

FADE IN

EXT. SOUTHLAND. SHOWGROUND. CIRCA 1914. DAY.

We are looking at a large BLACK AND WHITE photograph of a crowd at an A&P Show. We see a row of ploughs and traction engines under a NEW ZEALAND FARMERS' COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION banner, a clown on a penny-farthing, a queue outside CASEYS THE ALMOST MAN tent and a long table, laden with huge pumpkins and cabbages with rosettes attached to them. Children with pet lambs and calves, on leads, are lined up in front of a judge. A woman brandishes handbills in front of a WOMENS CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION tent which is pitched alongside an ALES AND SPIRITUOUS LIQUORS tent. A brass band plays on a rotunda.

A Tout stands on a wagon, holding a bull horn to his lips and pointing to a banner proclaiming, RIDE WILD PILGRIM AND WIN ONE HUNDRED POUNDS. A horse stands in an open-topped float, hitched to the wagon.

As we look closer, the tout comes to life. His gaudily coloured suit contrasts with the predominantly blacks, browns and whites of the crowd.

TOUT

One hundred pounds for the man
who dares. Let's see what Southland
men are made of, eh. One hundred
smackers, where's a man with spirit?

In the horse float, a wild-eyed, chestnut stallion lunges and kicks.

The crowd stare in awe at the horse. Some men look sheepishly at the tout and steer their women away.

CORNELIUS (CORNEY) SAVAGE, late 20s, stocky, fair-haired, sharpish features, and carrying a swag, edges his way to the front of the crowd.

He pushes past a lean, SHIFTY-EYED BLOKE, early 20s, dark-skinned, whose tattered clothes and hard bitten features, tell us he's a veteran of life in the tough lane.

CORNEY

I'll have a go.

TOUT

And who might you be my fine fellow?

CORNEY

Dickson Cornelius Savage, but Corney'll do.

Hearing this, the shifty-eyed bloke looks up.

TOUT

Corney, eh. A fine specimen if ever I saw one. Step up here my good man.

Corney climbs up and has a good look at Wild Pilgrim.

The crowd grows, now that there's a taker for the challenge, then it surges towards the main showring.

EXT. SHOWGROUND. DAY.

Punters, clamouring to place their bets, surround a thin, ferret-faced BOOKIE. They make way for TED MUSGROVE, 50-ish, ruddy and thick set.

TED

Here's a fiver on Wild Pilgrim. Reckon I know me own horse well enough to be sure me money's safe.

BOOKIE

A safe bet indeed mister Musgrove.

As the mob of punters thins out, the SHIFTY-EYED BLOKE sidles up to the bookie.

BOOKIE

Show me your money, Hori.

The shifty-eyed bloke grabs the bookie by the collar and gets right in his face.

SHIFTY-EYED BLOKE

I'm not one of your natives see (beat)
now put this half-crown on that fella
Corney or taste a bit of knuckle.

BOOKIE

Done sir. You'll be in the
lord's favour because he loves
a gambler and the odds are against
you.

SHIFTY-EYED BLOKE

Stuff the Lord. He's never shown me a
favour. I've heard of that fair-haired
bloke. That'll do me.

INT. HORSE PEN. DAY.

We hear a HORSE SNORTING and see hooves STAMPING on straw-lined floor boards. Through the gaps between the wall planks, we see a man's legs walking towards us.

A dirty boot-cap fills the gap, then another is shoved in the gap above it.

The hooves go mad and the SNORTING becomes a SCREECH.

EXT. SHOWRING. DAY

Ted Musgrove takes his seat, on the bleaches, next to LIZZIE, his 20ish, red haired, buxom daughter and pulls out his fob watch.

TED
I reckon this bloke'll be flat
in the mud in a few minutes.
Just like all the others.

Lizzie nods her agreement.

Lizzie
Who's he?

TED
Dunno dear, some bloke
calls himself Corney.

EXT. HORSE PEN. DAY.

Corney settles into the saddle and gives the thumbs up.

Yard hands open the gate and Wild Pilgrim lunges into the arena.

EXT. SHOWRING. DAY

The crowd ROARS and Ted starts his stop watch.

Wild Pilgrim rears, hooves flailing, then bucks several times but Corney stays in the saddle. The horse then tears off in a mad gallop around the showring. Corney just hangs on.

On the last circuit, he swings his near-leg clear of the railings and rides with one foot in the off-side stirrup.

The crowd leap to their feet.

Wild Pilgrim slows to a trot and stops in the centre of the ring. Corney adjusts his grip on the reins and waits as the horse paws the ground and shakes its head.

Wild Pilgrim explodes into a gallop straight at the railings.

A woman in the crowd looks away and covers her young son's eyes. He pushes her hand away, his eyes agog.

Lizzie is terrified, she clutches her father's arm.

Only yards from a 'head-on,' Wild Pilgrims locks his forelegs and skids to a halt. Corney is slammed onto the horse's neck. He GROANS with the impact but stays on.

Wild Pilgrim backs up to the middle of the arena and halts, head down, pawing the ground and snorting. Breathing hard, Corney braces for whatever's next.

Wild Pilgrim charges at the railings, then pulls up short and, anchoring his hind legs and kicking off with his forelegs, hurls his body left and right in a series of wild swings, to and fro.

Corney is flung about like a rag doll. He leans forward and wraps his arms around the horse's neck and hangs on for all he's worth.

Now, Wild Pilgrim alternates between lunging left and right and rearing.

Mud splatters people close to the rails.

The horse pauses, then lunges to the right but instead of following this with a lunge to the left, it completes a full circle and continues circling as fast as it can.

Mud and hooves spin into a brownish blur, making Corney retch and clamp his eyes shut.

He pushes himself upright and hauls on the reins but he can't raise Wild Pilgrim's head .

Leaning back and gritting his teeth, Corney keeps the pressure on the reins until the horse's head comes up and the wild circling stops.

Ted Musgrove looks at his watch and his eyes pop out. He looks again, more closely, then shows it to Lizzie.

Her eyes bulge too.

Ted shows his watch to people around him. They too can't believe their eyes.

Again, Wild Pilgrim races around the ring, so close to the rails that Corney has to kick his inside leg free and ride with only one foot in the stirrups.

The horse swerves and heads for the middle of the ring as Corney swings back into the saddle and slumps there, gasping.

Wild Pilgrim slows to a halt.

The horse's legs buckle and Corney kicks free and lands on his feet, still clutching the reins. Wild Pilgrim lands on his side and rolls on his back, saddle and all, legs kicking. Corney dodges the lashing hooves and keeps his grip on the reins. The horse completes the roll and gets to its feet but Corney leaps back into the saddle before it moves again.

The crowd are on their feet CLAPPING and CHEERING.

The bookie looks worried and the shifty-eyed bloke grins.

EXT. SHOWGROUNDS. DAY

Sales people, hawkers, clowns and buskers stare towards the SOUND OF CHEERING from the showring. Their stalls and machinery displays are almost deserted.

An apron-clad hawker throws a PORK PIES billboard onto a buggy and starts to pull down a canvas stall.

A boy runs towards him waving a silver coin. The hawker takes it, bites it, then opens a wicker basket and gives the boy a handful of pies. The boy scurries off towards the showring.

EXT. SHOWRING. DAY

The galloping horse and rider cast a long shadow over the muddy ring. Corney is slumped in the saddle but seems to have a bit of control over the horse, until it stops and starts bucking. Corney is nearly thrown but digs his heels into the horse's flanks and rights himself.

Wild Pilgrim pauses, blowing hard. Corney sways nearly out of the saddle, then with a deep breath and a grimace, forces himself upright. He looks around him.

The crowd are a blur of open-mouthed, grinning faces.

The muddy ground appears to undulate, making him sway, drunkenly, from side to side.

Wild Pilgrim breaks into a gallop again. Corney is thrown backwards, flat on the horse's back. He hauls himself upright but lets go of the reins.

Out of control, Wild Pilgrim bolts for the railings, with Corney gripping the mane.

This time, Wild Pilgrim crashes, side-on, in a shower of splinters, into the railing.

Corney cries out as a big splinter sticks into his thigh. He pulls it out and falls from the saddle, grabbing the reins, with one hand, as he goes down.

The horse drags Corney through the mud leaving bloody smears in the drag marks.

Summoning his last reserves of energy, Corney gets a grip on the saddle horn as Wild Pilgrim breaks into a trot. He hangs on and is dragged half way round the ring before he gets a foot in a stirrup and hauls himself into the saddle.

His hands and wrists are criss-crossed with bloody welts.

The crowd are on their feet again CHEERING.

The Zambuks lift their stretcher and get ready.

Wild Pilgrim is slowing down. He tries another buck and swerve but it's half-hearted. Corney is slumped over the saddle.

Wild Pilgrim slows to a standstill, flanks heaving. Corney drags himself upright and waits for Wild Pilgrim's next move.

The crowd waits, hushed.

Ted and Lizzie wait.

The bookie waits.

The zambucks wait.

The grinning, shifty eyed bloke waits.

Wild Pilgrim doesn't move. He lets out a long snort, his legs fold under him and he rolls on his side, blown. As the horse goes down, Corney slides from the saddle and collapses, leaning back on the saddle

The crowd goes wild. The bookie is wide-eyed with shock.

Ted Musgrove and Lizzie bustle over to Corney as two officials pick up Wild Pilgrim's reins but they can't avoid getting blood on their white coats.

The Zambuks hurry out with their stretcher.

Corney watches them approach, too exhausted to show any emotion.

TED

Here's your hundred quid son.
By god you've earned it all right.

Ted thrusts the wad of notes into Corney's shirt pocket.

Corney looks up at the faces staring down at him.

TED

Ted Musgrove. I own that beast.

He bends down and shakes Corney's hand.

The Zambuks cut Corney's trouser leg, exposing an oozing wound, and set about dressing it.

Lizzie crouches down and examines the welts on Corney's hands. She grabs the Zambuk's red cross bag and dabs the cuts with iodine, glancing at him as he winces.

TED

Oh! This is Lizzie, my daughter.

Corney nods at her and forces a smile. He sits up a bit and takes a good gulp from the silver hip flask Ted offers him.

CORNEY

Wild Pilgrim eh. You got
the right name for him.

TED

Too right! And he's still wild
as ever but you've stayed on
him longer than anyone else

CORNEY

That's nice to know but
I feel like I just done ten rounds
with Torpedo Murphy.

Ted, the officials and the Zambuks have a good CHUCKLE.

TED

His world featherweight title wouldn't
keep him on Wild Pilgrim for a minute.
If there were titles for horse riding I'd
say you'd have the lot me boy.

CORNEY

Take more 'n a title to get
me back on that horse again.

Ted crouches in front of Corney and holds out the flask
again. Corney has another gulp.

TED

I've been thinking Wild Pilgrim
would make a good race horse(beat).
How about breaking him in for me?

Corney looks at his skinned hands, then at Ted and then
at Lizzie.

CORNEY

I'll think about it.

TED

Well, you'll find me at Ryal Bush.
Offer's open. I pay good for good work.

Lizzie offers Corney a hand up but he waves her away and pushes himself up, leaning on his good leg.

LIZZIE

You look sick. Can you walk?

Corney tests his wounded leg and finds he can limp about.

CORNEY

Nothing broken.
I'll be all right after a few beers,
thanks.

He nods goodbye. The white-coated officials tug Wild Pilgrim to his feet and lead him away as Corney gives him a friendly pat on the rump.

CORNEY

Might see you again fella.

EXT. SHOWGROUNDS. DAY.

The shifty-eyed bloke, still grinning from ear to ear, runs towards the bookie but the sight of a constable wipes the grin from his face and stops him dead in his tracks. He turns about and disappears into the crowd.

INT. TENT. DAY.

Men crowd around a makeshift bar guzzling from tankards and bottles. Barrels are stacked high behind the bar. There's hand-shakes, pats on the back, and 'BRAVOS' as Corney limps in.

A bearded, stout BARMAN thrusts a tankard at Corney and waves away his coin.

He drains the tankard in one go and the barman refills it.

CORNEY

Thanks, I feel better already.
Whaddya know about Ted Musgrove?

BARMAN

Ted. One of the best.
You new around here?

CORNEY

Sort of. Ted's offered me a job.

BARMAN

You'll find no better boss
this side o' Cook Straight.
Mark my words.

Corney nods his thanks and mingles with the drinkers enjoying the beer and bar talk.

Silhouetted on one side of the tent is the WCTU woman, brandishing her handbills.

EXT. RYAL BUSH FARM. DAY.

It's late afternoon and, in a paddock near the homestead, Corney leads Wild Pilgrim, saddled and harnessed to a log, around in a circle, following the deep furrows they've already gouged. Harnessed as he is, Wild Pilgrim still fights back. Corney stops often to pat the horse.

The scars on his hands are faint welts.

Ted Musgrove leans on a fence watching.

Lizzie walks by carrying a bunch of flowers and stops under a cabbage tree. She puts them at a headstone which says, IN LOVING MEMORY. COLLEEN MUSGROVE. 1860-1912.

Ted turns to watch her. After a few moments reflection, she walks over to her father. He gives her a fatherly hug and they watch Corney.

LIZZIE

Funny how he doesn't like talking
about himself much.

TED

Well, a man's got a right to keep himself
to himself. He's got a way with horses
though, by Jove he has.

Corney halts the horse near them. Ted waves a greeting
and Lizzie smiles.

CORNEY

Ted. Lizzie.

TED

That furrow gets much
deeper you might strike oil.

Corney LAUGHS as he bends to tighten the saddle strap.

CORNEY

Thank's for the warning Ted.

Corney straightens up and looks beyond them to the
homestead, wrinkling his nose.

CORNEY

Somethin smells good.

LIZZIE

My apple pie, well, mother's
really. She showed me how.

TED

You'll never taste better
this side o' the Mataura.

CORNEY

In that case, the sooner
I'm done here the better, eh.

With that, he unhitches the log and swings into the saddle. Wild Pilgrim rears and fights the bit but Corney soon has control. He smiles at Lizzie as he forces the horse into a canter.

TED

Amazing eh. No one could get near
that beast a few weeks ago.

INT. STABLE. DAY.

In the fading light, Corney finishes sweeping out the horse stalls and walks, WHISTLING, to the tack room, which serves as his bedroom. He stops in the doorway.

His spare shirts, one white, one blue, lie folded and ironed on his bed which has been made up with hospital folds. He smiles as he fingers the ironed creases in his shirts, and the neat folds of the blankets and sheets.

A note is pinned to his blue shirt, *FOR THE DANCE ON SATURDAY NIGHT. XXXXX LIZZIE*

His smile opens into a grin and he mimes a slow, close dance.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Lizzie takes a large, crusty pie out of the coal range, places it on the bench and freezes.

EXT. FARMYARD. EVENING.

In the light of a lantern on the stable wall, she sees Corney, stripped to the waist, washing in a trough. His muscles flex as he lathers up, rinses and towels himself dry.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT

Ted, Corney and Lizzie sit at the kitchen table finishing their apple pie. Ted is at the head of the table and Corney and Lizzie face each other.

CORNEY

Hmm, nice, Lizzie. I've never tasted better, anywhere.

LIZZIE

I'm glad you liked it. More Father, Corney?

TED

No thanks dear. Pipe time. Excuse me.

Ted gets up and leaves, fishing his pipe and tobacco out of his pocket.

Lizzie stands up and leans over the table letting her loose blouse sag and giving Corney a good look down the front.

LIZZIE

Sure you won't have some more?

