

BENEATH THE POPPY FIELDS

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FADE IN:

EXT. LANCASHIRE COUNTRYSIDE - (ENGLAND) - DAY

The warm September breeze moves the corn in slow waves across the farmers' fields as high in the clear blue sky the skylarks chirp their quirky songs.

Late summertime in England is truly delightful, especially for Johnny Gordon, best known as JOHNNY G, as he gently kisses his beautiful wife, Jane, whom he calls, JINNY.

They are having a picnic and lying together on their picnic blanket. The remnants of the picnic occupy the furthest corner of the blanket, except for two bottles of black stout nestling in the shade at the edge of the cornfield.

Leaning on his elbow looking down into her lovely brown eyes, his hard face softens as his deep blue eyes take in the beauty of his young wife.

JOHNNY G

One day we'll have kids, Jinny.

JINNY

Not till we have our own house.
I'll not have kids while living
with my mother and our Billy in th'
house... bloody oaf he is.

JOHNNY G

Billy is a miner, just like me. He
works like a beaver at t' coal face
and--

JINNY

And he behaves like one when he
comes up out t' pit. He's a bloody
animal.

Johnny leans over to grab a bottle of stout, yanks out the cork and glugs it practically in one, leaving just an inch in the bottom of the bottle. He holds it out.

JOHNNY G

Here, 'ave a swig o' th' ale...
goes well wi' t' pie.

JINNY

We isn't low-bred tha knows, so
stop acting like our Billy, an' get
me t' other bottle. His behavior is
rubbin' off on thee so mebbe it's
time t' flit. [move house].

Johnny finishes the bottle and leans back to grab the other. Pulls the cork out and wipes the top with his sleeve and hands it over.

Jinny demurely accepts it and takes a sip as ladylike as she can and passes it back.

This little act is another reason Johnny loves her so much - and she knows it. They collapse, laughing and kissing on the picnic blanket. Johnny looks down into her eyes for a serious moment and whispers.

JOHNNY G

We can't flit. Ma needs our rent money and times'll get harder wi' this war 'n' all.

JINNY

There's a house comin' empty in Kent Street an' I want it. Ma can come wi' us, but not Billy; he can stay where he is. His girlfriend will move in wi' him when we flit.

JOHNNY G

Thee's a crafty lass, Jinny. I bet thee knows when we're flitting. I bet thee's got it all worked out.

JINNY

Come on, let's go home; thee's on t' night shift tonight.

JOHNNY G

Aw, an 'ere's me thinking about a kiss an' cuddle in t' sunshine before--

She dives at him, landing right on top of him giggling and kissing as he falls back off his elbows to lie flat on his back as she straddles him and pulls up her skirts.

JINNY

Tha' must have seen up my skirts... didn't ye? I forgot to put my drawers on this morning an' ye must have seen my thatch.

Johnny watches her face as she gives him a moue, a blown kiss, like a pout, which to Johnny was the signal to penetrate. He hunches up and unbuckles his leather belt and pushed his trousers down.

Johnny knows what is coming next. She teases him controlling the sliding motion along her belly.

Johnny tolerates her notional power over him momentarily and then thrusts into her. Only the birds and insects can see their love-making.

It wasn't long before Johnny spurted his seed into her and there they lay, entwined, kissing and stroking each other.

JOHNNY G

Tha's being naughty.

JINNY

I can't help it - I want to go again.

As she again squeezes those special magic muscles only women have.

JINNY (CONT'D)

An' ye may as well come in me again, coz right now I don't care an' I felt ye coming in me, it wuz warm an' splendid, an' now I can feel ye growing inside me an' I want to feel it again - warm an' splendid.

The warm sun shines on the lovers as they continue nature's beautiful ritual, which inevitably concludes with sighs and kisses.

Johnny grabs the picnic blanket and flaps it clean of crumbs as Jinny stands to flick her long, billowing, ankle length skirt and pats it back into shape; just a tug on the ribbon that acts as a belt to display the tiniest of waists. She tucks in her linen shirt and displays her pert breasts before hiding them behind a baggy waistcoat.

Johnny picks up the empty beer bottles and pops them into the picnic bag with the remaining debris; only a flattened patch of grass is the evidence of their presence here as they stroll away from their beauty spot along a cart track winding between hedgerows toward home.

EXT/INT. MINERS COTTAGE - LANCASHIRE VILLAGE - DAY

Johnny pushes open the front door and steps back to allow Jinny into the house. He steps in behind her to see his mother-in-law, best known as MA, placing lumps of coal on the fire. The fire is in the centre of a large cast-iron range with ovens on either side and a large black kettle hangs above the fire on a hook fixed somewhere up the chimney.

JOHNNY G

Leave that, Ma. I'll do that.
Jinny'll make a brew an' we can all have a read afore we eat.

After putting coal on the fire, Johnny sits on one of the four sturdy wooden chairs surrounding the dining table and opens a newspaper.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Where's Billy? He better not be down t' pub.

MA

Said he was goin' t' Widnes, then goin' t' Clock Face t' see his girlfriend. He'll be home for teatime - he knows what's on t' stove.

Jinny notices the concerned expression on Johnny's face as he reads the newspaper.

JINNY

What's up?

JOHNNY G

Bloody Germans are killing thousands of our men in t' war and they said it'd be all over by Christmas and that was last bloody year.

JINNY

Mebbie ye should stop readin' t' bloody newspapers... they're bloody evil and full of blithering shite.

The door opens and in steps BILLY, Jinny's brother.

BILLY

I nearly broke into a trot when I got a whiff o' that down t' street. Cut us a chunk o' that loaf, our Jinny. I'm drownin' in saliva just now; the smell is drivin' me mad.

JINNY

Yer already bloody mad and thee can wait till we all sit down to eat. Yer manners are gettin' worse since thee's been seein' that tart in Clock Face village.

Billy gave an exaggerated sigh and a sulk Michael Angelo would love to have painted. He was a handsome lad, big for a seventeen-year-old with curly blonde hair and a hard body, sculpted over the last three years at the coal face.

BILLY

Sithee [See thee], our Johnny; that posh bugger, the officer, Hellfire Jack, is on t' way up 'ere from London to get miners an' Manchester tunnellers t' join th' army. They reckons he's even takin' t' grave diggers and--

JOHNNY G

--Bollocks, who the hell is they?

BILLY

Ring o' Bells landlord's brother has a pub in London an' knows all about it.

JOHNNY G

That's bloody ripe. So, all t' Kaiser's generals'll know by now coz Flanders is nearer to London than we are.

Talk about the increasing threat of war puts the wind up Jinny. She slams down the hot baking tray and marches through the back door on her way to the lavatory across the yard, kicking chickens out of her path as she goes.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Now look what thee's done. Wi' all that shite about t'war, she's gone t' privy just as we're about to eat. Y' know how nervous yer sister is lately. Bloody think afore ye opens cakehole.

Billy went to the back door and shouts across the yard.

BILLY

I'm sorry, our Jinny. Come on back in th' house. I won't say nowt about t' war again, honest.

Jinny comes back into the house as Billy remarks.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Food for the Gods is what we get, our Jinny. Yon lamb's kidneys are makin' my mouth water.

INT. NUMBER 3 SHAFT - BOLD COLLIERY - NIGHT.

Johnny and his men enter the cage at No: 3 Shaft at Bold Colliery. The cage takes them down to 1,850 feet where they leave the cage and march along the tunnel to the coal face.

Trudging along the dark tunnel, lit only by dim oil lamps, Johnny looks at each of the hard faces, glistening in the poor light. He exhales a satisfied sigh as pride rules him.

Approaching the coal face there is a loud crack and rumble as a large rock dislodges and crushes the miner who is drilling a hole in the tunnel wall.

Johnny rushes to the spot where blood spills out from under the rock, soaking the miner's legs and filling his clogs.

JOHNNY G

Too late, boys. Go get jacks so we can raise the rock and pull him out afore breakin' t' rock.

The miners worked like demons trying to rescue one of their own but the man died instantly beneath the massive rock.

INT. JOHNNY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jinny enters the bedroom at 3pm on the dot, with a steaming cup of tea. She places the cup on the bedside cabinet and silently opens the curtains, allowing bright sunlight to light up the room as she sits on the edge of the bed looking lovingly at her man.

There is a tiny shard of coal embedded into his cheek just beneath his eye, which hadn't been washed out during the early morning shower before leaving the colliery.

She picks at the shard of coal with her fingernail and a trickle of blood emerges from the punctured skin as it came out. She quickly licks it clean and sticks a thumbnail size piece of newspaper on the tiny wound and watches as the red blood blossoms outwards like a rose before the bleeding ceases.

Johnny's eyelids flutter momentarily and a moment later she is gazing into the blue eyes she loves so much.

JOHNNY G

Thanks, Jinny; thee's a diamond - giz a kiss.

He grabs and pulls her on top of him as she giggles happily in their private moment but the caress ends abruptly as he remembers Jimmy Golden, the crushed miner.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Sorry, Jinny, but I've gotta get over to Sutton t' pay respect to Jimmy Golden's family. Twas a bad accident but it coulda been worse, the rock could've dropped on my crew.

JINNY

I know, I'll make us a picnic for
when thee gets back and we'll go t'
Owl's wood and call in t' pub on t'
way home.

JOHNNY G

Aye, lass. That's a grand idea. No
wonder I love thee so much - giz
another kiss.

But that is one kiss too many as she snakes her tongue into
his mouth and reaches beneath the sheets to grab his manhood,
which responds instantly.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Ma is downstairs so ye must move
slowly wi' out shakin' t' bed -
take tha drawers off an' climb on.

JINNY

My drawers are already off, but I
want to see it afore ye puts in.

She deftly straddles him in the 69 position and teases him
with her tongue. He responds by teasing her with his. Ma
didn't hear any shaking bed because they both exploded into
orgasm together without penetration.

EXT. THE ROAD TO THE COLLIERY - DAY

The early morning sun sees men wearing clogs and miner's
helmets, noisily marching along the lane towards the coal
mine. This is the morning shift, which relieves the night
shift at 8am.

Johnny's brother-in-law, Billy, larks about with a big
strapping man called, SOLLY, a Liverpoolian, and TAFF, a wiry
Welshman. The jolly pushing and shoving causes annoyance as
others get jostled amongst the banterers.

Johnny calls a halt to the jostling as they approach the
colliery gates where a shiny Rolls Royce motor car is parked
and a group of men in suits stand next to it; all looking
concerned and terribly serious.

One man stands out from the gathering as he steps up onto the
running board of the car; dressed immaculately in tailored
Royal Engineers uniform and addresses the men with his
impressive patrician accent and strong baritone voice. This
is HELLFIRE JACK.

HELLFIRE JACK

I am Major, John Norton-Griffiths,
of the Royal Engineers and here to
recruit men to join brave men
digging under the German lines in
France. Your country needs you now
more than ever; not in the
trenches, but beneath them, setting
charges that blow the Bosch to hell
where they belong. You will be paid
higher wages than our normal
soldiers and more than you earn
here at the coal face.

The miners look on in awe at the man they already know about
through reading newspapers and here he is; Hellfire Jack, as
he is more commonly known amongst the mining community: a
millionaire engineer and Member of Parliament no less.
However, like all British soldiers, he referred to the
Germans as the Bosch.

Some of the men shuffle away to start their shift but Johnny
remains; looking at the recruiting sergeant with his sheets
of paper and pen at the ready, using the Rolls Royce bonnet
as his recruiting desk. He shouts.

RECRUITING SERGEANT

Sign up here!

He shouts as Hellfire Jack stands up taller on the running
board and utters his favourite line.

HELLFIRE JACK

Kill the Bosch now so your wives
and children never see their
bayonets coming for them down your
street... and conscripted men will
not be paid as much as volunteers
and conscription is coming very
soon - think about that!

Johnny looks on, face steel cut as his day shift team
disintegrate before his very eyes and join the army.

The very thought of joining the army to go to war creates a
chasm of stress in his chest, which he felt was immediately
filled by an anvil. He very nearly threw up. Never before had
he experienced such traumatic inner turmoil in the making of
a decision.

JOHNNY G

Sithee [See you], there's two of us
to consider in our house so wait
till I come back. I'm off home.

Everyone watches him marching back along the lane.

BILLY

He'll be back.

In the terraced row of 'two up, two down' miners' houses, Jinny, arms folded, is talking to neighbours when the lady next door points up the lane and stutters.

NEIGHBOUR

Bloody hell, some'ts 'appened at'
pit. Your Johnny's comin' down t'
lane.

Johnny's natural gait made him look somehow menacing and sinister; he didn't march or take long strides but ambled along with bunched fists as though he was going to hit something when he got there. Out of earshot, some men called him 'Iron arse.'

The sight of the approaching Johnny sent a chill wind of concern through the group of miner's wives. Jinny broke away and walked fast towards him as the others dispersed to spread the news that something wasn't quite right at the colliery. Johnny's hard face frightened Jinny.

JINNY

What's 'appened?

JOHNNY G

The army is at t' pit recruitin' t'
lads. They're all signing on...
your Billy was first in t' queue.
He's a soldier now in t' Royal
Engineers. That posh bloke,
Hellfire Jack, is there; tha'
knows, the one as always in t'
paper. I can't go down t' pit on my
own so I've come home to tell thee
about it.

Her eyes widen with the decision she has to make. Her face is stricken with uncertainty. He reaches for her as she collapses sobbing into his chest. His heart broke as he whispers in her ear.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Duty calls, my dearest
sweetheart... we knew this day
would come, but listen, we are
working underground - not on t'
battlefield an' we get higher wages
than down t' pit.

JINNY

Have ye signed on?

JOHNNY G

Not yet, that's why I've come home,
so we can talk about it.

She stiffens and holds him at arm's length, glaring at him with big watery eyes that melt his soul.

JINNY

Your love of country is not as strong as your love of me; else you would have signed on. Go now and sign on; I'll put t' kettle on an' make a fry-up so don't be long.

There is a cheer when Johnny comes marching back to the colliery. Hellfire Jack recognises leadership quality when he sees it and whispers to his sergeant.

HELLFIRE JACK

Put him down for three stripes...
Jerry is in for a surprise.

After signing on the dotted line, the sergeant hands Johnny a paper travel warrant with all the men's names on.

RECRUITING SERGEANT

Thee's in charge t' travel arrangements and bah gum thee'll make sure each man arrives at Chatham Barracks at tea time tomorrow.

JOHNNY G

I'm not responsible for this lot, I'm t' boss down t' pit, not out 'ere in t' street.

RECRUITING SERGEANT

Thee's in charge now; Acting, Unpaid, Sergeant Gordon.

JOHNNY G

Acting, Unpaid - what in fuck's name does that mean? I do fuck all unpaid.

Johnny bunches his fists ready to start punching. The sergeant very nearly soiled himself as Johnny's ice blue eyes and granite face loomed closer.

HELLFIRE JACK

Stop there!

The authoritarian voice of Hellfire Jack cut through the tension and stops Johnny in his tracks.

HELLFIRE JACK (CONT'D)

You will be paid as a Sapper until the end of the month when your probation ends and you earn the substantive rank of Sergeant... Until then, you are Acting Sergeant Gordon.

Momentarily puzzled, Johnny nods approval and looks at the list of names on the travel warrant. In his gravelly voice, reserved for telling people off, he calls out.

JOHNNY G

Billy Nolan; Peter Salisbury
[SOLLY], Gareth Dupree [TAFF],
Robert Alcock [ALLBALLS], Andrew
Emans [ANDY], Thomas McKinney
[KINNEY], Colin Howell [BRUMMIE],
Thomas Tudor [TAT] and Barry Bliss
[YIGGS]...All in t' Griffin t'
night... wi' wives or girlfriends.

Billy looks blank and whines.

BILLY

We 'aven't been paid. I 'aven't any
money fo' t' pub.

Hellfire Jack steps forward and harrumphs loudly.

HELLFIRE JACK

The colliery management will take
care of that right now.

Says Hellfire Jack, glaring at the suited gentlemen as though he was about to shoot them. That worked.

Having decided nobody else was signing on at this colliery, Hellfire Jack and his sergeant drive off to the next colliery on their itinerary as Johnny strolls out of the gates counting his money followed by all the men of his team of coalface miners.

Apart from Jinny, all of the miners' wives and girlfriends are in for a hell of a shock as the men headed home to impart the news.

INT/EXT. BRUMMIES HOUSE - DAY

Brummie's wife, RUTH, opens the bedroom curtains allowing the bright sunshine to enlighten the task of changing the bed linen. After laying a fresh sheet and pillow cases she looks through the bedroom window to see the big, strapping, young, ALBERT JENNINGS, loitering on the street corner awaiting her signal.

She opens the bedroom window and shakes the small bedside rug outside, which was the 'all clear' signal for Albert Jennings to approach and enter the house, making sure no neighbours were about to see his entry into Brummie's house.

She watches him stroll along the street; all 6' 4" of muscular youth with a handsome face and curly blonde hair, which excited her to the core; soaking her underwear as she envisions his penetration of her desirable body, which she knows is irresistible to young Albert, whose impulse was to ejaculate the moment his glans slid into her, which is why she knows that first dynamic burst would be down her throat.

This is the forbidden fruit; the fresh passion, the immense gorging of young Albert's vibrant shaft, which stokes the fires in her belly. The thoughts of it send her giddy as she hears his footsteps on the stairs.

His handsome head appears first, apprehensive but smiling with desire as she slowly lets her skirt fall to the floor followed by a tug of her drawers as she wriggles them down past her knees to kick them off completely onto the skirt on which she stands fully erect, showing off her bright ginger bush.

The apprehension in Albert dissipates instantly with the wondrous vision before him; the bright sunlight illuminates the ginger bush, driving his manhood forward like a telescope just opened in his trousers.

Ruth could not help herself as her desire drives her forward to pull off Albert's braces and pull down his trousers, which placed her head right there, facing the object of her wanton lust. Without a word she took the head of his shaft into her mouth, which immediately explodes with a gush of semen as Albert's sensations shook the wax in his ears.

Moments later they are on the bed with Albert exploding again inside her as she moans in ecstasy with her own explosion of orgasm and the demanding of more of the same.

Ruth is truly surprised as she hears the clatter of clogs approaching their terraced house. Over the years she had come to recognise Brummie's footfalls; the realisation it is him approaching their front door creates a kaleidoscope of challenges she thinks she cannot win, so she panics and throws young Albert Jennings off her naked body when the clatter ceases outside her front door, which was never locked.

Brummie opens the door and steps inside their snug living room and calls out.

BRUMMIE

Are ye in, Ruth? I've got some news
for thee.

Upstairs, there's a numbing silence and panic as Ruth shoves young Albert under the bed. There is a dull clang and a splash as his head hits the chamber pot, splashing stale, stinking urine down his face and into his mouth. A splutter escapes his throat as he gags on the vinegary taste and his eyes smart with the acid contents of Brummie's and Ruth's bladders.

The realisation that Brummie; the miner with the most frightening reputation of bone-crushing fights had arrived home to find young Albert, naked in his bedroom with his also naked wife, was enough to churn his innards to liquid mush and the impelling urge to vacate his bowels.

RUTH

Just coming, darling. Put t' kettle
on, I'll be down in a minute.

Brummie sits in his favourite chair and starts to take off his clogs as Ruth whispers to young Albert.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Don't move until I get him out of
the house then get dressed and fuck
off.

ALBERT JENNINGS

I'm shitting myself, I can't hold
it any longer.

This is the moment gasses and solids fly out of his arse, so loud, even Brummie hears it.

BRUMMIE

Are ye alright up there, Ruth?

RUTH

Just coming, dear.

As calm as she can she quickly dresses and whispers to young Albert.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Ye clean that up afore ye goes.

BRUMMIE

I think we'd best go out. If I
stunk like that, I'd go t' doctors.
C'mon, let's go t' doctors, ye
ain't well. I'll empty t' po
[chamber pot] when we gets back.

Ruth grabs her coat and bag and scurries out through the door behind Brummie.

EXT. MINERS COTTAGE - LANCASHIRE VILLAGE - DAY

In the street outside Johnny's house, Ma has hold of Billy Nolan and is beating him around the ears, hurting herself more than Billy.

MAJOR

Ye gormless feekin' git, why'd ye
join th' feekin' army?

BILLY

Coz I'll get more than if I was
conscripted - Leave off, Ma!

MA

More what? Feekin' brains is what
thee needs more of.

Giving him a last clout across his face and a sharp knee into his bollocks, sends him to the ground clutching himself in the ghastly pain of testicle trauma.

MA (CONT'D)

That's what thee'll get more of
where thee's going. You feekin'
idiot.

INT. GRIFFIN PUB. LANCASHIRE VILLAGE - NIGHT.

The noise and laughter in the Griffin pub are music to the landlord's ears as he pulls pints of frothing ale for the men and beer shandies for the women. An old bloke starts thumping the old piano and the sing-song is soon roaring out of the pub's windows, frightening the birds.

JOHNNY G

This is the night to remember.
Laughter and singing and on t' way
home the night birds and the
rustling and smells of the
countryside will stay with me until
I come home.

Jinny snakes her arm around his hard waist and looks up into his sparkling blue eyes, bright in the darkness of his face, his peaked cap shading his good looks from the lights of the pub. As handsome as he was, she sees something about him that others may see as sinister, which somehow made her think of the old adage: Still waters run deep.

JINNY

Sithee, be thyself an' take no risks an' thee'll come home alright. Don't look out for our Billy or any t' others; they're all tough men and nays why they signed on.

JOHNNY G

Mebbe thee sees things better'n me but there's a bond down t' pit that cannot be broke.

