

T R U C E

by
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THIRD DRAFT
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SUPER: Based on true events

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, YPRES SALIENT - DAY

CLOSE ON - A SOLDIER'S HAND

lying motionless on a mound of mud where he fell. Fingernails yellowed and chipped. A GOLD WEDDING BAND on his ring finger.

We cannot see the rest of the soldier, just the dirty bloody uniform of his arm. British khaki? German field grey? French dark blue? It's impossible to distinguish. Over this image:

SUPER: December 1914nd

The war was supposed to be over by Christmas.

Instead, almost one million men have been killed and millions more are rushing to join the fight.

But with the onset of the harsh European winter, most military advances have ground to a halt.

Now soldiers on both sides sit and wait for spring thaw, staring at one another across the desolate, shell-raked plains of No Man's Land...

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: That there is no soldier. His arm's been ripped off at the elbow. Nothing else remains of him. Just an arm lying in a battlefield moonscape of rubble and craters...

...and a thousand decaying corpses drowning slowly in the endless mud. Bloated, rotting bodies. Twisted and frozen.

This is No Man's Land, a countryside with no life nor soul.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

CLOSE ON - SERGEANT GRAVES (33)

slouched on a hospital bed somewhere. Graves is a farmer from the Midlands. A simple man caught in a complex war. He's got cuts on his face and neck, but his eyes bear the real wound.

Sergeant Graves has seen Hell. And it has marked him. We find him staring off vacantly at the clean, white hospital wall...

...a RECRUITMENT POSTER hangs opposite him. The poster shows a proud, strapping English Tommy off to join the hunt against the evil, conniving German Hun. Graves gazes at the poster.

A BRITISH ARMY SURGEON reads a report O.S. throughout this:

ARMY SURGEON (O.S.)

All up we removed thirty-six pieces of shrapnel from the left torso and leg... Seven pieces we couldn't get at without causing more damage.

Graves listens stoically, never once looking at him.

ARMY SURGEON (O.S.)

We repaired the arterial rupture in the left arm. Stitched the cuts in the face and neck. The concussion impaired the left ear drum. You may also experience trouble seeing due to acute retinal trauma caused by the flash of the explosion... Would you like me to keep going?

Graves nods as if he were being read a grocery list.

ARMY SURGEON (O.S.)

The right radius was fractured. The left shoulder was dislocated. Seven bruised ribs. Two broken teeth. And the left ankle suffered a sprain...

The surgeon stops himself there, concerned.

ARMY SURGEON

I'd ask you again: Let me send you back home, you've done enough. The wounds warrant a discharge. There's no shame.

Graves looks at him. No... Then he closes his eyes with a sigh. Sitting on his cot like it's all too much to bear...

...there's one question he's almost too afraid to ask:

GRAVES

Will I be able to paint?

ARMY SURGEON

Excuse me?

GRAVES

Will I be able to paint?

ARMY SURGEON

I think the important thing is that you're alive and --

GRAVES

But will I be able to paint?

ARMY SURGEON

Well, yes. You'll be able to paint.

GRAVES

Good... 'Cause I couldn't bloody paint before.

He looks up at the surgeon and breaks into a weary grin.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Graves steps out of the hospital in his uniform. A .303 slung over his shoulder. The first thing he does is use his BAYONET to tear the cast off his right arm.

He flexes his forearm, wincing at the pain. Next, he lights a cigarette and takes a nice long drag. Looking around him...

...the hospital sits in the center of a huge British military hub. What was once a small French town is now flush with rank and file "Tommies".

It's a hive of activity. Hundreds of fresh BRITISH TROOPS are pouring off SUPPLY TRUCKS and forming up on the airfield. The troops are mesmerized by the ROYAL FLYING CORPS FIGHTERS that strut along the nearby runway.

SUPER: British Expeditionary Force
St. Omer, Northern France

ANGLE ON - GRAVES

as he watches the new troops hurrying to get into line. The excitement in their eyes is palpable. He smirks cynically...

...his own eyes drifting to the east, about forty miles away, where the MUFFLED MUZZLE FLASHES of the front line cannon are lit up against the dark RAIN CLOUDS above.

CUT TO:

EXT. OFFICER'S CHATEAU, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Graves moves with a limp in his left foot as he navigates his way through the bustling grounds toward the officer's chateau which is sealed off by BARBED WIRE fences.

He reads a name off a slip of paper to a GUARD.

GRAVES
Lieutenant Caldwell?

The guard points lazily across the grounds...

...where a muscle-bound BRITISH OFFICER is engaged in a very professional display of target practise with live ammunition.

The officer ducks behind a stack of crates, then pops up to shoot TENNIS BALLS which a JUNIOR OFFICER is hurling across his line of fire.

It's simulated trench warfare at it's best. And this officer doesn't miss once. Graves watches, stunned and impressed...

...he approaches as the officer finishes off his magazine.

GRAVES
Lieutenant Caldwell? Sergeant Graves,
you've been assigned to my platoon.
Happy to have you with us, Sir. Our
last Lieutenant was a right bloody
Nancy Boy. Didn't last the month --

BRITISH OFFICER
Uh, Sergeant?
(pointing behind)
That's Lieutenant Caldwell.

WHAT GRAVES SEES: A pale, thin man sitting on a stool, legs crossed. He wears WIRE RIM GLASSES. And an OXFORD RING. And he's reading a BOOK OF POETRY as if he were on a picnic...

...this is LIEUTENANT CALDWELL (33).

And Graves' smile promptly plunges.

GRAVES
Bugger.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL

engrossed in his book as Graves approaches. He doesn't look up or even seem to know that somebody's standing before him.

Graves is more than a little put off by this.

GRAVES
Lieutenant --

Caldwell lifts a hand without lifting his head. One minute...

...and Graves just stands there. Waiting impatiently as the lieutenant finishes the line. Visibly moved. Looking up now.

CALDWELL

Ever read Keats, Sergeant?

GRAVES

Buried a Lance Corporal Keats once,
does that count?

CALDWELL

(shrugs)

Depends. Did you read any Keats at
his funeral?

Graves stares at him, unamused.

CALDWELL

I'm sorry. He was probably a good
friend of yours.

Graves says nothing, despising this guy already.

Caldwell senses it. He rises and offers Graves the book.

CALDWELL

Here. Take it.

GRAVES

I'm not a... I don't have much use
for books, Sir.

CALDWELL

That one will save your soul.

Graves reluctantly takes the book. Caldwell just smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRFIELD, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Two thousand BRITISH SOLDIERS are mulling about the airfield,
formed in loose lines. Eating BULLY BEEF and some hot STEW...

...they are mainly new recruits, sprinkled with veterans.

ANGLE ON - FIVE BRITISH SOLDIERS

gathered around their packs in the middle of the airfield. A
group of "old sweats", sharing cigarettes and trading barbs.

These men will form the backbone of our story...

...there's CORPORAL SNELL (28), muscular and tight. Snell has a hard edge to him, shaped from years working the Lancashire coal mines. And he hates Germans with a passion.

Snell is a stone-cold killer -- just the kind of guy you want on your front line. A million more like him and the war would be over tomorrow.

PRIVATE TIPPOWITZ (26) worked in the mines with Snell. But he could have been a university professor. Tippowitz is a genius whose mind is simply too quick for his tongue...

...consequently, he speaks incomprehensible gibberish through a beguiling Cheshire grin. Nobody pays much attention to him.

A third ex-miner is PRIVATE ROBINSON (25). Robinson doesn't look like much of a soldier with his diminutive frame and a uniform two sizes too big...

...but there's a hell of a tough streak in him. Tippowitz and Snell protect him like a little brother, something he rallies in vain against constantly.

LANCE CORPORAL BENTON (24) is a ladies' man. Here but for the snappy uniform and shiny boots. Benton would fuck the crack of dawn if he thought he had the chance...

...but he's worth his salt in a fight. He ought to be singing in a West End nightclub. Instead, he's up to his ears in mud.

Last, there's PRIVATE AVERY (26) who's one of the kindest men you'll ever meet. Courteous. Friendly. And good-natured...

...an avowed football fanatic, Avery carries a ball with him everywhere. He's also the best shot in the entire outfit. He carries his own HUNTING RIFLE instead of the standard .303.

Like Graves, they're all solid working-class blokes. Ordinary men far from home. And like Graves, they regard the new upper-class Lieutenant Caldwell with immediate skepticism...

...a fact they don't try too hard to conceal as Graves leads Caldwell over to them.

SNELL

Here we go, look who's come back
from the dead.

AVERY

They didn't discharge you, boss?

GRAVES

Doctor called it "surface injures".

Caldwell seems to know that's a lie.

BENTON

These days, you bloody-well have to
get your head blown off before they
send you back home.

ROBINSON

That's a right crime, that is.

GRAVES

I got some time off, I'm good.

ROBINSON

Get your trigger finger shot up,
that's a ticket back to Blighty.

SNELL

Careful Fritz doesn't mistake your
piddler for your trigger finger.

The others playfully jeer Robinson.

ROBINSON

Mistake it for a *tree trunk's* more
like it --

GRAVES

Where's Billings?

And the smiles run away. All eyes to the ground...

...and Caldwell knows at once -- *there's been a death in this
tight family*. And all these men are genuinely affected by it.

SNELL

Sniper.

ROBINSON

Flippin' rat jumped at him. Landed
right on his crotch.

SNELL

He was only standing for a second
or two. Huns were waiting for him.

GRAVES

(frustrated)

Christ... I'm out for three bloody
weeks, you let the rats come back?

BENTON

Wasn't our fault, Serge. Honest.

GRAVES

But you knew Billings hated rats,
you knew that.

AVERY

I got a bead on the Hun what did
it. We get back, I'm gonna return
him the favor.

CALDWELL

Were you able to bury him?

The men look at him: *Who invited you into this conversation?*

SNELL

Yessir. Full court honours.

GRAVES

This's Lieutenant Caldwell. He's
replacing Lieutenant Weatherby.

ROBINSON

Was that his name? Weatherby?

GRAVES

This's Corporal Snell.

SNELL

Lieutenant.

GRAVES

Privates Tippowitz and Robinson,
all worked in the mines together.

Caldwell shakes their hands, trying to keep up.

GRAVES

Lance Corporal Benton.

BENTON

Hullo, Sir.

CALDWELL

Hello.

GRAVES

And Private Avery.

AVERY

Welcome to the Western Front,
Leftenant.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the airfield...

EXT. STOCKADE, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

...a BRITISH MILITARY POLICEMAN sets a chair against the wall of the stockade. He wears a distinctive RED COVER on his cap.

A dozen more RED CAPS file out of the stockade now, escorting a BRITISH CORPORAL who's been stripped of everything save for his basic khaki uniform. *His face is grim.*

They set the Corporal on the chair and line up twenty yards away. The airfield behind them a further hundred yards off.

There's a hideous lack of compassion on display here as the RED CAPS routinely LOAD and COCK their rifles. The LEADER of the group stands to the side.

RED CAP LEADER
Ready...! Aim...!

BRITISH CORPORAL
Shoot straight, you bastards!

RED CAP LEADER
Fire!

BOOM! Six bullets sound like one...

EXT. AIRFIELD, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

...and two thousand SOLDIERS turn their heads at the sound...

EXT. STOCKADE, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

...watching the rounds punch the Corporal against the wall...

EXT. AIRFIELD, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

...only one soldier doesn't turn. Or even flinch. Graves. He stares at Caldwell: *Welcome indeed.* Caldwell is shaken.

EXT. STOCKADE, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

The Corporal slumps off his chair and the RED CAPS drag him inside the stockade as if they were taking out the trash...

...a PATCH OF BLOOD staining the bricks is all that remains.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AIRFIELD, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The regiment is now lined up on the airfield, watching a two-seater ROYAL FLYING CORPS B.E.2c "Quirk" land on the runway.

KING GEORGE climbs out of the back seat to be greeted by an entourage of SIX GENERALS. They salute and shake hands with the King. Admiring his plane for a few moments.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL & GRAVES

in line next to each other. Graves scoffs quietly.

GRAVES

Seems the King wants to give us a
royal send off. Like we're all old
family friends or something.

Caldwell glances at Graves, something concerning him...

...his eyes drift pass his sergeant to the stockade where a
RED CAP is discreetly soaping the BLOOD STAIN off the wall.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRFIELD, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The engine on the "Quirk" is still running in the background as KING GEORGE leads the official entourage along the ranks.

The King pauses by a gung-ho recruit, PRIVATE EASTMAN (23).

KING GEORGE

You love your country, soldier?

EASTMAN

Yessir, My Lord!

KING GEORGE

I trust you'll show the Alleyman a
thing or two?

EASTMAN

Right so, My Lord! Right so!

KING GEORGE

(to his generals)
That's the spirit. This one's going
to have your jobs some day.

The generals paint smiles on their faces as they move on.

CLOSE ON - GRAVES

a little further down the line, whispering to his men:

GRAVES

Keep a chin up, lads... Just look straight past the old tosser. Any luck, he'll walk right by --

KING GEORGE

Haley Caldwell?

CALDWELL

My Lord.

KING GEORGE

Goodness, how long's it been?

CALDWELL

Oxford. Six years, I believe.

KING GEORGE

Do say hullo to your family. I've been meaning to have them over at the palace for tea. It'd be lovely to see some old friends again.

Graves is thunderstruck. The others watch, curious.

KING GEORGE

What on Earth are you doing here at the front? This isn't for you. Your father would have a fit.

CALDWELL

Please don't tell him, Sir. I... He wouldn't understand.

KING GEORGE

I'm not sure *I* understand.

CALDWELL

It's every man's duty to be a part of the fight, My Lord.

KING GEORGE

Yes, but surely we can find you a position in the War Office or the supply lines or somewhere...else.

CALDWELL

But, Sir... The fight is at the front.

KING GEORGE

Come now. Don't be ridiculous, I'll have my staff set up a transfer --

CALDWELL

Please, My Lord... It's enough that my name should purchase my rank let alone my post.

KING GEORGE

(pause)

Well... If there's anything I can do for you, please don't hesitate.

CALDWELL

Thank you, My Lord. Thank you.

And the royal entourage continues. Graves stares at Caldwell.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRFIELD, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The inspection is over. The 'Quirk' taking off, launching the King back up into the cloudy skies as the REGIMENTAL SERGEANT MAJOR barks orders to the troops.

ANGLE ON - OUR GROUP

donning their packs and heading off. Snell catches Robinson and Tippowitz. Glancing at the absconding military plane.

SNELL

How do you like that?

ROBINSON

Like what?

SNELL

Didn't even stay long enough to shut down his engine.

The men consider this as they follow Caldwell and Graves away from the airfield, towards the ARTILLERY FLASHES in the east.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD, FLANDERS - DUSK

The steady bursts of FRONT LINE CANNON transcend the fading sunlight, accompanied by a perpetual BASSO PROFUNDO ROAR...

...we find two very different columns of BRITISH SOLDIERS on a country road, passing a battered ROAD SIGN which marks the border between France and Belgium.

The fresh, clean troops are striding into Belgium on the left while the hardened, muddied troops are trudging and stumbling back into France on the right. Many are bandaged and limping.

ANGLE ON - THE OLD SWEATS

as they advance stoically back towards the front amongst the new troops. Silent looks passing between the two columns...

...a few of the wounded nod to Graves as if they know him.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL

walking a little faster than everyone else. He's apparently trying to reach Graves who's towards the head of the pack...

...the soldiers catch the new lieutenant as he passes them.

AVERY

You play, Leftenant?

CALDWELL

Play?

AVERY

Football.

Avery chips his ball to Caldwell...

...who promptly drops it. Fumbling it once or twice as he picks it up. Wiping the mud off. Handing it back to Avery.

CALDWELL

Sorry, I... I've never much been one for sports.

ROBINSON

First time in France, Sir?

CALDWELL

No, I've holidayed here before.

ROBINSON

Holidayed, have you?

(to himself)

Well, isn't that lovely? Isn't that just grand?

He rolls his eyes at Snell who sneers back.

Caldwell doesn't notice, passing Tippowitz now.

TIPPOWITZ

A very evening for the Flanders,
Lieutenant. Ah, with the raining
and the shelling, don't you think?

GRAVES

Pay him no mind. The day Tippowitz
speaks a coherent sentence'll be
the day God pays a visit to Hell.

Caldwell looks at Tippowitz, he smiles proudly.

