

1917

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'Life, to be sure,
Is nothing much to lose,
But young men think it is,
And we were young.'

-A.E. Housman

'We have so much to say, and we shall never say it.'

*-Erich Maria Remarque
All Quiet On The Western Front*

NOTE:

The following script takes place in real time, and - with the exception of one moment - is written and designed to be one single continuous shot.

EXT. MEADOW - DAY, APRIL 6TH 1917

A rolling landscape. The rustling of leaves, and birdsong.

Thunder rumbles in the distance. There is no rain.

A figure lies against a tree, eyes closed - this is SCHOFIELD, early-20s. Soft features.

A man is sleeping next to him on the grass - BLAKE, 19, youthful, strapping.

SERGEANT SANDERS (O.S.)

Blake.

Blake doesn't stir.

SERGEANT SANDERS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Blake!

Blake wakes. He's in uniform, damp and crumpled - Lance Corporal chevrons adorn it.

BLAKE

(sleepily)

Sorry, Sarge.

SERGEANT SANDERS

Pick a man, bring your kit.

BLAKE

Yes, Sarge.

Blake stands, stiff limbs coming back to life.

Schofield's eyes are still shut. Blake holds out his hand to Schofield. Schofield opens his eyes - they are gentle, wise. Schofield grudgingly raises his hand for a lift.

Blake heaves him to his feet - his uniform is identical to Blake's, same rank, the only difference is the brass wound stripe on Schofield's left sleeve.

They trudge towards Sanders, fastening their webbing. A smattering of SOLDIERS - same regiment - same state of fatigue and filth, lie around them. Stealing sleep.

SERGEANT SANDERS (O.S.)

Don't dawdle.

BLAKE

No, Sarge.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

After a few paces the long grass begins to give way to well trodden earth. Washing lines appears on either side of them.

Blake and Schofield move past them. After a while -

BLAKE (CONT'D)
Did they feed us?

Schofield shakes his head, he hands an envelope to Blake.

SCHOFIELD
No, just mail.

Blake's eyes light up at the sight of the envelope, he tears it open, reads it as he walks. Eyes scanning quickly, his face filling with warmth.

BLAKE
(reading)
Myrtle's having puppies.

Blake finishes the note and slips it into a pocket.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
You get anything?

SCHOFIELD
No.

Schofield doesn't seem to mind.

The mess tents are now alongside. Fires are stoked, cooking is underway. More soldiers mill about.

BLAKE
I'm bloody starving, aren't you? I
thought we might get some decent
grub out here - only reason I
decided against the priesthood.

Schofield lets out a laugh. Blake looks on hungrily as they pass by the mess tents.

Schofield rummages in his pockets, finds what he's looking for - a handkerchief with some food wrapped in it. Blake's eyes fall on it hungrily.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
What you got there?

SCHOFIELD
Ham and bread.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BLAKE

Where did you find that?

SCHOFIELD

I have my uses.

Schofield breaks the bread in half. As he does this, they move down a slope, and begin to descend down into the earth, into--

EXT. COMMS TRENCH - DAY - CONTINUOUS

A narrow Comms trench.

SCHOFIELD

Here-

The bread is stale, practically cardboard. Blake's teeth struggle to get through it.

BLAKE

(mouth full of food)

Tastes like old shoe.

SCHOFIELD

Cheer up. This time next week it'll be chicken dinner.

The trench drops deeper into the earth...

BLAKE

Not me. Leave got cancelled.

SCHOFIELD

They say why?

BLAKE

No idea.

A beat. The world above has now disappeared.

SCHOFIELD

It's easier not to go back at all.

Blake registers this - looks at him.

The wider Rear Trench crosses their path. Chains of soldiers move past them - shifting crates, ammunition, cooking, and medical supplies.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAKE
 (looking at the soldiers)
 Something's up.

Expectation is growing in Blake. But Schofield looks concerned. They cut a route through the bustle.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
 Did you hear anything?

SCHOFIELD
 No.

BLAKE
 Has to be the push, right?

Men carrying things push past them. Blake watches.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
 Ten bob says we're going up.

SCHOFIELD
 I'm not taking that bet.

BLAKE
 Why? 'Cos you know I'm right?

SCHOFIELD
 No. 'Cos you haven't got ten bob.

Blake laughs.

They follow Sanders into-

EXT. SECOND TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

They turn into a wider second line trench.

SERGEANT SANDERS
 In your own time, gentlemen...

Up ahead, Sanders waits.

Blake and Schofield put on speed, catch Sanders.

BLAKE
 Is there news, Sarge?

SERGEANT SANDERS
 News of what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAKE

The big push. It was supposed to happen weeks ago. They told us we'd be home by Christmas.

SERGEANT SANDERS

(mild sarcasm)

Yes, well, sorry to disrupt your crowded schedule, Blake, but the Brass Hats didn't fancy it in the snow.

BLAKE

More's the pity Sarge, I could have done with some turkey.

SERGEANT SANDERS

Well, I'll make sure to relay your displeasure to command.

Ahead and above them is a web of telegraph wires - stretching overhead and along the trench. THREE ROYAL ENGINEERS are working on them, tagging and testing. They duck around them.

SCHOFIELD

So what's on the cards then, Sergeant?

SERGEANT SANDERS

The Hun are up to something.

SCHOFIELD

Any idea what?

SERGEANT SANDERS

No - but it's bound to ruin our weekend.

Sanders turns a corner, and comes to a stop. Just beyond him is the dark, yawning mouth of a Dugout.

SERGEANT SANDERS (CONT'D)

Now listen, Erinmore is inside, so tidy yourselves up.

They are suddenly alert.

SERGEANT SANDERS (CONT'D)

You never know - might be mentions in dispatches for this one, if you don't bugger it up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Sanders gives them a look, and disappears inside the dugout.

Schofield quickly buttons up his tunic, hiding any sins there may be underneath.

Blake nervously tidies himself, leans in to Schofield.

BLAKE
Must be something big if the
General's here.

They enter.

INT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Lit by paraffin lamps, it takes Schofield a moment for his eyes to adjust to the half-light. He and Blake hand their rifles to the ORDERLIES, salute, and stand at attention.

There is a simmering sense of unease in this place.

In the centre of the room, there are two tables. On one table lie several maps, on the other are a number of large aerial reconnaissance photographs.

GENERAL ERINMORE (50s), LIEUTENANT GORDON (40s) and a CAPTAIN are gathered around the far table, looking down at the aerials, talking in hushed tones.

Other men watch from the shadows - TWO NCOs and ANOTHER ORDERLY.

SERGEANT SANDERS
Lance Corporals Blake and
Schofield, Sir.

General Erinmore turns around. Looks at Blake and Schofield.

GENERAL ERINMORE
Which one of you is Blake?

BLAKE
Sir.

ERINMORE
You have a brother, a Lieutenant in
the 2nd Devons?

BLAKE
Yes, sir. Joseph Blake. Is he-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERINMORE

Alive, as far as I know. And with your help I'd like to keep it that way.

Blake stares at Erinmore, he would do anything.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

Sanders tells me you're good with maps. That true?

BLAKE

Good enough, Sir.

ERINMORE

So.

Erinmore turns the map to face Blake. The British lines are marked in blue, the German lines in red.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

We are here. The 2nd Devons are advancing here.

He points out a cross on the map at Croisilles Wood.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

How long will it take you to get there?

Blake hesitantly studies it. Croisilles Wood sits in the centre of a huge area of land, which is scored as occupied territory.

BLAKE

I don't understand, Sir.

SCHOFIELD

Sir, that land is held by the Germans.

ERINMORE

Germans have gone.

Shock plays on their faces.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

Don't get your hopes up. It appears to be a strategic withdrawal. They seem to have created a new line, nine miles back here, by the looks of it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Erinmore runs his finger along the massed red lines of the German trenches and fortifications, newly drawn on the map.

The new German Line - what came to be known as the Hindenburg Line - is huge, and cuts its way across the paper, almost intersecting with Croisilles Wood.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

Colonel Mackenzie is in command of the 2nd. He sent word yesterday morning that he was going after the retreating Germans. He is convinced he has them on the run - that if he can break their lines now, he will turn the tide. He is wrong.

Schofield watches Blake as he begins to register what this might mean.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

Colonel Mackenzie has not seen these aerials of the enemy's new line.

Erinmore turns to the other table.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

Come round here, Gentlemen.

Blake and Schofield move to the next table. They look down at the large aerial photographs.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

Three miles deep. Field fortifications, defences and artillery the like of which we've never seen before.

Beat.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

The 2nd are due to attack the line shortly after dawn tomorrow. They have no idea what they are in for. And we can't warn them - as a parting gift, the enemy cut all our telephone lines.

Blake and Schofield are silent while they take this in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

Your orders are to get to the 2nd
at Croisilles Wood, one mile south
east of the town of Ecoust.

Erinmore hands over an envelope to Blake. We see the
distinctive red stamp of Army Command.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

Deliver this to Colonel Mackenzie.
It is a direct order to call off
tomorrow morning's attack.

Erinmore speaks slowly, desperate to impress upon Blake and
Schofield the gravity of this situation. Nothing can be
misunderstood.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

If you don't, it will be a
massacre. We would lose two
battalions. Sixteen hundred men,
your brother among them.

Schofield hides his shock. But Blake looks at Erinmore,
determination etched in his face: *understood*.

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

Do you think you can get there in
time?

BLAKE

Yes, Sir.

ERINMORE

Any questions?

BLAKE

No, Sir.

Schofield eyes flick to Blake: *No questions?* Blake purposely
doesn't catch Schofield's eye.

ERINMORE

Good. Over to you, Lieutenant.

The men salute Erinmore. Lieutenant Gordon, stands to one
side.

LIEUTENANT GORDON

Supplies, Gentlemen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Lt. Gordon nods them over to a table. Various items are laid out on it.

LIEUTENANT GORDON (CONT'D)
Map, torches, grenades, and a
couple of little treats.

They look. A folded map, two electric torches, two grenades and two small packs of Huntley and Palmer biscuits lie on the table. They take them and start hastily putting them into their webbing. While they do:

LIEUTENANT GORDON (CONT'D)
Leave immediately, take this trench
west, up on Sauchiehall Street,
then north west on Paradise Alley
at the front. Continue along the
front line until you find the
Yorks.

Gordon slides a note into Blake's top pocket.

LIEUTENANT GORDON (CONT'D)
Give this note to Major Stevenson.
He's holding the line at the
shortest span of No Man's Land.
You'll cross there.

Both men turn at the mention of No Man's Land.

SCHOFIELD
It will be daylight, Sir. They'll
see us.

ERINMORE (O.C.)
No need to be concerned. You should
meet no resistance.

An Orderly hands them back their rifles.

Blake moves towards the doorway. Schofield turns to Erinmore.

SCHOFIELD
Sir, is it just us?

Erinmore looks up.

ERINMORE
*"Down to Gehenna or up to the
Throne*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

ERINMORE (CONT'D)

*He travels the fastest who travels
alone."*

Wouldn't you say, Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT GORDON

Yes, Sir. I would.

The General looks at them levelly.

ERINMORE

Good luck.

Blake and Schofield turn and head through the door-

EXT. SECOND LINE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Schofield's eyes wince in the daylight. A small curved branch leads from the rear of the dugout back to the Second Line.

SCHOFIELD

Blake - let's talk about this for a
minute.

BLAKE

Why?

Blake is already off, moving fast.

Schofield moves after him, trying to fill and fasten his webbing as he goes.

SCHOFIELD

Blake!

Blake begins to move faster, setting a punishing pace. Boots clattering over the wooden boards.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

We just need to think about it-

BLAKE

-There's nothing to think about.
It's my big brother.

Schofield runs to catch up, he falls in behind Blake, breathing heavy.

SCHOFIELD

We should at least wait till it's
dark-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAKE

Erinmore said to leave immediately.

SCHOFIELD

Erinmore's never *seen* No Man's
Land. We won't make it ten yards.
If we just wait-

BLAKE

You heard him. He said the Boche
have gone.

SCHOFIELD

Is that why he gave us *grenades*?

The Second line runs through a small row of derelict railway
cottages. Braziers have been lit, men mill around queueing to
collect their rations.

Schofield and Blake push themselves to the edge of the trench
to get around the crush.

Blake is through and clear, but Schofield bumps into a
Sergeant.

SERGEANT

Watch where you're going!

SCHOFIELD

Sorry.

Blake keeps pace, Schofield jogs to catch him.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

All I'm saying is that we wait.

BLAKE

Yes, you would say that, because
it's not your brother, is it?

Schofield moves alongside Blake again, grabs his arm.

SCHOFIELD

Look, the last time I was told the
Germans were gone, it didn't end
well.

Blake shakes him off, and pushes his way forward, squeezing
in and out of the lines of traffic - His shoulder and pack
battering against MEN as he passes them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

You don't know, Blake, you weren't there.

Ahead a group of men are bunched up collecting mail and parcels from the post bag. Gumming up the trench.

BLAKE

Excuse me... Excuse me!

Blake and Schofield squeeze past them.

Another junction. A painted sign: "SAUCHIEHALL STREET" points to a smaller branching comms line. Blake turns up it. Schofield follows-

EXT. SAUCHIEHALL LINE (COMMS "DOWN" TRENCH)- CONTINUOUS

Much narrower. Blake pushes onwards, going against the direction of the traffic. Schofield follows after him, single file, increasingly frustrated. Soldiers buffet against them.

A Sergeant snarls at them.

SERGEANT MILLER

You're going up a down trench you bloody idiots.

BLAKE

Orders of the General, Sir.

Schofield follows, catching the ire from the men Blake has just passed. He checks his watch.

SCHOFIELD

Alright, say the Boche have gone. Nine miles will take us, what, six hours? Eight at the very most. So we've got time to wait until the sun sets. Otherwise we'll be wide open-

BLAKE

-It's enemy territory, we've got no idea what we're walking into-

SCHOFIELD

-Blake, if we're not clever about this, no one will get to your brother.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAKE

I will.

Blake's tone indicates that this is the end of the conversation.

They are approaching a junction. They slow down. A flicker of fear on both of their faces.

SCHOFIELD

We're here. This is the front line.

EXT. PARADISE (FRONT LINE) TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

The Front Line.

A sign hangs on the junction wall: PARADISE ALLEY. Just visible above the trench wall to the front is an endless line of wire.

BLAKE

Now we need to find the Yorks.

There is an eeriness here, a sudden smothering silence.

Blake looks around. Trying to work out which way is North West.

Blake heads in that direction, moving fast again. Schofield follows alongside him.

The trench stretches away from them, in a long line. Duckboards slick with mud mark out a path.

There are many men here, and many pairs of eyes watch from the shadows of dugouts.

Crudely painted signs are strung up along the walls, dire warnings. We catch glimpses as Blake and Schofield pass:

KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN IN DAYLIGHT! ENEMY SNIPERS AT PLAY!

They walk single file down the Front Line.

TWO STRETCHER BEARERS are heading towards them, A MAN carried between them. Schofield drops back, looks down. The man is unconscious, his face bandaged - two red bloodstains in place of eyes.

Fear is rooting itself in Schofield. He fights it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Schofield looks up, he's briefly lost sight of Blake round the next bend. He moves to catch up. He hears voices.

PRIVATE STOKES (O.S.)
Here, watch who you're shoving.

BLAKE (O.S.)
Get out of the way then.

Schofield's puts on speed, quickly pushes aside the soldier in front of him.

He makes his way to Blake, three SOLDIERS have surrounded him. One, PRIVATE STOKES - a large red-haired bruiser, with tattoos on his forearms - is gripping Blake's tunic. Blake has him by the collar. Both are angry. Blake is on the verge of tears.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
Let go.

PRIVATE STOKES
Fuck you think you are, pushing wounded men around?

Schofield is quickly into the fray, putting himself in between Blake and the Private.

BLAKE
Let go of me!

SCHOFIELD
Stop.

PRIVATE STOKES
Arsehole knocked our Sergeant down,
the man's fucking wounded-

Beside them an NCO with a sling on, is being helped out of the mud.