CORNEY

No thanks, two nice surprises in one day is enough for me.

LIZZIE

Two?

CORNEY

Apple pie and ironed shirts.

Lizzie leans closer as she picks up his plate.

LIZZIE
You're lucky aren't you.

CORNEY
Yep, for a change,
hope it lasts.

LIZZIE
Oh, I think it will.

They grin at each other and Corney gets up and helps her clean up.

EXT. RYAL BUSH HOMESTEAD. NIGHT.

Ted, Corney and Lizzie sit in wicker chairs on the verandah, enjoying the starry night. Ted puffs contentedly on his pipe, Lizzie works on a quilt while Corney makes a stock of roll-your-owns.

LIZZIE
That Jack Thompson from the
Southland Times was pestering
me last week, when I was in
town.

TED
Hmm, what about?

LIZZIE
Oh, he said he wants to
write about Corney and
Wild Pilgrim.

Corney puts a cigarette to his lips and strikes a match.

TED
Did he now (beat). Wouldn't
hurt my plans one bit if
them two was the talk o' the town.

Corney pauses, holding the match away from his cigarette.

INT. HUT. NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

In the black and white, still photograph we see Corney and the dim outline of an older man. They're seated at a rough table, glaring at each other and the older man has his clenched fist raised.

CORNEY

(OC)

I'll do what I wanna do
not what you want.

EXT. RYAL BUSH HOMESTEAD. NIGHT.

The flame on Corney's match touches his fingers. He jerks and flicks the match into the night, stares after it, then stands up.

CORNEY

Been a long day.
Think I'll hit the sack.
Night all.

He saunters off towards the barn.

Lizzie and Ted stare, bewildered, after him.

INT. STABLE. NIGHT.

Corney is brushing Wild Pilgrim as Ted appears in the doorway and taps out his pipe on his heel.

Corney looks up as Ted approaches but carries on grooming.

TED

Thought you was gonna
hit the sack.

CORNEY

I'll be there soon.

Ted strokes Wild Pilgrim's muzzle.

TED

He's coming on well.

CORNEY

Yep, you'll have to find yourself a jockey soon.

TED

Whaddya mean. You're the best there is.

Corney finishes brushing Wild Pilgrim, then forks fresh hay into the feed box, watched closely by Ted.

CORNEY

You asked me to tame him, Ted and I've near as done that. We never talked 'bout nothin else.

TED

C'mon Corney you know I'm staking my future (beat) our future on racing Wild Pilgrim.

He grasps a handful of hay and feeds it to the horse.

TED

You 'n me we could make a good go of it racing Wild Pilgrim and breeding from 'im.

CORNEY

You're right Ted but I don't know if it's for me.

TED

Don't know! Thought Corney Savage,
of all people, would know just what he
wanted outta life.

CORNEY

Well I don't but I gotta find
out for me self.

Corney slings a blanket on Wild Pilgrim and bends to
buckle it up.

TED

I'm not one to push me nose
in where it don't belong but
there's something else (beat)
it's Lizzie (beat) I just haven't
seen her look so happy, ever.

Corney buckles the blanket and stands up facing Ted.

CORNEY

All right Ted. I'll sleep
on it.

Ted nods then walks away. He pauses in the stable doorway
to light his pipe.

TED

By the way, I'm gonna get that
newspaper bloke out here.
Whatever happens you'll be famous.

INT. HUT. NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

In this black and white, still photo we see Corney and
the older man standing face to face, only the table lies
on its side and the older man has both his hands gripped
around Corney's shirt collar.

OLDER MAN

(OC)

You'll do what I say.
I've slaved my guts out
on this farm and you're not
gonna walk away from it.

INT. STABLE. NIGHT.

Corney squats, chews a piece of straw and stares after Ted.

INT. STABLE. DAY

The sun is well up. Corney is stroking Wild Pilgrim's muzzle and talking to him.

CORNEY

Good luck fella.
You'll be a champ one day.

Ted appears in the stable door.

CORNEY

Mornin Ted.

Corney yawns and rubs his face.

TED

It's a fine one at that
Corney. You look a bit tuckered out.
Well?

CORNEY

Hardly slept a skerrick but I've made
me mind up (beat) I'm movin on.

He hoists his swag and walks towards the door.

CORNEY

Thanks for everything Ted.
I hope we meet again. Lizzie's
a fine woman all right (beat)
I'll miss her.

Ted sighs, raises his arms, then lets them flop by his side.

TED

You got me beat young fella but
you've made your mind up. We're sorry
to see you go. Just remember, my offer
stays open.

They shake hands and Corney shrugs his swag into place and sets off.

INT. BEDROOM. DAY.

From her bedroom window, Lizzie sobs her heart out, watching him plod along the track to the farm gate.

EXT. SOUTHLAND PLAINS. DAY.

Corney trudges down a rutted, muddy track which runs straight across the swampy plains. Smoke from recent burn-offs drifts across the track and the blackened skeletons of trees litter the landscape.

He looks glum and he hoists his swag from shoulder to shoulder.

He smiles and breaks into a trot when he sees, ahead, a horse-drawn wagon, loaded with flax, coming along a side track.

INT. BUTCHER'S SHOP. DAY.

A cleaver chops into a carcass on a round, wooden block.

Sides of meat and sausages hang from an overhead rail and other cuts are arranged in trays on a counter. From the back-to-front lettering on the window we see we're in BURMEISTER'S BUTCHERY.

The WINDOW SHATTERS as a rock sails through it and the bloody cleaver hits the floor

There's a GROAN and a white-haired, apron-clad butcher, holding his bleeding forehead, slumps over the chopping block.

Through the shattered glass we see a mob brandishing fists and sticks and we hear them chanting HUN,HUN,HUN.

A middle-aged man, wielding a lump of wood, bursts through the shop door and starts smashing up the shop as the butcher cowers on the floor in the bloody sawdust.

The butcher curls into ball as he sees another pair of boots charge into his shop.

It's Corney. He grapples with the middle-aged man, twists his arm until he drops the lump of wood, then shoves him outside.

EXT.DUNEDIN STREET. DAY.

The middle-aged shop buster lies in the street, holding his arm.

Hands on hips, Corney faces the mob who JEER and YELL at him.

There's a stand-off. A couple of young men take a hesitant step toward Corney but change their minds and look at the ground. A few women prod their men but no one steps up.

The mob disperses as a couple of constables amble along the street and Corney runs for the flax wagon, parked nearby.

INT. PUBLIC BAR. NIGHT.

Corney steps into a crowded, noisy and smoke-filled bar and elbows his way towards the counter.

He meets two swaggie mates. There's LOFTY, 30ish, tall and lanky, and JACKO, 40ish, stocky and ruddy. There's much back slapping and hand shaking.

CORNEY

Lofty, Jacko, well I'll be darned.

LOFTY

Whaddy know, cobber?

CORNEY

Bit o this an a bit o that, Lofty,
yuh know how it is.

JACKO

My shout.

Jacko heads for the bar.

At the far end of the bar, a big, barrel-chested BLOKE puts down his glass and stares at Corney.

CORNEY

What've you blokes been up to?

LOFTY

Aw, the wind just blew us in from
the lignite mines.

Jacko joins them and hands out tankards.

CORNEY

Mining, eh. Somethin different.
What's the word around here

JACKO

Everyone's talking about
war with Germany.

CORNEY

Seems like it 's started already.
Cheers.

They touch tankards and have a good guzzle.
The big, barrel-chested bloke pushes his way towards
them, clenching his fists.

BIG BLOKE

You're that German lover aren't yuh?

The bar falls silent and Jacko moves to watch Corney's
back.

Corney finishes his beer and looks at Lofty.

CORNEY

Ever loved a German mate?

LOFTY

Met a few in the gum fields
up north but wouldn't call
that love.

Corney turns to Jacko while Lofty watches the big bloke.

CORNEY

Jacko?

JACKO

Only me Mauser which I
got off that Boer I shot,
back in nineteen hundred.
I loved that German, by Jove.

A SNIGGER ripples through the bar and a bearded drinker,
about Jacko's age, calls out.

BEARDED DRINKER

Good on ya Jacko.

The bearded drinker's friends MURMUR their support and the bar patrons square off, with the majority facing Corney and his mates.

CORNEY

Looks like you've got the wrong bloke mister. But if you gotta bone to pick with me 'cause I gave that ol' butcher a hand against a mob of bloody bullies then step outside.

The big bloke swings a haymaker which Corney ducks, steps in and poleaxes him with an uppercut.

The crowd stare in stunned silence.

Corney leans in aiming another blow at the still body on the floor.

Lofty and Jacko seize the chance and hustle Corney towards the door.

Two men try to stop them. Lofty drops one with a kick in the crutch and Jacko the other with a lethal head-butt.

Outside, they check each other over, then they head off down the muddy street.

EXT. BUSH. NIGHT.

Corney, Lofty and Jacko sit outside a bivvy, of ti tree and a piece of tarpaulin, sharing a bottle of whiskey and eating bits of an eel, which is grilling over a campfire.

LOFTY

You still got a nice uppercut.

CORNEY

It helps, so does a cobber who can kick like a mule and one with a pickaxe for a for'ead.

JACKO

Well a bloke has to have at least one good trick up his sleeve.

LOFTY

You'll be getting a name for
yourself around here Corney.

He takes a swig from the bottle and passes it to Corney.

JACKO

Lofty's right you know.
Last thing you want is the
law gettin wind of you's whereabouts.

Corney pauses, the bottle halfway to his lips.

CORNEY

Know somethin I should Jacko?

He takes a gulp from the bottle and passes it to Jacko
who drains it in one long swig.

JACKO

Well, the talk up your hometown
way a few months back was the blue
coats a lookin' for you.

INT. HUT. NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

A black and white photo captures Corney's uppercut
hitting the older man's jaw. The man's head is thrown
back, his eyes are closed and his arms flung sideways.
One foot is already off the ground. He's going down.

EXT. BUSH. NIGHT.

A faint beam of moonlight filters through the overhead
branches and catches the faded tarpaulin of their bivvy.
The remains of the eel lie in the smoking, dying
campfire.

LOFTY

Come with us to Sydney, there's.

JACKO

Or join up, like I did, back in nineteen hundred. Great days all right. Us Rough Riders, we ruled the veldt. No questions (beat) as long as you could ride 'n shoot.

He tries to wring another drop from the bottle, then tosses it aside.

Lofty and Jacko kick off their boots, shake out their blankets and are soon snoring.

Corney lies awake watching the fire die down.

INT. HALL. DAY

THE OTAGO REGIMENT NEEDS YOU says the banner on the wall of the big hall. Beneath the banner, an Army MAJOR, his Sam Browne and brass buttons gleaming, sits behind a large desk, flanked by an orderly at a smaller desk. Behind them, two white coated doctors stand with their stethoscopes and charts ready.

A single file of men, of all ages, supervised by a stern SERGEANT, stretches from the major's desk to the door and outside.

The walls are adorned with Union Jacks, NZ Coats of Arms and posters with caricatures of evil looking Prussian officers trampling over a map of Belgium and butchering women and children. Another poster advertises, DUNEDIN PATRIOTIC FUND. DANCE. EVERY SATURDAY NIGHT.

Corney stands first in line. The sergeant salutes the major, about turns and barks at the men.

SERGEANT

Listen to me you lot. When I says so you'll step forward one at a time and halt one pace from the major's desk. State your name, date and place o birth and hoccupation, in a loud, clear voice. Answer the major's questions, in a loud, clear voice. Then go wheres I tell you.

He marches down the line of men, scrutinising them, then marches back to the major's desk.

The major nods.

SERGEANT

First man, step forward.

CORNEY

Richard Travis, born in
1886, in North America. I'm a horse
breaker.

MAJOR

You look like you've sat in
a few saddles Travis.
Next of kin?

Richard purses his lips and knits his brow.

MAJOR

Next of kin. That's someone
in your family we can contact
if (beat) if we have to.
Most fellows give their mother.

RICHARD

Lizzie Musgrove, at Ryal Bush.
Southland. She's not family
but she'll do.

The major looks him up and down and nods to the sergeant.

The orderly fills in a form, hands it to the sergeant who
thrusts it at Richard

SERGEANT

Take this and go the doctor.
Next man, step forward.

EXT. DUNEDIN STREET. DAY

The queue snakes out the dance hall and along the street
where a brass band entertains the men as they shuffle
inside.

Women wearing PATRIOTIC FUND sashes hand out scones and a woman, in a WOMENS CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION apron, hands out leaflets.

A man darts across the road and pushes into the queue by the doorway.

The WCTU woman hands him a copy of THE WHITE RIBBON and he reads.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(OC)

Lads, come back with honour,
or come not at all. Protect
every girl, ne'er cause one
to fall. Oh, come back with honour,
or come not at all.

He chuckles and we see it's that shifty eyed bloke. He turns to the woman as he moves inside the hall.

SHIFTY EYED BLOKE

Their honour'll be safe with me
love. Starkie,'ll be back.

INT. DANCE HALL. DAY.

The sergeant spots the shifty-eyed bloke and marches up to him.

SERGEANT

There's a native contingent
for the likes of you.
Now be off.

The shifty-eyed bloke makes to grab the sergeant, but thinks better of it.

SHIFTY-EYED BLOKE

Nothin in that sign there says no
Spanish and Delaware Indian does it (beat)

sergeant.

The sergeant steps up close and looks him over.

SERGEANT

A savage all the same. One things for
sure. You smell like a darn native.
We'll let the Major decide.

The sergeant grabs him by the arm and frog marches him to
the major's desk.

SERGEANT

This 'ere native says 'e's Spanish
and Delaware hindian. Sir.

The major looks him over, wrinkling his nose as he does
so.

MAJOR

What gaol were you in last?

SHIFTY-EYED BLOKE

Ain't ever been in one. I left a
warm bunk on a coastal steamer, the
Kittawa she was, to fight for me country.

SERGEANT

Just answer the major's question.
We're not hinterested in your
life's sorry 'istory.

MAJOR

What's your name
and where were you born?

SHIFTY-EYED BLOKE

James Douglas Stark, born in
Invercargill, bout twenty years ago.

The major glances at the sergeant.

SHIFTY-EYED BLOKE

Just to set things right, sir.
I'm the second son of Wylde Stark
a Delaware from the Great Bear Lake
and Anita from Madrid, Spain. I am sir.

MAJOR

Won't take us long to check
that, Stark. Let's see what
the doctor says.

He nods to the sergeant who points Starkie to the doctor.

EXT. TENTED CAMP. DAY.

Early morning and a bugler blows REVEILLE as the NZ
Ensign is hoisted up a flagpole.

This is set on the edge of a grass parade ground which is
surrounded by row upon row of white, bell-shaped tents.

Men tumble from their tents struggling into boots and
uniforms.

MONTAGE of scenes showing, soldiers struggling to stay in
step as they're drilled on a parade ground.

Route marching, in full kit, along country roads.

Firing rifles and Lewis machine guns on a range.

Richard Travis and a sergeant admiring bullet holes in
the bull's eye of a target.

Charging and bayoneting straw dummies.

Lining up, with mess tins outside a cook tent.

Richard jumps a mud-filled ditch, on an obstacle course.

Starkie peeling spuds.

More square bashing, only now they march, turn and halt,

as one.
EXT. TENTED CAMP. NIGHT.

The lamps go out in the tent lines as a BUGLE CALL drifts over the camp.

INT.TENT NIGHT

A match flares inside a tent, lighting up three grizzled faces gathered around an upturned ammunition box.

