE  
I am aware.

**INT. HALLWAYS - DAILY MAIL - DAY**

Northcliffe walks down the halls towards his office, Meckel is hot on his heels, pestering him.

MECKEL  
It's entirely unprofessional, sir.

NORTHCLIFFE  
There are more important things than contracts, Meckel. Like national security. It would do you good to remember that.

They reach Northcliffe's office, and Northcliffe opens the door to find -

MECKEL  
It sets a dangerous precedent! We cannot let the Bureau of Propaganda walk all over us -

- Masterman is sitting in Northcliffe's office, awaiting them. Meckel startles when he sees him.

MASTERMAN  
Hello Alfred. Who's this?

MECKEL  
Christopher Meckel. Editor in chief, *sir*.

MASTERMAN  
Charmed. Now be a good sport, old boy, and give us the room?

The door closes leaving Northcliffe and Masterman alone.

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)  
I have more news. I'm not sure you're going to like it.

NORTHCLIFFE

What is it?

MASTERMAN

Well, it seems we are due to enter the next phase in our recruiting campaign.

NORTHCLIFFE

And?

MASTERMAN

Well, it involves quite a few flyers. And you see we don't have leases on enough printing presses to meet the demand.

NORTHCLIFFE

How many flyers are quite a few?

MASTERMAN

Three million.

Northcliffe doesn't bat an eye.

NORTHCLIFFE

Has the budgetary review been completed?

MASTERMAN

Well, that's the thing, see. It was. And the results are bad, old boy. They're bad.

Northcliffe slicks his hair back, hard, with evident stress. He leans on his desk for stability.

NORTHCLIFFE

Meaning?

MASTERMAN

Kitchener reviewed it and there's simply no money to spare for advertising. There's hardly enough to *equip* our soldiers as is.

NORTHCLIFFE

So you won't be reimbursing me either, will you?

MASTERMAN

Not until we achieve a more favorable position in the war.

NORTHCLIFFE

Do you know what it costs in terms of time and energy to print three million flyers?

MASTERMAN

I am aware this is no small favor.

NORTHCLIFFE

Do you know how hard it is to explain to customers that they won't receive full circulation? Do you know what it does to the reputation of the paper? Let alone on doing it on such short notice. Let alone paying for it myself!

MASTERMAN

This war is trying for all of us. But in victory - you will be made whole. And your sacrifices will be honored.

Northcliffe isn't impressed.

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

It is of the utmost importance to Lord Kitchener.

NORTHCLIFFE

Not important enough to pay for though, is it?

MASTERMAN

You ought not give Lord Kitchener reason to question your loyalty. He offers his allegiance but once.

NORTHCLIFFE

There is a difference between allegiance and subservience.

MASTERMAN

The enemy is bleeding us white, Northcliffe. You can give us the transfusion we need.

NORTHCLIFFE

Again, that is not my business.

MASTERMAN

The thing is, old boy, if you *don't* help us out, well, it's essentially endangering the empire. At least from Kitchener's point of view.

NORTHCLIFFE

If our security is in danger it is because of his shortcomings. Not my presses. I told you it was a one time agreement and I meant it.

Masterman sees there's no deal to be made. He pushes up slowly and leaves.

MASTERMAN

I will inform Lord Kitchener of your decision.

**EXT. SHIPYARD - PORT OF DOVER - DAY**

Smokestacks billow on an ocean liner as British TROOPS march in a column from train car to gangplank. Wagons, carriages, and cars MOTOR about.

Enormous pulleys lift horses onto the ship via harness.

Malins walks through, camera in hand, tripod over his shoulder, heavy rucksack hanging off of him, bandolier of film across his chest.

He's wide eyed and awestruck. It's a newly mechanized army mobilizing for war. *And he's in the heart of it...*

He sees a troop column marching in lock step towards the boat. The day is sunny, the soldiers are formidable, the scene is inspiring... *hell, it's heroic.*

Malins has a moment of pure wonder.

Then a motor lorry SWERVES around him and SPRAYS his face with mud.

Malins wipes his face clean. He's still grinning though. Then he starts sizing up angles, looking for the perfect shot.

He takes a roll of film from his bandolier and fits the first few frames onto the camera sprockets.

He snaps it shut. *Ready to go.*

**EXT. SHIPYARD - PORT OF CALAIS - EVENING**

Malins steps down from the gangplank carrying a tripod, and a camera case. He has a heavy duffel over his back. He turns his head, looking around.

He's in France now.

MCDOWELL (O.S.)  
Lieutenant Malins!

Malins' head swivels, he spots JOHN MCDOWELL (25) lanky, but handsome with very sparse facial hair, sitting behind the wheel of a car.

McDowell jumps up and runs over to help with the bags.

MALINS  
McDowell?

MCDOWELL  
Guilty as charged, sir.

MALINS  
Smile!

Malins pulls a VEST POCKET KODAK from his jacket. It's a small, boxlike camera with an unfolding matte box.

He SNAPS a picture: McDowell, smiling at the docks.

MALINS (CONT'D)  
Very nice.

MCDOWELL  
Thank you, sir.

MALINS  
Masterman has told me a great deal about you.

MCDOWELL  
Don't believe a word of it. More luggage on the ship?

MALINS  
No, this is all.

McDowell PLOPS the luggage in the back of the car and takes the driver's seat. He clears some room for Malins beside him.

Malins takes out his X-5 camera and starts preparing it before he gets in.

MCDOWELL

Oh, my. Is that the X-5?

Now it's Malins' turn to be coy.

MALINS

Guilty as charged.

MCDOWELL

She's a beauty, isn't she?

MALINS

Took me three years taking family portraits on the weekends to earn this. Never turned down a job once.

Malins slides a new roll of film into the film compartment, loads the film onto the sprockets carefully.

MCDOWELL

You can load it in the daylight?

MALINS

Oh, you can load it in the day light. Have you ever used one of these before?

MCDOWELL

Never.

MALINS

Here, look at this.

Malins shows him the film canisters.

MALINS (CONT'D)

Black out cartridges. Protects the film from light. Now, do you know how to load the film?

MCDOWELL

Not on this camera, no.

MALINS

Do you want to learn?

Malins shows him how to lock and unlock the sprockets.

MALINS (CONT'D)

Then you feed the film through. Perforations over the sprockets. Clamp it back down, then put the film in its compartment.

Malins loads and secures his film. He presents McDowell with the loaded camera.

MALINS (CONT'D)

Here. Do you want to try? I plan to test you on this later.

MCDOWELL

Ha! No, no I don't want to ruin your handiwork.

MALINS

Before we leave, I need an establishing shot of the docks.

MCDOWELL

That won't be a problem.

MALINS

So please drive us about two hundred meters down the road and pull over.

The "Please" piques McDowell's interest.

MCDOWELL

Absolutely... is this your first trip to Belgium?

Malins ignores the question entirely and pretends to consult his list.

MALINS

Hold on, I want to get a shot out the back.

Malins shifts position to face back towards the dock as McDowell starts driving them away.

Malins brings the camera to his eye and SNAPS a picture.

**\*CLICK\***

**EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - CONTINUOUS**

They drive through beautiful, pastoral Belgian towns. Cows and windmills in the distance. Tons of cavalry and foot soldiers use the road.

Destruction has not touched this place.

MCDOWELL

So what is on your list?

MALINS

Well, I covered the docks already.  
Road to the front. The trenches, of  
course. No Man's Land and field  
command.

MCDOWELL

No Man's Land?

MALINS

Yes.

MCDOWELL

A picture *of* it or a picture *in* it?

MALINS

Well... both.

MCDOWELL

What's your plan?

MALINS

I'll have to figure it out when I  
get there. How are the conditions?

MCDOWELL

The conditions?

MALINS

Yes.

MCDOWELL

In No Man's Land?

MALINS

Yes.

MCDOWELL

They're awful. They've always been  
awful.

MALINS

Right, but when you say "awful,"  
what do you mean?

Malins doesn't realize how ridiculous his question sounds.

MCDOWELL

Do you hear yourself right now?

MALINS

Yes but specifically, how is it  
awful? I'm just thinking ahead...

(MORE)

MALINS (CONT'D)

for the photography. They don't tell us much back home.

MCDOWELL

Imagine a rat infested dung heap except instead of dung, it's corpses. And instead of a heap, it's a field a mile across. Or maybe a few hundred yards. And the whole thing is pockmarked with shell craters. And those are filled with bodies. And the craters are filled with water that's absorbed all the gas and fumes and chemicals of the entire war. Oh and while you're out there? The shells come down all the time.

MALINS

Can you take cover in the craters?

MCDOWELL

No.

MALINS

Why not?

MCDOWELL

Mud.

MALINS

Mud?

MCDOWELL

Yes, mud. You'll fall in and get stuck and drown. Or I mean shells, gas, snipers. They have this new gun now that shoots fire... pick your poison.

Malins is put in his place. He moves his hand towards his heart, feeling the heartbeat.

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)

Your ignorance might be cute if it weren't so dangerous.

Malins doesn't like the comment, but he holds his tongue as McDowell turns off the road.

MALINS

And how far away from the front are we now?

MCDOWELL  
Maybe sixty miles.

McDowell pulls the car to a stop.

MALINS  
Why are we stopping?

MCDOWELL  
Dinner.

MALINS  
We aren't going to the front?

McDowell throws a little more sass in his tone than one might expect when speaking to an officer.

MCDOWELL  
We are going to the front but  
you've got to remember to eat,  
*lieutenant.*

**EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT**

Malins and McDowell approach a cottage with smoke trickling out and an open cellar.

MALINS  
I assumed we would just be going  
straight to the front.

MCDOWELL  
Have you had field rations yet?

MALINS  
No.

MCDOWELL  
Well in that case, I'm about to do  
you a great kindness.

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)  
So what did the Bureau tell you?

MALINS  
To capture the shot list in four  
weeks.

McDowell scoffs.

MCDOWELL

I think you're being had my friend.  
The average rotation at the front  
is two weeks.

MALINS

Really?

MCDOWELL

Yes. Average rotation in the front  
line trenches? Three days.

MALINS

No one told me any of this.

McDowell leads him into -

**INT. CELLAR - CONTINUOUS**

A cozy, warm cellar. There's a pit at one end where CORPORAL JUDSON (25) beady eyes and odd looking but very self possessed, carves a roast GOOSE.

The cupboards are stocked with food and preserves. This isn't a war zone... *it's a super market.*

MCDOWELL

Judson. We have returned.

JUDSON

You must be Malins. A pleasure to  
meet you, Lieutenant.

Judson gives Malins an emphatic handshake.

JUDSON (CONT'D)

You came on a great night. I am  
pleased to say we have not only  
goose but blood sausage, biscuits,  
a very special whortleberry jam -

MCDOWELL

Whortleberries? Where?!

Judson points to the table. McDowell SNATCHES the jar and a spoon.

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)

This jam is the best thing that -

McDowell stops in his tracks, disappointed.

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)

Oh... oh, no.

JUDSON

What?

MCDOWELL

It's the wrong brand.

McDowell takes a full spoonful of the jam from the jar and eats it straight. He gives it a so-so nod.

JUDSON

You're welcome.

He turns back to Malins.

JUDSON (CONT'D)

It's very good. We also have potatoes, biscuits and cigars and coffee. Pull up a chair.

McDowell makes himself comfortable.

MCDOWELL

This is a night when God is good.

MALINS

Incredible. Better than Claridge's.

JUDSON

Any friend of McDowell is a friend of mine. I hope you'll stay the night.

Malins takes in his surroundings. *It really is cozy.*

MALINS

Oh, I'd love to but we're continuing up to the front.

Judson looks at Malins as if he must be joking...

MALINS (CONT'D)

I don't want to waste any time. And it's only a couple hours in the car.

JUDSON

Um, lieutenant? It's a two day trip.

MCDOWELL

He's right.

MALINS

But you said it was sixty miles.

MCDOWELL

It's sixty miles, sure. But it isn't a road you can drive on. It's a highway of mud. And you have to cross on these little boards.

JUDSON

It's a two day trip.

MCDOWELL

We could go closer to the line if you wanted but then we'd just end up in some farmhouse with no supper and here, Judson has gone out of his way to make a nice spread for us. It's the least we can do to repay the hospitality.

McDowell catches himself.

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)

- Sir.

Malins is beet red with embarrassment.

MALINS

Well... I suppose I would be glad to have a bed then, Judson. But we will have to get an early start tomorrow.

MCDOWELL

Of course, of course.

McDowell and Judson share a nod.

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)

But since we are staying the night, lieutenant, I hope you don't mind if I indulge myself.

MALINS

Indulge?

