

VINEGAR HILL

Written by

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The true story of how a cohort of young men,
exiled from Ireland after the rebellion of 1798,
joined Napoleon's Irish Legion and fought their way
across the battlefields of Europe.

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FADE IN:

EXT. PÈRE LACHAISE CEMETERY - PARIS - DAY

SUPER: "Paris 1850"

Winter snow lies on the ground and on the ornate gothic stoneworks of the vast cemetery. It's the Christmas holidays 1850. We focus on a flower stall by the main gates. A distinguished looking gentleman in his early seventies approaches the flower stall. His name is MILES BYRNE. He wears a black frock coat and top hat with a couple of military medals discretely pinned to his chest. He walks with the aid of a walking stick. His white beard is neatly trimmed into a goatee. The female flower seller calls out to Miles.

FLOWER SELLER

Is it that time of the year
already, General?

MILES

Comes round quicker and quicker.
Did you get the bouquet like I
asked?

FLOWER SELLER

Bells of Ireland. Same as always.

MILES

You're an angel, Beatrice.

We follow Miles as he carries the bouquet along a winding tree lined path through the cemetery, passing mausoleums and tombs on either side. We come upon a grave at the bottom of a small hill, in front of which is stood a woman in her mid-sixties dressed in black. Her name is MARY LAWLESS. Miles approaches her hesitantly.

MILES (CONT'D)

Mary?

The woman turns round to face Miles.

MARY

Miles Byrne?! As I live and
breathe. Is it really you? When did
you become such an old fellow?

MILES

It kind of crept up on me.

MARY

So it's been you with the flowers
every Christmas time. All these
years. What are those flowers
called?

MILES
Bells of Ireland.

MARY
Of course. They would be. Ever the patriot.

MILES
Old habits die hard.

MARY
So how the devil are ye? How's Frances?

MILES
Ach, she's fine. She manages to put up with an old soldier. I've been writing my memoirs. Just so I keep out of her hair.

MARY
Memoirs is it? Well, there's plenty to tell. You'll have your work cut out for you if you can remember half of it.

Miles raises a hand and points to his forehead.

MILES
The rest of me might be falling apart but I've still got it up here.

MARY
So where will you start. The '98? You were there from the beginning weren't you?

MILES
People don't want to be reminded of all that. No, my story starts in France.

EXT. FRENCH SHIP - DAY

SUPER: "1803"

We open on a close up of a pair of hands holding a signet ring that bears the imprint of a woman playing a harp. We pull back to reveal that a young man in his early twenties is holding the ring. It's the young Miles Byrne.

He has close cropped blond hair and the ruddy complexion of a farmer. He's on the deck of a sailing ship. Sailors are in the background, working on the rigging. The ship's French captain approaches Miles.

CAPTAIN

We've given those English cruisers the slip, Mr. Byrne. We'll be in Bordeaux by night fall. You're a very lucky man to have made it this far.

MILES

Luck of the Irish.

CAPTAIN

I'll have word sent ahead to Paris to expect you.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

A horse and coaches thunders away from us. Paris beckons like a jewel in the distance.

EXT. COACH OFFICE - PARIS - AFTERNOON

The coach and horses has just pulled up. Miles Byrne gets out of the carriage and takes his first look at the bustling streets of Paris. He is immediately met by two men. One is dressed in the full dress uniform of a French colonel. This is COLONEL DALTON. The second man is dressed in expensive looking civilian clothes. This is DR MACNEVEN.

MACNEVEN

It's an honour to meet such a notable United Irishman. I'm Dr. MacNeven. This is Colonel Dalton. We understand you have word from Ireland.

MILES

I've a message for Thomas Emmet. From his brother.

MACNEVEN

Then what are we waiting for?

Colonel Dalton addresses his coachman.

COLONEL DALTON

(in French; subtitled)
Coachman. The Ministry for Justice

INT. COACH - AFTERNOON

The three men talk as they travel in Colonel Dalton's carriage.

MILES

You're Irish?

MACNEVEN

Colonel Dalton was born in France,
but his parents are as Irish as the
pigs in Wexford. You'll soon find
that you're tripping over the Irish
in Paris. Ever since the '98. You
were there, weren't you?

MILES

I was that.

MACNEVEN

So many Irish martyrs.

MILES

Too many. We've won a few battles.
We need to start winning wars.

MACNEVEN

That's why we're all here.
Napoleon's promised us help.

MILES

The French have promised help in
the past. It's always turned up too
little and too late.

MACNEVEN

It'll be different this time.

EXT. THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE - AFTERNOON

The coach pulls up at the ornate Ministry buildings on the
Place Vendôme.

INT. MINISTRY OFFICE - AFTERNOON

We're in the lavish offices of the Minister for Justice JUDGE
REGNIER. He and THOMAS ADDIS EMMET stand at a table looking
over some papers. The Judge wears a white wig, and looks very
grand. Both men are in their early forties. Miles is ushered
into the elegantly furnished study by Dr. MacNeven and
General Dalton.

MACNEVEN

Hello Thomas. This is the young man
we told you about. Miles Bryne. He
has word from Robert.

REGNIER

Do you recognise this man?

EMMET

I've never seen him before in my
life.

REGNIER

How do we know he's not an English spy?

Miles reaches into his pocket and pulls out the signet ring we saw earlier. He approaches Thomas Emmet and hands it to him.

MILES

Robert told me to give you this.

Emmet takes the ring, studies it, and embraces Miles.

EMMET

This man is a trusted United Irishman. What news from Robert?

MILES

It's not good. We failed to take Dublin. Robert is captured, awaiting trial. If France is to aid Ireland, it must be now.

REGNIER

The First Consul is eager to have a report on the current state of Ireland. I suggest you have it ready in the morning.

INT. EMMET'S LODGINGS - EVENING

Emmet, Miles and MacNeven have retired to Emmet's apartment to write the report for the First Consul. They've just eaten, and Emmet's wife JANE is shooing their two children out of the dining room.

JANE

To bed now, children. Your father and his friend's have important work to do.

The children leave and the three men get to work. Emmet pours them each a brandy.

EMMET

So Miles, what went so wrong with the rebellion?

MILES

It was the explosion at the depot that did for us. We had to rise before we were ready. The whole thing descended into chaos from there.

FLASHBACK - EXT. THOMAS STREET - NIGHT

A pike wielding mob is rampaging down Dublin's Thomas Street. A horse and carriage tries to force it's way through the angry crowd. The rioters bang on the side of the carriage and drag out the sixty year old LORD KILWARDEN along with his daughter and nephew. They're all terrified. The elderly man is recognised by a rebel.

REBEL

That's Lord Kilwarden. Get him.

The frenzied mob stab him with repeated pike thrusts. He dies in agony. His nephew suffers a similar fate while his daughter is helped to safety by a sympathetic bystander.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY - INT. EMMET'S LODGINGS - EVENING

MILES

Robert blames himself, but the plan's still sound. Take Dublin, the country will follow.

EMMET

I weep for Robert.

