

PATHS OF GLORY

Screenplay by

Stanley Kubrick and Jim Thompson

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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 BROULARD.....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 Broulard'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

1

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

2

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.

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(CONTINUED)

2

COL. DE GUERVILLE

Gentlemen.

They all stand uneasily at a loss for small talk.

MAJ. COUDERC

(nervously)

I hope your trip was pleasant,
General.

GEN. BROULARD

(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 in-
side, sir, General Rousseau is
awaiting you in his office.

DISSOLVE:

INT. PLUSH SALON - DAY

3

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 BROULARD wanders about the room admiringly. GENERAL ROUSSEAU packs 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. BROULARD

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.

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3

GEN. BROULARD

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 BROULARD 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. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

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.

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(CONTINUED - 2)

3

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.

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3

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. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD returns the smile and turns his attention to an ivory letter-opener.

GEN. BROULARD

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)

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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.

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

GEN. BROULARD
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. BROULARD
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.

BROULARD faces around. His eyes fairly sparkle.

GEN. BROULARD
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 question 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 gossiping minds.

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3

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

GEN. ROUSSEAU

Would you like some cognac?

GEN. BROULARD

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 BROULARD 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. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

(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)

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3

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.

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3

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

4

Establishing the 181st 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

5

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.

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COL. DAX

Do you know your real trouble, Captain Renouart? You're egotistical. 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.

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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 corncob, 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.

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5

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

6

The only similarity between the two men is their rank of private. MEYER is a tall bushy-haired man with bizaare, 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 counter-ploys is greeted by an appreciative chorus of snickers and chortles of 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 PARIS, PRIVATE LEJUENE and, not far from them, LIEUTENANT ROGET. 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?

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6

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 salesman'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 Lunkhead 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.

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6

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

7

We hear the laughter of the previous scene in the distance. 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.

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7

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

8

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

8-A

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

8-B

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

8-C

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 instructions 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

8-D

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

8-E

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

8-F

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

8-G

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.

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8-9

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 begin-
ning 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 ex-
plosion about fifty yards off to the side of the road.
DAX knows they are in trouble.

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8-G

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 regrets firing. Says he wasn't informed of the relief.

COL. DAX

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

VARIOUS ANGLES

8-H

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

COL. DAX

(calmly)

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

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8-H

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

9

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

10

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-black 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.

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

10

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)

10.

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

11

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

CPL. PARIS

He's fortifying himself.

PVT. LEJUENE

It smelled like heaven.

CPL. PARIS

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

PVT. 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.

PVT. 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.

ANOTHER ANGLE

12

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.

VARIOUS ANGLES

13

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

13-A

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

13-B

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

13-C

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

13-C

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

13-D

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 be-
cause 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

13-E

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

13-F

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

13-G

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

13-H

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

13-I

Seen against the sky, a large mound of ruins.

ANOTHER ANGLE - THE THREE MEN

13-J

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

PVT. 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

13-K

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

13-L

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

13-M

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

13-H

PARIS raises up and cocks his revolver.

ROGET rises to one knee and flings a grenade.

PARIS fires at ROGET but misses.

A blinding explosion. A shriek. LEJUENE calls "Paris", weakly.

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

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

A machine gun stutters in the distance.

ROGET disappears on the run behind the mound of ruins.

ANOTHER ANGLE - PARIS

13-0

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

13-P

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

CPL. PARIS O.S.
Calais. Calais. Corporal Paris
returning from patrol. Calais.

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

14

ROGET sits at a table, writing with a penoill. 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 sneaking, 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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

14

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)

(CONTINUED - 2)

14

CPL. PARIS

(cold hatred)

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)

(CONTINUED - 3)

14

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 Captain's 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 night's work. You should
be proud of yourself.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. THE TRENCHES - DAY

15

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. Every-
thing all right?

ETTIENE
(embarrassed)
Yes, sir.

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

ETTIENE
Ettiene, sir, Pfc, Company A.

GEN. ROUSSEAU
Are you married, Private Ettiene?

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

15-A

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

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

15-A

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)

(CONTINUED - 2)

15-A

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)

(CONTINUED - 3)

15-A

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-crying, on a note of controlled hysteria.

SOLDIER

W-would I like to? Would I like to - to se...

(chokes up)

Ex-excuse me, sir! Sorry, sir! I'm --

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 4)

15-A

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

16

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)

{CONTINUED - 1}

16

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)

(CONTINUED - 2)

16

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 crado!