McDowell produces a long pipe... then he produces a small **pharmacist vial** full of **OPIUM**.

MALINS (CONT'D)

What is that exactly?

McDowell rolls the putty into a ball and loads the pipe.

MCDOWELL  
Like aspirin but a bit stronger.

MALINS  
What is it?

JUDSON  
Chinese molasses.

Malins doesn't know but the whole thing looks rather sketchy.

MCDOWELL  
It's opium. (Bluntly) Would you  
like some?

MALINS  
Thank you, no.

McDowell takes a deep pull of the drug and starts COUGHING.  
Malins eyes this new development warily.

MALINS (CONT'D)  
Do that often, do you?

JUDSON  
You haven't spent much time around  
soldiers, have you, mate?

MCDOWELL  
(Re. Malins) He's a baby. It's his  
first deployment. Give him a week.

**Cannons** begin to **THUNDER O.S.** in the distance...

#### **INT. PRINTING PRESS - DAY**

Paper CHURNS through a printing press.

Keys are STAMPED onto the paper, making new headlines for the  
DAILY MAIL.

Hundreds of papers SWING on racks across the factory, folded,  
pressed and hung on racks.

All around, WORKERS are running about. Some oversee the  
printed papers, others line up keys on the presses.

Rafferty oversees the entire operation from a catwalk above.  
Then, he notices a COMMOTION below.

At the entrance to the press, a DOZEN MILITARY POLICE (MP's)  
pour into the building. They wield night sticks and begin  
physically apprehending the EMPLOYEES.

They immediately start separating employees from their work stations. The entire printing operation is halted in a matter of moments.

Rafferty watches the whole thing.

RAFFERTY

Shit.

Rafferty quickly marches to a phone on the wall.

RAFFERTY (CONT'D)

(Into phone) Operator, get me the Daily Mail.

The military police start to close in on him. Their heavy boots POUND on grate metal of the catwalk.

RAFFERTY (CONT'D)

Get me Northcliffe. It's urgent.

They're coming straight for him now, ten yards away.

RAFFERTY (CONT'D)

Northcliffe. They're taking the -

DIAL TONE.

Behind him, on the other side of the phone stands Masterman, holding the cut telephone cord.

MASTERMAN

Hello, old boy. May I have a word?

**EXT. ROAD - A FEW MILES FROM THE FRONT LINE - DAY**

Close on Malins' shot list: **2. The Road to the Front**

McDowell and Malins have begun their long, slogging walk to the front. They climb a parapet to find an atrocious sight.

The path ahead is a wretched highway of wooden boards over a moonscape of mud. Shattered, branchless tree trunks stick out of the ground like tombstones.

Malins has to stop for a moment... *he's stunned*. He feels his chest, taking stock of his heartbeat. McDowell notices him doing so and looks at him inquisitively.

Malins plays it off as nothing by taking out his vest pocket kodak camera... **\*SNAP\***

MALINS

Is this what once was Belgium?

McDowell just lights a cigarette and keeps walking. It doesn't even register.

MCDOWELL

It gets worse at the front. You may want a cigarette for the smell.

Up ahead, a squad of soldiers moves in the opposite direction, walking back from the front. The squad moves slowly in widespread formation, the boards distributing their weight.

MALINS

That looks like a combat unit.

Malins' hands SNAP to his pack like a magnet. He takes out his X-5 and a roll of FILM from his bandolier. He cracks open the back and unrolls the film onto the sprockets.

In a matter of moments, he's good to go.

McDowell just SIGHS as Malins meanwhile sets the aperture and the focus, testing it against his eye.

MCDOWELL

You don't want to shoot this.

MALINS

It's on the shot list.

MCDOWELL

Mud flats?

MALINS

The road to the front.

Malins SNAPS his first picture, a wide view of the soldiers trekking across the morbid plain.

MCDOWELL

This? This is very pedestrian.

MALINS

Roads often are.

MCDOWELL

Just saying. It's a waste of time.

MALINS

Why did you even sign up for this job in the first place if you don't want to take photos?

MCDOWELL

So I don't have to go into No Man's Land!

MALINS

You are the only assistant I have ever had in my life.

MCDOWELL

Rude.

MALINS

I honestly think if I went down the way and picked any man in that unit, even with zero prior knowledge of film, he would be a better assistant than you.

MCDOWELL

Jesus, that's harsh, mate.

MALINS

Just instead of naysaying everything, try to be a little supportive.

MCDOWELL

You want to shoot this? Go ahead.

Malins shakes his head in frustration. He moves nimbly across the duckboards, leaving McDowell to puff away on a cigarette.

Malins calls out to the soldiers as he approaches...

MALINS

Hello, lads. Want your picture in the Daily Mail? Hell, every newspaper in the Empire! I can make you famous! You could be the new face of the B.E.F.! Now who's got some fire in the belly? Eh? Wave to the folks back home, would ya?

None of the soldiers care at all.

MALINS (CONT'D)

Imagine: you on the front page! Headlines read, "Hero!" How proud would your mum or dad be then?

Malins reaches striking distance but still, nobody responds.  
He pulls up his camera and starts to capture them regardless.  
SGT. SCHOLLE (45), squad leader, a rough hewn man of simple stock.

SCHOLLE  
Formation, halt. Single file for  
the crossing!

Ahead, the path narrows and progress slows. Malins turns to see why: a **muddy ravine** and a **treacherous crossing**.

The path is a single board wide.

Next to it, are the exposed roots of an upturned tree and a divot of **murky, oily water**.

Soldiers stand in a spread out line, waiting to cross.

#### **EXT. RAVINE - ROAD BACK FROM THE FRONT - DAY**

Malins spots a good vantage point to take pictures as PVT. CHILTON (18, a behemoth of a man) steps to the front of the line.

Chilton begins to cross slowly, bracing on the roots. He carefully creeps forward... his boot slides over the muddy board. The going is slow and careful.

Malins climbs carefully onto a more treacherous path, one that takes him up a small slope and gives him a view of the crossing. Camera out... **\*CLICK\***

Down below, Chilton takes another step and the tree root **BREAKS OFF** in his grip... *at the worst moment possible.*

CHILTON  
What the - ?!

Chilton SLIPS, and his heavy backpack takes care of the rest.

It tilts his balance. He WAVES his arms to recover but it's no use.

He **TOPPLES** helplessly onto the ground.

But when he lands... he doesn't stay put. He starts to **sink into the mud like quicksand**.

Malins dashes up the remainder of the path, and pulls his camera to his face to **\*SNAP\*** pictures.

Scholle jumps into gear and moves to the front of the line.

SCHOLLE  
Out of the way.

Scholle slows as he approaches Chilton who is already trying to crawl out of the mud with utter desperation.

SCHOLLE (CONT'D)  
Chilton, hold still. I'm going to  
get you out. But first stop moving.  
The more you move the faster it  
pulls you down.

Scholle turns back to his men -

SCHOLLE (CONT'D)  
Rope!

One of the soldiers behind Scholle THROWS Chilton a cord of ROPE.

SCHOLLE (CONT'D)  
Grab on. Good. Now everyone, take  
hold.

The line of soldiers behind Scholle prepare to pull him out.

**\*CLICK\*** Malins takes another picture.

Scholle clocks Malins taking photos and shoots him a withering look.

Malins just keeps the camera to his eye... *waiting for Chilton to move.*

SCHOLLE (CONT'D)  
Now slowly, start to pull.

The soldiers begin to HEAVE on the rope. It CREAKS and TIGHTENS... but gives them nothing. Chilton doesn't budge.

SCHOLLE (CONT'D)  
Pull!

Again, they HEAVE. This time, however... the rope FLIES out of Chilton's hands.

CHILTON  
Shit! No!

The soldiers in line SPILL over backwards. PVT. BARKER (18, the caboose) TUMBLES off the boards and into an impact crater.

At the pit of Barker's crater, however, lies a pool of **brackish water** - a stew of mustard gas, decomposing body parts and gasoline...

It's a cocktail of poison. **And it swallows Barker whole.**

SCHOLLE

Stop moving! Everyone stop!

Barker **THRASHES** in the water. Scholle throws him a rope but the sludge is too deep. The walls are too slippery...

The soldiers just watch. Not a thing they can do to help.

Malins lowers his camera in disgust as he realizes the man is drowning. *He doesn't want to document this anymore.*

Barker submerges for good. The struggle stops. The water goes still. A few bubbles rise to the surface, then... **nothing.**

Scholle exhales... a moment of grief.

Malins looks to his camera... *what the hell did I just shoot?*

Scholle rises like a man possessed. He directs his attention back to Chilton. *They aren't losing two men.*

SCHOLLE (CONT'D)

Alright, Chilton. Tie the rope around your chest. Then wrap it over your arms. Now, soldiers - look alive. Heave on three! One, two, three!

Chilton complies. Right arm. Left arm... *Ready.*

The soldiers PULL. But there's no budge. They exchange looks. *What can they do but try again?*

Malins watches, his camera by his side, as they pull harder.

CHILTON

Ah! My arms are going to tear off!  
My god!

SCHOLLE

Heave!

Chilton SCREAMS in pain as the soldiers GRUNT with effort. The rope TIGHTENS but - nothing.

**They can't budge him.**

SCHOLLE (CONT'D)  
Lay off! Lay off him. There's  
nothing to be done.

The troops relent and when they do, *the mud pulls Chilton deeper.*

CHILTON  
Get me out. Get me out. Somebody  
please get me out. Please.

Scholle shakes his head. The mud is too deep, the suction too strong. It's **impossible**. Chilton's never getting out.

CHILTON (CONT'D)  
Don't leave me. Don't leave! Come  
out with a spade. Dig me out!  
Lieutenant, please! Scholle,  
please?! Scholle! Or send for help.  
Send for a mule!

SCHOLLE  
Men, form ranks. One at a time. And  
don't step off the boards.

*Malins slowly realizes. He looks to the camera in his right hand... what the hell has he just documented?*

Then, suddenly, Malins' X-5 is YANKED from his hands. It's Scholle. He throws the camera SMACK into the mud, a few yards off the path.

SCHOLLE (CONT'D)  
This isn't a fucking film shoot.

Scholle follows his troops across the duckboards.

Chilton's WAILS become haunting SOBS, as the troops leave him stranded, entirely on his own....

An unperturbed McDowell walks up next to Malins,.

MCDOWELL  
Are you just going to let him do  
that to your camera, lieutenant?

Malins collects himself. He peers out at Scholle marching away and then looks over to his camera stuck in the mud.

MALINS  
You know what? Fine! You want to  
just point everything that's wrong?

Malins grabs a duckboard from the path and re-positions it so that it reaches his camera.

MCDOWELL

You must be joking, right? I wasn't serious. I was just giving you a hard time.

MALINS

And I've had enough of it. You don't help with anything. What do you do besides sit there and poke fun? All you care about is staying as clean as possible.

Malins puts his hand to his heart. He doubles over from being worked up.

MCDOWELL

Are you alright?

MALINS

I'm fine. No thanks to you.

Malins takes a deep breathe. Then... he gets on his hands and knees starts to crawl out to the camera. As soon as he's on the board, *it starts sinking*.

One hand over another, Malins moves quickly as the board descends deeper and deeper into the mud.

Malins gets close enough to reach out for the camera. His fingers at full extension, scraping the air for the strap of the camera...

*And they reach it.*

Malins rolls himself back and off the board quickly and nimbly. Within moments, he's back to safety with the X-5.

McDowell admits begrudgingly:

MCDOWELL

Well. Good job, sir. I apologize.

MALINS

Good. Now get in line and start marching.

McDowell does as he's told and starts heading towards the front. He looks over towards Chilton.

MCDOWELL

That's odd.

MALINS

What?

MCDOWELL

Normally they'd shoot the poor  
bastard.

**INT. PRIVATE OFFICE - WELLINGTON HOUSE - NIGHT**

A CLERK scans shelves full of meticulously labeled FILES, comparing a list in his hands to the items before him.

He opens one top secret folder entitled "Operation Prism Lens," only to find that it's empty.

The clerk looks up terrified.

**INT. MASTERMAN'S STUDY - NIGHT**

The phone RINGS in the empty study. Masterman walks in, quickly to pick it up.

MASTERMAN

Chancellor Masterman for Lord  
Kitchener.

AID (O.S.)

Please hold.

A voice we will come to know crackles through the receiver...

KITCHENER (O.S.)

Hello, Charles.

MASTERMAN

Hello, sir. I need to see you.  
Immediately.

KITCHENER (O.S.)

Is everything alright?

MASTERMAN

We have a leak.

