

FINAL EXPECTATION

by

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FADE IN

1

INT. BRITISH FIRING TRENCH DEC. 22ND - DAY

1

A young private, OLIVER, crouches down while trying to listen. Not too far away, a noise that sounds like an animal in pain is heard. He is only eighteen years old and is small in stature. He appears out of place among the men that are taller and have mustaches or beards. Oliver's friend RALPH goes running by and Oliver stops him.

OLIVER

What's making that bloody racket?

RALPH

I think it's a horse.

OLIVER

What the hell happened? Sounds like it's going crazy.

RALPH

It was carrying a cart of supplies to the frontline. German sniper got him.

CU (CLOSE UP)

of Oliver running East through the trench. He is seeking the wounded horse. He passes by soldiers talking, and a few others are frantically running. Coming out of the trench, he discovers the horse with a frenzied look on its face. It violently thrashes about as blood trickles down its body from a hole in the stomach.

The horse thrashes about as we see its harness used to pull the cart is still connected, restricting his movements. Boxes of ammo and grenades have been spilled in the mud. Some soldiers frantically pick up supplies.

OLIVER

Shh! Shhhhh! It's okay. It's okay boy.

Oliver looks around and begins to shout at any soldier that comes close to him.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVER

Hey! What's going on? Why isn't
anyone taking care of the horse?

Oliver begins to pull out bandages from his pack, but sees that the horse has already lost a lot of blood. In its crazed state, he knows it would be nearly impossible to help it anyway.

Oliver puts the bandages back, and retrieves a couple 5-round magazines and slowly loads them into his rifle.

OLIVER

Well, I guess no one else cares
enough to do it.

Ralph finds Oliver loading his rifle and approaches him to see what he is doing.

RALPH

What are you doing, Olly? We're
supposed to grab the supplies and
take them away. They're not gonna
be happy if they find out you're
using your ammo on a horse.

OLIVER

I don't give a damn. Look at him!
He doesn't know what the hell's
going on here. Look how scared he
is.

Ralph places his hand on Oliver's shoulder.

RALPH

Want me to do it?

OLIVER

No.

Ralph walks away. The other soldiers have taken the supplies, and now it is just Oliver and the horse behind the trench.

Oliver quickly raises his rifle and looks down the sights. He aims at the horse for an extended period of time, and his rifle begins to sway from his attempt to hold it steady for so long.

He lowers the gun, looking around and seeing no one else around. A few tears are streaming down his face.

ECU (EXTREME CLOSE UP)

(CONTINUED)

of Oliver as he raises his Enfield Rifle again and takes aim. One shot is fired, and then comes a second. After the second shot, the horse is finally silent.

PROFILE

Oliver slowly drops his rifle and gets down on his knees next to the horse. Two more bullet wounds are seen on the horse, and Oliver is seen gently stroking his mane.

OLIVER
(whispers)
I don't know what kind of a man
would've done this to you. I'm
sorry.

Other men come about after the shots to investigate the source of the noise. Once they see the dead horse, they go about their business. Oliver grabs his rifle from the mud and tries to clean it off. He is angry at the Germans for shooting this animal, angry at his own side for not putting it out of its misery, or both. He slowly walks back to his trench position.

Oliver pulls out a pencil and paper while sitting next to the animal, and begins to write, occasionally glancing down at the once beautiful creature.

OLIVER
(V.O.)
Looking into his eyes, there is no
recognition of his moment. Concepts
like artillery barrages, rifles,
snipers, hold no place deep in his
memory. After all, it's a man's
war, started by us, fought by us,
driven forward by us.

We see Oliver's paper and realize that he is trying to create a poem.

OLIVER
(V.O.)
Is it fair then, to ask God's
creatures to take part in this?
Should those that can't understand
war be forced to participate in it?
That horse didn't get drafted, or
volunteer to pull carts of
supplies. The simplicity of his
life was taken away, replaced with
a gross mechanical machine of war.

CUT TO:

2

INT. BRITISH SUPPORT TRENCH - DAY

2

Oliver is gathered with twenty other soldiers and officers. Huge rats scurry by the meeting taking place inside the tall manmade walls of Belgian mud. LT. WELSH is speaking to the men.

LT. WELSH

Listen up, gents. Tonight, we're gonna raid the Huns' trenches. We're gonna break this blasted stalemate one way or another. Any volunteers?

CU

Oliver peeks to his left and right. His friends Ralph and HARRY are both among the pool of men. The men all look to one another. Oliver's hand is the first to go up, after a long silence.

LT. WELSH

(pointing)

You there! What's your name, son?

OLIVER

Pvt. Reynolds, Sir!

LT. WELSH

Thank you Private. Come on, boys. Don't tell me my only volunteer is gonna be a Private. No offense, son.

Lt. Welsh is an officer that commands respect. Unlike some of the others, he isn't trying to find a reason to yell at someone. He always calls you 'son' which must be some kind of respect. Everyone is visibly more comfortable after that first volunteer speaks up. Ralph, Harry, and two other men volunteer. The trench raiding party is set at six, as Lt. Welsh will lead the attack.