A hand puts the match to a small candle, stuck in a tin, on the box. In the dim flickering light we see a deck of cards and four enamel mugs on the box.

The earth floor is covered in straw and palliasses have been stacked to one side. A man speaks.

MAN'S VOICE

(OC)

Black bastard's done the dirty on us.

ANOTHER MAN'S VOICE

(OC)

Sssh, I can hear something.

A black-haired head and khaki-clad shoulders wriggles under the bottom of the tent.

Starkie looks up and grins.

He crawls into the tent, dragging a clinking sack. He reaches in and, with a flourish, holds up a bottle of whiskey.

STARKIE

One for Tomo.

He hands the bottle to TOMO, 30ish, dark haired, short with a shaggy moustache atop his broken-toothed grin.

Starkie flourishes another bottle.

STARKIE
One for Plunger.

PLUNGER is 30ish, balding, a pug's face sits on his brick, shit-house frame.

STARKIE
And one for DE WET.

A 40ish, a sandy-haired giant who towers over the others. They're guzzling as Starkie deals the cards.

STARKIE
I'm feelin lucky boys.

PLUNGER
Too right. We thought you'd done the nigger rascal on us an scarpered with our money.

Starkie lunges across the box and grabs Plunger by the throat.

STARKIE
Call me a nigger once more you ugly,
Mick bastard and so help me I'll.

Plunger grabs Starkie's arms and pulls him across the box, upending it. The candle sets fire to the straw and the others struggle to stamp it out and separate Plunger and Starkie.

EXT. TENT CAMP. NIGHT.

The fire catches hold and Tomo staggers out, coughing. Plunger, his shirt on fire, and Starkie, roll out grappling each other. The tent is ablaze.

We hear a GONG BEATING. Tomo slaps the flames on Plunger's shirt as De Wet forces Starkie and Plunger apart.

A squad of soldiers arrive with fire buckets. They douse the flames but the tent is destroyed. A crowd gathers, including Richard, and a sergeant, who picks up a blackened whiskey bottle from the ashes.

An OFFICER, on horseback, trots up and the sergeant shows him the bottle.

OFFICER

Sergeant. Charge those men with disobeying written orders.

SERGEANT

Sir.

EXT. TENTED CAMP. DAY.

Soldiers line up outside the paymaster's tent. We see Richard Travis collect his pay and then jog towards the camp gates where a group of soldiers wait for him.

On the way, he pauses to watch Starkie, Plunger, De Wet and Tomo, wearing packs and carrying rifles above their heads, being doubled around the tent lines.

A waiting SOLDIER calls out.

SOLDIER

(OC)

C'mon Dick, our billets are waiting.

INT. LOUNGE. NIGHT.

Dick, in dress uniform sprawls on a couch in front of an open fire, in a small lounge. His shiny, brown boots gleam in the firelight.

A framed picture of a young, mounted rifles trooper, astride a horse, stands in the middle of the mantelpiece,

above the fireplace.

A hand written inscription on the bottom of the photo says, Love to mother. Archie, South Africa, 1900.

Mrs MAUD JONES, dark-haired and still lissom in her early 60s, enters, bearing a tea tray.

Dick sits up as she places the tea tray on a low table.

DICK

I'll pour this time Mrs Jones.

He pours two cups of tea and then takes a small package, wrapped in brown paper, out of his pocket and places it on the table.

DICK

This is for you, to say thanks for being so good to me.

MAUD

Oh, thank you Richard.
It was a pleasure. The least I could do for our boys.

She unwraps it and finds a statue of a brown, rearing horse.

MAUD

Oh, It's lovely. Porcelain too.
Thank you again.

Maud places the statuette on the mantelpiece by the photograph.

DICK

It reminds me of Wild Pilgrim the horse I was telling you about.

MAUD

My Archie loved horses too.

She gazes at the photo, then dabs her eyes and sits down.

DICK

I'm sorry to upset you Mrs Jones.
You can be proud of him. I bet.

MAUD

Oh, it's not you Richard. I'm
being silly really. I am proud
of him but I'd rather be proud
of a live son. It's just (beat)
all you young men marching away,
again. Some won't come back.

DICK

Well don't you worry about me
Mrs Jones. I'll be fine.
Let's have our tea before
it gets cold.

They both reach for their tea cups. Dick raises his in a
toast.

DICK

I'll be back for another before
you can say (beat) 'Kick the Kaiser.'
How's that?

Maud smiles and raises her tea cup.

DICK

You know Mrs Jones
I've never felt like this
about any job before.
It's not just the excitement
and the good blokes.
I dunno, just feels right somehow.

Dick finishes his tea and leans over to poke the fire.
They watch the fire's fresh glow and flicker.

MAUD

I'm sure you'll do well Dick.
And I'll pray for you, and all
the boys, same as I did for Archie.
It's all mothers can do.

INT.HUT.NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

Another black and white photo in which Corney is bending over the prone form of the older man and looking up at the terror-stricken face of a woman who is about the older man's age

INT.LOUNGE.NIGHT.

A pile of glowing embers is all that remains of the fire. There's just enough firelight to make out the photo of Archie, and Maud's new horse statue looking down from their perch on the mantelpiece. Maud is nodding off.

DICK

I'll clear up here Mrs Jones
You look a bit tired.

MAUD

Yes I am. Good night Richard.

DICK

Night Mrs Jones.

Dick buries his face in his hands then stares into the dying fire.

EXT. WHARF. DAY.

The deck of the SS Ruapehu is jam packed with waving and shouting soldiers.

The wharf, alongside the ship, is also packed with waving men, women and children. Some are crying. A maze of

coloured streamers joins soldiers with well-wishers.

Dick is at the rails waving and grinning. He sees Mrs Jones and climbs onto the railing to get her attention.

She looks sombre but when she sees him, she smiles and waves back.

The ship's siren BLARES and wharfies start to lift the mooring ropes from their bollards and ready the gangway for lifting.

A soldier, his jacket flapping and puttees unravelling, stumbles and pushes his way through the crowd.

Beyond the crowd, two constables run along the wharf in pursuit. The crowd part and make way for the soldier, cheering and patting him as he passes. As the constables reach the edge of the crowd, it closes up and slows their pursuit.

With a push from a couple of men in the crowd, the soldier gets onto the gangway as it rises. He turns and waves to the crowd and the police.

It's Starkie.

INT. TROOPSHIP DAY.

In the crowded troop deck, soldiers play cards in the spaces between the rows of three-tiered bunks while others lie reading, writing or dozing.

Starkie thrusts his last cigarette at a winning player, tosses down his hand and leaves the card school to mooch about the bunks.

He sees Dick, blindfolded, kneeling on the deck loading a rifle magazine while another SOLDIER sits on a bunk timing him with a stopwatch.

Dick thumbs the last round into the magazine.

TIMING SOLDIER
Eight seconds, good going Dick.

DICK
I can beat that. We'll try again

He starts emptying the magazine.
Starkie joins them, clapping his hands.

STARKIE
Well if it aint' Corney, the
champion horse breaker.

Dick rips off the blindfold and looks up.

DICK
You, the firebug. And, you're
wrong. I'm Dick Travis, got it.

STARKIE
Starkie's the name,
from Southland.

DICK
Good on yuh mate but as you can
see I'm busy.

STARKIE
I won't keep yuh. Just wanted
to let on that I wouldn't want any
sergeants seein what you're doin.
Next thing they'll have us all
at it. Just you enjoy the free boat ride
like the rest of us.

DICK stands up, holding a bullet, and faces STARKIE.

DICK
Well I'm not a shirker like
you, so bugger off.

STARKIE
I do me share. An another thing, I
got me own name. Not like
some blokes eh (beat) Mr Dickson
Cornelius Savage.

Dick leans into Starkie's face

DICK
So where've you been on the
run, Ryal Bush I suppose.

STARKIE
Never 'eard of Ryal Bush but
I lost a half a crown on you
at the show.

Dick shrugs.

DICK
None o my business what you do
so keep your nose outta mine.
This ship's full o' blokes with
stories they never tell no one
and you're no different either.
Chased right on to the ship.

DICK leans closer into Starkie's face.

DICK
So, you go your way
an I'll go mine.

STARKIE shrugs and saunters off, smiling to himself.

EXT. SEA. DAY.

In the early light, a row a whalers, packed with soldiers
in battle kit, is towed by a small launch through a calm,
dark sea. On either side, the dim shapes of other laden

whalers keep station.

Ahead, the shore is marked by the flash and THUD of explosions and the CRACKLING STUTTER of machine guns.

As the dinghies close the shore, SHOUTS AND CRIES can be heard as men flounder in the shallows and dash about the beach, between shell bursts.

Shells straddle the dinghies upending some and riddling others with splinters. Men struggle and scream in the reddening water but the flotilla carries on.

The shore is close. It's an inferno of bursting shells. Dead Australian soldiers float among the flotsam.

The launch slips the tow rope and the dinghies grind into the stony shore.

EXT.BEACH.DAY.

The soldiers leap out and scramble across a narrow beach and crouch under steep cliffs.

Some float at the water's edge, others lie dead or wounded on the beach.

A middle-aged, NZ MAJOR, panting hard, joins them under the cliffs. A signaller, with a field telephone, follows him, uncoiling wire.

MAJOR

Move up that gully to the crest
and dig in on the right
of the Australians. Quickly.

Chivvied by their NCOs, the Otago soldiers move, in single file, up a gully cut into the cliff face. The Major shouts into the telephone.

MAJOR

The Otago Regiment is moving
up Shrapnel gully now.

A YOUNG SOLDIER pauses as he trudges past the major.

YOUNG SOLDIER
Where the hell are we, sir?

MAJOR
You're on the Gallipoli peninsular
in Turkey. Constantinople's
just over there but the Turks
are in between, so look sharp.

An OLD SOLDIER passing the Major asks.

OLD SOLDIER
What the fuck's going on, sir

MAJOR
It's simple. The Turks are
doing their darndest to kill us
or push us back into the sea. So
the sooner you get up there
and kill them first, the better.

EXT. HILLSIDE. DAY

Dawn reveals a broken line of rough trenches zigzagging
across the grain of a maze of brownish, scrub-covered
ridges and gullies, rising steeply from a small cove.

The cove is a scene of ant-like activity as
reinforcements and stores are landed, under shell fire,
and wounded are back-loaded.

Men struggle up steep tracks carrying supplies to the
trenches. Some are hit and fall down the steep slopes.

Cargo ships lie at anchor off shore and patrolling
warships bombard Turkish positions inland.

EXT. TRENCH. DAY.

In the Otago Regiment's trench, on a small plateau, Dick
Travis, his shirt covered in flies, crouches at a
periscope, sketching the Turk's position.

The trench is full of soldiers. Starkie, Tomo, Plunger and De Wet loll about, rifles ready, waving away clouds of flies and watching Dick. Some fill sand bags and others dig dugouts.

DE WET

What's he find so interesting?

STARKIE

Dunno, but I've a feeling it might be trouble for us.

Starkie crawls along to Dick.

STARKIE

Dick, me old mate,
I hope you're not thinkin
o' doin something to upset
the Turks more in they are
already.

Dick finishes his sketch.

DICK

I thought we agreed to
keep out of each others' way.
So, outta my way.

Stuffing his sketch in his pocket, he grabs his rifle and, keeping beneath the parapet, makes off along the trench.

INT. DUGOUT. DAY

In a sand-bagged dugout, Dick and his Company Commander, Major MACKENZIE, late 30s, short, thickset, lean over an upturned crate examining Dick's sketch.

MAJOR MACKENZIE

Hmm, too risky. The Turks've got us

covered. We've lost too many men already.

DICK

Me, alone, at night, that's
a different story, sir.

MAJOR MACKENZIE

No Travis. It's not worth the risk
and that's final.

DICK

I know what I'm doing. I'll
take the risk sir. Darn
sight better 'n sittin in a
fly-blown trench letting Johnny
Turk 'ave it all his own way.

They cringe as Turkish shells CRASH outside and dirt
cascades from the sand-bagged roof. There's a call for
STRETCHER BEARERS.

The major brushes dirt from the sketch and massages his
forehead. He sighs, unbuckles his pistol and hands it to
Dick.

MAJOR MACKENZIE

You can borrow this. Find out
what you can and get back in
one piece. I'll alert the sentry
posts and flank units. No heroics Travis.

DICK

Thanks sir. I won't let you down.

Dick gets up to leave but the Major motions him to wait.
He reaches into a box on the dirt floor and takes out a
hand grenade.

MAJOR MACKENZIE

Take this. It's a Mills bomb.
We just got them. Not enough
for everyone, unfortunately.
You pull out this safety pin and throw
I'm told they're very effective.

Dick takes the bomb and gets the feel of it,

DICK

Feels good. I won't waste it.

MAJOR MACKENZIE

Good luck Travis.

EXT. TRENCH. NIGHT.

Dick, his face and hands blackened and a pistol stuck in his belt, inches over the parapet and, with a pat on the back from another soldier, slithers into the darkness.

Starkie and his mates are among the other soldiers looking on from the bottom of the trench.

STARKIE

Mad bastard. Tryin' to win the war on his own.

TOMO

Wouldn't catch me out there by me self.

STARKIE

Five smokes says he gets back.

Tomo, Plunger and De Wet nod their acceptance and, shielding their matches with their hands, light up.

PLUNGER

I'm feeling lucky tonight. Reckon I won't need to ration me baccy for a while.

TOMO

Only lucky bastards around here are the dead ones.

INT. CHURCH. NIGHT.

In a candle lit church, Mrs Jones sits reading a letter.

DICK

(VO)

Thanks again Mrs Jones for all you done for me. I wanted to tell you about me self but I'm no good at it. Anyway, when you pray for us, I'd like you to put me mother in as well. She don't know where I am but she'll be worried. Egypt is hot an dirty an it ain't much fun ridin a camel. Don't worry about me, remember what I said. Yours truly. Dick Travis.

She puts the letter in her purse and kneels to pray.

EXT. SCRUBBY HILLSIDE. NIGHT.

A Turkish soldier's head and shoulders are silhouetted on the skyline. Flat on his belly, Dick edges his way around boulders and under low bushes, towards the Turk.

He's close enough now to hear the MURMUR OF VOICES and see two heads silhouetted above a low sandbagged wall. He crawls closer and gathers himself for a dash.

He draws his pistol and launches into a crouching charge up the few yards of slope to the Turkish trench.

He vaults a sandbagged wall and shoots the two Turks before they can react.

A Turkish officer, brandishing a sword, charges around a corner. Dick shoots him and kicks the sword aside.

The screams and the shooting triggers a fusillade of shots along the whole front. Flares burst over the Turk's line.

A file of Turks, bayonets fixed, rush at him. Dick takes the Mills bomb from his pocket pulls out the pin and lobs the bomb into the charging Turks.

The blast cuts down the whole group and knocks Dick onto the body of the slain Turkish officer

He's on his feet before the dust and smoke has cleared. He grabs the Turkish officer's cap and a map case and leaps over the trench into the darkness, followed by a burst of machine gun fire.

INT. TRENCH. NIGHT.

The Otago soldiers are alert, watching the display of shooting and flares. A SOLDIER fires.

SOLDIER

Here they come.

DICK

(OC)

It's me, Dick Travis,
from Southland, you stupid
bastard.

Dick looms out of the darkness and jumps into the trench, grinning at the faces grinning back. He makes his way along the trench getting pats on the back as he goes. A corporal hands him a steaming mug.