**INT. KITCHENER'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

**LORD KITCHENER** (60, with a severe face and every bit as intense as his poster) sits in his office. His office is a palace of authority. *He is the Patton of all Pattons.*

Masterman sits timid before Kitchener...

MASTERMAN

Some highly sensitive material was stolen from the archives of military intelligence. Our entire series of photos reviewing conditions at the front, commissioned as part of a study on modern warfare for our upcoming assault.

Kitchener rises, furious.

KITCHENER

What type of operation are you running, Masterman?

MASTERMAN

No excuses, sir.

KITCHENER

Well. Retrieve them before they surface anywhere. And bring me the party responsible.

MASTERMAN

Sir, I hate to be difficult but that is an imposing request.

KITCHENER

Why?

MASTERMAN

The sheer number of publications... we simply do not have the manpower to govern them all.

KITCHENER

Then intimidate them. Start with the most powerful. The rest will fall in line.

Kitchener pushes up from his desk, to pace behind Masterman, making him squirm in his seat.

KITCHENER (CONT'D)

Allow me to paint a clearer picture of the problem. Do you know how many people we lost at the Somme? On the first day of the big push? Do you have any idea?

MASTERMAN

There are many numbers that circulate -

KITCHENER

Sixty thousand. In one day. Sixty thousand. We lost twenty thousand in the first ten minutes. You see, we didn't find out until afterwards but the shells we used, the shells were all wrong. We used shrapnel shells when we needed to use high density explosives. So when our boys got to the other side, they found the wire was intact. And they were cut to shreds. Twenty thousand dead in the first ten minutes. But that's nothing compared to the mess on the Eastern Front. The Russians? The Russians lost three quarter of a million in the first month of the war. That was three years ago. You see this war is not some battle between noblemen with private armies or some imperial conquest. This is a war for the foundation of the world. Our very existence is at stake. Our soldiers, our industry, even our civilians, the whole of our nation must fight the whole of theirs. It is total war. And if the press starts draining me of men then you will be no different to me than the Germans.

MASTERMAN

How much authority do I have?

KITCHENER

You have the executive branch of the military at your disposal. Use it.

**EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCHES - NIGHT**

Malins and McDowell climb a hillock and as they crest it, they look down to see the front lines before them.

The sight stops Malins in his tracks.

It's one MASSIVE, crisscrossed and zigzagging ditch. Soldiers scurry over walkways of rotting boards. Battle damaged wicker revetments brace the walls.

It's as if an ant hive took over a cemetery... **a bombarded cemetery.**

Three interconnected, fortified trenches are all that stand between Malins and No Man's Land. A series of small COMMUNICATION TRENCHES connect all three lines.

The closer you get to the front, the more destroyed the trenches are. Before Malins, in order, are...

Closest is **the SUPPORT TRENCH**: it is bombarded, flooded and rank but it is safest from sniper fire and most intact with plenty of aid stations.

In the middle, **the RESERVE TRENCH**: even more worn down. Soldiers mill around underground lodgings and campfires, Still bombarded. Still flooded. Still rank.

Farthest away, **the FRONT LINE**: an absolute, torn up shithole. Carnage built into every square inch. Soldiers sleep carved into the walls, rats beside them. Flooding everywhere.

And finally, beyond it, shrouded in mist: **NO MAN'S LAND**.

MCDOWELL

Well... we're here.

MALINS

Yes. At long last.

Malins takes out his shot list from his jacket pocket and unfolds it. Close on shot list: **3. Trenches**

Malins looks at the challenge before him. He puts his hand to his heart and then disguises the action by pulling out his Vest Pocket Kodak.

He **\*SNAPS\*** a picture.

#### **INT. FRONT LINE TRENCHES - NIGHT**

It is a graveyard both human and animal. VERMIN gnaw bones.

HEAVY RAIN pelts thick mud. Canons RUMBLE over the downpour, beating like the drum of doom.

It's as if the underworld oozed out of the ground and scarred the earth.

McDowell is smoking a cigarette with a bunch more tobacco plugged in his nose. Malins' nose is plugged as well.

MCDOWELL

So this is it.

McDowell sets down his pack by the sleeping berth that's been carved into the trench wall.

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)

This is where we sleep.

MALINS

Really?

MCDOWELL

All the trenches are marked with street signs. You can memorize the grid but the sectors are all alpha numeric - A1, A2, B1, B2 - so on and so forth. So the street names are easier to remember.

MALINS

How best do you think I could get my bearings?

MCDOWELL

Follow a sentry on duty. Oy!

McDowell waves down - PVT. RODGERS (24, handsome, classic leading man) as he walks by.

RODGERS

What?

MCDOWELL

You on watch?

RODGERS

I am.

MCDOWELL

Come take my friend around would you?

RODGERS

Excuse me?

MALINS

I'm a photographer. Mind if I tag along?

RODGERS

Tag along.

Malins gets up and follows him. McDowell makes no motion to get up, shouts after them as they leave.

MCDOWELL

You go right ahead. I'm already  
familiar with the lay of the land.

Malins and Rodgers walk down the trench together, around the  
zigzagging corners.

RODGERS

You new here, eh?

MALINS

Something like that.

RODGERS

Welcome to Passchendaele.

**EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCHES - NIGHT**

Rodgers leads Malins as they trudge through deep mud, zig  
zagging past ghastly scenery of corpses, wreckage and rats.

RODGERS

Well we always start here, with  
Bob.

A decomposing, severed HAND juts out of the ground above  
fetid pools of rain.

MALINS

Bob?

RODGERS

(To the hand) Nice to see you, Bob.  
Shite evening for lookout, isn't  
it?

Rodgers drinks from a flask, puts it away and SHAKES the  
severed hand. Malins frowns. *Rodgers' comfort with the hand  
is more than a little disturbing.*

RODGERS (CONT'D)

He's a good man, Bob. Always keeps  
his watch. Always lends a hand.

MALINS

And what is your name?

RODGERS

Private Rodgers.

MALINS

Lieutenant Malins. A pleasure to  
meet you.

RODGERS  
You're an officer?

MALINS  
(Sigh) It's honorary.

Then, much further down the trench harried VOICES rise...

BRITISH SENTRY (O.S.)  
Halt! Password?!

Rodgers tenses at the sound of action. **KRACK! KRACK!** Rifles spit back a reply.

Malins draws his pistol.

BRITISH SENTRY (CONT'D)  
Huns on patrol! Huns on -

Grenade **EXPLODES** and cuts him off.

Rodgers snaps into gear and runs down the trench towards the combat without hesitation. Malins follows.

#### **EXT. D SECTOR - FRONT LINE TRENCH**

Rodgers and Malins reach the next sector. They peer through the rain and glimpse a lone, *stationary figure*...

RODGERS  
Waterloo?! Waterloo?

The two approach cautiously. The shape slowly materializes into... a charred PAIR OF LEGS planted headlong in the ground.

An impact crater SMOLDERS nearby.

RODGERS (CONT'D)  
Shit.

#### **EXT. B1 SAP - CONTINUOUS**

Rodgers runs down a sap (the forward-most trench, less fortified, more battle scarred; it juts into No Man's Land, perpendicular to the British line).

Malins is right behind him.

They reach a small lookout position at the end of the sap, a machine gun hut shrouded in rain and darkness.

RODGERS

Waterloo?

A voice comes from within the hut...

DUPREY (O.S.)

Waterloo! Get in here!

**INT./EXT. MACHINE GUN HUT - B1 SAP - CONTINUOUS**

Rodgers and Malins enter to find DUPREY (35), thick mustache, manning a machine gun, watching over No Man's Land.

RODGERS

Everything alright?!

Next to Duprey, a destroyed radio box. On the other side lies a British CORPSE riddled with shrapnel.

RODGERS (CONT'D)

Are you hit?

Duprey points to a piece of IRON lodged in his calf.

DUPREY

Heard a patrol sneaking around so I took a few warning shots. Jerry didn't like that.

RODGERS

Did you get any of them?

DUPREY

No way to know.

RODGERS

Star shell?

DUPREY

Radio's out. Sentry was supposed to call for it.

RODGERS

Sentry's dead. I'll return. Malins stay here. (To Duprey) He's a photographer, not a soldier.

DUPREY

Right.

Rodgers leaves. Everything just changed. *Fast.*

Duprey turns to Malins...

DUPREY (CONT'D)

Stand on the firing step. Take a rifle not a pistol. Don't put it down.

Malins climbs the firing step and scans the horizon.

Overhead, a STAR SHELL (a magnesium flare) cuts a high arc through the sky, illuminating everything bright as day.

There are THREE GERMANS cutting the British wire.

DUPREY (CONT'D)

Huns! Huns on the wire! Death Row!

Malins startles and FIRES wildly at them.

The Germans pull up **RIFLES** and squeeze off a few shots. Duprey sprays them with MACHINE GUN fire.

Malins ducks at the incoming fire. Duprey stays up, firing back, until a **bullet RIPS through his throat.**

He TOPPLES an instant, clutching his neck, BLOOD SPURTING all over. Malins is still ducking below the sandbags as Duprey falls, rolling on the ground.

Malins freezes for a second. He doesn't know what to do... Duprey is bleeding to death right in front of him.

Duprey's struggle gets weaker and weaker until his body stops convulsing, his voice stops whining and his GARGLES turn into a death rattle.

Malins is stuck, paralyzed, watching the pool of blood grow.

Duprey expires. Malins averts his eyes and sees the **machine gun**. He collects himself and goes toward it.

Malins grabs the gun, looks out toward his enemy and a new type of intensity creeps over his face. He squeezes the trigger, **FIRING** the clip until it's empty...

He waits but there's no return fire. *The Germans are gone.*

Rodgers returns from behind Malins. He sees Duprey dead.

RODGERS

Fuck. You alright?

MALINS

Yes.

RODGERS

Take the rifle. I'll take the  
machine gun.

Rodgers loads the machine gun with a new clip. He COCKS it  
and looks out over No Man's Land, *ready to kill*.

Pan from Malins to see his view of No Man's Land. Now we can  
look at it for what it really is. And it is horrifying.

Artillery has chewed the ground into pulp. Smoke wafts over  
walls of tangled wire. Mangled corpses strewn over bombarded  
ramparts. So many rats the ground looks like it's moving.

MALINS

Fucking Huns.

RODGERS

He said you were a photographer.  
Looks like you're a soldier.

Malins remembers he has a camera.

MALINS

Ha. I am.

As Malins reaches inside his jacket for his Vest Pocket  
Kodak... **he remembers his heart condition.** *He survived.*

Malins puts his hand on his heart. A wave of relief washes  
over him. Rodgers notices Malins getting emotional.

RODGERS

You alright?

MALINS

Sure, sure.

He tries to load a new roll of film into his camera but his  
hand is SHAKING. He can't load the film onto the sprockets.

MALINS (CONT'D)

Yes. A photographer. A good one  
too. I can -

He tries again... and pauses before trying a third time

MALINS (CONT'D)

I can do it. I can do it. I can -

He can't load the camera. His hands are shaking too much.

RODGERS

It's alright. It's alright.

Malins THROWS the camera to the ground, frustrated.

*He's too rattled.*

**EXT. MALINS/MCDOWELL DUGOUT - MORNING**

Malins and Rodgers trudge back to the dugout, new friends, exhausted but wired from the adrenaline.

MALINS

I feel I owe you a great allegiance  
after your bravery last night.

RODGERS

That's the job, mate.

MALINS

Would you mind if I took your  
portrait? I promise I can load the  
camera this time.

Rodgers smiles. *Not a bad idea.*

RODGERS

Why not?

MALINS

Excellent! McDowell get the tripod.

Malins runs over to his supplies by the dugout and takes his X-5 out enthusiastically. McDowell moves very slowly to help. Rodgers wanders about finding a good spot to pose.

MALINS (CONT'D)

We can take a series. No need to  
worry. The light is gorgeous.

As Malins **\*SNAPS\*** a picture of Rodgers there's a slight WHISTLING overhead. Only for a moment... *then it stops.*

RODGERS

Well, this is for all the -

- **BOOM!** A shell explodes above the trench sending up a mass of SHRAPNEL. A METAL PLATE tears through Rodgers' cloth cap and SLICES his head in half.

The smoke clears. **Rodgers is a corpse.**

Malins and McDowell recover from the impact... *stunned.*

Then... more WHISTLING. A lot more.

**BOOM! KRACK! POW!** Out of nowhere, an artillery barrage lands upon them, as powerful as thunder and lightning.

Malins throws himself to the ground and makes himself as small as possible.

Incoming shells buzz like hornets as **FIFTEEN MORE** come down upon their section of the line. Some hit the trench, others land above ground. Some shake the earth, others are duds.