HARRY

Why'd you volunteer Olly?

OLIVER

Can't say for sure. Felt like the right idea. No one put a gun to yer head, ya fool.

HARRY

Someone needs to be there to cut your food for you, young man.

(CONTINUED)

Harry ruffles Oliver's hair because he knows it annoys him. Harry, Ralph, and Oliver walk back to Oliver's dugout in the trench. Oliver reads them a poem he has written, a sort of tradition before going into battle. This time, the poem is about the horse that he killed out of mercy.

After Oliver is done reading the finished poem, the three men sit there silently for a couple minutes. Ralph is the first to break the silence.

RALPH

You were right, Olly.

HARRY

Right about what?

RALPH

It wasn't right, what happened to that horse. One of us should've put him out of his misery long before you did.

HARRY

Oh, yeah. I overheard a couple of the guys talking about the horse earlier. You were the one that killed him, Olly?

The three men pick up their cards and continue the poker game. This game has been going on for a while, as we see a sheet of paper with dates and tallies of how each man is doing.

Their playing surface is an overturned crate, and strewn about is a combination of currency, cigarettes, and tobacco.

RALPH

Did I ever show you guys a photo of my girl?

HARRY

Wait, what? You have a girlfriend?

OLIVER

You never mentioned anything about that.

RALPH

You see how photos of girlfriends and wives go missing around here, mysteriously. Figured if I showed a photo of her to the guys, I would never see it again.

(CONTINUED)

All three men share a laugh.

RALPH

And besides, she's my fiancée. You two are the only guys over here that know any of this.

HARRY

Sheesh, you think you know a guy. Then you hear news like this. Allow me to make an announcement of my own. I don't have a fiancée, or even a girlfriend.

Oliver wins the hand and rakes in a small pile of cigarettes.

OLIVER

If you don't mind me asking, why did you choose now to mention this?

RALPH

We got this blasted raid a little later. Us three are all going on it. Who knows if we'll all make it back.

HARRY

So you just wanted us to know before going on a trench raid, that you are off the market? I should quit my advances? Aww, sod it.

RALPH

Why do you always have to be such a smartass?

HARRY

All in good fun, Ralphie. I only joke about people I like, so rest easy.

Harry has won this last hand with three kings. The prize is some tobacco, a large sum of it. Oliver and Ralph are smoking excess cigarettes.

Harry pulls a few chocolate bars out of his jacket and passes them around.

OLIVER

Where'd you come across these? It's been a long time since I saw chocolate.

(CONTINUED)

RALPH

I swear, Harry. I don't know how you do it. We could be in the middle of the desert, and you could still scrounge together a full meal.

Harry now removes small flasks from his pack. He is laughing while doing so, and gives both men a wink as he sets them down on the crate triumphantly.

RALPH

Is that brandy? I'd think about shagging you for some good brandy.

HARRY

I don't think your fiancée would approve of that. We all have our talents, chaps. I'm a scrounger.
(pointing)

Olly here is a poet. Ralph is too afraid of the ramifications to show a picture of his girl to anyone else but us.

CUT TO:

3

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

3

We DOLLY on the six man raiding party as they crawl their way through no man's land. Each time enemy flares illuminate the open ground in red or green, they lie as still as they can. When possible, they crawl into craters to hide, or use dead bodies for cover.

LT. WELSH

More flares. Stay down boys.

Oliver rolls into a nearby crater. A bloated German soldier's face is staring through him. He nearly fires off his pistol from the shock.

HARRY

(whispers)

Psst! Olly? You alright?

HARRY'S POV:

He peeks over the edge of the crater. Oliver's pistol is pointed at the dead German, ready to fire.

(CONTINUED)

HARRY

I don't think that's gonna do much good, mate. That boy's bugged already.

Oliver closes his eyes for a moment. He carefully draws back his revolver. By now, the flares have fizzled out. Once again, we DOLLY on the team crawling through the mud.

LT. WELSH

(whispers)

About halfway now. No turning back.

The trip is becoming slower, as the men are getting caked in the thick mud. Out of the blue, German voices are heard in the distance.

LT. WELSH

Huns. Not a sound. Looks like three of 'em. They're walking back towards their line.

CU

One of the three Germans turns and looks in the direction of the British party, thinking he heard something. He signals to the others, and they begin to search.

LT. WELSH'S POV:

The lead German is now within twenty feet of his position, but they haven't been spotted. The Brits lie as still as possible, with faces kissing the muddy ground.

GERMAN SOLDIER #2

You see anything?

GERMAN SOLDIER #1

Nothing.

They turn around and begin to walk away from Lt. Welsh and the men.

LT. WELSH

Gently boys. Let's get a move on before they fire more flares.

In the darkness, we DOLLY as the team moves out once again. The German barbed wire is now in sight. The men prepare their weapons and wire-cutters.