JINNY

You ain't down t' bloody pit. Yers're goin' in bloody trenches an' 'oles in t' bloody ground where there ain't no coal.

He lifted his pint and savoured the taste.

JOHNNY G

Bloody ale down south is flat 'n cloudy so I'll have another t' remember t' taste.

JINNY

Get me one, so I can remember t' taste too. I won't be comin' in t' Griffin till thee comes 'ome.

The pub is full of men going to war; some of them from other shifts and some from other departments of the colliery. Johnny's men gravitate around him and Jinny as 'Last orders' is called by the Landlord. Solly raises his pint glass and roars a toast.

SOLLY

Here's to a short war and a safe homecoming.

A great roar of approval and cheers erupts in the pub, shaking the timbers and the patriotism could be cut with a butter knife. The only glum face is that of Yiggs Bliss; he is miles away in thought. Taff nudges him.

TAFF

Penny for 'em.

YIGGS

I am so happy knowing I'm not goin' down t' pit ever again and I'll be breathin' the clean fresh air of France and gettin' away from this fuckin' awful shitty hole in the ground.

BILLY

I'll fuckin' drink to that an' what about those French lasses? I'll have some o' that.

JINNY

Broadening thy horizons, are ye? Just make sure ye don't bring no frog tart back here. You're supposed t' be seeing a girl in Clock Face.

BILLY

Aye, will ye tell her where I've gone when she comes lookin' for me?

The howls of laughter are drowned by the Landlord's bell as he shouts, 'Time gentlemen, please!'

EXT. COUNTRY LANE OUTSIDE THE GRIFFIN PUB - NIGHT

The night ended with everyone traipsing home singing into the night with Johnny and Jinny arm in arm, humming to the tunes as their last night together fades to memories everlasting.

Solly and his wife, BERYL, walk with Taff, who is talking to his wife, CATHRYN.

TAFF

It might be best If ye goes back to Wales, Cathryn.

CATHRYN

Why? My friends are here.

Beryl stopped everyone in their tracks and stamped her foot.

BERYL

What about me? Cathryn is my best pal; if she leaves now, I will be alone here. No, we wives must stick together and support each other.. ain't that right, Solly?

SOLLY

Thee's right, Bee [Beryl], but I don't want t' interfere twixt man an' wife.

TAFF

The girls're right, Solly. It was just a passing thought. I should 've known better than talking wi' a belly full o' ale.

SOLLY

Look at yonder shootin' star -
Look, there. I think that's an omen
- a good one - don't ye?

TAFF, BERYL AND CATHRYN

Aye, (was the chorus of three, and
just to reinforce the notion,)
'Aye,' again.

Just then, Yiggs Bliss and Billy Nolan marches past them
striding out like on a Brigade of Guards route march.

YIGGS

We 'aven't packed yet. Gonna be up
all fuckin' night packin' smutter.

CATHRYN

What is smutter?

SOLLY

That's what Jews call clothing.
Yiggs is a Jew. That's why he's
still a bachelor.

BERYL

Why? He's such a handsome man.

SOLLY

Coz he can't find a Jewess.

BERYL

So what? There's plenty o' lasses
round here.

SOLLY

His Ma is very strict. She won't
allow him to bring a Gentile girl
home.

BERYL

That's discrimination.

SOLLY

No, it's not. It's being Jewish.
Just like I won't let our daughter
bring a Jew, chink, nigger or
anyone I don't like the look of
into our house.

BERYL

We haven't got a daughter and I'm
goin' to speak to Father Kelly
about your views.

SOLLY

That'll be interesting, coz he
taught me those views.

They stride away into the night heading for home and bed, knowing the morrow brings the aching loss of Goodbye.

EXT. CHATHAM RAILWAY STATION - ENGLAND - DAY

The packed train pulls into Chatham station in the late afternoon as the sun shines down on an ambulance train full of wounded soldiers going in the opposite direction. The noise of the chuffing steam trains did not prevent the sounds of the wounded emanating from the carriages.

BILLY

Christ almighty; listen to that. It sounds like they're all having their teeth pulled out. What the fuck's 'appening over there?

SOLLY

Red crosses on t' side means it's an ambulance train.

Whistles blow and lots of shouting NCOs on the station platform order the men out of the carriages and form them into three ranks on the platform. The noise of shuffling boots and shouting corporals drowns the ambulance train's pitiful sounds.

TRANSIT SERGEANT

Make sure you have all of your kit. The train is leaving now! Sling your kitbags over your right shoulder and stand to attention.

The shuffling ceases momentarily as everyone stands to attention and the train lets out a great belch of steam as it slowly moves and clanks out of the station, revealing the ambulance train across the tracks.

TRANSIT SERGEANT (CONT'D)

By the front quick march! Left, right, left, right.

A lot of men have difficulty in getting into step as the corporals moved along the ranks correcting them; taking their mind off the ambulance train on the platform opposite. Much shouting.

CORPORALS

Eyes front! Eyes fucking front!

The column of men march proudly as the patriotic people of Chatham cheer them along their way to Brompton Barracks - the home of the Royal Engineers.

SUPER: THREE DAYS LATER - FRANCE

EXT. COASTAL RAILWAY STATION - FRANCE - DAY

On arrival at Le Havre, the troopship spews its cargo onto the dock where organised chaos is taking place with soldiers running to-and-fro as groups of men are shouted at and herded hither and thither to form up before boarding a train. Not any old train. No, this train was a long line of cattle trucks with wild eyed horses being dragged up ramps into the wagons.

The Royal Engineers contingent drift out of harm's way and gather in the shade of a long shed where they split into their small groups and immediately light up their ciggies, unsure of what happens next.

Johnny keeps his men close as they enjoy their cigarettes. Marching toward them, a CAPTAIN TWEEDY and SGT-MAJOR SCRAGG soon make their presence felt as the latter shouts.

SGT-MAJOR SCRAGG

Get those fags out and fall in!
Three ranks- Quickly! - Fucking
move! Get those rifles into the
shoulder and pick up your kitbags.
You are now on active service so
listen carefully to your commanding
officer, Captain Tweedy.

Captain Tweedy checked his watch and pointed to the cattle trucks just across the dock.

CAPTAIN TWEEDY

Sorry about the transport, but it's
that or marching... and I am not
marching anywhere.

Looking at the troopship he said.

CAPTAIN TWEEDY (CONT'D)

I hear some of you had a problem
with a cavalry officer onboard the
Queen Alexandra: Something about
being seasick all over his boots.
I must inform you now, should any
such nonsense occur from this
moment on, I will shoot you on the
spot - Now form into your sections
for the Roll Call.

The stamping of boots and 'Yes sir' is heard forty times and the following silence is disturbed by the scavenging seagulls and moans of newly arrived wounded being carried onto the *Queen Alexandra* for the journey home to England.

SGT-MAJOR SCRAGG

All present and correct, Sir.

CAPTAIN TWEEDY

Very good, Sergeant Major Scragg.
Please get them aboard the train
while I find the Quartermaster.

The men climb into the wagon as Sgt Major Scragg beckons Johnny to join him. The two men look into each other's eyes; neither of them intimidated by the other as they met alongside the train.

SGT-MAJOR SCRAGG

You are a sergeant in the Royal Engineers and you are going into battle with other Royal Engineers who have earned their stripes through due diligence and years of service. You and your men will get the shock of your lives when you leave this train and I expect you to control them and get them digging out of sight of every fucking officer on the front line. Discipline means everything to the officer class and men get shot for insubordination on the front line-- Savvy?

JOHNNY G

Savvy, Sgt Major Scragg. But I'm not their fucking keeper, I am--

SGT-MAJOR SCRAGG

Oh, yes you fucking are - and call me, "Sir" when you address me. You are their fucking God from now on and you'll need to be tougher here than at the coalface.

JOHNNY G

No disrespect, Sir, but what does thee know about down t' pit?

SGT-MAJOR SCRAGG

Not as much as thee, Sergeant, but in the pits you're about to go down: I know a darn sight more than thee so get back to your men and get some sleep. Hot grub and a tot o' rum are at the end of this line... then down t' pit you go.

The noises of horses and the clanking train seem to lull the men to sleep rather than prevent it.

Some of them lie awake as wagons are noisily uncoupled in the waning light of the late summer evening then fall asleep again as the train moves on.

Yiggs Bliss was looking up at the stars and elbowed Tat Tudor.

YIGGS

I've never seen so many shooting stars in one night, Tat, have you?

Tat grunted and rolled onto his back to look skyward.

TAT

Not sure if them's fuckin' stars mate. They ain't far enough away for my liking. But I wish they was.

The penny drops for Yiggs.

YIGGS

Fuckin' 'ell! Them's fuckin' artillery shells; how the fuck far are they goin'? Must be a dozen miles or more - Jeez, what the fuck 'ave we volunteered for?

The men look at each other, searching for that inkling of fear they all feel while hoping they have suppressed their own fear enough to be hidden from their comrades.

With these men testosterone needs to be stronger than adrenalin because this is the world of the warrior; whether they fight Germans or the coalface, they must win.

Eventually, the train stops and they all begin to stir and sit up. Realising that this is the end of the line, Johnny gave his first orders to his men.

The darkness seems to enhance the authority behind the voice as in the distance, exploding artillery shells light up the night sky.

JOHNNY G

Make sure you have all your kit and stay by me. No yapping or smoking till I say so.

The noise of scraping metal is heard as the side opening of the wagon drops open and Sgt Major Scragg beckons them out onto a railway sidings platform. He stage-whispers.

SGT-MAJOR SCRAGG

Be careful of the wounded on your way to that lorry over there.

The wounded men, lying on stretchers, cover practically every inch of the sprawling platform: hundreds of them; some silent, some moaning in pain.

Leading his men, Johnny deftly creeps through the lines of stretchers; his men close on his heels head for the lorry where a SGT BENNETT beckons them and greets them.

SGT BENNETT

Good to see new blood, lads.
Straight in t' lorry and mind you
don't do t' splits on th' old blood
on t' floor, and I be Sergeant
Bennett, your section commander.

JOHNNY G

That's my job, these are my men.

Sgt Bennett notices Johnny's three chevrons and follows the line of his arm up into the steel cut face where the blue eyes shine under the peak of his forage cap.

SGT BENNETT

(holding his hand out for
a shake)

My mistake matey. Joe Bennett, all
t' way from Widnes in Lancashire.

JOHNNY G

Johnny Gordon. We're all from
around Widnes, Bold Heath and
Sutton Manor. We were all down t'
pit four days ago; how long's thee
been here?

SGT BENNETT

Since start last year; I'm a
regular, done ten years - an'
here's thee with three stripes in
four days. Fuckin' hell, is thee
related t' King?

JOHNNY G

Aye, old King Coal, the merry old
soul - ONE day matey; not four, I
got fuckin' stripes on t' first
day. Stripes was on t' uniform
waitin' for me; Hellfire Jack
ordered--

SGT BENNETT

Hellfire fuckin' Jack? The brass is
shitting sandbags coz he's comin'
here tomorrow.

JOHNNY G

Brass; what's that?

SGT BENNETT

Fuckin' officers. You got some learnin' to do matey. Come'n see me if you're in a pickle; we're in t' same company. 174th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers, an' we're headin' for Albert, not far from here. Scraggy'll be in t' cab wi' me, y' see, I'm t' driver so try to get comfy. You've got hot grub and a tot o' rum waitin' for ye.

Sgt Major Scragg arrives and secures the tail-board with Joe Bennett's help. No words were exchanged and the two men went to the front of the lorry and climbed into the cab. A low crunching of gears and a jerky start and off they go to rear echelon HQ in the French town of Albert.

EXT/INT. SAPPERS BILLET - ALBERT - (FRANCE) - NIGHT

The men leave the lorry to follow Sgt Bennett through a heavy curtain and along a candle lit passageway into a large room where a long table upon which is laden Dixies, full of steaming meat stew and a tea urn behind which stands a burly corporal holding a heavy metal ladle.

Rows of metal cups are on a nearby table next to a pile of long loaves of bread, cut into large chunks.

CORPORAL#1

One piece of bread and two cups;
one for t' stew an' t' other for t'
tea an' rum, Look after t' cups,
they're yours, so keep 'em clean
an' don't lose 'em. Now line up in
front of me for t' stew an' tea.
Rum is your pudding after t' tea.

The men sit on wooden benches to eat off large tables. The men finish eating and they all look at the corporal.

CORPORAL#1 (CONT'D)

You don't think I'm putting on a
pinny [pinafore] an' fuckin'
servin' ye, do ye? Fuckin' get up
here an' finish the horse stew
afore I dish out the rum.

A moment of silence then a chorus of, 'Fucking horse!'

CORPORAL#1 (CONT'D)

Aye, fuckin' 'orse, What the fuck
do you expect-prime fuckin' beef?
It be fresh meat from yonder
battlefield. Hundreds of 'em get
killed every day so we eat 'em...

(MORE)

CORPORAL#1 (CONT'D)

Ye didnae think we fuckin' bury 'em
did ye?

SOLLY

First time I've ate horse. It wuz
better'n some butchers' meat I've
tasted.

YIGGS

That don't surprise me, Liverpool
butchers chop up dogs 'n fuckin'
cats 'n fuck knows what else.

SOLLY

How the fuck does thee know owt
about Liverpool? You've never been
there you fuckin' woolyback.

YIGGS

No, but I've met enough fuckin'
scousers to know. Yers are like a
fuckin' rash; yers get everywhere.

Sgt Bennett arrives all brash and serious.

SGT BENNETT

Right boys, grab your rifles and
your cups - leave your kit, it is
safe here. We're goin' down t' pit
an' it's a long walk t' front. Do
not stand upright till we reach
tunnels - Bosche snipers are
experts at head shots.

EXT. THE BATTLEFIELD - NIGHT

The night sky is lit up with flashes and bangs as artillery
shells pass each other on their way to their various German
and British targets.

Sgt Bennett leads the men along a path which soon turns into
a slutchy slope and becomes duck-boarded trenches zigzagging
through the French countryside toward the front line.

The going is slow and precarious as the Sappers squeeze past
infantrymen manning trenches.

They arrive at a place where the trench runs deeper and forms
a junction with another trench that runs underground.

SGT BENNETT

This is a Russian sap. It's a concealed communication trench for the movement of men and equipment that Jerry can't see, so no bugger gets killed in here... unless a shell hits it.

JOHNNY G

Where's it going?

SGT BENNETT

T' front line and t'other tunnels. This is Lochnagar Street where we have several tunnels on the go; we've been diggin' 'ere for months now and so has Jerry, but he doesn't know about our tunnels. Y'see, we work silently on t' cross.

JOHNNY G

On t' fuckin' cross... what the fuck's that?

SGT BENNETT

Yers'll see in a minute when we gets t' face... an' remember, no fuckin' talkin' an' no fuckin' noise. Jerry don't know we're 'ere an' its gotta stay that way - savvy?

They all nod in enthusiastic agreement and move on until they reach another timber clad entrance with a narrow gauge railway line running out of it and along Lochnagar Street into the murky darkness ahead.

Sgt Bennett halts the Sappers as a rubble laden trolley, pushed by a Chinese labourer emerges from the tunnel and quietly trundles away out of sight along Lochnagar Street as he whispers.

SGT BENNETT (CONT'D)

Chinks get rid t' spoil so don't get in t' way an' never speak to 'em.

Following the railway lines down a gentle slope they arrive at the shaft-head chamber and see they need to climb down a ladder trussed to the top rim of tubbing, which is a circular section of steel cladding going vertically down into the earth, each section bolted to each other descending to 90 feet.

Above them is a robust rig of lifting gear to haul up the trollies of spoil: it sits motionless during shift changes.

Any other time, it would be a hive of silent activity lowering empty trollies and lifting full ones out of the tunnel. This arduous work is done by Chinese coolies, not by soldiers.

Johnny goes first and mounts the rim by grabbing the ladder and stepping on the box step and pulls himself up to stand on the rim. Before descending, he looks at his men and purses his lips, touching them with his forefinger. 'Shhh,' and disappears down the shaft.

Climbing down this dark hole would be challenging for most men but for miners this was just another route to get to work.

At the bottom of the shaft they arrive at a large area cut out of the clay where stacks of timber and railway lines are stored along with the paraphernalia of mining. Johnny gathers his men and waits for the last man down: Sgt Joe Bennett.

Sgt Bennett beckons the men forward to where the tools lie on the clay floor in front of the face to be dug. Grabbing a cross shaped piece of timber, he places it so it connects at the roof with the roof timbers. He then grabbed a spade and with his back on the cross, demonstrated silent digging by shoving the spade with his feet using the cross shaped timber as the backrest.

Demonstration over, Sgt Bennett gets off the cross and passes the spade to Solly who deftly mounts the cross and starts his first cut into French soil.

Throughout the night the men work hard, like miners do and there are no thanks for their effort apart from the brews and hot soup provided by WO2 JIMMY CONNER, the Quartermaster of the Tunnelling Company.

The shift ended with the arrival of Hellfire Jack who beckons Sgt Gordon away from his men.

HELLFIRE JACK

Right, listen, Sgt Gordon. When you leave the shaft, you will see terrible things on your journey through what I can only describe as a bloody battlefield. Going back to your billet you will see many wounded and dead soldiers. You will also be a target for Jerry snipers, so keep your heads down and never try to see what is going on outside any of the trenches you are about to go through.

Joining his men at the shaft he imparts Hellfire Jack's message and taps his helmet.

JOHNNY G

Tin hats stay on heads till I says
otherwise and stick close to each
other and no fuckin' talking.
C'mon, lets get out of here.

On the way out, they meet the relief shift coming in. Lots of grins and nods of unsure recognition, but total silence.

A sentry steps aside to allow them into Lochnagar Street, the shallow tunnel leading to the trenches and battlefields of France.

Trudging through Lochnagar Street the sounds of exploding shells seem far away, but then, as they approach the open trenches the chatter of machine gun fire got louder and louder and the whizz-bang noise of overhead shelling created the sensation of a banging tambourine inside their heads.

Lochnagar Street ends at right angles to the trench and in the mouth of the tunnel lay several bodies laid with just enough room to walk through into daylight between the bodies. Some of them were headless while others were mangled flesh and tunic, totally unrecognisable.

Johnny steps into the river of blood on the tunnel floor before stepping out into daylight. The men follow him, stunned into silence by the sight and sounds of trench warfare.

Johnny looks back at his men who are all crouching in the trench.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Stay close. And don't fuckin' stop
for ought-even if you're fuckin'
shot: keep moving.

The going is really rough now with having to scramble over collapsed trench walls where the rubble lay on the wooden duck boards with dead soldiers' protruding limbs stuck out grotesquely and bloody dead faces gaze up as they stride over them.

EXT/INT. SAPPERS BILLET - ALBERT - (FRANCE) - DAY

Johnny and his men arrive at their billet on the outskirts of a village, which suffered much shelling but was still usable as billets for soldiers.

The men drag their feet across the courtyard and into the canteen where their kit was still perched on the wooden benches where they were left last night.

After a hot breakfast they settled down to sleep in the cellar below the canteen.

Johnny G was sipping his tea as Hellfire Jack arrived with fresh orders.

HELLFIRE JACK

Sgt Gordon, you and your men are to be attached to The Kings Liverpool Regiment further up the line. I take it that you and your men are familiar with explosives, especially working in a colliery?

JOHNNY G

Aye, sir. We have plenty of experiences with explosives.

HELLFIRE JACK

Good. You will support the infantry as best you can and be aware; the infantry officer relies on discipline so warn your men to be careful with attitude - or they will be shot.

EXT. THE WESTERN FRONT - TRONES WOOD - (FRANCE) - NIGHT

The eyes are saucer-like, bright, like an owl's. Peering from beneath the steel rim of his helmet. The terror can be seen in the flash of an exploding shell further along the trench.

SUPER: ONE YEAR LATER ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

Mud and debris rain down on him. An arm and shoulder, attached to a head land in front of him. Sgt. Johnny Gordon, says,

JOHNNY G

Hello Billy. I'll write to yer mam if I get out alive... If...

His face looks as though it has been hewn out of the ground with damp earth clinging to parts of his helmet and tunic.

The brooding eyes now look dark under the steel rim as he scans the broken ground in front of the trench. In the silence of the moment a snarl creases his hard face.

A large rat, and then another, try to drag the severed arm away to their hidden nest. No doubt they have young to feed.

As if in slow motion, the barrel of a Webley pistol appears alongside his right eye. Ever so cautiously it lines up on Billy's remains. His eyes glitter with rage as he fires.

He drops to his knee on the firestep as the parapet of sandbags disintegrate under withering machine-gun and sniper fire... Fucking hell!

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

So much for softening up before we go over the top. Our long range snipers are dropping short... That was Billy Nolan blown to pieces.

(he crosses himself)

Great Lord, take Billy to life everlasting. Amen.

Dirty faces appear in the darkness like ghostly apparitions. They've been there all the time, waiting... waiting... for the dreaded whistle that sends them all to hell.

Johnny G looks at the expression of absolute trust and self-surrender visible in the faces of his men... His men.

Brummie, shifts his weight to his other leg, nudging Allballs, who is feeling crusty right now.

The regional accents of these men are sometimes difficult to understand. Nevertheless, a joy to hear the rich English words of the early 20th Century.

ALLBALLS

Fuck off, Brummie, lean on some fucker else... Hey, Sarge, can thee get the artillery to kill the fuckin' Germans instead of us?

The north country dialect is strong; an unshakable mix of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic stock from which most of these men were born with a God-like resistance to fear.