MILES

Ireland weeps for Robert.

INT. PRISON CELL, KILMAINHAM GAOL - DAY

It's 20th September 1803. The day of Robert Emmet's execution. During this sequence we hear in voice over Emmet's famous valedictory speech given at his trial. We're at the entrance to Robert's cell. Robert sits calmly as the Sheriff accompanied by a couple of soldiers opens the doors to his cell.

SHERIFF

Mr. Emmet. It's time.

ROBERT

(V.O)

My Lords, as to why judgement of death and execution should not be passed upon me, I have nothing to say.

EXT. THE COURTYARD OF KILMAINHAM GAOL - DAY

Robert has been taken down to the courtyard, where an open topped cart is ready to take him to the place of execution. A troop of cavalry and infantry are ready to escort him on his last journey. Robert shakes hands with the Governor of the gaol.

ROBERT

(V.O)

I stand here a conspirator, as one engaged in a conspiracy for the over-throw of the British government in Ireland.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE KILMAINHAM GAOL - DAY

The carriage begins its slow procession to the gallows at Thomas Street. Crowds line the street, some cheering, some jeering. The troops and cavalry attempt to keep order.

ROBERT

(V.O)

I am charged with being an emissary of France, for the purpose of inciting insurrection in the country and then delivering it over to a foreign enemy. It is false!

EXT. THOMAS STREET - DAY

The gallows erected on Thomas Street comes into view. Scuffles between the crowd and the troops break out.

ROBERT

(V.O)

It is true, there were communications between the United Irishmen and France. It is true, that by that, war was no surprise upon us.

EXT. THOMAS STREET - CONTINUOUS

Robert steps from the cart and is led to the scaffold. His hands are tied behind his back.

ROBERT

(V.O)

When my spirit shall have joined those bands of martyred heroes who have shed their blood on the scaffold and in the field in defence of their country, this is my hope, that my memory and name may serve to animate those who survive me.

EXT. THOMAS STREET - CONTINUOUS

The executioner places a black hood over Robert's head. The noose is placed around his neck. Military drums strike up a thunderous roll.

ROBERT
(V.O)

Let no man write my epitaph. When my country takes her place among the nations of the earth, then, and not till then, let my epitaph be written. I am done.

EXT. THOMAS STREET - CONTINUOUS

The drums come to an abrupt halt. The single plank upon which Robert has been standing is pulled away. The crowd falls eerily silent.

EXT. PARIS STREET - DAY

Miles is walking through a bustling Paris street market. He cuts rather a lonely figure, surrounded by the hubbub of chatter and noise in which he takes no part.

He pauses at a street corner and pulls out a crumpled sheet of paper and studies it. He looks up and turns round, trying to find a street sign. A wide hipped woman barges into him and careers off, muttering a curse under her breath.

MILES
Pardon.

INT. THE LONDON COFFEE HOUSE - DAY

This bustling coffee house on the Rue Jacob is popular with the many Irish exiles in Paris, although this early in the morning there aren't many customers.

We are looking over the shoulder of a smartly dressed gentleman who's reading the latest edition of the English language newspaper "The Argus". The headline reads "Robert Emmet executed. More arrests expected."

At the counter can be seen Miles Byrne, who's talking to the cafe owner MADAME LECOMTE.

MILES
Er... parlez vous Anglais?

MADAME LECOMTE
Un peu.

MILES

Huh?

MADAME LECOMTE

A little bit.

MILES

Er... How much pour..a coffee?

Madame Lecomte turns to the man reading the newspaper. His name is WILLIAM LAWLESS. He is about thirty with longish black hair.

MADAME LECOMTE

(in French; subtitled)

Is he one of yours?

WILLIAM

(in French; subtitled)

You know very well how to speak English, Madame Lecomte.

MADAME LECOMTE

(in French; subtitled)

It's too early and I've got a headache. Do me a favour.

William sighs and folds up his newspaper. He walks up to the counter and puts some money down.

WILLIAM

(in French; subtitled)

Give the boy a decent breakfast and do a pot of coffee for the pair of us.

MADAME LECOMTE

(sarcastically)

Oui, monsieur.

William shakes Miles by the hand and introduces himself.

WILLIAM

William Lawless. Late of the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin. Professor of Anatomy and Physiology. Currently enjoying the hospitality of his excellency Napoleon Bonaparte. Please come and join me.

The two sit down at William's table.

MILES

I was told this was the place to meet all the Irishmen in Paris. Where are they all?

WILLIAM

Bit early yet. You wait 'till later. You got a name?

MILES

Sorry. Miles Byrne. Late of Wexford. Fresh off the boat.

WILLIAM

You seen the news?

William hands Miles his newspaper with the headline proclaiming Robert Emmet's execution. Miles scrunches the paper up and throws it down to the ground in anger.

MILES

Bastards! He had the chance to get away but he stayed just so he could say goodbye to his lassie. When are we going to stop becoming martyrs and start becoming soldiers?

Flattening out the scrunched up pages, William begins the task of re-assembling his newspaper.

WILLIAM

So you were there for the rising?

MILES

Rising? It wasn't a rising. A mob of drunken eejits running up and down Thomas Street with pointy sticks is what it was. It might have been different if Dwyer and the Wicklow boys had got involved.

WILLIAM

You knew Michael Dwyer?

MILES

Fought with him all through the '98 and then in the Wicklow Mountains after Vinegar Hill.

Madame Lecomte brings over a plate of croissants with ham and cheese and a pot of coffee.

WILLIAM

Merci, Madame.

MILES

What's this?

WILLIAM

Breakfast.

MILES

This isn't breakfast. Where's the oatcakes?

WILLIAM

I believe the word you're looking for is "merci".

MILES

There aren't words to describe this. Cheese for breakfast!

WILLIAM

Hurry up and eat it. We're going for a walk.

EXT. PLACE DE LA CONCORDE - DAY

William and Miles are walking across the Place de la Concorde towards the Seine.

WILLIAM

I wanted to show you this.

The pair reach the river. Stretching along the river for a mile in both directions is a massive naval dockyards and armories. Scores of flat bottomed boats are being assembled.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Troopboats. Designed and built to get French soldiers across the channel.

Across on the opposite side of the Seine can be seen one of the troopboats being rowed with gusto by forty sailors. Standing on the deck is a figure wearing a black bicorne hat and a military greatcoat. He's surrounded by a coterie of staff officers and aides-de-camp.

MILES

My God. Is that who I think it is?

WILLIAM.

He's often down here. Napoleon isn't playing. He really intends to invade England. Those same boats can get us to Ireland. Think about it.

William hands Miles a card which he's pulled from his pocket.

WILLIAM

I have to bid you farewell. This is the card of a colleague of mine. Tell him I sent you. He'll be able to help you with your French.

MILES

I'll do that.

WILLIAM

Let me know how you get on. I'm at
Madame Lecomte's most mornings.

William turns to leave.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

One more thing. If you want to fit
in here grow your hair out a bit.
No-one here has that "croppie"
hairstyle anymore.