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

16-A

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

ANOTHER ANGLE

16-B

GEN. ROUSSEAU

Well, I've seen much more formidable objectives. Yes, much, much worse. Not something we

(continued)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

16-B

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)

(CONTINUED - 2)

16-B

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 regret-
table, 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 wonder-
ing, 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)

(CONTINUED - 3)

16-B

MAJ. SAINT-AUBAN

(icily)

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)

(CONTINUED - 4)

16-B

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 per-
cent 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)

(CONTINUED - 5)

16-B

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

Idon'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)

(CONTINUED - 6)

16-B

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 battle field.

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!

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 7)

16-B

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.

DISSOLVE:

INT. DUGOUT - MEYER AND FEROL - DAY

16-C

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

16-C

PVT. 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.

PVT. FEROL

(servilely)

A thousand pardons, m'sieur.
A thousand thousand pardons.
A thousand thousand thousand
pardons...I am desolate. It
was unforgiveable, inexcusable,
imbecilic, stupid --

PVT. MEYER

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

PVT. 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 --

PVT. MEYER

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

PVT. 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?

PVT. MEYER

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

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 2)

16-C

With a flourish, FEROL 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. FEROL

(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 out 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)

(CONTINUED - 3)

16-C

PVT. FEROL

We-el...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-
bing, 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)

(CONTINUED - 4)

16-C

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)

(CONTINUED - 5)

16-C

PVT. MEYER
What?

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

DISSOLVE:

EXT. TRENCH - NIGHT

17

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

DISSOLVE:

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

18

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 shooting 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 pain-
ful, isn't it?

PVT. DUVAL
What does that prove?

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

18

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 bayonets, what are you most afraid of?

PVT. DUVAL

High explosive.

SOLDIER

Me too.

SOLDIER

And me.

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?

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 2)

18

FVT. DUVAL
You're too deep for me professor.
All I know is nobody wants to die.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. BARBED WIRE - DAY

19

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

EXT. A SHELL CRATER - DAY

19-A

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

TRAVELING SHOT - WIRE ENTANGLEMENTS

19-B

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 magazine 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

19-C

It is crowded. The men lean silently against the reinforced 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

19-E

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

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

19-E

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

19-F

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

19-G

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

EXT. TRENCH - FAVORING PARIS

19-H

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

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

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

19-H

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

19-I

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

19-J

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 19-K

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

EXT. TRENCH - CAPTAIN RENOUART AND SGT. PICARD 19-L

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 19-M

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 19-N

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 19-O

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

ANOTHER ANGLE - BATTLEFIELD 19-P

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

ANOTHER ANGLE - BATTLEFIELD 19-Q

All along the German line S.O.S. rockets rise deliberately, burst, and arc slowly downward.

TRAVELING SHOT - FRENCH TRENCH

19-R

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:

19-S

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

19-T

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

19-U

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

19-U

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

19-V

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 parapets, 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

19-W

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

19-W

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

20

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

20

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

20-A

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

20-B

CAPTAIN NICHOLS woodenly replaces receiver. The others are absorbed in their glasses. The phone rings. NICHOLS lifts the receiver.

EXT. BATTERY OF SEVENTY-FIVES

20-C

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

20-D

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

20-E

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

20-F

CAPT. NICHOLS

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

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

20-F

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 un-
divided 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 head-
quarters.
(slams phone)

EXT. SUPPORT TRENCH - COLONEL DAX

21

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

21

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

EXT. COMPANY A TRENCH - DAY

22

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

22-A

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)

(CONTINUED - 2)

22-A

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

23

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

23

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 Couderc 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

24

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)

{CONTINUED - 1)

24

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 Chateau 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

24-A

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

25

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

25

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 obeying 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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 2)

25

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

26

The same gleaming black staff car we saw in the first sequence pulls up. Amid appropriate military bustle, GENERAL BROULARD 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

27

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

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

27

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 curs! 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.

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 2)

27

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)

(CONTINUED - 3)

27

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.

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

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 4)

27

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)

(CONTINUED - 5)

27

COL. DAX

I mean, why are you here. In what capacity, do you appear here.

GEN. BROULARD

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. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

(brightly)

Mmm, yes, so it would, wouldn't it. You're quite right, Colonel.

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 6)

27

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. BROULARD

No-oo. 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 curae? A friend of the court, that is, using the term court to include all parties to the controversy?