(CONTINUED)

LT. WELSH
Pvt. Reynolds. Pvt. Milton. Spread
out. I want this wire cut in
multiple places.

RALPH
(whispers)
Watch yourself, Olly. Don't muck it
up.

OLIVER
When we get back, I got a pair of
queens waitin for you.

They shake hands.

CU

Oliver carefully cuts the barbed wire, while Ralph does the
same further down the line. Lt. Welsh's plan is to have two
points of entry, and escape.

The men reform into two groups of three: Oliver with Lt.
Welsh and Harry, Ralph with two younger men, JOHNNY and
BENSON.

4 EXT. GERMAN FIRING TRENCH - NIGHT

4

The two groups ready their arsenal. Mills Bombs will be
thrown into the trenches. The men will follow with pistols
and custom-made melee weapons.

LT. WELSH
Grenades,
ready?Three...two...one...now.

We move CLOSER to see Oliver's fingers pulling the pin on
his Mills Bomb grenade. Six grenades fly through the air
from two directions.

Before the explosions are heard, all six men run towards the
trenches.

5 INT. GERMAN FIRING TRENCH - NIGHT

5

The grenades have stunned or wounded multiple Germans.
Oliver jumps down into the trench and swings his spiked club
at the first enemy he sees.

A second blow to the head crumples the German to a heap on
the ground.

(CONTINUED)

GERMAN OFFICER
Raid! Raid! Get up!

CU

A burly German knocks Oliver to the ground. He grabs a nearby rifle and raises it to strike it into his head. Lt. Welsh fires his pistol into the back of the German's head. His brain splatters onto Oliver's uniform.

LT. WELSH
Come on! Get back in the fight,
son!

A horrible mix of German and English voices is heard throughout the trench. Both sides are embroiled in bloody hand-to-hand fighting.

Oliver comes upon Ralph in a desperate struggle with a German officer, and shoots him twice in the chest with his pistol.

RALPH
Thanks Olly! I owe you one. That
cheeky bastard had me.

We see Oliver and Ralph running through the trench at full speed. Ralph shoots a soldier in the stomach emptying his revolver. He stops to reload, but Oliver keeps running.

Oliver approaches a concrete bunker at the trench, and grabs a Mills Bomb from his belt.

6 INT. GERMAN BUNKER - NIGHT

6

We see four Germans frantically trying to figure out the scope of this attack. In the doorway, a grenade comes into view and lands by the feet of two soldiers. They are gathered around a wooden table.

GERMAN BUNKER SOLDIER
Grenade! Get out of here!

A huge thud from the EXPLOSION sends the four men flying. The table shatters and sends shards through their bodies.

CUT TO:

7 INT. GERMAN FIRING TRENCH - NIGHT

7

The Germans are beginning to grasp that this attack is a small scale trench raid. Red flares light up the sky. Oliver runs into Lt. Welsh, and sees his face covered in blood.

LT. WELSH

Fall back! Come on Reynolds. Time to go.

Lt. Welsh and Oliver climb the trench wall and head towards the holes in the barbed wire. Oliver spots a familiar body on the ground.

CU

Ralph's body is littered with bullet holes. His face has an empty look on it. His revolver is still in his right hand.

OLIVER

Lt. We can't leave Ralph here. We gotta take him with us.

LT. WELSH

No time! Get moving!

8 EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

8

Lt. Welsh and Oliver arrive at one hole in the barbed wire. Harry, Benson, and Johnny are at the other cut section.

We hear a new sound, the thunderous rapid fire of a German machine gun. It is fired by ANTON, an experienced twenty-eight year old muscular soldier with a huge mustache.

ANTON'S POV:

Fires a long burst from his MG 08 machine gun, cutting down Harry, Benson, and Johnny as they cross through the barbed wire.

Anton sweeps his fire to his left, towards Lt. Welsh and Oliver. They are forced to keep running and leave behind the men that have been shot.

We DOLLY through No Man's Land, as Oliver and Lt. Welsh sprint as fast as they can trying to avoid MG fire.

LT. WELSH

(pointing)

There's our wire!

9 INT. BRITISH FIRING TRENCH - NIGHT

9

We peak over the top of the British trench, and see Oliver and Lt. Welsh running towards us. Bullets are ripping through the mud behind them, and more flares are lighting up the sky.

Both men dive into the safety of the trench. Only two return from the six that set out. Oliver doesn't stand up, but sits against the wall and grabs hold of his knees.

CU

Lt. Welsh walks over and sits down beside Oliver, and puts his arm around his shoulders.

LT. WELSH
(whispers)

I'm sorry. I know you were close to Harry and Ralph. Raids like these aren't worth it when we lose men like them.

OLIVER
Why did we do it then, Lt.?

LT. WELSH
It wasn't my call. The Commander wanted some intel on the Huns' trenches. Probably for an upcoming assault.

OLIVER
We were in the middle of a poker game.

CUT TO

10 INT. GERMAN TRENCH DUGOUT - NIGHT

10

Anton is sitting by himself in his dugout built into the trench, smoking a cigarette. A soldier comes running up to the entrance and hands him a letter.