BLAKE
Alright. I'm sorry, alright, I'm
sorry.

Blake struggles to get free, tears of frustration well in his eyes. Schofield sees this, realises Blake is on the verge of losing control.

The Private's hand balls into a fist, his anger simmering.

Schofield gets between them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SCHOFIELD
We're on commission. Orders from
the General.

BLAKE
Let me through.

Stokes stops.

SCHOFIELD
(levelly)
Get out of the way.

PRIVATE STOKES
Right. Just watch where you're
going.

The other men move aside to give them a passage through.

They keep moving. Schofield is a step behind Blake, he steals
glances at him, concerned.

The two men walk on, the silence heavier. After a while -

SCHOFIELD
It's bloody quiet...

A beat. Blake looks at Schofield.

BLAKE
Was it like this before Thiepval?

The name does something to Schofield. Fear clings to him. He
pushes it away.

SCHOFIELD
I don't remember.

BLAKE
You don't remember the Somme?

SCHOFIELD
Not really.

BLAKE
Well, you did alright out of it. At
least wear your ribbon.

Beat.

SCHOFIELD
Don't have it anymore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

They push on round the next bend.

BLAKE

What? You lost your medal?

Before he can answer, the trench suddenly expands - the back wall has been blown out into a large crater. Debris and sandbags are strewn around. A small team of DIGGERS work on it with picks and shovels, breaking up the earth, pulling out body parts from the mud, putting them in empty sandbags.

SCHOFIELD

Stay low.

Schofield climbs over the rubble and sandbags, crushing his body to keep his head below the front parapet.

Blake follows. One of the diggers turns to Schofield, his voice a harsh whisper.

NCO HARVEY

God's sake. Careful there, you're stepping on the dead.

Schofield looks at the sandbag, 15 inches by 25. Red is rusting through it.

NCO HARVEY (CONT'D)

That's our Sergeant -

Schofield quickly moves off the bag.

NCO HARVEY (CONT'D)

Be better washing them out of this dugout with a bloody hose.

BLAKE

Do you know where the Yorks are?

NCO HARVEY

The next bend you'll be standing on top of half of them. Shot to hell two nights ago.

Blake and Schofield continue. They slip round a bend and into a small bay.

They stop by two men - one is burning the lice from his clothes with a lighter Another, BUCHANAN, sits against the back wall, a small dog on his lap.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

SCHOFIELD

Yorks?

Buchanan nods.

PRIVATE BUCHANAN

Yes, Corp.

BLAKE

Where's Major Stevenson?

PRIVATE BUCHANAN

Killed a couple of nights ago,
Corporal. Lieutenant Leslie has
command.

BLAKE

Where can we find him?

Buchanan nods down the line.

PRIVATE BUCHANAN

Next dug-out.

They round the bend and spot the dugout. It has been badly shelled, but patched and re-built. A fire is lit in a brazier just outside the door. Inside, a provisions bag and a few other wooden items hang from a rafter, out of reach of the rats.

SCHOFIELD

Here.

LT. LESLIE is asleep on a small camp bed, his arm over his eyes. A couple of ORDERLIES sit or lie nearby.

They approach the sleeping Leslie.

BLAKE

Sir?

He doesn't stir. Blake speaks louder.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Lieutenant Leslie, Sir?

Leslie stirs a little, he doesn't move his arm from his eyes.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

What is it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

BLAKE

We have a message from General
Erinmore.

Leslie looks up, his face shines with sweat, his voice is
croaky, full of flu, a little delirious.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

Are you our relief?

Schofield shakes his head.

SCHOFIELD

No, Sir.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

Then when the fucking hell are they
due?

BLAKE

We don't know, Sir. But we've got
orders to cross here.

Blake offers the letter.

Leslie sits up. Looks at them queerly.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

That is the German front line.

BLAKE

We know, Sir. If you'll just take
the letter-

Blake hands over Erinmore's letter. Leslie sighs, tears it
open and reads quickly.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

(as he reads)

Settle a bet, what day is it?

SCHOFIELD

Friday.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

Friday. Well, well, well. None of
us was right. This idiot thought it
was Tuesday.

(off the letter)

Are they out of their fucking
minds?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

One slow night, and the brass think
the Hun have just gone home.

SCHOFIELD

(looking at Blake)

Do you think they're wrong, Sir?

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

We lost an officer and three men
two nights ago. They were shot to
bits patching up wire. We dragged
two of them back here. Needn't have
bothered.

Blake is determined to press on.

BLAKE

Sir, the General is sure the enemy
have withdrawn. There are aerals
of the new line-

Leslie gets to his feet.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

Shut up. We've fought and died over
every inch of this fucking place,
now they suddenly give us miles?

Schofield turns and stares at Blake.

Blake won't meet his eye.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

It's a trap.

Leslie leans in to Schofield.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

But, chin up. There's a medal in it
for sure. Nothing like a scrap of
ribbon to cheer up a widow.

Schofield stares at him like he would lift him out of his
boots with one punch.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

Alright.

Leslie walks out of the dugout. As he walks-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

BLAKE

Where's the nearest way through,
Sir?

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

Our wire's a mess. But there is a
path through. Of sorts.

He leads them a few paces to a small dead-end lookout trench,
half earth, half corrugated steel. At the end of it is a
rudimentary periscope.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

(to the soldier)

Rushworth! Let him look.

The soldier manning it steps away to allow them to look.
Blake presses his eye to the lens.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

Straight ahead, to the left, past
the dead horses-

Blake squints, moves the periscope. While Blake does this,
Leslie lights a cigarette, his hands shaking.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

There's a gap directly behind them.
Useful, because if it's dark you
follow the stench. When you get to
the second wire, look out for the
bowing chap. There's small break
just beside him.

As Blake scans the terrain with the periscope, Schofield
methodically prepares himself.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

The German line is a hundred and
fifty odd yards after that. Watch
out for the craters. They're deeper
than they look. You fall in,
there's no getting out.

Leslie indicates for them to follow.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

This way.

Leslie kicks at a sleeping PRIVATE KILGOUR as he walks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

Wake up, Kilgour.
(to himself)
Bloody waste of space.

SCHOFIELD

Any cover, Sir? Anywhere to jump
off from?

Leslie leads them to a wide ladder leaning against the trench wall.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

No. The sap trench was blown to
hell weeks ago. It's full of bodies
anyway. Your best bet is to pop
over here.

Blake and Schofield stop by the ladder, ready themselves,
checking and loading their rifles, fixing their bayonets

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

If you do get shot, try to make it
back to the wire. We won't come
after you, not until it's dark.
And, if by some fucking miracle you
do make it, send up a flare.

SCHOFIELD

Don't have any, Sir.

Leslie gestures impatiently to a nearby PRIVATE KILGOUR.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

Well get him one, Kilgour! Make
yourself useful.

PRIVATE KILGOUR

Yes, Sir.

Kilgour goes to fetch the flare gun, Leslie amuses himself:

LIEUTENANT LESLIE

(sprinkling whisky on the men)
"Through this holy unction may the
Lord pardon thee whatever sins or
faults thou hast committed"

Leslie laughs mirthlessly. Schofield and Blake try to stay
focused.

Kilgour hands Leslie a flare pistol and two cartridges.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

I do *hate* losing these to the Hun.
So when they start shooting at you,
could you be so kind as to throw it
back, there's a good chap.

Blake tucks the flare and cartridges into his pack.

LIEUTENANT LESLIE (CONT'D)

Cheerio.

Leslie steps back. A crowd of MEN have now gathered behind him to watch Blake and Schofield, their faces a combination of shock and fascination.

Blake and Schofield climb onto the firing step.

Schofield looks at Blake, speaks quietly to him.

SCHOFIELD

You sure?

Blake isn't. But he nods.

BLAKE

Yes.

Blake goes to climb over. Schofield stops him.

SCHOFIELD

Age before beauty.

Schofield takes a deep breath, and goes first. He puts one hand over the parapet. Then the other.

Slowly he advances up, his head inching over the protection of the trench. His hand is shaking, he drives it into the mud, grasping for purchase.

Everyone is still, breathless, listening for the enemy to fire.

Schofield drags his body up and over into -

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS

Vast, almost unbearably open after the close quarters of the trench.

A light mist hangs low over the land.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The ground is treacle-like. Schofield's hands and knees sink into it as he pulls himself forward, his eyes are trained through the British wire towards the German lines.

The whole world is lunar and empty. Earth pounded to atoms, all mounds and holes.

Nothing moves. Nothing lives.

The only sound is Blake's breathing as he heaves himself out of the trench beside Schofield.

Both men are still for a beat. Hunched down low on their knees, two nocturnal animals caught in the daylight.

British wire runs in loops ahead of them, tangled and haphazardly strung. A mess to navigate through.

They get to their feet and move forwards over the slick earth, towards the putrid remains of the horses. Breathing through their mouths, trying to deal with the stench.

A layer of black fur covers the animals, as Schofield and Blake close in on them they see the fur is actually flies, hundreds of them.

Schofield moves past the remains and through the first break in the wire. The path is pocked with craters and puddles, shrapnel litters everything.

Blake follows Schofield through the channel - ahead, on the second wire, is "the bowing chap" - a GERMAN SOLDIER, dead, bent double over the wire, one arm outstretched in a courtly manner, as if bowing.

Schofield doesn't linger on the dead German, doesn't look at his face. He focuses on the task at hand. To the side of the man is a small gap in the razor wire, easy to miss without the landmark. Schofield struggles to further pull apart the dense tangle of wire. He indicates for Blake to pass through.

As he does so, Schofield slips in the mud. His hand instinctively closes around the wire. It slices into his palm, hooking into his flesh.

Bright red seeps along his hand, he wrenches it back, tearing the skin to free himself. A heavy breath hisses out of him. He balls his hand into a fist to stem the bleeding.

BLAKE (O.C.)
You alright?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Blake looks at him with concern. Schofield nods that he's fine.

SCHOFIELD

Look for cover.

Everything after here is unnatural land. Craters are gouged out of the earth. There is a rise and fall to this stretch, but no flow or reason to it.

About a hundred yards from them, in the distance, is an artificial horizon, something grey, mesh-like, stretching the entire length of the land - The German Wire. Occasional dead trees dot the land beyond.

Blake goes into the closest crater. He looks to Schofield, some silent communication. Schofield's eyes pull out a path where there isn't one.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

Sap trench.

Schofield goes first, crouching low, moving faster now, picking his way towards a hole in the earth.

And then jumps directly into the old sap trench.

Blown out and neglected, it is now little more than a ditch, but it offers a stretch of cover.

Schofield checks his wounded hand. It pulses blood. He feels as if he is being watched. He looks around.

Next to him is the body of a German soldier; face down in the mud, rats are on the corpse, feasting.

Blake jumps into the sap just next to Schofield. He lands right next to A DEAD MAN, looking straight at them. He is sitting up, his lips and eyes have been chewed off by rats. White teeth grin in a pale face.

Blake reflexively scrambles back in horror, knocking into Schofield. Schofield slips, reaches out to steady himself, and grabs at the first thing he finds - the BODY OF THE GERMAN.

Schofield's wounded hand lands on the man's back and sinks - right through.

Schofield's cut hand goes into the putrid flesh.

Beside him, Blake is frozen. Panicking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Schofield gestures to him - 'stay calm'. Blake tries to steady himself.

They move further along the side of the sap trench. Schofield peers out. About eighty yards now to the German wire.

They gather themselves. Schofield takes the lead. He pulls himself out of the sap, Blake follows.

They move, crouched low. Watching. Waiting for guns to open on them.

Silence.

The land is flatter here. There is an eerie feeling of emptiness and silence. Schofield and Blake keep moving forwards, trying to stay focused. Crouching to keep low.

The mud is like oil, but some things are solid underfoot. Outlines of guns, shrapnel, unexploded shells, bodies.

Suddenly a loud sound approaching.

TWO PLANES.

Blake and Schofield both move quickly to the nearest shell-hole. They throw themselves in and freeze. Keeping the brims of their helmets low, hiding their faces from the planes above. Blending in to the landscape around them.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

(Sotto)

Stay still.

The engines grow louder. The planes fly close overhead, and then begin to recede into the distance.

Both men now turn their heads to look at them.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

(Sotto)

They're ours.

Blake nods.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

(Sotto)

Keep going. We're half way.

They move back out into the open expanse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Large shell holes appear on either side of them. They pick their way through them, balancing carefully along the ridges.

They climb to the top of a small hillock and suddenly on the other-side - vertigo. The ground falls away steeply in a mine crater, stories deep.

They look down into it.

BLAKE

There's a gap in the wire.

We can see the base of the crater: The nearest line of German wire has been split by the blast, and hangs limply down the side wall of the crater, the other half of it disappears into a huge pool of water at its base.

They meet each other's gaze. An obvious way through the wire. It's clear they need to go down into the crater.

They slide carefully down the steep bank.

At the base of the crater the water is fathomless - the colour of mucus, and the same consistency. A DEAD GERMAN floats in it, bloated.

Blake follows in Schofield's exact footsteps, walking around the edge of the pool.

Blake looks into the pool. Things float in it. Bodies. The pages of a letter, a cigarette tin, a water canteen.

Ahead of them, halfway up the far bank another line of German wire - the main one - is suspended across the crater. There is a gap beneath the wire.

They climb up the far bank towards the gap. Blake is struggling.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Sco...

Schofield helps him up the slope.

The main German wire is a huge thicket of razor wire, denser than a hedgerow. Using their hands, they dig into the muddy sides of the crater, and pull themselves upwards, through the German wire.

Schofield looks - close to him, caught on the wire, a small clump of human hair blows in the breeze.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Hands and bayonets digging deep into the muddy bank, they haul themselves out of the crater. Ahead of them is the German Front Line.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

There! That's the front line.

They lift their rifles and aim them towards the German line.

Blake moves first. He quickly approaches the German trench. Schofield is next to him.

Both men suck in a breath and stand tall, leaning over the German sandbags.

Their rifles sweep in unison down the length of the trench. Empty. Schofield turns to Blake.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Fuck me. They really have gone.

They look around in awe - this trench is massive, fortified... and seemingly abandoned. Intermittent shell holes have levelled large sections.

Blake and Schofield drop down into the trench.

EXT. GERMAN FRONT LINE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

This trench is better crafted than the British trench. Deeper and well reinforced, and eerily empty. They are alone.

To one side the trench is smashed in. A mountain of earth and debris. Blocked.

Schofield crouches, attends to his bleeding hand. Blood oozes out of it.

BLAKE

Your hand alright?

SCHOFIELD

Put it through an effing German.

Schofield has taken out his canteen, he pours water on his sliced up palm. Blake keeps watch.

BLAKE

Patch it up. You'll be wanking again in no time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHOFIELD

Wrong hand.

Blake laughs.

Blake moves off, rifle ready. Schofield follows, wrapping a bandage round his hand as they move. He tightens the dressing with his teeth. Red seeps through the white gauze.

Ahead of them is a brazier, full of spent white coal dust. Blake kicks it over, the white dust crumbles, red embers glow - wisps of smoke. Still smouldering.

Schofield turns to Blake, his eyes are on the embers too.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

They're not long gone.

Blake hands tighten on his rifle, he pushes off, heading east down-

EXT. GERMAN COMMS TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Blake leads them into the deep, narrow trench. Creeping forward quickly, eyes darting ahead, looking for any enemy.

The comms trench opens out into-

EXT. GERMAN SECOND LINE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Blake hovers by the mouth of the comms trench, peeking out. Another dead end.

BLAKE

No good.

Schofield is at his back. Their eyes scan the empty second line trench.

They push on in silence.

Their footsteps click and echo over the duckboards. They move, bayonets pointed forward.

The trench takes a sharp turn. Schofield and Blake inch round, rifles up, checking.

Ahead of them the trench is destroyed. A direct hit. Earth, sandbags, and huge splinters of timber jut out of the pile of dirt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHOFIELD

Blocked.

It is impassable.

Next to them is the mouth of a dugout. A doorway.

Blake peers into the darkness.

