PATHS OF GLORY

Screenplay by

Stanley Kubrick and Jim Thompson

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FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY
CAST OF PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

COLONEL DAX.................Commander of the 181st Regiment.
A handsome man in his thirties -
vigorous and tanned by the weather.

GENERAL ROUSSEAU...........Commander of the Fourth Division,
of which the 181st Regiment is a
part. He is a friendly looking man
in his fifties.

GENERAL BROUILLARD..........Corps Commander, responsible for
the Fourth Division. A trim, wiry
old man with watery eyes.

SOME OF THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE 181st REGIMENT

CORPORAL PARIS..............An athletic man in his late twenties
who is involved in a feud with his
Lieutenant.

PRIVATE ARNAUD...............A tall, scholarly looking man with
steel-rimmed glasses, who suffers
the separation from his family.

PRIVATE FEROL...............A bushy haired, giant with an
irritating penchant for practical
jokes.

LIEUTENANT ROGET.............A puffy-faced coward who one might
easily dislike on first sight.

CAPTAIN RENOUART............A young man graced by a kind of
good looks that seem almost feminine.
A friend of Colonel Dax; over-
burdened by a sense of guilt.

CAPTAIN SANCY..............A prissy-looking man who harbors an
incredible dislike for Private Ferol.

LIEUTENANT JONNART.........An acting Company commander.
CAPTAIN HERBILLION.........ADC to Colonel Dax.
MAJOR SAINT-AUBAN..........ADC to General Rousseau.
MAJOR COUDERC..............Member of Rousseau's staff.
COLONEL DE GUERVILLE.......Member of General Brouillard's staff.
MAJOR VIGNON...............Commander of 1st Battalion.
CAPTAIN NICHOLS............Artillery spotter.
CAPTAIN PELLETIER...........Commander of artillery battery.
SUPERIMPOSED TITLE:

For a few seconds: "France 1915"

EXT. VARIOUS ANGLES - STAFF CAR - DAY

Drenched in the dazzling clear sunlight of a spring day, a gleaming black staff-car winds its way along the back roads of the rolling French countryside. An old grizzled farmer looks up from plowing. A child waves from a broken porch swing. A red-cheeked, pregnant, peasant girl idly watches the car pass nearby.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. ELEGANT COUNTRY ESTATE - DAY

The headquarters of GENERAL ROUSSEAU. It is a lovely, gracious place surrounded by well-kept tall hedges, graceful willow trees and a sloping grassy lawn of enormous sweep. The staff-car swerves up the winding gravel drive leading to the entrance. Everywhere in evidence is the restrained bustle connected with a military headquarters. Smartly uniformed guards; small groups of officers arriving and departing; dispatch riders conversing with each other in hushed tones.

Waiting for the staff-car are GENERAL ROUSSEAU'S two aides, MAJORS SAINT-AUBAN and COUDERC. They politely greet the occupants of the car, ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL BROULARD, a trim, wiry old man with watery eyes, and his aide, COLONEL DE GUERVILLE, a fat, tall man in his middle forties. The chauffeur hops out to open the door.

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
(saluting)
Good afternoon, General Broulard,
Major Saint-Auban, of General
Rousseau's staff, and this is
Major Couderc.

GEN. BROULARD
(exiting car)
How do you do, gentlemen.
This is Colonel de Guerville.

(CONTINUED)
COL. DE GUERVILLE

Gentlemen,

They all stand uneasily at a loss for small talk.

MAJ. COUDELIER
(nervously)
I hope your trip was pleasant, General.

GEN. BROUILARD
(straightening his jacket)
Thank you, Colonel. It was quite enjoyable...yes, the country's quite beautiful this time of year.

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
Well, if you'd like to come inside, sir, General Rousseau is awaiting you in his office.

DISSOLVE:

INT. PLUSH SALON - DAY

Which has been converted into GENERAL ROUSSEAU'S office. There are maps everywhere; on the wall, spread on the table, folded on chairs and stacked on shelves. The room is richly furnished in Louis XV, with thick carpets, fine paintings and everywhere graced with art objects of all kinds. GENERAL BROUILARD wanders about the room admiringly. GENERAL ROUSSEAU puffs his pipe, thoughtfully. He is a friendly looking man, in his fifties. Somewhat of a cat and mouse game appears to be in progress.

GEN. BROUILARD
Paul, you've done a wonderful job on this room.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
You're very kind, George, but it's really pretty much the way I found it when the Blanchards evacuated the place. I may have added a touch here and there but nothing really important.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. BROUILARD
Well, Paul, say what you will, but I prefer to believe that your taste in carpets and pictures is second to none.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(playing the game)
Thank you -- I do think it's important -- I mean the place a man works, the way it looks. The atmosphere of the room has an effect on the man who works in it.

GENERAL BROUILARD scrutinizes an elegant vase resting on a marble table top. Smiling to himself, he looks up brightly and crosses the room to GENERAL ROUSSEAU'S desk, seating himself comfortably in a leather chair.

GEN. BROUILARD
(complete change of tone)
Paul, I've come to see you about something big. It's top secret and it mustn't go further than your chief of staff, and not to him unless you can trust his discretion.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Of course.

GEN. BROUILARD
A group of armies is forming on this front for an offensive in about three weeks. Joffre is determined to make a complete breakthrough. The latest word seems to be that the Americans are not coming into the war. Apparently they don't seem to mind having their ships torpedoed. So it looks as though we won't be getting any help, at least not very soon, anyway. Why are you smiling?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Oh, forgive me, go on, please.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. BROULARD
No, really, I know it's silly but I wish you'd tell me what you were smiling at.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
I'm really sorry, I didn't mean to be rude. I just thought for a moment that I knew what you were about to say. Please go on.

GEN. BROULARD
(pleasantly)
I never knew you were a mind reader -- what did you think I was about to say?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(tentatively)
Something about the Ant Hill?

GEN. BROULARD
You are a mind reader, Paul.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Not really. It is a key position. It's in my sector -- and furthermore, to be perfectly honest, I've heard some talk. You know nothing's really a secret at headquarters.

GENERAL BROULARD studies GENERAL ROUSSEAU for a moment, then he smiles pleasantly.

GEN. BROULARD
Well what do you think?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
About what?

GEN. BROULARD
About the Ant Hill?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
I suppose just about the same sort of things that everyone else thinks about it. It's the key to the whole German position in this sector.

(continued)
GEN. ROUSSEAU (cont'd)
That's not news to anyone, I'm sure. It's a miniature
Gibraltar. The Germans have held onto it for over a year.
And I dare say that they know what it's worth, too. They've
put a lot of work into seeing that we don't take it away
from them.

GEN. BROUARD
(solemnly)
I saw Joffre yesterday. He gave me formal orders to take the
Ant Hill no later than the tenth. That's day after tomorrow.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(smiles patronizingly)
I don't want to be disrespectful to the old boy but that kind of,
'I want it no later than the tenth,' stuff comes very close to being ridiculous, don't you think?

GEN. BROUARD
(disappointed)
I don't imagine I'd be here if I really thought that. Look,
Paul, we all know it's not going to be a picnic -- but then no one ever said it would.

ROUSSEAU smiles at him, politely. BROUARD returns the smile and turns his attention to an ivory letter-opener.

GEN. BROUARD
I've entrusted this job to Sorel and Swann already and they've
failed both times. If there's one man in this army who can do this for me, it's you, Paul. I'd have called on you first but you were up to your neck at Souchez.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
You're very flattering, George, but really, it's out of the question -- absolutely out of
(continued)
GEN. ROUSSEAU (cont'd)
the question. My division was
cut to pieces. What's left of
it is in no condition to even
hold the Ant Hill, let alone
take it. I'm sorry but that's
the truth, at least in my
opinion.

BROUARD gets out of his chair and walks to the window.
He picks at a fleck of paint on the glass.

GEN. BROUARD
I'm sorry to hear you talk this
way. What I mean is, that as
your friend -- I shouldn't want
to see anything like this, no
matter how genuine it might be --

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(pleasantly)
What are you trying to say,
George?

GEN. BROUARD
Well, let's be honest with each
other. We always have been, and
there's no reason why we should
start doing things any differently
now. You've got a right to know,
or perhaps I should say, as a
friend I have a right to tell you.

BROUARD faces around. His eyes fairly sparkle.

GEN. BROUARD
The talk about headquarters is
that you're being considered
for the twelfth corps - and
with that, another star. Now
we both know that you've got a
good enough record to be able to
refuse this order on the grounds
you've stated. No one would ques-
tion your decision and they'd get
someone else to do the job. But
then you know the way talk starts
about a thing like that. Of course
it's always by those rear echelon
commandos who wet their pants when
a car backfires -- but they've got
mouths, and they've got dirty
gossipy minds.

(CONTINUED)
ROUSSEAU smoothes back his hair, nervously. He moves to a small bar.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Would you like some cognac?

GEN. BROUARD
No thanks, I try not to start before dinner. In fact the doctors have been trying to get me to lay off the stuff completely.

ROUSSEAU pours himself a brandy, replacing the cap of the bottle with great precision. He drains the snifter slowly. He looks at BROUARD with an idle expression that seems to say, "All right, let's suppose I am interested, what's the next move?"

GEN. ROUSSEAU
You're awfully clever, George. But then you always have been.

GEN. BROUARD
(smiling)
But not clever enough, apparently. A little transparent there at the end. I was confident your judgment wouldn't be swayed by an appeal to your ambition, no matter how valid it might be. But you can't blame me for trying. Frankly, I'd have been disappointed if you hadn't seen right through me.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(solemnly)
Well, I don't think I have to be ashamed of the fact that I have a normal amount of ambition -- and that naturally I'm concerned about my reputation at headquarters, but there are other considerations. I am responsible for the lives of eight thousand men.

GEN. BROUARD
(knows Rousseau is hooked)
Of course you are. And I know you wouldn't tackle a thing unless you were sure that you were doing right (continued)
GEN. BROULARD (cont'd)
by those men. Now look -- just suppose for the moment that you were convinced, at least to the point of your conscience being clear. Now, if for some unlooked for reason the thing didn't come off right -- well, at least you gave it your all. The casualties will prove that. You did the best you could. Perhaps your division was under strength. Perhaps it was tired. Its morale was low. Perhaps, in retrospect, it might appear they were not really in the best shape to carry the assault. But it wasn't your idea. You simply did your best to carry out orders. And furthermore, although I know this is of secondary interest to you, I must take the risk of angering you by pointing out that this would not hurt your chances for the twelfth corps. In fact, it would probably help them.

ROUSSEAU lights up a cigar, first carefully snipping one end with a cutter.

GEN. ROUSSEAU

How's artillery?

GEN. BROULARD

All you want.

ROUSSEAU savors his cigar.

GEN. ROUSSEAU

How about replacements?

GEN. BROULARD

(hopefully)

We'll see what we can do.

GEN. ROUSSEAU

When do you see this coming off?

GEN. BROULARD

No later than day after tomorrow.

(CONTINUED)
ROUSSEAU lazily reaches across his cluttered desk for the telephone.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(into phone)
Ask Major Saint-Auban to come in, please. Just a second --
(covers mouthpiece)
What's the name of your Colonel?

GEN. BROULARD
de Guerville.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Ask Colonel de Guerville to come in too.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD — DAY — VARIOUS ANGLES

Establishing the 161st Regiment dispiritedly slogging back to the trenches. They are loaded down like pack animals. Their uniforms look as though they had been marinated in mud. The sky in the direction they are marching is occasionally illuminated by a dim flash of light followed a split second later by a dull boom. The tramp of their feet is out of step — and this is accentuated by the irregular clanking and banging of their equipment. There are, ideally, about one thousand men winding along the road in columns of fours.

THE HEAD OF THE COLUMN — COLONEL DAX AND CAPTAIN RENOUART

COLONEL DAX is a handsome man in his thirties — vigorous and tanned by the weather. CAPTAIN RENOUART is a young man in his late twenties, graced by the kind of good looks that would go into making a beautiful woman — an elegantly trimmed moustache completes his face.

The two men walk a little apart from the rest and talk in hushed tones. They have been talking before we come upon them. COLONEL DAX is noticeably annoyed. They speak in low tones so as not to be overheard.
COL. DAX
Do you know your real trouble, Captain Renouart? You're ego-
tistical. You've got a big head. You're so sure the sun rises and
sets up there in your noggin you don't even bother to carry matches.
Now let me ask you one question. And believe me I'm entirely serious
about it. Do you think you're God?

CAPT. RENOUART
(idly)
Of course I don't, Colonel.

COL. DAX
You're not infallible, then?
You're every bit as apt to be
wrong as any other human being?

CAPT. RENOUART
(firmly)
I'm not wrong about the Ant Hill.
Anyone with a brain in his head
would know that --

COL. DAX
And you've got the only brain in
the world. They made yours and
threw the pattern away? The rest
of us have a skullful of corn-
flakes.

CAPT. RENOUART
Look, I know I don't have that
wonderful legal mind of yours.
You can twist everything --

COL. DAX
All right, you say it's impossible.
The best military minds in France
think it's possible, but you don't.
Both times other outfits have been
cut to pieces. Now we're given the
job. We're under strength and
we're battle weary. It makes no
sense at all.

CAPT. RENOUART
Right.

(continued)
COL. DAX
But what conclusion can we justifiably draw from all of that? Difficult? -- yes. Small chance for success? -- yes. Possibility of great casualties? -- yes. No apparent reason clear to us? -- yes. Conclusion? Not very pleasant to look forward to, but definitely not impossible. If we never fight unless we're absolutely sure of --

CAPT. RENOUART
Now you're putting words in my mouth. And furthermore you're reducing it all to an absurdity. Look, beyond your wonderful crystal clear logic there's a thing called common sense. And that common sense understanding of the situation says in big bold letters, impossible, senseless, willful murder.

COL. DAX
How do you mean, impossible? Like a dead man walking -- a guy with a bullet through his heart? Something like that?

CAPT. RENOUART
(warily)
Yes.

COL. DAX
I knew a man to do exactly that. He had a hole in his ticker you couldn't cork with a corn cob, but he walked almost three miles. I proved that he did and established that his wife couldn't have been near the place he was shot. You see the trouble with common sense is that things are often not what they seem to be.

CAPTAIN RENOUART shrugs and walks along silently. DAX regards RENOUART, uncomfortably.

(CONTINUED)
COL. DAX

(very quietly)
Look, Edward, I've seen too many guys like you not to know the type. You're a brooder. You carry the whole world around on your shoulders. You'd feel personally responsible if it started raining. Figure that you might have stopped it in some way, or that you ought to have had umbrellas for all of us. Well, you better snap out of it as of right now. Act like a man. Live up to those captains' bars you're wearing. You do it, or I'll take 'em off of you. I'll nail your tail to a stump and push you off backwards.

CAPTAIN RENOUART smiles, ruefully.

IN THE COLUMN - MEYER AND FEROL

The only similarity between the two men is their rank of private. MEYER is a tall bushy-haired man with bizzare, uneven features who, by some, might be considered ugly. FEROL is a slender, somewhat good-looking, if ferret-faced, young man of about the same age as his friend - late twenties. They appear to be worried and depressed in spirit and trying, with some success, to joke their way into a better mood. Each of their ploys and counterplots is greeted by an appreciative chorus of snickers and derisive encouragement from the men marching on all sides of them. They are playing everything "to the balcony" - and wait for a second to measure the response of each remark. Each seems to have his own fans. Among the group are CORPORAL PARTS, PRIVATE LEJUENE and, not far from them, LIEUTENANT ROOBET. All of whom we shall hear from importantly in a scene soon to follow. We include them here to establish them as part of the Regiment.

FVT. MEYER

(as though continuing a conversation)
Well, it's bound to be one or the other. Either you need a bath, or lightning struck a latrine near here.

(looks around)
Don't see any lightning, do you?

(CONTINUED)
PVT. FEROL
The wind's shifted, pal. You
smell your own breath.

PVT. MEYER
Not me. I had wild honey for
supper, and this ain't the same
odor. I'd say it was largely
Eau de Old Underwear with a big
whiff of Cologne of Stiff Socks.

PVT. FEROL
Are you hinting that I stink?
All right! -- no bedtime story
for you tonight. I won't tell
you what happened to the sales-
man's daughter and the traveling
farmer.

PVT. MEYER
I already know. He was just about
to give her a big smooch, when the
Captain blew the bugle on him.
He said, All right, Buster. Back
to the front lines, and win me
another medal. By the way, I
finished that new poem about him.

Cut away to CAPTAIN SANCY during the conversation. He
pretends not to hear.

PVT. FEROL
Which one? Lyric to a Lunatic
or Ode to an Oaf?

PVT. MEYER
This is another one. I call it
Sonnet to a Son.

PVT. FEROL
Well, let's have it. I can't
feel any worse than I do already.

PVT. MEYER
(making it up)
A Captain who thought he was a
General...Had a head that was
solidly mineral...Twice as hard
as a brick...And three times as
thick...It kept his ears from
banging together.

(CONTINUED)
PVT. FEROL
(startled)
Kept his ears from — what kind
of rhyme is that?

PVT. MEYER
Free verse, sonny. Poetic license.

PVT. FEROL
Yeah? Well, don't look now, but
I think you just lost your license.

Explosive laughter from all sides. CAPTAIN SANCY scowls.

ANOTHER PART OF THE COLUMN - ARNAUD AND DUVAL

We hear the laughter of the previous scene in the dis-
tance. ARNAUD is a tall, wiry man with steel-rimmed
glasses. DUVAL is a plump, friendly looking fellow.
From the way they treat each other we gather they are
very good friends. The two men talk quietly but the
soldiers on each side of them cannot help overhearing
the conversation, with the result that they wear a
studied look of inattention.

PVT. ARNAUD
(reading a letter)
Just a few lines my darling to
tell you that I shall not be
going up to the front for a week
or more. We have just reached a
rest area so you don't have to
worry about me at all. I have a
conviction...

(voice trails off)
Well, the rest is just personal.

PVT. DUVAL
You should have mailed it back
in the rest area.

PVT. ARNAUD
When the order to move out came
I was so completely surprised I
forgot about the letter.

PVT. DUVAL
If you get a chance, you should
send it anyway. It will make her
just as happy as if it were true.
PVT. ARNAUD
Yes, I suppose so.

The two walk in gloomy silence.

PVT. ARNAUD
(as if telling a secret)
I've got a bad feeling this time.
I can feel it coming.

PVT. DUVAL
Don't talk that way, you'll put a jinx on yourself.

PVT. ARNAUD
I can't help it. It's been two years -- two years without a scratch, without even getting sick. How long can your luck hold out?

PVT. DUVAL
It can hold out as long as it has to.

PVT. ARNAUD
If you keep flipping a coin and it keeps coming up heads time after time, you've got to expect a tail.

PVT. DUVAL
That's not entirely true though. They say it's fifty-fifty on each flip no matter how many times it comes up head or tail. If you flipped a hundred heads in a row the odds of getting a head on the hundred and first flip would still be fifty-fifty.

PVT. ARNAUD
That may be true, theoretically but if I saw someone flip even six heads in a row, I'd bet tails on the seventh. They say it's fifty-fifty but somehow it doesn't seem to work out that way.
LONG SHOT - THE REGIMENT

The slow moving, clanking column winds through the
deepening gloom of oncoming night like some monstrous
snake. A muffled boom-boom-boom punctuates the hushed
night air.

SLOW DISSOLVE:

VIEW OF THE NIGHT SKY

The horizon line flickers intermittently. Each flicker
is followed now by a louder and more richly defined
boom. We are not far from the front.

VARIOUS ANGLES OF THE REGIMENT

The sides of the road are littered with the grim residue
of war. The ground is churned up like a lumpy pudding.
Here and there we can see silhouetted against the
flickering black sky the remains of a splintered tree.
The men are silent. They are hunched forward with
fatigue. Some men are shivering, their frosty breaths
testifying to the coldness of the night.

THE HEAD OF THE COLUMN - COLONEL DAX

He walks with a small group of officers -- his ADC
CAPTAIN HERBILLION, CAPTAIN RENOUART, MAJOR VIGNON
and a few others.

COL. DAX
(to Herbillion)
Pass the order back positively
no more smoking. No loud talk-
ing. And gas masks on the alert.

CAPTAIN HERBILLION acts in accordance with his instruc-
tions and non-coms echo the order back through the
column. MAJOR VIGNON drops back. HERBILLION catches
up with DAX. They all walk in silence.

VOICE O.S.
Hey, there, 181st!

CAPT. HERBILLION
(glances at Dax)
181st, yes -- who are you?
POINT OF VIEW

Six men seem to appear as if by magic out of the black night.

LT. TROCARD
Guides from the Tirailleurs to
take you in, sir. Lieutenant
Trocard speaking.
(salutes)

ANOTHER ANGLE

COLONEL DAX returns the salute in a perfunctory manner.

COL. DAX
Colonel Dax, commanding.
(to Herbillion)
Have the column halt. Don't close
up. Keep the intervals. Company
commanders forward at the double.
Have the men fix bayonets.