GEN. BROULARD

(purses lips thoughtfully)

Now, I think that would come very close to it, Colonel. Amicus Curae -- 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. BROULARD

That's correct.

COL. DAX

And you're certainly not interested in digging up scapegoats for the staff's mistakes?

GEN. BROULARD

(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)

(CONTINUED - 7)

27

COL. DAX

Actually, having complete confidence in General Rousseau's good judgment and integrity, your part in this inquiry is a substantially passive one. Any decisions that are made will be his and his entirely.

GEN. BROULARD

Of course.

COL. DAX

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

GEN. BROULARD

(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. Something 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 slaughtering. Therefore, General Rousseau. He's been forced to compromise himself. 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)

(CONTINUED - 8)

27

GEN. BROULARD

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. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

(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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 9)

27

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 repercussions, 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. BROULARD 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. BROULARD

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. BROULARD

(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)

(CONTINUED - 10)

27.

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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 11)

27

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. BROULARD
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. BROULARD
(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)

(CONTINUED - 12)

27

GEN. BROULARD

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

(peevd)

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)

(CONTINUED - 13)

27

COL. DAX (cont'd)

(Dax thinks he has
really struck gold)

What reverberations may be stirred
up?

GEN. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

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. BROULARD

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)

(CONTINUED - 14)

27

GEN. ROUSSEAU

Respectfully, eh?

(brusquely)

I will take the matter under consideration, Colonel, but I have serious doubts that --

GEN. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

(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 BROULARD 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?

(CONTINUED - 15)

27

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 troublesome.

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.

DISSOLVE:

CLOSE SHOT INSERT - TYPEWRITER

28

It types out:

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

28

To: Company Commanders;
Lieutenant Jonnart, Lieutenant
Roget, Captain Sancy and Captain
Renouart.

From: Colonel Dax, Commanding
181st Regiment.

You are hereby ordered to select
and arrest one man from your
company and have him at the regi-
mental 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.

DISSOLVE:

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

29

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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

29

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 --

(mimicking him)

-- understanding them is your specialty, outguessing them is your bread and butter.

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 2)

29

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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 3)

29

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

30

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

30

SGT. GONOU D O.S.

Yes, sir.
(Gonoud enters room)

LT. ROGET

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

SGT. GONOU D

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. GONOU D

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. GONOU D

Yes, sir.

LT. ROGET

Well, don't make any mistakes.

SGT. GONOU D

(salutes)
Yes, sir.
(he exits)

DISSOLVE:

INT. CAPTAIN SANCY'S QUARTERS - DAY

31

He talks with SERGEANT PATIN.

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

31

CAPTAIN SANCY

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)

(CONTINUED - 2)

31

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 circumstance 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)

31

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 your-
self 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 distur-
bance 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

32

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

32

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 Jonnart acting commander of C company, from Colonel Dax, commanding 181st 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)

(CONTINUED - 2)

32

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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 3)

32

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)

(CONTINUED - 4)

32

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 sorr--ry.

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

33

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

34

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

35

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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

35

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. PARIS

No, absolutely not.

PVT. FEROL

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)

(CONTINUED - 2)

35

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 emphasize the points you brought up in your testimony.

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 3)

35

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.

DISSOLVE:

INT. COURTROOM

36

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 CODDERC 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:

INT. COURTROOM

37

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

37

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 retired to deliberate.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. GUARD HOUSE - SERGEANT-MAJOR BOULANGER - DUSK

38

Paces 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)

(CONTINUED + 1)

38

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. GONOU

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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 2)

38

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

39

The men have just been served a magnificent meal. Roast beef, potatoes au gratin, 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.

PVT. 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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

39

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.

PVT. ARNAUD

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

PVT. FEROL

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

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 2)

39

PVT. ARNAUD

It's a lot like that old chest-nut 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?

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 3)

39

FVT. 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?

FVT. 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?

FVT. FEROL

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

FVT. ARNAUD

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

FVT. FEROL

Maybe some of them are our friends.

FVT. 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.

FVT. 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.

FVT. 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.

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 4)

39

PVT. FEROL
(squashing bug)
Now you've got the edge on him.

CPL. PARIS
I wonder what time it is?

PVT. FEROL
About midnight, I'd guess.

PVT. ARNAUD
What time do they come for us?

CPL. PARIS
At dawn, I think.

PVT. 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?

PVT. FEROL
Dawn is just before the sun comes
up.

PVT. 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.