Malins can only writhe in horror. He buries his head in the ground for cover.

There is no longer silence between impacts. It is a cacophony pierced only by human SCREAMS. And then quick as it came... **it STOPS.**

Malins looks up in the silence... Rodgers is dead. The dugout is buried. And regular life resumes.

REPORTER (PRE-LAP)  
Who do you think you are?

**EXT. DAILY MAIL - DAY**

On the top steps, military police hold up reporters as they try to file in. The soldiers stop them forcibly and inspect their briefcases.

REPORTER #2  
Get your hands off.

Northcliffe arrives on the scene to see the military accosting his reporters. He immediately pushes his way to confront the military police.

NORTHCLIFFE  
What on earth is happening here?

MILITARY POLICE  
Order of the High Command. There's been a security breach at the Bureau of Propaganda. All publications are to be under monitoring until further notice.

NORTHCLIFFE  
What are you talking about?! We don't have any leaked information!

MILITARY POLICE  
As a pre-caution, sir.

NORTHCLIFFE

I do not take your intrusion  
lightly.

Multiple military police step in front of his way.

MILITARY POLICE

We'll need to look through your  
briefcase as well, sir.

NORTHCLIFFE

I will not be searched like some  
trespasser. You're on *my* property.  
I own the god damn building.

MILITARY POLICE

I do hope you comply, my lord. I  
would hate to take you into  
custody.

He points to a pair of HANDCUFFS on his belt. Northcliffe  
looks around, surrounded by his employees. He's thrust  
entirely on the spot.

NORTHCLIFFE

I have nothing to hide. But I won't  
stand for this for a minute.

He finds Meckel in the crowd.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)

Go to the office of our counsel.  
Have them send someone down here.

Northcliffe turns back to the military police. He grins.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)

Gentlemen. Today, I think I'll work  
from home.

**INT. NORTHCLIFFE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Meckel sits by Northcliffe, over his shoulder.

MECKEL

My lord. The military have served  
one out of every four presses. And  
in all our most populous areas.  
It's all under the guise of the  
Defense of the Realm Act, sir. It  
allows them to take extraordinary  
measures in the name of national  
security.

NORTHCLIFFE

Have you heard anything from  
Rafferty yet?

MECKEL

Still nothing.

Northcliffe looks out the window at the military police  
harassing his reporters at the entrance to the building.

NORTHCLIFFE

I want to see the ledgers. I need  
to know how much money we have in  
reserve. We need to mount a  
defense.

MECKEL

The hit on our revenue is twofold,  
sir. We are forfeiting revenue from  
advertisement and we are forfeiting  
circulation. To take on legal fees  
as well... we may want to check the  
ledgers first.

NORTHCLIFFE

It's no surprise. They told us what  
they're doing, didn't they?

Meckel doesn't follow.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)

They're bleeding us white.

MECKEL

So what do we do tomorrow?

NORTHCLIFFE

Tomorrow, we wake up in the morning  
and we go to work. And we put up  
with the harassment. We endure. And  
we talk with our lawyers and we  
find the quickest way possible to  
get those soldiers off my property.

**EXT. SPY TREE - RESERVE TRENCH - FRONT LINES - EVENING**

A lone tree rises some twenty feet above the battlefield.  
It's missing all its branches. The trunk is split at the top,  
shattered by artillery.

Soldiers scurry about in the trench below ground but above,  
there is no life.

We slowly approach the lone tree, *just about the only thing standing...* we zero in on a knot in the trunk to reveal -

**INT. SPY TREE - RESERVE TRENCH - FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS**

The tree is a steel reinforced sculpture; a decoy used as a spying station.

A ladder runs up the middle of the trunk where Malins and McDowell wait.

They survey No Man's Land through peep holes. The enemy lines are only about 100 yards away.

MALINS

Half our wire is cut.

Malins' POV: No Man's Land. It's a casserole of old meat and fresh corpses. The barbed wire guarding the British trench is missing huge sections.

MCDOWELL

Sometimes they cut the wire to soften us up for a raid.

MALINS

Other times?

MCDOWELL

Boredom and tradition.

Malins \*CLICKS\* a picture through the peep hole then he goes back to consulting his shot list.

Close on Malins shot list: **4. No Man's Land**

MALINS

So we still have to take care of that No Man's Land shot.

MCDOWELL

We?

MALINS

Yes. We.

MCDOWELL

I don't know about that, lieutenant. If I were you I would just take a picture from here and another from the sap and count my lucky stars to make it home alive.

MALINS

But you're not me. And you're not in charge of this outfit. And I am. And I say we are taking the picture from No Man's Land. That's been the plan this entire time and I have never once been unclear about that.

MCDOWELL

I mean... I can help you get out there but you really don't *need me* there in order for you to take the picture, do you?

MALINS

You are my guide. I would encourage you to bring me a whole lot closer to my goal before asking me such questions.

MCDOWELL

So you're saying I don't have to go into No Man's?

MALINS

I'm saying you should ask me that after you've brought me a lot closer.

McDowell catches his drift.

MCDOWELL

Well then, I propose we take the tunnel, peek out your - sorry, "our" - heads, snap a picture, Bob's your uncle, we're back.

Malins looks through the binoculars one more time over the hell before him. He brings them down.

MALINS

Is there even the slightest bit of safety to be found out there?

MCDOWELL

Somewhat. No one's looking for you there.

MALINS

So we hide in plain sight?

MCDOWELL

I wouldn't say it's plain sight. But I would definitely hide.

Malins takes a deep breath.

**EXT. TUNNEL ENTRANCE - FRONT LINE TRENCH - EVENING**

McDowell and Malins walk the trench.

MCDOWELL

We dig tunnels. Some say it's to plant bombs on the other side. But not always. Other times troops climb out of 'em in craters and bring back wounded. Or go out there for a raid. Any number of uses for 'em. Sometimes we run into Germans tunnelers though. That gets nasty.

The corner of Hellfire Alley and Death Row. The ground slopes down into a deep, dark passage. SGT. PARKER (28, a baby faced hulk of a man) stands guard.

MALINS

Sergeant, how's the tunnel?

PARKER

It's a little flooded but no cave-ins the last two days.

MALINS

Is there an access point to No Man's?

PARKER

Would you like me to show you, sir?

MALINS

Yes.

They walk into the damp depths. McDowell stays behind.

MCDOWELL

Good. Good. So Parker can take you from here then or...?

Malins shakes his head.

MALINS

You're coming too.

MCDOWELL

Right, yeah. I'll come along. Sure. Just down the tunnel.

**INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS - EVENING**

Darkness replaces daylight. Lumber CREAKS and water DRIPS throughout the tunnel. Lamps flicker on the wall. Creepy...

MCDOWELL  
I swear, this is -

PARKER  
Shh!

Parker puts a finger to his lips urgently. He takes out a stethoscope and listens to the dirt wall.

PARKER (CONT'D)  
(Whisper) They can hear us. Through  
the earth.

Malins reaches for his pistol, *unsure what lies in store*. Parker listens intently and...

PARKER (CONT'D)  
We're alright. Come on.

**INT./EXT. TUNNEL EXIT - NO MAN'S LAND - EVENING**

The tunnel opens into an impact crater. The ground is a morass of sludge. A ladder goes up the side of the crater, leading to the middle of No Man's Land.

Parker leads them out of the tunnel. They speak quietly.

PARKER  
Machine guns north and south. One  
at Satan's backbone. One on the  
sharp cliffs.

MALINS  
Where's the closest cover?

PARKER  
Line of sandbags to the south. Good  
as you can find.

Malins loads his camera with film. He moves fast. Then eh turns to McDowell and presses a vest pocket kodak to his chest.

MALINS  
Go up there and click this roll  
until it's empty.

MCDOWELL  
Are you kidding me?!

MALINS  
No. That's been the plan this  
entire time and I have never once  
been unclear about that.

MCDOWELL  
I wouldn't have come if you told me  
you were going to make me go up  
there!

Malins SHUSHES him.

MALINS  
I know.

**EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS**

No Man's Land is even ghastlier up close. Fog and smoke, wire  
and sandbags, corpses and rot.

A PERISCOPE peeks out of the ground... it turns this way and  
that before going back down.

From the same spot, Malins slowly crawls out of the crater...  
he looks this way and that, then... **he makes a break for it.**

He rolls into cover behind an overturned cart, then readies  
his camera. Every RUSTLE of fabric sounds *deafening*.

McDowell and Parker peer out from the crater. He nods, *all  
clear.*

McDowell and Parker crawl out to find cover. Malins **\*CLICKS\***  
pictures as they go.

Parker finds some grenades and a couple magazines of ammo.

McDowell, however, spots a STEEL HELMET by a pulpy faced  
corpse and starts moving towards it. *It's a significantly  
exposed position.*

MALINS  
(Urgent whisper) McDowell. What are  
you doing?!

McDowell takes the helmet and CLIPS it to his belt. Then he  
spots another, further up.

Malins watches him and waves at him -

MALINS (CONT'D)

What are you doing? I need you  
taking pictures -

McDowell looks back at Malins, his face goes frozen with fear. Then Malins hears it: **German VOICES whispering nearby.**

Parker hears it too. They all freeze as... a dozen GERMAN SOLDIERS walk out of the fog, ready for battle.

Malins presses himself hard against the earth.

*Please let them pass.*

Malins holds still until he notices through the fog: *Parker pulling the pin on a grenade.* Malins tries to wave him off but it's too late...

Parker lobs it high in an arc after the Germans. It sails through the air silently until... dynamite **CRACKS** and Germans **SCREAM.**

Malins' chance to escape begins evaporating. McDowell runs back to the tunnel. Parker **FIRES** his rifle at the Germans. Malins throws a grenade at them when suddenly -

Bullets WHIP OUT of the fog, shrieking by their heads. A German grenade **BURSTS** nearby.

*Malins is a sitting duck.*

MALINS (CONT'D)

Fuck! Come on!

Malins and Parker run back to the tunnel, McDowell already there. A bullet **SWIPES** Parker's legs out from under him. He's hardly down a moment before Malins SCOOPS him up.

**INT./EXT. TUNNEL EXIT - NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS**

Malins and Parker SPILL into the crater. McDowell awaits them at the bottom.

MALINS

What the hell was that?!

MCDOWELL

Raiding party. Same ones who cut  
our wire.

MALINS

Parker's hit. We've got to get him  
back.

**INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS**

They carry Parker through the tunnel as fast as they can.  
He's GRUNTING in pain with every step.

**INT./EXT. TUNNEL ENTRANCE - EVENING**

McDowell and Malins reach the entrance to the trench and slow.

MALINS  
Where's the closest aid station?

MCDOWELL  
Reserve trench.

MALINS  
Alright, let's -

**CRACK!** A grenade **EXPLODES** twenty yards away. German SHOUTING follows closely behind.

MCDOWELL  
Oh god...

MALINS  
What the hell is going on?!

MCDOWELL  
It's the raid. They're here.

The German Soldiers from No Man's Land pour over the British defenses. **They're armed to the teeth...** brass knuckle trench knives, pistols and spades.

*Not good.*

**INT./EXT. TUNNEL ENTRANCE - FRONT LINES - NIGHT**

Malins and McDowell are right where we left them, the Germans swarming the trench, catching the British unprepared.

MALINS  
Huns!

BRITISH SOLDIERS run out of the dugouts, readying themselves to fight but the Germans have the advantage. They fall upon the British as they come into the trench.

Malins watches as a German soldier SWINGS his spade like an axe **firmlly into the neck of a British Soldier.**

A SECOND BRIT **STABS** the German in the side, tackling him and SHOVING his face into the mud. In a matter of moments, the Second Brit is **SHOT** by yet another German.

One piles on top of the other in a never ending scrum of madness.

MCDOWELL

We've got to get out of here! Come!

McDowell is half crazed. They dash through the madness, carrying Parker on their shoulders, sprinting and fighting their way back to safety.

**INT./EXT. AID STATION - TRENCHES - NIGHT**

An aid station overrun with WOUNDED SOLDIERS. Men wait in line with BANDAGES over their eyes, arms on the shoulders of the man in front of them. *They've all been blinded by gas.*

Malins and McDowell BURST into the station and find a FIELD DOCTOR (50, a portly civilian enlisted to help the army).

Malins carries Parker, unconscious and bloodied. McDowell grabs the Doctor frantically.

MCDOWELL

This man needs attention now! It's desperate.

Malins lays Parker on a table. The Doctor hardly takes a glance.

DOCTOR

He's gone.

MALINS

What?! No! It's his leg -

DOCTOR

I don't know how else to say it but that man is not alive.

