

FALLEN EAGLE

by

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Fallen Eagle

"The door of history turns on small hinges,
and so do people's lives"

FALLEN EAGLE

FRONT TITLES

BLACK SCREEN

THE PERCUSSIVE SOUND OF A CLOCK BEATS OUT A SLOW-MARCH. A RHYTHMIC TICK-TICK-TICKING MARKING TIME. STEADFAST AND RELIABLE. LIKE A HEARTBEAT.

PROLOGUE:

FADE IN:

INT. COSBY PUB - DAY

From the black screen a clock-face comes into focus - gleaming brass, tarnished with age. Its Roman numerals shine, reflecting years of care.

The CAMERA WITHDRAWS to reveal a grandfather clock. It stands tall and proud against a wall. Its pendulum slowly swings to the metronomic beat.

More SOUNDS filter in: the CLINK of glasses, spirited CHATTER, someone LAUGHS loudly. The CAMERA PULLS BACK further to show the inside of a typical country pub.

Patrons stand in comfortable groups by a highly polished bar-top enjoying lunchtime drinks and easy banter. Old-style pumps stand at attention, their metal trims glinting.

The CAMERA PANS across the crowded bar to a table where one man sits alone by an open window. This is decorated World War Two veteran Giles MERRIDAY, an old campaigner in his nineties. A half consumed pint is perched on the table before him.

Like the grandfather clock he has nobly stood the test of time. His posture is dignified, his appearance tidy. As the CAMERA CLOSES-IN we see he is in a quiet, reflective mood. The environmental sounds begin to hush.

MERRIDAY (V.O.)

I've never been much of a drinker.
But, I come here once a year and
usually about this time.

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MERRIDAY (V.O. CONT.)

It's a pilgrimage I've made for
over sixty years.

(looks down to his hand
- he's holding
something)

I've no idea why I chose this
particular place, but it's as good
as any I guess you'd say. I simply
come here to remember. A kind of
tribute if you will.

(beat)

I'd been in Normandy a little over
two weeks. He was soldier, just
like me. And our paths crossed,
not once but twice. And you know

...

(pauses as he looks into
his hand again)

... despite all the carnage, death
and destruction, the broken bodies
and brutality of those few hellish
days ... of all those chaps I knew
then, all my mates, fellow
squaddies. Of all the faces ...

Merriday looks down into his hand once more as the CAMERA
CLOSES IN to peer over his shoulder. His hand is a fist,
palm down -- but we know he is holding something.

MERRIDAY (V.O.)

... it's his face I see. The face
of my enemy.

(beat)

So I come here each year and
reflect on our two brief
encounters.

(pause as he thinks)

I believe someone once said "The
door of history turns on small
hinges, and so do people's lives".
Well, I was several miles south of
Caen when such pivotal moments
occurred in my own life. During
that scorching summer of 1944.

(beat)

At a place which would eventually
come to be known as the Falaise
Pocket.

The CAMERA PULLS BACK toward the window, leaving Merriday
with his thoughts.

CUT TO:

EXT. COSBY PUB - DAY

The pub sounds diminish as the AERIAL CAMERA pulls up and away from the pub and into silence, extending the view to include rural middle England at the height of summer.

Multicoloured fields drape the land like a patchwork quilt. Clusters of woodland are scattered here and there. Narrow country roads lace the landscape. The scene is very English, orderly and serene.

FADE OUT.

NORMANDY, AUGUST 1944

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODLAND - MORNING

From rural England the AERIAL CAMERA introduces another landscape, SWEEPING in over dense woodland. A timeless setting in forty shades of green. There is the WHISPER of a breeze as we descend. A crow calls out, a JARRING, raspy cry as the CAMERA enters the woodland shade.

Birdsong echoes beneath the dense canopy. Enchanting. The captivating TRILLING is interrupted by a new sound. A giant fist THUMPING the ground in the distance. The sound of artillery.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND FLOOR - MORNING

The dense woodland appears primeval. Closely packed trees stand like guardsmen. Their broad, straight trunks stretch high into the over-arching canopy.

Shafts of sunlight PIERCE the gloom. Elsewhere, dense undergrowth adds concealing shadows. Joyful BIRDSONG continues to echo here, at odds with the dull THUDDING of heavy ordnance.

These are interrupted by the SOUND of nearby movement - the CRACK of a dry twig; the SCRATCHING noise of disturbed foliage.

CAMERA PANS slowly left as two British infantrymen CREEP into view. The khaki battledress of each man is stained and dishevelled, their webbing smeared with mud. They are

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sweating, nervous, movements furtive. Their Lee Enfield rifles are held ready.

This is Private Giles MERRIDAY and Corporal Fletcher BULLARD. Bullard leads. He holds up one hand then reaches into his tunic. Both men lower to a crouch.

Bullard withdraws a map from his tunic and inspects it. It may well be in Greek. He turns it this way and that. Squints up at his surroundings, head swivelling. No clue. He half turns to Merriday.

BULLARD
Which way now?

MERRIDAY
(nods to where the trees appear less dense)
If I'm right, forward command is two, three miles or so yon side the woods.

Bullard grunts and stuffs the map back into his tunic. He looks about him. Looking, not seeing. His body language shows him to be a man way out of his comfort zone. Merriday glares at him.

MERRIDAY
We should've stayed with the others when jerry opened up on us.
'Stead of dancing for the trees like you said.
(pause)
We stayed with them, we'd be back at command suppin' a brew, 'stead of bein' clawed to buggery in here.

BULLARD
Yeah, yeah. So you keep tellin' me. C'mon - you want a brew that bad you'd better get a shift on.

Bullard turns in the direction indicated by Merriday and the two men rise before continuing, remaining cautious.

They approach dense shrubs at the base of a tree. The scene is TRANQUIL yet their caution suggests a hidden MENACE.

The trilling birdsong is halted by a single CLANGING SOUND of metal on metal. An alien sound out of place here. It is close by.

BULLARD
(holds up a hand as he
drops to a crouch)
What the hell ...

The two men crouch into cover, eyes fixed in the direction of the sound. Rifles are held at the ready. Merriday slowly works the bolt - CER-LICK. The woods are silent.

BULLARD
(licks his lips
nervously, then
whispers)
Whatever it was is just over
there. Wait here.

Bullard crawls forward, pushing his way into the thicket. The CAMERA follows, closes on the trees, adjusting focus to a clearing beyond. As the thicket blurs, the field-shift reveals a German PANZER tank, barely fifty yards away.

The Panzer is immobile, SILENT. A PREDATOR at rest. One black-clad crewman squats by the nearside track, wrestling with a spanner. He THROWS it down in frustration.

A second crewman, forage cap tilted back, stands by his side. He takes a swig from a water flask. A third soldier is a yard or two nearer surveying the clearing. He looks toward the thicket, an MP40 machine pistol slung across his chest.

CUT TO:

BULLARD IN COVER

Bullard mouths silent obscenities as he SCUTTLES backward. He's struggling to rein in his rising panic.

By the time he reaches Merriday he's regained some measure of control. The two squaddies huddle down in cover. Merriday is composed, business like. Bullard is animated, breathless. This street-wise brummy is no coward - but he's out of his depth. For a leader of men that's a dangerous mix.

BULLARD
Bloody hell, it's a Panzer. Just
sat yon side a clearing. No more'n
fifty yards.
(he begins to open his
webbing packs, pulling
out ammo)
There's three jerries.

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MERRIDAY
What're you doin'?

BULLARD
Three men.

MERRIDAY
Yeah but those things have five
crew. Where're the others?

BULLARD
(becoming frustrated)
Bloody hell man, I don't know. I'm
not their soddin' mam.

MERRIDAY
(remains composed)
There may be more of 'em, that's
all I'm saying. Inside, most
probably.
(begins to pull away)
Look, we need to take this back.
Who knows how many more of those
bastards there are in these woods.
This is battalion's next
objective, you know that. We don't
pass this on it'd be ...
(pauses)
The lads would be cut to ribbons.
That's all I'm saying.

Through all this, Bullard continues to prepare for action,
pausing only briefly to glare at the other man. It's clear
he's in no mood to discuss this.

BULLARD
You ready then? We can sort 'em.
Them and their friggin' tank. Then
you can take your info back. Never
know, you might get a pat on the
head for it.
(digs deep in his
webbing pouches)
How much ammo you got?

MERRIDAY
(adopts a kindly tone as
though speaking to a
child)
C'mon, Fletch. This is valuable
stuff. That's why we're here. A
pre-offensive recce, they said.
You know that.

MERRIDAY (CONT.)
If we get killed the information
dies with us - then what?

BULLARD
(in no mood to listen,
he continues to search
his pouches)
I said how much ammo?
(beat)
Bugger, I'm down to three mags.
You?

MERRIDAY
(shakes his head and
sighs)
Eight, maybe nine. Three grenades.

BULLARD
(leans close and leers)
Eight, maybe nine. What's your
problem? We'll only need a mag
apiece. Two at most.
(pauses as he leans back
onto his heels)
Now come on. I'll take the one on
the right, you can have lefty.
Whoever gets the last one wins a
coconut.

Bullard doesn't bother waiting for a reply. He rolls forward onto his belly and begins to crawl through the undergrowth. CAMERA closes on MERRIDAY.

Merriday shakes his head, disgustedly. He ejects the magazine from his rifle and checks it. Then, using the heel of his hand he taps it home. Then, keeping low, he follows the other man.

CUT TO:

EXT. BROKEN-DOWN PANZER - MORNING

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

The monstrous war machine looks out of place. A few branches have been scattered over its hull to shield it from allied pilots. It seems there are maintenance issues here.

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Three German soldiers have gathered by one of the tank's huge tracks. Sturmmann Ernst LUNSER kneels by a wheel struggling with a spanner.

He's the archetypal German stormtrooper. Formidable, impressive in his SS uniform - but sleeves rolled up. A grafter.

The nut clearly won't budge. A comrade, PETER stands by his side, relaxed. A third, GUARD stands off a yard or so. He is scanning the clearing, MP40 held ready.

The CAMERA ANGLE also gives us a view of the clearing beyond the sentry to the thicket beyond. The two tommies can't be seen, but we know they're there. Preparing to shoot.

CAMERA pulls back to PETER as he's about to comment on progress.

PETER

(swigs from his flask,
glances down and calls
out to the guard)

Hah! It seems Ernst has been
beaten by a lousy little bolt.

LUNSER (O.S.)

It's these damn spanners. They're
hopeless.

The CAMERA follows Peter as he laughs and squats down to join his comrade who is stressed, sweating. Pissed off. Lunser pulls a dirty rag from a pocket.

PETER

(grinning)

Our English friends have a saying:
A poor workman blames his/

LUNSER

(flicks the rag angrily
at his comrade)

Don't give me that tripe.
(leans back against the
tank)

You think this is just about
spanners?

(beat)

Where's that shit-faced lump of
lard now? Where's his glorious
Luftwaffe?

Peter adopts a reflective manner. Picks up a stick and scratches the ground as Lunser continues to make his point.

LUNSER

The RAF own the skies and are
ripping our boys to ribbons.

(pauses and gestures
with a finger, adding
emphasis)

And understand this, Peter, it is
boys they're sending us now.
You've seen them - laying by the
road. Bodies blasted open - mouths
still wet from mummy's tit.

GUARD (O.S.)

(hisses a warning)

Keep it down you two. You heard
the shooting earlier.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP of the sentry, He PEERS intently toward the thicket. He's heard something but not sure what. The birds are silent. He slowly unslings his MP40 as he scans the woodland.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to capture the scene.

A sudden movement in the thicket alerts the sentry and he TURNS to call to his comrades.

GUARD

(shouts, panic in his
voice)

Shit. Get inside.

The warning comes too late as a volley of SHOTS ring out from the far side of the clearing, SHATTERING the calm. The guard SPINS around and drops to the ground.

OFF CAMERA there is an agonised SCREAM as another bullet finds its target. Ricochets WHINE off the tank casing. Gunfire ECHOES through the trees.

CUT TO:

LUNSER throws down the spanner, leaps over Peter's prone body and RUNS for cover. STUMBLES over equipment, SCATTERING it as more rounds ZIP through the air.

CUT TO:

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EXT. WOODLAND - MORNING

Bullard and Merriday are in cover firing their rifles. Beyond the clearing Lunser has sought refuge already. The hatch is up and he drops inside.

Bullard fires indiscriminately. Merriday is controlled - one, two - one, two. Bullard rolls aside and discharges a magazine. He's getting low. Things haven't gone to plan.

BULLARD

(Dragging his last
magazine from a pouch)

Bloody hell, I'm nearly out. I
thought you were a good shot.

MERRIDAY

(Also turns aside to re-
load. Looks disdainfully
at Bullard as he slots a
new magazine)

I didn't see you do any better.
Now what?

Merriday digs into an ammo pouch. Pulls out a couple of magazines and hands them to the corporal.

BULLARD

(Turns back to look
toward the Panzer)

Let me think.

(He has an idea)

How many grenades you say you
have?

CAMERA CLOSES in on Merriday's face. It's clear he's already had enough of this chap. He's no wish to get killed because of him.

MERRIDAY

It doesn't matter how many. You
planning to stroll up and drop 'em
in?

(mimics the action)

Here you go lads.

BULLARD

(Angrily fires off two
more rounds at the
Panzer)

Christ!

BULLARD (CONT.)
(Half turns and taps his
arm stripes)
How'd you think I got these?
Combat training, Giles. Give me
some credit for Christ's sake. Now,
shut up, let me think.

MERRIDAY
(Wearily)
Combat training.
(beat)
Corporal, if we don't move now ...

Merriday leaves the rest unsaid.

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE PANZER

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND
SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

We're in the Panzer's dark, cramped interior. It's a
confusion of angles, metal rods, wheels and sweating
bulkheads.

The CAMERA looks over the blurred image of Lunser's
shoulder. Through a hatch and out toward the brightly lit
clearing. The rifle fire has ceased. Lunser breathes
heavily. Sudden panic becomes self-control.

LUNSER
Where the hell are you?

CAMERA FOCUS pulls back, the clearing blurs. Instead we now
see the tank hatch in detail. Bolts. Rivets. Lunser's
shoulder board. We also see in sharp relief the barrel of
an MG34. Protruding from an adjacent ball turret. The
barrel begins to TRAVERSE.

LUNSER
There you are.

There's a brief SHUFFLING as he prepares the gun. An ammo
belt CLANKS against a bulkhead. Then a breech CLICKS shut.

A pause. A head-splitting din fills the confined space as
the MG34 SPRAYS the thicket, each shot accompanied by an
orange FLASH, quickly filling the cramped cabin with smoke.

CUT TO:

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BULLARD & MERRIDAY, IN COVER

The two infantrymen HUG the ground as incoming rounds SHRED the foliage around them. They're PINNED down - no way they can return fire. There's no point. Over three inches of steel separate them from their enemy. Options are limited.

The two men have adopted foetus-like positions. HUDDLED down in the leaf litter, away from the MG34's withering fire.

MERRIDAY

(Shouts to be heard over
the incoming rounds)

Now what, corporal? Think you can
still take 'em?