Johnny G pokes a small thin man with his pistol. Andy looks up at Johnny G.

JOHNNY G

Go tell the signaller to tell the drop-shorts to put their fuckin' shells into the trees to our front.

ANDY

Okay, Sarge, but what about the officers?

JOHNNY G

Don't tell 'em - just tell the fuckin' sigs man... I said.

(MORE)

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Now fuck off and keep yer fuckin'
head down... Allballs, you go with
him, one of you should get through.

The two soldiers disappear along the trench as more shells
rain down in no-mans-land right in front of their trench.

The exploding shells create a tangible disrupting energy felt
by the men through the earth and in the air. Loose items flap
or careen into the sky. Grim faces press into trench walls.

The maelstrom flings dead men high and stinking human remains
fall into the trench and onto the men... A daily occurrence.

Solly heaves a leg out of the trench and grabs a helmeted
head. Ripping off the fancy spiked German helmet from the
bloody head he roars in his broad Scouse accent...

SOLLY

At last! Got me fuckin' souvenir
an' didn't have to shoot the
bastard to get it. Fuck off, Fritz.

The rotting head sails over the top into no-mans-land.

BRUMMIE

That head musta been there for over
a week; there wasn't any skin on
it. My nasal hair has fell out with
the fuckin' stink.

In the darkness a deep Scot's voice belonging to Kinney,
booms along the trench.

KINNEY

Aye, an' yea'd best chuck the other
bits oot afore the fuckin' flies
congregate on us. Fuckin' dysentery
an' aw kindsa shit diseases are--

BRUMMIE

--Up yer fuckin' kilt, Kinney. Its
bad enough with the krauts an' rats
without you wittering on about
fuckin' flies.

A lull in the barrage provides a moment of silence.

JOHNNY G

If that dopey bastard officer blows
his whistle now - we all die... The
fuckin' krauts will hear it and cut
us to fuckin' pieces.

The silence is hurting with ears ringing from the previous
blasts. Faces pressed against the trench walls move and are
now etched with acute trepidation. Eyes glitter with alarm.

Johnny G looks along the trench... taut - eyes straining...

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Where are those two fuckers? They should be back by now. The fuckin' sigs man is along the trench - not in fuckin' Paris.

BRUMMIE

They musta got through to the sigs bloke, Sarge. I bet they're re-siting the guns into the woods yonder and--

The silence is broken by the overhead whining of incoming artillery shells and the ground shakes with the impacting explosives. Johnny G looks cautiously over the top.

JOHNNY G

Gimme yer fuckin' tin hat, Brummie.

He takes the helmet and puts it on a bayonet and raises it above the parapet for the snipers to shoot.

As though death has lost its meaning he snatches a quick look across no-mans-land at the German positions.

Nothing, only indescribable noise as the trees hiding the Germans are blasted with high explosives and shrapnel shells.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Thank fuck for that. Trones Wood will be firewood by the morning.

A figure looms up out of the murky cordite fumes wearing an officers peak cap of the Kings Liverpool Regiment.

The men start to get up to attention for Capt. David Davidson, (25), DAFFY, is what they call him behind his back.

DAFFY

(patrician accent)

As you where, men. Stay down.

Johnny G steps down from the trench observation steps and the two men eyeball each other. No love lost here.

DAFFY (CONT'D)

Sergeant Gordon, I know you are Royal Engineers on detachment to ME, which means you obey MY orders.
(looking around him now at the grim faces of battle hardened men)
So why are you so far away from the Battalion lines? I risk my damned neck each time I need you.

It seems like the words hang in the air for a moment.

JOHNNY G

How many men have you lost in this
barrage, Sir?

He sees Allballs and Andy returning, out of breath.

DAFFY

Too many. Why do you ask?

JOHNNY G

Because I have only lost one man
since this battle started last week
and he was killed by our own
artillery five minutes ago. I don't
trust our artillery gunners so I
keep my men on the left flank, the
fringe of the gunners barrage. That
way we don't suffer from drop
shorts - You, on the other hand sit
directly in the line of fire...
You've had drop shorts, haven't
you?

Daffy lifts his hat and wipes grime and sweat from his brow.

DAFFY

That is why I've come for you. The
HQ dugout has been hit and has
fallen in, burying men and
battalion ammo, which includes your
high explosives... So get your men
and follow me. Spades are on site.

The look on Johnny G's face is enough to galvanize his men
into action - Lets show the fucking cannon fodder how the
Royal Engineers win fucking wars.

IN THE TRENCH - TRACKING

The men move surprisingly fast in such confined spaces as
they leave Daffy to keep up the rear.

The terrible noise of artillery shells exploding amongst the
trees just eighty yards away seems to urge the men on.

They turn the first corner of the captured zigzag designed
trench, which traverse in different directions and jump over
the dead bodies of German soldiers, half covered with the
dirt of collapsed earth walls of the trench.

Corner after stumbling corner takes away their breath but
there's no slowing down of these hardened warriors.

The trench gets deeper where the HQ area begins and the men race past snipers who are standing on firesteps (ledges) cut into the wall; their shooting is drowned by the artillery barrage.

Up ahead they see the bloody scene of collapsed walls fallen into the dugout; a huge crater, burying men and equipment; body parts are all over the show - heads - legs - guts...

Breathless, the men grab spades and picks to join the rescue diggers, some of whom are wounded but digging nonetheless.

Johnny G looks at his men take to the task of pulling live and dead bodies from the pile of earth. He notices a small gap where the rubble meets the trench wall. The penny drops.

JOHNNY G
(shouts loudly)
Clear the trench - get out of here.

Daffy, the officer, grabs his arm and pulls him around.

DAFFY
What the hell do you think you're
doing sergeant? Get them digging!

Johnny G grabs Daffy's sleeve and pulls him forward.

JOHNNY G
See that - see fucking that. That
is the chamber where the bastards
tunnelled... where the explosives
were planted, right under our
fucking feet. This is not a drop
short, its a fucking tunnel mine,
there'll be more than one so spread
your men out to lessen casualties.

DAFFY
What are you going to do?

JOHNNY G
The same to them... C'mon, you lot,
get those fuckin' explosives, we'll
give 'em a fuckin' surprise.

DAFFY
You're going to open their tunnel?

JOHNNY G
They won't be expecting us at their
end. They'll have closed it off
because of the blast.

DAFFY
You reap what you sow, Sergeant.

JOHNNY G

Aye, Sir, an' I'm the fuckin'
reaper.

The men dig like the experienced coal miners they all are.

The tunnel is soon exposed and the explosives are passed down into it where Johnny G expertly makes up the initiation sets for the enormous underground bomb.

All set, his men are ready to move along the tunnel.

IN THE TUNNEL - TRACKING

Everything prepared, they set off along the dark tunnel. Johnny G leads the way shining his torch whilst holding out a length of wire to locate trip wire booby traps to his front.

The men are in pairs, bent double carrying the explosives: Ammonal in 50 lb. tins.

Bent double because of the height of the tunnel roof, the men sweat profusely as they stumble along in the darkness, but not a sound do they make.

It is certain death if they are heard by the enemy, who right now are being blasted by the British artillery.

But still no chances are taken as Johnny G leads his men cautiously along the narrow tunnel. The impacting shells cause the earth to tremble beneath their feet.

It gets worse as they near the German lines. The dull thump of exploding ordnance shows concern on each hard face as the eyes glitter in trepidation.

They know to a man that one exploding shell above them will bring down the roof and crush them to death. Its in the eyes.

The earth tremors and the noise increases as the ground rises toward the opening shaft, where Johnny G knows the Germans are sheltering on the other side of the blocked tunnel.

Soundlessly, the men place their tins of Ammonal in a stack in order for the greatest energy release on detonation.

In pairs, the men return silently whence they came. Into the murky light of the trench they crawl into the welcoming outstretched hands of their corporal, back from sick leave.

IN THE TRENCH

Royal Engineers corporal, Taff.

TAFF

Come on boys, I've got a brew on
over yere. Hot 'n sweet it be too.
(MORE)

TAFF (CONT'D)

(the baritone welsh accent
is music to the men)

Save some for me and my lovely
sergeant or I'll piss in the next
brew.

The mens' spirits are lifted by the return of their corporal and relieved to be out of the suffocating tunnel.

IN THE TUNNEL

Taff disappears down the hole to find Johnny G uncoiling the det-cord. Johnny G grunts appreciatively at the sight of Taff. These men love each other for what they are - warriors.

JOHNNY G

What the fuck are ye doing here?
You got a Blighty, a fucking head
wound. You should be in that Welsh
fucking pit digging coal.

TAFF

Now then boyo, the coal can wait
till we kick out the Hun. Besides,
it was only a twenty stitches job
between my temple and my ear.

He raises his helmet and in the poor light Johnny G can see the livid fresh scar running around his head.

JOHNNY G

Shoulda put a bolt in your neck,
you look like Frankenstein's
fuckin' monster.

TAFF

I didn't know you could read - now
I know where your sense of humour
comes from... Frankenstein.

Greeting ceremony over, they get down to the business of killing Germans.

IN THE TRENCH

The officer, Daffy, scrambles over the rubble looking a bit nervous as Johnny G cuts fuzes.

DAFFY

Sergeant Gordon, we go over the top
when the barrage ends... soon.

JOHNNY G

That's great news, Sir. You lot go
over the top and we'll go under the
top... through there. And I would
like to take a grenade team of your
men with me.

Captain Davidson is taken aback and splutters...

DAFFY

I - I - I've never done that
before... my men? My bloody men?
Who do you think you are? You
bloody rag-tag bunch of Diddycoys.

Johnny G absorbs the venom, staring back without expression.

There is no emotion on his face but there is ice in his soul for inexperienced toffs responsible for large numbers of casualties such as this dubious twit.

JOHNNY G

Me and my men have been in action
for nearly two years - We've done
it loads of times. You've just
started here last week and thousand
of you are dead already. So listen
if you value your men.

DAFFY

(grudgingly)
What do you want to do?

JOHNNY G

When the barrage lifts I will blow
the Germans out of their trench,
which is directly opposite us here.
They have machine-guns aimed right
at us and the moment you blow your
whistle they'll start firing. Don't
blow your whistle until my bomb
goes off and count to twenty...
then blow it.

The officer, Daffy, is now even more nervous.

DAFFY

My orders are to go over the top
when the last shell drops in...
(checks his watch)
Fifteen minutes.

JOHNNY G

Twenty seconds isn't going to hurt
anybody, but if you don't do it,
many more of your men will die. My
men and your grenade team will kill
the machine gunners before they
kill all of you. Think about it.

Captain Davidson nods and scrambles back over the rubble and dead men, narrowly being missed by sniper fire.

KINNEY

See that, Sarge, they fuckin' snipers are firing with shells fallin' all around 'em... An' I bet that Toff blows 'is whistle afore our bomb goes off.

SOLLY

What do you expect, Kinney? He's a fuckin' infantry officer, his whistle is more important to him than the men who he thinks are urchins from some shitty Liverpool back street.

YIGGS

If he had a brain he'd be fuckin' dangerous. We've seen enough of them to know he won't be around much longer.

ALLBALLS

Sithee, if yon's brain was made of gunpowder he wouldn't have enough to blow his hat off. See how he holds his head, like he's got shit on his upper lip.

Johnny and Taff smile as the banter rolls on. Taff says...

TAFF

Either make a brew or get some kip.

KINNEY

Och aye, yers all talk shite anyway... I'm fer a brew. C'mon Andy, get the kettle on.

ANDY

Get it your fuckin' self. I'm akip.

The men rest with their backs to the slant of the crater, not quite horizontal but not vertical either.

Sliding to the bottom of the crater is prevented by exposed timbers protruding from the ground and the heap of corpses not yet removed. Sniper fire prevents this dreadful task.

The sounds of snoring emanate from the crater as infantrymen look on in amazement as the noise of the battlefield keeps them on their toes as they watch the sleeping Sappers.

The Sappers are totally desensitized to the relentless loss of life in this war. Sleeping on the hoof is second nature to the Sappers.

Constantly in the presence of death and destruction, their cavalier attitude is just another shield against insanity.

With the stoic of a pit-pony, each man sleeps, except for Johnny G, who looks over them with shaded eyes, knowing one shout will get a hair-trigger reaction from his men.

The first blush of the morning, the light before dawn is creeping across no-mans-land. Ten men scramble into the crater at the tunnel entrance. They carry sacks of grenades and rifles.

The infantry CORPORAL#1, looks bewildered and asks Johnny G...

CORPORAL#1

Where are the rest of the men?

JOHNNY G

Yer fuckin' standin' on 'em.

The corporal looks down to see a dead hand by his boot.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Right, you lot. Give each of my men two of your grenades. When we break through, you lot go to the right and we go left. Get the machine-guns first, your mates will be killed if you don't... savvy?

The men pull out grenades and hand them around to the Sappers, who immediately check pins and fuzes.

Their alacrity with anything explosive always impresses young soldiers as grenades are stripped and checked.

Johnny G checks his watch and starts counting down from ten. Then, an ear jangling silence - Johnny hits the plunger and blows the charge.

A terrific blast of noise and debris comes flying out of the tunnel. Like rats up a spout, the men disappear into--

THE TUNNEL

In the black hole they are bent double as they charge through.

The journey through the tunnel is hell for the infantrymen. The Sappers are used to this and knowing what to expect, they carry spades and picks to deal with the debris.

The cordite fumes hang thick and the infantrymen are coughing their guts up as the Sappers gee them up as they stumble on.

The explosion has blown a massive crater and the light of dawn provides a feeling of relief and fear as the Sappers tear into the remaining blockage with spades and picks.

EXT. THE TRENCH JUNCTION - TRÓNES WOOD - DAY

Johnny G squirms through the hole and scans up and down the trench. The new light of dawn provides a beautiful clear sky as Johnny gulps the fresher air of the French countryside.

IN THE TRENCH

Mutilated soldiers are littered all around. Two stunned snipers with telescoped rifles try to bring their weapons to bear on Johnny G. He kills both of them with his pistol.

This part of Trones Wood is now treeless but the German machine-guns are firing into the advancing British infantrymen from heavily fortified bunkers.

The infantrymen curse and scream as they trip over the wire entanglements of no-mans-land.

JOHNNY G

Fuckin' move - move - get yer
fuckin' grenades into the fuckin'
machine-guns - move - move...

The men scurry out of the tunnel like a plague of rats. The Sappers go left and the grunts go right - absolute chaos as they find their bearings and seek out their targets.

EXT. NO-MANS-LAND - TRONES WOOD AREA - DAY

The early morning sun of the French high summer, shines on the carnage below as British soldiers, entangled on the barbed wire of the battlefield die in droves as the Germans--

IN TRONES WOOD

--sweep the crater riven ground with machine-gun fire.

The first line of trenches on the outskirts of the wood are now exposed because of the bombardment, which now begins again with a 'creeping barrage' starting at the tree line.

The grenade team and the Sappers have cleared the first German trench, and what is left of the first wave of infantrymen fall breathlessly into--

THE TRENCH

--where the officer, Daffy, survives the awful charge across no-mans-land and crouches amongst dead men, teeth chattering on a warm summer morning, frightened out of his wits.

He tries to stand as Johnny G puts his hand on his shoulder.

JOHNNY G

Stay down, Sir. Take deep breaths,
in through your nose and out
through your mouth... deep, deep.

The noise of the creeping barrage eases slightly as its curtain of fire moves further into the wood.

The men are on the firestep awaiting the order to advance. They all know the score - follow the creeping barrage to the next line of trenches. Johnny removes his hand...

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Time to go, Sir.

Daffy pulls out his whistle and Johnny G yanks it off him.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

You don't need that fuckin' thing.
Just fuckin' go. I'm right behind
you and so are your men.

Over the top they go and scores of infantrymen follow.

The creeping barrage is supposed to have destroyed the German barbed wire but most of it is still intact as the men become entangled. Looking like they're treading grapes as they die.

JOHNNY G's P.O.V. IN NO-MANS-LAND

Explosions, splintering trees and Germans flying high into the air. Machine-gun posts still firing from heavily fortified dugouts. Men falling into shell craters.

A dead man entangled across barbed wire provides his stepping stone across it.

Head first into a shell crater - fuckin' hell - scrambles to the rim - Daffy alongside - eyes like ping-pong balls.

Trench is twenty yards away. Pulls pins on two grenades - Daffy's eyes go wider - first grenade in the air - second grenade now airborne - other men copy - its raining grenades.

Coal-scuttle helmets - Webley pistol firing at them - Into the trench shooting with one hand, stabbing with the other.

The hand-held bayonet slices into the windpipe of the screaming German, the light of life dies in his terrified eyes as the steel is yanked out and Johnny G takes stock.

Hand to hand fighting increases blood lust in the superior force of the attackers as they shoot, slash and hack their way along the trench.

Grey clad Germans lie all around; their human flesh turned to bloody pulp by the artillery shells, which are still crashing down further into the trees.

No neat little holes in tunics here; just blood, guts, heads, limbs and heart-wrenching screams of wounded soldiers.

Johnny G steps up to the fire-step. Enemy fire is now sporadic but he takes no chances as he taps a helmet with his bayonet and the soldier hands it to him.

Johnny raises the helmet on his bayonet up over the parapet and cautiously peeps out across into the remaining trees.

JOHNNY G's P.O.V. - THE WOODS

are being pulverized by artillery shells. A machine-gun is firing from a heavily fortified dugout and further along, another bunker hides more machine gunners.

His men, the Sappers, are all in the trench, busy filling rifle magazines. Despite the chaos, there is a feeling of huge energy and vigor.

Further along the trench the infantrymen are in a state of shock and despair.

The infantrymen, who are mainly inexperienced youngsters from various Lancashire towns, copy the Sappers and prepare for the next charge across no-mans-land into the petrified wood.

Johnny finds Daffy, the officer, white faced, leaning against the trench wall. Judging by the look on Johnny's face he's seen this many times in the past two years.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Good show, Sir. You led your men with panache. Now we must hold the line here... as you well know, so--

DAFFY

--What do you want, Sergeant?

The cursory tone is nothing to Johnny G. He barely looks up from his open ciggy packet as he puts one in his mouth and lights it.

Their eyes meet through the smoke. Daffy breaks the stare and looks up as a shell explodes nearby.

Johnny G hardly looks at Daffy, but the tension between them right now is palpable. Johnny offers a ciggie but Daffy declines...

JOHNNY G

These trenches have been here for months, so there must be communication trenches between here and the enemy in the woods.

(MORE)

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Me and my men will go left and I'm asking you to send some of your men to the right so we're not taken by a surprise counter attack.

Daffy braces up; straightens his tunic, checks his Webley pistol and looks along the trench where his men are busy charging magazines.

Some of them have the thousand yard stare, the precursor to shell-shock.

They are not talking to each other because they don't know what to say. Look at them; charged with adrenalin and fear, they are dumbstruck. Novices to the battlefield - Teenagers.

He looks back into the hard eyes of Johnny G; knowing he is being judged, he smothers the flicker of uncertainty. Johnny smiles knowingly.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Keep 'em busy, Sir. Takes their minds off what they've just done.

DAFFY

Very good, sergeant. Report back to me in twenty minutes please.

Corporal Taff sees Johnny G about turn and knows what's next.

TAFF

Right, boyo's, move out and remember... don't pick up any souvenirs... and don't bunch up.

The Sappers grab their kit and tactically move along the trench; Corporal Taff leading, Johnny G at the rear.

Dead men in grey tunics litter the trench and are trodden on, first by Taff and then by the others.

Johnny G glances back at Daffy's men; his hard eyes soften momentarily, then back to flintiness... Just in time to shoot a (dead) body as it fumbles with a grenade.

Johnny G grabs the grenade and throws it over the top into no-mans-land... 'Crump' he could hardly hear it over the din of the shells exploding in Trones Wood.

Following his men along the zigzag trench, Johnny smirks at the aids to comfort cut into the walls of the long standing trench; long shelves for sleeping on, places for books and even photo's of family groups.

The men ahead halt and Johnny clammers past them to reach Taff who holds his left arm out stiffly to prevent further advance. He is at a junction in the trench.

This is a communication trench running at right angles to the one they're in. It leads into Trones Wood.

He quickly holds out his helmet with a bayonet.

A sniper bullet ricochets off it. Johnny G hands him a German helmet and mimes to do it again... slowly.

The helmet slowly goes into the view of the sniper and is slowly brought back unharmed.

JOHNNY G

That confused the bastard - now put
the other one back out.

Taff drops the German helmet and holds out his own again.

Nothing... nothing. Taff slowly withdraws the helmet.

TAFF

Yere's a crafty boyo or he's legged
it into the woods.

Johnny G looks quickly about and amongst the dead is a slim young German. The mens' eyes follow his and immediately, Andy and Kinney scramble over and lift it up - they've done this before.

Taff shoves his helmet onto the dead man and they lean him out into view. The head is torn apart in the fusillade of bullets crashing through the trench.

They let the body drop into full view and the shooting ceases as the field grey uniform is exposed to the enemy.

JOHNNY G

Solly, Brummie, get back to the
Sigs bloke and tell him to bring
back the drop-shorts to the western
edge of Phase two - drop a marker
first. When you've done that, see
what Daffy is up to.

The two Sappers scamper off back along the trench.

The others relax as Johnny G sits on the firing step and lights up a ciggie.

ALLBALLS

Sithee, Sarge, can we open our
letters from home now? I haven't
had chance to read mine yet and wi'
what's happening around here, I may
never get to read it.