Timber stairs descend two storeys down into the earth.

BLAKE

This might be a way through.

They click on their torches and move down the stairs.

Whole tree trunks have been used to reinforce the walls. They share a look. The sophistication of the Germans amazes them. At the foot of the steps, Blake turns the corner.

BLAKE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Jesus...

Schofield follows him quickly, the timber creaks under him as he rounds into the mouth of-

INT. GERMAN DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

He turns the corner and sees Blake, torch in hand.

BLAKE

Look at this. It's massive.

The dugout is huge - an entire barracks carved out of the chalky earth. It's ghostly in the torch light.

Timber struts run along walls and ceilings. Rows of bunk beds run along the length of the huge room, stacked up to the ceiling.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

They built all this.

Blake and Schofield move through it, their torchlights slicing through the darkness. It is palatial compared with what we have seen on the British lines.

Schofield's eyes land on something - a photograph, someone's wife and child, pinned to a bed frame. Schofield stares at it for a beat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blake noses through some of the detritus left behind by the Germans, then moves through into:

The Officer's Quarters: Iron bed frames, an arm chair, a desk. In one corner are the remains of a cooking area, some boxes of supplies lie abandoned.

Next to one of the beds a tunnel stretches away from him into the darkness.

SCHOFIELD

Here's our way through.

BLAKE (O.C.)

Sco - how about this?

Schofield turns to see Blake sitting on one of the officers' beds, bouncing gently. The springs squeak loudly in the silence, he grins. Then movement catches his eye. A massive rat gnaws on a canvass sack suspended form the roof beams.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Bloody hell... Even their rats are bigger than ours.

By the light of their torches, they can see a large, bloated rat moving quickly along one of the roof beams.

Their torches follow the rat, as it scampers along the beam. The light catches more canvas sacks, all suspended from a the ceiling. Grease is pooling at the base of them, turning them translucent - bags of food, or at least an approximation of it. Other frayed and empty canvas sacks lie around.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

What do you think's in the bags?

SCHOFIELD

You cannot be that hungry.

Blake thinks for a beat.

The rat makes a leap for one, dropping from the rafter to the canvas. The bag swings violently under the rat's weight, a pendulum in the middle of the room.

BLAKE

Look at him. Cocky little bastard.

Something has caught Schofield's eye. A crate full of food tins has been left in the corner. Schofield walks over and grabs one.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SCHOFIELD
You could eat this, though.

He turns to read the writing in Blake's torch light:
"Fleischkonserve"

BLAKE
What is it?

Schofield tosses a tin across the room to him. Blake catches it, reads the label.

SCHOFIELD
Boche dog meat.

BLAKE
What's in the other boxes?

Schofield goes for the other crate... and freezes.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

SCHOFIELD
Trip wire.

Blake stands stock still.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
Don't move.

The two men are frozen.

BLAKE
Where is it?

SCHOFIELD
Goes from here to the door.

Blake's breath quickens as he scans the room, trying to pick out the wire in the torchlight... The door is about ten feet away.

Suddenly -

BAM!

Both men jump - The rat and the canvas bag are on the floor.

BLAKE
Jesus!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The rat is dragging the canvas bag towards the door to the next room, desperate to keep its treasure from the two men.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

No...no! -

Blake's eyes go wide, he starts forward for the rat-

The rat lets go of the bag and flees - into the wire. A flash of blinding light then almost simultaneously-

BOOM!

Impossibly loud. The blast is reflected back in off the solid walls, a section of roof drops. Dirt and chalk dust blast outward.

Blake is flung backwards against the wall with a thud.

White chalk dust swirls in the room, bright in the torchlight. Blake's torch lands on the floor, beam pointing upwards at the ceiling.

For a second there is silence.

Blake begins to pant. The wind is knocked out of him. He catches his breath.

He feels his head, reaches for his torch. His eyes scan the room.

His torchlight slices through the dust and smoke. The world has been turned over. Some parts are buried. And where Schofield was standing - a pile of rubble.

Panic streaks across his face.

Then there is a sound. Muffled, from deep in the white dirt.

Screaming.

Schofield is buried.

Blake is on his feet, staggering towards the mound of chalk and dust. Moving over it, ears to the dirt, listening.

Schofield's screams slip through it.

Blake frantically begins to dig.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Sco?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Ripping earth away from one spot, then listening to Schofield's muffled screams and moving to another. Desperation on his face.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

SCO!

The screams are getting weaker. Disappearing beneath the sounds of the timber creaking and groaning.

Blake swims through the earth, sweeping it away-

Schofield's screams stop.

Blake thrashes in the chalk - at last unearths -

Lips. Schofield's mouth, wide open, filled with pale grey dirt. Still.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

SCO! SCO!

Blake tears the chalk away from his mouth and nose and suddenly Schofield heaves into life, retches, coughing up dirt, sawing in breaths.

Blake uncovers Schofield's face, his eyes are packed with dirt and chalk. Blake keeps digging, frees Schofield's arm, chest. Schofield thrashes in the debris, trying to free himself. He can't. It's too tightly packed.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

SCO! Wake up! Wake up! SCO!

Blake grabs at Schofield's arm and with all his might wrenches him out of the dirt.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

SCO... Stand up! Stand up! Up! UP!

Schofield is in shock - numb. Caked in the pale white earth. His heaves and retches fill the tiny space. His body shaking and contorting with shock.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

STAND UP!

The timber is groaning all around them now. Blake looks up at it.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

The whole thing's coming down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

As Blake looks, the chalk dust swirls in the air, drawn towards the tunnel entrance, sucked out by the backdraft. Their way out.

Blake stands, half-drags Schofield to his feet. Schofield can hardly see out of his dust-filled eyes. Blake pulls him over to the tunnel entrance.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
You keep hold of me!

INT. GERMAN TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Carved through the chalk bedrock. Seven feet high and reinforced with timber, some of which have already split in the blast. The tunnel slopes gently down, deeper into the earth. White walls reflect Blake's torch.

The earth around them groans, silt and dust piss from the ceiling.

Schofield coughs and convulses, grasping on to Blake, towed along in his wake.

The tunnel splits, one fork has been destroyed, Blake pulls them forward the only way they can go.

BLAKE
We need to keep moving. Come on!

SCHOFIELD
I can't see - I can't see!

Blake stops suddenly.

BLAKE
Stop! Stop!

He has kicked a bucket that sits on the lip of a mineshaft. The bucket drops into the hole, pulleys spinning ferociously.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
Stop. It's a mineshaft.

Blake looks for a way round it. It has been blown by the Germans.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
We'll have to jump. Come on!

Blake jumps across it. Schofield is frozen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAKE (CONT'D)

You're going to have to jump! Just jump.

SCHOFIELD

I can't- I can't see!

Blake wheels around and shines his light on Schofield.

Schofield's eyes stream with tears and debris, he's paralyzed, blinded.

Between them is nothing but a gaping hole in the floor, fathomless blackness.

The walls around them groan under the strain. The place is coming down.

BLAKE

You need to trust me. Jump!

Schofield tears in a breath then leaps forwards towards Blake.

Schofield takes off, jumps across the hole and lands hard. His back foot slips down the side of the mineshaft, but Blake grabs him, and heaves him up.

Blake pushes forward, Schofield clings to him.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Don't let go of me! Don't let go!

The sound of earth collapsing suddenly fills the tunnel. The dugout behind them has collapsed in.

Ahead there is a fork in the tunnel. Blake spots something to his right - a blue haze.

Daylight.

He pulls Schofield towards it.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Light! There's light!

They scramble forwards. Light begins to flood the passage way. They reach the end of the tunnel and stumble out into the light.

EXT. REAR GERMAN TRENCHES - CONTINUOUS

Blake scrambles down a small incline, scanning for enemy. They are in a large sunken ditch.

Schofield stands, bent double, at the mouth of the tunnel, trying to catch his breath. Both of them are covered with chalk dust. They look like pale ghosts.

SCHOFIELD

Stop... stop. Just...just let me stand.

BLAKE

Dirty bastards.

Schofield gathers himself and drops down beside Blake.

Blake pushes on, climbing up a small rise, rifle ready. Schofield goes after him, shakily.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Careful, they may have left other traps.

Blake crests the small berm and looks.

Curving away from him - a quarry. A huge desolate amphitheatre.

The quarry is several storeys high. Holes and entrances are carved all over it, like rabbit warrens.

Scattered around is the detritus of war. Several huge German guns and some small artillery lie damaged and abandoned. Small mountains of brass - thousands of spent shell casings.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Jesus.

Blake sweeps his rifle around, searching for any threat. This place is abandoned.

Schofield makes it to the top of the berm, and drops down to the ground, trying to clean out his eyes.

SCHOFIELD

Dust... so much dust in my eyes.

He empties the remaining water from his canteen onto his face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blake approaches Schofield, hands him his canteen. Schofield washes the chalk off of his face.

BLAKE

Here. Have some of mine.

Blake crouches beside him. He watches him, concerned.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

I wish I'd shot that rat now.

Schofield turns on him, sharp.

SCHOFIELD

And I wish you'd picked some other bloody idiot.

BLAKE

What?

SCHOFIELD

Why in God's name did you have to choose me?

Schofield checks his pockets - takes out small tobacco tin. Checks inside it. His hands are shaking badly.

BLAKE

I didn't know what I was picking you for.

SCHOFIELD

No, you didn't. You *never* know. That's your problem.

Blake is stung.

BLAKE

Alright then, go back. Nothing's stopping you. You can go all the way bloody *home* if you want.

At the mention of home Schofield turns on him sharply.

SCHOFIELD

Don't.

A beat. Schofield puts the tobacco tin back in his pocket.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BLAKE

(calmer now)

Look, I didn't know what I was picking you for. I thought they were going to send us back up the line, or for food, or something. I thought it was going to be something easy, alright? I never thought it would be this.

A beat.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

So do you want to go back?

Schofield looks at him, softening.

SCHOFIELD

Just fire the fucking flare.

He loads and lifts the flare, and looks back towards the British lines.

BLAKE

(under his breath)

Up yours, Lieutenant...

He fires it straight up. The light streaks through the sky. He watches it drop.

Blake tosses the flare gun, lowers his hand to Schofield and helps him up.

Schofield stands unsteadily. Blake studies his compass, getting his bearing.

SCHOFIELD

Do you know where we are?

BLAKE

Ecoust is directly south east. If we keep that bearing, we should make it.

He looks in the direction Blake is facing - the land rolls gently down, a trampled road leads out of the quarry, a shattered copse of trees juts out of the earth. Charred and black.

Schofield nods. Blake stows the compass. Raises his rifle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Come on then.

They begin to walk.

Blankets, ammunition, guns, bayonets, shells. All have been abandoned in this place. They pass the remains of artillery - the gun barrels have been blown out.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Look at that. They destroyed their own guns...

SCHOFIELD

They destroyed their own trenches too.

BLAKE

What do you mean?

SCHOFIELD

I think they wanted us to go that way. They wanted to bury us.

They walk.

A noise startles them both. They turn to the source, ready to fire -

A large rat scuttles over A DEAD GERMAN. Blake kicks a rock at it. It scatters.

BLAKE

Bastard rats.

Blake looks across at Schofield. He is still shaking slightly.

They walk, watchful. Eventually:

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Hey - did you hear that story about Wilko? How he lost his ear?

SCHOFIELD

I'm not in the mood. Keep your eyes on the trees, top of the ridge.

Blake watches the top of the slope. They walk.

BLAKE

Bet he told you it was shrapnel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Beat.

SCHOFIELD

What was it then?

BLAKE

Well, you know his girl's a hairdresser, right? And he was moaning about the lack of bathing facilities when he wrote to her - remember those rancid jakes at Arras?

Schofield nods - they were disgusting.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Anyway, she sends him over this 'hair oil'. Smells sweet, like Golden Syrup. Wilko loves the smell, but he doesn't want to cart it around in his pack, so-

They continue into the-

EXT. SHATTERED COPSE - CONTINUOUS

They tread carefully over the battered earth. It's littered with casings and flecks of metal.

BLAKE

He slathers it all over his barnet, goes to sleep and in the middle of the night he wakes up, and a rat is sitting on his shoulder *licking the oil off of his head!*

Schofield begins to laugh, despite himself.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Wilko panics and he jumps up and when he does - the rat bites clean through his fucking ear and runs off with it!

They are both laughing quietly.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Oh, he made a hell of a fuss, yelling, screaming.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The ground sweeps gently downward out of the burnt copse. Living things return to the world in small patches.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Best of it was he put so much bloody oil on himself that he couldn't wash it off! He was like a magnet. Rats left *us* alone, but they couldn't get enough of *him*. Poor bastard.

They emerge from the copse, scanning the surroundings. They appear to be alone.

Above, far in the distance, the same two British planes seem to hover in the sky, arcing back towards British lines. Schofield looks up at them.

SCHOFIELD

Heading back home.
(beat)
I wonder what they saw...

Schofield pulls his eyes away from the planes. The two men briefly scan the land around them.

BLAKE

Watch the ridge lines.

They move off again. Blake's eyes stick to the left, Schofield's scan the right. After a beat.

SCHOFIELD

Well that's your medal sorted then.

BLAKE

What do you mean?

They continue walking.

SCHOFIELD

"Lance Corporal Blake showed unusual valour in rescuing a comrade from certain death" blah, blah, blah.

BLAKE

You reckon?

SCHOFIELD

I do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Blake is pleased.

BLAKE

Well, that'd be nice. Since you
lost yours.

A beat.

SCHOFIELD

I didn't lose mine.

Schofield keeps walking.

BLAKE

What happened to it, then?

SCHOFIELD

Why do you care?

BLAKE

Why do you not?

Beat.

SCHOFIELD

I swapped it with a French captain.

BLAKE

Swapped it? For what?

SCHOFIELD

Bottle of wine.

BLAKE

What did you do that for?

SCHOFIELD

I was thirsty.

BLAKE

What a waste.

(beat)

You should have taken it home with
you, you should have given it to
your family.

Schofield doesn't respond.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Men have died for that.

No response.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BLAKE (CONT'D)

If I got a medal, I'd take it back home, why didn't you just take it home-

SCHOFIELD

Look it's just a bit of bloody tin! It doesn't make you special, it doesn't make any difference to anyone.

BLAKE

Yes it does.

Beat.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

And it's not just a bit of tin.
(then)
It's got a ribbon on it.

Schofield laughs, exasperated.

Then he turns to Blake, looks at him.

SCHOFIELD

I hated going home. I hated it. When I knew I couldn't stay. When I knew I had to leave them, and they might never see me-

He chokes up. Fights with himself for a moment. Then he turns and walks ahead.

Blake watches him, feeling guilty. Then he follows.

Up ahead, Schofield is approaching the remains of a walled orchard. He stops at the gate.

EXT. WALLED ORCHARD - CONTINUOUS

The near wall has partially collapsed in a mound of rubble. Beyond it cherry trees litter the ground. All have been cut down, felled in the wanton destruction of the German retreat. Pale blossoms swim all around, ruffled by the wind.

Schofield looks at it all.

SCHOFIELD

(to himself)
Jesus. They chopped them all down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blake has followed him, a little guiltily. Wanting to apologise, but unsure how. He takes in the orchard.

BLAKE

Cherries.

Blake looks at one of the trees. He reaches down, picks a blossom, holds it up.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Lamberts.

They begin to walk through the felled trees.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

They might be Dukes, hard to tell when they aren't in fruit.

SCHOFIELD

What's the difference?

Blake is a little wry, sensing Schofield softening.

BLAKE

Well people think there's one type, but there's lots of them - Cuthberts, Queen Annes, Montmorencys. Sweet ones, sour ones...

SCHOFIELD

Why on earth would you know this?

BLAKE

Mum's got an orchard, back home. Only a few trees. This time of year it looks like it's been snowing, blossom everywhere. And then in May, we have to pick them. Me and Joe. Takes the whole day.

A pang of homesickness creeps into Blake as he and Schofield clamber over a downed tree. They are now alongside each other.

Schofield registers this.