BULLARD

(Also has to shout)

Shut it. We need to move.

(beat)

Get back to Caswell. At least
we've something to give him. Like
you said, there could be more.

(Steals a quick glance
through the thicket)

When they reload we make our move.

(points)

That way. Through the trees to
that rise.

As if on cue the gunfire ceases. The SILENCE is complete.

BULLARD

(Pushing himself quickly
to his feet)

Go!

The two men STUMBLE upwards and fight their way through the clawing branches, rifles held low. Useless. They need speed to survive.

BULLARD

(Breathing hard)

C'mon. We've only seconds.

The pair SKITTER through the woodland, shoulders hunched, heads down. Twigs CRASH and SMASH underfoot, leaves are thrown high as they dash toward safety.

The harsh mechanical RATTLE of the tank's MG34 resounds. Bullets RIP up the ground about the two men's running feet.

With dirt SPITTING up around them they make their objective. Together they LEAP a slight rise to flop down on the other side. They are in the lea of shallow, leaf-strewn ridge.

BULLARD
(On his back, breathing hard)
Bloody Nora that was close.

MERRIDAY
(Already pushing himself to his feet)
C'mon, Fletch let's go. I just hope we're not too late.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRITISH COMMAND H.Q. - MORNING

A British officer stands atop a Sherman Tank, binoculars in hand. This is Lieutenant Mark CASWELL. He's a career soldier - Cambridge educated, Sandhurst trained.

He calmly surveys the landscape. An open plain, leading uphill to woodland. The woods appear TRANQUIL. He scans the area by eye, before raising his binoculars.

Behind the tank is the British forward command position. Vehicles are parked haphazardly, boxes stacked and netted. Ammo crates. Fuel drums.

A bren gun stands on its tripod. Nearby, a Union Jack has been draped defiantly over a stack of crates.

Soldiers HURRY here and there. Some sit on boxes, cleaning rifles, filling pouches, tightening straps.

Caswell lowers his binoculars as his NCO approaches the tank. This is Sergeant Ian DUNBAR. Also a disciplined twenty-two-year man. Committed and capable, eager as a terrier. He stands at ease.

CASWELL
Ah, sergeant.
(checks his watch)
Any sign of those reconnaissance lads yet.

DUNBAR
Not yet, sir.

CASWELL
I see.

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Caswell raises his glasses and surveys the landscape once more.

CASWELL
I'm expecting orders to move up any time now. I really am loathe to do that until I know jerry's strength.

DUNBAR
Sir.

CASWELL
(half to himself)
That's an awful lot of ground we'll need to cross. And not an ounce of cover.
(lowers his glasses)
I suggest you brief the men, sergeant. Let them know what to expect.

DUNBAR
(turning)
Sir.

CASWELL
Oh, and sergeant ...

DUNBAR
(turns back)
Sir?

CASWELL
Be sure to let me know just as soon as those reconnaissance boys return will you?

The CAMERA LIFTS, giving an overview of the camp as Sergeant Dunbar HURRIES to brief the men.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

The two British infantrymen are CAUTIOUSLY navigating the woodland. Grubby, hob-nailed boots CRUSH the woodland debris. Twigs CRACK, leaf-litter SWISHES and CRUNCHES, the sounds muted by the dense undergrowth.

There is the occasional CRUMP of artillery in the background. A reminder of war. The two men are tired, nerves taut as bowstrings.

A loud RUSTLING in nearby undergrowth causes the men to stop and crouch, aiming their rifles toward the dense, shadowed shrubbery. As one, each man checks his rifle's safety switch.

Bullard frowns toward the source of the sound, bringing his rifle up to bear. He licks his dry lips. Behind him, Merriday stares ahead, eyes transfixed. He tightens his grip on his weapon. Even the birdsong has ceased.

The silence is suddenly broken by a loud FLUTTERING and FLAPPING of wings, like pennants in a gale.

BULLARD
(flinches in surprise)
Bastard. A soddin' bird.

Behind Bullard, Merriday sniggers. A tight, nervous laugh.

BULLARD
I nearly shit myself there.
(exhales)
You sure we're still heading the
right way?

MERRIDAY
(nods)
If I am we should soon reach the
Ussy road. About half a mile or
so.

The two men continue, cautiously. Boots again slowly negotiate the woodland floor. Merriday checks his watch.

CUT TO:

INT. COVERED WAGON - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

We are in the back of a German covered wagon. It's moving at SPEED down a narrow country lane. There is an URGENCY here.

The rear canvas is tied back, FLAPPING loudly. Beyond it the lane is a shaded corridor flanked by parallel hedgerows and ancient trees. They SAIL past as the wagon PITCHES and ROCKS onward.

Inside, seated on benches are three soldiers. Wooden crates occupy the cramped floor-space between them.

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Two of the three are Wermacht infantrymen, Unterofficer Karl BEKKER and Feldwebel Marz BAUMAN. Their dull *feldgrau* uniforms show signs of rough living. They chat comfortably, their voices low as they show one another photos of loved ones.

Bekker is nearest to the canvas. He occasionally pulls back the cover to peer at the sky. Nervous.

The third soldier is SS Schutze Klauss GERBER. In contrast to others, his dress is immaculate. His badges GLEAM, his insignia stark white against the black battledress.

Recently given a seven-day leave pass he is now returning to the front line. He calmly spends a few moments watching the others.

GERBER
(leans forward,
slightly, addressing the
Feldwebel)
So, my comrade Sturmann Lunser is
with you?
(beat)
At your camp?

BAUMAN
Yes, he is.

Unterofficer Bekker PULLS back the canvas flap and PEERS outside once more. He turns back.

BEKKER
Three, four kilometers.

Gerber nods his thanks and leans back. The other two continue to share pictures. Gerber watches a moment then leans in again.

GERBER
(holds out a hand)
May I?

BAUMAN
Sure.
(hands over a photo)
My son. Mathias. He's fifteen.

GERBER
(nods, smiling)
A good looking boy. He'll make a
fine soldier in a year or so.

Gerber hands back the picture. Bauman pockets it with his others. Leans back. He and Bekker exchange glances.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

Bullard and Merriday are still in the woods. They're squatting by a tree. Bullard has his map out again. It's open on his knee. The woods are quiet.

BULLARD

(frustrated, his voice
taut)

I thought you knew where we were.

MERRIDAY

(calmly)

I tell you, we can't be too far
from the road. We must have
travelled further south than I
thought, that's all.

BULLARD

Goin' round in pissin' circles.
I've a throat like a badger's
arse.

Bullard folds the map and begins to STUFF it into his tunic as Merriday unclips his own water bottle, handing it over.

MERRIDAY

Here. Careful, I don't have much
left.

Bullard takes the bottle. He is beginning to drink when the silence is broken by the harsh CRUNCHING of gears. The sound is immediately followed by the dull RUMBLE of an engine.

MERRIDAY

I told you/

BULLARD

(sweeps up a hand)

Shush!

(pauses to listen)

It's changing down. Come on.

The two men retrieve their rifles and head off in the direction of the sound. They TROT through the shadowy woodland. No longer furtive but with renewed purpose.

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In front of them, the undergrowth becomes less dense and shadows diminish as they near the road. Together, and with rifles held ready, the two men shoulder aside the remaining cover.

CUT TO:

THE USSY ROAD

The two infantrymen push through the hedgerow, stepping out onto the road. Immediately they crouch down, hugging the shadows.

The vehicle is a German army covered wagon. The pair watch in silence as the truck draws away down the narrow lane. Moments later they hear another CRUNCH of gears as the driver changes down once again.

It is a little over a mile away when it turns left out of sight. The two men look at one another, their expressions blank.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN CAMP - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

The German forward position occupies farmland, bordered by hedgerows. The Germans are here in strength. Some soldiers are at ease - some playing cards, smoking, having a laugh.

Other men - all Wermacht troops, are constructing defensive positions, setting up machine guns, issuing ammunition. Some use entrenching tools, making last-minute changes to a broad trench system. The trenches overlook an area of open ground.

At the field edge squats a bunker, partially shielded by the hedge. The barrel of a machine gun protrudes from its slit-opening. Crates are stacked nearby. Jerry cans.

In stark contrast, a field kitchen sends plumes of smoke into the air. One soldier, Manfred HERDLER, stirs a pot, grubby white apron, forage cap aslant. A meal is being prepared.

Nearby, another soldier sits alone, on a log. His black uniform stands out against those of his fellow troops. We see this is Sturmmann Ernst LUNSER. Having abandoned the

stricken Panzer he has made his way to this forward position.

The CAMERA CLOSES on Lunser. He is in reflective mood, SCRATCHING at the dirt with his bayonet as he whistles '*Oh du Schöner Westerwald*'. There is the SOUND of a diesel engine. He looks up.

CUT TO:

THE COVERED WAGON

The covered wagon SPEEDS into the campsite, PLUMES of dust following. It halts. Tail-board CLATTERS down. Bekker and Bauman jump out, reaching in to assist Gerber as he clambers down.

Gerber looks about him as he brushes down his uniform. Searching. Behind him, Bekker and Bauman unload supplies. There is a shout.

LUNSER (O.S.)
Klauss! Over here!

Gerber turns and grins. Strides over to greet his comrade.

CUT TO:

FIELD KITCHEN

Lunser remains standing by the log welcoming Gerber as he joins him. There's a handshake, SLAPPING of backs, ad-libbed hearty greetings.

The two sit on the log as HERDLER approaches, wiping his hands on his apron.

GERBER
(to Lunser)
I understand you had some trouble.

LUNSER
(sighing)
Uh huh. Peter and Anton are dead.
A tommy patrol, I think. I had to/

HERDLER
(to Gerber,
interrupting)
Drink?

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GERBER

Sure. Coffee?

Herdler nods and withdraws to pour the drink.

LUNSER

I had to leave the Panzer. Up there.

(points to woodland)

So I made my way here. I've not been here long. Honestly, the front line is shifting so fast it's impossible to know where's safe and where isn't. It's chaotic.

GERBER

And the panzer?

LUNSER

Grenade.

Lunser mimics the DROPPING of a grenade through a hatch. Mimics an EXPLOSION. Gerber watches, wide-eyed.

GERBER

Shit.

Lunser nods and the pair are silent for a moment, hunched shoulders. Herdler brings the drink and hands it over. Ad-libbed exchange of thanks. Camp activity continues around them.

Lunser recovers from his melancholy and brightens, suddenly straight backed.

LUNSER

But what about you? I thought you had a seven-day pass. It's been/

GERBER

Four days, I know.

LUNSER

But you were going to

(beat)

Duisberg, wasn't it? Your uncle?

GERBER

(scornfully)

That commie bastard? No, to my fiancee. Katja.

(smiles)

In Essen.

Lunser waits for Gerber to continue. He doesn't.

LUNSER

And?

GERBER

(shrugs)

I got as far as Aachen. Spent a day and a half on the damn platform. It took me two to get that far.

LUNSER

Terror bombing?

GERBER

Let's say the railways aren't running to a fixed timetable right now.

(shrugs again)

The bars are empty. Restaurants. I thought I may as well be here.

The two men are silent again for a few moments. Lunser idly watches as two men manoeuvre a PAK38 into position by the trench.

Two young soldiers walk past, heading for the hedge-line. One carries an MG42. The other - a youngster - carries the ammo-box, the loose end of a belt in his other hand. They laugh, cheerfully.

Lunser scratches his chin, thoughtfully. Gerber follows his gaze, also watching a moment.

GERBER

(points to the activity)

Busy bees.

LUNSER

(shakes his head)

Things do not look good, my friend.

GERBER

Excuse me?

LUNSER

(sweeps his hand wide)

Just look, Klauss. Chaos. We're being beaten. Whipped from all sides, like a rabid dog.

Fallen Eagle

GERBER

(grips Lunser's arm,
eagerly)

Stay true, man. This is a set-back, but the Fuhrer - he'll have things in hand. Like always. Field Marshall Rundstedt, The Fox. They'll be planning a counter-offensive right now. You'll see. Once we get those King Tigers/

LUNSER

(groans)

Oh Klauss. King Tigers?
(sticks out a foot and
points to it)
These belonged to a dead man. What makes you so sure of the King Tigers when we can't even get new boots?

GERBER

(passionately now)

No, no, once we get them ...
(beat)

You just watch Tommy then. It'll be another Dunkirk.

LUNSER

Okay then, answer this. How will your King Tigers get here?

(beat)

Klauss Gerber couldn't even reach the Ruhr.

GERBER

Bear up, my friend. You heard Goebbels: '*we must sacrifice our comforts to gain victory*'.

(taps his belt buckle,
smugly)

'God with us' Ernst, 'God with us'.

Lunser turns to face his friend. He shakes his head.

LUNSER

For heaven's sake, Klauss.
(beat)

I too was an idealist. Patriotic and proud. That's why I chose the SS after all.

GERBER
(surprised)
Was, Ernst? Was?

LUNSER
(pauses and sighs)
You don't know this. It hurts even
now to speak of it.
(beat)
I was eight years old when my
uncle Nikki hung himself. The
shame of bankruptcy.
(looks Gerber in the
eye)
And you know why his business
collapsed?

Gerber SHAKES his head slowly. Behind them the camp
activity goes on. Vehicles are moved. Equipment CLATTERS as
boxes are shifted. Hand grenades distributed. Ad-libbed
SHOUTS.

LUNSER
(clenches his fist
tightly in front of his
face)
Britain and France. They bled us
dry. Kicked us when we were down.
Pushing our faces into the dirt to
satisfy their fucking thirst for
revenge. Squeezing the Fatherland
until it had no more to give.
(beat)
His company folded. Six men lost
their jobs. Six families.
Starving.

GERBER
Shit.

LUNSER
That's what killed Uncle Nikki,
Klauss. They killed him.
(pause)
He survived their bullets at
Verdun. Made it through the war
... only to hang himself in '33.
Hung himself with his own service
belt.
(points to Gerber's own
belt)
Its buckle also said 'God with
us'.

Fallen Eagle

LUNSER (CONT.)
(laughs, ironically)
Do you think he was trying to tell
me something, Klauss?

Lunser stands and arches his back. Stretches. Gerber remains seated, his head down. Facing the dirt.

LUNSER
I wonder, my friend. We happy band
of brothers marched here singing
'Oh du Schöner Westerwald'. Now we
scuttle back east like rats to a
hole.
(beat)
And what will we find once we get
there eh? After all the bombing.
(beat)
Like the line in the song ... is
the dancing over then?
(sighs)
I'm off for a piss.

He leaves Gerber seated and walks toward the hedgerow.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND EDGE - DAY

We follow Lunser as he strides toward a dense hedgerow. Once again he whistles 'Oh du Schöner Westerwald' - this time he is subdued, whistling out of habit. He pushes his way through an opening in the hedge and enters the woodland beyond.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

Infantrymen Bullard and Merriday have re-entered the woods. With rifles held ready they are cautiously traversing the dense undergrowth once more.

News of the Panzer's location is critical intelligence that must be relayed to command H.Q. But sight of the covered wagon so close to the British lines has suggested an additional threat. One that must quickly be investigated.

