

"VALOR"

Martin Blinder, WGA

*Written from the farthest edge of fading human memory*

FADE IN:

OVER CREDITS

A montage of ancient sketches, drawings and designs of primitive mobile armaments, siege weapons, battering rams, troop transports, etc., some once realized in battle, others probably remaining forever on their artists' drawing boards:

An outsize Roman chariot carrying four legionnaires  
positioning their spears so as to provide 360 degree protection;

The armored elephants of Hannibal; of Kublai Khan;

The Trojan horse, disgorging Ulysses' men from its belly;

A feudal wagon boarded up with rough-hewn planks to protect  
the soldiers within;

Leonardo's futuristic designs for troop carriers;

A dozen Moorish warriors bunched behind a huge wheeled shield;

A knight's suit of armor;

Armored plating for a horse;

and finally

A World War I blueprint for the first tank.

STOCK FOOTAGE--DAY

SIX FLEETING MONTAGES of black and white, silent documentary stock footage, circa 1914, fitted to the words of the NARRATOR, his voice that of a mature, possibly elderly Englishman, but still resonant and portentous.

Concurrent are TWO SIMULTANEOUS SOUND TRACKS, one a slow, steady, muffled, FUNERIAL DRUM BEAT, the other constructed of SOUNDS APPROPRIATE TO EACH of the six successive images, but dim and distant, as if a century away.

MONTAGE: Stately Austrian EMPEROR FRANZ JOSEPH, eighties, his crown festooned with enormous feathers, walking at a majestic pace, followed by his splendiferous COURTIERS, gold braided, plumed, bemedaled and very nearly immobilized by their own pomp and circumstance. A TINNY VIENNESE WALTZ PLAYS O.C.

NARRATOR (over)

In 1914, Austria, a huge but decaying, comic-opera, monarchy fragmented by bitter ethnic rivalries, tottered toward disintegration. In desperation, it provoked a war with tiny Serbia. A short, easy war.

MONTAGE: Superimposed on a map of the "Western front" -- the Belgian-French border -- are six quick shots of WORLD WAR I ARMIES marching with energy and elan, dissolving one into the other:

Austria's: Elaborately overdressed, 19th century toy soldiers;  
Germany's: A serious war machine--a menacing sea of steel-tipped helmets, massive horse-drawn artillery;  
Russia's: From an ornate Palace balcony the last TSAR, resplendent in white uniform, reviewing his troops;  
France's: Cavalry, trotting down the Champs d'Elysses through the Arch of Triumph to the cheering of crowds;  
England's: Infantry with Tommy-helmets, heavy backpacks, marching up gangplanks to troopship;  
America's: PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON on flag-

bedecked reviewing stand, as dough-boys parade past.

NARRATOR (over)

But one by one, the other great powers took sides till nearly the entire world found itself at war.

MONTAGE: Warfare on the "Western Front"--a treeless, muddy wasteland of trenches, barbed wire, shell holes and death:

- Line after line of SOLDIERS falling to machine-gun fire as they rise from trenches and attempt to storm the 1,000 yards of no-man's land between opposing armies.
- The same fate befalling HORSE-CAVALRY.
- Formidable concrete emplacements, turrets, pill-boxes.
- Enormous cannon, recoiling as they fire.
- The earth heaving and retching from huge artillery shell blasts.
- More trenches, now abandoned to mist and rain.

NARRATOR (over)

For four bloody years, wave upon wave of infantry and cavalry on one side, then the other, would attack, only to be cut down, sometimes just moments after leaving their trenches, as they'd attempt, again and again, day after day, to reach the enemy dug in in just a short distance away.

MONTAGE: Ragged, grim, weary, DEMORALIZED SOLDIERS in broken formations, trudging soggy roads through the battered countryside, sometimes with, sometimes against, the flow of displaced, dazed, bedraggled CIVILIANS. There is the occasional horse-drawn wagon, crammed with WOUNDED MEN, or with several FAMILIES and all their household belongings.

NARRATOR (over)

When World War One finally ended in 1918, the limb-strewn, corpse-clotted trenches had claimed eight and one half million lives.

(He SIGHS)

And four, centuries-old monarchies and the secure, solid, sepia 19th Century world they thought they controlled, vanished with them.

MONTAGE: A slow, overlapping succession of vast cemeteries-- English, Canadian, French, German, American--swollen with uniform row upon row of white crosses. Now and again A BIRD SINGS.

NARRATOR (over)

Nothing--nothing came of these Herculean battles.

NARRATOR (Cont'd)

(A CATCH in his voice. He SIGHS, then continues, holding down his feelings.)

Twenty, thirty, sometimes forty thousand men slaughtered in a single day -- with no ground gained; four years of futile trench warfare, all for nothing.

Yet, ironically, throughout this terrible, terrible time, my country, England, possessed the means to break the cruel, bloody stalemate and quickly bring it to a victorious end - a decisive weapon which, promptly used, would have halted the profligate waste of young lives --

MONTAGE: In the middle of a cemetery, HOLD on bronze statue of three World War I soldiers in heroic pose. SILENCE now, save for the narrator's last words.

NARRATOR (over)

--a weapon that could have changed history.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. 1894 LAUER ENGLISH ESTATE/UPSTAIRS PLAYROOM--DAY

The image of the soldiers' statue melding into a TIGHT SHOT of three little toy lead soldiers on a cardboard battlefield.

PULL BACK to include the two handsome YOUNG LAUER BROTHERS--FLYNN, age 9, relatively tall, robust but by far the gentler of the two; and COLE, age 7, small but feisty, and wearing a child's late 19th century sailor suit and cap.

Together the boys play "war" on their elaborate battlefield of antique miniatures--two entire opposing toy armies consisting of lead and wooden infantry and cavalry, assorted artillery, cardboard forts, and stockades.

Flynn fires a pop-gun cannon. A well-aimed cork levels a good chunk of the first row of Cole's men--they fall backward and knock down the second which then tips against a third, etc.--a domino effect.

FLYNN

Ha! What shooting! You are dead, Cole,  
you are dead.

COLE

No I'm not. Just you wait. I warned  
you.

Cole pulls the string on the trap door of a small cardboard box, and a half dozen, large, fierce-looking black armored beetles come charging out. They scatter, but largely in the direction of Flynn's troops, careening against the toy figures.

FLYNN

My hemanoptria lepradoptrius! You  
bloody bastard.

The beetles knock over Flynn's soldiers, artillery, forts -- everything.

FLYNN

Didn't I tell you to keep your mitts off  
my insects--?!

He tries to recapture them. Cole chooses this moment to fire his popgun cork, right in his brother's eye.

FLYNN

Ow--you--!

Tearful, Flynn gathers up a handful of soldiers and flings them at Cole. Cole ducks, then grasps and overturns their battlefield. Toys and beetles cascade down on Flynn.

FLYNN

You stupid...

He reaches over and with one hand shoves Cole. Cole stands up and pushes back with both hands, toppling Flynn, chair and all--

COLE

Charge!

He leaps atop the older, larger boy -- who is no match for Cole's ferocity.

FLYNN

Ouff!

Flynn pushes futilely at Cole who has seated himself squarely on his brother's chest.

FLYNN

OK! I surrender! Get off--Surrender!

Flynn squirms, lifts legs and hips but cannot raise Cole.

FLYNN

Get off! Blast you, Cole. It's just a bloody game.

From somewhere in the house:

COCKNEY WOMAN (O.C.)

Flynn--are you fighting with your little brother again? Leave him be.

COLE

Yes. Leave him be.

COCKNEY WOMAN (O.C.)

Your father's come home...

Cole is unmoved.

FLYNN

Get off!

COCKNEY WOMAN (O.C.)

And I believe he has a surprise.

This works. In a flash, Cole is up and out of the room.

FLYNN

(rising)

Hey--Hey, Cole. Hold on...

He scrambles off the floor and follows.

INT. VESTIBULE

As the boys dash in they are brought up sharply by what greets them--

Their FATHER, GRAHAM LAUER, age 45-50, patrician; his distant cousin, LOUISE, age 35, dressed in black; and Louise's daughter, DAISY-REBECCA, AGE 4, cute, wide-eyed.

GRAHAM LAUER

Gentlemen, you remember my cousin, Louise, don't you? From India? And little Daisy-Rebecca? They'll be-- very much a part of the family now.

No response. Awkwardly, he plows ahead.

GRAHAM LAUER

They're to be living in Gran-  
Mama's old cottage. Alright?

(Beat)

It will be just like having a little  
sister.

(Turning to Louise)

And someone to--help look after you.

(Beat)

As your mother did.

The boys exchange a dubious look.

GRAHAM LAUER

(tentatively)

Why not show Daisy-Rebecca your toys  
(with more confidence)--show her the  
ponies--yes--and how well you both ride.

The boys glance at each other, then without a word scoot out the front door, leaving Daisy-Rebecca behind. She peers up at her mother. Louise smiles and nods. And Daisy-Rebecca toddles off after Cole and Flynn--without so much as a backward glance.

EXT. LAUER STABLES

Two ponies, already saddled.

Cole, ever the more aggressive, gets to the animals first. Both boys mount, just as Daisy-Rebecca catches up. They pretend to ignore her but are very much aware of her presence, a life-long competition for her now begun.

They gallop off, Flynn the more graceful rider but Cole the more daring.

EXT. ESTATE GROUNDS

TRAVELING

Cole and Flynn charging, neck and neck across the field;

Down a dirt road, Cole ahead by short-cutting a turn with a hazardous leap over a stone wall;

Across a second field, Flynn gaining;

Again neck and neck, hooves POUNDING;

They pass us, Flynn slightly ahead;

We're directly behind them as they start to jump a hedge,  
Flynn about two seconds in front, as we--

CUT TO:

EXT. ESTATE GROUNDS--DAY

TEN YEARS LATER

FLYNN and COLE are now coming down head on and directly at us  
from the top of their jump, but--they're ten years older and  
their horses full-size--Flynn, dressed with a romantic,  
Edwardian flair, now a 19-year-old country gentleman; Cole, now  
17, impeccable in the uniform and cap of Sandhurst Military  
Academy.

The race ends abruptly where it began, Flynn beating Cole by a  
good length.

They rein their sweating horses to a halt next to 15-YEAR-OLD  
DAISY-REBECCA, at the edge of arresting adult beauty. She sits  
side-saddle on a stallion the equal of her cousins', a sun bonnet  
on her head.

Both boys are growing into charismatic men but could not be more  
different. Flynn has an easy, luminous smile, a polished,  
carefree poetic style, self-effacing charm, and a face women  
might call "beautiful."

Cole, no less handsome, is cheerless, exacting and intense. He  
is never still. Even standing in one place he is in restless  
motion; seated, a foot or hand tap constantly.

Daisy-Rebecca is to all appearances at one with Flynn's grace  
and confidence, yet resonant with Cole's brooding, darker  
passions.

FLYNN (to Cole)

When will you learn to pace yourself?

REBECCA

Your brother's right. You use up your mount the  
first ten minutes.

Flynn will always beat you in  
the long run...

COLE

(crisply)

We're all dead in the long run...

REBECCA

Which is why you and I no can longer  
ride together. Straight away it becomes  
a race. Don't think I've ever  
seen you relax. Do you relax, Cole?

FLYNN

(to Rebecca)

He's always been combative, but military  
academy's made him infinitely worse,  
wouldn't you say, cousin?

Flynn dismounts and stands with Rebecca, then slips eye glasses  
from his vest pocket and puts them on. Cole glares down at them  
both.

COLE

Soldiers just fight the wars. It's you  
starry-eyed poet laureates who glorify them.

He dismounts.

COLE

I'm hugely fortunate. Sandhurst sees fit  
not to muddy our minds with literature,  
dreary nature walks, chasing after moths...

FLYNN

Pity. Music, poetry, especially  
nature -- they tell of real life -

Flynn looks directly at Rebecca and smiles warmly.

FLYNN

Of love. Beauty. Why even the lowly  
insect can teach us something.

Daisy-Rebecca turns from his covetous gaze and faces Cole.

DAISY-REBECCA

You, particularly, could learn much from the  
insects, don't you think, Cole?

COLE

Oh? And what have you two learned  
from the insect world?

(A sardonic smile)

Reproduction?

Daisy-Rebecca fires Cole a lethal look, but before she can put words to her thoughts, a gust of wind lifts her bonnet off her head and into the air like a kite. Cole leaps back on his horse--his chance to score points with Daisy-Rebecca.

COLE  
I'll get it...!

TRAVELING

The bonnet flies and dances with the wind. It dips down to skip along the ground, then bounces back up.

Cole gallops after it recklessly across the open meadow and into --

A DENSE THICKET

Cole snatches the bonnet from the air, just as his horse stumbles in the underbrush and falls. Cole hits the stony ground with a THUD. The huge animal crashes down heavily on top of him, pinning his hips and legs.

DAISY-REBECCA (O.C.)  
Cole--!

Daisy-Rebecca and Flynn gallop on scene, aghast.

Cole's horse scrambles to its feet.

Cole lies sprawled on his back, grimacing with pain. He holds up the bonnet.

COLE  
Your--chapeau, mademoiselle...

He loses consciousness and releases the bonnet--again it is caught up in a small gust that lifts it for a moment, then drapes it over a low branch.

ON BONNET, circa 1904

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ESTATE GROUNDS/SPRING--DAY

TEN YEARS LATER

ON SUNBONNET, circa 1914, hanging from a branch.

ANGLE WIDENS to embrace an animated post-fox-hunt brunch beneath the trees.

In attendance (or approaching):

- the entire LAUER FAMILY—Flynn, now 29; Cole, 27; Graham Lauer, Daisy-Rebecca (simply REBECCA to her friends), now 24; her mother, Louise, 55;
- numerous chums of Flynn, Cole and Rebecca, including CYRIL and
- four or five TEENAGERS, GIGGLING and TELLING SECRETS;
- several middle-aged SOLDIERS, PONTIFICATING;
- clumps of small, improbably well-behaved CHILDREN, clad blindingly in white;
- a few dozen POLITICIANS/CIVIL SERVANTS and THEIR WIVES;
- an equal number of COUNTRY and SPORTING GENTLEMEN and THEIR WIVES;
- and an army of bustling SERVANTS, male and female, serving trays in hand.

Finally, a small contingent of setters and pointers wander about freely.

A third of the celebrants (including Cole and his father) wear traditional red fox-hunt riding outfits, the rest, their elegant Sunday finery.

All is bright innocence and peace. The late morning sun filters through the new, bright-green leaves, creating a Renoiresque dappling of the figures and faces below.

TRACKING through the guests with TUXEDOED MAN-SERVANT pouring champagne.

ON TWO SPORTING GENTLEMEN

SPORTSMAN ONE

...the breeding. I now rest my mares every other year, but I expect...

MOVE TO THREE MINISTERS

MINISTER ONE

(overlapping)

...Balkan races hate each other even more than they hate the Austrians.

MINISTER TWO

The Tsar could cool the Serbians down if only he would act.

MINISTER THREE  
That's his problem. (Shaking head) An  
 absolute autocrat who cannot make decisions...

MOVE TO TWO COUNTRY LADIES and Louise.

LADY ONE  
 (overlapping)  
 ...Isn't it time your daughter chose,  
 my dear?

LOUISE  
 Long past -- I'm becoming quite concerned.

LADY TWO  
 Why should Rebecca choose one man when  
 she has them all...?

MOVE TO UNIFORMED ARMY OFFICERS

OFFICER ONE  
 (overlapping)  
 ... Kaiser is a hairbrained trouble-  
 maker. And unstable, wouldn't you say?

OFFICER TWO  
 Quite so. A fine English mother--how could  
 he have turned out such a reckless nuisance...?

MOVE TO Graham Lauer, close by the punch bowl, energetically  
 lecturing Flynn who listens politely. Both men wear  
 spectacles.

GRAHAM LAUER  
 The United States will never be a  
 world power--an ocean away from the  
 center of things, no king, no empire and  
 apparently no interest in acquiring one,  
 content to hide away in her corner of  
 the globe while events pass her by...

FLYNN  
 (playing along)  
 A wonder, Father, she's not been  
 swallowed up by Canada.

Graham Lauer refills his punch cup, fighting a pill-rolling  
 tremor between thumb and forefinger.

GRAHAM LAUER

Indeed, Flynn. The perils of democracy--  
America speaks with too many voices ever to  
amount to anything...

MOVE TO Rebecca and Cole, just arriving from opposite  
directions, both on horseback. He wears hunting attire, she  
not. They come together, rein in their horses. There is intense  
chemistry between them, but always unspoken. They jab at one  
another instead.

REBECCA

You think running with the hounds wise,  
good sir? I think of that hip of yours,  
bouncing about.

COLE

My hip is just fine, thank you.

He glances at several ministers side by side on horseback,  
engaged in heated argument.

COLE

But this endless political drivel  
everywhere we go these days -  
that brings great pain. Though I  
see you take to it quite well.

Cole slips a wooden cane out of a rifle holster affixed to his  
saddle and slides off his horse, deftly distributing the impact  
of his feet hitting the ground between his good leg and the cane.  
He then moves about briskly, a slight limp notwithstanding.

Rebecca also dismounts, just by a tree. Retrieves the bonnet  
hanging there.

An elderly, arthritic STABLEMAN (McCORMICK) silently appears,  
collects their two horses. Cole and Rebecca stroll toward  
Graham Lauer and Flynn.

REBECCA

I much prefer political debate to a mob of men  
shooting down an  
unarmed fox.

COLE

Now and again the fox gets clean away,  
Rebecca. Politicians are always with us...

Cole and Rebecca reach Graham Lauer and Flynn. Flynn gives

Rebecca a broad smile as he moves toward her, subtly displacing Cole.

FLYNN

Cousin dear, it's nearly noon and you  
and I have yet to visit with Cyril and Edgar.  
Poor Cyril, for one, can hardly stand it.

(To Father, Cole)

Won't you excuse us.

Rebecca glances at Cole, then takes Flynn's arm as he whisks her away.

TRAVELING

Flynn/Rebecca, arm in arm. PASSING LADIES smile at Flynn and receive a courtly nod.

FLYNN

See there? Cyril's straining his eyes  
terribly, trying to keep you in sight.

REBECCA

Oh, he is not...

FLYNN

Of course he is. There - see how he looks at you?

REBECCA

Yes. No--how does he look at me?

FLYNN

Like he hasn't eaten in four days.  
Rebecca shakes her head.

REBECCA

He'd quickly find me an acquired taste.

FLYNN

(smiling)

Apparently one that many have long  
acquired -- none more than myself.

