

MESSENGER DOGS

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Based upon true events

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FADE IN:

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER:

"I LOOK UPON THE PEOPLE AND THE NATION AS HANDED ON TO ME AS A RESPONSIBILITY CONFERRED UPON ME BY GOD. I BELIEVE, AS IT IS WRITTEN IN THE BIBLE, THAT IT IS MY DUTY TO INCREASE THIS HERITAGE, FOR WHICH ONE DAY I SHALL BE CALLED UPON TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT.

WHOEVER TRIES TO INTERFERE WITH MY TASK, I SHALL CRUSH.

- KAISER WILHELM II, 1913"

EXT. VERDUN, FRANCE - BATTLEFIELD - NIGHT

Running. Four dog legs POUND across a barbed-wire covered earthen battlefield.

EXPLOSIONS FLASH. SHOTS RICOCHET.

SUPER: "NEAR THE GERMAN LINES - 1916"

The DOG, a black and white Border Collie named FRITZ, races past disemboweled MEN who reach out in pain.

Bullets PEPPER the dirt. Fritz reaches the main trench line -- leaps.

In mid-air, a BULLET THUDS into him.

He YELPS, tumbles down into a water-logged GERMAN trench.

NOTE: The men speak in German with SUBTITLES:

HANS (O.S.)

Fritzie!

A muddied, German soldier, HANS (30s), a fair-haired man whose aged face testifies to his years of courage, SPLASHES over to Fritz, drops to his side.

He cradles Fritz. Blood smears across his grey tunic.

HANS (CONT'D)

Shh... It's alright, Fritzie, you made it. Good dog, good dog.

An OFFICER (27), uniform spotless and crisp, a testament to his lack of courage, shoves his way through GERMAN SOLDIERS lining the trench.

OFFICER
Move! Move aside.

The Officer leans over Fritz, grabs his COLLAR and rips off a small metal canister, Fritz WHINES in pain.

He unwraps a soiled paper message from the canister, scans it.

Fritz lets out a RASPY breath.

HANS
Sir, he needs medical --

The Officer CRUMPLES the note, tosses it in the mud, pulls his pistol, aims -- Hans jumps up --

A single SHOT.

Fritz YELPS, Hans cries out, drops beside a dead Fritz.

The Officer turns to the German Soldiers crouched along the muddy trench, waves the pistol.

OFFICER
We have been given orders to hold this position... no matter what.
(to Hans)
It appears we will be here longer than expected. Burn the carcass so it doesn't foul the water.

Hans lifts Fritz's lifeless body and moves down the trench line, the war RAGES all around him.

EXPLOSIVE FLASHES turn night into day.

OFFICER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Get rid of it.

Oblivious, Hans walks on, tears streak down his muddy face and fall on the blood-stained black and white fur.

EXT. LONDON - ST. MARY'S ORPHANAGE - DAY

A centuries old, five-story brick building on two acres of unkempt grounds fronted by a marble statue of St. Jerome, the statue's hand extended, welcoming.

OFFICER (V.O.)

No one wants a worthless cur, not
even the rats.

Over the door etched in stone it reads, "INDUSTRIAL HOME
FOR DESTITUTE CHILDREN."

SUPER: "LONDON, 1910"

A MATRON (60s), an overweight Wicked Witch, covered head-
to-toe in a grey, wool overcoat, waddles and pants her
way up the stone steps past the statue.

Clutched in her left hand, the tiny arm of HENRY CRESWELL
(10), tussled hair under a cap, rumpled clothes one-size
too big, with each step he resists the climb as a
battered cardboard suitcase bangs against his left knee.

The Matron stops in front of the large oak door, adjusts
her coat. She glances down at Henry.

MATRON

Tidy your hair. Check your shoes.
This here's the last chance for
you laddie, so you'd best get it
right and proper.

INT. ENTRY - DAY

A sparse room, a small desk to one side anchored by Miss
ROGERSON (50s), wrinkled face, prim and proper movements,
pursed lips, her dark hair pulled so taut her eyebrows
raise in a permanent arch.

She focuses on papers at the desk.

MISS ROGERSON

Yes? What is it?

MATRON

Pardon, Ma'am. I'm to deliver
this here boy to the
superintendent.

MISS ROGERSON

That would be me.

MATRON

Beggin' yer pardon, Ma'am. I was
expectin' a...

Stone-faced, Miss Rogerson glances at Henry.

MISS ROGERSON

Is this it?

MATRON

Yes, Ma'am. This here's the one who needs carin'. He's a bit of trouble he is.

Miss Rogerson turns back to her papers, picks up a pencil

MISS ROGERSON

Name?

MATRON

Henry. Henry E. Creswell.

Miss Rogerson stops writing.

MATRON (CONT'D)

Er, pardon... Evelyn. Middle name's Evelyn.

Miss Rogerson scribbles on, rolls her squinted eyes up to Henry.

MISS ROGERSON

I see. That won't be problem, now, will it?

Henry shakes his head.

MATRON

He's not much one for words Mistress. As a fact he's one that don't care much for others... nor they him.

MISS ROGERSON

Better that way. Parents?

MATRON

Deceased, five years now. Been in Saint Georges House of Harrogate, the one for dead copper's kids.

MISS ROGERSON

Father's rank? Force?

HENRY

Me da' was a constable, number seventy-five, Sunderland.

MATRON

Shush, boy. She weren't speakin' to you.

Miss Rogerson scribbles, stands, grips Henry's arm.

MISS ROGERSON

(to Matron)

You will find that at St. Mary's we focus on the spiritual, physical and educational welfare of our charges... in that particular order. That will do for now.

(to Henry)

You're to come with me, Mister Creswell.

Miss Rogerson pulls Henry toward a hallway.

MATRON

Ma'am, if there be anything --

Miss Rogerson waves a hand, not turning back.

MISS ROGERSON

-- He's with St. Mary's now. You may leave.

The Matron departs. Miss Rogerson guides Henry down the hallway.

MISS ROGERSON (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

There'll be none of your codswallop here, Mister Creswell. And no gallivanting about. I've but two rules. Neither lying, cheating nor thievery. If I catch you breaking that rule, you'll be punished. Is that clear?

HENRY

Yeah.

MISS ROGERSON

Yes, Miss Rogerson. Second rule, Mister Creswell.

HENRY

Yes, Miss Rogerson.

MISS ROGERSON

And mind you... keep that middle name to yourself.

EXT. SIDE YARD - DAY

MISS ROGERSON (V.O.)

A boy named Evelyn does not bode
well... not well at all.

A circle of BOYS, TREVOR WEXLER (12), an unfortunate
bully who beats those even more unfortunate, BOOTH and
PHILLIP (11), fraternal, sadistic twins, gather near a
fence, their focus on an unseen victim below.

Teasing SHOUTS fill the air. Backed up against the fence
corner MALNOURISHED DOG quivers, her teeth bared, tail
tucked, patchy brown/black fur that accentuates her gaunt
appearance.

Trevor swings a stick down, STRIKES the dog. It CRIES
then SNARLS.

TREVOR

That'll teach ya to stay outta our
yard.

He raises the stick...

HENRY (O.S.)

Drop it!

Henry shoves through the twins, marches over to stand
between Trevor and the Dog. Trevor lowers the stick,
grins.

TREVOR

Well, if it ain't Evelyn. Come to
save the bitch have ya?

HENRY

Leave her be.

Trevor glances at Booth and Phillip.

TREVOR

Tell ya what. I think we're gonna
trade up.

Booth and Phillip grab Henry, grapple him to the ground.
Trevor straddles Henry's legs, SMACKS his fists into
Henry's face, again and again.

Booth and Phillip chant.

BOOTH/PHILLIP

Evelyn, Evelyn,
He's the Kaiser's next of kin,
So send him back to old Berlin.
Evelyn, Evelyn.

TREVOR

(to Henry)
Say it. Say it now or I'll scrag
ya.

HENRY

Get... off... me.

TREVOR

Blimey, ya even squeak like a
girl.

Trevor SLAMS his fist into Henry's face. Blood SPURTS.

At the fence the dog stands, SNARLS, her hair on end, her eyes locked on Trevor. The boys ignore her.

BOOTH

Agin', Trevor. Hit'em so's his
beak comes off.

PHILLIP

Yeah, give'em the bollocks.

Trevor pulls back his balled fist. The Dog LUNGES, sinks her teeth deep into Trevor's outstretched hand.

Trevor howls, dog and boy fall backward, he BEATS his other fist against the Dog's body.

The Dog YELPS, releases, rears up and SWIPES her teeth across Trevor's arm.

Red gashes gush blood. Trevor falls onto his back, screams in pain.

TREVOR

It's the knackers for you.

The Dog moves between Henry and Trevor, her eyes never break from Trevor, a low, protective, GROWL.

Trevor SCRAMBLES backward, his hand finds a rock, he raises it over his head.

MISS ROGERSON (O.S.)

Enough!

Trevor freezes, glances over at Miss Rogerson. On either side of her, she holds the ears of Booth and Phillip, they wriggle in protest.

MISS ROGERSON (CONT'D)

I will not repeat myself, Mister
Wexler.

Trevor drops the rock.

MISS ROGERSON (CONT'D)

(to Henry)
Please get off the ground.

Trevor darts in front of Miss Rogerson, holds up his bloody hand, points at the dog.

TREVOR

Miss... Miss, it attacked me. It
near took me hand and arm off.

Henry struggles up. The Dog stays between Henry and Trevor, teeth still bared.

Miss Rogerson releases her ear-numbing grip on Booth and Philip.

MISS ROGERSON

(to Trevor)
I daresay you deserved much worse.
Get yourself to the nurse, and the
rest of you... inside.
(to Henry)
My office, now.

Miss Rogerson pivots, struts away. Trevor glares at Henry, but keeps his distance.

TREVOR

Don't think you're done... Evelyn.
I'll get you... and the little
bitch.

All three boys laugh, walk away. The Dog relaxes. Henry steps to the fence, bends down, pulls a section of loose wire and broken boards to the side.

His other hand motions at the fence opening.

HENRY

Go on now, get going. If you're
looking for a friend, it ain't
this lot.

The Dog's ears perk up. She takes a tentative step toward Henry, her tail a cautious wag.

Henry digs in his pocket, holds a biscuit out. The Dog's tail goes full wag.

MISS ROGERSON (O.S.)
Mister Creswell.

HENRY
(to dog)
Come on, take it a'for old Jolly
Roger sees it.

Henry tosses the biscuit over the fence. The Dog SCOOTs through the opening, GOBBLES the biscuit.

MISS ROGERSON (O.S.)
Mister Creswell!

HENRY
Coming Jolly... Miss Rogerson.

Henry trots after Miss Rogerson.

The Dog peers through the fence, her eyes track Henry. She BARKS once, her tail wags. Henry looks back, smiles.

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

SUPER: "TEN YEARS LATER"

Now 17, a gangly bean-pole of a boy, Henry, in shorts and no shirt, puberty has kicked in.

He throws a red ball across the roof, it and the dog disappear around the rooftop entry structure.

That same rooftop doorway BANGS open.

Trevor (at 19) steps out, Booth and Phillip (at 18), trail behind. The trio stops a few yards from Henry.

TREVOR
Well, well lads, if it ain't our
special friend.

HENRY
You shouldn't be here, it's not
safe.

TREVOR

The only thing's not safe is yer
arse.

Booth steps out from behind Trevor, a long lead pipe held
in his grip.

BOOTH

Let me have a go at 'em, Trev.
Soften him up a bit a'for ya crack
his head.

TREVOR

Naw, poofter's all mine.

Trevor takes the lead pipe from Booth, advances towards
Henry. Henry remains calm, holds out one hand, his
fingers flick twice, a practiced move.

OFF SCREEN: A dog BARKS.

The boys turn toward the sound.

From the corner of the rooftop structure, the Dog, her
fur no longer patchy, her frame muscular, healthy, she
bounds towards the group.

All three boys falter backwards.

The Dog SKITTERS to a stop, spins, plants her
considerable bulk between Trevor and Henry. Her eyes lock
on Trevor.

A low GROWL rumbles from her throat.

HENRY

You remember Sophie, don't you,
Trev? She certainly remembers
you.

Trevor unconsciously rubs his scarred hand. Sophie takes
a step forward, SNARLS.

TREVOR

Well now, the little mange done
turned into a full-grow'd bitch.
Tell me, Evelyn, does she keep you
nice and warm at night?
(to the dog)
And I ain't forgot what you done.

Trevor glances at Booth and Phillip.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Seems like old times, don't it
lads?

Trevor nods. Booth and Phillip rush Henry.

Sophie LEAPS, her full body SLAMS against the two stunned boys, and KNOCKS them to the ground.

Trevor advances, swings the pipe, SMACKS Henry across the thigh.

Henry CRIES out, crumples to the ground. Pipe in hand, Trevor advances.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Now I'm gonna shows ya how we make
Yorkshire puddin' in White Chapel.

Trevor raises the pipe, takes aim at Henry's head.

BOOTH (O.S.)
Trev!

Trevor hesitates, cocks his head. Henry grins.

Sophie, in mid-leap, fangs bared, COLLIDES with Trevor's face, her teeth SLICE across his right cheek.

Trevor screams, his already scarred hand presses against his bloody cheek, the other clenched around Sophie's collar.

Trevor stumbles backwards towards the roof's edge, drags Sophie with him.

Entangled, Trevor and Sophie cascade over the edge.

HENRY
Sophie!

Henry, Booth and Phillip rush to the edge, peer over.

HENRY'S POV

A few feet below, Trevor hangs from a fire escape stair railing.

BOOTH
Hold on Trev! I'll get Jolly!

Trevor grins up at Henry.

TREVOR

The bitch got what she deserved.

Henry looks past Trevor, thirty feet below on the

COBBLESTONE FRONT DRIVE

Sophie's crumpled body lies motionless, a pool of blood weaves across the cobblestones beneath her.

EXT. FRONT DRIVE - DAY

Henry rushes out the front door, drops beside Sophie.

HENRY

No, no, no, no, no...

Sophie WHINES. Henry cradles her head in his hands. She WHIMPERS, pants in rapid succession. Her eyes close.

HENRY (CONT'D)

My brave little Sophie... I'm so sorry... I never meant...

Voices SHOUT from inside the building. Miss Rogerson appears on the front steps.

MISS ROGERSON

What is the meaning of this?

BOOTH (O.S.)

Miss Rogerson?

She glances up at

THE FIRE ESCAPE STAIRS

Trevor dangles. Above him, Booth and Phillip hang over the roof's edge, Booth points toward Henry below.

BOOTH (CONT'D)

Oy! He tried to kill Trev. He shoved him over the roof.

ON THE FRONT DRIVE

MISS ROGERSON

Henry, what have you done?

Henry rises, frantic, glances around, wipes his face, then LIMPS down the long drive toward the front gate.

Miss Rogerson takes a few steps after him.

MISS ROGERSON (CONT'D)
Henry, come back here! You cannot
leave, I forbid it!

MISS ROGERSON'S POV

Beyond the dead Sophie, down the drive, Henry rounds the front gate, takes off at a full run, disappears.