CAPTAIN HERBILLION salutes, drops back and issues the
appropriate orders which are then relayed down the line.
The column awkwardly stumbles to a halt, in many places
bunching up despite orders. Officers are everywhere
trying to preserve as much order as they can. Halting
a thousand men on a broken road on a moonless night is
not the easiest thing in the world to do.

POINT OF VIEW

A star shell bursts not far away and falls in a slow,
graceful brilliance. A few seconds later followed by
the nearby thunderous concussion of artillery.

FAVORING DAX'S GROUP

They all look up startled. The glare of the star shell
illuminating their rigid features.

COL. DAX
Where the devil are they?

LT. TROCARD
Just around the bend, sir.

(CONTINUED)
COL. DAX

Imbeciles -- don't they know there's a relief on tonight. They'll draw fire for sure. Herbillion!

CAPT. HERBILLION
(on the run)

Yes, sir.

COL. DAX

That battery is down around the bend in the road. Send someone down there and have those idiots stop firing until this relief is over.

CAPT. HERBILLION

Yes, sir.

(he moves away
calling o.s.
"Sergeant Gonoud, etc")

Three flares rise consecutively in the distance. The battery fires again. The Company commanders are beginning to collect around DAX.

COL. DAX

Red over green over red. That's not ours, is it, Lieutenant?

LT. TROCARD

No, sir. It's a jumpy sector.

By now all of the company commanders have collected around DAX. There are about a dozen of them plus DAX and the guides.

COL. DAX
(cooly)

Gentlemen, this is Lieutenant Trocard. He's going to take us in. As soon as we get --

He is interrupted by a rushing sound followed by an explosion about fifty yards off to the side of the road. DAX knows they are in trouble.

(CONTINUED)
COL. DAX
(crisply)
Report to my dugout as soon
as you have completed your
reliefs. What's the password
tonight, Lieutenant?

LT. TROCARD
Calais, sir.

COL. DAX
Calais. All right gentlemen --
back to your companies. Keep
the intervals. Forward on the
double.

The Company commanders run back shouting orders. CAPTAIN HERBILLION comes up. The men form up not without a great
deal of confusion.

CAPT. HERBILLION
Runner reports battery commander
presents his compliments and re-
grets firing. Says he wasn't in-
formed of the relief.

COL. DAX
Very good, Captain. Have the
men move out, on the double.

VARIABLE ANGLES
HERBILLION issues orders. The column begins to move for-
ward, amid utter confusion, alternately bunched up or too
strung out. Another overhead whoosh, whoosh, whoosh fol-
lowed by three explosions, nearer to the road. The men
keep moving. DAX stands by the side of the road with
CAPT. HERBILLION.

COL. DAX
(calmingly)
Keep your intervals. Don't bunch
up.

Suddenly, there is a rushing sound overhead and a rapid
string of deafening, blinding shell-bursts quite nearby.
When the dust clears we see a couple of dozen casualties
lying in the road -- many still alive and crying out for
help. Officers keep the column moving. Stretcher-bearers

(continued)
come up on the run. Then there is still another whoosh, whoosh overhead but this time the shells fall far off the road, harming nothing but the shattered countryside. Then no more firing at all. COLONEL DAX appears relieved and hurries forward.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. THE TRENCHES - NIGHT

The 181st crowds through, making as little noise as it is possible for one thousand men overloaded with metallic equipment to make. Gunfire is light and very infrequent.

DISSOLVE:

INT. LT. ROGET'S DUGOUT - NIGHT

LIEUTENANT ROGET, who we have seen briefly on the march into the trenches, is a balding, puffy man sporting a thin mustache. He is in his middle thirties and he has the kind of face you take an immediate dislike to without even pausing for a moment's reflection that first impressions are not always correct.

He sits before a battered wooden table. The dugout is literally dug out of the earth itself, reinforced by rough-hewn wooden beams and logs. A crude bed of straw packed into a wooden mold is the only sign of comfort.

LIEUTENANT ROGET is drinking, and from his heavy movements we may assume he has not just begun. His face is cork-blacked and he is in full battle dress but for his helmet which rests on the table beside him. He takes several swallows from a bottle of cognac which is almost empty. There is a candle jammed in a bottle. The flame flickers in a draft. ROGET looks up.

CORPORAL PARIS and PRIVATE LEJEUNE enter. We have seen them briefly on the march, too. PARIS is a good-looking, well-built man. LEJEUNE is a chunky, solid-looking man. They are in battle dress and have their faces blacked. They snap to attention before LIEUTENANT ROGET. He regards them stonily and makes a visible effort to pull himself together. He succeeds to the extent of being able to reproduce a ponderous air of solemnity.

CPL. PARIS
Corporal Paris and Private Lejuene reporting, sir.
LT. ROGET
You took your time about it.

CPL. PARIS
We prepared as quickly as we could, sir. We had to alert the sentries.

LT. ROGET
(burping)
All right. At ease, men. This is a reconnaissance patrol. We're to avoid a fight if we can. There'll be only the three of us. German wire. Machine-gun posts. Identification of bodies. We go out to the left -- come back through Post six on our right. Is everything clear at Post six?

CPL. PARIS
The sentries are all warned down to here. Number six will start sending up flares at ten minute intervals at 0-four hundred.

LT. ROGET
I want them very five minutes.

CPL. PARIS
I told them that, sir. The sergeant says every five minutes is too much. He says it's certain to draw artillery.

LT. ROGET
Quite a strategist, that sergeant. What's his name?

CPL. PARIS
I don't know, sir.

LT. ROGET
You're a liar, Corporal. But I don't have the time now. You men wait outside for a minute. I'll join you.

CPL. PARIS
What's the password, sir?

(CONTINUED)
(CONTINUED - 2)

LT. ROGET

Calais.

CPL. PARIS

Yes, sir.

PARIS and LEJUENE glance back over their shoulders as they duck out the exit door.

EXT. TRENCH - NIGHT - ANOTHER ANGLE

PARIS and LEJUENE sit on the firing step. They talk in whispers.

CPL. PARIS

He's fortifying himself.

FVT. LEJUENE

It smelled like heaven.

CPL. PARIS

You can always tell when he's had a few. He gets sarcastic.

FVT. LEJUENE

At least he could have passed it around, the swine. Say, what's he got against you anyway?

CPL. PARIS

We were buddies before he became an officer. He thinks I don't have sufficient respect for him. He's right. The lousy crum.

FVT. LEJUENE

I don't like this. A patrol's bad enough but led by a drunken Lieutenant --

ROGET comes up the dugout steps.

LT. ROGET

If you're ready, gentlemen, let's go.

CPL. PARIS

We're ready.
They follow ROGET down the trench. He stops at a group of six men. Three of them stand near a machine gun mounted on the parapet. CAPTAIN CHARPENTIER steps forward. They all come to attention.

CAPT. CHARPENTIER
At ease, men. The lane through our wire is right out in front here. The machine gun is pointing to the opening. Good luck.

LT. ROGET
(sobered considerably)
Thank you, Captain. Everything is clear and understood. And you men, keep your fingers off that coffee grinder till we get out of the way. All right, come on.

VARIABLE ANGLES
With ROGET in the lead, they stealthily crawl over the parapet. The clouds have broken and now the moon is full. The broken contours of the ground stand out in grotesque relief. Bending low, they swiftly enter the opening in the wire. All three carry revolvers and extra grenades. They crawl painstakingly through the lane. Suddenly their path is blocked by more wire. The night is very quiet. All their movements seem to make an inordinate amount of noise.

LT. ROGET
(whisper)
It was supposed to be clear!

CPL. PARIS
(whisper)
Quiet! It's only a block in the lane. Follow me. We can crawl through here.

ANOTHER ANGLE
PARIS crawls down a slight incline, and wriggles under the wire. The barbs catch him and he laboriously frees himself. He is through. He raises himself cautiously to one knee. He signals the others to follow, and makes for a nearby shell-hole.
ANOTHER ANGLE

Standing in the shell-hole, he checks his position. Suddenly he jumps. Grimly etched by the moonlight two men seem to be asleep. ROGET and LEJUENE slide over the rim of the crater.

LT. ROGET
(whisper)
Who are those two?

CPL. PARIS
(whisper)
Can't you smell? They're dead.

PVT. LEJUENE
(examining them)
From third battalion.

Note: throughout entire patrol the men talk in whispers unless otherwise indicated.

ANOTHER ANGLE

ROGET starts to climb out of the shell-hole.

LT. ROGET
Come on, then. Let's proceed, gentlemen.

CPL. PARIS
(grabs his arm)
Not that way, Lieutenant. You'll be back in our own wire. Keep the moon on our right and crawl. We're not on the Champs Elysees.

PARIS exchanges a worried glance with LEJUENE.

LT. ROGET
Well, those two are.

He giggles at his own joke.

CPL. PARIS
And we'll be joining them if we keep making this much noise.

ROGET nods his head solemnly. Then he realizes the insult. He is quite drunk.

(CONTINUED)
LT. ROGET
I wouldn't worry about that, Corporal. Just do your part and follow orders. I'm in command of this patrol. Now let's move out of here.

ANOTHER ANGLE

LT. ROGET crawls over the lip of the shell-hole. PARIS and LEJUENE follow. The silence is broken by a distant brief exchange of small arms fire. ROGET increases his speed, increasing the noise of the patrol. In the almost perfect silence of the night, the noise they are making is terrific. PARIS grabs ROGET by the ankle and crawls up alongside him.

CPL. PARIS
Let's slow down a bit, Lieutenant. We're getting near their wire. We're making too much noise. Move a few yards at a time. Then stop and listen. They may have a patrol out, too.

LT. ROGET
Who do you think (belch) you're talking to?

CPL. PARIS
(menacingly)
Look, I know my business. I'm not going to have my head blown off because you don't ---

ROGET searches LEJUENE'S face for some sign of support. He finds none.

LT. ROGET
(sulkily)
You'll hear more of this when we get back.

ROGET starts to crawl again — slowly and cautiously.

DISSOLVE:
ANOTHER ANGLE

The three men near the German wire. The Ant Hill looms up in the b.g. -- an irregular mass silhouetted against the moonlit sky. ROGET belches, loudly. Instantly a flare arcs up. It bursts overhead and slowly descends. Everything is bathed in a blinding brilliance. The patrol freezes against the broken mounds of earth. A machine gun trips a short burst. The flare dies restoring the night.

ANOTHER ANGLE

The men slowly raise their heads. PARIS and LEJUENE exchange another worried glance. ROGET moves off again along the German wire. There are many corpses around them. ROGET stops. His head sags. PARIS crawls alongside.

LT. ROGET
Hurry up. Get me away from these bodies. I'm going to be sick.

CPL. PARIS
Crawl into that shell-hole -- and be quiet about it.

ROGET disappears into the hole. LEJUENE crawls up to PARIS.

PVT. LEJUENE
We'll be lucky to get out of this mess with him. I think we should -- (he draws his trench knife)

CPL. PARIS
(over sound of Roget quietly retching)
Not yet. I think this'll sober him up.

ANOTHER ANGLE

ROGET returns from the crater. He seems to be shivering.

LT. ROGET
I feel much better. Look, I think we've seen enough. Let's get back.

As he crawls off, PARIS and LEJUENE seem relieved. They follow.
CLOSE FOLLOW SHOT - ROGET

As he crawls, his fear mounts. His breath comes shorter and shorter. He begins to shiver as if overcome by a great chill. He begins to crawl faster. Suddenly he stops. The others crawl abreast.

POINT OF VIEW - LONG SHOT

Seen against the sky, a large mound of ruins.

ANOTHER ANGLE - THE THREE MEN

LT. ROGET
(shivering)
What do you make of it?

FVT. LEJUENE
It looks like the ruins of a house.

ROGET'S teeth begin to chatter. He seems confused.

LT. ROGET
(stuttering with his chill)
Lejuene, work your way around the right. PARIS will come with me on the left. We'll meet on the other side.

CPL. PARIS
Split a night patrol? You're crazy.

ROGET points his pistol at PARIS'S head. PARIS turns and looks down the shaking barrel. LEJUENE searches PARIS for a sign.

LT. ROGET
Move out, Lejuene.

ANOTHER ANGLE

LEJUENE hesitates then crawls off to the right. He stops every few feet and listens. The only sound is his own heavy breathing.
ANOTHER ANGLE - ROGET AND PARIS

ROGET lowers the pistol. Shivering, he smiles unpleasantly. PARIS returns an icy stare. ROGET moves off to the left. PARIS follows. They painstakingly work their way around the ruins.

ANOTHER ANGLE - ROGET AND PARIS

They stop and listen. A perfect silence. They wait. ROGET'S teeth begin to chatter again. He closes his mouth. PARIS studies the weird ruins. Still no sign of LEJUENE. ROGET starts to crawl. PARIS grabs his ankle.

CPL. PARIS
(whisper)
We've got to wait for him.

LT. ROGET
(whisper)
He must be lost. Where is he.
He should --

Suddenly, a sound of boards squeaking nearby.

VARIOUS QUICK CUTS

PARIS raises up and cocks his revolver.

ROGET rises to one knee and flings a grenade.

PARIS fires at ROGET but misses.


Three flares go off, flooding everything in a brilliant light.

ROGET is on his feet, his mouth open, gesticulating wildly.

A machine gun stuttering in the distance.

ROGET disappears on the run behind the mound of ruins.
ANOTHER ANGLE - PARIS

In the garish light of the flares, he crawls to the broken body of LEJUENE. He is dead. A burst from the machine gun erupts in neatly spaced rows of plaster-dust over his head. He slithers into a nearby shell-hole.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. FRENCH TRENCH - NIGHT

A bearded sentry sights his rifle through the firing slit. A voice whispers hoarsely.

CPL. PARIS O.S.

The sentry steps back, his rifle still leveled. PARIS slides over the parapet. He sags to the trench-boards, breathing heavily.

SENTRY
I heard the firing, Corporal. Did you lose the rest of your patrol?

CPL. PARIS
At least one. Did Lieutenant Roget get back?

SENTRY
I don't know. He might have somewhere up the line. Are you hurt?

CPL. PARIS
(getting to his feet)
No, I'm all right.

SENTRY
Need any help?

CPL. PARIS
No, thanks, I'm all right.

He wobbles off down the trench.

DISSOLVE:
INT. LT. ROGET'S DUGOUT - NIGHT

ROGET sits at a table, writing with a pencil. PARIS enters.

LT. ROGET

Well --

CPL. PARIS

Surprised, Lieutenant?

LT. ROGET

Yes, happily surprised. I thought you'd been killed.

CPL. PARIS

But you didn't wait to find out, did you Lieutenant?

LT. ROGET

Now look here, what do you mean?

CPL. PARIS

I mean you didn't wait after you killed Lejuene.

LT. ROGET

Have you gone out of your head? Killing Lejuene, what are you talking about? And remember you're talking to an officer.

CPL. PARIS

Oh, well, then I must be mistaken then. No officer would do that. No man would do it. Only a thing would. A gutless wonder. A sneak- ing, booze-guzzling, yellow-bellied rat with a bottle for a brain and a streak of spit where his spine ought to be.

LT. ROGET

That's enough, Corporal!

CPL. PARIS

I don't doubt it. You've gotten yourself into a bit of a mess, Lieutenant.

(continued)
LT. ROGET
Oh, so that's it? Well, I don't mind telling you that you've gotten yourself into a worse mess. First, general insubordination. Second, threatening to kill your superior officer. That's mutiny number one. Third, refusing to obey an order and inciting others to do the same. That's mutiny number two and three. Fourth, firing at your superior officer. That's attempted murder and mutiny number four. How do you suppose those charges will look on paper.

CPL. PARIS
Well, since you mention it, I'd say they wouldn't look half as good as these. Drunk on duty. Endangering the lives of your men through drunken recklessness. Refusal to take counsel. Wanton murder of one of your own men. Gross incompetence in general and finally, Lieutenant, cowardice in the face of the enemy.

Both men are silent for a moment. ROGET smiles.

LT. ROGET
(reasonably)
Have you ever tried to bring charges against an officer. It's my word against yours, you know. Whose word do you think will be believed? Or let me put it another way -- whose word do you suppose will be accepted? Now I'll tell you what I'm willing to do. All I've got in this report so far is that you and Lejuene were killed on patrol. I'll fix it up to read that you made your way back after becoming separated during the fire fight. And that will end the matter once and for all.

(continued)
CPL. PARIS
(said hatefully)
You killed Lejuene. You know that, don't you? You threw that grenade and killed him.

LT. ROGET
It was an accident. I'm sorry and I'd give anything in the world if it hadn't happened -- and that's the truth. Honestly, I know you don't like me, but what kind of a man do you think I am? I'd give anything in the world if it hadn't happened.

PARIS leans across the table.

CPL. PARIS
(softly)
You're a weak, miserable, coward. You always have been. You're vain and you're self righteous. And you're the kind that cause the worst kind of trouble. And if I ever have another chance to pull the trigger on you I won't miss again. I promise you.

CAPTAIN CHARPENTIER enters the dugout. From his manner we may assume he heard none of their conversation.

CAPT. CHARPENTIER
Good morning, men.

PARIS comes to attention.

LT. ROGET
Good morning, Captain.

CAPT. CHARPENTIER
At ease, corporal. How was the patrol?

LT. ROGET
All right, sir. I think we found out a thing or two?

CAPT. CHARPENTIER
Good, good -- any casualties?

(Continued)
LT. ROGET

(remorsefully)
One, sir, Lejuene.

CAPT. CHARPENTIER

Oh, that's too bad. Have you
finished your report, Lieutenant?

LT. ROGET

(anxious to please)
I'll be through in a couple of
minutes, sir. I just have to
touch up a few points.

CPL. PARIS

With the Captains permission, I'd
like to get back and get some
sleep.

CAPT. CHARPENTIER

Of course. Well done, Corporal,
well done.

CPL. PARIS

(salutes)
Thank you, sir.

LT. ROGET

Good-night, Corporal. You did
a good nights work. You should
be proud of yourself.

Dissolve:

EXT. THE TRENCHES - DAY

The day is overcast and gloomy. Dark clouds scud across
the gray sky. An occasional burst of small-arms fire
mars the otherwise quiet air. Led by CAPTAIN HERBILLION,
GENERAL ROUSSEAU and his ADC, MAJOR SAINT-AUBAN stride
into view around a traverse. Moving at a smart clip,
they pass troops who stare sheepishly at ROUSSEAU. He
appears to be well liked by the men and returns cordial
nods to many of them. Now and then he stops for a brief
exchange of words - very much enjoying the admiring
glances of onlookers; the whole affair having much of the
quality of a political candidate seeking favor among his
constituents.

(Continued)
(CONTINUED - 1)

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Hello there, soldier. Everything all right?

ETTIENE
(embarrassed)
Yes, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(pleasantly)
What's your name, soldier?

ETTIENE
Etienne, sir, Pfc, Company A.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Are you married, Private Etienne?

ETTIENE
(tremendously embarrassed)
Yes, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
That's fine, I bet your wife is proud of you.

ETTIENE
Yes, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(touching his cap)
Carry on, soldier - and good luck to you.

ETTIENE
Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

MEYER and FEROL have been standing near the embarrassed young soldier and they suppress nervous giggles as ROUSSEAU moves away. However, it is clear from the attitude of other men who were witness to the scene that the General's stock has gone up considerably in their eyes.

ANOTHER ANGLE - FOLLOWING ROUSSEAU'S PARTY

They stop in front of CORPORAL PARIS. He snaps to attention. LIEUTENANT ROGET stands nearby.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU
Hello there, soldier. Everything all right?
ROGET moves closer, anxiously.
CPL. PARIS
(glances at Roget)
Yes, sir, everything's all right.
ROUSSEAU notices PARIS has been cleaning his rifle.
GEN. ROUSSEAU
Working over your rifle, I see. Well, that's the way -- it's a soldier's best friend. You be good to it, and it'll always be good to you.
ROGET and PARIS exchange icy glances.
CPL. PARIS
(idly)
Yes, sir. That's the way I feel about it, sir. I -- I --
(glances at Roget)
Other soldiers collect around the group.
GEN. ROUSSEAU
(grandstanding a bit)
Yes, Corporal? Something on your mind? Some suggestion or criticism, perhaps. I always encourage my men to speak their minds freely. It's a bad thing for a man not to be able to get something off his chest.
ROGET rivets a frosty gaze on PARIS. PARIS hesitates.
ROUSSEAU smiles patiently.
CPL. PARIS
(boldly)
I just wanted to express my concern for the general's safety in the trenches, sir.
ROUSSEAU is a bit astonished by the personal nature of the remark and the implied disregard for their separate stations in life.

(continued)
GEN. ROUSSEAU

Well, thank you, Corporal. It's very rewarding for me to see such concern for my welfare -- though it is entirely uncalled for. The trenches are a very safe place, indeed. Good luck to you, Corporal. Carry on.