(beat)

When will you take me seriously,  
Rebecca?

REBECCA

Perhaps when you start to take yourself  
seriously, dear cousin.

As they approach Cyril and Edgar, Rebecca catches Cyril staring.

He blushes and looks away.

CUT BACK TO:

GRAHAM LAUER/COLE

Cole's eyes are glued to Flynn and Rebecca, together incandescent in the sunlight.

GRAHAM LAUER

Your brother tells me you have my factory all in a tizzy again. What is it this time?

No response. Cole's attention lies elsewhere.

GRAHAM LAUER

Cole?

Cole turns to his father.

COLE

What, sir? Oh--my new gear shift. We begin production Monday.

GRAHAM LAUER

"Gear shift."

COLE

You remember my telling you, father--first it trades power for speed to climb the hills, then shifting back for the straightaway...

GRAHAM LAUER

Complications. More complications. Something else to break down. Keep it simple, son. (Reminiscing) A horse and carriage--elegant in its simplicity, utterly reliable...

COLE

But like it or no, sir, transport today means motor cars. Lorries. If the Lauer Motorworks is to survive we must innovate...

GRAHAM LAUER

Trouble is, you need a mechanic riding right along with you if you hope to get back

home in one of those things. Now when I was in charge, even--even a woman could take any one of our carriages, harness it to a good horse...

COLE

The best horse gets old. It can get sick. (Meaningfully) It can fall, Father. And if it should stop dead, you can't climb under and fix it. I'm afraid the future dictates that we...

GRAHAM LAUER

Son, I've trouble enough with present indignities.

With a squint he glances down at his tremulous hand.

GRAHAM LAUER

Please don't expect me to cope with the future.

An arm on his son's shoulder.

GRAHAM LAUER

The future is your responsibility, my boy.

CUT TO:

ESTATE GROUNDS

MINUTES LATER.

In the far background, Graham Lauer chats with Louise, a minister, and TWO MIDDLE-AGED MEN in army officer's uniform. Other guests mill about. Servants pass amongst them offering champagne, crumpets, etc.

ON Cole, as he joins Rebecca, Flynn, Cyril and Edgar.

REBECCA

Our King and the Kaiser are cousins, for heavens sakes. They'd never go to war. Would they?

COLE

(pointedly)

Cousins don't always see eye to eye.

CYRIL

You know, a short, patriotic war would be a fine thing. Civilization seems to need one now and again.

EDGAR

Flushes out the sewers.

REBECCA

Good Lord...!

FLYNN

He does have a point, Rebecca. Forests would die without a roaring fire every fifty years to clear the undergrowth.

EDGAR

Put the Germans in their place, give England a healthy purge...

REBECCA

Young men dying--a healthy purge?

CYRIL

Oh come. There's all that noise and smoke and mucking about, but few actually get hurt. It's the exhilarating possibility of death, Rebecca, you see--therein lies the virtue of war.

A Tuxedoed servant glides by with a tray--Cyril and Edgar both thirstily exchange empty champagne flutes for full ones.

Flynn removes, cleans his spectacles.

FLYNN

Funny thing. The Germans in my club--doubt you'd find a gentler, more scholarly group of men...

EDGAR

Perhaps. But time their Kaiser was taught a lesson.

CYRIL

Poor fellow. Up against the world's strongest navy...

REBECCA

Yes, another obscene waste. Thousands of our people with no place to live but the streets, so England builds more dreadnoughts...

COLE

(quietly)

I quite agree, Rebecca...

REBECCA

You agree? With me?

COLE

Yes. All those ships. A waste of money. Dreadnoughts don't win wars.

FLYNN

(smiling)

So won't you tell us, general. How does one win a war?

REBECCA

Flynn, don't get him started...

COLE

(evenly)

With men. Masses of men. You throw your infantry against the enemy at his weakest point and kill more of him...

REBECCA

Barbaric...

COLE

...than he of you. You hit them while they're down. You raze their towns. Burn factories and crops, starve their women and children till their army loses its will to fight.

REBECCA

God...!

COLE

That's how you win a war. It's not a bloody tea party.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE--DUSK

Rebecca alone on her horse, cantering up a gentle knoll.

She reins her horse in at the top, surveys the still glowing

fields and meadows stretching out below into the velvet twilight. Behind her a full moon is rising--a huge golden ball.

For a moment she listens to a NIGHTINGALE compete with the CRICKETS. Then she spurs her horse to a wild gallop, every bit as reckless as Cole.

EXT. STABLE--NIGHT

By the light of her lantern, Rebecca puts her horse in for the night, closes the stall gate--and is startled to see a second lantern approaching.

COLE

Rebecca-is that you?

REBECCA

Good evening, Cole. Taking over for McCormick?

COLE

I'm afraid McCormick's finally showing his age--either he didn't see he'd left Prancer saddled last night, or just forgot. Again.

REBECCA

So now it's your job to follow up.

COLE

(gruffly)

He's been with us more than fifty years. We could hardly let him go.

Rebecca smiles at his ill-concealed sentimentality.

REBECCA

Surely not.

TRAVELING

Cole/Rebecca, walking side by side, lanterns in hand.

COLE

Riding rather late.

REBECCA

I was. The air--so warm and sweet. One might ride all night.

COLE

Yes. You actually can feel the softness everywhere around you...

REBECCA

Can you?

COLE

As if it were the tropics.

REBECCA

Why I'd no idea you noticed that sort of thing.

COLE

What sort of thing?

REBECCA

Appeals to the senses. Romantic nuances. Like soft air...

COLE

Quite so. Not only am I lame, I'm very nearly numb, deaf and blind. Miraculous I manage to get around at all.

REBECCA

Now Cole, I wasn't suggesting...

COLE

True. You don't suggest. You always say what you think straight out. Never the least bit ambiguous. Essential, I suppose, when conversing with a dimwit like me who's no ear for nuance.

REBECCA

Oh come now, Cole.

They continue to walk. She places a fond hand on his arm.

REBECCA (Cont'd)

Sorry if I offended you.

No response.

REBECCA

(continuing, cheerfully)

Alright, truth to tell, I'm not sorry at all.

COLE

Didn't think so.

REBECCA

I confess. I enjoy getting a militant rise out of you.

COLE

A strange entertainment. For a ardent pacifist.

REBECCA

It's only play, for heaven's sakes. Everyone likes to play. Why, even you used to like to play once upon a time. Even played with me. You remember--you and I, the tree house, and what we did that Sunday morning. It was your fifteenth birthday, I believe.

They reach Rebecca's cottage. She stops. Cole continues on along the path to the main house.

COLE

We were children, Rebecca. Good night.

REBECCA

(smiling broadly)

Good night, Cole.

She enters her cottage.

Cole stops, turns and looks back longingly towards Rebecca's cottage as its lights go on, then shakes his head and continues on his way.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ANGLO-GERMAN GOETHE CLUB--NIGHT

Two dozen boisterous YOUNG MEN in 24 tall chairs -- almost thrones -- grouped around a massive, wooden rectory table. It sits in the center of a high ceilinged, burnished wood-panelled room, redolent with bronze, velvet, and leather; heavy drapes; oriental rugs; a carved balustrade.

On the walls are portraits of King George V, the Kaiser, Goethe, Wagner, Heine, Kipling, Hagel, Nietzsche, Schopenhaur, and other luminaries of Europe's late romantic period.

Though summertime, enormous logs burn and crackle in the huge fireplace. Ceramic steins, each emblazoned with the face of a great 19th century intellectual, sit atop the jade mantel.

Like steins are in the hands of the celebrants, who include Flynn, DICKIE, FRITZ, and SIGGI, all of them in their mid to late twenties/early thirties, and all in their cups. About two thirds are English--though fluent in German--and the remainder German, though speaking barely accented English.

Throughout, the dialogue plays briskly over the loud, AMBIENT AD LIB CONVERSATION and LAUGHTER, the inebriated speakers stepping on each other's lines.

FLYNN

"Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also." As Goethe said: (in German) "He who respects himself renounces the right to assault others."

SIGGI

(in English, with a slight German accent)  
Ah, but then Shakespeare: "Had I had a dozen sons, I'd rather eleven die nobly for their country than one survive in hiding."

FRITZ

(beginning in German)  
There'll be no fighting, gentlemen.  
(switching to English)  
Our Germany is a land of poetry and peace. Inconceivable we'd ever go to war--and over Serbia! A trivial, far away place...

FLYNN

And all the Kaiser's promises?  
All your alliances, treaties...?

FRITZ

Paper. Pieces of paper. Most Germans have never heard of Serbia, let alone know where to find it. Picture the Kaiser's army stumbling, searching blindly about Europe. "'Scuse me--can you point out the road to Serbia?"

DICKIE

(very tipsy and tuning in late,  
accent conspicuously British  
upper class)

Serbia--northern India, n'est ce pas?

SIGGI

Northern India!? This may come as a shock,  
old fellow, but there are still parts of the  
world, large parts which remain well  
outside the bloody British Empire...

FLYNN

For the moment, perhaps...

DICKIE

(ponderously)

Well, no matter that the world goes  
up in flames. We, the Goethe Anglo-  
German Society shall remain immutably a  
peaceful island of civilization.

The group AD LIBS agreement.

SIGGI

(emphatic)

Quite so--in fact, I should like to drink  
to that--in fact (standing), I propose a  
toast...

GROUP

(ad lib overlap)

...Yes, a toast!  
God, another toast? It's his third...

FRITZ

Fourth, I believe...

SIGGI

...to world civilization...

FRITZ

Ach der lieber! "World civilization," yet...

FLYNN

(overlapping)

German imperialism in full flower...

FRITZ

And just how does it happen that "the  
sun never sets on the British Empire...?"

FLYNN  
 Damn good thing. Who'd trust an Englishman  
 after dark...?

Siggi raises his stein and his voice.

SIGGI  
 (overlapping)  
 ...the burden of civilized men to  
 suffer barbarians and vandals...

GROUP  
 (overlap)  
 Down with barbarians and vandals!

SIGGI  
 (overlapping)  
 ...with the patience of Job. When  
 SIGGI  
 (continued)  
 blind nationalism stirs men's base instincts,  
 it is for all of us here, the philosophers,  
 the poets, the quiet thinkers of our generation,  
 to maintain the light of reason.

Grave nods of assent, save for one philosopher who collapses face  
 down on the table in a stupor.

GROUP  
 (a few ad libs)  
 Here, here!

Outside, distant BELLS begin to toll.

SIGGI  
Our sensibility will provide the beacon to  
 a humanity that has lost its way.

A SECOND SET OF BELLS--FAR CLOSER AND LOUDER--joins the first,  
 together almost drowning out Siggi's voice.

SIGGI (Cont'd, louder)  
 Our capacity to discover truth, to create  
 harmony--no national boundaries...

The heavy door to the club bursts open and TWO YOUNG MEMBERS dash  
 in.

YOUNG MEMBER 1  
 (breathless)  
 They've gone and done it...!

GROUP  
 (ad lib)  
 Who's done it?  
 Done what?

YOUNG MEMBER 1  
 It's started. The war...

YOUNG MEMBER 2  
 The Serbs, Russia, Germany, France--  
 all mobilizing...

YOUNG MEMBER 1  
 (overriding)  
 The King's called parliament into special  
 session. Tomorrow morning. England is  
 to declare war on Germany!

The British and German nationals, struck dumb, stare across the  
 table at each other.

Flynn is first to find his tongue.

FLYNN  
 (mildly)  
 Then, gentlemen, we needn't fight--till  
tomorrow.

He stands, raises his stein, and one by one looks into the faces  
 around him.

FLYNN (Cont'd)  
 As for tonight--to Deutschland!

ENTIRE GROUP  
 (standing)  
 Deutschland!

They drink.

SIGGI, FRITZ,  
 OTHER GERMANS  
 To England!

All drink again and, as if of one mind, hurl their steins into  
 the fireplace. Ceramic faces of Goethe and of the other  
 illustrious, contemplative men SHATTER.

INT. "LAUER'S LORRIES LTD."

A small 19th century factory, but with much evidence of Cole's 20th century modernization and expansion--shiny steel equipment welded to old cast iron structures, a new wing under construction.

Though now devoted to the engineering of trucks, two grand, carriages remain on display, one with "LAUER'S LIVERIES" emblazoned on its doors, the somewhat newer one with "LAUER & SONS LORRIES & LIVERIES."

COLE'S OFFICE

is just inside the front entrance, through a glass door. There, adjacent to a drafting table, sits the antique toy soldiers, forts and cannons with which the brothers had been playing twenty years before, dozens of little figures still set out carefully in mock battle. Cole's cane dangles from a corner of the table.

ON THE FACTORY FLOOR

Deserted, save for

Cole and his chief foreman, SAMUEL, sixties. They crouch together beneath a new truck undercarriage prototype. Both wear vests, their shirtsleeves rolled up, hands black with grease. Here, as always, Cole still wears a tie--its knot never loosened.

He gives a lug-nut one last turn of a wrench.

A DISTANT BELL TOLLS.

COLE

There. My father has a point, you know. Keep it simple. What if--what if we could somehow drive the front wheels, rid ourselves of all this drive-shaft linkage...

SAMUEL

Hard to get rotational traction pulling from the front...

COLE

Horses have been pulling carriages for hundreds of years. Suppose we--suppose coupled up all four wheels...?

OTHER BELLS join the first.

Both men stand, put down their tools.

SAMUEL  
 These lorries to deliver coal, Sir,  
 or climb mountains?

COLE  
 Just the very best design we can, Samuel--  
 what is all that racket?

He glances at a wall clock.

COLE  
 9:17...?

A wall phone in a wooden cabinet RINGS. Samuel answers.

SAMUEL  
 (shouting--a phone still  
 awkward for him)  
Hullo--yes, he's here...

Cole takes phone, listens impassively for several moments.  
 Then-

COLE (Cont'd)  
 Yes? When? I see.  
 (Beat)  
 Hardly a surprise.

He turns round and in his mind's eye sizes up the undercarriage  
 he and Samuel have been working on.

COLE  
 Yes, we can do that, sir.  
 (Beat)  
 Yes. I've been thinking along those--  
 (Beat)  
 Right.

He slowly hangs up the phone, the full import of what he's just  
 heard registering on his face. He turns to Samuel.

COLE  
 (continuing quietly)  
 Samuel, we're going to design a second  
 set of wheels for that rear axle. Seems it may  
 have to bear more weight  
 than we planned. Considerably more.

EXT. ROAD TO LONDON--DAY

Cole is driving Flynn in an open motor car.

COLE

Father very much wants to come back.  
to work. Help us convert to military  
production. It will be costly and  
difficult.

FLYNN

A good deal more difficult with  
father's help. Still fancies us coach-  
builders.

Cole nods.

COLE

(meaningfully)

I thought I might assure him we already  
had enough hands...

FLYNN

Em. That will be a problem. What with  
so many men enlisting--.

He gets Cole's drift.

FLYNN (Cont'd)

No, Cole...

COLE

Work with me for six months. A  
year at most.

FLYNN

Not withstanding I've neither appetite nor  
affection for machinery, it even less for me...

COLE

I can handle the engineering. It's those--  
other problems. You're so effortless with  
people. They take to you. I'm not much  
use at...

FLYNN

You might want to try a bit of tact.  
Every so often. Just as an experiment...

COLE

"Tact"--saying one thing to a man's face  
when you heartily believe another?

FLYNN

(suppressing smile)

Umm. I see where that might not work...

COLE

(bitterly)

I should be leading troops in this war,  
not struggling to get some mechanic  
to come to work sober.

(Beat)

Tell me, Flynn. What would you have done  
if, years ago, I'd been able to go off  
with father's regiment? Before that bloody  
horse...

FLYNN

(sighing)

I'd have gritted my teeth, taken over the  
plant. And Lauer & Sons would still be  
turning out London's finest horse-drawn  
carriages. But, thank the Lord,  
you're in charge here at home. And as  
things stand--I was waiting to tell  
you--seems there is a fine place in this  
war for a patriotic fellow like me.

COLE

Ah, the Red Cross seeks a violinist to  
entertain the nurses...

FLYNN

(exuberant)

A place in the Scully fusiliers, 3rd  
infantry. Little did you know--all this  
morning you've been motoring with one  
Flynn Lauer, 2nd Lieutenant. Straight  
away I shall be marching merrily off  
to France with the rest of the lads.

COLE

(Beat)

You -- you've enlisted?!

Flynn grins, nods.

COLE

Flynn, you've never in your life so much as shot a quail. What in heaven's name...?

FLYNN

You've always pulled most of the weight for this family, Cole.

(smiles)

Time to do my part. For King and country.

Cole searches for words. Finally--

COLE

Well, with you there at the front, a quick victory is assured.

FLYNN

Oh? For which side?

EXT. LONDON STREET

They pull up in front of the Fabian Society, a genteel storefront in a two story brick building. Up and down the street, war posters--ridiculing the Kaiser, appealing for enlistment--are slapped on windows and walls, nailed to every pole.

But the Fabian Society is conspicuous for their absence, its facade unsigned save for a brass plate: *DEDICATED TO THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN.*

Cole lets the engine idle.

COLE

When do you go?

FLYNN

Tomorrow morning, actually.

COLE

So soon...

FLYNN

I'm leaving with Dickie and Cyril. They'll be collecting us all at dawn.

He smiles.

FLYNN

Don't look so morose, little brother. They say this war shall be the end of war.

COLE  
 Emm. Certainly for those killed.  
 (Beat)  
 Flynn, you may not fully realize--.  
 I hope--.  
 (A new thought)  
 Does--does Rebecca...?

Flynn shakes his head "no."

FLYNN  
 This little luncheon.

COLE  
 Ah. Right. A bit of battle experience.  
 To prepare you for those nasty Germans.

FLYNN  
 She'll come round.

Cole shakes his head dubiously.

FLYNN  
 Well, doesn't matter. It's not--it's not  
 as if she were--as if she and I--.

Flynn CLEARS HIS THROAT, rises and leaves the vehicle. He looks back at Cole.

FLYNN  
 Sure you won't join us?

Cole shakes his head.

COLE  
 I, er, must get back. A new  
 bottleneck to wrestle with. Last week  
 it was steel cable. Today it's plating.

He gives Flynn an exaggerated salute--which Flynn returns--then shifts into gear and drives off. Flynn smiles and watches after him for a moment, then turns and enters the building.

COLE'S PHAETON

Cole's jaw is set as he blinks rapidly, fighting to hold back tears.

