

COMRADEN

By

Shane Fairbanks, Tia Curtiss, Thayne Harris, Roni Hecker,
and Josie Snyder

COMRADEN

World War I Drama

Plot Summary:

This is the story of two young men who meet in a deadly encounter in the blood soaked fields of No Man's Land in World War I. Both men entered the war from different countries, with different expectations, and their experiences in war have greatly changed their worldview, and their personalities. The men nearly kill each other after they both end up in the same shell hole during an attack, and when one of them awakes after being severely wounded, their conversation reveals that they have more in common than two enemies may have realized.

Character List:

Wilhelm (Willy) von Frank - College-aged German factory worker, socialist, has a British girlfriend who attends the University of Erfurt in Erfurt, Germany. When war breaks out in 1914, Willy will be torn between his commitment to his nationalistic family, his socialist ideals that make him a conscientious objector, and his love for his foreign girlfriend. He will do everything he can to avoid the war, but once drafted the pressure from his father and fear of a life-sentence in prison for his cowardice convince him to reluctantly join the German army headed for the Western Front. When the story takes place, it is four years into the war, and Willy has become a hardened veteran of the war. He and the German army are fighting for survival in the face of fresh American troops sent to attack in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

Elizabeth Coleridge - American exchange student at the University of Erfurt. She is unable to return to her family in Buffalo, NY since the war has broken out, and her love for Willy is her only solace. When Willy leaves for the Western Front, she will find no comfort in his letters, which begin to reveal the detrimental impact of war upon his character to the point that she feels she no longer recognizes him. Meanwhile, her classmates, townspeople, and even Willy's family treat her as a foreigner who has no place in Germany. Her passion for Willy and hope for making a life with him after the war in Germany drives her to serve as a nurse for the Red Cross, which brings her directly into contact with the horrors of war.

Johnathan Williams - Johnathan is a patriotic and idealistic young American who is a recently graduated student from high school who plans to attend New York University to study law. He hopes to one day be a politician, and he is a firm

believer in the American dream, Wilson's Progressive international diplomacy, and when the United States is drawn into war in 1917, he enlists in order to bring democracy to the "enslaved people of Europe." His father, Alfred, is ardently opposed to the war, believing that the war has been started by militarists hoping to profit from the lives and sacrifice of boys like his son. Against his parents' wishes, Johnathan joins the army and goes to the Western Front as a doughboy. After being sent to the Front, he engages in his first battle in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

Alfred Williams - Johnathan's father. He is a simple man with little ambition besides being a sundry store owner in his small town. He hopes that one day his son will continue in his footsteps, but he is willing to support his son's ideas of going to college in New York, with the hope that he could return to practice law in their small town. He does not support the war, and he is fearful that his son will try to go to war against his wishes. Alfred lost a brother in the Spanish-American War, and he does not believe that war can be justified unless it is in self defense.

Marcus LaGree - Marcus works in his father's church as a janitor and odd-job man. He lives and works in the same town as **Johnathan**, but they do not really know one another since Marcus is African-American and has never really associated with Johnathan. He is young and ambitious, but he sees little opportunity for an African-American youth, so he hopes that registering for the US Army will give him a chance at equal treatment and equal opportunity after the war. After he joins, he will be assigned to the Harlem Hellfighters and see action in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

Freddie - **Marcus's** African-American friend who serves in the Harlem Hellfighters with him. He is quiet, but personable. He hopes to not only distinguish himself in war, but also to survive. He never rushes into a fight with suicidal enthusiasm, but keeps his head low and bravely protects his friends when under heavy fire.

Helen Hughs - Helen is a nurse that Johnathan encounters before he arrives on the Western Front at St. Mihiel for the American offensive. She has seen terrible bloodshed as a Red Cross nurse and has participated in numerous amputations and surgeries in field hospitals. She is drained, bitter, and intensely afraid of further attacks made by the Allies since she knows that it will only put more men in her field hospital. She converses with the love struck Johnathan about horrors of war and she reveals to him how unromantic and unchivalrous war will be.

Heinrich - German Friend and hardcore fighter who inspires and trains Willy to do battle as part of the

Stosstruppen. He is driven, patriotic, and fears nothing. He takes on danger with such ease and is so cool under fire that it initially makes **Wilhelm** fear him, but then inspires him.

Otto von Frank - Father of Willy. He is a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War and he expects his son to achieve military glory on the battlefield. When he realizes that Wilhelm is not a patriot and that he wants to avoid the war by working in a factory or dodging the

Samantha - American Red Cross nurse who is working in a field hospital with **Helen**. She is sassy, flirtatious, a smoker, and is in Europe to escape the stuffy conservatism of American society -- looking for adventure and freedom by working in the war. She foreshadows the changes that will take place after the war with independent flapper women.

Adolf - Adolf is a shy, antisocial, but incredibly patriotic young Austrian. He does not associate with his comrades in the trenches. He will be a minor character, but his scenes will allude to the fact that he is Adolf Hitler. He will nearly be killed by **Johnathan** in No Man's Land, but Johnathan -- who has just watched Wilhelm die in the shell hole and is preparing to run back to his trench -- does not kill Adolf, although he has him in his rifle sights.

Captain Wilson - Officer of the American regiment that JOHNATHAN belongs to. He is driven to earn distinction in battle by having his men break through the GERMAN defenses.

Lt. Shaw - White Officer of the Harlem Hellfighters. He is condescending toward his African-American troops, and he demands the best of them.

Eddy - JOHNATHAN's friend from high school. The two registered together after graduation, but EDDY did not feel fully committed in the sense that JOHNATHAN did. He is timid, shy, and a little awkward. His friendship to JOHNATHAN is all that really drew him to the war, but now they are in the trenches together. He will be killed in battle from a German gas attack.

Props List

Totems for each of the main characters to unite them

White paper

Yellow paper

Blood (corn starch, red dye)

Smoke grenades

Guns
Handgrenades
Baby powder
Shuvels
Wood
Machine gun mount
Candles
Lanterns
Barbed wire
Helmuts
Nurse costumes
Saw
Tatered clothing
Clip boards
Medical tent
Hankerchief

OPENNING EXT.AMERICAN TRENCH - DAY

Film opens with sound BATTLE NOISES, MEN LOADING WEAPONS, BOMBS EXPLODING, ORDERS BEING GIVEN, over a black screen that displays slow fading credits and title sequence.

There will be no music playing in this scene to emphasize the battle noises and expressions on men's faces.

Quick cut to JOHNATHAN who is NERVOULSY BREATHING HEAVILY, LOADING HIS RIFLE, then holding it to his chest. His back is pressed tightly to the wall of his earthen trench. Men around him are preparing to go over the top -- awaiting instructions.

Cut to camera tracking backward as it reveals many men preparing to go over the top and loading weapons as BOMBS EXPLODE across No Man's Land. Camera passes OFFICER, who turns toward camera to address his men in the trench.

(CONTINUED)

CAPTAIN WILSON

(Arms behind back, confidently addressing men in a southern drawl)

Men! This is the opportunity that you all have been waitin' for. You have *trained* for this moment. Your country *depends* on you for this moment. Your momma *birthed* you for this moment. And your girl will *kiss the hell outta ya* when you get home because of this moment. The Hun is across that 1,000 yards of dirt. They call that space "No Man's Land" for a reason. You *do not* want to be caught in No Man's Land for any period of time. Get to the Hun's trench, or die tryin!

Camera cuts to Johnathan during the speech, with OFFICER blurred in background (bokeh shot).

CAPTAIN WILSON

On my mark, men. Wait for the Whistle!

Camera focuses on JOHNATHAN's face as CAPTAIN WILSON says his last line. He closes his eyes in terror as he waits for the whistle to sound and the screen goes black as BATTLE NOISES and JOHNATHAN'S HEAVY BREATHING are heard.

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY (PAST)

WHISTLE NOISE sounds as JOHNATHAN flashes back to being in Gym Class as a senior in high school.

MR. TYSON

(he drops the whistle from his mouth)

Bring it in lads!