EXT. THREE BLOCKS FROM ST. MARY'S - ALLEYWAY - DAY

Henry charges down the narrow alley, halts, spins, in full panic mode.

He screams at the top of his lungs, slides down the wall, repeatedly slams his fist into the street.

HENRY
They'll never get me... never.

He sobs.

COPPER (O.S.)
Oy! What's this?

Henry jerks his head up, locks on a Copper down at the other end of the Alley. The Copper moves toward him.

COPPER (CONT'D)
Here, boy-o, you the one from the
home? They's looking for you.

Henry jumps up, bolts the opposite way and out into the main street. The Copper lifts a whistle, TWEETS a warning.

DOWN THE STREET

Henry runs as fast as he can, dodging other PEOPLE, jumping over vendor carts.

OFF SCREEN: the Copper's whistle TWEET-TWEETS his escape.

EXT./INT. ENLISTMENT OFFICE - DAY

A queue of young, wide-eyed BOYS stand outside the door of the main room, dozens of posters line the windows proclaiming the "call to duty".

From the building corner a breathless Henry comes charging, slows, his eyes scan the Posters.

OFF SCREEN: distant TWEET-TWEETS of the Copper's whistle, grow louder, closer.

He glances back down the street, straightens up a bit, a defiant walk into

THE ENLISTMENT OFFICE

A long line of young boys, at the end of the queue is LAWRENCE PRESCOTT (20), a tall, physically fit lad with a full shock of neatly trimmed hair.

Henry wanders in, his gaze taking it all in, he bumps into Lawrence.

HENRY

Shite, sorry.

Lawrence turns back to Henry, looks him over.

LAWRENCE

A might bit on the edge of it, aren't you?

HENRY

I'm nineteen, and from what I hear they ain't too particular in the infantry.

LAWRENCE

Infantry? Right. So you're volunteering?

HENRY

Uh... right. Volunteering.

The queue of boys shuffles forward, Lawrence and Henry step into the main room.

At the front of the queue, a large, mustached ADMISSION OFFICER (40s), holds court behind a desk. A jagged scar running up his left cheek that intersects his lifeless left eye. He rattles off staccato-like questions to the boy in front of him.

ADMISSION OFFICER

Name?

BOY

Owens, Sir. First name Percival.

ADMISSION OFFICER

(points at the line
of boys)

You part of this lot?

PERCY

Yes Sir, we're all from Grimsby,
Sir. Lincolnshire.

ADMISSION OFFICER

I know where it is you daft boy...
Grimsby? From Wintringham?

PERCY

Yes, Sir, North Yorkshire.

The Admin scribbles something on a form.

ADMISSION OFFICER

Fine waste of a football team if
you ask me. Very well, move on to
the exam room, Owens. Next?

The line of boys shuffle forward.

HENRY

(to Lawrence)

Football team?

LAWRENCE

Pals' Battalion they call it. All
from the same team in Wintringham.
We enlist together, fight
together.

HENRY

Oh.

LAWRENCE

May I ask your name?

HENRY

Henry, Henry Creswell.

LAWRENCE

All right Henry Creswell, you just
became an official member of the
team.

ADMISSION OFFICER

Next?

Lawrence moves up to the Admin Officer.

LAWRENCE

Prescott, Lawrence William.

ADMISSION OFFICER

Prescott? You related to Renly
Prescott?

LAWRENCE

No relation, Sir. My father was a
captain in the Second Boer
campaign.

ADMISSION OFFICER

So was I son, and you can see
where that got me.

The Admin scribbles on the form, waves a hand.

ADMISSION OFFICER (CONT'D)

Move on.

Lawrence moves aside, Henry steps forward.

ADMISSION OFFICER (CONT'D)

Name?

HENRY

Creswell, Sir. Henry Eve... Henry
Creswell.

The Admin Officer looks up, takes in the paltry state of
the boy in front of him.

ADMISSION OFFICER

Good lord, son, if you'd turn
sideways I dare say the Gerries
couldn't take a bead on ya. You
the team mascot of this bunch?

HENRY

Mascot, Sir?

Lawrence walks back over to the Admin Officer, grins,
puts an arm around Henry.

LAWRENCE

Our lucky charm, Sir. Worth at
least three extra points a game.

ADMISSION OFFICER

Is that so?

(to Henry)

You know son, I once knew a boy about your age who ran away from home and signed up during the Sudan Campaign.

The Admin Officer leans toward Henry, squints.

ADMISSION OFFICER (CONT'D)

He rode with Wolseley to fight those nasty Sudanese at Khartoum. Tried to rescue 7000 men. Know what happened?

Henry shakes his head.

ADMISSION OFFICER (CONT'D)

All of 'em slaughtered... cut from belly to throat just two days 'for we arrived. And you know what that boy got in return?

HENRY

Sir?

The Admin Officer taps his scar.

ADMISSION OFFICER

Just so's ya know what you're getting into, that's all. But then, you're old enough to know better, right?

HENRY

Sir? Uh, yes, Sir... right.

ADMISSION OFFICER

Move along ya sorry lot. Next?

Lawrence grabs Henry's arm, drags him away.

HENRY

Thanks.

LAWRENCE

C'mon mascot, adventure awaits!

EXT./INT. CITY STREET/THE PICKLED EGG BAR - EVENING

Decked out in new British Infantry uniforms, Lawrence and Henry move down the street, crack a few jokes, stop outside a doorway.

Henry glances above the door, a sign reads, "THE PICKLED EGG, EST. 1878"

HENRY

Hope it's better than it sounds.

Lawrence slaps his back, pushes Henry

INSIDE THE BAR

Small, cramped, but full of a lively crowd, most are other SOLDIERS, YOUNG GIRLS, a gruff looking BARKEEP eyes the two boys at the door, nods them in.

At the bar, Percy catches sight of the two, raises his pint.

PERCY

Oy! Larry, join us mate.

Henry and Lawrence make their way to the crowded bar. Percy looks Lawrence over.

PERCY (CONT'D)

I say, it ain't as pretty as what we got at Wintringham... makes you look like a brown turd left out in the sun.

Lawrence and many around them laugh. Percy looks toward Henry.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Who's the stray?

Lawrence grips Henry's shoulder.

LAWRENCE

Meet my new mate, Henry. Henry, this here's Percy Owens. Best goalie on the team.

PERCY

And the fooking balls to prove it.

Percy juts out a hand to Henry.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Welcome to the club, Henry.

The Barkeep SLAMS a couple of pints on the bar in front of Henry.

BARKEEP

Rules, gents. Yer nice to the lasses, no puking in the privy, and no fighting inside. Figure you'll have enough of that where yer headin'. First rounds on the house.

All three boys CHEER, swig their pints.

EXT. THE PICKLED EGG - NIGHT

Lawrence, Percy and Henry, all three with arms wrapped shoulder to shoulder, wobble down the street.

LAWRENCE

Nope, we're going to Whitechapel to gets us some proper lovin', and that's the end of it.

PERCY

More like we get the pox.

The boys stumble, Henry the least drunk of the three, keeps them all upright. Lawrence pulls Percy forward, Henry stays put.

HENRY

I best be gettin' back. I'll see ya both at the station in the morning.

Lawrence smiles, waves Henry off, he and Percy weave down the street, break out in drunken song.

EXT. ST. MARY'S - FRONT DRIVE - NIGHT

Henry peers around the main gate pillar at the orphanage building. No lights, no sounds; all asleep.

He darts to the side of the orphanage.

Tight against the wall, he peers up. A planter trellis covered in dead vines extends to the roof's edge.

A last look around, he climbs.

Halfway up, he passes a window, slips, the trellis wood and vines CRACK. He freezes.

A light from inside the window flicks on. Henry pulls tight against the trellis. A shadow passes across the window.

A moment, the light flicks out.

Henry moves on.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Henry walks across the moon lit roof, searches. He spots something, picks it up. It's the same red ball he and Sophie would play with.

OFF SCREEN: a door CREAKS.

Henry stiffens, doesn't turn.

HENRY

If you come any closer, I'll kill you.

MISS ROGERSON (O.S.)

I doubt that will be necessary, Mister Creswell, or should I address you by your military rank?

Henry spins.

AT THE ROOFTOP DOORWAY

Miss Rogerson smiles back, her eyes on the red ball.

MISS ROGERSON (CONT'D)

She enjoyed that with you.

Henry glances at the red ball.

HENRY

Those were good times.

A moment.

MISS ROGERSON

Would you like to see her?

Henry snaps his head up, nods.

EXT. SIDE YARD - NIGHT

Henry, red ball in hand, stands beside Miss Rogerson, a small grave with freshly turned soil at their feet, a wood plank near one end with the word "Sophie" hand carved into it.

MISS ROGERSON

Henry, I want you to listen to me, this one time. Our search for love for someone... something, can blind us to the dangers around us. Where you are going, what you are about to do, is very brave, but you must be vigilant.

Henry is silent, his gaze locked on the grave. Miss Rogerson places a hand on his shoulder.

MISS ROGERSON (CONT'D)

But it will come to you, and when it does, it shall be wonderful. Cherish it, honor it, and most of all, protect it with your life.

Henry holds back the tears. Miss Rogerson pats his shoulder, backs away, walks back to the Orphanage.

Henry kneels beside the grave, digs a small hole, places the red ball inside, covers it up with dirt.

HENRY

I promise.

MONTAGE:

SUPER: "ALDERSHOT, ENGLAND. BASIC INFANTRY TRAINING CAMP"

-Henry and Lawrence slog through the obstacle course, with Henry barely able to keep up. The instructor constantly berating him. Lawrence and another boy help him finish.

-Henry fails physical test after physical test; breaks down his pistol under duress, sharp shooting, and hand-to-hand combat. His fellow soldiers take time to teach him how to improve.

-The rest of his squad are overly protective, almost preempting any sort of accident or slip up by Henry.

-Some of the soldiers on leave, carouse on the town, Henry in tow but not his cup of tea.

-Graduation ceremony for Henry and the squad.

-Henry's squad joins hundreds of other young soldiers as they board transport ships to cross the English Channel.

END MONTAGE

EXT. ALBERT, FRANCE - BRITISH 34TH DIV. CAMP - NIGHT

A dirt road leads up to a fenced entry gate, the sign above reads, "BRITISH 34TH DIV. ENCAMPMENT, ALBERT, FRANCE."

Rain PUMMELS the camp.

Clustered rows of stark white, pyramid-like troop tents dot the barren field, every twenty yards an eight-inch Howitzer pokes up from an oversized foxhole, a line protecting the eastern edge.

INT./EXT. BRITISH TROOP TENT - NIGHT

Inside the tent, one small lantern, TWO SOLDIERS polish their boots. The 1st Soldier sticks his head outside the tent flap.

The 2ND SOLDIER glances up at the bum of the 1st.

2ND SOLDIER

Here, are you daft man? Get yer bloody arse outta me face.

OUTSIDE THE TENT

Several yards away, Henry leaves the mess tent, a PAIL of food in hand, he SLOGS through the muddy soil along the line of tents.

Henry, draped by a soaked British uniform, his coat collar pulled up snug around his face, he nears the Soldiers' tent.

The 1st Soldiers' head disappears back inside. From inside, whispered voices, SHADOWS flicker across the lantern-illuminated tent walls.

1ST SOLDIER (O.S.)

Oy. It's that Creswell wanker coming out the mess.

2ND SOLDIER (O.S.)
 Bloody right. That sod can't lift
 a stick to save himself, or the
 one in the 'ole with him.

One SOLDIER SHADOW scoots up to the tent entrance flaps.

1ST SOLDIER (O.S.)
 I'm gonna give him a lit'l taste
 of French countryside.

OUTSIDE THE TENT

Henry SLOPS forward. A dog BARKS. He looks up at two RAIN-SOAKED GUARDS twenty-five feet away, one flanked by a leashed AIREDALE TERRIER, they walk toward him.

Eyes locked on the Terrier, Henry passes the Soldier's tent, oblivious.

From inside the tent, a LEG shoots out from the tent flap, catches Henry's ankle, he trips and CRASHES to the muddy ground.

Food, pail and kit fly and SCATTER in the muck.

LAUGHTER erupts from inside the tent. Drenched in wet mud, Henry sits up, glares at the Soldiers' tent.

HENRY
 Cowards. Git out 'ere and --

OFF SCREEN: a BARK

Henry looks over his shoulder at the Airedale. It breaks the Guard's grip and BOLTS towards Henry.

GUARD #1
 Beetle! Here now, stand down!

The Airedale LUNGES at Henry, RIPS a small patch of cloth from his uniform.

GUARD #1 (CONT'D)
 Beetle! Return!

The Airedale turns, trots back to Guard #1. Henry grips his torn sleeve, struggles to stand.

Guard #2 approaches, holds out the torn shoulder patch.

GUARD #2

Sorry 'bout that mate. He don't usually do that less he thinks you're a goner. You laying in the muck and all.

HENRY

I don't understand what --

GUARD #2

-- You know, them's that left in no-man's land... their guts all a-flappin' about... just lyin' there hopin'...

(points to the
Airedale)

One of these mutts'll find 'em 'for they kick it.

HENRY

I thought he was going to take me arm off.

GUARD #2

You'd be a sight lucky to have 'em try... he might just save your bleed'in life out there.

The two Guards move away in the heavy deluge, round the corner of the mess tent. Henry kneels in the mud, searches for his kit and utensils.

OFF SCREEN: More SNICKERS from inside the Soldiers' tent.

SERGEANT (O.S.)

Creswell?

Henry continues to search, finds his spoon and pail.

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

Creswell!

Startled, Henry jerks around, drops his kit again.

In front of him, a heavysset SERGEANT (50s), squints through the downpour. Henry comes to a hasty salute. Globbs of mud drip from his hand.

HENRY

Yes, Sir, Sergeant.

SERGEANT

You deaf, son? And what the bloody 'ell are you muck'in about for?

HENRY

Mess Sir... me supper.

OFF SCREEN: LAUGHTER bursts from inside the Soldiers' tent.

The Sergeant takes it all in.

SERGEANT

Yes, well... appears you're done.

HENRY

Not quite. I was --

SERGEANT

-- Colonel wants to see you.

The Sergeant spins, marches away. Henry leans down, reaches for the metal pail and spoon.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Leave it be. You won't be needin' it where you're going.

OFF SCREEN: SNICKERS from inside the Soldiers' tent.

1ST SOLDIER (O.S.)

Move along, wanker.

Henry wipes his face, smears mud, he walks after the Sergeant, now barely visible in the heavy sheets of rain.

INT. COLONEL'S TENT - NIGHT

The COLONEL (40s), a dark, bushy mustache, not a speck of mud on his uniform, sits at a makeshift desk of ammunition cartons and wood planks. Everything in the tent neat and tidy

A candle illuminates the scattered papers under his left hand. He grasps the candle, lights a pipe, takes a puff.

A SCUFFLE OF BOOTS from outside the tent.

HENRY (O.S.)

Permission to enter, Sir.

COLONEL

Yes, yes.

The tent flap rises. A mud-crusted Henry walks in.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Good God, man, you look a fright.
Some sort of camouflage drill?

HENRY

Not exactly, Sir. One of the
guard dogs --

COLONEL

-- Yes, well... you're a damn
mess.