SCHOFIELD

So, these ones all gonners?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BLAKE

Oh no, they'll grow again when the stones rot. You'll end up with more trees than before.

A large wall borders the lower end of the orchard, still intact. Schofield arrives at the gate.

Ahead of them, visible through the gate is a small valley. In the valley lie the remains of a French farmhouse, abandoned. It is utterly derelict now - the roof is just a skeleton of beams. Next to it is a clapboard barn, ragged with shell holes.

Schofield and Blake peer through the gate at the small collection of buildings below. Everything is still.

Schofield looks anxiously at the farmhouse.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

It looks abandoned.

SCHOFIELD

Let's hope so.

BLAKE

We have to make sure.

Schofield leads the way, he moves through the gate cautiously, rifle raised. Blake follows.

They slip down the hill. They are in an old pigsty, surrounded by a broken fence, which runs down to the murky water of a pond.

Carefully, as he walks, Schofield scans the buildings ahead.

The wind rustles the long grass. An ominous atmosphere pervades this place.

They approach the farmhouse.

SCHOFIELD

(sotto)

I'll take front, you take back.

They split. Blake disappears round the back, Schofield moves towards the front door.

A DEAD DOG lies by the path.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Schofield looks at it for a beat. His hands tighten on his rifle, as he braces himself for what might be inside.

Schofield quickly walks up the small front path, through the open door.

INT. FRENCH FARMHOUSE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He is still for a moment on the threshold, breath held, listening for any sounds of life in the house.

The silence burns.

Schofield enters. The only sounds now are the floor boards creaking under his boots.

This place has been trashed by the soldiers who were here.

Schofield turns right into -

INT. FRENCH FARMHOUSE, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Schofield moves through the bedroom. Empty. He moves back into-

INT. FRENCH FARMHOUSE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Schofield crosses the hallway. He spots Blake through the window.

BLAKE

Anything?

SCHOFIELD

Nothing.

Schofield moves forward towards the kitchen. Something catches his eye.

A child's doll sits on the floor. Cigarette burns on its eyes.

Schofield looks at it for a beat. Then moves into the kitchen.

INT. FRENCH FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Low, dusty light streaks in from the smashed windows. Schofield takes in the room. Blake enters through the back door.

BLAKE

Did you find any food?

SCHOFIELD

No.

(beat)

I don't like this place.

He moves out through the back door-

EXT. REAR FRENCH FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Schofield moves across the barren yard to a dilapidated barn.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Remnants and debris are scattered around.

The low sounds of a cow echo from the fields beyond.

Schofield looks - a single COW stands in the field. Two or three other dead cows lie near it.

Schofield turns, scanning the barn floor. He peers into a milk urn, it's empty.

Close by there is a bucket, lid half on.

He tips the lid off with his foot -

Milk.

He kneels and smells it, then lowers in a hand and lifts some to his mouth. It's been months since he tasted anything as good.

Behind him, Blake exits the farmhouse.

BLAKE

Map says we get over that ridge and it's a straight shot to Ecoust.

SCHOFIELD

Good.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He takes out his empty canteen and pours milk into it, fills it to the brim.

The huge door at back of the barn is open to the fields.

The drone of plane engines through the doorway catches Schofield's attention.

Schofield spots planes through the barn door. He moves towards them to get a better look. Entranced.

He moves outside to watch.

EXT. REAR FRENCH FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Schofield wanders out away from the barn. He looks up into the grey sky.

Three planes - a dogfight. Tiny at this distance, insect-like.

Schofield's eyes follow them keenly: Two British fighters against one German.

The violence is so far removed from him that it looks balletic. Beautiful even. He moves towards them to get a better look.

The planes twist and circle in the air, engines droning and whining as the planes dip and rise.

BLAKE (O.S.)

Is that our friends again?

SCHOFIELD

Looks like it. Dogfight.

BLAKE

Who's winning?

SCHOFIELD

Us, I think. Two on one.

The two of them stand looking up at the majesty of it.

Then, in the distance, the German plane begins to trail black smoke.

The hum of the German engine fails. The two British planes follow it, hammering away on their guns until it is clear that there is no hope for the German.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAKE

They got him...

The German plane coasts silently towards the earth.

Blake and Schofield watch as it gets closer and closer. Hypnotised.

From the bend of wings you can tell the PILOT is trying to glide. Trying and failing.

The plane drops like a leaf, catching updrafts only to suddenly dip again - aiming for the fields some distance ahead of them.

The plane dips. Wobbles. Fighting to stay up. It banks left, and drops below the horizon.

Schofield walks forwards to have a better look. Then suddenly, the plane reappears over the horizon, flying very low. It is heading straight at them.

Schofield realises they are in the path of the plane. He begins backing away, retreating towards the house.

The plane is much closer now, behind them as they run. They can't make it back to the house.

Schofield and Blake throw themselves down on the ground, pressing themselves into the earth as the plane screams in their direction, smashing into the barn directly behind them.

Black smoke pours from the plane and the shattered skeleton of the barn.

The fire is quick, licking along the old wood.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Smoke billows from the plane. Inside it someone is screaming.

Blake moves first, he runs into the barn, Schofield tailing him.

Tongues of fire whip out from the engine, the pilot is inside. Burning.

Flames lick at his mangled legs and torso, his gloved hands cover his face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blake grabs at the man, the back of his hand touches the yoke as he tries to free the pilot - he cries out as the metal sears his skin.

Schofield tears open the pilot's strap and together they wrench him free, dragging him from the remains of the cockpit, and pulling his body through the smoke.

The Pilot's legs are on fire.

PILOT	PILOT
Meine beine! Meine beine!	<i>My legs! My legs! Help me!</i>
Hilf mir! Hilf mir!	<i>Help me!</i>

EXT. REAR FRENCH FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Schofield and Blake drag the pilot by his shoulders - the true extent of his injuries laid bare in the daylight.

The flames have done bad damage. His trousers have been partially burnt off, blood streaks down his legs.

The Pilot's blue eyes dart at them, in agony. He shivers violently with shock, his lips form words, his voice is a harsh whisper.

(N.B. None of the German dialogue will be subtitled. We should understand only what Blake and Schofield understand.)

PILOT	PILOT
Lazarett, Kamerad. Bitte.	<i>Military hospital, comrade.</i>
Bitte. Wasser. Water.	<i>Please. Please. Water. Water.</i>

They look down at the Pilot, shocked, unsure of what to do. Schofield turns to Blake.

SCHOFIELD
(sotto to Blake)
We should put him out of his misery.

Schofield and Blake share a look.

BLAKE
No. Get him some water. He needs water.

Blake kneels beside the pilot, gently cradles his head on his knees. The pilot struggles, terrified and in pain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Schofield moves to the water pump, his back to Blake and the Pilot.

BLAKE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It's alright, you're alright. Stay still. Stay still...

PILOT	PILOT
Bitte töte mich nicht. Ich möchte leben.	<i>Please help me, I don't want to die.</i>

Schofield works the pump, the levers screeching as the mechanism creaks back to life.

Creak- creak-

Orange water cascades out, slapping into the metal trough.

Schofield keeps cranking the squeaking handle, it almost drowns out the voices behind him.

Creak- creak-

Schofield collects the water in his helmet.

Creak- creak-

Then suddenly - shouting.

From behind him, piercing through the other sounds.

BLAKE
Stop...Stop!

Schofield turns, starts forward.

Blake screams in agony. Schofield moves towards him, confusion on his face, until he sees-

A bloody knife in the pilot's hand, pulled out of Blake's abdomen.

SCHOFIELD
No, no, no!

Schofield grabs his rifle-

He fires two shots into the pilot, killing him outright.

Blake is looking down at his own bloody hands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BLAKE
Bastard, bloody bastard.

Blake gets to his feet, breathing heavy. Clutching his abdomen, he staggers away from the pilot's body.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
Oh, God no. Oh, God no.

Schofield watches him, scared.

Blake goes for his dressings, he clumsily pulls them out of his pocket, they unspool in his shaking hands.

Blood is seeping through Blake's tunic. He drops to his knees. He looks down at his own blood and sobs.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
Jesus. Jesus, no.

Schofield moves forward, grabs the dressing, just as Blake drops down to the ground.

SCHOFIELD
We have to stop the bleeding.

Schofield wads the dressing, he moves Blake's hand and pushes the white bandage hard against Blake's tunic, trying to stem the blood.

Blake shouts in pain.

BLAKE
Stop it. Stop it!

Schofield tries to calm him.

SCHOFIELD
It's alright, it's going to be alright. We're going to stand up.

Schofield wraps his hands around Blake's webbing.

BLAKE
Yes. Yes.

Blake sets his feet. Schofield wrenches him up. Blake screams in agony.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
No! I can't. I can't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

They drop back down.

Blake is pale, blood is pumping out of him, his lips are already grey.

SCHOFIELD

We have to get to an Aid Post.

BLAKE

I can't.

SCHOFIELD

I'll carry you. It isn't very far.

BLAKE

Just bring a doctor here.

Schofield looks around for help, there isn't any. They are alone.

SCHOFIELD

We can't, we have to go together-

Schofield looks at Blake, desperation in his eyes.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

We're going to get up. We're going to get up.

Schofield moves behind Blake, grabs him under his arms. He lifts Blake, but Blake cannot support his own weight, his legs buckle.

BLAKE

Stop, please! Stop!

Schofield holds him up. Begins to drag him.

Schofield keeps trying to drag Blake. The more Blake struggles the more blood pisses out of his wound.

Blake is suddenly wild, he screams like an animal, flailing savagely, clawing at Schofield's chest and neck, spitting blood, struggling against him.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Put me down! Put me down, you bastard, please! Put me down!

They fall backwards.

Schofield moves to face Blake.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Blake's whole face is colourless now.

Schofield looks down. His eyes land on Blake's dressing. It is scarlet now, sopping wet with blood. He swaps it for a fresh dressing. Panic swarms him.

SCHOFIELD

You have to try to keep moving.

Blake is weakening.

BLAKE

Let's just sit... let me sit.

SCHOFIELD

We can't. We have to find the 2nd. Remember? Your brother. We have to go now...

Schofield stares down at Blake, he's not lucid anymore. His eyes are already glazing.

BLAKE

You can start on without me. I'll catch up.

SCHOFIELD

You can't stay here. We have to move, alright? We have to move.

A beat.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

Come on. Come on. That's it. Come on, come on...

Schofield wraps one arm around Blake's back, the other round his legs, he gets to his feet and with all his might he heaves Blake upward. Blake howls in pain.

Schofield screams with the effort, giving it all he's got. But Blake is a dead weight. He can't lift him.

They drop. Schofield looks at him, desperate.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

Your brother. We have to find your brother.

Blake's breathing is coming in short bursts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

BLAKE

You'll recognise him. Looks like
me...a bit older.

Schofield holds Blake's head up. He looks impotently around for help.

Behind them the barn is crumbling in on itself, scarlet embers drift across the sky, carried on the breeze. Blake stares up at them, confused.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

What are they? Are we being
shelled?

SCHOFIELD

They're embers, the barn is on
fire.

Blake looks bewildered. Then some pain creeps into his eyes, some awful knowledge.

BLAKE

I've been hit... What was it?

Schofield looks down at him, unsure how to answer.

SCHOFIELD

You were stabbed.

Blake looks surprised. His hand feels dumbly for his wound. It lands on Schofield's - he's holding down the tunic, stemming what blood he can.

There is blood on Blake's lips. His breathing is becoming laboured.

BLAKE

Am I dying?

A beat.

SCHOFIELD

Yes, I think you are.

An "Oh" forms on Blake's lips. Profound sadness follows the shock.

Blake reaches up slowly, and taps his tunic pocket, Schofield guesses his meaning - goes to the pocket, pulls out a wallet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

This?

BLAKE

Inside...

Schofield opens the cover, inside are a bunch of letters, and a photograph - Blake, his mother, and his brother Joe. Schofield holds it up for Blake to see: *yes, that's what I want.*

Schofield puts the photograph in Blake's hand, he presses it to his breast.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Will you write to my mum for me?

SCHOFIELD

I will.

BLAKE

Tell her I wasn't scared.

Schofield nods.

A long beat. Schofield lets go of the pressure on Blake's wound. He holds his hand.

SCHOFIELD

Anything else?

Blake is slipping away, tears well and roll down his cheeks.

BLAKE

I love them...I wish that...
I wish...

It's half strangled by sadness. A long beat. Schofield holds him. Death is close, stiffening Blake's body, it's already in his eyes.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Talk to me.

Schofield looks at Blake, he has no idea what to say.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Tell me you know the way.

SCHOFIELD

I know the way. I'm going to head south east until I hit Ecoust.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

Blake listens.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
I'll pass through the town and out
to the east, all the way to
Croisilles Wood.

BLAKE
(faint)
It'll be dark by then.

SCHOFIELD
That won't bother me... I'll find
the 2nd, I'll give them the
message, and then I'll find your
brother. Just like you, a little
older...

He stops. Blake is no longer breathing.

Without the lines of worry or agony on his face Blake looks very young.

Schofield is still for a moment, cradling the head of Blake.

A long beat. Behind Schofield the barn is collapsing in on itself.

The smoke has risen several stories into the sky.

Schofield looks at Blake. Desperate.

Then, he snaps out of it. With sudden determination, he rummages through the pockets of Blake's tunic - takes the message for the 2nd, blood from his hands smudges on the envelope.

He stows it safely in his top pocket. He pulls out the map from Blake's tunic. It is saturated in blood. Illegible. Schofield throws it away.

He takes Blake's rings from his lifeless hands, then opens his tunic and goes for Blake's identity disc, tearing it off of the twine.

He pries the photograph from Blake's dead hand, looks at it, then leaves it face down over his heart, inside his tunic.

Schofield looks around them, beside the pond is a patch of long grass.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

Schofield heaves Blake's torso up - the endeavour entirely different now Blake is dead.

Nothing is heavier than the dead body of someone you loved.

PRIVATE PARRY (O.S.)
You alright, mate?

Schofield looks up, shocked to see TWO BRITISH PRIVATES - PARRY and ATKINS.

PRIVATE ATKINS
It's alright, it's okay.

PRIVATE PARRY
Come on, help him.

Parry and Atkins move forward and take Blake's legs. Together the three of them move Blake to the long grass. As they move him:

PRIVATE ATKINS
Jesus, what happened to him?

Schofield doesn't answer.

PRIVATE PARRY
Was it the plane? We saw the smoke.

Schofield nods.

SCHOFIELD
(sotto)
Yes.

They lower Blake down. Schofield kneels by his head. Lost.

A gentle voice, off camera.

CAPTAIN SMITH (O.S.)
Go fetch his things.

Sir. PRIVATE PARRY PRIVATE ATKINS
Yes, Sir.

Parry and Atkins go to collect Schofield's helmet and rifle.

CAPTAIN SMITH
(quietly)
A friend?

Schofield nods. He kneels beside Blake's body. Impotent.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

A beat.

CAPTAIN SMITH (CONT'D)
What are you doing here?

SCHOFIELD
I have an urgent message for the
2nd Devons. Orders to stop tomorrow
morning's attack.

CAPTAIN SMITH
Where are they stationed?

SCHOFIELD
Just beyond Ecoust.

CAPTAIN SMITH
Come with me.

Smith heads back towards the farmhouse. Schofield doesn't
move. He can't look away from Blake.

Smith stops, turns back.

CAPTAIN SMITH (CONT'D)
Come with me, Corporal. That's an
order.

Schofield looks up at him.

CAPTAIN SMITH (CONT'D)
We're passing through Ecoust. We
can take you some of the way.

SCHOFIELD
Sir.

Using the grass, he wipes Blake's blood from off his hands.
He stands, drags his eyes away from Blake's body and then
moves after Smith.

He collects his rifle and helmet from Parry then follows
Smith through the farmhouse and back out into-

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

A small convoy of four trucks idle on the road, all caked in
mud and battered from their journey. Soldiers mill, smoking,
pissing, stretching their legs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

At the head of the small convoy is an Officer's car. Exhaust fumes swirl in the still air.