JOHNATHAN bounds over to the coach with his friend EDDY trailing behind.

MR. TYSON

Gents, I have something to show you.

MR TYSON proudly displays an "I WANT YOU FOR THE US ARMY" Uncle Sam draft poster. As he proudly displays it, there are excited smiles and some noises of approval made by the boys who slap each other on the backs and elbow one another jovially.

(CONTINUED)

MR. TYSON

As you know, the dirty Germans have been sinking our American ships, and Uncle Sam isn't gonna take it any more. Now our President has asked for your support. I, myself, would join, but I'm just past the age for registration, so it is up to you, young men, to serve your country and make the world safe for democracy!

JOHNATHAN's eyes light up and he excitedly stares at the poster his teacher holds up to the crowd of boys. EDDY, standing next to him, looks decidedly less enthusiastic, but pensive as he looks around at his classmates.

MR. TYSON

Now I'm not one to push you boys into joining a war. But this is a just war, and it is a patriotic duty to serve your country. Some of you will be graduating soon, so let me just say how proud I will be to shake the hand of the man that leaves here to go over there.

JOHNATHAN is nodding enthusiastically at this point.

MR. TYSON

Well, enough chit chat. Let's have you start runnin lines! We can't send Uncle Sam a bunch of chubby recruits!

JOHNATHAN and EDDY begin walking over to the baseline of the basketball court.

JOHNATHAN

I can't wait. I'm registering the day after graduation.

EDDY

You so sure that it's a good idea?

JOHNATHAN

(condescendingly)

Uh, yeah. Why not?

EDDY

Aren't you afraid to get shot, or *killed*? I heard the Germans use gas.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNATHAN
(playfully punching his friend
on the shoulder)
It's nothin we can't handle!

MR. TYSON
Alright, boys, on my mark!

Quick cut from the end of the gym scene with a close angle on JOHNATHAN's excited face to the now terrified JOHNATHAN huddled against the wall for cover.

CAPTAIN WILSON
On my mark, men. Wait for the
Whistle!

The WHISTLE SOUNDS and the men ROAR as JOHNATHAN and his regiment pour over the top of the parapet. BATTLE NOISES and EXPLOSIONS tear through the air as BAGPIPES play and men charge blindly into No Man's Land.

Camera pans up over the trench and follows JOHNATHAN as he and his men begin running into No Man's Land. Cut to drone camera following men up and over. MEN SCREAMING WILDLY as ENEMY MACHINE GUNS AND RIFLE FIRE erupts across the battlefield. EXPLOSIONS fall all around the men who begin to fall in droves.

Camera cuts to line of men running elbow to elbow get shot down (front angle).

Camera cuts to line of men get blown to pieces (behind angle) as camera tracks to the side.

Running camera tracks on JOHNATHAN as he runs through No Man's Land. Men fall left and right of him, but he continues through No Man's Land until it is just him running.

EXPLOSION blows up off camera from JOHNATHAN who falls into a shell hole in the middle of No Man's Land.

Gas clouds begin to spread across No Man's Land as the American forces retreat. Germans begin their counterattack running into No Man's Land wearing gas masks and running down the Americans who flee back to their trench.

EXT.SHELL HOLE - DAY

Gas clouds pour into JOHNATHAN's shell hole as he quickly pulls on his mask. He drops his rifle beside him as he does so.

WILLY jumps into the shell hole wearing a mask and looking toward the American trench without realizing that Johnathan is on the opposite side. He turns and sees JOHNATHAN who pulls a knife and stabs WILLY in the stomach beneath the rib cage. Camera sees shock and terror in WILLY's eyes beneath his mask, then turns to JOHNATHAN who -- also shocked and terrified -- falls backward and inches back to his side of the trench.

The smoke begins to clear and JOHNATHAN rips off his gas mask as he BREATHS HEAVILY. Camera tracks to his face which displays feelings of relief, exhaustion, and shock.

JOHNATHAN (V.O.)

I never knew war would be so terrible. Nowadays, everything scares me. The German guns, the gas attacks, the explosions that rip men's bodies apart -- it wasn't supposed to be like this.

BLACK SCREEN

"One Year Earlier"

EXT. SMALL TOWN DAY (PAST)

Slow fade to Johnathan running through mainstreet of a small town. He waves to some passers by, then enters his home.

INT.HOME - DAY (PAST)

JOHNATHAN, walking excitedly through his home's hallway, carries a paper indicating that he has registered for the US Army, and he poudly carries it to display to his father.

JOHNATHAN

Father!

ALFRED

Good morning, JOHNATHAN. You seem awfully excited this morning.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNATHAN
Oh, I am, Father!
(he stands at attention
proudly)
I am now PRIVATE JOHNATHAN
WILLIAMS! Newly registered for the
United States Army!

JOHNATHAN continues to stand at attention, smiling at his father, but his smile slowly begins to fade as he sees how the news has affected ALFRED's disposition.

ALFRED
(almost whispering, obviously
distraught)
What have you done?

JOHNATHAN
How do you mean?

ALFRED
Registered!... for this... this...
War!

JOHNATHAN
I must protect my country, Father
--

ALFRED
(angrily and sarcastically)
From what?!

JOHNATHAN
German tyranny! They've destroyed
Europe! This is something we have
to do!... *Something I have to do.*

ALFRED
--In a war that *America* has no part
of!

JOHNATHAN
But President Wilson says that we
must make the world safe for
democracy --

ALFRED
Oh, that's glorified
propaganda! Don't you realize that
his war is just a war for profit!

(CONTINUED)

JOHNATHAN

No, Father, it's different from that. I'm fighting for democracy -- for something I *believe* in!

ALFRED

So when this war is over, what then? You think the rest of the world will want to be just like us?

JOHNATHAN

I don't see why not --

ALFRED

(condescendingly)

Think, JOHNATHAN! You are no more likely to spread American democracy by giving your life in battle than my brother was likely to do so when he died of meat poisoning in the Spanish-American War! He joined Uncle Sam's imperialist war with the same youthful enthusiasm that you are now, and he never even saw a battle. Never did anything to help the Cuban people. Never did anything to give any *gifts of democracy to the world*. (actor add hand quotes) He simply gave his life, ingloriously, as he shit himself to death because he thought that war was worthwhile.

JOHNATHAN

It's more than that. Over there, our doughboys are making a difference.

ALFRED

(pleadingly)

Then why are the Germans still fighting? Why have they not been beaten? They've been warring on two fronts and *still* cannot be crushed.

JOHNATHAN

(stuttering and searching for an answer)

Because... Ah... but now the Russians are finished, so it's a race to France to beat the German reserves to the Western Front --

(CONTINUED)

ALFRED

And who's to say that you'll get there fast enough? Whose to say that you giving your life, or limbs, or sanity to this cause will do *anything* to help the world?!

JOHNATHAN

(struggling to put his thoughts into words)

But... President Wilson says --

ALFRED

I don't care what Wilson says! I care what happens to you. I care about your future! You are worth so much more than this war will offer you... (sadly) You wanted to be a lawyer--

JOHNATHAN

--I wanted to be a Senator, or even President someday, but how can I do that if I am not willing to fight for my country?

ALFRED

Let those who want war give their lives for their country! You're my son, and I want you to live!

JOHNATHAN

(dramatic pause)

Wars cannot be won if sons will not fight. You think you're the first father to disagree?

ALFRED

Nor will wars be won by the sacrifice of one more. If you go, I cannot give you my blessing.

A long silence ensues as father stares at son. JOHNATHAN looks from the floor to his father, then to the floor. He appears to be starting to cry, and he slowly starts to exit the room, then breaks into a run.

INT. CHURCH - DAY (PAST)

JOHNATHAN, distraught after his confrontation with his father, runs into the first church he encounters. He enters the Baptist Church and LOUDLY BANGS down into a pew, gets on his knees and begins to pray with his registration papers CRUMPLED in his hands. He is BREATHING LOUDLY, MUMBLING prayers when he is interrupted.