The Colonel stares.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

And?

HENRY

Creswell, Sir. The Sergeant said
you wanted to see me?

COLONEL

Creswell, Creswell. Ah, yes...
that Creswell. Let's see, I have
it here somewhere.

The Colonel shuffles some of the papers, scans one.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Look here, I've been asked to send
a man up the north coast near
Etaples to assist the frogs. Sort
of a special project... morale and
all that.

HENRY

Project, Sir?

COLONEL

Seems the Frenchies have a
training school up there that
requires a bit of British
ingenuity.

The Colonel reads the note page again.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Says here... ah, yes, here it is.
(reads out loud)

Choose a volunteer. Preferably a man with strong resolve, patience, and an ability with canines.

HENRY

I don't think I --

COLONEL

-- War dog training school to be exact. My understanding is that you've had some recent dog experience.

HENRY

But, Sir --

COLONEL

-- Corporal, look here. I'm doing my damndest to find you a place in this little skirmish. It's no secret you've not done well with this lot, that's as plain as the mud on your face.

HENRY

I'm not sure I understand, Sir.

COLONEL

As luck would have it, seems some of your mates from back home were part of a Pals' group, got assigned to the camp as well. Chaps'll already be used to you, right?

The Colonel stands, picks up some other papers.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Your orders.

Without a glance, Henry takes them.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

There now, can't be all that bad. All that sea air, it'll make you ready for what's to come. You're to report to Major Wallins tomorrow afternoon.

HENRY

Sir, it's over one-hundred kilometers to the coast. I'd have to leave tonight and I don't have any way to --

COLONEL

-- I hear it's a full moon, the bloody rain's stopped, so you shouldn't have any trouble finding your way now, should you? I'm sure you'll make out.

EXT. COLONEL'S TENT - NIGHT

Henry steps out from the Colonel's tent, scans the immediate area then stares up at the

NIGHT SKY

Dark clouds obscure the moon.

HENRY

So much for finding my way.

OFF SCREEN: a PUTT-PUTT, PUTTERING noise.

HENRY'S POV

An overweight DISPATCH RIDER, splattered in mud, RUMBLES up the rutted road on a Triumph motorcycle.

The Dispatch Rider RUMBLES up, a sliding stop, his back tire sprays mud and muck across Henry's trousers.

He plops off, props the back wheel up on a kick-stand, struts up to Henry.

DISPATCH RIDER

You're in me way. Move off.

Henry moves a bit, the Dispatch Rider shoves past to the Colonel's tent, pauses, straightens his tunic, flicks both ends of his curled mustache.

DISPATCH RIDER (CONT'D)

You watch me bike. Think you can do that, sonny?

He turns to the tent entry, and disappears inside the tent. Henry eyes the motorcycle, glances back to the tent.

He jumps on the motorcycle. It ROARS to life. The Dispatch Rider pokes his head out of the tent.

DISPATCH RIDER (CONT'D)

Oy! That's me bike.

HENRY

Don't worry, I'll watch it!

Henry GUNS the bike, the back wheel SHOOTS mud and muck and coats the Dispatch Rider.

Henry accelerates forward, GLANCES off a stack of garbage pails, almost goes down.

Determined, Henry struggles to maintain control. The bike WOBBLER along the muddy dirt road.

SOLDIERS scramble out of the way.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Nothing to it.

The bike TEARS down the road and toward the line of troop tents.

Henry approaches the Two Soldiers' tent, slows the bike, extends his foot, kicks both front tent stakes aside.

The tent falters, collapses inward. Angry SHOUTS of surprise from inside the tent. Henry grins, SPEEDS down the dirt road.

EXT./INT. ETAPLES, FRANCE - TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Cold, wet, grey; winter in Coastal France.

ATOP A RUSTY BICYCLE

CLAIRE PRESCOTT (22), small in stature but tall with intelligence, bundled in a woolen plaid coat, scarf and mittens. She peddles down a narrow, cobblestone street, stops and goes inside

A POST OFFICE

A POSTAL CLERK services a queue of LOCALS in line at a small window, he glances up, smiles.

POSTAL CLERK

Bonjour, Claire.

CLAIRE

Bonjour, Bertrand.

Claire steps to the rows of personal mail boxes along the far wall. She removes a small key on a leather strap from around her neck, hesitates, crosses her fingers, unlocks one of the boxes.

She peers inside, smiles. She removes a single letter, closes the box. Claire steps to the front window, RIPS it open. Her eyes skitter across the page.

BEN (V.O.)

Seventeen November, nineteen-seventeen. My dearest Claire. It has been some time since I have written...

CLAIRE

Two months ago?

Claire touches a small modest RING on her left finger, smiles, goes back to the letter.

BEN (V.O.)

I remembered that November twelfth was your birthday. The best I can do is to write a letter from a dirty trench along the front, and the only gift I could send is one of the enormous rats that continually plague us.

Claire reads on.

BEN (V.O.)

I trust Lawrence is faring better than I, and at least he is close by should you ever need him. So I close with the best of love for the only little girl in the world for me, your own, Ben.

Claire clutches the letter to her chest.

EXT. COUNTRY HILLSIDE - DAY

From a hilltop, Henry sits on the motorcycle, scans his paper orders one last time, gazes out across

THE LANDSCAPE BELOW

Over a hundred acres covered in a mass of white tents, rectangular wood structures neatly arranged like end-to-end dominos, red cross hospitals, a railway yard, all capped by the North Atlantic ocean.

Throughout the camp, SOLDIERS scurry about like ants.

The entire camp is outlined in barbed wire and machine gun emplacements.

ON THE HILLTOP

Henry STARTS the bike, RUMBLES down the road.

EXT. BRITISH CAMP GATE - DAY

Two UNIFORMED FRENCH SENTRIES stand guard. Henry stops the bike, hands his orders to SENTRY #1 who gives them a cursory read.

The men speak in French with SUBTITLES:

SENTRY #1
(to Sentry #2)
Look, Marcel. Another one for the
dog show. Perhaps we should get
him a collar as well?

The Sentries laugh.

HENRY
Which way?

The Sentries revert to ENGLISH:

SENTRY #1
Can you not smell it from here?
Why don't you just follow your
nose... eh, Fifi?

The Sentries LAUGH.

HENRY
Bloody frogs.

Henry RIPS back the orders, GUNS the bike through the gate.

SENTRY #1 (O.S.)
Au revoirs, Fifi!

EXT. DOG TRAINING AREA - DAY

Henry stops by a six-foot-high wire fence, peers through at a training FIELD lined with deep crisscrossing trenches.

Several SOLDIERS train a variety of DOGS. Smoke grenades POP near a trench.

One Soldier, pudgier than most, stands with his back to Henry. The Soldier prods a black and tan SHEPHERD that's reluctant to enter the smoke.

The Soldier kicks the cowering Shepherd.

SOLDIER

Run you bleed'in coward!

The Soldier turns slightly, his right face outlined, two nasty scars become visible.

BACK NEAR THE FENCE

Henry freezes, eyes riveted on Trevor.

HENRY

It can't be.

ON THE FIELD

Trevor grips the Shepherds' collar, WHACKS him with a riding whip. The Shepherd WAILS.

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

Bloody hell.

Trevor releases the Shepherd who races toward a gas-filled trench.

OFFSCREEN: An ENGINE GUNS.

Trevor turns, stares toward the fence line.

TREVOR'S POV

A receding motorbike chews up the dirt road.

INT. MAJOR WALLINS' OFFICE - DAY

Ten-by-twelve room. Rickety, wood chairs. A framed picture of Lord Kitchener hangs. Henry stands in front of LIEUTENANT GRANT (20s), at a small, wobbly desk, he's an expeditious, rubber-stamping bureaucrat.

LIEUTENANT GRANT

Help you?

Henry drops his orders on the desk.

HENRY

Corporal Creswell reporting to Major Wallins.

The Lieutenant scans the orders.

LIEUTENANT GRANT

Not in. See the Lieutenant, barracks three.

HENRY

Yes, Sir. I think there's been some sort of mistake, Sir.

LIEUTENANT GRANT

Orders look clear to me.

HENRY

Yes, Sir, but I don't know nothin' about training no dogs, Sir.

LIEUTENANT GRANT

Seems that's about to change, Corporal.

The Lieutenant goes back to his paper shuffling.

LIEUTENANT GRANT (CONT'D)

Near the dog school, out and to the right.

EXT. THE COUNTRYSIDE - SUNRISE

A low, morning mist hangs across the hillside. A grey mustached MESSENGER (60s) pedals a rusty bicycle along a

DIRT ROAD

The messenger WHISTLES a jaunty tune. A leather shoulder bag FLAPS against his brown woolen uniform.

EXT. COUNTRY FARM HOUSE/BARN - SAME

A hand-painted sign hangs over the entrance to a converted, bombed out barn. It reads: "VETERINARY HOSPITAL".

To one side, a dilapidated corral occupied by TWO BANDAGED MULES and a SCRAWNY HORSE. A patch-work wood fence encircles the whole farm.

Claire, in men's breeches finished with knee-high black leather boots, lugs a bucket of oats to the corral, SHAKES it.

The Scrawny Horse saunters over, buries his nose in the bucket.

CLAIRE

Mornin', Stamp.

Claire strokes Stamp's head

OFF SCREEN: the Messenger's WHISTLE grows louder.

Claire glances toward the dirt road.

On the bike, the Messenger BOUNCES along, stops in front of the barn, leans the bike against the fence.

MESSENGER'S POV

Claire waves from up by the corral, he waves back, gimps up to the front door, KNOCKS.

The door opens to reveal DR. ASHFORD (50s), slightly overweight, baggy eyes, balding with a handle-bar mustache and matching beard, he dries his hands with a towel.

Claire, too far away to hear what is said, focuses on the two men as they talk.

Dr. Ashford nods, accepts a letter from the Messenger, reads the contents.

The Messenger mounts his bike, rides off. Letter in hand, Dr. Ashford, walks up to Claire.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Where?

DR. ASHFORD
 A month ago. Verdun. At Fort
 Vaux. Claire, I don't think you
 should --

Claire takes the note, reads a bit.

DR. ASHFORD (CONT'D)
 Some new weapon. Something called
 a flame thrower.

CLAIRE
 He... burned?

DR. ASHFORD
 Claire, take the day --

Claire shoves the note in her pocket, spins, stumbles
 toward the corral.

CLAIRE
 -- I have to finish feeding Stamp.

She reaches the corral fence, drapes her body over the
 top rail, SOBS. Stamp gently nuzzles her hand.

EXT. BRITISH CAMP - DOG SCHOOL KENNELS - MORNING

In a semicircle, fifteen stone-fortified huts, one dog in
 each. AIREDALES, COLLIES, AND SHEPHERDS, all chained to
 posts outside each hut.

A larger ring of 35 similar huts face and encircles the
 smaller group.

OFF SCREEN: A BUGLE TRUMPETS.

DOGS yawn, stretch, and scratch.

INT. BARRACKS 3 - SAME MOMENT

The BUGLE CALL reaches a long rectangular room lined with
 fifty bunk beds filled with SOLDIERS who yawn, stretch
 and scratch.

Henry rolls out of a lower bunk, dresses.

INT. MESS HALL - MORNING

Seated alone at a table, head down, Henry eats. All around him, chairs SCRAPE, tin cups CLANK, Soldiers talk, laugh.

A FIST HOLDING A RIDING WHIP

SLAMS on the table beside Henry. He jumps.

TREVOR (O.S.)

How's your girlfriend, Sophie?

Henry bolts up, KNOCKS his chair over. Fists balled, he spins.

Surprised, Trevor steps back.

HENRY

Not so brave without the twins at your back, are you, you twat.

TREVOR

Whoa, easy there, chum. We don't stand on the Queen's rules, here. You only have to salute when we're on duty.

Trevor taps two stripes on his shoulder. Nearby Soldiers laugh.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Last I laid eyes on you, your little arse were running away from a fight. We don't need no milksops in this unit.

HENRY

Bugger off... Sir.

TREVOR

Aw, Henry, is that any way to treat an old chum? Us being a part of the same Battalion and all?

(to soldiers)

I give you me good mate, Evelyn. He and I go back a ways and I'm sure you'll all give 'em a warm 'ello.

Trevor scans the room. Feet SHUFFLE. A nervous COUGH.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
 Yeh, well, seems the lads already
 know you. But then, you're used
 to that aren't you? Dog's best
 friend and all that shite.

Henry shoves Trevor backward.

Trevor lunges, grabs Henry's shirt, jerks him in tight,
 faces inches apart.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
 Jolly ain't here to save you,
 Creswell. Or didn't you notice?
 No rooftops to hide your bitches.

HENRY
 Afraid you'll fall off again? Oh,
 you ain't told 'em that bit, have
 you? How you scream like a little
 girl.

Trevor seethes.

SERGEANT (O.S.)
 A..ten..shun!

Every Soldier jumps up, boots SCRAPE, they stand erect.

Trevor glances over Henry's shoulder at

THE MAIN MESS ENTRY DOOR

Lieutenant Grant glares back. Trevor releases Henry,
 steps back, turns to the Soldiers.

TREVOR
 Now.... seems to me we gotta find
 something extra special for the
 new bloke.
 (to Henry)
 I recall you being good at digging
 your way out of a mess, and I've
 got the perfect place to practice.

EXT. BOG ROW - DAY

A symmetrical line of two-by-three foot trenches, ten
 deep. Every other trench filled with dirt. Rocks placed
 in the shape of the letter "L" crown each recovered
 mound.

From inside the last open trench, a shovel sweeps upward, dirt flies. Henry's head bobs up and down with the movement.

At a nearby trench, SENTRY #1 lays down his rifle, his back to Henry, he straddles the opening, and relieves himself. URINE SPLATTERS.

He fastens his britches, glances over at Henry.

SENTRY #1
 Bonjour, Fifi. Are you still
 looking for a collar? Perhaps you
 should try one of your
 girlfriend's huts in the kennels?

The Sentry picks up his rifle.

SENTRY #1 (CONT'D)
 Keep digging mon-ami. I will be
 back soon to fill the hole with my
 lunch.

The Sentry cackles, lumbers off. Henry digs.

LAWRENCE (O.S.)
 Your name Evelyn?

An angry Henry throws the shovel out of the trench, scrambles out behind it, turns to the culprit, freezes.

Standing before him, Lawrence.

HENRY
 Lawrence!

Henry rushes to him, they embrace.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 How'd you get --

LAWRENCE
 -- The Grimsby lot, together most
 of the way, until Passchendaele.
 Haig's folly they call it... all
 for a bloody railway we never
 captured.

HENRY
 At least you're here... what a bit
 of luck.

LAWRENCE

Well, more than luck I would gather... but look here, the chaps all say --

HENRY

-- The chaps?

LAWRENCE

The boys in this dog unit. Your unit?

Henry steps back, now unsure. Lawrence presses on.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

As I understand it, you seem to have a certain knack with our four-legged mates.

HENRY

Surprised they noticed.

LAWRENCE

Well, not exactly. More like you preferred them. I must say, the boys seem a bit, uh...

Henry turns, picks up the shovel to continue.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Look here. There's a dog. He's had a bad run, refuses to respond. And, well... I was rather hoping you could give it a go.