INT. FABIAN SOCIETY

A busy, cluttered office. Large, framed portraits of George Bernard Shaw and Karl Marx on the wall, along with a banner reading "LAW--NOT WAR." Socialist political posters, papers and cards are stacked on a large table. A MIMEOGRAPH MACHINE RUMBLES in the next room.

FIVE WOMEN bustle about, two wearing armbands that read "WAR: ENRICHES CAPITAL/KILLS LABOR."

Rebecca enters, an ink-smudge on her nose.

REBECCA

You're on time!

FLYNN

Sorry. Wasn't I supposed to be?

REBECCA

You're never on time.

FLYNN

Cole brought me.

REBECCA

Ah yes--the family stopwatch.

Flynn looks around.

FLYNN

Socialism seems to be prospering...

REBECCA

We all have trust funds. Er -- give me just a moment please -

Taking off apron--

REBECCA

You did say Savoy Grill?

FLYNN

I did. Wait...

He takes his breast handkerchief and wipes the ink off her nose, shows her the dark smudge on the cloth --

FLYNN (Cont'd)

The fortunes of peace.

He aims a kiss at her mouth but she demurely turns her face slightly and he lands on her cheek.

INT. SAVOY GRILL

Through the gilded, beveled glass and past the potted palms and silver serving carts we see

FLYNN AND REBECCA AT A TABLE

She's eating, he's talking.

Then slowly she puts down her fork, looks up, stares at him as we move toward them to within earshot.

FLYNN

...it'll be over by Christmas.

REBECCA

You don't know that.

FLYNN

It's common knowledge...

REBECCA

All of you think this is a sort of romantic lark, living out some glorious sonnet...

FLYNN

No. It could be an ugly, dangerous business...

REBECCA

Then how can you support it? How can you go off all the way to France to shoot some --some poor German baker who's done you no harm?

FLYNN

(gently)

I'm an Englishman, Rebecca, and those German bakers--or at least the fellows who order them about--mean England great harm. Their atrocities in Belgium...

REBECCA

Oh posh! War propaganda. Your German friends (remembering)--Fritz, Siggi--they're probably over there obediently cleaning their rifles because of the same sort of rubbish.

FLYNN

I'm sure they're doing what they believe has to be done.

(Beat)

I'm profoundly sorry, Rebecca. Our family must do its share. Cole, of course, can't go...

REBECCA

(overlapping)

You mean you have to kill your share.

FLYNN

It might not come to...

REBECCA

That's right. It might not. You could get killed first.

She catches her breath, takes her napkin and blots tears that are welling up.

REBECCA

Oh Lord!

She abruptly rises, her chair SCRAPING back loudly.

REBECCA

Well go ahead then, if you're so bloody eager. But I don't want to see it. I don't want to know about it. I don't want to hear a blessed word from you till you're--you're through playing soldier and you've come back. I only hope to God you do come back...!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. REBECCA'S COTTAGE--NIGHT

Low ceilings. Simple. Neat.

Rebecca sits in an alcove, knitting furiously.

A thought stabs through her brain. The knitting needles stop. She closes her eyes, rests her head against the back of her chair.

A soft KNOCK.

She opens her eyes.

Another KNOCK.

EXT. DOOR TO REBECCA'S COTTAGE

Rebecca opens the door and finds Flynn on the threshold. Wordlessly, she looks at him, her face solemn.

FLYNN

I'll be leaving quite early tomorrow.

No response.

FLYNN

Wanted you to have this--I've put my  
best poems together--well,  
(smiling)  
I think they're my best.

He offers her an slender, leather-bound handmade binder. Rebecca looks at it.

FLYNN

Please. As a favor to me.

REBECCA

Do I owe you any favors?

FLYNN

Course not. I am eternally in your  
debt. This can be yet another on account.  
These poems--today I realized they're  
all about you--one way or another.

She nods, accepts the book. He bends, kisses her forehead. Turns to go. She catches his sleeve.

REBECCA

Wait. Not--not yet.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COLE'S BEDROOM--DAWN

A large room, spartan furnishing.

Cole jerked rudely awake by the JANGLING of his alarm clock.

He silences it with a SLAP of his palm, leaves his bed, grabs a cane from the headboard, exits the room, pads a bit stiffly

DOWN THE HALL into

FLYNN'S BEDROOM

Book-lined, fine paintings, a violin and cello, a gramophone, nature collections in display cases.

COLE

Flynn?

Flynn's bed appears unslept in. An open closet is half empty. Cole is puzzled.

He hears a TRUCK outside, looks out the window.

A flatbed truck with a DOZEN MEN piled in back pulls into the driveway at the far end of the property, where a two room cottage sits. A light inside is lit.

COLE'S P.O.V.:

The front door of the cottage opens and Flynn dashes out, duffel in hand. He stops, turns, and runs back in a few feet to embrace and kiss Rebecca who's come to stand in the doorway.

Cole goes ashen.

He watches Flynn toss his duffel to the men in truck, then leap aboard. The truck, its headlights fading in the apricot dawn, starts off again. Cole and Rebecca stare after it.

Abruptly Cole turns from the window, bends his knee and brings his cane down sharply across his good thigh. The wood SNAPS in two.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WAR DEPARTMENT/OFFICE OF SENIOR RECRUITING OFFICER--DAY

COLONEL HALIFAX, fifties, his back to the door of his office, gazes through an open third story window down to the feverish activity in

THE STREET BELOW--

P.O.V.: SOLDIERS in spanking new uniforms; ENLISTEES coming and going from the building entrance GREETING their COMRADES as they pass; boisterous, congratulatory clumps of euphoric CITIZENS; a BRASS RECRUITING BAND, BLOWING at the top of its lungs; a blizzard of Union Jacks.

BACK ON OFFICE

The door opens and Cole enters.

Halifax neither hears him enter nor the door closing behind him.

COLE  
(loudly)

Morning, Sir!

Halifax turns with a start.

COLE  
Lauer, Sir. Cole Lauer...

COLONEL HALIFAX  
(nearly inaudible because of the  
raucous STREET NOISE)  
Lauer, yes of course. Been expecting you--  
just a minute--

He returns to the window and closes it, MUFFLING THE DIN.

COLONEL HALIFAX  
Look at them down there. You'd think we'd  
already won the war

He turns again to face Cole.

COLONEL HALIFAX  
Emm. You look much like your father. Not  
as tall perhaps. Please--

He points to a chair by his desk. Both men seat themselves as Halifax picks up a letter.

COLONEL HALIFAX

He's written me about your--problem. I do admire your spirit--the acorn never falls far from the tree. But--(looking down at the letter) I just don't see a way. I'm sorry. As I've written your father...

COLE

You're signing up 45-year-old men...

COLONEL HALIFAX

Fit 45-year-old men.

COLE

I'm extremely fit...

COLONEL HALIFAX

Of course. Except--.

(Beat)

A fall from a horse, I understand...

COLE

Yes--the left leg's a bit shorter than the right. I can still move it fast enough to get me to the Germans...

COLONEL HALIFAX

(not unkindly)

Regimental regulations simply do not permit us to...

COLE

Lord Nelson had one eye, Sir, as I recall.

COLONEL HALIFAX

(Beat)

Admirals don't have to march. Or run...

COLE

Should I prove a competent soldier and bag my share of Germans, the limp will matter little. Even less if I get myself killed.

COLONEL HALIFAX

Your logic is unassailable, but...

COLE

And in all due respect, Sir, nowhere in the regulations could I find any specification as to length-of-leg.

Halifax smiles a bit, CLEARS HIS THROAT.

COLONEL HALIFAX

No doubt you're entirely correct, Mr. Lauer. But be assured, both must be at least of the same length...

COLE

(doggedly)

The Germans would never know.

Halifax shakes his head "no."

COLONEL HALIFAX

Half the German army's mechanized you know. England must do the same. We need your skills. Badly. Right here. This war will be won as much in our factories as on the battlefield.

COLE

(Beat) Yes Sir.

Cole rises.

COLONEL HALIFAX

(haltingly)

I'm sure none of this seems--fair. It's more than a little apparent you'd have made a fine officer. Any regiment--any regiment would have been eager to--to have you--had you not...

He trails off as Cole abruptly turns, charges the door. Halifax shakes his head sadly as Cole storms out.

EXT. WAR DEPARTMENT/STREET

Moments later.

Cole jostles his way through a massive pulsing CROWD streaming against him:

loudly enthusiastic SOLDIERS, some in full uniform and carrying duffels, others still half outfitted;

long lines of exuberant ENLISTEES flanked by flag-waving

moral SUPPORTERS whose CHEERS compete effectively with the BAND nearby;

a small but spirited war-bond PARADE, replete with CAVALRY contingent;

and any remaining bit of space crowded with patriotic CELEBRANTS.

On every shop window, pole and doubledecker bus, recruiting posters shout: "ENLIST NOW!" And "GO!" And "YOUR KING NEEDS YOU.!"

The CAMERA cranes up as an ever smaller Cole disappears beneath waves of humanity sweeping joyously to war.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLANDERS (NORTHERN FRANCE)--DAWN.

First light, grey and clammy, breaks over a vast wasteland devoid of all vegetation save for a few charred tree stumps. Here and there a shattered chimney marks the place a farmhouse once stood.

O.C.: Intermittent, distant ARTILLERY, occasional WHINNY OF A HORSE, BRAYING OF A MULE.

A new PLATOON of young British Expeditionary Force infantry, Lieutenant Flynn Lauer at the head, SERGEANT-MAJOR, about 40, leather-tough, by his side. They march along the muddy road through the desolation, past shattered trunks of once-stately poplars that had lined the road. They skirt a shell-smashed truck, then a dead artillery horse, upended, stomach swollen, hooves pointing heavenward in supplication.

SERGEANT

All you lads' first day at the front,  
Lieutenant?

FLYNN

Not a one has yet to fire a gun in anger.  
Is it that obvious?

SERGEANT

Heh, pretty much, Sir. Y'ere all so spiffy  
clean. But it's the eyes, mostly--

Looking straight at Flynn --

SERGEANT  
 (continuing, matter-of-factly)  
 Still bright and cheery. Don't see no  
 death in there yet.

Flynn, taken aback, is silent for a moment. Then-

FLYNN  
 How--how long for you, Sergeant-Major?

SERGEANT  
 (proudly)  
 Practically the day it started, Sir. We  
 was the first Tommies to land in France.

FLYNN  
 I feel fortunate having so experienced  
 a man...

SERGEANT  
 Yes, Sir. I'll look after you like  
 you was me own son.

Flynn glances at the sergeant's insignia--the 347th.

FLYNN  
 But why--may I ask, Sergeant--why'd you  
 transfer out from the 347th--to this green  
 unit?

SERGEANT  
 Didn't.

FLYNN  
 Didn't?

SERGEANT  
 Didn't transfer. 347th's gone. 'Cept  
 Cecil, Scooter, and Miles and me. Wiped out on the  
 Somme. Then they 'ad to stick the four of us what was left  
 somewhere.  
 Could 'ardly fight Jerry all by ourselves.

FLYNN  
 An entire battalion...

SERGEANT  
 It 'appens. We Tommies stick together, you  
 know. Major says: "Over the top," over the  
 top we go. To a man.

(He smiles)

'Ceptin' the major, of course. 118 men  
goin' over. Just us four came back.

FLYNN

Christ! That's...

The sergeant shrugs, smiles.

SERGEANT

'At's alright.  
(Looking off into the distance)  
We do the same to them.

FRONT LINES

The platoon marches up to a long, zigzag trench roughly eight feet deep, manned by battleworn CAREER BRITISH SOLDIERS at about ten foot intervals.

SERGEANT

Platoon halt!

(to Flynn)

Suggest, sir, you move 'em in, quickly,  
single file. Heads down 'ere on out. Jerries'll  
be watching for those shiny new 'elmets, ya know.

FLYNN

Right.

(Shouting)

Platoon! Move out! Ahead single file!  
Stay low!

Flynn's men scramble down into and along the trench, passing the settled positions of the other troops, little older, but already aged, grizzled--perhaps there is death in their silent, impassive gaze.

FLYNN

Fill in the gaps.

Flynn and the sergeant follow down the trench. Where Flynn finds several of his new arrivals bunched together, he intersperses experienced soldiers in amongst them. The sergeant approves, helps Flynn shuffle the men evenly.

SERGEANT

Sorry but you couldn't 'ave come at  
a worse time, ya know.

FLYNN  
(alarmed)

Why--are you--are we expecting an attack?

The sergeant shakes his head.

SERGEANT

No such luck, Sir. Mostly we're real keen for Fritzi to come calling now and again. Breaks up the boredom, know what I'm saying? Nope - it's time for breakfast.

Grimacing he points to a MESS CORPORAL threading his way through the trench, ladling gruel onto each man's tin plate. He serves Flynn, then the sergeant.

Flynn takes a cautious taste.

FLYNN

Ugh! Insufferable! They told us they save their best food for the front.

The sergeant mechanically wolfs his down --

SERGEANT

This 'ere is their best.

CUT TO:

FLANDERS TRENCH

A LITTLE LATER

A thick mist. THUNDER heralds a light but chilling rain. No protection from the elements save a few makeshift oilcloth lean-tos. The new men shrink into their uniforms, the seasoned soldiers seem indifferent.

SERGEANT

Don't look so glum, Sir. This 'ere rain. 'At's good.

FLYNN

(with a shiver)

The rain is terrible.

SERGEANT

No. 'At's good, Sir. The Jerries--they're partial to attackin' in the rain. (A sardonic smile.) Accordin' as they can't see us, they think we won't see 'em.

Flynn peers warily out over the top of the trench. The dark sky, rain and mist have coalesced into impenetrable gloom.

FLYNN

And they're goddamn right. You can't see ten yards out there...

SERGEANT

Don't matter, Sir. We 'ear 'em. And when they get close--if they get close--we'll see 'em well enough.

CUT TO:

FLANDERS TRENCH

HOURS LATER

Rain now falling hard. Soaked, shivering men knee-deep in mud and water.

A LOUD CRACK announces the opening of an artillery barrage. SHELLS WHISTLE AND HISS invisibly overhead.

SERGEANT

(winking)

Seems we're in luck. The Boche are real--how would you say? Sys-tem-at-ic. Forty minutes of shells. To soften us up. Then we all get to practice our German...

A huge shell EXPLODES quite nearby. The sergeant doesn't flinch, but notes Flynn's concern.

SERGEANT

Overfusing again. Their new guns 'ave too much range--bludy shells must land two miles behind us. (He laughs) Beating the bejesus outta GHQ, I 'ope. Now--ya 'ear that sound? (Imitating) whoosh-bang!

Two shells accommodatingly go WHOOSH-BANG overhead.

SERGEANT

(continuing, with malignant cheerfulness)

Them's big ones. Don't worry 'bout those. But the small ones -- them's meant just for us. From the Jerries' old cannons. They go "pitter-pitter-pitter-bang." You 'ear

"pitter-pitter," drop flat on the ground!  
No time to run. On 'is good days a Boche  
gunner can drop one right on top of you.

CUT TO:

FLANDERS TRENCH

PRECISELY FOURTY MINUTES LATER

Flynn checks his watch. Abruptly, the shelling stops.

Sergeant readies rifle, nods to Flynn.

FLYNN  
(ordering)

Ready to fire.

DISTANT ORDERS TO STAND READY echo dimly along the entire trench  
line. Then SILENCE.

ON FACES OF THE MEN one by one as they shoulder their weapons:  
Flynn's troops tense, the others alert but impassive.

Quiet.

Waiting.

A SQUEALING wave of rats pours over the trench wall. The new  
soldiers, startled, horrified, fend off the frenetic animals  
with rifle butts; the old troops scarcely blink.

The rats scatter down trench, then up the other side, and  
disappear.

SERGEANT

All them Bosch footsteps coming this way.  
Scares the rats.

(Smiles)

Or maybe rats just don't take to Germans neither.

FLYNN  
(straining his eyes)

I don't see...

The sergeant nods, puts a finger over his mouth.

O.C., the muffled SOUND OF MOVEMENT, then a few INDISTINCT WORDS  
OF GERMAN, several clear EXPLETIVES.

SERGEANT

(softly)

They're at the wire.

CLICK OF WIRE CUTTERS, more GERMAN WORDS, closer now. Closer. Then--

Shattering BRITISH MACHINE-GUN FIRE--not the rapid, smooth sound of today's automatic weapons but a slow, coarse RAT-TAT-TAT.

CRIES IN GERMAN.

Flynn and his troops peer anxiously over the trench--and still see nothing. The "older" men wait patiently.

Ten seconds pass. Twenty.

The grey-green, helmeted figure of a GERMAN SOLDIER looms out of the mist, then TWO more, then DOZENS, walking, trotting, staggering, hunched over, bayoneted rifles extended in front of them. The British, bolt upright, begin FIRING their rifles, the new troops wildly, the seasoned men with care and deadly precision.

The first advancing Germans fall but those behind are more numerous and come faster, FIRING as they charge. Legs, SHOTS, bellies and chests. SHOTS. Wounds. SHOTS. CRIES. Blood.

All the attackers are cut down before they can reach Flynn's trench.

The shooting stops. SILENCE.

ON Flynn's men, stunned, breathing heavily.

The seasoned troops calmly reload.

Flynn looks on either side of him down the trench at his men--a few, very few, have been hit. He starts to move toward the nearest of the wounded, but the sergeant grabs his arm --

SERGEANT

Second wave. Better fix bayonets.

FLYNN

Er, right. Fix bayonets!

SERGEANT

And remember, if yer bayonet gets stuck in a man, Lieutenant, just fire a round. It'll shake loose.

MACHINE-GUN FIRE starts again as a thicker LINE OF GERMANS advances across the sucking mud. Flynn's men frantically reload, fix bayonets. The older troops start FIRING.

A single GERMAN reaches the trench, towers over Flynn, rifle pointed straight down at him. Flynn freezes--the German seems little more than a boy.

A RIFLESHOT--the sergeant's bullet slams into the German's brow.

As he falls, OTHER GERMANS reach the trench--leap down upon the British. Hand to hand combat--bayonets, rifle butts.

TIGHT ON Flynn, we see no fighting but HEAR the SOUNDS of deadly SCUFFLING, THRUSTING bayonets, PISTOL SHOTS, the GRUNTS, GROANS, SHOUTS and CRIES of desperate exertion. Flynn's face registers fear, fascination, shock.

But the Germans are too few and already spent--in moments the battle is over.

Several last GROANS, then a stillness settles over the shaken men.

The Sergeant cocks an ear, peers cautiously over the lip of the trench.

SERGEANT

Seems Fritzi's about done, Lieutenant.

(Beat)

Lieutenant?

Flynn snaps back.