ANGLE ON - THE OLD SWEATS

watching Caldwell walk with Graves ahead, out of earshot.

BENTON

So what's the thinking then, eh?

ROBINSON

Just one more upper-class git come to
get his upper-class mug shot off.

A ripple of acknowledgment spreads throughout the group.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL & GRAVES

marching beside one another. Something on Caldwell's mind.

CALDWELL

Might I have a word, Sergeant?

GRAVES

You outrank me, Lieutenant. Have as
many words as suits you.

GRAVES

I sensed that you were "upset" with
the manner in which I addressed the
King earlier and I'd like to --

GRAVES

Had nothing to do with you manner.

CALDWELL

Oh? What then?

Graves glances at him, shakes his head.

GRAVES

Not my place, Sir.

CALDWELL
You can speak freely. Please.

GRAVES
(shrugs)
Just surprises me anyone would want
to go to the front.

CALDWELL
Every man has his reason, I suppose.

GRAVES
Not every man gets a free ticket
out of the trenches.

Caldwell makes notice of Graves' limp...

CALDWELL
I read your medical report. Surface
injuries? Was that was you said?

...and Graves is pissed, but Caldwell is a superior officer.

GRAVES
I came here in August. A thousand
men in the battalion. One thousand
good men. Know how many we got left
today? *Thirty*.

CALDWELL
I'm sorry.

GRAVES
I'll use *my* ticket, Lieutenant. But
not until those thirty men are dead
and buried.

Graves marches ahead, leaving Caldwell to consider this...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RESERVE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

BOOM! A British thirteen pounder fires off a round.

We're at the front now along the Ypres Salient. And the night
is black as coal. The RECRUITS are waiting behind the reserve
trenches, the very rear line of defence...

...and the whites of their eyes leap out of the inky darkness
as they get their first glimpse of the battlefield about four
hundred yards ahead. Strobe-lit by FLARES and EXPLOSIONS.

CLOSE ON - THE OLD SWEATS

as BULLETS start to slap and crack past. The recruits around them duck and cringe each time. But our guys barely flinch.

SNELL

Don't get a wind up... If you can hear it, it's already passed you.

GRAVES

Take a good look around. This's the last you'll see of the world till we rotate back out. You do not ever raise your heads, your hands, or your arses above the trenches.

A SOLDIER beckons them from the trench entrance now...

GRAVES

Welcome to Ypres.

...and Graves signals his platoon forward. Jostling along a pathway made out of CRUDE LADDERS to keep them from sinking into the watery mud.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL

as he ventures down into the trench, watching as his view of the world above narrows into a sliver barely three feet wide.

(NOTE: From now on, the sound of GUNFIRE and CANNON will be a constant presence. Furthermore, we will never see above the trenches unless our soldiers do or unless otherwise noted.)

Graves leads his troops through a bizarre subterranean world, passing WOUNDED or SHELL-SHOCKED SOLDIERS and Regimental Aid Posts filled with SCREAMING MEN and DESPERATE MEDICS.

Caldwell is clearly affected but he keeps his game face on...

EXT. SUPPORT TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...and now they reach the support lines, the middle tier of trenches. Barely a hundred yards from the front. Here, the thunder of ARTILLERY competes with RIFLES and MACHINE GUNS.

The RECRUITS are racked with terror, GAGGING and PUKING over the excruciating smell that seems to permeate these trenches.

The nearby LATRINES are flooded, the natural waterline of the Flanders plain being unusually high. Excrement floats readily out of the toilet seats and pours into the trench.

Caldwell covers his nose and mouth with a HANDKERCHIEF as he watches SOMEBODY'S THUMB float by in the runnel of piss and water flowing beneath his boots.

Some of the other recruits see the finger as it bobs up and down beneath them. One of them pukes, adding to the filth.

Benton points the floating finger out to Private Eastman.

BENTON

And somebody somewhere's *dying* to scratch his bum.

Private Eastman is sickened, the old sweats just smile...

...now Graves appears around a corner, beckoning them with a HAND SIGNAL. Caldwell smothers his fear and trails after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMMUNICATIONS TRENCH, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

They zig-zag slowly through a communications trench towards the front line now. The BULLETS are louder than ever here.

Graves leads the way, crouching low in a particularly shallow part of the trench to tap a BELL fixed near the ground...

...as they follow him, everybody crouches. And taps the bell.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

Finally, they emerge into the dreaded fire trenches, the very front line of defense. Caldwell hesitates at the entrance...

...and Avery bumps past him with an off-handed grin.

AVERY

We call this the "suicide ditch".

And it's not hard to see why...

...these trenches are the *most* shallow and *least* protected of all. They appear somehow temporary. Dug hastily as if this is as far as the first soldiers ever got.

German TRACERS zip past scant inches above their heads while shells EXPLODE on or around them constantly. And MACHINE GUN FIRE is a constant, ripping into PARAPETS and BARBED WIRE.

The conditions of the trenches themselves are appalling...

...exhausted SOLDIERS squatting in waist high water. Covered in mud. Barely awake. Rats. Frogs. Bugs. They're all here.

ANGLE ON - GRAVES

tapping the front line SOLDIERS on the shoulder one by one, switching them out and ushering his own men in their place.

One of the soldiers he taps just slumps lifelessly...

...a BULLET HOLE in the man's head -- nobody has noticed for hours. Graves simply gives Caldwell *this* post. And moves on.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL

who watches the old sweats and does what they do. Hunkering down. Settling in. All of the new troops are shit-scared...

...especially Private Eastman who's not so gung-ho anymore.

They begin to hear somebody HOWLING like a wolf at the German trenches in between EXPLOSIONS and GUNFIRE. It's Tippowitz...

...and the recruits understandably think he's lost it.

CALDWELL

(at Robinson)

What's he doing?

ROBINSON

Tippowitz? He's the wolfman, he is.
Scares the piss cutta the Huns.

CALDWELL

Is he mad?

ROBINSON

(scoffs)

You think any of us are in a right
mind volunteering for this strife?

Caldwell says nothing, glancing back at Tippowitz.

And Robinson takes a moment, gauging the lieutenant.

ROBINSON

Year ago, we were done thirty feet
or so. Me and Snell and Tippowitz.

CALDWELL

In a coal mine?

ROBINSON

Right. So we hit this vein. Water blows in like a cannon. Snell gets me out. I don't swim. But Tippowitz gets trapped. Whole tunnel caves in on him. Like that. So he's drowned. Or suffocated. Or crushed, yeah?

(shakes his head)

He tunnels his own way out. Takes him two days. Middle of the night, he climbs out. Nobody's there. So he goes home. Sleeps. Shows up for work the next day. Nobody's there. We're at his wake, yeah? Giving speeches and whatnot. When in he walks like a ghost. Poor old pastor almost had a flippin' heart attack.

Tippowitz is still HOWLING. Caldwell just watches him.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

Several hours later, we find Caldwell right where Graves left him. Manning his firing post just like every other soldier...

...none of them dares to peek above the trench. They just sit there, shivering as their feet get anchored into the FREEZING MUD. Graves makes his way back down the line to Caldwell now.

GRAVES

Captain wants to meet you.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - NIGHT

They enter a FORTIFIED DUGOUT which shelters several troops by its walls. Light from a lamp spills out the doorway...

INT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - CONTINUOUS

...this is the command post. A glorified foxhole with a desk and chair. At least, it's somewhat dry thanks to a corrugated iron roof. And the sound of GUNFIRE is a little more muted.

CAPTAIN McINTYRE (36) sips on a cup of coffee emblazoned with the King's face as PERKINS, a signals corpsman, works hard to fix the captain's FIELD TELEPHONE.

McIntyre exudes authority. Confident. Sharp. And no bullshit.

MCINTYRE

Bloody phone line's down again. Be better off using carrier pigeons, wouldn't we Perkins?

PERKINS (SIGNALS CORPSMAN)

Sir, I'll have this fixed in a jiffy. Don't you worry none.

Caldwell salutes McIntyre sharply.

CALDWELL

Lieutenant Caldwell reporting for --

MCINTYRE

Yes, yes I know who you are. Your father's the Earl of Devonshire.

CALDWELL

(pause)

I'd like to ask that you treat me no different, Sir.

MCINTYRE

McIntyre's my name. My family's been working for your family for generations. You smoke?

(Caldwell declines)

You will.

He lights up, flipping through Caldwell's MILITARY DOSSIER.

MCINTYRE

Rather ironic, isn't it? In peace, I would be taking orders from you.

CALDWELL

I think you'll find I'm not like my family, Captain. I've not had a man servant since the age of fifteen.

MCINTYRE

Oh yes, of course. You're the "dark horse". The one they cast out.

CALDWELL

Actually, I left on my own accord.

MCINTYRE

You left your family estate? And your title? For what, may I ask?

CALDWELL

To open my eyes. See the world.

MCINTYRE

And what did you find?

CALDWELL

That I love England, Sir. And that I'd willingly give my life for her.

MCINTYRE

You mean, the life *afforded* to you.

CALDWELL

We don't choose the families we're born into, Sir.

MCINTYRE

No. No, sadly not.

McIntyre and Caldwell eyeball each other a moment.

Graves watches the two men closely, feeling the tension.

MCINTYRE

Right... You and your men will stay in the fire trenches for the next ten days. Then you'll spend a week in reserve. A few days at rest. And then you'll be back. We begin every morning before dawn with a stand-to order. Followed by breakfast and trench maintenance. I expect you to lead by example and be a model to your men. You'll be taking patrols out into No Man's Land from time to time and they'll be looking to you for guidance. You just follow your orders and make sure the men follow theirs. Any questions?

CALDWELL

When do you go out on patrol, Sir?

Graves cringes at that one.

MCINTYRE

(laughs)

When I get an itch up my arse. Now get back to your post.

He says it jokingly, but it's obviously their cue...

...Caldwell salutes and retreats out of the dugout. McIntyre watches Caldwell, the levity draining sourly from his face.

MCINTYRE

Lieutenant? There are some of us
who have to earn what you seem so
ready to toss aside.

(Caldwell stares at him)

Try to bear that in mind.

CALDWELL

Yessir.

Caldwell leaves and Graves follows him out. McIntyre stewes...

...then returns to Perkins who's still trying to get the line open. McIntyre starts COOING softly. Perkins looks at him.

MCINTYRE

I'm practising my pigeon.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAWN

A heavy pre-dawn mist swamps the fire trenches. The SHELLING has stopped from the night before. Just the occasional SNIPER SHOT rings out now.

A "stand-to" order reverberates up and down the trench lines, courtesy of the sergeants. We see Graves repeat the order:

GRAVES

(calling out)

Stand-to!

The soldiers fix BAYONETS and climb up onto their FIRE STEPS, aiming their rifles over the parapets, into No Man's Land...

...occasionally, when the fog lifts, they can see spectral outlines of GERMAN SOLDIERS doing the same "stand-to" just eighty yards away.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL

peering down his rifle sights. Breathing fast. He can see a GERMAN SOLDIER aiming his rifle at him. Neither man shoots.

ANGLE ON - PRIVATE EASTMAN

whom the King spoke to earlier. He hasn't slept a wink. The last twelve hours have been the most harrowing of his life.

ANGLE ON - THE OLD SWEATS

leveling their rifles at the Germans. There is a deadly sheen of professionalism to these men. They have killed and are set to kill again.

HIGH ANGLE - THE FRONT LINES

appear as the fog scatters to reveal hundreds of rifles aimed at each other. Nobody is moving. A *furiously tense stand-off*.

And it happens every morning out here on the Western Front...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

The sun has risen. And the soldiers in the fire trenches are working hard to repair walls and dig deeper, firmer ditches.

EXT. COMMUNICATIONS TRENCH, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Robinson is hauling WATER CANS up from the rear lines...

...crouching to tap the bell near the ground as he passes the shallow section of the communications trench we saw earlier.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

He reaches the fire trenches now where the mud is as thick as butter. He struggles through the trench, a difficult thing to do for a slightly-built man...

...inevitably, one of his feet gets stuck. He tries to push off with his other foot but now that foot also gets stuck.

SNELL

Need a hand, mate?

ROBINSON

No, I'm all right. Just let me...

...he struggles to free himself but only succeeds in falling forward. Now both his hands and his feet are stuck in mud.

ROBINSON

(laughs)

Gawd... Just shoot me now, yeah?

Snell and Tippowitz quickly help him out, smiling with him.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Caldwell is stationed with Avery in a fire bay, shoring up SANDBAGS as they talk. Graves and Benton work with them.

AVERY

Worked in the sewers, I did. My old man did the same. And his old man before that. Thought this'd be a way to get out. You know, get out of the sewers. And where do I end up? Another bloody sewer --

-- CRACK! The shot almost takes Avery's head off...

...all the old sweats duck reflexively. Graves jerks Caldwell down a second later. He crouches alongside them, rattled.

But Avery's already up, peering into a MAKESHIFT PERISCOPE: A box with two angled mirrors at either end which allows him to see "over the top".

AVERY

That's the Jerry bastard what got Billings. Here, take a gander.

Caldwell handles the periscope with quivering hands.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - A GERMAN SNIPER

on the other side of No Man's Land one hundred yards away. A shock of BLOND HAIR underneath his ubiquitous spiked helmet.

ANGLE ON - AVERY

who has crafted a prop for his HUNTING RIFLE so that it rests on a sandbag overlooking the trench. A STRING ON THE TRIGGER.

He takes over the periscope and waits for the German to show.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - AN EMPTY SNIPER NEST

then suddenly, there he is. Avery quickly pulls on the string attached to the trigger. BANG! The rifle rocks in its berth.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - THE GERMAN SNIPER

ducks just in time, then brazenly flashes Avery the finger.

ANGLE ON - AVERY

as he takes the rifle down and bitterly reloads...

...and then he continues telling his story to Caldwell, as if interrupted by an old nuisance.

AVERY

Thing is, I used to think: "What could be worse than this? Working in piss and shit for a quid?" Two days in the trenches, I knew what the answer was.

AVERY/GRAVES/BENTON

People shooting at you.

Caldwell manages to smile with the soldiers.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Meanwhile, Private Eastman is trembling. He makes a decision and then tentatively lifts his right hand above the trench...

...CRACK! He screams. His hand awash with blood.

Two FINGERS have been shot clean off -- including his trigger finger. Eastman stares at his missing digits. *He's thrilled.*

EASTMAN

I did it... I got a Blighty! Look,
I got a Blighty! I'm going home!

Graves hurries over and inspects the wound...

...he fires a look at Eastman. Graves doesn't condone what the kid has done, but he can't very well blame him either.

GRAVES

Get back to the R.A.P.

EASTMAN

Yes, Sir!

GRAVES

And keep your head down.

Eastman gathers his rifle and crouch-walks away...

EXT. COMMUNICATIONS TRENCH, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...he hustles down into the communications trench with a shit-eating grin on his face, cradling his maimed and bloody hand.

In his glee, he forgets to hunch down and tap the bell...

...CRACK! A sniper's bullet drops him in a heartbeat.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

The shot echoes through the trenches and they all know...

...a wave of despair washes over the soldiers. And Graves goes ballistic, turning his rage at the soldiers around him.

GRAVES

I said keep your heads down! All of you! *Keep your heads down!*

And he storms off, dragging Eastman's corpse to the rear...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

The disgusting smell and dampness of the water-logged trench is too much for the new recruits who are too nauseated to eat breakfast...

...but our group of seasoned vets are chowing down, immune to it all. Caldwell is eating with them. Graves hasn't returned.

CALDWELL

And why did you sign up, Corporal?

SNELL

Me. Tippowitz. Robinson. We're all here on account of what the Huns did when they took Belgium.

TIPPOWITZ

Aye, and the evil's triumphant but for nothing of the good men, is it?

SNELL

Read in the papers they raped nuns, and paraded through the streets of Brussels with babies stuck on their spears. Like they was proud of it.

CALDWELL

You believe everything you read?

SNELL

I believe my government.

Caldwell stares at the men, seeing a chance to contribute.

CALDWELL

Any of you know what "propaganda" means?

ROBINSON

Means to have a real good look.

CALDWELL

It means being led to believe what someone wants you to. Defeats sold as triumphs. Enemies portrayed as monsters.

SNELL

Germans are monsters. Smile at you while they stab you in the back.