Henry shakes his head.

HENRY

I'm not as good as they think.

LAWRENCE

Yes, well. Pity. I suppose we'll have to put him down. Still, glad you're in one piece.

Lawrence turns, takes a few steps.

BEHIND HIM

Henry drops the shovel, takes a step forward.

HENRY

What's his name?

Lawrence stops, smiles.

INT. BUILDING 7 - DAY

A small reception area, a desk manned by Dr. Ashford, pipe in hand.

OFF SCREEN: a KNOCK

DR. ASHFORD

Bring him in.

The main reception door opens, Lawrence and Henry step inside.

Dr. Ashford rises from behind a desk, eyes search the two.

DR. ASHFORD (CONT'D)

Can I help you Lawrence? Got an animal that needs help?

LAWRENCE

Er, well, in a way, yes. Doctor Ashford, Corporal Henry Creswell of His Majesty's Royal Signal Corps.

(to Henry)

Henry, David Ashford, veterinarian extra-ordinaire.

Henry and Dr. Ashford shake hands.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Henry here's the one we chatted about.

DR. ASHFORD

Ah, yes, I see. Well then... let's have a look shall we?

Dr. Ashford leads them down a hallway past a door marked "Exam Room" and into a larger room full of dog kennels.

DR. ASHFORD (CONT'D)

There are over two hundred dogs of varying breeds in the school at any given week. Many of them arrive with diseases or some other malady that requires us to quarantine and treat prior to allowing them in the general population.

Dr. Ashford stops at a kennel which contains a LARGE SHEEP DOG.

DR. ASHFORD (CONT'D)
Gertie here has a nasty eye
infection that we've almost cured.

OFF SCREEN: A RATTLING sound distracts Henry.

He walks toward one wall of kennels, stops in front of kennel #13, kneels down, peers

INSIDE

A dog's open mouth lunges forward, it's teeth latch onto the door grate, a VICIOUS RATTLING, a threatening GROWL.

LAWRENCE'S POV

Henry stares inside a kennel, speaks softly. He reaches up, unlatches the kennel door.

Lawrence taps Dr. Ashford's shoulder. The doctor turns, looks where he's pointing.

ASHFORD'S POV

The Kennel door swings open. A Border Collie emerges. First a black and white NOSE, a SNIFF, a cautious PAW followed by another.

Henry extends his hand, palm down. Another SNIFF, the Border Collie moves closer, his head touches Henry's fingers.

Inside the Kennel, his tail THUMP-THUMPS the side wall.

DR. ASHFORD (CONT'D)
(to Lawrence)
By God, I never thought I'd see
this.

Henry ruffles the fur on the dog's head.

DR. ASHFORD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Henry, meet Dodger.

DODGER'S POV

A friendly smile for a human, another SNIFF of the hand, Dodger backs into the kennel, Henry closes the door.

Henry follows Dr. Ashford and Lawrence down the hallway.

DR. ASHFORD (CONT'D)

He needs someone to work with him until his shoulder heals. And I was thinking you might --

HENRY

Not sure I'm the bloke to --

Up ahead, the door to the exam room swings open. A BLONDE SOLDIER steps out carrying a BOXER PUPPY with a bandaged head.

Claire follows, escorts him to the front door, her eyes focused on the Puppy, oblivious to the other Men behind her.

CLAIRE

You keep those bandages dry and Felix away from any more trench training. I want him back in a week's time.

BLONDE SOLDIER

Tank' you, Miss Hartley. Tank' you so much.

The Blonde Soldier leaves. Claire turns, looks from Dr. Ashford to Lawrence then rivets on Henry. Their eyes lock, a moment of silent intensity.

DR. ASHFORD

Claire, this is Lance Corporal Creswell.

The spell broken, Claire smiles at Henry.

CLAIRE

Hello.

Smitten, Henry only manages a wave. Dr. Ashford clears his throat.

DR. ASHFORD

Henry is considering helping us out with a bit of rehab for Dodger.

CLAIRE

(eyes on Henry)

Really? That would be nice, I mean, he needs a good companion.

Henry takes a step forward.

HENRY
 (to Claire)
 I can't say no.
 (to the Doctor)
 I'd love to spend more time with
 uh... him.

Lawrence SLAPS Dr. Ashford on the back.

LAWRENCE
 Hah! Told you!

DR. ASHFORD
 Wonderful. Exercise is twice a day
 for two weeks. Shall we say
 tomorrow morning to start?

Still focused on Claire.

HENRY
 Tomorrow morning?

CLAIRE
 Around nine.

Lawrence grabs Henry's arm.

LAWRENCE
 C'mon, Cressie. Back to the
 trenches.

Lawrence pulls/shoves a mesmerized Henry to the door,
 looks back at Claire.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)
 Bye, sis.

Henry snaps out of it, jerks to a halt.

HENRY
 Your sister? Blimey!

EXT. DOG TRAINING COURSE - NEXT DAY

Henry stands in front of a barrel, his focus on something
 nearby, he raises a hand, palm up.

HENRY
 Wait!

A mass of dog flies forward, collides with Henry, the two topple backwards over the barrel, Dodger glued to his chest.

The pair THUD against the hard ground. Henry laughs.

Dodger smothers Henry's face with tongue lickings. Henry does little to stop him.

HENRY (CONT'D)
You're s'posed to go over the
barrel... not me over it.

Satisfied, Dodger steps aside, sits, BARKS. Henry sits up.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Okay. No more muckin' about.
We've only got a few days to get
you ready for the games. Try it
again.

Henry makes a practiced gesture with his left hand.

Dodger spins, runs toward a sign that reads, "START LINE".

HENRY (CONT'D)
'ere! 'Old on!

Henry scrambles up, stares across the field at the

START LINE

Where Dodger skids to halt, turns, sits, his eyes locked on Henry.

DODGER'S POV

Stretched between Henry and Dodger, the course is riddled with obstacles that simulate the real battlefield; rolls of barbed wire, fences, muddy ponds, fallen trees, and trenches.

At the end of the course, three HAY-STUFFED SOLDIER UNIFORMS lie on the ground to resemble wounded men.

NEAR THE BARREL

HENRY (CONT'D)
I wonder --

Henry raises his hand, holds it a moment, and chops it downward.

At the start line, Dodger springs forward, runs the obstacle course at full speed, not missing a challenge.

Barb wire, over it; barrels, over those; a fence, through the rails; SPLASHES a pond.

A tree stump, more barbed wire and a leap over a six-foot wide trench.

Dodger grabs a hay-stuffed soldier's ARM, yanks.

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

Bloody hell?

Dodger pulls the entire hay-stuffed soldier, inch-by-inch, back toward the open trench, they flop over the trench edge and down inside, hidden from view.

A moment passes. Henry runs toward the trench.

Seconds before he reaches the edge, Dodger leaps out, a piece of torn cloth dangles from his mouth.

Dodger turns, reverse navigates the entire course back to

THE START LINE

Dodger turns, sits, waits, the torn cloth still gripped between his teeth like a favorite ball.

Breathless, Henry jogs up.

HENRY (CONT'D)

That was bloody amazing! Who taught you that?

Henry leans over, removes the cloth from Dodger's mouth, examines it. It's a piece of shoulder patch insignia from the hay-stuffed soldiers' uniform. Dodger BARKS, his eyes focused beyond Henry.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Found a live one, did you?

CLAIRE (O.S.)

And we'd like to keep it that way.

Startled, Henry spins. Dodger's tail goes into wag override. A few feet away, Claire smiles back, a small JACK RUSSELL TERRIER held in her arms.

Dodger's tail THUMPS harder.

EXT. BARRACKS 5 - DAY

Henry and Dodger jog past the barracks, the main door opens, Lawrence steps out, spies them, leaps down in pursuit.

LAWRENCE

I say, Henry. Hold on.

Henry stops. Dodger sits at Henry's side, pants. Lawrence catches up.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Who's running who, here?

HENRY

Game's tomorrow.

LAWRENCE

Oh, right. Good news, Cressie. Major Wallins has approved your transfer. Effective immediately.

HENRY

What about Dodger?

Lawrence puts his arm around Henry, they walk side-by-side. Dodger follows.

LAWRENCE

Well, seems I've a bit of pull in that regard. Ashford's recommended that Dodger be released in your charge.

Surprised, Henry stops. Dodger sits.

Henry, his hand subconsciously moves to rest on Dodger's head, looks at Lawrence.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Well, mate, you just became an official member of the war dog clan. Welcome to the pack.

Lawrence does his best wolf HOWL.

HENRY

That's brilliant!

(to Dodger)

You hear that boy?

Dodger BARKS, joins in on the HOWLING. The men laugh.

LAWRENCE

I swear, he understands you.

HENRY

Yeah, we do.

LAWRENCE

Listen, we, that is the boys and I... we all thought we'd celebrate the news.

HENRY

Uh, I'm not too good at that sort.

Henry glances down at Dodger.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Besides, we've still got training for the day, and --

LAWRENCE

-- Henry. Whatever's important to you, is important to us. That includes Dodger.

HENRY

That's great, but, uh, I thought I'd go thank Dr. Ashford for --

LAWRENCE

-- She's been waiting all afternoon.

HENRY

Oh... well. Can't let her down.

Lawrence claps his arm around Henry's shoulder, laughs.

LAWRENCE

C'mon, mate. Let's get you cleaned up and presentable. If there's one thing I do know about my sister, she's not fond of her men smelling like yesterdays' kit.

INT. BUILDING 7 - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

Dr. Ashford reviews records at his desk. A METALLIC CLICK catches his attention. He glances down the

HALLWAY

Claire walks a DOG into a kennel along the back wall.

DR. ASHFORD (O.S.)
As soon as I finish these exam
records, we should call it a
night. I know you've made plans.

She closes the kennel gate, locks it.

CLAIRE
Apparently not.

OFF SCREEN: A door SLAMS.

DR. ASHFORD (O.S.)
Claire? Could you come up front
for a moment?

CLAIRE
Be right there.

Claire walks down the hallway and into the

RECEPTION ROOM

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I asked Lawrence to try and talk
him into --

She freezes. Trevor stands in front of the desk.

TREVOR
Miss Hartley.

Trevor scans Claire from head to toe.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Always a pleasure.

Dr. Ashford stands.

DR. ASHFORD
What do you want, Corporal?

Trevor TAPS some shiny bars on his tunic.

TREVOR
It's Captain as of this morning.

DR. ASHFORD

Well, desperate times do call for
desperate measures.

TREVOR

'Ere, 'old on. I don't --

Claire pushes past Trevor, stands beside Dr. Ashford.

CLAIRE

Let me guess. Another dog's been
hurt.

Trevor seethes, his glare moves between the two.

TREVOR

Nothing that requires your medical
opinion. I've come to ask about
Creswell.

Trevor steps forward, inches from Claire's face.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Seems he's been keeping some
company without me au'thorization.
Only personnel officially assigned
to the War Dog school are
permitted to work with the mutts.
(to Ashford)
Creswell's no longer allowed near
them.

DR. ASHFORD

Now, see here, I --

Claire raises a hand.

CLAIRE

(to Trevor)
-- Henry is acting under direct
orders from Dr. Ashford, who, by
the way, holds the rank of
Lieutenant-Colonel. Is that a
problem... Captain?

TREVOR

I hardly think --

CLAIRE

-- That would be my point.

Trevor boils.

TREVOR

Being that you're a lass, and a
might fancy one at that, I don't
feel me humble upbringing will
keep me mouth from saying what I'm
really thinking.

CLAIRE

Even better. You can go.

Trevor tips his cap, turns, FLINGS open the door. Claire
rushes after him.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Captain?

Trevor turns back, Claire pulls to a stop.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

You bring one more dog into this
clinic with unexplained injuries,
and you won't have to worry about
who does or doesn't work with
them. And that's what I'm really
thinking.

A high noon standoff.

TREVOR

Miss Hartley, best keep your
little pet on a leash.

Trevor pivots, storms out.

INT. MAJOR WALLINS' OFFICE - DAY

MAJOR WALLINS (30s), uniform-tight chubby, a bristle
mustache, seated at a desk, he riffles through official-
looking documents.

A KNOCK. Major Wallins stares down at the documents.

MAJOR WALLINS

Yes, what is it?

The office door CRACKS open, Trevor steps through, closes
it, struts to the desk, executes a perfect salute. Major
Wallins remains focused on the documents.

MAJOR WALLINS (CONT'D)

At ease, Captain. You got your
promotion.

Trevor waits, Major Wallins scribbles on, straightens the documents, looks up.

MAJOR WALLINS (CONT'D)

All right, what's so bloody important?

TREVOR

Yes, Sir. Thank you for seeing me. There's a new bloke I'd like to transfer to the program, Sir.

MAJOR WALLINS

I see. And why is this particular man so important?

TREVOR

Well, Sir... He has a very good way with the mut... er, dogs, Sir.

MAJOR WALLINS

Oh, that... where is he now?

TREVOR

You recently assigned him to unit seven, Sir. He's the chap from the thirty-fourth sent to assist.

MAJOR WALLINS

Ah, yes. The volunteer. And you say he's tops with those dogs of yours?

TREVOR

Some would say, yes, Sir.

Major Wallins returns his attention to the documents.

MAJOR WALLINS

Very well. I'll have the Lieutenant issue the orders.

Trevor salutes, pivots, and heads for the door.

MAJOR WALLINS (CONT'D)

Captain?

Trevor turns back.

TREVOR

Yes, Sir?

MAJOR WALLINS
 Exactly which program are you
 placing this chap in?

TREVOR
 Accelerated trench logistics, Sir.

Major Wallins looks up, a bit surprised.

MAJOR WALLINS
 Does he understand that means
 he'll be going to the forward
 lines?

TREVOR
 He does, Sir. I told 'im me self.

MAJOR WALLINS
 Well then, do what you need to do.

TREVOR
 I intend to, Sir.

INT. OFFICER'S CLUB - NIGHT

Simple, rough-hewn wooden tables lie scattered around a large open square of floor. A makeshift bar of barrels and planks covers one corner, while a phonograph SCRATCHES out a current hit song.

COUPLES dance and SOLDIERS drink in the smoky room.

Beer pints in hand, Henry and Lawrence crowd a table of Soldiers, Percy among them. Lawrence raises his glass.

LAWRENCE
 To our intrepid Lance Corporal,
 Henry Creswell. New dog to the
 pack!

PERCY
 Here, here!

They TOAST, a few HOWL, they all drain their mugs.

PERCY (CONT'D)
 Welcome home, Henry.

Henry opens his mouth to reply, but his attention is drawn to the

FRONT DOOR

There stands Claire, a blue dress, hair perfect. She's beautiful.

He stands.

CLAIRE'S POV

She scans the room, locks eyes with Henry, she smiles, winds her way across the dance floor to Henry's table.

HENRY

Miss Hartley.

CLAIRE

Henry... may I call you Henry?

HENRY

Of course... uh --

LAWRENCE

(to Henry)

-- This is worse than watching you dig out bogs. Christ man, do ask her to join us.

Percy snickers. Henry motions to a chair.

CLAIRE

Yes, of course, thank you.