Starkie goes around his mates collecting cigarettes.

PLUNGER

Here me last gypo ones
I'll get em back when your luck
changes, as it will.

STARKIE

That wasn't all luck mate.
In fact, nearly got rich on
him once before.

DE WET

You cunning whelp.

He a cobber of yours?

STARKIE

Nope but I know enough about
him to take me chances and
I've got another ace on him which
I've a feelin will come in very
handy one day, very handy.

INT. DUGOUT. DAY.

A LIEUTENANT COLONEL and a CAPTAIN, sit on camp stools,
around a crude table of planks and sandbags, examining
the Turkish officer's cap and map. Dick squats against a
sandbagged wall watching.

CAPTAIN

We haven't seen this badge before
sir. Could be new troops in the line.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

Hmm. What did you make of em
Travis?

DICK

A noisy lot sir, didn't chase me
like some 'ave. Maybe they thought
I had more hand bombs. They're damn
good.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

If only we had more of everything
(beat) now where were we. Their artillery
has slackened off too. Either their
supply situation is as bad as ours or
they're stockpiling for something big.
I'm not taking any chances. Adjutant.
warn the front line companies and send up
the reserve, please.

CAPTAIN

Yes sir. But first?

The Captain holds up a brown envelope.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

Oh, of course.

CAPTAIN

On your feet, at attention,
Pte Travis.

Dick , his eyebrows knitting, looks up at the Captain.

CAPTAIN

C'mon Travis, I'm not joking.

Dick stands at attention.

CAPTAIN

You're incorrectly dressed Travis.

DICK

What the hell's going on here.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

He means, Lance Corporal Travis,
that you should be wearing these.

The Lieutenant Colonel hands Dick the envelope. He takes out a set of Lance Corporal's stripes, admires them for a second then salutes. The Lieutenant Colonel returns his salute

DICK

Thank you, sir.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

You can relax now Corporal Travis. Well done that was very fine work.

As Dick leaves the dugout, the smiling officers return to their maps and the Captain picks up a telephone.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

Dawn reveals the Otago battalion is alert , bayonets fixed and crouching below the parapet. At intervals along the trench, officers, whistles ready, peer through periscopes.

Opened ammunition boxes line the trench floor and hand bombs, made from jam tins with a wick stuck in the top, sit on the parapet.

Behind the main trench, soldiers crouch in a shallow, freshly dug reserve trench.

There's a WHINING SOUND and the soldiers crouch lower in their trenches as a Turkish barrage THUDS on and around them.

Sections of trench cave in. Men are flung into the air, some disappear in direct hits, dirt and rock cascades on others.

EXT. SCRUBBY PLAIN. DAY.

The ground in front of the Otago trench is alive with rank upon rank of crawling Turks.

The artillery barrage shifts to the rear of Otago trench and the Turks rise to the SOUND OF BUGLES and advance in line.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

WHISTLES sound along the Otago trenches and with a RIPPLING CRACK the soldiers open fire.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

Their fire cleaves gaps in the ranks of the attacking Turks.

Slain Turks pile up but the living climb over them,

firing and urged on by sword wielding officers.
INT. TRENCH. DAY.

A Lewis gunner is shot as he changes the gun's magazine.

Dick pushes him aside and takes over firing the gun.
The walking wounded help the defenders by loading
magazines, applying field dressings to the severely
wounded and lighting the fuses of hand bombs.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY

A hail of home-made bombs arc out from the Otago trench
and cut down the leading Turks.

The attackers falter and the Otagos climb from their
trench and meet the Turks head on.

A savage hand to hand melee ensues.

Dick, firing the Lewis gun from the hip, cuts down a mass
of Turks.

An Otago soldier falls screaming from a sword slash
across his face.

Starkie bayonets a Turk and can't pull the blade out.
Another Turk, bayonet levelled, charges him but is
dropped by a shot from Plunger.

The soldiers in the reserve trench advance, leap over the
front line trench and charge into the fray.

Outnumbered, the Turks break off the attack and retreat
in disorder.

The Otago soldiers straggle back to their trench, some
crawl, bleeding, others support walking wounded.

Stretcher bearers move around collecting wounded, friend
and foe.

EXT. SCRUBBY PLAIN. DAY.

A ragged line of human shadows undulates over the dusty, scrub-covered and broken ground. The shadows disturb a carpet of flies which rises BUZZING and uncovers hundreds of bloated and mangled corpses.

The shadows belong to Otago soldiers, unarmed, wearing white armbands and carrying stretchers. They pause, some gag and retch, others tie cloths over their noses.

Approaching them, is another rank of unarmed Turkish soldiers also wearing white armbands and carrying stretchers.

The ranks halt and officers from each side, bearing white flags, approach and talk amid the corpses.

The officers check their watches and, after a brief pause, raise their arms together. At this signal, the ranks of soldiers move forward and start looking for their own dead and carrying them back to their own lines.

The Turkish and New Zealand soldiers intermingle as they search among the corpses. They glance warily at each other, sometimes lending a hand to lift corpses or swapping cigarettes.

At the Otago trench, an unarmed officer stands on the parapet watching the body collection through binoculars. Below the parapet, Dick and other troops crouch armed and ready.

Standing on the lip of a Turkish trench, an unarmed officer watches the body collection through binoculars. In the trench below him a line of Turkish soldiers crouch armed and ready.

Starkie drags a Turkish corpse off an Otago one and hears a TINKLE. He looks closer and there's few gold coins shining in the dirt.

After a glance around, he grabs the coins, searches the Turkish corpse and finds more, which he pockets.

The ground is clear of corpses and only a Turkish and a New Zealand officer remain standing together. They look at their watches, salute each other and walk back to their own lines.

INT. DUGOUT. NIGHT.

Starkie and his mates play cards by candle light. He has the largest pile of cigarettes.

STARKIE

If we ever get outta
this shit hole I'll treat
us all.

PLUNGER

I'll want more than cigarettes
that's for sure.

TOMO

Too right Plunger, a couple a
weeks in Cairo with a binte, eh.

STARKIE

Okay boys, two weeks
in Cairo it'll be.

He shows them his bag of Turkish gold.

STARKIE

All on Johnny Turk.

They all grin and thump each other on the back.

DE WET

You bloody beaut Starkie.

Their antics are cut short as a Turkish barrage THUDS and CRUMPS around them bringing down shower of dirt and beams Outside, someone calls "BEARERS."

DE WET

Hope I didn't speak too soon.

INT. SHIP'S CABIN. DAY.

General Sir WILLIAM BIRDWOOD and Admiral WESTER WEYMSS, flanked by other Navy and Army officers, sit around a table, covered by a large map of the Gallipoli peninsular. The front line is drawn in blue and shows a narrow bridgehead around ANZAC Cove and Cape Helles.

GENERAL BIRDWOOD

This stalemate can't go on.
We can't advance and we'll
freeze if we stay. The High Command
has approved a plan to evacuate.
Admiral Weymss, please.

ADMIRAL WEYMSS

Thank you General. Winter storms come up
suddenly in these waters so it's going to
be hazardous, however the Navy won't
let you down.

GENERAL BIRDWOOD

Right. Now let's get down
to details. We don't want
another shambles.

The General stands, picks up a pointer and turns to a large wall-map of Europe and the Mediterranean. He traces a route, marked by blue ribbon, from ANZAC COVE to EGYPT and then to FRANCE

GENERAL BIRDWOOD

(OC)

The Navy will take us from here, to
Egypt for training and reequipping, and
then to France to fight the Germans.

As the pointer touches France the map dissolves to.

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.

A dusty road runs between rolling, green fields dotted with dark green copses and grey, stone cottages.

The REGULAR TRAMP of marching boots and male voices singing; 'MADEMOISELLE FROM ARMENTIERES, PARLEY VOUS, can be heard, growing louder.

A column of NZ Infantry, with rifle and pack, come marching down the road.

Fresh-faced recruits march alongside weather-beaten veterans of Gallipoli.

They're singing their own version of the famous song.

MARCHING INFANTRY

Mademoiselle from Dun e din, parley vous?
Mademoiselle from Dun e din, parley vous?
Mademoiselle from Dun e din, hasn't bin
fucked in fifty years, Hinky, dinky,
parley vous.

Dick Travis adds his version.

DICK

Mademoiselle from Wai ku ku.

The troops LAUGH at this and break into Dick's version;

MARCHING INFANTRY

Mademoiselle from Wai ku ku,
parley vous. Mademoiselle from Wai ku ku,
parley vous. Mademoiselle from Wai, ku ku.

DICK

She 'ad four chins and 'er knees
did knock. An a fanny as big as a
grandfather clock.

TROOPS

Hinky, dinky, parley vous.

In the rear rank, his Lemon Squeezer, pushed back, Starkie pulls a bottle of wine from his jacket, has a swig and passes it on.

Tomo, De Wet and Plunger all have a hearty guzzle.

As the column merges with the haze on the horizon a DULL RUMBLE fills the air and bright flashes stab the darkening sky.

EXT.DIRT ROAD. DAY.

The troops plod, in ragged files, on each side of a slushy road winding through a moonscape of shell holes, mud, and splintered trees.

The leading troops come to a cross-roads and LAUGH as they follow a broken sign pointing to ARMENTIERES.

Howitzers lie askew in the mud which is laced with broken strands of barbed wire and the rat-covered carcasses of horses.

Some soldiers vomit in the shallow roadside ditches while others tie handkerchiefs over their noses.

Dick stares, hard and long, at the half-buried carcass of a chestnut horse, still harnessed to a smashed wagon.

EXT. SHELL-BLASTED CITY STREET. DAY.

Dusk is falling as they trudge into the great pile of rubble and shattered buildings that is Armentieres.

The gaunt, pale faces of British soldiers stare back at them from dugouts and crannies in the rubble.

The New Zealand troops scatter for cover as a German barrage THUMPS into the rubble.

EXT. WRECKED BUILDING. DAY.

Covered in concrete dust, Starkie and Tomo lie amid a pile of masonry and timber.

Tomo gets up and lifts a beam clear of Starkie's foot. He bends down and peers at the floor.

TOMO
What 'ave we 'ere?

Starkie stops massaging his ankle and follows Tomo's stare.

A handle is just visible in the rubble.

They grasp it and heave.

A door opens upward showing the top of a stone staircase.

Starkie lights a match and leans down the staircase.

He looks back at Tomo and grins.

STARKIE
Whaddaya know Tomo
old son. Enough plonk
down here to keep us
happy for a long time.

From outside they hear shouted command, "FALL IN."

STARKIE
Quick, we'd better
hide this.

They close the lid and push rubble over it.

EXT. SHELL-BLASTED CITY STREET. DAY.

Dick is standing in the street as Starkie and Tomo

clamber out of the ruined house.

DICK

What are you blokes
grinnin about?

STARKIE

Nothin corp, just
happy we's still alive.

EXT. TRENCH. DAY.

It's raining torrents. The trench is a quagmire. At intervals along it sentries stand on the fire step peering over the parapet.

In the bottom of the trench, a tangle of legs stick out from huddle of a capes. Cigarette smoke wafts out.

The legs belong to Starkie and his mates.

STARKIE

Okay, we agree. I'll slip out
with the work party tonight.
Next time you see me it'll be
plonk with our bully, eh.

Tomo, Plunger and De Wet grin and nod in agreement.

Dick scans the German trenches with a periscope and sees.

EXT. GERMAN FRONT LINE. DAY.

Their trench is bordered by multiple rows of barbed wire and dotted with concrete pill boxes.

A periscope looks back.

No mans land is a morass of mud and craters brimming with black water.

INT. DUGOUT. NIGHT.

Water drips from the low sand-bagged roof. The floor is an ankle deep bog. In the light of an oil lamp, Dick and Major STAN PRICE, 30s, tall, dark haired, sporting a thin moustache, sit at an upturned crate, sipping from steaming mugs.

MAJOR

We think they're Saxons
but we need to know a lot more.

DICK

Good as done sir.

MAJOR

This isn't Gallipoli Dick.
The Huns have had years
to build their defences. Take
a patrol with you.

DICK

Not all that again, sir.
Okay, so they've stopped divisions.
So did the Turks but they
couldn't stop me. Anyway, I got
more o' these now.

He holds up a Mills bomb.

EXT. GERMAN OUTPOST. NIGHT.

It's still pouring with rain. Two Germans squat in a mini lake in the bottom of a circular, sand-bagged pit, their hands cupped around cigarettes. A third stands on a fire step at a machine gun.

A Mills bomb explodes in the outpost killing the two smoking and spinning the machine gunner around to look down the barrel of Dick's pistol.

A flare bursts above the outpost showing a German party

hurrying along a sap.

Pushing his prisoner ahead of him, Dick tosses a grenade along the sap, then rolls over the edge of the outpost.

EXT. SHELL-BLASTED CITY STREET. NIGHT.

In the flickering, orange glare from a burning building Starkie kicks away the rubble from the cellar door he and Tomo had found.

He drops to his knees, grasps the handle and is flattened by shiny boot in his back.

Twisting around, he looks down the barrel of pistol, held by a grim-faced Military Police (MP) SERGEANT

MP SERGEANT

Hah. A nigger as well
as a deserter and a looter.

Starkie rolls, grabs the MP's boot and twists. The pistol fires and the bullet chips the stone floor, an inch from his head, just as another MP steps from the shadows and batons him unconscious.

INT. DRAWING ROOM. DAY.

Tarpaulins cover most of the furniture in the richly carpeted room. A wall is covered by a map of northern France and Belgium, with ARMENTIERS highlighted and the front line marked in blue.

Dick, his tunic unbuttoned, leans back in a soft chair, across the desk from MAJOR GENERAL RUSSELL, medium build, moustachioed, late 40s, the Commander of the NZ Division.

The General examines a pair of Zeiss binoculars.

GENERAL

Thank you Dick, I hear these
are better than ours.

DICK

They must be sir
cause all the
officers want em

The General chuckles and, taking a bottle of whiskey from his desk drawer, pours himself a shot and pushes the bottle and a mug towards Dick.

GENERAL

As long as I can remember
the other fellow's always
had something that's better
than ours.

DICK

Well, you can't say that about
our Mills bombs. They're
just great. Wouldn't go anywhere
without 'em.

The General lights up and offers him one.

GENERAL

Yes, they're a success
story all right. But let's
talk about these lone patrols
of yours. We know a lot about
the Hun as a result and from
our other raids, of course.
The Corps Commander, General
Birdwood is very impressed.

There's a knock on the door.

GENERAL

Come in.

Private ALEX MACDONALD, early 30s, fair hair atop a tough face, comes in holding a report. His eyes pop out when he sees Dick sitting there, glass in hand, large as life.

DICK

So this is where you got
to Sandy.

ALEX

Last night's activity report sir
with Dick's, um, Corporal Travis'
prisoner debrief.

GENERAL

Thank you.

The private about turns and walks out, eyes still poking
out, as the General concentrates on the report.

GENERAL

Hmm, just what I was saying.
your Hun's talked his head
off. Good show Dick.

The General refills their mugs.

GENERAL

Well, where were we. Oh yes,
much as we all appreciate
your single efforts Dick,
there's more to be done than
one man could ever do.
I want to form a special section
for scouting and raiding and
I want you to raise, train and
lead it.

Dick stands up and puts down his mug.

DICK

Best order I've ever got.

He salutes and walks towards the door.

GENERAL

By the way, you'll need these.

He hands Dick a set of sergeant's stripes.