COLONEL COLLINS (O.S.)
Oh, come on Sergeant. Put more men
at the base. At the trunk! It'll be
heavier there...

The trucks are filled to the brim with SOLDIERS - a mixture of seasoned fighters and fresh recruits. All are covered in the mud of No Man's Land.

CAPTAIN SMITH
Might be a tight squeeze.

They move towards the Officer's car. Mud hardens on the undercarriage and the wheel arches.

COLONEL COLLINS
No. You're not going to be able to
just lift it. Pivot the front end
to the left-

At the front of the convoy a large tree trunk blocks the road, like the cherry blossoms, felled on purpose, trunk neatly chopped. Several PRIVATES and an NCO are gathered around trying to lift it.

A Colonel, COLLINS (corpulent, sweating) barks orders from the front seat of the car.

Smith and Schofield approach the car.

COLONEL COLLINS (CONT'D)
(to the driver)
Jesus. They don't make things easy
do they. They could at least have
retreated with a bit of grace.
Bastards.

CAPTAIN SMITH
Sir-

Collins turns and looks down on Smith and Schofield, his face registering confusion.

COLONEL COLLINS
(registering Schofield)
You're not one of mine.

SCHOFIELD
No, Sir.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Collins looks at Smith for explanation.

CAPTAIN SMITH

He's got an urgent message to
deliver to the 2nd Devons, Sir.

Collins' attention is drawn back to the tree, the men have managed to shift it a few feet to the left.

COLONEL COLLINS

(To the driver)
Can you get past it?

SERGEANT HARROP (O.S.)

No, Sir.

COLONEL COLLINS

Oh, for God's sake.
(Loudly, to the men)
Just move it!

CAPTAIN SMITH

There's room in the casuals truck,
sir. He has orders-

COLONEL COLLINS

Yes, yes, alright.
(to Harrop)
Come on now. You can get through
there sideways.

The car begins to roll forward.

Smith moves off, as the Colonel's car begins to manoeuvre its way around the felled tree.

Smith and Schofield walk past the row of trucks, all packed with soldiers. Schofield takes it in.

SCHOFIELD

How did you get here, Sir?

CAPTAIN SMITH

Crossed No Man's Land just outside
Bapaume. Took us the whole night.
Bumped into a couple of Hun
stragglers on the way who made a
nuisance of themselves.

SCHOFIELD

You going up to the new line?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CAPTAIN SMITH
 Attempting to. The Newfoundlands
 have pushed forwards and requested
 reinforcements.

They approach the last truck. Smith looks at him.

CAPTAIN SMITH (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry about your friend.

Schofield nods.

CAPTAIN SMITH (CONT'D)
 May I tell you something that you
 probably already know?

They stop. Schofield looks to him.

CAPTAIN SMITH (CONT'D)
 It doesn't do to dwell on it.

SCHOFIELD
 No, Sir.

They have reached the rear of the fourth and final truck. TWO
 or THREE PRIVATES mill by the rear step, smoking. They stand
 to attention when they see the Captain.

CAPTAIN SMITH
 (to Schofield)
 Hop on.

Smith speaks to the soldiers.

CAPTAIN SMITH (CONT'D)
 Make some space there... Come on,
 in you get!

A bit of grumbling as the soldiers try to make space for him.
 A couple of the men help him up and into-

INT. ARMY TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Twenty men, an amalgamation of companies - some SCOTS, some
 SIKHS, are crammed in here. Schofield makes space for himself
 on the fringe. The men don't look at Schofield, don't much
 care about the hitch-hiker.

They are quiet for a beat, until Smith's footsteps die away
 and the sound of the engine rumbles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Schofield sits silently.

PRIVATE COOKE
 Alright. Here we go again boys.

PRIVATE ROSSI
 Welcome aboard the night bus to
 fuck-knows-where.

PRIVATE COOKE
 Is that a dead dog?

No one answers him.

Schofield looks out of the back, watching the road and the
 farmhouse disappear behind him.

PRIVATE BUTLER
 (To Rossi)
 You got a fag?

Rossi hands one over.

PRIVATE ROSSI
 Yeah, there you go.

They light their cigarettes.

PRIVATE COOKE
 (sotto)
 Butler... Oy. Carry on with that
 story.

PRIVATE BUTLER
 (sotto)
 Oh yeah, Right. So. When we get off
 the train, Beaufoy comes up to us
 and he's having a right go -
 (He attempts a posh
 accent, complete with
 lisp)
 "Lance Corporal! Whatever one does,
 one *never* lets standards slip!"
 Then Scott comes out of the
 latrine, he wipes his hand on the
 back of Beaufoy's jacket! Shit all
 down his back.

Laughter.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PRIVATE COOKE

Was that meant to be Captain
Beaufoy?

PRIVATE BUTLER

Oh, piss off you. You can't do any
better.

Schofield pulls his bloody tunic tight around himself,
watches. He almost disappears into the noise of the men.

PRIVATE COOKE

(Impersonating the lisp)
"MEN! Your rifle stocks are an
embarrassment to the entire
expeditionary force."

SEPOY JONDALAR

You're both bloody awful.

PRIVATE COOKE

You don't know, you barely even
speak the bloody language.

PRIVATE MALKY

He's got a better grasp of it than
you, Cooke.

PRIVATE COOKE

Go on then Jondalar, give it a go,
let's see it!

The men are getting rowdier. We watch Schofield as they grate
on his quiet grief.

PRIVATE ROSSI

Let's hear it then Jonny!

The men noisily encourage him.

SEPOY JONDALAR

(Much the best
impersonation - perfect
lisp, gestures)
"Rossi! Never in my two hundred
years as a soldier have I seen such
a sorry excuse for a latrine pit-"

The men are all laughing, enjoying it.

PRIVATE COOKE

Shite. That is total shit!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Cooke gets shouted down by the men. Someone chucks a canteen at Cooke, misses.

PRIVATE COOKE (CONT'D)
Oy! You could have taken my teeth out with that.

PRIVATE ROSSI
You could do with a new set.

Schofield is still. The laughter settles.

After a beat Schofield checks his wristwatch. BUTLER sees it.

PRIVATE BUTLER
You got somewhere you need to be?

The men all look at him.

Suddenly, the truck lurches violently. Schofield bumps into a man near him. The engine groans under them. The sounds of tyres spinning.

PRIVATE ROSSI
Oh, no...

A spatter of mud is thrown up. The engine revs, but the truck sinks deeper.

Schofield stands, leans out of the canvas.

PRIVATE COOKE
Arsehole needs driving lessons.

A few men groan in agreement.

Schofield jumps out into-

EXT. ROADSIDE DITCH - CONTINUOUS

Schofield looks at the stuck wheel. The truck has driven off the road trying to get round another fallen tree. Its rear wheel is sinking into a muddy ditch.

Ahead, the convoy is stopped, waiting on them.

Schofield speaks to one of the Privates, Cooke, as he stares at the wheel.

SCHOFIELD
He should reverse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PRIVATE COOKE

Yeah.

Cooke does nothing. Schofield moves to the Driver's side of the truck.

SCHOFIELD

(Loudly, to the driver)

Try it in reverse. REVERSE.

A crunch of gears as the driver puts it in reverse. The engine revs again. Schofield bends down to look. The wheel is still spinning. The truck is slipping deeper.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

No. Stop. STOP!

After a beat the sound of revving dies out and the engine idles.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

Everyone needs to get out.

Some of the men climb to their feet and drop out. Others don't move.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

All out!

The men aren't moving fast enough.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

Come on!

PRIVATE BUTLER

Alright, alright. Keep your bloody hair on.

Begrudgingly a few fall in behind and beside the truck and ready themselves.

SCHOFIELD

Right. One. Two. Three.

The tyre spins on the spot, mud flies up. Schofield and the men push. Heaving together-

The truck isn't moving.

But Schofield won't stop, he pushes and pushes, groaning under the effort. Desperation etched all over his face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PRIVATE COOKE

We need to get some wood, put it
under the wheels.

The other men drop back away from the truck frame.

Schofield doesn't.

SCHOFIELD

No! We haven't got the time!

He puts everything he has into shifting the truck.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

We all need to push!

His whole body shakes with the effort.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

Come on! COME ON!

He begins to yell. Pushing, screaming in desperation.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

COME OOOON!!

The men look at him.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

Please. I have to go now! Please.

The men see Schofield's desperation. Recognise it.

They fall back in beside him.

PRIVATE BUTLER

Alright, come on lads! Come on.

Together the twenty of them push, all at once, all stretched
to the very limits of their strength.

PRIVATE ROSSI

Come on, boys!

SCHOFIELD

One. Two. Three!

Schofield screams in desperation.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

AAAAAAHHHHH!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PRIVATE ROSSI

Come on boys! One last push! Yes!
One. Two. Three!

Suddenly, the truck moves, the wheel catches some grass and WHOMP-

It lurches forwards, out of the ditch. Schofield falls forward into the mud.

He struggles to his knees, trying to get his emotions back under control, struggling not to cry.

Jondalar lifts him to his feet.

SCHOFIELD

Back in. Get back in. Go.

The other men are looking at him, they see his emotion. They start to load back in.

Jondalar puts his hand on Schofield's arm. A fleeting moment of solace.

SEPOY JONDALAR

Are you alright?

Schofield nods.

TWO SOLDIERS stand on the rear step, helping to pull the others up and in. As they do-

PRIVATE COOKE(O.S.)

Here, Driver, how about you try to keep it on the bloody road for a change!

DRIVER (O.S.)

Oh, piss off.

The men are almost all loaded in. Schofield brings up the rear.

INT. ARMY TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Schofield takes the arm of the soldier helping men up and is pulled inside.

The convoy moves off. Rattling over the land.

Around Schofield the men are quiet, their eyes on him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

After a while-

SEPOY JONDALAR
So, where are you going?

SCHOFIELD
I have to get to the 2nd Devons.
Just past Ecoust.

SEPOY JONDALAR
Why?

SCHOFIELD
They're attacking at dawn. I have
orders to stop them.

PRIVATE MALKY
How come?

SCHOFIELD
They're walking into a trap.

PRIVATE COOKE
How many?

SCHOFIELD
Sixteen hundred.

This stops them all.

PRIVATE COOKE
Jesus.

PRIVATE BUTLER
Why did they send you on your own?

SCHOFIELD
They didn't. There were two of us.

A beat. The men understand what this means.

PRIVATE ROSSI
So now it's down to you.

SCHOFIELD
Yes.

PRIVATE COOKE
You'll never make it.

Beat. Schofield turns to Cooke. Looks at him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SCHOFIELD

Yes. I will.

Butler offers Schofield some of his whisky. He takes a drink.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Now all the men are looking out the back, watching the distance drop away.

The truck is sweeping past a small hamlet, or at least the remains of one, houses have been reduced to skeletons, the destruction is fresh, embers still smoulder. Anything of value built on this land has been systematically destroyed.

Dead cattle lie in the fields.

PRIVATE ROSSI

Look at it. Fucking look at it...
Three years fighting over this. We
should have just let the bastards
keep it. I mean, who machine guns
cows?

PRIVATE MALKY

Huns with extra bullets.

PRIVATE ROSSI

Bastards.

While they talk, Schofield checks that the letter is still in his pocket.

He carefully puts it in his tobacco tin.

SEPOY JONDALAR

Clever. They know if they don't
shoot the cow, you will eat it.

Rossi nods: *fair point*.

PRIVATE ROSSI

Still bastards.

PRIVATE MALKY

Yeah, it's not even our bloody
country.

Brakes creak as the truck slows a little. Schofield reacts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PRIVATE BUTLER

How long gone d'you reckon they are?

SEPOY JONDALAR

Why? Worried we'll catch up with them?

PRIVATE BUTLER

Yeah, right. Be a bloody miracle at this rate.

PRIVATE COOKE

They are probably right around the next corner.

PRIVATE ROSSI

Piss off, no they're not.

PRIVATE COOKE

Why don't they just bloody well give up? Eh? Don't they want to go home?

PRIVATE ROSSI

They hate their wives and mothers... and Germany must be a shit hole.

PRIVATE COOKE

They're retreating... they're miles back. We've got them on the ropes at least.

SEPOY JONDALAR

No. We don't.

The truck slows down. It is juddering, as if navigating cobbles.

Schofield's eyes dart to the back, worried.

Suddenly the truck grinds to a halt. A few ready themselves to jump out.

PRIVATE BUTLER

Oh, bollocks. What's up now?

PRIVATE COOKE

Not another bloody tree.

The driver calls through the canvas.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DRIVER (O.S.)
 Bridge is down.

PRIVATE COOKE
 (sarcastic - sotto)
 Oh. That's a shame.

Schofield looks out the back of the truck.

SCHOFIELD
 Looks like I'll be getting out
 here. Good luck.

PRIVATE ROSSI
 Keep some of that luck for yourself
 pal. Think you'll be needing it.

PRIVATE BUTLER
 Good luck, mate.

PRIVATE MALKY
 Good luck.

Drops out onto-

EXT. CANAL SIDE - CONTINUOUS

Schofield jumps down into a new landscape.

The land is sliced through by a huge, straight, industrial
 canal. The sun is now below the horizon.

The men from the truck watch him go.

PRIVATE COOKE
 Good luck, guv.

PRIVATE SINGER
Good luck.

PRIVATE COOKE (CONT'D)
 Don't balls it up.

SEPOY JONDALAR
 I hope you get there.

SCHOFIELD
 Thank you.

Captain Smith approaches.

CAPTAIN SMITH
 Next bridge is six miles. We'll
 have to divert.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHOFIELD

I can't, Sir. I don't have the time.

CAPTAIN SMITH

Of course.

Smith offers Schofield his hand. He takes it.

CAPTAIN SMITH (CONT'D)

Best of luck.

SCHOFIELD

Thank you, Sir.

Smith goes to leave, stops.

CAPTAIN SMITH

Corporal. If you do manage to get to Colonel Mackenzie, make sure there are witnesses.

Beat.

SCHOFIELD

They are direct orders, Sir.

CAPTAIN SMITH

I know. But some men just want the fight.

SCHOFIELD

Thank you, Sir.

Captain Smith calls out to the driver at the head of the convoy.

CAPTAIN SMITH

Driver! Move off!

Schofield watches as the small convoy drives away. Fumes swirl in its wake.

He turns his attention to the new obstacle - the remains of a bridge, shattered and half blown - now little more than twisted metal dropping into the water.

The town of Ecoust is a jagged silhouette, visible about two hundred yards the other side of the canal. Smoke drifts. The town is still on fire.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The canal is large and industrial - about 90 feet wide, stone sides, once deep, wood and detritus float on the surface of the water.

On the opposite bank are the remains of a lock house. Two storeys. Windows blown in, roof half collapsed. Beyond that, the remains of some small buildings, all abandoned, and then the jagged remains of Ecoust.

Schofield surveys it. Looks around. All seems quiet. Eerie.

Schofield looks around for a way across. The blown bridge is his best bet. Both sides of the metal bridge have collapsed, and slant down into the dark water.

Schofield starts along the broken bridge, then climbs up onto the slim metal balustrade and starts inching downwards towards the waterline. It takes all his effort not to lose his balance and fall into the water below.

Finally he reaches the base of the slope, and looks across at the remaining half of the bridge. About eight feet of water between him and the other side...

He prepares himself to jump across and-

CRACK-

A gunshot slaps the water just in front of him. Birds fly up.

Instinctively, he leaps-

He lands heavily on the other side of the bridge. His foot slips into the water, and he hauls himself up with his hands.

He clings to the metal latticework, scrambling forward.

CRACK- another shot rings out, hitting the water behind.
CRACK- a bullet hits the metal near his hand. He quickly climbs across the torn carcass of the bridge towards the far bank.

Another bullet rings out, as he drops down, throwing himself into-

EXT. CANAL - CONTINUOUS

The cover of the far bank wall. He rips in breaths as he presses his body into the stone bank. He stays low, inching along the side until he can get a sense of where the shots are coming from.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He looks. Now he can register the direction of the shots. A SHOOTER, in the lock house. On the upper floor. A single high window.