Malins spots a trickle of blood down Parker's neck. He lifts off Parkers cap which is soaked in blood too.

*There's a shrapnel SPLINTER in the back of Parker's head.*

MALINS

No...

Malins falls to his knees. The tragedy knocks the wind out of him. He puts his hand to his heart.

**EXT. SUPPLY DEPOT - NIGHT**

McDowell stumbles wearily into the depot... looking pale and drained.

**INT. SUPPLY DEPOT - CONTINUOUS**

Judson is on duty again, looking prim and proper as ever.

JUDSON

My god, man. You look like you had  
an awful night.

McDowell drops a STEEL HELMET on Judson's desk.

MCDOWELL

Give me.

Judson hands him another VIAL OF OPIUM in exchange for the two helmets.

Malins watches from the doorway. He clocks the deal with complete surprise.

**INT. DUG OUT - FRONT LINE TRENCHES - NIGHT**

Rain. Trenches are flooded. Rats everywhere. Misery, pure misery.

McDowell rolls up a ball of OPIUM. He plays with the putty in his fingers and loads it into a pipe.

*This is his ritual, his peace.* He slowly takes a hit and looks out towards No Man's Land.

Malins walks up to him and takes a moment.

MALINS

Can I try?

McDowell nods. Malins takes the pipe and tries his inaugural puff, hitting it hard and COUGHING viciously as a result.

MALINS (CONT'D)

So you trade helmets for drugs?

MCDOWELL

You can trade anything for  
anything.

In the distance, an incoming shell WHISTLES and EXPLODES, throwing up squibs of mud. Malins' perception of sound MUFFLES. His perception of time SLOWS.

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)  
Twelve more hours.

Another shell EXPLODES. *Then another and another.*

Malins curls up on a tarp as small mortars pepper the field behind him. The explosions blend into **a classical symphony.**

He starts LAUGHING, hard. Even harder. *Ribs splitting.*

*Is he going crazy?*

And then all of a sudden... his laughter turns to **sobs.**

#### **EXT. DAILY MAIL - NIGHT**

Northcliffe leaves the building. As he walks down the steps he robotically hands over his briefcase to the military police for inspection.

Northcliffe waits, desensitized to the whole process as they rifle through his with things zero regard for his personal property.

Northcliffe checks his watch, bored.

#### **EXT. SIDEWALK - RECRUITMENT DEPOT - NIGHT**

Northcliffe walks down the street, past the depot where his son enlisted.

On the ground out front are now spread countless FLYERS. The flyers his presses printed.

Northcliffe stops to pick one up. It has the white feather illustration on it and it reads:

**"ENLIST TODAY! DO NOT BE A COWARD!"**

Northcliffe SIGHS as a GUST of wind whips up. It swirls all the flyers into a tornado around him. Hundreds, fluttering through the air.

Northcliffe swats them away in frustration but they're everywhere, like a snowstorm.

Then he notices something across the street and behind him: a MAN with their face obscured by a collar and scarf... then they disappear. *Is he being followed?*

**EXT. NORTHCLIFFE HOME - NIGHT**

Northcliffe walks up to his home and finds an envelope before his door. It is addressed to: **Lord Northcliffe.**

Northcliffe picks up the letter. He glances this way and that. He spots the MAN again, this time walking away hurriedly.

NORTHCLIFFE

Hey! Hey there! Are you following me?

But the man is gone. *It's spooky.*

**INT. NORTHCLIFFE'S STUDY - NIGHT**

Northcliffe opens the envelope. He takes out a series of pictures. A note falls out:

**"If you don't print these, the High Command will keep perpetuating the same slaughter, over and over."**

The photos are absolutely ghastly...

**No Man's Land...** *corpses strewn one after another.*

**The Trenches...** *skeletons jut out of the trench walls. Carnage in every square inch.*

**An Aid Station...** *soldiers stand in line, arms on the men in front of them, gauze over their eyes, all blinded by gas.*

There are dozens more pictures and as Northcliffe flips through them all, we realize each is more gruesome than the last.

OLLIE (O.S.)

Father?

Northcliffe looks over to find Ollie in full uniform now, every bit a soldier. He's excited but nervous.

Northcliffe startles at Ollie's presence. He shoves the pictures back into the envelope and hides it behind his back.

OLLIE (CONT'D)

The time has come to say farewell  
I'm afraid. We ship out tomorrow  
morning. We'll be part of the  
second push.

It hits Kitchener like a ton of bricks.

NORTHCLIFFE

You're part of the new offensive?

Northcliffe tries quickly to switch and feign enthusiasm.

OLLIE

Destined for glory. I was glad to  
have a moment to say goodbye before  
departing. I love you Father. I  
will do my very best to make you  
proud.

NORTHCLIFFE

I am proud already.

Northcliffe pats his son on the shoulder. He squares Ollie in  
front of him. This is the most affection he's perhaps ever  
shown. *Is he going to say something?*

No... something stops him.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)

Be careful out there, son.

Northcliffe gives Ollie a hug and subtly slips an ENVELOPE  
into Ollie's rucksack as he goes. Then, Northcliffe watches  
Ollie leave.

**INT. KITCHEN - NORTHCLIFFE HOME - NIGHT**

Northcliffe has the photos spread out on the counter before  
Beth. She regards them with her hand over her mouth,  
completely aghast at the carnage.

BETH

You did not show him these?

NORTHCLIFFE

The army already has their talons  
in him. What good would it do to  
deflate him?

BETH

Do you shirk your responsibility?

NORTHCLIFFE

We cannot help him if he does not want it! If we tell him not to go, it will only make him want to serve even more. All we can do is wait until he sees the front. And when he writes his displeasure, I will help him all I can.

Northcliffe pours himself a drink.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)

I did give him a letter though. It said to trust his instincts if he ever finds himself ordered to do anything that doesn't make sense.

BETH

You would wait until he has a taste of danger?

NORTHCLIFFE

I would wait until he comes to his senses.

BETH

I would not wait at all.

**INT. STUDY - NORTHCLIFFE HOUSE**

Beth walks stealthily into the office. Built in mahogany bookshelves, a grand desk... Beth's body language suggests this isn't *her* room.

She picks up the telephone on the desk and furtively lowers her voice for the call.

BETH

Operator? 2L-4N please.

On the other end of the line is a pleasant, female voice.

MAID (O.S.)

Masterman residence.

BETH

Hello, the lady Lucy Blanche Masterman please.

MAID

May I ask who's calling?

BETH  
The Baroness Northcliffe.

**EXT. BELGIAN TOWN - A FEW MILES BACK FROM THE FRONT - DAY**

A red sun has risen over the battle torn landscape. Hardly a soul stirs throughout the town. Another weary morning of war.

**INT. HOTEL ROOM - BELGIAN TOWN - DAY**

A KNOCK on the door wakes up McDowell. He's in a sorry state, hungover, curled up in bed, filthy...

MCDOWELL  
What is it?

Malins opens the door and walks in.

MALINS  
I have outstanding news.

McDowell puts his head in his hands. *Mornings are painful for him.*

MCDOWELL  
What is it?

MALINS  
I reviewed the shot list. We have but one location yet to capture. Do you know what it is?

MCDOWELL  
(Sarcastic) Bayonet charge?

MALINS  
Field Command, intelligence, general operations. Can you be ready in an hour?

McDowell sighs. He gets up slowly.

MCDOWELL  
Alright.

Malins turns to leave and give McDowell some privacy.

MALINS  
And McDowell?

MCDOWELL  
Yes?

MALINS

Do pack up your belongings and such. Bring them with you.

MCDOWELL

Are we being thrown out?

MALINS

We are taking passage back to England. After this morning's operation we will return home to develop the photos. Sound alright?

McDowell gets up from bed and practically TACKLES Malins with a hug. Turns out he's nude from the waist down.

MCDOWELL

Thank you.

MALINS

The boat leaves tomorrow. In thirty two hours we'll be on the way to London.

**INT. HALLWAY - HOTEL - CONTINUOUS**

Malins exits and walks right into a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER

Oh, sorry.

MALINS

My apologies.

MESSENGER

I am looking for Lieutenant Malins.

MALINS

I am Malins.

The Messenger hands him another brown, "**TOP SECRET**" letter.

MESSENGER

Have a nice day.

The Messenger then departs.

Malins opens the envelope and warily removes some papers from it.

Malins takes one look at the letter and his face drops. *It's a shot list:*

**Assault Shot List**

1. Troops going over the top.
2. Troops crossing No Man's Land.
3. Hospital Ward

Malins looks horrified. *This is not a good assignment.*

**INT. NORTHCLIFFE'S STUDY - DAILY MAIL**

Northcliffe watches his reporters on the street below as they get harassed before entering the building. Then he sees -

**EXT. FRONT STEPS - DAILY MAIL**

Meckel walks up the steps and reaches the checkpoint.

MILITARY POLICE

Papers?

Meckel produces his identification and hands his briefcase to another soldier.

MILITARY POLICE (CONT'D)

Chancellor Masterman has requested you for questioning.

MECKEL

Why?

MILITARY POLICE

You'll have to take it up with him, sir.

A handful of military police grab Meckel and force his hands behind his back. They quickly cuff him before he can fight back.

MECKEL

This is absurd. I've done nothing wrong.

MILITARY POLICE

Something about maligning the crown. From Chancellor Masterman himself.

**INT. NORTHCLIFFE'S STUDY - DAILY MAIL**

Northcliffe watches through the window still.

NORTHCLIFFE

My god...

Northcliffe's phone RINGS. Northcliffe picks it up.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)

Yes?

ASSISTANT (O.S.)

Sir, your wife is calling in.

NORTHCLIFFE

Alright.

BETH (O.S.)

The Masterman's have invited us to dinner tonight. Would you like to go?

NORTHCLIFFE

Chancellor Masterman?

BETH (O.S.)

And his wife.

Northcliffe is taken aback. He looks at the eager editors before him. Off Northcliffe's indecision...

**INT. HALLWAY - HOTEL - DAY**

Malins KNOCKS at McDowell's door. It opens to reveal McDowell, already dressed and already, stoned.

MCDOWELL

I can just pack after the shoot. It will be faster if we go do it now.

McDowell sees Malins' unhappy face.

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)

What is it?

MALINS

(Reading) You are ordered as a soldier of the King to fight gloriously against the invasion of a treacherous enemy.

**EXT. TRENCHES - DAY**

Soldiers mill about, cooking food over fires. Coping with the grotesque trenches as best they can.

MALINS (V.O.)

You must perform a task which will  
require your courage, your energy,  
and your patience.

Soldiers fill up sandbags with dirt. When they dig deep enough they find a body or some scattered body parts... but it all goes in the sandbag.

MALINS (V.O.)

You will embark upon the most  
monumental attack in the history of  
warfare.

A few yards down the line, a **TRENCH MORTAR** lands harmlessly.

The assembly line pauses for a moment - everyone checks themselves - they find they're unhurt and continue un-phased.

**EXT. ROAD TO THE FRONT - DAY**

A column of troops moves carefully atop the planks.

MALINS (V.O.)

Beginning today, the British empire  
will unleash two days of the most  
furious firepower the world has  
ever seen. The Germans will be  
vanquished in their trenches and  
the battle field will become a  
highway to glory.

As the soldiers pass on their way to the front, the camera sinks down to find Chilton's corpse, stuck in the mud.

Rats have gnawed his face and ears. He looks grotesque. Parts of his skull are visible, bleached by the sun.

**EXT. ROAD TO THE FRONT - DAY**

Far less muddy of a road. One that can support lorries. The landscape looks unharmed, the buildings intact.

Everywhere on the road, troops move towards the front. They're being mobilized for the offensive.

MALINS (V.O.)

When it is time, a quarter million  
of your countrymen will flood the  
enemy fortifications, and reclaim  
them in the name of God.

A motor truck drives by, slowly heading up to the front.  
Ollie and Barney are in the back, jostling around, lighting  
cigarettes for their comrades, unaware of the horror ahead.

MALINS (V.O.)

Should there be any resistance, we  
shall call upon you to subdue the  
enemy with courage, with honor and  
with your life if necessary.

It starts to RAIN on Ollie. And from now on, it is always  
raining for Ollie whenever he is at the front, and it is  
never raining for Malins.

**INT. HALLWAY - HOTEL - AS WE LEFT THEM**

Malins finishes the letter.

MALINS

Do your duty bravely. Fear God.  
Honor the King. Lord Horatio  
Kitchener, Field-Marshal.

Malins looks at McDowell as if apologizing for getting his  
hopes up to return home. McDowell, however, is reading the  
SHOT LIST that fell out of the envelope.

MCDOWELL

They want to send us over the top.  
With the infantry.