MARCUS
 (stopped suddenly from his
 janitorial work)
 Can I help you, sir?

JOHNATHAN
 (surprised -- he didn't see
 MARCUS there)
 Huh? Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't
 realize anyone else was in here.

MARCUS
 No, it's ok. I'm just getting
 things ready for tomorrow's
 services.

MARCUS walks slowly over and sits in the pew near JOHNATHAN.

MARCUS
 I'm Marcus.

JOHNATHAN
 Johnathan.

JOHNATHAN makes the move to shake hands, and MARCUS, a little surprised at a white man willing to shake hands with an Afro-Am. takes his hand and respectfully shakes.

MARCUS
 Nice to meet you.

JOHNATHAN awkwardly looks as though he's about to start praying again, but does not because he believes MARCUS wants to start talking.

MARCUS
 You know, it ain't often I see a
 white man come into my daddy's
 church.

JOHNATHAN
 (somewhat surprised and
 looking around)
 Why not?

(CONTINUED)

MARCUS

Well... this a Negro church... Sir.

JOHNATHAN

Oh. Yeah, I guess I forgot. Same God though, right?

(laughing awkwardly)

MARCUS

(laughing)

Yeah, I guess you right. Mose people just not as... uh... open to the idea as you, I spose.

JOHNATHAN

Well, I'm looking for some answers... I guess a Negro church is as good as any to find those, right?

MARCUS

Mmmmmhmmm. Jesus here to hear them prayers, alright.

JOHNATHAN nods and looks as though he's going back to his prayers as MARCUS briefly admires the surroundings and looks curiously at JOHNATHAN.

MARCUS

So whatcha need answers fo? Sumpin' on yo mind?

JOHNATHAN

You could say that. The fate of the world. The rape of Belgium. Democracy versus tyranny. And my future on top of all of that.

MARCUS

(surprised at the weightiness of answer)

Phew. I figured it was bout a doll and her gams.

JOHNATHAN

(laughing lightheartedly)

No. I don't have a woman in my life. YET! ...No, nothing like that. I signed up for the army. But my dad said I'm just going to be turned to cannon fodder and throw my life away for a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOHNATHAN (cont'd)
pointless war that doesn't concern America. But I think it's a war that concerns everyone. If I don't serve in this war, I'll never be able to respect myself. I mean how can I love a country that I'm not willing to die for? And what good is freedom if you can't help others to have the freedom of democracy too?

MARCUS
(nodding and pensive)
Well, I know whatchu mean. I'm actually shipping out next week with the Army too.

JOHNATHAN
(excitedly)
Really? That's when I'm leaving too! Maybe we'll be in the same regiment!

MARCUS
(smiling at his new friend's naivete)
Naw... I don't think we'll be in the same regiment. I'm gon be in the Negro regiment.

JOHNATHAN
(disappointed, realizing his stupidity)
Oh, right.

MARCUS
I'll probly be doing some trench diggin', or grave diggin', or kitchen duty. But I figure it's the only way Uncle Sam gon recognize me for my potential, you know? I don't want to work in my daddy's church forever, and maybe fighting in the war will get me somewhere different.

JOHNATHAN
You see? That's what I'm talking about. But my old man just doesn't get it. I want to fight to make our world a better place!

(CONTINUED)

MARCUS

Then maybe you just gon have to do sumpin. We won't get anywhere by asking for things and keepin our heads down. We gotta earn it and fight for it.

JOHNATHAN

(nodding, pensive)
You're right...

He leans back in the pew and nods as if coming to his senses.

JOHNATHAN

(extending his hand to MARCUS to shake it again)
Hey man. Thank you. I came to the right place.

MARCUS

(smiles shyly)
Anytime.

JOHNATHAN

Looks like I'll be seeing you next week.

MARCUS

Yessir. We'll go show Uncle Sam that we gonna fight for our rights.

JOHNATHAN

Amen to that.

They both LAUGH. JOHNATHAN gets up and walks out as MARCUS sits with a proud smile on his face and looks around the church, then he leans forward with his head down and begins to pray.

EXT.FIELD HOSPITAL ON THE WESTERN FRONT - DAY (PAST)

****Scene where JOHNATHAN meets HELEN.**** She gives him a little dose of reality of what the Western Front is really like. Scene should open with her performing surgeries and attending to wounded with SAMANTHA. After a brutal scene she takes a stress-relieving smoke break outside of the field hospital as JOHNATHAN walks past and is entranced by her.

Scene opens with HELEN straightening up, setting a scalpel down, and leaning back from her patient. The camera is

(CONTINUED)

positioned just behind the horizontal body of the patient, where we can see HELEN's face clearly. She looks exhausted, and resigned to the fact that her life has become a bloodbath. Camera flicks to the other side of her as she turns around and begins walking away from the patient. Another young woman in a stained nurse outfit walks alongside her - SAMANTHA.

HELEN
(Resigned)
You did well today. Don't beat yourself up over what happened.

SAMANTHA
(Worried)
It's just so hard to see, you know?

They are still walking toward the camera, and SAMANTHA falls behind as HELEN approaches the door flaps of the tent

HELEN
(Expressionless)
It is. But there's nothing we can do about it except work what we've got.

She leaves SAMANTHA behind and walks out of the tent. She walks a short distance behind the tent and leans against a nearby tree. huddling over, she pulls out a pack of cigarettes and matches. She lights one with shaking fingers and leans back with relief against the tree. A young boy walks from the opposite direction towards her, and HELEN looks up to see JOHNATHAN approaching.

JOHNATHAN
(Giving a flirty smile and holding a letter out to HELEN)
Hey! You HELEN?

HELEN
(Nodding hesitantly)
What do you want?

JOHNATHAN
(Sidling closer)
Samantha said this came in the mail for you.

HELEN
((Taking it from him))
Thank you She turns a little away from him to read it. Her expressionless mask breaks a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HELEN (cont'd)
little, but she swallows and
manages to keep it together.

JOHNATHAN
(Concerned))
Are... you okay? What's going on?

HELEN
(Shaking voice))
Nothing. Just... nothing.

JOHNATHAN
(Stepping a tad closer))
...Are you sure?

HELEN
(Steeling her expression and
looking him straight in the
eyes))
I said, I'm fine. Who are you,
anyway?

JOHNATHAN
(Puffing out his chest and
smiling, not realizing that
she's not in the mood))
Johnathan Williams. I'm a private.
My friend Eddy got hurt, so I'm
visiting him.

HELEN
(Trying to wrap her head
around how this boy can
possibly seem optimistic about
War.))
Well, Johnathan, why are you here?
In France, I mean. They haven't
even sent out a draft yet. She
tilts her head expectantly.

JOHNATHAN
Well, I'm here because I believe in
freeing the enslaved people of
Europe and bringing them democracy.
I can't just sit at home and go to
law school and just let innocent
people suffer.

HELEN
(Laughing bitterly))
You don't know anything, do you?

(CONTINUED)

JOHNATHAN
((Confused))
What... what do you mean?

HELEN
I assume that you're happy to be here?

JOHNATHAN
Well, yeah, like I said, I want to deliver -

HELEN
So you want to just spill more blood?

JOHNATHAN
No-

HELEN
You want to put more innocent American men in my hospital?

JOHNATHAN
No, Helen, I don't think you understand-

HELEN
No Johnathan, I don't think you understand. Have you ever seen the inside of a person become the outside? Or watch a person rot right before your eyes?

JOHNATHAN
((Getting pale))
No, of course no-

HELEN
Yeah, well, you don't want to.

JOHNATHAN
Helen, this war isn't about individual people, it's about fighting for the greater good-

HELEN
This war has taken everything from me. I've been here for a year, an entire year, Johnathan, watching people die right in front of me, doing everything I can to stop it, but all of my efforts are for

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HELEN (cont'd)

naught because they die anyway, and i can't do anything about it. It's taken everything I loved, Johnathan! My life, my family, and now - (Choking back tears) - now it's taken my brother. So don't you dare tell me that war isn't about people, because everything it is is people. Just because you volunteered to put yourself in this hell doesn't make you a prince in shining goddamn armor. It makes you an idiot.