FLYNN

Wha? Yes. All--all right. Bugler, please sound the "all clear."

A few yards from Flynn a still tremulous young SOLDIER puts a bugle to his lips. Mouth too dry. Not so much as a squeak. He blows. Blows again. Not a sound.

SERGEANT

(to bugler)

Sonny, why don'tcha trot on down through the trench and just tell 'em.

CUT TO:

INT. FACTORY: "LAUER'S LORRIES LTD."--DAY

CLOSE ON repeating rifle affixed to a tripod, aimed at a steel plate thirty yards away. ANGLE WIDENS to include Cole in a long grey work coat behind the rifle, and TWO ASSISTANTS standing on either side of the armour plate.

Behind the three men an assembly line hums, well advanced from the custom factory we saw earlier. We glimpse construction of prototypes for a massive troop transport truck, an ambulance, two-wheeled artillery carriages, and a primitive experimental jeep, all already in army green.

Everywhere WORKERS are efficiently in motion.

Cole FIRES the rifle. The bullet penetrates the armour plate through to the other side.

COLE

All right.

His two assistants angle the plate a few degrees. Step aside. Cole FIRES the rifle again. This time the plate stops the bullet.

COLE

Another half degree should deflect the bullet entirely.

Wearily the men tilt the plate slightly--been at this all day.

BOBBIE, a teenage delivery boy, arrives. Hands Cole a letter, dashes O.C.

COLE

Let's take a short break, gentlemen.

The two men rush off before Cole gives them something else to do.

Cole opens the letter and starts to read, is interrupted by Samuel who shows him something on a clipboard. Cole nods his approval, then returns to the letter.

FLYNN (OVER)

It's a bloody mess, Cole. They run us through barbed wire and across no-man's-land. Sometimes we gain a thousand yards or so but it costs us as much as a quarter of our strength. Then it's the Germans' turn. More often than not they take the thousand yards

FLYNN

(continued)

right back, but we kill them by the hundreds. Then we're up again. This month we've exchanged the same worthless piece of ground five times...

A WORKMAN comes up to Cole with a bit of machinery in hand. Gives it to Cole who stands, measures it against a protractor he slips from his breast pocket.

COLE

Does that look symmetrical to you?

WORKMAN

Yes sir. In a way...

COLE

It doesn't to me. Please do it over.

WORKMAN

We just done it over, Sir.

Cole returns the part to the workman, and still holding Flynn's letter, pulls a small pad out of his pocket, jots down a few figures, tears out the sheet. Hands it to the workman.

COLE

Do it over again--this time perfectly. You've plenty of practice now.

The workman hurries away. Cole shouts after him--

COLE

There are lives at stake, Ridley.

He shakes his head.

COLE

(sotto voce)

Futile.

Returning to Flynn's letter:

FLYNN (OVER)

And then the shelling. Incessant. Day and night. We just sit in the trench and take it. Neither side has any strategy--except to force a breakthrough. But there are never any breakthroughs. Jerries' defenses are too strong. So are ours.

FLYNN

It's deadlock, with thousands dying, for nothing. I fear for my men. For all of them, it's just a matter of time.

Cole lowers the letter. Stares at the rifle balanced on its tripod. Gives it a hard SLAP. The rifle spins round and round...

O.C. a clock CHIMES.

INT. LAUER DINING ROOM--NIGHT

A grandfather clock CHIMES eight times.

A large panelled room, its incandescent lights supplemented by candles.

Graham Lauer, Rebecca, and her mother (Louise) grouped at the end of huge dining table. A place is set at an empty chair to Graham's left, directly opposite Rebecca. No food as yet. The three sit in silence, each in his or her thoughts.

CUT TO:

LAUER DINING ROOM

A half hour later. The clock CHIMES once. The family continues to wait patiently, plates empty.

Cole rushes in.

COLE

Dreadfully sorry. So many things happen at the last minute--.

He takes his seat.

CUT TO:

LAUER DINING ROOM

The candles are melted down. The four finish dinner with the aid of TWO SERVANTS, one bringing the last course, the other collecting dishes and pouring more wine. Cole drinks only water.

GRAHAM LAUER  
(an old story)

...And can you point to one "improvement"--  
one single change in the last 20 years that  
hasn't in honest fact made life measurably  
worse?

REBECCA  
Well just offhand, you might say the  
telephone--

COLE  
Telegraph?

GRAHAM LAUER  
(dismissive)  
Bad news arrives a bit sooner. I'm in  
no hurry.

SERVANT ONE  
(to Graham Lauer)  
More port, Sir?

GRAHAM LAUER  
Thank you, Bates, no.

He raises his glass, still a quarter full, to eye level.

GRAHAM LAUER  
Wasn't very good. Surely, not  
Sandeman?

SERVANT ONE  
No sir. Wednesday was the last of it.

GRAHAM LAUER  
You should have told me. We'll lay in  
some more.

SERVANT ONE  
There's none to be had, Sir. (Pause)  
German blockade...

GRAHAM LAUER  
Ah yes. The blockade--

Setting down glass--

GRAHAM LAUER  
A small enough sacrifice, God knows...

For a moment his hand tremor increases sharply, and a pained, far away expression crosses his face. Then abruptly he forces his anxious thoughts out of mind and rises from the table.

GRAHAM LAUER (Cont'd)

Louise, might I interest you in another game of whist? The usual stakes.

LOUISE

(rising)

With pleasure, Graham. Thank you.

COLE

You're certainly reckless with my inheritance, Father.

REBECCA

(looking about)

Quite. If your father persists in playing cards with Mother every night, some day a very tiny percentage of this will all be yours.

LOUISE

Please, (blushing) Daisy-Rebecca. You're embarrassing me. They're just games of chance. My luck is sure to change.

GRAHAM LAUER

Yes. Tonight things will be different. I'd bet on it...

Graham and Louise leave as the servants clear the table, depart in turn, their trays laden.

Cole and Rebecca have the room to themselves. They sit in silence for several moments, studiously ignoring the currents between them. Then-

COLE

"Daisy-Rebecca." I suppose mothers never relinquish childhood names.

REBECCA

True. Mother chose "Rebecca." But I was father's "little flower," as he would put it, and he insisted on "Daisy." They rarely agreed on anything so I was stuck with both.

COLE

(amused)

Really. Your father's "little flower--."

REBECCA

When flowers are but small seedlings you cannot distinguish them from weeds.

Rebecca sips her wine, frowns.

REBECCA

This is pretty awful.

Cole shrugs.

COLE

I've little use for any of it. When I was about three years old I had my first glass. In India. It had been left out in the sun-- must have been close to boiling but it was sweet so I drank it all. Made me quite ill. Forever destroyed any possible taste for wine.

(Beat)

Curious how strong childhood feelings are still with you years later.

Their eyes meet. A long pause.

REBECCA

Yes.

(Beat)

Any news from...?

COLE

Three letters. Yesterday. They come like that. In clumps. Then nothing for weeks. I have them for you.

(A wry smile)

He always writes about the food--says if we were simply to load it into cannons and fire it at the Germans, they'd surrender at once.

(Turning somber)

And the generals: he says the generals know nothing.

REBECCA

Flynn doesn't tell me a bloody thing. Just his little jokes. I brought this--

Taking out a small packet:

REBECCA

--an advertisement he suggests I place in the Times.

(Reading):

"For rent, in choice area of Northern France-- this very compact combination bedroom/living room/kitchen, only 3 x 8. All modern inconveniences, especially gas and water. Just minutes from German tourist activities, excellent hunting and shooting. Current

REBECCA (Cont'd)

tenant eager to relocate."

(shaking head)

Incredible--he's over there in all that blood and muck and he's still able to...

Tears fill her eyes.

REBECCA

Cole, what in God's name is going to happen?

COLE

I don't know.

He rises from the table.

COLE

Seems it'll go on and on till one side or the other runs out of men. And any bugger who does his sums can see that this little island will run out first.

REBECCA

All so stupid. Why do they continue to...

COLE

(with a rueful smile)

A general can push a pencil across a map without a single casualty.

He sighs and moves to the fireplace, above which an old Enfield rifle is displayed.

COLE

It's the twentieth century--: there there must be some device, some-  
mechanism to give clear advantage,  
something to force a breakthrough,  
end the slaughter...

REBECCA

An honorable weapon...

COLE

Honorable? Yes--honorable--if it shortened  
the war. Before Flynn--before Flynn--.

He cannot finish.

REBECCA

(softly)

Of course.

Cole takes the rifle down, sights briefly along the barrel, puts  
it back.

COLE

But what--how--. I try this, I  
try that--nothing comes--nothing that  
hasn't been thought of before--and failed  
to make the slightest difference.

(SIGH)

Every day I feel more useless. Thrown  
to the ground again.

REBECCA

What matters is how often you get up.  
And you always get up again, Cole. Always.

She smiles at him.

Behind her a half moon shines through a window.

EXT. NEAR THE RIVER SOMME, NORTHERN FRANCE--NIGHT

A trench in the light of that same half moon, augmented by  
lanterns.

Flynn, now sporting a mustache and captain's bars, lectures a  
HANDFUL OF RECRUITS, their faces darkened with lamp black.  
Flynn holds a piece of barbed wire in one hand, a wire cutter  
in the other.

Distant artillery fire brightens the horizon. An occasional  
shell WHISTLES overhead. The recruits duck reflexively; Flynn  
seems oblivious. He holds up the barbed wire.

FLYNN

There are yards and yards of this  
between us and the Germans.

RECRUIT NO. 1 ("RALSTON")

Mean lookin' stuff, isn't it?

FLYNN

Quite. An invention of our clever American cousins.  
To keep their cattle penned, I believe.  
Thus far, their sole contribution to the war effort.  
Now you won't want to be dallying  
with it tomorrow morning when the Boche  
gunners can see you, so we'll be cutting  
a few lovely big boulevards through it  
tonight-

Demonstrating-

FLYNN (Cont'd)

--like--this. Soon as we're over the top,  
spread out. Keep down, but take care you  
don't get turned round in the dark.  
Can't have you going over to the Germans.  
Use Loos-or what's left of it--

He points to a glow on the horizon, a small town in flames--we  
can just make out the outline of a church, silhouetted by the  
fire behind.

FLYNN (Cont'd)

--to keep your bearings. Questions?

RECRUIT NO. 2 ("TINY")

What if they start shooting, Captain?

Tiny is well over six feet.

FLYNN

Duck and run, Tiny. Better a coward for a  
moment than dead for the rest of your life.  
You'll get your whack at them tomorrow.  
And remember, you hear the little shells  
coming--[get] flat on the ground.

All right, follow at ten second intervals.  
Ralston--right behind me. Tiny, bring up the  
rear. (He smiles, stands) For king and  
country--

--And slides up and out.

EXT. NO-MAN'S-LAND

AT THE WIRE, a jungle of razor-sharp fences and large loose wire coils.

Occasionally a distant shell burst enables us to better glimpse Flynn and, nearby, a few of his men scattered about, clipping, pulling, cutting away. They no sooner clear a small passageway in the wire when-

PITTER-BANG, PITTER-PITTER-BANG!

No-man's-land is illuminated by the FLASH of exploding shells. The sky, as if made of incandescent china, shatters on the troops below. All too well now we see Flynn's entire platoon and, here and there, the bloated CORPSE of a German soldier hanging from a tangle of wire.

The earth heaves, rolls, pitches, knocking men to the ground. Disinterred body parts fly from shallow graves.

A recruit is caught by a direct hit just as he's lifting a strand of wire--the smoke clears: only his hands, still grasping the wire, remain.

Two men duck behind a small mound. EXPLOSION. Deep shell hole. One man has vanished, the second spends the last moments of life watching his bowels tumbling out.

The men are panicking now, taking off every which way.

FLYNN

(shouting)

Going back! Quickly. This way. Keep,  
down! On your bellies.

CUT TO:

NO-MAN'S-LAND

SECONDS LATER.

Flynn and most of his men crawl and wriggle like frantic snakes, back toward safety.

But Recruit No. 1 is thrown up in the air by a shell EXPLODING a few yards away. He lands relatively unhurt but disoriented, staggers to his feet and starts running the wrong way. Gets tangled in wire. Frantically tries to pull loose.

Flynn turns to help, but before he can get five feet, a

MACHINE-GUN BURST riddles the entrapped man. His body goes limp on the wire. Flynn closes his eyes for a second, then starts crawling again to the British lines.

ON Tiny, huddled in a shell hole, too frightened to move. A huge BLAST a short distance away and an arm flops around his shoulder--Tiny almost jumps out of his skin--it's the limb of a corpse. He throws it off, is about to leap out of the hole in terror when a second arm comes down firmly on his shoulder--it's Flynn.

FLYNN

Down, Tiny. Down! Stay with me.

The two men thread their way out of the hole and towards the British lines, gradually joined by the others.

SHELL FIRE is diminishing, and as the men scramble back into their trench, stops entirely.

EXT. TRENCHES--DAY

Mess Corporal issuing the last few men their breakfast.

Flynn eating with gusto.

MEDICS changing bandages of injured but still functional men.

A SIREN sounds. An ORDER resonates up and down the trenches:

VOICE (OC)

Masks!

A yellow cloud drifts over the trenches as Flynn and his men don gas masks. They look like aliens from some other universe.

RECRUIT NO. 3, fear adding to clumsiness, can't get the straps straight, is still fumbling as the lethal mist envelops him. He coughs, gasps as Flynn dashes over to him, jerks the mask from his hands and forces it tightly over his face.

The recruit panics. Fights Flynn.

FLYNN

Easy, soldier, easy. Medic!

A medic and the sergeant, both masked, simultaneously reach the two men just as the recruit--tearing, vomiting, choking--pulls away from his mask. Flynn manages to get it back on while the other two hold down the struggling man, now soiling his pants.

And then-

A breeze blows through the trench, dispersing the gas. Flynn is first to notice, lifts the mask from the frantic recruit's face.

FLYNN

It's alright, alright--

An all clear SIREN SOUNDS. The three men remove their masks. The sergeant points downwind with some satisfaction.

SERGEANT

The shit's blowing back toward the Jerries.

MEDIC

Serves the bleedin' bastards right.

DISTANT COUGHING and GERMAN EPITHETS O.C.

The recruit is still twitching spasmodically but beginning to catch his breath.

MEDIC

He got a good dose. Better take him back. Can you see?

The recruit squints, nods "yes."

MEDIC

Let's go then.

They move OS. Flynn, Sergeant and the others ready their rifles.

SERGEANT

Lucky sod. He's saved a lotta trouble.

(Beat)

The Boche must 'ave guessed we's planning to pay our respects.

FLYNN

Don't they always?

A BUGLE blows.

FLYNN

Well, they certainly know now.

Up and down the trench the men stand ready.

The tension spreads along the entire length of the pending

British assault.

Flynn's group holds one small segment of an irregular, mile-long trench packed with MEN shoulder to shoulder -- Canadian, South African, Australian, Ceylonese -- all awaiting their signal. About 200 yards behind there's another trench, readying the SECOND WAVE. A few hundred yards beyond them a RESERVE LINE OF MEN is poised.

COMMANDER (OC)

Over the top! Let's go!

THE ORDER REVERBERATES up and down the trenches. The first line of men scrambles up and forward. Distant machine-guns begin their deadly RATTLE.

ON Sergeant, Flynn.

SERGEANT

In for a penny, in for a pound.

They bound up and out of the trench.

EXT. NO-MANS-LAND

Flynn and his men slog across the soggy moonscape toward paths cut the night before. SAPPERS lug planks they throw atop a sagging bramble of wire, flattening it to the ground.

Men pour through the breaches, over the planks, through gaps in the wire, a few scrambling underneath. Once past the wire they trek across the tortuous terrain towards the Germans. Around them rifle bullets WHIZ like angry bees.

For a moment, luck is with Flynn's platoon. A GERMAN MACHINE-GUN to their right is preoccupied with a breakthrough to its right; the German GUNNERS to the British left are wrestling with a jammed gun. A few British are hit by rifleshot, about one man in five, but the rest keep coming straight ahead, steadily--as if to a drum beat, unflinchingly, directly into the enemy fire.

A few more fall here and there. The others keep going.

A mortar EXPLODES in a spray of dust and smoke. The air clears. THREE MEN, Tiny among them, lie broken on the ground, skin scorched and chalkwhite, hair and eyebrows burned away, uniforms reduced to a charred patch at the crotch.

More tommies are picked off but Flynn's platoon continues its steady advance, now almost at the German trenches. And then--

MACHINE-GUN CROSS-FIRE begins. Almost the entire first assault group falls as grass before the scythe, turning the ground red.

The SECOND WAVE OF BRITISHERS, just starting past the wire at the edge of German lines, are the next to be cut to pieces. Methodically. Remorselessly.

Flynn, the sergeant, and a handful of men get within 10 yards of the first German trench when they're pinned down by the left machine gun, no longer jammed. GERMANS in the trench ahead, excited and confident, rise up to aim their rifles --almost point blank upon their beleaguered attackers. They are themselves greeted with an unexpected, savage BLAST of British marksmanship and fall back, dead or mortally wounded.

Flynn and his men see their moment, jump up, make a dash for the German trench. The pitiless machine-gun catches them.

A mortar hits the Sergeant in the neck, blowing his head clean off. For several seconds his body remains upright, carotids spurting, hands still clutching the rifle, then slowly crumples to the ground.

In moments almost all the men but Flynn are down. A single bullet strikes Flynn's rifle from his hand.

Rendered fearless by rage and futility, Flynn draws his service revolver, turns and charges the machine-gun. Is struck in the legs. Falls.

The TWO GERMAN GUNNERS, their attention drawn by the heat of battle elsewhere, swing their eyes and fire away from Flynn. He pulls himself to his feet. Staggeres over to the machine-gun pit and BLASTS away at the two astonished gunners. Kills them both. Drops into the pit. Turns their weapon on the other German machine-gun position. It falls silent. Then Flynn swings his weapon back on the German trenches, picking MEN off like ducks in a gallery.

The THIRD WAVE of British infantry begins its sweep forward, now virtually unopposed. TWO YOUNG TOMMIES brazenly kick a soccer ball between them as they advance. A partridge that has somehow survived the carnage, takes flight. A YOUNG OFFICER, cigarette held at a jaunty angle between his teeth, raises his rifle and blasts it out of the sky.

The Brits have taken the German trenches and a paltry 500 muddy, desolate yards--over which are sprawled a few dead mules and horses, and bodies of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of soldiers.

INT. COLE'S OFFICE--DAY

Cole trying to concentrate at his drafting table, cluttered with sketches of would-be mechanized troop carriers, long sheets of mathematical computations. He stares off into space, catches himself, returns to his task, brow furrowed.