Bullard leads. Together they NAVIGATE the trees. Movements FURTIVE. Eyes scanning the shadows. SEARCHING.

BULLARD
(whispers)
It can't be much further now,
surely.

MERRIDAY
(moves up, abreast,
pointing)
Isn't that a lane entrance through
there?

The two men CROUCH lower as they continue, testing each tread carefully before moving further on. They approach a dense thicket, their eyes focussed on the thinning trees beyond.

They step around the thicket. A SHUFFLE to their right alerts them and both men SWING round, bringing rifles to bear. Lunser is standing by a tree, barely ten feet from them.

SURPRISED by the two tommies' sudden appearance he is FROZEN - mid-way through buttoning up. He watches them over his shoulder. Expressionless.

He begins to TURN slowly. His only weapon is the P38 in its covered belt holster. He SLOWLY lifts his arms away from his body. Hands, palms out. No threat.

Bullard SNATCHES his rifle up and PULLS the trigger. CLICK. Weapon jam.

BULLARD
Bastard!
(turns quickly to
Merriday)
Shoot the bugger!

Merriday does not. He and Lunser gaze coolly at one another over the open clearing. Neither moves.

BULLARD
(shouts as he wrestles
with his rifle)
Shoot him you soft sod.
(pauses)
Shit.

He lets go of his rifle barrel and SNATCHES at his bayonet frog. Merriday quickly reaches out and GRABS his wrist.

MERRIDAY
He's unarmed.

Fallen Eagle

BULLARD

Sod that!

The sound has already ALERTED others at the nearby camp. There are SHOUTS in German, warnings. RUNNING feet.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN CAMP - DAY

Activity halts as men look toward the hedge-line, confused. They glance nervously to one another. Unterofficer Bekker is already running, weapon ready.

BEKKER

Quickly! That was English!

The Feldwebel DROPS what he is carrying and SNATCHES up his own rifle. He points to a group of nearby soldiers.

BAUMAN

Grab your rifles. Follow me.

(turns and runs after
Bekker)

In the background, the cook (Herdler) THROWS off his apron and looks around for his rifle. Finds it. SNATCHES it up.

HERDLER

(shouts)

Come on!

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND CLEARING - DAY

Lunser accurately reads the situation. He continues to meet Merriday's gaze. Nods in recognition of his enemy's mercy and SLOWLY steps away from the tree. He takes a backward step toward the camp. Two. Three.

SHOTS ring out and bullets ZIP through the trees. Bullard and Merriday DUCK and exchange hurried looks.

BULLARD

Hellfire! There's a nest of 'em!

(ducks further as a
round zips overhead -
points)

This way!

As one, they cast caution aside, turn and RUN. With BULLETS ZIPPING around them they run for the dense tree cover. Doubled over, packs BOUNCING, legs PUMPING like pistons.

CUT TO:

EXT. HEDGE-LINE, USSY ROAD - DAY

Bullard and Merriday PUSH through the hedge bordering the woods and cautiously peer left and right. The lane is clear. They step out onto the verge.

There is no sound of pursuit, aside from distant shouts echoing in the woods. Behind this, in the far distance, artillery continues to THUMP the air.

The two infantrymen exchange glances and edge slowly along the hedge-line, rifles held low. Time is moving on.

MERRIDAY
(whispers)
You cleared that jam?

BULLARD
(nods)
The useless pile of crap.

Merriday looks at his watch. He knows the allied assault is imminent. Knows they need to get this intelligence back before it does.

Without warning the familiar, mechanical RATTLE of an MG42 SPLITS the air as rounds FLY around them. Some KICK up SPURTS of earth at their feet.

BULLARD
Down!

The pair DROP prone. Rifles brought immediately to bear. Merriday FLICKS his safety off. And aims. Bullard is already firing, his hand a BLUR as he works the Lee Enfield's bolt.

ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR. The MG42 goes silent. The two infantrymen exchange glances. Pause. Bullard SLOWLY rises to a crouch. STANDS. Merriday stands with him.

The pair CAUTIOUSLY, approach the site of the machine gun. They can now see the barrel protruding from the foliage. It remains still. Quiet. It is then they hear a RASPING cry. It is German.

Fallen Eagle

DYING SOLDIER (SUBTITLE)

Mother!
(beat)
Mother!

The two infantrymen exchange glances and HURRY toward to MG42. They push through the hedge. There are two Germans. One is laid out, head face down, a limp hand resting on the weapon's stock.

The other is only a teenager in a soldier's uniform. He had been feeding the belt, now he is SPRAWLED out on his back.

His collar, two sizes too big is loose around his throat. His tunic is heavily stained with blood at the shoulder. A round has RIPPED in here, SMASHED several ribs and TORN one of his lungs to SHREDS. Blood TRICKLES from the corner of his mouth.

DYING SOLDIER (SUBTITLE)

(sightless eyes staring
upward)
Mummy, please.

Bullard SQUATS by his side and REACHES for the boy's hand. Bullard - the tough corporal from Birmingham - is in some DISTRESS.

Behind him, Merriday stands with rifle held ready and looks around nervously. They're still dangerously close to the enemy camp.

MERRIDAY
Come on, Fletch. We need to go.

Bullard stays where he is.

DYING SOLDIER (SUBTITLE)
(voice fainter still)
Help me, Mummy!

The boy's head LOLLS to the side. Bullard stares. Licks his lips. He reaches into the soldier's breast-pocket.

MERRIDAY
(more urgently)
Come on, Fletcher. There's no time
for that.

Bullard is leafing through the man's *Soldbuch*. He finds some photographs. Photos of home. He is gutted.

BULLARD
(voice low)
That was his mam, wasn't it?
(beat)
He was calling for his mam.

MERRIDAY
(reaching down to
Bullard's shoulder, tugs
his tunic)
I don't know. Yes. Probably. Now
come on, mate. They catch us here
with this they'll be right pissed
off.

Bullard has found a photograph of a woman. Middle aged,
she's smiling to camera.

BULLARD
(choked)
Oh, Christ! Jesus Christ.

Merriday PULLS Bullard to his feet. Bullard is puppet-like,
strings broken. As he STUMBLES to his feet, the photos
TUMBLE from his hand.

MERRIDAY
Let's go. Double up, we need to
report this.

The two infantrymen turn from the MG42. Together they push
their way back through the hedge-line. This time Merriday
leads.

CAMERA pans down to the dead soldier and on to the
photographs, now laying in the dirt.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN CAMP - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND
SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

Activity at the German camp appears more feverish. The
unexpected intrusion by two tommies has highlighted their
precarious position.

Soldiers return from the woodland, rifles on shoulders.
Reflective. A sombre mood etched on each of their faces.

Fallen Eagle

Feldwebel Bauman STRIDES in purposefully, weapon in hand and RALLIES the men. He points to two young privates.

BAUMAN
You, and you. Over here. Quickly.

The two soldiers double up and Bauman leads them to the crates recently unloaded from the wagon. They begin to carry them over to the PAK 38.

Nearby, two more soldiers wheel a Nebelwerfer into position and begin attending to it.

CUT TO:

THE FIELD KITCHEN

Sturmmann Lunser strides to his log-seat and rejoins his comrade, Schutze Gerber. Gerber looks at him expectantly. Behind them, Unterofficer Herdler re-ties his apron and picks up a ladle.

GERBER
Well, what was all that about?

LUNSER
(head down, in thought)
Two tommies. Infantrymen. Strays,
probably.

GERBER
(snorts, derisively)
Spies, most likely. What happened?

LUNSER
Caught me having a piss. One had a
weapon-jam.
(beat)
He was ...
(indicates the field-
kitchen)
... as close as I am to that
field-kitchen.

GERBER
Lucky for you he/

LUNSER
(interrupting)
And the other refused to shoot.

GERBER
What?

LUNSER

He refused. He disobeyed an order.
Saw I was unarmed and didn't
shoot.

GERBER

(snorts, again)
Damn pussy!

Lunser turns quickly and STARES at his comrade. His face is expressionless, but we know he is CONFUSED.

Things don't stack up. His indoctrination since childhood; his BELIEF in the Reich and all it stands for - all have been TURNED on their head in the last few minutes.

Things are mixed up. Too many contradictions. He is even beginning to view his comrade in a new light.

The sound of ARTILLERY increases for several seconds. Lunser turns his head to listen. It stops.

LUNSER

(turns to Gerber)

You think it was weakness that stayed his hand.

GERBER

Don't you?
(he sees his friend's anxiety)
Look, Ernst, you're tired. We all/

LUNSER

You bet I'm tired. I want to go home now, Klauss. Is that a weakness, too? In your eyes?
(pauses - continues more softly)

After all this, if by some remote chance I survive this shit and I do manage to go home
(beat)

it won't be Field Marshall Runstadt I have to thank. Nor Goering, the fat bastard. It won't even be you, my friend.

(beat)
No, it'll be that tommy. Him and his weakness.

(beat)
Crazy war, huh?

Fallen Eagle

As the two SS men sit, each alone with his thoughts, there is the sound of RACING vehicle engines. Someone is in a HURRY. The two men look up.

CUT TO:

KUBELWAGEN

A kubelwagon enters the camp. Accompanied by a motorcycle and sidecar combination. A soldier in the sidecar holds an MP40 ready. Both travel at speed, BRAKING sharply in a CLOUD of dust and dirt.

In the kubel's rear seat an officer SLOWLY stands. He surveys the camp. This is Oberleutnant Gustav KRUGER. A DISTINGUISHED looking officer with a commanding presence.

His family has a long-standing military tradition. Father and grandfather both highly decorated Prussian officers.

His own military career was assured. It was also expected of him. He hopes he can follow the family tradition of victory and bravery. A realist, he recognises the truth behind the Reich's thousand-year dream and is ever-fearful of failure.

A private RUSHES forward to open the door. Kruger steps out, baton under-arm. The private SALUTES. Feldwebel Bauman approaches. He stands CRISPLY to attention and also salutes.

BAUMAN
Heil Hitler, Oberleutnant!

KRUGER
Indeed. At ease, Feldwebel ...?
(pauses, questioningly)

BAUMAN
Bauman, Herr Oberleutnant.

KRUGER
Feldwebel Bauman. Tell me
(pauses, scanning the
site)
where is your commanding officer?

BAUMAN
(looks about, briefly)
I am he, Oberleutnant. Leutnant
Eisenstadt was killed two days
ago. Oberfeldwebel Fischer also.

KRUGER

(sighs wearily)

Very well.

(turns to scoop up a map
pouch from the rear
seat)

Assemble your NCOs. I need to
relay news of enemy troop
movements. High command suspects
an attack to be imminent.

(beat)

If that is so, we must be ready to
meet it.

(nods toward the Field-
kitchen)

I see you also have an SS element.
Waifs and strays, I suppose?

BAUMAN

(smiles)

Yes, Herr Oberleutnant.

KRUGER

We'd better include them then.
They tend to get upset when
ignored.

BAUMAN

Yes, sir!

As Bauman goes to gather his NCOs, Kruger walks to the kubel's bonnet and begins to withdraw a map from its pouch.

CUT TO:

KUBEL-BONNET BRIEFING

Oberleutnant Kruger has spread his map over the kubel's bonnet. We see it is a map of the Caen area. The grid is covered by a confusion of arrows and symbols.

Facing Kruger, on the opposite side of the vehicle are a small assembly of troops. At ease. Attentive. Sombre.

Kruger calmly surveys the group, which includes: Feldwebel Bauman, Unteroffiziers Karl Bekker and Manfred Herdler, SS Sturmann Lunser and SS Schutze Gerber.

Fallen Eagle

KRUGER

There you have it. A desperate situation, but one we must each face with grit and determination.

(pause)

So in summary, our seventh army friends to the south, including Panzer Group Eberbach are being squeezed by American forces. We here in the north face the British and her allies. Including the Poles.

(beat)

A fight on two fronts is never ideal. But we must prevail if we are to stem the allied advance.

(pauses to gaze over the assembly)

Gentlemen we must hold this line. Those were my orders. They are now yours. Failure leaves the door open to the Fatherland and your homes. Questions?

Unteroffizier BEKKER holds up a hand and receives a nod from Kruger.

BEKKER

Oberleutnant

(beat)

I see the two enemy fronts are narrowing. Here.

(points to the map)

Trun and Chambois. Is there not the likelihood we will be surrounded? Cut off like Paulus? Another Stalingrad.

KRUGER

That is a possibility rather than a likelihood. And one we must prevent.

BEKKER

(again points to the map)

But should we not withdraw? Form a new front

(beat)

Here?

GERBER
(stepping forward,
stands proudly to
attention)
We will prevail, Oberleutnant!

Kruger studies the SS rifleman a moment, as one views dog-shit on a shoe.

KRUGER
(to Sturmmann Lunser)
I take it this man speaks for you
also, Sturmmann.

LUNSER
(comes to attention)
No, Herr Oberleutnant, but on this
occasion I agree with his
sentiment.

GERBER
(apologetically)
What I mean to say, Oberleutnant,
is your orders will be carried
out. To the letter.

KRUGER
(begins to fold the map)
That is most kind.

Sturmmann Lunser places a hand on Gerber's arm to silence him. Gerber has centre stage so has other ideas.

GERBER
We Germans will continue to fight
proudly for the Fatherland,
Oberleutnant. The loss of Caen may
have made things look a little
bleak/

KRUGER
(holds up a hand,
silencing Gerber)
I'm sorry, Schutze ...?

GERBER
Gerber, Oberleutnant.

KRUGER
I'm sorry Schutze Gerber. I have
to disagree. For Germany the
situation looked bleak the moment
we began to burn books in the
street.

Fallen Eagle

KRUGER (CONT.)

(beat)

And that was a long time before
Caen.

Kruger gathers up the map and pouch and hands them to his driver. The briefing is over but he has one more thing to add. He turns back to the men.

KRUGER

Believe me when I say there is
nothing I desire more than to see
all of you safely back home with
your families.

(to Bekker)

And yes, were it my choice to do
so I would withdraw east of
Chambois. Regroup.

(pauses and continues to
address them all)

However, I am a soldier, like all
of you. I have my orders. We hold
this front.

(to Bauman)

You will of course relay this
information to your enlisted men,
Feldwebel Bauman.

BAUMAN

Certainly, Herr Oberleutnant.

The group exchange salutes. Bauman escorts the Oberleutnant to the rear of the kubel. Opens the door for him. Kruger settles into seat, then leans over to address Bauman once more.

KRUGER

One more thing, Feldwebel

(beat)

Keep your men safe. As many as
possible. For God knows, Germany
will need them once all this
madness is over. Goodbye for the
present.

(he salutes)

CUT TO:

EXT. BRITISH COMMAND H.Q. - DAY

We rejoin the British troops at their forward position overlooking open farmland. Activity continues apace. Ammunition belts are DISTRIBUTED, weapons cleaned. Kit ASSEMBLED.

Two squaddies LOAD boxes into the back of a half-track. Tank crewmen secure loads atop the Sherman, net them and strap down. The Sherman FIRES up. Dense black diesel smoke BILLOWS out. PLUMES in the air. There are SHOUTS of complaint.