PARIS salutes. The General's party moves on. He and SAINT-AUBAN proceed down trench, moving at a faster clip than previously. Apparently, ROUSSEAU has consumed his allotted time for personal greetings and now confines himself to brisk "hellos", "how-are-yous", etc., without stopping. Then they come to a soldier who seems frozen in his attitude of attention. A young man, his haggard face is an absolutely immobile mask, his eyes stare straight ahead.

GEN. ROUSSEAU

Everything okay, soldier?

SOLDIER

(jerkily)

Yes, sir, Gen! Okay, Gen!

GEN. ROUSSEAU

(quietly)

Gen?...Soldier -- It's General, soldier, not Gen.

SOLDIER

Okay! Right! Yes, sir, General! Yes, sir, yes, sir, General!

GEN. ROUSSEAU

(gently)

Easy, son. It's all right.

SOLDIER

Yes, sir! Yes, sir! Thank you, sir! Right, sir --

GEN. ROUSSEAU

How long -- when did you come in the service?

SOLDIER

1914, sir! Yes, sir, 1914! First reserves called up, sir! Came straight to the front, sir! Yes, sir, yes, sir, came --

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU
But you've had leave. When were you home last?

SOLDIER
Home? Home, sir? Home, home, home -- ?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Your family. How long since you've seen your family?

SOLDIER
No family, sir. Just my mother, sir. No family of my own, sir.
All dead, sir, got 'em all, sir, direct hit, sir. Wife and child, sir, wife, child, and baby on the way, sir. Got 'em all, got 'em all. G-got...

GEN. ROUSSEAU
I -- I'm sorry. I'm very sorry, son.

SOLDIER
Yes, sir! Thank you, sir! Got 'em --

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Soldier...

SOLDIER
Yes, sir! Got 'em all! Wife, child, and --

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(gaining his attention)
Soldier! -- I'm going to send you home, soldier...home to your mother's. Would you like that?

The SOLDIER'S face twists suddenly. He smiles, laughs, his eyes fill. Fighting to control himself, he speaks half-laughing, half-criing, on a note of controlled hysteria.

SOLDIER
W-would I like to? Would I like to - to see...

(Chokes up)
Ex-excuse me, sir! Sorry, sir!
I'm --

(Continued)
GEN. ROUSSEAU
(turning to Saint-Auban)
Major!

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN

Yes, sir?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
I want this man on his way by noon! No later than noon, understand?

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN

Yes, sir!
(turns man's canteen slightly, noting his name stencilled thereon)

SOLDIER
I'm -- s-sorry, sir. Excuse me, sir. I'm all -- all right now. I'm fine, fine. I'm just fine, General. I'm --

GEN. ROUSSEAU

Yes, soldier --
(drops hand on his shoulder)
Yes, you're just -- fine. You deserve a rest.

ANOTHER ANGLE

ROUSSEAU nods curtly, and jerks his head at SAINT-AUBAN. He strides on down trench, not looking to left or right, with SAINT-AUBAN following. They come to tunnel entrance, where a guard salutes smartly and steps aside. They proceed up the tunnel to DAX'S headquarters-lookout post. As they enter, DAX looks up from outspread map, salutes and is saluted.

DAX
(shaking hands)
General...Major...I'm honored.

(continued)
GEN. ROUSSEAU
(with Saint-Auban
murmuring polite
assent)

Our privilege entirely. Always
a pleasure to see you, Colonel.
Well --

(glancing swiftly
around)

-- this is quite a neat little
spot you have here.

COL. DAX
(cordially)

Well -- I'll reserve comment on
the neatness, but at least it's
little...I'm pretty shy on seating
accommodations --

(gestures)

but --

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(briskly)

Got more than enough for me.
Never got the habit of sitting
-- Like to be on my feet; keep
on the move.

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN

I can vouch for that, Colonel,
I can hardly get the General
behind a desk long enough to sign
an order.

GEN. ROUSSEAU

Well, that's the way I am, y'know,
Dax? Can't understand these arm-
chair officers -- fellows trying
to fight a war behind a desk.
Waving papers at the enemy. Worry-
ing about whether a mouse is going
to run up their pantsleg.

COL. DAX

(smiling)

I don't know, General. If I had
a choice between mice and Mausers,
I think I'd take the mice every
time.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU
(laughing)
You'd never make me believe that. Not with your record... Seriously, though. If a man's a ninny, let him put on a dress and hide under the bed. But if he wants to be a soldier, then, by heavens, he's got to be one! He's got to fight, and he can't do it unless he's where the fighting is. That's my credo!

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
And you'd never failed to live up to it, sir.

COL. DAX
(spreading hands)
I think I'll have to say I agree, with you putting the case so convincingly, General.
(lays hand on telescope)
Now, I imagine you'd like a look around, wouldn't you?

DAX adjusts telescope, and steps aside.

COL. DAX
This will give you a good view of the Ant Hill, General. About as good as you can get without actually being on the site.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(peering through telescope)
Well, that won't be long now, will it?

TELESCOPE SHOT
We see the Ant Hill and no-man's land.

ANOTHER ANGLE

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Well, I've seen much more formidable objectives. Yes, much, much worse. Not something we
GEN. ROUSSEAU (cont'd)
can grab and run with, of course,
but certainly, uh -- uh --

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
Pregnable, sir?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(doubtfully)
Pregnable? -- well, I suppose.
Sounds kind of odd though,
doesn't it? Like something to
do with giving birth.

COL. DAX
Which is the direct opposite of
our present operation.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(laughs)
Quite! You're right on your
toes, this morning, Colonel.
Even sharper than usual.

COL. DAX
It's my distinguished visitor --
excuse me, Major -- visitors.
With such brilliant company, I
could hardly help but respond.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(chuckling)
Did your relief come off smoothly
last night.

COL. DAX
Not too bad - drew some artillery
about thirty casualties.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Mmm, yes. I noticed on the road
in. Utterly inexcusable. Stupid!
All swarmed together like a bunch
of flies -- just waiting for some-
one to swat 'em.

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
They never learn, it seems. They
get in a tight place -- under heavy
fire -- and they gang up every time.
The herd instinct, I suppose. Kind
of a lower-animal sort of thing.

(CONTINUED)
COL. DAX
(a little too quietly)
A kind of human sort of thing, it seems to me. Or do you make a distinction between the two?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(idly adjusts belt)
Well, now -- uh -- very regrettable, at any rate. Very. Yes, indeed. But you know, along those lines, I've had an idea recently that I think might be very useful -- I've been wondering, gentlemen. Do you suppose it would be of any value if, after an attack, a detail went out and mapped the casualties? That is to say, the dead form an axiomatic pattern of the enemy fire, the flow of battle and our own mistakes. Now if we could map them, show just where they were killed, and in what numbers --

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
An excellent idea, sir. It would certainly allow us to profit by our experience. General, I'm going to insist that you submit this idea to the General staff.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(modestly)
Oh, well, the General Staff. I don't mean to be derogatory, naturally. But by the time they got around to considering it--merely an idea for saving lives. What do you think of it, Dax?

COL. DAX
(uncomfortably)
I -- think it's an interesting idea, sir. If it has a flaw it may lie in the direction that the circumstances of battle are rarely identical -- and the lesson of one day may be of very limited value on another.

(Continued)
MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN

(ricily)
That, of course, is merely the
Colonel's off hand opinion.

COL. DAX
On the contrary, Major. If you
are interested, there is a com-
plete analysis of the idea written
by Von Borke in 1830.

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
Is the Colonel implying that
General Rousseau has borrowed
this idea from a text-book?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Gentlemen, gentlemen – please.
I am certain the Colonel meant
no offense.

COL. DAX
My apologies, General. I most
certainly did not mean any
offense.

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
I'm sorry, sir. My apologies,
Colonel Dax.

COL. DAX
Of course, Major.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Now, Major, will you be kind enough
to excuse us for a few minutes?

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
(saluting)
Yes, sir.
(he exits smartly)

ROUSSEAU walks to the peep-hole and peers out. He turns
back suddenly.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(confidentially)
What do you think of it, Colonel?

(Continued)
COL. DAX
(regretfully)
I'm not sure about it. Will the 181st have any support?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(regretfully)
There won't be any support. I have none to give you. I understand the problem, Dax. Believe me, I do. Your regiment's a little under strength, the men are tired—

COL. DAX
(quietly)
They're exhausted, General.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(apologetically)
Oh, Dax, that's laying it on a bit thick, isn't it?

COL. DAX
I don't think so.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(very kind and gentle)
Naturally men are going to have to be killed, possibly a lot of them. They absorb bullets and shrapnel and by doing so make it possible for others to get through. Say five percent killed by their own barrage — and that's a very generous allowance. Ten percent more in crossing no-man's-land, and twenty percent getting through the wire. That leaves sixty-five percent with the worst part of the job over. Let's say another twenty-five percent in actually taking the Ant-Hill, we're still left with a force more than adequate to hold it.

COL. DAX
(dully)
General, you're saying — you're anticipating that more than half my men, sixty percent of them are going to be casualties.

(continued)
GEN, ROUSSEAU
(nodding)
But we'll have the Ant Hill. It's a terrible price to pay, but we will have the Ant Hill!

COL, DAX
(quietly)
Will we?

GEN, ROUSSEAU
(earnestly)
I'm depending on you, Colonel. All France is depending on you. I'd like you to think of it that way when you send those men into battle tomorrow, of what a great privilege it is, what a glorious opportunity that you and they have been handed, to --

(breaks off, as DAX smiles sadly)
Am I amusing you, Colonel?

COL, DAX
(politely)
I'm not a bull, General. I don't need a flag waved in front of me to get me to charge.

GEN, ROUSSEAU
I don't think I like your terminology, Colonel! If you see no difference between patriotism and -- and --

COL, DAX
I have my own brand of patriotism, General. The oratorical, Bastille-day variety -- I feel, as Samuel Johnson did, that, well...

GEN, ROUSSEAU
That it's the last refuge of a scoundrel?

COL, DAX
I'm sorry, sir. I'm just -- I meant nothing personal, of course.

(continued)
GEN ROUSSEAU
(warmly)
I'm sure you didn't. You're quite naturally over-wrought, and I suppose I did seem a little blatant...

ROUSSEAU walks up to DAX and affectionately puts his hand on his shoulder.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(quietly)
Dax -- I want to know. It's going to be difficult, cost us a great deal, but you do feel that we can take the Ant Hill?

COL. DAX
We'll do our best, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Colonel, that doesn't answer my question!

COL. DAX
General, you shouldn't have asked the question! It's like kicking a man into the ocean and then asking him if he can swim. The attack is scheduled. What difference does it make what I think?

ROUSSEAU smiles, ruefully. He glances out of the dugout across the battlefield.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(sympathetically)
I'm sorry, Colonel. I've given you one hard, seemingly impossible job after another, and now, when you're long overdue for a rest, I give you the most difficult task of all.

COL. DAX
(steadily)
Rest? I haven't said anything about needing a rest!
GEN. ROUSSEAU
And you never would either. You'd never ask for one, no matter how badly you needed it. So you aren't going to have any say-so about it, Colonel! As of right now, I'm ordering you on indefinite furlough.

COL. DAX
(strained smile)
General, you can't take me away from my men -- my command. You -- you wouldn't do that to me.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Not to you, Colonel. For you. For your own good and theirs.

COL. DAX
Good! Our own good! Why don't you say what you mean? Just because I'm not willing to --

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(utter sincerity)
If a commanding officer himself lacks confidence, what can we expect of his men? It wouldn't do, would it? It won't do. And since you seem in so much doubt -- Look, I don't want you to feel coerced, Colonel, that you have to say something you don't honestly believe. Unless you're convinced, of your own free will that tomorrow morning --

COL. DAX
We'll take it, General. We'll take it.

INT. DUGOUT - MEYER AND FEROL - DAY

MEYER is seated on a box, his back to FEROL, and with an old shirt tied around his neck. FEROL is trimming his hair, with an outsize pair of shears -- possibly a pair of wire snips. Accidentally, or accidentally-on-purpose, he nicks one of MEYER'S ears.

(Continued)
FVT. MEYER

Ouch!

(haughtily, as though
addressing a servant)
Watch yourself, my good man! One
more like that, and I'll see that
you lose your butcher's license.

FVT. FEROL

(servilely)
A thousand pardons, m'sieur.
A thousand thousand pardons.
A thousand thousand thousand
pardons...I am desolate. It
was unforgivable, inexcusable,
imbecilic, stupid --

FVT. MEYER

None of your arrogance, sirreh!
If there's anything I can't stand,
it's a man who won't admit it
when he's wrong.

FVT. FEROL

So sorry, m'sieur. It is only that
m'sieur's ears, zey are so big,
like ze ears in ze cornfield, and
his head it is so tiny, like ze
head of a pin --

FVT. MEYER

It'll be nonexistent if you keep
chopping at it...What are you doing
with all that meat, anyway -- eating
it?

FVT. FEROL

(with a gesture
of horror)
M'sieur! Perish the thought! Even
in jest, m'sieur should not accuse
me of --

(breaks off, suppressing
a simulated belch)
-- M'sieur, would you be so kind
as to lend me a toothpick?

FVT. MEYER

Give me a mirror, you cad! I want
to see what I look like without a
head.

(continued)
With a flourish, PEROL hands him a tiny fragment of mirror. MEYER studies himself critically, turning his head this way and that. Another SOLDIER saunters up and looks on, grinning. MEYER stares at him sternly.

PVT. MEYER
Barber, who is this man? I thought you were running a high-class shop.

PVT. PEROL
(whining apologetically)
I do my best, sir. But the neighborhood -- you should excuse the expression -- is lousy. Always the bums and the loafers are drifting in from the street.

SOLDIER
(grinning)
Boy, you sure got a dirty skull, Meyer. I'll bet there ain't that much rust on the Eiffel Tower.

PVT. MEYER
(sternly)
Don't criticize our national monuments! It's still a good tower, even if it is relatively rust-free.

SOLDIER
I'd get my hair cut if it wasn't for the dirt showing. I figure if a guy can't get rid of the rust, he'd better keep it covered up.

PVT. MEYER
Brilliant! Oh, but you are brilliant, aren't you? Will you let me polish your medals when you get to be a general?

SOLDIER
Not until you clean your bean. I don't want none of that rust rubbing off on my medals.

PVT. MEYER
(to Ferol)
Barber, does this man have a hole in his head, or do I have rust on mine?

(CONTINUED)
PVT. FEROL
We-ell...I have always heard that
ivory does not rust, but...
(studies Meyer's
head)
but here we seem to have an excep-
tion to the rule. If I might
suggest a mild shampoo...

He winks at soldier. MEYER nods, abandoning the phony
character he has been playing.

PVT. MEYER
I could go for a good head-scrub-
ing, at that.
(looks sharply at
Ferol)
But no tricks now, get me? Don't
forget that I'm working on you
next.

PVT. FEROL
Why, pal -- just hold that shirt
up over your eyes so you don't get
soap in 'em.
(Meyer does so)
-- Of course, I won't forget. And
another thing...
(lifts up pail of water)

PVT. MEYER
(muffled voice)
Yeah?

PVT. FEROL
I haven't forgotten the last time
you worked on me.

Suddenly dumps water over MEYER'S head. MEYER grabs at
him, and they go lurching around the dugout, upsetting and
smashing the crude furniture, knocking over and scattering
the piles of supplies. In the space of seconds, the place
becomes a shambles. CAPTAIN SANCY comes in, but they don't
see him. They knock him down with their wild melee before
they are aware of his presence. He is furious as they
come hastily to attention. CAPTAIN SANCY is thin, bald,
shrill-voiced and perhaps just a little precious. He
appears to possess very few of the qualities that go to
make a good leader.

(CONTINUED)
CAPT. SANCY
(tautly)
What is the matter with you birds? What is the matter with you? Are you crazy? Can't you ever stop clowning? Do you have to have someone watching you every minute to keep you out of trouble?...
Just look at this place! Look at it!

FEROL and MEYER look around nervously. Despite themselves, they can't quite suppress a grin.

CAPT. SANCY
You think it's funny, eh? Answer me!

FEROL AND MEYER
(mumbling)
No, sir.

CAPT. SANCY
(shrilly)
Sure, you do. You think you can get away with it -- that we need you too badly to punish you. Well, we'll see. There'll be another day coming, and I won't forget this. I'll fix you, I'm putting you right up at the top of my list, and just as soon as I get the chance --

PVT. FEROL
We're sorry, Captain. We didn't mean to --

CAPT. SANCY
Shut up! You're clowns, not soldiers. You've done nothing but disrupt this company since the day you came to it. And, by Heavens, you're going to pay for it! I'll see that you do, if it's the last thing I ever do!

Glares at them angrily, then turns on his heel and strides out. FEROL wipes imaginary sweat from his brow.

PVT. FEROL
You know what, Meyer?

(Continued)
PVT. MEYER
What?

PVT. FEROL
I don't think he likes us very well.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. TRENCH - NIGHT

Everything is quiet. A few sentries stand-to on the firing step.

DISSOLVE:

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

Seen in the flickering light of a single candle are ARNAUD, DUVAL and five or six other men. They are bedded down for the night in straw and blankets. Some of the men smoke pipes. Some smoke cigarettes. None are trying to sleep — and have, apparently, been shoot-ing the breeze for some time.

PVT. ARNAUD
(meditatively)
I'm not afraid of dying tomorrow, only of getting killed.

PVT. DUVAL
That's as clear as mud.

PVT. ARNAUD
Well, which would you rather be done in by, a bayonet or a machine gun?

PVT. DUVAL
A machine gun, naturally.

PVT. ARNAUD
Naturally, that's just my point. They're both pieces of steel going into your guts. Only the machine gun is quicker, cleaner, less painful, isn't it?

PVT. DUVAL
What does that prove?
PVT. ARNAUD
That proves that most of us are more afraid of getting hurt than
of getting killed. Look at Bernard. He's in a panic when it
comes to gas, but gas doesn't mean anything to me. He's seen photos
of gas cases and it doesn't bother me a bit. But I hate like the devil
to be without my tin hat. But I don't mind not having a tin hat for
my tail. Why's that?

PVT. DUVAL
Well, you ought to since that's where your brains are. All right,
why is it? Why don't you want a tin hat for your tail?

PVT. ARNAUD
Because I know a wound in the head will hurt much more than one in the
tail. Your tail is just meat, but your head is all bone.

PVT. DUVAL
Speak for yourself.

PVT. ARNAUD
Now you tell me, apart from bayo-
nets, what are you most afraid of?

PVT. DUVAL
High explosive.

ME too.

PVT. ARNAUD
Exactly, it's the same with me. Because it can chew you up worse
than anything else. Just what I'm trying to tell you. If you're
really afraid of dying, you'd be living in a funk all your life
because you know you've got to go some day, any day. And besides,
if it's death you're afraid of, why should you care about what it
is that kills you?
PVT. DUVAL
You're too deep for me professor.
All I know is nobody wants to die.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. BARBED WIRE - DAY

Silhouetted against the dawn sky. A perfect stillness
blankets the air. Nothing moves.

EXT. A SHELL CRATER - DAY

A sparrow drinks from the stagnant liquid collected in
the bottom. A rat scurries across the surface. The
sparrow flies away.

TRAVELING SHOT - WIRE ENTANGLMENTS

Camera moves slowly parallel along the thick network of
wire in f.g. The battered fortifications of the Ant Hill
dot the b.g. A breeze softly rattles some rusty tin cans
hung in the wire. A torn page from a French pin-up maga-
azine flutters on the rusty barbs. Camera finally comes
to rest on the dead LEJUENE. He sits in the wire as in
an arm chair. The breeze gently rocks him and ruffles
his hair. His eyes are open. This is the spot he was
killed by LIEUTENANT ROGET'S grenade.

TRAVELING SHOT - FRENCH TRENCH

It is crowded. The men lean silently againt the re-
inforced earth wall. Each man is loaded down with
extra ammunition and grenades. Some carry satchels of
explosive. They look like travelers waiting for a train.
The long bayonet extends from every rifle.

EXT. TRENCH - FAVORING MAJOR VINGON, COLONEL DAX
AND CAPTAIN HERBILLION

COLONEL DAX squints through a trench periscope.
MAJOR VINGON studies his wristwatch. He turns to
CAPTAIN HERBILLION.

(Continued)
(CONTINUED - 1)

MAJ. VINGON
(softly)
Zero minus five.

COLONEL DAX straightens up slowly. He extends his hand to MAJOR VINGON.

COL. DAX
(affectionately)
Good luck, Vingon. I'm expecting Sauerbraten for lunch.

CAPT. HERBILLION
Yes, good luck, sir.

MAJ. VINGON
Thank you both. We'll make it a good show. Don't you worry.

They all salute. COLONEL DAX and CAPTAIN HERBILLION exit the shot. MAJOR VINGON peers through periscope.

EXT. TRENCH - FAVORING ARNAUD AND DUVAL

ARNAUD removes his wife's letter from his shirt pocket. He holds it to his lips. Then puts it away. ARNAUD glances at DUVAL. DUVAL stares blankly ahead. DUVAL notices his friend's attention. ARNAUD forms a smile. DUVAL attempts one in return. ARNAUD squeezes his friend's neck affectionately.

