

Platoon. Act 2 Scene 4

*Western Front, the Somme. The height of the artillery barrage. Flashes in the darkness. Against the tarpaulin we see TOM, RALPH and ARTHUR crouched down in full kit, trying to stop the noise from their ears. The stage begins to lighten. Suddenly the barrage stops. We hear the birds singing. TOM and RALPH rise slowly. ARTHUR remains in some kind of trance. Now an ear occasional bursts of fire from the German guns.*

RALPH. Not in daylight! Not in bloody daylight! Why leave it so late? We could have gone over in the dark. They'll see us all now!

VOICE (off): Stand by!

VOICE (off): Close up Nine Platoon! Iggerly, iggerly!

TOM. Every man should have two jobs.

RALPH. Hitch my big pack up Tom. . .

TOM (hitching the pack as RALPH loosens straps) No one should be stuck forever in one boring job. We should all share the tedious work and the interesting work.

RALPH. Fuck! I've broke this nail. Loose this strap will you?

*TOM does so.*

If I'm in a shell hole I'm going to be out of this like greased shit. The water in them holes can drown you.

TOM. It needs thinkers in charge, not thick heads. Rational men. Men who have proper regard for the thoughts of others. Readers. Men who've taken the trouble to read what the thinkers have to say.

RALPH. I'm not going to drown. Shot or blown to bits but not drowned. Loose your straps. I reckon if you're out of your pack quick enough and get it under your feet you might keep up. But tie your water bottle separate. Fuck all use not drowning if you die of thirst! Oh these straps. I'll never get out fast enough.

TOM. You could cut them.

RALPH. I've tried. Bayonet's too blunt!

TOM. Borrow this.

RALPH. That's your leather knife . . . What will you do?

TOM. Oh aye. - .

RALPH. What you made of Tom? You going over there to talk philosophy with them?

TOM. There's a lot of good German philosophers.

RALPH. Well there's fuck-all of them over there! Wake up Arthur, get up.

VOICE (off): Move up nine platoon. Move!

ARTHUR (to his pet pigeon England's Glory): Now sweet . . . now my beauty . . . the sun is shining and the air is clear . . .

RALPH. Hold on to me Tom. Oh mother, I've got the movies. Push me if you see me falling back . . . don't let them see me go back. Christ I'm clasped so tight I'll bust!

*CSM RIVERS dashes in to join them.*

RMRS. Heads down! Get your heads down! Seven-thirty ack-emma. . . mines detonating.

VOICES. Stand by! Stand by! Take cover!

RMRS. Brace yourselves!

*A vast deep roaring sound as the Hawthornden Ridge mine goes off. They cower and sway as the shock waves go through the trench.*

Well the Pals! Next stop Serre for Beaumont Hamel, Bapaume and Berlin! (Shouts off.) Mr Williams, sir!

Move your platoon up! (Quietly to TOM:) Think of her, shall we Hackford . . . think of her? If you lose your officers don't make for the gaps in the wire . . . Jerry's got his Spandaus trained on the gaps and he'll rip you to pieces. . . cut your own; understood? Got your wire cutters?

TOM. Yes sir.

RIVERS. Let glory shine from your arseholes today boys. Rise on the whistle . . . dress from the right . . .

rifles at the port . . . go steady and we'll be drinking schnappes and eating sausages by sundown. Boggis. . .

let's have a prayer.

ARTHUR. Oh God. . . do you smile still? Do you smile to see your handiwork?

*Whistles begin to blow around the theatre, mingling into one another.*

RIVERS. Over we go . . . stay in line . . . right marker!

VOICES. Come on the Pals. Up the Accringtons! Nine platoon! Ten platoon! With me, with me, with me!

Dress from the right. Leave that man! Leave him!

*They go over the top.*

*Mingling with the machine guns stuttering we hear an awkward, heavy piano introduction to Edward German's 'Oh Peaceful England' being played. EVA appears in her Britannia costume. She is singing at the fund raising concert. She looks tense and nervous . . . almost angry. She begins to sing:*