In the background we see Bullard and Merriday approach the camp from the hedge-line. There are several witty ad-libbed greetings. The CAMERA closes on the pair. Bullard remains in a sombre mood. But the two have survived an arduous morning. Their relief is palpable.

CUT TO:

SERGEANT DUNBAR

CAMERA follows Sergeant Dunbar as he STRIDES through the camp toward a tent. We see Lieutenant Caswell is there. He is studying a map.

As he walks, the wily sergeant looks left and right, OBSERVING the activity. Noticing everything, missing nothing. He DRAWS near to a squaddie, Private BABBS. The private is sat on a box, STARING at the clouds. Daydreaming. Dunbar stops.

DUNBAR
(in a fatherly tone)
Gathering wool, Private Babbs?

BABBS
(puzzled)
Sergeant?

DUNBAR
(half turns and calls to
a junior NCO)
This man's bored, Corporal Ames.
Give him something to do.
Something messy.

He walks on toward the tent. The CAMERA follows.

Dunbar approaches the tent and stands to attention. Lieutenant Caswell looks up. He appears contemplative. All

Fallen Eagle

too aware of the enormity of the task ahead but he continues to exude a cool-headed confidence.

CASWELL
(sighs, wearily)
Ah, Dunbar. At ease, man.

DUNBAR
(stands at ease)
Sir. You asked me to report once the recce lads returned.

CASWELL
They're here?

DUNBAR
Sir, two of them. Corporal Bullard and Private
(beat as he thinks)
Merriday, sir.

CASWELL
(looks Dunbar in the eye
as the news registers)
Two only.

DUNBAR
Two so far, sir. Jerries in the woods
(nods to the far woodland)
An exchange of fire. They got separated. A bit hairy by all accounts.
(beat)
They're having a brew, sir. You wish to see them?

CASWELL
(pauses to think)
No, sergeant. Let them drink their tea for a moment. Get their breath back. It sounds like they've had a rough time of it.

DUNBAR
Thank you, sir.

CASWELL
Bring Corporal Bullard over in ten minutes, will you?

DUNBAR
Sir.

Dunbar turns away. Caswell returns to the map. Thoughtful. One hand cupping his chin.

CUT TO:

BULLARD MAKES HIS REPORT

We are at Caswell's map table. With him is Sergeant Dunbar and Corporals Bullard and Ames. Bullard appears DOWNCAST. He's had the wind knocked from his sails. The other three are ATTENTIVE.

CASWELL

(in a kindly tone)

I understand you've had rather a
tough time, Corporal.

BULLARD

(eyes down)

Sir.

CASWELL

Rather be somewhere else, eh?

BULLARD

(meets Caswells eye,
half smiles)

Can't deny that one, sir.

(beat)

Much rather be swannin' down the
Waterloo Road to Molineux with a
pint in me belly. Sir.

CASWELL

(smiles, looks to Sgt
Dunbar)

Aah, a Wanderers fan, Sergeant.

DUNBAR

(a faint smile)

Someone has to be, sir.

CASWELL

Indeed.

(looks down at the map,
serious now)

Right then, I understand you
encountered Jerry here.

(points to the map)

All eyes are on the map now. The brief humour has lightened the mood a little. Now it is business once more.

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BULLARD

(points at the map)

About there, sir. A job to say
exactly. Jerry opened up on us. I
saw two of our lads go down
(beat)

Didn't see who. The rest of us, we
all scattered. Me and Pinky
(beat)

That's Private Merriday, sir, we
found ourselves on our own.
Couldn't reach the lads. Too many
jerries.

Caswell STANDS a moment, chin CUPPED in one hand as he
considers Bullard's words.

CASWELL

(directly, to Bullard)

And Sergeant Dunbar informs me you
encountered a Panzer.

BULLARD

Sir.

(points to the map)

About here, I reckon.

CASWELL

(to Dunbar)

As I feared. If we cross that open
terrain ...

(back to the map,
subdued now)

It'll be like the glorious
twelfth.

BULLARD

(flummoxed)

Sir?

CASWELL

(to Bullard)

The glorious twelfth, Corporal.

Twelfth of August ...

(beat)

The beginning of the grouse shoot.
Lagopus lagopus Scotica.

Bullard is none the wiser and EXCHANGES glances with
Dunbar. Dunbar remains expressionless. He is familiar with
Caswell's idiosyncrasies.

BULLARD

There was just the one sir. I
don't believe it was fully
operational, neither.

(points down at the map)

And a Jerry camp about here, sir.
Didn't get to see their strength
but we'd been hearing vehicles on
the road. I'm sure they have
numbers.

DUNBAR

(to Caswell)

Just the one tank though, eh, sir?

CASWELL

(pondering)

Oh I doubt that, Sergeant. You
rarely come across a lone Panzer.

DUNBAR

Sir?

Caswell looks to his Sergeant and CONSIDERS his words
carefully.

CASWELL

It's like this, Sergeant. Our
friend the Hun realised the
importance of those beauties when
we used them to thrash their chaps
in the last show.

(mimics an advancing
line of tanks with his
fingers)

We'd push forward in strength, you
see.

DUNBAR

Yes, sir.

CASWELL

Now Jerry has had the cheek to
adopt our strategy and he uses it
to great effect.

(beat)

We, on the other hand, have
decided to adopt a different
gambit. Infantry support. It won't
do, I'm afraid.

(pauses, then half to
himself:)

No, history has a way of
highlighting man's folly.

Fallen Eagle

CASWELL (CONT.)

(beat)

I fear our misuse of the tank in
wartime will be one in a long line
of such blunders.

Caswell continues to CONTEMPLATE the map a moment, stealing
the occasional GLANCE across the open terrain toward the
woods.

In the background an allied lorry arrives at the camp,
CRUNCHING gears, brakes SQUEALING. This is a supply wagon.
There are a few ad-libbed SHOUTS as NCOs call for willing
hands.

Caswell reaches a decision.

CASWELL

(cheery, to Bullard)

Thank you, Corporal. Make sure you
and your man get a bite to eat.

(turns to the other NCO)

You, too, Corporal Ames. Carry on.

As the two NCOs walk off in the direction of the cook tent,
Caswell turns to his Sergeant.

CASWELL

So, Sergeant, I'm tasked with
taking that ground

(points to the woods)

And I now learn Jerry is there in
number, with armour.

(beat)

So what now?

DUNBAR

(taken a little aback,
but rises to the
occasion)

I'd pound them to Hell, sir. Get
the co-ordinates to the artillery
boys. Have 'em lob a few bloody
great shells in first. Soften the
buggers up a bit.

CASWELL

Thing is, Sergeant, I don't have
much by way of help on that score.
There's quite a lot going on in
other sectors right now. Artillery
is in short supply.

DUNBAR
Sir.

CASWELL
No, but I'm promised more armour.
An American division, too, if
things go to plan.

DUNBAR
(smiles)
Oh well, sir. Can't be helped, I
s'pose.

CASWELL
Quite.
(looks at his watch)
Armour aside, we've a lot of open
ground to cover. A few well-placed
Panzers could really spoil the
day.

Dunbar stands EASY as Caswell considers his options.

Corporal Bullard APPROACHES and stands at ease. Waiting.
Caswell notices him and turns.

CASWELL
(wearily)
Yes, Corporal.

BULLARD
Mail's arrived, sir. Have I your
permission to/

CASWELL
Yes, indeed.

Bullard turns on his heels and doubles up in the direction
of the lorry.

Once again, the Lieutenant has reached a decision. He turns
crisply to his sergeant.

CASWELL
We need to get eyes over there,
Sergeant. Quickly. Gain a fuller
understanding of what we're up
against.

(beat)
Assemble a further patrol, will
you. I suggest two well-equipped
rifle sections and an MG squad.
Give them what they need.

Fallen Eagle

CASWELL (CONT.)
(beat)
Break out a Piat.

DUNBAR
Sir!

Dunbar begins to turn.

CASWELL
Oh, and Sergeant. I'd like you to lead. But don't forget. The primary purpose is reconnaissance.
(pauses to look toward the woods)
We must have eyes in there before we commit our boys in strength.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRITISH COMMAND H.Q. - DAY

The British base is a hive of ACTIVITY. The truck has been offloaded and crates stand nearby. The driver sits on one, enamel mug in hand. He's enjoying a brew. A squaddie stands next to him, CHATTING.

To one side, Sergeant Dunbar is ASSEMBLING a reconnaissance squad. There are ad-libbed shouts, orders, snatches of conversation. Kit is being dragged up, hauled on.

Some soldiers sit on makeshift seats reading their mail. Some have wistful smiles on their faces. One looks distraught, running a hand through his hair.

CUT TO:

MERRIDAY - NEWS FROM HOME

We follow Lieutenant Caswell as he STRIDES purposefully through the camp. He has a book in his hand. We don't see what it is. He passes a private, seated on a box reading mail.

The private is Giles Merriday. He is quiet. He appears PENSIVE. Sad, almost. By one boot is an opened parcel. A small box, partly concealed by a jumble of brown paper.

Caswell stops, steps back a pace and turns to the private.

CASWELL
(a faint smile)
Ah, Private Merriday.

Merriday looks up. Recognition crosses his features. He straightens up, shoulders square.

MERRIDAY
Sir.

CASWELL
Well done this morning. Bullard told me all about it. Caught your breath yet?

MERRIDAY
(smiles)
Just about ...
(beat)
... sir.

CASWELL
Look, I know you've been busy this morning but I'd like you and Corporal Bullard to join Sergeant Dunbar on a further reconnaissance of jerrie's position.
(pauses)
Your input would be extremely useful. Having been there.

MERRIDAY
(a little downcast)
No problem, sir.

CASWELL
(nods to the parcel)
News from home. And some goodies, too, I gather.

Merriday leans over a PULLS a jar from the box. It has a fabric cover, secured with ribbon.

MERRIDAY
(looks at the jar,
wistfully)
A taste of home, sir. Crab apple chutney. The wife puts a drop of rum in it.
(beat)
Sort of takes the edge off.

Fallen Eagle

CASWELL

And the news ... ?
(beat)
Good, I hope.

MERRIDAY

(looks up and purses his
lips)

Generally speaking, sir. You know
how it is.

CASWELL

(sadly)

I do.

MERRIDAY

The wife's brother Tom. Down in
Hounslow. A doodle-bug took out a
house a few doors away.

(beat)

Tom was okay, but he lost all his
windows. Wrecked his greenhouse.

(beat)

His two young lads ...

(beat)

Well, one of 'em's wettin' the bed
now. He's nine.

Lieutenant Caswell remains SILENT a moment. Unable to
comment, perhaps. He REACHES out and places a hand on
Merriday's shoulder.

CASWELL

Bad luck.

(pauses)

I gather our RAF boys are
delivering the same to jerry, but
with a whole lot of with interest.

(beat)

If that's any consolation.

MERRIDAY

(looks up, sadly)

I'm not sure it is, sir. You see,
I think of Tom's boys. I mean,
it's not their fault, is it? All
this.

(beat)

Can't help but wonder how many
young German lads're wettin' their
beds.

Before Caswell is able to word a reply, Sergeant Dunbar
strides up. Comes to attention. Delivers a crisp salute.

DUNBAR

The lads are ready for the off,
sir.

As the lieutenant and sergeant talk, Merriday SCOOPS up his belongings and stands. Looks around for his rifle.

CASWELL

(turns to Dunbar)

And how are the lads?

DUNBAR

(faint smile)

Fine, sir. Glad to be off their
arses.

CASWELL

(pauses and inhales
deeply)

Good man. Let's hope this is one
more small step toward us all
going home.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAVELLING KUBELWAGEN - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND
SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

An aerial CAMERA shot shows the Motorcycle/sidecar and
kubelwagen SPEEDING over open farmland.

The field is flanked by broad, concealing hedgerows.
Artillery THUMPS the air over the horizon.

CUT TO:

We are in the kubelwagen with Oberleutnant Gustav Kruger.
The vehicle ROCKS and ROLLS over the open field.

Ahead, the motorcycle and sidecar combination BOUNCES
wildly, KICKING up dirt.

The sidecar passenger appears nervous. He eyes the sky and
flanking hedgerows. His head turns left and right, eyes
SEARCHING. He holds his MP40 ready. Knuckles white.

Kruger leans forward to address the driver. The
Oberleutnant appears tired. Drawn.

CUT TO:

Fallen Eagle

Kruger leans toward the [front seat] CAMERA. Behind him, dirt and dust PLUMES, CHURNED up by the kubel's tyres.

He GRIPS the driver's seat-back to steady himself and addresses the [off-screen] driver while using a free hand to indicate the surrounding hedgerows.

KRUGER
(raising his voice to be heard)
Any advantage this network of cover provides us with the one hand ...
(draws back a clenched fist toward his face)
It takes away with the other, as it also protects our enemy.
Shields him from view.
(sits back then immediately leans forward again)
So, the corridor of hedges and woods you see here is our weakness
(beat)
one the enemy will soon seek to exploit. We must plug this quickly.

CUT TO:

The motorcycle escort SPEEDS by a static CAMERA, SPRAYING a cloud of dust in all directions. Through this cloud follows the kubel. Oberleutnant Kruger remains LEANING forward.

The CAMERA pans briefly around the landscape.

CUT TO:

Kruger is still addressing the [off-screen] driver:

KRUGER
By now Feldwebel Bauman's pioniers will be fortifying their defence line.
(beat)
Once they have done this, any enemy soldiers seeking to use these woods as cover will be in for a very rude awakening.
(leans back, then half to himself:)

KRUGER (CONT.)

S-mines are dreadful. Brutal. But
my God, if they help keep my own
men alive I will use them.

(beat)

As many as may be necessary.

CUT TO:

EXT. HEDGEROW, BRIT CAMP - DAY

Sergeant Dunbar has assembled a squad by the hedgerow. Men STAND about in untidy groups. CHATTING. Checking kit. Sharing jokes. There's the CLATTER of equipment. A distant COUGHING roar as a diesel engine FIRES-up.

A small straggle of latecomers joins the group. Dunbar looks over them all in dismay.

DUNBAR

(parade-ground shout)

Right you lot, form a line. This
ain't Southend bloody promenade.

From the ranks, a private raises a query, his tone a miserable whine.

WHINING PRIVATE

What's all this about then, Sarge?

DUNBAR

You know full well, private. Jerry
is in those woods

(points)

So Lieutenant Caswell, bless him,
wants us to go up there. Find 'em
and hand you over.

(beat)

If anything's going to shorten
this war that will.

There's ribald LAUGHTER and a few ad-libbed comments.
Dunbar points to a soldier holding a bren gun.

DUNBAR

You, lad. Don't be shy. Let's have
that up here.

(looks around)

Where's our two pathfinders?

BULLARD (O.S.)

Over here, Sergeant.

Fallen Eagle

From off-screen, Corporal Bullard and Private Merriday walk into view. Their Lee Enfields are SLUNG on their shoulders.

Two more soldiers are with them. One carries a PIAT. The other has a rack of charges.