CALDWELL

Did you know the ships carrying our coffins back home are only allowed to dock between midnight and dawn?

ROBINSON

What, for real?

CALDWELL

I once saw a lady kick a dachshund in the street. I also saw men trash a store in Mayfair just because its owner had a German-sounding name.

SNELL

You know any Germans, Lieutenant?

CALDWELL

Some of my best friends are German.

SNELL

Then you'll excuse me if I tell you to sit somewhere else.

CALDWELL

I'll sit where I please, Corporal.

SNELL

No Hun-lovin' officer's gonna share a dugout with me and my mates.

BENTON

Snell, put a gab on it, eh?

CALDWELL

I'm not a "Hun-lover". I'm just --

SNELL

You better be on your feet in two
bleedin' seconds or I'll --

-- Graves suddenly announces his presence by a corner...

GRAVES

Snell! Forward listening post. Now.

...it's unclear how long he's been standing there or how much
he's heard. Snell glares at Caldwell and leaves with his kit.

Graves follows, glowering angrily at Caldwell as he passes...

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCH, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Graves takes Snell along the fire trench to the entrance of a
narrow sap trench which extends at a right angle out into No
Man's Land -- towards the Germans.

Snell pauses before going in. Graves gives him a look. Snell
nods, *I'll be okay*. And he scuttles forward. Graves waits...

EXT. SAP TRENCH, NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS

...as Snell ever-so-silently creeps towards the German lines
in the sap trench. Keeping low. Under the trench walls...

EXT. FORWARD LISTENING POST, NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS

...about forty yards out, he finally reaches the end of the
sap trench. Another BRITISH SOLDIER is here. Slumped against
the mud wall. *Unmoving*.

Snell approaches cautiously, rifle at the ready. Reaching out
to feel the soldier's pulse under his neck. Touching him...

...the soldier wakes with a fright, startling both of them.

Neither one dares make a sound. Snell shoots him a look for
falling asleep on the job. The soldier shrugs apathetically.

Snell takes the man's place, getting comfortable as the other
soldier begins to make his way back down the sap trench. Back
to the comfort of his mates. Snell is now completely alone...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FORWARD LISTENING POST, NO MAN'S LAND - DAY

Snell sits in the exact same place later in the day. Huddled up as best he can and freezing cold as thick RAIN pours down mercilessly upon him.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FORWARD LISTENING POST, NO MAN'S LAND - DUSK

The rain has stopped. And the light is fading. Snell is still sitting here. Bored out of his mind. He straightens a leg...

...and his rifle CLANGS softly against his WATER BOTTLE.

And Snell goes perfectly still. Bracing himself.

Peering at the top of the trench. Holding his breath.

Several chilling moments slip by almost like an eternity...

...and nothing. No grenades. No response. Snell breathes a heavy sigh of relief and a soft grunt of self-reprobatation.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Englander?

Snell quickly lifts his rifle.

Aiming at the top of the trench.

Waiting for the inevitable attack...

...but it doesn't come. Snell doesn't know what to make of this. Then he hears that voice again about ten yards away:

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

I know you are there. I know you can hear me. I've been listening to you breathe all day.

Snell slips his bayonet onto the barrel.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Are you bored? Are you cold?

Snell doesn't answer, his rifle at the ready.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

They stick us out here with no-one to talk to and nothing to do. Ja?

And still nothing from Snell. No response. No talk.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

My name is Karl Ulrich. What is yours? Are you not going to talk to me, Englander? Or perhaps you want to shoot me? Why don't you throw a grenade at the sound of my voice?

And we can see Snell wants to very much.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

I forget. You do not have grenades, do you? Nor do you have mortars. We know this. We know because we never get killed by these things.

The voice turns menacing now...

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

But I have a grenade. I have it in my hand right now. I could use it.

...and now Snell's hands start to quiver.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

I could aim at that sound you made, yes I could... I could throw this grenade and it would kill you.

Snell furtively scans the sky at the top of the trench...

...but no grenade comes flying at him. *Just an easy laughter.* Not mocking or taunting. There's almost a sadness to it.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

But what difference would it make?
(sighs)

If I killed you, all they would do is send another one out to replace you. There are so many of you. So many of us.

Snell remains motionless and stoic.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Well... I have to go now. My shift is over. Shall we talk tomorrow?

Snell hears the soldier shuffling about. And then silence. He doesn't move, certain it's a trick. It has to be. *Hasn't it?*

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

Graves hears Snell coming down the sap trench -- he's waited here the entire day and he's relieved to see Snell's okay.

SNELL
We need grenades.

And Snell crawls onwards. Graves watches him go...

CUT TO:

EXT. RESERVE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

CLOSE ON - GRAVES & AVERY

huddled together, panting hard. In the heat of combat.

AVERY
I can't stop 'em, Serge! They're coming up too fast!

GRAVES
Just hold your line. Don't let them past. I'll cover your flank. Go!

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: The two men are playing *football* in the reserve trenches. Avery and Graves versus Snell and Robinson.

They play hard but fair, using everything they can to their advantage. Rebounding off concrete bunkers. Passing through drainage sumps...

...their "goals" are marked at either end of the trench with SPOTTER FLAGS. Their "field" is the length of the trench.

ANGLE ON - TIPPOWITZ

as the four players rush past. He's concentrating on a game of poker with some SOLDIERS. They groan as he wins a hand.

TIPPOWITZ
A matter merely mathematical, don't be obvious. It's the odds. With two and fifty-two... Ah, but with five with five? That's a hop and a skip and a whoopdee-do. What's the say?

BRITISH SOLDIER #1
(aside)
Bloody smart for a nutter, isn't he?

ANGLE ON - BENTON

lying on a fire step with his shirt off, getting some sun on his alabaster-white skin. Caldwell's sitting beside him...

...looking through several PHOTOS that Benton's given him.

BENTON

This's Lisa. We met the day I was shipped off. Me and her are gonna get married when I get home.

CALDWELL

Congratulations.

BENTON

This here's Kate. Met her the same day. We're also getting married.

CALDWELL

Oh?

BENTON

And that's Yvette. Nurse back at St. Omer. Lovely smile, eh?

CALDWELL

Marrying her, too?

BENTON

Well, I guess I'll have to choose.

Graves and Avery pause beside them.

AVERY

Become a Mormon. Marry all three.

BENTON

What's a Mormon?

GRAVES

Someone with a whole lot more up top than you, mate.

AVERY

And a whole lot more below I'll bet.

Before Benton can reply, Snell chips the ball into a nearby puddle, splattering Benton's naked torso with icy water...

...and Benton screams bloody murder. Reflexively booting the ball away. It bounces off the parapet, disappearing over the top, out into No Man's Land...

...and the game quickly ends. All of the soldiers gaze up at the parapet. Avery seems to be particularly chilled by this.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

A FULL MOON drifts silently in and out of thick clouds...

...far below, our group is readying for a patrol. Loading up with weapons and ammunition. Stripping down to essentials.

ANGLE ON - AVERY

who's keeping to himself. Benton approaches him.

BENTON

Sorry about your ball, mate.

AVERY

Yeah... Maybe the wife can send us another one, eh?

Something else is clearly bothering him...

BENTON

We're gonna be all right.

...but Avery doesn't look so sure.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL

nervously checking his WEBLEY REVOLVER. Watching Graves as he unwraps a vicious-looking medieval SPIKED CLUB from his pack.

He loops a strap over his wrist, glancing at Caldwell.

GRAVES

Deadliest place on Earth up there,
Lieutenant. You stick close to me,
you might make it back.

Caldwell haltingly follows Graves up onto the FIRE STEP...

...where Captain McIntyre is waiting. He checks the time on his POCKET WATCH. Then he signals Graves to go over the top.

MCINTYRE

(awkward)

Good luck.

Graves just nods, waiting for the clouds to hide the moon...

...then he peels out over the top. Caldwell follows. And so do the others. McIntyre wishes them all good luck in turn.

CLOSE ON - McINTYRE

who can hear the emptiness in his own voice. Once the last man has gone over, he quickly begins to make his way back to the command post...

...passing a SIX MAN MACHINE GUN CREW that's covering the patrol out in No Man's Land with a deadly .303 Vickers.

CUT TO:

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

Seven DARK FIGURES crawl silently through a dark landscape...

...they move only a few yards at a time. Covering each other through the BARBED WIRE entanglements that protect the line.

Each man is on full alert, his heart in his mouth. Unable to ignore the veritable plague of ROTTING CORPSES at every stop and turn. It is utterly terrifying.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE RUBBLE, NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

The moon slowly glides out of the clouds. And the group takes quick cover behind the stone rubble of a BOMBED FARMHOUSE...

...pressing themselves low into the mud as the silvery light floods the grounds. Graves taps Caldwell on the head. Points to his right boot which is sticking out from the rubble.

Caldwell ever-so-slowly pulls his boot in. Graves checks the sky as the moon mercifully returns behind the clouds...

...and they're off again, heading towards the German lines.

CUT TO:

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, YPRES SALIENT - NIGHT

CLOSE ON - CALDWELL

sticking close to Graves in the pitch black night. All he can hear is the sound of his heart THUMPING FAST in his chest.

ANGLE ON - THE GROUP

keeping their eyes peeled, but unable to see more than a few yards in front of their face. Hands sweating. Blood pumping.

The moon abruptly peeks out of a gap in the clouds...

...and in the flood of sudden light, they see a GERMAN PATROL right in front of them. *Ten enemy soldiers a few yards away.*

And Caldwell's heart stops beating for a second...

...BANG! Graves gets off the first shot.

Killing the German soldier nearest him.

Bullets WHIZ and SMACK. Soldiers drop and spin as both sides fall into a furious bloody pit fight. GRUNTING and SCREAMING.

Graves shoulders his rifle and launches at the next German soldier with his SPIKED CLUB. Cracking him across the face.

Caldwell fires off his WEBLEY then frantically reloads.

Snell is particularly ruthless. Going beyond just killing his enemy -- *pulverizing the dead man's face with his RIFLE BUTT.*

Robinson moves swiftly, sticking a soldier with his BAYONET.

Benton and Tippowitz club a German with their rifles. But he gets off a shot, KNICKING Tippowitz's arm. He doesn't notice.

Avery hangs back, expertly FIRING and RELOADING his rifle.

Though initially outnumbered, the British soldiers seem to be winning the fight. But then, a German MACHINE GUN opens up...

...RATTA-TATTA! RATTA-TATTA! Bullets rip into the group.

Graves SCREAMS with pain, grasping his shoulder. It's not a bullet -- *it's his dislocated shoulder popping out again...*

...he falls back out of the fight, calling out:

GRAVES

Retreat!

He grabs Caldwell who's still SHOOTING wildly...

...and the seven of them dive into a mad-dash scramble back to their trenches. The British MACHINE GUN CREW covers them.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

Avery's first back, sliding down into the fire trench. He's followed closely by Benton and Snell, tumbling over the top.

Tippowitz is next, HOWLING with adrenaline.

Finally, Caldwell dives down. And lastly, Graves. Everybody's breathing hard. Caldwell goes to help his injured sergeant...

...but Graves brushes him aside. Beckoning Snell.

He knows just what to do. This is apparently an old injury.

With a single, brutal twist, Snell shoves Graves' shoulder back in place. Graves SCREAMS again, but the pain subsides quickly and mercifully.

He rolls his shoulder around, wincing. Checking on his men, more concerned with how they are. His face suddenly pales.

GRAVES

Robinson.

And all at once, they realize...

...he's still out there. In No Man's Land. And now they hear him. About thirty feet away. Groaning. Calling out for them.

ROBINSON (O.S.)

Help... Help me...!

GRAVES

Robinson!

ROBINSON (O.S.)

For Godsakes! *Somebody get me!*

Snell doesn't hesitate, neither does Tippowitz...

...both men lunging fearlessly back up over the top to get their mate. But a burst of MACHINE GUN FIRE cuts them off.

Bullets shatter the SANDBAGS around them...

...and they yield back into the trench. Graves snatches a PERISCOPE off a parapet. Peering out across No Man's Land.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - MUZZLE FLASHES

from the German lines. A MACHINE GUN right there. Waiting for them. Graves pans around and finds Robinson in the moonlight.

He's clutching his bloody stomach.

Trying hopelessly to crawl for the trench.

ANGLE ON - THE GROUP

desperate and unable to help him.

GRAVES

It's no good.

CALDWELL

We can't just leave him there.

GRAVES

Jerry's got a machine gun leveled
at us. He's just waiting for us!

Caldwell snatches the periscope off Graves.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - THE GERMAN MACHINE GUN CREW

waits across No Man's Land in a sliver of moonlight...

...he can also see three WOUNDED GERMAN SOLDIERS writhing
about in the mud. Calling out to their mates like Robinson.

Another German soldier tries to reach them from his trench...

ANGLE ON - THE BRITISH MACHINE GUN CREW

who are similarly waiting for just such an opportunity. They
trigger a FIERCE SALVO at the German. *And they don't miss...*

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - THE GERMAN

catapults back into his trench. Ripped apart by the bullets.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL

who's just seen all this. His mind races. Robinson's SCREAMS
are getting weaker, like daggers in all the men's hearts.

CALDWELL

So that's it?

GRAVES

Any man left in No Man's Land is
good as dead. That's just how it
is, all right?

Caldwell gazes through the PERISCOPE again. And he makes a
decision. He climbs up onto the FIRE STEP, near the top...

...and calls out into No Man's Land. *In perfect German.*

CALDWELL
(subtitled, in German)
I am a British officer! Please stop
shooting and listen to me!

The German MACHINE GUN fires in response. Caldwell ducks, frightened. The men staring at him as he calls out again:

CALDWELL
(subtitled, in German)
We have a wounded man out there!

GERMAN OFFICER (O.S.)
Wir haben drei!

Caldwell's as surprised as the others to get a response.

CALDWELL
(subtitled, in German)
If you don't shoot, we won't shoot!

GRAVES
What are you saying?

CALDWELL
I'm asking them not to shoot. They
have wounded out there, too.

SNELL
Let 'em all die slowly.

CALDWELL
Or we can arrange a trade. One of
ours for three of theirs.

The idea is tantalizing. Robinson groans again.

SNELL
We're coming for you, Robinson! You
hang in there! Robinson? *Robinson!*

GERMAN OFFICER (O.S.)
Ich traue du nicht uber den weg!

CALDWELL
(subtitled, in German)
We must trust each other! I give
you my word! As an officer and a
gentleman!

Several seconds tick by agonizingly...

...then they hear the German BARKING ORDERS at his men. It's faint but Caldwell can just make it out. He's astonished.

CALDWELL

It's working... He's *doing* it! He's telling them not to shoot!

Caldwell scuttles over to the MACHINE GUN CREW.

CALDWELL

Hold your fire. That's an order.

MACHINE GUNNER

Only good Hun's a dead Hun, Sir.

CALDWELL

Just don't bloody-well shoot until I bloody-well tell you to, Private!

The gunner reluctantly nods as...

...a sudden call rings out from the Germans:

GERMAN OFFICER (O.S.)

Ich bin fertig!

CALDWELL

(subtitled, in German)

All right! Here we come!

He gives a nod to Snell and Tippowitz. They climb over...

...and *incredibly*, they don't get shot. Caldwell watches from the MACHINE GUN pit while Graves watches via his PERISCOPE.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Out in No Man's Land, the Germans race to grab their wounded as Snell and Tippowitz hurry to bring in Robinson. He's only barely conscious now.

It's a preposterous scene. Snell glares at the nearest GERMAN SOLDIER who takes a second to glare back. Ten feet apart...

...and then both group rush back towards their own trenches.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Caldwell hurries back to the group who surround Robinson like a protective wall. Caldwell breaks through to discover Graves closing Robinson's lifeless eyes. *Robinson is dead.*

And Tippowitz goes beserk. SCREAMING like a man possessed. He peels away at his UNIFORM, down to his bright red LONGJOHNS.

Graves is ashen, staring endlessly at the corpse.

Snell quivers with rage. He grabs his rifle and FIRES a quick shot, killing the last German as he gets back to his trench...

...he ducks back down to find Caldwell glaring at him.

SNELL

Just letting 'em know the war's
back on.

Caldwell goes to reprimand Snell...

...but Graves discreetly stops him. Snell picks up Robinson's corpse and walks off, his face a mask of pain and vengeance.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD, RESERVE TRENCHES - DAWN

Snell digs a grave in a FIELD OF CROSSES far behind the lines amidst the cold, cloudy dawn and the distant SOUND OF GUNS...