Rebecca bursts in. She wears a Red Cross volunteer's white uniform with the traditional red and white armband.

Brandishing a letter--

REBECCA  
Flynn's in hospital...!

COLE  
(equal concern)  
I know...

REBECCA  
You know--why didn't you tell me...?

COLE  
Says he was writing to you as well--  
wanted to tell you himself...

She taps her letter.

REBECCA  
He doesn't tell me anything, he never tells  
me anything, just writes funny little  
poems, it's so bloody maddening--.  
(regaining control)

REBECCA  
How badly is he hurt? Really. He says  
it's only a scratch, but the letter's  
not even in his own hand.

Cole hesitates--.

REBECCA  
Cole!

COLE  
It's, it's not that bad--

Rebecca's eyes fling daggers.

COLE

But rather more than a scratch, I'm afraid. Both legs shot up. I gather infection's the worst of it. The fighting went on all day--took hours just to get him out...

REBECCA

(stricken)

When are they shipping him home?

COLE

Don't know if they--I don't know when they can do that. Not yet. He's...

REBECCA

I want to go over there...

COLE

We can't...

REBECCA

Bloody hell. There isn't anyone in the War Office your father doesn't know.

COLE

Civilians can't get within a mile of the front. Even if we could get over to France somehow...

REBECCA

I'm sailing to France...

Cole shakes his head.

REBECCA

I'm in the Red Cross, dammit.

COLE

You're not a nurse, Rebecca. (Beat) Believe me, I've tried repeatedly

COLE (cont'd)

to get clearance --the last time just this morning--.

He trails off.

REBECCA

Well, are all the little warriors pleased with themselves? Cyril, dead. Edgar, dead. Dickie's hands blown off. Now Flynn. And for what?

Rebecca sweeps an arm--the one with the Red Cross band--across the toy battle display. Miniature soldiers fly off the table onto the floor.

REBECCA

And we Lauers are the worst, sitting here in English comfort, safely making profit from the armaments that gets these poor men killed.

COLE

(without conviction--he knows this is no political argument)  
We're engineers, Rebecca, not munitions-makers...

REBECCA

I know about engineers--they promise a better cotton gin and design a cannon.

COLE

Lauer makes only transport...

REBECCA

Only transport? How do you think the men get to the front? And what delivers the guns and bullets they use to kill each other?  
(Close to tears)  
Lauer & Sons takes care of all that quite well, thank you very much. Lauer & Sons, Lauer & Sons...

She starts to SOB. Cole approaches, takes her tentatively in his arms, she puts her arm around his neck, they embrace, at first comforting each other. He kisses her gently and Rebecca begins to respond but just as their embrace changes to something very different, she breaks away--.

REBECCA

I'm--I'm sorry, Cole--

Flushed, she turns, races out the door.

Cole stares after her, surprised to find himself winded.

Then he turns round and distractedly, deep in thought, kneels and begins gathering up the toy soldiers, slowly, one by one. He stands and out of habit starts rearranging them in neat battle rows. Smiles faintly to catch himself in resonance with childhood.

He scoops up two more handfuls of figures, is about to set them

on the table--when he stops and stares at the battlefield.

CUT TO:

INT. TOY SOLDIERS BATTLEFIELD--DAY

FLASHBACK to the childhood scene of young Cole and Flynn playing toy soldiers: Cole unleashing the beetles which knock down everything in their path.

BACK ON SCENE

Cole flings down the toy figures in his hand, strides over to his drafting table, writes, sketches, mumbles--

COLE

Cole--you're so bloody thick.

(Beat)

24 hours--perhaps a day and a half.

12 hour shifts. Got plenty of 17

gauge plates...

He dashes over to his office door, opens it--

COLE (Cont'd, feverishly)

Samuel! Samuel! I need you. Now!

SAMUEL

(scurrying up)

Sir?

COLE

We've all got to work on this. Straight through. Everything else stops.

SAMUEL

Except for tomorrow, sir...?

COLE

Tomorrow? What in hell's tomorrow?  
Tuesday...

SAMUEL

This Tuesday's Ascension Day. The men  
are off...

COLE

The men will report tomorrow. Christ can wait till Wednesday to ascend. I'm sure He can find another day's work yet to be done here on earth. And you're staying on tonight. Please. And I want drafting...

SAMUEL

Clemons or Smitty?

COLE

Both. And Bobbie-- I want him for a pickup. At the armory.

SAMUEL

Sir, I just told Bobbie he could go home early. He's real sick. Sneezin' and shiverin'...

COLE

He can be sick here as well as at home. This is what we need -

Cole jots a few items down on his clipboard, rips the page out, hands it to Samuel.

COLE

And if the guns are not immediately available he'll go back first thing tomorrow. Oh-- the war cabinet permit--the purple permit--that must go with him.

Samuel starts to depart.

COLE

And Samuel--this is one damn lorry that will climb mountains.

EXT. BRITISH ARMY PROVING GROUNDS--DAY

A maximum security compound somewhere outside London. ARMED GUARDS everywhere. Within it a makeshift, mini-recreation of the western front:

trenches,  
a thicket of barbed wire,  
contrived shell holes,  
several plywood targets the shape and size of German soldiers,  
a small wooden viewing platform elevated a few feet off the ground.

Seated on the platform are

Cole;

BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBERTSON, well fed, arms folded and rather full of himself, his once handsome face spoiled by alcohol and rich living;

a BIRD COLONEL;

TWO SUBALTERNS;

and TWO CIVILIANS--

WINSTON, a cherubic, balding man, late thirties, with a big cigar and bowler hat;

and General Robertson's female STENOGRAPHER, mid-twenties, gratuitously endowed, flashy jewelry, stenopad in hand.

From time to time Robertson dictates a few observations which the stenographer duly notes down, but winks and subtle physical contact between them suggests other duties to him as well.

A machine-gun and TWO GUNNERS sit just in front of the review stand, alert and ready to fire.

At the end of the test site is a good-size wooden shed, from which emanates the SOUND OF A LARGE ENGINE AND CLANGING OF METAL PLATES.

As TWO SOLDIERS swing the shed's doors open, the world's very first mechanized armored vehicle lumbers out--a truck retrofitted with huge, thick, crudely riveted steel plates, all at odd angles. Two in front, protecting the radiator and windshield, come together like the point of a ship's bow.

The vehicle's six wheels are each wrapped in a kind of snow chain that bites deeply into the earth. A rotating turret on top and apertures in the plating allow the SEVERAL MEN within to extrude muzzles of machine-guns, fore, aft, and on each side.

Guns facing the targets OPEN FIRE, blasting them to pieces.

The vehicle then turns towards the viewing stand. The bird colonel nods to the two gunners at his feet who, after a moment's hesitation, spray the armored vehicle with gunfire. The bullets bounce harmlessly off its angled steel plates. The vehicle keeps advancing at a ponderous 5 m.p.h.

Cole hurries the startled observers off the viewing stand and down three steps to the side. The vehicle approaches, rolls over the machine-gun emplacement as its gunners nimbly scatter, and smashes into the viewing stand, grinding it to splinters as it pushes the debris aside.

All the observers--save for General Robertson, who seems a bit bent out of shape--are impressed. The stenographer particularly appears taken by Cole and his demonstration. Won't help his case with the general. Winston beams.

WINSTON

Well done!

The vehicle turns again and heads toward the barbed wire and "enemy trenches" just beyond. But as it starts through, a strand of wire catches one of the wheels. As it turns, the wire tightens until the wheel is immobilized.

Cole closes his eyes. Disappointment on the faces of all but Robertson who nods to himself knowingly.

A heavy door on the vehicle's side swings open and Samuel scrambles out, wire-cutter in hand. With effort, he frees up the wheel. Hauls himself back inside.

The vehicle lurches forward again, clears the remaining wire, traverses the first trench--a shallow one--continues on to the second--drops in--

and can't climb out. ENGINE STRAINS, GEARS SHIFT AND GRIND, but no go. It's stuck.

After a few moments Samuel and the other three occupants clamber out, gather round, try to figure out what to do next.

ON observers

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Looks like you've still some work ahead of you, Lauer.

COLE

(shaking his head)

We tested and re-tested--we should have had sufficient torque...

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Yes, well--actual battle conditions are a bit more difficult than tooling 'round Piccadilly Circus.

(turning to Winston)

And please, Churchill, no more secret weapons. Wars are won by men. On foot.

WINSTON

Before German machine-guns wiped out half our horses, I recall you saying that wars were won by cavalry.

GENERAL ROBERTSON

(unfazed)

Situations change. British command changes with it. Progress. But this (pointing to Cole's exhausted vehicle) -- this isn't progress. This went out with the Teutonic knights. Soldiers don't win battles cowering behind shields. Soldiers attack.

COLE

(evenly)

And obviously that's precisely what this vehicle is designed to do, Sir. Attack.

GENERAL ROBERTSON

It doesn't do it very well, does it?

He nods to Winston, struts off with his group. His stenographer shoots Cole a quick, farewell smile.

Winston shakes his head.

WINSTON

Still fighting the last war. As I recall, he almost lost that one too.

Winston and Cole walk slowly toward the disabled vehicle--

WINSTON

Do not be discouraged, my boy. A difficult problem. What with shell holes and trenches, there's scarcely ten yards of flat, level ground left anywhere in France. You will keep at it?

COLE

Of course, Sir. (To his four workers)  
Alright gentlemen. Leave it for now.  
Samuel, better bring up a tow.

The men nod, depart.

COLE (Cont'd, to Winston)

I'll stay with it, till it works. And it will work.

WINSTON

Good. Best keep things under your hat. Give your project a name -- something credible, but misleading. Rumor has a Mata Hari behind every tree but there is the occasional genuine article. Let us have you working on--say--some sort of heavy duty water carriers-mobile water tanks. Yes--

Rapping knuckles on vehicle-

WINSTON (Cont'd)

We will simply call them -- "tanks."  
What are you doing for money?

COLE

My family still has a quid or two...

WINSTON

I am relieved to hear it. The War Office has none. At least, none I can get hold of--

He relights his cigar.

WINSTON

As yet. The Germans we can handle. It is the British War Office that makes me tremble. Won't spend a shilling to develop something new. Fortunately for Britain, the German high command is even less enamored of innovation.

He shakes Cole's hand, turns to leave, then turns back.

WINSTON

Your father--he is well?

COLE

(surprised)

Why yes -- quite well...

WINSTON

My commander in '04. We fought the Boers together. Tough bunch, the Boers. Glad South Africa's with us in this one. England's fast running out of men.

He looks at Cole's leg for a moment, reassures him with a knowing nod.

WINSTON

These days they'd probably welcome you in the infantry, bum leg and all. But now you are needed here. (He points) Perfecting that.

Have you been to the front, Cole?

COLE

No Sir. Lord, I've made every effort. Repeatedly. You see, my brother's...

WINSTON

(overlapping)

Something I have trouble getting our armchair military strategists to do. I'm leaving from Southampton tomorrow. 7 a.m. We must travel with the good General Robertson--it's taken me two weeks just to get him to arrange this trip at all--but you and I should be in France and at the front well before evening.

ON Cole, stunned. He opens his mouth, then closes it again.

EXT. PAS de CALAIS RAILROAD STATION--MID-DAY

Bustling with FRENCH AND ENGLISH TROOPS and matériel.

A military train pulls away from the station.

CLOSE ON ARTILLERY CAR. The 200 foot barrel of a huge cannon slowly passes by end to end.

As the cannon finally moves O.C., ANGLE ON LAST CAR, an ornate pullman.

INT. GENERAL STAFF RAILROAD CAR

A elegant rosewood paneled dining car in motion, its long table awash in a sea of linen, silver, crystal, china and flowers.

A lunch of many courses, a wine with each, served by a swaying white-jacketed WAITER and BUSBOY. General Robertson sits at one end of the table, Winston at the other, Cole and SEVERAL OFFICERS and Robertson's stenographer--her attraction to Cole undisguised--arrayed along the sides.

The busboy tends to a gramophone, turns a record over, gives the handle a few turns and sets down the needle. A scratchy BRAHMS SYMPHONY begins, competing with the RUMBLING of the train.

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Wagner's music isn't as bad as it sounds,  
but I much prefer Brahms, Beethoven, Bach...

WINSTON

Every one of them German. Please,  
continue Cole.

COLE

(to Robertson)

As I was saying, sir, we're doing some  
design modifications on the tank. If you  
would reconsider...

GENERAL ROBERTSON

You listen to the great composers, Lauer?

Robertson catches a glimpse of himself in a passing silver  
service piece and re-positions a strand of his thinning hair.

Cole takes a deep breath, struggles to keep his impatience in  
check.

COLE

(evenly)

Afraid all family appreciation for the  
arts went to my brother. For me, music  
is mere mathematics. My brother hears  
pleasing sounds, I see numbers.  
Which brings me back to the tank's new  
gear ratios...

The stenographer bestirs herself.

STENOGRAPHER

You're not at all like your brother then,  
Mr. Lauer?

COLE

Polar opposites, Miss Radcliff.

STENOGRAPHER

So I may presume he's quite unattractive?

COLE

Er, no, ma'am.

(smiles)

I doubt very much if you'd find him  
the least bit unattractive.

She gathers her pearl necklace about her warmly, stroking its strands.

STENOGRAPHER

Ah. And where might one actually  
find your brother, Mr. Lauer?

COLE

(immediately somber again)

Actually, he's in hospital now.

(Beat)

The Somme, you see.

Engrossed in conversation, the diners fail to notice their train chugging to a halt, or that a troop train, heading the opposite way, waits on the adjacent track, packed with gaunt, bedraggled, and wounded SOLDIERS. All stare, hollow-eyed, through the glass at the incongruous opulence a few feet from their faces.

GENERAL ROBERTSON is the first to catch the grim scene just outside his window. Without so much as a gesture of recognition, he nods at the busboy who, following his gaze, does his bidding--and draws the shades.

EXT. APPROACH TO GHQ OF SUPREME COMMANDER HAIG

Cole, Winston, a somnolent Robertson, his stenographer, and a SOLDIER/DRIVER, slowly motor down a long driveway in an open car towards a magnificent French chateau. The stenographer, feminine wares unfurled, is giving Cole the full treatment, but he remains caught up in his own thoughts.

The chateau is flanked by marble statues and surrounded by a vineyard fanning out on all sides to the horizon. Only upon reaching the gravel inner courtyard--bustling with military vehicles and PERSONNEL coming and going--is there evidence that somewhere there might be a war on. We are *far* from the front.

INT. CHATEAU

AN OFFICE ANTEROOM

furnished with French antiques.

Cole and Winston rise as FIELD MARSHALL HAIG, sixties, ramrod

military bearing with panache, self-assured, often in error but never in doubt, strides in and fills the room. Haig's brass and cordovans shine brightly, his intellect less so.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG  
(brisk Scottish brogue)  
Churchill! Safe and sound, I see. Where's  
General Robertson?

WINSTON  
Something about a nap, Field  
Marshall.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG  
A nap. Hmmph. First rate officer once.  
First rate. Promotions ruined him.  
Well come in, come in--

INT. HAIG'S OFFICE

Cole and Winston follow Haig into the large, well-appointed adjoining room.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG  
Don't suppose ya brought along the troops I  
requisitioned?

WINSTON  
I do believe they shall be following soon,  
Field Marshall. As you know, we have had to  
go to conscription...

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG  
About time. I will make soldiers of them.  
Only we need them now, Churchill. Can't  
win a war by merely holding our ground.  
Last month ya sent only 8,000--barely  
enough to replace normal wastage. Our  
fall offensive will sweep the Germans back  
across the Rhine--if ya give me the men.

WINSTON  
I promise to convey your urgency to London.  
(Turning)  
Er, permit me to introduce one of our  
ablest engineers, Cole Lauer. I am hopeful...

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

Engineer?

(Chuckling)

Ya know what they say--ask an engineer for a better cannon and he designs a cotton gin. Do ya build roads, Lauer? These French goat paths -- just the 40 miles to the reserve trenches takes almost two hours...

COLE

No. Not roads. Armored vehicles, Sir. Fact is, I'm developing a motorized attack weapon...

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

(skeptical)

Motorized attack weapon? You don't say?

(Smiling)

I trust ya know something of our new 30 MM cannon? The first of them are just getting to France.

COLE

Yes sir, I've seen the specifications but no cannon can...

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

Then ya know that we've reached the very limits of military technology -- a rapid-fire artillery piece that can throw a 2 ton shell 50 miles. 24 hours of that kind of shelling will have the toughest German on his knees--if he still has any knees.

(Jabbing Cole )

Now there's an offensive weapon.

COLE

And then what?

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

Then what?

COLE

Can the 30 MM take ground, sir? Can it capture towns...?

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

Well of course, we bring in the infantry to mop things up...

COLE

Well if you'll still need infantry, then you need armored vehicles to penetrate remaining enemy defenses, shield and carry men...

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG  
(impatient)

I see. ( He doesn't) Very interesting. Now--to the matter at hand...

WINSTON

Yes, Field Marshall. We are most eager to get to the Somme salient today. Perhaps you can take us to the front, show us where the...

Haig shakes his head "no."

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

Scheduled to go riding with General Pétain this afternoon. Putting these French generals on a horse is almost the only way ya get them moving at all. No spine, these Frenchies. It's their bloody country--yet they expect we Brits to carry all the freight.

Abruptly, he scoops up his hat and riding crop.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

But I foresee no difficulty fixing ya two up with something. No difficulty. Appreciate the way ya take an interest in these things, Churchill. See what we're up against for

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG (Cont'd)  
yourself. Come. The motor pool is hard by the stables.

EXT. CHATEAU COURTYARD

As Cole, Winston and Haig trot down the front steps, they encounter a squad of SIX INFANTRY MEN carrying rifles, a young sergeant in charge. In the group's center is a forlorn, dazed, unarmed CORPORAL, his uniform disheveled.

Haig holds up his hand. The squad halts and all salute, save the prisoner.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

What's this, Sergeant?

YOUNG SERGEANT

Firing party, Sir.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

I see. Em.

Haig steps up to the condemned soldier, no more than 18 years of age, and stiff with fear.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

What'd ya do, son, that brought you to this?

CONDEMNED SOLDIER

(very softly)

I--I abandoned my post, Sir.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

Ya ran away?

CONDEMNED SOLDIER

(Beat)

Yes, Sir.

Haig is palpably saddened. His voice softens, his pace slows.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

Ya see corporal, we cannot excuse that sort of thing. You let down not only the rest of the lads, but an entire country, a country depending on ya. Ya see that, don'tcha?