PVT. 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)

(CONTINUED - 5)

39

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 any-
body -- 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)

(CONTINUED - 6)

39

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 cockroaches 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.

PVT. FEROL

What is?

CPL. PARIS

Dying - only you can die for yourself. No one else can do it for you.

PVT. FEROL

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)

(CONTINUED - 7)

39

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)

(CONTINUED - 8)

39

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)

(CONTINUED - 9)

39

PRIEST

I don't think you'll feel a thing. These hours are the worst. But you must use them to prepare yourselves.

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

DISSOLVE:

INT. LAVISH DINING ROOM - NIGHT

40

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 BROULARD'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 BROULARD swallows, rises and excuses himself. He follows the ORDERLY out of the dining room, up a winding staircase to a library off the main hall. He enters alone.

INT. THE LIBRARY - NIGHT

40-A

COLONEL DAX rises from a leather chair, saluting and extending his hand. GENERAL BROULARD returns the salute, idly, and shakes hands warmly.

GEN. BROULARD

(mischievously)

Well Colonel, we meet again - good evening.

COL. DAX

(stiffly)

Good evening, sir. I must apologize for disturbing your dinner like this.

GEN. BROULARD

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

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

40-A

COL. DAX

(pleasantly)

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

GEN. BROULARD

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

COL. DAX

Some brandy, perhaps?

GEN. BROULARD

Martel's four-star?

COL. DAX

Wonderful, I'd love some.

GEN. BROULARD

(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.

COL. DAX

(warming up)

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

GEN. BROULARD

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.

COL. DAX

(pleasantly)

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

(continued)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 2)

40-A

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 myself under fire and found them huddled together like frightened children. Granted the fire was withering and many of them would have been killed, nevertheless, they were in the trenches when they should have been moving forward. 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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 3)

40-A

GEN. BROULARD (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. BROULARD
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. BROULARD
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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 4)

40-A

GEN. BROULARD (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. BROULARD

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)

(CONTINUED - 5)

40-A

GEN. BROULARD

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 mean which it would be hard to say is more elevated.

GEN. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

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

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 6)

40-A

COL. DAX

It seems, General, that a certain Captain came to see me this afternoon, a Captain Pelletier, commanding Battery B of Division artillery.

GEN. BROULARD

The name seems familiar.

COL. DAX

I believe you met him briefly after the inquiry this afternoon -- something about some shells falling short?

GEN. BROULARD

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. BROULARD

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?

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 7)

40-A

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. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

Frankly, despite the fact that I have no legal background, I can see quite clearly that this 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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 8)

40-A

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 unscrupulous people who will use it for their own petty schemes.

GEN. BROULARD
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.

BROULARD 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. BROULARD
(icily)
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 discuss things. You press me on a subject 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)

(CONTINUED - 9)

40-A

COL. DAX

(angrily)

I'm not leaving until I finish
what I've --

GEN. BROULARD

(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. BROULARD

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. BROULARD

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 him-
self was uncovered and prevented.
And by who? By what guardian of
(continued)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 10)

40-A

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. BROULARD
Are you quite through?

COL. DAX
Yes, General, I am.

GEN. BROULARD
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

41

FEROL has finished his confession and the PRIEST has
given him absolution. PARIS has been watching the pro-
ceedings 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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

41

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)

(CONTINUED - 2)

41

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)

(CONTINUED - 4)

41

CPL. PARIS

(goes 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.

DISSOLVE:

INT. GUARDHOUSE - NIGHT

42

PARIS is stretched out on a straw bed, muttering incoherently. His eyes are open but stare blankly ahead. His face is covered with perspiration. A DOCTOR withdraws 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 maniac 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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

42

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 you 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

43

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

44

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

45

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

46

Stands not far from GENERAL ROUSSEAU'S group. He is flanked by his ADC, CAPTAIN HERBILLION 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

47

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, hawp!

SERGEANT BOULANGER bellows the necessary commands to move the three rifle squads into position about ten yards from the execution posts.

EXT. GUARDHOUSE

48

SERGEANT GONOUUD arrives with his escort. There are twelve guards and four stretcher bearers. The guards have fixed bayonets.

INT. GUARDHOUSE - DAWN

49

ARNAUD and FEROL hear 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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

49

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 GONOUUD 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 GONOUUD almost as if they expect him to shoot them right there on the spot.

SGT. GONOUUD

Good-morning, men.

PVT. ARNAUD

(smiles inappropriately)
Good-morning, Sergeant. How are you today?