EXT. TRENCH - FAVORING CAPTAIN BONNIER AND LT. JONNART

CAPTAIN BONNIER slowly munches a candy bar. LIEUTENANT JONNART stares absentely at the trench-board eight inches from his face. Clumps of men huddle motionless in b.g.

EXT. TRENCH - FAVORING PARI

Pressed in with a knot of soldiers. He deeply inhales a cigarette and passes it on.

CPL. PARI
(to himself)
Eighth time over the top. This time I will be killed.

(CONTINUED)
BEARDED-SOLDIER

What'd you say, soldier?

CPL. PARIS

I said, "Did you inherit that beard from your mother?"

EXT. TRENCH - FAVORING CAPT. CHARPENTIER, LT. ROGET AND SERGEANT GONOU

CHARPENTIER scratches under his helmet. ROGET looks around at his men. GONOU checks his watch.

LT. ROGET

How is your heel, sir?

CAPT. CHARPENTIER

Terrible. Sore as blazes. What a time to get a blister!

LT. ROGET

(glances at watch)

Zero minus three.

EXT. OBSERVATION POST - GENERAL ROUSSEAU

He studies the terrain through a huge pair of binoculars mounted on a miniature tripod. He is flanked by MAJOR SAINT-AUBAN and CAPTAIN NICHOLS. There is a large map spread before them. It is divided into many small numbered squares. A telephone clerk squats on the ground. He bends over his equipment. His shoulder almost touching CAPTAIN NICHOLS' knee.

TELEPHONE CLERK

Through to Division, sir. Through to Polygon. Everything quiet. All units report themselves ready. Zero minus two.

ROUSSEAU looks around. He is satisfied. He takes a deep breath and expels it slowly.

GEN. ROUSSEAU

(removing hip flask)

May I offer you gentlemen some cognac?
EXT. TRENCH - MEYER AND FEROL

They are pressed in with a group of men. They all appear to be wrapped in thought.

EXT. TRENCH - CAPTAIN RENOUART AND SGT. PICARD

They are quiet as the rest. Three medics with large red cross arm-bands stand in b.g.

CAPT. RENOUART

Zero minus one.

VARIOUS OTHER ANGLES OF PRINCIPALS AND OTHERS

Leading up to Zero-hour. Build with an increasing cutting rhythm. There is no music. The sound-track is quiet except for the hushed natural sounds of the men.

EXT. TRENCH - CAPTAIN CHARPENTIER

The silence is suddenly split by the earth shaking discharge of many cannons. There is a rushing sound overhead. A pause. Then a shock of sound as the barrage explodes near the German trenches.

CAPT. CHARPENTIER

(to nobody)

There it is.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - LOW SHOT

Geyser of black earth spew skyward. The air hums with shrapnel.

ANOTHER ANGLE - BATTLEFIELD

Huge sections of wire entanglements are lofted lazily upward. The black upheavals appear everywhere. The sound is deafening.

ANOTHER ANGLE - BATTLEFIELD

All along the German line S.O.S. rockets rise deliberately, burst, and are slowly downward.
TRAVELING SHOT - FRENCH TRENCH

The German counter-barrage begins. The air is alive with metallic hums. Most rounds fall short or long. Only scattering earth and debris over the motionless lines of French troops huddled against the trench wall. One round bursts very close. It collapses the trench wall, and kills several men. The expressions on the men's faces are a study in fear. The tempo of the German barrage increases. Now the German machine guns clip the parapet, tossing up plumes of earth.

QUICK SEQUENCE:

Brief shots of the French, still huddled in the trenches, favoring principals a great deal, INTERCUT with shots of the cataclysmic upheaval of the battlefield. It is a kind of theme and variations in fear.

TRAVELING SHOT - FRENCH TRENCH

The sun is almost blotted out by the smoke and dust of the barrage. MAJOR VINGON looks up from his watch. He turns to SERGEANT BOULANGER.

MAJ. VINGON
(calmly)
Sergeant, have the men stand-to.

Sgt. BOULANGER
(salutes)
Yes, sir.
(shouting to his left)
Sergeant Picard, have the men stand-to. Pass it on.
(shouts to his right)
Sergeant Gonoud, have the men stand-to. Pass it on.

Up and down the line the non-coms begin moving the men up to the firing-step. The men seem wooden and clumsy. They are overloaded with equipment. The CAMERA briefly sees many of the PRINCIPALS in passing.

LOW ANGLE - CAPTAIN CHARPENTIER

Whistles begin to sound. The hoarse shouts of non-coms urge their men over the top. CAPTAIN CHARPENTIER scrambles atop the parapet. He turns waving his arm.

(CONTINUED)
CAPT. CHARPENTIER

Come on men. Follow me.

Machine gun bullets explode at his feet. He topples back into the trench knocking CORPORAL PARIS into the trench boards, giving him a murderous crack on the head.

TRAVELING SHOT - TRENCH

The men of CAPTAIN CHARPENTIER'S company struggle over the parapet. Machine-gun fire bursts with a whoosh along the sand-bagged crest of the trench. Three times the intense automatic fire sweeps the parados, stiffening the men crazily and crashing them down heavily into the muddy trench-boards. The remaining men, as if of one accord, decide to wait. No one says anything. LIEUTENANT ROGET makes no effort to rally the men. He tries to look occupied.

VARIOUS SHOTS AND ANGLES

Many men of the other companies clear the trenches and advance. Stumbling forward over the churned up earth. Amidst the deadly hum and buzz of shell fragments. Lifted into the air by black geysers of high explosive. Running. Falling. Screaming with pent up fear. The farthest point of the advance is the middle of the German wire. There the men are pinned down by the intense German fire.

The principals are covered to the following plot results:

a. CAPTAIN BONNIER leads his company forward. They get tangled in the wire. German machine guns sweep the line. The men seem to do a strange dance as they are hit still caught in the wire. ARNAUD sees DUVAL killed by his side. The survivors take what cover they can find. CAPTAIN BONNIER is killed by a shell burst. LIEUTENANT JONNART takes over.

b. CAPTAIN SANCY bravely leads his company almost through the wire. If one had judged CAPTAIN SANCY by his priggish personality, he would have been badly deceived.

(continued)
The losses are ghastly. The men are pinned down. MEYER and FEROL are in the forward elements. They distinguish themselves nobly.

c. MAJOR VINGON is killed as he vainly tries to rally the men in the wire.

EXT. OBSERVATION POST

Glued to their glasses are GENERAL ROUSSEAU, CAPTAIN NICHOLS, MAJOR SAINT-AUBAN, COLONEL COUDERC. The telephone clerk squats beside his equipment.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Where are they?

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
There, on the left, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Where are the rest? Zero plus six and they're not out of the trench yet. They're not advancing.

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
No, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Get Colonel Dax, Corporal.

CORPORAL
Line's dead to Colonel Dax, Sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
These miserable cowards. They're not advancing. The barrage is getting away from them. They're still in the trenches.

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN
The fire is very heavy, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Captain, order the seventy-fives to commence firing on jumping-off positions.

CAPT. NICHOLS
General...Sir?

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU
Yes, Captain?

CAPT. NICHOLS
I respectfully ask the General
whether he seriously means that
command?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Captain, do you fail to comprehend
the meaning of my order?

CAPT. NICHOLS
No, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Then carry it out, Captain!

CAPT. NICHOLS
Yes, sir.

NICHOLS picks up the map and an extension receiver.
ROUSSEAU re-focuses his glasses.

CAPT. NICHOLS
Hello, Polygon, this is Division.
Batteries one and two commence
firing on coordinates 32-58-78.
Please verify. Over.

EXT. THE BATTERY OF SEVENTY-FIVES

Telephone clerk in f.g. CAPTAIN PELLETIER stands beside
him. Guns and crews in b.g.

TELEPHONE CLERK
(repeating into phone)
Batteries one and two to commence
firing on coordinates 32-58-78.
Over.

CAPT. NICHOLS O.S.
That is correct. Over.

EXT. OBSERVATION POST

CAPTAIN NICHOLS woodenly replaces receiver. The others
are absorbed in their glasses. The phone rings. NICHOLS
lifts the receiver.
EXT. BATTERY OF SEVENTY-FIVES

CAPTAIN PELLETIER studying a folded map.

TELEPHONE CLERK
(matter of factly)
Polygon, speaking. Battery commander says there must be some mistake. Those positions are our own front lines. Please verify. Over.

EXT. OBSERVATION POST

CAPT. NICHOLS
General, the battery commander reports those are our own positions. He says it must be a mistake.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Confirm the order, Captain.

CAPT. NICHOLS
(into phone)
There is no mistake. The order is confirmed.

He hangs up the phone. He exchanges a non-committal glance with the telephone corporal squatting beside him. The phone rings.

EXT. BATTERY OF SEVENTY-FIVES

CAPTAIN PELLETIER, nervously, watches the clerk.

TELEPHONE CLERK
Polygon speaking. Battery commander respectfully reports he cannot execute such an order unless it is in writing and signed by the General.

EXT. OBSERVATION POST

CAPT. NICHOLS
General, Battery Commander respectfully reports he cannot execute such an order unless it is in writing and signed by the General.

(CONTINUED)
ROUSSEAU grabs the phone.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Put the Battery Commander on the wire at once.
(pause)

CAPT. PELLETIER
(filter)
Battery Commander speaking, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(calmly)
This is General Rousseau speaking. The troops are mutinying - refusing to advance. Fire as ordered until further notice.

CAPT. PELLETIER
With all respect, sir. I cannot execute that order unless it is in writing, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
What's your name, Captain?

CAPT. PELLETIER
Pelletier, sir. Battery B, one hundred and eighty-first regiment, fourth division.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Captain Pelletier, are you going to obey my order?

CAPT. PELLETIER
With all respect, sir, you have no right to order me to shoot down my own men unless you are willing to take full and undivided responsibility for it. I must have a written order before I can execute such a command. Supposing you are killed, sir, then where will I be?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(in a rage)
You'll be in front of a firing squad tomorrow morning. That's where you'll be. Hand over your command and report yourself under arrest to my headquarters.
(slams phone)
EXT. SUPPORT TRENCH - COLONEL DAX

Artillery is bursting all around. The air is filled with the whine of small arms fire. The trench is packed with troops. COLONEL DAX stands with CAPTAIN HERBILLION and several officers. A runner comes up, breathless. He salutes.

RUNNER
(salutes)
Communications reports the first wave is pinned down in the wire, sir. Company A is still in the trenches.

COL. DAX
You mean they've fallen back?

RUNNER
No, sir. They haven't moved out yet. Communications can't get through to them, sir.

COL. DAX
Thank you, Corporal.

RUNNER
(salutes)
Yes, sir.

COL. DAX
Major, carry on according to orders. Take your men over when the first wave clears the wire.

FAT MAJOR
Yes, sir. May I ask where the Colonel is going?

COL. DAX
I'm going to find out why Company A hasn't moved out yet, Major.

CAPT. HERBILLION
Does, the Colonel, think it proper to expose himself in this manner?

FAT MAJOR
I respectfully suggest, sir, that I can send a runner to Company A --

COL. DAX
There's no time for that. Here, give me a hand, will you Major.

(Continued)
DAX scrambles over the parapet. Bending low, he picks his way forward over the broken ground.

EXT. COMPANY A TRENCH - DAY

The men are still in the trenches. The wounded are receiving first-aid. The dead lie where they fell. PARIS sits up dazed. He disentangles himself from CAPTAIN CHARPENTIER'S body. He sees LIEUTENANT ROGET feigning some activity. The men stand around looking sheepish.

ANOTHER ANGLE - COLONEL DAX

Slides into the trench.

COL. DAX
Who's in command here?

LT. ROGET
(walks to Dax)
I am, sir, Lieutenant Roget, Company A.

COL. DAX
Where is Captain Charpentier?

LT. ROGET
He's dead, sir. Got it going over the top.

COL. DAX
Why are your men still here, Lieutenant?

LT. ROGET
The fire was too intense, sir.

COL. DAX
In whose opinion, Lieutenant?

LT. ROGET
In mine, sir -- I mean the men -- see for yourself, sir. Look at the casualties. I did my best.

COL. DAX
The fact that you are still alive, Lieutenant, indicates to me that your efforts were not your best.

(CONTINUED)
LT. ROGET
(edges closer - whining)
It would be wrong for the men to hear this, sir, but I respectfully submit the Colonel's remarks are not fair. If you want the perfect truth, sir, the men were demoralized. I couldn't rally them. After the first casualties, they wouldn't budge. The casualties were terrible, I admit, but the plain fact is, sir, that the men wouldn't move. I did all that was humanly possible.

COL. DAX
Very well, Lieutenant. The other companies are pinned down in the wire. They need our help. Have the men stand-to. We'll give it another try.

LT. ROGET
Yes, sir.

LIEUTENANT ROGET starts to move away slowly. Then he notices men from the other companies falling back into the trenches.

LT. ROGET
(relieved)
They're falling back, sir -- all of them. The attack must have been stopped cold, sir.

EXT. ROUSSEAU'S OBSERVATION POST
The phone rings.

CAPT. NICHOLS
This is Division.
(pause)
Yes, sir.
(hangs up)
General -- according to first reports the attack has failed all along the line. The men are falling back to our own trenches.

ROUSSEAU petulantly buckles away his field glasses. He turns to MAJOR SAINT-AUBAN.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU

Major, arrange for the immediate relief of the 181st regiment. Have them sent to Chateau de L'Aigle. Have Colonel Dax report to headquarters. Have Colonel Cordier assemble a field court martial and have it ready to sit at noon tomorrow.

GEN. ROUSSEAU

(muttering to himself)
If those little sweethearts won't face German bullets, they'll face French ones.

FADE OUT:

EXT. PARADE GROUND - CHATEAU DE L'AIGLE - DAY

The place is actually one of those magnificent medieval fortress-castles which, one may assume, has been turned over to the Army to use for its own purposes by the owners who evacuated it as the high-tide of war washed closer.

The parade ground is a huge grassy area about the size of a football field. It is surrounded on three sides by white-birch trees. The fourth side opens on the castle and is connected by a wide gravel road, lined with flower beds and further back, stately pine trees.

The 181st Regiment is drawn up in a three sided square around the perimeter of the parade ground. The regimental color-stand flutters smartly. The regimental band is grouped off to one side. Officers stand in small formations ahead of their troops. COLONEL DAX stands with CAPTAIN HERBILLION and CAPTAIN RENOUART.

There is a long roll on the field drum. SERGEANT-MAJOR BOULANGER steps smartly out to the center of the field. He stops in front of a knot of officers which comprise ROUSSEAU'S staff. They are grouped in the center of the field as if for a review. ROUSSEAU carries himself with solemn dignity. The drums stop. The only sounds are of insects humming in the hot sun and birds twittering in the trees.

(Continued)
SGT. BOULANGER
General Order for the day September thirteen. The 181st regiment is hereby placed under collective arrest and will be confined to the grounds of the Château de L'Aigle until further notice. The camp will be under guard and anyone attempting to leave without a pass will be tried for desertion. Anyone not responding to a challenge to halt will be shot on sight. By order, Rousseau, General Commanding.

Another roll on the drums. SERGEANT BOULANGER marches off the field. The band strikes up. ROUSSEAU'S group leaves the field. Non-coms begin shouting orders.

CLOSE SHOT - COLONEL DAX AND CAPTAIN RENOUART

The look in RENOUART'S eyes implies, all explanations aside, that DAX is in a large measure responsible for all of this by his passive acceptance of recent events. DAX seems more than a bit annoyed at the accusing nature of RENOUART'S glance. He shifts his attention to ROUSSEAU'S disappearing group, and we suspect that DAX is still to be heard from.

Dissolve:

EXT. OUTSIDE CASTLE - DAY

PARIS and several men lounge in the sun.

SOLDIER 1
I heard the Colonel committed suicide.

SOLDIER 2
He got over it quick enough. I just saw him go by in a car.

CPL. PARIS
That's right, he was in the car with the General.

SOLDIER 1
Maybe he's under arrest.

(continued)
CPL. PARIS
He ought to be, sending us into
that slaughter.

SOLDIER 2
They say he threatened to shoot
an officer.

SOLDIER 1
Who did?

SOLDIER 2
The General.

CPL. PARIS
He ought to shoot the Colonel for
sending us into that attack.

SOLDIER 1
He ought to shoot himself then.
The Colonel didn't have anything
to do with it. He was just obey-
ing orders.

SOLDIER 2
That's right. The Colonel said
he'd resign if they went ahead
with the attack.

CPL. PARIS
Who told you that?

SOLDIER 2
I heard it.

SOLDIER 1
And I heard one of the headquarters
runners saying there was a devil
of a scene somewhere and they
threatened to shoot each other.

SOLDIER 2
Who did?

SOLDIER 1
Dax and the General.

CPL. PARIS
Suits me if they do. You know this
reminds me of a story I heard one
time. There was this fellow.

(continued)
CPL, PARIS (cont'd)
He was stuck in a swamp, see, clear up to his ears in mud and muck,
And there was a big turtle gripping
him by one leg, and a bunch of
poison snakes wrapped around the
other, and a big saw-toothed eel
chewing on his rear. So the owner
of the swamp comes along, and says
he's going to have him arrested
for trespassing.
(takes another puff
from cigarette)

SOLDIER 1
(blankly, after a
moment's pause)
I don't get it.

CPL, PARIS
(disgustedly)
You don't get it?

SOLDIER 1
Huh-uh. I mean, what's the point?

CPL, PARIS
It's up there on top of your head.

Many snickers from the group.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. CASTLE ENTRANCE - DAY
The same gleaming black staff car we saw in the first
sequence pulls up. Amid appropriate military bustle,
GENERAL BROUARD and his aide COLONEL DE GUERVILLE exit
and are formally greeted and escorted inside by MAJOR
SAINT-AUBAN and MAJOR COUDERC.

DISSOLVE:

INT. BAROQUE - SALON - DAY
Appearing almost to be a museum, it is so full of lavish
furnishings, tapestries and art objects. COLONEL DAX,
GENERAL BROUARD and GENERAL ROUSSEAU are found in the
midst of a heated discussion.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU
I ordered an attack and your troops refused to attack. In my book that's mutiny.

COL. DAX
My troops did attack, sir. But they could make no headway.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Because they didn't try, Colonel. I saw it myself from the O.P. Three quarters of the regiment never even left the trenches.

COL. DAX
Two thirds of the regiment was in support - not even in the front lines.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
I mean battalion, of course, don't quibble over words. I do not intend to be moved from my position. I'm going to have a section from each company tried under penalty of death for mutiny and cowardice — and I repeat it was mutiny. Mutiny and cowardice. Refusal to obey an order. They're scum, d'you hear me? -- the whole rotten regiment! A pack of sneaking, whining, tail-dragging ours! They've got skim-milk in their veins instead of blood!

COL. DAX
Then it's the reddest milk I've ever seen. My trenches are soaked with that red, skim-milk...

GEN. ROUSSEAU
They were ordered to attack and they refused. If that —

COL. DAX
There was no question of refusing. Failure to do the impossible, doesn't imply unwillingness to do it. You do see that, don't you, General? Suppose you were ordered to take Berlin by tomorrow morning.
GEN. ASSOLANT
(stiffly)
If I were ordered to take Berlin, I would take it, or die in the attempt.

DOL. DAX
(quickly)
Seeing that you're still alive, then, I gather that you were not ordered to take the Ant Hill. The order originated with you.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
With me? What do you -- Colonel Dax, you're being impertinent!

COL. DAX
I was simply pursuing a question, General.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
You already know the answer! You know the order came from the General Staff!

COL. DAX
Why, General?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Why? What do you mean?

COL. DAX
Yes, why? You were right here on the grounds. You'd been within striking distance of the Ant Hill for weeks. If it was possible to take it, why hadn't you done so, as you had in the case of so many other objectives? Why did you wait for an order from the General Staff?

GEN. BROULARD
(clearing throat)
I believe we're straying from the point, gentlemen. The issue here, as I see it, is simply --

(Continued)
COL. DAX
(cutting him off)
The issue here is whether my regiment is to be condemned to cover up, what might be called by someone less kind than myself, an idiotic error in judgment. General Rousseau didn't attack the Ant Hill on his own initiative because he knew what the General Staff should have known, and doubtless did know but was unwilling to admit: That any attack, with the forces at our disposal, was doomed to failure.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Colonel -- Colonel Dax, I am going to overlook your outrageous behavior for the moment. Right now --

COL. DAX
General, I think the question of my so-called outrageous behavior had better be settled immediately. My regiment is under the shadow of two serious and shameful crimes. I know they are not guilty of either. I intend to do everything I can to establish their innocence -- or do nothing at all. If I'm to be forced to mince words, to stand on protocol and procedure at every point, to neglect the lives and honor of my men -- to neglect them, those things, so that the touchy dignity and tender feelings of blunderers may be protected --

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Colonel Dax!

COL. DAX
-- then I will not be a party to this hearing. I won't assist in the pretense that it's anything but a mockery, and an attempt to distort and conceal the truth rather than reveal it.