CUT TO:

INT. RESERVE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Caldwell and Graves pursue McIntyre through the rear supply lines. No passing SOLDIER dares miss saluting the captain.

CALDWELL

Think about it, Captain. Just think
for a moment -- this could be the
start of something extraordinary.

MCINTYRE

No. And I'm not to hear of anything
like this again.

CALDWELL

I was out there last night. I saw
the dead in No Man's Land. Imagine
how many bodies we could bury or
return to loved ones if we just --

MCINTYRE

We are here to kill Germans. Not to
negotiate with them, Lieutenant.

They reach a STAFF CAR waiting for McIntyre. His DRIVER has a clean, pressed OFFICER'S COAT on a hanger for the captain...

...both men stand back as McIntyre carefully dons his coat.

GRAVES

What about Tippowitz, Sir?

MCINTYRE

I thought we'd been through that.

GRAVES

Robinson was like a kid brother to him and Snell. Only signed up cause they did.

MCINTYRE

Can Tippowitz still shoot?

GRAVES

When you tell him to. Doesn't seem to be able to think for himself.

MCINTYRE

A soldier who shoots when you tell him to and isn't able to think for himself. Wish I had more like that.

GRAVES

Captain, I --

MCINTYRE

It's war. People die. Tell him to get a grip, for goodness sakes.

(Graves is furious)

Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go retrieve my orders since I can't seem to get a working phone line.

CALDWELL

Captain...? You never told us what the purpose of that patrol was.

McIntyre hesitates, reluctant to tell them.

MCINTYRE

It was a diversionary strike.

GRAVES

Diversion for who? The French?

MCINTYRE

The Russians.

CALDWELL
The Russians? On the Eastern Front?

MCINTYRE
They're as much a part of this war
as we are. We strike here, Germany
sends soldiers here, thereby giving
the Russians a bit of a break.

And the car drives off. Graves and Caldwell just stand there.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD, RESERVE TRENCHES - DAY

Snell finishes engraving an epitaph on ROBINSON'S CROSS:

Here lies Private Melvin Robinson.
He gave the Russians a bit of a break.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - VARIOUS - DAY/NIGHT

The European winter is coming in force now...

...floating films of ice form on the water in the shell holes
and trenches. COATS and BALACLAVAS freeze up stiff as boards.

One soldier peels off a WATER-CLOGGED BOOT. His foot is pale
and swollen. He jabs it with his bayonet but feels nothing...

...another soldier burns lice off his skin with a CANDLE.

Nobody moves much, huddled around flameless PIT-FIRES and
smoking BRAZIERS. Bored and miserable. Beating their hands
and feet in a vain attempt to keep warm.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Tippowitz mans his position on the firing line, still in his
LONGJOHNS. Staring away. Rocking steadily back and forth...

...a passing SOLDIER lights a cigarette and places it in his
mouth. Tippowitz barely notices the man. Or the cigarette. A
disturbingly blank expression on his face.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - DAY

Alone at his desk, Captain McIntyre reads the weekly MILITARY DISPATCHES. We notice that his walls bear no POSTCARDS and no LETTERS. Only ROSTERS and REGULATIONS...

...he takes a break for a bite of beef stew. It tastes awful, but he swallows it with a long drink from his WATER CANTEEN.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Graves sits on the front line, trying to read the book of Keats that Caldwell gave him. Clearly, he doesn't get it.

GRAVES

"But woe is me, I am but a child to
gladden thee, and all I dare to say
is that I pity thee..."

Caldwell approaches suddenly. Graves tries to hide the book.

CALDWELL

"...that on this day I've been thy
guide; that thou must wander far in
other regions, past the scanty bar
to mortal steps before thou cans't
be taken from every wasting sigh,
from every pain, into the gentle
bosom of thy love."

GRAVES

Might as well be written in French.

CALDWELL

Oh, the French would only use it to
bed women.

They share a faint smile. Caldwell sits down beside him.

CALDWELL

(after a moment)
You know, Christmas is coming.

GRAVES

Not for us, it's not.

CALDWELL

The Pope's proposed a cease-fire on
Christmas Day. A truce.

Graves chuckles sarcastically.

CALDWELL

You think that's naive?

GRAVES

No, Sir. I think it's a wonderful idea. In fact, I think we should have one every other Sunday. Tell you what, let's climb over the top right now and walk across No Man's Land and tell Fritz all about it.

CALDWELL

Oh, I see. You're a cynic.

GRAVES

Goes with the job, doesn't it?

CALDWELL

I seem to recall reading about some kind of truce during the Boer War.

GRAVES

Beg your pardon, Sir, but forget the Boer War. Forget all the wars before. There's never been a war like this. Never. The hatred. The anger. Both sides so sure they're in the right.

CALDWELL

Well... I suppose it was a nice thought.

GRAVES

Pope's always good for a laugh.

CALDWELL

(pause, thinks)

Flip over a few pages. You'll find one of my favorite lines there.

Graves obliges him, finding some UNDERLINED WORDS.

GRAVES

"He ne'er... He never is crowned with immortality, who fears to follow where airy voices lead."

Graves looks up but Caldwell has moved on around the corner.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - THE GERMAN SNIPER

is lining up for a shot, seemingly at Avery. We see the smoke from the shot first. The SHARP CRACK comes a moment later...

...but, strangely, the bullet flies high. Way off the mark.

ANGLE ON - AVERY

who passes the periscope off to Benton. The two of them have apparently been watching the German sniper for some time.

AVERY

I don't get it. What's the bastard shooting at?

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - THE GERMAN SNIPER

lines up again. Smoke. CRACK! This time, the German's bullet hits a LOOSE BRICK on a pile of rubble in No Man's Land...

...the brick wobbles, but doesn't fall off the pile.

ANGLE ON - BENTON & AVERY

as the periscope is passed back.

BENTON

Looks like he's trying to knock that brick over. On the rubble.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - THE GERMAN SNIPER

lines up once more. Avery zeroes in on the pile of rubble as the German SHOOTS. The brick tips a little, but doesn't fall.

ANGLE ON - AVERY

as he realizes with a stab of amazement:

AVERY

He's as bored as we are.

BENTON

You gonna show him how it's done?

AVERY

Too right...

Avery lines his rifle in its mount, grabbing the string.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - THE BRICK

comes into view. Avery takes his time, getting it right. He pulls the string. BANG! The brick wobbles... *And falls off.*

ANGLE ON - AVERY

WHOOPING triumphantly.

AVERY
(calling)
Beat that, you bastard! *Beat that!*

And it's on --

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

-- a bizarre shooting match. Avery versus the German.

CRACK! BANG! CRACK! BANG!

The two snipers are targeting other bricks now...

...taking turns. The German hits. Then Avery hits. It almost falls. Then the German finishes it off. They hear him CHEER.

CRACK! BANG! CRACK! A mob of TOMMIES gathers around Avery...

...they CHEER every time he knocks off a brick, then BOO when the German does. *Like they're at a soccer match or something.*

BANG! CRACK! Graves hurries up now with Caldwell...

...and while Caldwell's amused, Graves isn't. His eyes going to the few Tommies who are daring to peek up over the trench.

BANG! As Graves rushes towards them...

...Avery scores again, drawing a fresh round of CHEERS and APPLAUSE. Graves grabs the closest Tommy, pulling him down.

RATTA-TATTA! RATTA-TATTA!

A German machine gun explodes at them.

Bullets ripping into the SANDBAG PARAPETS.

Several Tommies get caught off guard, catching rounds in the shoulders and heads. Blood sprays like mist. Soldiers SCREAM with terror and pain.

Caldwell hits the dirt with everybody else...

...as Graves starts tending to the wounded. Pulling out a MED-PACK. Dressing a gaping SHOULDER WOUND in the closest Tommy.

GRAVES

Orderly! Fetch a medical orderly up
here now!

Benton scatters off down the trench to get an orderly...

...while Avery and Caldwell help Graves. The sergeant hurls a bitter look at his lieutenant. Caldwell just nods soberly...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FORWARD LISTENING POST, NO MAN'S LAND - DAY

Snell is back at his forward listening post out in No Man's Land. The UNSEEN GERMAN is talking to him once again nearby.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

On my third day in Belgium I was
ordered to kill a man. I did not
want to. They said he fired at a
patrol but the man was frail and
old and could not possibly hold a
rifle. I refused. But they made me
do it anyway. They said I had to.

Snell listens, perplexed by the German's apparent guilt...

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

I see that man now. Every night in
my sleep. He asks me why he had to
die that day and I have no answer.

...and a long, harrowing silence fills the air.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

You know something, Englander? You
are a good listener.

(grunts)

If only my wife was more like you.

Snell can't help but snort a smile at that.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Ah, Englander! You're alive. Tell
me, are you married, like I am?

But Snell still won't reply.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
Oh, at least tell me your name.
What could that hurt? Englander?

SNELL
Snell.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
Schnell? Schnell is a German name.

SNELL
No, Snell. *Snell*.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
You're German, Schnell.

SNELL
I'm not bloody German.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
But your ancestors were German.

SNELL
No, they weren't.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
Don't be ashamed. Did you know the
Kaiser Wilhelm and King George are
cousins?

SNELL
That's a load of bollocks.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
So is the Russian Tsar. He's married
to Queen Victoria's granddaughter --

SNELL
Look, just --

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
This war is but a big family feud --

SNELL
Just shut up, all right? The Kaiser
and the King are not bloody cousins
and I'm not bloody German!

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
Perhaps you are right... No German
would ever be so ignorant, *Schnell*.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - DAY

McIntyre sits at his desk, staring at a PIECE OF PAPER in his hands a long moment. As if not quite believing what it says.

A STAFF RUNNER stands before him, out of breath...

...he, too, seems to know what it says by the terrified look on McIntyre's face. The captain dismisses him with a nod.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESERVE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Mail call in the reserve trenches. TOMMIES excitedly crowd around a POST MASTER who is handing out LETTERS and PARCELS.

POST MASTER

Benton! Norrington! Swann! Benton!

Turner! Sparrow! Snell!

(with a look)

Bloody Benton again!

Benton smells each LETTER, drinking in the perfume.

ANGLE ON - OUR GROUP

waiting for their names to be called. Avery's reading a NEWS PAPER. We see a story about the Pope's Christmas Truce idea.

AVERY

"...a day of rest. A day of peace
and goodwill towards other men."

SNELL

Of course, he wants peace. He's the
bloody Pope, isn't he?

BENTON

You think they'd let some of us go
home for a visit if there was to be
no fighting for a day?

SNELL

Never gonna happen. The generals
wouldn't allow it.

AVERY

Still. Be nice, wouldn't it? A day
without them trying to kill us. Or
us trying to kill them.

Graves approaches the group as Avery says this.

GRAVES
(re: the paper)
Where'd you get that?

Snell directs the sergeant's eyes to Caldwell...

...he's talking with another GROUP OF SOLDIERS nearby. Graves snatches the paper out of Avery's hands and makes a beeline.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL

who doesn't see Graves coming until it's too late. He shoves the NEWSPAPER in Caldwell's face. All respect for rank gone.

GRAVES
Did you do this? Is this you?

CALDWELL
I beg your pardon --

GRAVES
You keep talking this crud around
my men, I'm gonna --

-- just now Captain McIntyre peels around the corner.

MCINTYRE
Well, that's it. Orders just came
through. We're going over the top.

CALDWELL
When?

MCINTYRE
Tomorrow at dawn. Myself included.

And he walks off. Caldwell looks at Graves.

The sergeant dumps the NEWSPAPER at his feet.

POST MASTER
Robinson!
(no reply)
Robinson? Where's Robinson?

SNELL
I'll take that.

Not a sound as Snell takes and pockets the letter...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RESERVE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

The word has spread by night fall and a somber mood fills the trenches. Most SOLDIERS write home, some just sit and think.

Caldwell checks on his men, including the ones from our group and ending with Graves. The sergeant is keeping to himself as he methodically loads his weapons. A tension between them.

CALDWELL

No-one to write to, Sergeant?

GRAVES

Stopped writing a month ago. Told the wife to do the same.

CALDWELL

Why's that?

GRAVES

Makes it too hard to keep fighting.

CALDWELL

Don't you want your family to know you're all right?

Graves shrugs, but not because he doesn't care.

He stops what he's doing, weighing something over.

GRAVES

I laid in that bed for three weeks when I got shelled... Nothing to do but think about things. I realized that... I came to accept that I'm never gonna see my family again.

CALDWELL

Oh, you're selling yourself short. You're an old sweat. You can make it through this strife.

GRAVES

Surviving the Boers, that was about skill and experience. Surviving the trenches is just luck. And I reckon I've had my fair share. And that's okay, I've made my peace with that.

(hesitant)

It's just...

He finds it hard to voice this.

GRAVES

...they say when you die, your soul goes to Heaven, right?

CALDWELL

Right.

GRAVES

Well, sometimes... Remember that young bloke, put his hand up over the trench... When that sniper did him in, I should've... I should've felt *something*... I should've...

He's trembling now, like we've never seen him before.

GRAVES

I'm not afraid to die. I just don't wanna die without a soul.

And he picks up his rifle and heads towards the front lines.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COMMUNICATIONS TRENCH, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

The darkest hour before the dawn. And on this night it's even darker thanks to a thick blanket of TORRENTIAL WINTER RAIN.

The soldiers file up a communications trench towards the fire lines. Passing Tippowitz who's sitting by the side -- totally out of it. *Almost catatonic.*

They drop off personal items in a sack beside him. WATCHES, LOCKETS, FAREWELL LETTERS. Tippowitz doesn't seem to notice.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

The troops wade through waist-deep water in the fire lines, taking up their positions and waiting for the order to go...

...every one of them is struck by a primal terror. They know with absolute certainty that they are going to die in a few hours. And there's nothing they can do about it.

Many of them say their goodbyes to one another. A few hugs and handshakes. Last minute soggy CIGARETTES are shared.

There's a FAINT WHISTLE overhead through the rain...

...and KA-BOOM! Artillery DRUM FIRE on the German lines.

Shrapnel and high explosive, an INFERNO OF EXPLOSIONS.

The TOMMIES can feel and even see the earth shaking.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL

who is studying McIntyre's frightened eyes through the HEAVY DOWNPOUR. He's muttering to himself, a prayer perhaps...

...now McIntyre catches him staring. And Caldwell looks away.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, GERMAN FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON - THE MUD

in No Man's Land near the German lines. The RAIN and SHELLS churn the mud into butter. A veritable *quicksand of slime...*

...and this is what the Tommies will soon be running across.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAWN

There's a dull light in the trenches now. And the rain has all but stopped. The last few rounds of artillery EXPLODE...

...and immediately, the officers make the call down the line:

CALDWELL

Fix bayonets!

All the soldiers oblige silently.

Attaching their BAYONETS to their RIFLES.

GRAVES

Work it up, lads! First one in old Fritz's trenches gets a pint on me!

McIntyre views the German lines through a PERISCOPE.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - GERMAN SOLDIERS

are climbing out of bunkers and dugouts, manning their posts as the British artillery fades. *Rifle after rifle after rifle...*

...and no less than FIVE MACHINE GUNS in their sector alone.

ANGLE ON - McINTYRE

stunned and horrified. Reluctantly drawing out his OFFICER'S WHISTLE. A scared YOUNG TOMMY beside him watches anxiously.

YOUNG TOMMY

Did we get 'em, Cap? Did we?

Caldwell and Graves can read the answer on McIntyre's face...

...he doesn't respond to the Young Tommy. He can't... He just puts the WHISTLE to his quivering lips and blows mightily.

ANGLE ON - THE TOMMIES

as a CHORUS OF WHISTLES blows throughout the trenches...

...and the soldiers scramble over the parapets. Climbing up ladders and steps. ROARING battle cries and SHOUTING curses.

The sound of the GERMAN GUNS deafens them instantly...

...a thousand MAUSER RIFLES thundering like one. The Germans don't even have to try and aim at the wall of British khaki.

Two thirds of the British soldiers are scythed down.

Six thousand men instantly dead and wounded.

Most of them are hit before they've even had a chance to lift or aim their rifles. Luck decides who lives and who dies.

ANGLE ON - McINTYRE

half way up a ladder, frozen with fear. Clutching his WEBLEY as wave after wave of men scale the trenches to their deaths.