JOHNATHAN

((Taking a breath and realizing))

I'm so... I'm so sorry, Helen. I didn't realize.

HELEN

((Taking a deep breath and drawing herself together))

No... no, it's not your fault. It's not your fault at all. It's how the press romanticizes this place, and it's not your fault that you are one of thousands of young people who believed their lies. I'm sorry that this is how you have to discover the truth of how this world works.

JOHNATHAN

I just want to do some good. Any good. Now that I'm stuck here, I may as well do something. So I'll fight.

HELEN

((Smiling, a little more genuine than before))

That's the spirit.

((The sides of her smile drift down again into a sad frown))

I just hope to God that I never see you in my hospital.

JOHNATHAN

((Giving a hesitant nod))

That won't happen.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

((Looks at him with a knowing
sort of gaze))
Nothing is ever decided. You may
get out of here without a scratch.

JOHNATHAN

((Turning as he hears a call
in the distance))
I hope so.

HELEN

You and me both.

Johnathan nods and heads off. Helen watches him leave with a sad expression and then looks at the tent, resigning herself to the fact that now she has to get back to work. She heads back inside.

EXT. WESTERN FRONT - DAY (PAST)

MARCUS sits with FREDDIE, shovels in hand. They are taking a smoke break when their commander LT. SHAW interrupts them.

SHAW

(angrily)
What the hell you two doin? Did I
say to take a break? You are
fighting in the most elite Negro
Regiment this country has to offer,
and I don't recall anyone saying
Uncle Sam wanted you to piss the
war away smokin'. If you boys
wanna be in the Harlem
Hellfighters, then you better fight
better than you dig trenches!

MARCUS

Yessir!

FREDDIE

Sorry, Sir!

SHAW

Reports from the brass are sayin
that the Germans are preparing an
offensive along our front. We're
still waiting for reinforcements,
so this trench better be ready
faster than the Huns can say
"Wienerschnitzel"!

SHAW walks away as MARCUS and FREDDIE get back to work.

(CONTINUED)

****NEED CONVERSATION BETWEEN MARCUS AND FREDDIE** ACTORS
just plan on a little ad-libbing**

JOHNATHAN slogs through the mud of the trench with his men. His regiment is part of the reserves being brought up to the Front. He sees MARCUS and is visibly surprised.

JOHNATHAN

Marcus?

MARCUS

Johnathan!

JOHNATHAN

I thought you said you wouldn't see any frontline duty?

MARCUS

Well, this offensive's been a slaughter, so they're callin in erbody they can get, I spose.

JOHNATHAN

Have you seen any action yet?

MARCUS

Nope. Just foot sloggin' and mud crushin'.

JOHNATHAN

Huh?

MARCUS

Trench lingo. You'll learn it quick enough... You look nervous. You alright?

JOHNATHAN

Yeah, just... well I've heard that the front is pretty bad.

MARCUS

Damn straight it is. But I ain't seen much of the grim reaper yet. Fritz has just been droppin' lead in No Man's Land tryin to soften our defenses. No attacks yet, but rumor is it's gonna happen any day now. I was in the reserve trenches until today, and this one was pummeled pretty hard just before we got here. Just tryin to fix it up and make it feel like home.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNATHAN
(looking around nervously)
Yeah, well, I guess I better rejoin
my unit.

MARCUS
Alright. You take care of
yourself, Johnathan.

JOHNATHAN
You too, buddy.

JOHNATHAN begins to walk away as FREDDIE rejoins MARCUS.

FREDDIE
Who the hell was that whiteboy?

MARCUS
The defender of democracy.

FREDDIE
What?

MARCUS
Just a kid who doesn't realize what
he's gotten himself into.

FREDDIE
(jokingly)
Oh, and you do?

MARCUS
(laughing)
I know more than you do!

FREDDIE
Get back to yo shovel, boy!

FREDDIE & MARCUS return to digging trenches when the sounds
of GERMAN CANNONS ERUPT across the front lines, sending
everyone into a panicked rush to find their weapons and
cover.

EXT.TRENCH - DAY (PAST)

Continuation from previous scene. Men begin frantically
seeking cover as explosions rip through the Trench.

Prepare to use practical effects like flying dirt, debris
and smoke canisters.

(CONTINUED)

After a minute of bombardment, gas canisters drop into the trench and begin to HISS loudly. Terrified, the men hurriedly grab their gas masks and pull them on. JOHNATHAN gets his on in time, but another man near him cannot get his on in time and begins CHOKING and GUTTERING loudly. He grabs JOHNATHAN for support, and JOHNATHAN holds the dying young man as his eyes roll back and he expires.

Camera passes over various shots of men in masks, huddled to the earth. As the gas fades away, men begin removing masks, but as they do a WAR CRY ERUPTS across the GERMAN LINES.

Men in the American trench hardly have time to remove masks and begin grabbing weapons as MACHINE GUN FIRE cascades across No Man's Land from the American defensive positions. JOHNATHAN dives to his post and begins firing over the trench.

BATTLE SOUNDS echo across the lines as men are shot next to JOHNATHAN left and right. He grabs hold of the machine gun after the man firing it is shot through the head and collapses. He begins FIRING WILDLY when a grenade is thrown and EXPLODES beside the gun position. JOHNATHAN is blown back from the trench wall and falls hard to the ground.

As he begins to recover his senses a line of GERMAN ATTACKERS begin crawling over the parapet of the trench and drop into the American defenses. Men SCRAMBLE and FIRE wildly. Camera tracks backward as JOHNATHAN gets to his feet and runs backward FIRING his rifle as he goes.

He TRIPS over a fallen comrade and drops his weapon. A GERMAN soldier runs up and prepares to fire when he is unexpectedly shot and collapses on top of JOHNATHAN. JOHNATHAN, who is shocked and overwhelmed by all that is going on, pushes the body off of him with a look of terror on his face.

MARCUS and FREDDIE run up to him and help him up.

MARCUS

You can always count on the Harlem Hellfighters, eh white boy?

JOHNATHAN

(exasperated and stuttering
from terror)

MARCUS? Oh, God! What...

FREDDIE

They're falling back!

Camera passes over the trench scene revealing bodies -- both AMERICAN and GERMAN -- tossed about the trench in carnage as the GERMAN soldiers retreat back across the parapet and into No Man's Land.

SHAW
(hurredly and angrily)
COUNTERATTACK! Over the top, men!

MARCUS
What?! But we've just been shot to pieces!

SHAW
Get your asses over the top! Run those bastards down before they get back to their trench. That's an order!

A WHISTLE BLOWS as men begin climbing the parapet. EXPLOSIONS from GERMAN mortars begin SPUTTERING and FALLING all around the men. MACHINE GUNS and RIFLE FIRE SPITS from the German lines as men begin a mad rush across No Man's Land, seeking cover as they go.

Camera follows JOHNATHAN and two men in front of him. One gets hit and falls. JOHNATHAN and the second man are thrown off their feet by an explosion, and they begin crawling, but as MACHINE GUN fire rakes No Man's Land, a bullet hits the second man. JOHNATHAN, lacking any other cover rolls the mans body up and he frantically begins burying his face in the dirt as he sounds like he's WEEPING.

Camera cuts to MARCUS and FREDDIE who are not far away, seeking cover in No Man's Land as bullets and mortars rip across the landscape.

MARCUS
We're pinned here!

FREDDIE
We gotta go back.

MARCUS
(seeing JOHNATHAN behind a body and frozen with fear)
Damn, kid!

MARCUS begins to run, head kept low, through enemy fire to get to JOHNATHAN'S position.

(CONTINUED)

FREDDIE
Where the hell you goin'?

FREDDIE, realizing what's happening, begins to run after MARCUS.

MARCUS
We gotta get outta here.

JOHNATHAN
(STUTTERING and fearful)
No... I... We... Can't...

MARCUS
C'mon!