Schofield slides along the bank until he hits a small stairwell set into the wall of the canal bank. Barely enough cover, but his only option.

CRACK. Another bullet sings against the stone as he darts to the other side of the stairs.

Schofield readies his rifle, his hands are ice, and injured, and slow to work. They shake violently as he tries to check and load the weapon.

Panting, he tries to still his trembling body as he creeps up to the top of the stairs, he peers over the top step to line up his shot.

CRACK- a bullet sings off the stone next to his head.

He sucks in a deep breath and holds it. He exhales as he leans into the shadow of the wall, and readies his rifle...

Schofield lifts his body above the wall, and fires once.

CRACK.

Quickly, the shooter fires back.

Schofield aims again, CRACK.

The shooting stops.

Silence.

Schofield is still for a moment. Breathing heavy. Shaking from the cold and from adrenalin.

He spins and fires another two shots through the window of the lock house.

CRACK. CRACK. Wood splinters. He waits.

Again, silence.

He steadies himself and stands carefully, rifle ready, and quickly advances to the lock house. He pushes open the doors and moves inside.

INT. LOCK HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

No movement on the ground floor.

The staircase is ahead of him. His ears burn listening for any sounds, any hint of movement.

He holds his breath, the wood creaks under him as he backs against the wall, rifle pointing to the top of the staircase.

Staying low and against the wall he moves upwards. Parts of the upstairs come into view -

He can now see the door to the upper room.

Slowly, he moves along the short corridor. With his foot, Schofield pushes at the door. It swings open, agonisingly slowly, creaking on its hinges.

Revealing-

A GERMAN SOLDIER, slumped against the far wall, wounded - but with his gun raised.

A split second to react, Schofield raises his rifle and

BOOM-BOOM!

Both guns go off at the same time.

The German's bullet hits Schofield on the helmet, ripping his neck and upper body backwards, almost lifting him off his feet.

Schofield stumbles backwards and falls-

Down the stairs.

BAM - he hits the stone at the foot of the stairs and...

Black.

INT. LOCK HOUSE - NIGHT

Still black.

In the darkness the sound of a single drip.

Out of the darkness, Schofield's face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The drip comes from a hole in the ceiling, and falls on Schofield's forehead. He opens his eyes.

Schofield starts to move, gingerly. He lifts his hand with difficulty, runs it along the back of his head. Looks at it - slick with black blood.

He sits up, begins to focus. His face and hair are wet. His legs are sprawled on the stairs above him. He looks around dumbly. Unsure of what is up and what is down.

He looks at his watch - smashed in the fall. No idea what time it is.

Panic begins to claw at him. He has somewhere to be. If only he could remember it.

He looks around for his rifle. He spots it above him, at the top of the stairs. He crawls towards it.

Reaches it.

Suddenly, the room fills with light. Outside, a flare streaks across the sky. As the light swings across the room, Schofield now sees the German soldier lying dead, slumped against the wall.

Schofield stands and gradually descends the staircase.

EXT. ECOUST, CANAL SIDE - CONTINUOUS

Darkness.

Then, another flare hisses across the black sky, light bursts from it.

It falls slowly to earth, the magnesium light blinding.

As the light falls the whole world undulates before him. Not clear to him if he is awake or dreaming.

The falling flare is playing with reality; shapes and shadows warp across the land.

There has been a rainstorm. The outlines of destroyed buildings contract and expands ahead of him.

He begins to stagger forwards through Ecoust. Struggling to pick his way through shifting spots of darkness, unable to tell what is shadow and what is a ditch. The puddles reflect the Verey light, glowing as it falls, stinging his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CRACK - A gunshot. Somewhere in the darkness there is another sniper.

A brief moment of confusion, as he looks around for the source of the gunshot.

CRACK. Another gunshot. Distant shouts. Schofield begins to run.

He runs at full pelt. As he does, the flare light dies. Now he is careening through shapeless darkness.

We are running blind, with Schofield. The sound of his footfalls, his breathing.

He crashes through a puddle, the noise draws shots. The bullets buzz around him in the darkness. Then -

HISS - another flare bursts above him.

He flings himself down in the rubble.

Shots clip the ground around him. Schofield lies motionless, breathing heavily, trying to disappear into the rubble around him, waiting for the light to die.

He looks up, trying to memorize his next path as the light moves the ground ahead of him. The light dies.

Schofield is up and clattering in darkness across cobbles.

Another flare goes up into the night sky, but this time Schofield doesn't stop. He keeps running.

It sweeps directly over him, he darts into the bombed out remains of a shop. As the light from the flare dies above him, he turns the corner into -

EXT. ALLEY WAY, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

Narrow, dark.

He starts to move along the alley. Feeling safe in the blackness, heading towards the flickering light at the end of the alley -

EXT. MAIN STREET, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

Schofield looks both ways. A broad main market street stretches away in both directions.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

All windows are smashed, buildings have been shelled and collapsed in on themselves. Some have vanished altogether.

Schofield cautiously peers out along the wide street. To his left, at the far end of the street, is a Main Square, framed by a colonnade.

Beyond, just out of sight, something large is burning.

Schofield checks both ways, then begins to walk down the ruins of the empty street, towards the square. Wary.

Large medieval colonnades flank the entrance to the square, some have crumbled. Schofield slips through them and into -

EXT. ECOUST MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Schofield stops under the columns. The destruction here is staggering -

Colonnades run around most of the square, massive sections of it are pitted with gaps. Whole buildings are gone, like missing teeth - blackness yawns in them. Entire storeys have fallen away, revealing empty rooms.

At the centre of the square, the remains of a fountain.

In the far corner of the square the Church is on fire. The firelight reflects off the wet cobblestones and puddles. Schofield stares at it. Awed.

Then he spots something-

In front of the bright flames: A MAN'S SILHOUETTE.

Schofield sees him. The Man stops, lowers his weapon. Starts to walk towards him.

Schofield cannot make out if he is a German or British soldier and begins to move towards him.

Suddenly the Man lifts his gun and starts to run, heading straight towards Schofield. It's A GERMAN SOLDIER.

Schofield responds quickly. He takes off running, heading through the colonnade. The Soldier raises his rifles and fires after him.

Schofield doesn't stop, heading out of the square and into -

EXT. SIDE STREET, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

He can hear the shouts of the Soldier coming after him. Schofield runs full tilt. He turns a corner. Ahead, to his left, at about knee height, is a low cellar window.

He heads towards it, grabs at it. It's locked.

He can hear the footsteps of the soldier getting closer.

Beside the window is a coal chute. In a flash, Schofield is on his hands and knees through the dark opening, scrambling into -

INT. COAL CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Pitch black while his eyes adjust.

He clutches his rifle, steps back into the shadows. His breath saws in and out, he listens to the slap of running footsteps getting closer.

Schofield slides down into the darkness as a pair of German boots run by the low window.

He stays crouched in the darkness for a time, listening to the footsteps receding. His eyes finally leave the window and look around him.

He is in a low-ceilinged coal cellar. Sections of the roof above have collapsed, letting in drips of rain and some faint light. The room is empty. Then something catches his eye.

At the far end of the room, a small doorway. Heavy fabric has been hung across it. His eyes catch the flicker of flame escaping through material.

Schofield readies his rifle. He points it at the curtain, ready to fire, gun cocked-

Carefully he advances into the small room. Pushes the fabric aside with his rifle.

In the centre of the room a furnace, presumably used to heat the house. A small makeshift fire has been lit in it. Around the fire a couple of blankets, some firewood, empty cans, crusts of stale bread.

As Schofield's eyes adjust to the light, he sees movement in the shadows. Instinctively, he lifts his rifle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

There is a woman crouched in the corner. LAURI, late teens, frail and hollow-eyed.

Her eyes fill with fear when she sees Schofield enter her hiding place. She doesn't move to flee - there is nowhere to go.

LAURI	LAURI
(subtitles; pleading)	(subtitles)
Il ny rien ici. Nous n'avons rien pour vous. S'il vous plaît.	<i>There is nothing here. We have nothing for you. Please.</i>

Schofield sets his rifle down, holds his hands up, as if to say: *I am not a threat.*

SCHOFIELD
Anglais. Not German. Friend... I'm
a friend.

She calms a little. He looks around.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
This place, this town. Ecoust?
C'est Ecoust?

Lauri nods.

LAURI
(subtitles)
Oui.

Schofield looks relieved.

He suddenly begins to feel the pain in his head. He sways a little.

LAURI (CONT'D)	LAURI (CONT'D)
(subtitles)	(subtitles)
Ou sont les autres?	<i>Where are the others?</i>

She looks at him.

SCHOFIELD
Others? No. Just me.

She looks. He gestures.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
Only. Me.

She understands. A beat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
I need to be somewhere... I need to
find a wood to the South East?

Lauri looks at him blankly.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
Trees... les arbres?

Schofield searches his woozy head.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
Croiset?

LAURI
Croisilles?

Schofield nods.

SCHOFIELD
Yes.

Lauri points out the direction.

LAURI
(subtitles)
La rivière-

LAURI
(subtitles)
The river-

SCHOFIELD
River?

LAURI
River. It go there. Trees.
Croisilles.

A little wave of relief. He tenderly touches his bleeding head with his hand, winces with the pain, reels with nausea.

LAURI (CONT'D)
(subtitles)
Assiez-toi.

LAURI (CONT'D)
(subtitles)
Sit down.

She motions for Schofield to sit, pointing at a chair near the fire. He sways, but doesn't move.

LAURI (CONT'D)
Asseyez vous. Monsieur.

LAURI (CONT'D)
Sit down. Sir.

He understands enough to obey her. Swaying slightly he drops into the chair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Still holding his hand to his head, he closes his eyes and feels the warmth of the fire on his face. It makes him almost delirious.

Lauri watches him. She slowly moves over to Schofield and places her hand on his. He jumps at her touch. Tenderness foreign to him.

LAURI (CONT'D)

Shhh. Shhh.

Her kindness translates.

She inspects the wound. She carefully parts his damp hair, finds the jagged wound. He flinches.

She is very close to him, he can feel her breath on his neck. She reaches down, takes out a handkerchief, holds it against the wound.

He closes his eyes, relaxes against her touch.

Lauri looks at Schofield, his eyes closed, his uniform caked in blood and mud.

At last he turns back to face her. They lock eyes. A beat.

SCHOFIELD

(quietly)

Thank you.

Then, from behind her comes a sound. Something soft, small. A BABY stirring. Schofield starts.

Lauri moves to the corner of the room. An old mattress lies on the floor. Next to it, a drawer from an old chest has been lined with cloth. She reaches in, lifts the child, cradles it protectively.

LAURI

(subtitles)

Ma petite.

LAURI

(subtitles)

My little one.

Schofield stares at the baby as it settles in her arms. It can't be more than five months old.

SCHOFIELD

A girl?

She nods her head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

LAURI
(subtitles)
Qui. Une fille.

LAURI
(subtitles)
Yes. A girl.

Schofield smiles. A long beat.

The baby is waking, she begins to cry. Lauri soothes her. Schofield kneels down bedside them.

The baby is soothed, she settles.

SCHOFIELD
What is her name?

Lauri looks to Schofield, desolate. Shakes her head.

LAURI
(subtitles)
J'ne sais pas.

LAURI
(subtitles)
I don't know.

SCHOFIELD
Who is her mother?

LAURI
(subtitles)
J'ne sais pas.

LAURI
(subtitles)
I don't know.

The sadness nearly drowns them both. A long beat.

Schofield opens his pack and rummages -

SCHOFIELD
I have food. Here. I have these.
You can have them - here, take them
all, for you and the child. Here.

He empties his rations onto the mattress, a bounty in this barren place. Lauri looks at them, aching with hopelessness. Schofield doesn't understand.

LAURI
(subtitles)
Elle ne peut pas manger ça.
Elle a besoin de lait...

LAURI
(subtitles)
*She can not eat that. She
needs milk...*

She searches for the word in English-

Schofield blinks at her, in disbelief.

SCHOFIELD
Milk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Lauri nods.

Schofield's cold fingers pry the canteen from his belt. He opens it and hands it to her. She looks at him in wonder. She smells the canteen. Milk.

Lauri looks up at him, amazement and gratitude etched onto her tired features.

LAURI

Merci.

The baby is fussing.

Schofield moves closer, gently talking to the child.

SCHOFIELD

Bonjour.

The baby's bright eyes latch on to his.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

Bonjour.

The baby looks at him. Begins to settle.

LAURI

(subtitles)

Avez-vous des enfants?
Children - you?

LAURI

(subtitles)

Do you have children?
Children - you?

He doesn't answer. He watches the baby.

SCHOFIELD

Shhhh... It's alright...

LAURI

(subtitles)

Elle vous aime. Continuez...
continuez a parler.

LAURI

(subtitles)

She likes you. Continue ...
keep talking.

Schofield looks at the child, searching for something to say.

He says the first thing that comes into his head.

He speaks softly, like he's done it before...

SCHOFIELD

"They went to sea in a Sieve, they
did,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

*In a Sieve they went to sea:
In spite of all their friends could
say,
On a winter's morn, on a stormy
day,
In a Sieve they went to sea."*

The baby's eyes don't leave Schofield.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

*"Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies
live;
Their heads are green, and their
hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a Sieve."*

A beat. The baby has settled, hypnotised by the sound.

They are still for a moment in the firelight.

Suddenly, the distant church bell tolls. The noise rolls through the quiet cellar. Schofield starts at the sound.

He counts the clock strikes in his head as they happen.
TWO... THREE...

He keeps looking down at the baby, but his eyes are filling with fear.

FOUR...FIVE... His heart is sinking.

SIX. He holds his breath.

Silence.

He stands. Goes for his pack. Lauri watches him, confused.

LAURI

(subtitles)

Le jour. Les soldats vont
vous voir... They see you. Il
fera jour. Vous devriez
attendre. Stay. Stay. Please.

LAURI

(subtitles)

*The morning. The soldiers
will see you. They see you.
It will be light. You should
wait. Stay. Stay. Please.*

SCHOFIELD

I have to go.

Schofield takes his rifle and moves to the doorway.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

He leaves.

INT. HOUSE, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

He pushes through the doorway. Damaged wooden stairs lead up. Schofield slips over the rubble, over the remains of the house.

He peers along the empty street.

EXT. SIDE STREET, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

Schofield stays in the shadows, and begins to work his way along the street in the direction Lauri pointed him.

The town is silent. He looks up at the sky to see if the sun is rising. No light.

He reaches a crossroads - small alleyways branch off. He looks around. Lost. He turns to his right - a wide alleyway.

He moves along it, quickly, quietly.

BANG - ahead of him a door flies open, warm light spills out onto the street, followed by a German soldier. PRIVATE MULLER, 30s, blind drunk.

Muller stumbles a few steps and then vomits. Moaning and muttering to himself.

Schofield ducks into the darkness of a doorway.

Muller moans and pukes again. Schofield backs inside the doorway and into-

INT. SCHOOL HOUSE, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

A small school assembly hall and a couple of other rooms have been blown together into one large space. Metal beams where there once was a roof. A few school desks, tipped onto their sides.

To one side of the room, wide arched windows let in shafts of light from the burning church outside. They streak across the inky darkness.

At the far end of the room is the door Private Muller just exited. A small fire burns on the floor by it. Smoke hangs in the room. A couple of empty bottles lie around.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Schofield stays in the shadows. Silently scanning the darkness, listening to the pathetic moans of Muller outside.

He looks around, searching for another way out, a way past Muller.

Out of the shadows steps a man - ANOTHER GERMAN SOLDIER - BAUMER, late teens. He is doing up his fliees.

They lock eyes, three feet apart.

A beat - shock on both their faces, then horror. Neither of them want this.

Baumer opens his mouth to scream.

Schofield closes the three feet and is on him - pushing Baumer hard against a pillar.

Schofield holds Baumer there, his hand clamped over the young soldiers mouth. They lock eyes. Schofield holds his finger to his lips: *Stay quiet.*

Baumer nods.