EXT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

Miles Byrne approaches a restaurant. The cold, frosty street is lit by the warm, welcoming lights from inside. We hear the sounds of a large gathering. People laughing. Glasses clinking.

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

In the background we see Miles coming through the double doors. There's a huge birthday celebration going on. It seems as if every exiled Irish man or woman in Paris is here. William Lawless notices Miles and hails him over.

WILLIAM

Miles! Glad you could make it.
Champagne?

MILES

You wouldn't be having a drop of
the black stuff?

WILLIAM

You're in luck. This is the only
place in Paris you'll find it.

William turns towards the bar.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Garçon. Pint of Guinness for Mr.
Byrne here.

A man in his mid-twenties stumbles past with a rather florid complexion. This is JOHN SWEENY, a fellow United Irishman.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

John. This is Miles Byrne, the chap
I was telling you about.

John grabs Mile's hand and shakes it vigorously.

SWEENY

John Sweeny. Welcome to my birthday shindig. William told me all about you. Robert Emmet's little messenger boy. Quite the patriot aren't you.

MILES

I've done my bit.

SWEENY

Well, you're a refugee now, like the rest of us. You'll have to excuse me. I've got an urgent appointment with the jacks.

Sweeny turns round as walks away.

SWEENY (CONT'D)

(to William)

You'll see me back to the apartments if it looks like I'm losing my way...

William turns back to Miles.

WILLIAM

You'll have to forgive John. He's deeper into his cups than usual.

MILES

It is his birthday. I'll still stick one on him if he makes that "messenger boy" crack again.

WILLIAM

Any news from Thomas Emmet? We invited him but got no word.

MILES

I've not heard from him. He took the death of Robert pretty hard. We all did. I don't think he's been in Paris for weeks.

A waiter turns up with Mile's pint of Guinness.

MILES (CONT'D)

(in French; subtitled)

Thank you, how much will that be?

WAITER

(in French; subtitled)

On the house.

WILLIAM

We've a tab running. I see you're a quick learner.

MILES

Huh?

WILLIAM

Vous parlez en français.

MILES

I know enough not to starve to death.

A well-built man with a neatly trimmed red beard joins Miles and William. His name is HUGH WARE.

HUGH

Is this our new recruit?

WILLIAM

Miles. This is Hugh Ware. I believe you're both veterans of the '98.

HUGH

You were at Vinegar Hill? I don't remember seeing you there.

MILES

There wasn't much time for formal introductions. I was there.

HUGH

Unlike our William here. Sunning himself on the continent while we've been fighting the good fight or languishing in jail.

WILLIAM

The Battle of Bergen wasn't a walk in the park, but I take your point. I managed to get out just before they got Lord Eddie and the rest.

HUGH

You knew Lord Fitzgerald, didn't you?

WILLIAM

I had that honour. Truth be told he's the only one of us who knew his way round a battlefield.

Suddenly the doors crash open and a tall exuberant man dressed in an extravagant military uniform strides in. His name is ARTHUR O'CONNOR. Around him are an entourage of six or seven men, one of whom is an earnest thin faced young man with a high widow's peak called THOMAS CORBET.

ARTHUR

You had a party and didn't invite me! What kind of arseways development is that?

HUGH

Jaysis. Let me sort this out.

Hugh dashes over towards Arthur and his group.

MILES

Who's that? Is he a general?

WILLIAM

He'd like to think he is. No, that's Arthur O'Connor. He thinks he's the representative of the United Irishmen here in Paris. Trouble is so does Thomas Emmet. The two hate each other.

MILES

He doesn't look too happy that he wasn't invited.

WILLIAM

We thought Thomas might be here and didn't want to cause a scene. They almost fought a duel once. Hugh managed to talk them out of it. Excuse me a minute...

William walks off, leaving Miles to look around the room. He notices a pretty girl of around seventeen who is sat with her parents and her two younger sisters. He's approached by a young man, JOHN TENNENT, with a distinctly military bearing.

TENNENT

An eye for the ladies, have ye?

Miles turns round to face him quickly. John holds out his hand.

TENNENT (CONT'D)

John Tennent. I fought with William in the Dutch campaign in '99. We gave the Duke of York a kick up his arse and no mistake.

MILES

Pleased to meet you.

Miles risks another look at the girl. She notices and winks at him. He turns around even quicker than before.

TENNENT

That's Mary, Hampden Evan's girl.
Don't even think about going there
unless you're willing to take some
lumps. Her da's got a temper
something fierce, so he has.

William is clinking a glass with a spoon, calling for quiet.

WILLIAM

Glad so many of you could make it.
We're here to celebrate the
birthday of a fine comrade and
noble patriot John Sweeny. Of
course we are.

John stands up and waves a huge bottle of champagne in the
air. The crowd cheer.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

But we're also here for another
reason. We're here because we're
United Irishmen.

Various sounds of agreement come from the crowd.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

We're united in our love of freedom
and we're united in our hope for a
future where Irish men and women of
all religions can live side by side
free from want, free from fear and
free from hatred.

The crowd erupts in a huge cheer. William waits for the noise
to subside, then raises his glass.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I'd like to propose a toast. To
Wolfe Tone, Lord Edward Fitzgerald,
Robert Emmet and the thousands of
Irish martyrs who can't be here.
Absent friends.

The crowd stands as one and raise their glasses.

CROWD

Absent friends.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

The guests are starting to make their way home. Arthur
O'Connor has a word with William by the exit.

ARTHUR

That was a fine speech you made
there.

(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Don't be thinking about going into politics. I'll have to take you down a peg or two if you do.

WILLIAM

I'll take my chances on the battlefield. I'd rather a bayonet in the front than a knife in the back.

William turns round abruptly

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Has anyone seen John Sweeny?!

MILES

I think I heard him in the jacks. Painting the privy seven shades of sick by the sounds of it.

DREAM - EXT. WEXFORD VILLAGE - EARLY MORNING

Close-up on a cauldron of bubbling pitch being heated over a log fire. We hear the sound of breaking windows, the shouts and screams of villagers and the course shouting of loyalist yeomanry. The band of loyalists are led by a notorious local thug called HUNTER GOWAN.

HUNTER

Get 'em out. Get 'em out. All those filthy taigs out of their beds.

We pull back and see more of the village being terrorised. Red coated yeomanry are dragging men, women and children out of their beds. The thatched roofs of their cottages are being set light to. With his black bicorne hat and flamboyant sash, Hunter Gowan looks more like a bandit leader than a regular soldier.

HUNTER (CONT'D)

Hand over your pikes you rebel bastards. We know you've got them.

WOMAN

You can't do this.

HUNTER

Martial law. We can do what the feck we like. Start with the women. Cut their hair off.

The yeomen tie the women's hands behind their back and start roughly hacking the hair off their heads. One of the men rushes forwards to stop the assault on his wife. He's rifle butted to the back of the head with a sickening crack and falls to the ground.

HUNTER (CONT'D)

I'll have your pikes or my name's
not Hunter Gowan. Last chance.