CONDEMNED SOLDIER

(barely audible)

Yes, Sir. I see that.

Haig reaches into his pocket for cigarettes, offers one to the condemned man, strikes a match, lights them both.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

We intend no cruelty to ya. But in every army there are men who are afraid, men who

will do their duty for just one simple reason: they know what happens to those who don't.

(Gently) Your example will stiffen their resolve.

You're to make the supreme sacrifice today, son, so that tomorrow others--others should not fail.

CONDEMNED SOLDIER

Yes, Sir.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

Ya running away--that no longer matters.  
Tis done. It's the past. Ya can't take it  
back. But the contribution ya make today--  
that's what's important now, as important  
as the devotion of any man who dies  
for his country. You too are giving your  
life for England, do ya see, and there's  
always honor in that. Always. Understand  
what I'm telling ya?

CONDEMNED SOLDIER  
(heartened a bit)

I--I think so, Sir...

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

Good. Good.

Haig notes two of the prisoner's buttons are unfastened.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG

Let's button up that tunic, shall we?

The condemned man obeys. Haig holds out his hand. They shake,  
then salute.

FIELD MARSHALL HAIG  
to sergeant/squad)

As you were.

All salute.

YOUNG SERGEANT

Squad--forward.

The soldiers march off and start round the corner, the condemned  
man now holding his head high, and in brisk step with the others.  
Cole, Winston and Haig resume their course in silence.

After several moments we hear, from afar, the SOUND OF THE  
EXECUTION going forward. First a DRUM ROLL.

ON Cole

YOUNG SERGEANT (O.C.)

Present arms!

(Beat)

Ready!

Aim!

Fire!

And then a VOLLEY. Cole flinches.

CUT TO:

EXT. PASSCHENDAELE-LATE AFTERNOON

The most forward, allied staging area--Passchendaele, a ruined Belgian village a fraction of a mile from the trenches themselves. The few buildings which remain standing show irreparable artillery damage. Here and there are artillery emplacements, camouflaged with bushes against aerial observation.

The main street is choked with debris. Around it struggle trucks, horse-drawn gun-limbers, and columns of tired, apathetic, BRITISH, CANADIAN, INDIAN AND FRENCH ENLISTED MEN AND NCOs. All foot soldiers. Not an officer in sight. The countless wheels, hoofs, boots and distant intermittent artillery-fire together RUMBLE like faraway thunder.

Cole appears driving a military motorcycle, Winston in its side-car, through the center of town. Both wear caps and goggles.

The road directly ahead is jammed with military traffic. Cole pulls over.

The two men remove their head gear, climb off, and continue on foot.

WINSTON

Where are the officers?

COLE

It appears the Field Marshall is not alone in preferring to lead from the rear.

They pass a first aid station with dozens of new, unused pine coffins stacked out front.

WINSTON

Preparations for his big push, I'm afraid.

COLE

Excuse me for a moment, sir...

Cole darts inside the aid station, immediately re-emerges with a FRENCH ORDERLY who points down the road and, with his hands, gives further directions.

Cole rejoins Winston just as a procession of EIGHT SOLDIERS,

blinded by mustard-gas, their eyes bandaged, and each with a hand on a shoulder of the man in front, are led by a MEDIC into the aid station.

COLE

The primary field hospital is nearby. One of several, actually. Perhaps I might...

WINSTON  
(nodding)

Of course.

The STEADY DRONE OF AN AIRPLANE ENGINE grows louder. Cole, Winston and the SURROUNDING MEN look up, searching the leaden sky. As yet, nothing.

AERIAL VIEW

Passchendaele Road view through wing-struts of a German biplane.

BACK ON ROAD

All eyes are now on the sky.

The plane, still a novelty, is spotted. The men, Cole and Winston amongst them, just stand there gazing upwards with curiosity.

AERIAL VIEW

Road train station, troops.

ON BOMB RELEASE. It opens. A bomb falls away on scene.

ON GERMAN PILOT--smiles, waves.

BACK ON Winston, Cole.

WINSTON

Looks like he's dropping leaflets...

COLE

Christ! That's not...

He throws himself against Winston, knocking him to the ground, then piles on top of him, seconds before AN EXPLOSION. Troops scatter in the smoke and dust.

Then--

COLE

All right, Sir?

WINSTON

Yes, yes, quite alright, thank you, Cole.

The two men stand and survey the damage--minimal. Around them, the troops slowly regroup.

Winston brushes himself off, smiles at Cole.

WINSTON

We've just seen the future, I'm afraid.

(Beat)

Good luck with your brother.

INT. 21ST CASUALTY HOSPITAL--DAY

Bedlam under tents--several enormous, canvas-roofed, interconnected hospital wards. Each has proper space for several dozen patients but are now jammed with hundreds of SOLDIERS. Many lie in agony from severe head, sucking chest or open abdominal wounds, some delirious with pain and fever. Not a few, lacking beds, are laid out on tables or on the floor. Almost all are swathed in bandages unchanged for days.

A few NURSES and ORDERLIES occasionally squeeze through the rows, eyes glassy with fatigue, impervious to the MOANS and CRIES.

The figure of a man appears silhouetted at the front entrance--a just ended rain-shower has been followed by shafts of golden evening sunshine, and steam rises all around him.

He steps into the tent--it is Cole--and as his eyes accommodate to the gloom, he recoils at what he sees.

In despair, he begins his unpromising search--many of the men lie face down, the identity of others obscured by bandages or great disfigurement--and there are several more tents packed with wounded yet ahead.

He stops an ATTENDANT.

COLE

Sorry, but I wonder if you could assist me? I'm looking for my brother--Lauer, Flynn Lauer.

The attendant shrugs, points to a woman Red Cross NURSE at the far end of the tent, crouched with TWO MALE ORDERLIES over a lifeless SOLDIER. They lift him from his bed onto a gurney.

Cole hurries over and--relief: it is not Flynn.

As the orderlies cart the corpse away, the nurse turns to Cole.

COLE

I see how terribly busy you are, Sister--  
might I trouble you for just a moment? I'm  
looking for a Captain Lauer. Flynn Lauer.  
He's been here several weeks. Just--just  
leg wounds...

The nurse impassively reaches down and removes a raft of  
papers--page upon page of soldiers' names--from a pouch in  
her uniform. Quickly scans them as Cole watches anxiously. No  
luck.

She reaches for a second, smaller list. Searches it, and--for  
the first time her face shows expression.

NURSE

Lauer. Ward O.M-2, straight on--there.  
Sorry, sir...

Cole starts off.

COLE

Thank you very much indeed, sister.

NURSE

You should find him about halfway down, sir.  
On the right.

INT. O.M-2 (OFFICERS SECOND MORIBUND WARD)

O.M-2 is eerily quiet, an occasional COUGH the only sound. Most  
of the MEN are very still, either in extremis or quite weak. All  
stoically await their fate.

There are no attendants. Not one.

Cole searches for Flynn.

MOMENTS LATER

A delirious PATIENT opens his eyes, bolts straight up just as  
Cole passes his bed, and staring straight ahead, says--to no one  
in particular:

PATIENT

It's alright. Perfectly alright.

then drops back down again in a stupor.  
ANOTHER ROW OF BEDS

Flynn, on his back, head propped up with pillows, his legs under an arched wooden frame that keeps the weight of the bedding elevated off whatever may be left of his limbs.

He looks awful--sickly, gaunt, unshaven.

Cole approaches. The two men make eye contact. Flynn at first can't focus, doesn't believe, is then astonished, and finally breaks out in a facsimile of his old grin.

FLYNN

How the devil...? The war over already?

Cole dashes over--they embrace.

FLYNN

What are you doing here?

COLE

Guest of the War Cabinet, actually.  
No time to write. God, Flynn, what's--?  
This ward, all these men--they've simply  
abandoned you...

FLYNN

(matter-of-fact)

I'm very much among friends. Just that  
everything's stretched pretty thin here.  
Must save what little they have for those  
who might have a--who might best benefit.

Cole doesn't get it.

COLE

But this ward--why are you--Flynn--you're  
not--I mean--

Then, cognizant of the dying around him, he does.

COLE

What in blazes are you talking about...?

FLYNN

(evenly)

The surgeons do what they can but they've no  
way to stop the sepsis. Seems they've run  
out of things to amputate.

COLE

So--so they just turn their backs...

FLYNN

We're looked after.

(Beat)

There's very little pain. Funny, don't even feel terribly ill. A little feverish, that's all...

COLE

We'll--we'll get you back to England...

FLYNN

(a jaunty smile)

God, at least spare me that--you know how badly I do on boats. Remember that last trip--our "grand tour" of the Greek Isles? Retched from morning till...

COLE

We can get you proper care...

Flynn shakes his head "no."

FLYNN

Moving me about just spills more of the microbes into the blood. Appears I'm swimming with the little buggars.

(Feeling badly for his brother)

Sorry, Cole--Help me sit up a bit more, will you?

Cole does. Flynn's movements suggest that he's even more fragile than he looks.

FLYNN

How are they taking--all this, at home?

COLE

Father doesn't talk about it. Not a word. Louise is a rock, as usual. Continues to clean father out at cards. And Rebecca, well Rebecca is quite prepared to swim the channel to come collect you--Blast it, Flynn, I don't, I can't...

FLYNN

(shaking head "no")

Cole...

Cole sighs and, though still arguing, begins letting go.

COLE

We should try. We must at least try to get you home. I could...

FLYNN

(slowly, emphatically)

No, Cole. Thank you. Please, you must understand: I chose to come here, we all of us chose to come here, for good reason.

(Beat)

Together we took on the Germans, together bled into French soil. And now we'll be--staying here. Together. Will you explain to them for me? Cole?

Cole, resignation settling in, nods with a long SIGH.

FLYNN

(continuing softly, with increasing difficulty)

Speak to them for me, won't you? Love all of them. And Rebecca--tell our Rebecca--there was never a day when I didn't think of her. Tell them, for me, of the small piece of this bloody country--that shall forever be England.

EXT. LONDON STREET--DAY

Cole approaches the Fabian Society building. He wears a black armband.

The ebullient war-fever of before is long gone. All is somber. Quiet.

WOMEN, largely in black, outnumber the MEN (now mostly boys, the aged and the occasional CRIPPLED SOLDIER) by four or five to one.

Motor-cars are few. Shop windows are near empty of goods or boarded up. The banners and flags are gone or in tatters. There are no more parades.

War posters persist but their message has changed. One reads: DON'T WASTE BREAD! SAVE TWO SLICES EVERY DAY AND DEFEAT THE U-BOAT! Another: FOOD IS AMMUNITION. CLEAN YOUR PLATES!

Even the street peddlers have vanished, save for one or two NEWS VENDORS whose headlines, in surreal incongruity, proclaim:

SMASHING ALLIED VICTORY IN ARABIA.

A ONE-LEGGED MAN on crutches, empty trouser-leg flapping, hobbles by as Cole enters the building, its front window cracked and mended with tape.

INT. FABIAN SOCIETY

In disarray, its portraits and slogans now taken down. Rebecca and ANOTHER WOMAN are packing things into crates. Both look up. Rebecca smiles in recognition but Cole does not --cannot--smile back.

Instantly Rebecca knows. Pain washes across her face.

INT. LAUER ESTATE FOYER--NIGHT

Cole barges in through the front door, cane in hand, and wearing an evening suit. He's been drinking.

He approaches the grand staircase. At its foot, a huge suit of knight's armor stands guard, its mace raised in a combative stance.

For a moment, Cole and "knight" glower at each other. And then Cole--this grieving, profoundly solemn man--takes his cane and, Chaplinesque, trips the knight. It comes CRASHING to the floor.

COLE

(sotto voice, contemptuous)

Armour!

Cole carefully sets down his cane, picks up the fallen knight's mace. He likes the feel of it in his hand--far better than that of the cane.

He goes to the foot of the stairs--a large ornamental wooden ball tops the beginning of the bannister. Tempting, but he lets it pass. Unsteadily, he starts up the stairs.

INT. FLYNN'S ROOM

Cole wanders into his brother's room. He puts down the mace. Gazes at, touches, handles some of Flynn's things--a Goethe stein, a pipe, violin, books; then a section of Flynn's naturalist collection--terrarium, butterflies on pins, etc.

He turns to a gramophone--its needle stranded in the middle of a record. Cole gives the handle several vigorous turns. A thin tenor begins a chorus of "THERE ARE SMILES, THAT MAKE YOU

HAPPY..."

He picks up and studies one of several postcard-size insect display cases. Behind the glass a little shard of nature is preserved. Part of a bush is painted realistically on the inside of a rear wall of the case in Cole's hand; the case itself is filled with several real twigs with a half dozen white insect egg sacs attached.

TIGHT ON CASE

One of the egg sacs has hatched--there's a hole in it--and several millipedes are crawling every which way inside the case--up, down and around the sides, the glass, and the stones and twigs making up their miniature forest. Nothing stops them.

The music has come to an end, the NEEDLE SCRATCHING round and round the record label.

ON COLE

His eyes come alive as he hears in his head a bit of dialogue from the past:

DAISY-REBECCA (OVER)

*"You, particularly, could learn  
much from the insects, don't  
you think, Cole?"*

COLE

I've cracked it! I've bloody well  
cracked it!

He tosses the millipedes' home high into the air.

EXT. FACTORY GROUNDS--DAY

Winston and ASSISTANT (Palmer), a male civil service type, stand in a yard adjacent to the Lauer factory, and surrounded by a high fence. Faces of Cole's WORKERS crowd the factory windows.

We HEAR it moments before we see it--a primitive World War I tank emerging NOISILY from a wide factory door, Cole at the controls.

Unlike Cole's earlier effort, this tank is all of a piece, a steel, lozenge-shaped rhomboid. It's propelled by two continuous caterpillar treads, each encircling the entire circumference of one side of the tank and running fore to aft along the bottom, continuing up over the top, and then back down again.

A name is painted neatly on one side: OTTO.

## INSIDE THE TANK

Cole activates either of two levers, one for each tread, thus causing the tank to stop, turn one way, then another, with relative ease.

## BACK ON SCENE

The tank slowly circles the perimeter of the yard.

## INSIDE THE TANK

Cole shifts into "high" gear.

## BACK ON SCENE

With a jerk, "Otto" snorts and lumbers forward, slices through a thick test tangle of barbed wire, bridges easily over a wide trench, noses down into a "shell hole" and clambers up the other side.

Cole next directs the tank to a 15 foot high mound of earth. The tank climbs up at a steep angle with no difficulty. But then, instead of leveling off at the top and dropping down the other side, Otto continues with its nose pointing skywards. Like a high diver doing a slow-motion back flip, the tank is propelled back on itself.

Cole, dangling upside down for a minute, cuts off the engine. Chagrined, he scrambles out, a sheepish look on his face.

## COLE

Just a matter of repositioning some weights...

## WINSTON

An unmitigated success. Unequivocally. Hardly reasonable to expect it to climb straight up. Cole, I want you to begin production immediately.

Turning to his aide--

## WINSTON

And Palmer, the French need not know about this just yet.

The three start toward the factory building, Winston gesturing with excitement.

WINSTON

Tell me, once you get under way, how long will it take to build each one, start to finish? They must be frightfully heavy. How often must we refuel...?

EXT. WAR OFFICE-DAY

Cole, carrying a portfolio, exits his phaeton at the steps to the War Office. Across the street behind him, a building has been reduced to rubble.

At the foot of the steps, a NEWSBOY is hawking his papers, one with the headline: "GALLIPOLI ABANDONED;" another reading: "ALLIES WITHDRAW."

NEWSBOY

Extra! Allies pull out! Getcha piper. Withdrawal from Gallipoli...

Cole buys a paper, points across the street.

COLE

What in hell happened?

NEWSBOY

Zeppelin raid. Dropped this huge bleedin' bomb in the middle of the night. You could 'ear the blast all the way to St. Paul's.

Handing Cole his change--

NEWSBOY

You got business in there?

Cole nods.

NEWSBOY

Maybe you can tell me then, guv--why'd we start scrapping with all those German blokes? Used to know, but now I forgot.

COLE

I suppose some great powers need a great enemy--even if it means inventing one.

Cole puts the paper under his arm, heads up the stairs.

INT. WAR CABINET

A long room, dominated by a massive mahogany table.

Seated around it are seven or eight men in their forties and fifties, General Robertson and his lubricious stenographer, the Bird Colonel, a MAJOR and OTHER BRASS, and one professorial looking civilian minister:--PROFESSOR WAINWRIGHT.

Winston is absent; there is a conspicuously empty chair at the end of the table with an ashtray and remains of a cigar.

On one wall is an enormous map of the western front; riddled with colored pins, it is the focus of the men's attention.

A door opens and SECRETARY (Anna) enters with tea tray.

GENERAL ROBERTSON

(to secretary)

Isn't Mr. Churchill's protege here yet?

SECRETARY

Sir?

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Cole Lauer.

SECRETARY

Oh yes, Sir. He's been waiting quite a few minutes. Never entirely sure--

She looks pointedly at Robertson's stenographer.

SECRETARY (Cont'd)

--when I might interrupt.

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Please show him in--(indicating tea tray)  
we'll take care of that.

An exchange of glances between Robertson and the secretary suggests more than a professional relationship. A more icy exchange--between secretary and stenographer--reflects the women's mutual antagonism.

The secretary sets down tray, departs. The men come round, help themselves to tea. Robertson solicitously pours his stenographer a cup.

The secretary reappears, Cole in tow.

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Thank you, Anna.

With a jealous look at stenographer, impassively sipping her tea, secretary exits.

GENERAL ROBERTSON (Cont'd)

Lauer, I believe you know most of these people here--Miss Radcliff, of course, Colonel Parker, Majors Atkins, Richie, Thacker, Brown, Professor Wainwright, of course...

They all nod. No effort to shake hands. Cole notes Winston's empty place.

COLE

Are we waiting for Mr. Churchill, Sir?

GENERAL ROBERTSON

He won't be joining us.

COLE

I'm sorry?

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Gallipoli. Another one of his hairbrained schemes. And another terrible failure. Churchill felt obliged to resign.

COLE

Resign...!

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Churchill's a man of ideas, Lauer. Most of them bad. Please, let us have your report. His absence shan't make a bit of difference to your reception here. We all want to win the war. Some tea?

Cole scans the faces at the table for a potential ally--and encounters only an unbroken wall of frigid skepticism--save for an enigmatic smile from the stenographer.

COLE

Thank you, Sir. No.

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Well, let's go ahead, shall we?