JOHNNY G

It's raining fuckin' artillery
shells and you want to read?
(MORE)

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

(he pulls an unopened
letter from his own tunic
pocket)

Yeah, good idea; think about home
in all this shit.

They all laugh at the ridiculousness of it all. The gallows
humour continues as Kinney pulls out French francs from his
letter.

ANDY

Aw, Kinney, last time you had frog
money you went sick with a drippy
dick.

KINNEY

She said she needed the money for
her wee ones. How was I to know she
was on the game?

TAFF

She speak English then boyo?

ANDY

She did'na say oot, she was dead;
she must have been to take him on.
Look at him; fucking UGLY dis'na do
him justice.

Johnny G looks at his men with hidden pride. They never fail
to impress him. Each of them read letters from home as he
reads their faces, each in turn brings him joy. Warriors.

Johnny G carefully opens his letter and pulls out a single
sheet. A glimpse of the spidery writing - "*Darling Johnny,*"

His face drains of colour, his men look at each other
concerned. He reads it again. The men look on expectantly.

TAFF

Bad news, Boyo?

He looks about him to see his men looking at him. He seems to
be somewhere else, not here in this maelstrom of exploding
shells and mutilated bodies, which now comes back to reality.

JOHNNY G

Its, er, from my wife, er... I have
a son... Johnny, born last week...

The men react instantly with back slapping and joyful
congratulations but there is still a shadow of consternation
on his face. They all feel a bit uncomfortable now.

TAFF

How's your wife, Boyo, she okay?

He seems to snap out of it now and smiles at them.

JOHNNY G

Yeah, she's fine, Taff... I didn't know she was pregnant. She kept it from me because of what's going on here in France... Didn't want me to worry... wants me to come home all in one piece. It must have happened on that short leave we had last year.

Solly and Brummie return along the trench running hard, out of breath.

TAFF

You two being chased?

Solly puts his weapon down and gulps for breath.

SOLLY

The marker... gotta see the marker. Should be here any second... here it comes.

A high pitched whining heralds the incoming shell. A terrific explosion along the connecting trench excites the men.

JOHNNY G

Gotta be a direct hit...

Brummie runs like hell back along the trench.

YIGGS

(jittery)
What's up wi' 'im?

SOLLY

Off to tell the sigs man a direct hit. It'll rain shells in a minute just over there - that right, Sarge?

An expression of doubt crosses Johnny's face as he moves the men back along the trench... He brings up the rear.

JOHNNY G

Yeah, c'mon, move back in case there's a drop short - Fuckin' move! RUN!

They quicken their pace as they hear the incoming whine and then the deafening roar of exploding shells amongst the enemy just across the way.

A single shell lands right where they were just standing, completely destroying the junction of the trenches and knocking them all down as they run.

In a stunning silence the men pick themselves up and shake off the dirt as they check for casualties. Very slowly, the noise of battle returns; as does Brummie.

Johnny G crosses himself as he gets up; blood running down his neck along with grit and soil trapped under his helmet.

Brummie scrambles past his pals to reach Johnny who is dusting himself down and about to remove his helmet.

BRUMMIE

(panting)

Quick, Sarge, it looks like Jerry has counter-attacked through communication trenches along the line. Daffy sent for you, so--

JOHNNY G

--Sent for fuckin' me? He shoulda sent for fuckin' drop shorts.

(he looks at his men -
picks out Solly)

Go tell the Sigs man tell artillery to drop a cluster at the eastern end of Phase two - no markers; just a cluster. Then tell Daffy we're attacking Jerry in the Phase two trench. C'mon, boys, back to work.

Throwing caution to the wind, Johnny charges back along to the cratered junction and scrambles across into the enemy communication trench, which is still hung with cordite fumes.

With the men close on his heels he reaches the junction with the main trench, which is totally unrecognizable with body parts strewn across the craters - the detritus of shelling.

The creeping barrage continues further into the woods, leaving destruction in its wake. Along the trench can be heard shouting and the chattering noise of a fire-fight.

Johnny halts his men and signals to be quiet. They listen.

The creeping barrage stops... wait - wait... then it happens.

The familiar whine of incoming shells fills the air as the requested cluster is delivered right on cue into the grey clad enemy along the trench.

A few seconds and the creeping barrage continues again into Trones Wood, leaving behind the horrors of trench warfare.

The group of Sappers led by Johnny G, skirmish along the trench, dispatching the odd grey clad body that moves.

A couple of well placed snipers were busy killing Daffy's men along the communication trench. Johnny threw a grenade into the nearest hide and killed two men... One more hide to go.

Johnny's fieldcraft is second to none as he moves over disrupted earth toward the hide. Nearly there - near enough to chuck a grenade - crawling like a lizard - he stops...

A furrow of earth confronts him. To crawl over this ridge will expose him to the enemy in the woods - fuckin' hell.

I/E. FORTIFIED BUNKER - TRONES WOOD - DAY

A grey clad machine-gunner points to where he saw a movement in no-mans-land. His loader urges him to keep shooting at Daffy's men in the communication trench.

The machine-gunner keeps stopping to look at the ridge of earth hiding Johnny G. Just in case, he fires a burst at the ridge in--

NO-MANS-LAND

--Johnny is about to slither over the ridge when he hears a "baby cry". Puzzled, he remains still as the top of the ridge disintegrates with machine-gun fire - fuckin' hell!

Motionless, apart from the expressions of disbelief and absurdity crossing his dirty face; he waits for his men to deal with the fortified bunker... But everything's changed.

Rattled to the core, his brain is in overdrive as he tries to come to grips with what just happened. He begins to mutter...

JOHNNY G

Did Lord Jesus make that happen?
Did He use my new son to warn me?
Great Lord of the Universe, I thank
thee for saving my life. You must
have a special task for me as many
thousands of men have perished on
these poppy fields of France... So
why me?

He pulls out his crucifix from around his neck and kisses it.

EXT. COMMUNICATION TRENCH - CAPT. DAVIDSON'S POSITION - DAY

Pinned down by enemy machine-gun fire, the infantrymen can only shield themselves as best they can. Men are using dead bodies as cover from the withering fire from their front.

The zigzag design of the trench provides some cover but the fire power aimed at Daffy's men takes its toll as Daffy tries to think his way out of the situation.

Love of England is a strong emotion but fear is bearing down on him in the shape of German machine-gun bullets... despair.

Panic is shaping his face; he looks about him like a lost soul, he looks back along the route of retreat, which is as risky as advancing... his men lie dead - where is Sgt Gordon?

He looks at the Webley pistol shaking in his hand; a crouching grunt opposite jerks his thumb backwards, he shouts but can't be heard over the din of explosions.

INFANTRYMAN #1

(screaming)

Go back! Fuckin' retreat!

(the sudden silence seems
to amplify the shouting)

Go back, go fuckin'--

(silence)

--back... Fuckin' hell, sir.

They've fuckin' stopped... What the
fu--

DAFFY

(suicidal gaze)

Charge! Forward men!

Daffy stuffs his whistle in his mouth and blows for all he's worth - stumbling forward, clambering over the dead. He trips, falls flat on his face in the blood and muck.

The headlong rush of men trample him in the confined space of the trench floor. A passing boot kicks the back of his head knocking him unconscious.

Minutes later he feels rough hands lifting him.

Sgt Johnny Gordon helps him up and shoves him to the side of the trench where Taff and Brummie support him.

JOHNNY G

Yer alright now sir. Bloody good show, your men have secured the forward trench and are standing by waiting for you.

(patting him down -
checking for wounds)

Some of the men think you've been shot but you look all in one piece to me so let's have a ciggie and--

DAFFY

--You disobeyed a direct order in the field. That means a firing squad for you Sergeant bloody Gordon.

(snarling sardonically)

I'm putting you under arrest for cowardice in the face of the enemy.

With a trembling hand he points his pistol at Johnny G who dismisses Brummie with a nod. Brummie legs it back to the front where the others are.

JOHNNY G

My men just saved your life, you stupid man. We silenced the guns that were killing you all. You--

DAFFY

(off Taff)

--Corporal, take his pistol. Escort him to Battalion HQ... You are under arrest... Follow me...

With a sardonic grimace he sets off along the trench away from his men. Johnny and Taff fall in behind him.

They round the corner of the zigzag trench and Taff calls to Daffy to halt

TAFF

Now listen yere boyo. We just saved your toffee-nosed life and you thank us by putting our hero sergeant yere in front of a firing squad.

Daffy about turns and raises his pistol at Taff's face.

DAFFY

I gave a direct order for you lot to join me in the attack - I should have known better than to rely on your bunch of scruffy clodhoppers.

TAFF

Our clodhopping sergeant yere has the DCM for gallantry in the field and you are envious and bitter. Your men are lions led by a donkey; you are callous, vain and--

DAFFY

--Shut up! You damned Welsh gypsy, or I will escort both of you to--

The continuing bombardment drowned the noise of Taff's Webley pistol as Daffy's brains fly out of the back of his head, taking his hat with it.

Johnny G and Taff immediately check for witnesses - there are none. Wordlessly, they drag him to a nearby firing step.

TAFF

Righto, boyo, I'll tell the men to watch out for the sniper.

Taff hands back the Webley - Johnny G holsters it.

TAFF (CONT'D)

Good men died because of that
toffee-nosed dandy and we--

JOHNNY G

--Forget it. C'mon, back to the men
and I never want to hear "DCM"
mentioned ever again - Got it?

TAFF

Righto, boyo - never again.

Off they go back the way they came to find their Sappers.

EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCHES - TRONES WOOD - DAY

Apart from the artillery barrage, which has now slackened somewhat. The only other noise is the sporadic firing from further afield in either direction along the front.

The infantry corporal approaches Johnny G warily.

CORPORAL#2

Sithee, sergeant, I am the senior
soldier right now. My officer and
the other sergeants are all dead or
lying out there somewhere wounded.

Johnny finishes polishing his pistol and holsters it.

His craggy face looks weary and strained but he cheers up for the corporal. He puts his hand on his shoulder and their helmets clink as they touch.

JOHNNY G

Right lad, you're in charge until
we get relieved tomorrow.

CORPORAL#2

I didn't now that, Sarge.

Johnny pulls a sketched map from his tunic, shows it with his finger poking a line. The corporal looks on, puzzled.

JOHNNY G

See that line?
(the corporal nods)
Its just over there in the woods
and when we are sitting there
tomorrow supping a brew we get
relieved.

CORPORAL#2

But Sarge, that's a hundred yards
away an' there's bunkers and
dugouts everywhere out there.

Just then, a massive explosion throws earth and body parts
high into the blue sky.

The tunnel mine so big it sucks the air out of the lungs of
the Sappers and the nearby infantrymen.

Torsos, heads, legs and arms rain down 50 yards away to the
right.

JOHNNY G

(off the corporal)

Are your men over there?

CORPORAL#2

Those poor bastards are the
Manchester PALS battalion. They're
in line abreast of us but we
haven't enough men to link up with
them... there's a bit of a gap
between us.

JOHNNY G

The gap looks to be a bit bigger
now so spread your men out further
and prepare for a counter attack.

The corporal slinks away as grim faces gather around Johnny.
Taff pushes through with two steaming mugs of tea.

TAFF

This is the last brew. We need to
send someone back for more tea.

JOHNNY G

That can wait - we need to recce
along the trench; these tunnel
mines have been here for weeks if
not months so there'll be tell-tale
signs directly opposite so take
Solly and Allballs - you know what
to look for.

Without a word, Taff, Allballs and Solly head off along the
trench to the west. Johnny gestures Kinney and Andy to move
out towards the east.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Fifty yards max and don't get
caught up with the Manchester lads.
Come straight back to me.

(off Brummie)

Get me Fritz's tin hat.

Brummie doesn't have to go far for one of those... He hands Johnny the helmet and knowing what's next - his bayonet.

Johnny pokes the helmet over the parapet - nothing. He removes his own helmet and puts on the German helmet.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

(off Brummie)

I need to see what lies between here and that next trench - bloody wire was still intact on that last charge - cost a lot of men.

Stepping up onto the firing step he cautiously raises his head above the top sandbag.

JOHNNY'S P.O.V. ACROSS NO-MANS-LAND

Broken trees; disrupted earth, shell craters, splintered bunkers in the ravaged wood, exploding shells beyond the next trench and just 20 yards in front, a rat disappears down a wooden hatch - a dugout.

The constant din of battle ceases momentarily and he hears a "baby cry". Dropping like a stone to his knees he rips off the helmet and stares at his shaking hands in the muck.

BRUMMIE

Fuckin' hell, Sarge. You look ill. What did you see? I could have sworn I heard a baby cry. Did you--

In a trice Johnny had hold of Brummie's tunic, their noses touch as Johnny shouts into his face.

JOHNNY G

--Say that again about a baby cry!

Utterly taken aback by Johnny's behavior, he shouts back.

BRUMMIE

I heard a fuckin' baby cry... I thought I heard it before but didn't say ought coz you might think I'm fuckin' shell shocked.

Johnny backs off, straightening Brummie's webbing straps and bullet pouches. His face still puce but normal colour is quick to return.

TAT

I heard it to tha knows.

YIGGS

So did I.

Yiggs and Tat sit quietly sipping the last of the tea.

JOHNNY G

You heard it before? Did the others hear it? Are you pulling my leg?

BRUMMIE

Nobody's mentioned it but I wondered if it was a German trick to entice us into no-mans-land...

JOHNNY G

Bollocks, they ain't that sick, but there's got to be an explanation.

Kinney and Andy return from their recce looking exhausted.

ANDY

Yonder Manchester boys are in ribbons, Sarge. I don't know what to think... so many of them killed.

KINNEY

Aye, Fritz is showing his true colours now wi' his dirty tricks.

JOHNNY G

What dirty tricks?

The artillery barrage intensifies but much nearer to their position and the earth trembles beneath their feet.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

They're giving the area another going over - must be a lot of wire out there...

(shouting)

What dirty tricks, Kinney?

KINNEY

Sgt Major over there says a baby was found and they all gathered round ta see it. Fritz knew they would... Dirty bastards.

The Sappers' revulsion is etched in their faces as the barrage continues around them.

Taff, Allballs and Solly scurry around the zigzag corner to join them; their grim faces herald bad news.

TAFF

We are to hold this position while fresh troops arrive for the next advance, which is a night attack at 0200 hours... Tonight.

JOHNNY G

Who said?

TAFF

Beyond the Liverpool Regiment to the west... or what's left of them, are my countrymen, the 39th Welsh Division. Fuckin' hard boyos they be too. A Cap'n told me to pass it along until field telephones catch up with us. But for sure its tonight boyo.

Johnny G frowns enigmatically - Taff looks on, puzzled.

TAFF (CONT'D)

What the fuck's the matter now?
We've done this a thousand times--

Johnny turns on Kinney and Andy and snaps angrily.

JOHNNY G

--You two, go tell the Manchesters the good news and scrounge some tea. See what's left of that tunnel mine and if we can use it tonight.

(off Taff)

There's a dugout twenty yards to our front and I don't know why its there. Fucking strange things going on around here.

The men sit on sleeping shelters cut out of the clay by the Germans.

The seemingly never ending thunder of artillery shells screaming overhead into the wire of no-mans-land doesn't faze these men as they fish out their ciggies.

Solly pulls out his baccy tin; him being one of the legendary few who can fill a ciggie paper with baccy, roll it, lick it, seal it and light it all with a single flick of his hand.

In the maelstrom of noise and trembling earth their grimy faces reveal a wariness, indicating a foregone conclusion that death is inevitable and certainly imminent.

One lit match is passed from hand to hand to light up as they sit wearily waiting to hear about strange things going on.

TAFF

Alright then Boyo, I can't wait to yere what strange things can happen in a place like this, especially on a lovely sunny day amongst the poppies along the tranquil river Somme.

Taff's banter creates little movement on the surrounding faces, apart from them looking up at their sergeant.

JOHNNY G

(off Brummie)

We thought we heard a baby cry out
there in no-mans-land.

They all turn to Brummie.

BRUMMIE

Aye, an' then Kinney an' Andy comes
back an' says the Manchester lads
got suckered onto a tunnel mine by
a cryin' baby... they gathered
round to see it an' Fritz blew 'em
all up. Fuckin' sick bastards.

YIGGS

(off Tat)

We heard it too... fuckin' weird.

JOHNNY G

I don't get this fucking dugout to
our front. Its just a man-sized
square hole with a wooden frame
around it. I can't see its purpose.

Taff gets up to climb the firestep - Johnny stops him.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Wait till it gets dark, then we'll
both see what it is... it might be
a tunnel hatch or maybe a bunker.

BRUMMIE

We might be sitting on a tunnel
mine. What do you think Sarge?

JOHNNY G

If I thought that, Brummie, do you
think I would be standing here?

TAT

We 'eard a fuckin' baby cry, Sarge,
an' they Manchester lads 'eard one
as well an' look what happened to
them... Blown to fuck.

Allballs pulls out what looks like a hunter's horn and lies
on the trench floor with it to his ear.

JOHNNY G

If you hear anything other than our
creeping barrage down there I'll
get you a fucking stethoscope for
Christmas and--

SOLLY

--Sarge, get him a fuckin' enema kit - he stinks like a polecat coz he's full o' shit.

BRUMMIE

Last time he did that he heard voices... remember?

SOLLY

Aye, it was fuckin' Satan.
(falsetto)
"I'm waiting for you."

The gallows humour is lost in the intensified barrage. Johnny G has to shout to be heard.

JOHNNY G

Brummie, you and Allballs go back to rear echelon for rations and get me a Geophone [listening device] from our SQMS. Tell him we need more Ammonal and a replacement for Billy Nolan... Scrounge what you can.

EXT. MANCHESTER LADS POSITION - MINE CRATER - DAY

Kinney and Andy pick away at the trench wall searching for the tunnel. Kinney slams his spade into the loose earth and falls through after it - they've found the tunnel.

The nearby grunts join in to enlarge the access to the dreaded tunnel. They step back in admiring amazement as the two Sappers scramble down into the maw of the earth.

ANDY

(shouts at the men)
Stay well back and don't block the hole - we need to breath down here.

The Sappers disappear into the gloomy cavern.

INT. MINE CRATER TUNNEL - DAY

The two Sappers stand still; unmoving, straining their ears listening, holding their breath, listening.

Andy switches on his torch, illuminating the debris stretching out ahead of them. Kinney lights his torch too.

Silently, the Sappers creep forward side by side; Andy's torch shining on the floor while Kinney's shines at head height. The cordite fumes still hang thick in the air.

Cautiously, they creep along at snail's pace looking for booby traps. Andy's torch flashes along a taut wire stretched across the tunnel at ankle height.

Both men step back in unison and kneel first then a hands and knees crawl forward, their hands feeling the floor in front of them. They whisper to each other...

ANDY

Good job we didn't go straight for the wire... there's a pressure switch here just in front of it.

KINNEY

Aye, if they bloody Manchester lads had got in here afore us they'd aw be dead thenoo.

ANDY

Just a wee minute while I stick a pin in this bastard and clear it.

With his torch in his mouth, Andy fiddles with a safety pin to neutralise the pressure switch - job done, he carefully lifts the metal device out of its housing in the muck.

Kinney leans over and plucks the detonator out of the main charge, which is covered in ball-bearings - antipersonnel.

KINNEY

Dirty bastards... now for the trip-wire... its taut so its a push-pull switch an' it can be on my side or your side so I'll check my side first. You go back if you like--

ANDY

--Up yer fuckin' kilt - just get on wi' it.

Both men's eyes are wide with trepidation as Kinney gingerly feels along the wire using finger and thumb whilst holding his weight with his other hand.

Holding his breath, his right hand goes into the small cavity in the tunnel wall where his end of the booby trap is hidden from view.

Sweat pours down his face; his heart beats in his ears as he carefully withdraws his hand.

KINNEY

Ah dinna ken where the fuckin' wire is goin' - ah canni reach the fucker.

Kneeling, he wipes the sweat from his eyes as Andy repeats the process on his side.

It is excruciatingly slow and difficult to manipulate his arm around a bend without compromising the trip-wire.

The seconds tick away as the sweat drips off his nose onto his tunic. Andy grunts and curses.

ANDY

Got the wee bastard - its a push-pull wi' a charge this side an' you can bet on your side too. I'll put a pin in my side an' if you canni reach your side we can assume its a charge wi'oot a switch.

Kinney passes him a safety pin and whispers..

KINNEY

Ye can assume what the fuck ye like but ye ain't cuttin' that fuckin' wire while I'm here. Fuck ye.

Both men get off their knees and dust themselves down.

ANDY

Awreet, we'll pull it on the way oot... put a tinsel on it so we don't fuckin' trip over it on the way back.

Kinney fishes out a strip of silver paper and hangs it on the wire. The men step over the wire and move on.

Shining their torches ahead of them, all they can see is a fog of fumes hanging hauntingly over the clay floor.

On and on they silently creep, seeking out trip wires and the detritus of underground miners; planks of wood and pit props that may hide a pressure or release switch booby-trap.

At last, they arrive at the blocked exit shaft and listen...

The muffled sound of German voices can be heard on the other side of the caved in shaft, and then a machine-gun stuttering on their left, and then another on their right.

They've heard enough, about turn and creep back to where they found the trip-wire.

Andy pulls out a wire hook and attaches a bobbin of twine to it as Kinney unwinds it walking away.

He arrives at the exit hole and gives a low whistle.

Andy attaches the hook to the trip-wire and heads back to Kinney. Both men scramble up the rubble to fresh air, careful not to tighten the twine.

EXT. MANCHESTER LADS POSITION - MINE CRATER - DAY

Out of harms way - Andy yanks the twine... "KABOOM" a hell of a bang and a great chorus of cheers well up from the German trenches.