EXT. FIELD. NIGHT.

Grass and a few low bushes grow among the craters and strands of barbed wire littering this old battlefield.

Dark clouds drift over the moon creating moving shadows.

Three straw-filled dummies in German uniforms are propped with their heads just above the lip of a shell crater.

Dick lies in a shallow ditch beside the crater scanning the field with binoculars.

He sees a soldier stand up from behind a bush and bowl a bomb, over-arm at, him.

A Mills bomb plops into the grass just outside the crater but doesn't explode. Dick watches and waits.

A line of soldiers charge out of the darkness CLICKING their pistols at the dummies as they converge on the crater and leap into it.

Dick gets up, picks up the bomb and, holding it up, walks to the edge of the crater.

One of the group looking up at him is Sandy, the fair-haired orderly from the General's office.

DICK

You'd be dead as door nails
by now. This is no good
out there. It's gotta land here.

He tosses the bomb at their feet and laughs as they leap away.

DICK

Out there all it does is tell Fritz
you're comin. And another thing,
get in amongst em soon as it goes bang,
before Fritz knows what's up. Now, we'll
do it again.

A soldier tosses the bomb to him and they walk a few
paces from the crater and lie down.

DICK

This is about as close as you
gotta be.

He hands the bomb to Sandy.

DICK

Here, this time pull the pin
out and for Chrissake keep
low when you throw it.

The soldiers press themselves, face down, in the earth as
Sandy rolls onto his side, pulls out the pin and lobs the
bomb into the crater

There's a flash and a BANG and they look up to see Dick,
Sandy and another, jumping into the crater.

Dick looks at Sandy, and ALBI, late 40s, grizzled
features.

DICK

You blokes'll do
for a start. We'll practice
again tomorrow night.

INT. DUGOUT. DAY.

Dick ducks into Major Price's dugout and stands, grim
faced, in front of him.

MAJOR PRICE

I know, I know, you're busy training your scouts but this has just come from Div. You've been called as a defence witness at Private Stark's court martial

DICK

What! I dunno nothing 'bout him or what he done.

MAJOR PRICE

Sorry Dick, military law, nothing you or I can do about it.

Dick stares, open-mouthed, clenching his fists.

INT. STABLE. DAY.

The horse stalls are topped with barbed wire and their entrances covered by screens of barbed wire. A barefooted, shivering soldier lies on a palliasse in one of these improvised cells.

He flinches as a shadow falls over him, then he stands up.

The shadow is from Dick, standing outside the barbed wire screen.

DICK

Bloody hell!

Starkie is a bruised and bloody mess.

STARKIE

Sorry if I scared you it aint what I wanted you for.

DICK

Look Stark. I got no time for
MPs beatin blokes up but there's
nothin I can say an I'm not
gonna stand in a court n lie.
Sorry, I can't do nothin for you.

STARKIE

I don't want no favours an
yuh don't have to lie either
It's like this.

Dick holds up his hand and turns away, shaking his head.

STARKIE

A few good words from you,
that's all, and I keep me trap
shut about you murderin your old man.
Dick about turns and stares, his eyes mere slits.

STARKIE

In the pub in 'potiki. The law
come 'round askin 'bout a bloke
called Cornelius Savage Word was
he'd killed his old man then bugged
off. So, I puts two and two together.

INT. HUT. NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

We see again the black and white photo of Corney's
uppercut impacting on the older man's jaw.

INT. STABLE. DAY.

Dick presses his face to the barbed wire screen-door of
Starkie's cell.

DICK

Don't threaten me with
a load of pub blabber.

STARKIE

It ain't blabber an you know it.
An you know the Army wouldn't be too
happy to hear one o their Sergeants
was wanted back 'ome for doin in his
ol man. Would they?

DICK

What happened in 'potiki's got
bugger all to do with what's
goin on 'ere. All that matters
is what goes on in No Mans Land.
Nothin else, so stick your story.

He spins on his heels and walks away.

STARKIE

We'll find out soon enough.
Anyway, it ain't right, me in here
for tryin to nick a bit o plonk and
theres you, a sergeant who done for
his ol man, standin out there scott free.

Dick pauses and walks back to Starkie.

DICK

I play fair Stark an I ain't
takin sides with no red cap but
I ain't gonna face a court and
lie and that's that. You got
yourself in this mess.

Starkie shrugs and smiles.

STARKIE

A few good words aint lyin
and not much to keep your
stripes and reputation. Eh.

DICK

Good luck in court.

He turns and walks away head down and frowning.

The MP sergeant, who caught Starkie looting, sits at a desk in a furnished stall, just inside the main door, reading a newspaper.

He looks up, smiles and points to a chair as Dick comes to the desk.

MP SERGEANT

Anything else I can do for you sergeant?

DICK

Yep. Get a doctor to Stark and get him his boots and some blankets now.

The MP sergeant stands up and leans over his desk.

MP SERGEANT

Now wait a minute. I say what goes `ere. Besides, that nigger `ad it comin.

He doesn't see the blow which hit his jaw and flung him against the wall

Dick's got him by the collar, holding him up.

DICK

A doctor, boots, blankets, and hot food, now, or by Jesus when I've done with you there won't be enough left for the stretcher bearers.

The sergeant slides down the wall when Dick lets him go.

DICK

We give our Fritz prisoners a better go `n that.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

It's raining as Sandy and Albi, camouflaged with leaves and branches crawl, half-submerged, up a shallow, swampy ditch.

Sandy, in the lead, pauses, checks his compass and peeps over the edge of the ditch.

A sand-bagged wall and the tops of two helmets are visible a few yards away. He signals Albi that they're level with the Germans and pulls the pin from a bomb.

He lobs it and they charge the outpost, vault the sand-bagged parapet and shoot the two stunned Germans.

The German reaction is immediate. Machine gun bullets SMACK around them pinning them in the dugout.

A barrage CRASHES all around them. A direct hit obliterates Albi and wounds Sandy.

He drags himself out and into the ditch, and crawls away, cradling a shattered arm.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. NIGHT.

It's still raining. The faint moonlight shows a swarm of rats gnawing at the feet of body lying halfway down the slope of crater. There's a GROAN, the foot twitches and the rats pause. Another GROAN.

It comes from Sandy, lying on his back with his shattered, right arm stuck inside his jacket.

A shadow falls on the rats and they waddle away.

Dick slides over the crater lip on his belly. He gives Sandy a morphine tablet and puts his arm in a sling.

DICK

You'll be right now cobber.
Just hang on a bit longer

He hoists Sandy onto his back and, crouching low,

staggers back to their lines.

They're caught in the open as a flare bursts overhead and fired on by a German patrol.

Dick lays Sandy down and checks his pulse as Sandy groans and his eyelids flicker.

Dashing from crater to crater he engages the Germans with bombs and pistol, forcing them to pull back

Dick crawls back to Sandy, checks his pulse and, lifting him onto his back, staggers through the mud towards their line.

INT. HOTEL DINING ROOM. DAY.

Boards cover the shell holes in the once elegant dining room. Three brigadiers, their Sam Browne's gleaming, sit at a long table facing two captains seated at single desks .The distant SOUND OF HEAVY GUNFIRE can be heard.

Starkie, flanked by two armed MP, stands at attention behind the captains and facing the panel.

The BRIGADIER, in the middle, picks up a sheaf of papers and addresses the court.

BRIGADIER

Eight three four six Private
Douglas Stark. The court finds
you guilty of looting but not guilty of
desertion.

Starkie gives them his poker face. His wounds are expertly dressed.

BRIGADIER

In considering sentence we
took particular note of Sergeant
Richard Travis' testimony as to
your soldierly qualities and
his request to have you in his
scout section. The court hereby sentences
you to three months stoppage of pay.

INT. DUGOUT DAY.

This is little more than a cave hollowed out of the trench wall and a few poles bracing a roof of iron sheets. Dick sits on a stretcher cleaning his pistol

He squints as the sack doorway is pulled back and Starkie ducks in.

They size each other up

STARKIE

Now what?

DICK

Let's get one thing straight
I didn't like sayin what I did
but none of our blokes deserves
what them red caps did. Not even you.

They stiffen and look up just as a series of loud THUDS erupt outside bringing down lumps of dirt from the walls.

The barrage stops and they wait, looking at one another.

STARKIE

Better this than gaol(beat) thanks.

DICK

You're under my orders now
and you'll meet my standards

STARKIE

Stop soundin like a toff Travis
you're the murderer not me. A word
from me an your 'igh 'n mighty days
are over.

DICK

An one from me an you're back
in the hands o' that MP sergeant.
We goin out for a shufti tonight?.

STARKIE

I'll be there, but don't forget
I'm not gettin paid for any of this.

DICK

That's not my business but
don't you forget that a word
from me could get you a stripe
an you'd soon make it up.

Starkie shrugs and crawls to the opening.

STARKIE

What time we goin over?

DICK

Be here just before Stand To

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

Amid the smoke still drifting about from the barrage,
Starkie and his mate sprawl on duckboards smoking.

They sit up to make room for a stretcher party struggling
through with a casualty. Blood drops on their boots as
the stretcher bearers move through.

On a fire step, a corporal scans No Mans Land through a
periscope, then gives the thumps up.

Dick threads his way along the trench past soldiers
sleeping, cleaning weapons or playing cards.

He rounds a corner and comes across Starkie, smoking. His
mates lie further along the trench, snoring.

DICK

Here catch

He lobs a Mills bomb at him, then laughs as Starkie
somersaults away from it.

DICK
It's okay pins in.
Bring it with you tonight.

Starkie tosses the bomb from hand to hand.

STARKIE
Always fancied me self as
a spinner but never got
in the borstal eleven.

INT. DUGOUT NIGHT.

Water drips from the roof and runs down the walls. Dick finishes blackening his face and hands with a burnt cork and offers it to Starkie.

DICK
You wouldn't need this would yuh?

STARKIE
Delaware and Spanish, a good
mix and don't ever forget it.
Comes in 'andy sometimes.

He looks at the sketch map of their sector which Dick holds up.

DICK
There's a big stunt comin up
The brass hats say it'll shorten
the war if we capture here 'pass'
somethin' or other.

He points to PASSCHENDAELE.

STARKIE
Heard that one before.

DICK

We all 'ave but the CO wants
to know more about Fritz.
And one more, thing. This is my show
Stark. Got that.

Starkie nods and Dick hands him a pistol.

DICK

Got the bomb?

Starkie opens his satchel. It's full of Mills bombs.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. NIGHT.

Rain hoses down on a sea of mud, pierced here and there
with leafless, splintered trees.

Flares soar from the German lines and rifle fire flickers
and CRACKS

Dick and Starkie lie beside each other on the edge of a
crater. Rats feed on corpses lying half submerged in the
bottom. Dick takes a small, home-made periscope from his
pocket and scans the horizon.

A party of Germans are laying out coils of barbed wire in
front of a large, concrete pill box.

DICK

They're putting up more
wire. We'll go further north.

STARKIE

They're wide awake too
Let's just fuck off.

Dick grabs him by the collar

DICK

This is my show remember.
We go north.

Starkie shrugs and they slither away through the mud.

A German searchlight sweeps across them. They freeze and squeeze themselves into the mud. It sweeps back and holds them in its glare.

They dash for a crater and Dick goes down in a hail of bullets.

Starkie grabs him by the collar and drags him into the crater.

Blood oozes from Dick's chest. He GROANS.

DICK

Tell 'em Fritz knows

He loses consciousness.

EXT.NO MANS LAND. NIGHT.

Starkie is crawling on all fours through deep mud with Dick slumped over his back.

He stops to rest on a slight mound covered by the debris a farm house. Ahead of him, he sees a German patrol crawling his way.

He gets a Mills bomb out of his satchel and is about to throw it when he stops and replaces the pin.

He opens his satchel and gets ready to pull the pins from all the bombs at once.

He pulls all the pins out, closes the bag and, swinging it around by the strap, launches it at the Germans.

There's a spectacular flash and EXPLOSION and Starkie is up, with Dick in a fireman's carry, lurching through the mud and firing his pistol.

He struggles on skirting craters and then starts yelling.

STARKIE

Otago it's Starkie. Otago
don't shoot it's Starkie.

EXT. OUTPOST. NIGHT

Tomo and two others lie on ground sheets on the edge of a crater. Tomo fires a flare which shows Starkie, carrying Dick , stumbling across their front.

TOMO

Starkie over ere,
yah dumb bastard over `ere.

A SOLDIER, next to Tomo, cranks the handle of a field telephone.

SOLDIER

Outpost Clutha here.
Send bearers quickly
Sergeant Travis is hit.

INT. DUGOUT. NIGHT.

Major Price is talking on the phone. Starkie and a WARRANT OFFICER stand by his desk.

MAJOR PRICE

Yes sir there's concrete
pillboxes and they're putting up
more wire They're,very alert.
Report from private Stark.

The Major looks up and rolls his eyes.

MAJOR PRICE

Yes, Stark, there's only one.
He carried in Sergeant Travis
Yes. Very bad show all right.

The dugout trembles as shells CRASH nearby.

MAJOR PRICE

The barbed wire is not cut. Hello.
Not cut, hello?

He turns to the warrant officer.

MAJOR PRICE

Blast, line must be cut.

WARRANT OFFICER

Let's hope our gunners cut
Fritz's wire before we go over, sir.
I'll get a runner ready an a party to
check the line.

The Major nods and turns to Starkie.

MAJOR

Good show Stark you
might've saved sergeant
Travis. Let's hope
so. Is there anything else?

STARKIE

No sir.

MAJOR PRICE

Very good Stark. Sar'major
an extra rum ration for
him please.

WARRANT OFFICER

Yes sir. Let's go Stark.

INT. STABLE. DAY.

Dawn light falling through the wide open doorway shows
the stalls are full of wounded, lying on stretchers under
mud-splattered blankets. Medics tend to some, others lie
still or smoke, many are GROANING.

The dimness is lit up by brilliant flashes outside and a loud RUMBLING shakes the walls and rafters bringing down clouds of dust.

Dick wakes up, wide-eyed. He props himself up with his good arm. His chest is criss-crossed by bandages. He stares about and calls out.

DICK
STOP! STOP! STOP!

An ORDERLY walks among the wounded.

ORDERLY
They're our guns, don't worry.

A doctor arrives and tries to give Dick a morphine injection but Dick stops him.

DICK
Fritz. He knows.

He flops back grimacing as a red stain seeps through his bandage. The doctor nods and injects the morphine.

EXT. STABLEYARD. DAY.

The muddy, cobbled courtyard is covered with stretcher cases, including a few Germans. Some are dead already and laid to one side. De Wet is among them.

Mud-smearred stretcher bearers stagger in with their gory loads, then plod out for more. Horse-drawn carts and motor ambulances arrive with more wounded.

A doctor moves from stretcher to stretcher assessing priorities. Orderlies carry the chosen inside.

INT. STABLE. DAY.

Dick comes to and peers at the fuzzy, black and white shapes drifting past. They're nurses tending the wounded.

Next to him lies a soldier with his lower leg amputated. His bandaged stump is suspended by a strap from the rafters.

DICK
How's things cobber?

The soldier looks around. It's Tomo.

DICK
Tomo. How's the blokes?

TOMO
Proibly all dead. I'm just lucky to get out o' that balls up with only 'arf a leg gone.

Dick struggles to get a smoke out of his pocket and lights it for Tomo.

TOMO
Thanks.

DICK
What happened to your mate Stark?