Tears flood his eyes as he sinks back down into the trench.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL

who locks eyes with McIntyre before going over. Brandishing his WEBLEY. Shouting encouragement to his fellow soldiers...

...even helping one Tommy who is too terrified to move on his own. Until a MACHINE GUN tears that soldier from his grasp.

Caldwell FIRES his Webley angrily at the German lines.

CRACK! He stumbles. His legs giving out. Wobbling...

...he touches his temple, staring at the blood on his fingers before he collapses in a heap. *He made it only five yards...*

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Meanwhile, the third of the men still standing charge across No Man's Land toward the German lines. Uphill. In thick mud.

Their boots sink up to their knees.

They can't run. *They can barely walk.*

The rain and the shells have killed them.

Now it's only a matter of the Germans picking them off. Most of them are sitting ducks. *More than half of this lot fall.*

And Avery is one of them.

Snagged by his own BARBED WIRE.

He fights to free himself, sinking in the mud as BULLETS whip over him. But every move he makes only entangles him more...

...he glances ahead and sees all his mates still charging the German lines. He tries to follow them, but he's caught firm.

He thrashes at the BARBED WIRE angrily.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, GERMAN FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

The remaining half of the initial remaining third now somehow make it through the AVALANCHE OF BULLETS to the German lines.

ANGLE ON - GRAVES

in the lead, stepping on RUBBLE and discarded RIFLES and even CORPSES to avoid sinking in the wicked mud. It's as if he was jumping from stone to stone across a pond.

ANGLE ON - SNELL & BENTON

who are close behind. As well as maybe a dozen others.

They all get caught on the German BARBED WIRE. Here, they're within range of German HAND GRENADES which arc through the air towards them like waves crashing against the shore...

...the grenades tear the British troops apart. Some fall upon the wire, unwittingly providing thin gaps for the now handful of surviving soldiers to at last rush the German trenches.

They start firing their RIFLES from the hip. Expertly jacking rounds into the chambers. Saving their six for this moment...

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, GERMAN FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...the effect is devastating. The Germans are now vulnerable in their trenches. The British troops have the high ground.

As they tumble wildly into the enemy trenches...

...we realize the German trenches are a total contrast to the ones we've seen so far on the British side. Here, horizontal wooden "A-frame" SLATS keep the mud packed into the walls...

...while raised DUCKBOARDS keep boots out of the water. And a zig-zagging trench pattern keeps shell damage to a minimum.

These trenches are obviously built to last...

...but there's no time to appreciate any of this. The British troops are on enemy ground and fighting for their lives. It's a matter of BAYONETS and RIFLE BUTTS now.

A PHALANX OF GERMANS barrel towards them down the trench...

...and Graves is already swinging a captured MAXIM around. In the narrow confines of the trench, they have nowhere to run.

The belt-fed MACHINE GUN shreds them all to pieces.

A momentary respite. Graves looks around him...

...sees Snell racing past, shooting.

GRAVES

Snell? Snell!

SNELL

What?

GRAVES

Anyone else make it this far?

SNELL

I don't know!

Graves looks up and down the German lines, realizing that at no other point did British soldiers get as far as they did...

...they are alone and nobody's coming to help.

And Germans are flooding towards them on both sides. Pushing them back. Slowly taking back this section of their trench.

More and more TOMMIES fall. And they're running out of ammo.

Their position is suddenly, brutally overrun.

Germans literally stomping over the dead and dying.

ANGLE ON - SNELL

who SHOOTS his last round, then "javelins" his rifle at the Germans, and scurries up a ladder. Two other TOMMIES follow.

ANGLE ON - GRAVES

covering them until his MACHINE GUN runs dry. He picks up and throws a German STICK GRENADE at the oncoming horde. And then he climbs over the top, hesitating...

...and reaching back for Benton who's also run out of bullets now. As he climbs a ladder, a PHOTO spills from his khakis.

Another and another. *All his "lady photos".*

And Benton does the strangest thing.

With the Germans SHOOTING and closing in, Benton reaches down to retrieve the photos as they fall through the DUCKBOARDS...

GRAVES

Leave them!

...but Benton's human instincts are too strong.

He snatches the photos. And starts to climb again...

...but by now the Germans are on him. Pulling him back down.

BENTON

Serge!

They reach. Grab hands.

Seven Germans against Graves.

Benton's terror-filled eyes on him.

As the Germans drag Benton down into the trench -- his death scream cut brutally short as Graves reluctantly rolls away...

EXT. FARMHOUSE RUBBLE, NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS

...it's now an almost suicidal run back to the Allied lines in growing daylight. Graves takes cover behind some rubble.

There's somebody else here...

...the muscle-bound BRITISH OFFICER whom Graves had met back at St. Omer. The one who was target practising like a pro.

He's now weaponless. And cowering behind the rubble. What he has seen, God only knows. *He is an utter mess.* Traumatized to the point where he can barely speak.

BRITISH OFFICER
(muttering)
...don't... I don't want to die...

And Graves just looks at him...

...CRACK! The back of the officer's head implodes.

A sniper shot from behind. A chunk of blood SPLATTERS Graves' face. He stares in shock, then gets the hell outta there...

CUT TO:

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, YPRES SALIENT - DAWN

Elsewhere, Snell and two other Tommies are engaged in a full-blown sprint back to their lines. None of them are carrying their rifles anymore. Barrelling pell-mell through the mud.

CRACK! One of them drops, shot in the back...

...Snell doesn't look back. He stumbles. Gets up. Pushing on. Harder. CRACK! The other one falls. Snell keeps on running.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Fifty yards to go now. No way he's not gonna make it. And he knows it. Tears streaming down his face. He's expecting it...

...any moment now. That sharp death knell pain between his shoulder blades. Here it comes. Dead Man Running. And then suddenly, Snell realizes where he is.

He looks to the right and dives...

EXT. SAP TRENCH, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...into what we see is his forward listening post.

CRACK! The bullet with his name on it flies overhead.

Snell doesn't stop here. Scrambling along on all fours down the shallow sap trench. Thirty yards. Twenty. Ten. Five...

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...back to the fire trenches. He's greeted by a few WOUNDED SOLDIERS who are stunned to see someone actually come back.

WOUNDED SOLDIER

Blimey... Where'd you come from?

Snell just looks at them and curls up into a tight ball...

CUT TO:

EXT. SHELL HOLE, NO MAN'S LAND - DAWN

...meanwhile, Graves slides into a deep shell hole out in the middle of No Man's Land. A water-logged crater six feet deep.

He's out of breath, needs a minute.

Crouching in the knee-deep water...

...he's caked with mud and the blood of other men. And the light of dawn is coming now. That's not good. Less cover.

A BATTLE CRY rings behind him.

Graves spins around, defenses up.

A single GERMAN SOLDIER has followed him. Chased him out here with a burning need for vengeance. Graves levels his rifle...

...CLICK! He's out of bullets.

The German lines up...

...CLICK! His rifle's jammed.

Graves quickly draws his SPIKED CLUB...

...no time to secure the loop over his wrist as he lunges at the German who tosses his rifle and draws a PIONEER'S AXE.

The two enemies go at each other with their weapons...

...it's a bitch of a fight, plunging into thick mud. Both men were exhausted to begin with. HACKING. STABBING. PARRYING.

WHACK! Graves' club connects with the German's axe...

...and the CLUB'S SPIKES bite into the axe's WOODEN HANDLE so hard that the two weapons unexpectedly get *fastened* together.

The two men are now in a bizarre sort of tug-of-war, pushing and shoving until Graves finally yanks the PIONEER'S AXE out of the German's hands.

Unfortunately, his SPIKED CLUB promptly slips on out of his own hands. The forgotten wrist loop dangling mockingly as...

...the two weapons twirl away over the lip of the shell hole.

Both men watch their weapons disappear...

...then the German unsheaths his two foot long BAYONET. Its JAGGED EDGE gleaming menacingly in the murky pre-dawn light.

Graves responds with his own BAYONET...

...and it's on again. They grab each other -- one hand trying to stab with the bayonet, the other holding his enemy's away.

They fall into the water. Gasping for air.

Scrambling to the surface to discover...

...that Graves has dropped his bayonet.

He searches for it frantically in the muddy water...

...but here comes the German. Diving at him. Graves ducks to the side. The German's bayonet embedding itself in the mud.

As he wheels around for a deathblow attack...

...SNAP! His bayonet breaks off at the hilt. He looks at it disbelievingly. So does Graves. The German tosses the hilt.

Graves deflects it. Tosses his water bottle back.

They throw everything they've got at each other now. WEBBING, CAPS, SCABBARDS, ROCKS, RUBBLE. Nothing does much damage...

...so they proceed to fight it out with their fists. Knuckles crack in the cold, pain shooting up their arms. Graves starts to get the upperhand.

But then his left shoulder pops out. And Graves SCREAMS like a caged animal. Falling back, immobile. Squirming in agony.

The German hasn't the strength to finish him off. He retreats to his corner, collapsing on the opposite side of the crater.

They glare back across at one another, breathing with hate...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, YPRES SALIENT - DAY

We see the carnage in No Man's Land by the light of day. If there were a thousand bodies here before, now there are TEN THOUSAND. Scattered about, twisted and horribly contorted.

These men represent the pride of the British youth...

...one dead Tommy appears to be standing upright, sunk in the hardened mud past his knees. A LARGE BROWN RAT begins to gnaw on his exposed wounds.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SHELL HOLE, NO MAN'S LAND - DAY

Several hours later. Daylight is fully upon them. And neither man has had the strength to move from their former positions.

Graves crawls towards the top of the crater, wincing at the pain in his DISLOCATED SHOULDER. He dares to peek above now, looking for a way out of his predicament...

...only to receive a harsh welcome from a German MACHINE GUN.

Graves ducks back into the crater as bullets rip into the mud above. The German is pleased. Graves looks at him. *Your turn.*

The German stops smiling and peers above the crater...

...and he receives a salutation no less warm from a British MACHINE GUN. It forces him back down into the shell hole.

And Graves is pleased.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SHELL HOLE, NO MAN'S LAND - DUSK

The day has passed and the night is rapidly approaching...

...and the two enemy soldiers are still caught in their shell hole prison. *And now it's starting to get really bloody cold.*

Both men are weak and wounded. And neither one has eaten much today. All they can do is sit about. And shiver. And freeze.

There's an icy fog on their breaths now...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SHELL HOLE, NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

The water in the shell hole has now frozen over...

...and both men are shaking uncontrollably. Savaged doggedly by a vicious WINTER WIND. And temperatures approaching zero.

A look between the two. And they know.

They're not gonna make it through the night.

We can see the fear in their eyes. Both of them facing long, cold painful deaths far from the warmth of home. *Unless...*

...he starts to move before he realizes what he's doing. The pain in his shoulder numbed for now by the oppressive cold.

The German sees him.

And moves a little himself.

They begin to inch their way around the crater now. Closing in on each other. It's torturous work. Their bodies stiff.

Closer and closer now. They stop momentarily. Staring at each other a yard away. *A mute acceptance of the need to survive.*

And so they huddle together, using each other for warmth.

Arms wrapped tightly. Lying there. Still.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHELL HOLE, NO MAN'S LAND - DAY

The sun shines the next morning. Graves and the German are right where we left them. Huddled together, eyes closed...

...a FINE LAYER OF FROST on their uniforms and their faces.

For several moments, neither one of them moves. *They could be dead.* Then Graves cracks open his eyes. And looks around...

...he sees the German wake beside him.

And they quickly fall apart.

But this time, they don't retreat to opposite sides of their shell hole. They just stay where they are -- side by side.

Hunger pains take over from the cold pains now.

Graves digs into his pockets and pulls out a BISCUIT. And the German's eyes grow large. He has nothing. No food. No water.

And suddenly, Graves feels a little uncomfortable...

...he breaks the biscuit in half and offers it to the German next to him. The man is at first suspicious. Then confused.

He waits until Graves has a bite of his half...

...then the German wolfs his half down. Now Graves opens his WATER BOTTLE and drinks a little. Offers some to the German.

GERMAN SOLDIER

Danke.

GRAVES

You're welcome, shithead.

The German smiles obliviously and drinks some more...

CUT TO:

EXT. SHELL HOLE, NO MAN'S LAND - DAY

Graves tries to punch his dislocated shoulder back into place by throwing himself against a WOODEN POST sticking out of the mud. But each attempt only brings more pain...

...the German offers his assistance. Graves is suspicious at first. But then the pain is so bad that he finally concedes.

With a violent shove, the German clicks Graves' shoulder back into its socket. Graves YELPS with a pain that near paralyzes him. But it's worked. Graves can move his arm again.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SHELL HOLE, NO MAN'S LAND - DUSK

The second day is coming to a close. Both men sit together in the shell hole. It's awkward. Neither man knows what to say.

They don't notice the GRENADE at first.

Tumbling errantly into the shell crater.

It explodes and WHITE TEAR GAS spills out.

Graves quickly covers his mouth with his sleeve. The German pulls out a GAS MASK. Fumbling as he fixes it over his head.

The gas spreads fast in the shell hole...

...soon, they can barely see each other. Graves is CHOKING now, trying not to breathe. His sleeve is no protection.

The gas peels out of the shell hole, providing cover...

...and the German seizes the opportunity. Scrambling out of the shell hole. Disappearing back towards his front lines.

Graves is left alone in a cloud of white.

Doubling over as the gas starts to invade his lungs.

Then suddenly, the German is *back* in the shell crater...

...kneeling over him. Taking a deep breath. He removes his gas mask and fixes it over Graves. And disappears again.

Graves sucks in semi-decent air, getting his wind back...

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...he stumbles out of the shell hole, staggering back towards the British lines. Cloaked in a protective veil of thick gas.

As he nears the trenches, a spooked TOMMY fires at him.

GRAVES

Don't shoot, you bastards! *I'm one of you!*

Finally, he crumples back into the British fire trench...

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...the few Tommies on duty here stare at him as he removes the gas mask and gulps in fresh air. Then he sets the mask down. And just gazes at it.

In this moment, Sergeant Graves is forever changed...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. REGIMENTAL AID POST, RESERVE TRENCHES - DAY

Caldwell's eyes blink open drowsily, looking around...

...he's in the Regimental Aid Post. It's full of WOUNDED MEN, sedated and calm. The SURGEONS are napping, beyond exhausted.

Caldwell sits up. His head pounding. A bandage there.

He notices Tippowitz now, sitting on a nearby chair. Staring away blankly. Still wearing only his bright red LONGJOHNS.

CALDWELL

Tippowitz?

The private almost falls off his chair...

...surprised and delighted that Caldwell is awake. He can't get the words out. *Wait here. I'll get them.* And he's off.

CUT TO:

EXT. REGIMENTAL AID POST, RESERVE TRENCHES - DAY

Tippowitz, Graves, Snell, and Avery are in the Regimental Aid Post now while a SURGEON is redressing Caldwell's HEAD WOUND.

GRAVES

You can thank Tippowitz. He was the one who came out and got you.

CALDWELL

Thank you, Private.

TIPPOWITZ

The trouble is not for the taking or the liking, Lieutenant. It's a fair ride, no?

GRAVES

Doc says the bullet grazed you.

AVERY

Aye, guess some of us are just too dumb to get killed.

SNELL

They got Benton. And ten thousand others dead or wounded... Some two hundred-fifty officers with 'em.

CALDWELL

(stunned)

Did we achieve anything? Any new ground? Any advance at all?

Graves shakes his head. Caldwell looks at him. He's livid.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - DAY

Caldwell slams his fists down on Captain McIntyre's desk -- just the two of them, having it out. McIntyre is rattled.

CALDWELL

You murdered those men!

MCINTYRE

The Germans murdered them.

CALDWELL

You gave the order!

MCINTYRE

I was following orders and how dare you speak to me this way! You are a lieutenant!

His THUNDERING VOICE slams Caldwell into silence...

...and McIntyre calms down, trying to reason with Caldwell, though it sounds like he's trying to reason with himself.

MCINTYRE

The individual life of a soldier really means very little... It has to. It's the only way to win a war.

CALDWELL

Captain McIntyre. I apologize for my outburst. But the men will want to know why the attack was ordered.

MCINTYRE

The generals are all top military strategists. They know what they're doing.

CALDWELL

Sir?