She sits, throws a glare at Lawrence and Percy. Henry is riveted. Lawrence drunk rises.

LAWRENCE

Another round?

HENRY

(to Claire)

Would you like a drink?

Claire glances at her watch.

CLAIRE

I'm on the overnight shift at quarter past.

HENRY

Oh.

LAWRENCE

Suit yourself.

(to Percy)

C'mon old man, let's get pissed.

Lawrence and Percy weave away.

HENRY

Could I walk you?

CLAIRE

We could take our time if we left now.

EXT. CAMP GROUNDS - NIGHT

A moon lit Henry and Claire walk side-by-side. Several dogs BARK in the distance. Henry reaches for her hand, she accepts.

CLAIRE

You've made great progress. We were beginning to think no one could reach him.

HENRY

I don't see why. He's a right good dog, just needed someone to show him some... some patience.

CLAIRE

Feels a bit more than that.

They walk a few more yards in silence. Claire stops near barracks five. Henry halts, turns toward her.

HENRY

What's wrong?

CLAIRE

Why does it frighten you?

HENRY

I don't --

Claire grasps his hand in hers.

CLAIRE

Henry, it's okay to care for someone, or something... like Dodger. It's a part of who we are.

HENRY

It's just... I've never been able,
never met --

Claire pulls Henry in tight, kisses him. Henry hesitates then responds with a passionate embrace.

A few moments, they relax, remain entwined.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Blimey, you're not like the lasses
back home.

CLAIRE

War doesn't allow for the luxury
of time.

From the distance, a long, low HOWL pierces the air. Henry peers in that direction.

HENRY

Someone's lonely.

Claire follows Henry gaze into the distance.

CLAIRE

He's not lonely.

HENRY

How do you know?

CLAIRE

I've treated him enough times to
know what he sounds like when he's
afraid.

HENRY

Of what? The dogs are trained to
run through gas, mortar rounds and
God knows what.

CLAIRE

Roman belongs to Trevor.

Henry gazes back into the distance.

HENRY

He has to be stopped.

CLAIRE

What?

HENRY

We'd better get going or you'll be late.

CLAIRE

Right.

They turn, walk hand-in-hand.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Promise me you'll come back.

HENRY

From what? Claire, I --

CLAIRE

-- Promise.

Henry places his arm around Claire's shoulder.

HENRY

I promise... definitely not like the lasses back home.

The same HOWL calls again from the distance. Henry glances back toward barracks five, squints at something then keeps walking.

From the dark corner of

BARRACKS FIVE

The glow of a cigarette rises up, brightens to reveal Trevor's scarred face. He puffs, exhales.

EXT. DOG TRAINING COURSE - DAY

A huge grass-covered RECTANGULAR FIELD.

Along the sideline, framed by Allied national flags flapping in the breeze, a CROWD of OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, NURSES and DIGNITARIES talk and mingle.

A COMPANY BAND PLAYS a snappy tune. KEEPERS and DOGS of all breeds and sizes run, jump, compete.

It's game day.

IN CENTER FIELD

Two side-by-side identical dog obstacle courses. Spread across the course, whistles in hand, two soldiers dressed like UMPIRES prepare to judge.

Trevor and Roman stand ready at start line #1.

ON THE SIDELINE

Major Wallins strides next to BRIGADIER GENERAL HUMPHREY SCOTT (60s), brown riding boots, medal covered tunic and a large nose capped by wiry grey eyebrows.

Lieutenant Grant follows a few steps behind.

GENERAL SCOTT

And you say these animals can travel up to three kilometers across enemy lines?

MAJOR WALLINS

Right, Sir. Most men wouldn't make fifty meters before being clipped by a Gerry sniper.

GENERAL SCOTT

And the trainers?

MAJOR WALLINS

All sorts, Sir. Men of good moral character, strong, disciplined family upbringing, and most certainly a man that appreciates the limits of canine mentality.

ON START LINE #2

Henry steps Dodger up to the Start Line, kneels beside him.

HENRY

All right, boy... straight through and back, like we practiced.

A few yards away on Start Line #1, Trevor and Roman wait.

TREVOR

(to Henry)
Bugger off a 'fore it's too late.

Henry stands, glares at Trevor. Dodger GROWLS.

HENRY

Piss off, Sir.

Roman GROWLS, lunges toward Dodger, his leash SNAPS taut.

TREVOR

Not yet, Roman... not yet.

ON THE SIDELINE

Lawrence, Percy and Claire stare across the field.

CLAIRE

Do you see him?

LAWRENCE

I'm sure he's simply tardy so he
can make some sort of grand
entrance.

Claire laughs. Her face brightens, she waves her hand.

CLAIRE

There he is!

ON START LINE #2

Henry smiles, waves back toward the sidelines. Umpire #1
steps between Henry and Trevor.

UMPIRE #1

Gents.

(to dogs)

Laddies. Are we ready?

Henry and Trevor nod.

UMPIRE #1 (CONT'D)

Right. Now remember. Each dog
must complete the course with no
misses. You may not call nor
signal your dog. First one passes
the trench and tags the right
bloke, wins his team a two-day
pass. Agreed?

HENRY

Agreed.

TREVOR

Yes, yes, get on with it.

Umpire #1 frowns at Trevor, turns to Henry, smiles.

UMPIRE #1

May the best dog take the egg.
Ready, set?

Umpire #1 raises his right hand. Henry and Trevor grip the dogs' collars, UN-CLIP their leashes.

The dogs tense. Ears forward, eyes focused straight ahead.

Umpire #1 drops his arm.

Trevor and Henry release their grips.

Roman and Dodger spring forward. CHEERS from the crowd.

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE OBSTACLE RACE

-Both dogs navigate the course, side-by-side, neck-and-neck.

- Dodger misses a jump over a simulated barbwire fence, stops, goes back and does it again.

- Roman pulls ahead. Dodger catches back up to Roman.

- They approach a smoke-filled trench. Dodger leaps.

- At the same moment Roman leaps to his left, SLAMS into Dodger, deflecting him down into the trench.

- Dodger and Roman vanish beneath the smoke.

- The crowd GASPS.

- Hidden in the smoke, the two dogs face off. A battle of teeth and pure hatred.

- Roman backs off, his back leg topples some stacked boards that fall on a discarded grenade. It EXPLODES.

- Roman is thrown forward into Dodger. Both dogs fall into and IMPACT the trench wall.

END SERIES

ON THE SIDELINE

Lawrence, Percy and Claire hold their breath.

PERCY

There!

Percy points at

THE SMOKE-FILLED TRENCH

Dodger leaps up from inside, races across the course toward the hay-filled uniforms.

The crowd CHEERS.

Umpire #1, his face covered with a gas mask, scrambles down into the trench.

Umpire #1 stands on the trench edge, peers into the smoke then reaches out.

Umpire #2 lifts Roman's body upward.

UMPIRE #2
Bloody dog's still alive.

Umpire #1 stands, gives a "thumb's up signal".

HENRY
He's all right. He made it.

TREVOR
It weren't s'posed to be him.

EXT. DOG TRAINING COURSE - MOMENTS LATER

On the field, Dodger SNIFFS one hay-filled uniform, moves to the next, then stops. He WHINES then RIPS the shoulder patch off.

But this is no dummy; it's a real man posing as a WOUNDED SOLDIER. The Soldier rolls up, grips his shoulder.

WOUNDED SOLDIER
Oy! You 'bout near took me arm
off!

Dodger sprints off, shoulder patch gripped in his teeth.

Umpire #1's whistle BLOWS, the Crowd CHEERS.

AT THE SIDELINE

Dodger leaps into Henry's outstretched arms, the winners both look to the Crowd. More CHEERING.

Henry and Dodger trot up to Claire. Dodge still carries the torn shoulder patch.

LAWRENCE

I say, that was brilliant!

Claire hugs Henry.

CLAIRE

You were wonderful!

Dodger gives a cloth-muffled BARK. Claire leans down, pets Dodger.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Yes, you too.

LAWRENCE

I don't believe I've ever seen one of ours do that. Quite a dog you've got there, mate, quite a dog.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE HILLTOP - DAY

Henry GUNS the Triumph motorbike and accelerates down a long stretch of isolated farm road towards the city below.

On the back seat, Claire's arms clutch tight around his waist, her scarf flutters from her neck.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

On the bike, Henry and Claire PUTTER into the square.

A combination of TOWNSFOLK and SOLDIERS move about. Claire points to a small brasserie ahead. Henry rides towards it, parks, they walk to the a small bistro table outside.

A French WAITER in a starched white, stomach-to-toe apron glides up, ready to take their order.

HENRY

Two coffees, mate. And biscuits.

The Waiter speaks in French with SUBTITLES:

WAITER

Monsieur? Biscuits?

CLAIRE

Hold on, Henry.
 (to Waiter in French)
 Would you bring us croissants and
 coffee, please?

WAITER

Ah, yes, Madam. Right away.

The Waiter glides away.

CLAIRE

I thought all Brits spoke French.

HENRY

Sheltered life, I guess.

They both look around, uncomfortable. The Waiter
 reappears, serves their order.

WAITER

Enjoy your... bis-cuits.

Henry devours a croissant, smiles at Claire.

HENRY

Bloody marvelous.

Claire is lost in thought. Henry shoves another pastry in
 his mouth.

CLAIRE

How does a man like that end up
 here?

Henry gives a croissant-muffled response.

HENRY

Beg your pardon?

CLAIRE

Trevor. So out of place, cruel.
 Most of the men can't stand him.

Henry leans back, his appetite gone.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

He seems to know you.

HENRY

That was a long time ago.

Awkward silence.

CLAIRE

Shall we walk? The shops are quite good, maybe a present for Dodger?

HENRY

Right.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE STREET - DAY

Henry and Claire move down the quaint street. Claire grasps Henry's hand.

HENRY

I wish things were... different.

Henry turns her toward him.

HENRY (CONT'D)

There's talk the Allies have overrun the Hindenburg Line at Verdun. It could be over any day.

Claire turns away, raises her hand to her mouth.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Claire, what is it? Nothing's going to happen.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry. It reminds me of --

Recognition dawns on Henry.

HENRY

I'm such an idiot.

Claire turns back, grips his hands.

CLAIRE

I won't let it happen, do you understand? I won't.

HENRY

Claire, it'll all be over before it ever reaches us. Besides, I'm a poor excuse for a soldier. They aren't that desperate.

CLAIRE

The killing... the bloodshed, it doesn't choose between good and bad, Henry.

Claire composes herself.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, enough of this horrid
talk. We've got two whole days.
Let's not waste a minute.

A mischievous smile spreads across her face, she pulls Henry with her down the street.

EXT. SKIES ABOVE ETAPLES, FRANCE - DAY

A distant SOPWITH CAMEL BIPLANE with two OCCUPANTS skirts low clouds over the countryside.

It executes several daring roll-overs, loops and hair-raising maneuvers, then settles into an even glide.

IN THE REAR SEAT

Claire, her scarf whipping in the wind, raises her goggles, grins from ear-to-ear.

CLAIRE
(shouts)
Having fun?

Up front, Henry, in complete fear of his life, grips the sides of the plane, looks out and down, jerks his head back to stare straight ahead.

HENRY
I think I'm gonna lose me
biscuits.

The plane flies into dense clouds, momentarily hiding it from view.

CLAIRE (O.S.)
Right now?

The plane flies out of the clouds. Claire looks forward, the seat empty. She panics, searches the sky below.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Henry!

Henry sits up in his seat, his face ashen, a speck of vomit on his chin.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
 My God, Henry. I thought you'd
 fallen out. Are you okay?

Henry wipes his mouth on his sleeve.

HENRY
 I am now.

Henry looks down between his legs.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Plane's a bit wonky.

Claire laughs.

IN THE SKY

The Sopwith turns gently, angles down toward the ground.

EXT. SKIES ABOVE - MOMENTS LATER

Five German FOKKER D-EIGHT BIPLANES BUZZ in formation. In
 the

LEAD PLANE

The PILOT reaches forward on the fuselage, COCKS a
 machine gun, glances back at the trailing PLANES, swings
 out his right arm, motions downward.

IN THE SKY

The lead plane dips down and to the left.

ENGINES WHINE. The four other planes follow.

EXT. GRASS AIRSTRIP - DAY

The Sopwith TAXIS up to a camouflaged hanger, pivots and
 SPUTTERS to a halt.

Henry scrambles out of the plane. Still weak, he holds
 onto the plane's wing.

Claire jumps out, rushes next to him.

HENRY
 Sorry 'bout that bit back there.

CLAIRE
Not the first time.

HENRY
Where'd you learn to do that?

CLAIRE
Ben. He used to take me up all
the time.

HENRY
Bollocks.

CLAIRE
No, it's okay. Those were good
times. He was one of the first to
shoot down the new Fokker-D-
Eights.

HENRY
Of course he did.

EXT. GRASS AIRSTRIP - SAME MOMENT

Henry and Claire walk arm-in-arm toward the motorbike.

An air-raid siren BLARES. Henry and Claire stop, look
skyward.

HENRY
Must be a drill.

A frightened young MECHANIC in oil-stained overalls, runs
past, stumbles, falls. Claire extends her hand.

CLAIRE
Hold on, it's just a drill.

The terrified mechanic SCRAMBLES up, ignores Claire's
hand, points to the sky behind them.

The mechanic SCURRIES toward the hanger. The HUM of plane
engines fills the air.

Henry's eyes rivet upward.

IN THE SKY

The lead German PLANE bears down on the grass airstrip.

INSIDE THE LEAD PLANE

The Pilot grips the firing trigger of his gun, squeezes.

ON THE GRASS AIRSTRIP

One hundred yards away, gunfire TEARS up the ground from the oncoming plane. It heads directly at Henry and Claire.

Henry pulls Claire to the ground, shields her. The line of bullets CHEW up the ground, race toward them... miss by inches.

The plane ROARS past overhead, so close the sound is DEAFENING.

IN THE SKY

The planes sweep up toward the main city center.

ON THE GRASS AIRSTRIP

Henry and Claire jump up, race toward the motorbike and hop on.

Henry STARTS the bike, GUNS the engine, they RACE out the airfield entrance.

EXT. COUNTRY HILLTOP - LATER

On the motorbike, Henry and Claire BRAKE to a stop, peer out at

THE BRITISH CAMP BELOW

Buildings burn. Black smoke. Soldiers run. SCREAMS.

LOW HOWLS filter up the to the

HILLTOP

CLAIRE

Oh my, God, the kennels, they're locked.

Henry GUNS the bike down the hillside.

EXT. BRITISH CAMP - DOG TRAINING SCHOOL - DAY

Chaos. SHOUTING. DEAD BODIES. Mass confusion.

OFFICERS, NURSES, TRUCKS and DOGS run in all directions.

Henry navigates the bike through the disorder, stops in front of Building 7. The front door stands open.

INT. BUILDING 7 - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

Henry closes the front door behind Claire.

CLAIRE

David? Hello?

Claire peeks into the Exam room, turns back to Henry, shakes her head.

Silence. A grim Henry drops in the desk chair.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

We're too late.

HENRY

Wait. It's their training... they won't respond to the noise.