Bullard and Merriday have eaten, rested and have replenished ammunition stocks. Both appear refreshed but uncertain. It's already been a tough day.

DUNBAR
(beckons to them and turns toward the front of the now rapidly-forming column)
C'mon then, we'll have you up here as well.

The squad quietens as the Sergeant walks down the line to the head of the column. The joking is over. There is a palpable change of mood.

Dunbar arrives at the front and turns.

DUNBAR
Right. Less than a mile away there are men with guns who want to shoot you.
(beat)
So, from here on keep your heads down and gobs shut.
(turns front)
Let's go.

The whole column adopts a doubled over posture and begin CREEPING along the hedge-line. Alert, eyes SEEKING, gun barrels swinging left to right.

CAMERA lifts, above the column. Their objective - the distant woodland comes into view. Into focus.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN CAMP - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

We are with Sturmmann Lunser and Schutze Gerber on their makeshift seat by the gulaschkanone. Gerber is writing - a letter home, maybe. Lunser idly toys with his bayonet. He's watching the frenetic camp activity.

In the main camp a small group of pioniers double here and there collecting kit and packs. There are ad-libbed shouts as equipment is sought. A yard or two away, Feldwebel Bauman shouts; tries to create order from chaos.

LUNSER

(half to himself as he
watches the activity)

Mmmmm

(laughs softly)

I'd better find another spot to
have my next piss.

GERBER

(looks up)

Excuse me?

LUNSER

(points to the activity)

There.

(beat)

Pretty soon those boys will have
turned my toilet into a death-trap
for the unwary.

GERBER

Why so?

Lunser casts his arm wide to the bunker, the array of defences and the nearby trench system.

LUNSER

This defensive wall

(beat)

All this is because we know the
British are north of here. Know
they're forming up ready to push
this way.

GERBER

(bored, turns back to
his writing)

Uh, huh.

LUNSER

(nods to the woodland)

We now know they're also to the
east. Our two tommy friends have
kindly shown us these woods are an
open door.

(beat)

Fallen Eagle

LUNSER CONT.)

One Oberleutnant Kruger wishes to close.

(nods and gives a wry smile)

Once they've done; laying their mines and setting their pretty trip-wire charges, it'll be a door that I, for one, would not like to use.

As Gerber continues to write, his attention fully on his task, Lunser spends a moment to idly watch the pioniers.

The CAMERA crosses the camp toward the small group of men. All are heavily laden with packs of explosives. Some men carry mines. They ready-up. With one or two ad-libbed shouts, they form a line and disappear into the woods.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND MINEFIELD - DAY

NOTE: ANY DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

We are in the woods with the pioniers. They are CAUTIOUS, doubled up. SILENT, but for the occasional CLINK of equipment. Someone WHISPERS, beckons to another.

We see they have proceeded deep into the woods. Now, they retreat gradually toward their own line, mining the woods as they go.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Two pioniers together. One goes from a STOOPING walk to lay belly down in the leaf-clutter. His comrade CROUCHES by his side. Undoes straps on the prone man's pack and withdraws an S-mine. The first man is already preparing a hole with his bayonet.

CAMERA focuses on a stick-grenade. It is attached to a tree, partly covered by foliage. A cord has been attached to the pin and extends O/S. From the opposite side, also O/S, a soldier's hand reaches in ... pushes the foliage to cover the grenade. CAMERA pulls back to reveal the trip-wire.

Another pionier has prepared a hole and lays a tellermine into it. Proceeds to cover it with soil, twigs and leaf-clutter.

Sequence culminates with ...

EXT. WOODLAND MINEFIELD - DAY

Two pioniers are SQUATTING on a woodland path. This is a clear and well-used route. It is probably one Bullard and Merriday used earlier in the day. In the path's centre, a yard or two away, three spikes point upward out of the ground. An S-mine: well-hidden and DEADLY.

Wordlessly, the two men proceed with their grim task of laying a trip-line between two trees. They exchange glances. Faces expressionless.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND EDGE - DAY

The British reconnaissance boys have reached the woodland edge. There are MUFFLED comments. Boots SHUFFLE through the field-edge grasses. Kit CLATTERS.

Dunbar holds up a hand and turns. Facing the men, he beckons them down. As one, they take a knee. Attentive.

DUNBAR
(in a hushed tone)
Listen up. Jerry is in these
woods. Corp Bullard here knows it.
He's seen 'em.
(pauses to survey the
group)
You've been warned. I'll not be
responsible for any stupidity.
(beat)
I may write to your mums. But
that's all.

Dunbar turns to Corporal Bullard.

DUNBAR
Over to you, Bullard.

Corporal Bullard GLANCES down at the map he's holding. He spends a brief moment looking at it, then POINTS toward an opening in the tree-line. Dunbar nods and steps aside, allowing Bullard to head into the woods. The patrol follows him.

Fallen Eagle

CUT TO:

The CAMERA is INSIDE the woods and we watch as Bullard enters, leading the men deeper into the gloom. The British troops cautiously approach, eyes nervous, gun barrels TRAVERSING left, right, left.

The CAMERA withdraws, SWEEPING the woodland path as the squad recedes into the distance.

As it crosses the leaf-litter the CAMERA travels over and focuses on the triple spikes of an S-mine. Christened the 'Silent Soldier' by the French, it waits to spray devastating lethal shrapnel, killing or maiming anyone unfortunate enough to step on it.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE OBSERVATION POINT - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

CAMERA sweeps in over arable farmland to a lone kubelwagen with its motorcycle and sidecar escort parked on a field. The sidecar passenger has dismounted and stands nearby, MP40 held ready. Alert. Watchful.

In the rear of the kubel, Oberleutnant Kruger stands tall. He is SURVEYING the nearby woodland through his field glasses.

CUT TO:

KRUGER'S POV - THROUGH BINOCULARS

The tail-end of a British reconnaissance party leave the field-edge and enter the woodland. They're in patrol formation. Their camouflage smocks almost merging with their surroundings.

KRUGER (O.S.)
My God!

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE OBSERVATION POINT - DAY

Kruger SNATCHES down his binoculars and turns to the driver. What he has seen has disturbed him immensely. There is an URGENCY to his voice.

KRUGER

Private! Contact Feldwebel Bauman.

Tell him the British are approaching his position from north-west.

(beat)

He must prepare his men to receive them. Quickly!

The driver swiftly LEANS over to the radio set occupying the passenger seat. He SNATCHES at the handset and rapidly CRANKS the handle.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN CAMP - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

At the German bunker Feldwebel Marz Bauman stands chatting to Unteroffizier Bekker. Behind him, on a table, is a radio set. Another soldier is seated there. The radio-man. He busies himself at a writing pad.

A call comes in. The radio-man SNATCHES the handset from the cradle and listens. Ad-libbed words of acknowledgement. His eyes widen in ALARM.

RADIO-MAN

(into the handset)

Yes!

(to Bauman)

Sir! Oberleutnant Kruger!

He THRUSTS the handset out to Feldwebel Bauman who takes it and LISTENS, attentively. The Radio-man looks on, as does Bekker. All appear TENSE, expectant. The camp is silent.

SUDDENLY, from the direction of the woodlands, a huge EXPLOSION shatters the calm. All three soldiers SPIN round in alarm. STUNNED silence. A pall of smoke CORKSCREWS up from the trees.

CUT TO:

Fallen Eagle

EXT. WOODLAND MINEFIELD - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

We return to the small group of pioniers. They had selected a small clearing and had been enjoying a brief break when the mine detonated.

Men turn to one another, wide-eyed. Wordless questions. The SHATTERING EXPLOSION echoes into nothing. Suddenly, from the nearby trees there is an AGONISING SCREAM. At the same time, a pall of black smoke BILLOWS into the clearing.

The squad-leader, an Obergefreiter, recovers from the shock and immediately takes charge.

OBERGEFREITER
Defensive positions! Quickly!

All around him men SCATTER, taking cover as they ready their weapons. One man THROWS himself down, setting up a machine gun, bipod down. Another man BELLY-FLOPS by his side, leans on his elbows, ready to feed the ammo belt.

The CRACKLING STACCATO of several Lee Enfields sounds out from the trees. The German machine gunner SLAMS the gun's belt cover down. His comrade SHOUTS and points to the trees.

GUNNER #2
There!

The machine gunner SWINGS the barrel. He pulls the trigger, adding the machine gun's harsh CHATTER to the sound of the British rifles.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND MINEFIELD - DAY

The British rifle-squads have quickly recovered from the shocking explosion and are taking up positions to engage the enemy. We see a well-trained and effective fighting force doing what it does best.

Sergeant Dunbar steps into view. He adopts a crouching position, Sten resting in the crook of an arm. He gestures to the Bren gunner.

DUNBAR

(shouts)

You!

(points to a position)

Over there. Enfilade fire. Pour it on!

Behind him, almost hidden by SHATTERED wood and BLASTED shrubbery lays a soldier, his voice no more than a CHOKING GURGLE -- like a partly-blocked drain. His helmet lays nearby.

All around him the ground continues to smoke. The soldier's clothing is in disarray. We cannot see the man's belly which has been ripped open by shrapnel.

A kneeling soldier, FUMBLING with his first aid kit is all we need to see. His HORROR is evident. The mine victim has only seconds of life left.

From their positions of cover, riflemen begin SHOOTING through the undergrowth toward the clearing. Seconds later, a German machine gun replies and bullets ZIP and WHINE, SHREDDING foliage, SMASHING into trees.

CUT TO:

Bullard and Merriday lay in cover. Both ready their rifles. As one they work their bolts.

BULLARD

Here we go again.

They both FIRE. Work bolts. FIRE AGAIN. The operation is grim, REPETITIVE. The serene woodland has given over to the brutality of war. From the clearing comes a SCREAM. The firing continues.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN CAMP - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

The German camp is a scene of INTENSE ACTIVITY. There are ad-libbed SHOUTS as an assault squad is hastily prepared.

Lunser HURRIES back to his comrade, Gerber, who stands by the gulaschkanone watching the sudden activity.

Fallen Eagle

In the background a group of men assemble at the woodland edge, ready to enter. They hold weapons ready. From the woods comes the PERCUSSIVE BACKBEAT of small arms, interspersed by the occasional BANG of a grenade.

Lunser reaches Gerber and bends to retrieve their weapons, handing Gerber's to him.

GERBER
What's going on?

LUNSER
(urgent)
Come Klauss the pioniers are under attack. A large British force, it seems.

GERBER
(cautiously accepts the offered rifle)
How large?

LUNSER
(checks his ammunition)
We don't know. That's why Bauman needs as many men as he can spare.

Gerber nods. He, too, checks his ammo supplies. He SNATCHES up a pair of stick grenades and THRUSTS them into his belt. Together, they DOUBLE OVER to the waiting troops.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND: GERMAN LINE - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

We SPEED through the woodland as Bauman leads his ASSAULT squad. With their boots SCOOTING through foliage, the men SCURRY toward the embattled pioniers.

All men run doubled over, weapons held ready. Their EQUIPMENT CLATTERS. Gas mask cases CLUNK against belts and bread bags THWACK.

Behind all this noise, the CHATTERING RATTLE of machine guns and small arms fill the woods. SMOKE SWIRLS all about.

The sound of battle is punctuated by the INTERMITTENT THUMP of artillery in the distance.

The CAMERA pans ahead to the clearing. The pioniers are defending bravely. A sudden SHOUT in English. The oncoming reinforcements have been spotted.

Rounds suddenly SLASH the air about the approaching troops' heads. Bullets RICOCHET off trees, sending bark SPINNING. Men shout ad-libbed warnings.

GERBER
(ducking lower)
Shit! That was close!

LUNSER
Idiot! Keep your head down!

The pair squat, making themselves small amongst the undergrowth. Bullets continue to ZIP through the air.

To the SS men's right Feldwebel Bauman directs his men, gesturing this way and that. His men answer by SCUTTLING forward to strategic positions as ordered by their fatherly NCO.

Gerber looks questioningly to his comrade.

GERBER
What about us?

Lunser pokes his head above cover. One second, two. Down again.

LUNSER
(nods to the grenades at Gerber's belt)
Good you brought those.
(turns toward the British line and points)
There's a machine gun over there pinning our guys.

A SCREAM from the pionier lines RESONATES through the trees as if to confirm Lunser's point.

LUNSER (CONT.)
We need to silence it. Come on.

The two men RISE to a stoop and run through the trees toward the front line. BULLETS KICK up the ground as they go.

LUNSER (CONT.)
(points to cover)
There!

Fallen Eagle

The chosen spot is a fallen tree. They LEAP into cover, breathing heavily.

Their run has placed them close to the British position. From here the two men see the Bren's barrel jutting from close-packed undergrowth. It is causing mayhem. Lunser nods a wordless order to Gerber.

Gerber RAISES himself to a kneeling position. He PULLS the grenade from his belt, RIPS the cap and POPS the fuse. With one hand pointing to his target he pulls his other arm back, aims and LOBS the grenade high.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODLAND FIRE-FIGHT - DAY

Sergeant Dunbar surveys the ongoing fire-fight. Immediately to his right two soldiers man the CHATTERING Bren gun. To his left, half hidden infantrymen send rapid-fire rounds into the German lines.

It is difficult to see who has the upper hand. Dunbar knows that his position is precarious.

He sees a stick grenade SPIRAL in from the German line. It TUMBLES end over end toward him. He begins a mental count.

ONE ... TWO ... THREE ...

... it lands between him and the Bren. The number two gunner looks down in horror.

Dunbar SNATCHES it, pulls back, THROWS. He ducks.

DUNBAR
(loud)
Get down!

The grenade EXPLODES in no-man's land, SHOWERING them all with earth, twigs and stones. His mind is made up.

He leans to the soldier to his left. It is Giles Merriday.

DUNBAR (CONT.)
(shouts to be heard)
Private. Send word down the line.
Prepare to withdraw. On the smoke.

Merriday shuffles left toward Bullard.

CUT TO:

Bullard is working his rifle bolt, firing rapidly when Merriday leans in. He stops shooting, lowers his head.

BULLARD
What now?

MERRIDAY
We're pulling out.

BULLARD
(grimly)
Not surprised.

MERRIDAY
The sarge is laying smoke.

Bullard glances up in time to see the sergeant's smoke grenade hit the ground between the lines and spin, SPEWING thick, brown smoke in all directions. A screen quickly forms.

BULLARD
(rising to his feet,
shooting still)
There it is. Let's go.

The pair withdraw backwards through the woods. Around them, other men are doing the same. The Bren is still firing, covering their retreat.

CUT TO:

Sergeant Dunbar pulls a pair of hand-grenades from his tunic. He leans toward the Bren team.

DUNBAR
(shouts)
Get ready lads!

He PULLS the pin of one grenade and lobs it. As part of the same movement he JUGGLES the next one, PULLS the pin and LOBS that.

... THREE ... FOUR ... FIVE ...

One loud explosion is rapidly followed by a second. The air is full of debris.

DUNBAR (CONT.)
(to the Bren team)
Now! Go! Go!