Cole, tight-lipped, tacks a photograph and several schematic drawings of the tank over the map.

COLE

You recall the problem presented by  
trenches, barbed wire, the uneven terrain.

With a stick, he points out the tank tread.

COLE (Cont'd)

Here's the solution--continuous, flexible  
tread that can wrap itself around obstacles.  
Adapt itself to any kind of ground.

He points to its weaponry.

COLE

The tank can now carry machine-gun fire and  
two six-pounders right to the enemy. And most  
important, it can deposit men, uninjured and  
able to fight, right on the enemy's lap. We're  
ready to start shipping...

MAJOR ATKINS

How many men do they carry? I see only four.

Cole moves his pointer to a cross-section of the tank's interior,  
jammed with its two operators, two gunners, ammo, engine and  
gasoline compartments.

COLE

That's correct.

MAJOR ATKINS

Four men against a trench full of Germans?

COLE

The tank is merely the point of the spear.

He points to an artist's drawing of the tank in action.

COLE

But a tank will break through whatever  
barriers the Germans create. An entire  
platoon can advance safely and quickly  
behind it. That platoon--that's the rest  
of the spear.

MAJOR RICHIE

You say advance quickly. How quickly?

COLE

Speed will vary with conditions, of course.  
The average is 9.8 miles per hour cross-country.

COLONEL PARKER

A horse makes far better time...

COLE

Upon meeting up with machine-gun fire a horse's time falls abruptly to zero.

MAJOR THACKER

(smirking)

You're not seriously suggesting your tanks replace the cavalry?

COLE

The horse was introduced into combat in the third millennium B.C., Major. I had hopes that after 23 centuries the British army might finally be ready for a second innovation.

That chills the room down another ten degrees. Several men shift uncomfortably in their seats.

PROFESSOR WAINWRIGHT

Ah, one small logistical question, Mr. Lauer. Petrol.

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Ah yes. Good question. Say to launch this assault of yours and continue on, say, twenty-five miles into enemy territory? How much petrol?

COLE

(hesitating)

Twenty-five miles? Each tank should require--I'd estimate--about 90 liters.

GENERAL ROBERTSON

90...!

PROFESSOR WAINWRIGHT

Have you the slightest idea, Sir, what's involved in delivering of that quantity of petrol anywhere near the front? I fear you're operating under some illusion that...

Cole locks on Wainwright with a savage gaze. He speaks quietly, but his words, rising from a deep sense of himself, turn the man to stone.

COLE

Illusion? I--have--no--illusions.

Dead silence. Then

MAJOR RICHIE

Ahem. Tell you what's most troubling to me. I trust you've read the professor's latest propulsion studies. Explains rather well why continuous tread can't work on marshy soil, especially with...

COLE

Look, set up another demonstration. Devise whatever obstacles...

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Frankly, Lauer, we're long past the time for demonstrations. I should tell you that Field Marshall Haig's grand offensive began this morning. We put all our resources into that.

COLE

But...

GENERAL ROBERTSON

It's abundantly clear what you think of me--or whoever might disagree with what you're hell-bent on doing. Certainly I am, no more, no less than anyone else, a prisoner of my past experiences. But we cannot do it all.

COLE

I've put six months and almost every shilling I have into this. 35 tanks are finished, ready to go. Once in the field, operation is simple...

GENERAL ROBERTSON

Moving them across the channel right now would be quite impossible, what with German U-boats decimating our shipping. I appreciate the strength of your convictions, Sir. Nonetheless I still see these--tanks, largely as a distraction, a high risk gamble, an extravagant consumer of petrol already in short supply. I'm sorry.

(Turning to the others)

Further enquiries?

There are none. Robertson nods dismissedly.

Cole, seeing that all was foregone, snatches his exhibits off

the wall. Rolls them up in a cold fury.

Not a word as Cole closes up his portfolio, turns and flies out the door, SLAMMING it behind him.

The group sits in tense silence, except for Robertson who--not the slightest bit discomfited--methodically lights up a pipe.

GENERAL ROBERTSON

(continuing, evenly)

Hell hath no fury like a non-combatant.

EXT. LAUER ESTATE COURTYARD

Rebecca, clipboard in hand, is giving final instructions to tuxedoed servant from the earlier fox hunt scene--though he now wears an eye patch and is attired in a "home guard uniform." He climbs into the driver's seat of a truck piled high with household goods--blankets, tins of food, etc.--collected from private homes. A stiff breeze wraps itself around Rebecca's skirt, ruffles her hair.

REBECCA

And for heaven's sakes, Michael, this time please keep the grease pails away from the blankets.

Michael nods and drives off, just as Cole's phaeton pulls in very fast at the opposite end of the circular driveway.

Cole slams on the brake, slides to a halt in a cloud of dust. He hoists himself out.

ON Rebecca, glad to see him and at first amused that his driving is so in character. Then she perceives his great agitation.

She watches as Cole reaches back for his cane and his tank portfolio, retrieves them, then fumbles and drops them both on the ground--which does little to lighten his mood. He picks up the cane but stares several long seconds at the portfolio lying in the dust.

Rebecca's heart goes out to him.

With a SIGH, Cole stoops down. Gathers up the portfolio. He holds it in his hands for a moment, then opens it and watches impassively as the wind whips his designs and sketches, one by one, into the air.

INT. LAUER ESTATE/COLE'S ROOM--NIGHT

Cole in bed, but wide awake.

He turns on a lamp, looks at the night-table clock. Nearly 4:00 a.m. He shakes his head, kills the light.

INT. REBECCA'S COTTAGE

She's also wide awake, staring at the ceiling. She rises, paces, peers out her window at the Great House, sees the light in Cole's bedroom go on, then off again. She turns on a lamp.

INT. COLE'S ROOM

Cole tosses and turns.

He gives up, rises, looks out the window. Sees Rebecca's cottage illuminated. He turns away, then is compelled to look again.

He can stand it no longer. He throws on a dressing gown, slippers, takes his cane, strides towards the door. As he reaches for the knob, the door opens. A woman stands in the doorway, illuminated by back light.

COLE  
(startled)

Rebecca...?

REBECCA  
You can't sleep either.

COLE  
(Beat)  
No. I can't.

She enters. Behind her the door swings closed.

REBECCA  
You sleep badly because you're always  
thinking, thinking--

Cole grabs for her, envelops her in his arms.

In the darkness we HEAR a wet kiss.

REBECCA  
Stop thinking.  
(Kiss)

COLE

God, all these feelings-  
 (kiss)  
 years of feelings, Rebecca  
 (kiss)  
 where to put them--

REBECCA

I know just the place.

COLE'S ROOM-DAWN

In the soft light, Cole and Rebecca half recline in bed, she with her back towards him and in his arms.

REBECCA

The intensity is always there, isn't it?  
 In everything you do.

COLE

What did you expect?

REBECCA

(Beat)

Exactly what you've given me.

For a moment they sit with their own thoughts. Then--

COLE

You know I've always--felt this way,  
 don't you? Since we were children.

REBECCA

(playfully)

What way?

COLE

You know--this way. About you.

REBECCA

Am I to take that as a declaration of love?

COLE

(Pause) Yes. Yes, you may.

REBECCA

Romantic to the core, aren't you. Yes, of course, Cole, I've known how you felt.

COLE

Mm. Modern "women's intuition" I suppose.

REBECCA

No, men's eternal transparency. Still, you might have spoken up.

COLE

I don't have the kind of words...

REBECCA

You are easily among the most articulate of men...

COLE

Confusing me with Flynn, aren't you...?

REBECCA

You have your own words.

(Beat)

I'm sure I didn't help matters.

(Beat)

I know I didn't.

She snuggles, kisses him on the cheek.

REBECCA

(Pause) Now what are you thinking?

COLE

(Beat)

About you.

REBECCA

Yes, what about me?

Cole is out of his depth.

COLE

(Beat)

It's difficult--

REBECCA

(softly)

Of course.

Cole struggles.

COLE

I feel as if--.  
I'd always believed you'd--.

REBECCA

(gently)

That's a lovely start.

He tries again.

COLE

I thought with this bloody leg, women--  
you wouldn't--.

Rebecca shakes her head "no."

More silence.

REBECCA

What else did you think?

Cole searches again for words.

COLE

Flynn. That you had--you had chosen Flynn.

She shakes her head "no."

COLE

But--the morning he left for France--

REBECCA

Yes--?

COLE

I saw him leave your cottage--I saw you  
together...

REBECCA

Yes, we were--together.

(Beat)

The only time.

(A big SIGH)

Since all of us were small, I've had this  
balancing act. Flynn and Cole, Cole and Flynn.  
I've held you both away all these years--  
so not to lose one for the other. Yes, I  
chose. That very first day--when we were  
children--I chose. I chose you both.

REBECCA

(continued)

And that last night, the night he left, I tried to keep as much of Flynn as I could--safe with me--as you are safe with me.

(Beat)

He told me he was off to France I became frightened. Behaved stupidly. Pushed him away. Before he could leave me. Later, when he came to say goodbye, I had the chance to undo what I had done.

COLE

I thought--I thought you and Flynn--I thought you loved Flynn...

REBECCA

Of course I did. I'm a woman. I loved Flynn, as did you, just about anybody who knew him--all of us.

COLE

Then...

REBECCA

And I've loved you every bit as much. I've always loved the two of you. An indecent indulgence, I know. What any woman wouldn't do to have either of you. And here I had both. Unspeakably selfish person that I am, I wanted to keep it that way. I wanted to keep you both.

(Beat)

Now Flynn is gone...

COLE

And I'm here.

He shakes his head in confusion.

COLE

I've not had much luck with women, you know. Never could figure out how you're fitted together.

REBECCA

(chuckling)

We're all of a piece. You must take the whole thing--either it works for you

(she kisses him)

or it doesn't.

Cole nods, then goes for and lights a cigarette. By gesture, Rebecca asks for one.

COLE

You smoke?

REBECCA

Quite a bit, actually.  
 (conspiratorially)  
 Socialist equality. Don't worry--  
never in public. I haven't  
 entirely lost my manners.

As he lights her cigarette, A PHONE RINGS OS. Cole pads out to the

HALLWAY

Cole, on phone.

COLE  
 (into receiver)

Sir!

A wide-eyed expression.

COLE

It's just a question of on-loading--  
 (listens)  
 Yes, Field Marshall. If they can drive a  
 lorry, we can teach them to operate a tank--  
 (listens)  
 Well, if you can manage the trains, I can do  
 the rest from--yes, sir--  
 (listens)  
 Yes. Right away.

He slowly puts down the phone. Returns to

BEDROOM

COLE

Appears we're quite finished with demon-  
 strations and redesigns...

REBECCA

After all you've done, they won't even  
 give you...

COLE

Field Marshall Haig. He's authorized deployment. The front lines.

REBECCA

What? How...

COLE

Our offensive has ground to a dead halt. A quarter million men lost and the Germans haven't given a inch. Haig's has turned to me--because we haven't anything else.

EXT. THE FRONT LINES - DAY

A luminous afternoon.

SEVERAL GROUPS OF TOMMIES--about 50 men in all--advancing warily on open ground down a gentle incline carpeted with glowing blood-red poppies. Ahead is a small stream, then a sparse thicket of bushes and a few old, gnarled apple trees, pink with blossoms. The ground slopes upward again from the stream. At the top of the rise, about 300 yards ahead at the far end of the thicket, sits a small, white wooden chapel, radiant in the bright sunlight.

No gun fire, no sign of an enemy.

The first row of men reach and cross the stream, then advance cautiously up the other side toward cover of the thicket 20 to 30 yards beyond.

A LIEUTENANT leading the men scans the ground ahead. Sees nothing suspicious. Signals to the platoon behind to follow. They move quickly up the slope as another row of men, just behind, start across the stream.

AMBUSH: A virulent torrent of MACHINE-GUN FIRE suddenly pours out from foxholes hidden behind bushes and from the hilltop chapel above. Secure in a short but strategically well-placed trench, a dozen GERMAN RIFLEMEN pop up, add to the hail of bullets.

Many Britishers are immediately hit, the remainder drop to the ground or scramble for what little cover they can find. Over the next few seconds another dozen are picked off. A few turn, try to run back, are felled immediately. In moments, half the men are dead or wounded, the rest pinned down helplessly. And then--

A TREMENDOUS RACKET O.C.--a RUMBLING, GRINDING, GROWLING from

the rise behind the British. Blackish-brown exhaust fumes, then the top of the first tank, then a dozen rear up over the slope and come barreling down the other side toward the stream, the beleaguered tommies, and the Germans up on the hillside beyond.

ON SUCCESSIVE GROUPS OF GERMANS--puzzlement, astonishment, then fear on their faces. It's many long seconds before they recover their wits, train their weapons on the tanks and open FIRE--ineffectively.

The tanks reach the stream. One hits a deep spot and floods. The others easily cross over. Advance up the other side.

A TANK GUNNER'S P.O.V.-through a slit we see the occasional flash of enemy machine-gun fire from behind the bush, but no clear target.

BACK ON SCENE

The tanks keep coming.

Increasing anxiety on the faces of the Germans. One of their machine-guns spits red-hot tracer bullets. We see--as do the Germans--how they bounce harmlessly off the biased steel plates.

A handful of Tommies jump behind a tank and advance along with it, shielded from German fire.

BRITISH CORPORAL

Let's go!

The tanks, FIRING blindly in the vague direction of the German emplacements, start to make hits. A few Germans, then ever greater numbers, panic, leap from their dugouts. Try to scramble away. All are quickly cut down.

Tanks reach the forward-most German emplacements. Run them over, guns and gunners crushed. Men are mauled in their trenches, their cries lost in the ENGINE NOISE.

Surviving Germans further up slope, terrified, abandon positions en masse. Tanks and the British infantry firing from behind their protective cover make short work of them.

Finally only the chapel is left. HEAVY FIRE still spews from its windows. The tank closest is hit, a second stalls, but the third keeps advancing.

It reaches the chapel, SMASHES in, chews up the splintering wood. The roof collapses on top of it but the tank pushes straight on through to the other side. Flattens it.

## REMOTE HILLTOP

Cole, Field Marshall Haig, his ADJUTANT, a FRENCH COLONEL, SEVERAL OTHER OFFICERS, French and English, survey the distant battle with unconcealed glee. Cole, the general and colonel each observe through huge field glasses.

HAIG

Where in blazes are they going?

COLE

To all appearances: Berlin.

HAIG

How do we call them back?

COLE

(stumped)

I--I never thought of that.

HAIG

They're getting way ahead of our lines.  
Way ahead. (He turns to adjutant)  
 We've got to try and broaden the advance.  
 Have the 4th Battalion brought up behind the  
 tanks. Spread 'em out so the Boche can't  
 outflank them.

The adjutant hops to it.

Haig peers again through his field glasses at the rapidly receding tanks.

HAIG

Combat is like a highwire act--stop and ya  
 fall off. Keep moving: victory. We should  
 have built these two years ago.

Cole bites his tongue.

HAIG

When will ya be gettin' us more?  
 We need to win this war before the  
 Yanks come in and take the credit.

COLE

How many more, sir?

The general puts his field glasses down.

HAIG

500 should do nicely for now, (To colonel),  
don't you think, Jacques?

INT. LAUER TANK FACTORY NO. 2--DAY

A dozen tanks without treads, lined up on an assembly line.

SEVERAL MEN are working on the first tank only. That, plus OTHER MACHINERY CREATE A CONSIDERABLE SOUND, but elsewhere there's little activity, and a number of WORKMEN are standing around, idly CHATTING.

ON Cole and Samuel, in heated discussion--too much of a RACKET to hear their words.

Cole turns, tears off work coat, strides rapidly to the door.

EXT. WAR OFFICE

Cole jumps out of his phaeton and, as he charges up the front steps, is accosted by a legless male BEGGAR with a tin cup, about to ask for alms.

BEGGAR

'Cuse me, sir...

COLE

(brushing past)

You're excused.

Cole gets to the top of the stairs, stops. Turns round and looks back at the beggar, a disabled vet, who for a moment looks to him like Flynn.

Cole flies back down while reaching into his pocket. Pulls out a wad of bills. Without checking the amount he stuffs them in the vet's cup.

INT. WAR OFFICE RECEPTION AREA

Robertson's secretary listens unruffled from behind her desk as Cole rails at her.

COLE

Are you seriously telling me I'm denied these parts because they're going into staff cars for field commanders...?

SECRETARY

I'm sorry, sir.

She hands Cole a document from off her desk.

SECRETARY

As a result of a decision the general made months ago to divert all...

COLE

(scanning document)

Incredible! I must speak with General Robertson. Now!

SECRETARY

Sorry, sir. That's not possible.

Cole charges for the general's door.

COLE

Bloody hell...!!

SECRETARY

He's not here, sir. He's on leave. A holiday in Madeira, I believe.

Cole stops. Glares at her.

COLE

In the midst of a war?

(Thumping document)

Incompetence of this magnitude you'd think would require his full attention. Unlike his adulteries and drunken binges, it cannot merely be practiced at odd moments...

SECRETARY

(meaningfully)

I quite agree with you, sir. Perhaps you'd care to speak to someone else. General Robertson's aide is avail...

COLE

Oh I'm going to speak with someone else all right!

He storms out.

INT. NO. 10 DOWNING STREET

The Prime Minister's inner office.

Tacked to one wall is a huge map of the Western Front with coded pins connoting the many divisions of both sides.

PRIME MINISTER LLOYD GEORGE, forties, behind his desk, hands back some papers to his UNDERSECRETARY. Both men are dressed in formal pinstripe suits.

LLOYD GEORGE

(wearily)

That's that. Anything else?

UNDERSECRETARY

Er, I'm afraid that--tank gentleman is still waiting to see you, Prime Minister.

LLOYD GEORGE

Mm. Tell him, tell him I've a meeting with the king.

UNDERSECRETARY

We told him that yesterday, sir.

LLOYD GEORGE

Ah yes. (Beat) Tell him that with the war at crisis point, I don't have a free moment. Explain to him that Russia's collapse releases sixty more German divisions to fall upon us on the Western Front. The French are fast becoming a token presence. Australians mutinying, Americans only just getting here in number, and their damn General Pershing has yet to let them fight. And then there's the U-boats-.

UNDERSECRETARY

Yes sir. I explained all that to him. The day before yesterday. He replied something to the effect that these were all compelling reasons to immediately deploy his--tanks.

LLOYD GEORGE

I see. (Sigh) Every crackpot inventor has a miracle weapon that will win the war in a fortnight.

UNDERSECRETARY

If I may, sir, Field Marshall Haig seemed quite impressed with these vehicles. And Mr. Churchill had authorized...