MCINTYRE

There were no "definitive" command objectives. It was hoped the attack would boost morale.

CALDWELL

Well... I'd say it failed.

MCINTYRE

So it would seem, yes.

Caldwell salutes sharply and turns to leave.

CALDWELL

If you don't mind my asking, Sir,
how did you survive the action?

MCINTYRE

(looks at him)

Luck.

CALDWELL

Yes. Yes, I'm sure that's how the
men see it.

And he's gone. McIntyre stares after him, alarmed.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - DAY

McIntyre squares on his CAPTAIN'S HAT and his OFFICER'S COAT, checking himself fastidiously in the mirror. Psyching himself up for something...

EXT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - CONTINUOUS

...then he steps outside into the trenches. The SOLDIERS near the command post are surprised to see him. He's been holed up in that bunker even since the attack.

McIntyre eyeballs them all, letting them know who's in charge of this outfit. They salute him obediently. And he moves on.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Further along the trench, we find Graves making breakfast for Tippowitz as Snell makes CRUDE GRENADES out of nails and tins of BULLY BEEF. All in all, it's a relatively quiet morning.

Avery is drinking some tea at his sniper rifle post...

...strangely, he's standing upright on his FIRE STEP in full view of the Germans. And somehow, he's not getting shot at.

None of them notice Captain McIntyre until he speaks:

MCINTYRE

What the devil is going on here?

Nobody speaks. McIntyre turns on Avery.

MCINTYRE

You there, private. Get down before
you get shot.

AVERY

Aye, Captain.

Something about this is strange indeed. None of the men are
willing to speak. Caldwell hurries up, watching on as...

...McIntyre wanders over to a periscope and takes a look.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - THE GERMAN SNIPER

like Avery is standing up on his FIRE STEP one hundred yards
away, enjoying his breakfast. *He seems to know he's safe.*

ANGLE ON - MCINTYRE

confused by this. He looks at his men.

MCINTYRE

There's a German soldier in full
view over there. Well? Why doesn't
somebody shoot him?

AVERY

It's breakfast, Sir. We don't shoot
during breakfast anymore.

GRAVES

It's just for an hour, Captain.

AVERY

Right. So's we can us have some tea
in peace. You know, like normal.

MCINTYRE

(looks again)

Isn't that the sniper who's been
killing so many of you?

AVERY

Aye, Captain.

MCINTYRE

Well, don't you want to kill *him*?

AVERY

I did. I tried. So did he. Truth of
it is, we were getting bored so --

MCINTYRE

Bored?

AVERY

I don't know how to explain it. We made a... We made an arrangement.

MCINTYRE

An arrangement? With a *German*?

AVERY

It's not like how it sounds, Sir.

MCINTYRE

It sounds like treason. It sounds like something the red caps would shoot you for.

McIntyre looks through the PERISCOPE again.

MCINTYRE

Kill him.

AVERY

Captain, I --

MCINTYRE

Kill. Him.

Avery glances across at Graves.

He gives Avery a look, *do as he says*.

AVERY

(to McIntyre)

But it wouldn't be fair, Sir --

MCINTYRE

Fair? What is this? A game of cricket or a war?

CALDWELL

Captain, I think you should --

MCINTYRE

I'm in charge here, Lieutenant. Am I not?

(back to Avery)

I'm giving you an order, private. A simple order, really. I am ordering you to kill the enemy.

And Avery realizes he has no choice...

...he turns to his rifle in its berth. His hand quivering as it takes the string. Peering reluctantly into his PERISCOPE.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - THE GERMAN SNIPER

appears in his gunsights. Completely unaware that he's being targeted at this moment. *Several horrible moments tick by...*

ANGLE ON - AVERY

who turns to McIntyre suddenly.

AVERY

I can't do it, Sir! I won't!

MCINTYRE

You listen to me, private --

AVERY

Aye, that German's killed a lot of us. But I've killed a lot of them!

MCINTYRE

That's enough out of you --

AVERY

And I'm sick of it! I'm so sick of all of it!

CALDWELL

Avery, don't --

AVERY

You said it, Lieutenant. We could have a truce. Just a day is all.

McIntyre glares menacingly at Caldwell.

AVERY

What'd be wrong with that? What'd be wrong with just one day?

MCINTYRE

I'm not going to tell you again, private. *Now shoot that man.*

GRAVES

Do as he says, Avery.

Avery stares at Graves. Stares at Caldwell. All the soldiers watch with baited breath to see what he's going to do...

...he just turns slowly, hand on the TRIGGER STRING again.

PERISCOPE P.O.V. - THE GERMAN SNIPER

still unaware. As Avery lines up, unable to fight anymore. He pulls the string. BANG! And the German's head snaps back...

...and even from a hundred yards away, Avery can see the look of surprise and betrayal on the German's face as he collapses down into his trench.

CLOSE ON - AVERY

who can't believe what he's just done.

Tippowitz gazes at him, registering the guilt. Graves eases Avery down from the FIRE STEP. Snell keeps making grenades.

ANGLE ON - MCINTYRE

who looks satisfied but he's still got a score to settle.

MCINTYRE

(to Caldwell)

What's this about a truce? Hmm? Was that your idea?

(no reply)

Did you know about this, Sergeant?

GRAVES

Yes, Captain.

MCINTYRE

And you did nothing about it?

SNELL

Avery!

Avery's climbing a ladder.

The others rush to stop him.

Too late. Avery exposes himself.

Arms outstretched, eyes closed, surrendering...

...BOOM! A volley of GERMAN BULLETS chew into his body.

Catapulting him back into the trench.

He splashes in the water.

Gazing up at Heaven.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FORWARD LISTENING POST, NO MAN'S LAND - DAY

Snell sits at his forward listening post, smoking a CIGARETTE as he talks with his still unseen German counterpart nearby.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Two days until Christmas. They told us this war would be over by then.

SNELL

They told us the same.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

If it doesn't end on Christmas Day, when will it?

SNELL

It'll end when you blokes give up.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

I don't think the Kaiser will ever give up. Not until he's run out of soldiers.

SNELL

Suits me fine either way.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

(pause)

We invented Christmas, did you know?

SNELL

No, you didn't.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

It all originated with the winter solstice centuries before Christ --

SNELL

You did not bloody invent Christmas, all right? *We* invented Christmas.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

You? You outlawed Christmas!

SNELL

What? What are you going on about?

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

In 1645 Oliver Cromwell and his English Puritans made celebrating Christmas a crime.

SNELL

Well, we invented Santa Claus.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Santa Claus is the Dutch term for a third century Turkish monk.

SNELL

What are you, a history professor?

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Ja, I teach at the University of Berlin. I've spoken at Oxford, too.

SNELL

Caroling. We invented caroling.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

We invented Christmas trees.

SNELL

You did not... Look, we're supposed to be quiet out here.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Relax, Schnell. No-one can hear us.

SNELL

That's not the point, is it?

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

The point is: I am a Saxon. You are an Anglo-Saxon. On both ends of the rifle, we are the same.

SNELL

We are not the same. We were never the same.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Schnell... I am disappointed in you.

SNELL

Yeah, well I don't reckon I'm too fond of you neither, Jerry.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Karl. My name is Karl.

(remembering)

Oh, I brought something for you.

SNELL

What is it?

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
A gift. A present. A tradition more
or less invented by the Americans.

SNELL
Whatever it is, I don't want it.

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
I'm going to throw it over.

And instantly, Snell's back up on full alert.

Readying one of his GRENADES made from a BULLY BEEF tin.

SNELL
Don't you throw nothing over here!

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
Just a little something --

SNELL
I mean it!

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
Here it comes --

SNELL
No!

Something small and round flies at Snell...

...and before it lands, he lights his BULLY BEEF GRENADE with
his cigarette and throws it back. Then he dives for cover.

Nothing happens. He looks at the German's gift.

It's not a grenade. *It's a tin of hot chocolate.*

And then Snell hears the German find what he threw:

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S.)
And what have you got for me? Bully
Beef! I love Bully Beef!

SNELL
Wait! No, Karl --

-- BOOM! The grenade EXPLODES ten yards away.

As the mud settles, Snell listens for the German. Wishing he
could hear his voice again. *But there is only cold silence.*

CUT TO:

EXT. SAP TRENCH, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Graves scuttles up the sap trench, drawn by the noise...

...he sees a SOLDIER coming towards him. And he levels his rifle. But it's Snell. Graves is relieved to see he's okay.

But Snell has a look about him. He's horrified by what he's done. He just passes Graves and continues back to the line, and Graves follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Snell returns to the fire trenches where several Tommies are waiting. They're pleased to see their man come back alive...

...patting him on the back and offering him a drink of rum.

SNELL

I killed him...

BRITISH SOLDIER #1

'Course, you did.

BRITISH SOLDIER #2

Snell, the Hun-killer. How many's that for you now? A hundred?

SNELL

No. No, I killed him.

BRITISH SOLDIER #1

Yeah, we heard the grenade go off.

BRITISH SOLDIER #3

Way to go, Snelly. Stick to 'em all right good. Stinking Boche Germans.

Graves appears now, watching Snell slip into denial and rage.

SNELL

I killed him. I fucking killed him!
(calling out)
Like that, Fritz? Send me another
one! Go on! I'll do that one, too!

The soldiers laugh and smile with him. Graves says nothing...

FADE TO BLACK:

SUPER: Christmas Eve

EXT. SUPPORT TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Our dwindling group is in the support trenches, sitting apart from one another. Nobody's in a festive mood. The POST MASTER is delivering a SMALL BRASS BOX to each soldier...

...inside are some sweets and tobacco and a PHOTOGRAPH of its sender, Princess Mary. A SOLDIER reads the accompanying card:

BRITISH SOLDIER #1

"...with best wishes for a Happy Christmas and a victorious New Year. From the Princess Mary and friends at home."

(laughs)

Yeah, I feel all Christmassy now.

CALDWELL

She's actually a good person. You should get to know her.

The soldier looks at him, confused...

...but Caldwell just stands and takes a place by Graves who's got lookout duty. Graves doesn't acknowledge his lieutenant.

CALDWELL

You blame me for Avery, don't you?

GRAVES

No.

CALDWELL

You blame me for his death.

GRAVES

I blame Fritz.

CALDWELL

But you think I put ideas in his head. You think I --

GRAVES

What do you want, Lieutenant? You want me to say Private Avery was a good old fashioned Hun-hating Tommy till you came along? He might still be alive if it wasn't for you?

Graves and Caldwell stare at each other...

...the POST MASTER approaches Graves with a package now. But Graves thinks it's just another BRASS BOX from Princess Mary.

POST MASTER
Sergeant?

GRAVES
Give it to someone else.

POST MASTER
It's addressed to you.

He tosses the package to Graves who stares at it in shock.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUPPORT TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

Graves finds some privacy in an empty dugout. Gazing at the package a moment. *It's from his wife.* Her name on the back.

His hands tremble as he opens it, terrified to find a PHOTO of his wife and children. And a letter. His eyes well up as he reads the letter. And we hear a lovely voice:

GRAVES' WIFE (V.O.)
My darling Thomas. I know you asked
me not to write, but it's almost
Christmas and the War Office is
encouraging those of us with men at
the front to send encouragement.

As she speaks, we see other TOMMIES reading letters...

GRAVES' WIFE (V.O.)
I won't worry you with any of the
hardships we're dealing with here
at the farm. We'll pull through. I
just want you to know that the
children and I pray for your safe
return every night. We'll be strong
for you. And you be strong for us.

...we see their faces. Young and old. *Everybody has somebody.*

GRAVES' WIFE (V.O.)
Sending you all my love... And the
love of our children... Elizabeth.

And Graves breaks down, weeping alone in the dugout.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DUSK

Night is falling. And with it, a bitter winter frost.

The oppressive mud has hardened. And the smell of decomposing flesh in No Man's Land has abated for the corpses all frozen.

ANGLE ON - OUR GROUP

hunkered down in the fire trenches. Tippowitz is still in his LONGJOHNS, seemingly unaffected by the biting cold. Snell is beside him, SHIVERING.

SNELL

Everything good at home, Serge?

GRAVES

Not exactly how I pictured spending Christmas Eve is all. I'd usually be carving up the turkey about now. The kids would be bouncing off the walls, too excited to sleep. We'd have a fire going. Crackling in the hearth. If I was there right now...

(smiles)

...I'd jump in that fucking fire.

They all look at each other, TEETH CHATTERING in the freeze, and they start to laugh. Even Tippowitz cracks a grin...

..and then it's silent for several moments.

The soldiers sit about at their posts, getting colder as the sun goes down. Too cold to speak now. Caldwell cocks an ear.

CALDWELL

You hear that?

GRAVES

What?

CALDWELL

Nothing.

He really means nothing. For the first time, the omnipresent sounds of GUNS and CANNON is strangely absent at the front.

EXT. RESERVE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Everywhere, more and more SOLDIERS are noticing. Perched in their dugouts or lying in the R.A.P. *They hear pure silence.*

EXT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - CONTINUOUS

The anomaly even draws the attention of Captain McIntyre who peels out of his command post and looks around curiously...

...a sudden call of alarm rings out down the trench.

BRITISH SOLDIER (O.S.)

Stand-to!

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

The Tommies instantly go on alert, lining up their rifles...

...Caldwell, Graves, Snell, and Tippowitz are all now peeking dangerously over the top of their trench at the German lines.

SNELL

What the Christ is that?

WHAT THEY SEE: *Lights in the enemy trenches...*

...all up and down the German line. CANDLES flickering in the chilly night breeze. Just sitting there. Hundreds of them.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - NIGHT

McIntyre sees the German lights through a PERISCOPE...

INT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - CONTINUOUS

...he ducks back inside his command post where Perkins, the signals corpsman, is back working on the TELEPHONE WIRES.

PERKINS

What is it, Sir? What's going on?

MCINTYRE

I don't know. Could be a prelude to an attack. That thing working yet?

PERKINS

Almost. I just have to --

-- but McIntyre's already gone, along with his hat and coat.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

McIntyre crouch-walks along the fire trenches, stopping by Graves and Caldwell. Peeking over the top with them.

MCINTYRE

What do you make of it, Sergeant?

GRAVES

Can't say, Sir. Never seen anything like it before...

CALDWELL

(realizing)

They're Christmas trees.

MCINTYRE

What?

CALDWELL

The Germans have put up Christmas trees in their trenches.

A hint of a smile on Caldwell's face now.

MCINTYRE

Intelligence reports say Jerry's planning an attack to keep us on our toes.

CALDWELL

Sir, it's Christmas Eve.

(McIntyre stares blankly)

They're celebrating.

But McIntyre just can't conceive of it.

MCINTYRE

I don't know. I'll... I'll have to get orders on this.

CALDWELL

Captain --

MCINTYRE

You're in charge, Lieutenant. Keep the men at their posts.

And he hurries off. Caldwell looks at Graves, then back at the lights. Graves clearly has a bad feeling about this...

CUT TO:

EXT. RESERVE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

McIntyre hurries into his STAFF CAR, driving away from the front. The GERMAN LIGHTS a faint white line far behind him.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

Caldwell is excited. Everybody else is wary. Eyes riveted to the CHRISTMAS LIGHTS dancing in the wind in the German lines.

CALDWELL

Beautiful, isn't it?

GRAVES

It's something...

SNELL

Huns reckon they invented Christmas trees, you believe that?

CALDWELL

It was actually a monk by the name of Martin Luther.

SNELL

A German monk?

GRAVES

Germans have monks, Snell.

CALDWELL

They say he was walking home late one night. When all of a sudden he looked up and saw a brilliant ocean of stars twinkling amidst the evergreens.

SNELL

Stars?

CALDWELL

It was too beautiful to describe to his family so he cut down a fir and set it up in his house. The candles were meant to represent the stars.

Snell and Tippowitz are listening with Graves. All of them taken with the story. Sitting there in the strange silence.

And now they hear something even more strange than silence...

...the sound of men singing. A wonderfully rich deep baritone drifting out from the German trenches across No Man's Land:

GERMAN SOLDIERS (O.S.)
(singing)
O Tannenbaum! O Tannenbaum!
Wie treu sind deine blatter...

SNELL
What're they saying?

GRAVES
They're not saying, they're singing.

Caldwell smiles, amazed.

CALDWELL
It's a carol. "Oh Christmas Tree."