The Sappers' dirty faces crack with glee as the grunts look on astonished. One young chap stumbles over the rubble to them and asks...

GRUNT #1

Ee by gum, what were all that about? Them there Jerrys all laughing an' cheerin' like?

KINNEY

They think they booby trapped us.

The Sappers look at each other and roll over laughing.

ANDY

'ow long 'ave ye been in the army, lad? Ye disna look old enough.

The young chap blushes and stammers...

GRUNT #1

Sithee, I joined up wi' my younger brother in May, so we've bin in'th army for nearly two months now, so--

The two Sappers look at each other in mock amazement...

ANDY

-- 'is younger fuckin' brear!

The Sappers lean on each other laughing their heads off.

The stern faces of the surrounding grunts spoils the fun.

KINNEY

WHAT?

Another young chap; not wearing a helmet because of a head wound, the blood still seeping from the dirty bandage...

GRUNT #2

Captain Davidson ordered him over the top into machine-gun fire...

(off grunt #1)

'is brother got cut in two.

Two very tough warriors get to their feet with sadness in their eyes and give the surviving brother a hug. Andy's parting shot was...

ANDY

Keep yer 'ead down and dinna allow
anyone down there.

(pointing to the hole)

If Fritz starts shelling, yers can
shelter in there but don't go too
far in. Stay down this end.

Grim faced, Andy and Kinney head back along the trench to
join Johnny G and the others.

EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCHES - TRONES WOOD - NIGHT

Fresh troops have moved into position all along the front
line and men and their kit have made lateral movement
difficult and annoying to many... especially Johnny G.

His troop of Sappers are resting on their cut out shelves
while Johnny G and Taff test the Geometer on the floor of the
trench, which is testing their tempers as men to and fro.

A tall slender figure looms up out of the darkness and trips
headlong over the kneeling Taff and falls on Johnny G.

Using his impressive power, Johnny flips the intruder over
his head and gets to his feet ready to start punching.

The slim figure clambers up to stand a good five inches
taller than Johnny G.

This is Second Lieutenant David Anderson, the replacement
platoon commander, full of enthusiastic inexperience, best
known as MR. ANDO.

JOHNNY G

You fucking blind twat. What the
fuckin'ell do you think you--

MR. ANDO

--Shut up, you bloody clodhopper.
You are referring to an officer as
being a blind something or other. I
am Lieutenant Anderson to you and
your men, and I am the replacement
Platoon Commander for Captain
Davidson... I give the orders here.

Pointing a swagger stick at Johnny G, he snarls...

MR. ANDO (CONT'D)

That man there... Step forward and
be recognized.

Taff gets to his feet as Johnny strides forward and presents
his grimy, wild-eyed face within inches of the young officer.

JOHNNY G

Royal Engineers troop commander,
Sergeant Gordon. On detachment to
Kings Liverpool Regiment. Sir.

Taff's dirty face appears next to Johnny's with his livid, freshly stitched head wound visible in the poor light of the late evening. The young officer's eyes are drawn to it.

TAFF

Now listen yere, boyo. You not looking where you're going knocked my wounded head, thereby risking our forward patrol when it gets darker and--

MR. ANDO

--Stand to attention when you speak to me, you filthy object.

(off Johnny)

I don't know about any patrols going out tonight... Who ordered it?

JOHNNY G

I did. I am going to recce the ground ahead of our position here and the German bunker just here to our front.

MR. ANDO

I know nothing about German bunkers near our position... Where is it?

Johnny points at the trench wall.

JOHNNY G

Twenty yards that-away. The enemy lines are eighty yards further on with machine-gun positions directly opposite in several dugouts along our front. They survived the artillery barrage and--

MR. ANDO

--Another barrage is due to start...

(checks his watch)

--in an hour, so you will not have much time for patrolling. So I forbid it - Stand down, sergeant until I tell you to move.

JOHNNY G

We don't operate like that on detachment. As Royal Engineers we use our initiative to save lives and kill Germans...

(MORE)

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

A tunnel mine killed the Manchester lads along with some of yours just over there today, so we are charging the tunnel with explosives at the German end of the tunnel to coincide with the advance from here. Thereby, killing any Germans around it and advancing through the tunnel with grenades to attack the machine-guns that will cut your men down before you get half way across there.

MR. ANDO

The artillery will eradicate that threat so--

JOHNNY G

--That's what Captain Davidson said and hundreds died so leave the engineering to the engineers and lives will be saved and Germans will die in their--

MR. ANDO

--I will not have my orders countermanded by you or any other bog-trotter, Sergeant. You will go over the top with the King's or face the firing squad. Carry on.

The subaltern about turns and marches off into the darkness and more shouts of indignation from men down the line.

The sapper's faces show defiance regardless the inevitability of death should they go over the top or face a firing squad but their eyes sway Johnny G's decisions... as usual.

JOHNNY G

Taff, go back to rear echelon to our HQ and tell Hellfire Jack our problem.

(off Kinney)

Kinney, you go with him and tell him about the tunnel and that you've already cleared it for tonight's attack.

The two men pick up their weapons and disappear into the darkness; on their way to find Hellfire Jack.

INT. REAR HQ BUNKER - ROYAL ENGRS - NIGHT

Taff and Kinney stand to attention in front of the CHIEF CLERK, a Warrant Officer, who is accompanied by a MAJOR.

The Chief Clerk is telling the Major what Taff has told him and finishes the story about the coming action.

CHIEF CLERK

-- and that's the problem, sir.

MAJOR

Well, we can't have popinjay subalterns interfering with experienced men like Sergeant Gordon... can we?

(off the two men)

Wait here.

The Major knocks on a nearby door and as he is about to grab the handle - it flies open and out comes an immaculately dressed Colonel with flashing eyes and a mustache, making him truly handsome and dashing... Hellfire Jack.

HELLFIRE JACK

Stand at ease you two... Chief, get a case of good French wine, give it to the Corporal. I heard every word you men said. So take the wine, give it to Johnny G... Oh, yes I know all about you men.

(off Taff)

You, Taff, should be home in Wales nursing your wounded head, but you are here, fighting for King and Country, which means a great deal in my book... Bloody infantry.

(off the Major)

Basil, get a crown for Sergeant Gordon, I am promoting him in the field to Staff Sergeant and while you're at it, get three stripes for Sergeant Dupree here WHAT! Congratulations, Taff. You are now a Royal Engineers Senior NCO. Get yourselves back and deal with that tunnel.

With a furrowed brow he goes back into his office muttering about infantry subalterns.

The Major and Chief Clerk return and give the men a Hessian sack which hides the wine.

MAJOR

When you get back you can expect a visit from the CO of the Liverpool Lads. The Colonel will be talking to him now. Good luck, men.

The Sappers march out of the HQ heading back to their trench.

Hellfire Jack steps out of his dugout office, which once belonged to the Germans with its furniture and wooden doors, still bedecked with German office paraphernalia.

HELLFIRE JACK

Chief, get those men back here first thing tomorrow. They can rest for a day and then into the start of the new gallery under the Hun HQ. They've done with the bloody infantry, I need their skills in the new tunnel.

The Chief Clerk grabs a field telephone and furiously winds the side handle for a connection.

EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCHES - TRONES WOOD - NIGHT

The Officer Commanding, the Liverpool Lads shakes the hand of Staff Sergeant Johnny Gordon whilst holding a bottle of wine in his other hand. Johnny G salutes as the Major slinks away.

The Sappers relax and sit on the ledges grinning at each other as they pass around bottles of wine.

Johnny good naturedly tilts Taff's helmet exposing the wound.

JOHNNY G

That'll get you a couple of pints in the Sergeants Mess, Taff.

The men smile at the banter. Solly looks at Johnny...

SOLLY

Ha, I hope this doesn't change things with you two going up in the world.

JOHNNY G

I don't think so... We're all going down in the world tomorrow - into the bowels of the new tunnel--

ANDY

--Aye, the sooner the fuckin' better we get away from toffee-nosed fuckin' dandies wi' pips on their shoulders.

KINNEY

Och aye, but dinna ye forget how ye danced about laughing when they pulled us out o' that last yin tae come here? Fuckin' awful hole that was... Lotta men died down there.

TAT

Oh, Jesus fuckin' Christ, no wonder they call you the poison fuckin' dwarf; you're as cheerful as fuckin' mustard gas.

A familiar tall dark figure looms into view and looks intently into each face as his lip curls into a snarl.

MR. ANDO

Get to your feet when an officer is present, you insolent--
(off Johnny G)
--cowards.

The Sappers are stung into anger and are on their feet in a trice; their eyes blazing with rage.

Johnny's eyes are locked onto the eyes of the young officer.

JOHNNY G

That is twice we have met and each time you have intimated cowardice to me and my Sappers who have had many battles with the Hun... You have never yet stepped into no-mans-land, so make sure you come to my men when we occupy that German trench over there and we'll discuss cowards and how not to be one.

SOLLY

(starts repartee)
Look how tall he is, Staff; he's head and shoulders over his men--

KINNEY

--Aye, an' ye can bet who the German snipers'll be aimin' at--

ALLBALLS

--An' yonder machine-gunners'll be picking you out, Mr. Anderson. Ye'd best crouch low... 'specially if we don't get they machine-gunners with our tunnel mine and--

TAFF

--Bollocks! We'll get the machine-gunners and the snipers afore 'e's half way across no-mans-land.

Staff Sergeant Johnny Gordon stops the banter, knowing it has hit the mark. His eyes betray the hidden smirk aching to crack his fathomless face.

JOHNNY G

Sergeant Dupree, get the men down the hole. Place the charge and prepare to fire. The barrage starts soon and I want you all out of the hole before it begins.

(off Mr. Ando)

It is usual for Platoon Commanders to send a grenade team with us to silence the machine-guns... Sir?

Taken by surprise, Mr. Ando harrumphs loudly.

MR. ANDO

What! My men are needed for the charge across no-mans-land, Sergeant, and--

JOHNNY G

--Staff Sergeant, Mr. Anderson.

(pointing at the new crown over the chevrons)

And if you aren't sending a grenade team through the tunnel with me, you will lose many good men and probably yourself, so--

MR. ANDO

--Damn it, man... Staff Sergeant, why should you be so bloody full of yourself... preposterous; it--

JOHNNY G

--Experience and Sapper initiative, Sir... Plus two years fighting the Bosche underground and in the trenches. You'd do well to listen to my men; they are all decorated soldiers - and survivors.

The chinless wonder stiffens and displays his stiff upper lip as the Sappers move out along the trench heading for the tunnel. With his swagger stick under his left arm he snarls.

MR. ANDO

An officer of the line; a Platoon Commander does not seek advice from a bunch of barn yard yokels. How dare you suggest such nonsense, you bl--

A baby "cries".

JOHNNY G

--Shut up! Listen to that!

Looking at each other incredulously as the sound is drowned by sporadic shell fire. Johnny checks his watch.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Nearly an hour before the barrage begins - there's nothing between us and the German trenches apart from the mysterious hole in the ground out there.

MR. ANDO

So bloody what! It is twenty yards away and snipers are waiting for idiots to investigate because they must have heard it too... And they bloody put it there.

Grim faced, Johnny checks his Webley pistol and flashes his torch along the sleeping shelves looking for - a bayonet.

JOHNNY G

Would you like to join me, Sir?

MR. ANDO

Losing an NCO is bad enough, losing an officer is--

JOHNNY G

--In that case; would you be kind enough to inform the gunners to cease firing star shells so I can get out there undetected?

Mr. Ando looks up to see the sky illuminated like it was daylight caused by the apocalyptic images of exploding star shells, hanging beneath their slowly descending parachutes.

Mr. Ando quickly departs to instruct the signallers to inform the artillery to cease fire with star shells.

Johnny G climbs the fire-step in readiness to slither over the top and crawl across no-mans-land to the mysterious hole to his front. Waiting - waiting - waiting - darkness falls...

The Germans, alarmed at the sudden darkness, open fire with machine-guns and sniper fire.

German artillery shells also start exploding all across the front; giving the Brits a taste of what's to come.

The broken ground and shell holes provide Johnny with some cover but he's moving too fast to be caring about cover.

In just a few seconds he's there; peering down into the darkness. Putting his arm down the wooden hatch, he flicks on his torch to see a dugout with another floor hatch.

Slithering his feet into the hole, he lowers himself down and dangles a few feet above the earth floor. He drops and rolls.

INT. ENEMY DUGOUT - NO-MANS-LAND - NIGHT

Holding his breath in the dark silence, he breathes easy again as the star shells start again and shed a little light down through the wooden hatch.

With pistol drawn he silently approaches the other wooden hatch.

In the flashes of light from above he sees a ladder leading down to the floor below. Fucking hell.

Holding his breath he listens... a soft cough like that of a child - or a woman, coming from further below.

Fucking hell, how deep is this bunker?

Deftly stepping on the ladder he climbs down to the floor and sees a flicker of light from beneath yet another hatch.

His eyes flash with fear as he steps on a cable. Crouching, he follows the cable which disappears into a pile of earth rubble, which he knows is a blocked tunnel.

Following the cable in the opposite direction he discovers a massive camouflet chamber packed with explosives.

Frenetically pulling out his torch; not caring who sees the light, he follows the cable to the detonator and carefully disarms it.

Frantically searching for other cables he doesn't see the head coming up through the hatch. It's a WOMAN.

He very nearly shoots her when she speaks with a French lilt.

WOMAN#1

English? You are English? Don't shoot, I am French.

Dropping to his knee, levelling the pistol and torch at her face, he holds up the cable for her to see.

JOHNNY G

Any more of this down there?

WOMAN#1

Ah, the telephone wire; yes, they told us not to touch it until they connect the telephones. It is down here in the main corridor.

JOHNNY G

Who is down there?

WOMAN#1

Only one baby now, they took the others away - I hid him under my bed. Come, I show you.

Johnny follows down the ladder into a large candle lit corridor where he sees doors opening into what could be described as boudoirs.

Following her into the first one, he is taken aback by the splendor, a luxurious bed and couch with wardrobes and a carpeted floor.

Looking back into the corridor he can see the entrance is blocked with earth rubble.

Pointing at a cable running along the corridor floor she says...

WOMAN#1 (CONT'D)

That is the telephone wire - it goes through there.

His eyes follow her pointing finger and like a man possessed, he claws through the rubble covering the camouflaged entrance.

Shining his torch through the small hole he sees the bomb.

Making the hole bigger and scrambling through, he carefully digs out the initiation set and disarms it.

Ensuring there are no more initiation sets to this massive mine, he scrambles back and rejoins the woman.

WOMAN#1 (CONT'D)

Did you see the telephone?

JOHNNY G

It was a bomb designed to blow after the first bomb to catch the rescuers - dirty German bastards. What are you doing here anyway?

WOMAN#1

This is the brothel for the men in this sector - They were having a wonderful time... and then you English arrived. They told us you would never get this far.

It then dawned on her what he had just said.

WOMAN#1 (CONT'D)

A bomb? A bomb!

(hysterical screaming)

What are we to do? Aghhh...

Johnny grabs her and clamps his hand over her mouth. It was that moment her perfume and slenderness aroused him.

Something primal deep into his guts disturbs him.

JOHNNY G

Shh. Be quiet now, we don't want the Germans to hear us... I will take you to safety -
 (checks his watch)
 - in half an hour. Where is the baby?

She grabs his hand and leads him back to--

THE BEDROOM

--where she stoops to pull a bundle of clothing from beneath the bed; opening the bundle to reveal the pretty pink face.

Removing his helmet, he embraces the woman and baby and in the magic of the moment she kisses him passionately.

Placing the baby on the couch she again kisses him but this time she pulls him to the bed; the same primal drive as Johnny's exploding within her, grabbing what she can before...

WOMAN#1

You are a Godsend and I can only reward you by making love. But this also may be the last time I ever make love - I sense no future for me, but for the baby... he lives.

Without a pause, Johnny swiftly sheds his tunic as she undresses to reveal great beauty and they both fall on the bed, kissing and passionately embracing.

They make torrid love as their emotions crash through them like never before.

Johnny lies looking at the boarded ceiling knowing it hides clay. Thoughts about the absurdity of the situation make him whisper...

JOHNNY G

You must have something special in store for me, Lord Jesus.

He checks his watch - Times up!

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Get dressed, we have very little time. We must get back to our lines.

She is dressed before him but he is moving and dressing all at the same time.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)
 Grab your baby, the barrage starts
 any minute now.

Terror stricken at Johnny's haste, she grabs the baby from the bed and follows Johnny up the ladder.

He reaches down and yanks her up through the hatch and off he goes up the next ladder followed by the screaming duo.

Again he roughly pulls her through the hatch and lies down to reach for the ladder to use to escape through the final hatch into no-mans-land.

Placing the ladder beneath the hatch he races up it and with his bayonet, raises his helmet above the hatch - nothing.

The woman and baby are right behind him on the ladder.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)
 Give me the baby when I get out. Do
 not stand up, you must crawl behind
 me to safety... now move!

Slithering out onto broken ground, he reaches back and grabs the baby from the woman just as the first shells arrive to pulverize no-mans-land.

Fuck this! He gets up and runs with the baby.

The screaming woman tries to catch up but is vaporized by exploding shells; her instincts were spot on, and that was the moment the baby fell silent in Johnny's arms.

The continuous unbroken rhythm of the guns heralds Johnny's arrival to his men waiting anxiously for him.

Sliding over the parapet he passes the baby like a rugby ball to Solly and shouts--

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)
 CATCH HIM!

Solly catches the flying bundle of rags as Johnny crashes into the trench wall and drops to his knees.

The men are dumbstruck by the new arrival.

SOLLY
 Fuckin'ell Staff, we haven't got a
 uniform to fit this little fella.
 Worra we gonna do with him?

JOHNNY G

His mother's behind me - where the hell is she?

ANDY

On her way to the angels, Staff. You only made it by the skin of your teeth. What the hell happened?

KINNEY

Aye, Staff, at least ye saved the wee yin. Solly, gi 'im a suck on your teet - he likes you, mon. I canni wait ta hear this story.

Taff arrives with Allballs fairly out of breath.

TAFF

Charges are set and all ready to blow boyo... What the hell's that, boyo? Bloody hell, man. We can't take him with us--

SOLLY

--And he can't stay here.

ALLBALLS

Sithee, Staff, back yonder is a horses nose-bag, should I--

JOHNNY G

--Fuckin' run, now. GO!

Wild-eyed Allballs races away along the trench as the others gather around the baby, completely ignoring the crashing artillery shells falling just a few yards away.

Johnny looks at the faces of his men gazing down at the soft pink face. He knows these men will want an explanation.

The hard eyes that have witnessed prolonged indescribable carnage soften in the light of bursting star-shells and high explosive heavy artillery shells. Johnny is totally bemused.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Solly, you and Allballs follow us through the tunnel.

(off Taff)

The rest of us move now. C'mon.

The Sappers race away along the trench to the east.

EXT. MANCHESTER LADS POSITION - MINE CRATER - NIGHT

Gathered around the tunnel entrance are a dozen grunts carrying sacks of grenades. The Sappers arrive and Johnny takes charge.

In the light of the star-shells the men share the grenades, check fuzes and pins and then squirrel them away into various tunic pockets.

Brummie scrambles down into the tunnel and connects the plunger cables - all ready to blow.

The young infantry-mens' eyes are wide with fear as they obey Johnny's instructions to pull down their helmets over their eyes as Johnny checks his watch.

JOHNNY G

Wait for it... wait...

(the shelling ceases)

BRUMMIE!

(Brummie presses the plunger as Johnny stands to see the Germans heading skyward...)

Go, go, go, fuckin' move!

The men scramble down into the tunnel as all along the front whistles are blowing as thousands of men go over the top.

INT. MINE CRATER TUNNEL - NIGHT

Torches flash as the men race along, doubled over because of the low head room.

The fumes hang heavy as they cough their guts up and some of them are screaming in fear of their lives.

The Sappers' discipline controls the calamity as they move through the tunnel geeing the grunts along in Dante's Inferno. The Sappers clear the exit of debris and enter--

THE GERMAN TRENCH CRATER--

Where body parts are littered all along the rim and beyond.

EXT. FRONT LINE TRENCHES - TRONES WOOD - NIGHT

The grunts break right and seek out their targets, hurling grenades as they advance along the trench.

Johnny sends his men along the trench to the left, shouting.

JOHNNY G

No further than fifty yards!

He climbs a firing step to look back across no-mans-land at the advancing British being mown down by the Germans.

Looking along the trench he sees the grenade teams hurling their grenades into fortified dugouts, killing machine-gunners and grey-clad soldiers. Death is everywhere.

A new creeping barrage begins just a few yards from the captured German trench, so the destruction of Trones Wood continues just as Solly and Allballs appear in the trench.

Solly is wearing the horses nose-bag on his back just like a papoose with the baby fitted snugly inside, not making a sound as Allballs fusses along behind him.

Johnny drops down beside him as screaming infantrymen fall and dive into the trench, relieved to be out of no-mans-land.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Solly, stay in the tunnel entrance -
the first infantry men are just
getting here - lot of wounded... we
go no further than this bloody
tunnel, the German artillery will
start any minute now - bastards.

As though Johnny had prompted it, artillery shells explode amongst the stragglers in no-mans-land - shrapnel whistling by overhead - cries of the wounded heard between explosions.

More infantrymen dive, leap and fall into the trench; relief replacing the expressions of wild fear on their faces.

Taff, Kinney, Andy, Tat, Yiggs and Brummie squeeze past the growing number of infantrymen to arrive back at the tunnel.