BROUARD regards DAX through narrowed eyes, an intrigued reluctantly amused look on his face.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU

Are you quite through, Colonel?
All right! Now, I am --

GEN. BROULARD

gesturing casually)
A word, General?

GEN. ROUSSEAU

Well...Certainly, General.

GEN. BROULARD

I believe the Colonel has a point
...even though he makes it rather bluntly.

{smiles pleasantly
at Dax}

This isn't a trial, but it does
bear certain aspects of one. And
Colonel Dax, technically, is cast
in the role of the defense. Under
the circumstances, and in view of
the seriousness of the charges,
a court of law would allow him extra-
ordinary consideration. Within the
bounds of propriety, he would be
given all possible latitude in pre-
senting his case.

ROUSSEAU stares blankly out the window.

GEN. BROULARD

I'm merely offering an opinion,
General. Please don't feel con-
strained to accept it.

GEN. ROUSSEAU

I'm very happy to accept it...You
may proceed, Dax.

COL. DAX

Thank you, sir.
(turning to de
Guerville)

General, what is your position at
this hearing?

GEN. BROULARD

What is my...? I'm not sure I
understand you, Colonel.

(CONTINUED)
COL. DAX
I mean, why are you here. In what capacity, do you appear here.

GEN. BROUARD
I'm not at all sure... I'm afraid that might not be a pertinent question, Colonel. In fact, it would seem to veer toward the opposite.

COL. DAX
It seems right on target to me, General. But, of course, if you'd rather not answer...

GEN. BROUARD
(laughs)
You'll put the worst possible misinterpretation on it? I can understand your success as an attorney, Colonel... But, getting to your question -- of course, I don't mind answering it. I'm here to represent the General Staff.

COL. DAX
What are your functions as their representative. To advise, observe, or just what?

GEN. BROUARD
(hesitates)
Well... it's rather difficult to categorize, Colonel. Perhaps if I knew the reason for your question...

COL. DAX
I don't see how that would affect your position. It would be exactly the same, it seems to me, regardless of my reason for being interested in it.

GEN. BROUARD
(brightly)
Mmm, yes, so it would, wouldn't it. You're quite right, Colonel.

(Continued)
COL. DAX
Well? You’ve made suggestions, given advice a time or two. Are you here as the staff’s advisor to General Rousseau?

GEN. BROUARD
No—no. Not exactly, Colonel. In a sense perhaps, yes, but on the other hand, no.

COL. DAX
I wonder if we can’t pin that down a little tighter, General. I have nothing against yes and no answers, you understand, but I find them somewhat confusing in combination. Now, would it be fair to say that you were present, more or less, as amicus curiae? A friend of the court, that is, using the term court to include all parties to the controversy?

GEN. BROUARD
(purses lips thoughtfully)
Now, I think that would come very close to it, Colonel. Amicus Curiae—yes, I believe that exactly describes my position.

COL. DAX
Then, you’re absolutely impartial? The General Staff positively has no interest in this matter except to see that justice is done?

GEN. BROUARD
That’s correct.

COL. DAX
And you’re certainly not interested in digging up scapegoats for the staff’s mistakes?

GEN. BROUARD
(laughing)
Colonel, really! That sounds like one of those still-beating-your-wife queries. But, no, certainly not. We are not looking for scapegoats. 

(continued)
COL. DAX
Actually, having complete confidence in General Rousseau's
good judgment and integrity, your part in this inquiry is a sub-
stantially passive one. Any decisions that are made will be
his and his entirely.

GEN. BROUARD
Of course.

COL. DAX
And just as you take no direct
part in making those decisions,
you will assume no responsibility
for them.

GEN. BROUARD
(chuckles, turns to
Rousseau)
Don't deny it, General -- you've been hiding this man. Keeping
him for your own, eh? I think that was very selfish of you.
Now, let's see...Oh, yes. I believe you were saying when I
interrupted you, Colonel. Some-
thing rather nasty, as I recall.
Would you like to go on with it?

COL. DAX
(shrugs)
Why bother? Let's lay it on the
line. The staff is looking for
sacrificial goats, but it's too
squeamish -- not to mention,
cautious -- to do its own slaughter-
ing. Therefore, General Rousseau.
He's been forced to compromise him-
self. His vanity is wounded. He --

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(explosively)
Now, this is too much! This --
this kind of talk definitely is
not within the boundaries of
propriety!

(continued)
GEN. BROUILARD
General, I think we must try to bear in mind that Colonel Dax's exceedingly painful position is not an unnatural habitat for painful words. You, Colonel, I want you to keep General Rousseau's position in mind -- his official position, and the great dignity adhering thereto.

COL. DAX
In view of your admonition, General, I think I'd better preface it with a few words. Briefly, I sincerely believe in what I am saying, and it is said with no intent to give hurt to you or General Rousseau.

GEN. BROUILARD
(smiles)
That sounds rather ominous, Colonel. I think I'll withhold absolution temporarily.
(nods)
Please proceed.

COL. DAX
Well --
(hesitates)
General, I don't quite know how... I mean, in view of your courtesy, it's difficult to -- to --

GEN. BROUILARD
(amiably)
Oh, go ahead, Colonel. Go ahead. Take one glove off. Loosen the cork in the poison bottle. Be a little nasty, if you have to. After all, if you have an intrinsically nasty situation...
(shrugs)

COL. DAX
(brusquely)
I was saying, the staff pulled a bonehead. By dishing out punishment for its error, it hopes to
(continued)
COL. DAX (cont'd)
escape responsibility -- to give the impression that the Ant Hill could have been taken if my men had done their duty. The staff wants no part of the job itself. It's too good for such dirty work -- can't officially admit its existence. Also it's too smart. Also, with General Rousseau so conveniently eager, it doesn't need to do it. It needs to do nothing but let him carry the ball and keep out of his way while he runs for the goal. If he makes it, fine, the staff has won. If he fumbles, if there are repercussion, that's still all right. The staff is no worse off than it was before. It has taken no part in the game, and the penalty is strictly General Rousseau's.

DAX stops speaking. BROIUARD waits to make sure that he is through. Then, smiling pleasantly, he turns to ROUSSEAU. The General is frowning slightly, not fully understanding what he has heard not believing what he has understood, but just a little worried nonetheless.

GEN. BROUARD
Well, General? What do you say to that?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(smiling uncertainly)
Well, uh, I'm -- I don't see that any comment is called for. Wouldn't care to dignify it with a comment.

GEN. BROUARD
(inclining head)
Thank you for your confidence, General. Now -- Yes, Dax?

COL. DAX
I'd like to ask a question, General -- one that you've evaded thus far. Is the General Staff taking official cognizance of these proceedings which may evolve from these.

(continued)
GEN. BROULARD
(spreads hands smiling)
The answer would seem obvious, Colonel. I believe I'm here, am I not?

COL. DAX
You can be here physically, without being here officially. That is --

GEN. BROULARD
Or de facto, but no de jure, to use your Latin legalistics. Yes, so I could.

COL. DAX
Well?

GEN. BROULARD
(becoming slightly annoyed)
I believe I've made my position here completely clear, Colonel. I've explained it not once, but several times. Wait! --

(holds up hand)
If it appears to need further clarification, I will be glad to supply it...but not to you, Colonel. I just don't see that it's any of your business, you know. It's a matter purely between General Rousseau and me, or, I should say, the General Staff. Any questions or answers on the subject will be kept within those brackets.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Colonel Dax, you have made certain statements and insinuations about the offices of the General Staff which paints an extremely ugly picture. Do you really have that mental picture of the men who guide our armies -- who hold the destiny of France, her welfare and her honor, in their hands? Do you actually see them as blockheads and blunderers, petty little men who would willfully throw away the lives of our soldiers

(continued)
GEN. ROUSSEAU (cont'd)
to enhance their own position?
I can't believe that you do, Colonel. I refuse to believe that you do.

COL. DAX
(uncomfortably)
Well...perhaps my language was too strong, General. Much too strong. I'm more than willing to believe that the General Staff acted in good faith, and that it felt confident the attack would succeed. But --

GEN. BROUARD
And it was right, Colonel. It was absolutely right.

COL. DAX
(laughs incredulously)
Right! Right! After what happened yesterday, you can tell me that --

GEN. BROUARD
(quietly)
What else can I tell you? That the men which France must live or die by are not to be trusted? That we can have no faith in them? That they are as likely to be wrong as right? You know better than that, Colonel. You're an intelligent man. In general, awkward as it may be at the moment, your feelings -- your philosophy -- must closely parallel mine.

COL. DAX
(hesitates; laughs shortly)
Let's say it did, General. Let's just say that it did.

(he sighs, shakily)
Gentlemen, if it's an example you want one man will do as well as a hundred. But I wouldn't know how to choose him. I would have to offer myself -- after all I'm the responsible officer.

(continued)
GEN. BROUARD
Oh, come now, Colonel, I think you're overwrought. It isn't a question of officers.
(to ROUSSEAU in a...
"...oh come on let's settle this thing,"
tone of voice)
Suppose we make it a dozen. We won't say it was mutiny. It would be just as well I think to keep that ugly word out of it. Just cowardice in the face of the enemy.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(peeved)
I was talking about four sections and here we are down to one squad already.

COL. DAX
I implore you, gentlemen. A dozen men. A dozen men like a dozen head of cattle. It's monstrous. Either the whole battalion is guilty or I am alone. But think of our record. Of what we'd just been through at Spuchez. Of the condition of the men. Of the rain. And of the murderous Boche fire. These men were not --
(an idea occurs to Dax)
If you take twelve men how will they be selected?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
I will leave that entirely to you, Dax.

COL. DAX
If I were to ask each company commander to select three men, would that suit you?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
That would seem to.

COL. DAX
And how shall you know who these people are? Where they come from? What connections they may have?
(continued)
(CONTINUED - 13)

COL. DAX (cont'd)
     (Dax thinks he has 
     really struck gold)
What reverberations may be stirred 
up?

GEN. BROUARD
     (matter of factly)
You have a point there, Colonel.

A painful silence hangs over the room. Outside a bird 
sings.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
     (very self-righteous)
All right, you've made your point. 
Perhaps I was a bit too anxious to 
see the proper justice meted out. 
I've spent my whole life in the 
Army and I've always tried to be 
true to my principals. That's the 
only mistake I can ever be accused 
of. You've scored your point, I 
can't argue with it. I'll settle 
for one man from each company - four 
in all.

GEN. BROUARD
Excellent solution.

DAX stands bent in defeat. He takes a deep uneven breath.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
The court martial will meet at 
the Chateau at three this after-
noon. That will be convenient for 
you, won't it, General?

GEN. BROUARD
Yes, quite.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Is there anything else, Colonel 
Dax?

DAX rises and walks to the window. He looks outside.

COL. DAX
General Rousseau, I respectfully 
request that I be appointed attorney 
for the accused men.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU
Respectfully, eh?
(brusquely)
I will take the matter under con-
sideration, Colonel, but I have serious doubts that --

GEN. BROUARD
(easily)
Oh, I think we can permit that, don't you, General? Of course, we can. Consider it settled, Dax.

COL. DAX
Thank you, sir...General Rousseau, do you wish anything further from me?

GEN. ROUSSEAU
No.
(significantly)
Nothing that can't wait until later!

COL. DAX
Thank you. If I may, then...

Clicks heels and comes to attention. Salutes as the two GENERALS rise, then exits as they return his salute.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(glancing at wristwatch)
Noon, straight-up, General. I hope you can stay for lunch?

GEN. BROUARD
(smiling)
I was about to invite myself, General. Any time you're ready.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
No time like the present, General.
No time like the present.

They exit, ROUSSEAU courteously steering BROUARD by the elbow. Just as they open door, they encounter battery-
command FELLETIER, who salutes hastily and steps back.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Yes, Captain, what do you want?
CAPT. PELLETIER
You ordered me to report to you
here, sir. Pelletier, battery
commander --

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Yes, yes. I wanted to speak to
you about some of your shells
falling short. I haven't got time
to go into it now. Report back to
your command until further orders.

CAPT. PELLETIER
Yes, sir.
(he salutes and moves off)

GEN. BROULARD
That's bad stuff. It demoralizes
the men. Makes them lose their
faith. You must deal with that
sort of thing with the utmost
severity.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
I quite agree with you. And the
worst punishment would be shelving.
Say to Macedonia or a colony. He's
an ambitious man and very trouble-
some.

GEN. BROULARD
A court of inquiry ought to roast
him a bit first.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
In cases like this...shells falling
short - I always try to avoid an
inquiry. It gets around among the
men and makes a very bad impression.
Shelving will be the best discipline
for him, at least in my opinion.

DISOLVE:

CLOSE SHOT INSERT - TYPEWRITER
It types out:

(CONTINUED)
(CONTINUED - 1)

To: Company Commanders;
Lieutenant Jonnart, Lieutenant Roget, Captain Sancy and Captain Renouart.
From: Colonel Dax, Commanding 13th Regiment.
You are hereby ordered to select and arrest one man from your company and have him at the regimental guardroom no later than fourteen hundred hours of this day, ready to appear before a summary court martial on charges of cowardice in the face of the enemy.
Signed; Herbillion, Captain, Adjutant.

INT. DAX'S OFFICE - DAX AND CAPTAIN RENOUART - DAY

It is a neat orderly place.

CAPT. RENOUART
(shrilly)
This is insane. It's cold blooded murder. I can't choose a man. You can't ask me to. My men aren't cowards. They didn't mutiny. You can't really expect me to pick an innocent man and send him to his death just because those idiots want to look good in the newspapers. Why they don't stand any chance at all. Even with you defending the men they don't have a prayer
(a touch of sarcasm)

COL. DAX
You're right about one thing. I won't make a bit of difference. I'll do my best. Try to make things as difficult as I can for Rousseau, but it's his game. He makes the rules and decides when it's over. Look, this isn't going to be a trial.
(continued)
COL. DAX (cont'd)
There's no question here of guilt or innocence. The only question is what does Rousseau intend to do. I accomplished something up there this afternoon, at least I think I did. For one thing I got them to cut down from forty men to four.

CAPT. RENOUART
I suppose if you could get it down to one you'd throw a party.

COL. DAX
Don't you think your sarcasm is running away with itself a little? Slice it anyway you like, four is a lot better than forty.

CAPT. RENOUART
I doubt if the four would say so.

COL. DAX
(ignoring remark)
I did something else, too, maybe even more important. I think I showed Rousseau the possibility that if there are repercussions on this, the staff may not be standing behind him. I tried to underscore that pretty hard. The biggest hope now is that I made this point clear enough and that Rousseau is going through with this deal just to make some kind of a grandstand play. Maybe give the boys a year at hard labor or something of that sort.

CAPT. RENOUART
You've got it all nicely tied up and packaged with pretty pink ribbon around it. That wonderful crystal clear mind of yours has it pegged just right. People are your business --

(imitating him)
-- understanding them is your specialty, outguessing them is your bread and butter.

(CONTINUED)
COL. DAX
All right, sweetheart, you're just brimming over with sympathy, your heart's breaking for those poor innocent guys. Well maybe mine is too, did you ever think of that? But I did something about it. I worked as hard as I could pulling every trick in my bag. What am I supposed to do if I lose a case, shoot the judge and help the prisoner break jail? I play strictly by the book. I may have a few interpretations that seem a trifle original but I don't throw the book away when it suits my purpose. It's not a perfect system but it's the best one that's been devised yet. Perfection, absolute truth -- I wouldn't knock myself out looking for them. They just aren't to be found.

CAPT. RENOUART
Colonel, you're a phony. I don't know why I didn't see it before this. You're a smooth-talking faker -- a liar! You could explain how the cow jumped over the moon and my mouth would water for buttermilk. It's all a matter of habit, Colonel. Lifelong habit. Scratching the fattest back with one hand and patting yourself on the head with the other. Why should you stop now, when you've done it all your life?

COL. DAX
(angry)
And what have you done all your life? Where did you get this pedestal you've put yourself on? What's it made out of? Fake heroics, right? -- hot air pumped in from a good safe spot on the sidelines. I know your type, mister. I've been meeting you for years. Criticism, melodramatics -- boy, they can't beat you at it. But when the chips are down, when some kind of move has to be made, huh-uh.

(continued)
COL. DAX (cont'd)
You're not there. You don't know how to do anything. You haven't got the guts to do anything. So -- so I'll tell you what you can do now. Get out of here! Get out, and carry out that order I gave you! And if you have any trouble -- if you don't know where to find a coward, a do-nothing boy -- I'll fix you up with a candidate. Now that's an order, Captain.

CAPT. RENOUART
(choking with rage)
Yes, sir! Any further orders, sir?

COL. DAX
(knows he has gone too far through anger)
Look, Renouart, I think you know how much I think of you --

CAPT. RENOUART
(cutting in coldly)
Any further orders, sir?

COL. DAX
(after a moment's hesitation)
No further orders, Captain.

CAPT. RENOUART
Thank you, sir! (exits)

DISSOLVE:

INT. LIEUTENANT ROGET'S QUARTERS - DAY

CAMERA opens on a CLOSE SHOT of the order and pulls back to include LIEUTENANT ROGET pacing the floor. He takes a last drag on his cigarette and grinds it against the floor with his heel.

LT. ROGET
Sergeant, Gonoud!

(continued)
SGT. GONOUDE O.S.
Yes, sir.
(Gonoud enters room)

LT. ROGET
(solemnly)
Sergeant, you've read the order from regimental headquarters?

SGT. GONOUDE
Yes, sir.

LT. ROGET
(solemnly)
I want you to arrest Corporal Paris. Take him down to the guard room as ordered. But do it quietly, without anyone knowing about it, if you can.

SGT. GONOUDE
That'll be difficult, sir, with all the men around.

LT. ROGET
Just tell him to come along with you. Tell him you've got a job for him. Don't arrest him formally until you're clear of the camp area. If he asks any questions, say you don't know anything. By the way, do you know Paris?

SGT. GONOUDE
Yes, sir.

LT. ROGET
Well, don't make any mistakes.

SGT. GONOUDE
(salutes)
Yes, sir.
(he exits)

DISSOLVE:

INT. CAPTAIN SANCY'S QUARTERS - DAY
He talks with SERGEANT PATIN.

(CONTINUED)
CAPTAIN SANY
The beauty of this mess is its freedom from complication. All the men are equally innocent. None of them showed cowardice, but one of them’s got to be shot for it nonetheless. Now the point is which one?

SGT. PATIN
I don’t see how that’s so beautiful. Do you call that justice?

CAPT. SANCY
Who said anything about justice? There’s no such thing. But injustice is as much a part of life as the weather. Anyway, the lucky fellow will be making his contribution to winning the war.

SGT. PATIN
In other words, you think the man who is shot is as much a part of the scheme of things as the officer who calculates the barrage, the infantryman who goes over the top, or the quartermaster who doesn’t.

CAPT. SANCY
Certainly, discipline is the first requisite of the army. It must be maintained, and one of the ways to do it is to shoot a man now and then, just to show the others how smart they are to be on the right side. He dies, therefore, for the ultimate benefit of his comrades and his country.

SGT. PATIN
Have you anyone in mind.

CAPT. SANCY
I have two people clearly in mind—the two incorrigibles, Meyer and Ferol. They are lucky to have this opportunity.

(CONTINUED)
SGT. PATIN
They also happen to be among the
best soldiers in the company.
As a matter of record, they got
farther in the attack than anyone
in the regiment.

CAPT. SANCY
Which adds one more proof of their
stupidity. Try to get this straight.
If the whole regiment had been made
up of Meyers and Ferols, would it
have done any better? No. Shells
kill good soldiers just as fast as
bad ones, in fact, even faster.
We're all cannon fodder.

SGT. PATIN
Well, then it looks like Meyer's
elected.

CAPT. SANCY
What makes you say that?

SGT. PATIN
He is the worst of the two.

CAPT. SANCY
Yes, on the face of it that's true.
But there's another important cir-
cumstance you've overlooked. He's
a Jew.

SGT. PATIN
All the more reason -

CAPT. SANCY
That's where you're wrong. You're
being shortsighted. This is one
time when being a Jew is going to
save a man's life instead of costing
him it.

SGT. PATIN
I don't follow you.

CAPT. SANCY
Do you remember the Dreyfus case?

(CONTINUED)
(CONTINUED - 3)

SGT. PATIN
I've heard of it, of course, but what's that got to do with this?

CAPT. SANCY
A great deal. It's a lesson, that's all, a lesson against exposing yourself to the same thing over again.

SGT. PATIN
But this isn't going to be a Dreyfus case.

CAPT. SANCY
No one thought the Dreyfus case was going to be one either. They never dreamed when they picked on that quiet little Jewish officer that the whole world would ring with his name for years to follow. That ministry after ministry would fall and a war loom possible because of him. Or that the entire nation of France would be kept in a state of disturbance over him and his fate. No, if I chose Meyer the cry of anti-semitism would undoubtedly be raised, rightfully so, too. No one can say when or at whose expense that cry would be silenced. That's where I'm using my head. I want to be clean.