FREDDIE arrives and begins firing to over cover. A grenade lands in their midst and they all briefly see it. FREDDIE jumps on the grenade and his body is tossed in the air as JOHNATHAN and MARCUS fall to the ground.

MARCUS
FREDDIE!

AMERICAN soldiers all around them fall back in retreat to their trench. MARCUS grabs JOHNATHAN and pulls him to his feet as the two run back toward the trench. JOHNATHAN is the first over the parapet. He turns and looks to see MARCUS preparing to hoist himself over the parapet back into the trench when several bullets hit his back and sprays blood from the exit wounds. He hovers a moment on the top of the trench, and then falls forward over the wall just above JOHNATHAN.

** Need to find a way to have MARCUS fall as if no one catches him and collides hard with the trench floor.

JOHNATHAN slowly reaches down to the bloodied corpse of his friend. As he does, EXPLOSIONS pummel the AMERICAN trench again. Dust and debris sprays from down the line behind JOHNATHAN as he looks at MARCUS and the explosions are getting closer and closer.

SHAW
(grabbing JOHNATHAN wildly,
bringing him back to reality)
Get down you fool! Counterbarage!

They both fall to the dirt wall as an EXPLOSION PULSES near them.

EXT.SHELL HOLE - DAY

The EXPLOSION SOUND from the previous scene wakes JOHNATHAN up with a sudden jerk. He blinks a few times and realizes that he's in a shell hole with a GERMAN across from him.

JOHNATHAN looks around and inches to the top of the shell hole looking for a way out. As he peers above the hole toward the GERMAN lines, a SHOT rings out and WHIZZES past JOHNATHAN as other shots PUNCTURE the dirt at the edge of the shell hole.

JOHNATHAN slides back down into his position as he is visibly worried and wondering how to escape from this position.

Camera cuts to inside WILLY'S gas mask. He is slowly regaining consciousness and sees JOHNATHAN across from him. His hands slowly reach up to his mask and he pulls it off with a loud GASP for air.

JOHNATHAN frantically grabs for his rifle and aims to fire.

WILLY
(weakly, but quickly)
Nein! Comraden!

JOHNATHAN
What?

WILLY
Ich gebe auf!... I surrender...
Please don't shoot.

JOHNATHAN
(uncertain of what to do,
rifle still ready to shoot)
I thought I killed you.

WILLY
Not yet... It seems that you came
close though...

JOHNATHAN, unable to decide what to do, keeps his rifle on WILLY and looks around frantically, as if an attack is imminent. He slowly and nervously moves toward WILLY, then with a sudden rush he grabs WILLY'S rifle and falls back to his position.

Camera shows side angle of the two. A few seconds of awkward silence emanate the shell hole as the two stare at each other. WILLY is seriously wounded, laying flat against the shell hole as his hands awkwardly move around his

(CONTINUED)

stomach and chest looking for the wound. He finds it and WINCES LOUDLY. He stares up at the sky, BREATHING LABORED AND HEAVILY.

JOHNATHAN does not take his aim from his enemy and continues staring at him in shocked amazement.

WILLY
It would seem I'm dying.

JOHNATHAN
You jumped into my shell hole.

WILLY
Such was my fate.

JOHNATHAN
(angry and somewhat emotional)
Why'd you do it?

WILLY
Do what?

JOHNATHAN
Jump in my shell hole!

WILLY
(smiling sardonically)
Correction... It was you who were occupying *my* shell hole.

JOHNATHAN, not sure what to make of all of this looks confused behind his gun sights.

WILLY
So what is your name, my young friend?

JOHNATHAN
I'm not your friend.

WILLY
I'm practically dying in your arms. My life was mine, and it looks as though you have taken it from me. What could be more intimate than to give another person your life?

JOHNATHAN
You didn't *give me* your life.

WILLY

But I didn't take yours.

JOHNATHAN

(harshly)

You *would* have.

WILLY

Yes... Probably... But here we are... And I would like to know the name of the man that has taken my most important possession from me.

JOHNATHAN

(resigned, after a pause)

Johnathan.

WILLY

Johnathan... I'm Wilhelm... My friends call me Willy.

JOHNATHAN

You speak pretty good English, Wilhelm.

WILLY

Call me Willy, please. And yes, I do speak English well.

JOHNATHAN

Why?

WILLY

What do you mean?

JOHNATHAN

(speaking disrespectfully and somewhat sarcastically)

Why do you speak English so well? You're *German*, afterall.

WILLY

Should not a German know how to converse in English as well?

JOHNATHAN

We're enemies.

WILLY

Our countries, yes. But you and I have no reason to be enemies now... You've stabbed me in the lung, and your blade must have hit even more,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WILLY (cont'd)
for it pains me to breathe or even
move. The blood flowing from my
stomach does not appear to be
slowing down. I anticipate that my
war is over. Let us talk as men,
not as enemies, so that I may die
in peace.

JOHNATHAN
Die in peace? What makes you think
that you deserve that? Where was
the peace for the Belgians when
your countrymen raped their women
and butchered their children?

WILLY
That is just Allied propaganda.

JOHNATHAN
(growing increasingly angry)
What about all of the American
ships that you sank.

WILLY
I am not a sailor, my friend. Just
a simple soldier.

JOHNATHAN
(almost growling)
Then what about all of my friends
that you've killed.

WILLY
For that, I am sorry... I am here
for the same reasons that you
are. To fight for my country and
defend my honor as a man.

JOHNATHAN
(smirking sarcastically)

WILLY
It's funny really. I never even
wanted to join this godforsaken
war.

JOHNATHAN
(suddenly surprised)
What do you mean?

(CONTINUED)

WILLY

I was a factory worker. I wanted to stay in my hometown and avoid the war... I wanted to marry my girlfriend. (smiling sadly now)

She is an exchange student at the University in Erfurt - my hometown. She is American. That is how I became such a superb conversationalist. (laughing slightly)

JOHNATHAN

Then why didn't you stay?

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF ERFURT CAMPUS - DAY (PAST)

WILLY walks in his work attire through the campus and is distractedly reading a book.

Cut to ELIZABETH walking down the steps of her class building writing in a notebook and turning on the sidewalk to walk toward WILLY who doesn't see her. They collide and both drop their things. There's an awkward scramble to pick up the materials for one another.

WILLY

Es tut mir Leid, Frauline.

ELIZABETH

Oh, I'm so sorry.

WILLY

Was?

ELIZABETH

(realizing she'd spoken English and feeling embarrassed)

Oh, I mean, Es tut mir Leid.

WILLY

English?

ELIZABETH

Nein, ich bin Amerikaner.

WILLY

(excitedly)
I speak English!

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH

You do?

WILLY

Ja! I take year in school!

ELIZABETH

(laughing)

Ah, das ist gut!

WILLY

You speak good German! I speak good American!

ELIZABETH

You mean you speak English well.

WILLY

Ja! Yes!

ELIZABETH

Bist du hier Schüler?

WILLY

No, not a student. I work.

ELIZABETH

Then what are you doing here?

WILLY

Huh?

ELIZABETH

Bist du hier Schüler?

WILLY

My home ist... over there.
(pointing far away)

ELIZABETH

Oh. It's nice to have someone that I can speak English with. It gets lonely when you are a foreign exchange student.

WILLY nods enthusiastically, but somewhat uncomprehendingly.

ELIZABETH

(gesturing toward the book)

What are you reading?

(CONTINUED)

WILLY

Karl Marx.

ELIZABETH

(taken aback)

That's some weighty stuff.

WILLY

Huh?

ELIZABETH

Das klingt schwer zu lesen.

WILLY

No, it's good! Workers of the world unite! (struggling for English words) Why... you... in Erfurt?

ELIZABETH

Well, I'm from Buffalo, NY. I'm an only child, and my father said he didn't want me to become just another housewife, so he sent me here to be educated so that I could make something of myself.

WILLY nods and smiles, but it is obvious that he is stretching his English speaking skills.

ELIZABETH

(smiling, but starting to feel a little awkward)

Well, I suppose I should get going.