McDowell references the list.

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)

Opening charge... troops climbing  
out of the trenches - they want us  
**in** No Man's Land as the attack  
washes over us!

MALINS

It would seem Providence has given  
us a challenge...

MCDOWELL

This is not Providence. This is  
suicide. Have you ever seen an  
assault before?

(MORE)

MCDOWELL (CONT'D)

Of course you haven't! I don't even know why I'm asking you.

An **EXPLOSION (O.S.)** lands near enough to SHAKE the building.

MALINS

These are our orders. And we will obey them. I have every confidence in our abilities.

MCDOWELL

How will you even see anything? How will you focus? There will be too much smoke! Not to mention the fucking enemy fire!

MALINS

We're capturing lightning, McDowell. We are capturing lightning. And in order to do so, we must stand in the rain.

MCDOWELL

We need a plan. Or we're both going to die.

And just at that moment, the British **ARTILLERY** begins the assault on the Germans in the distance.

*The FIREPOWER is overwhelming.*

#### **EXT. BELGIAN TOWN - EVENING**

**Sounds of ARTILLERY** continue, never stopping for a moment.

Ollie and Barney march in a column of SOLDIERS, they're now done with the lorry. They approach a town which stops Ollie in his tracks.

Ollie holds up the postcard from the depot, the town on it looks very nice... and the one in real life looks like its skeleton.

Reality is bombed to debris. Not a building left standing, just fragments of walls and piles of rubble.

OLLIE

Hmm...

Ollie tries to shrug it off... but it's chilling. Ahead of them, CARPENTERS are hard at work.

BARNEY

What are they making?

OLLIE

I don't know. Probably sawing  
duckboards for the trenches.

The column snakes towards the carpenters, walking past them.

BARNEY

(Shouting to the carpenters) Say,  
mate! What are you building for us?

The Carpenter doesn't even acknowledge them.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

Come now! Settle a bet?

Nothing. Ollie smacks him.

OLLIE

Stuff it.

As they walk past the carpenters, piles of the finished  
product come into focus... *they're building coffins.*

**INT. DINING ROOM - MASTERMAN'S HOME - NIGHT**

Northcliffe and Beth sit with Masterman and Lucy for dinner.  
Valets, an oak table and a humble spread for how regal the  
setting is.

MASTERMAN

The truth is - and we can all speak  
plainly among old friends... we  
must simply endure. We must outlast  
them. We have this new offensive,  
our second wave, but even that will  
not be the end of it.

BETH

Well, it takes sharper minds than  
mine to run the war. I mean the men  
you must work with. I imagine  
someone of your stature must even  
have an audience with the Field  
Marshal Lord Kitchener?

Masterman loves the flattery. Northcliffe is made uneasy by  
it.

MASTERMAN

I have the privilege of speaking to him, yes. Quite frequently, actually.

NORTHCLIFFE

Beth -

BETH

What? The Chancellor is an intelligent man! I'm sure Lord Kitchener must value your opinion quite highly.

MASTERMAN

Sometimes more than others.

BETH

I wonder if our esteemed host might offer his opinion on a matter?

MASTERMAN

I would be remiss to ignore my guest.

BETH

Ask Kitchener to move our son out of harm's way. I want him to be safe.

Masterman is caught between the border of rudeness and decency.

MASTERMAN

It is not such a straightforward task as that.

LUCY

Oh, Charles, surely it is! You report to Kitchener directly. For someone of your stature... I mean this is so far below your station, Kitchener would hardly bat an eye.

Masterman looks to Lucy, his wife, then to Northcliffe.

MASTERMAN

You didn't want to ask me yourself?

NORTHCLIFFE

I had no illusions you would receive me favorably.

MASTERMAN

Beth, my dear friend, a man in my position cannot play politics with lives.

LUCY

Please, my Lord, is there nothing you could do? He is their only son.

Masterman takes a deep breathe and collects himself a second to simmer down.

MASTERMAN

There is nothing to be done. Alfred already knows this. I am surprised he didn't tell you.

BETH

Tell me what?

MASTERMAN

I'm afraid I told the Viscount here. Kitchener is very kind to his allies, but to his adversaries... he is not as forgiving.

BETH

Adversary? What? The business with the flyers? And the lawsuit?

MASTERMAN

Yes, the issue of the lawsuit.

NORTHCLIFFE

I will let you use my presses.

MASTERMAN

I am afraid it is a little too late for that, old boy.

BETH

Surely, there must be something else we could do. Is there nothing?

All eyes turn to Northcliffe. He's trapped. He fidgets his hands for what seems like an eternity... he looks to his wife.

BETH (CONT'D)

Alfred?

Off her pleading eyes...

NORTHCLIFFE

I'll let you write your own headlines. I will give you the full banner of the Daily Mail.

MASTERMAN

Interesting. But still not enough.

Beth can see her husband is failing. She steps up to the plate.

BETH

We have photos.

The bombshell is dropped.

MASTERMAN

You have what?

BETH

The ones you're tearing apart the offices for? We have them.

Masterman rounds on Northcliffe.

MASTERMAN

Is this true, Alfred?

NORTHCLIFFE

I have photos. And they came from the front. I do not know if it is the leak or something else. But they are ghastly.

*This catches Masterman's attention.*

MASTERMAN

You have them in your possession?

Northcliffe takes a deep breathe.

NORTHCLIFFE

I can return them to you.

BETH

And you need to let Meckel and Rafferty go as well!

Masterman dismisses her with a condescending look.

BETH (CONT'D)

I don't think it's anything to be scoffed at. They're good men.

MASTERMAN

Yes, we can release them. (To Northcliffe) I will need the photos but I will also need certain assurances.

NORTHCLIFFE

Such as?

MASTERMAN

That nobody will ever print them. I don't want them appearing in any back wash magazine. If people knew...

Northcliffe knows what he's agreeing to.

NORTHCLIFFE

You have my promise.

Masterman nods. The deal is done.

MASTERMAN

Very well. Do you have a preference on where to transfer him?

NORTHCLIFFE

Far away from the front.

MASTERMAN

I will formalize the request.

#### **EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCHES - NEXT DAY**

The cannons continue to **ROAR** nonstop. A steadily building turbulence of shells.

The Royal Fusiliers, Ollie's company, are all in their dugouts. Not a person is asleep, but everyone is exhausted.

The earth **THRASHES** from all the explosions. Soldiers have ear plugs in.

Ollie is himself holding a letter from Kitchener. Barney has one too and is reading his own aloud.

BARNEY

- do your duty bravely. Fear God.  
Honor the King. Lord Horatio  
Kitchener, Field-Marshal.

OLLIE

Well. That's tomorrow, isn't it?

BARNEY

We assemble for briefing at 0400.

Ollie looks at the letter again.

OLLIE

Right. Fear God. Not the Germans.

**INT. PHONE BOOTH - INTELLIGENCE STATION - NIGHT**

Malins holds the phone up to his ear, talking with Masterman on the other end. Malins is a nervous wreck over the battle in the morning. Over where he is. Over what he has to do.

MASTERMAN (O.S.)

Malins. Are you prepared for the assault, old boy?

MALINS

Yes sir. We'll set ourselves up in No Man's about twenty yards past the tunnel exit point. I've made a little shelter and we'll wait there the night before the assault.

MASTERMAN (O.S.)

Good.

MALINS

Did you get the film we sent back?

MASTERMAN (O.S.)

Yes. It's being developed.

MALINS

And Chancellor?

MASTERMAN

Yes?

His voice cracks with emotion.

MALINS

If we don't make it back or if anything happens... well, I hope you like them. I hope you like them very much. We've - we've worked hard for them. I don't know if there's... It isn't all pretty. I'm sorry it wasn't better.

MASTERMAN (O.S.)

Malins?

MALINS

Yes?

MASTERMAN (O.S.)

I have every confidence in you.  
Good luck. And god speed.

**INT. HOTEL ROOM - BELGIAN TOWN - NIGHT**

Malins looks out the window. The hills are alight with FIRE. The enemy line is getting **PUMMELED** by British guns. The whole line is a mess of FIRE and SMOKE. Malins looks out...

*This is far greater than anything that has come before.*

He turns his attention to the camera gear laid out on the bed before him. He takes out a rag and starts polishing.

**INT. BATHROOM - HOTEL - NIGHT**

McDowell takes a hit of **opium** from his pipe and steps under the shower. The water soothes him.

**EXT. SUPPLY DEPOT - BELGIAN TOWN - NIGHT**

Judson hands out steel helmets to soldiers in line. The soldiers pay him in cash and various contraband.

*All around, soldiers perfect final preparations for battle.*

McDowell and Malins walk past, in full battle gear.

They see Judson hard at work. For a moment, however, Judson looks up and they catch eyes for a brief nod.

McDowell and Malins tip their hats and march onward.

**INT. INTELLIGENCE STATION - CONTINUOUS**

It's raining here. Hard.

A MESSENGER walks into a tented bullpen of desks and maps.

CLERKS and ORDERLIES are drawing up final preparations, organizing orders, etc. The Messenger approaches the desk of one CLERK.

MESSENGER

Excuse, me.

CLERK

Yes?

MESSENGER

I have a wire I need sent to the Royal Fusiliers. Care of Private Northcliffe.

CLERK

Alright, tag it on the list.

The clerk points towards a metal wire, hanging above his desk. It is full of a stack of dispatches to be telephoned out. The Messenger puts it on the end of a very long list.

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - WAR OFFICE - NIGHT**

Kitchener stares out the window as if trying to spy his troops far in the distance, preparing for battle.

Behind him, GENERALS wait. They're having brandy and cigars. They're anxiously waiting to pat themselves on the back for a campaign well done.

KITCHENER

- and, after we have poured one point two million shells on the German line, after we have consumed them in a cloud of fire, the British Expeditionary Force will expand on our recent gains, and press onward until the enemy is vanquished.

**REVEAL:** Kitchener is dictating to a TYPIST.

The typist reviews his work and spots an omission -

TYPIST

Title for the headline, sir?

KITCHENER

The Glorious Second Push.

**EXT. MALINS HIDEOUT - NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT**

Malins and McDowell bed themselves down, in a nest surrounded by sand bags and camouflaged amidst the destruction.

They look over the field of carnage around them.

MCDOWELL

As good a place as any.

Malins pats him on the shoulder.

MALINS

I know I give you a hard time. But  
I want you to know, it's only  
because you are quite truly the  
worst assistant I have ever had.

MCDOWELL

I'm the only assistant you've ever  
had.

MALINS

Exactly. And if you'd let me  
finish, I was going to say that it  
means you're also the best  
assistant I've ever had.

Malins extends his hand.

MALINS (CONT'D)

It's been an honor.

And now, when McDowell says the rank, *he means it.*

MCDOWELL

Thank you, lieutenant.

They CLASP hands.

#### **EXT. TRENCHES - NIGHT**

Ollie and Barney walk through the trenches with other men in their unit. They reach a small intersection where the COMPANY CAPTAIN is waiting to address his troops.

Finally, the last stragglers take a knee and everyone turns to their leader for a somber address.

COMPANY CAPTAIN

Gentlemen. At zero five hundred we  
will begin assembling with our  
units at the designated deployment  
points. At zero five thirty we will  
have final inspections. At zero six  
hundred, we will go over the top.  
Take the next hour for yourself.  
Leave notes and letters tacked to  
the mail post in Company H.Q..

(MORE)

COMPANY CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
Make your peace with whomever. May  
God be with you.

The men break, slow to rise, intent on prayer and privacy.

Ollie and Barney start to walk away.

BARNEY  
I don't know about you but it  
sounds dreadful just to sit around.  
I would rather play cards or -

Ollie gets TAPPED on the shoulder from behind. It's the  
Company Captain.

COMPANY CAPTAIN  
I need to speak with you. In  
private.

**INT. CAPTAIN'S BILLET - MINUTES LATER**

The billet is small, cramped and dirty.

A drawing of No Man's on the wall... lighters made from  
bullet casings... magazines... makeshift furniture... *it's a*  
*home*. Trinkets and tokens left from one soldier to the next.

CAPTAIN  
You are hereby relieved of combat  
duty.

OLLIE  
What?!

The Captain draws from his desk a DISPATCH message.

CAPTAIN  
We received a telegram this  
morning. Apparently you have been  
*urgently* reassigned to  
administrative duties in Calais.

OLLIE  
Forgive me, sir. I can hardly  
follow.

CAPTAIN  
Apparently someone in the upper  
echelons of management needs you  
elsewhere.

Ollie, trying to comprehend.

OLLIE

Leave now? At the breathe before  
the plunge?

CAPTAIN

That is what the order says.