Henry jumps up and runs down the hallway, past the row of cages to kennel thirteen. He glances inside, FLINGS open the door.

Dodger bolts out, jumps into Henry's arms, slobbering licks.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Thank God.

Henry glances back down the hallway.

In the doorway, Claire smiles, raises a hand and brushes away a tear from her cheek. Henry smiles back. Claire walks to Henry, strokes Dodger's head.

CLAIRE

Inseparable.

Henry locks eyes with Claire.

HENRY

Yes, I believe we are.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

The entire COMPANY is crammed into the room, humans and Dogs. Henry, Dodger, Claire, Lawrence and Dr. Ashford are grouped at one table. Dodger's eyes are locked on something across the hall.

DODGER'S POV

Trevor stands nearby, his leer directed at Claire. Dodger emits a low, GRUMBLE.

AT THE TABLE

Claire follows Dodger's gaze, catches Trevor's look, her arm instinctively grips Henry's arm. Henry touches her hand, unaware. Dodger's eyes never leave Trevor.

HENRY

I'm sure it's not that bad.

LAWRENCE

Right, likely a good spot of news that we're winning!

SERGEANT (O.S.)

Attennnn-shun!

The entire room comes to attention, eyes front.

Major Wallins, riding crop tucked under one arm, struts across the floor, steps up on a makeshift riser, salutes, looks out over the room.

The Company goes silent.

MAJOR WALLINS

Good morning, gentlemen... ladies.
Please, sit.

The Company GREETs him in return, settle back in.

MAJOR WALLINS (CONT'D)

I am glad to see all of you here.
As you know by now, the Gerries have launched a major offensive across the Meuse-Argonne. Our boys are doing their best to hold them back, but there have been significant casualties.

The Company MURMURS. Major Wallins raises his hand to quiet the room.

MAJOR WALLINS (CONT'D)

I realize many of you lost friends today, and most likely you will lose more. But let me remind you that there is a far greater sacrifice going on at the front.

Major Wallins stiffens, juts out his chin.

MAJOR WALLINS (CONT'D)

It is our job... our solemn duty, to provide the best-trained dogs possible... no matter what the odds. Am I right?

The company CHEERS.

MAJOR WALLINS (CONT'D)

Very well, then. Our orders are to make-ready every dog, every keeper possible. Our boys are in their hour of need, gentlemen, and by God, we are not going to let them down!

The company erupts in CHEERS. Henry raises his hand.

HENRY

Sir? Major, Sir?

Major Wallins spreads his hands for quiet.

MAJOR WALLINS

Yes, what's your question?

HENRY

When, Sir?

Major Wallins turns back to the room, his best fake smile.

MAJOR WALLINS

We leave in three days.
Dismissed!

EXT. MESS HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Henry and Claire huddle together near the building corner, Dodger ever at his side.

HENRY

He'll never let me do it.

CLAIRE

Henry, he doesn't need to know, he trusts you. Please, if anything happens --

LAWRENCE (O.S.)

-- I say, Cressie?

Henry and Claire turn toward the

MESS HALL ENTRY

Lawrence, unbreakable boyish smile, waves, strides over.

CLAIRE

Not a word.

Lawrence saunters up, SLAPS Henry on the back.

LAWRENCE

Looks like we're in this one together!

HENRY

Yes, seems so.

CLAIRE

Lawrence, you'll look after Henry for me, won't you?

LAWRENCE

Of course. Percy and I shall do our best. After all, he's got to hurry back so's the two of you --

Henry shoots Lawrence a glare.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Yes, well, I'm off.

Lawrence trots away. Claire stares after him.

CLAIRE

What's all that about?

HENRY

Claire, I --

Claire turns back. Henry grasps her hands, pulls them up to his chest, stares into her eyes.

CLAIRE

Henry Creswell. What's gotten
into you?

AT THE MESS HALL ENTRY

Lawrence turns back, watches Henry and Claire.

LAWRENCE

I daresay this is going to be
good. Poor sod.

LAWRENCE'S POV

Henry clutches Claire's left hand, drops to one knee.
Claire's right hand jumps to cover her mouth.

Henry tilts his head, mouths some words. Claire nods her
head. Dodger pushes in, a big lick on Henry's face...
they laugh.

Henry jumps up, embraces Claire, spins her in the air,
Dodger dances around them, happy BARKS. CATCALLS and
WHISTLES from admiring Soldiers.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Welcome to the family, you two.

EXT. DOG TRAINING COURSE - DAY

Two dozen KEEPERS and their DOGS practice various skills.

SCOREKEEPERS, paper pads in hand, stroll around,
scribble.

Near a stack of empty ammo boxes, Henry kneels beside
Dodger, strokes his fur and points toward the course.

HENRY

Find!

Dodger bolts forward and flies through the

OBSTACLE COURSE

Dodger snatches a Soldiers' helmet, spins, and takes off
in a full run back toward Henry.

Henry beams. Ten feet away, Dodger SKIDS to a stop, drops the Helmet, his hair bristles, stares past Henry and SNARLS.

HENRY (CONT'D)
What's the matter, boy?

TREVOR (O.S.)
Well, well. Haven't we been busy.

Henry spins, balls his fists, ready for a fight.

HENRY
Bugger off!

TREVOR
Careful, Lance Corporal, it's thirty days in the can for striking a superior Officer.

Henry steams, backs down. Trevor takes one step toward Henry. Dodger GROWLS.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Seems he don't like me.

HENRY
He has a good sense of smell...
Sir.

TREVOR
He'll need it where you're going.

Trevor backs up a few steps.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Funny thing about war, it's full of surprises. Never know what yer enemy will do next.

INT. OFFICER'S CLUB - NIGHT

A large CROWD. MUSIC. LAUGHTER. Henry and Lawrence down a pint at a small table.

INT. BUILDING 7 - RECEPTION ROOM - NIGHT

Behind his desk, Dr. Ashford lays down a pencil, rubs his eyes.

A KNOCK on the door.

DR. ASHFORD

Yes, who is it?

The door swings open.

Trevor and a FAT SOLDIER BUSTLE into the room. Dr. Ashford rises, scowls.

DR. ASHFORD (CONT'D)

What do you want?

INTERCUT - OFFICER'S CLUB/BUILDING 7

OFFICER'S CLUB

LAWRENCE

That's bloody amazing, Henry. How in the devil does he find his way back?

HENRY

Most of the dogs, the one's that carry messages, are one-way. You've got two keepers. One on the front line, the other at the back station. The dog runs a path between them.

LAWRENCE

But you're by yourself. The chaps all say he's like a boomerang... you send him miles away, and he always comes back.

HENRY

He's what the Frenchies call a liaison dog. Not many of those about. Dodger's special.

LAWRENCE

Daresay it's not just the dog.

BUILDING 7

Trevor holds out some official-looking papers.

TREVOR

We have orders to remove a dog and transport it for immediate duty at Amiens.

DR. ASHFORD

The front lines? And the keeper of
this dog?

TREVOR

Not required. Step aside.

Trevor drops the orders on the desk, brushes past a
shocked Dr. Ashford. Dr. Ashford picks up the Orders,
reads them.

DR. ASHFORD

Dear, God.

OFFICER'S CLUB

LAWRENCE

Wonky name that, keepers.

HENRY

We keep them safe, feed them,
train them. In return, they save
lives.

LAWRENCE

So what happens when a dog and his
keeper get separated?

HENRY

They fight their way back.

BUILDING 7

On a leather leash, Dodger struggles against the Fat
Soldier's constant pull toward the front door.

DR. ASHFORD

You're making a serious mistake,
Captain. He won't let this
happen.

TREVOR

(to Fat Soldier)
Corporal, put the dog in the
truck. I'll meet you outside.

The Fat Soldier struggles out the door with Dodger.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

(to Ashford)
Make sure you tell him it was me.

Trevor picks up the paper orders, walks out the door.

EXT. OUTSIDE BUILDING 7 - NIGHT

The Fat Soldier shoves Dodger into the back of an ambulance and SLAMS the doors. Trevor hands him the Paper Orders.

TREVOR

Use one of the depot rail cars,
and be sure you get on the right
track.

The Fat Soldier salutes, climbs into the ambulance. The engine CRANKS to life. Trevor leans in the open driver's side window.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Drop the mutt 'an report back to
me.

FAT SOLDIER

Yes, Sir.

The Fat Soldier throws the ambulance into gear, drives away.

INT. OFFICER'S CLUB - NIGHT

Lawrence downs his pint. Rises.

LAWRENCE

Fancy another?

Henry fumbles with his glass, a blank stare.

HENRY

Uh, Lawrence, a word?

Lawrence drops back into his seat.

LAWRENCE

I've seen that look, out with it,
mate.

Henry faces Lawrence, opens his mouth, hesitates, then gulps his beer in one CHUG.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Hold on, mate, ease up, we've got
all night.

HENRY

Sorry. Bit nervous.

LAWRENCE

Don't despair. I won't let the Gerries get you, least not the first day.

HENRY

Lawrence... I... I've asked Claire...

LAWRENCE

She's crazy about you too, Henry.

CLAIRE (O.S.)

May I join you?

Henry and Lawrence stand. Claire steps forward, gives Henry a peck on the cheek.

Henry offers her a chair and drops beside her. Hands entwined, they ignore Lawrence.

LAWRENCE

Yes, well, I was just going for another. Shan't be long.

Lawrence disappears into the crowd.

HENRY

He approved.

Claire nods.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You told him? We agreed that I would be the one to --

CLAIRE

-- Henry, it's all right. We're all right. I want to keep it that way.

Henry frowns. Lawrence PLOPS three pints of lager on the table, spills half.

Lawrence picks a pint up, raises to the CROWD.

LAWRENCE

Here! Shut up all ya bloody burks! I've got a rather important announcement.

The Crowd faces Lawrence, voices die down. Lawrence turns back to Claire and Henry.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)
 To my good mate, Henry Creswell,
 and my lit'l sister, Clarice. May
 they live a long life and make
 lots of babies.

Lawrence raises his pint. The crowd CHEERS. Henry takes a swig of his beer. His eyes sweep the room and rivet on the

FRONT DOOR

Dr. Ashford, face pale, eyes frantic, scans the room. His gaze locks on

HENRY

Who lowers his glass, stands.

CLAIRE
 Henry?

Henry makes his way past the noisy crowd.

Confused, Claire stands, reaches for Lawrence. Lawrence, in mid-gulp, lowers his beer and turns to Claire. Her eyes peer across the room.

Lawrence follows her stare.

CLAIRE'S POV

At the front door, an animated Dr. Ashford shakes his head, points out the door. Henry pats Dr. Ashford on the shoulder, a gesture of forgiveness, turns back to Claire.

A look. Henry darts out the door.

Claire grips Lawrence's arm, steadies herself.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
 Dodger.

EXT. CAMP GATE ENTRY - NIGHT

The same two uniformed French sentries, Sentry #1 asleep in the guardhouse, Sentry #2, rifle slung over his shoulder, lights a pipe.

The REV of a RACING ENGINE. Sentry #2 lowers his pipe, stands erect and peers out into the darkness

DOWN THE ROAD

Henry and the motorbike SKID around a corner and plow full speed toward the

GUARDHOUSE

Sentry #1 SNORTS awake, grabs his rifle, steps out of the guardhouse.

ON THE BIKE

Henry leans forward, aims for the small opening between the tip of the pole and the

GUARDHOUSE

Sentry #1 takes a tentative step into the road, raises his rifle.

The Sentries speak in French with SUBTITLES:

SENTRY #1
Halt! You cannot --

Henry squeezes the bike between pole tip and guardhouse, ROARS past. Both Sentries stare at the retreating motorbike.

His mouth agape, Sentry #2 turns to Sentry #1.

SENTRY #2
Fifi?

EXT. RAILWAY STATION - NIGHT

On the motorbike, ENGINE RUNNING, Henry questions a TRAIN YARD MASTER.

The Train Yard Master points over to a parked rail car, then motions toward a long stretch of track.

Henry nods, REVS the motorbike and TEARS down a road alongside the track.

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - RAILWAY TO AMIENS - NIGHT

A rail car with its' bus-topped chassis, train-like wheels, CHINK-A-CHINKS down the track.

In the front seat, Fat Soldier swigs a bottle of beer. In the back seat, a large cage.

Dodger peers out from the cage door, WHINES.

The Fat Soldier glances back.

FAT SOLDIER
Shut up, ya mangy git.

A determined Dodger PAWS the door latch. It BOUNCES.

EXT. ROAD TO AMIENS - NIGHT

Henry slows the bike at an intersection. To one side, a makeshift signpost. One wooden plank points to Amiens. The second, to a train stop.

Henry GUNS the motorbike down the road toward the train stop.

EXT. RAILWAY TO AMIENS - NIGHT

The Rail Car glides down the track, the WHEELS CLICK-CLICK, CLICK-CLICK over the rails. Fat Soldier tosses an empty beer bottle out of the car.

The bottle SMASHES against a sign that reads: "AMIENS-10 KM."

The Fat Soldier leans back, glances in his side view mirror.

IN THE MIRROR'S REFLECTION

A small light bounces up and down. The Fat Soldier can't believe his eyes, looks back over his shoulder.

TWENTY FIVE YARDS BEHIND THE RAIL CAR

Henry and the motorbike SKITTER and BOUNCE alongside the track.

Henry motions for the Fat Soldier to stop the car, he gains on the rail car, pulls up alongside.

IN THE RAIL CAR

Panicked, the Fat Soldier flips back around, his right foot mashes the accelerator. The rail car speeds up.

In the back seat, Dodger BARKS, DOUBLE PAWS the cage door latch.

ON THE MOTORBIKE

Henry rises up and stares at the rail car, spies Dodger's black and white form, his paws BATTER the Cage Door.

HENRY

Hold on, boy!

The motorbike pulls even with the train's rear wheel. Henry gives the bike one last SURGE of speed, stands up, leaps.

His hands latch onto the upper edge of the back door, his feet push off the bike.

The motorbike CAREENS down the embankment and CRASHES off to the side.

Dodger BARKS, PAWS at his cage door, the latch JUMPS, the door swings open.

Dodge jams his head out the side opening of the rail car, BARKS

DODGER'S POV

The rail car drags Henry, his feet held high to avoid the ground. Henry looks up.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Stop him, boy!

IN THE BACK SEAT

Dodger spins, launches into the front seat beside the Fat Soldier, takes a stance, a RUMBLING GROWL.

The Fat Soldier's eyes go wide, he glances out his side window

FAT SOLDIER'S POV

Henry still clings to the car.

FAT SOLDIER
Bloody hell! Have you gone daft?

HENRY
Stop the car.

FAT SOLDIER
I can't do that!

OFF SCREEN: the sound of RIPPING CLOTH

The Fat Soldier screams, turns back to Dodger. In Dodger's mouth, a swath of fabric from the Fat Soldier's uniform.

FAT SOLDIER (CONT'D)
Bloody hell.

The Fat Soldier JAMS on the rail car's brake. It slows to a METAL-ON-METAL SCREECHING stop.

Henry SCRAMBLES up into the back seat.

Dodger leaps back with him, full dog slobber-licking mode. Henry smiles.

HENRY
You know I'd never leave you.