TOMO
After he carried you in he jumped the bags with us. Last I saw of 'im.

DICK
Another stuff up?

TOMO
'Course. Arty missed the wire an Fritz mowed us down while we was stuck up to our arses in mud.

DICK
Did he report?

TOMO
Report what?

DICK
Our patrol, we saw their bloody
new wire and pillboxes and everything.
Did Stark report it?

Tomo takes a long draw on his cigarette and shrugs.

TOMO
Suppose so. He told us about it.
Anyway, wouldn't have done
no good if he did. The fuckin brass
don't listen to no one, do they (beat)
least of all Starkie.

Dick lights his own smoke and mutters to himself.

DICK
They would've listened to me,
they would've.

A DOCTOR comes by on his rounds. He puts his stethoscope
to Dick's chest.

DOCTOR
Hurt to breathe Sergeant?

DICK
Not too bad. When am I going back, sir.

DOCTOR
There's an ambulance
convoy going back this
afternoon. You and your
mate here will be on it.

DICK

Back to the front, I mean.

DOCTOR

Are you sure you weren't
hit in the head as well.
You're not going anywhere
near the front with that
big hole in your shoulder.

Dick lies back and watches the orderlies and nurses busy at work over the wounded. He sees Major Price and the Company Sergeant Major carried into the curtained off area marked OPERATING THEATRE.

INT.SHELL-BLASTED BUILDING. DAY.

The bare room is full of SHOUTING AND CHEERING soldiers who stand in a large circle swigging bottles of beer and wine. There's Kiwis, Aussies, Scots, Brits and Canadians.

A soldier shuffles out from a curtained-off alcove, hitching up his trousers. The next soldier in line pays a rouged and heavily powdered woman, who looks behind the curtain, then beckons him in.

Plunger stands in the middle of the noisy circle. All eyes are on the spinning coins as they rise and drop inside a circle, marked on the floor with chunks of masonry.

One coin lies flat, shiny side up, the other rolls on its edge, then falls, dull side up.

PLUNGER

Odds!

JEERING breaks out as money changes hands and is dropped into a bucket at Plunger's feet.

He takes the Kip from an Aussie soldier and hands it to Starkie.

PLUNGER
What'll it be?

STARKIE
Turkish gold.

This is greeted by JEERS, and cries of 'BALDIES', 'MAKE IT QUEENS'.

Starkie takes two gold coins from his pocket and holds them up. They're shiny on one side and dull on the other.

STARKIE
Fair dinkum, arm wrestled
Johnny Turk for 'em meself.

His comment is greeted by a burst of LAUGHING and CHEERING.

Plunger takes the coins from Starkie and places them, dull side up, on the Kip. Money and cigarettes fill the bucket as the bets are placed.

All eyes are on Starkie now.

Through a shell hole in the wall we see a convoy of red cross ambulances pass by.

PLUNGER
Come in spinner!

Starkie flips the Kip and sends the coins spinning upwards. They land both shiny side up.

PLUNGER
Heads!

CHEERS, AND GROANS, and he replaces the coins on the Kip.

PLUNGER
Come in Spinner.

Starkie flips them and the school goes quiet as they fall and roll around.

One drops shiny side up, the other rolls a bit more and drops, shiny side up.

PLUNGER

Heads.

There's wild CHEERING and back slapping as Plunger replaces the coins and gathers in the growing pile of bets.

PLUNGER

Come in Spinner.

Starkie flips the Kip. The coins rise spinning and come down shiny side up.

PLUNGER

Heads! You threw a trot again,
You lucky young bastard.

There's GROANS and a few CHEERS as he hands Starkie a large wad of notes.

That MP sergeant and a squad of MPs appear inside with their batons drawn.

MP SERGEANT

Well, well, well, if it ain't
me nigger friend. We're in luck too
boys.

A bottle smashes on his head and he drops.

PLUNGER

Get the bastards boys.
Run for it Starkie.

A brawl erupts. Bottles fly at the MPs who raise their batons and wade in.

Naked women run SCREAMING from the alcove, clutching their clothes.

Plunger head butts an MP to the floor.

A soldier goes down under a baton blow on the head.

An MP goes down with a chair wrapped around his head and gets a face full of hobnailed boots.

Starkie slips through the melee towards a shell hole in the wall, bottling an MP on the way. He vaults through the hole.

The rapid CRACKS of a pistol, stop the fighting.

An MP OFFICER points a smoking pistol at the roof.

He talks to the MP sergeant whose face is bleeding and who is supported by a fellow MP.

Bloodied MPs and soldiers lie where they've fallen.

An NZ OFFICER and a WARRANT OFFICER arrive and talk with the MP Officer.

MP OFFICER

Very well, you get your men back to their billets by curfew. But I want the one who threw the bottle at my sergeant.

The NZ Officer nods and turns to the Warrant Officer.

NZ OFFICER

Sar'major, find out who it was.

The Warrant Officer turns to the troops who've grouped together facing the MP s, who've lined up behind their officer.

WARRANT OFFICER

Ten Shun! Before you're dismissed
to your billets I want the man
who threw the bottle at the
Sergeant here to step forward.

No one moves.

MP SERGEANT

It were the Kiwi nigger I nabbed
lootin.

NZ OFFICER

You must be mistaken Sergeant.
All our natives are in
a pioneer battalion.

MP Sergeant

It were the nigger all right
sir.

NZ WARRANT OFFICER

No one fits that description
here sir.

MP OFFICER

He can't have got far
Well get him soon.

WARRANT OFFICER

Fall in. On the road.
Everyone. Carry em if you
have to. On the double.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD. DAY.

Dick, still bandaged but clad in pyjamas, sits up in a
proper bed, in a proper hospital ward, full of soldiers.
It's bright and airy with views over gardens and wide
lawns.

He looks up as SQUEAKING WHEELS announce the arrival of the tea trolley, pushed by ALICE, late teens, fresh-faced, wearing a floral dress. He smiles at her.

ALICE

Cup of tea Mr Travis. My
you do look much better today.

DICK

Thanks Alice, I feel just great.
How about some extra sugar this time?

Alice smiles and drops four lumps in his mug and parks the trolley close to his bed. He reaches behind the curtained-off, lower tray and pulls out a full sand bag.

The ward watches as he grips the sandbag.

DICK

Goin for ten today boys.

Grimacing, he starts lifting the sand bag up and down with his wounded arm. Everyone counts for him.

ALICE AND PATIENTS

One, two, three, four, five, six.

He's straining, gritting his teeth and looking at the roof.

ALICE AND PATIENTS

Seven (beat) eight (beat) nine (beat)ten.

He drops the bag and flops back, sweating heavily as a fresh spot of blood stains his bandage and the ward erupts in CHEERING.

ALICE bends over and, while the troops enjoy the view of her legs, heaves the sandbag onto the trolley and moves on, handing out tea.

A nurse appears at the end of the ward and is pushed aside as the MATRON bustles past.

MATRON

Nurse, change this man's dressing. I'll have you know sergeant it's a chargeable offence to deliberately prevent your wounds healing.

DICK

Doin me best sister. Just the Gets the sweat n blood up too right.

The matron glares at him and walks out as the smiling nurse changes his dressing and the patients and Alice grin and give him the thumbs up.

INT. OFFICE. DAY.

The MEDICAL OFFICER stops writing and looks up as the door RATTLES. Through the frosted window he sees the outline of the matron and a blue-robed figure.

The door bursts open and Dick pushes past the protesting matron.

MATRON

He won't listen to me sir.

MEDICAL OFFICER

What on earth's going on?

DICK

I want to be discharged sir.

MEDICAL OFFICER

I'll decide that, not you, now get back to your ward.

Dick gets down and starts doing press ups.

DICK
How many do you want sir?

MEDICAL OFFICER
What the devil are you
up to. Get back to your ward
at once.

Dick carries on pressing up. He gets to thirty and stops
but stays in position ready for more.

DICK
Thirty enough?

The Medical Officer sighs and the matron rolls her eyes.

MEDICAL OFFICER
For heavens sake stand up.
Your due for two weeks
convalescence on discharge
so.

DICK
Let's forget that. Just
send me back to the front
sir. I'm sure there's some
poor bugger could do with my
bed more'n me.

MATRON
There's patients waiting
for beds sir.

MEDICAL OFFICER
Indeed so. Very well sister,
discharge him.

DICK
Thank you sir.

He gets up, salutes, and walks out, grinning from ear to ear.

MEDICAL OFFICER

By the way sergeant Travis,
you're discharged but not to
the front. I've got orders
to send you to the training
camp at Etaples, as an instructor.

Dick's grin disappears.

He stops and stares, unseeingly, at a poster on the wall outside the office which shows a wounded soldier below the headline, .YOUR BLOOD COULD SAVE HIM.

EXT. CHATEAU. DAY.

The chateau is ringed by barbed wire, except for a gap cut by a muddy, dirt road leading to the front door. Signal wires hang in loops from posts erected alongside the road. Two sentries guard the gap and others patrol the perimeter wire. Soldiers come and go between the chateau and tents on the front lawn. A lorry is parked outside.

A soldier on a bicycle hurtles along the road leading to the chateau.

He slows and waves as the older of the two SENTRIES smiles back and casually signals him to stop, then he accelerates past.

YOUNGER SENTRY

Halt!

He shoots and chips the chateau's front wall.

Before he can fire again, the older sentry wrenches the younger one's rifle aside and they chase the soldier.

The soldier leaps off the bike and runs up the stairs into the chateau.

INT.CORRIDOR. DAY.

The cyclist charges down a dimly lit, wooden corridor towards a door marked, MAJOR GENERAL RUSSELL, COMMANDER NZ DIVISION.

A CAPTAIN rises from his desk outside the general's office grabbing for his holstered pistol. He gets it out just in time to point it at the charging soldier.

CAPTAIN

Halt! Hands up! Sergeant
Travis! What in God's name
is going on.

Dick raises his arms above his head as the sentries arrive and aim their rifles at him.

DICK

I've got to speak to the General
quick.

The Captain looks bewildered.

The office door opens and a pistol appears followed by the general.

GENERAL

What the devil is going on?

CAPTAIN

Well sir

DICK

I have to speak to you
urgently sir and I couldn't
get a proper pass.

The general looks from Dick, to the captain, to the sentries, then lowers his pistol.

GENERAL
Very well. Captain,
bring Sergeant Travis in
please.

The sentries lower their rifles.

YOUNGER SENTRY
Who the hell is he?

OLDER SENTRY
That, young fella, was Dick Travis.
King of No Mans Land great clobber of
the general And you, yah daft bastard,
nearly shot him.

INT. OFFICE. DAY.

The general sits facing Dick who is standing across from
his desk. The captain sits to the side, holding his
pistol.

GENERAL
That's right Dick, to
Etaples as an instructor.

DICK
But sir, I'll be more use
to you scouting. You know
there's no one better at it.

GENERAL
There's no question you're
the best in the whole division
but you're not bullet proof and.

DICK
But.

The general holds up his hand.

GENERAL

As I was saying, your experience is invaluable. You've been fighting since Gallipoli and decorated for bravery. The Americans are in the war now and the Huns are nearly finished. You've done more than your fair share of fighting Dick.

Dick looks at the captain, then back at the general.

DICK

Can I speak to you in private sir.

GENERAL

Oh all right but make it quick.

He nods towards the adjutant who leaves, closes the door and sinks into his chair, shaking his head.

DICK

It's like this. The night I got hit I was darn sure Fritz knew a big stunt was comin an I'm sure the brass would've listened more if I'd been the one who reported it.

GENERAL

Good God man you can't blame yourself, for that.

DICK

Well I do and it was bad lyin there seein all the wounded blokes and thinking it was my fault.

The general lights a cigarette and offers one to Dick, motioning him to sit down.

GENERAL

That's a feeling that
haunts every commander
Dick but we all have to
obey orders.

DICK

There's somethin else too
and it's hard to say.

He gets up and paces around the office, then comes back
to the front of the General's desk.

The General has a swig from his silver flask, then offers
it to Dick.

GENERAL

Go on, now's your chance, out with it.

DICK

It's funny but out there
in No Mans Land I feel in charge
of me life. I know it sounds daft
but all I want is to keep doin it.
If you can see what I mean sir.

The general looks at his desk, nodding, then looks at
Dick.

GENERAL

God I hope I don't regret
this, but all right Dick.
You win, off you go.

Dick smiles and salutes

DICK

Thanks a lot sir You won't
regret it and I'm sorry about
all the fuss comin in.

The General smiles and waves him out.

GENERAL

Oh, If I were you I'd get
my parade uniform up to scratch.

The General holds up his hand to stop any questions.

GENERAL

You'll find out soon
enough. Good luck Dick.

EXT. FIELD. DAY.

The sun shines. The Otago Battalion is drawn up, in three ranks, on a flat, green field, by a small village. The officers form a single rank in front of the battalion and Dick and Sandy stand in front of them.

Major General Russell and his aide, the captain whose desk is outside the general's office, stand on a white, wooden dais, facing the parade.

GENERAL RUSSELL

It's my privilege today to award the
Distinguished Conduct Medal to two of
your comrades for bravery which stands
out in a brave battalion.

The aide hands the citations to the General.

GENERAL RUSSELL

Eight five nine six Private
Alexander MacDonald.

As Sandy grounds arms and marches towards us, we hear the beginning of his citation.

GENERAL RUSSELL

(VO)

For conspicuous gallantry and
devotion to duty. He went out into
No Mans Land in daylight.

Montage of scenes, Sandy in the ditch throwing a bomb at
the outpost, in the outpost with Albi shooting the German
soldiers, crawling in the ditch cradling his bloody arm.

GENERAL RUSSELL

He set a magnificent example of
courage and initiative to his comrades.

Sandy halts in front of the General.

GENERAL RUSSELL

Nine five two three Sergeant Richard
Travis. Military Medal and Croix de
Guerre.

As Dick grounds arms and marches towards us, we hear the
beginning of his citation.

GENERAL RUSSELL

(VO)

For conspicuous gallantry in action.
He went out by himself.

Montage of scenes showing Dick alone and at night,
crawling under barbed wire, bombing a German outpost, a
German soldier surrendering at the point of Dick's
pistol.

GENERAL RUSSELL

He had on many previous occasions
done very fine work.

Dick halts in front of the General.

The General, accompanied by his aide carrying the medals on a velvet cushion, steps down and pins a medal to each soldier's chest.

GENERAL RUSSELL
Well done Private MacDonald.
Well done Sergeant Travis.

The two men salute together, about turn and march back to the ranks.

INT. DUGOUT. DAY.

MAJOR PRINGLE, mid 30s, tall and slim, looks up, smiles and shakes hands with Dick.

MAJOR PRINGLE
Ah, Sergeant Travis, congratulations.
Well I daresay you'll want to get
your hands back on the scout section.

DICK
Yes sir, but first of all I
just want to get back out there.

The Major looks at him, nods and points to Rossignol Wood, on a sketch map on the wall.

DICK
Rightoh. Um, any news of Stark?

MAJOR PRINGLE
Nothing. The MP are turnin the
rear areas upside down. Even
suggested he might be hiding out in
the line. But they wouldn't know
what that's like, would they?

DICK
No one would who hadn't lived here.
Well, best I be getting ready to scout
around that wood.

EXT.COMMUNICATION TRENCH.NIGHT.

It's pouring with rain and a work party heavily laden with ammo boxes, food panniers and other stores, trudge along in thick mud. Stooped under their capes, they look like a column of turtles on the march.