Fallen Eagle

The Bren gunner HAULS up the heavy weapon and the three men run for safety, bullets CREASING the air around their heads.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN CAMP - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

Men of the pionier patrol return to the camp alongside their rescuers. All are weary. STUNNED by the sight of more death.

Many are once again sick with relief at their own survival. They have cheated death one more time.

There are wounded, too. Some are helped in by comrades, shoulder to shoulder. Others are carried in, bloodied and groaning. Dying. The overall scene is one of abject defeat.

Only one man is jubilant. Gerber. His body language is MANIC, his mood BUOYANT. Lunser walks into camp alongside him - though not 'with' him -- as though wishing to distance himself from this fanatic.

Lunser and Gerber walk toward the CAMERA while, behind them, men shout for aid. MEDICS RUN to receive the wounded. The two SS men carry their rifles slung over their shoulders. Gerber PUNCHES his palm.

GERBER

(joyous)

They turned and ran. Ran like rabbits.

LUNSER

(cranky)

Jesus! Are you blind, man?

Gerber pauses mid-stride and the two men face one another. Gerber appears puzzled.

LUNSER (CONT.)

Our arrival swung the balance.
Their leader knew slogging it out
would endanger his men. The man
showed merit.

Gerber snorts in disdain.

LUNSER (CONT.)

He withdrew, wiser once he'd seen
our strength. Can't you see that?

(beat)

Can't you see him now, making his
report? The British massing? Ready
to hit us again -- this time in
greater numbers.

The two men reach their familiar log-seat and un-sling
their rifles. They loosen belts and packs, ready to sit.
Around them other men are doing the same. Sharing
cigarettes, wiping sweat from grimy foreheads. Resting.
Relieved.

GERBER

(tetchy)

They ran. That's all I saw. You
should take heart in it.

(looks at Lunser in
disgust)

Instead of whining.

(beat)

Take heart from mighty Tommy
running away.

LUNSER

(isn't listening)

If only our leaders showed that
man's merit. Instead, they leave
us in this stinking trap. Like
sacrificial lambs.

(looks into his hands)

And for what?

GERBER

(mddy)

For Germany.

Lunser looks wistfully toward the trees as Gerber begins to
strip his own rifle. He has a strop on now but his actions
remain animated. The man, indoctrinated since childhood is
unable to contemplate defeat.

LUNSER

(quietly)

Germany.

(pause)

Mielkendorf. Salty breeze fresh
from the Baltic. Poplars swaying
on the Dorfstrasse.

(beat)

Katherina.

Fallen Eagle

Gerber suddenly looks up, interested. It isn't often Lunser reveals anything of his private life.

GERBER
Your wife?

LUNSER
(shakes his head)
My fiancee.

Lunser turns to Gerber and smiles. It is a wan, weary smile. Hints of sadness.

LUNSER (CONT.)
She's in Kiel.
(pauses to reflect)
I asked her to leave. I cleared it
for her to stay on my father's
farm, miles away from the
shipyards. She refused.

Lunser looks away and resumes to gaze up at the nearby trees as though willing himself back onto Mielkendorf's Dorfstrasse.

LUNSER (CONT.)
(softly)
She said she'd be okay. Said she'd
be safe.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRITISH COMMAND H.Q. - DAY

Sergeant Dunbar leads the WEARY reconnaissance patrol through the hedge-line and into the camp. The scene is one of intense activity. There are far more men and vehicles here now.

Among the British soldiers are now the unmistakable uniforms of American infantrymen. Mixed pockets of soldiers stand in easy groups. They exchange cigarettes and stories. There is laughter. Soldiers suppressing anxiety with humour.

Dunbar points to those of his men who are assisting the wounded. He indicates the camp's makeshift aid station.

DUNBAR
Over there. Make sure they're seen
to ...
(beat)
... and quickly.

CUT TO:

Merriday and Bullard step into the camp. Bullard notices the Americans, pauses mid-pace and groans.

BULLARD
Oh, Christ! Soddin' Yanks.

Merriday turns to his corporal, his expression one of dismay.

MERRIDAY
(reproachful)
Oh, come on, Fletch. We're going
to need these boys.
(beat)
Where'd we be without their help?

Bullard stops and grips Merriday's sleeve. He's ANGRY now. This is a major bee in the man's bonnet. The two men face off as the other reconnaissance lads shuffle by.

BULLARD
Where'd we be?
(beat)
Where'd they be without us, you
mean.

MERRIDAY
What? What do you/

BULLARD
Let me tell you.
(beat)
If we hadn't stood on our tod, as
bloody always, alone for two
friggin' years. Fightin' jerry,
bein' creamed at home, houses
flattened.
(beat)
If we'd caved in like the French.
(pauses, passionate)
I'll tell you where they'd be.
(beat)
They'd be cap-in-hand to Adolf
bloody Hitler, pleadin' for trade
deals, and all the time, looking
over their shoulder to see what
the Nipps were up to.

Fallen Eagle

MERRIDAY

(indignant)

Come on, we'd have starved without
their help. All the supplies, all
the/

BULLARD

(louder)

At a price, Giles. At a bloody
price. Worse than those soddin'
black-market profiteers.

MERRIDAY

Rubbish!

BULLARD

Yeah, they've kept us fed alright.
Dishing it out with one hand and
rakin' in the profits with the
other.

(pause, adopts a
sarcastic tone)

Thanks very much, lads.

(beat, disgusted now)

Like sellin' buckets to your
neighbour when his house is
ablaze.

MERRIDAY

Sorry, Corporal but you're talking
crap. And besides, whatever your
view, the fact remains.

(beat)

We'd be stuffed if it wasn't for
them.

Bullard snorts in disdain, turns and makes for the cook-tent, leaving Merriday alone.

BULLARD

(sarcastic)

Aye we might still be.

Merriday sighs and surveys the camp. Then he, too, makes for the rest area, staying a few paces behind the grumbling corporal.

Nearby, Dunbar is still directing the walking wounded to the aid station. An American trots across to him. He's a medic. This is Private Paul SHAPIRO from small-town, rural Massachusetts.

Shapiro reaches for the arm of a wounded soldier.

SHAPIRO
(to Dunbar)
Can I help?

DUNBAR
Course you can, matey.
(beckons to the aid
station)
There's more over there. Some are
a bit knocked up. See what you can
do for 'em.
(beat)
And thanks.

As Shapiro gentry escorts the wounded infantryman to the aid station, Sergeant Dunbar RELAXES slightly, sighs and wearily wipes his eyes. He flinches as he hears his name.

CASWELL (O.S.)
Sarn't Dunbar!

Lieutenant Caswell strides across to join the NCO, talking as he approaches. Meanwhile, Dunbar stands crisply to attention, shoulders back. Tiredness suppressed.

There's urgency in Caswell's voice, but he remains steady, self-assured.

CASWELL
Sorry, sergeant, I'm going to need
your report. This is it, orders
have come through to move.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRITISH COMMAND H.Q. - DAY

We are once again at Lieutenant Caswell's map table. Caswell stands there and takes a moment to survey the assembled NCOs before him. They are a mix of British and American.

In the background, vehicles rev their engines. Amid shouts and hand-signals they manoeuvre into position, guided by their attendants.

PUNCTUATING the camp noise there is the RUMBLE and CRUMP of artillery in the distance. The barrage has been stepped up.

The men at the map table are silent, attentive. Caswell clears his throat.

Fallen Eagle

CASWELL
(business-like)
Gather round, please.

He glances at the map, drawing breath while the assembly takes a step closer.

CASWELL
(to the group)
As you know, it's long been the plan that we attack the enemy line here ...
(points to the map)
... throwing as much armour as we can muster in a swift assault over these fields.
(beat)
I had hoped to send a further force through these woods as a diversionary tactic and ... well, our recon lads have just returned from there.
(to Dunbar)
Sarn't Dunbar?

Dunbar leans forward. He indicates the map.

DUNBAR
We ran into Jerry here. Heavy infantry. The usual mix, MG34s, 42s. And those blasted Panzerfausts.
(beat)
We got no further, but we know he's there in number and the woods are mined.
(beat)
Caught the buggers at it. Lost one of my lads to one o' them bouncing bastards.
(beat)
We saw no tanks, but we know them to be there.

Caswell takes over, once again.

CASWELL
(to Dunbar)
Thank you Sergeant.
(to the group)
Right, we don't have time to get our engineers in there to clear the mines so my diversionary strategy is out of the question.

Caswell surveys the group, his expression dark. He knows attacks of this nature are often costly.

He feels a measure of responsibility and it's clear that today leadership weighs heavy on him.

CASWELL

(sighs)

Aerial reconnaissance shows him to be quite well dug-in so expect stout resistance.

(he eyes each one in turn)

Jerry's Panzerfausts have been taking out a great many of our tanks lately, so it's absolutely vital we go in fast and hard.

(beat)

Use our infantry boys to neutralise those nasty devils before they inflict too much damage.

(beat)

The view from the top is we may now have Jerry on the run. But never underestimate him, he's a sturdy scrapper. He's been at it a while now.

(pauses to indicate the map)

Our effort is part of a co-ordinated assault on a wider front. The plan is to squeeze their salient from both sides and draw some of their SS boys from the east.

(stabs the map, enthusiastically)

And that will allow our Canadian and American friends here to finally spring the trap.

(pauses to survey the group)

If they can achieve that, the whole of the German seventh army will be fenced in.

The news is received enthusiastically. There are ad-libbed comments and views. Caswell lifts up a hand.

Fallen Eagle

CASWELL

Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

(beat)

That will not mean game-over by any means, but it will put us closer to the final whistle.

(beat)

First of all, we must succeed here today. Off you go, brief your men.

(looks at his watch)

Kick off is in thirty minutes.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN CAMP - DAY

NOTE: THE DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

We observe the German camp through the kubel's grimy, mud-spattered windshield as it SPEEDS toward the bunker and trench-system. The bonnet THWACKS loosely. The body-panels CLUNK.

The camp is once again busy. There appears to be more troops here. A half-track has recently halted untidily before the bunker. Infantrymen spill out.

In the kubel, Oberleutnant Kruger is once again GRIPPING the driver's seat-back. He leans forward like an eager fox-hound. He has urgent news.

CUT TO:

FROM THE TRENCH

The kubelwagen HURTLES into camp, SPRAYING dust and stones. The side of the vehicle is striped with mud. It's been driven hard.

The kubel is still RATTLING and SKIDDING to a halt when Kruger stands and leans for the door. An infantry private runs to assist. Amid the camp hulla-baloo are ad-libbed shouts. Commands. One voice cuts through the noise.

SOLDIER (O.S.)

Someone fetch the feld. Quickly!

CUT TO:

INT. THE BUNKER - DAY

Within the shadowed interior of the bunker three soldiers prepare equipment for battle. One soldier is Feldwebel Bauman. He shows a young private the correct way to load an MG-42.

Day-light streams in through the fire-slit. Glaring white light throws everything into stark relief. The jet-black muzzle of the MG-42 protrudes into the light, angled up, waiting to spray death.

A soldier shouts in from the doorway.

SOLDIER (O.S.)
Excuse me Feldwebel. Oberleutnant
Kruger is here.

Bauman and the young gunner exchange glances. Silent questions. Bauman turns for the door, wiping his hands on a dirty rag.

BAUMAN
Shit!

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN CAMP-DAY

We follow Feldwebel Bauman as he strides across the camp. Men are busy. Some nod their heads in deference as he walks by. There are one or two ad-libbed words of greeting along the way.

As Bauman approaches the kubelwagen, Oberleutnant Kruger notices him.

KRUGER
Ah, Bauman. We've had good luck at
last.

BAUMAN
Luck, Oberleutnant?

The pair meet and exchange swift salutes.

KRUGER
(nodding)
A British scout car was
intercepted a few miles from here.

Fallen Eagle

BAUMAN
(curiously)
A scout car.

Kruger places a hand on Bauman's shoulder and smiles. This stroke of luck has come as a relief to the officer.

KRUGER
Indeed. Inside were allied detailed attack plans. Plans for their assault on our lines. Can you believe that?

BAUMAN
(nods enthusiastically)
Good luck indeed, Oberleutnant.

KRUGER
(serious)
Yes, Bauman. But this position will be the focus for their assault in this area.

(pauses ... gravely now)
We MUST hold this line. The future of the seventh army depends on it.

(pauses again to let
Bauman compute the
information)
I'm sorry my friend. The enemy are set to strike within the hour. You must ready your men.

It's clear this is a BODY-BLOW to the plucky Feldwebel. But the tough veteran has been through the mill time and again. He quickly recovers.

Shoulders back he gives a swift half-salute.

BAUMAN
Yes, Oberleutnant!

He begins to turn but the Oberleutnant stops him. He hasn't quite finished.

KRUGER
(points O/S)
Their massed tanks will be crossing this open ground.

BAUMAN
(concerned)
MASSED tanks, Oberleutnant.

Bauman looks toward the two panzers parked nearby the trench system. Giants they may be but he knows more will be needed. Kruger follows his gaze and understands. He grips Bauman's shoulder once more, reassuringly.

KRUGER

Fear not, Feldwebel Bauman. High-command recognise the importance of this position.

(beat)

Reinforcements are on their way.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN LINES - DAY

NOTE: ANY DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

The CAMERA gives us a view of the woodland edge. A PLEASING sight. A typical woodland in the height of summer. Dense leaf cover. SHADOWS and hazy SUN-BEAMS.

The ROAR of a diesel-engine fires up shattering the idyllic setting. The roar becomes a harsh, sustained GROWLING, followed by the RUMBLE and CLANK of tank tracks. The very trees seem to tremble.

The CAMERA pans. The woodland edge gives way to scarred farmland, the ground RIPPED-UP by military convoys. The RUMBLING grows ever louder and a cloud of diesel smoke BILLOWS into view.

The cloud is immediately followed by the draconian lines of a Panzer. It's a monster, RUMBLING and CLANKING, its treads GRINDING the earth to dust.

Riding the tank, head and shoulders out of the turret is the beast's black-clad tank commander. His forage cap is clamped to his head by a set of headphones. His death's-head cap badge glints between them. He appears arrogant, invincible.

With lordly swipes of a hand he shouts ad-libbed commands. "LEFT", "LINE-UP", "QUICKLY".

The CAMERA continues to pan revealing more of the monsters. Each has its haughty commander perched atop - each a slave to his own beast. Twentieth-century dragon-riders.

Fallen Eagle

From behind the tanks a column of infantrymen break rank and swarm toward the German line, ready to man the trench system.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH - DAY

NOTE: ANY DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

From the piled earth of trench we see the German troops advance at the double. There is the CLATTER of kit, the CLACK of weapons against belt buckles. K-98s, MP-40s.

Behind them the Panzers manoeuvre, CRUSHING the earth in thick clouds of dust and smoke.

Soldiers leap into the trenches, swarming like ants. Some carry MGs which they swing up onto the trench-wall, snapping bipods down into position. Each man is wordless, each expression is grim.

For these men, the 'Happy Days' of 1940 and '41 are long gone. Now they are doggedly fighting to defend their homes. And to survive.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN LINES - DAY

NOTE: ANY DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

BATTLE PREPARATION SEQUENCE - BUNKER (EXT.)