WOMAN

For the love of God, we're not
rebels.

HUNTER

Pitch-capping it is then.

The woman is dragged over to the cauldron of boiling pitch. We hear a loud rhythmic banging. The pitch is painted onto her shorn head. The skin of her scalp blisters immediately. Her screams are terrible, the banging even louder.

HUNTER (CONT'D)

That's it. Nice and thick.

The pitch is set alight. The whole of the woman's scalp is alight. She screams like her lungs will burst. The banging now is almost deafening.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY - INT. MILES BRYNE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Miles comes too with a start. He's been having a nightmare and is drenched in sweat. The loud banging we've been hearing is somebody knocking on the door.

MILES

Hold on. Just a minute... jaysis..

EXT. MILES BRYNE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Miles opens the front door. William Lawless is waiting patiently on his doorstep. He hasn't shaved and has a hint of a five'o'clock shadow.

MILES

What time do you call this?
You may as well come up seeing as
you're here.

INT. MILES BYRNE'S LODGINGS - DAY

We're in Mile's cramped apartment. It's little more than a box room. Miles stands at the sink shaving. William is sat at a small table looking at the cover of a book Miles has been reading.

WILLIAM

"The Exercise and Manoeuvres of
Infantry." A bit of light bedtime
reading?

MILES

Man needs a hobby.

William looks around and notices Miles' unpacked trunk with clothes spilling out of it.

WILLIAM

You don't look like you're planning on staying around long.

MILES

Plans? To be honest I've not got any past getting some breakfast.

WILLIAM

I was like that when I first got here. It's not so bad once you get used to it.

MILES

I don't want to get used to it. I want to get back home and carry on the fight.

WILLIAM

You're not alone. Listen, this isn't just a social call. I want you to know that if you ever stuck for funds, all you have to do is ask. I have plenty of stock...

MILES

I'm fine for a few months if I'm careful, but thanks for the offer.

WILLIAM

Yes, but you mustn't starve yourself.

MILES

You can buy me breakfast then. As it happens I've got feck all in.

Miles wipes off the razor and hands it to William.

MILES (CONT'D)

For God's sake have a shave first, though. You look like a bloody tinker.

William laughs and takes the razor.

WILLIAM

You're right. Standards must be maintained. If you're free this evening, I've a surprise planned.

MILES

I think my calendar's clear.

INT. OFFICES OF THE MINISTER OF WAR - DAY

The Minister of War GENERAL BERTHIER has called a meeting to discuss the situation with the United Irishmen. Also present are Colonel Dalton and GENERAL HARTY.

HARTY

I have a list compiled by a John McGuire of all those United Irishmen currently in Paris who would be willing and able to accept a commission in a new Irish battalion.

DALTON

Who is this John McGuire? Why not get O'Connor or Emmet to compile the list?

HARTY

You can't be seen to be giving favour to one without mortally offending the other.

BERTHIER

The situation is intolerable. They call themselves "United Irishmen" when they are in fact no such thing. Any news on the formation of the committee the First Consul requested?

HARTY

The committee has not been formed as yet. There have been difficulties agreeing a list of names that are agreeable to both O'Connor and Emmet.

DALTON

Unbelievable!

HARTY

Emmet suggested that membership of the committee should be put to a vote.

DALTON

What? This is the army, not a student debating society.

BERTHIER

The situation needs to be resolved.
An army is being formed by General
Augereau at Brest for the invasion
of Ireland. The Irish Legion will
be part of this army. Commissions
go out in December.

EXT. THEATRE DES VARIÉTÉS - EVENING

Crowds gather for the evening performance. A banner reads
"Brunet stars in: Jocrisse."

INT. THEATRE DES VARIÉTÉS - EVENING

Miles is sat with William Lawless and Dr. MacNeven. The
auditorium is rapidly filling. The sound of instruments
tuning up comes from the orchestra pit.

DR. MACNEVEN

Is this your first time at the
theatre, Miles?

MILES

It is. Never had the time or the
money, even when I was in Dublin.

DR. MACNEVEN

You should enjoy Paris while you
have the chance. Rumour has it that
we'll be heading for the coast
soon.

William waves at somebody in one of the side boxes.

WILLIAM

Hampden Evans. He's having one of
his soirees after the show.

Miles looks up to the box. He catches the gaze of Hampden's
daughter, Mary. She throws him a glance before turning to
talk to her mother. The orchestra strikes up a tune as the
show starts.

INT. THE HOME OF HAMPDEN EVANS - EVENING

Miles, William and Dr. MacNeven have gone to an informal
party at Hampden Evan's house following the theatre
performance. It's quite a lavish house and various United
Irishmen have been invited. William is introducing Miles to
Hampden and his family, including Mary.

WILLIAM

This is the young man I was telling
you about. Miles Byrne.

HAMPDEN

Only patriots are welcome in this house, son. Patriots and heroes, so that makes you doubly welcome.

William and Hampden go off to talk, leaving Mary to talk with Miles.

MARY

Father says that you're quite the famous rebel now.

MILES

I'm just a Monaseed farm boy who got caught up in events.

MARY

If what father says is true you're going to be a soldier in Napoleon's army. How exciting. That's got to be better than milking goats.

MILES

There's more to warfare than dashing around on horseback with the bugler sounding the charge and the wind in your face. In fact there's precious little of that.

MARY

You rebel boys. So serious.

MILES

I've got my lighter side. I'd like the chance to prove it to you some time.

MARY

Are you making a pass at me?

MILES

Maybe.

MARY

With my father almost within earshot. That's incredibly bold. Or foolhardy.

MILES

Think of it more as a tactical manoeuvre.

MARY

But do you have the stamina and manpower to take the field?

Miles leans in closer to Mary and whispers in her ear.

MILES

I think you'll find I'm lacking in neither.

We switch focus to the conversation Hampden Evans and William Lawless are having. We can see Miles and Mary in the background. Mary's laughing and is slightly flushed.

HAMPDEN

Your boy Miles is off to a flying start. I'm going to have to break them up in a minute.

WILLIAM

Let the boy have his time with the lassie. He's seen things in his young life that would drive many an older man to the bottle.

HAMPDEN

I had more of a gentleman in mind for my Mary. An upstanding citizen such as yourself.

WILLIAM

Get away. If I was still a professor in Dublin I might have prospects. As it is, I'm not much of a catch.

HAMPDEN

I don't know. A Captain in Napoleon's army. It's not so bad.

INT. THE LONDON COFFEE HOUSE - DAY

The cafe is full to busting point. The United Irishman have all just received their commissions and have been given their marching orders. We focus on Miles Bryne, William Lawless, Hugh Ware and John Tennent.

TENNENT

Well, it was a fine holiday, but it looks like it's back to work.

HUGH

What would you know about work? Haven't done an honest days graft in your life.

TENNENT

It's a long coach trip to Morlaix. Am I to be listening to your insults *all* the way ?

HUGH

Hell no. Me and Miles and a few of the lads will be walking.