A SOLDIER hurries towards them shouting and CLANGING a gong.

SOLDIER
Gas! Gas! Gas!

He turns around a signboard on the wall of the trench to display its warning. GAS ALERT.

The work party struggle into their masks.

They have to stop again to let a masked stretcher party through with their GASPING AND CHOKING load.

They come to a sign-posted junction and follow a sign pointing to OTAGO BATTALION. Another sign points to CANTERBURY BATTALION.

EXT. TRENCH. NIGHT.

Everyone is wearing a gas mask. The work party drop their stores in a dump, dug out of the rear wall of the trench, and the food carriers continue on along the trench and start serving food.

Soldiers, in gas masks, file past to get their mess tins filled with a glutinous stew, while others keep watch from the fire steps.

Their dixies fill with rain as they wait for the all clear.

Plunger is among those who chance it and take off their masks to eat, before their stew floats out of their dixies.

Nothing happens to them, so others do the same and tuck into their watery meals.

A soldier in a gas mask squats beside Plunger and lifts his own mask up then pulls it down again.

It's Starkie. He lifts the mask up enough to speak.

STARKIE

I know, I know, you're bloody pleased to see me. Lucky for the gas eh. I snuck in with the work party. Now find me a place to 'ide.

The ALL CLEAR gets passed along the line.

Plunger leads Starkie, still wearing his mask, along the trench to a caved-in dugout covered by a buckled sheet of corrugated iron. He lifts up the cover and the moonlight reveals a hole lined with ammo boxes with the necks of wine bottles sticking out of them.

PLUNGER

In you go, but don't drink anything or I'll bloody well turn you in.

Starkie crawls in and has his mask off and a bottle to his lips as Plunger drops the iron cover in place.

EXT. FOREST. NIGHT.

The forest has been devastated by shell fire. It's a maze of craters, splintered trunks and piles of deadfall interlaced with trenches, pillboxes and barbed wire.

Dick crawls through this jumble. He skirts a German outpost and worms his way through twisted branches and mud to the edge of a coil of barbed wire. Lying on his back he snips his way under the wire, pausing to gaze at the stars overhead. Artillery flashes on the horizons and a few shells THUD around about. He freezes at the SOUND OF GERMAN VOICES.

Up the slope ahead of him looms a concrete pill box. The voices fade and he continues.

Now he is under the firing slit, a bomb and pistol ready.

He reaches up and rolls the bomb through the slit.

There's a DULL BOOM and smoke billows from the pillbox.

When the smoke has cleared he shines his torch through the slit.

The pill box is empty.

A German appears around the side of the pill box, shoots and misses.

Dick gets him with his first shot and rips his collar badges off.

Bullets smash into the concrete wall as more Germans approach.

Dick lobs bombs at them and retreats.

EXT. DUGOUT. DAY.

It's early morning. Major Pringle and Dick sit in a large sandbag-lined dugout smoking. They've both got steaming mugs of tea. The Major pours a tot of rum in their mugs.

DICK

Bare as a baby's arse.
No sign of it bein used at
all, not recently anyway.

MAJOR

Not like Fritz to leave a strongpoint
unmanned, especially at night.

DICK

There's something funny
goin on that's for sure
Oh, I got these as well.

He hands over the collar badges and they examine them.

MAJOR
Don't recognise these, do you?

Dick shakes his head.

MAJOR
Anything else Dick?

DICK
Not this time sir.
You'll get your binos
soon enough. You can bet on it.

MAJOR
Hope the war doesn't finish
first. Oh, your mail.

Dick smiles when he sees it's from MRS JONES and then
stuffs the letter in his tunic pocket.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

Plunger, a Lance Corporal's stripe on his sleeve, is
cleaning a Lewis gun when Dick squats down beside him.

DICK
Well Lance Corporal now. Good on
Yuh. Heard anything about Stark.

PLUNGER
Not a peep. Probably got himself
a mademoiselle back there somewhere.

DICK
Just checking. Wouldn't want
the MP to get their hands on
him. Do a good job on that, we
don't want any jams.

Plunger nods and glances towards Starkie's hideout as
Dick moves away along the trench.

INT. DUGOUT. NIGHT.

Dick lies in his tiny, unlined dugout reading his letter by the light of a candle.

MRS JONES

(VO)

Dear Richard, I hope you are well.
The papers say Germany is nearly finished.
I hope this means you and the boys will be home soon.

He shakes his head as he hears THE RUMBLE OF ARTILLERY AND THE STUTTER OF MACHINE GUN FIRE. He reads on.

MRS JONES

(VO)

I am sorry to say I have some sad news. Your father has passed away. It happened on your farm when a tree fell on him. Mercifully, it happened quickly and he felt no pain.

INT. HUT. NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

As we hear Mrs Jones' news we see the black and white still of Dick's uppercut connecting with his father's jaw.

EXT. FARMYARD. NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

In this B & W photo Dick is mounted on a horse waving goodbye to his mother whose anguished face looks up at him from where she sits on the hut's steps. His father's legs just visible on the floor through the open door.

INT. DUGOUT. NIGHT.

The candle is down to a stub and water seeps down the muddy walls of the dugout and soaks into the sacks under Dicks stretcher.

MRS JONES

(VO)

The police told me this when they came looking for you. It was your mother who asked them to find you and let you know. I hope you don't mind me telling you.

The candle flutters out and Dick relights it leaning close to the light.

MRS JONES

(OC)

I pray that God will grant you and all the our brave boys a safe return home. With kindest thoughts, Maud Jones. Oh, I forgot. Here's a photo from the Otago Daily Times. I think you'll like it.

Dick holds the grainy black and white photo to the candle and sees a smiling Ted Musgrove and Lizzie, standing beside Wild Pilgrim under the headline, WILD PILGRIM WINS SOUTHERN DERBY

He's smiling and starts WHISTLING as he folds the letter and puts it in his tunic pocket, then he gets out his notebook and chews on his pencil.

INT. DUGOUT. DAY.

It's dawn. Dick stands with some other officers and NCOs in Major Pringle's large dugout. The Major points to Rossignol Wood on a sketch map, pinned to the wall.

MAJOR PRINGLE

We're going to clear Rossignol Wood and capture the high ground beyond it overlooking Puisieux-au-Mont. Sergeant Travis' recce indicates the Germans may have thinned out.

The Major looks at the grim faces of the officers and men gathered around him.

MAJOR PRINGLE
Keep close to the barrage
and don't go beyond the ridge.
We go over at 5pm Double rum
ration at 4pm. Good luck.

EXT TRENCH DAY.

A clod of earth lands on the tin roof of Starkie's
hideout. The roof lifts a little and Starkie peers out.

Plunger beckons him into the trench and Starkie crawls
in.

Plunger hands him a dixie.

PLUNGER
Here have a swig of me rum

STARKIE
Rum, must be a stunt on.

PLUNGER
How'd yuh guess. You comin?

STARKIE
I can't bloody well stay here
can I.

PLUNGER
You can be me number 2.

He points to a Lewis gun on the floor of the trench.

PLUNGER
What about after?

STARKIE
I'll think of somethin
besides I reckon I could call
a favour or two off Travis.

PLUNGER

Speak of the devil. He was
askin after you. Worried the
the red caps might be hurtin
yuh he was.

STARKIE

Nice to know he cares.

They light up and squat in the trench enjoying the rum.

A large rat waddles along the trench and Starkie whips a
knife out of his boot and throws it, skewering the rat.

He pulls out the knife and wipes the blade on a sandbag.

PLUNGER

You should be in the circus.

STARKIE

Yeah we could do an act
you could dress up as a rat

They roar with laughter.

EXT. ARTILLERY BATTERY. DAY.

A gunner slams a round into a breach.

The gun crews stand ready. An artillery OFFICER, watching
his watch, drops his arm and yells

OFFICER

Fire.

The GUN FIRES and jerks back on its trail. The battery is
wreathed in smoke as the gunners reload and fire, again
and again.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

Bayonets glint in the late afternoon sun. An officer's watch says one minute to five o'clock. In a minute we'll go 'over the top' with first wave of the Otago Battalion.

Our barrage THUNDERS overhead and our hearts THUMP as sections of our trench crumble from the impact of our artillery a few yards ahead.

A JUNIOR OFFICER, his voice quavering, reminds his men.

JUNIOR OFFICER
Keep up with the barrage
and don't go past the objective
Good luck men.

Dick is smiling when he joins a fellow SERGEANT.

SERGEANT
Had double of rum Dick.

DICK
Nope but I've never felt better
in years.

The sergeant shakes his head in wonder.

Further along the trench, Starkie lights a fag and grins at Plunger standing next to him.

PLUNGER
What are you grinning about?

STARKIE
Just thinking of you in a rat suit.

WHISTLE BLASTS ripple along the trench. It's time to go.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

The lowering sun throws our shadows ahead of us as we clamber over the parapet and advance at the walk.

The ground slopes upward. Gaps have been cut in our wire but it still snags our clothing.

Rifles at the high port, we advance behind our barrage, a moving wall of flame, smoke and heaving earth.

Our ranks become ragged as we dodge craters and clamber over deadfall.

The German MACHINE GUNS FIRE.

Men fall singly and in groups, some don't move, many SCREAM and writhe but our ragged line keeps going forward.

German artillery EXPLODES among us cutting men down, vapourising others.

Our barrage lifts, there's the edge of the mangled wood, dead Germans, a smashed trench, but it's cover.

We run for it.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

Dick jumps in breathing heavily and spots a group of Germans approaching along a sap from a flank. He rushes towards them hurling bombs along the sap. Starkie jumps into a another section of the trench and lands in a coil of barbed wire. He looks up in time to see a German aiming a rifle at him.

The German is shredded by a burst from Plunger's Lewis gun, then he too jumps into the trench.

STARKIE

Thanks mate, was wonderin
where you'd got to.

Plunger shrugs, points to his ear and shakes his head.

STARKIE
Lucky it wasn't yuh
bloody eyes.

He helps Starkie out and they flop down to catch their breath. Other gasping soldiers arrive.

INT. SAP. DAY.

Dick is engaged in a private war bombing his way up the German sap. He comes to a fork and meets a German head on. They stare at each other for a second, then Dick shoots him.

He yanks the leather gloves off the German, climbs out of the trench and, despite the bullets kicking up the dirt around him, starts filling one fork with barbed wire coils which lying about on the lip.

Then he's off along the other fork, bomb and pistol ready.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

The captured German trench has filled with troops crouching under machine gun fire. The young officer, who we saw encouraging his men at the start, shouts orders.

OFFICER
Spread out, Advance.

They haul themselves up and over and vanish in a German barrage.

Starkie is among those who make it back to the trench.

The young officer peers over the parapet and is frozen by the sight of the mangled bodies lying out in front.

A sergeant pulls him down.

SERGEANT
We can't stay here sir

The officer stares through the sergeant at first, but then recognises him.

OFFICER
Of course, get the men ready
for another go.

INT. BUNKER. DAY.

A German machine gun crew sit out the barrage deep underground in their concrete bunker. It's well built with bunks, telephones, lighting and ventilation.

The telephone on the wall RINGS and a German answers it then gestures to the others. They grab their weapons and ammunition boxes and clamber up the stairs leading to the pill box.

INT. GERMAN PILL BOX. DAY.

The firing slit overlooks the cratered, tree-strewn slope up which the Otago Battalion is attacking. The tops of their steel helmets can be seen in the old the German trench in which they've taken cover.

The German gun crew load a belt of ammunition and wait. They can't miss.

INT. SAP. DAY.

Dick comes to a block of logs and barbed wire. His private war has led him off to a flank of the main attack

He peers over the edge of the sap but sees only the cratered slope and blasted tree stumps.

He reloads his pistol and gulps from his water bottle.

INT. GERMAN PILL BOX. DAY.

Looking along the barrel of the German machine gun, we see the Otago Battalion climb out of the captured trench and advance up the slope.

The MACHINE GUN FIRES and hoses the line of attacking troops.

Men are skittled, others dash for the cover of craters or fallen logs with bullets flicking up dirt and splinters all around them. Some wounded crawl for cover, only to be stopped in bursts of machine gun fire.

INT.SAP. DAY

Dick hears the MACHINE GUN FIRE and scans the slope with his pocket periscope.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

He sees only craters and piles of deadfall.

The MACHING GUN FIRES again and he sees a wisp of dust from a mound of earth covered in logs and branches.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

Holstering his pistol, he checks his stock of bombs and crawls out of the sap towards the cover of a fallen log. From a hollow under the log, has another look. A tangle of barbed wire strands mark the line of an old trench. He sees another cloud of dust as the MACHINE GUN FIRES.

Flat on his belly, he crawls towards the barbed wire and drops into an empty, shallow drain which leads to the pill box.

He freezes as MACHINE GUN FIRE RATTLES overhead. Raising his periscope, he sees he's directly below the pill box and beneath the machine gun's fire.

Grasping a bomb and tightening his straps he worms his way out of the trench towards the pill box.

He crawls right under the barrel of the machine gun and is covered in a shower of twigs and dust as it FIRES.

He primes two bombs, takes a deep breath, rises on his knees and lobs the bombs at the slit. One rolls in, the other bounces back at him.

He leaps away as both bombs EXPLODE and a wooden splinter sticks in his thigh. Grimacing he pulls it out. Blood stains his trouser leg.

German bombs sail out of the pill box but miss.

He scrambles closer and lobs another bomb in. It EXPLODES and sets off ammunition in the pill box.

Flames and smoke erupt from the firing slit.

Dick tosses in a couple of bombs for good measure.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

In the captured German trench the young officer peers through binoculars over the parapet. He sees the smoke cloud over the pill box and yells to the men.

OFFICER

Christ must be the Hun
machine gun post that's hit.
Let's go now before they get
into action. Over the top.
Let's go.

The troops scramble out and advance up the slope.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

A few shells burst around us and rifle fire kicks up the dirt but we continue.

We see someone waving us on from the top of that pillbox

A soldier yells out.

SOLDIER
Hey, that's Dick Travis up there.

We CHEER and charge the smoking and flickering German line on the crest.

Some of us drop but there's no stopping us now.

Dick hears GERMAN VOICES SHOUTING from the pill box beneath him. He leans down and rolls his last two bombs into the firing slit and jumps down below it.

They EXPLODE and he stands up and empties his pistol into the smoke. There's no more sound or movement from within.

The attacking troops shoot and bomb their way into the German trench.

INT.TRENCH. DAY.

Most surviving Germans retreat along well-built, communication trenches. Some fight it out hand to hand but are either killed or taken prisoner.

As the German prisoners are herded to the end of the trench an Otago soldier looks over the parapet and calls out.

SOLDIER
Hey, Look at this!

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

Some look over and there are shouts of "WHAT A SIGHT," "BEAUTIFUL AIN'T IT."

Patches of green grass can be seen in between the craters and trench networks sloping away from the crest as well as a few green bushes and green copses.

In the distance there's a village with a few red roofs and white buildings still intact.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

Starkie stumbles along the trench getting blank stares or shrugs to his questions.

STARKIE

Anyone seen Plunger?
Plunger, anyone see him?

Dick jumps into the trench amid back slapping and cries of WELL DONE DICK, GOOD ON YUH COBBER.

DICK

Rightoh, rightoh, who's in charge?

There's no officers or NCOs to be seen.

DICK

Looks like I'm the boss
for now. Get ready for
a counter attack. Share out bombs
and bullets. You and you!
collect ammo off the casualties
back there.

Just as he's giving orders a German barrage CRASHES around them.