TAFF

There's no communication trenches
down thataway boyo, just a hell of
a lot of wounded... Where's the wee
one?

The flashes of exploding shells illuminate the concerned eyes of the Sappers as Johnny nods at the tunnel entrance.

In the magic of that moment, chaos and noise cease as the men rush forward into the black maw of the earth to find Solly--

IN THE TUNNEL

--where the darkness is broken by the lighting of a match.

KINNEY

(holding the match)

Gi us a fuckin' candle, Taff. We
canna see yon fuckin' wee yin.

Taff pulls a candle from his bullet pouch and touches it to the match. The grimy faces would frighten a banshee in this eerie light, but the baby's eyes are alight with glee.

Johnny appears amongst the grinning faces followed by a big man, the SGT MAJOR of the Kings Liverpool Regt.

All but Solly stand up to face him - and hide the baby from his view. Eyeballing Johnny G, he sticks out his hand to shake Johnny's.

SGT MAJOR

We've lost you; you are to make your way back to the rear echelons.
 (shaking all of the mens' hands in turn)
 Many more of my young soldiers would be dead but for you lot. I can't thank you enough.

JOHNNY G

That's very kind of you, Sir, but I think we'll have a brew before we go; y'know, wet the whistle while we can; which reminds me, how did Mr. Anderson get on?

SGT MAJOR

Oh, Christ almighty. He died blowing that bloody whistle. Standing there, all six feet fuckin' odd of him, blowing for all he was worth. Sad really, young bloke like that... fuckin' war.

Taff catches Johnny's eye with a "Fuck him" expression.

JOHNNY G

My sentiments too, Sir, but I suspect things would be different if the generals and politicians shared these trenches with us.

The Sgt Major patted Johnny's shoulder and disappeared into the whiz-bang night to tend to his wounded and frightened soldiers along this sector of the front. Talking as he went.

The Sappers busy themselves preparing a meal and hot drink. They each have a contribution which works like clockwork while all around them in the nearby trench is pandemonium.

Solly props the nose-bag so the baby is comfortable and deftly rolls a ciggie.

SOLLY

Warm some tinned milk for the baby.

Kinney and Andy fuss about a little camping stove with mess-tins and mugs as Brummie opens bully beef and Allballs digs out hardtack biscuits.

Seemingly, an invisible wall separates chaos from the Sappers and the trench warfare just feet away.

The Sappers sit or crouch in a protective ring around the baby; all in a position to see the white little face in the candlelight and glowing ciggies as they eat and smoke.

Johnny G looks at the faces of his men; each face a road map of the most sustained onslaughts on human psyche, each one of them desensitized to the everyday loss of life. Look at them.

The love, the trust, the dependency on each other as warriors, brothers in arms is tangible right now. He knows he is in safe hands; they know they are in his safe hands.

JOHNNY G
(checking his watch)
Ten minutes and we're off.

BRUMMIE
(off Solly)
You're already off; see you don't
pass your lice onto the little
fella.

ANDY
Nah, he's a fuckin' Jew; he'll gi'
fuck all away. He even wakes up ta
see if he's lost any fuckin' sleep.

SOLLY
Bollocks, haggis brain, you--

ANDY
--Leave ma family emblem outta thi--

ALLBALLS
--Sithee, what might that be:
Bollocks or Haggis?

KINNEY
(off Allballs)
Who pulled your fuckin' chain?

And the banter rolls on as they prepare to move out.

Johnny G catches Solly's eye--

JOHNNY G
You can be Gunga Din for the baby
until we get back. You give him to
the medics; the nurses will look
after him, we have a hole to dig.

The Sappers disappear along the black hole, their banter and laughter surreal amidst the noises of war.

EXT. REAR ECHELON - HQ CASUALTY AREA - DAY (DAWN)

In the hectic medics area, hundreds of wounded await treatment for their wounds as stretcher bearers lay out the dead in rows just fifty yards away to the south.

Solly and Allballs approach a blood spattered nurse; one of the few females treating the wounded as she kneels to adjust a dressing on a young man's stump - where his leg used to be.

She looks up at Solly as he pulls the nose-bag from his shoulder and puts it down into her free arm.

He pulls away the cloth to reveal the tiny white face and the nurse is taken completely by surprise at such a sight here in Hell. She eases him out of the nose-bag and hums a tune.

SOLLY

He's French and he's an orphan.
Johnny G nearly died saving him in
no-mans-land. Look after him will
ya.

Allballs tugs him away - both of them stumble amongst the wounded laid out in seemingly endless rows. Mumbling and moans of pain emit from bloody ragged bundles of humanity.

ALLBALLS

Sithee, Solly, let's not dally
here. Fair plays on my fragile mind
tha knows. Yon baby will be safe
now.

The lusty infantile cry of the baby momentarily silences the murmuring of the wounded as the nurse carries him to a tent.

Solly's granite face crumbles under the pressure of primal pity and frustration. Tears escape, cutting channels through the facial grime as an uncontrollable sob escapes his breast.

With enormous effort of will, Solly conquers his fleeting loss of stoical endurance and barges into Allballs throwing his arm around his shoulder like old pals and off they go.

SOLLY

Down the hole is better than goin'
over the fuckin' top mate.

ALLBALLS

Yeah, but sithee, it's got it's
moments. Remember Kinney falling
down the Glory Hole shaft? Johnny G
shouted, "Have you broken
anything?" Kinney shouted back,
"There's na much ta fuckin' break
doon here."

The men chuckle at the memory but only for a moment; their faces mask the hidden fear of tunneling under enemy lines.

INT/EXT. REAR ECHELON - HQ AREA - ABLUTIONS TENT - DAY

A queue of grimy men undress and wait to enter the delousing tent before showering and feet inspections.

The men ease forward, each carrying his bundle of clothes into--

THE ABLUTIONS TENT

--where a line of steaming vats full of boiling water ready to kill the lice was being stirred by Chinese labourers.

In the thick fog of steam each man thrust his bundle of clothes into his designated vat and the Chinese man swiftly submerges it, boiling the lice while the men look on from under the nearby shower - Brummie couldn't resist it...

BRUMMIE

Chuck an egg in it, Chinky, we'll
have egg flied lice for tea.

The men laugh, as do the Chinese but them chattering in Mandarin just makes it funnier as the men collect their clothing as it comes out of the massive mangle still hot and steaming.

Cautiously moving forward on wooden deckboards the men take their place sitting on a long bench with their feet outstretched in front of them and a medic inspects each foot and douses it with medication.

All done, the men pair off and perform their own delousing drill. One holds a lit candle as the other passes the seams of their clothing over the flame.

They smile as they hear the lice popping like Chinese crackers. All done, Johnny G gathers his men.

JOHNNY G

Right, we report to Requiem Shaft
tonight so let's get some hot grub
and a kip... we're going to need
it. Hellfire Jack is in charge
tonight so it'll be tough.

The men dress in silence. Some of them pulling on fresh socks, others pulling on boots over bare feet. Their hard faces can't quite hide the trepidation of what's coming.

The arrival of a small Chinese man carrying a large tray with steaming mugs and thick white bread piled high on it starts the banter. Smiles and chuckles crack the hard faces.

BRUMMIE
 Fuckin' ell, how did he do that?

SOLLY
 Do what?

BRUMMIE
 Bring that food all the way across
 here with his fuckin' eyes shut.

Brummie could see the penny didn't drop for everyone but made no further comment as they all tucked into the grub.

INT/EXT. REQUIEM SHAFT - THE WESTERN FRONT - NIGHT

In the darkness a group of men wait in the shadow of the sandbag wall revetment, which is the entrance to the Requiem Shaft tunnel.

To the east and west of the shaft are the front line trenches full of British infantrymen.

Star shells light the sky as exploding shells and the 'zip' of sniper fire make up the tapestry of the night sky.

The shaft entrance is covered with a tarpaulin sheet, which acts as the blackout cover.

Further inside is another tarpaulin sheet, which is the secondary blackout sheet, so men leaving gather between the two tarps before exiting without shedding light.

A group of men exit; their faces bereft of any recognizable expression, no banter, just an atmospheric sense of relief to be out of Hell.

Johnny is somewhat dismayed with his timing; he should have got here two or three minutes later. Oh, fuck it, c'mon.

JOHNNY G
 Right, get in there now an' thank
 your lucky stars you're not with
 the fucking infantry.

Johnny G and his men shuffle forward through the first tarp and on through the second to enter the hell of subterranean warfare. A heightened sense of awareness now takes over.

With faces steel cut, they silently descend the ladders of the fabricated steel tubular shaft to--

THE MAIN GALLERY

--and pick up the required tools. All set and ready to go, they stand silently waiting - waiting...

A fearsome energy is in the air, a mix of trepidation and vigor felt by everyone about to enter the bowels of the earth in tiny tunnels, which often collapse and kill men.

Out of the gloom comes Hellfire Jack; eyes glittering in the poor light of paraffin lamps and candles recessed into the walls and hanging from the wooden pit props.

Even in the dismal dangerous surroundings of the gallery he looks truly handsome and dashing - and totally ruthless.

HELLFIRE JACK

Good evening, gentlemen. Welcome to my parlour. It is a new parlour and you are about to extend it...

(points to his feet)

THATAWAY!

(looking into each face)

Silent digging, which means clay-kicking all night. No coughing or sneezing... and no talking. You will see at the end of this main gallery, two tunnels; one to the left and the other... obviously. You will be working the West Wing, which is the left tunnel, the East Wing being the right tunnel.

Looking into Johnny G's face, he clasps his shoulder...

HELLFIRE JACK (CONT'D)

Staff Sergeant Gordon here has a reputation to keep...

(off Taff)

As does Sergeant Dupree, so I know the Bosche will not hear us this night... Will they, Sappers?

Not a sound as each man gawks into his meaningful eyes.

JOHNNY G

I am a man short sir. Billy Nolan hasn't yet been replaced. Can I--

HELLFIRE JACK

--Sergeant Dupree will take Billy's place - That right, Taff?

TAFF

Too bloody true, boyo - Er, I mean colonel... Sir. Sorry about that.

The men stifle their giggles as they pick up their tools and rifles and line up ready to move into the gloom.

HELLFIRE JACK

Leave your weapons here. Johnny G's pistol will do for now.

(MORE)

HELLFIRE JACK (CONT'D)

The Bosche haven't detected us yet
and I am relying on you to keep it
that way.

(mockingly Shakespearian)

Follow me in the name of King
George who will one day hear of
your exploits in the terrible
underground world of tunnel warfare
beneath the poppy fields of France.

With Hellfire Jack leading, they silently shuffle along the
murky tunnel on a downward gradient until the last head
disappears from view. They walk down to the QM's Compound.

INT. UNDERGROUND QUARTERMASTER'S COMPOUND - NIGHT

The Sappers reach the bottom of the gradient to see a vast
dugout containing thousands of setts (pit-props); sandbags,
rubber wheeled trolleys and the rails they run on.

The Sappers walk through groups of men, busy pushing and
pulling trolleys along a small gauge railway line
disappearing into another tunnel.

In the poor light of the cavern they are seen as Chinese
labour gangs responsible for dealing with the spoils of the
dig. Apart from heavy breathing the place is silent.

Ahead of the Sappers the rail track splits into two with one
track disappearing into a hole bearing a handwritten sign
above the entrance "West Wing" and the adjacent hole "East
Wing" being just a few feet away. The men halt.

HELLFIRE JACK

Right, you're all familiar with how
the system works, three men: a
kicker, a bagger and a trammer work
one hour shifts. You can do two
hours on and two hours off if you
prefer it, but you will do an eight
hour dig. The Quartermaster keeps
hot food and drink on the go so
help yourselves between shifts. The
Quartermaster is Warrant Officer
Conner, I'm sure you all know him.

(stepping back, he
salutes)

Right, get on with it.

In a moment he's gone back whence he came.

JOHNNY G

Taff, you take Solly, Tat and
Allballs. I'll follow you in a
minute.

(off Brummie)
(MORE)

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

You take Andy, Yiggs and Kinney and find your way around this dump. See where everything is and prepare a kip for all of us. You'll be doing two hour shifts, so it's two on two off as usual. I'm going to find WO2 Jim Conner.

Taff, Solly, Tat and Allballs load a trolley with setts and sandbags and disappear into the hole of West Wing, pushing the trolley ahead of them.

The other four; Brummie, Kinney, Andy and Yiggs, start their recce of the compound and disappear among stacks of mining paraphernalia.

IN THE FAR CORNER OF THE COMPOUND

--is a shed with light shining through the open door. Johnny G enters and walks into a manly hug with a bear of a man.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

Fuckin' ell, Johnny. I knew you was comin' but not so soon... Sorry to hear about Billy Nolan, his mam'll be in bits.

JOHNNY G

Oh aye, it's worse when you know the family. I'll write to her shortly... Fuckin' war. Anyway, what about this tunnel? And are the Bosche active in this area?

Jim pours Johnny a mug of tea and offers a ciggie.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

The tunnels a fuckin' long'un and Fritz was here before us, so aye, Fritz is digging away like fuck. But he ain't heard us yet.

Johnny sips the hot tea and puts it down.

JOHNNY G

Too fuckin' hot. I'll check on my lads and come back in a minute.
(over his shoulder)
Where are the "Friends?"

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

Directly opposite, in the dark corner, but I doubt you'll need 'em. Had no gas in this sector yet.

Johnny slinks out of the shed and heads for the dark corner where he can hear the "Friends" chirping. Reaching up, he takes a small cage, housing a single bird from the stack.

Bringing it back into the light he sees it is a robin, not the usual canary used as a gas detector by miners.

JOHNNY G

Hello Mister Robin, fancy meeting you here. I'll set you free when we come out of the hole.

Johnny carries the little bird carefully as he heads for--

THE WEST WING TUNNEL

Bent double in the tunnel he checks the setts (pit-props) as he goes down the gradient, deeper into the bowels of the earth and the roof height diminishes to trolley height.

Out of the murky light comes a loaded trolley. Johnny quickly gets into a recess cut into the tunnel wall and waits.

Noiselessly, the trolley bypasses Johnny and stops as Taff sees Johnny in the alcove. Taff gesticulates to follow him back out, mouthing the word "Jerry."

Noiselessly they head back up the gradient to--

THE COMPOUND

Where the trolley is passed to a Chinese labourer and silently disappears along the tunnel.

Turning to Johnny, Taff whispers in his ear.

TAFF

I can hear Jerry digging to the left of our gallery. They may breach our wall... I need a pistol.

Johnny whispers back in Taff's ear as he digs out his pistol.

JOHNNY G

Take mine, I'll get a Geophone from Jimmy Conner and be with you shortly.

Taff pushes an empty trolley silently down the gradient as Johnny heads for the--

Q.M. SHED/OFFICE

Johnny's silent entry makes Jimmy Conner jump.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

What the fuck! Why're you fuckin' creepin' about? Giving me the fuckin' jitters... Whassup?

JOHNNY G

I need a Geophone down the west hole. My men can hear Jerry scraping around near our hole.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

Fuck! Fuck! Are you fuckin' sure? We haven't heard a squeak from Jerry since we started these galleries.

JOHNNY G

Well he's fuckin' squeaking now. When Taff says its Jerry: its fuckin' Jerry, so let's have the Geophone so we can track him.

Jim pulls open a large cupboard and stands back.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

Take your pick, Johnny.

Johnny scans the cupboard; reaches in and lifts out a box, the size of a biscuit tin. He also takes a stethoscope.

JOHNNY G

Lend me your pistol just in case they break through. There's no room for rifles down there.

Jim pulls his pistol from the holster hanging on the door.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

Its loaded and you better take some grenades. I'll get the news to Hellfire Jack.

Johnny stuffs grenades into his tunic pockets and heads for--

THE WEST WING TUNNEL - AT THE CLAY FACE

-- where Taff, Solly and Allballs are on their knees silently listening to sounds of digging and scraping.

Crawling on his hands and knees, Johnny silently approaches his men. They look on as he deftly places grenades in a recess cut into the side wall where a candle flickers.

Reaching inside his tunic he pulls out the tiny cage with the bird inside and gently places it next to the grenades.

The men have their ears cocked, listening to the muffled sound of voices speaking German.

Allballs raises his hand indicating five Germans digging west of them, possibly three or four feet below.

Johnny responds by passing the Geophone to Taff and using the stethoscope on the clay sidewall of the tunnel as Taff sets up the Geophone.

With ear-pieces in place, Taff adjusts the listening discs and immediately points west at a downward angle.

Johnny passes the stethoscope to Allballs and indicates for him to stay with Solly - listening. Johnny and Taff leave, silently crawling on all fours heading for the--

Q.M. SHED/OFFICE

--where they meet Jim Conner and Hellfire Jack. A brew is on the go so Jim pours four cups of tea as Hellfire Jack rolls out a drawing on the table.

HELLFIRE JACK

Jolly bad show Jerry showing up on our patch... What have you got?

JOHNNY G

About four feet down to the west of our face, Gerry is digging towards us. He'll be abreast of us in a couple of hours but I reckon he'll miss us by a foot or two.

HELLFIRE JACK

Bloody hell! Prepare for the worst, take weapons and grenades in case they break through.

TAFF

They must think they're alone down there, Sir. The banging and chatter is too loud for them to think otherwise. They don't know we are here else they'd be more careful.

HELLFIRE JACK

I hope you are right, Sergeant Dupree but I'm sure you will kill them anyway - What!

Poking the drawing with his finger, Hellfire Jack snorts--

HELLFIRE JACK (CONT'D)

He's obviously heading for that big crater just in front of our lines, which means his tunnel is to move troops forward, safe from our artillery shells. Bloody hell, Jerry must be attacking all along the salient... probably this week.

The men look at each other stone-faced. Fucking hell.

Johnny G and Taff take their leave and head for--

THE WEST WING TUNNEL - AT THE CLAY FACE

Crawling on hands and knees towards his men, Johnny can hear the Germans even before he reaches them. Soundlessly the four men crouch in the confined space of the tunnel.

Sweat runs down each face as the tension increases. Their eyes smart as the sweat leaks into them. Their hearts pounding so hard as to be heard in their tiny clay coffin.

A sudden "tweet" from the robin sounds like a trumpet fanfare in the silence, making them all jump with fright... Fuck.

The bird is looking straight at Johnny... "tweet."

The German digging stops... Absolute silence - the mens' faces cut like the clay they dig.

Eyes are flashing in the flickering candlelight - Johnny slowly reaches up and gently grabs the tiny cage and slowly brings it down, but not without dislodging a grenade.

INT. GERMAN UNDERGROUND GALLERY - AT THE CLAY FACE - NIGHT

The German mining team consisting of eight miners and an officer, stand in silence listening, holding their breath.

Two men at the face holding picks; two men just behind them holding spades, Two men behind them holding sand-bags and two men behind them loading the bags onto a trolley.

The German tunnel is big enough to stand in and their officer is standing with his finger to his mouth, "shushing" them to silence, his face daring them to make a sound - as if they would.

They all stand there motionless - silence - then someone coming along their tunnel toward them whistling a tune.

The officer creeps away from his men to silence the whistler.

INT. THE WEST WING TUNNEL - AT THE CLAY FACE - NIGHT

Helplessly, the men look at the grenade falling from the ledge. It hits a spade with a metallic clang as Johnny drops the bird in his effort to catch the grenade.

He hears a "baby cry". He freezes so Taff bends forward instead to grab the grenade.

The robin "tweets" loudly as you would expect it to.

The pointed end of a pick comes through the clay wall straight into Taff's eye, through to his brains, killing him instantly and they all fall through the collapsing wall into--

THE GERMAN UNDERGROUND GALLERY

--where Johnny, with one knee on the ground starts shooting and German miners fall dead.

In the chaos of killing, Solly tosses a grenade after the escaping officer and two of his men; they die in the blast.

Allballs is using Taff's pistol to kill the scrambling Germans trying to escape - all the Germans die.

In a haze of cordite fumes they quickly assess the situation.

The silence is oppressive as Johnny, on one knee, contemplates the smoking muzzle of his pistol.

His bitter, brooding expression jolts Solly and Allballs.

ALLBALLS

Sithee, Staff, we'se all goin' to miss him--

SOLLY

--Aye, but not as much as--

JOHNNY G

--Shhh...

Johnny G hands his pistol to Solly with a box of ammo that he fishes out of his bullet pouch.

With hand signals and nods the two Sappers take post along the tunnel where the dead German officer lies.

Turning to the rubble and the twisted body of Taff, he kneels and pulls out the pick from Taff's head.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

You should have gone home to Wales boyo when you had the chance.

There is a moment of deep grief as Taff's one open eye pales over as though his soul is now leaving. A single tear cuts a path through the muck on Johnny's face.

A noise behind him makes him turn to see Jim Conner holding a couple of pistols in outstretched hands toward him.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

Here, take these, they're loaded. I've got a drum of Ammonal in the trolley.

(MORE)

WO2 JIMMY CONNER (CONT'D)

You'll have to blow this German hole sharpish - we heard the shooting up top so Jerry will be investigating shortly. What the fuck happened?

Johnny takes the weapons and places them on the floor.

JOHNNY G

Jerry heard us and pulled our tunnel wall into theirs. Now I've lost Taff, the best soldier I--

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

--Jerry heard you? Don't let Hellfire Jack hear that. This tunnel is key to his big plan and your reputation will be dog shit.

JOHNNY G

His big plan! We've been digging out big plans for over two years and many good men died for it. The big planners should be down here with us. Shit on their plans.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

Aye, I agree but I'm telling him that Jerry blundered into our tunnel and you lot killed them all... and you better back me up.