GERMAN PRIVATE
Here you are, sir. This came for you today.

Anton takes the letter without a word. As he opens it, he sees it is from his wife of five years, LORAINÉ.

ECU

(CONTINUED)

We see Anton's face as he reads Loraine's letter. His eyes meticulously crawl across each line of the page. Once he is done reading, his gaze lingers for a few seconds. His face gives no indication as to the contents.

We see Anton leave his dugout and walk through the trench. Other men take notice of him and salute, while moving to get out of his way.

Anton stops at his machine gun. He removes a cloth from a pocket and begins to clean the weapon.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

11 INT. BRITISH FIRING TRENCH DEC. 23RD - DAY 11

Fog has overtaken the battlefields of Belgium. An eerie silence is everywhere. Even the birds are quiet. The British soldiers are standing in the trench with rifles at the ready. Their breath can be seen pouring forth from their mouths at steady intervals. An occasional snowflake falls among them.

Oliver is writing something.

ECU

on his paper. The names 'RALPH' and 'HARRY' are seen. Words underneath both have been scratched out multiple times. Oliver folds the paper and places it into his pocket while shaking his head.

Oliver grabs his rifle and stands up.

CUT TO

12 EXT. BRITISH SUPPORT AREA - DAY 12

Behind the trenches, British artillery crews are preparing to fire field guns. These guns fire large heavy shells, and we see the soldiers loading them.

We see a moving shot of fifteen field guns as each fires a shell to begin an artillery barrage.

CUT TO

13 EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - DAY 13

Shells slice through the fog and explode. As the guns continue to fire, the shells creep closer to the German trenches. The shrill blow from multiple whistles is heard in the distance.

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER
Get moving, men! Over the top!

Hundreds of British soldiers come out of the trench and begin running into no man's land.

OLIVER'S POV:

Rows of soldiers are running towards the wall of friendly artillery fire. Oliver is in the middle of this huge assault force. Fog makes for low visibility.

14 INT. GERMAN FIRING TRENCH - DAY 14

German soldiers are calmly standing in the trench. We hear the EXPLOSIONS getting closer.

ANTON'S POV:

Anton is looking over the top of the trench. Huge clouds of brown and grey are thrown into the air. Anton's fingers grasp the trigger of his machine gun.

The explosions are tossing chunks of barbed wire into the air. They are creeping closer to the German trench. Soldiers crawl into their dugouts as shells now land in the trench.

We see Anton raising one finger with each impact. He is trying to count the number of explosions, comparing this barrage to previous instances.

The explosions stop. Anton and the Germans crawl out and stand up in front of the trench wall. At his MG position, Anton sees shapes running through the fog and smoke.

GERMAN OFFICER
Fire! Tommies in the open!

Anton is the first German to open fire, with his machine gun. A long burst from his MG hits two British soldiers in the frontal assault wave. More short controlled bursts are fired.

Other MGs and rifles open up, kicking up mud, wounding and collapsing charging soldiers.

CUT TO

15 EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - DAY 15

OLIVER'S POV:

Men are falling in front of him. Oliver is forced to jump over, or sidestep friendly bodies. Oliver knows where enemy MG positions are, based on the intel from the trench raid.

Oliver jumps into a shell crater between the barbed wire and the trench. He grabs a Mills Bomb from his belt. He yanks the pin and throws the grenade where the MG should be.

16 INT. GERMAN FIRING TRENCH - DAY 16

CU

Anton is firing a long MG burst. He spots a small round object hurtling towards his position. It barely stands out against the dark grey skies. An enemy grenade, and it's coming right towards him.

Anton steps back from his MG, and dives to his right. The grenade explodes in front of the gun, and debris rains down in the trench.

Anton quickly moves to his MG and sees it is undamaged. Aiming down the sights, he opens fire on soldiers running away from him. His firing stops when he hears one loud WOOSH above his head, followed by one after another. It's the sound of German artillery.

EXPLOSIONS are seen far away in no man's land. They are advancing towards the British lines, catching an occasional soldier that hasn't finished his retreat yet.

OLIVER'S POV:

OLIVER

Damn it, I'm cut off.

Oliver settles down in his crater positioned close to the German trench. He is stuck between the artillery barrage and the enemy. Worse, he is cut off from everyone else that is in full retreat.

CUT TO

17 INT. NO MAN'S LAND CRATER - NIGHT

17

Oliver counts his ammo and grenades. No more grenades, and he lost most of his rifle ammo. The German artillery is silent, but flares have taken its place.

OLIVER

Okay. I need to get out of here.

Oliver peeks over the lip of the crater. We see the tremendous distance back to his trench.

OLIVER

Alright. Just give me a damn break.

As a red flare fizzles out overhead, Oliver listens for the sound of the next one. It doesn't come. He slowly crawls out of the deep crater, now exposed in no man's land.

Oliver's slow crawl is stopped when the POP of a flare breaks the silence. He is too far away from the next crater, so he lies as still as he can, face in the mud.