SGT. PATIN
It's tough on Ferol, though. Meyer's a Jew so he becomes the patsy.

CAPT. SANCY
It's always tough on somebody. That's the way life is.

DISSOLVE:

INT. MESS ROOM - DAY

There are about one hundred men present. The buzz of their conversation is abruptly cut by "Ten-hawp!" The men snap to attention. LIEUTENANT JONNART enters the room smartly, accompanied by SERGEANT BOULANGER. They

(CONTINUED)
come to a halt in the center of the room. SGT. BOULANGER carries a small carton containing many small folded slips of paper. ARNAUD stands in the rear of the room.

SGT. BOULANGER
(monotonously)
At ease, men. I have an order to read to you.

-produces order-
To Lieutenant Jonnard acting commander of C company, from Colonel Dax, commanding 161st regiment. You are hereby ordered to select and arrest one man from your company and have him at the regimental guard room no later than fourteen hundred hours of this day, ready to appear before a summary court martial on charges of cowardice in the face of the enemy by order signed Herbillion Captain adjutant.

The dreadful silence which follows is broken after a few seconds by an incredulous guffaw from the back of the room.

SGT. BOULANGER
Knock it off!

LT. JONNART
This is no laughing matter men. In fact it's very serious. You all know what a summary court martial can mean.

SOLDIER VOICES OVERLAPPING
Which one?
They're mad.
I don't believe it.
I was no coward.
It's a joke.
Let them shoot, Dax.

SGT. BOULANGER
Knock it off. Knock it off!

LT. JONNART
I've gone over the company roster carefully and all you men here in the hut were in the attacking wave this morning. All of those in our company not in the hut were on special duties.

(CONTINUED)
BEARDED SOLDIER
I wasn't in the attack.

LT. JONNART
Who's that? Come up here.

BEARDED SOLDIER
(making way forward)
Don't you remember, Lieutenant, you sent me yourself to the dump to get those detonators.

LT. JONNART
That's right. You can go then.

BEARDED SOLDIER
I think I'll stick around and watch the fun.

SGT. BOULANGER
Get out of here before we change our mind and keep you for the drawing.

BEARDED SOLDIER salutes and scampers out.

SOLDIER VOICES OVERLAPPING
Holy smoke, he's going to draw lots -
Draw lots -
I won't draw any -
Me neither -
They've got no right -
Married men should be exempt -
Men with mothers -
Certainly with widowed mothers -
Or sisters -
My three brothers are already dead -
I was the farthest one in front -
I was no coward, I won't draw -
Only the shirkers draw -
I have four children -
Ha, ha, watch the shirkers step up -

SGT. BOULANGER
That's enough, knock it off. Knock it off!

LT. JONNART
(calmly)
Everyone has a good reason for not wanting to die. But orders are orders and one of you has to be (continued)
LT. JONNART (cont'd)
chosen. The fairest way is to draw
lots. There are one hundred and
eleven slips of paper in this box.
One slip is marked with a cross. The
man who draws it will go before the
court martial.

SOLDIER 2
There are only one hundred and ten
of us here now. You sent Camus out.

LT. JONNART
(thinks a moment)
I will remove one slip of paper and
open it. If it's got the cross I'll
put it back and remove another.

He removes a paper and unfolds it. It is blank.

LT. JONNART
That leaves the right amount.

SOLDIER
The paper's thin and we'll see if
it's marked.

LT. JONNART
The slips are folded tightly and
each man will be blindfolded before
he draws.

SOLDIER
(mournfully)
I want to see my lawyer.
(raucous guffaws)

SGT. BOULANGER
Knock it off. Knock it off. You
won't be laughing after you draw.

LT. JONNART
You will be called forward in
alphabetical order. Sergeant,
call of the nominal roll call.

BOULANGER shuffles through a pile of papers. He removes one.

SGT. BOULANGER
(reading)
Arnaud!

(continued)
ARNAUD makes his way forward.

SOLDIER 3
Don't worry, you've never won a race at a hundred to one.

SGT. BOULANGER
Knock it off. Silence.

ARNAUD comes to attention in front of the two officers. BOULANGER blindfolds him. Then he guides his hand into the box. A hush falls over the room. He draws a slip. BOULANGER pulls his arm out of the box. ARNAUD slips off his blindfold. He stands sheepishly holding the piece of paper.

SOLDIER 4
You'll be sorry.

No one laughs.

SGT. BOULANGER
(quietly)
Let's see what it is, Arnaud.

ARNAUD unfolds the paper. It is marked with a cross. Big close-shot of paper plus MUSIC cue.

DISSOLVE:

INT. CAPTAIN RENOUART'S QUARTERS

He sits alone at a battered typewriter. He begins to type. RENOUART'S voice - thoughts heard over typing.

CAPT. RENOUART
My dear Dax, I should like to apologize for the insulting nature of remarks earlier today. I see things clearly now and I intend to make amends. I realize how much in the wrong I was and how basically unsuitable I am for the rank I hold. Be that as it may, I have found a man most appropriate to the present situation. He shall be delivered to you in a short while. Respectfully yours, Renouart, Captain, Co. A.

DISSOLVE:
INT. DAX’S QUARTERS

DAX sits at his desk reading the note. The last third of the memo is read aloud on the sound track. The voice is RENOUART’S. DAX finishes and puts the note down, relieved. There is a knock at the door.

COL. DAX

Come in.

MESSENGER

A message from Lieutenant Hardy of Company A, sir. Captain Renouart has just killed himself -- shot himself in the head, sir.

DISSOLVE:

INT. GUARDROOM - DAY - DAX, PARIS, FEROL, ARNAUD

It is a gloomy room made almost entirely of concrete and stone. A small patch of sky may be seen through a single barred window too small for a man to crawl through even if the bars were removed. A planked table stands in the center minus its chairs. There is no place to sit except the floor which is made more comfortable in several places with beds of straw. The stone walls are stained with dampness. DAX paces back and forth. The men sit or lean here and there.

CPL. PARIS

After Lieutenant Roget threw the grenade he disappeared into the darkness. I identified Lejeune’s body by his dog-tag. Then I made my way back. Roget blackmailed me into keeping quiet about the whole thing.

COLONEL DAX frowns. He stands up and fumbles for a match. ARNAUD gives him a light. The men are a little uneasy in the presence of COLONEL DAX, despite his friendly role.

CPL. PARIS

You believe me, sir, don’t you?

COL. DAX

Yes, I believe you but who else will? And besides, I’m afraid that story won’t do you much good, and it might do you a lot of harm.

(continued)
COL. DAX (cont'd)

In the first place, you've got no witnesses. Secondly, even if you had, I think the story would only antagonize the court. They wouldn't tolerate an enlisted man bringing such accusations against an officer, particularly since it's irrelevant to the charges you're being tried for. Why Lieutenant Roget chose you among your entire company, has nothing whatsoever to do with the charge of cowardice. Take my advice and don't say a word about that affair at the court martial. If and when we get clear of all this we can take the story of the patrol up on a regimental level.

DAX crosses to the window, inhaling deeply on his cigarette.

COL. DAX

Now I want to ask each of you a question and I want you to answer it in absolute honesty. It will be for your own good if you do. And it might do you a lot of harm if you don't. If I am to defend you I must not be in the dark about anything. Did any of you do anything or show any sign that might be construed by witnesses as cowardice in the face of the enemy?

CPL. PARIIS

No, absolutely not.

PVT. PEROL

Not me.

PVT. ARNAUD

No, sir.

COL. DAX

If you did, I beg of you to tell me so we can work out a defense. I don't want any surprises during the trial.

(CONTINUED)
PVT, FEROL
I was almost through the wire.
Meyer can tell you, so can
Captain Sancy. I was out in
front.

PVT. ARNAUD
I was right next to Lieutenant
Bonnier in the wire when he was
killed.

CPL. PARIS
I was climbing onto the parapet
when Captain Charpentier's body
fell on top of me and knocked me
back into the trench. I hit my
head on something and when I came
to the company was still in the
trench. Just about that time you
appeared, Colonel, and chewed out
Lieutenant Roget.

COL. DAX
My advice to you is to stick to
those stories. Tell them simply
and don't let the prosecutor shake
you out of them. Now one or two
hints on your behavior. Remember
that you will still be soldiers in
the presence of your superior
officers, not litigants before a
bar of justice. Make your bearing
respectful but in no means cringing.
Act like what you are, soldiers and
brave ones at that, but don't overdo
it to the point of seeming arrogant
or lacking in a sense of discipline.
I've looked at the room where the
court will sit. You will have the
afternoon light in your eyes. Don't
let this disconcert you and above
all don't let it make it seem as if
you were dropping your eyes, hang-
dog fashion. When you are speaking,
look each judge in the eye. Don't
whine or plead or make speeches. Just
make simple statements in a soldierly
manner. Make them short but make them
so they can be heard all over the room.
Try not to repeat yourselves, I'll do
that for you when I sum up. I'll empha-
size the points you brought up in your
testimony.

(CONTINUED)
CPL. ARNAUD

How does it look, Colonel?

COL. DAX

I'd be dishonest if I said I didn't think you were in serious trouble. But we're going to do everything we can for you. Keep your courage up. Show them a brave front. Now, I've got some work to do -- Court sits in about an hour.

INT. COURTROOM

It is a large bare room in the basement. Steam pipes run along the plaster walls near the ceiling. The room is arranged around three wooden tables, for the judges, for the defense and for the prosecutor. The prisoners' dock is formed by several benches placed off to one side. GENERAL ROUSSEAU and MAJOR CORDERC leaf through some papers. MAJOR SAINT-AUBAN takes his place beside them. DAX sits alone at the defense table picking at a lead pencil. The prosecuting attorney searches through a briefcase. The only other people present are two military policemen standing at attention at the door. There is a low murmur of conversation. SAINT-AUBAN stands.

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN

The court martial is open. Bring in the accused.

The two guards open the door. The prisoners are marched in smartly by two other guards. The guards leave the prisoners standing before the dock. They nervously glance at DAX. He gives them a reassuring nod.

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN

(perfunctorily)

This is a summary court martial and we shall therefor dispense with most of the usual formalities. The accused will be seated. The prosecutor will present his charges.

The prosecutor rises.

PROSECUTOR

Honored, judges of the court --

SLOW DISSOLVE:
DAX sits furiously picking away at his pencil. It is plain that he is angry and has himself under rigid control. The prisoners look very worried.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY
...and so, gentlemen of the court, I say it has been proven beyond any shadow of a doubt that the accused are guilty of cowardice in the face of the enemy. I shall therefore confine myself to requesting the court act in accordance with the provisions of the Code Of Military Justice, to find the accused guilty of the charges as stated, and to impose the penalty which is prescribed by the code. Thank you.

(sits down)

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Is the defense ready to make its summary to the court?

COL. DAX
(mounting anger)
Honored judges of the court, it is impossible for me to summarize the case for the defense, since the court has not allowed me a reasonable opportunity to present my case in a manner which would make it forceful and understandable. I have been prevented from introducing evidence that I consider vital to the defense. I have been denied the privilege of cross-examination. The prosecution has presented no witnesses. Furthermore, there has been no written indictment of charges against the defendants, and the defense has never had an opportunity to study the alleged charges prior to the trial. Lastly I protest against the fact that no stenographic notes of the trial have been kept. It is my absolute conviction that the aforesaid constitutes a gross violation of legal procedure which in itself renders this court martial null and void.

(he sits slowly)

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU
(Shuffling papers)
Accused stand up.
(They stand)
Have you anything further to say
in your behalf?
(They glance at DAX.
He rises again)

COL. DAX
(routinely)
The accused Ferol says he is innocent
and begs for the mercy of the court.
The accused Arnaud says he is innocent
and asks the court to consider his
wife and children. The accused Paris
says he is innocent and begs the court
to take cognizance of his decorations
for bravery.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Very well. The accused will be
escorted back to the guard room.
This hearing is closed. The court
will now retire to deliberate.

Dissolve:

EXT. GUARD HOUSE - SERGEANT-MAJOR BOULANGER - DUSK

Faces back and forth before a squad of men standing at
attention. He is a leather-faced, iron-hard man.

SGT. BOULANGER
As you know the court martial found
the accused guilty and sentenced them
to be shot. The executions will take
place at eight o'clock in the morning,
sharp. Everything must go off without
a hitch and with the least possible
delay. It is not to be hurried, but
there mustn't be any fumbling around.
I have been put in charge and made
personally responsible for any lack
of order or for any mistakes. You can
take it from me that I shall pass on
any blame, and with interest, to any
of you who fail in your duties.

He studies each man in passing.

(Continued)
SGT. BOULANGER
Sergeant Gonoud, you are appointed to command the prisoners' escort from the guard-house to the execution posts. You will have a guard of twelve men under arms, rifles loaded, bayonets fixed, four men to each prisoner. The four men are to be individually assigned to each prisoner and held responsible for that one prisoner alone in case trouble starts. At any sign of trouble the prisoners are to be instantly covered. If the trouble does not subside at once, the prisoner is to be shot on the spot. If any concerted action gets under way, they are all to be shot or bayoneted. But every effort must be made to get them under control without resorting to shooting. Is that clear?

SGT. GONOUDE
Will the prisoners be bound?

SGT. BOULANGER
No, the prisoner's hands will not be bound until they are at the execution posts. There is no wish to have any unnecessary cruelty inflicted on them. The escort is not to exchange a single word with the prisoners except words of command. You will be given a litre of cognac with which to fill your canteen. When you go to fetch the prisoners you are to give each one of them a good swig of it and a cigarette if he wants it. But see that they don't take too much. Don't forget that it will be on an empty stomach - a very empty stomach, if my guess is any good. Then, when the detachment reaches the corner of the wood where it turns onto the parade ground, you are to give them each another swig. That will be their last. Is that clear? As soon as this meeting is over, Sergeant Gonoud will go to the guard-room and timing himself carefully, he will walk up to the

(continued)
SGT. BOULANGER (cont'd)
parade ground at a pace a little slower than the usual marching time.
You are to make a note of the exact amount of time it took you to reach
the center of the field near its western edge by the trees. That
time, plus eight minutes, is to be deducted from eight o'clock, and
that will be the time the escort is to leave with the prisoners from the
guard-house. Have you got that all clearly in your mind?

DISSOLVE:

INT. GUARD HOUSE - NIGHT - PARIS, ARNAUD AND FEROL

The men have just been served a magnificent meal. Roast
beef, potatoes augratin, assorted vegetables, seeded
rolls, wine, and a tray of pastries. It has been placed
on a fine, white linen, tablecloth which now adorns the
rough table. There are but two things lacking - chairs
and silverware.

Two armed guards wait at the iron door for the K.P. who
served the meal.

The condemned men hover about the table distractedly.
They seem to breathe in short gasps. They have a strange
brilliance about the eyes, a kind of glazed, feverish
quality. Their movements are jerky and often seem to start
without purpose, then, once abandoned, the purpose is
remembered.

CPL. PARIS
I thought condemned men were served
anything they wanted. We weren't
even asked.

FVT. FEROL
(nervous giggle)
I heard once where a prisoner asked
for a woman and a bottle of whiskey
- and he got it.

K.P.
(prissy)
Listen, you boys are lucky you got
this. The Colonel got the cook
out of bed to fix this for you.
(continued)
K.P. (cont'd)
He's got to get up at four every morning to light the fires -- and tonight he's been fussing around the kitchen for hours making this for you boys.
(starts to leave)

CPL. PARIS
Don't we get any chairs or things to eat with.

K.P.
I'm sorry those are orders. I haven't got the authority to give you any chairs.

CPL. PARIS
How are we supposed to eat the meat?

K.P.
Boys, I don't know the answer to every question. Be thankful for what you've got.
(he exits with the guards)

The men stare blankly at the food. FEROL picks at the potatoes with his fingers. Little by little they all begin to gather up food in a variety of grotesque ways - peeling strips of meat off, scooping up pastries, etc. Gradually the scene begins to resemble what might occur if savages went to a buffet luncheon. They eat with a frenzy. Stuffing food into their mouths as quickly as they can. Suddenly PARIS bolts away from the table into the corner and wretches violently.

This seems to interfere with the pleasure of the others, and they slowly chew to a halt breathing hard as if to prevent a similar fate from overtaking their dinner.

FVT. ARNAUD
It's funny -- we spend a lot of time learning how to use knives and forks and now we're back to fingers.

FVT. FEROL
That's true about a lot of things that don't seem to add up to very much right now.
PVT. ARNAUD

It's a lot like that old chestnut about Shadow Soup.

PVT. FEROL

Shadow Soup, what's that?

As the men talk there is a sense of distraction about it all. They don't really listen to each other - or for that matter, talk to each other. Their voices are somewhat shrill - and they seem to be searching for something they can't remember.

PVT. ARNAUD

It's a recipe of a kind. You take a chicken and put it on a spit. Then you take a large kettle of water and bring it to a boil. Then you place the chicken over the kettle so that it's shadow falls on the boiling water. You cook it for three hours, add salt and pepper and you've got shadow soup.

PVT. FEROL

(change of tone)
You don't suppose they put something in the food, do you?

CPL. PARIS

(re-joining the group)
You don't suppose they want to poison us before they shoot us?

PVT. FEROL

(suspiciously)
I think they put something in it.

PVT. ARNAUD

Like what?

PVT. FEROL

Something to make us groggy - or something.

PVT. ARNAUD

What would be wrong with that, if they did?
PVT. FEROL
Maybe nothing for you, but I'm going to get out of this somehow - and I don't want to be drugged.

CPL. PARIS
How're you going to get out, chew your way through that stone wall?

PVT. FEROL
Listen, we've got to get out of this. They're going to kill us in a few hours if we don't.

CPL. PARIS
Have you got an idea?

PVT. FEROL
No, but there's got to be a way. How many guards do you suppose they have outside.

PVT. ARNAUD
I bet they've got a couple of squads. I heard them march in and that's what it sounded like.

PVT. FEROL
Maybe some of them are our friends.

PVT. ARNAUD
(meaning no)
They're all from the fourth battalion. Anyway, right now we have no friends.

CPL. PARIS
Why kid yourself, we're not going to get out of this.

PVT. FEROL
Maybe you won't but I will. I guarantee you of that.

The men drift back into their private thoughts and wander about the cell.

PVT. ARNAUD
You see that cockroach. He'll be alive tomorrow morning and we'll be dead. He'll have more contact with my wife and child than I will. I will be nothing and he will be alive.
FVT, FEROL
(squashing bug)
Now you've got the edge on him.

CPL, PARIS
I wonder what time it is?

FVT, FEROL
About midnight, I'd guess.

FVT, ARNAUD
What time do they come for us?

CPL, PARIS
At dawn, I think.

FVT, ARNAUD
When is that?

CPL, PARIS
That's funny, I don't know, really. You always read in the paper, 'The prisoner was shot at dawn.' But I wonder how they figure out when dawn is?

FVT, FEROL
Dawn is just before the sun comes up.

FVT, ARNAUD
The sky begins to get light about four -- no, I'd say about five-thirty. It's black night -- then, all of a sudden, the sky is gray. Then after a bit, bluish purple -- and then pink. I'd say it's dawn when the sky is pink.

CPL, PARIS
I think it gets pink right away -- but it's funny, I can't remember.

FVT, ARNAUD
Actually, though, it doesn't get pink unless it's going to be a sunny day. If it's going to be cloudy or rainy the sky just gets gray.

(continued)
PVT. FEROL
What do you hope it is, sunny or rainy?

CPL. PARIS
Sunny.

PVT. ARNAUD
Sunny.

PVT. FEROL
Me too, although it's just the same to me. Tomorrow's no special day - why should I care what kind of a day it is? I'm not going to die tomorrow.

FEROL goes back to the table and takes another pastry.

CPL. PARIS
You know, I don't hate anybody. Right this minute, for the first time in my life, I don't hate anybody -- not even Roget. I don't blame him for choosing me. He was afraid of me. If I could press a button right this second and destroy him, I wouldn't do it.

PVT. FEROL
If I could press a button and get that Captain Sancy, I'd press it. I'd press it for General Rousseau too if I got two chances.

PVT. ARNAUD
If I could press a button, I'd like to see my wife and children again.

CPL. PARIS
(intently)
I think it does get pink right away - the sky, I mean.

PVT. FEROL
If I could press a button, I'd press it so I could be four thousand miles away from here.

(CONTINUED)
PVT. ARNAUD
That cockroach was lucky - he
didn't see it coming. One minute
he was alive and full of whatever
dreams and thoughts that cock-
roaches have, and the next minute
he was dead. That's not so bad.
That's the way I'd like to go.

CPL. PARIS
We all know we have to die someday
- it shouldn't matter so much knowing
when.

PVT. ARNAUD
It shouldn't, maybe, but it does.
It matters a lot.

CPL. PARIS
You know, it's the only thing no one
else can do for you.

What is?

PVT. FEROL
Dying - only you can die for your-
self. No one else can do it for
you.