JOHNNY G

I'll tell my men the same. You're a good pal, Tommy. Now I must get Taff out of here.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

Not before we set this drum of Ammonal ready to blow you ain't. C'mon, move yer fuckin' arse.

Jimmy Conner wrestles the 50 lb. drum of explosive out of the his tunnel into Johnny's arms in the German tunnel.

JOHNNY G

We need more than this to block it proper... much more.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

I know that, but we haven't the time. You fix it ready to blow while I go back for more. If Jerry attacks you'll need to blow it.

Jimmy Conner disappears back along the tunnel as Johnny rolls the drum to Allballs and Solly.

SOLLY

Too quiet for my likin' Staff.
Should've had a response by now.

ALLBALLS

Aye, they might have adjoining
tunnels like we have and they're
mining it ready to bury us--

JOHNNY G

--Shut up, you daft bat - Put the
primer on this ready to blow. Cut
the safety fuze for a one minute--

ALLBALLS

--One fuckin' minute! Look how far
we have to run.

JOHNNY G

Yer a fuckin' ferret, Allballs.
You'll be up that hole like a
fuckin' rat up a spout... fuckin'
cut it.

Hearing a noise behind him, Johnny goes back to the breach.

Kinney, Andy, Yiggs, Tat and Brummie are there, each with a
drum of Ammonal. Andy passes his drum to Johnny.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Right, put the rest here and take
Taff out of here quickly. Come back
with more Ammonal.

The men get their drums down to the floor and gather up Taff
as Johnny rolls a drum towards Solly. They grunt with the
effort of squeezing Taff back through the breach. Andy and
Yiggs follow, trying to push Taff up the incline.

Silently, the Sappers place the charge as Kinney, Tat and
Brummie arrive with more drums of Ammonal.

SOLLY

If Jerry comes now we're fucked coz
Taff is blocking our escape.

KINNEY

They've got a flat trolley to get
him out... Dinnae fuckin' jinx us.
I'll gi 'em a lift the noo.

JOHNNY G

Get over there quick and get him
out. Come back with three more
drums... and a box of grenades.

Tat creeps back to the breach and helps the others to move the lifeless body, doing their best not to make a sound.

INT. GERMAN UNDERGROUND GALLERY - DUGOUT HQ - NIGHT

The opulence of the German HQ shows the months of occupation with its carpets and polished wooden furniture, but even more so by the splendid uniforms of the officers with shiny boots.

On the walls there are charts with drawings of galleries all along the German front line; the results of months of digging.

A captain with a livid duelling scar on his left cheek is pointing his swagger stick at a dotted line on the wall chart as a group of dirty miners look on.

Hauptmann (Captain) ERNST HOFFMAN is immaculate in his fitted tunic and highly polished boots as he briefs his men.

ERNST HOFFMAN

(in German; subtitled)

The English are here at the face of the main gallery... Correct?

PRIVATE SCORZENY.

(pointing at a dirty little man who nods affirmatively)

And they have only pistols and grenades... yes?

PRIVATE SCORZENY

I heard two pistols and one grenade as I approached the face. They did not see me coming so I crept back into the shadows and returned here.

ERNST HOFFMAN

You didn't think to return fire?

PRIVATE SCORZENY

My pick does not have a trigger so I thought it prudent to report it.

The men stifle their giggles but not quickly enough for the likes of Ernst Hoffman, a typical Prussian martinet.

ERNST HOFFMAN

Today, I am to execute three men for cowardice in the face of the enemy - You, Scorzeny, are in that grey area where I haven't yet made up my mind for you to be the fourth. I think it prudent for you to exhibit much courage today.

The men shift uncomfortably, but not a word. Their hard grimy faces portray the harshness of much time spent digging under the fields of France. A fact for which Ernst Hoffman couldn't care less, constantly flaunting his patrician airs.

Turning back to the wall chart he again prods the dotted line. Alternately pointing at adjacent lines on the chart he turns quickly, eyeballing the men.

ERNST HOFFMAN (CONT'D)

These two tunnels were dug months ago and if the Englanders are here,
(pointing his stick)

we can use the eastern tunnel to mine their main gallery which must be here.

(pointing his stick)

We know this tunnel is deeper than theirs so we can dig beneath them starting a tunnel at right angles here and place a charge big enough to completely wreck their plans.

SERGEANT BRAUN and CORPORAL STEIN, carry out this task immediately.

Sergeant Braun (42) is obviously a tough guy with a broken nose and many scars around his face and stands to attention.

SERGEANT BRAUN

Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann.

Corporal Stein (36) is not so eager.

CORPORAL STEIN

Herr Hauptmann, will you be picking the exact place to start the work?

The men feel the instant change in demeanor as the innocent question is a touché moment for the earlier cowardice slant.

It is difficult to see the innocuous expression on Stein's face through the layers of muck, but artfully its there.

ERNST HOFFMAN

Would you have me take you by the hand, Corporal Stein? Your place of work is down there amongst the worms - safe from enemy snipers and artillery shells. Any more stupid remarks and you will be a private up here in the trenches. GET OUT!

The men exit the HQ unable to hide their smirks.

INT. THE WEST WING TUNNEL - AT THE CLAY FACE - NIGHT

Kinney pulls and Brummie pushes Taff on a flat trolley but the going is slow in such a confined space.

Kinney crawls backwards on all fours up the gradient with Taff's webbing belt in his teeth as the tow-rope. Brummie pushes Taff's boots at the other end.

With sweat pouring from them, they emerge into the larger gallery where they can stand upright. Jimmy Conner awaits them.

Chinese labourers soundlessly place drums of Ammonal ready to load onto the trolley.

Gently, they pick up Taff's body and silently disappear along the gallery.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

Get these down to Johnny smartish
and come back for more. Tell him
Hellfire Jack is on his way and
he's not happy.

Jimmy Conner goes after the Chinese and Taff's body.

They load the trolley and silently take it down to the breach in the wall where Andy lifts a drum and everything goes like clockwork as the men to and fro with drums of Ammonal at--

THE GERMAN UNDERGROUND GALLERY

--where an impressive stack of explosive drums block the entire tunnel except for an observation gap at the side.

The initiation set is primed and Johnny inserts the one minute safety fuze ready to light.

Johnny wears a concerned expression as Hellfire Jack appears and angrily whispers as well as using sign language.

HELLFIRE JACK

Without tamping, this charge may
not be enough to collapse the
gallery... nor allow our men to
escape the blast. As you well know,
the explosion will follow the path
of least resistance.

JOHNNY G

We don't have time to tamp it.
Jerry hasn't been to see us yet so
I reckon he's going to counter
attack with a charge somewhere near
us.

(MORE)

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

I will leave one man here to light
the fuze while we clear the area
and use the Geophone to check any
movement nearby.

Hellfire Jack gives a thumbs up gesture and waves every one
out. Johnny gives Solly the fuze matches and whispers -

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

I will be back to tell you to
strike but if Jerry comes before
me, you strike it and get out fast.

In the deathly silence their eyes meet - no fear - just solid
trust in each other.

INT. GERMAN FRONT LINE - ENEMY RELIEF TUNNEL - NIGHT

Sergeant Braun leads his men along the eerie, poorly lit
tunnel, which is big enough to be three abreast and be able
to stand upright to enable mass movement of troops.

Corporal Stein uses a 'pace stick' to measure the distance
required to put them abreast of the breach in their other
tunnel. Silently, he pushes a stake into the clay wall.

The men, all carrying digging tools and rifles stand aside as
the two NCOs measure exactly where along the clay wall they
should start digging.

Using his bayonet, Corporal Stein cuts an arch shape into the
timbered clay wall and beckons the men.

They silently remove the wooden boards and pit props.

The first cut into the clay starts the--

ATTACKING TUNNEL

The Germans' haste creates a low level of noise as they dig
into the clay and bag it for removal.

INT. WEST WING TUNNEL - COMPOUND - NIGHT

In total silence, Hellfire Jack and Johnny G are on all fours
using a Geophone as Jimmy Conner looks about him at the
motionless workforce, all standing like statues, dead still.

Looking at the Geophone motion discs with their earphones on,
Johnny G and Hellfire Jack simultaneously point their fingers
west at a downward angle in line with the floating needles in
the motion discs of the Geophone. Hellfire Jack whispers...

HELLFIRE JACK

They have just started their attack
tunnel...

(MORE)

HELLFIRE JACK (CONT'D)

over there to come beneath us.
 (standing now he gestures
 for silence and to stay
 put. Beckoning Johnny to
 follow him)

Over here, I have a deep
 communication tunnel. A hands and
 knees only I'm afraid but enough
 for you to put in a Bore-hole
 charge to bring them down and their
 main gallery with them... Johnny,
 the race is on.

He pulls back a tarpaulin, which is hiding a sandbag revetted
 opening approximately three feet high by two feet wide and
 pitch black inside.

The tarp falls back into place and Johnny goes back to the
 men still standing in silence as Hellfire Jack disappears up
 the shaft ladder. Johnny instructs the men.

JOHNNY G

Jimmy, have you got a Bore-hole
 charge in your store?

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

Aye lad, already primed and ready
 to blow; safety fuze or electric,
 got all the bits here when you're
 ready.

JOHNNY G

Good, give it to Kinney.

(off Kinney)

Check it and bring it to the
 entrance... then get another one.
 The rest of you get your tools, a
 flat trolley and sandbags. Jimmy,
 we need torches and an auger for
 the Bore-hole charge... and your
 Chinks can fill extra sandbags for
 tamping. Brummie get the Geophone
 and come with me.

Silently they disperse to start work as Brummie scoops up the
 Geophone and follows Johnny to the tarp where he lights two
 torches and drops to his knees and crawls into--

THE COMMUNICATION TUNNEL

--where Johnny leads the way on hands and knees down a steep
 gradient.

Brummie lights the lamps in the recesses cut into the walls
 of the tunnel as he passes them.

Reaching a point where an alcove is cut into the wall, Johnny
 sets up the Geophone while Brummie lights the nearby lamps.

In the oppressive silence and poor light, Brummie watches Johnny fit the ear pieces and starts listening.

His face is dribbling sweat onto his hands as he places the motion discs; first on the floor and then on the wall.

Brummie's concerned face watches Johnny as he quickly takes off the ear pieces and gesticulates to move deeper.

Just a few yards further down the gradient, Johnny stops and uses the Geophone again.

Anxiously, Brummie watches him place the motion discs on the wall and then on the roof of the tunnel. Quickly removing the ear pieces he gives Brummie the thumbs up and whispers...

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

You set up the trolley with sandbags and make sure its secured to a good rope to control the descent. Put six bags on it and Kinney can come down in front with the auger. Send Andy to relieve Solly. Solley'll tell him what to do. You're in charge up top... Send Solly down with the next load of sandbags. C'mon, *tout de suite*.

Brummie departs, leaving Johnny listening to the enemy.

INT. GERMAN FRONT LINE - ENEMY RELIEF TUNNEL - NIGHT

Seemingly oblivious to the noise, the German miners dig ferociously into the hard clay face of their tunnel as the spoil is bagged and thrown back to a waiting trolley.

Sergeant Braun and Corporal Stein stack explosives onto a flat trolley.

CORPORAL STEIN

(in German)

I hope this bang ends this fucking war. I swear I'll shoot that cunt, Hoffman if this goes on much longer.

SERGEANT BRAUN

His resting place is down here in the shitty guts of France... just you wait and see.

Stein's brooding face cracks into a grin...

CORPORAL STEIN

You crafty Bavarian yodeler. You've got a secret plan - haven't you?

(MORE)

CORPORAL STEIN (CONT'D)

I knew you was up to something to be quiet all this time. Our previous snotty bastard went missing. Herr Hauptmann Keller; been missing since Easter; another Prussian prick, just like this bastard.

Sergeant Braun grabs Stein's neck and pokes a bayonet into his gizzard. Snarling quietly but frighteningly sincere...

SERGEANT BRAUN

Ideas like that are dangerous, especially when you are already in your grave down here, you--

Stein pushes him off, rubbing his neck with one hand and a pistol in the other.

CORPORAL STEIN

--You too are in your grave if you touch me again. You need to ask for a weekend pass; you're beginning to look like a fucking mole instead of being my friend.

The two German warriors simultaneously realize their strong bond is not worth breaking. They drop their weapons and embrace with a strong hug and much back slapping.

SERGEANT BRAUN

Let's give these fucking Tommies a trip to the angels... just look at all these fucking fireworks.

Private Scorzeny appears pulling a trolley laden with sandbags full of spoil and disappears along the tunnel.

CORPORAL STEIN

Not long now, Herr Englander.

Sergeant Braun's facial grime hides the fear within as he bends to see his men beavering away at the clay face several yards into the shitty guts of France.

INT, WEST WING TUNNEL - COMPOUND - NIGHT

Brummie, Tat and Yiggs wrestle with a rope, feeding it through their hands as the loaded trolley inches down the gradient toward Johnny G and Kinney.

Jimmy Conner arrives with two Chinese labourers carrying a Bore-hole charge. Gently, they place it next to another as Jimmy places a 'T' handle shot blaster (plunger type).

THE COMMUNICATION TUNNEL

Kinney uses the earth auger, drilling at an angle to bore beneath the Germans, who can now be heard digging not far away above them. The auger is difficult to use but soundless.

Johnny and Solly stack sandbags, blocking their own tunnel on the downward side. Johnny sees Kinney sweating and struggling with the auger. Everything is said in whispers and signs.

JOHNNY G

How much more?

KINNEY

Another foot, maybe eighteen inches. Clay's fuckin' hard.

JOHNNY G

Get up top, send Allballs down with the first torpedo. Go on, fuck off.

Silently, Kinney disappears up the gradient as Johnny turns the auger. Churning the clay out of the hole is knackerin in the confined space and foul air of the tunnel.

Solly bags the soil and they change over, Solly on the auger.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Right, that'll do. Pull it out and take it up top. Where's fuckin' Allballs?

The trolley arrives with Allballs and a six foot long torpedo that weighs heavy and is difficult to push into the auger hole bored to fit the torpedo in the tunnel wall.

Grunting, pushing and sweating, the Sappers persevere in the confined space and finally slide it home so just the metal end-cap is showing in the torch light.

Johnny unscrews the cap to reveal the initiation set up, which Johnny cleans off the grease from two brass segments with clips for electric detonation.

In the centre is a hole for safety fuze detonation. Johnny whispers to Allballs...

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Go get the other torpedo. Bring it down nose first and bring the blasting cable.

Allballs lies flat on the trolley and tugs the rope. He noiselessly disappears as the men up top pull him up.

Johnny uses the Geophone again and can hear German voices over the noise of the digging tools. He removes the ear pieces and packs away the Geophone. He whispers to Solly.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Don't need that anymore. They're about ten feet away and digging like hell. We'll wait till they stop and start carrying their explosives in, then we'll blow.

Allballs arrives with the second torpedo and a coil of wire.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Right, go back and get me two drums of Ammonal.

Allballs lies on the trolley, tugs the rope and off he goes.

INT. GERMAN FRONT LINE - ENEMY RELIEF TUNNEL - NIGHT

Sergeant Braun beckons his men to join him at the stack of explosives. The men creep out as Corporal Stein goes in with his pace-stick.

He gestures for them to sit and have a smoke. As they light up, Stein approaches and whispers...

CORPORAL STEIN

Nearly there. A further two metres and we can load the explosives.

(looking at the sandbags)

Tamping the charge will take half an hour and we need to fill more sandbags so we better get crack--

SERGEANT BRAUN

--Two minutes won't matter. Here, have a toke on mine. I got this from one of our Arab friends.

The men grin knowingly as Stein takes a deep drag and grins.

INT. WEST WING TUNNEL - COMPOUD - NIGHT

Jimmy Conner supervises the loading of two drums of Ammonal and orders Allballs to descend backwards in front of the trolley to keep it steady in--

THE COMMUNICATION TUNNEL

Reaching Johnny and Solly, he starts to unload but Johnny stops him, gesturing silence, he whispers...

JOHNNY G

They've stopped digging. Listen, quiet as the grave now.

Allballs looks at Solly's dirty face, the whites of his eyes look bigger than usual as the sweat drips off his chin.

ALLBALLS

Sithee, Staff, did you have to mention the fuckin' grave?

The palpable sense of fear increases as the noise of approaching Germans telegraphs through the overhead clay.

The scraping sounds of tools indicates further digging.

JOHNNY G

Right, they've started digging again. Get that fuckin' Ammonal in place here. Put a sandbag on each and place the other torpedo on top.

Soundlessly, the job is done as Johnny pares the electric cable ends and cuts the wire to Jury-rig the two torpedoes' brass clips in tandem, ensuring simultaneous detonation.

Passing the coil of wire to Solly, he whispers...

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Take that up top and don't allow anyone to connect to the shot-blaster. Send Kinney to relieve Andy in the other tunnel. Tell Brummie we need more sandbags for tamping.

Solly feeds out the wire as he leaves; pushing it into the bottom edge of the tunnel so as not to get entangled with feet or trolley wheels.

Allballs fishes out a roll of safety fuze from his bullet pouch and cuts two arms length pieces and hands to Johnny.

He crimps a detonator to each length and carefully inserts them into both torpedo primer holes.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

If by any chance the electric dets don't blow; You can dash down here and light these safety fuzes.

ALLBALLS

Sithee, Staff, why do they call it "safety fuze?"

Johnny grins at the gallows humour as the sandbags arrive.

They lay the safety fuzes next to the electric cable, trapping them so they can be lit from the upward side.

Silently they work laying the sandbags from floor to roof, forming a barrier for the back blast to be contained. The last of the sandbags is placed on the pile. Johnny whispers.

JOHNNY G

Go tell Quarter Master Jimmy get
all personnel out... Chinks,
everyone except my Sappers.

Allballs crawls away up the incline to--

THE QUARTERMASTERS COMPOUND

--where Allballs whispers to Jimmy Conner. In the silence of this massive dugout compound, men slowly creep through the main gallery to the Requiem Shaft ladder and up to fresh air.

INT. GERMAN FRONT LINE - ENEMY RELIEF TUNNEL - NIGHT

Eight bedraggled miners sit exhausted, wiping sweat and grime from their faces as Private Scorzeny loads heavy boxes of explosive onto a trolley and pulls it into--

THE ATTACK TUNNEL

-- where Corporal Stein prepares cables and primers for the detonation of this massive underground mine.

Puffing and panting, Private Scorzeny starts unloading the explosives. He accidentally drops a heavy box with a dull penetrating thud into the clay floor.

In the dark confines of the roughly hewn tunnel his eyes bulge with fear and pain as Stein's strong hands grab his scrawny throat and chokes the shit out of him.

CORPORAL STEIN

(in German)

You fucking dip-shit. If they
didn't hear us before, they've
fucking heard us now. Go get the
rest of the men to bring the boxes
here... fucking *schnell!*

Fighting for his breath and totally distressed he frantically unloads the trolley and pushes it back to the men in--

THE RELIEF TUNNEL

--just as Sergeant Braun turns up accompanied by Hauptmann Ernst Hoffman, wearing overshoes to protect his highly polished jackboots.

The men scramble to their feet as their officer approaches and Scorzeny arrives with the empty trolley.

ERNST HOFFMAN

Scorzeny, you look frightened. Have
you seen the enemy in there?

Corporal Stein appears, playing out electric cable.

CORPORAL STEIN

We need to hurry. Scorzeny just dropped a box - telling the enemy exactly where we are. They could bury us any minute and--

SERGEANT BRAUN

--*Schnell!* Get the explosives into place. *Schnell, schnell,* move now.

The men start immediately loading trolleys with explosives as Ernst Hoffman slowly begins his retreat backwards.

Stein gives Sergeant Braun the eye indicating Hoffman's retreat.

SERGEANT BRAUN (CONT'D)

Hauptmann Hoffman, bring the exploder and detonation cord from the pile behind you. *Schnell,* before we are buried here.

The colour drains from Hauptman's face and everyone stops what they are doing to look at him.

The moment is exquisite for Stein and Scorzeny; their faces beam sardonically.

Literally shitting himself, Hoffman turns and quickens his retreating pace,

The men hurl lumps of clay after him and his face is a mix of fear and anger as he runs and stumbles headlong into a loaded trolley, knocking himself out.

Stein looks on, shocked as the men dash forward and pick Hoffman up and carry him to a trolley and wheel him to--

THE ATTACK TUNNEL

--and lay him next to the wall of explosives where they gag and tie him. Corporal Stein smiles knowingly as the men continue to stack the explosives.

CORPORAL STEIN

I am so glad I am Bavarian or maybe I would be part of his disappearing act.

Sergeant Braun slaps his shoulder and whispers...

SERGEANT BRAUN

My men have been with me for years. We're all from the same colliery back home. Loyalty to each other means more than the Kaiser or any Prussian bastard...

(MORE)

SERGEANT BRAUN (CONT'D)

We have more respect for our enemy
than these prancing fuckers dressed
like fucking peacocks.

Stein gulps as he regrets man-handling Scorzeny. He watches him building the stack of explosives neatly around the head and shoulders of Ernst Hoffman. Oh fuck, I need to apologise.

INT. WEST WING TUNNEL - COMPOUND - NIGHT

Solly gives Kinney more grenades and whispers...

SOLLY

Johnny said to relieve Andy but
maybe you should stay with him for
a couple of minutes - we're all
ready to blow here.

KINNEY

Aye, we'll hae a ciggy afore he
gans back here. An' dinnea ye
forget me if ye blow afore me.