WILLIAM

That's at least a twenty day march.

MILES

We figured soldiering is nine tenths marching, so we'd get some practice in.

TENNENT

You'd better get a start on then.

EXT. ROAD FROM PARIS - DAY

We see Miles , Hugh and six others setting off for the twenty day hike to Morlaix. In the background we can see a stage coach pulling away from us. Fellow United Irishmen including John Tennent wave hats out of the stage coach windows.

TENNENT

(from stagecoach)

Bon voyage. See you in Morlaix.

EXT. ROAD TO MORLAIX - DAY

Close-up of a hare hiding in the undergrowth. We cut to a shot of Miles aiming down the barrel of his rifle. There's a loud bang and a billowing of smoke. Cut to Miles walking into a woodland clearing with a couple of hares strung over his shoulder. He throws the hares down in front of Hugh, who's got a campfire going. The rest of the small group are sat round the campfire.

HUGH

You farm boys are all good with a rifle. They made good use of you at Oulart Hill.

MILES

We had Father John Murphy to thank for that one.

Hugh begins the job of gutting and skinning the hares. We have a close-up of the fire and dissolve into a flashback.

FLASHBACK - EXT. OULART HILL - AFTERNOON

SUPER: "Oulart Hill 27th May. 1798"

Thatched cottages are alight in the foreground. Great plumes of smoke rise into the sky.

About a hundred red coated militia stand in loose formation, facing Oulart Hill. Atop the hill are about a thousand pike wielding rebels, although a substantial number of these are women and children. The militia leader Colonel Foote is on horseback. He's talking to his sergeant.

SERGEANT

They're not shifting off the hill, sir.

FOOTE

We'll just have to go up and get them, won't we.

SERGEANT

Are we waiting for the artillery?

FOOTE

We don't need six pounders to deal with these bog-trotters. I want to wrap this up in time for supper. Sound the advance.

A bugle sounds and the militia troops advance. We focus on Miles Byrne and other rebels who are hiding in the long grass half way up the hill. They're all armed with rifles.

MILES

Here they come. Stay down until they draw level with us.

At the top of the hill fifty year old priest FATHER JOHN MURPHY stands with the massed pikemen. The militia let off a couple of loose volleys. Two or three pikemen fall.

FATHER MURPHY

Stand firm. Wait until they're in range.

The militiamen continue their advance. They draw level with the rebels who are still hiding in the long grass.

MILES

Now!

The rebels rise suddenly. There are about twenty either side of the militia column. They let off a vicious volley that slams into the unsuspecting Redcoats. From the top of the hill Father Murphy waves a sword.

FATHER MURPHY

Charge!

The pikemen unleash a ferocious charge down the hill and steam into the militia before they have a chance to re-load. The militia turn and run. It's a total rout. We come out of the flashback as the pikemen run the fleeing militia down, past the burning cottages.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY - EXT. ROAD TO MORLAIX - EVENING

Miles and Hugh are sat by the campfire.

MILES

Our first victory. I thought it was going to be easy after that.

HUGH

We all did.

Miles lies down and wraps himself in a blanket

MILES

I'm getting some shut eye.

EXT. MORLAIX - DAY

SUPER: "Morlaix 1804"

It's twenty days later, and our group approach the harbour town of Morlaix, near Brest. Reaching the crest of a hill, Morlaix and it's harbour spread out before them. Beyond is the open sea. A dozen French warships are at anchor in the harbour. There's snow on the ground.

HUGH

See those ships, boys? They're our passport home.

INT. BARRACK ROOM - DAY

In the foreground a tailor is working at table on which reams of green and white fabric are stacked. He's making up uniforms for the newly formed Irish Legion. His assistant takes the measurements of a new recruit with his tape measure. It's Christmas morning. A rather half hearted attempt to decorate the barrack room has been made.

Behind the tailors, sat on leather chairs in front of an open fire are four officers, dressed in the new uniforms. Amongst these are William Lawless, Dr. MacNeven and John Tennent and LOUIS LACY. Lacy is handsome and dark skinned with a slight Spanish accent.

Miles Bryne and Hugh Ware and the rest of their group walk through the main doors, still carrying their bedrolls and rucksacks.

TENNENT

Well, look who it is. You decided to join us?

HUGH

Aren't you a sight for sore eyes in you nice green uniforms.

(MORE)

HUGH (CONT'D)
 If I squint a bit I can almost
 mistake you for real soldiers.

Hugh addresses Louis Lacy.

HUGH (CONT'D)
 I know these eejits. Who are you?

Louis offers his hand.

LOUIS
 Louis Lacy.

HUGH
 Spanish?

LOUIS
 Born in Spain. My family's from
 Limerick.

HUGH
 For that you have my condolences.
 Who's our commanding officer? It
 better not be one of you feckers or
 I'm turning round and walking back
 to Paris.

DR. MACNEVEN
 Commander Bernard Macsheehy. You'll
 be meeting him soon enough. Be
 careful though, he's in a frightful
 black mood today and no mistaking.

INT. COMMANDER MCSHEEHY'S OFFICE - DAY

Chef de Bataillon JAMES BLACKWELL stands to attention before a big leather bound desk. He's a tall, thin man in French military uniform. Behind the desk sits COMMANDER MACSHEEHY. A short thick set man who, with his receding hair and elaborate side whiskers looks older than his 29 years. He's reading a report and is clearly furious, close to exploding with anger.

MACSHEEHY
 What?! They made Arthur O'Connor a
 general? That two faced back-
 stabbing popinjay. The only
 military command he's ever had is
 with the Volunteers. The Volunteers
 for feck's sake.

BLACKWELL
 You are not convinced of his
 military capabilities?

MACSHEEHY

The only thing O'Connor has a talent for is figuring out who has all the power and influence, then sticking to them like a bloody lamprey. He won't be happy until his friend Bonaparte has made him First Consul of all Ireland.

Macsheehy throws the report down in disgust, pulls out a fresh sheet of paper and grabs a quill.

MACSHEEHY (CONT'D)

I'm not having this, I'm not having this at all, Blackwell. I'll show him he's not the only one who's got friends in the Ministry of War.

EXT. PARADE GROUND - DAY

Macsheehy is conducting a review of the troops. Blackwell is by his side holding a musket. Around fifty soldiers are lined in two ranks. They are in full dress uniform, but are unarmed. Amidst their ranks we see some familiar faces, Miles Byrne, William Lawless, Hugh Ware, John Tennent and Dr. MacNeven. A shooting target can be seen about 75 yards away.

MACSHEEHY

Well, you look the part. It's a wonder what good tailoring can do. Right now though, all you are is smartly dressed targets. Turning you into soldiers, that's my job.

Blackwell hands Macsheehy the musket.

MACSHEEHY (CONT'D)

Let me introduce you to your new best friend. The Charleville 1777.

Macsheehy pulls a paper cartridge out of his pocket, bites the top off, primes the pan, loads the cartridge into the barrel with his ramrod and fires at the target, all in one seemingly fluid motion.