CPL. PARIS
Look, I know I'm not going to live
forever, I wouldn't want to if I
could. But I'm not going to die
tomorrow.

PVT. ARNAUD
You know, they say if you could live
forever you wouldn't want to. If I
could press a button and live forever,
I'd press it.

CPL. PARIS
I'd press it in a second.

PVT. FEROL
Who wouldn't? They just tell you
you wouldn't want to live forever so
you won't feel cheated that you can't.
I'd like to see the man who wouldn't
want to live forever if he could.

(CONTINUED)
CPL. PARIS
Would you want to live forever if your wife couldn't?

PVT. ARNAUD
I never thought about that.

CPL. PARIS
Would you press a button to live forever if it meant your wife had to die the second you pressed it?

PVT. ARNAUD
That's not fair to ask - anyway, it's impossible. What's the sense of talking about what's impossible?

PVT. FEROL
I'd press a button to live forever even if the whole world had to die that second.

CPL. PARIS
But then what would you do? There'd be no one to do anything with.

PVT. FEROL
I'd be alive - that's what I'd do. Nothing's more important than being alive.

CPL. PARIS
Maybe it's lucky we don't have choices like that.

The sound of heavy footsteps approach down the corridor. The men look at each other in absolute terror.

PVT. ARNAUD
(not at all certain)
It's not dawn yet. It's only about midnight.

FEROL falls to his knees and begins praying softly. The heavy door swings open and a PRIEST enters. He is a thin, sorrowful looking man with bushy black hair. The door bangs closed behind him.

PRIEST
Good morning, my sons.

(Continued)
FVT. ARNAUD
Father, it's not time yet, is it?

PRIEST
No, it's only about midnight.

FEROL remains on his knees and begins sobbing quietly.

CPL. PARIS
Is there any news?

PRIEST
My sons, you are soldiers, after all - and I don't think I have to beat around the bush. I'm afraid I bring you very bad news - you must prepare yourselves for the worst. Colonel Dax told me to tell you so. He has been in telephone contact with Army headquarters but he has been unable to speak to General Broulard - or for that matter, to anyone in authority. It's the same way at Division - no one wants to be found.

FVT. ARNAUD
How much time do we have?

PRIEST
You have plenty of time yet - certainly more than enough to prepare yourselves.

CPL. PARIS
When is it scheduled for?

PRIEST
Shortly after daylight - probably about seven o'clock.

CPL. PARIS
Are you sure of the time?

PRIEST
Quite sure - the whole regiment has been ordered to parade. They wouldn't be parading in the dark.

FVT. ARNAUD
Will it hurt much, father?

(CONTINUED)
PRIEST
I don't think you'll feel a thing.
These hours are the worst. But
you must use them to prepare your-

selves.

He walks over to PEROL and begins softly intoning some
appropriate words. PEROL falls forward kissing the black
material and sobbing like a child.

Dissolve:

INT. LAVISH DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A formal dinner is in progress at a glittering banquet
table. It is adorned by lovely - and not so lovely, ladies
in gossamer gowns, and splendid officers clad in their
formal dress-uniforms. The table is graced with elegant
table-ware and is overflowing with food and wine. An
ORDERLY enters and walks to GENERAL BROUARD'S place.
The General has a mouth full of food, and he hastily daubs
his chin as the orderly whispers something in his ear.
GENERAL BROUARD swallows, rises and excuses himself.
He follows the ORDERLY out of the dining room, up a wind-
ing staircase to a library off the main hall. He enters
alone.

INT. THE LIBRARY - NIGHT

COLONEL DAX rises from a leather chair, saluting and ex-
tending his hand. GENERAL BROUARD returns the salute,
idly, and shakes hands warmly.

GEN. BROUARD
(mischievously)
Well Colonel, we meet again -
good evening.

COL. DAX
(stiffly)
Good evening, sir. I must apolo-
gize for disturbing your dinner
like this.

GEN. BROUARD
Think nothing of it, Colonel. I was
glad to get away from it. Would you
like a cigar?

(continued)
CCL. DAX

(pleasantly)

No, thank you. Smoking's just about the last vice I haven't acquired as yet.

GEN. BROUARD

A drink, then -- what can I get for you?

CCL. DAX

Some brandy, perhaps?

GEN. BROUARD

Martel's four-star?

CCL. DAX

Wonderful, I'd love some.

GEN. BROUARD

(pouring two brandies)

Colonel, I must confess I greatly admired your wit and charm earlier this afternoon, although you were a little rough with Rousseau. But now I have to pay you another compliment – I admire your tenacity. I've been dodging your calls all day.

CCL. DAX

(warming up)

You're extremely kind in your opinion of me, and certainly without equal in your gracious acceptance of this intrusion.

GEN. BROUARD

Of the latter, I can only say, despite the strange conflict of circumstances we find ourselves embroiled in right now, I have to admit that I enjoy your company – and I think I like you. Probably because, underneath it all, I suspect we're both quite alike.

CCL. DAX

(pleasantly)

You are very kind, sir. However, there is one rather large difference between us. You are a professional

(continued)
COL. DAX (cont'd)
soldier and I am an amateur soldier.
When this war is over, I shall be a
lawyer but you shall be a soldier.
And I suppose in a large measure our
differences today are a reflection of
that fact.

BROULARD settles himself comfortably in an arm-chair.

GEN. BROULARD
(good-naturedly)
Well, if you insist on being so fair-
minded and presenting both sides of
the case, I shall have to say I agree
with you. But seriously, there is
much in what you've said.

COL. DAX
Since this conversation is in private
and most certainly off the record,
may I say, sir, that I quite clearly
see the Army's grievance. The issue
is cloudy and because of that I was
quite able to make it even cloudier.
But I must in all honesty agree there
is a legitimate grievance on the Army's
part. It is an indisputable fact that
some men of the lead battalion never
left the trenches. I went forward my-
self under fire and found them huddled
together like frightened children.
Granted the fire was withering and many
of them would have been killed, never-
theless, they were in the trenches
when they should have been moving for-
ward. I doubt if their presence in the
assault would have vitally effected
the result, but in all truth, who knows?
-- perhaps it would have.

GEN. BROULARD
(nodding)
No one can ever know. On the other
hand, I must admit it is perfectly
obvious from the testimony and the
casualties that, on the whole, the
effort of the troops was very good.
But we've got the problem of keeping
the effectiveness of the troops very
good. What about the men who did go
(continued)
GEN. BROUARD (cont'd)
over the top -- who got as far as
the enemy wire -- who saw their
friends fall all around them?
What would they think if we let the
shirkers get away with it?

COL. DAX
I believe you're sincere in what
you say. I also agree that there
is a great deal of merit in your
position. But may I respectfully
ask, in the confidence of this
library, isn't there yet another
reason at play in your decision to
allow those men to die as examples?

GEN. BROUARD
I can't lie to you, Dax, you know
very well there is. But damning
as it may sound, it is a secondary
consideration. It is, in fact, you
might say, making the most of a tragic
situation. Of course the General
Staff would like to shift the burden
of failure off its own shoulders.
Why not? We're subject to all kinds
of unfair pressure from ambitious
civilians and politicians. We think
we're doing a good job -- helping
France. Why should we bear any more
criticism than we have to?

COL. DAX
In other words, you feel that as long
as the men are to some extent guilty
of cowardice, and as long as it is
truly necessary to set an example for
the good of the others, you feel that
is a kind of lucky convenience for the
General Staff that it can also dump
the responsibility of failure onto
the men.

GEN. BROUARD
That's close to it. It's no worse
than when the police find some hood-
lum shot dead in the street, they
claim him to be the cause of one or
two of their long outstanding unsolved
(continued)
GEN. BROUILARD (cont'd)
crimes. We can't undo the attack.
We undertook it with sincere faith
in its possibilities. It wasn't in
the cards, that's all.

COL. DAX
General, I am really quite sym-
pathetic to your point of view --
although I suppose it would be
truer to say I understand your
point of view. It finally comes
down to a clear moral issue that
applies both to the execution of
the men as an example, and to the
shifting of blame onto innocent
shoulders. You feel that dis-
honest as it may be to blame the
men for the staff's failure, it none-
theless serves a higher purpose. It
helps preserve the staff which is
doing good for France. It protects
the staff from its critics who are
perhaps more interested in personal
ambition than in the good of the
country. I suspect you may also feel
it is rather inhuman to select men
at random from the battalion and have
them executed as an example, but
this, too, will perhaps save other
lives in the future by welding the men
of the Army into a more efficient
fighting force.

GEN. BROUILARD
Very well put, Dax, though somehow
I take it you don't approve.

COL. DAX
There are people who might argue that
good cannot come from evil. That the
ends cannot be used to justify the
means. That if it were possible to do
away with all the injustice and cruelty
in the world at the expense of the
murder of a single innocent child, that
they would think it wrong to kill the
child.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. BROUARD
Then you don't approve of the means. But it's easy for you when you don't have the responsibility of the Army to carry.

COL. DAX
I can hardly say I don't approve of the means when I am about to employ a means which it would be hard to say is more elevated.

GEN. BROUARD
(pleasantly)
I don't follow you, Dax.

COL. DAX
Despite the fact that I understand your reasons, I am absolutely convinced, all explanations considered, that the execution of those men tomorrow morning would be a monstrous and inhuman thing. My position is really very clear, at least to me. Although for a while I wasn't sure myself where I stood because I was blinded by your reasons. Certainly there is something to be gained by killing those men. From a practical standpoint, perhaps much more than by saving them. In the end it comes down to a very simple realization. Executing those men is a brutal and inhuman thing. I don't have to carry my moral searchings any further than that. And I intend to stop it -- or I should say, to have you stop it.

GEN. BROUARD
(politely certain DAX is talking through his hat)
How do you intend to do that?

COL. DAX
I should rather not put a label on it.

GEN. BROUARD
Well, please go on then, I'm all ears.

(continued)
COL. DAX
It seems, General, that a certain
Captain came to see me this after-
noon, a Captain Pelletier, commanding
Battery B of Division artillery.

GEN. BROUARD
The name seems familiar.

COL. DAX
I believe you met him briefly after
the inquiry this afternoon -- some-
thing about some shells falling short?

GEN. BROUARD
Oh, yes, I recall now.

COL. DAX
Would you be surprised to learn that
General Rousseau ordered Captain
Pelletier to fire on the French
trenches? Yes, into the French
trenches. During the attack, when
the advance was faltering in the
German wire, General Rousseau ordered
Captain Pelletier to open fire on the
men who hadn't left the trenches --
the so-called mutineers. Captain
Pelletier refused to do this without
a written order. General Rousseau took
the phone himself and ordered Captain
Pelletier, in front of the telephone
clerk and Captain Nichols, the
artillery spotter, to fire into our
own trenches. Again Captain Pelletier
refused without a written order. Again
he was ordered and again he refused,
all in front of witnesses.

GEN. BROUARD
Colonel, you are aware, I should hope,
that General Rousseau has placed this
Captain Pelletier on report for some
poorly registered shots that fell short
on our own men while they were advancing.
Do you really believe this fantastic
story which has obviously been concocted
by Captain Pelletier and his friends to
cover up their own mistakes?
COL. DAX

Yes, General, I do. Furthermore, I have sworn depositions from all the principals concerned with this affair. And most important, I really don't care at this moment whether their story is true or not. It serves my purpose in either variation. In fact I should act the same even if I knew for an absolute certainty that their stories were entirely false.

GEN. BROUARD

(a bit shaken)
You know, Dax, I'm beginning to find your attitude just a little annoying. I'm really not used to being spoken to in this manner.

COL. DAX

(a little hot under the collar)
I'm sorry, General, I meant no offense or breach of good taste. But you see, General, we're talking about the lives of three men.

GEN. BROUARD

Frankly, despite the fact that I have no legal background, I can see quite clearly that the matter of the artillery Captain is quite irrelevant to the charges against the condemned men.

COL. DAX

And I'm not a newspaper man or a politician but I can recognize in this situation of a French General ordering his own artillery to fire on his own French troops, the type of story that fires the imagination of the people. That brings forth every crusader for justice and the rights of man. That starts the politicians buzzing in the back rooms -- all searching for one thing -- who is responsible for this outrage against justice and humanity? Once this self-righteously hysterical search for the (continued)
COL. DAX (cont'd)
responsible party begins only God
knows where the accusing finger will
come to rest. As often as not the
issue will lose its true purpose
and become a tool in the hand of un-
scrupulous people who will use it
for their own petty schemes.

GEN. BROUARD
And why should anyone believe those
men?

COL. DAX
For one reason, because they might
want to. It might very nicely serve
their purposes to believe the story.
For another, because the story would
be presented and documented by the
Colonel in command of the regiment,
who was not under arrest, who has not
committed any act of cowardice, who
is a respected member of society, and
last but not in any way least, who is
a friend of many years standing with
the French press through his activities
as a lawyer in Paris.

BROUARD gets up, crosses to his desk and grinds out his
cigar in an ash-tray. The full extent of his anger is only
now beginning to show itself.

GEN. BROUARD
(icyly)
Dax, you have more gall than anyone
I've ever seen. You interrupt my
dinner party. You barge in here when
I've made it plain I don't want to see
you. You show contempt for my rank in
the manner and tone you choose to dis-
cuss things. You press me on a sub-
ject I absolutely do not want to hear
another thing about. I tolerate all
this in as courteous a way as I know
how -- and now you try to blackmail
me. Well that's too much. Much too
much. There is no further purpose
this discussion can possibly serve.
I should like you to leave.

(continued)
COL. DAX
(angrily)
I'm not leaving until I finish what I've --

GEN. BROUARD
(cutting in angrily)
You're leaving right now, Colonel. Remember Colonel this still is the Army. You're not back in the Paris salons yet.

COL. DAX
(rigidly calming himself)
I will leave in a moment, General. Please allow me to finish what I have to say.

GEN. BROUARD
There is nothing else that I should care to hear.

COL. DAX
(quietly)
Please, General, just for conscience sake please allow me to finish.

GEN. BROUARD
Very well, Dax -- but I've really had quite enough. You must end this nonsense.

DAX collects his thoughts and calms himself.

COL. DAX
This thing has gone much too far to wrap it up nicely without anyone getting hurt. Too much has happened. Someone's got to get hurt. To my mind it comes down to a simple little question -- and that is, who? Who is going to get hurt? There's someone in this little mess who has fall-guy written all over him -- Rousseau. His assault on the Ant-Hill failed. His order to fire on his own troops was refused. His attempt to murder three innocent men to cover for himself was uncovered and prevented. And by who? By what guardian of

(continued)
COL. DAX (cont'd)

justice and humanity? -- why the
general staff, of course, General
Broulard, in specific. He stepped
in at the last moment to set things
right. He called General Rousseau
to task for his vain, cruel and in-
human devices. Yes, General, there
is only one reasonably clean way out
of this -- the pretty pink ribbon
must go around Rousseau's neck.

GEN. BROUARD

Are you quite through?

COL. DAX

Yes, General, I am.

GEN. BROUARD

You have a way of making a mockery
of everything you say. Perhaps,
you are actually the worst one
among us. But I have no intention
of carrying this any further. You
know in your own heart what you
are -- that is enough. Now please
leave or I shall have to ring for my
orderly to escort you out of here
under arrest.

COL. DAX

(convinced he is
beaten)

Thank you for your time, General.
Good-night.

(he exits)

INT. GUARDHOUSE - CONDEMNED MEN AND PRIEST - NIGHT

FEROL has finished his confession and the PRIEST has
given him absolution. PARIS has been watching the pro-
cedings like a snake curled up in the corner. The
PRIEST moves towards PARIS softly droning a "Hail Mary".

CPL. PARIS

Keep away from me! Look, father,
you're a good fellow and all that --
a pal, even, but don't start un-
loading that stuff around me. If
the others want it, go off in the
corner and give it to them.

(CONTINUED)
PARIS'S eyes shine with an unnatural brilliance. His words come a little too fast.

PRIEST
I understand your anguish, my son, but you must not harden your heart.

CPL. PARIS
Why not? -- afraid it might stop the bullets.

PRIEST
It is God's will - you must prepare yourself. God will forgive you your sins when you have repented them.

CPL. PARIS
Why is it God's will? Why must I die? I've done nothing to deserve this.

PARIS seems on the verge of hysteria.

PRIEST
God is love, and so you were created. And what God has given He may also take away. But, inevitably, being love, He taketh with love - know that and rejoice.

CPL. PARIS
I'll tell you something, Father. Back in my home town there was a certain little bistro, with an amusing sign over the bar. It said, 'Don't be afraid to ask for credit because our way of refusing is very polite.'

PRIEST
Paris, you are so full of hate and fear -- why, you haven't even written a letter to anyone. Isn't there someone you love?

CPL. PARIS
I have no one I want to write to -- oh yes, there is someone -- a prostitute in Bordeaux. But I've forgotten her name. I suppose that shocks you.

(CONTINUED)
He giggles nervously.

PRIEST
Did not Jesus himself make his face to shine upon Mary Magdalene? Did he not say that no man should stone her unless that man himself was free of sin... as no man was or ever will be.

CPL. PARIS
(sneeringly)
You're telling me. Maybe you can tell me what He said about a guy getting killed for no reason except some lunatics decided someone needed some killing.

PRIEST
He said, 'Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.'

CPL. PARIS
Look, Father, I was born in your faith, reared in it, practiced it. But now I see it for what it is. A fraud and a deceit, Father. A worthless counterfeit. A vacuum enclosed in empty promises. That's your faith - and you can have it. And what about war, pestilence, injustice and human misery?

PRIEST
They do not flourish to the degree they once did, my son. As an educated man, you must know that. You know that civilization has steadily improved since the dawn of Christianity.

CPL. PARIS
It has steadily improved period - right back to the time of the first man, long before Christianity was ever heard of. Otherwise, we'd still be living in caves and killing each other with clubs. We wouldn't be enjoying the blessings of shrapnel and poison gas - oh, yes - and court-martials.

(continued)
PRIEST
God does not expect perfection from us - only that we strive for it, and repent our imperfections. What is really troubling you, my son? Why do you reject Divine Grace? Surely not because there are mysteries you have not penetrated, because the seeming paradoxes and contradictions of Wisdom Eternal cannot be reconciled with the tiny knowledge of the mortal mind. Fire can kill, can it not? And water -- any and all of the elements? Yet we must have them to survive. They are at once a blessing and a curse -- to cite a paradoxical truth -- depending on how they are used. You accept these things. You recognize that life itself is a contradiction -- existence a miracle. Knowing these things, seeing the proof of Heavenly Intelligence all around you, how can you doubt the promise of salvation though it is made known to you in parables? How can --

CPL, PARIS
(screaming wildly)
Stop it. Stop it. Stop it, I tell you. I can't stand any more of this. Now leave me alone. Leave me alone.

PRIEST
Do I offend you in any way?

CPL, PARIS
Look, you're driving me crazy - don't you understand? Everything about you offends me. That skirt you've got on. That necklace you're wearing. All your mumbo-jumbo. Now leave me alone - leave me alone!

PRIEST
In spite of your stupid blasphemy, I forgive you in the name of --

(continued)
CPL. PARIS
(going berserk)
Stop torturing me -- leave me
alone...

With those words he launches himself at the priest knocking
him down. FEROL dives at him and they both crash to the
floor. PARIS frees himself and makes for the PRIEST again,
kicking him in the stomach. ARNAUD tackles him and gets a
smashing fist in the face for his trouble. During the
fight, there are shouts from the corridor and the sound of
running footsteps. The iron door swings open and a half-
dozen guards charge in using their rifle butts. PARIS
makes a wild dash at them and they try to block him. He
screams and claws and bites and in general appears to have
gone completely mad. One of the guards finally clubs him
senseless with his rifle butt. His head hits the concrete
floor with a terrible popping sound, like a hard-boiled
egg being cracked. The PRIEST prays all through the
struggle. FEROL and ARNAUD watch with idle interest.

PRIEST
(softly to himself)
Paris, I grant you absolution.
I am sure it is God's will. I am
sure He understands and forgives,
even as he understood and forgave
when his own son cried out from the
cross. 'My God, why has thou for-
saken me?'

ARNAUD falls to his knees and begins praying.

DISOLVE:

INT. GUARDHOUSE - NIGHT

PARIS is stretched out on a straw bed, muttering in-
coherently. His eyes are open but stare blankly ahead.
His face is covered with perspiration. A DOCTOR with-
draws a hypodermic from his arm and rises wearily.
ARNAUD paces the floor, deeply withdrawn into his own
inner fantasies - he seems to have the absorption of a
manic in an institution. FEROL and the PRIEST watch,
nearby. The DOCTOR addresses a guard. The DOCTOR is as
cold as a fish.

DOCTOR
Well, that should keep him quiet
long enough. It's a nasty skull
fracture, though - he may not live
out the night.

(continued)
GUARD
What are we to do with him, sir.

DOCTOR
I don't know - perhaps you should have finished the job while you were at it.

PRIEST
Surely, they won't execute this man in this state.