Schofield slowly drops his hand from Baumer's mouth. Wary.

Baumer sucks in a breath and shouts out:

BAUMER	BAUMER
Engländer!	<i>English!</i>

Schofield reacts quickly, ramming his palm into Baumer's mouth, gagging him as they both fall onto the hard ground - the sound echoes loudly though the school house.

Baumer bites down on Schofield's hand, still bound with its bandage.

Schofield gasps out, gritting his teeth against the pain. He forces his hand further into Baumer's mouth, his other hand goes to the boys throat - squeezing with all his strength.

Baumer has a knife. Schofield wrestles it out of his hand.

Baumer thrashes and kicks under Schofield, rolling the two of them to the side.

They are two feral creatures - both know this is to the death.

A shadow at the far end of the room. Muller is coming back...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PRIVATE MULLER
 Mein Gott Baumer... Das war
 ein Fehler. Wir sollten heute
 Abend zurück gehen.
 Vielleicht hat niemand
 gemerkt, dass wir weg waren.

PRIVATE MULLER
*Christ Baumer... This was a
 mistake. We should go back
 tonight, maybe no one will
 notice we've gone.*

Muller staggers his way over to a spot by the fire, slumps
 down. Rummages among the empty bottles.

Baumer tears a breath in through his nostrils, tries to
 scream -

Schofield squeezes harder on the boy's neck, pushing the
 boy's head down into the ground. Crushing him into the broken
 glass and debris.

PRIVATE MULLER (CONT'D)
 Wo ist der Brandy? Du kleiner
 Scheisser.. wehe du bist
 damit fortgelaufen.

PRIVATE MULLER (CONT'D)
*Where's the brandy? You
 little shit, you better not
 have run off with it.*

Desperately, Baumer beats his hands against Schofield's
 chest. Muller hears the noise.

Muller turns and peers towards them. He can't see them in the
 shadows.

PRIVATE MULLER (CONT'D)
 Baumer. Wo ist..? Baumer?

PRIVATE MULLER (CONT'D)
Baumer. Where is..? Baumer?

But Schofield can see him, and his focus briefly shifts.

In that moment, Baumer fights back - Kicking, clawing,
 punching. But he is weaker now. Schofield redoubles his
 efforts. His hands and arms ache. Acid stings in his muscles.

Schofield is desperate. His eyes flick between Muller and
 Baumer.

Baumer's feet scratch and scrape frantically on the stone.

PRIVATE MULLER (CONT'D)
 Baumer?

PRIVATE MULLER (CONT'D)
Baumer?

Muller stands, teeters towards them.

Then - Baumer's arms fall limp.

Schofield snaps up, leaving his rifle behind him, and leaps
 out of the shadows.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

He barges straight past Muller, heading for the door at the far end of the room. Muller staggers back -

MULLER (O.S.)
BAUMER!

EXT. SIDE STREET, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

Schofield is out of the door, running, hands free, breath sawing in his ears. The sound of Muller behind him-

PRIVATE MULLER (O.S.) PRIVATE MULLER (O.S.)
ENGLANDER! ENGLANDER! ENGLISH! ENGLISH!

Muller's howl chases Schofield along the street. The sound of the door swinging open echoes after him.

Schofield doesn't stop. Behind him is the sound of Muller giving chase then-

CRACK-

A bullet sings off the wall opposite.

EXT. SMALL STREET, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

Schofield sprints, looking over his shoulder.

He turns... and fifty yards in front him -

Another German Soldier. The same man who chased him across the square. The soldier breaks into a run, reaches for his rifle.

The soldier shoots, but Schofield breaks left across the street and into -

EXT. TINY STREET, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

A narrow alley.

Schofield darts down it, looking for some escape.

Muller and the other German race into the alley behind him.

Shots burst on the wall next to Schofield.

To his left is another corner, Schofield sprints for it. Flat out into -

EXT. CURVED STAIRS STREET, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

Ahead of Schofield is a flight of stone steps.

He leaps down. Taking them three or four at a time.

He slams against the wall, leaps down another flight.

His breath burns in his lungs. At the bottom of the stairs, is a long straight street, about 100 yards. Leading to a Bridge.

Schofield runs towards it.

EXT. BRIDGE STREET, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

His heartbeat thunders as he sprints flat out.

The street slopes downhill. Yards fall under him. We can now see the burning Town receding behind him.

The sound of the Two Germans battering down the stairs echoes after him.

They hit the flat street. 30 yards behind him.

They open fire.

Bullets crack off the cobbles just in front of him.

He is 50 yards from the bridge, running full tilt.

Shots ring out.

Schofield reaches the bridge. Bullets ring off the rubble.

He keeps sprinting.

And suddenly, with no warning, Schofield veers across the street, puts one hand on the stone wall of the bridge...

...and vaults clean over it -

EXT. RIVER, ECOUST - CONTINUOUS

Schofield drops forty feet and smashes into the water.

We are under the dark water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Schofield resurfaces, gasping for air. Numb, panicking, he thrashes and kicks, fighting the weight, the cold, the fear.

He struggles to slip off his webbing. It tangles up in his arms, pulling him down.

Finally he gets it off, it is swallowed up in the white water which churns all around him.

Losing the weight of the webbing, he manages to stay above the water.

The bridge and the German soldiers are long gone. The water is fast flowing after the rain, rapids sweep him along.

A felled tree lies across the river. Schofield grabs hold of its branches, tries to pull himself up. But the torrent is too strong to fight. It rips his hands away, and pulls him under again.

He surfaces. Coughs and splutters on the water line.

The rapids continue to pull him through the water at speed.

Schofield goes with it. Letting the water carry him.

He scans the river banks ahead. They tower up steeply. He looks for a way out. Around him, rocks jut out from the water dangerously. They churn the river into a whirlpool, spinning him around.

He is now traveling backwards downstream.

Behind him, a large rock rises up out of the water. He is approaching it fast. He doesn't see it.

The water drives him hard into the rock. His back and head are slammed against it.

Schofield is winded, disorientated, barely staying afloat.

Ahead there is a sound.

A deep rumbling.

He fights to keep his ears above the water, to hear it.

The rapids are getting faster, more turbulent.

Schofield realizes what the sound is - the roar of water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Panic flashes on his face. He thrashes, tries to swim to a bank.

But it's too late.

A waterfall lies ahead.

He braces himself, and then the waterfall is on him in a flash.

Schofield goes over it.

He is pulled down into the plunge pool.

We lose sight of him. And then, nothing. He is gone.

For a few moments, just the roar of the falls.

Then, suddenly Schofield resurfaces, gasping for air.

The churning water pushes him free of the falls. He manages to turn onto his back.

The river has got wider, deeper. He grabs hold of a branch.

The current carries him. The world around him has turned blue in the pre-dawn light.

The river sweeps him forward. He is still gasping for breath.

Now the tumbling river gradually begins to smooth out into a cool apron of water.

Schofield is almost unconscious. He is slipping down, his mouth just above the waterline.

His eyes flutter and open, he spits out water.

Grey mistrals roll through a pale world. Unearthly. They hover above the river ahead.

The river slowly pulls him. Occasional trees line the bank.

This place is untouched by war. Spared. Clean and cool and filled with some life.

Schofield is fighting it, but ready to accept that this is the end. He knows too well there are worse places, worse ways...

Inch by inch he starts to slip down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

His ears fall under the waterline. The sound is sucked from the world. His eyes stare upwards. Lips just above the water.

Schofield seems so peaceful, just floating on the water. The sound of the falls recedes.

We are aware of birds, the wind in the leaves.

Then the water around him turns flat. The current begins to slow.

White. Petals float on it, a patchwork blanket.

Cherry Blossom.

Schofield is swept through the white petals.

Schofield raises an arm from the water and sees the petals clinging to him.

Blake.

A long beat.

Life seeps back into him, breaks through the icy numbness.

Schofield's limbs struggle to work in the cold.

He fights, willing movement.

He swims towards the bank.

Ahead there are the sounds of a dam: a gentle fountain of water.

The sun is rising somewhere - the pre-dawn light is beginning to illuminate the world around him.

He has reached the dam - a fallen tree. He begins to haul himself out. He looks down.

BODIES.

Twelve bodies, give or take.

SOLDIERS - British, German. And CIVILIANS. Men and women.

They have caught and gathered, blocked by the tree from floating downstream. They have formed a kind of dam.

He takes the only option. He pulls himself up, and climbs across the bodies. His way out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

He makes it to the river bank, and stumbles up onto the slope.

EXT. RIVER BANK - CONTINUOUS

He drags himself across the grass, and collapses to his knees.

He cries.

Big racking sobs - for the river, for life, for Blake, for the baby.

The morning is forming.

Far off in the distance, something foreign, or long forgotten.

Music. Singing.

Schofield listens. Then slowly gets up, walks, shaking, towards the sound. He stumbles but doesn't fall. His frozen limbs are forced, dragged, back to life.

Schofield moves up the steep rise. He stops and looks at the woods that now lie ahead of him.

EXT. PINE WOOD - CONTINUOUS

Shafts of morning light stream through the pine trees.

Schofield walks towards the music. Uncertain if it is real.

The music is in the air, a canopy, almost directionless. He can now make out a voice. And words.

VOICE (O.S.)
...there is no sickness, toil, nor
danger/In that bright land to which
I go...

Schofield picks his way through the thin trees... and suddenly the music has a source.

A YOUNG SOLDIER stands in a small clearing.

A British COMPANY - about two hundred men - are gathered around listening.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The young soldier's voice is pure, untrained. He sings the old folk song - "*I Am A Poor Wayfaring Stranger*".

YOUNG SOLDIER (O.S.)
I'm going there to see my Father,
And all my loved ones who've gone
on.

Schofield stops on the edge of the clearing. Unsettled by the world before him. Unsure if these men are living or dead.

If he is one of these ghosts.

He leans against a tree and slumps down on the outskirts of the group. The music washes over him.

Dawn is breaking.

He closes his eyes. Done.

YOUNG SOLDIER (CONT'D)
I'm only going over Jordan
I'm only going over home.

The song finishes. A smattering of applause.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)
D Company! MOVE OUT!

The men stand up and begin to move. Then a voice.

PRIVATE SEYMOUR
You alright pal?

Schofield opens his eyes. A pair of legs before him.

PRIVATE SEYMOUR (CONT'D)
Where are you from?

Another pair of legs.

PRIVATE GREY
He's probably got the wind up.

PRIVATE SEYMOUR
Well he's not one of ours.

PRIVATE BULLEN
He's bloody soaked.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PRIVATE GREY
Fuck it, let's just pick him up and
take him with us.

SCHOFIELD
(very faintly)
Have to find the Devons.

PRIVATE GREY
What's he saying?

PRIVATE SEYMOUR
What's that mate?

SCHOFIELD
The Devons. I have to find the
Devons.

A pause while the soldiers share a look.

PRIVATE SEYMOUR
We're the Devons.

Schofield looks up at them, disbelief on his face.

SCHOFIELD
You're the Devons.

PRIVATE SEYMOUR
Yes, Corp.

SCHOFIELD
Why haven't you gone over?

PRIVATE BULLEN
We're the second wave.

PRIVATE WILLOCK
They don't send us all at once.

PRIVATE SEYMOUR
We're D Company, we spent the night
digging in. We go last.

Schofield staggers to his feet. His hand goes to his tunic
pocket, to the envelope.

PRIVATE SEYMOUR (CONT'D)
Are you all right?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SCHOFIELD
Mackenzie. Where's Colonel
Mackenzie?

PRIVATE SEYMOUR
He's down at the line.

SCHOFIELD
Which way?

PRIVATE SEYMOUR
This way. We're headed up there
now.

Schofield takes off down the line of men, shoving and pushing his way as the queue of them winds out of the woods.

We hear Seymour behind him.

PRIVATE SEYMOUR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Oy! Steady on mate! Where you
going?

Schofield reaches the edge of the wood. From the break in the trees he can see the land stretching ahead of him.

The one-day-old British trench, is perhaps forty yards away, and beyond it, far in the distance, on the higher ground is a black ribbon across the land: The German trenches. From here you can just begin to sense the scale of it.

A comms trench leads to the front line. Schofield staggers down into it.

EXT. 2ND COMMS TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Schofield begins to run along the comms trench, stumbling, weaving in and out of the advancing line of soldiers.

SCHOFIELD
Move!

We catch glimpses of the men as Schofield passes -

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
Let me by - Move! Let me through!

He grabs the first Corporal he sees by the shoulder.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
Where's your commanding officer?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANCE CORPORAL DUFF
He's in the holding pen.

Schofield sprints in that direction - shoving and barging now.

As he approaches the Holding Area, we can see THRONGS of SOLDIERS - The 2nd A and B Companies.

EXT. HOLDING PEN - CONTINUOUS

The holding area is packed with men.

LIEUTENANT HUTTON(O.S.)
B Company, stand to! Now listen,
and listen well!

Schofield spots the commanding voice, pushes through towards the Lieutenant-

LIEUTENANT HUTTON (CONT'D)
On the first mark, A Company will
advance! B Company will then move
to the front line!

SCHOFIELD
Sir, I have a message from General
Erinmore!

LIEUTENANT HUTTON
Who the fuck are you?

SCHOFIELD
The attack has been called off.
General Erinmore has called off the
attack.

The Lieutenant stares at Schofield, incredulous.

LIEUTENANT HUTTON
Balls, man. We're about to go over.
We've got them on the run.

SCHOFIELD
(frantic)
You don't! Please. Don't send your
men over.

LIEUTENANT HUTTON
Get out of the way, Corporal -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHOFIELD

These are direct orders from Army
command! Where is the Colonel
Mackenzie?

Schofield brandishes his letter. Still wet from the river,
but legible. He looks like a madman. Hutton grabs him by the
lapels.

LIEUTENANT HUTTON

(furious)

Jesus Christ, man! Go and see the
Captain!

Hutton shoves him away. Schofield staggers on, pushing out of
the holding area. As he goes, we hear Hutton bellowing to his
men-

LIEUTENANT HUTTON (CONT'D)

Now I want us up there quickly, you
understand? Do you understand!

Hutton's men respond: 'Yes, Sir!' etc.

Schofield rushes through them and into -

EXT. 2ND FRONT LINE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

The narrow trench is packed with more men.

This trench is hastily dug. Little more than a temporary
berm, perhaps five feet high. Hundreds of men crouch just
inside the trench wall, waiting, preparing.

He pushes past more men. And still more.

SERGEANT WRIGHT

Sections 9 and 10 at the ready! We
will advance on the first whistle
blast!

Schofield pushes forwards.

SERGEANT GARDNER

You must not slow down! If the man
next to you falls, keep moving!
Your orders are to break the lines -

SCHOFIELD

Where is the Captain?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gardner nods to CAPTAIN IVINS, rocking back and forth, head bowed.

SERGEANT GARDNER
He's over there.

Schofield gets to Ivins.

SCHOFIELD
Sir? Sir!

Ivins looks up at Schofield, he's crying, muttering to himself, terrified. Tears roll down his face.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
Captain, I have a message. This
attack is called off. You have to
stop, you have to stop -

Before he can say more, the air vibrates. An impossibly loud sound -

GERMAN ARTILLERY.

Shells scream overhead and then - a wall of noise.

The air seems to tremble.

SOLDIERS press themselves into the walls of the trench, take cover wherever they can.

The earth groans as the shells land. Pounding the earth all around. Not yet zeroed in on the British Line.

CAPTAIN IVINS
(Soundlessly)
No. No. No.

Schofield grabs Ivins.

SCHOFIELD
(Shouting, soundless)
Where is Colonel Mackenzie?

Men cover their ears and squeeze their skulls, but the sound still drowns them. Captain Ivins has his hands over his ears. Schofield tries to wrestle his arms away, so he can be heard.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
(Again, soundless)
Where is Mackenzie?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

No response. The noise is too much.

Some men push their heads against the front wall of the trench, scream into the mud, all voices are lost. Others cower into the earth.

The noise is unbearable.