Unteroffizier Manfred Herdler stands before the bunker. He has observed the Feldwebel's meeting and now eagerly awaits his orders. He grips his K98, idly working the bolt.

The camp is hectic and noisy now. The growling of assembled diesel engines fill the air with their throbbing din as tanks manoeuvre.

One man refills a half-track from a jerry-can.

Activity surrounds Herdler. Alongside him, two soldiers struggle to strengthen the barbed wire ring-fencing the

bunker wall. Herdler looks and shakes his head. He makes a pushing motion with one hand.

HERDLER
(frustrated)
More to the left.

Feldwebel Bauman hurries into view and beckons to Herdler, pointing to the rear of the bunker.

BAUMAN
Come, Manfred.

Bauman stops and turns. His eyes scan the camp, searching for his other Unterofficer. He sees him.

BAUMAN (CONT.)
(shouts)
Bekker! Come here, quickly!

CUT TO:

TRENCH WALL

Lunser and Gerber are helping a couple of Wermacht privates to haul ammunition to the trench. Two more soldiers in the trench stand ready to receive them.

In the background, the kubel accelerates away in a cloud of dust.

Gerber is distracted. He's watching Bauman with interest. Eyes narrowed. He hands off his box to the waiting men and taps Lunser's shoulder.

GERBER
(points toward the
bunker)
See that?

LUNSER
What?

GERBER
What do you think's going on?

Lunser shrugs and wipes his hands down his tunic. The Feldwebel's sudden activity has clearly piqued Gerber's interest.

GERBER (CONT'D)
Don't you think we should know?

Fallen Eagle

LUNSER

Know what?

GERBER

I don't know?

(beat)

Whatever it is that's going on.

Lunser gives a half smile and shrugs again as he considers. He glances at the departing kubel. He's weighing things in his mind.

LUNSER

(nods)

Come on then.

They walk briskly toward the bunker. Their route takes them past the trench line. We glimpse the activity inside.

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE TRENCH

Two soldiers man an MG42. One has the breech cover open and works the bolt, greasing it with a cloth. The other man drags a rattling ammo belt from the box by his feet.

A further infantryman grunts as he drops a second box down next to the first -- CLUNK. Yet another soldier runs past, rifle slung low, head down, kit bouncing.

There's urgency here. Bauman's news has not yet filtered out but the men witnessed his exchange with Kruger. They know the signs and what to expect.

The CAMERA travels down the trench. Soldiers lean against the trench wall, aiming rifles, flicking up back-sights, checking lines of sight. One such man is several feet ahead.

The CAMERA focusses on him and closes in. The man checks his own weapon. He leans forward and brings the rifle up to rest it on the earth bank. The CAMERA lifts and pans to reveal his point of view.

Before the trench is an open field. Hedgerows. There are woods in the far distance. Rural and idyllic.

The CAMERA'S field of view screws out to a long-shot. This reveals a line of allied tanks crawling forward. At this distance they are silent. Menacing.

White smoke jets out from a gun-barrel, and hangs in the air like a puff-ball.

SOLDIER (O.S.)
My God! GET DOWN!

A muffled BOOM, then a WHOOSH and a shell EXPLODES in the middle distance sending up huge clods of earth and flame. Fragments beat down and a black plume of smoke marks the blast-site.

CUT TO:

THE BUNKER

BOOM! All in Feldwebel Bauman's hastily assembled meeting turn as one at the impact of the first shell. They exchange swift, troubled glances. Bauman is the first to recover.

BAUMAN
GO!

Lunser and Gerber look to one another.

LUNSER
(ironically)
Welcome to another fine day in sunny France.

Unteroffiziers Herdler and Bekker scuttle off, shouting ad-libbed orders, waving.

HERDLER
(to the two soldiers at the fence)
Get your weapons!

Other men sprint to their positions as a STUTTERING CRACK of small arms fire resonates in the distance. The first enemy rounds ZIP in, SPLITTING the air.

Lunser and Gerber bolt for the trench adjacent to the bunker.

LUNSER
Come, Klauss! In here.

GERBER
I'm right with you.

The two men LEAP in and begin preparing their weapons. Behind them, the MG jutting from the bunker's fire-slit

Fallen Eagle

CLATTERS as it traverses. Then it HAMMERS away, jets of flame SPITTING from the barrel.

Panzers picketed nearby rev-up as commanders BARK orders into their mikes, their voices drowned-out by the engines' racket.

The tanks commence turning, GRINDING the earth, their juddering exhausts BELCHING choking, black plumes that scatter and drift across the scene.

Out on the field a second shell CRASHES in, closer than the first. Then others, closer still -- WHUMP, WHUMP, WHUMP! Fragments of earth and white-hot shrapnel CLATTER down.

The allied armour draws closer, eager khaki and olive-green clad troops visible now crowding behind each one.

CUT TO:

THE PANZER

A tank commander surveys the battlefield from his panzer. His own urgent, ad-libbed SHOUTS into the mike are lost among the deafening SNARL of diesels and the CLANKING of steel treads as the tank turns. Metal plates SQUEAL, treads PULVERISING the ground.

The turret traverses. We follow the barrel as it lines up with a distant Sherman. The commander leans forward, aiming.

PANZER COMMANDER
(shouts)
FIRE!

The tank violently JUDDERS backward. It is a cacophony of shaken metal, louder even than the BOOMING explosion from the barrel as it sends a shell SCREAMING toward the Sherman.

A massive plume of dirt ERUPTS in the middle distance. The field is already partly obscured by black rags of smoke from multiple shell-bursts.

Through the smoke-shreds, a line of armoured vehicles -- Shermans, Churchills, Half-tracks and bren-carriers -- DRIVES inexorably toward the trenches.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BATTLEFIELD - DAY - MONTAGE

FREQUENT SCENE-SHIFTS AND INTER-CUTS REFLECT THE CHAOS OF BATTLE.

IN THE TRENCH

Lunser and Gerber work their weapons, sending rapid-fire rounds toward their targets. Over the trench wall the oncoming armour GRINDS and CLANKS ever closer. They are unstoppable.

We see SWARMS of allied soldiers, stoop-shouldered approaching cautiously. Kneeling, shooting, then advancing some more.

Behind cover, the two SS men pick their targets -- BAM, BAM, BAM!

In the trench a young soldier appears from O/S, hunched-shouldered, carrying an ammo-box. He drops the box by Gerber's feet. Then continues his clumsy, crouching jog, weighed down by ammo belts slung around his neck. He stumbles on ...

... and we follow him as he hurries, head down toward the MG-42 team.

The two MG-42 gunners work efficiently. One traverses the weapon, SPRAYING 1,200 57mm rounds per minute into the oncoming troops. The other nervously feeds the JUDDERING belt as spent shells SPEW from the breech, cascading over the trench floor. All the while, clods of earth rain down.

CUT TO:

OVERHEAD VIEW

The two opposing armoured forces RUMBLE and CLATTER toward one another in a CRUSHING show of strength. Shooting, manoeuvring, GRINDING earth, CHURNING up clouds of dust that drifts with the smoke of battle.

Between the armoured behemoths, scattered groups of soldiers engage in a deadly fire-fight. There is no order here. This is a primitive fight to the death.

CUT TO:

Fallen Eagle

THE BRITISH INFANTRY

Partly hidden in the dust-cloud thrown up by their Sherman-shield, a squad of tommies inches toward the German lines.

A man steps out from cover. He kneels, aims, BAM! He SCUTTLES back in cover, working his Lee Enfield's bolt. Another man does likewise. Steps out, brings his rifle up
...

... and SPINS round, dropping like a stone, DEAD before he hits the ground. One comrade stops and kneels by the fallen soldier. He reaches out, recognises death, stands and moves on.

BOOM! An explosion only yards ahead of the Sherman BLASTS shards of earth over the troops. An NCO takes a knee as the Sherman stops. He scans the trench-line.

BRITISH NCO
(shouts)
Bloody hell! They have a PAK!

The NCO stands and rapidly BANGS the side of the Sherman, SHOUTING. His words are lost in the din. The Sherman's commander peers over. There's a brief, inaudible exchange. He looks up, gazing toward the trench. The CAMERA refocusses and we see he has noticed ...

... a GUN-BARREL protruding from its camouflage-net cover behind the entrenchments. It fires again. BANG! Another smoke cloud and another deadly burst ERUPTS, spraying shards of steel in a wide arc and SHOWERING the allied troops with debris.

The Sherman's commander SHOUTS down into the hatch. The Sherman's barrel traverses.

CUT TO:

UNTEROFFICER BEKKER

Bekker is squatting in cover behind the trench-line. He surveys the field. Rounds WHISTLE in, THWACKING into the ground around him. He quickly notices the immediate threat to his PAK crew. He SNATCHES his MP-40 and RUNS for the PAK.

CUT TO:

PAK-38 CREW

The two-man crew work feverishly, unmindful of the advancing danger. One loads a shell, SLAMS the breech. The other aims, pauses, fires -- BOOM!

Beyond the riveted steel shield a Sherman is barely two hundred yards away, its gun aimed directly at the PAK. The ground in-between is constantly ROCKED by exploding ordnance.

CUT TO:

UNTEROFFICER BEKKER

Bekker knows he can't make it to the PAK crew in time. Mid-way into his run he reaches a parked Panzer. He stops and SHOUTS up at the tank's commander. There's an inaudible exchange. Bekker points out the Sherman

The tank commander nods. The Panzer revs and begins to manouevre, its mighty turret traversing.

CUT TO:

AMERICAN INFANTRY

Supported by their Shermans and half-tracks the Americans are DRIVING down one flank of the battlefield. Their advance has placed them in striking distance of the enemy lines.

Previously shielded by armour, the soldiers now disperse, taking up strategic positions. They target the trench system, POURING FIRE on major threat-points -- MG-42s, MG-34s, Panzerfausts, Panzerschrecks.

NCOs direct their squads using hand signals. Men SCATTER, taking up firing positions. Some fall.

A medic moves among the fallen, responding to urgent calls for aid, assisting the wounded.

All the while, bullets RIP the ground around them, and shells WHOOSH in, BLASTING huge chunks out of the ground and BLANKETING the field with smoke.

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE BUNKER

We look out over the battlefield through the bunker's grim fire-slit. Two soldiers work an MG-42, their bodies silhouetted against the harsh daylight.

A stream of empty shell casings SPRAY into the air as the MG CHATTERS loudly, HAMMERING the oncoming allies. A belt runs through, CLATTERING onto the concrete floor.

The #1 gunner flips up the breech cover -- CLICK! The #2 SLAPS on the new belt. #1 SLAMS the cover down -- CLACK!

They are a machine in motion. The HAMMERING resumes, RAKING bullets into the advancing troops.

CUT TO:

AMERICAN INFANTRY

We re-join the American squad. They have made good ground, but their advance has placed them within the bunker's killing-field. Beyond them we can now see the squat, concrete building. The ugly structure is partly obscured by hedges and netting.

The MG-42 barrel swings toward them ...

... BRRRRRAAAP! Two infantrymen are thrown down, ripped open by the deadly hail of lead.

U.S. INFANTRYMAN (O.S.)
MEDIC!

The CAMERA PANS over the field. The US medic SCAMPERS into view, a low crouch, one hand on his helmet, his satchel swinging and slapping. Deadly rounds ZIP in and ricochet, ZINGING off stones and steel.

BRITISH INFANTRY SQUAD

Beyond the running medic we see another Sherman CLANKING inexorably toward the German lines. A shell BLASTS out of the gun barrel and the tank ROCKS back in a cloud of dust and smoke.

Its machine gun swings constantly -- CHATTER, CHATTER, CHATTER! Ahead of the tank the trench wall is chewed up by a stream of bullets.

Trailing this monster is a British squad. Each man adopts a semi-crouch, his Lee-Enfield tucked into his shoulder, firing steadily -- BAM, BAM, BAM!

Ahead of the squad, its officer turns to face his men, his sten slung easy over one arm. He signals with his free hand. We see this is Lieutenant Caswell.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BATTLEFIELD - DAY

The British infantry platoon are bunched behind the Sherman's protective cover, shielded from German bullets and shrapnel.

But tanks can do only so much in battle. There are tasks only well-trained, well-equipped infantry can achieve. Defeating a heavily entrenched enemy is one of them.

CASWELL
(shouts to be heard)
Ready men! It's time to get to
work/

But Caswell hasn't witnessed the carnage being caused by the Bunker. Sergeant Dunbar has and he steps forward, urgently.

DUNBAR
Sir, sorry sir ...
(points)
... jerry has a bunker over there.
An MG. It's rippin' strips off our
boys.
(beat)
We try and take that forward line
now we'll be cut down.

Lieutenant Caswell holds up a hand to keep his men back while he squats and peers around the Sherman's tracks. He sees the threat.

CASWELL
(mildly flustered)
Oh, bloody hell!

At that moment another American drops - caught by the MG's withering fire. Another round ZINGS off the Sherman's steelwork. Caswell pulls back, sharply.

There's a brief pause as he considers.

Fallen Eagle

CASWELL (CONT'D)

(determined)

Right then, it appears our tanker friends have their hands full dealing with the Panzers.

(beat)

It's up to us to tackle that bunker ...

(beat)

... and the best way of dealing with those blighters is rear-entry.

A few nervous chuckles from the ranks draws a hard stare from the sergeant. Caswell ignores it and presses on.

CASWELL (CONT'D)

(glances to the hedge-line)

We'll need to dash to cover over there, work down the hedgerow and hopefully catch 'em by surprise.

(to Dunbar, while indicating the turret)

Sergeant, please let our friend know what we're up to.

Dunbar scuttles around to the more sheltered side of the tank. There's a brief exchange.

Meanwhile, Caswell signals his squad to take a knee while he surveys their line of approach. All the squad's eyes are on their officer. It's clear the men are nervous, but their confidence in Caswell also shows.

Dunbar returns. He takes a knee.

DUNBAR

(to Caswell)

Right you are then, sir. He's on-board. His MG will lay down cover fire.

Caswell nods, steals another glance around the Sherman then stands clear, waving his squad onward.

CASWELL

NOW! GO!

Dunbar leaps up and begins his run. The others hesitate as a murderous spray of bullets continue to ZIP and CRACK, splitting the air. Dunbar stops, turns around, his expression more dangerous than the hail of lead.

DUNBAR
(furiously)
GET YOUR COWARDLY ARSES MOVING!

This energises the others. As one they RUSH from cover and SCUTTLE toward the hedge-line, Dunbar leading the way.

Lieutenant Caswell stands defiantly, his back to the German lines as he waves his squad onward. Amazingly, he remains unscathed. He finally adopts a crouch himself and hurries after his men.

All the while, bullets kick up soil around the soldiers' feet as the enemy machine gunners zero in.

With Dunbar leading and Caswell bringing up the rear, the squad make the hedge-line without casualty.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HEDGE-LINE - DAY

The British squad adopts patrol formation in the lee of the hedgerow. Caswell leads, sten SWINGING left to right. Beyond the hedgerow it is BEDLAM with the constant sound of DESTRUCTION and CARNAGE. Here, there seems to be an eerie CALM.