WILLY

Can I walk with you?

ELIZABETH

Just us?

WILLY

Huh?

ELIZABETH

(motioning with her hands)

Just us?

WILLY

Ja! Just us!

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH

(somewhat flirtatiously)
That's not what a proper lady
should do. (WILLY appears to be
struggling to
translate)... *Richtig dame?*

WILLY

(understanding her meaning
now)
Ah, but I will be proper boy.

ELIZABETH

(laughing coquettishly)
You mean, proper gentleman.

They begin to walk as scenes of them talking and walking,
sitting on benches, holding hands, sitting beneath a tree,
fade in and out. Repetitive shots of WILLY waiting for her
outside of her classroom help give the impression that a
longer period of time has passed.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF ERFURT CAMPUS - DAY (PAST)

WILLY and ELIZABETH sit beneath a tree. It is obvious that
time has passed since now they converse in English with
little difficulty.

WILLY

I think there is going to be a war.

ELIZABETH

What does the assassination of an
Archduke have to do with Germany?

WILLY

My countrymen want to use it as a
chance to expand.

ELIZABETH

But what will happen to you if
there is a war?

WILLY

I will work in the factory. Maybe
I can avoid the draft. Everyone
says the war will be over quickly.

ELIZABETH

I certainly hope so.

(CONTINUED)

WILLY

You may not be safe here if there
is a war.

ELIZABETH

Why not? America is not at war.

WILLY

War has a way of involving everyone
eventually.

ELIZABETH

But what am I to do? I don't want
to leave. I want to make a life
here with you!

WILLY

We must stick together. No matter
what! Just us.

ELIZABETH smiles knowingly at WILLY and they hold hands.

INT. GERMAN HOME - DAY (PAST)

WILLY enters his home and begins removing his dirty factory
worker clothes. He walks into the kitchen and pours himself
a drink. His father OTTO is sitting at the table reading
the newspaper and smoking a pipe.

OTTO

(putting down the newspaper)
Guten Aubend, Wilhelm.

WILLY

Guten Aubend, Vater.

OTTO

Something came for you in the post
today.

WILLY

Oh? What is it?

WILLY sits at the table with OTTO.

OTTO

(proudly holding up a draft
notice for his son to see)
Your entry into manhood.

WILLY stares at the slip. He is at a loss for words and his
shock and anxiety show clearly on his face.

(CONTINUED)

OTTO VON FRANK

You know, I've been thinking about it all... When you were born, I made a promise... A promise to myself that I would raise you to be a man. There is a war going on for the Fatherland, but here you sit...

Otto then grabs a draft paper sent to him from the Imperial German Army and sets it in front of Wilhelm.

OTTO VON FRANK

... While your comrades of the Fatherland are working.

WILHELM

I am working.

OTTO VON FRANK

I don't see a gun in your hand, Wilhelm. I don't see medals on your chest. I don't see bravery... (emphasis on this line) I don't see the man I promised myself I'd make you.

WILHELM

I am still helping. I am still working. I am contributing to the cause.

OTTO VON FRANK

But when the Allies come and tear down the homes of the Germans and destroy the German heritage, you can blame no one but yourself for staying put.

WILHELM

There are other ways.

OTTO VON FRANK

Wilhelm, for a long time I've kept quiet in an effort to keep this family together, but your ideals...

WILHELM

(nervously)

Father, I do not agree with the war... I am a socialist, and --

(CONTINUED)

OTTO VON FRANK

(in a booming thunder-like voice, he stands and slams his fist on the table)

This is not a matter of ideals!
This is a matter of what we need...
What Germany needs... Right now! I expect you to achieve the level of glory and honor I earned. I want you to carry on the Von Frank name as I have - as a war hero!

WILHELM

But I'm not like you!

An uncomfortable silence engulfs the room as OTTO slowly walks over to his son's side. He places two fists on the table in front of WILHELM and leans toward his son.

OTTO VON FRANK

(leaning forward, icily glaring, saying the words slowly with emphasis)

That is my point. If you refuse to do your duty... Your country will abandon you, your comrades will despise you, and I... will *hate* you.

WILHELM

(looking down at the table)

Father, if you send me into this war, you send me to Hell... and if I die... (he looks up at his father) you send yourself to Hell.

WILHELM reaches slowly for the draft notice. He takes it and inches his chair away from the table as OTTO continues to glare at him and stands uncomfortably close. WILHELM gets up slowly and walks away.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF ERFURT - DAY (PAST)

****Scene where WILLY** meets up with Elizabeth outside of her classroom and explains to her that he has been conscripted.

ELIZABETH exits her school building, and upon seeing WILLY, she excitedly hurries down the steps to see him. They embrace and ELIZABETH moves in for a kiss. WILLY, somewhat abruptly withdraws his head but maintains the embrace.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH
(still smiling slightly but
curiously looking at WILLY)
What's wrong, my love?

WILLY
I think we need to talk.

ELIZABETH
(her smile fades and is
replaced by concern)
Alright. Is everything ok?

WILLY
Let's sit.

ELIZABETH nods and takes his hand. The two walk over to a bench and sit down. ELIZABETH sits patiently and looks at WILLY with concern, but waits for him to begin the conversation.

WILLY
(stuttering somewhat, looking
for the right way to begin)
I... uh... I spoke with my father,
and...

ELIZABETH
(a little confused, but
looking almost excited --
perhaps imagining that WILLY
is preparing to ask for her
hand in marriage, or something
that would be a good thing)
Yes... What about?

WILLY
Well... (clearing his throat)...
It's not what I would have wanted,
but... ah...

ELIZABETH
(looking less excited, placing
her hand on WILLY's knee)
Willy, just tell me. Whatever it
is, I'm sure we will be fine.

WILLY
(taking a deep breath and
relaxing slightly, as if
resigned to his fate)
Ok. Remember when I told you that
I wanted to avoid the war? That I
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WILLY (cont'd)
thought if I continued working at
the factory I would not get
drafted?

ELIZABETH
(concerned)
Yes.

WILLY
Well I was wrong... I've been
drafted.

ELIZABETH
But... you're only 18, and...

WILLY
And healthy, and German. What more
does the Army care about?

ELIZABETH
(rushed)
But, I thought that the war would
be over by now, or that you could
avoid it and we could make a life
together here in Germany.

WILLY
I know. But the war is unending,
and there is no way for me to avoid
it any longer.

ELIZABETH
Well, then *refuse!* We could run
away together --

WILLY
And go where, exactly?

ELIZABETH
We could emigrate!

WILLY
There's no way for a military aged
German to leave the country legally
now that the war is on, especially
if he's already been drafted.

ELIZABETH
But, what about going to
Switzerland. It's neutral. Then
we could find a way to get to
America -- to my home, and family.

(CONTINUED)

WILLY

(somewhat firmly)

No. I can't. I must serve. It's not what I want, but I will not be a coward that runs away.

ELIZABETH

(starting to tear up)

But what about our life together? You promised me that it would be just us.

WILLY

There will be time for that when the war is over.

ELIZABETH

And what am I to do without you? ...An *American girl*... in *Germany*? People already hate me. Even when I *spea*k German, they hear my accent and know. What am I supposed to do?

WILLY

...I don't know.

ELIZABETH

My only friend, and my only family is you. Your family only tolerated me before, but they'll never accept me if you aren't around.

WILLY

I know.

ELIZABETH

I'll be all alone.

WILLY

I'm about to go to the Western Front, and I will be stuck in an 8 foot trench that could be my grave. Even when I'm with other men, I'll be alone and constantly on the brink of death. And you think *you'll* have it hard *here*?

ELIZABETH

(somewhat embarrassed)

You're right... of course. It was silly of me to think about myself. I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

WILLY

I understand... but I need you to understand why I am leaving. It's not because I want to, but because I must.

ELIZABETH sits with her head down, eyes to the ground weeping silently. She holds WILLY'S hand with both of hers, gripping it with white-knuckled intensity.

WILLY

(softly)

Elizabeth... Ich liebe dich.