EXT. SUPPORT TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

The glorious SINGING floats back through the British trenches and warms the ears of every SOLDIER freezing in his boots.

GERMAN SOLDIERS (O.S.)
(singing)
Du grunst nicht nur zur Sommerzeit.

EXT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - CONTINUOUS

Perkins curiously steps out of the command post...

...as SOLDIERS actually head past towards the fire trenches -- willingly -- so that they can better hear the Germans sing:

GERMAN SOLDIERS (O.S.)
(singing)
Nein auch im winter, wenn es schneit.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

The fire trenches quickly fill up with awestruck Tommies.

GERMAN SOLDIERS (O.S.)
(singing)
O Tannenbaum! O Tannenbaum!
Wie treu sind deine blatter.

The carol ends. And there is silence... And then the Tommies burst into APPLAUSE. WHISTLING. CHEERING. Calls of "Encore!"

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL & GRAVES

who are blown away by the British response. Caldwell joins in with the CLAPPING. So does Tippowitz. But Graves doesn't...

...and he gets a sharp look for it from Caldwell. And now:

CALDWELL
(singing)
O come all ye faithful...

GRAVES
Don't do that --

Caldwell just sings louder:

CALDWELL
(singing)
Joyful and triumphant...

GRAVES
You're the most senior officer, for
Chrissakes --

Tippowitz joins him now:

CALDWELL/TIPPOWITZ
(singing)
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.

GRAVES
Look what you're doing --

Now more and more Tommies take it up with them:

BRITISH SOLDIERS
(singing)
Come and behold Him.
Born the King of Angels.

Every British soldier except Graves and Snell now singing:

BRITISH SOLDIERS
(singing)
O come let us adore Him.
O come let us adore Him.
O come let us adore Him.
Christ the Lord!

Caldwell's eyes on Graves as they finish...

...now they hear the sound of the Germans APPLAUDING them in turn, drawing stunned smiles on almost every British soldier.

EXT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - CONTINUOUS

One soldier who's not smiling is Perkins. He's confused and worried. There's something inherently not right about this.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Graves is not pleased either. Snell is downright pissed.

GRAVES

All right, that's enough. If the captain was here --

CALDWELL

Sergeant? They want it, too. They want it as much as we do.

SNELL

There's not gonna be a truce. The generals would never go for it.

CALDWELL

The generals are forty miles away.

SNELL

This is fraternization with the enemy, this is. It's not right!

CALDWELL

It's one day! And then we can all go back to killing each other the next day!

GRAVES

They'll see it as treason.

CALDWELL

Listen to me --

GRAVES

Now I have it hard enough keeping my men safe from German bullets...

CALDWELL

I'm not --

GRAVES

...I'll be *damned* to see one of them go to a British bullet!

Caldwell stares hard at Graves. Everybody watching them...

...they're interrupted by the Germans. A new carol. One that is instantly familiar to every British soldier out here.

GERMAN SOLDIERS (O.S.)
(singing)
Stille Nacht, heilige nacht.
Alles schlaft, einsam wacht.

The Tommies join in with the English version:

BRITISH SOLDIERS
(singing)
'Round yon virgin Mother and Child
Holy infant so tender and mild...

Caldwell pointedly doesn't sing, *he no longer has to...*

...both sides are now harmonizing together. Bitter enemies in their trenches singing carols on the night before Christmas.

GERMAN SOLDIERS (O.S.)
(singing)
Schlafe in himmlischer Ruh...

BRITISH SOLDIERS
(singing)
Sleep in Heavenly peace...

CUT TO:

EXT. OFFICER'S CHATEAU, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Forty miles away, McIntyre's car pulls up outside the grand officer's chateau we saw back in the beginning in St. Omer.

McIntyre looks around, confused, because the entire place is swarming with STAFF CARS and MILITARY DRIVERS. Soft Christmas music spills from the chateau.

CUT TO:

INT. BANQUET HALL, OFFICER'S CHATEAU - NIGHT

A STAFFER leads McIntyre into the opulent banquet hall...

...he stops dead in his tracks. The hall is filled with HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS and their WIVES. Dancing. Laughing. Eating.

An enormous CHRISTMAS FIR TREE consumes one end of the hall, glittering with lights and gold ribbons. A mountain of shiny presents at its base. A nearby QUARTET plays Christmas music.

CLOSE ON - MCINTYRE

hesitating in the doorway. He glances back at the trail of MUDDY FOOTPRINTS he's brought into the chateau with him...

...and he frantically starts to clean his boots.

The staffer tries to help, offering him some TISSUES. But the mud decimates them. Another STAFFER offers a HAND TOWEL...

...and this finally does the job. McIntyre straightens his uniform, takes his hat off, and pats down his hair. Gives a nod to the staffer who leads him inside.

ANGLE ON - THE SIX GENERALS

we saw during the royal inspection in the opening. The elite of the elite. Elderly gentlemen who believe they're fighting a gentleman's war...

...they're gathered around a long table enjoying their plump TURKEYS and the finest French wines in their SILVER GOBLETS.

McIntyre notices this specifically as he's brought to them.

GENERAL #1

Ah, Captain McIntyre.

MCINTYRE

Do please forgive the intrusion,
General. Lines are down again.

GENERAL #1

Not at all, not at all.

(to the others)

Gentlemen, may I introduce one of
the rising stars in our ranks.

If McIntyre could allow himself to blush...

GENERAL #1

Captain, I believe you know -- or
at least know of -- everyone here.

MCINTYRE

Absolutely, Sir. I spent my youth
studying all of your field manuals
and battle guides -- and I should
probably disclose that I plagiarize
every one of them on a daily basis.

...the generals laugh haughtily.

GENERAL #2
Join us why don't you, Captain?

MCINTYRE
Thank you, Sir, but I --

-- a BUTLER appears with some wine, a MAID with a plate...

...and before he knows it, McIntyre is sitting alongside the generals. His gods. *He's literally got a seat at the table.*

GENERAL #1
Well, Captain? How do you think the war is going so far?

GENERAL #3
Put the poor man on the spot, why don't you?

GENERAL #1
It's always valuable hearing from the common soldier, isn't it?

GENERAL #4
Not always.

MCINTYRE
Sir, something odd is happening in the German lines this evening.

GENERAL #2
Don't tell us they're surrendering.

More haughty chuckles around the table.

MCINTYRE
No, Sir. It seems... They've put up Christmas trees in their trenches.

GENERAL #4
Christmas trees?

MCINTYRE
With candles.

GENERAL #4
Must be a trick. Intelligence was right. They're about to attack.

GENERAL #1
Oh, for God's sake. I made up that intelligence brief just to keep our chaps on the alert.

As McIntyre listens now he notices a few things...

GENERAL #1

Military lethargy. Times like this,
the object of war becomes obscured.

...the general carves himself some more delicious turkey.

GENERAL #1

Soldiers start to think of home. Of
families and loves ones and holiday
meals around the kitchen table.

...another general removes a piece of fat from his teeth.

GENERAL #1

It becomes difficult to motivate
them when the time for sacrifice
arises again.

...another general casually spills some expensive wine.

GENERAL #1

Christmas trees... Soldiers cannot
afford such luxuries. Why it would
be disastrous to their ability to
wage war.

The other generals clank their GOBLETS with their KNIVES...

...and McIntyre just sits there, stunned by the hypocrisy on
display before him. He still hasn't touched his dinner yet.

GENERAL #1

Well, Captain?

MCINTYRE

Yes, General?

GENERAL #1

Aren't you going to eat?

McIntyre looks at his plate of food...

...hesitating for several moments. *And then he digs in.* The
generals smile at the sublime reaction that fills his face.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

There's an air of possibility buzzing through the trenches...

...the Tommies crowding the front line, peering towards the Germans. Anxious to see if anything's going to happen now.

ANGLE ON - CALDWELL & GRAVES

standing nervously on their FIRE STEP. Tippowitz is watching the German lines. Snell is sitting down, trying to ignore it.

A voice suddenly calls out from the German lines:

GERMAN OFFICER (O.S.)

English, come over!

GRAVES

You first, Fritz!

He says it as a joke, but then his smile vanishes.

WHAT THEY SEE: a GERMAN CORPORAL rising haltingly up over his trench. Standing there unprotected. An INTERPRETER follows...

...both men are clearly trembling with a gut-wrenching fear.

ANGLE ON - THE BRITISH SOLDIERS

grabbing their rifles. Aiming at the two Germans.

CALDWELL

Hold your fire!

Snell realizes what's happening, but makes no objection...

...while Caldwell closely examines the Germans with a pair of binoculars. His blood is pumping, a real sparkle in his eyes.

CALDWELL

I'm going out there.

GRAVES

No, you're not.

CALDWELL

They've made the first move. If we don't respond now --

GRAVES

The captain said to stay here.

CALDWELL

But he didn't know this was going to happen!

Caldwell goes to climb up the ladder...

...but Graves stops him, one last appeal.

GRAVES

How do you know it's not a trap?

CALDWELL

I'm willing to risk it.

GRAVES

They're Germans!

CALDWELL

They're *human*! They're...

Caldwell cuts himself off, exasperated.

CALDWELL

Everyone says they want peace, but how much do they really want it? I mean... You have to really want it, don't you?

GRAVES

Lieutenant, a bloke'd have to be right crazy to go out there. You hear me?

Tippowitz sure does.

He promptly climbs up...

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...out into No Man's Land. *Totally unprotected*. No rifle. Not even a uniform. He just strolls out there in his LONGJOHNS...

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...and the British troops all watch him breathlessly from the trenches. Including Perkins. Graves is going out of his mind.

GRAVES

Tippowitz! Get back here!

CALDWELL

They're not shooting at him...

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Tippowitz navigates the mud, not stopping for anybody...

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, GERMAN FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...now the two Germans notice Tippowitz striding towards them in his BRIGHT RED UNDERWEAR. They are both confused and wary.

GERMAN CORPORAL
(subtitled, in German)
Why is he not wearing his uniform?

GERMAN INTERPRETER
(subtitled, in German)
I don't know, Corporal. I'm just an interpreter... Perhaps he's showing us that he has no weapons?

The Corporal looks at his interpreter...

...and then quickly starts undressing, too. The interpreter hesitates. *It's fucking winter!* But then he does likewise.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Caldwell and Graves watch from their trenches as the Germans take off their warm WINTER CLOTHES, piece by chilly piece.

GRAVES
You've got to be joking.

CALDWELL
It's got to be below zero tonight, I'm sure.

EXT. FARMHOUSE RUBBLE, NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS

The three men meet amid the rubble of a farmhouse...

...the Germans are both freezing. Tippowitz is smiling like a goofball. The German Corporal gives his interpreter a nod.

GERMAN INTERPRETER
(to Tippowitz)
We would like to talk with you of a cease fire tomorrow to mark the day of Christmas.

TIPPOWITZ
Well, that's a whistle. Oh, it's a fine rule, eh? Is he now?

The German Corporal waits for his interpreter to interpret...

...but of course the poor interpreter has no bloody idea what Tippowitz just said. He tries again, more clearly this time:

GERMAN INTERPRETER
(to Tippowitz)
We. Would like. To talk. With you.

TIPPOWITZ
Ah, now what's the say? Where are
you oh that's a right one, hmm?

Again, the interpreter's totally dumbfounded.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Caldwell and Graves watch them, out of earshot.

CALDWELL
What do you think they're saying?

GRAVES
God only knows.

The two of them share a smile.

EXT. FARMHOUSE RUBBLE, NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS

The German Corporal's getting impatient with his interpreter.

GERMAN CORPORAL
(subtitled, in German)
Well? Translate it, will you?

GERMAN INTERPRETER
(subtitled, in German)
Perhaps my English is not so good.

The Corporal's had enough of this crap...

...he reaches into his pocket and pulls out two CIGARS. Gives one to Tippowitz and lights it for him. Tippowitz likes it...

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...from the trenches, they watch Tippowitz wave triumphantly back at them, brandishing his new cigar like a trophy. Graves laughs at him.

GRAVES
On ya, Tippowitz! Crazy bastard...

INT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - CONTINUOUS

Perkins rushes back into the command post. He's deeply unsure about all this. He charges up the FIELD TELEPHONE, now fixed.

PERKINS
(into phone)
Yes, uh...Captain McIntyre, please.

CUT TO:

INT. BANQUET HALL, OFFICER'S CHATEAU - NIGHT

Back to the chateau. McIntyre has finished his dinner, licked his plate clean. The generals are talking directly to him. As if perhaps grooming him.

GENERAL #1
Discipline. Discipline is the core
that feeds the whole.

MCINTYRE
Yessir. Absolutely.

GENERAL #1
It's what makes the Army work. Men
respect it. And follow it.

MCINTYRE
Discipline.

GENERAL #4
Something the Germans are seemingly
lacking in this evening.

MCINTYRE
Quite right, Sir.

GENERAL #4
The Romans had a practise known as
"decimation" whereupon every tenth
legionnaire was clubbed to death by
the rest of his unit whenever that
unit shirked its duties.

GENERAL #2
Barbaric lot, the Romans.

GENERAL #4
And yet, they ruled the world for
five hundred years.

GENERAL #2

When this war is over, the British
Empire will far eclipse the Romans.

GENERAL #3

I'll drink to that.

GENERAL #2

Here-here.

GENERAL #1

(aside to McIntyre)

The High Command is always looking
for bright, young officers to join
us here at HQ.

MCINTYRE

Yessir.

The General catches the watchful eyes of his STAFFER...

...who comes to escort McIntyre out. That's his cue. McIntyre
puts down his wine. And a BUTLER swipes it a second later.

He stands to go, waiting for a moment to bid the six generals
farewell. But they're all busily talking amongst each other.

MCINTYRE

Thank you for, uh... For dinner.

Nobody hears him. He turns and leaves, unphased by this.

CUT TO:

EXT. OFFICER'S CHATEAU, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

McIntyre is still smiling as he exits the chateau...

...his mood dampens only when he takes that first step back
into the mud. He sighs at his boot. And hurries to his car.

The STAFFER from the banquet hustles out after him.

STAFFER

Captain McIntyre! Message for you,
Sir. From the front.

He hands McIntyre a SLIP OF TYPED PAPER.

And as McIntyre reads it, his eyes grow dark...

CUT TO:

EXT. STOCKADE, B.E.F. HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

McIntyre stands by his STAFF CAR as a dozen MILITARY POLICE rush out of the stockade and pile into an ARMY TRUCK...

...loading their RIFLES and donning their notorious RED CAPS.

MCINTYRE

Quickly now. I want each man with
seventy rounds apiece.

He climbs into his car and the truck quickly follows him.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE RUBBLE, NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

Tippowitz is still out in No Man's Land, enjoying his cigar with the two GERMANS. They're sitting down now, together...

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

...back in the trenches, Caldwell turns to Graves.

CALDWELL

You know what I was just thinking?

GRAVES

What's that?

CALDWELL

Why is it harder for us not to kill
each other? Killing requires such
effort. Not killing requires *none*.

Graves reflects on this, gazing back out into No Man's Land.

CUT TO:

EXT. MCINTYRE'S STAFF CAR, COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Meanwhile, McIntyre races back to the front in his car. He is absolutely livid. He checks his WEBLEY REVOLVER. It's loaded.

ANGLE ON - THE RED CAPS

in the back of their truck. LOADING and COCKING their rifles.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

And Caldwell and Graves are unaware.

CALDWELL

This is it... This is it, don't you see? It's the beginning of the end.

GRAVES

End of what?

CALDWELL

The war.

(Graves is skeptical)

Look around you. These men. They're choosing peace.

And as Graves looks at the unarmed BRITISH SOLDIERS standing about in the fire trenches, *he finally dares to believe...*

CUT TO:

EXT. RESERVE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

McIntyre's face is full of rage as his STAFF CAR deposits him by the reserve trenches. He waits for the RED CAPS to unload.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

The Tommies in the fire trenches are basking in the magic of this moment. Even Snell isn't having an *entirely* bad night...

EXT. SUPPORT TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

...but now here comes McIntyre and his RED CAPS. Marching up through the empty support trenches. Heading for the front.

Perkins is waiting outside the command post. He follows them.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - NIGHT

Caldwell offers his hand to Graves who shakes it. They smile together, then Caldwell begins to climb the TRENCH LADDER...

...just as McIntyre and the RED CAPS reach the trenches.