The Captain leaves Ollie alone to his decision.

**EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCH - DAWN**

The sky is lightening with day, but still it rains on Ollie. Sunrise approaches. The **SHELLING** continues.

Barney lines up with his unit beside a tall wooden ladder climbing up to No Man's. He scans left and right. Ollie is nowhere to be found. Barney checks his watch... 0530.

Smoke is heavy in the sky. The ground shakes ceaselessly. Everyone is pallid and trembling. Many prayers up and down the line. A SERGEANT paces past troops in line.

SERGEANT

Check the man in front! Bayonets.  
Grenades. Pistol. When you're in  
the open, get to the enemy line as  
quickly as you can. There's no  
barbed wire to block you, the  
artillery destroyed it, so do not  
get bogged down in the craters and  
do not fire your weapon until you  
cross into their trenches.

Barney turns to the man next to him...

BARNEY

Where the fuck is Northcliffe?

The sky above is thick with smoke. Zero visibility. It is a wall of gas, fumes and fire.

**INT. BILLET - SAME TIME**

Ollie is pacing, clothes in hand, torn whether to pack or not. *He doesn't want to leave his comrades.*

He puts clothes into the bag, then dives back into his pack to take something out and that's when... he comes across the letter from his father.

*It's unopened.*

He looks at it quizzically, tears it open and reads it, words hitting him deeply.

OLLIE

(Reading) My dearest son. No doubt you will fight bravely and well. But as the trials of this war sets upon you, remember above all else: use your mind. Think before you act. Do not simply be cowed by authority. You are the one who must live with the repercussions of your actions. Use judgment and above all, follow your conscience.

A nearby EXPLOSION shakes the dugout... Ollie looks at the door, torn whether to run or to fight.

**EXT. MALINS HIDEOUT - SAME TIME**

Malins and McDowell sit with cameras, in the cover of an impact crater. Still, it is sunny where they are.

They have prepared for the eye of the storm.

Track over the ground to see just some twenty yards away from them...

A ton of British INFANTRY crowd in the tunnel exit, ready to attack. They fill the crater, waiting and focused solely on the action ahead.

Everything above them is SMOKE and THUNDER. The shelling has not let up for a moment.

CLOSE ON: Malins' pocket watch strikes 0545.

**EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCH - SAME TIME**

Barney is kissing a cross on his necklace. When...

OLLIE (O.S.)

Move!

Barney turns. Ollie is standing in full battle gear. *He came back.*

BARNEY

Where the hell were you? I thought you turned yellow on me.

OLLIE

Someone offered me a job but I had to tell them it was daft. It didn't agree with my conscience to let you go in there alone.

BARNEY

I imagine they're a bit pissed that you missed the check.

OLLIE

I imagine they're happy I'm here now.

They're moments from the assault.

An explosion so powerful that the dirt in the trench SHAKES, a wall of sandbags LOOSENS, Ollie STUMBLES off balance...

**EXT. MALINS HIDEOUT - SAME TIME**

In the distance beyond Malins and McDowell we see a massive explosion. In fact, massive does it no justice.

It is the **Hawthorne Ridge Mine**, 75 tons of dynamite buried under the German line. The largest non-nuclear explosion of all time.

As the explosion settles, the clock strikes 0600. All of a sudden the relentless artillery **STOPS**.

For a moment, it is quiet. For a moment, it is almost peaceful. In this breathe of silence...

**EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCHES - SAME TIME**

Silence amidst the rain... Ollie looks up, taken so aback by the abrupt change that he forgets where he is.

**EXT. MALINS HIDEOUT - SAME TIME**

The quiet is haunting.

Malins and McDowell look around as if they've lost themselves. Then... from offscreen, a whistle **RINGS OUT**.

*It's time.*

The soldiers clamber up the sides of the crater and into No Man's Land, running towards Malins and McDowell.

The infantry charge fearlessly and they **\*SNAP\*** picture after picture.

CAPTAIN

Charge!

**EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCHES / NO MAN'S LAND - SAME TIME**

The Commander puts a whistle to his mouth. It **RINGS** shrill and clear.

Barney and Ollie take steps towards the ladder which will lead them to the enemy.

Ollie reaches the ladder second and start to climb.

COMMANDER

Now! Go! Go! Go!

All the soldiers scramble out of the trench and into...

**EXT. NO MAN'S LAND**

Ollie peers his head over. Ahead, a dense wall of smoke. There is no way to see what lies ahead.

He charges the smokescreen. After a few strides over sandbags and corpses, the silence is interrupted by the **CRACKLING** of fire, burning all across No Man's...

Then a horrible sound emerges: **machine guns**. The enemy has reached their battle stations. *Now it's a battle.*

Ollie runs forward stumbling over debris, blinded by smoke but valiant nonetheless.

**BULLETS** fly out of the fog and smoke and lay into the assault. **TRACERS** fly regularly and all around.

Ollie ducks behind an overturned cart. He turns back to see half a dozen soldiers **OBLITERATED** in one salvo. And then... the first **SHELLS** start to fall.

They're shrapnel shells - they burst overhead into a million, tiny, metal pellets. *And they shred the infantry to bits.*

*The British are completely helpless.*

Barney, comes up from behind Ollie.

BARNEY

Ollie! Get up! Move!

And Barney is hit by a pellet in the back of his shin.

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

Gas masks! Put your gas masks on!

Ollie picks up Barney and moves him behind cover. He helps Barney put on his GAS MASK then takes a knee to fit his own.

Ollie stands up wearing his MASK. It covers his entire face like a stormtrooper. The goggles stare at us with dead eyes.

OLLIE

Stay here to regain your strength.  
Then crawl back.

BARNEY

If I'm crawling anywhere it will  
only be forward.

They look... *it really is just a flesh wound.*

OLLIE

Are you sure?

Barney gets up and tests it.

BARNEY

Good enough.

Barney leads the way, hobbling yet quite spry.

Ollie swings up his rifle and follows. He hardly turns the corner only to see...

Barney walks straight into a wall of **GUN FIRE**. In hardly a moment, it tears him up beyond recognition.

*He's dead.*

**EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - TUNNEL EXIT - SAME TIME**

Malins and McDowell begin taking pictures as their soldiers plod steadily towards the Germans.

These are the crack troops, the tip of the spear.

The field is ridden with obstacles though. For Malins it provides cover. For the soldiers it provides trouble.

Malins levels his camera and **\*SNAPS\*** pictures of the men as they go.

Malins squints up ahead; he's about halfway to the German line.

Ahead, the British reach the German line. But when they arrive, there's commotion and confusion... they begin waving their hands in the air, telling others to retreat.

MALINS

Have they stopped?

McDowell peaks his head up to look, but only for a moment.

As the smoke starts to clear, one terrified CRY pierces loud above all -

BRITISH SOLDIER (O.S.)

The wire's intact!

BRITISH SOLDIER #2 (O.S.)

We're trapped!

*Not good.*

Smoke clears to reveal: huge swathes of BARBED WIRE are still intact all along the German line.

They're preventing the British from reaching their enemy... *and it leaves them sitting ducks.*

MALINS

Shit.

Then in one terrifying moment, the German line **OPENS FIRE** on the British. BULLETS, GRENADES, ARTILLERY and MORTARS all let loose at once.

Every single soldier who tries to climb over the wire gets caught like a fly in a web and **RIDDLED** by bullets. Others run back in fear but it doesn't matter. They're killed too.

It is a **massacre** in the purest sense of the word.

McDowell and Malins look on horrified. Malins **\*SNAPS\*** a picture. McDowell pulls him down behind a rampart.

MCDOWELL

They're penned in up ahead! We're all penned in!

The mayhem intensifies as even more Germans reach their weapons and begun firing. Malins tries his best to film. McDowell can hardly watch. He's at wit's end.

MALINS

Look - the main wave is coming.

Malins points back towards the British line as their soldiers start to EMERGE from the smoke.

MCDOWELL

We need to get them going over the top!

MALINS

We got to get them here and now!

For a brief moment, the soldiers look fearsome and heroic - charging through the smoke...

And then the enemy find them in their sights and open fire.

Bullets tear gas masks, uniforms and flesh to ribbons. **It's hopeless.** The British fall SCREAMING and WRITHING. And the Germans don't stop shooting until their corpses are still.

MCDOWELL

We've got to go to the tunnel entrance -

An explosion nearby **SHAKES** them.

MALINS

We've still got to get them going over the top. Ready?

Another **EXPLOSION**, this one closer. Malins is hurled to the ground. He loses his breath.

Malins gasps for air. He's separated, disoriented and lost in the smoke. He clutches his heart. Then he looks around for McDowell but **finds nothing...**

*McDowell is gone.*

**EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - FRONT LINE TRENCH - SAME TIME**

Ollie weaves through the battlefield. All around him, SHRAPNEL SHELLS tear his comrades apart. It's awful.

Another hail of machine gun **FIRE** bursts through the smoke. Those who aren't killed by artillery find bullets instead.

Ollie runs frantically until an **EXPLOSION** knocks him off balance.

Then another on his other side, this one stronger. It throws him up twenty feet in the air and he lands on his thigh so hard his femur TEARS through his leg.

Ollie SCREAMS in pain. He tries to lean on his arm but FALLS onto his back. He looks to see why: his elbow is a bloody stump.

All around British are dead and dying. Piles of bodies so high that the corpses themselves provide cover.

Ollie starts to panic and SCREAM torturously until -

**INT. NORTHCLIFFE'S OFFICE - DAILY MAIL**

Northcliffe looks out his window, as if searching for his son with his gaze though he's an ocean away.

A MILITARY MESSENGER steps into the office.

MILITARY MESSENGER  
Lord Northcliffe?

Northcliffe turns, sees the man and knows what it's about.

NORTHCLIFFE  
Come in and close the door.

The Messenger complies.

MILITARY MESSENGER  
I have the headlines for your front page, sir. From the Bureau.

Northcliffe takes an ENVELOPE from the Messenger.

He pulls out the headlines: **The Glorious Second Push.**

**EXT. DAILY MAIL HEADQUARTERS - DAY**

Dozens of MILITARY POLICE pour into the building.

NORTHCLIFFE (V.O.)  
Dearly beloved, the time has come to celebrate what was. The freedom and independence we have lost. That we sacrificed for the good of the empire.

**INT. OFFICES - DAILY MAIL HEADQUARTERS - DAY**

The MP's take station at every hallway. They begin going through the inboxes and outboxes of all the reporters, collecting both personal correspondence and news articles.

NORTHCLIFFE (V.O.)

We must welcome in a wiser, older  
brother who knows best.

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAILY MAIL - DAY**

Northcliffe gathers his REPORTERS and STAFF. Everyone's in a state of nerves and agitation.

NORTHCLIFFE

What is most important in this time  
is to carry on. And serve the best  
we can for the new mission we  
serve. And do our best to mold the  
world in our favor.

Northcliffe looks towards the back of the room as military police begin filing in.

Everyone looks to him, looking hopelessly for direction.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)

It's alright, it's alright.

Northcliffe waves them in.

NORTHCLIFFE (CONT'D)

Welcome to the Daily Mail.

**EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - EVENING**

The sun sets. The battle has ended.

Instead of artillery or machine guns, it is silent. With the exception of lone **KRACKS** from snipers picking off wounded.

Slowly, as if from under the rubble of some grotesque earthquake, McDowell climbs out of the ruin.

He drags himself slowly, hand over hand, across piles of bodies and debris.

His going is slow. As he struggles past, headed towards the British line, we see... *he only has one leg.*

We float up as he passes to see one hundred plus yards of carnage between him and the British line.

We float up above and realize: *it's going to be a long crawl.*

**EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT**

Raining here. Ollie is a bloody stump of a man, lying on a bed of debris and carnage.

He's weak from losing blood, not much time left in his life.

And that's when a RAT peeks its head out of the carnage. Ollie only notices it because of its movement.

It's a big rat. Larger than some dogs. And it waddles its way to the protruding bone in his shattered leg.

It takes a nibble from his flesh. Ollie protests weakly. He can't move easily but he tries to PUSH it off.

OLLIE

Get. The fuck. Away.

The rat is deterred... but only for a moment. And that's when Ollie feels the nibble of another rat on his bloody stump of an elbow.

He turns his head to see TWO DOZEN more rats all peering at him, eyes gleaming, teeth bared and GNAWING.

They start CRAWLING towards him, **curious and hungry...**

**INT. HOSPITAL WARD - RESERVE TRENCH - DAY**

The ward is a manmade cavern with room for sixty some patients. Stretchers stacked like many tiered bunk beds.