Anton is at his MG nest, one of the only Germans searching for a sign of movement. Faintly he hears what sounds like a cough.

Oliver hears the cough and can tell that it is close. A British soldier lying on his back reaches his hand out to Oliver for help. A long burst of MG fire rakes the ground between them, and two bullets hit the wounded man.

We see the end of Anton's MG as smoke pours from the barrel.

Oliver pretends to be dead while the ground is lit up by the flare.

OLIVER

(whispers)

I'm going to kill that goddamn
gunner. I'll shove my next grenade
down his throat.

Once the flare dies, Oliver begins to crawl again. Anton's fire has alerted the rest of the trench. The Germans open up with another artillery barrage.

The first EXPLOSION is so close that it takes away Oliver's hearing. He is close to a crater, and rolls to his left into it. He collapses on top of a bloated British corpse. He rubs his ears and shakes his head.

The British troops are also alerted by Anton's fire.

18

INT. BRITISH FIRING TRENCH - NIGHT

18

LT. WELSH

What the bloody hell are they shooting at? Have our snipers spotted any of our boys out there?

BRITISH PRIVATE

No sir. No reports of anyone out there, their's or ours.

LT. WELSH

Well, the Huns aren't going to fire at nothing.

LT. WELSH

(whispers)

Someone's out there. Poor bastard.

Looking into the darkness, each explosion lights up a large section of the battlefield. It is inaccurate. The Germans don't have a specific target. They're probing.

CU

Oliver is lying next to the dead Brit in his crater. His hands are firmly placed over his ears, and he is getting showered with mud and dirt. One EXPLOSION brings down a large object with the debris. Landing in Oliver's lap, we see the mangled leg of a dead horse.

OLIVER

Christ. That kid really cocked up my escape.

LT. WELSH'S POV:

Lt. Welsh is straining to see what the Germans are firing at in no man's land. Despite the darkness, he is peering through binoculars trying to focus on each explosion. He can see a limb or body tossed into the air with each one, but no sign of life.

LT. WELSH

Why the hell aren't our guns firing back? We must have a boy out there, and we're sittin here with our nethers in our hands.

19 INT. NO MAN'S LAND CRATER - NIGHT

19

Oliver picks up the horse leg and tosses it out of the crater. The frequency of artillery has lessened and the impacts are further away.

Oliver decides to make a break for the trench. Climbing up the crater wall, stumbling through displaced dirt, he can just make out friendly barbed wire.

Lt. Welsh is still trying to find someone through his binoculars. A sudden BURST of a flare illuminates a British soldier in green light. The figure is running straight for him. German snipers and machine gunners also see him.

LT. WELSH

Oh my god. We got one of ours
coming home. Give him cover, boys!

British rifles return fire. Oliver has bullets zipping past from both directions. Lt. Welsh has his suspicion confirmed as the figure gets closer.

LT. WELSH

It's Reynolds, men. He's alive!

Oliver is running as fast as he can. He can see a man waving his arms, encouraging him.

20 INT. BRITISH FIRING TRENCH - NIGHT

20

LT. WELSH

(waving)

Come on, son. Almost there.

Oliver leaps as hard as he can into the trench. He crashes into Lt. Welsh. He can hardly breathe.

LT. WELSH

You made it, son. I don't know how
in the blazes you did it, but
someone's looking out for you.

OLIVER

Anyone else make it back, Lt.?

LT. WELSH

Yeah. About fifty of us made it
alright.

OLIVER

How many went out?

Oliver sits up in the trench. Lt. Welsh's smile disappears.

(CONTINUED)

LT. WELSH

About four hundred would be my guess. Think we killed some Germans at least? I'll tell you something, son. No way in hell we killed anywhere close to the number we lost. If the Huns were smart, they'd sit back and hope we keep sending attacks like this.

OLIVER

Our trench raid did more damage than this bloody assault?

LT. WELSH

Absolutely. And we got intel on their trenches too. Helped out our artillery boys.

Oliver and Lt. Welsh stare at each other. Attacks have met this level of success repeatedly, and it shows from the expressions on their faces.

Behind them, we hear the loud concussive sounds of a new British artillery barrage beginning.

21 INT. GERMAN FIRING TRENCH - NIGHT

21

Anton is walking through the trench towards his dugout. In his left hand is a large chunk of bread, and in his right, a letter.

In the darkness, we see Anton's face lit up by the light from an EXPLOSION. It is very close and causes him to fall onto his back.

Immediately, additional explosions find the mark inside the trench. The Germans are caught off guard and in the open. Anton stands up and sees soldiers running for cover. Others have already been hit.

CU

Anton's right hand reaches down and grabs the letter. A large rat scurries over it. The bread is left behind, and multiple rats run to it.

This artillery barrage is much more accurate than previous attempts. Anton runs and crawls into his dugout in the trench. While explosions are landing around him, he lights a small lamp and begins to methodically read the letter.