DICK

Anyone see the officer
go down.

SOLDIER

About twenty yards back
I think.

DICK

Signallers, any sigs make it?

The soldiers look around and shrug but none reply
A sergeant staggers along the trench holding his hand
bound up in a bloody rag.

SERGEANT

Giddy Dick, I just got
in. Copped it in the last dash.

DICK

Got any flares?

SERGEANT

No, the officer's
got em and the pistol.

DICK

Right take over here
I'm going to find 'em.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

He climbs out of the trench and dashes back through the
smoke and shell bursts to a crater.

Peering over the lip he sees a few bodies but not the
officer.

He climbs out and dashes to another crater and dives in
almost landing on top of the young officer's bloody
corpse.

Unholstering the dead officer's flare pistol, he fires
two greens followed by a red.

In another part of No Mans Land, Starkie, oblivious to
the shelling, dashes from corpse to corpse, turning some
over and shouting.

STARKIE

Plunger! Plunger!

He sees Plunger sitting up against a tree trunk, cradling the Lewis gun and he runs towards him.

STARKIE
Plunger! Get down
yuh daft bugger.

He dives for the tree trunk and pulls Plunger down.

Plunger's helmet rolls off revealing a hole in it, then Starkie sees the bloody, red crater in Plunger's head.

He beckons to a stretcher party.

STRETCHER BEARER
He's had it mate.

The stretcher party moves off but Starkie aims his rifle at the them.

STARKIE
He aint stayin out here for
the rats now take him back to
the dressing station or so help
me I'll kill the lot of yous.

The bearers lift Plunger onto their stretcher and stumble away, looking back at Starkie aiming his rifle at them.

He watches the stretcher party trudge off then he lays down his rifle and picks up the Lewis gun.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

Dick jumps into the trench and speaks to the wounded sergeant.

DICK
I've fired the success signal.

SERGEANT

I hope the supports get here
Quick. Take a look, and we've stuff
all ammo left.

He hands Dick a periscope.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

He sees German infantry come out of wood and line up to
attack.

Half way between them and his trench, he spots an
abandoned German strongpoint, its sandbagged walls and
barbed wire encirclement are intact and there's a machine
gun in it. A half-finished sap runs towards him.

He looks back but there's no sign of the support troops.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

Dick jumps down beside the wounded sergeant and hands him
the periscope.

DICK

See that strongpoint I'm going to
hold em off from there with their
machine gun. You take over here.

SERGEANT

What! Our orders are to stay 'ere.

DICK

You'll stay forever if Fritz
gets here before our support.

SERGEANT

Take some men with you.

DICK
I'll be okay. Send a runner
back to hurry up the supports.

SERGEANT
Okay, but Fritz might've spiked
his machine gun.

Dick looks at the sergeant, weighing up what he's said.

DICK
Right, I'll take a Lewis.

Starkie is slumped in the trench smoking when the call
"LEWIS GUN" reaches him.

Dick is scanning the German lines with his binoculars
when Starkie arrives.

STARKIE
Who wants this bloody thing.

Dick whips around.

DICK
I do and where the hell
did you come from?

STARKIE
Well, I'm here and luckily
for everyone I've got this.

DICK
Give it here I'm going
over to hold up Fritz.

STARKIE
I didn't lug the bloody thing
just for you to be a fuckin hero.

SERGEANT

Stop grizzlin Stark and hand
it over or you'll be you
on the mat again.

Dick grabs the gun by the barrel but Starkie holds onto
it.

STARKIE

Take it but I'm comin as number two.
Time I got a bit of the spoils of
war, if you know what I mean.

DICK

I'm not arguing now. Remember
your still under my orders.
Let's go.

INT. SAP. DAY.

Dick rounds a bend in the sap and comes face to face with
a wounded German who raises his rifle. Dick shoots him
and runs on.

Starkie follows and stops to fleece the German's pockets.

The sap ends in the outpost with dead Germans lying in
the bottom. The machine gun is there, an ammo belt
attached, the barrel pointing skyward.

Dick enters in a crouching run, puts down the Lewis gun
and is swivelling the German gun as Starkie arrives and
gets behind the Lewis.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

A line of German infantry advance towards the
strongpoint.

INT. STRONGPOINT. DAY.

Dick and Starkie open fire, cutting big gaps in the German line and forcing them to ground.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

A CHEER runs along the Otago trench as they hear the MACHINE GUNS FIRING and see the German attack falter. Looking rearward, through his periscope, the wounded sergeant sees troops approaching through the smoke.

SERGEANT

Reinforcements, they're comin
pass it along.

INT. STRONGPOINT. DAY.

The Lewis gun jams on Starkie. He leaves it, drags an ammo box beside Dick and feeds belts into the German gun. Germans fall in heaps but more appear.

DICK

Bomb em. Bomb the bastards.

Starkie scrambles around the strongpoint grabbing bombs, Mills and German, and hurling them over the sandbagged wall.

The Germans pull back.

Machine gun fire splatters the sandbagged wall forcing Dick and Starkie to the ground. German bombs explode outside, collapsing a section of wall. There's a WHINING SOUND and a barrage CRASHES around them.

DICK

Smells like our stuff.

STARKIE

The supports must've
got off their arses.

The barrage lifts and they peer over the wall.No live
Germans

Starkie tries to clear the jammed Lewis gun but gives up.

STARKIE

Must've got damaged in the blast
that got poor 'ole Plunger.

DICK

Didn't know he'd copped it.

STARKIE

In the head. Lucky, I suppose.

Starkie loads a fresh ammo belt into the German gun.

STARKIE

This is the last one.
What's next?

DICK

Hold em till dark then
make a move (beat)
Why don't you bugger off now
I'll be okay by myself.

STARKIE

And let Fritz use me for
target practice. I'm
not that daft.

DICK

I didn't mean that (beat)
You got nothin on me now anyway.
I got a letter, a tree fell
on the old man after I'd gone.
So you might as well head back.

STARKIE

You forgettin there's a battalion of
red caps waitin back there for me.

DICK

What the bloody hell do you want
Stark?

STARKIE

I reckon I've more 'n earned a
stripe. That would do me
nicely. Might get left alone
for a change. A word from you, remember.

DICK

You're good with the bomb
I'll give you that and you
brought me in.

A bomb explodes by the dugout and Dick opens fire. The
ammo runs out and they crouch by the sand-bagged wall,
ready to throw their last bombs.

STARKIE

One more.thing.

Dick rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

STARKIE

The Cornelius Savage story.

DICK

Not bloody well now.

INT.TRENCH. DAY.

Dusk is falling as the Otago Battalion prepares to meet
the counter attack. A Lieutenant stands on a fire step
surveying No Mans Land through a periscope.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

The British barrage is a wall of smoke and geysers of flame and dirt.

A soldier, carrying another across his shoulders, staggers out of the smoke. German infantry advance behind them.

INT. TRENCH. DAY.

LIEUTENANT

Good grief. It's them! Covering fire.

At his order, men CHEER them on and open fire.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. DAY.

The CHEERING stops when the staggering pair disappear in the barrage.

The barrage lifts and the cloud of smoke and dust drifts away leaving no sign of them or the Germans in the fading light.

LIEUTENANT

Damn, damn! (beat)
Stand down. Night routine.

INT. TRENCH. NIGHT.

It's raining. A sentry stiffens and taps his mate.

SENTRY

Somethins movin. HALT!
Moa (beat) Moa.

The sentry fires. The RIFLE SHOT rouses men from sleep and sends them rushing to their posts. A sergeant bellows.

SERGEANT
Stand to! Stand to!

He fires a flare.

EXT. NO MANS LAND. NIGHT.

The flickering light of the flare shows a soldier,
carrying a body, staggering towards them.

SERGEANT
Cease fire! Cease fire!
Let them in. Bearers. Bearers.

A soldier clambers over the parapet and pulls aside a
coil of barbed wire.

Starkie collapses, on the parapet and the soldiers pull
him and the body in.

They roll the body over and see it's Dick, his letter
sticks out of his pocket.

Starkie, bleeding from several places and just conscious,
grabs the bloodied letter and sticks it in his own
pocket, as the bearers arrive.

EXT. ROAD . DAY.

A rutted, dirt road runs up a slight rise to a village on
the crest. A faded signpost tells us it's Couin.

British soldiers are resting under shelters along both
sides of the road. Some are cooking, one reads the Wipers
Times, others clean weapons.

They look down the hill as a SLOW DRUM BEAT is heard and
they stop what they're doing and stand to attention.

The band of the Otago Regiment slow marches up the hill playing The Death March. It is followed by a horse-drawn General Service wagon, its tray draped with black cloth on which rest a coffin.

The Otago Battalion led, on horseback, by Major General Russell, march behind the hearse.

One of the British soldiers turns to his mate.

BRITISH SOLDIER
Blimey, must be a brass hat.

INT. SCHOOL. DAY.

The desks have been stacked against the wall to make room for the rows of wounded on stretchers.

Starkie, his arms, head and chest thickly bandaged, lies on a stretcher reading Dick's blood stained letter.

A SLOW DRUM BEAT breaks into his concentration and he looks around at the rows of wounded, at the nurses and stretcher bearers coming and going.

He calls out to a couple of bearers who have just put down a stretcher case.

STARKIE
Hey coppers what's all the noise about?

STRETCHER BEARER
Just another funeral mate,
must be someone special
by the looks of it.

STARKIE
That'll be Travis for sure
how about a lift to the door clobber?

Hearing this, the wounded soldiers look up with interest.

WOUNDED SOLDIER

Travis, I've heard of him,
the Kiwi sergeant. Take
me out too mate.

STRETCHER BEARER

Whadda ya think we are
the bloody Flanders Bus
Company.

STARKIE

Bugger yous then.

He struggles into a sitting position and, grasping a broom, heaves himself up and hobbles to the door.

Another soldier, his arm in a sling, follows him.

NURSE

Get back to bed
at once, Doctor! Doctor!

The room echoes with cries of, "C'MON LOVE."
"ME TOO MATE" and "GIVE US A LIFT OUT SPORT."

DOCTOR

Where do you think
You're going.

STARKIE

To pay our respects
to one of the best.

The nurse looks at the doctors, who look at the wounded, who look at the bearers, who shrug and start carrying the wounded outside.

EXT. SCHOOL STEPS. DAY.

Stretcher cases, some bandaged and bloody, nurses and doctors in blood stained aprons, crowd the steps of the schoolhouse, by the muddy road leading to the nearby church and cemetery. Starkie leans on his broom smoking.

They watch as the band, the horse-drawn hearse and the battalion march past and into the cemetery.

EXT. CEMETERY. DAY.

As the drummers enter the cemetery, the church bell starts TOLLING.

A hedge bordering the cemetery has been cut down to make way for new graves which fill a neighbouring field.

An Army chaplain, in purple vestments, stands by a freshly dug grave.

The funeral procession marches in and forms a hollow square around the grave.

The pall bearer party of sergeants remove the coffin and place it on the ropes at the edge of the grave as the firing party forms up next to them.

CHAPLAIN

Let us pray.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Mrs Jones is dusting her lounge. She stops at a KNOCK on the door. The postman hands her a letter with CENSORED stamped in black on the envelop.

Opening the letter, she returns to the lounge and sits down.

DICK

(VO)

Hello Mrs Jones. Thanks for your letter and picture they were good. Not so good about me father was it. Me poor Mum.

She pauses, sighs and continues.

DICK

(VO)

One thing if its' no trouble
would you get word to Theresa Savage
that's me Mum on the farm at 'potiki. Tell
her I'll come an see her soon as I get
back. It won't be long now also could you
say the same to Lizzy Musgrove at Ryal
Bush. Thanks Mrs Jones. Good wishes. Dick.

There's tears in her eyes as she looks at the photo on
the mantelpiece of her son, Archie.

EXT. CEMETRY. DAY.

Archie's ghost stands with the ghosts of Dick, Major
Price, Plunger, De Wet and Albi by the grave.

As the Chaplain intones the Soldier's Prayer we move
along the impassive faces of the living soldiers.

CHAPLAIN

(OC)

To give and not count the cost.
To fight and not heed the wounds

There's Sandy in the front rank along with the other
solemn faces, young and old.

CHAPLAIN

(OC)

To toil, and not seek for rest
To labour and not to ask for any reward
Save that of knowing that we do thy will.

OTAGO BATTALION

Ahmen.

Major General Russell addresses the Battalion.

MAJOR GENERAL RUSSELL

The best words I can find for today come
From the latest entry in your battalions
record which says this of Sergeant Travis.
His name will live as a glorious example
of heroism and devotion to duty.

EXT.FARM TRACK. DAY.

Lizzie Musgrove walks along a wagon-rutted track to
towards a wooden mail box at the RYAL BUSH farm gate.

She takes out a letter and frowns when she sees it's from
MRS M Jones, 28 Argyle St Dunedin. After tearing it open
and reading it, she breaks into a run to her house,
WHOOPING for joy.

EXT. CEMETRY. DAY.

GENERAL RUSSELL

You and New Zealand will be
Pleased to know that the King
has approved the Victoria Cross for our
friend and brother-in-arms Dick Travis.
For most conspicuous bravery and
devotion to duty North Herbuterne,
France on July 14 1918.

The General nods towards the chaplain.

CHAPLAIN

May he rest in peace.

The pall bearers pick up the ropes and get ready to lower
the coffin.

EXT. FARM HOUSE OPOTIKI. DAY.

The paint has long gone from the rough walls of the farm
house and sheets of roofing iron have peeled and lifted.
tin roof.

It's raining and an elderly woman stands on the porch watching a man on horseback approach along a muddy track.

Pulling up by the porch, he taps his forehead, leans down and hands the woman a letter.

She frowns when she sees it's from, Mrs M. Jones, 28 Argle St Dunedin and shakes her head looking at the rider but he just shrugs and rides away.

She tears it open and starts reading, holding the letter close to her eyes and mouthing each word.

EXT. CEMETRY. DAY.

A bugler plays THE LAST POST.as the pall bearers lower the coffin.

The firing party fire A VOLLEY and making a flock of birds burst out of the trees.

EXT.SCHOOL STEPS. DAY.

The wounded and their medical attendants flinch as the second VOLLEY sounds over the village followed by a third VOLLEY.

The nurses and bearers start to help the wounded back inside but Starkies stays put.

EXT. CEMETERY. DAY.

The drummers start up a SLOW BEAT as the Otago Battalion marches out of the cemetery.

The General dismounts at the graveside and salutes.

EXT. SCHOOL. STEPS.

Starkie leans in the doorway, smoking, watching as the last file of troops marches past.

General Russell follows, on horseback, and as he draws level with the school steps he notices Starkie and stops.

GENERAL RUSSELL
You're Stark aren't you?

Starkie is shocked to be singled out by the general and he tries to straighten up and hide his cigarette.

STARKIE
That's me sir.

GENERAL RUSSELL
You did well bringing in
Sergeant Travis.

Starkie nods.

GENERAL RUSSELL
I hope you recover well. Good luck.

STARKIE
Thank you sir.

Starkie watches the General ride away, then he limps inside and lies on his stretcher

EXT. DIRT ROAD. DAY.

The British soldiers resting along the road straggle to their feet as they hear the tune of PACK UP YOUR TROUBLES IN YOUR OLD KIT BAG AND SMILE.

They CHEER as the Otago Battalion, with the band leading and the ranks of ghosts at the rear, march past in quick time, as if on a ceremonial parade.

FADE OUT