FAT SOLDIER
He'll have me head if I don't deliver the dog.

Henry leans forward to the front seat, glances down at the Fat Soldier's pistol, snatches it from its holster, aims it at the Fat Soldier's groin.

HENRY
One in the head or the crown jewels?

Henry COCKS the pistol. The Fat Soldier looks straight ahead, squeezes his eyes shut.

FAT SOLDIER

Bugger!

Henry mashes the gun barrel further.

HENRY

Out.

The Fat Soldier CLAMORS out of the rail car. Henry scoots over to the driver's seat, pulls the door closed, leans out the window.

HENRY (CONT'D)

There's a road 'bout a half a kilometer back. You can catch a lorry back to camp.

Henry tosses the last beer to the Fat Soldier, SHIFTS the rail car into reverse, turns back to Dodger, THUMPS the front seat with his hand.

Dodger BOUNDS into Henry's lap, licks his face.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Okay... okay... ready to go home?

Dodger BARKS. Henry smiles, pats his head.

The rail car ACCELERATES backwards down the track.

INT. BRITISH CAMP - MAJOR WALLINS' OFFICE - DAY

A disheveled Henry, covered in muck, Dodger at his side, stands at attention next to Trevor, eyes straight ahead.

Seated behind the desk, Major Wallins puffs on a pipe, stares at the two men, glances at Dodger.

MAJOR WALLINS

Captain. On whose authority did you issue those orders?

TREVOR

Me own, Sir. I thought it best, Sir.

MAJOR WALLINS

And you considered this dog to be of inferior quality, is that correct?

TREVOR

Yes, Sir. Absolutely. Unfit for battle, Sir.

Major Wallins looks at Dodger whose head tilts a bit.

MAJOR WALLINS

I'm confused, Captain.

TREVOR

Sir?

MAJOR WALLINS

Was this not the same dog, the same man you told me were one of your best teams?

TREVOR

Well, yes, Sir. But --

MAJOR WALLINS

-- And did you not personally request that they be transferred to your section?

TREVOR

Yes, but... but...

MAJOR WALLINS

Captain, I have all the butts I need in this command. And I don't intend to keep yours in charge.

Henry grins. Trevor breaks his pose.

TREVOR

Sir?

MAJOR WALLINS

Stay at attention when I'm talking to you, Captain!

Trevor snaps back. Major Wallins reads from a paper.

MAJOR WALLINS (CONT'D)

Captain Wexler, you are formally charged with gross insubordination, falsifying His Majesty's orders, and endangering the life of one rather overweight soldier. Albeit the hike back did him some good. You are hereby reduced in rank to second Lieutenant.

Major Wallins leans back, a satisfied pipe puff.

MAJOR WALLINS (CONT'D)
Dismissed, Lieutenant.

Trevor salutes, turns to Henry, glares.

TREVOR
This shite ain't over.

Dodger emits a low GROWL.

MAJOR WALLINS
That'll be all, Lieutenant.

Trevor marches out.

Major Wallins stands, walks around the desk, sits on the corner, puffs. Henry remains at attention.

He reaches down, gives Dodger a playful pet.

MAJOR WALLINS (CONT'D)
I don't think that chap likes you.

HENRY
A shared feeling, Sir.

MAJOR WALLINS
Bit of a sticky-wicket, wouldn't you say corporal?

HENRY
Yes, Sir... sorry, Sir.

MAJOR WALLINS
Under normal circumstances, I'd have the right to court-martial you. At least throw you in the clink for thirty days.

HENRY
I understand, Sir.

Henry glances down at Dodger who returns the look.

HENRY (CONT'D)
He's not responsible, shouldn't be punished, Sir.

Major Wallins reaches out, pets Dodger again.

MAJOR WALLINS

Right. But these aren't normal times, are they?

HENRY

Wish I knew what normal was, Sir.

MAJOR WALLINS

Quite right. At oh-six hundred tomorrow, your section is moving out. Seems the Gerries are making a third assault near Epehy. You'll be attached to General Rawlinson's fourth army. This dog of yours --

HENRY

-- Dodger, Sir.

MAJOR WALLINS

Dodger. He seems rather good at finding wounded chaps on the battlefield. Is that correct?

HENRY

He's a cracker, Sir.

MAJOR WALLINS

Well, you're both going to get some practice. I'm promoting you to Captain and giving you charge of the unit. You leave tomorrow.

HENRY

Thank you, Sir.

MAJOR WALLINS

Don't thank me. We need determined, fearless leaders on the front. But it appears you're all we've got. Dismissed.

SERIES OF SHOTS - HENRY AND CLAIRE'S LAST NIGHT

- On the motorbike, Henry and Claire SPEED down a countryside road toward the lights of the city center.
- They pull up to a quaint café, stroll inside.
- Seated at a secluded table, they enjoy dinner, hold hands, and kiss.

- They ride the motorbike along the French shoreline then turn off toward the beach.

END SERIES

EXT. ETAPLES, FRANCE - SHORELINE - NIGHT

A warm summer night. Waves LAP against the sandy shore.

Henry and Claire get off the bike, walk hand-in-hand between the grassy dunes.

HENRY

Claire, I need to --

CLAIRE

-- Please don't, Henry. Let's enjoy the evening.

Henry stops. Claire walks on few steps, turns back, runs to Henry's arms. A passionate, long kiss.

Claire lays her head against Henry's chest, tears glisten down her cheeks.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

After Ben, I never thought I'd --

Claire pulls back, stares into Henry's eyes.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Don't go. We... we can take Dodger, go south, my aunt lives in Tuscany, she'd --

Henry grips her shoulders. Claire pulls Henry tight in her arms.

EXT. BRITISH CAMP - MAIN GROUNDS - SUNRISE

The COMPANY prepares to move out.

Complete bedlam. TRUCKS GRIND, SOLDIERS shout, DOGS BARK and WHINE. PEOPLE are everywhere, each on a determined task.

With Dodger on leash, Henry coaxes him into the back of an open truck. Henry crawls in behind, opens one of six cage doors lining the truck bed.

HENRY

It's okay, boy. I'll be right
'ere.

Dodger pads into the cage.

CLAIRE (O.S.)

Henry?

Henry closes the cage door, LATCHES it, turns toward the back of the truck. Claire stares back, her arms crossed.

Henry grins, jumps out of the truck, pulls Claire into his arms.

HENRY

You're so beautiful when you
sleep.

LAWRENCE (O.S.)

Hello there!

Dodger BARKS. Lawrence strides up to Henry and Claire.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

What a cock up this lot is. I'll
be glad when we reach a proper
military unit at the front.
What's on with you two?

CLAIRE

Lawrence, we were --

Lawrence raises his hands, draws back.

LAWRENCE

-- Oh, right, sorry. Well, just
wanted to pop by and let you know
that I've seen to it.

Blank stares from Henry and Claire.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

(to Claire)

Henry and Dodger? Made sure
they're attached to our company.

(to Henry)

We're forming up near the north
entrance. See you there, mate.

Lawrence spins, strides off. Claire stares after him.

CLAIRE

He thinks he's so bricky.

HENRY

What's that?

Claire turns back to Henry.

CLAIRE

Nothing, I... you best be going.

HENRY

We'll be okay, I promise.

CLAIRE

You'd better. One moonlit walk
won't wash with me, Henry E
Creswell. I'll need lots of
those.

Henry smiles. They embrace and kiss.

HENRY

I'll be off then.

Henry jumps up into the back of the truck. The truck
rolls forward.

CLAIRE'S POV

From the back of the truck, Henry waves.

CLAIRE

(whispers)

You promised.

EXT. EPEHY, FRANCE - BRITISH TRENCHES - NIGHT

SUPER: "THE HINDENBURG LINE"

Trench warfare. Cold, wet, rat infested. The average
soldier survives two days. Henry, Lawrence and Dodger
have been here for ten and they look it.

Lawrence and Henry stand atop short ladders propped
against the sides of a trench. They peek over the edge of
the trench, their eyeballs sandwiched between helmet and
dirt.

LAWRENCE

See him?

HENRY

Not yet. It's only been twenty
minutes.

LAWRENCE

How do you know he's out there?

Henry stares out onto the moonlit battlefield.

HENRY

I just know.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

Dodger pads across the ravaged terrain, nose down, he moves from twisted corpse to shattered body parts and ever closer to the German trench lines.

Suddenly, he stops. His ears shift forward, he SNIFFS.

In the distance, German LAUGHTER wafts over the dead bodies. He continues his search.

EXT. BRITISH TRENCHES - NIGHT

Lawrence and Henry, their eyes glued to the darkness, peer out, wait.

LAWRENCE

How many will this make?

HENRY

Thirty-seven... maybe thirty-eight if we're lucky.

LAWRENCE

What's his record?

HENRY

In one night? Sixteen.

Lawrence flips his head toward Henry.

LAWRENCE

You've got to be bloody kidding?

HENRY

Nope. A whole squad had been gassed, blinded and couldn't get back. He found one, and they all crawled back like elephants... hand touching the feet of the bloke in front.

A RUSTLE from the darkness beyond.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Here he comes!

From out of the dark, Dodger's rear end appears. It grows closer. He's TUGGING on something heavy.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Grab his foot!

Henry and Lawrence scramble up over the trench edge, reach out and grab hold of a soldiers' feet. They pull the limp body down inside the trench.

The unconscious Soldier is covered in dirt and dried blood. He doesn't move.

LAWRENCE

He's dead, mate.

HENRY

No, he wouldn't have dragged him all that way. Hang on.

Henry leans down, pulls off the Soldiers' helmet, the name "RAINS" written inside, he places two fingers to the man's throat, sniffs the Soldier's tunic, then smiles.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Gassed. He's still alive. C'mon, let's get him back to medi.

EXT. BRITISH TRENCHES - DAY

Henry, his uniform splattered with mud and dried blood, trudges through the crowded trench, Dodger leashed at his side.

Weary, exhausted SOLDIERS, including Lawrence, rest against the mud walls. An occasional rat SCAMPERS through the fetid water, across their feet; the Soldiers oblivious.

Henry stops to rest. The guns are silent.

From the battlefield beyond, constant CRIES from wounded men who lay dying in no-man's land.

Lawrence jumps up, faces the other Soldiers.

LAWRENCE

Christ! We can't just sit here!

The other Soldiers hang their heads, helpless.

Seated on an overturned bucket, an OLDER SOLDIER drops his cigarette into the mud. It FIZZLES.

OLDER SOLDIER
 Sit yer arse down. And don't go
 pokin' your head over the edge.
 Gerry'll likely pop yer noggin'.

The Soldiers give a weak laugh.

LAWRENCE
 You're all cowards.

The laughter stops. The Soldiers stare at Lawrence, a few stand, their fists balled up.

OLDER SOLDIER
 On second thought, go ahead, mate,
 take a gander.

Lawrence fumes. More CRIES from the battlefield.

Lawrence darts for the ladder propped against the mud trench, takes two steps up. Henry reaches over, grabs his leg.

HENRY
 Lawrence, don't...

Lawrence glances down, pulls his leg. Henry holds tight.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Don't make me send Dodger out for
 you.

Lawrence hesitates, glances up, then back to Henry.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 We'll get them after dark.

Lawrence considers, steps down one rung.

EXT. BRITISH TRENCH BACK LINES - EVENING

SOLDIERS sit around a 20 x 20 dug out square of dirt held back by sticks and rimmed with sandbags. A makeshift campfire, a steaming pot of stew. Each Soldier holds a tin pail and spoon, they eat.

Henry, seated next to Lawrence, SWATS a rat, it SQUEAKS and streaks down the trench line across the Duckboard walkways.

At Henry's side, a calm Dodger lays near the fire.

HENRY

That's all that'll be left once
it's over... rats and bones.

Soldiers around the fire MURMUR in agreement.

LAWRENCE

Are you sure he can get them all?

Henry looks down at Dodger.

HENRY

The live ones, yes.

Dodger stands, peers down the trench, a low GROWL.

TREVOR (O.S.)

Not bloody likely.

At one end of the dugout, Trevor and Roman block the trench line opening. Henry glares at Trevor, continues to eat.

HENRY

Help yourself to some stew and
biscuit... it's still Lieutenant,
isn't it?

The tension breaks. The other Soldiers turn back to conversation and food.

Deflated, Trevor yanks Roman's leash. Roman YELPS.

Henry watches Roman limp alongside Trevor, pull on the leash and pull as far away as possible. Trevor dips his pail into the stewpot, raises it to his mouth.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Roman first.

Trevor's arm stops mid sip. His eyes lock with Henry's.

Trevor flips the pail of stew onto the ground. Roman GULPS down the steamy, dirt-covered meat. Trevor dips his cup again, eats.

Henry stands, steps toward Roman, examines him.

HENRY (CONT'D)

He needs medical attention.

Trevor rises, steps between Henry and Roman, their faces inches apart.

TREVOR

I'm the keeper of this animal. I know what's best.

HENRY

Either you take him to the aid station, or I take him from you.

Tense moment, a stare down.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Not a request, Lieutenant.

Trevor gives, steps back, jerks Roman upwards and marches down the trench line. Henry stares after him, shakes his head, turns, sits next to Lawrence.

LAWRENCE

Can he really do it?

HENRY

What's that?

LAWRENCE

Dodger. Those men out there.

Henry grins, looks at Dodger.

HENRY

Whaddya say, boy? Ready to earn your keep?

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

A full moon. Twenty yards from the trench line, Dodger trots from crumpled body to body, nose touching each one, then moving on.

A WOUNDED SOLDIER lies on his side.

Dodger halts, drops to his belly, SNIFFS the Wounded Soldiers' face. The Soldiers' eyes flutter.

Dodger rises, his teeth clamp down on the Wounded Soldiers' uniform at the shoulder and drags him, inch-by-inch, into a mortar crater.

Dodger releases the tunic, grabs the Wounded Soldiers' gloved hand and yanks it off. He bolts back toward the British Trench lines.

EXT. BRITISH TRENCHES - NIGHT

Henry, Lawrence and other soldiers peer over the rim of the trench into

THE DARKNESS

A MUFFLED, SCRAPING sound.

LAWRENCE

Bloody Gerries!

Lawrence SCRAMBLES to bring his rifle up and fire. Henry's hand presses down on Lawrence's arm.

HENRY

Wait...

A large shape leaps from the darkness, over their heads and lands with a SPLASH in the muddy trench. Dodger, a soldier's glove in his mouth, wags his tail, WHINES.

Henry leans down, takes the glove, PATS Dodger's head.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Good boy, found one did you?

LAWRENCE

It's just a mitt.

HENRY

From a man who's still alive.

Lawrence glances up toward the rim of the trench, then back to Henry.

LAWRENCE

But how'd we get to him? The snipers, they --

HENRY

-- Different rules when the guns are silent.

Henry, eyes focused on Dodger, swings his arm outward. Dodger BARKS, CLAMORS up the trench wall and over the edge.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND - MOMENTS LATER

Dodger grips the Wounded Soldiers' tunic, yanks backwards, DRAGS the Soldier closer and closer to the edge of the

BRITISH TRENCH LINE

Henry and Lawrence reach forward over the edge of the trench, grab the Wounded Soldier and slide him down.