ELIZABETH

I love you too.

WILLY removes a necklace with a cross and saint's medal hanging from it.

WILLY

We both will be alone because of this war, but I know you will always be with me... It's just us.

ELIZABETH smiles vaguely, removes a ring from her right hand and offers it to him. He smiles and takes the ring.

ELIZABETH

Don't forget about me.

WILLY

Impossible.

EXT.SHELL HOLE - DAY

****Scene where JOHNATHAN is back in the shell hole with WILLY, who has been recounting his story. We need some transition dialogue to provide a plot jump to WILLY'S experiences on the front lines.**

JOHNATHAN sits silently pondering the stories that WILLY has just shared with him. At this point, his rifle is sitting on the ground beside him. He is visibly more relaxed, having heard WILLY share his experiences with him.

JOHNATHAN

Have you heard from Elizabeth since you left?

(CONTINUED)

WILLY

Only a few letters.

JOHNATHAN

How long have you been on the
Front?

WILLY

Two years, seven months.

JOHNATHAN

(somewhat shocked)

And in all of that time you've only
received a few letters from her?

WILLY

Yes. It was too hard to write my
experiences to her. And I hated
hearing how things were for her.

JOHNATHAN

What do you mean?

WILLY

This war has changed both of us.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH (PAST)

****Scene where WILLY meets HEINRICH and ADOLF in the trenches
and begins learning how to survive on the Western Front and
become a BA stossstrupp.**

WILLY walks through his trench as a fresh reserve in the
trench. He approaches a group of men who are LAUGHING,
playing cards, and smoking. HEINRICH appears to be the
leader of the group who is most "at home" in a trench. A
withdrawn and somber character sits apart from the men
holding his rifle.

HEINRICH

(noticing WILLY quietly
standing there, speaking
boisterously)

Willkommen!

WILLY

(nodding politely, but
speaking quietly)

Guten morgen.

(CONTINUED)

HEINRICH
Sind Sie mit dem fünften? (Are you
with the 5th?)

WILLY
Ja.

HEINRICH
Sehr gut! Das ist Maxim, Walter,
Karl, und Hans. Und das ist Adolf.

WILLY
Wilhelm. Schön dich zu treffen.
(Nice to meet you)

HEINRICH
Sitzen! (Sit!)

WILLY sits down, but is downtrodden and withdrawn from the
men.

GERMAN SOLDIERS
(resuming their card game that
HEINRICH is now dealing)
Ich werde dieses gewinnen! (I'll
win this one!)

GERMAN SOLDIERS
Nein, das ist mein!

The men LAUGH and play. HEINRICH notices WILLY's depressed
state and quietly speaks to him as his continues to play
cards.

HEINRICH
Nervös? (Nervous?)

WILLY
(pulled from his thoughts)
Was?

HEINRICH
Bist du nervös, Wilhelm?

WILLY
(looking like he's about to
cry)
Ja.

HEINRICH
Seien Sie nicht. Eine Lektion über
die Westfront: Töte sie oder sie
werden dich töten. Es ist so
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HEINRICH (cont'd)
einfach. (Don't be. One lesson
about the Western Front: Kill or
be Killed. It's that simple.)

Camera moves toward WILLY who again returns to his thoughts. He reaches up to his neck and begins absent-mindedly rubbing the ring that ELIZABETH gave him, that is now tied around his neck.

Transition into letter-writing scene

V.O. LETTER WRITING/READING SCENES (PAST)

Scene begins with WILLY writing a letter to Elizabeth from the GERMAN TRENCHES.

This scene will be done as a V.O. between WILLY and ELIZABETH as short shots blur together of WILLY starting out innocently on the battlefield by chatting with comrades, followed by smoke breaks, card games, then enemy bombardment, gas attacks, sniper fire, and all out war. As each battle scene gets progressively worse in violence, WILLY's expression should also change from fear and innocence, to anger and determination to kill or be killed.

As the V.O. from ELIZABETH is read, scenes will blur together of her walking with the letter in hand, going to class to class, and cooking her meals, but constantly depressed, distracted, and lost in her thoughts. There are no other characters associating with her in these scenes, and she should look isolated and alone.

WILLY (V.O.)

Dear ELIZABETH,

I wish that I could share with you pleasantries. I wish that I could tell you things that could put your mind at ease. But I promised you that I would never lie to you.

The Front is so much worse than I could have imagined. It's not the food. It's not the rats. It's the emptiness of it all.

We are bombarded day and night by the Allies whose shells never fall as dudds, and they throw all the weight of their industrial might from thousands of pulsating guns that shatter the earth around me, and destroy the humanity within me.

(CONTINUED)

Once the shells cease, they attack across a barren field of shattered lives and wasted potential. We meet them with sputtering fire of thousands of rounds per minute, and we spray them with the might of German nationalism.

Then we attack... After cowering in trenches like rats, when the enemy is in the open ground, we are sent over the top with bayonets fixed and ready to kill anything in sight. The moment the enemy is within reach, you lose all sense of humanity and restraint and a primal instinct consumes you. It makes me think that I would kill anything not in a German uniform at that moment: if my friend, brother, or father were in front of me, I would still run him through with my bayonet and keep running to the enemy trenches, for I know that they would do the same to me. Nothing can be worse than to survive another day as a beast within these trenches.

Is this the culmination of Man? Is this what thousands of years of human development has brought us? Where is Christ in these shell holes? Where is Nietzsche in our guns? Do Wagner's Valkyries fly as we go over the top? With what words can Schiller, Goethe, Shakespeare, or Byron justify our struggle?

I fear that I am too much of a coward: Rather than standing up for my beliefs, rather than mutilating myself by shooting off the hand that pulls my trigger, rather than leading a mutiny against my officers -- I obey, I goosestep, I kill... because I am a coward.

As V.O. of ELIZABETH's letter progresses, fade to scenes of her life on the homefront, isolation, loneliness, and WILLY's fighting and increasing tenacity on the Front. Camera sees views of WILLY's determination to kill or be killed in battle.

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

My dearest WILLY,

It is with an incredibly heavy heart that I read your last letter. I see reports about the Front every day in our papers, but I know that they are propaganda. Their reports of progress along the Front, abundances of food for our soldiers, and a retreating Allied force cannot possibly be true. I overhear my peers discussing in hushed tones the losses their families and friends experience daily from men killed or wounded.

(CONTINUED)

Selfishly, I feel as though I am fighting my own war here in Erfurt. Being an English exchange student in a German town amidst this Great War does not help me to make friends. My professors only tolerate me, the girls whom I thought were my friends avoid me, and your family...

I had hoped that your patriotic devotion and my desire to make a life in Germany would have convinced them of whose side I am on, but it would seem that love of country is stronger than love of kin.

I have nothing here without you.

The dialogue for this V.O. will blend and mix as though each were writing a different version of the same letter

WILLY (V.O.)

ELIZABETH,

I wish that I had some solace to offer you, but I have nothing left...

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

...my anguish increases daily, and I only wish that I could serve a country that wants me...

WILLY (V.O.)

...but what kind of country only wants you for cannon fodder and girth...

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

...is there no other way to use this life that has been given to me...

WILLY (V.O.)

...except to take the life of others in a war I never agreed with...

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

...it's not something that I can stand around and wait to see the conclusion of...

WILLY (V.O.)

...I must give all that I have on the Front, or I will lose all that I have...

(CONTINUED)

WILLY & ELIZABETH (V.O.)

My love, I will not stand idly by as this war takes everything from me...

WILLY (V.O.)

I will fight to this war's conclusion in order to save my life, even if I lose myself in the process...

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

I must leave Erfurt and serve as a Red Cross nurse to prove my dedication to my new country, even if I lose contact with you for a time...

WILLY (V.O.)

I can no longer write to you, for it is too painful...

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

No matter what happens, I am always with you...

I love you.

WILLY (V.O.)

Ich liebe dich.