22 INT. GERMAN TRENCH DUGOUT - NIGHT

22

ANTON
 (whispers)
 Loraine? I don't understand what
 you're doing.

From inside his dugout, in between explosions, we hear muffled screams for medics. A pair of stretcher-bearers sprint by, jumping over the bodies of soldiers diving for cover.

A huge EXPLOSION takes out the stretcher-bearers and tosses the white stretcher end over end high into the air. Anton removes spent cartridge shells from his pocket and lines them up, one for each confirmed kill for the day. We see a long line of shells already lining a wooden board in the dugout.

Anton folds up the letter neatly and places it on top of a stack in the corner. He's been through this too many times to panic. As the barrage ends, a private runs up to Anton.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

23 INT. GERMAN BUNKER DEC. 24TH - DAY

23

In the trench bunker, Anton is seen standing with a prestigious man, COLONEL GOETZ.

COLONEL GOETZ
 I've received word of your combat
 action these last couple days, Lt.
 A lot of people are keeping an eye
 on you.

Colonel Goetz extends his hand to Anton.

ANTON
 Sir? What are you talking about?
 I'm not doing anything differently
 from anyone else.

COLONEL GOETZ
 Don't be modest Lt. You're the kind
 of soldier we need more of. You're
 lethal. The kind of man that those
 Tommies will fear when they try to
 sleep at night. I'm putting in for
 a commendation for you-the Iron
 Cross.

(CONTINUED)

ANTON

With all due respect sir, I'm not looking for medals. I've got other things on my mind right now.

COLONEL GOETZ

We don't have a lot of great soldiers in this sector right now Lt. Whether you like it or not, you'll get what's coming to you. The top brass can be a great friend to men like you.

Colonel Goetz's smile has disappeared, and he is uneasy about Anton's tone.

COLONEL GOETZ

People need to think carefully about what they say around here.

(winks)

The wrong kind of talk gets noticed. I assure you.

ANTON

Can I go back to my post, Colonel?

COLONEL GOETZ

Dismissed, Lt.

Anton leaves the bunker in a hurry. Once outside, he turns and watches Colonel Goetz as he walks in the other direction, staring intensely.

24

INT. BRITISH SUPPORT TRENCH - DAY

24

We see a large group of British soldiers gathered in a crowd. At the front, standing atop an overturned ammo crate, is COMMANDER HIGHTOWER.

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER

I thought it was important to come see you boys and tell you what's what. I tell you now that those Huns didn't enjoy last night's artillery present. We owe it to Lt. Welsh and the intel that raid provided.

Numerous faces turn to look at Lt. Welsh. He shows no emotion or gratitude for the compliment.

(CONTINUED)

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER

I know it's tough. In our assault yesterday, we lost a lot of good men. That is unfortunate. We WILL do better next time. It won't go balls-up I can guarantee you.

Lt. Welsh shakes his head slowly.

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER

Don't lose sight of our enemy and the need to stop him at all costs. We can't allow Germany to end up on the winning side, men. We're not just fighting for ourselves. We're trying to stop evil from spreading.

Lt. Welsh, having heard enough, creeps out the back of the crowd and leaves Commander Hightower and his speech behind. Oliver follows.

LT. WELSH

I tell you, son. I've stepped in some horse shit in my day, but I don't have the boots for that. Bunch of bollocks. That there is talk from a man that will never look an enemy in the eye.

OLIVER

I don't care about his talk, Lt. I want to find that gunner that killed Ralph and Harry. I almost had 'im, sir.

LT. WELSH

I've lost friends too. Be careful about going down that path. Nothing can get a soldier killed quicker than anger and revenge. You have to think clearly.

They walk down the trench and can hear Commander Hightower going strong.

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER

(fading away)

Look at each man next to you. Think of your friends and families, and the men that can no longer fight. We must persevere...

(CONTINUED)

LT. WELSH

How much do you think he rehearsed that speech? Between the two of us, he's a real prat.

OLIVER

Does it work though? Do people buy all that?

25 INT. BRITISH TRENCH DUGOUT - DAY

25

Oliver and Lt. Welsh walk back to the Firing Trench and head inside Oliver's dugout. They play cards. In between hands, Oliver pulls out two notes meant for Ralph and Harry's parents. They are both still blank except for each man's name scribbled at the top.

Once the game is over, Lt. Welsh leaves the dugout. Oliver pulls out his knife and draws a map on the mud wall. CLOSE IN on the map to reveal the position of Anton's MG nest marked.

He pulls out a fresh piece of paper. He has written poetry to deal with the long days previously. This time, nothing comes to him. The pencil never touches the paper. Oliver thinks about the revenge he seeks against his friends' killer as he stares intently at his crudely drawn map.

CUT TO

26 INT. BRITISH TRENCH DUGOUT - NIGHT

26

Oliver is still sitting in front of his blank paper. Lt. Welsh approaches.

LT. WELSH

How you doin' son?

OLIVER

I'm fine, Lt.

LT. WELSH

I just heard some news, straight from Commander Hightower.