MACSHEEHY (CONT'D)

Do any of you have firearms experience?

Miles Bryne steps forward.

MILES

I've got some.

MacSheehy hands Miles the musket and a handful of cartridges.

MACSHEEHY

Let's see what you're made of.

Miles takes the musket and primes, loads and fires it. Hitting the target close to the bulls eye. He then loads and fires it again not once, not twice, but five times, each time hitting the target close to or on the bulls eye. On the second firing Blackwell pulls out his pocket watch. As Miles hands back the musket the assembled troops burst into spontaneous applause.

MACSHEEHY (CONT'D)

Did I say you could cheer?! Stand to!

The soldiers quickly settle down and stand to attention.

BLACKWELL

Five re-loads in close to a minute. That's not bad.

MILES

I used to shoot game with my Da. That musket's not bad, but it's not going to be very accurate past a hundred yards.

MACSHEEHY

You're going to be shooting at long lines of Englishmen. Just keep shooting fast, you'll hit some of the bastards.

MacSheehy hands the musket back to Miles.

MACSHEEHY (CONT'D)

Teach this lot how to shoot. Some of them couldn't hit a cow's arse with a banjo.

DREAM - EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

Close up on a dead cow lying in a field. We hear the drone of flies. Pull back to see that a massive rebel army is on the move. The air above the marching horde is thick with barbed pikes held aloft.

Women and children carrying all their worldly possessions walk alongside their men folk. We focus on an eighteen year old Miles Byrne. He's marching alongside an older man with curly black hair. This is MICHAEL DWYER.

MICHAEL

This is madness. We turn around now and attack Dundas and Loftus we'll hit them right where it hurts.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

We must have ten thousand pikemen here.

MILES

Hit and run is more the Wicklow style. Here in Wexford we tend to slug it out.

MICHAEL

Sit on a hill top and wait to get shot at more like.

A cavalry troop appears on the horizon, but think better of taking on the massed pikemen and withdraw.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

That's right. Feck off you bastards. Come back and you'll get a kick up the arse from Michael Dwyer.

A small girl ahead of the pair drops her rag doll. It's trampled into the ground by the marching feet.

GIRL

Maisie!

Miles bends down and scoops up the rag doll. He rushes forward to return the girl's toy.

MILES

Don't you worry. When we get to Enniscorthy we'll find somewhere safe for you and Maisie.

GIRL'S MOTHER

God bless you, son.

MILES

Get a move on. We need to reach Vinegar Hill by nightfall.

In the distance we can see the brooding mass of Vinegar Hill. It's getting dark and campfires are starting to be lit on the side of the hill. We can make out the silhouette of an old windmill at the top of the hill. To one side several cottages can be seen with their roofs burning. Two corpses hang from a tree nearby. Miles shudders as he marches past them. It's like a vision of the apocalypse.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY - INT. MILITARY BARRACKS - NIGHT

MILES

NO! Don't go there. Don't!

Miles has been asleep but comes awake with a sudden start. He lifts himself from his pillow and wearily rubs his eyes. There's a long line of bunks on either side of the wooden barracks with men asleep in all of them. Hugh is in the bunk next to Miles, wide awake.

HUGH

You get the dreams too?

MILES

Again and again. I can't shake them.

HUGH

Try to get some sleep. Early start tomorrow.

INT. OFFICES OF THE MINISTER OF WAR - DAY

General Berthier is working at his desk when an aide-de-camp knocks at the door.

BERTHIER

Enter.

The aide opens the large double doors.

AIDE

General Augereau to see you.

BERTHIER

Show him in.

GENERAL AUGEREAU enters. He's a patrician looking man with wavy hair that's greying at the temples.

BERTHIER (CONT'D)

Pierre, you wanted to see me. Let me guess, it's about the Irish regiment.

AUGEREAU

What else. It's a chain of command issue. Macsheehy refuses to have anything to do with O'Connor. If O'Connor is not to be the commander-in-chief of the Irish Legion, then what use is he.

BERTHIER

You'll soon find it's all politics with the Irish. We're stuck with O'Connor for now. Find something for him to do that'll keep him out of trouble.

AUGEREAU

It's highly irregular. We also have issues with undermanning. At the moment we have close to forty officers and only ten soldiers of the line. Who's going to do all the fighting?

BERTHIER

MacSheehy's come up with a solution for that.

EXT. MORLAIX HARBOUR - DAY

Around forty British sailors are being held at the docks at Morlaix by armed French soldiers. William Lawless and Miles Byrne are on horseback riding towards the harbour. They approach a sergeant who's stood behind a small wooden table and chair, supervising the prisoner transfer. Miles dismounts.

MILES

Are these the prisoners we were told about?

SERGEANT

Yes. They're all from the British frigate that run aground.

WILLIAM

Many Irish amongst them?

SERGEANT

How would I know? You all sound the same to me.

William sits up in his saddle and addresses the crowd of demoralised prisoners.

WILLIAM

Only yesterday you were sailors in the Royal Navy. Today, through no fault of your own, you find yourselves prisoners of France.

One of the sailors sitting on the dock side interrupts.

SAILOR 1

And who are you? You're no Frenchie.

One of the soldiers threatens the sailor with the butt of his rifle. William raises his hand to halt the assault.

WILLIAM

Hold. France is a formidable enemy,
but it can also be a loyal and
trustworthy friend. We can...

The assembled prisoners start to talk amongst themselves,
ignoring William. He throws a glance towards Miles. He's
losing them and knows it. Miles stands up on top of the chair
and addresses the crowd.

MILES

How many of you hail from Ireland?
How many of you were pressed into
service in George the Third's Royal
Navy?

A good half of the sailors put up their hands.

MILES (CONT'D)

Thought so. And how's that working
out for you now you've taken the
King's shilling? Are they looking
after you?

SAILOR 1

Are they feck.

MILES

That's right. All you are to the
English is cannon fodder. They can
send their ships all round the
world because there's an endless
supply of dumb paddies lining up to
take a musket ball for them.

A few sailors murmur agreement.

MILES (CONT'D)

We don't belong here. None of us
do.

Miles points out to sea.

MILES (CONT'D)

Where we belong is five days
sailing out that way. Until we can
get back there where we belong is
together. Together we can fight
back.

A few more sailors agree. Miles is winning them over.

MILES (CONT'D)

I'm Miles Byrne of the Irish
Legion. You have a choice to make.

(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

You can languish in the camps at Verdun or Valenciennes, or you can join us. Join us and kick back at the bastards that put you here.

The sailors stand up on cheer as one, although one of their number needs some convincing.

SAILOR 2

So how much is the pay?

EXT. MORLAIX HARBOUR - LATER

A long queue has formed in front of the Miles, who's sat at the table entering details into a ledger. William and the sergeant are stood to one side. A suntanned sailor in his early twenties approaches the table.

MILES

So you want to help free Ireland, Seamus?

SEAMUS

That I do. We had Michael Dwyer himself holed up in our barn in Tullamore, and that's God's own truth.