EXT.SHELL HOLE - DAY

****Scene where WILLY is visiably fading, he struggles to keep the conversation on his end. JOHNATHAN wants to keep him alive and tries to help bind the wound, but its appears too late.**

JOHNATHAN

What will you do when you survive all of this?

WILLY

(somewhat sarcasticly smiling)
You mean, after I survive you stabbing me?

JOHNATHAN

(awkwardly, obviously
embarassed and regretful)
I mean... the war.

(CONTINUED)

WILLY

I don't believe I will survive this war.

JOHNATHAN realizing that he has done nothing to help this dying man reaches in his supplies for some gauze and a bandage to apply to WILLY'S wound.

JOHNATHAN

God, what was I thinking! Let me see if I can help you.

WILLY

(as JOHNATHAN works on the wound)

Danke. But that's not what I meant.

JOHNATHAN looks up at him, puzzled.

WILLY

I don't think that I will be the same person, even if I live through all of this... No one of our generation who comes here will ever be the same.

JOHNATHAN finishes on the wound and sits back, pensive about what WILLY has just said.

JOHNATHAN

I'm sorry. That's the best I can do. I am sorry that I stabbed you.

WILLY

I would have killed you if you hadn't.

JOHNATHAN

But --

WILLY

(interrupting)

It's war.

They sit silently for a moment as BATTLE SOUNDS are heard gently in the distance.

WILLY

You still have not told me your name, comrade.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNATHAN
(sadly)
Johnathan.

WILLY
Well, Johnathan, you need to find a way out of this shell hole, eh? If there is another attack, which we both know there will be, you must escape. Or if you wait until darkness falls, perhaps you can crawl across No Man's Land, but don't get lost and end up in my trench. (smiling)

JOHNATHAN
I will try. What will you do?

WILLY
(struggling more)
I... I must rest awhile...

JOHNATHAN watches WILLY for a moment, then he begins looking around the shell hole to see if there is a way to escape.

WILLY
(touching the ring that is tied to a strap around his neck, is mumbling to himself in a dreamlike trance)
Just us... Just us....

EXT.SHELL HOLE - DAY

EXPLOSIONS burst around JOHNATHAN, which jars him back to the realities of war. He continues to seek refuge in the shell hole as GERMAN SOLDIERS attack across No Man's Land above him. BATTLE NOISES rage as the German soldiers are cut down around the shell hole and JOHNATHAN just digs into the ground for cover.

BATTLE NOISES begin to fade slightly as GERMAN SOLDIERS retreat, and JOHNATHAN begins to check over the edge of the shell hole. He starts creeping slowly out of the shell hole checking for enemies as he does. He sees no one near him although the battle continues to rage.

JOHNATHAN gets out and quickly begins trying to pull WILLY out of the shell hole as well, apparently hoping to drag him across No Man's Land to safety. He stops suddenly and sees ADOLF, who was in full retreat but stopped and raised his rifle. Suddenly an EXPLOSION knocks ADOLF off his feet and

(CONTINUED)

JOHNATHAN drops WILLY. ADOLF has lost his weapon from the impact and looks for it when he is frozen in place by the sight of JOHNATHAN standing with his rifle aimed at ADOLF.

Dramatic pause ensues as the camera reveals ADOLF's perspective with use of D.O.F. that slowly reveals JOHNATHAN, then camera cuts to D.O.F. change in focus from JOHNATHAN's gun sights to ADOLF standing in No Man's Land unarmed.

WILLY
(mumbling again)
Just us... Just us...

JOHNATHAN looks down at the mumbling WILLY, then looks back at ADOLF. After JOHNATHAN and ADOLF exchange stares, JOHNATHAN slowly lowers his rifle.

JOHNATHAN
(pointing at WILLY)
Comaraden! Take him!

ADOLF stares, stupified, as JOHNATHAN inches away, then turns to run back toward the AMERICAN trench. He disappears from the scene as ADOLF looks into the shell hole that JOHNATHAN just crawled out of.

ADOLF recognizes WILLY's corpse. He enters the shell hole and picks up WILLY, takes him over his shoulder and begins taking his body back to the GERMAN trench.

WILLY
(still mumbling)
Just us... Just us...

EXT. AMERICAN TRENCH - DAY

Camera runs behind JOHNATHAN as he tries to make it back to his trench as gunfire bursts from the American trench all around him. EXPLOSIONS erupt nearby and JOHNATHAN is hit. He falls a few yards from his trench.

AMERICAN SOLDIERS start yelling to him and gesturing for him to get up and keep coming toward the trench, but are fearful of leaving their cover.

CAPTAIN WILSON leaps from the trench and runs into No Man's Land to retrieve JOHNATHAN

CAPTAIN WILSON
Get up, you damned fool! Quick
lolligaggin!

JOHNATHAN and CAPTAIN WILSON crawl down the parapet into the American trench with an exhausted THUD. The men around him, surprised by his survival and sudden arrival back from No Man's Land, surround him to shake his hand or pat him on the back.

EXT. AMERICAN TRENCH - DAY

Continuation from previous scene, AMERICAN SOLDIERS continue firing upon the retreating enemy. An AMERICAN SOLDIER is aiming with his scoped rifle and looking for targets in No Man's Land. He sees through his scope a retreating GERMAN SOLDIER running with one of his wounded comrades on his back.

AMERICAN SOLDIER
 (aiming and talking quietly to
 himself as he prepares to pull
 the trigger)
 Where you goin' Fritz?

A SHOT RINGS OUT.

EXT. WESTERN FRONT - DAY

Quick cut from previous scene. ADOLF stumbles as he runs through No Man's Land, but he is determined to continue carrying WILLY.

INT. FIELD HOSPITAL - DAY

RED CROSS nurses are working busily on assisting wounded and screaming soldiers. HELEN just finishes with a bloody surgery and steps back when a familiar voice sounds from behind her.

JOHNATHAN
 (arm in a bloodied sling)
 Fancy seeing you here.

HELEN, taken aback, whirls around. Her surprise turns into a coquettish smile. She walks over to JOHNATHAN who sits as she attends to his wounded arm.

HELEN
 You doughboys always come back for
 more.

EXT.FIELD HOSPITAL ON THE WESTERN FRONT - DAY

ADOLF carries WILLY to a field hospital as numerous soldiers are limping or being carried into the hospital. There is chaos and the sounds of HURT AND DYING MEN as surgeries are performed, limbs are severed, and bullets are pulled from their flesh.

A few men stand with cloths wrapped around their eyes, having sustained gas attacks that blinded them.

ADOLF lowers WILLY's body onto an operating table, and a nurse has her back turned to ADOLF, but the audience cannot see her face. She is attending another wounded man.

ADOLF

(tiredly and sadly)

Mein Freund. Kannst du ihn
retten? (My friend. Can you save
him?)

ELIZABETH

(distractedly -- we still
cannot see her face but can
only hear her voice)

Wir können es versuchen. Setzen Sie
ihn bitte auf den Tisch. Wie lange
ist er schon verwundet? -- (We can
try. Put him on the table
please. How long since he's been
wounded? --)

ELIZABETH

(she is cut off as she turns and
sees his face)

Oh my God... Is he alive?

ADOLF

Was?

ELIZABETH

(stuttering, too shocked to
remember her German
pronunciation)

Ist er am... Leben?

ADOLF

Ich bin mir nicht sicher. (I'm not
sure)

ELIZABETH, feeling for a pulse in his neck, then putting her head to his chest, we see a close up of her face on the

(CONTINUED)

moment she realizes that he is dead. Her eyes change expression from anxious anticipation to distress and sadness. She grips his body holding her head tightly to his chest and begins to sob.

ADOLF

Ist er weg? (Is he gone?)

ELIZABETH

Ja...

ADOLF

Es tut mir Leid. (I'm sorry.)

ADOLF walks away slowly. Shot holds on ELIZABETH'S expression as she continues to weep and grip WILLY'S body, but the ambient noise begins to fade, leaving only her sobs to echo. Suddenly the screen cuts to black and everything is silent.

ELIZABETH

(in a whisper)

It was supposed to be just us.

END