(long pause)

He wants another trench raid tonight. Apparently, he was very impressed with the intel we got from the last one. Since we're the only survivors, he wants us to lead it.

(CONTINUED)

Oliver's back is to Lt. Welsh. He remains between him and his crude map on the wall, making sure Lt. Welsh doesn't see it.

OLIVER
When do we leave, sir?

LT. WELSH
(glances at watch)
Two hours.

OLIVER
I'll be ready, Lt.

27 EXT. NO MAN'S LAND ONE HOUR LATER 27

RUMBLING in the distance is heard. A few drops of rain arrive. Gradually, the rain intensifies until it reaches a downpour. The lightning has arrived too. Each flash of lightning illuminates no man's land for a brief moment.

28 INT. BRITISH TRENCH DUGOUT - NIGHT 28

Oliver and Lt. Welsh are trying to stay dry in Oliver's dugout. They are sitting next to each other, not a word is said. We see that Oliver's map with Anton's position has been erased from the wall.

In other dugouts, six other men are also waiting to begin the raid. Oliver breaks the silence.

OLIVER
Sir, are you worried about this one? This blasted lightning could be a problem. At least with flares, you can kind of predict those. This could catch us out in the open with our pants down.

LT. WELSH
(checking watch)
Maybe this will move out by the time we leave. Still have fifty minutes. That is if we don't drown first.

An hour of heavy rain has taken its toll on the trenches. Small rivers flow through them. For the men outside, constant wet feet are something that is a concern as there is no dry spot in the trench.

Wooden boards have been placed on the ground to keep above the mud, but are now submerged.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVER

I need to tell you something, sir.
I want to kill him, that gunner.
Can't stop thinking about 'im.

Lt. Welsh shakes his head and frowns.

29

INT. BRITISH TRENCH DUGOUT FORTY MINTUES LATER

29

LT. WELSH

Tomorrow's Christmas. What do you
think your family's gonna be up to?

Before Oliver can respond, a British Private comes running
up to the dugout.

BRITISH PRIVATE

Lt. Welsh, sir. Commander Hightower
has called off the raid, on account
of the weather. He wants to talk to
you right away, sir.

We follow behind Lt. Welsh as he trudges through the muddy
trenches back to the bunker where Commander Hightower is
found.

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER

Ah! Come in, Lt. This is bad
business, the weather rolling in
and fouling up this raid, isn't it?

LT. WELSH

Yes, sir.

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER

Once this weather clears up, we're
gonna give the Germans one hell of
a Christmas present. We're going to
attack them all across the sector.
This attack'll be twice as big as
the last one. You and your men are
going to play a crucial role, Lt.

LT. WELSH

Sir, did you see the casualty list
from our last assault?

After a pause, Commander Hightower adjusts his hat and
speaks again.

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER

Yes, yes. I've seen the reports.
I'm still trying to get to the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER (cont'd)
 bottom of it. Bad communication,
 bad leadership, whatever it was,
 I'll find out.

LT. WELSH
 Sir, I was there. The whole plan
 was the problem. This next attack
 you're talking about is going to be
 just as bad. It's not doing the men
 any good to see those kinds of
 numbers killed just like that.

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER
 Maybe those men just need a little
 motivation. It's amazing what
 soldiers can do when properly
 reminded of the stakes.

As Commander Hightower and Lt. Welsh are talking, we see Oliver sitting quietly in his trench dugout. He's holding a picture in his right hand. It's him with Harry and Ralph, all dressed in their uniforms.

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER
 (V.O.)
 Lt., if you can't motivate the men
 maybe you're not the right man for
 this job.

LT. WELSH
 (V.O.)
 You're not around them as much as I
 am, sir. You don't see the toll it
 takes on them. You can't keep
 asking them to move mountains.

Oliver's left hand is shaking badly. He clenches his fist to try and stop it, but is unsuccessful. He tries again, but it does no good.

Commander Hightower is becoming enraged at Lt. Welsh's attitude. We now see inside another British dugout, as a British private is rocking back and forth, laughing maniacally.

In another dugout, a Private is tightly holding a grenade in his lap. His fingers have grabbed the pin and hold it tightly, as we hear his fast heavy breathing.

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER
 (V.O.)
 Speaking like a goddamned coward!
 What's the matter with you? They're
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER (cont'd)
soldiers. I'm not going to let you
poison the minds of these men. I'll
do you a favor, Lt. You don't have
to worry about taking part in the
next attack. I'm transferring you
to another sector immediately.

Back to Oliver's dugout, he prepares a meal of corned beef
and bread. It's too much food for one and looks to be for
someone else.

LT. WELSH
(V.O.)
You can't take me away from the men
now, sir. Right before an attack?

COMMANDER HIGHTOWER
(V.O.)
I can do whatever the hell I deem
necessary, Lt. You're a rotten
apple. I'll be damned if you spoil
the bunch. Now get out of my sight!