SOLLY

Fuck off, you daft bat. I'll come
for you later. Go and kill some
fucking Germans.

Kinney stuffs grenades into pockets and pouches and goes to--

WEST WING TUNNEL (TRACKING)

--bent double, then drops on all fours, crawling towards the breach.

He stops to clear a roof fall and fits a sett to prevent further falls. If he wasn't frightened before he certainly is now.

Fear of a roof collapse widens his eyes as he continues his terrible journey to the breach where he climbs down into--

THE GERMAN UNDERGROUND GALLERY

--where Andy sits puffing on a ciggy as he looks through the observation gap to where the Germans would come.

Sensing movement behind him he turns to see Kinney creeping up on him. He whispers...

ANDY

There's something going on in the
dark along there. I could hear
whispering and maybe a footfall.

They both stand still with cocked ears listening. Silence.

KINNEY

Och, ye've bin here too long on
your own man. Ye should--FUCK!

A smoking grenade rolls between his legs - dropped from a hand through the observation gap.

Quick as lightening, Kinney picks it up and throws it back through the gap where it explodes twenty yards away... then silence as the two Scots eyeball each other momentarily.

Kinney grabs a sandbag and stuffs it in the gap leaving just enough room to peep through.

KINNEY'S P.O.V. - THE GRENADE THROWER

emerges from the smoke holding another smoking grenade and tries to push it through the smaller gap, all the time screaming and pushing.

The muzzle of Kinney's pistol pokes through the gap and the mad face is blown away and the grenade explodes harmlessly.

KINNEY (CONT'D)

If they're all like him we'se
fucked coz you didnea see him
comin'. Fuckin'ell man, light that
fuckin' fuze.

Again he looks through the gap and sees a muzzle flash and blackness as the sniper's bullet crashes through his eye, dragging his brains out of the back of his head.

Keeping his cool, Andy strikes the fuze match and presses it into the core of the safety fuze, igniting it with a hiss.

Momentarily, he kneels and mutters...

ANDY

Och, I'll sing ta ye in the glen
auld Highland warrior. The Brave.

With tears in his eyes he runs like hell to the breach and climbs up into--

THE WEST WING TUNNEL

--and crawls along in the darkness towards the light ahead of him where he can stand up, but right now he is on all fours.

His eyes glitter with fear and hope as the blast fires him along the tunnel like a dart from a blowpipe.

At one hundred miles per hour straight into the solid wall, which collapses and buries him forever along with the remains of his pal, Kinney.

INT. WEST WING TUNNEL - COMPOUND - NIGHT

In the vast compound, the earth shakes momentarily and dust drops from the timbered roof as smoke and dust billows from the west wing entrance. At the far end the Sappers crouch at--

THE COMMUNICATION TUNNEL

--looking at each other questioningly as Johnny G appears in the entrance; his face dark with dirt and anger.

JOHNNY G

Solly, come with me.

(off Allballs and Yiggs)

Connect that fuckin' shot-blaster ready to blow.

Scrambling to his feet, he runs with Solly to the west end entrance but can see they can't go any further - blocked.

SOLLY

They didn't make it, Staff.

JOHNNY G

They did; they just got to hell before us.

SOLLY

And here's me thinking I'm already in hell. Fuckin' ell Staff, you've got to find safer jobs for us. We've lost four men in as many days and here's you with a new son.

That stung Johnny. He grabs Solly's webbing and yanks him down to his level.

JOHNNY G

Don't lay that fucking shit on me or I'll shoot you my fucking self.

Solly struggles free and backs off defensively, stuttering.

SOLLY

I didn't mean any harm, Staff. Don't send me to another squad... What's left of my life is here with you and my pals.

Johnny shrugs off his anger and his eyes sadden as he mourns the loss of Andy and Kinney.

JOHNNY G

First, Billy Nolan, then Taff and now Andy and Kinney. I don't want to lose any more men, especially you, you big lug...

(MORE)

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

I need a sergeant, a corporal and more men and I think you have earned your corporals stripes. C'mon, let's go and kill some fucking Germans.

Silently, they make their way back to Allballs, Yiggs, Tat and Brummie, who are casually smoking and drinking tea with Jimmy Conner.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

I've got a pan of all-in stew on the stove with some fresh bread. Would you like some now or after you've blown?

Johnny looks at his men, each face in turn.

JOHNNY G

Are they still making a noise down there?

ALLBALLS

If anything, they are working harder since that last blast... Where's Kinney and Andy?

The sadness in Johnny's and Solly's eyes wipes the smile off Jimmy Conner's face.

JOHNNY G

They didn't make it. The two bangs we heard could have been grenades but the third was definitely a rifle shot. But for sure the fuze was lit and we'll never know what acts of valour took place in that hole.

WO2 JIMMY CONNER

It maybe not the right time to say this but new men are back at rear echelon. You should go and look them over. Blow your hole now and fuck off. This war waits for nobody.

Silently, Johnny grabs a stethoscope and disappears down--

THE COMMUNICATION TUNNEL

--on all fours. Reaching the sandbag tamping he checks the safety-fuze and electric cables and starts using the stethoscope, placing it to the roof.

Allballs creeps down to him and whispers to get out.

ALLBALLS

Hellfire Jack wants you up top.

They crawl back to the exit hole and half in half out, Johnny looks up at Hellfire Jack.

JOHNNY G

What's up, sir?

HELLFIRE JACK

According to my plans, I reckon Jerry has got his sums wrong... You are directly under his mine - Yes?

Johnny nods his head, yes.

HELLFIRE JACK (CONT'D)

Well, you are about forty yards that-a-way.

(pointing west back down
the tunnel)

So to hurt our galleries he needs to be at least thirty-five yards nearer. So you can blow him now and we'll all go for some breakfast. What!

He realizes his cheerful demeanor is lost on these men.

HELLFIRE JACK (CONT'D)

Staff Sergeant Gordon, have you got something to tell me?

Johnny gets up and dusts himself down and the others stand to attention. Hellfire Jack is totally bemused.

JOHNNY G

That breach in the west wing took two of my men and I can only assume they are dead because most of the gallery has collapsed and will take days to repair it.

Hellfire Jack harrumphs and ponders awhile, then whispers...

HELLFIRE JACK

Right. Bloody hell... Right, blow this mine and take your men back to rear HQ and make the most of a rest and hot food. Five new men will report to you before your next shift, tomorrow night... Yes?

JOHNNY G

Very good, sir, but will my men receive gallantry awards for dying the way they did?

(MORE)

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)

Their families deserve to have something from their sacrifice.

HELLFIRE JACK

During the last ten days, hundreds of thousands of men have been killed in action on this front. I hope their families will get more than a gong and a bit of ribbon...

(annoyed)

Give their names to the Regimental Chief Clerk... as though he hasn't got enough to do. Damned cheek. I didn't expect that from you.

JOHNNY G

Just one more thing, sir...

HELLFIRE JACK

WHAT?

JOHNNY G

I need a corporal and I thought you might promote one of my men, sir.

Piqued, Hellfire Jack stage whispers with a snarl...

HELLFIRE JACK

I just told you, five new men will report to you tomorrow night. One of them will be a corporal... and Captain Hamilton-Cox is your new squadron commander. Report to him when you finish here. Carry on.

Hellfire Jack strides away and climbs the Requiem Shaft ladder to fresh air.

Jimmy Conner slaps Johnny's shoulder and whispers...

TOMMY TUDOR

He talks to me like that at least twice a week. He needs some sleep. I don't know how the fuck he does it - he's all over this front line; in and out of dozens of tunnels.

JOHNNY G

Bully for him, but he doesn't do what we do.

(off Allballs)

Get back down the hole with the stethoscope and tell me when they've stopped making a noise. We'll eat now and one of the others will relieve you shortly.

Allballs crawls down the hole and the others head for Jimmy Conner's shed.

INT. GERMAN FRONT LINE - ENEMY RELIEF TUNNEL - NIGHT

Sergeant Braun lights a ciggie and offers one to Corporal Stein, who takes it and lights it off the same match.

Private Scorzeny and the others are taking the last of the boxes of explosive into the --

ATTACK TUNNEL

--and stacking them to the roof. Scorzeny drops to his knees and whispers into a crack between the boxes...

PRIVATE SCORZENY

(in German)

I hope you can hear me, you Prussian bastard. You are about to go to hell in the tiniest of pieces. Open your eyes, you cowardly turd, I want you to be awake to start your journey. I wish I could undo the gag so I could hear your screams.

The poor light of the tunnel is just enough to see one eye open; that is how Scorzeny built the boxes around Hoffman's head, he's waited a long time for this.

PRIVATE SCORZENY (CONT'D)

Ha, you are awake. It is I, Scorzeny, the Bavarian, the one who is in that grey area. Remember? Along with three soldiers you are going to execute for cowardice in the face of the enemy. How ironic for you to be waiting your turn to die for being a coward.

Sergeant Braun and Corporal Stein join him at the pile of explosives.

SERGEANT BRAUN

On your feet, Scorzy, we're going to detonate now. Wish him bon-voyage and fuck off.

Scorzeny mutters something to Hoffman and scurries away as Stein connects the cable to the detonator.

INT. WEST WING TUNNEL - COMPOUND - NIGHT

Eating Jimmy Conner's stew, the men are in better spirits but sorrow is still in the air around them.

BRUMMIE

Sithee, Staff, shall I go and
relieve Allballs now?

Johnny G nods approval and Brummie scampers away to--

THE COMMUNICATION TUNNEL

--and crawls down to Allballs, who whispers...

ALLBALLS

I can hear three men up there and
possibly six or seven men a few
yards back. One of them just said
'Auf wiedersehen' so they must be
finished and ready to blow...
there's no other noises so we need
to move now.

The two Sappers quickly crawl out to see Johnny standing
there waiting for them. He is holding the shot-blaster, ready
to hit the T-plunger.

JOHNNY G

Are they all still there?

ALLBALLS

They've stopped working but they
are still there... ready to blow.
Fire it now and they all die.

Very quickly, they fill the tunnel entrance with sandbags and
step back as Johnny holds the plunger.

INT. GERMAN FRONT LINE - ENEMY RELIEF TUNNEL - NIGHT

The men load their tools and equipment into a trolley and
start filling the Attack Tunnel entrance with sandbags.

Corporal Stein is uncoiling electric cable as he slowly moves
along the tunnel. A shot-blaster is attached to a webbing
strap slung over his shoulder.

Sergeant Braun supervises his men blocking the Attack Tunnel
entrance. He hears footfalls and voices approaching.

He sees Corporal Stein stand to attention as a group of
officers surround him - he points to Sergeant Braun.

The group of officers approach Sergeant Braun and OFFICER#1
beckons him. He marches to them and stands to attention.

OFFICER#1

(in German)

Where is Hauptmann Hoffman?

SERGEANT BRAUN
Safe in his bunker, I imagine.

OFFICER#1
I detect a hint of sourness,
Sergeant... You are Bavarian, yes?

SERGEANT BRAUN
We all are, here at the sharp end.
Not really the place to see
officers such as your good selves.

OFFICER#1
Your remarks are borderline
insolence, Sergeant. Perhaps a day
or two in the trenches will curb
your tongue.

SERGEANT BRAUN
If you don't mind, sir. We need to
move further along the tunnel so we
can fire our mine.

OFFICER#1
Where is the mine?

Sergeant Braun points to his men.

SERGEANT BRAUN
My men are blocking the entrance to
prevent back blast; a necessary
task for all our mines.

OFFICER#1
Show me.

SERGEANT BRAUN
The entrance is just there, sir.
There's nothing to see.

OFFICER#1
Show me the mine.

SERGEANT BRAUN
But, sir. That means--

OFFICER#1
Show me the fucking mine.

Overhearing this, Stein quietly places the cable and shot-
blaster on the ground and sneaks off into the darkness.

The men dismantle the sandbag wall in the entrance to--

THE ATTACK TUNNEL

-- and Sergeant Braun hands officer#1 a torch as he squats to squirm through without going on all fours. The other officers line up to follow - all this just to save face.

In his explosive coffin, Ernst Hoffman can see little but can hear all.

His chance of staying alive comes nearer as the group are able to stand in the small cavern of explosives.

Officer#1 shushes everyone to silence as Hoffman hums frantically through his nose.

OFFICER#1 (CONT'D)
Silence. What is that humming noise? Call the sergeant in here.

An officer bends down and shouts along the tunnel...

UNKNOWN OFFICER (V.O.)
Sergeant! Get in here now!

Knowing his enemy would have heard the shouting, Sergeant Braun gathers his men.

SERGEANT BRAUN
They've found Hoffman.
(off Scorzeny)
Connect the blaster and fire it.
Don't wait for me - go now.

Dumbfounded, the men stand there awkwardly, but when Scorzeny runs towards the Blaster they soon catch up.

INT. WEST WING TUNNEL - COMPOUND - NIGHT

In the silence, Johnny hears a muffled voice. He whispers...

JOHNNY G
They must think they're fireproof. Quick, get Solly and Jimmy Conner and get up the Requiem Shaft out of harms way. We are about ninety feet deep here and their bomb isn't going to blow upwards to make a crater, it will follow the path of least resistance and possibly blast through here. Go... now.

The two Sappers sprint lightly to Jimmy's shed and Johnny sees the four of them running to the Requiem Shaft.

Stepping to the side of the entrance, he looks down to see the electric cable running beneath the sandbags.

He hits the plunger - nothing.

He pulls back the plunger and hits it again - nothing.

Frantically, he pulls away the sandbags that block the entrance and crawls along, all the way down to the sandbag wall, behind which are the torpedoes.

Frantically searching for the fuze matches he delves into his bullet pouch and pulls out a box of matches and with it the little robin, which tweets loudly as it drops to the ground.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)
Bloody hell, it's you again.

He swiftly scoops up the bedraggled robin and puts it back in his bullet pouch and hurriedly strikes a fuze match and pushes it into the scarfed end of the safety fuze.

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)
Great Lord of the Universe please
help me now.

The match fizzles out. In a frenzy he lights another...
That's when he hears a "baby cry."

JOHNNY G (CONT'D)
Oh, sweet Jesus...

He forces the match into the core of the safety fuze -

A fizz and off it burns, sparkling through the tiny gap in the sandbag wall.

He checks his watch and crawls like hell towards the exit.

The robin "tweets."

INT. THE GERMAN FRONT LINE - ENEMY RELIEF TUNNEL - NIGHT

Private Scorzeny connects the cables to the brass segments on the Blaster and without looking, hits the plunger.

An enormous explosion obliterates the Attack Tunnel, vaporizing everything to create a gigantic cavern and ball of flame that rips through the gallery incinerating everything.

Corporal Stein feels a shock wave in the air of the tunnel and smirks knowingly as he hears the explosion.

He picks out a ciggie and in a split second of vision, sees it disintegrate with his hand as he instantly turns into ash.

INT. THE WEST WING TUNNEL - COMPOUND - NIGHT

Approaching the compound at the end of the Communication Tunnel, Johnny feels the earth beneath him tremble. Fucking hell.

He crawls faster but is buried by a roof collapse just as he reaches the compound.

Timbers pin him down as tons of earth tumble down on him, trapping his legs beneath the timber.

The entrance to the Communication Tunnel is hidden beneath tons of earth.

The deep, roaring noise diminishes to that of creaking timbers until eventually, silence... and then voices calling from a long way away - ninety feet up the ladder at--

THE TOP OF REQUIEM SHAFT

--Allballs, Brummie, Yiggs, Tat and Solly, each carrying spades, scramble down the ladder; ignoring Jimmy Conner's pleas for safety.

Other miners now appear and set about re-rigging the winch and overhead pulley that lifts sandbags and loaded trolleys full of spoil to the surface.

Miners' rescue teams work to a frenzied pace to save their comrades and these men are in full swing, like clockwork.

THE BOTTOM OF REQUIEM SHAFT

The five Sappers reach the bottom and are appalled at the sight of the caved-in tunnel. Nevertheless, they start digging as more men arrive with spades and sandbags.

Nobody speaks as they dig like hell and the spoil is hoisted up to the surface. Furiously digging, one man stops and asks,

MINER#1

Sithee, how many men are trapped down here?

SOLLY

One!

MINER#1

One? Who is it?

SOLLY

Johnny G. Staff Sergeant Gordon.
Our bossman.

ALLBALLS

Sithee, too much yackin' an' not enough fuckin' diggin'.

Underneath the rubble, Johnny is fast slipping away and is struggling to breathe.

In a dream-like state he hears voices like that of his men, mingled with the voice of his wife and the cooing of a baby.

He hears Captain Davidson, "You reap what you sow, Sergeant."

Lying trapped in a near foetal position able only to move the fingers of one hand, he tries to reach his face but can't.

JOHNNY G

Great Holy Father, shine your light
on the son I will not see. I
beseech thee never to let him
witness that which I have seen and--
(he passes into
unconsciousness as he
accidentally flicks open
his bullet pouch)

The bedraggled little robin's head pops out and "Tweet."

ALLBALLS

Hush! Quiet, fuckin' shut up.
Listen, I just heard a bird...
(pointing)
Down there... listen.

The silence is strangely expectant... "Tweet."

ALLBALLS (CONT'D)

Sithee, dig straight in there.

As they dig, so does more earth collapse, so wooden setts are inserted to hold back falling earth.

The men dig furiously, sweating and cursing French soil. A dirty hand is exposed and a cheer goes up from the men.

The tools are dropped and the men dig with bare hands. Solly clears muck from around the wrist and feels for a pulse.

SOLLY

Nothing... Aww, fuckin' hell...
Wait, I just felt a tiny throb.
Yes, its very weak - fuckin' get
him out!

Solly frantically clears muck from around the arm as Brummie scrambles out of the hole and yells...

BRUMMIE

Send down the Oxygen Resuscitation
Kit and a stretcher... And have a
medic standing by up there.

Allballs and Solly clear the muck from around the head and Solly gently removes the helmet. The other miners expertly remove the earth from the timbers.

They can see that the timbers have broken both legs and the tibia and femur bones protrude grotesquely from each leg.

Solly opens Johnny's mouth and plucks out the debris, clearing the airways.

SOLLY

C'mon, Johnny. This is no time for malingering. Hellfire Jack'll have our guts for garters if we don't wake you up.

YIGGS

Don't wake him till we get him on the stretcher. He'll be in too much fucking pain when we move him.

Allballs pulls the stretcher into place and the men gently lift Johnny onto it, his broken limbs dangling uselessly.

Brummie fits the resuscitation kit on the stretcher and places the oxygen mask over Johnny's mouth. All set, he shouts...

BRUMMIE

Hoist away carefully.

The stretcher is too long to fit the tubular steel shaft so has to ascend at an angle with Brummie climbing the ladder at the head end and Solly beneath him at the feet end.

THE TOP OF REQUIEM SHAFT

Two miners turn the winch handles as Brummie climbs out of the shaft carefully holding the oxygen mask to Johnny's face.

Clearing the lip of the shaft, Solly appears holding the stretcher steady as the winch men lower it to the ground.

A MEDIC leans over Johnny and quickly assesses the visible injuries, negatively shaking his head.

MEDIC#1

(Devonian accent)

His pelvis is fair smashed and his spine is probably broken - Oh argh--

BRUMMIE

--Don't fuckin' write him off yet you fuckin' scrumpy head.

MEDIC#1

Us West Country boys knows our way around broken bodies better than any fuckin' grockle, so shut yer fuckin' yap 'n gerrim o'er to the casualty tents wi'out gerrin shot. Snipers are busy at dawn.

Solly and Brummie each grab a handle at the head end and Allballs and Tat gets the feet.

Soldiers hold back the tarp so they can exit then run to the outer tarp allowing them into the French dawn and the ravaged landscape of trenches and shell craters.

EXT. THE WESTERN FRONT - BRITISH LINES - DAY (DAWN)

Trudging and stumbling through trenches where groups of men huddle around camping stoves brewing tea and cooking breakfast, the five Sappers stoically carry Johnny G to--

REAR ECHELON HQ CASUALTY AREA

--where the dead lie in rows as far as the eye can see.

Setting the stretcher down amongst hundreds of wounded men, the Sappers look around for a medic.

Solly and Allballs can't believe their eyes as they see a blood spattered nurse wearing a nose-bag like a papoose on her back as she tends to the wounded.

ALLBALLS

Sithee, yonder nurse still has our baby. Holy Mother of God... look!

Puzzled, the others looks to see what all the fuss is about.

BRUMMIE

We need to find a medic smartish if we're to save Johnny. Whassup?

SOLLY

We've found our own Florence Nightingale. Look she still has the baby Johnny saved the other day.

Allballs approaches the nurse who looks up at him. Immediately recognizing him she stands up and gives him a most beautiful smile. He points to Johnny.

ALLBALLS

Remember I told you about Johnny G? He's over there on the stretcher badly wounded because the tunnel roof caved in on him.

Holding her by the hand he takes her over to Johnny.

The six of them kneel by Johnny as she unhitches the nose-bag and lifts out the baby who instantly awakes making baby noises like they do.

The warriors are enchanted by the baby - and so is Johnny.

The baby looks at Johnny and they see he is awake.

In this extraordinary moment, the moaning of the wounded and the sounds of battle cease as the baby and Johnny smile at each other.

One last glance at each of his men as their tears cut through the clay on their faces as they watch his eyes glaze over in the departure of his soul.

Johnny's eyes close as his journey to the angels begin and the little robin pops out and joins him, flying high over the fields of France.

SUPERIMPOSE:

A British soldier, John J. Gordon, died of his wounds at Trones Wood during the Battle of the Somme on 11th July 1916.

FADE OUT.

THE END