DOCTOR
Won't they? I called Colonel Dax when I got the news. He was absolutely furious that this had happened. Of course, I explained to him the poor chap went berserk and his fellows were up against it. Anyway, he called Division to try and get this fellow's execution postponed. The conversation was short and not too sweet, from what I gather. The General said 'The medical officer will know what to do to get this fellow on his feet for tomorrow morning' - and hung up. Well, I know only one way this fellow will ever be able to stand up and face a firing squad - you have to tie him to a stretcher so he won't slip when you tilt it vertically. Maybe you can nail a couple of cross pieces at each end and tie him to those. I leave it to you.

He moves towards the door.

DOCTOR
By the way, if he's still alive in the morning, pinch his cheeks a couple of times before you take him out on the field. It may make him open his eyes. Well, good-night, gentlemen, I'm going to try and get some sleep.

(he exits)

DISSOLVE:
VARIous ANGLES - PARADE GROUND - REGIMENTAL BAND

Sixteen men in dress uniforms playing a spirited march. The early morning sunlight glitters from their polished instruments. The musicians appear to be deeply absorbed in the small square books of music mounted directly in front of their puffing faces. A short, fat SERGEANT vigorously conducts them.

VARIous ANGLES - PARADE GROUND - THE REGIMENT

Formed into a large, three sided, hollow square, spaced by Regimental flags that flutter splendidly in a light breeze -- rifles at parade-rest, eyes front, faces blank and expressionless. Mud from the trenches still cakes their uniforms. Here and there we see a familiar face -- LIEUTENANT ROGET, CAPTAIN SANCY, LIEUTENANT JONNART (more) and many of the soldiers we have come to know.

The Regiment's officers are distributed in small groups in front of the lines of men.

Three black posts, spaced about ten feet apart and backed by a wooded slope, form the fourth side of the square. A small detail of men stand near the execution posts. It is a gloriously beautiful day. The sky is clear and cloud-swept. The air is full of bird-song. A slight early morning haze softens the brilliant colors.

GENERAL ROUSSEAU

And a small party consisting of MAJOR SAINT-AUBAN, MAJOR COUDERC and a dozen junior officers of his staff, are grouped apart from the Regiment and closer to the execution posts. They stand at ease and converse in low tones. ROUSSEAU carries himself erect and proud. The chest of his dress tunic is covered with decorations. He gives the definite impression he has well earned them. He is the perfect picture of a military man.

COLONEL DAX

Stands not far from GENERAL ROUSSEAU'S group. He is flanked by his ADC, CAPTAIN HERBILION and several junior officers. DAX's face testifies to the sleepless strain he has endured. However it is clear that having failed to prevent this dreadful occasion, he is grimly resolved to do his military duty.
VARIOUS ANGLES - THE FIRING SQUADS

They stand at ease in three groups of twelve men. SERGEANT BOULANGER paces slowly before them, as if measuring each man for the job.

Sgt. BOULANGER
This is a duty you have to perform.
It is like any other duty in the army, and it must be performed properly. The better you do it, the easier it will be for the condemned men. Ten-hawp! On the command you will load rifles. Squaa--ds, haw!

Thirty-six bolts clatter back and forth.

Sgt. BOULANGER
On the command you will unload rifles. Squaa--ds un-haw.

The bolts snap back ejecting a gleaming copper-cased cartridge. The clean-greased rifle breeches remain open. A new cartridge rests in the clip, ready to be snapped forward into firing position.

Sgt. BOULANGER
On the command you will load rifles. Squaa--ds, haw.

The bolts clatter forward.

Sgt. BOULANGER
Squaa--ds, shoul--der, haw! First squad, column right, haw!

SERGEANT BOULANGER bellows the necessary commands to move the three rifle squads into position about ten yards from the execution posts.

EXT. GUARDHOUSE

SERGEANT GONOUH arrives with his escort. There are twelve guards and four stretcher bearers. The guards have fixed bayonets.

INT. GUARDHOUSE - DAWN

ARNAUD and FEROL near the sounds of the escort approaching. They both seem to be wracked by a terrible chill that renders their movements almost beyond their control. Their

(CONTINUED)
eyes are wildly feverish and fairly shine with the uncontrollable terror that has seemingly possessed every cell and nerve in their bodies. Their heads hang forward as if the weight of carrying them is excessive. Breath seems to come in quick raspy gasps. PARIS lies unconscious on the straw. The PRIEST moves towards them.

PRIEST

Courage, my sons - the worst is over.

The two men cower like frightened animals, apparently oblivious to anything but the sound of approaching footsteps. The heavy iron door creaks open. SERGEANT GONOUD enters followed by the guards and stretcher bearers. Suddenly the room is crowded with activity. The stretcher-bearers begin lashing PARIS to a specially prepared stretcher. No one seems to be paying any attention to ARNAUD and FEROL who stare at GONOUD almost as if they expect him to shoot them right there on the spot.

SGT. GONOUD

Good-morning, men.

FVT. ARNAUD

(smiles inappropriately)

Good-morning, Sergeant. How are you today?

SGT. GONOUD

Not too bad, how are you boys?

FVT. ARNAUD

(giggles)

Oh, we're just fine. You missed a wonderful dinner last night.

SGT. GONOUD

(waiting for the men to finish with PARIS)

Yes, I heard about that. It sounded very good. What did you have?

FVT. ARNAUD

(staring off into space, then smiling as if struck by some inner joke)

Roast beef - very juicy, too. And pastries, and --

(Continued)
ARNAUD lapses off into a private reverie. SERGEANT GONOUĐ'S conversation is much the same as the professional bedtime manner of a doctor with a dying patient.

PVT. FEROL
(almost inaudibly low)
Have you got a drink for us?

SGT. GONOUĐ
Of course, I almost forgot.
Here take a good swig of this.

FEROL takes several full swallows. He shivers as the warmth spreads through his body. GONOUĐ takes the canteen and hands it to ARNAUD.

PARIS is now securely tied to the stretcher. GONOUĐ takes note of this and glances at his watch. He takes the canteen away from ARNAUD.

SGT. GONOUĐ
Well, let's get busy - what's the use of hanging around here?
(to stretcher-bearers)
All right, let's go - pick up that stretcher.

The guards fall in around the condemned men.

SGT. GONOUĐ
Come on, you two - courage. Soon it'll all be over and you'll be in a better place than I am. Here, take one.
(offers cigarette)

Each man takes one, their hands shaking so badly they can hardly light up. The stretcher is lifted, bearing PARIS. He is still unconscious but breathing heavily. The PRIEST falls in next to ARNAUD and FEROL and bows his head in silent prayer.

SGT. GONOUĐ
All right, let's move out.

They file out awkwardly.
EXT. VARIOUS ANGLES

The grim procession winds its way into the bright sunshine. The prisoners blink in the dazzling light. Each prisoner is surrounded by four guards. The guards do not speak, ignoring the occasional remark coming from one of the condemned as if the doomed men are afflicted with some deadly and infectious disease, with which any contact would be deplorable.

FVT. FEROL

(whimpering)

Father -- please.

The PRIEST moves alongside FEROL and intones some inaudible spiritual support.

VARIOUS ANGLES

The column stops at a grove of trees near the entrance to the parade ground. PARIS is lowered to the ground. SERGEANT GONOU is given another swig at the canteen. Then he walks to the stretcher. He kneels beside PARIS. SERGEANT GONOU is a good man and finds this day a great trial to his endurance and to his sense of duty. With great repugnance he reaches down and pinches PARIS'S cheek. Nothing happens. He pinches again, several times. PARIS stirs, uneasily. GONOU is determined to do his duty despite the apparently horrible course it must take. He pinches him a few more times, then slaps him smartly. PARIS stirs and his eyelids flutter open.

CPL. PARIS

(weakly)

This is really living. Did I get wounded?

SGT. GONOU

Yes, but it's not a bad wound.

CPL. PARIS

Where are we going?

SGT. GONOU

To the hospital. Are you okay?

CPL. PARIS

Never felt better in my life.

(lapses off, then

opens his eyes with

a start, mumbling

incoherently)

Never a boy has wept nor dashed a thousand krim --

(CONTINUED)
SGT. GONOUDE
What did you say?

CPL. PARIS
(muttering - some words unintelligible)
I won't leave the table any more - I promise, papa. Here, give it to me, I want to give it to her. I didn't mean that, under the -- Mama, I'm sorry -- I'm not hungry any more -- It's as plain as the nose on your face, he doesn't mean what he says. Open the soap duckets -- open the soap duckets. I love you papa -- I lo --v-- e y--
(dies)

SGT. GONOUDE
(slapping)
Paris -- Paris?

GUARD
He's dead, sir.

SGT. GONOUDE
(to himself)
God forgive me.

He stands up, shakily. He walks back to the others. FEROLE is on his knees praying. GONOUDE offers ARNAUD the canteen again.

FVT. ARNAUD
(shrilly)
Will they let me take my jacket off?

SGT. GONOUDE
(pleasantly)
We'll see.

FVT. ARNAUD
(giggling)
You know, it just occurred to me, a funny thing. I haven't had a single sexual thought since they drew the lots. That's really extra-ordinary, don't you think?

(continued)
Suddenly, ARNAUD is blinded by a rush of tears. He sinks to the grass, sobbing uncontrollably and clutching at GONOUDE'S legs. The two guards pull him to his feet.

SGT. GONOUDE
(desperately)
Arnaud, pull yourself together.
Act like a man. Listen, Arnaud -- are you listening to me?

PVT. ARNAUD
(sobbing)
Yes.

SGT. GONOUDE
There'll be newspaper men and dignitaries out there. You have a wife and a family. How do you want to be remembered?

PVT. ARNAUD
(sobbing)
I don't want to die. I don't want to die.

SGT. GONOUDE
None of us want to die, but we all will. Many of us here will be joining you before this war is over. Now how do you want to be remembered -- as a hysterical weakling, or as a soldier?

PVT. ARNAUD
I don't care. I don't want to die. Save me, Sergeant -- save me, please.

SGT. GONOUDE
I can't save you. No one can now. It won't be so bad. There are worse things that can happen to a man. Now look, this is the last decision you will have a chance to make on earth. It's entirely up to you. You can pull yourself together and act like a man -- or we can drag you out there. In the end it'll be the same. It's up to you.

(continued)
This last speech seems to have had an effect on ARNAUD. He pulls himself up, still shaking with uncontrollable convulsions from crying. In the background the band has provided an ironic contrast in moods, playing a spirited march.

SGT. GONOUD
Courage, man - you can do this properly. I know you can.

PVT. ARNAUD
(quietly)
Let me take my jacket off!

SGT. GONOUD
Help him off with his jacket.

The jacket is removed a bit roughly. The guards are overzealous and nervous. GONOUD issues the appropriate orders to form up and the column moves off again for the last time. PARIS'S hand has slipped off the stretcher and grotesquely bobs up and down. One of the guards gingerly places it back at his side.

VARIOUS ANGLES - PARADE GROUND

The condemned men and their escort pause at the edge of the grassy field. SERGEANT GONOUD gives the final orders and they parade out past the Regiment. During the pause, the band abruptly stops playing. As the column moves forward again, it is accompanied by a muffled, dirge-like drumming, - as if each slow beat marked another beat of time less for the condemned men to live.

We shall INTERCUT various shots of the men of the Regiment with the condemned as they pass in a kind of grim review. We cannot avoid noticing the ironic contrast between the impressive military formations, standing at attention, Regimental banners cracking in the breeze - and the pathetic shuffling of the prisoners. The vibrance of the sunny morning with the blackened execution poles. The sounds of bird-song and trees rustling, with the funereal drums.

FEROL still prays, the PRIEST alongside. ARNAUD carries himself properly, and only someone close-by might notice the animal panic in his eyes.

(CONTINUED)
A small group of civilians are standing off to one side. Several wear black coats and tall, top-hats. One of them bends over an ancient looking camera, mounted on a huge tripod. ARNAUD notices this with satisfaction and draws himself up to his full height. A few moments later, as the column passes GENERAL RUSSEAU'S group, ARNAUD turns, majestically to GENERAL RUSSEAU.

PVT. ARNAUD
(great disdain)
Assassin! -- watch a hero die.

His guards press in closely but they are not needed. He turns away, solemnly and continues.

By now, we have gotten appropriate reactions from almost all the principals in the Regiment: LIEUTENANT ROGET, COLONEL DAX, CAPTAIN SANCY, PRIVATE MEYER, et al.

OTHER ANGLES -- THE EXECUTION POSTS

The column comes to a halt. The black posts are spaced about ten feet apart. Three squads of twelve riflemen each are placed opposite each pole. They stand at parade-rest in double rows of six. They are about twenty-five feet from the pole.

The prisoners are bound to the pole in such a way that their lifeless bodies will still be supported.

PARIS'S stretcher is propped up against the pole. He hangs forward grotesquely held by ropes. As condemned prisoners often are, ARNAUD and FEROL are very anxious to do everything correctly. They willingly place their arms just so. They both possess the unexplainable cooperativeness of the condemned.

The firing squads stand motionless. The PRIEST continues his spiritual efforts. SERGEANTS GONOUDE and BOULANGER are everywhere checking and double checking.

SGT. GONOUDE
(to Arnaud)
Do you want a blindfold?

PVT. ARNAUD
No, please, no blindfold.

(continued)
(CONTINUED - 1)

SGT. GONOUDE
(to FEROL)
Do you want a blindfold?

PVT. FEROL
Yes.

VARIOUS ANGLES - INTERCUT

During the above action, at the appropriate moments, we will cut away to get reactions from certain principals.

FROM THE PRISONERS' VIEWPOINT

The following action is all played from the prisoners' viewpoint. Everything is seen in long shot and either unheard or heard indistinctly.

The drums roll. MAJOR COUDERC solemnly walks to the center of the parade ground. The regiment seems a solid wall. He raises a sheet of paper.

MAJOR COUDERC
(slowly)
In the name of the French people, on this day, the fourteenth day of the month of September in the year of our Lord, one thousand, nine hundred and fifteen, the verdict of the Summary Court Martial of the Chateau de L'Aigle, will be fulfilled accordingly. The soldiers Maurice Ferol, Pierre Arnaud and Henri Paris, of the one hundred and eighty-first regiment of the fourth division, having been proven guilty of cowardice in the face of the enemy during the attack on the enemy line on September twelve of the year of our Lord, one thousand, nine hundred and fifteen, are to be executed by rifle fire in accordance with the judgment of the Summary Court Martial.

During the last third of MAJOR COUDERC'S speech, the following action begins. It is seen in long-shot and nothing can be heard of the dialogue. The length of MAJOR COUDERC'S speech will be altered accordingly to fit the following action.

(CONTINUED)
GENERAL BROULARD'S black staff car pulls slowly to a halt at the edge of the parade ground.

The soldier-chauffeur opens the rear door. The fat Colonel, DE GUERVILLE who we have seen before as a member of GENERAL BROULARD'S staff, exits stiffly, carrying a brief-case.

A tall junior officer detaches himself from GENERAL ROUSSEAU'S group and hurries to the car. The two officers exchange salutes and converse briefly.

The junior officer salutes again and leads the COLONEL to GENERAL ROUSSEAU.

They exchange salutes and converse briefly. The COLONEL produces an envelope from a brief-case. ROUSSEAU opens it and reads from a single piece of paper. He lowers the paper slowly. He says a few words to the COLONEL. The COLONEL shakes his head. ROUSSEAU glances at the paper again.

At this moment, MAJOR COUDRE finishes reading the death sentence, and returns to ROUSSEAU'S group. ROUSSEAU speaks to several junior officers. One of them salutes and turns to a non-com.

The non-com salutes and jogs across the field to the firing squad. He salutes and addresses SERGEANT BOULANGER. SERGEANT GONOUXD joins them. The non-com salutes and walks away. SERGEANT BOULANGER walks to the front of the firing squad.

SGT. BOULANGER
Squa-ds, right shoulder, haw.

He issues the appropriate commands to march the firing squads away. The band strikes up a spirited march. Other orders are shouted indistinctly in the background. The non-coms begin to march the regiment off the parade grounds.

ANOTHER ANGLE - THE CONDEMNED MEN

SERGEANT GONOUXD his face split by a grin, runs up to the prisoners.

SGT. GONOUXD
You boys really have a friend some place. General Broulard's just commuted your sentences to thirty days in the guardhouse. Here, get these men untied. I drink to your health.

(swigs deeply at canteen)
The guard detail struggles with the ropes. They smile sheepishly. ARNAUD suddenly goes berserk. He grimaces and begins snorting and drooling. Partially free, he jerks away from the execution stake. A rope still holds his ankles. He spills over on his face. He claws at the ground. The guards gently try to calm him. At the same time, FEROL smiles smugly as he is untied.

PVT. FEROL
I knew it! I knew it, by God.
I knew it! I knew I wouldn't die. I knew it!

ANOTHER ANGLE — GENERAL ROUSSEAU

He has drifted off by himself. His staff seems to have wandered off. He stands alone, a beaten figure. In the background the regiment is being briskly marched off the parade ground to the accompaniment of unintelligible shouted commands and the brassy strains of a French march. DAX approaches him.

COL. DAX
Good-morning, General.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(icyly)
Good-morning, Colonel.

They both stand at a loss for words. ROUSSEAU looks up sharply.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Perhaps you will be interested to know, Colonel, that in addition to this magnificent, last minute bit of grand opera on the part of General Broulard, I have been relieved of my command, pending further inquiry.

COL. DAX
(sincerely)
I'm sorry to hear that, sir. I hope you'll believe me if I say that, in spite of what I thought of your handling of this...affair, I have always had the greatest professional respect for you. I meant you no personal harm.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU
(bitterly)
I believe you, Colonel. There is nothing like real regret for brightening a bad conscience.

COL. DAX
(peeved)
I can assure you, sir, there is nothing whatsoever on my conscience.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Well, then you must be very proud of yourself, Colonel.

COL. DAX
I thank God this terrible thing did not happen. I'll say it again, I'm not proud of doing injury to you, sir. I have always regarded you as a fighting commander, a rarity in any army. It will be a great loss to the army if your abilities are put aside, due to this.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Is there any doubt in your mind, Colonel, that I shall receive the full share of credit for all this?

COL. DAX
If it's any consolation to you, sir, you must be aware that it is not altogether unlikely that I may expect some little momento of the Staff's displeasure, as soon as everything quiets down.

ROUSSEAU looks around at the regiment marching away. It is apparent that he was not without a great deal of devotion for his men, whatever his actions may have been.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Would you care to walk a little way with me, Colonel.

COL. DAX
Thank you, sir, I'd be very happy to.

(CONTINUED)
GEN. ROUSSEAU

This may sound like sour grapes, but, in a way, I'm not sorry for myself. Perhaps, I'm even glad it's over and done with. Someone once said, 'The two essential ingredients of progress are fire and funerals.' Perhaps a man can grow weary of being the instrument of that kind of progress.

They walk along in a friendly silence.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
(expensively)

Which one of us was on the side of the angels, I wonder.

COL. DAX

I'm not sure I follow you, sir.

GEN. ROUSSEAU

Well, take, for instance, the case of the early Christians. What was it, perhaps more than anything else, that strengthened and solidified them? -- persecution, wouldn't you say? The cruelest kind of injustice. Tyranny gave birth to the Magna Carta. Callousness and indifference to human welfare brought about the French Republic. And so on through History. It may be that progress comes really through a kind of challenge. And who is to say that if those men had been shot today, that it wouldn't have been a step towards the end of a certain kind of despotism in the army?

COL. DAX

General, you have a very strange theory there. I am not at all sure that I agree with you.

GEN. ROUSSEAU

I'm not at all sure I agree with myself. You know, perhaps when they say man is a rational animal, what they really mean is that he has a limitless ability to rationalize,
GEN. ROUSSEAU (cont'd)
to make excuses for himself, to
feel self-righteous no matter what
he does. I don't know why I'm
rambling on like this. Probably be-
cause there's nothing left for me to
do but talk. You know, Colonel, I am
undoubtedly a very wicked man - but
I don't feel wicked inside. Though,
I suppose that's a prerequisite
for being labeled truly wicked.

COL. DAX
Labels are fine for tin cans, but
not for people. I don't know,
perhaps every man is as righteous
as the circumstances of his life
allow him to be.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
That doesn't explain very much,
Colonel.

COL. DAX
Perhaps there are no explanations.
Perhaps we do what we have to.
But, you know, I was just thinking
of a conversation I once had with a
client of mine who was an Atheist.
I asked him how he could possibly
believe that Christianity was a
failure - that it hadn't worked?
Very simple, he said. It was never
tried.

They walk in a meditative silence. ROUSSEAU finally looks
up brightly.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Colonel, may I ask you to join me
at the Chateau for some coffee?

COL. DAX
I'd be very happy to, sir. I might
even suggest something a little
stronger, if it isn't too early for
you.

(continued)
ROUSSEAU laughs and puts his arm around DAX'S shoulder.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
It isn't too early for me, Colonel.
In fact, I'd say it was rather late.

They walk away from the camera. The last fading strains of the band are heard.

FADE OUT:

THE END