Schofield leaves Ivins, moving faster through the line now as men crouch and contort themselves low.

Schofield pushes forwards.

Then, twenty yards behind Schofield - a direct hit.

The concussion of the blast ripples along the narrow trench.

The walls literally bleed earth and chalk.

In an instant IVINS, his men, the entire section of trench they were in has vanished. They simply disappear -

Schofield is thrown forward, into a huddle of stunned men.

Sound creeps back into the world, raspy screams over the thunder of explosions. We can hear a voice in the distance.

SERGEANT GARDNER(O.S.)
Bearers! Stretcher bearers!

Schofield drags himself to his feet, keeps moving along the trench.

German shells whistle through the air all around.

Schofield pushes his way along.

Fountains of mud and iron burst in No Man's Land, towering into the sky, showering dirt and shrapnel onto the line.

Schofield doesn't stop running, pushing through A and B Companies.

The trench gets thinner, tapering in-

Schofield fights through the men now, running out of space, running out of time.

The trench narrows until Schofield can't get through the men.

The PLATOONS have lost their form here, there are no gaps between them, everyone is packed together in the chaos.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The German artillery is increasing now. Every moment is rocked with noise. There is no space, no silence.

Ahead of him, 100 yards down, the trench takes another direct hit. But Schofield keeps moving towards it.

MEN flow away from the damage. Pushing their way towards Schofield. Completely blocking the trench.

Schofield pushes forward until the trench becomes impassable.

A wall of men, with nowhere to go.

A burly Sergeant is ahead of him, brandishing a pistol, yelling commands, trying to regain some sort of order, but his words are lost in the roar of the shells.

SERGEANT GUTHRIE

GET BACK! Return to your sectors.

GET BACK! BACK! Hold fast!

Schofield pushes past him, and finds the nearest C.O. - LIEUTENANT RICHARDS. His eyes are on his men, revolver in hand.

LIEUTENANT RICHARDS

SEVEN PLATOON! ONE MINUTE!

Schofield grabs at him, screams-

SCHOFIELD

Sir, I have orders to stop this attack.

Richards wants to believe him.

LIEUTENANT RICHARDS

What?

SCHOFIELD

Where is Colonel Mackenzie?

LIEUTENANT RICHARDS

He's further up the line.

SCHOFIELD

How far?

LIEUTENANT RICHARDS

Three hundred yards. He's in a cut and cover.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Both of them look around.

LIEUTENANT RICHARDS (CONT'D)
You'll have to wait until the first
wave goes over.

SCHOFIELD
No! No, I can't!

Schofield turns and looks. More shells hit the trench. Chaos. The way to Mackenzie is impassable. Panic mingles with despair.

Richards turns back to his men.

LIEUTENANT RICHARDS
7 PLATOON! THIRTY SECONDS!

Suddenly, Schofield climbs up onto the firing step...

Richards turns and sees him.

LIEUTENANT RICHARDS (CONT'D)
You can't possibly make it that way
man, are you bloody insane?

300 yards. Open ground, utterly without cover. It may as well be on the moon.

Everything slows. Something in Schofield snaps.

LIEUTENANT RICHARDS (CONT'D)
What the hell are you doing, Lance
Corporal?

Schofield is on the top step...

He stands.

LIEUTENANT RICHARDS (CONT'D)
NO, NO, NO, NO!

Richards and his men watch on in disbelief, as an unarmed Schofield staggers out and into-

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - CONTINUOUS

Schofield stumbles forwards. Shocked that he is now out in the open.

Then he starts to run, picking up speed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Now Schofield is sprinting full pelt, parallel to the trench-

His breath burns in and out, sawing in his ears

Schofield doesn't stop.

His legs thump over the earth.

We hear the screech of the whistle. Three short blasts.

The roar of hundreds of men follows-

Schofield keeps sprinting to the western trench as now, SIX HUNDRED SOLDIERS pour out of the British front line-

Running out into No Man's Land, and crossing in front and behind Schofield.

Hundreds of soldiers, heading towards the German lines as he keeps sprinting to the western trench.

The German guns now erupt again.

Men fall in their dozens.

Hundreds more pour over the top.

Schofield is only half way. He stumbles, falls. But picks himself up and keeps on running.

The whole world shakes on its axis as the shells land.

The air thunders around him. The ground itself bursts and rolls.

A Company are still pouring out into No Man's Land.

Schofield is running, running.

Through the hail of bullets and shells.

Still running.

His lungs burn, his breath grates in his throat as he runs.

Behind him, men continue to pour over the top.

Schofield sprints the final few feet and -

He jumps desperately into -

EXT. 2ND COMMAND TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

He tumbles and lands amongst the waiting men of B Company, now in the breach.

Schofield careens through them and hits the ground hard.

Men look down at him in horror. He brandishes his message as a Captain, SANDBACH, closes in on him-

SCHOFIELD
(Breathless)
Colonel Mackenzie?

The Captain helps Schofield to his feet and pushes him in the direction of a dugout-

CAPTAIN SANDBACH
He's in there.
(he turns to his men)
B Company two minutes!

There is a lull in the shelling, the earth still rumbles above them with the sounds of distant machine guns, but the blasts have stopped.

Schofield runs, half limping, cutting through the men who are about to be sent over the top, and pushes his way to the entrance of a dugout.

SCHOFIELD
Let me through!

ORDERLY DIXON
Hey, hey...!

SCHOFIELD
Let me through!

Schofield drops down a few steps, a second orderly, BYRNE grabs him. Schofield tries to get past.

ORDERLY BYRNE
(overlapping)
What the hell do you think you're doing?

SCHOFIELD
I have to get through. I have to see Colonel Mackenzie!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ORDERLY DIXON
What are you doing?!

SCHOFIELD
I have to stop this attack-

He pushes past Dixon and into-

INT. MACKENZIE'S DUGOUT ANTE-ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The two Orderlies have Schofield by the arms now. He has no strength left to fight them.

His voice is lost in melee, as CAPTAIN RYLANDS sweeps past him and in-

CAPTAIN RYLANDS
Colonel, we've seen flares, the men on the left flank have made it to the German Line-

SCHOFIELD
Colonel!

ORDERLY DIXON
Hold him!

SCHOFIELD
Colonel!

The Orderlies haul him out of the dugout.

EXT. 2ND COMMAND TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Schofield struggles wildly against the orderlies, they have him pinned against the trench wall.

SCHOFIELD
Listen to me, listen to me! I have a letter! I need to see Colonel MacKenzie!

The Orderlies yell over him.

ORDERLY BYRNE
There's no bloody way you're getting in there, mate!

Captain Rylands exits the dugout and bellows down the sector to two Sergeants.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAPTAIN RYLANDS
Sergeant! Send the next wave!

The Sergeants yell back in the affirmative from further down the line.

SCHOFIELD
NO!

With the last of his strength, Schofield throws his elbow into the stomach of one of the orderlies. He breaks away from them and into-

INT. MACKENZIE'S DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Schofield careens into the room. A huddle of OFFICERS are inside, their backs to him. A commanding voice emanates from among them.

COLONEL MACKENZIE (O.S.)
Tell Ivins and Murphy to direct
their men to the left flank.
Concentrate everything there.

SCHOFIELD
COLONEL MACKENZIE!

The officers turn on Schofield, parting as they do. In the centre, staring straight at him, is COLONEL MACKENZIE, 40s.

Mackenzie stands ramrod straight, and is immaculately turned out, despite the chaos surrounding him. He has a small scar across his left eye.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
(in a rush)
Sir, this attack is not to go
ahead! You've been ordered to stop.
You have to stop.

COLONEL MACKENZIE
Who the hell are you?

SCHOFIELD
Lance Corporal Schofield, Sir. 8th.
I have orders from General Erinmore
to call off this attack.

Schofield offers up the letter. The other Officers all react. But Mackenzie doesn't take it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLONEL MACKENZIE
You're too late, Lance Corporal.

SCHOFIELD
Sir, these orders are from Army
Command. You have to read them.

He holds out the letter to Mackenzie. A damp scrap of paper.

A Major, HEPBURN, is listening closely.

MAJOR HEPBURN
Shall we hold back the second wave,
Sir?

COLONEL MACKENZIE
No, Major. Hesitate now and we
lose. Victory is five hundred yards
away.

Mackenzie is resolute.

SCHOFIELD
Sir...Sir! Please read the letter.

COLONEL MACKENZIE
I have heard it all before.
I'm not going to wait until dusk,
or for fog. I'm not calling back my
men, only to send them out there
again tomorrow. Not when we've got
the bastards on the run. This is
their last stand.

SCHOFIELD
The German's planned this, Sir.
They've been planning it for
months. They want you to attack.
Read the letter.

This catches MacKenzie's attention. He nods to Major Hepburn:
get the letter.

Hepburn takes the letter from Schofield, hands it to Colonel
MacKenzie.

MacKenzie opens it. Reads.

His face utterly impassive. Inscrutable.

Schofield waits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

COLONEL MACKENZIE

Major.

MAJOR HEPBURN

Yes, Sir.

A horrible moment of silence. Everything hangs on this.

COLONEL MACKENZIE

Stand them down.

MAJOR HEPBURN

Yes, Sir.

Schofield closes his eyes. Relief floods his body.

The Major runs from the dugout, a blast of whistles from the outside - a signal to stop.

Mackenzie addresses his other officers.

COLONEL MACKENZIE

Call up the orderlies. Tend the wounded. Hold the line in case they counter.

OFFICERS

Yes, Sir.

The Officers empty out of the dugout. Noises of orders being shouted and whistles being blown seep in from outside.

A long beat. Schofield senses Mackenzie moving closer to him. They are now alone.

Mackenzie speaks quietly.

COLONEL MACKENZIE

I hoped today might be a good day.
Hope is a dangerous thing.

Schofield stands stock still.

COLONEL MACKENZIE (CONT'D)

That's it for now. Then next week,
Command will send a different
message. Attack at dawn.

Mackenzie looks him in the eye.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

COLONEL MACKENZIE (CONT'D)
 There is only one way this war
 ends. Last man standing.

Mackenzie looks him up and down.

COLONEL MACKENZIE (CONT'D)
 Have someone see to your wounds.

Schofield is frozen.

COLONEL MACKENZIE (CONT'D)
 Now fuck off, Lance Corporal.

Schofield leaves the main dugout. Major Hepburn stands just outside the door. He grabs Schofield's arm as he passes. Schofield turns.

MAJOR HEPBURN
 (heartfelt)
 Well done, lad.

SCHOFIELD
 Thank you, Sir.

Beat.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
 Do you know where Lieutenant Blake
 is, Sir?

MAJOR HEPBURN
 Blake?

SCHOFIELD
 There were two of us. I was sent
 here with his brother.

He looks at him. The Major understands.

MAJOR HEPBURN
 Ah.

Beat.

MAJOR HEPBURN (CONT'D)
 Well, knowing Lieutenant Blake he
 would have gone over with his men.
 He was in the first wave.

SCHOFIELD
 How could I find him, Sir?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MAJOR HEPBURN

You can try the casualty clearing station, behind the line. Otherwise...

Beat.

SCHOFIELD

Thank you, Sir.

CORPORAL CAIRNS (O.S.)

Major Hepburn, Sir!

He leaves. A beat while Schofield orientates himself. Then he turns and walks out into -

EXT. 2ND TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

The sounds of the wounded and the dying as they pass. The German guns have stopped for now. A brief pause.

Schofield walks along the line.

The B, C and D Companies are gathered, pulling in the survivors, carrying dying and wounded men along the trench. Lifting them by hand where they have no stretchers.

Schofield continues along. Searching for officers, for Lieutenant Blake. No one looks at him. No one sees him. He slips past them, a ghost.

EXT. SHATTERED COMMS TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Schofield turns the corner, and pushes his way along the zig-zag length of the trench.

STRETCHER BEARERS push past him, pressing him against the back wall as they pass with the wounded.

SCHOFIELD

Sergeant, I have to find Lieutenant Blake. Do you know where he is?

SERGEANT

No.

Schofield follows them, up a slope, and emerging out into-

EXT. MEADOW - CONTINUOUS

An impromptu field station, where several overwhelmed MEDICAL OFFICERS, CHAPLAINS and ORDERLIES from the RAMC tend to the wounded.

Schofield moves to the tent.

SCHOFIELD

Sir, is Lieutenant Blake here?

MEDICAL OFFICER

No idea.

(beat)

Move along Corporal.

Schofield walks through the tent, scanning the wounded. Looking at the faces, the bodies.

MEDICAL OFFICER

If you can walk, move to the triage area.

None of the men are officers, none could be Blake's brother.

SCHOFIELD

Lieutenant Blake! Blake?! Has anyone seen Lieutenant Blake?

He moves through a tent of gravely wounded men. The terrible sounds of the dying. None are Blake's brother.

Schofield moves outside. He finally stands still, hopeless. Sick with his failure.

LIEUTENANT (O.S)

Now come on boys. He's taken one in the leg. He's lost a lot of blood.

Schofield turns to see an Officer. He is following a stretcher bearer into the field station from the opposite direction.

Schofield stares at the man's back. The sound of his voice. Just an instinct...

SCHOFIELD

Lieutenant Blake?

The Officer stops and turns to him. His similarity to his brother takes Schofield's breath away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LIEUTENANT BLAKE

Yes.

Schofield is shaky on his feet. He sways a bit, staring at him.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE (CONT'D)

Do you need medical assistance?

SCHOFIELD

No, Sir. I'm from the 8th.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE

What the hell are you doing here?

SCHOFIELD

I was sent here to deliver a message--

Recognition plays on Blake's face, he smiles at the mention of his brother's brigade, moves towards Schofield.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE

The 8th? You must know my brother.

SCHOFIELD

I was sent here with him.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE

Tom's here? Where is he?

Schofield looks at him. Blake's smile slowly drops. A pause.

SCHOFIELD

It was very quick.

Blake takes it in.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

Blake nods, wordless. Schofield goes into his tunic pocket, pulls out Blake's possessions. There is blood on them. The elder Blake's face is ashen as he takes them. His eyes fill with tears.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE

What's your name?

SCHOFIELD

Schofield, Sir.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Blake nods. He looks down at his brother's possessions in his hands.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE
I'm sorry... what?

SCHOFIELD
It's Schofield, Sir. William Schofield. Will.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE
Well, you need some food. Get yourself to the mess tent.

Beat. Schofield turns to leave. Then -

SCHOFIELD
If I may, I'd like to write to your mother. Tell her that Tom wasn't alone.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE
Of course.

Schofield searches for something to say.

SCHOFIELD
He was...he was a good man. Always telling funny stories.

Blake nods. It doesn't seem enough.

Then Schofield finds the right words.

SCHOFIELD (CONT'D)
He saved my life.

Schofield reaches out to shake his hand. Blake takes it. They are still for a second.

LIEUTENANT BLAKE
I am glad you were with him.
(Then)
Thank you, Will.

Schofield nods. He turns and walks away.

He is like a sleepwalker. Unsure of where to go.

He moves away from the makeshift Aid Post and into the meadow beyond.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The grass sways in the breeze. This place is beginning to turn gold in the morning sun. Schofield drifts through it.

The noise of the horror behind him gradually fades.

Ahead, on the plain, an oak tree towers. Untouched. On the high branches, leaves dance in the wind.

Schofield walks towards it. He sits on the far side of it, his back to the trunk. The land stretches out ahead of him in the early light.

He listens to the wind in the leaves. Birdsong.

He undoes his breast pocket. He pulls out the small tobacco tin. He stares at it.

He takes a deep breath and opens it. Two photographs.

Schofield lifts them out, looks at them:

TWO YOUNG GIRLS, his daughters. They smile at the camera.

He looks at the other - his WIFE.

He turns the photo over.

On the back, her handwriting:

"Come back to us."

He stares at it for a long beat.

The pain on his face ebbs into longing. Love.

He closes his eyes and feels the sun on his face.

THE END.

FOR LANCE CORPORAL ALFRED H. MENDES
1ST BATTALION, KING'S ROYAL RIFLE CORPS
WHO TOLD US THE STORIES