MILES

That's a strange thing. I roved with Michael Dwyer after the '98, and I'm not remembering any barn in Tullamore.

SEAMUS

Time plays tricks with a man's memory.

MILES

So it does. Welcome to the Legion.

The sailor moves on. Behind him in line is a young lad who can't be more than fifteen.

MILES (CONT'D)

What's your name, boy?

The boy answers in a thick Liverpool accent.

BOY

Edward Masterson, sir.

MILES

Where, in Ireland you from, Eddie?

BOY

Err...errr..

MILES

Is it Dublin you're from?

BOY

That's right, Dublin.

SERGEANT

This is ridiculous. I can't understand a word he's saying, yet even I know this boy is not Irish.

MILES

How many brothers and sisters do you have, Eddie?

BOY

Twelve.

MILES

That's Irish enough for me. Welcome to the Legion, son.

EXT. PARADE GROUND - DAY

MacSheehy is addressing the troops. Their numbers have been swelled so now there are about ninety. Blackwell stands to one side holding a green banner which is as yet unfurled.

MACSHEEHY

As some of you may be aware, the French Republic is no more. We are now soldiers of the French Empire. General Bonaparte, First Consul of the Republic, has been proclaimed Emperor Napoleon I. Long live The Emperor.

The soldiers take up the refrain, although not very enthusiastically.

SOLDIERS

Long live the Emperor.

MACSHEEHY

As soldiers of the Empire, we have been awarded our own imperial banner.

Blackwell unfurls the flag. On one side is a gold harp on a green ground surrounded by the words "L'indépendance d'Irlande." The flag flutters proudly in the Spring sunshine. Standing atop the banner is a cast bronze imperial eagle.

MACSHEEHY (CONT'D)

Let me hear it again. Long live The Emperor.

The soldiers repeat the declaration, this time with much more gusto.

SOLDIERS

Long live the Emperor.

MACSHEEHY

That's more like it. All military personnel are required to take an oath pledging fidelity to the new Emperor. Assemble here 12.30 tomorrow.

John Sweeny, who's standing in one of the rear ranks whispers to John Tennent, who's stood next to him.

SWEENY.

Flag or no flag, what kind of Republican swears an oath to an Emperor?

MacSheehy continues his address.

The Mayor of Morlaix is holding an informal gathering to welcome the Irish Legion to his town this evening. If you plan on attending I want you on your best behavior. You're not just representing the Legion, you're representing Ireland. Dismissed.

INT. MORLAIX TOWN HALL - EVENING

The town hall has been decorated with green and yellow bunting. A banner hung across the hall proclaims " Morlaix welcomes the Irish Legion." Commander MacSheehy sits on the stage with the Mayor of Morlaix and a few other dignitaries.

A string quartet plays chamber music in the background. On the floor the officers and men mingle. It's mostly a male crowd, but some of the older men have brought their wives and families. A handful of invited French civilians are present. Hampden Evans is introducing his daughter Mary to William Lawless.

HAMPDEN

You remember my daughter, Mary.

William kisses the young woman's hand.

WILLIAM

A pleasure. How are you finding life here in Brittany ?

MARY

There's nothing to do and
everything stinks of fish.

HAMPDEN

Mary's missing Paris. You be nice
to Mr. Lawless, Mary. He's a young
man with prospects.

Hampden moves away from Mary and William.

MARY

You'll have to forgive my father.
He's always playing the match
maker. He can't wait to get me off
his hands.

WILLIAM

If you were my daughter you'd never
be allowed in the same room as this
bunch of reprobates.

MARY

I'm not worried about a few soldier
boys. You've all scrubbed up rather
nicely, truth be told.

WILLIAM

When I last saw you, you seemed to
be getting on well with our Miles
Byrne.

MARY

He's a nice enough boy, but my
father says I should be looking for
a man. A man of substance.

WILLIAM

And you do everything your Da'
says ?

A waiter comes over and offers the pair a glass of champagne.

MARY

Not everything. He says I shouldn't
be drinking any of this stuff.
Cheers.

They clink glasses. Focus switches to a group of soldiers who
are standing to one side. Amongst these are Miles Byrne, Hugh
Ware, John Sweeny, Thomas Corbet and John Tennent.

TENNENT

William's doing all right. Precious
few ladies here for the rest of us.
If I'm going to be dancing with
Hugh again I'll be needing a drink.
Who wants another?

Tennent downs his champagne and heads off to the bar. Miles turns to John Sweeny.

MILES

You're quiet tonight, John. I thought you were one for the craic.

SWEENY

It's this oath business. I swore an oath to the United Irishmen. I'm a Republican. How in good faith can I swear an oath to a French Emperor?

CORBET

Quit your whining, Sweeny. The French took us in when no one else would. We're officers in Napoleon's army. If he wants an oath of allegiance, we should bloody well give it.

SWEENY

I'll give you something you won't forget if you don't watch it, Corbet. You always were Arthur O'Connor's little pet spear carrier.

CORBET

At least O'Connor's still fighting the fight. Where's Emmet? In New York last I heard.

MILES

Thomas and his brother have given up more than you can imagine for the struggle.

CORBET

All I'm saying is the only chance we have of liberating Ireland is with Bonaparte's help.

The band suddenly stops playing and Commander Macsheehy stands up to make an announcement.

MACSHEEHY

Glad so many of you could make it. I'd like to thank the mayor for his gracious invitation. I know he'd like a few words. Ladies and gentlemen, the Mayor of Morlaix.

There's polite applause. John Tennent turns up with a magnum of champagne in an ice bucket.

TENNENT

Looks like I turned up just in time.

INT. MORLAIX TOWN HALL - LATER

The band are playing a sedate waltz. A few couples are dancing, but it's a rather staid affair. Hugh Ware is having a quiet word with the players in the string quartet.

HUGH

Could you not liven it up a bit.
Give us a jig or two?

The band happily pick up the tempo. The floor fills up. Miles goes up to William and Mary, who are still talking.

MILES

Sorry to cut in, but could I ask the young lady for a dance?

WILLIAM

(taken aback)
Be my guest.

Miles holds out his arm. Mary accepts, and they whirl off into the dance.

MARY

You're rather forward for a farm boy.

MILES

You'd be all night waiting for William to ask you for a dance. I thought it'd be a terrible waste to see a pretty girl stuck talking to an old fella all night.

MARY

Maybe I like the old fellas.

MILES

Get away wi' ye.

John Sweeny, Hugh Ware, John Tennant and a few others are sat at a table drinking champagne. Across the other side of the floor can be seen Thomas Corbet and four or five friends. They are laughing and joking amongst themselves.

SWEENY

Look at them. The brides of Arthur O'Connor. Smug bastards.

Sweeny puts his drink down and strides over to Corbet.

SWEENY (CONT'D)

You should apologise for what you said about Thomas Emmet. He's twice the patriot you and your little friends will ever be.

CORBET

Sit down Sweeny. You're embarrassing yourself.

SWEENY

Any time, any place. Just name it.