They stare at the troops all standing casually about. Their rifles slung and dormant. *McIntyre's worst fears come true.*

The captain draws his WEBLEY.

And fires THREE SHOTS in the air.

EXT. FARMHOUSE RUBBLE, NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS

The shots ECHOES like a cannon across No Man's Land...

...and instantly, all three men out by the FARMHOUSE RUBBLE hit the mud. Side by side. Tippowitz glances at the Germans.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Everybody in the trenches ducks when they hear the shots. For the moment, nobody knows who is suddenly firing or why...

...panic kicks back in. SOLDIERS diving for their guns.

MACHINE GUNNERS open up at the German lines.

A volley of German BULLETS replies.

CLOSE ON - CALDWELL

frozen on the TRENCH LADDER, unable to comprehend how this is all unraveling so fast around him. And then he spots McIntyre storming up the trench towards him...

...and he burns with indignation. Graves yanks him down off the ladder. Yelling out to Tippowitz above the HEAVY GUNFIRE:

GRAVES
Move it, soldier!

EXT. FARMHOUSE RUBBLE, NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS

Tippowitz picks himself up and runs. A nice big target in his bright red UNDERWEAR. German and British BULLETS graze him...

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...as McIntyre fights to get through the crowd of Tommies. To get to Caldwell. To catch whoever it is out in No Man's Land.

MCINTYRE
(to the soldiers)
Out of my way!

But the SOLDIERS deliberately do little to oblige him...

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...allowing Tippowitz to get back to the line just in time.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

He slithers back down into the trench. Standing by Graves as McIntyre arrives. Tippowitz tries to hide his HEAVY BREATHS.

The Captain glares at him, then steps up to Caldwell.

MCINTYRE

You're relieved of your command.

CALDWELL

I've done nothing wrong.

MCINTYRE

I gave you a direct order to keep
the men at their posts Now...

(looking around)

Which of you was in No Man's Land?

Nobody speaks. McIntyre expected as much.

MCINTYRE

Perkins?

PERKINS

Yessir?

MCINTYRE

You said in your message there was
a British soldier in No Man's Land
mingling with the enemy.

(glancing at Tippowitz)

Tippowitz looks like he's just run
the marathon. Was it him?

PERKINS

I'm, uh...not sure who it was, Sir.

CALDWELL

It was me. I was out there.

Tippowitz goes to speak up but Graves quietly holds him back.

MCINTYRE

Lieutenant Caldwell. You are to be
placed under arrest immediately and
tried for treason.

CALDWELL
Why are you being so blind?

MCINTYRE
Excuse me?

CALDWELL
We could end this war tomorrow.

MCINTYRE
Don't be ridiculous.

CALDWELL
We still have a chance.

MCINTYRE
No. There is no chance. I'm sorry.

He glances at the RED CAPS.

They begin to take Caldwell away.

He stares at Graves and the others.

CALDWELL
Listen to me! Listen!

MCINTYRE
Get him out of here --

CALDWELL
The German do not want to fight on
Christmas!

MCINTYRE
I'm warning you --

CALDWELL
One day of peace! And you can have
it! You deserve it! Don't let them
take it from you!

MCINTYRE
You will be silent, Lieutenant!

CALDWELL
Fight for peace! Fight for it!

MCINTYRE
One more word from you and I swear
to God I'll shoot you like a dog!

Everybody stops. Eyes on that gun.

Caldwell shakes free of the RED CAPS.

He glances at Graves. Then to McIntyre.

CALDWELL

Tomorrow is Christmas... I'll not
kill my fellow man on the one day
I'm supposed to love him.

McIntyre holds his pistol on Caldwell.

Several moments slip by. Graves goes to intervene...

...BANG! His shot catches Caldwell square in the chest.

GRAVES

No!

There's almost a riot in the trenches.

Tippowitz goes medieval on the RED CAPS.

But they quickly restore order, leveling their RIFLES at the soldiers. McIntyre keeps others back with his SMOKING GUN.

MCINTYRE

Get back! *Get back!*

Snell stares at the captain, appalled by all of this...

...as Graves slips through the crowd. Picking up Caldwell,
cradling him. A last frightened look between the two men.

And Lieutenant Caldwell dies.

Everybody is riveted to the spot.

McIntyre eyeballs all the soldiers.

MCINTYRE

Gentlemen, we are at war! War does
not stop for holidays! There will
be no Christmas Truce in my sector!

And he barrels away. The troops clearing a path.

And the RED CAPS follow him. Setting Tippowitz free.

And Graves just sits there in the mud in the fire trench.

Holding onto his friend's dead body as the crowd disperses.

FADE TO BLACK:

SUPER: Christmas Day

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, YPRES SALIENT - DAWN

Christmas morning dawns on the Western Front... A thick, pea-soup fog swamps the entire Ypres Salient so that neither side can see the other.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAWN

The BRITISH TROOPS are sitting about in their trenches. Few have slept. A great sense of defeat saturates their souls.

A "stand-to" order reverberates up and down the lines...

...and the soldiers reluctantly fix BAYONETS and cock their RIFLES. Leaning up over the parapet. Aiming into the mist.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND POST, SUPPORT TRENCHES - DAWN

McIntyre sits in his command post, typing up a DISCIPLINARY ACTION form. He writes with calm self-assuredness. As if he knows he was correct with absolute certainty.

INSERT FORM - DISCIPLINARY ACTION #253

DEFENDANT: LIEUTENANT HALEY CALDWELL

CHARGES: DISOBEYING A DIRECT ORDER
FRATERNIZING WITH THE ENEMY

ACTION TAKEN: EXECUTION BY SHOT

He signs the form, making sure his name is legible. Then he folds the form into an envelope and hands it to his RUNNER.

MCINTYRE

Take that to HQ, fast as possible.

STAFF RUNNER

Yes, Sir.

The runner salutes and leaves. McIntyre checks his watch. And then he grabs his clean, pressed coat. And heads outside...

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

McIntyre crouch-walks along the front lines, checking that the soldiers are all dutifully manning their FIRE BAYS...

...several troops glance at him coldly after he passes by.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

He stops at a MACHINE GUN nest. The six man CREW obligingly salute him, though we can tell they hate his living guts.

MCINTYRE

Merry Christmas, gentlemen.

MACHINE GUNNER

Merry Christmas, Sir.

MCINTYRE

Let off a few rounds, would you?

The gunner looks at him, then does as ordered.

RATTA-TATTA! RATTA-TATTA! The rounds disappear into the fog.

A few moments later, a German MACHINE GUN somewhere replies.

RATTA-TATTA! RATTA-TATTA! And McIntyre walks on, pleased.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

He now comes to a spot where several FIRE BAYS lie empty. He barks at the nearest SOLDIER who obviously hates him, too.

MCINTYRE

Whose post is this? Well? Answer me, soldier! *Whose post is this!*

BRITISH SOLDIER #1

(reluctant)

Sergeant Graves, Sir. Corporal Snell. And Private Tippowitz.

McIntyre's eyes shine with a volatile rage.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD, RESERVE TRENCHES - DAY

CLOSE ON - SERGEANT GRAVES

slouched on a crate, staring off vacantly at something...

...another cross over another freshly-dug grave. This one is for Caldwell. No epitaph this time. Just his name and dates.

Graves looks worn out. More than that, he looks to have given up. Whatever hope might have crept through his eyes the night before is now gone. Graves is lower than we've ever seen him.

His RIFLE and WEBBING lie at his feet. Still in his hands is the ENTRENCHING TOOL he used to dig the grave. He finishes a cigarette, still staring at the cross.

Tippowitz and Snell mull about close by, watching him.

SNELL

We should be getting back.

(no reply)

The Captain will have our arses.

Still nothing from Graves.

Tippowitz isn't replying either.

Snell crouches next to his sergeant.

SNELL

(re: Caldwell)

What'd he expect? Did he expect us to just stop killing each other for a day and then get right back to it the next?

GRAVES

Something like that.

SNELL

What's the point of that? Stopping the killing for good -- *that's* how you win a war. *That's* a victory.

GRAVES

One day of not killing. One day to bury the dead. One day to be human.
(looks at him)

Wouldn't that be victory enough?

Snell doesn't quite know how to answer that...

...he's saved by the sudden appearance of McIntyre. Graves doesn't acknowledge him. McIntyre picks up Graves' rifle.

MCINTYRE

You men are supposed to be in the
fire trenches.

SNELL

We had to bury the Lieutenant, Sir.

MCINTYRE

Go. Now. You don't rotate out until
two o'clock.

SNELL

Yes, Captain.

Snell starts towards the trenches. Tippowitz hesitates, then follows. Graves doesn't move a muscle for several seconds...

...then he takes his rifle, passing by the captain.

MCINTYRE

Merry Christmas, Sergeant --

-- WHACK! Graves' fist striking him.

A solid hit, squarely on the jaw.

McIntyre drops like a ragdoll.

Into the mud.

And Graves is on him, pinning him down with his boot while he cocks his RIFLE and levels it dead into the captain's eyes.

Tippowitz and Snell watch, riveted.

Graves and McIntyre.

The cocked rifle.

Silence...

...and finally Graves pulls back. Tossing the rifle aside as he glares at McIntyre. Then he turns and simply walks away.

Passing Tippowitz and Snell, down into the trench...

...and they all realize at once -- Graves is heading for the front! A steely determination igniting his lifeless eyes.

McIntyre scrambles to his feet in pursuit.

EXT. RESERVE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Graves strides through the reserve trenches, passing SOLDIERS in their DUGOUTS and FUNK HOLES. McIntyre straggles behind...

MCINTYRE

Sergeant! Get back here! *Sergeant!*

...and very quickly, everyone realizes something's happening.

EXT. SUPPORT TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT - CONTINUOUS

Like Snell and Tippowitz, other soldiers begin to follow the captain and the sergeant now. *The whole trench coming alive.*

Word is spreading from soldier to soldier down the line.

EXT. COMMUNICATIONS TRENCH, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Closer and closer to the front.

Graves is gathering steam.

McIntyre pursuing him.

MCINTYRE

I said get back here! I'm ordering you to stop!

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Graves finally does stop at the foot of a trench ladder...

...he's gone as far as he can go. Above him lies one of two things: *death or hope.* He stares at the lip of the trench.

McIntyre catches up behind him now.

Snell and Tippowitz get there moments later.

Everybody watches the final confrontation now.

MCINTYRE

Go ahead. Let the Germans kill you.

(Graves doesn't flinch)

Are you willing to bet your life on the hopeless dreams of a dead fool?

Graves just looks at him. And climbs over the top...

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...he closes his eyes and stands there on the PARAPET waiting for the bullets. *He's unarmed and completely out in the open.*

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

McIntyre. Snell. Tippowitz. They wait in the trench, watching with the other soldiers. Unable to believe what's happening.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Graves opens his eyes, *somehow still alive...*

...he quivers with a rush of adrenaline. And he almost has to remember how to walk. Taking a first step into No Man's Land.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

McIntyre leaps up onto the FIRE STEP, his eyes on Graves.

MCINTYRE

(to the soldiers)

Stand-to! Stand-to, all of you!

The two dozen or so SOLDIERS in the section obediently hurry up onto the FIRE STEP with their rifles. One mans a VICKERS.

Tippowitz and Snell watch helplessly, nothing they can do.

MCINTYRE

Section shall open fire on Sergeant
Graves at my command!

(firm)

Ready!

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Graves hears the British soldiers load and cock their RIFLES behind him. He doesn't falter, ploughing on through the wire.

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers line up on Graves' back...

MCINTYRE

Aim!

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...and still Graves pushes ahead, driving through the mud and the BARBED WIRE. *If this is how he has to die, so be it...*

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...the SOLDIERS place their fingers on their triggers.

MCINTYRE

Fire!

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

Graves braces himself for it, still not stopping...

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...but nothing happens.

MCINTYRE

Fire, damn you! Fire!

And the soldiers just can't do it...

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...and Graves knows he's survived. It only spurs him on more surely. Heading into the mist now, *towards the German lines.*

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

And McIntyre is, understandably, outraged.

MCINTYRE

Shoot him! One of you shoot him! By order of the King, I command you --

SNELL

They won't shoot a man in the back, Sir.

McIntyre glares at Snell.

At that, Tippowitz climbs over...

CUT TO:

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, YPRES SALIENT - DAY

Graves stops in the middle of No Man's Land. Tippowitz a few feet behind him. There are CORPSES everywhere around them...

...and they just stand there, waiting endlessly.

And then, they start to see something.

Shapes emerging through the mist.

FIGURES. SOLDIERS. MEN.

Like Graves and Tippowitz, they are unarmed. Clad in muddy grey UNIFORMS. Some wearing SPECTACLES. And goatee beards.

But essentially, they are the same.

They stop six feet apart. There are three Germans, but one is obviously the leader of the group. He stares hard at Graves.

Several moments pass, both sides gauging the other.

And then Graves offers his hand. Both men stepping forward to bridge the last gap together. Their fists grasping tightly...

...as both men shake hands and smile.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - DAY

McIntyre's had enough. He grabs the rifle Tippowitz abandoned and climbs up over the trenches to shoot Graves himself...

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...but when he reaches No Man's Land, he abruptly stops.

WHAT HE SEES: A GERMAN SOLDIER is walking towards his trench with a SMALL CHRISTMAS TREE in his hands. Candles burning.

McIntyre automatically lines his rifle up on the soldier. And the German just stares at him. Waiting to see if this British officer is actually going to shoot...

...in his head, McIntyre commits to the kill.

And then, suddenly, the HEAVY MIST begins to lift all over No Man's Land. And McIntyre sees something that rocks his world.

WHAT HE SEES: All down the lines, SOLDIERS on both sides are now venturing out of their trenches and greeting each other.

Hundreds of them. *Thousands.*

British khaki and German field grey.

Far too many for McIntyre ever to shoot.

The German soldier standing before him triumphantly lifts the little CHRISTMAS TREE above his head. A big grin on his face.

And McIntyre slowly lets his rifle fall...

EXT. FIRE TRENCHES, BRITISH FRONT LINES - CONTINUOUS

...and sinks back down into the trenches. Other SOLDIERS are climbing over now. More and more. Including even Snell now.

And soon, McIntyre is sitting alone in an empty muddy trench.

CUT TO:

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, YPRES SALIENT - DAY

Meanwhile, an uncertain awkwardness has fallen between Graves and his German counterpart: *So we shook hands. Now what?*

And then, the German offers Graves a PRESENT...

GERMAN SOLDIER
Froehliche Weihnachten.

...it's a FRUIT CAKE. Graves takes it politely, but now he's at a loss. He hasn't got anything to give to the German.

And then he remembers. In his pocket.

The book Caldwell gave him. The book of poetry.

He gives it to the German now. *As a Christmas gift.*

GRAVES
Merry Christmas.

And the German takes the book, delighted...

...and right away, Graves feels as if a great weight has been lifted off his shoulders. He glances at Tippowitz who grins.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND, YPRES SALIENT - VARIOUS - DAY

SOLDIERS on both sides are now working together to exhume and bury the countless British and German dead in No Man's Land.

They hold joint services over communal MASS GRAVES...

...that done, the soldiers relax. Talking and smoking with each other. Sharing BEER and taking group PHOTOS. Some even give haircuts to one another.

ANGLE ON - TIPPOWITZ

who suddenly uncovers Avery's lost FOOTBALL in the mud. He kicks it playfully towards a pack of idle GERMAN SOLDIERS...

...and it's game on. British versus German. In No Man's Land.

The soldiers are LAUGHING on both sides as either team scores a goal or makes a break. Even patting each other on the back.

CLOSE ON - GRAVES

sitting with some Tommies and Germans. Having a smoke. Gazing at the unlikely scene about him. The FOOTBALL lands nearby...

...and Tippowitz stops by Graves to gather the football.

TIPPOWITZ

Football's a brilliant game, don't
you think?

A coherent sentence. *The day God pays a visit to Hell.* And as Graves looks around him, a warm smile creases his weary face.

SUPER: The Christmas Truce lasted beyond Christmas
and in some sectors, ended only in February
when the generals finally put a stop to it.

Had that truce ended the war, it would have
saved the lives of the eight million men who
died in the next four years of bloodshed...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD, RESERVE TRENCHES - DAY

Far behind No Man's Land, we see CALDWELL'S GRAVE basking in the Christmas sunlight and the distant sound of laughter...

FADE OUT.