LLOYD GEORGE

Churchill! I should have known. Winston would authorize a space ship to the moon. (SIGH) Very well. I'll set this chap straight. What's his name--?

UNDERSECRETARY

Lauer, sir. Cole Lauer.

LLOYD GEORGE

Lauer. Sounds German. All right. Send him in.

LLOYD GEORGE'S OFFICE

Some time later.

Cole, Lloyd George.

A battalion of model tanks has captured the Prime Minister's desk. On several easels and pinned to every wall are photos of Cole's tanks in action, tank designs, sketches, etc.

Lloyd George, a bit overwhelmed, nods enthusiastically. He cradles a model tank in his arms.

LLOYD GEORGE

...All right, all right. I'll see that you have whatever you need. But if we are to do this, it must be very soon indeed. Intelligence reports the Germans are preparing to launch their most massive offensive of the war. They realize full well the desperateness of our situation...

COLE

When, Prime Minister?

LLOYD GEORGE

The moment the roads are passable. The Huns know the Americans will be here in force by summer, so they must make their push now. (Softly) And should we fail to stop them, the Yanks won't make a bit of difference--the war will be over.

INT. COLE'S ROOM -- DAY

Cole throws clothes haphazardly into two wicker suitcases as Rebecca looks on disapprovingly.

REBECCA

But why must you go yourself?

COLE

Half the tanks are still without gear shafts. We'll be fitting them during the crossing.

REBECCA

And then you'll come back straight away.

COLE

Then they'll need me to help train the new crews--107 of them for starters.

EXT. LAUER DRIVEWAY

Cole, Rebecca.

He throws his cases into the back of the Phaeton.

REBECCA

So you'll just be training others to do the fighting. Promise me you're just...

COLE

(reassuring)

I'm a civilian, Rebecca. They'll keep me well behind the front.

She's not reassured. He CRANKS up the Phaeton.

REBECCA

Promise me, Cole.

The engine IDLES loudly as Cole climbs into the driver's seat.

REBECCA

Promise me, Cole!

COLE

I'm going to miss the ship, Rebecca.

REBECCA

I won't lose you too.

COLE

I'm only going to France for the wine.

REBECCA

You detest wine. Please tell me you'll stay out of the fighting.

COLE

I'll do my best.

Both know he's lying.

COLE

Rebecca, I love you. Beyond words.

Tears streaming on her face, she rushes to him. An awkward embrace, a deep KISS.

He shifts into gear and ROARS out of the driveway. She refuses to watch him leave her, perhaps forever, and so abruptly turns away, averting her eyes from the road.

EXT. BEHIND GERMAN LINES--DAY

EARLY SUMMER

Live action blended with contemporaneous documentary stock footage.

A massive build-up of GERMAN TROOPS, cannon, a stream of trucks piled high with shells, swarms of biplanes overhead. The Germans really mean it.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRITISH FRONT LINES--DAWN

A light rain falls on British trenches.

Attrition is all too apparent--the MEN are far more widely spaced than before.

ARTILLERY bombardment starts.

TOMMY ONE

Early, ain't they?

TOMMY TWO

Maybe they're anxious to end the war and go home.

EXT. BRITISH TRENCHES--DAY

The following day. The rain has stopped. But not the shelling.

MEN crouch against the walls of their trenches, stony-eyed, exhausted by the unremitting strain. Above them the air HOWLS and HISSES with invisible swift movement--shells, bullets, shrapnel, death.

EXT. THROUGHOUT BRITISH FRONT LINES

The German attack smashes through enfeebled British defenses:

- British positions blown to bits, overrun.
- TOMMIES falling back like leaves before a winter wind.
- A FRENCH DIVISION in hasty retreat.

EXT. SOISSONS RAILROAD STATION

Well behind the British lines.

AMERICAN INFANTRY and CAVALRY unloading from a train on track 1.

Over on track 2, Cole supervising the offloading of several dozen tanks.

O.C. WE HEAR TROOPS MARCHING, AD LIB ORDERS, DISTANT BUT FREQUENT ARTILLERY FIRE.

EXT. FRENCH SECTOR--DAY

STOCK DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

The Germans meet only token resistance as they sweep south on a wide front toward Paris:

Mechanized German vehicles, trucks and artillery carriages chug methodically down the road. Pass a sign: *Paris 28 KM;*

Broad lines of GERMAN INFANTRY chomp unopposed across fields;

Dispirited and exhausted FRENCH INFANTRY fall back;

No Americans yet in evidence.

EXT. BEHIND THE BRITISH FRONT LINES--MORNING

An advance guard of THREE DOZEN GERMAN INFANTRY reach the top of a ridge. Stare down wide-eyed about a quarter mile to the bottom of a gentle incline.

THEIR P.O.V.:

Into the sun.

A hundred tanks, engines IDLING, await them.

The Germans freeze with terror as the tanks CLANK into gear, begin to move toward them menacingly...

GERMAN OFFICER  
(in German, with English  
subtitle)

So'ne Scheisse!  
(Subtitle: Holy shit!)

His troops open FIRE, to no effect.

ANGLE ON individual tanks.

CLOSE ON FACES inside.

BACK ON GERMANS, disciplined, FIRING steadily on the advancing tanks, but clearly frightened.

The tanks open FIRE. Germans fall...

INT. BRITISH FIELD HEADQUARTERS

A communications center and command outpost near the front: half dugout, half wooden fort, insulated by sand bags. Spartan furniture, naked light bulb overhead, radio-telephone.

Cole, Haig, adjutant, DISPATCHER, FOUR OR FIVE JUNIOR/SENIOR OFFICERS.

Distant ARTILLERY FIRE.

Cole paces.

A RUNNER arrives.

## RUNNER

(breathless, to Haig)

Americans holding at Belleau Wood. But the French are falling back again at Verdun. The dispatcher is on the primitive field telephone, rapidly taking notes. He turns to Haig.

## DISPATCHER

The tanks have made first contact with the Germans, Sir. (Beat) Armienes sector.

## EXT. ARMIENES

The grand tank formation has begun to scatter and break up into groups of five to ten vehicles, and occasionally, only one or two. Small battles unfold:

## A CONTINGENT OF GERMAN CAVALRY

in all its doomed splendor. Charges six tanks. Most horses and riders are cut down, the rest rear up in panic, gallop off out of control.

## A SINGLE TANK

surrounded by TWO DOZEN GUTSY GERMANS. They close in, guns blazing.

Tanks machine-guns open up. Half the Germans fall but -

## INSIDE THE SWELTERING TANK

sharp flecks of metal are thrown off the inner armor plates by the gun-fire POUNDING the hull outside. They ricochet back and forth, stinging the CREW.

## BACK ON SCENE

A GERMAN CORPORAL slips close enough to lob a grenade in the tanks' immediate path. He is crushed by the oncoming vehicle but the EXPLOSION peels off one track. The tank grinds to a halt.

A SECOND GERMAN scrambles up. Pokes a grenade in through a gun-port. The BLAST silences the tank's guns.

EXT. BELGIUM/HINDENBERG LINE-MID-AFTERNOON

A dozen tanks approach the old German trenches.  
GERMAN TROOPS are dug in. Their last stand.

The tanks tear through the barbed wire of no-man's-land.  
Bound right up to and over the trenches, guns cutting down  
GERMANS left and right, leaving them scattered on the  
ground like so many bloody rugs.

ELSEWHERE

one desperate OFFICER of a German light artillery battalion  
is frantically having his MEN lower the angle of a howitzer  
from about 75 degrees to horizontal, as two tanks approach.  
Only 1,000 yards distant and closing. 900 yards. 800.

The howitzer FIRES, misses.

The tanks bear down. The Germans re-load. Fire. The  
first tank BLOWS to pieces. The second dispatches the  
German gunners with MACHINE-GUN FIRE. Smashes the  
howitzer aside.

ELSEWHERE

SEVERAL FRENCH PLATOONS, led and shielded by  
several British tanks, overwhelm a German position.  
Two tanks, fitted with flame-throwers, charge ahead like  
fire-breathing dragons. Incinerate everything in their  
paths.

INT. FIELD HEADQUARTERS

Previous personnel.

A terrific COMMOTION outside, the SOUND OF MACHINERY rattling  
the entire dugout. Sand sifts through the roof.

Cole and several others step outside.

EXT. FIELD HEADQUARTERS

A tank has lumbered in, shuts down. Its THREE CREWMEN help their  
OFFICER out, his face a mass of blood.

TWO CORPSMEN arrive with a stretcher. The wounded man waves  
away the stretcher but leans on the corpsmen for support.

CREWMAN ONE

Got some kinda shrapnel right in the  
bloomin' eye.

CORPSMAN

We'll fix him up.

They lead him away.

CREWMAN TWO

We wuz gettin' them Germans real good.  
Then theyse brought up some new type  
artillery. Picking off tanks right  
and left.

COLE

(alarmed)

What?

CREWMAN ONE

One shell from that bugger--all it  
takes. Blows a tank to smithereens.

COLE

Where--what did it look like--this  
anti-tank gun?

CREWMAN ONE

Never seen the gun itself, sir.  
Never even heard it goin' off. Must  
be miles away...

COLE

Perhaps it's camouflaged. You  
must have seen something.

CREWMAN TWO

No sir. We wuz trying to get in close  
when the lieutenant got it in the eye.

(Turning toward tank)

The beast 'ere was workin' real well,  
too. Lots of fight left in 'er.

(To no one in particular)

Can we get another driver?

HAIG'S ADJUTANT

None here. Not on their feet.

The three crewmen are visibly disappointed.

COLE

I'm a rather good driver.

CREWMAN ONE  
(polite but very doubtful)  
Beg pardon, sir, but it's not like motorin'.  
Tricky beast. A lorry crossed wit' the devil.

COLE  
I know all about it, Corporal.

He climbs in.

CREWMAN TWO  
And the Boche, sir. They're throwin'  
everything they've got. And till we  
figure out this new cannon...

COLE  
Yes, Sergeant. That's exactly what we've  
got to do. Shall we get on with it?

Skeptically the three men follow. Cole starts up the engine. Displays his virtuosity, spinning the GRUNTING tank around almost on a dime. Then lumbers full speed towards the front.

INT. COLE'S TANK

A Hades of heat, noise, fumes, smoke and splattering of oil--but Cole is elated.

EXT. BELLEAU WOODS

As Cole's tank approaches a lightly wooded area perhaps 100 yards from the first German trenches, it comes upon a shattered, still smoking tank. Then another blown over on its side, its treads torn off.

INT. COLE'S TANK

Crewman One peers through his gunner's slit.

CREWMAN ONE  
Gawd Omighty. Two more. See?  
Some fuckin' shootin'.

Cole nods, slows the tank to a crawl as they pass between the two disabled vehicles. A few POT SHOTS fly from the German trench just yards ahead. Cole looks closely at the overturned tank.

COLE  
I--I don't see how one shell could have--.

He repositions himself, inspects the first disabled vehicle.

COLE  
Strange. Looks like they've been blown  
up from beneath. See what's happened  
to the treads...

He stops the tank abruptly.

COLE  
Mines!

CREWMAN ONE  
What, sir?

COLE  
It's not artillery. The Germans have  
laid some sort of mine. Between here  
and that trench. (Rising) Corporal, you  
drove her this afternoon...

CREWMAN ONE  
After a fashion, sir. Only straight back  
to HQ...

Cole slips off his goggles, starts climbing out of the tank.

COLE  
Well just follow my signals. And try not  
to run me over.

CREWMAN ONE  
You goin' out there?

But Cole's already gone.

EXT. BELLEAU WOODS

Cole walks slowly in front of his tank, searching the ground.  
Spots one mine, then another--steel plates, barely covered with  
dust and leaves.

Waves the tank forward and with hand signals leads it around the  
mines, then between two more. The odd German RIFLE SHOT rings  
out. RICOCHETS off the tank behind him. Cole seems  
oblivious.

ANGLE ON German trenches

For several long moments the GERMANS watch Cole's suicidal

bravery with astonishment. Then there's a few shrugs, and it's war as usual--they all resume FIRING.

ON COLE

Apparently no more mines. He scrambles back inside tank, miraculously unharmed, just as bullets rain down in earnest.

INT. TANK

Cole re-takes the controls, the corporal his machine-gun. Stinging metal fragments splinter off the tank's wall with every German round that finds its mark.

Cole guides the tank to one end of the German trench, crushing a machine-gun stationed there, then skillfully straddling the narrow trench, moves along its length, the tank firing as it goes.

EXT. BELLEAU WOODS

Cole's tank, minutes later.

The woods are thicker now, visibility more difficult. Cole advances slowly. His gunners systematically pick off a half dozen widely scattered German machine-gun positions ahead. They fall silent, one by one.

Seems like they've got the last. No--: one machine-gun continues to FIRE, but now from behind them. Ponderously, Cole turns the tank to sight on their single remaining enemy.

TANK GUNNER'S P.O.V.: There--obscured by bushes and a low-hanging sun shining directly into the tank gunner's eyes, a machine-gun is still CHATTERING, about 50 feet away. But is it shooting at them?

The tank gunner tries to turn his cannon on it. Awkward angle. He FIRES anyway. Misses. And then--:

A brave YOUNG OFFICER jumps up and scrambles out of the machine-gun emplacement. Runs to the tank, BANGS on it with a pistol.

CAPTAIN HARRY S. TRUMAN

(pistol in hand)

We're Americans, you blind, British bastards!

Cole's head pops out of the tank.

COLE  
 (saluting)  
 Sorry, Captain. Rather ungracious  
 of us. Welcome to the war.

INT. FIELD HEADQUARTERS

Dispatcher, Haig, General Staff.

DISPATCHER  
 (on phone, reporting back  
 what he's hearing)  
 Tanks engaged. Everywhere. All across  
 the front.  
 (He listens)

HAIG  
 And?

DISPATCHER  
 (halting)  
 Hard to get a clear picture, Sir.  
 Sounds like they're holding their own,  
 Sir.  
 (Beat)  
 No--advancing for the most part.  
 (Beat)  
 Reports of some tanks disabled--  
 or out of petrol--but still firing--  
 German resistance faltering--  
 everywhere Germans falling back.

A look of amazement comes over his face. Slowly he puts down  
 the phone. Turns to Haig.

DISPATCHER  
 Sir, they say one tank -- they think  
 it's Mr. Lauer's tank -- has sliced  
 right through the German lines.  
 Crossed into Belgium.

EXT. ALONG THE WESTERN FRONT--EARLY EVENING

MONTAGE--The tide of battle turned:

GERMANS fleeing en masse;

FRENCH INFANTRY advancing;

AMERICAN INFANTRY advancing;

Tanks rolling down main street of German-held town to token resistance; behind them wide-eyed FRENCH TOWNSPEOPLE emerge from their cottages, cheer them on.

GERMANS surrendering, hands on head, entire battalions to a platoon, entire platoons to a single tank.

EXT. BELGIAN HILLTOP--SUNRISE

A distant rooster CROWS.

Cole stands alone, unshaven, clothes uncharacteristically disheveled, his battered, exhausted tank some yards behind him. He has a view of the entire countryside, and watches the slow, receding German tide and advancing allies with immense satisfaction. An allied air-squadron passes overhead.

COLE

(sotto voice)

Not over, Flynn, but soon.

Cole loosens his tie.

EXT. FRENCH RAILROAD YARD--DAY

Bright sunshine.

a weary, dust-covered lightly guarded remnant of a disarmed GERMAN BATTALION waits to be herded onto allied trains.

AT ONE END OF THE STATION

in the first few cars the process has started, under French supervision.

Another large group of gaunt GERMAN PRISONERS, hands-on-heads, arrive, guarded by a handful of AMERICANS.

ON A TRACK ACROSS THE YARD

a just-arrived train starts offloading more tanks.

Observing this are a GERMAN GENERAL, age 60, wearing a pincenez, his uniform still immaculate, a shrewd look in his eye; and his adjutant, CORPORAL HITLER, age 25, small square mustache, slick black hair, intense glowing eyes, the face vaguely familiar. Both watch the tanks balefully.

GERMAN GENERAL

(to Corporal)

You're looking at the future, Adolph. Germany can also build these--tanks. Better tanks. And we will...

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BRITISH FRONT LINES--LATE MORNING/FALL

Drizzly and dreary.

All is quiet. Rows of BRITISH SOLDIERS wait expectantly in their trenches.

NARRATOR (over)

That week was the worst of the war for the Germans, but many others nearly as disastrous followed in rapid succession, thanks in great measure to our tanks, and also to our American friends, at last there in force.

A DISTANT BELL BEGINS TO TOLL ELEVEN.

NARRATOR (over)

By November the German army had utterly lost the capacity--and the will--to fight. Their Kaiser abdicated and fled to Holland. And so, by common consent, on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918, the Great War at last came to an end.

On the eleventh chime, 500 yards across no-man's-land, a German soldier--it's Siggi--half rises from his machine-gun emplacement, fires one SHORT BURST high over the tops of the British trenches, stands, salutes, turns, and disappears into a mist of silver.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE IN HOUSE OF LORDS--DAY

PANNING the elegant room--circa 1950:

On the desk is a large family photo of a middle-aged Cole and Rebecca, and their three teenage children; another of Graham Lauer; and an old faded photo of Flynn in uniform;

one of Cole, Flynn and Rebecca as adolescents; Cole and Rebecca's wedding portrait.

Covering the walls: a tattered regimental flag along with plaques and cases of medals and citations, among them the Victoria Cross, photos of Winston Churchill, Cole standing with royalty, etc.

Then, on a display table, Cole and Flynn's antique battlefield.

NARRATOR (O.C)

But clear proof of the tank's singular value was not to come for another 25 years--25 years before my long struggle to develop them in effective numbers was decisively vindicated. And sorry to say, not by the British.

The CAMERA comes to rest on Cole, now in his sixties. He has been narrating from the outset.

COLE/NARRATOR

In May 1940, German tanks overran France and very nearly won World War Two in just six weeks. Funny how the weapon that ends the last war always starts the next. Fortunately, Hitler's tanks couldn't swim the channel.

(CHUCKLING)

COLE/NARRATOR (cont'd)

Like to think tanks have had their day, what with nuclear bombs stockpiled in every nook and cranny. Always there's a new threat.

Cole rises, a bit stiffly, from the chair, and takes his cane in hand.

COLE (Cont'd)

Can't imagine anyone dumb enough to start a war now, can you? Of course, Flynn and I, and the rest--we thought that back in 1914. Relying heavily on his cane, Cole limps out the door.

ON toy battlefield.

FADE OUT