SGT. GONOUUD

Not too bad, how are you boys?

PVT. ARNAUD

(giggles)
Oh, we're just fine. You missed a wonderful dinner last night.

SGT. GONOUUD

(waiting for the men to finish with PARIS)
Yes, I heard about that. It sounded very good. What did you have?

PVT. ARNAUD

(staring off into space, then smiling as if struck by some inner joke)
Roast beef - very juicy, too. And pastries, and --

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 2)

49

ARNAUD lapses off into a private reverie. SERGEANT GONNOUD'S conversation is much the same as the professional bed time manner of a doctor with a dying patient.

PVT. FEROL
(almost inaudibly low)
Have you got a drink for us?

SGT. GONNOUD
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. GONNOUD takes the canteen and hands it to ARNAUD.

PARIS is now securely tied to the stretcher. GONNOUD takes note of this and glances at his watch. He takes the canteen away from ARNAUD.

SGT. GONNOUD
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. GONNOUD
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. GONNOUD
All right, let's move out.

They file out awkwardly.

EXT. VARIOUS ANGLES

50

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.

PVT. FEROL
(whimpering)
Father -- please.

The PRIEST moves alongside FEROL and intones some inaudible spiritual support.

VARIOUS ANGLES

51

The column stops at a grove of trees near the entrance to the parade ground. PARIS is lowered to the ground. SERGEANT GONOUUD gives each man another swig at the canteen. Then he walks to the stretcher. He kneels beside PARIS. SERGEANT GONOUUD 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. GONOUUD 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. GONOUUD
Yes, but it's not a bad wound.

CPL. PARIS
Where are we going?

SGT. GONOUUD
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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

51

SGT. GONOU

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. GONOU

(slapping)

Paris -- Paris?

GUARD

He's dead, sir.

SGT. GONOU

(to himself)

God forgive me.

He stands up, shakily. He walks back to the others.
FEROLE is on his knees praying. GONOU offers ARNAUD
the canteen again.

PVT. ARNAUD

(shrilly)

Will they let me take my jacket
off?

SGT. GONOU

(pleasantly)

We'll see.

PVT. 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)

(CONTINUED - 2)

51

Suddenly, ARNAUD is blinded by a rush of tears. He sinks to the grass, sobbing uncontrollably and clutching at GONOUUD'S legs. The two guards pull him to his feet.

SGT. GONOUUD

(desperately)

Arnaud, pull yourself together.
Act like a man. Listen, Arnaud --
are you listening to me?

PVT. ARNAUD

(sobbing)

Yes.

SGT. GONOUUD

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. GONOUUD

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. GONOUUD

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.

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(CONTINUED - 3)

51

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. GONOU

Courage, man - you can do this properly. I know you can.

FVT, ARNAUD

(quietly)

Let me take my jacket off!

SGT. GONOU

Help him off with his jacket.

The jacket is removed a bit roughly. The guards are overzealous and nervous. GONOU 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

52

The condemned men and their escort pause at the edge of the grassy field. SERGEANT GONOU 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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

52

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 ROUSSEAU'S group, ARNAUD turns, majestically to GENERAL ROUSSEAU.

FVT. 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

53

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 GONOU and BOULANGER are everywhere checking and double checking.

SGT. GONOU
(to Arnaud)
Do you want a blindfold?

FVT. ARNAUD
No, please, no blindfold.

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

53

SGT. GONOU
(to Ferol)
Do you want a blindfold?

FVT. FEROL
Yes.

VARIOUS ANGLES - INTERCUT

54

During the above action, at the appropriate moments, we will cut away to get reactions from certain principals.

FROM THE PRISONERS' VIEWPOINT

55

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

55

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 COUDERC 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 GONOUJ joins them. The non-com salutes and walks away. SERGEANT BOULANGER walks to the front of the firing squad.

SGT. BOULANGER
Squaa-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

56

SERGEANT GONOUJ his face split by a grin, runs up to the prisoners.

SGT. GONOUJ
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)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 1)

56

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

57

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

(icily)

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)

(CONTINUED - 1)

57

GEN. ROUSSEAU

(bitterly)

I believe you, Colonel. There is nothing like real regret for brightening a bad conscience.

COL. DAX

(peevd)

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.

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(CONTINUED - 2)

57

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

(expansively)

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,

(continued)

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED - 3)

57

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.

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(CONTINUED - 4)

57

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:

T H E E N D