Through the confused CRESCENDO we hear a new sound. It's the mechanical CHATTER, CHATTER, CHATTER of an MG-42. Caswell holds up a hand and takes a knee. His men follow suit. Dunbar edges forward to Caswell's right.

CASWELL'S POV

The hedgerow extends ahead, marking the field-edge. At the end is the bunker only yards away. There's a rear opening, unguarded. We hear ad-libbed German commands:

GERMAN SOLDIER (O.S. SUBTITLE)
More ammunition, I need
ammunition!

THE HEDGE-LINE

Caswell turns to Dunbar who waits like a loyal gun-dog.

Fallen Eagle

CASWELL
(voice low)
Sarn't, get your bren laddie set
up over there
(points O.S.)
Have him cover our flank.

Dunbar begins to turn, already beckoning to the the bren-gunner.

DUNBAR
Sir!

CASWELL
(restrains him)
Oh, and where's our Worcestershire
cricketer?

Within the line of soldiers, Bullard raises a hand.

BULLARD
(smiling)
Me, sir!

Caswell indicates the corporal forward while Dunbar gives orders for the bren-gunner. Bullard trots forward at a crouch. He takes a knee by the Lieutenant.

BULLARD (CONT.)
Sir?

CASWELL
You have grenades?

BULLARD
(nods)
Sir. A pouch-full. Bloody heavy
buggers.

Caswell half turns and indicates the darkened bunker opening. More ad-libbed German shouts come from within.

CASWELL
(pointing)
You think you can bowl a googly
into there for me?
(beat)
Take the wind out of their sails a
bit.

Bullard is already pulling a grenade from a chest-pouch. Dunbar returns and takes a knee - ever alert, eyes on the bunker. To their right, the bren-gunner throws himself down. The gun RATTLES and CLICKS as he sets it up.

BULLARD
(grinning)
I'll have a go, sir. Whip their
middle stumps out, you mean?

CASWELL
(pats Bullard's
shoulder)
That's it, come on/

Caswell is interrupted by a MASSIVE explosion which RIPS the air beyond the hedge.

CASWELL (CONT'D)
CHRIST!

The constant CLATTERING sound of gunfire intensifies. The battle has reached a critical phase. A tipping-point. The men must act now.

CASWELL (CONT'D)
(to Bullard, recovering
quickly)
Off you go, then.

As Bullard shuffles forward into position, Caswell directs the men, using hand signals -- TWO, RIGHT, KEEP LOW.

Two men lumber off to the right, adopting attack positions, rifles ready.

CASWELL (CONT.)
(pats his helmet)
Ames, Merriday, with me.
(to Dunbar)
You too, Sarn't. We'll clear 'em
out once Bullard's done.

The group form up behind Bullard and ease to his right. Crouching, weapons ready. Tension is etched on each face.

Ahead of them, Bullard has laid his Enfield in the grass and has a grenade in one hand. He draws his hands together to pull the pin, and turns to Caswell for the go-ahead.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BUNKER (SIDE) - DAY

Three German soldiers scuttle toward the bunker's rear-door, bent double, anxious. Two are burdened by a heavy ammo-box, their K-98s slung on their shoulders. The third, a Gefreiter, has an MP-40.

Fallen Eagle

Bullets SCREAM through the air about them, ZIP off the bunker wall and CHING off steel defences. Off-screen, men cry out in agony -- their lives cut-short or ruined. We sense the allies are about to breach the German lines.

To the team's right, the bunker's MG-42 CHATTERS, spraying death into the allied line. The unseen gunner calls out.

MG-42 GUNNER (O.S. SUBTITLE)
(panic now)
WHERE'S THAT DAMN AMMUNITION?

The Gefreiter turns and fires at the oncoming enemy, BRRRRRRAAAP!

A grenade hits the bunker wall and CLATTERS at his feet. He snatches it up. Throws. BOOOM! He turns to the frightened privates.

GEFREITER (SUBTITLE)
Go! Quickly!

The two men scuttle on, weighed down and fearful. They finally round the bunker wall, where they stop dead, eyes wide in horror.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HEDGE-LINE - DAY

Bullard appears frozen, grenade in hand, poised to pull the pin when three German soldiers suddenly step into view. The two leading men drop their box and make to un-sling their rifles as the third swings up his MP-40.

Bullard hasn't seen them but sees the shock on his comrade's faces.

MERRIDAY
(shouts)
Fletch! Look out!

Bullard turns. The Gefreiter fires. BBBRAP! Bullets SLAP into Bullard's shoulder spinning him around, flooring him.

BULLARD
AAAAAHH, CHRIST!

Events happen fast now.

Caswell leaps up from his crouch and DASHES right, drawing fire. He races bullets as the Gefreiter spins, zero-ing in.

Merriday is also up and running across to Bullard who lays groaning in the grass, one hand pressed to his shoulder.

MERRIDAY
Stay down!

Merriday flings himself down by the wounded corporal. Protectively. He brings his rifle up and aims.

Caswell is shooting from the hip, his sten BUCKING WILDLY in his hands, BAM, BAM, BAM, BAM! One German rifleman catches two in the gut, folds forward and face-plants the ground. The second turns and aims as the bren-gunner opens up.

A stream of .303 rounds rip into the two remaining Germans - BAM-BAM-BAM-BAM-BAM-BAM!

Sergeant Dunbar realises the Bunker's MG-42 remains a serious threat. He runs for the opening.

DUNBAR
(shouts)
With me! Come on!

The squad leap up from their positions and begin running toward the Bunker. A shot - BAM! - echoes from the darkened interior. One of the men goes down.

DUNBAR (CONT'D)
GET DOWN!

More single-shot rounds echo from within, BAM, BAM, BAM! There's also a CLATTER and the MG-42 barrel appears, low down, set up on its bi-pod. It quickly swings toward Dunbar and his men.

To the sergeant's right, Lieutenant Caswell kneels and brings his sten up.

The MG-42 fires, the rounds ZIP, ZIP, ZIPPING over the squad's heads.

Caswell draws back the sten's bolt -- CLACK -- aims and pulls the trigger, BAM, BAM, BAM!

Caswell stops shooting. The MG-42 is silent.

Men exchange glances. From the other side of the hedge-row, the sounds of battle are less intense. There are fewer explosions. The CHATTER of small arms continues to resonate over the farmland, but gone is the RAGING SAVAGERY of before.

Fallen Eagle

Caswell indicates for his men to stay down. Bent low with sten ready, he cautiously approaches the bunker's doorway. He peers inside, then stands, turning to the others.

CASWELL
All clear!
(bats his helmet)
Gather round.
(looks O.S.)
Merriday?

CASWELL'S POV

Several yards away, Private Merriday kneels beside the prone figure of Bullard. Bullard groans. Merriday looks up.

MERRIDAY
Sir?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BUNKER (REAR) - DAY

Lieutenant Caswell's face shows he's weighing the situation, and has only seconds to decide on the squad's next action. His men gather round -- eager, weapons ready.

Only feet away, the three dead Germans lay in an untidy sprawl.

CASWELL
(to Merriday)
How is he?

Merriday is working on Bullard's shoulder, pushing down on a pressure bandage to staunch the blood.

MERRIDAY
(concerned)
I'll stay with him.

CASWELL
(pauses, then nods)
I'll send help as soon as I can.

Caswell turns, peers into the bunker and out to the battle beyond. The two lines have met. It's hand to hand now. Sergeant Dunbar steps forward.

DUNBAR
Sir?

Caswell turns back, replacing a magazine in his sten as he does so.

CASWELL
(to Dunbar)
We've a chance to flank them,
Sergeant.
(to the squad)
Check your weapons ...
(beat)
... let's wrap this up.

The whole squad quickly reload, switching mags, working bolts -- CLACK, CLACK, CLACK. Caswell waits, sees they're ready and indicates the side of the bunker.

CASWELL
Now, hit them hard.

At the double and led by their brave officer, the group move off around the bunker wall to rejoin the battle.

CUT TO:

MERRIDAY

Merriday remains kneeling by Corporal Bullard who is looking grim now -- tired, face screwed with pain. Merriday tries to suppress his own panic and work on the wound as best he can.

MERRIDAY
(anxious)
You'll be okay.

In the background the shooting continues -- a symphony of small arms punctuated by percussive beats of heavy ordnance.

Bullard trembles as he rides the pain. He reaches up and grips Merriday's arm.

BULLARD
... how ...
(beat)
... is it bad?

Fallen Eagle

MERRIDAY

You'll be okay, Fletch. Just hang
in there ...
(beat)
... the Lieutenant's fetching
help.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BATTLEFIELD - DAY

The CAMERA follows Caswell and his men as they run out from the bunker's cover to flank the German trenches. They spread out -- organised, disciplined.

Broken tanks stand amidst black billowing smoke -- more ragged clouds hang and drift over the battlefield. Through these shreds, men advance -- British and American together.

Caswell directs his squad -- signalling, shouting ad-libbed orders.

Ahead, only pockets of resistance remains. Small groups of Germans, doggedly fighting on against the odds. Oddly, within these, some weary German soldiers stand in their trenches and from behind dugouts, hands raised above their heads.

Only yards from the bunker, in one trench, there remains a defiant, stout resistance.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH - DAY

NOTE: ANY DIALOGUE IN THIS SCENE IS SPOKEN IN GERMAN AND SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

Lunser and Gerber are shooting over the trench wall at the oncoming troops. Beyond the allied soldiers, armoured vehicles manouevre, driving ever onward.

With the two SS men are Bauman, Bekker and a few other Wermacht troops. All pump their weapons, BAM, BAM, BAM, regardless of the futility. Defeat is painted on their faces. They know this is the ballet's closing act.

Yet one man remains defiant -- Klauss Gerber. He works his rifle, shooting fiercely into the oncoming line.

GERBER
(shouting)
NO! NO! NO!

He's pumping the rifle's bolt madly. He's not even aiming now. The enemy are barely yards from him. The trench wall kicks and spurts as bullets drive in.

This is the end.

He is a little boy who's about to have his favourite toy taken from him. He is heartbroken.

More rounds pour in, SLAMMING the trench wall -- these are from the REAR! Lunser spins around. He sees Caswell's squad moving in. We hear the bren's loud, steady beat -- BAM, BAM, BAM, BAM!

LUNSER
(voice low)
Jesus Christ!

Two Wermacht soldiers are SLAMMED by .303 rounds, their bodies thrown against the trench wall. Another screams. Lunser grabs Gerber's arm.

LUNSER (CONT'D)
WE HAVE TO GO!

Gerber stops firing and looks puzzled, as though hearing a foreign language. Lunser shakes his arm. Rounds THWACK into the trench-wall SCATTERING them with earth. Beyond, a hand-grenade is lobbed in. Bauman snatches it, lobs it back -- BOOM!

LUNSER (CONT'D)
WE HAVE TO GO, KLAUSS!

Gerber is incredulous, he SHAKES his head. Lunser his desperately DRAGGING him. The hedgerow is barely yards away. They might just make it. If they went now.

GERBER
... what ...

LUNSER
We're SS, Klauss. They HATE us.

We now hear ad-libbed calls and commands in English. There can be only seconds before the trench is overrun. Another Wermacht man is hit. He spins and flops down.

SOLDIER
AAAAAHH, CHRIST!

Fallen Eagle

LUNSER (CONT'D)
The dance is over, come on!

Lunser drags Gerber from the trench. Gerber is puppet-like -- he is tasting defeat for the first time. His bubble has been popped, his dreams destroyed.

We hear Caswell's voice calling to his own men. This injects life into Gerber's limbs. Grim determination returns to his face and he runs.

The two men dash for the hedgerow as bullets ZIP in around them, KICKING up earth, THWACKING into trees. Ahead is an opening.

LUNSER (CONT'D)
Through here!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HEDGE-LINE - DAY

Lunser and Gerber CRASH through the hedge into the open field beyond. The two men see that a further brisk run will take them to the woods and, perhaps, their own lines.

A SHUFFLING movement to their left causes both to turn. It is Merriday and Bullard. Merriday remains kneeling by the wounded corporal, STARING now at the SS men, his expression frozen.

Bullard groans. Merriday lays a hand on his chest, eyes fixed on Lunser.

Gerber brings up his K-98, working the bolt. Lunser stays his hand. There is the spark of recognition in his eyes.

LUNSER
(softly)
No, Klauss!

Lunser half turns to the hedge. The battle there is all but over. There is the occasional CRACK of small-arms fire and a throbbing GROWL of diesel engines. That aside, a strange quiet has descended.

Lunser turns back to Merriday. There is recognition on both sides now. A pause. All men are armed -- the scene could play out one of two ways.

Lunser takes a step toward the two Brits, his K-98 held low in one hand. Gerber reaches for him.

GERBER
Ernst, what ...

Lunser signals for Gerber to remain and he strides over to Merriday. As he does so, he fumbles at his tunic, undoes a button. He withdraws his hand. There is something there.

He remains standing by Merriday's side. No words are exchanged but there is an understanding here. An unspoken unity on a battlefield.

Lunser reaches out and hands something to Merriday who receives it silently, frowning. Puzzled.

LUNSER
(softly and in heavily
accented English)
Thank you, Tommy. Good luck!

Lunser turns on his heel and strides off to rejoin Gerber, before trotting toward the trees.

CUT TO:

MERRIDAY

Merriday spends a moment blankly watching the two men depart. Bullard stirs beside him.

A noise at the hedgerow causes Merriday to look up. It is American, Private Paul Shapiro. The young medic jogs toward him, one hand already diving into his supply satchel.

Merriday looks down. Opens his hand.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. COSBY PUB - DAY

We return to the Leicestershire pub. Merriday's closed fist comes into focus once again, exactly as we left it in the opening scene.

Around him all is quiet now.

Gone are the many patrons -- as though taken from us. Gone is the chatter, the laughter and the chink of glasses.

Fallen Eagle

Merriday sits alone. The atmosphere is hushed. We hear a clock, ticking faintly.

Slowly, Merriday rotates his hand and opens his fist. In his palm lays a medal ribbon -- black, red and white. It is the medal ribbon of a German soldier.

MERRIDAY (V.O.)

I survived the hell that was Falaise.

(beat)

And the battles that followed as we pushed slowly toward Germany, hundreds of men paying the ultimate sacrifice for every bloody mile.

(beat)

Fletch Bullard survived, too, though he would never play cricket again, poor devil.

(pauses to look at the ribbon)

My five medals arrived a year after I was demobbed. In a box through the post. No ceremony, not even a handshake or a 'thank you'.

(beat)

They meant nothing to me. I never really knew what they were for.

(beat)

Bravery? Devotion to duty? Patriotism? An attempt at appeasement by a guilty nation? I never really understood.

(beat)

The only medal I ever valued was this, handed to me personally by my enemy that day in 1944. I always grasped the meaning of this one.

(beat)

You see, it was for compassion.

The compassion felt by one fighting man for another ... regardless of his uniform.

The CAMERA pulls away. Leaving the old soldier alone with his memories -- the clock still TICK, TICK, TICKING in the background.

FADE TO BLACK.