Henry motions to the crowd of Soldiers near him.

HENRY

He's been gassed. Get a litter ready.

Two of the other Soldiers HURRY down the trench.

LAWRENCE

That's bloody amazing! What makes him do it?

Henry kneels beside Dodger, wraps his arm around him.

HENRY

Trust.

EXT. BRITISH TRENCHES - DAY

Henry halts in front of MAJOR PICKENS (50s), salutes. Australian by birth, Pickens is a giant of a man with a ruddy complexion and size twelve boots.

MAJOR PICKENS

Captain Creswell?

HENRY

Yes, Sir.

Pickens reaches in his jacket pocket, pulls out a slip of paper and pencil. He scribbles, folds and hands the note to Henry, glances at Dodger.

MAJOR PICKENS

Can he get it back to H-Q?

HENRY

Yes, Sir. Any return message?

MAJOR PICKENS

Return?

HENRY

He's pretty smart, Sir.

MAJOR PICKENS

Blimey. I'd heard there were dogs
like that. Yes, I need a reply.
Carry on.

Henry kneels beside Dodger, removes the metal canister attached to his collar, slips the note inside, and string ties the canister back on the collar.

Henry places both hands on the sides of Dodger's head, gives him a good rub.

HENRY

Ready, boy?

Dodger BARKS.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Home. And. Return.

Dodger spins, leaps up over the edge of the trench.

MAJOR PICKENS

Now what?

HENRY

We wait.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - MOMENTS LATER

A barren, lumpy wasteland. No trees, no movement.

Dodger streaks across the moon-like landscape, silent, determined.

EXT. COMPIEGNE, FRANCE - FOREST CLEARING - MORNING

Nine MEN stand outside a private railway car.

Three of importance include Allied Colonel-in-chief MARSHAL FERDINAND FOCH, German representative MATTHIAS ERZBERGER, and British LORD ADMIRAL ROSSLYN WEMYSS.

All pose for a photograph.

SUPER: "NOVEMBER 11TH, 1918. 5:10 AM. SIX HOURS BEFORE ARMISTICE DAY IS OFFICIALLY DECLARED"

Marshal Foch, a leather-bound satchel tucked under his arm, steps forward, turns to the group.

FOCH

Shall we go inside, gentlemen?

The group steps up and inside the railway car.

EXT. EPEHY, FRANCE - BRITISH TRENCHES - MORNING

Heavy ARTILLERY FIRE blankets the battlefield. SHELLS EXPLODE. The intermittent SPAT of GUNFIRE CHIPS away at the sandbags along the trench rim.

At the end of the trench, Major Pickens peers through a periscope over the trench line edge.

MAJOR PICKENS

Bloody hell!

Not taking his eyes from the periscope.

MAJOR PICKENS (CONT'D)

Get me Creswell and that dog!

EXT. BRITISH TRENCHES - MOMENTS LATER

Henry runs along the muddy waters of the trench line, stops near Major Pickens who rips his eyes from the Periscope, looks Henry up and down.

MAJOR PICKENS

Where's the dog?

HENRY

He's not back from H-Q, Sir.

More heavy SHELLING BURSTS on the battlefield. Henry and the Major duck.

MAJOR PICKENS

Damn it! I need to get a message to the right flank. Those bloody frogs refuse to move.

EXT./INT. BRITISH 4TH ARMY H.Q. - SAME TIME

Dodger, on leash with a SCRAWNY SOLDIER, pads up to a large white tent, a sign tacked over the entry flaps reads: "FOURTH ARMY - HQ".

He stops near an OLDER OFFICER who pulls the metal canister from Dodger's collar.

OLDER OFFICER
Hold 'em here, Corporal.

SCRAWNY SOLDIER
Yes, Sir.

The Older Officer turns to the tent entry and steps

INSIDE THE TENT

A rickety wooden table covered in battle maps is surrounded by several OFFICERS, all eyes locked on GENERAL RAWLINSON (50s), black boots, silver hair and a dimpled chin bordered by thick facial creases.

SUPER: "FOURTH ARMY HEADQUARTERS, GENERAL RAWLINSON'S COMMAND, 10:30 AM"

OLDER SOLDIER
Sir? A message from the fifth.

The Older Soldier hands the message to Rawlinson. He reads, raises a hand for silence, sinks to his desk. A blank stare.

OLDER SOLDIER (CONT'D)
Sir? Your orders?

He hands the message to the Older Soldier.

RAWLINSON
Get this message out to all troops along the front line. Nothing else matters. Now!

OUTSIDE THE TENT

The Old Officer hands the Scrawny Soldier a metal canister.

OLDER SOLDIER
Where'd this dog come from? Whose command?

SCRAWNY SOLDIER
Major Pickens, Sir, near Epehy.

OLDER SOLDIER

All right. Send him back with that.

The Older Soldier walks away. Scrawny Soldier kneels down, ties the canister onto Dodger's collar.

SCRAWNY SOLDIER

Think you can find your way back, boy?

Dodger BARKS. The Scrawny Soldier UN-CLIPS the leash. Dodger spins, shoots off across the field.

The Scrawny Soldier stares at the retreating dog.

SCRAWNY SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Bloody homing pigeon, that one.

EXT. BRITISH TRENCHES - DAY

Major Pickens watches Trevor kneel beside Roman and tie a metal canister to his collar. The intense SHELLING continues, unabated. The BLASTS so close every man flinches from the REPERCUSSIONS.

Henry approaches.

HENRY

Sir, about the rumor. It may already be over.

MAJOR PICKENS

Battles aren't won on rumor, Captain. Until we get orders to the contrary... we carry on.

HENRY

Sir, I --

Major Pickens steps around Henry toward Trevor.

MAJOR PICKENS

That dog ready, Lieutenant?

Trevor glances down at Roman. Roman shakes, pants, frightened to death.

TREVOR

Yes, Sir. Ready.

MAJOR PICKENS

All right, send him over.

TREVOR
 (to Roman)
 Forward station.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - SAME MOMENT

Dodger races across the battlefield. Mortar rounds CHEW up the ground around him.

Dodger runs for his life.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH LINES - SAME MOMENT

A GERMAN SNIPER peers through his

SIGHTING SCOPE

Watches Dodger streak across the ground. His finger closes around the trigger.

EXT. BRITISH TRENCHES - SAME MOMENT

TREVOR
 I said go!

Roman shakes, drops to the ground.

Trevor fumes, kicks Roman. Roman YELPS, jumps back against the trench wall, cornered. Trevor advances, raises his fist.

HENRY
 Trevor! Stop!

Roman's back arches, hair stands on end. A SNARL then a low GROWL. Trevor pulls his pistol, aims, FIRES.

The mud wall to Roman's right EXPLODES with the impact.

Henry rushes Trevor, they battle for control of the pistol. Trevor shoves Henry to the ground, aims the pistol at his head.

TREVOR
 I've had just about enough of your
 bloody orders, Evelyn.

MAJOR PICKENS
 Wexler! Holster that this
 instant!

Trevor COCKS the pistol, his other hand touches his scarred cheek.

TREVOR
 (to Henry)
 For you and your bitches.

In that instant, Roman launches. His canine teeth sink into the back of Trevor's neck.

Man and Dog tumble, the gun strikes the ground, FIRES.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH LINES - SAME MOMENT

HANS (O.S.)
 (in German)
 Wait!

The sniper flinches, the gun FIRES. Behind him, Hans rushes toward him.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - SAME MOMENT

Dodger leaps across a mortar crater. The sniper's bullet SMACKS into him, he YELPS, drops to the ground, rolls into the crater.

EXT. BRITISH TRENCHES - SAME MOMENT

Henry falls backward.

Roman TEARS into Trevor. Trevor screams. Teeth, claws and canine fury SHRED into his face.

Roman RIPS off Trevor's jaw.

Major Pickens draws his pistol. Two SHOTS.

Henry raises his head, a red stain blooms through his upper pants leg. He stares at Roman's dead body that lies across Trevor's bloody, equally lifeless body.

Major Pickens kneels beside Henry.

MAJOR PICKENS
 You all right, son?

Henry attempts to rise, falls back to the ground.

DOWN THE TRENCH LINE

FOOTSTEPS SPLASH in the muddy trench. Lawrence, breathless, turns the corner of the trench, halts, takes it all in.

LAWRENCE

Sir! Messenger dog from H-Q.

Relief washes over Henry's face.

HENRY

I knew he'd come back.

DOWN THE TRENCH LINE

More SPLASHY FOOTSTEPS approach. An overweight soldier turns the corner and steps next to Lawrence.

At his side, a black and tan GERMAN SHEPHERD with a metal canister attached to his collar.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Lawrence?

Lawrence ignores Henry, removes the message from the canister, hands it to Major Pickens.

Lawrence kneels beside Henry, rests one hand on his shoulder.

LAWRENCE

Henry...

Major Pickens reads, his shoulders slouch.

MAJOR PICKENS

It's over. Armistice signed at five o'clock this morning... six bloody hours ago.

Silence. No shelling, no noise. The MEN in the trench all gaze skyward, unsure.

HENRY

Sir, permission to go get my dog.

Major Pickens stares at the corpses of Trevor and Roman.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Sir!

MAJOR PICKENS

Our orders are to stand down and hold this line. And you are going to get that leg looked after. I'll be damned if the last man killed in this war happens on my command.

(to Lawrence)
Lieutenant?

LAWRENCE

Prescott, Sir.

MAJOR PICKENS

Prescott. Escort the Captain back to regimental aid.

EXT. BRITISH TRENCH LINE - LATER

Henry leans against the dirt wall, Lawrence cinches a tourniquet on his wounded leg. Satisfied, he stands.

LAWRENCE

One hour, mate. Then you'll have me to deal with.

Henry nods, a brief hug with Lawrence, he limps up a trench ladder, slips over the top.

EXT. NO-MAN'S LAND - DAY

Eerie silence. Henry runs/limps from mortar hole to mortar hole, he searches.

Nothing.

He keeps going, further and further toward German lines, no fear, relentless.

YARDS AWAY

A line of German Solders trudge through the battlefield, only a cursory look towards Henry; no fight left.

Up ahead, Henry spies something, raises his hand over his eyes.

OFF SCREEN: a dog BARKS.

He sets off as fast as his gimp leg allows, weaves between mortar holes, barbed wire, shattered bodies of men.

He slides to halt on the rim of a trench-line, peers down at

A DEAD GERMAN SOLDIER

A German Shepherd sits glued beside him, a low GROWL towards Henry.

Exhausted, Henry turns, a slow walk back toward the British trenches.

OFF SCREEN: a bone-chilling HOWL.

Tears stream down Henry's face.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD CRATER - AFTERNOON

Covered in mud, Dodger lies on his side, eyes closed.

OFF SCREEN: BOOTED FOOTSTEPS SPLASH, grow closer.

Dodger's eyes open to slits.

DODGER'S POV

Black jack boots. Hans kneels beside him.

HANS
(in German with
subtitles)
What is this? It cannot be.

Dodger's eyes close. Darkness.

INT. BRITISH REAR LINE - AID UNIT - NIGHT

A large, canvas tent. Two rows of identical cots each filled with a wounded SOLDIER. Red Cross NURSES flit about, tend to the Soldiers' needs.

A Nurse stands next to a cot, stares down at Henry. Henry slowly opens his eyes.

HENRY'S POV

The Nurse smiles down at him.

HENRY
 Claire!

Claire drops to the bed, embraces Henry. They kiss.

CLAIRE
 Thank God, you came back.

HENRY
 I told you we would.

Henry lifts his head, his left arm instinctively reaches down to the side of the cot for Dodger. Nothing. He searches the room around him.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Here boy!

CLAIRE
 Henry...

Henry's eyes lock on Claire.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
 I'm so sorry.

Claire embraces Henry. Tears stream down his face.

WOUNDED SOLDIER (O.S.)
 Excuse me, Sir?

Henry pulls back from Claire, looks up.

A WOUNDED SOLDIER leans on crutches, half his head and one eye wrapped in white bandages.

It's the same man Dodger last pulled from the trench a few nights ago. He has a strong Cockney accent.

WOUNDED SOLDIER (CONT'D)
 Begging your pardon, Sir. But I'd like to 'tank you.

HENRY
 For what?

WOUNDED SOLDIER
 For savin' me life, Sir.

HENRY

I don't remember --

WOUNDED SOLDIER

-- I was the last one you... your
dog... he pulled me out --

The Wounded Soldier steps forward, salutes.

WOUNDED SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Rains, Sir... Claude Rains of the
London Scottish.

HENRY

Yes... I remember you.

WOUNDED SOLDIER

If he hadn't chanced along, the
doctors say the gas would've taken
me other eye as well.

The Wounded Soldier glances around.

WOUNDED SOLDIER (CONT'D)

I'd like to 'tank him as well...
if that's all right. Not every
day a man gets a second go.

Henry looks away. The Wounded Soldier falters, unsure.

WOUNDED SOLDIER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Sir. He must've been
sometin' special to have done what
he did. Damn shame, though.

Henry looks back up.

WOUNDED SOLDIER (CONT'D)

These dogs, what they've done, the
blokes they saved. With the war
over... who's going to save them?

EXT. CHAM, GERMANY - BAVARIAN FOREST - FARMHOUSE - SUNSET

Sunlight illuminates a pure white farmhouse topped with
red clay tiles.

WOUNDED SOLDIER (V.O.)

I'm sure he's in a good place,
Sir.

Twenty yards away, a stone-wall barn with a tin metal roof. Dodger lies prone on the ground where grass meets stone wall.

A WHISTLE breaks the air.

NOTE: Dialogue in German with SUBTITLES:

HANS (O.S.)
Fritz, Fritzie! Come here boy.

Dodger wakes, rises, BARKS once in recognition.

UP ON A GRASSY HILLSIDE

Hans, dressed in the civilian clothes of a farmer, bends down and slaps his hands against his thighs.

HANS (CONT'D)
Come, boy. You don't want to miss it. Come!

AT THE STONE WALL

Dodger limps towards Hans, tail wagging. He reaches the

GRASSY HILLSIDE

Hans embraces Dodger, examines his front, left shoulder.

HANS (CONT'D)
You are much better, almost healed. Not even a German bullet could stop you. Come, we must go or we will be late.

Hans stands, turns and leads Dodger up the hillside.

At the crest, the view to the west stretches for miles. It's Spring, and the countryside below is vibrant with color, light and LIFE.

Dodger sits next to Hans.

HANS (CONT'D)
You are much like my first Fritzie was... a good dog.

Hans strokes the top of Dodger's head. They stare out across the landscape below.

SUPER:

"OVER 16,000 DOGS DIED IN BATTLE ALONG THE ALLIED WESTERN FRONT. OVER 7,000 DOGS LOST THEIR LIVES ON THE GERMAN SIDE.

IN TOTAL, 40,000 DOGS PERISHED DURING BATTLE FOR THE ALLIED FORCES. AT THE END OF THE WAR, THE FRENCH HAD OVER 15,000 DOGS STILL IN TRAINING.

WITH NOWHERE TO GO, THESE DOGS WERE MOSTLY ALL DESTROYED AS THE WAR MACHINE DEMOBILIZED."

FADE OUT.