McDowell lies on the lowest level. He has bandages all over his head, one arm is in a sling and his lone leg is in traction. His eyes are closed.

All around, the CLAMOR of a hospital. Wounded soldiers WAIL, CHAPLAINS and DOCTORS tend PATIENTS... Sounds mechanical and human BUZZ. All of it grating.

On the bed next to McDowell, one soldier thrashes and flails in a combat nightmare, **SCREAMING** as ORDERLIES hold him down.

Meanwhile McDowell lies on the bed unconscious until... his eyes POP open and when they do, suddenly, everything goes **QUIET.**

McDowell just stares blankly at the ceiling. We only hear silence. His expression is distant. The lights are on but nobody's home...

*It's shell shock.*

**EXT. HOSPITAL WARD - RESERVE TRENCH - DAY**

Malins wanders through the trenches, exhausted and bedraggled from the night before. He finds the hospital ward and unfolds the shot list from his pocket.

**3. Hospital**

He wearily loads a roll of film into his X-5 and enters.

**INT. HOSPITAL WARD - RESERVE TRENCH - DAY**

Malins enters and finds a DOCTOR with a manifest. He takes a picture.

DOCTOR  
What do you want?

MALINS  
I'm just here to document. I'll  
stay out of your way.

Malins moves to get a good view the ward and glances over the mess of beds in front of him, until...

MALINS (CONT'D)  
McDowell?

Malins, ecstatic, runs to McDowell, who lies just as we left him. His mouth is half open and drooling, in a perpetual state of blubbing.

MALINS (CONT'D)  
You made it! You son of a -

Malins stops in his tracks as he sees McDowell's condition.

MALINS (CONT'D)  
Oh McDowell...

It's pointless to even try and make conversation. Malins puts his head in his hands. **McDowell may as well be dead.**

Malins breaks. He cries. He allows himself a few tears to roll down his face. And then he quickly wipes them away before anyone can see.

MALINS (CONT'D)

Well I won't just sit around  
telling you all the nice things you  
always wanted to hear. And I  
certainly won't tell you you're the  
best assistant I ever had. Or that  
I love you like a brother. But  
Jerry is lucky you never made it  
into his trenches. Wouldn't be a  
spliff or stick of hash left in the  
whole German Empire.

He pulls himself together and regains his composure.

MALINS (CONT'D)

Now...

Malins brings up his X-5. He points it at McDowell on the  
hospital bed. **\*CLICK\***

Malins takes one final look at his friend when...

DOCTOR (O.S.)

Gas!

Malins looks up. He goes pale instantly.

Slowly pouring into the entrance of the cavern, is a gaseous,  
yellow cloud. It looks like a big cloud of pollen slowly  
seeping down into the room.

It's **mustard gas** and it sinks slowly through the air and down  
towards the patients.

For a moment the room is frozen in abject terror. And then,  
it erupts into **PANDEMONIUM**.

SCARED PATIENT (O.S.)

Gas! Get your masks out! Masks out!

SCARED PATIENT 2 (O.S.)

I don't have one! I need one!

Malins quickly takes off his pack and starts **TEARING** through  
it. He finds his mask. But then, before he pulls it out of  
the bag, he takes a moment to look around...

The entire ward is self destructing as the mustard gas  
approaches. British soldiers have begun **FIGHTING** each other  
tooth and nail.

SCARED PATIENT 3 (O.S.)

I need a mask!

SCARED PATIENT 4 (O.S.)  
Give me that back. That's mine!

The Doctor runs toward a footlocker, grabs a SPADE and WHACKS at the lock.

Patients CRAWL out of bed, looking frantically for gas masks, fighting each other to wrest control of them. There aren't enough masks for everyone. Not by a long shot.

The Doctor rips open the foot locker, to see a GAS MASK right on top. He puts it on only to be HIT by the spade he just put down and TACKLED by a mask-less SOLDIER.

**It's just as vicious as anything in the raid.**

Malins turns back towards a McDowell -

MALINS  
You need a mask. I can find you a mask.

Malins hides his mask for as long as possible until finally putting it on. Then he sees a WOUNDED SOLDIER approaching.

WOUNDED SOLDIER  
I need the mask - I need the mask -  
please - I need the mask -

Malins tries kicking him off, but the wounded soldier is CLIMBING Malins out of sheer desperation. Malins falls to all fours, trying to ward him off until finally...

**The gas reaches them.**

The wounded soldier's grip loosens as he starts to breathe it in. Malins backs away in horror as the wounded soldier begins CHOKING and COUGHING violently...

Then it turns into horrible WRETCHING. He starts SPEWING blood and bile all over Malins.

*The suffering is grotesque.* And it's happening all over the hospital ward.

Then, we see the first piece of pollen fall softly on McDowell's open, drooling mouth. For him, **there is no struggle** and Malins can only watch in horror.

Sound fades out.

**EXT. WELLINGTON HOUSE - DAY**

Malins walks up the street to Wellington House again, the home of the Bureau of Propaganda.

He stands outside the gate, looking at the house that gave him this assignment in the first place. Then he takes a deep breathe, pushes the gate open and walks down towards it.

MASTERMAN (PRE-LAP)

This is all wrong!

**INT. PROJECTION ROOM - WAR OFFICE**

Masterman looks over combat stills projected onto a screen. Malins with him. The footage is smoky, shakey, hard to see anything clearly as they flip from slide to slide.

Pictures show the British INFANTRY emerging from the smoke only to be MOWED DOWN. They die flailing and silently on the large screen.

MASTERMAN

Just what I feared. It's disturbing. It's disgusting.

MALINS

You sent me into a war zone -

MASTERMAN

Watch your tone, *lieutenant*. I do not fault you. The very mission itself was flawed.

MALINS

Excuse me?

MASTERMAN

The assignment was meant for publication. We can't use a frame of this!

MALINS

Sir, I think my pictures are an accurate representation -

MASTERMAN

It's not about accuracy, Malins. It's about circulation. We cannot publicize this.

Malins is thunderstruck.

MALINS

That was not what we agreed.

MASTERMAN

This was not the outcome that we hoped for either. From now on, you'll be staging scenes here at the back. We can set you up with the training barracks at the parade ground. It should have everything you need. And in much better condition by the looks of it.

This hits Malins hard.

MALINS

What about the photos I sent back earlier? Did you use any of those.

MASTERMAN

For intelligence purposes but not for circulation.

MALINS

You know, many of the men in these photos laid down their lives. Their sacrifice is worth our honor.

MASTERMAN

There is a use for all this but it is not in the papers. That's final.

Verdict delivered. Malins is helpless.

MASTERMAN (CONT'D)

But I'll tell you what we will do. We'll get some nice clean shots. Inspiring stuff. Our men jumping over the top, running into action. No bloodshed, no corpses. Just heroism.

MALINS

But sir, I am an action photographer. I didn't sign up to -

MASTERMAN

You are a soldier in the British Expeditionary Force is what you are. And you will behave like one and you will stop questioning orders.

Malins takes a second. His hand flutters to his heart. But he calms himself and nods, slowly giving in.

MALINS

Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir. My head is reeling and I am just trying to get a sense of everything. Can I at least see the pictures? I haven't had a glimpse of them since they were developed.

**INT. PRIVATE OFFICE - WELLINGTON HOUSE - DAY**

The same clerk who noticed the leak walks Malins over to a huge filing cabinet.

He SLIDES out the shelves and THUMBS through all the files.

He hands a TOP SECRET FOLDER labeled "Operation Prism Lens" over to Malins.

MALINS

Could I have a moment?

CLERK

I need to stay in here with you.  
For protocol.

MALINS

I don't know what is in this folder but a lot of the men in these photos I will never see again. I'd love a little privacy to get my bearings, please?

CLERK

Alright. But only a moment.

The clerk leaves.

Malins opens the photos to a picture of Rodgers in the trenches, Bob the hand sticking out of the earth, Barker falling into the crater...

Malins holds back the tears.

It's picture after picture, a huge body of work. Most of it ghastly. But none of it will see the light of day.

Malins flips until he arrives on the second to last picture. It's the picture of McDowell at the docks. He holds it up, nostalgic and surprised to rediscover a memory.

McDowell looks in his truly best form. Malins goes sad at the thought of his friend.

Then he flips to the final photo: the troops marching at the docks. Dozens of them in a column. Marching, unaware, to certain death ahead.

He reaches his hand to his heart, his breathe goes strained... **all those lives.**

Malins looks around and realizes he's entirely alone.

He carefully slips the photos under his jacket.

#### **INT. HALLWAY - BUREAU OF PROPAGANDA**

Malins exits the office where he was viewing the photos. He pretends to be wiping his eyes as if he were just crying.

MALINS

I... uh, I appreciate the kindness.  
I'm afraid I couldn't bear the  
sight of them. Excuse me.

He turns and quickly leaves.

#### **INT. MALINS' BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Malins flips over the pictures he stole from the Bureau. He puts them one by one into a beautiful SCRAPBOOK.

He drinks whiskey as he does it. He's drunk and depressed.

He takes a hit of opium off his pipe.

He arrives at a picture of McDowell and Judson, smiling together. He takes another sip of alcohol.

Pictures of McDowell in the motor car at the docks...  
McDowell and Judson at dinner... the mud flats... the  
soldiers struggling... No Man's Land...

#### **McDowell in the hospital.**

Malins looks at the picture, and finishes the glass in one sip... and then... **he decides he's had enough.**

He takes all the pictures and stuffs them in an envelope then gets up and leaves.

**EXT. DAILY MAIL - NIGHT NORTHCLIFFE'S HOME - NIGHT**

Malins waits on the far side of the street.

He sees Northcliffe get his brief cased checked by the military police then walk down the street. Malins follows him surreptitiously.

Northcliffe stops to glance at flyers outside the Recruitment Depot. Malins watches and pulls up his jacket... *Malins is the one who was following Northcliffe.*

**EXT. NORTHCLIFFE'S HOME - NIGHT**

Malins quickly crosses the street and hides just out of sight.

He watches Northcliffe pick up the photos and look around.

NORTHCLIFFE

Hey! Hey there! Are you following me?

Malins walks away and passes Ollie on the street as he goes.

***Malins was the leak.***

**EXT. FOXHOLE - PARADE GROUND - DAY**

Bullets KICK UP dirt and **SMACK** into sandbags while THREE SOLDIERS huddle for cover. ARMSTRONG (26, strapping); SWARTZ (30, gruff); ROWEN (40, mustached).

An EXPLOSION envelops them in a cloud of dust.

MALINS (O.S.)

Go, go, go!

As the dust clears, the men dash up and run over the top. Armstrong is HIT and falls onto the ground, dead. Rowen and Swartz carry forward, unharmed.

MALINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Cut!

REVEAL: Malins filming them. It's not combat. *It's a staged scene.*

Malins directs with zero enthusiasm. He's neither meticulous nor attentive and far from his usual, passionate demeanor.

Another soldier, TAYLOR (41) shoots harmlessly in the general direction of Armstrong, Swartz and Rowen.

Malins waves his arm lackluster fashion.

MALINS (CONT'D)

Good. Let's do it Again. And this time, just keep running 'til you're through the limits. Now, places!

**EXT. NEWS STAND - LONDON STREET - DAY**

Malins walks down the street. He's in the heart of London, crowded and full of goings on. He stops at the news stand to inspect the paper.

The Daily Mail headline reads:

**The Glorious Second Push**

It is a picture from the other day, Malins directing Taylor and Swartz. It looks heroic but there isn't a speck of carnage in the frame. *We know it's just a fake.*

The by line on the picture:

**Photo by Geoffrey Malins.**

Malins puts his paper down, not buying it. He shakes his head, disgusted at the whole mess.

Then notices how busy the stand really is. An endless stream of people buying papers. Regular people, stopping on their way home from work. **This is all they know of the war.**

Malins grabs his heart as if he's hyperventilating. A man grabs a paper from under Malins his nose and then dashes away. *It's very widely circulated.*

PATRON

You alright?

MALINS

Yeah. I'm alright. Just exhausted.  
From all this news.

Malins pulls his jacket up around his neck, walks away and doesn't look back. He hates it. All of it.

*And that's when the military police close in around him.*

Malins is apprehended and handcuffed, he struggles but it's no use. He's subdued in a moment. Pedestrians hardly notice the commotion.

We float upwards to get a sense of our surroundings...

Busy street traffic - pedestrians, horse drawn carriages and early motor cars. Life continues.

The tone is very somber. Men bustle about in waistcoats, women in dresses. Everyone wears hats. All along the street - on every edifice - are flyers. They smother the buildings, hug the lamp posts and litter the streets...

**And Lord Kitchener's face is on every one.**

**END.**