We follow close behind Lt. Welsh as he makes the trip back
to Oliver in his dugout. Other soldiers salute him as he
passes by. As he enters the dugout, he doesn't bother
sitting down next to Oliver.

OLIVER
What's the matter, sir?

LT. WELSH
Commander Hightower is transferring
me to another unit. I have to leave
immediately. I'm sorry, son.

OLIVER
Sir, why would he do that now? This
isn't right. Can you fight it
somehow?

LT. WELSH
I'm sorry, but there's nothing I
can do. It's politics. The
Commander apparently doesn't want a
leader with a mind of his own.

Oliver has stood up and is furiously pacing back and forth.

OLIVER
(whispers)
You're the last friend I had alive
here, Lt.

(CONTINUED)

LT. WELSH

Listen to me close, Oliver.
Whatever anyone tells you, don't
try to be a hero. No such thing as
a coward out here. Just live.

Lt. Welsh and Oliver shake hands. Lt. Welsh takes his left hand and lightly places it on Oliver's shoulder. A slight smile crosses both their faces. Lt. Welsh turns and leaves the dugout with his head held high, leaving Oliver alone.

OLIVER

(smiling)

He finally called me Oliver. Never did that before.

CUT TO:

30 EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

30

Darkness covers No Man's Land. Slowly, the moon appears from behind clouds. In the moonlight, we see a few snow flakes falling.

The only sound heard at the front is the pop and fizzle of a British flare. While the flare lights up the night sky, we see that the snowflakes are getting bigger and falling at a faster rate.

31 INT. GERMAN FIRING TRENCH - NIGHT

31

The camera starts at ground level. We see the immaculately clean boots of a soldier. The camera slowly raises until the back of Anton's head comes into view. Every couple seconds, a cloud of his breath pours forward into the night air.

Anton is rubbing his hands together and blowing warm air into them. He is manning his position at his MG nest. He has a small calendar next to him, and we see that today's date is 'DECEMBER 24TH.'

ANTON

(V.O.)

Tomorrow is Christmas day. My first
Christmas away from my wife. Five
years we spent together with our
family. And now she's leaving me.

On the ground next to Anton's right foot, a letter is becoming buried in the continuing snowfall. A few words and phrases can be read. We close in on the partial sentence beginning with the words 'I'M SORRY ANTON,' and another partial sentence with the words 'ANOTHER MAN.'

(CONTINUED)

Anton begins to take a cloth and clean the machine gun methodically. He takes the ammunition out and reseats it in the feeder system. Each action is slow and carefully done.

ANTON
(whispers)

If you knew what it was like over here, you might not choose now as the time to go. I can't defend myself against these claims, make my own case. I guess it's going to be a lonely Christmas this year.

32

INT. GERMAN FIRING TRENCH DEC. 25TH - DAY

32

From directly behind Anton's MG position, we see that he is still stationed here watching no man's land. There is now a thick coating of snow covering the battlefield. A few flakes are still falling.

Anton can see a few figures emerging from the enemy trench. Anton looks around behind him to see who is around. He spies CAPTAIN HARMEL walking away from him.

ANTON
Captain! Three enemy soldiers are out of the trench. They're walking this way, sir.

Captain Harmel runs over and stands next to Anton. Looking through his binoculars, he spots an additional ten British soldiers out of the trench.

CAPTAIN HARMEL
There's more Tommies coming. What is this? They've got their arms up. It doesn't even look like they're carrying weapons. Keep your gun trained on them, Lt. If they make any sudden movements, you know what to do.

ANTON
Yes, sir.

More and more British soldiers are pouring out of the trenches. Looking through Captain Harmel's binoculars, we can see that some of them are smiling. As they come closer, the faint sounds of singing are heard.

CAPTAIN HARMEL
Lt. Am I crazy or do you hear them singing?

33

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - DAY

33

OLIVER'S POV:

Looking behind him, a huge crowd of British soldiers is now in no man's land. Everyone is walking towards the German trenches carefully, with no sudden movements.

Oliver is not singing, but a few others are singing 'SILENT NIGHT' and waving their arms in the air. Suddenly, Germans start making their way out of the trenches and walking into no man's land. LT. Welsh's replacement, LT. STILES encourages the men.

LT. STILES

(shouting)

It seems to be working. Keep singing! They're starting to come out.

As Oliver and the front wave of soldiers have gotten to the German barbed wire, some Germans have met up with them. The greetings have tentatively begun.

LT. STILES

Ah, greetings Captain. My name is Lt. Stiles. Merry Christmas!

Lt. Stiles extends his hand to Captain Harmel. After a pause, Captain Harmel slowly reaches out and takes it.

CAPTAIN HARMEL

Merry Christmas, Lt. I'm Captain Harmel.

Oliver turns from this exchange to see a very large muscular German standing in front of him. This man walks up to Oliver and towers over him. The two men stare at each other, not saying a word.

Without smiling, Oliver finally speaks.

OLIVER

My name's Oliver.

Oliver extends his comparably small hand.

ANTON

I'm Anton.

END OF ACT ONE