CORBET

You're challenging me to a duel now? You should go home and sleep it off.

Corbet stands up and attempts to barge past Sweeny. Sweeny pushes him back and punches him in the face, flooring him. The band stops playing abruptly as Corbet's friends help him to his feet. Blood is streaming from his nose. Hugh Ware, John Tennent and William Lawless hold Sweeny back.

HUGH

Come on, John. Time to go home.

SWEENY

I'll go home when this bastard apologises.

CORBET

I'll apologise all right. I'm sorry I let you blind-side me.

Corbet punches Sweeny in the stomach. The confrontation between the two groups descends into a brawl. Miles leaves Mary at the edge of the dance floor.

MILES

Sorry, Mary. Duty calls.

Miles joins the fight. A soldier is about to smash Miles in the face with a bottle.

MILES (CONT'D)

Put that down!

The soldier dutifully obeys. Miles punches him on the chin, knocking him over.

MILES (CONT'D)

This is a friendly fight.

The mayor and his entourage beat a hasty retreat. Commander Macsheehy attempts to restore order.

MACSHEEHY
Sergeant-at-Arms. Arrest them!

SERGEANT
Arrest who?

MACSHEEHY
Sweeny. Corbet. The feekin' lot of
them.

Fists fly and chairs are thrown as the banner welcoming the Irish Legion to Morlaix flutters down from the ceiling.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE OUTSIDE MORLAIX - EARLY MORNING

Two figures walk towards us out of the early morning mist. They are Thomas Corbet and Hugh Ware. We become aware of two figures waiting for them in the foreground. They are John Sweeny and Dr. MacNeven. The two groups face each other. Corbet and Sweeny both hold pistols.

HUGH
We all know why we're here. We
don't have to go through with this.

CORBET
A challenge is a challenge.

SWEENY
Let's get this over with.

HUGH
So be it.

DR. MACNEVEN
Ten paces, then I will count to
three. Count one is the warning.
Count two, arm your pistol. Count
three, fire your pistol. Is that
understood?

CORBET
Aye.

Sweeny nods. The duellists stand back to back and the seconds retire a short distance.

DR. MACNEVEN
Ten paces.

The two march ten paces and turn around to face each other. On the count of three they fire at each other. Corbet is slightly wounded in the arm.

HUGH
Honour is satisfied. We may leave
the field.

CORBET

No. I demand satisfaction.

DR. MACNEVEN

You've both made your point. Let's go and have breakfast.

CORBET

Again.

Dr. MacNeven shrugs. Corbet's wound is starting to bleed more profusely and he's shaking slightly. Dr. MacNeven starts the countdown. On two Corbet fires early and catches Sweeny in the arm.

SWEENY

Jaysis. Bastard fired on two.

DR. MACNEVEN

You have a free shot.

Sweeny raises his pistol and aims directly at Corbet, who closes his eyes, waiting for the shot. Sweeny arms the pistol, but then lowers it.

SWEENY

We're done.

CORBET

No. Swords. We continue the fight with swords.

SWEENY

You're joking.

CORBET

Swords!

SWEENY

Feck that.

Sweeny raises his pistol and fires. It catches Corbet in his chest, knocking him off his feet. A red bloom billows out from the gaping wound in his chest.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - day

A column of around eighty soldiers is marching across the Brittany countryside. It's early autumn and the rain is turning the narrow track they're marching on into a sea of mud.

They wear the green uniform of the Irish Legion, whose banner is held aloft at the head of the column. The men talk amongst themselves as they march. We focus on William Lawless, Miles Byrne, Hugh Ware and John Tennent & John Sweeny.

HUGH

I swear it rains here in Brittany more than back home.

MILES

A new commander in a new town. I can see why MacSheehy got the chop after the duel, but I don't see why we couldn't stay in Morlaix.

WILLIAM

We've grown out of that town.

TENNENT

Then there'd be all the fighting and the drinking and the duelling.

SWEENY

How many times do I have to say it. Corbet gave me no choice.

WILLIAM

MacSheehy wanted you tried for murder. You're lucky he's no longer around.

MILES

Does anybody know anything about the new commander?

WILLIAM

Battalion Chief Petrezzoli.

HUGH

An Italian! They've sent us an Italian?!

WILLIAM

I believe Napoleon himself is Italian.

HUGH

Corsican. It's different. This is the Irish Legion. We should be led by one of our own.

WILLIAM

Paris thinks differently.

A call comes up from behind.

SOLDIERS

Coach!

The column moves to the side of the track to allow a stage coach to pass. It thunders past, throwing mud up in it's wake. We see a town in the distance that the coach and troops are heading towards.

WILLIAM

That'll be our new commander.

MILES

And is that Carhaix? Where's the sea? Where're the ships? How are we supposed to get to Ireland?

SWEENY

Are we walking on water now?

EXT. PARADE GROUND - DAY

The Legion are being inspected by COMMANDER PETREZZOLI for the first time. Petrezzoli is of average height and build with brown hair and a neatly trimmed moustache. To his side stands his French battalion adjutant CAPTAIN COURCASON, who has a rather aloof and aristocratic bearing.

PETREZZOLI

A miracle. That's what my superiors say is required. A miracle to turn the Irish Legion into anything resembling a functioning battalion.

Petrezzoli slowly walks down the ranks of troops. As he goes he adjusts items of kit and clothing that are not arranged to his liking.

PETREZZOLI (CONT'D)

They say the soldiers of the Legion are too insubordinate, too undisciplined, lacking all military bearing, appearance or attitude.

Petrezzoli stares direct into Miles Byrne's face.

PETREZZOLI (CONT'D)

You seem to be smiling. Do you find what I'm saying amusing?

BYRNE

No, sir.

PETREZZOLI

What's your name?

BYRNE

Lieutenant Byrne, sir.

PETREZZOLI

I don't like your face, Byrne.

Petrezzoli moves away from Byrne and addresses the rest of the troop.

PETREZZOLI (CONT'D)

In fact there are a great many things I dislike about the Irish Legion. My predecessor tolerated your incessant in-fighting. I will not. I have no knowledge of Ireland, its politics, or its people. Neither do I have any interest. Your petty squabbles mean nothing to me.

We focus on a few of the soldiers, particularly Lawless. They look furious.

PETREZZOLI (CONT'D)

I do not believe in miracles. I believe in the power of discipline and hard work. I believe the Irish Legion will be ready to do it's duty when the time comes. Whatever battles you fought in your own country, they're as nothing to the battles to come.

FLASHBACK - EXT. ENNISCORTHY - DAY

SUPER: "28th May 1798"

We're in the middle of a pitched battle between massed pikemen and the loyalist defenders of Enniscorthy. The fighting is in front of the Duffrey Gate, which leads into the town. The defenders are well dug in and the rebels are taking casualties from musket fire and cavalry attacks.

On nearby Ballyorrel Hill rebel commander Father John Murphy confers with his lieutenants, one of whom is Miles Byrne. Father Murphy wears a priest's hassock and is mounted on a white charger.

MILES

They're too well dug in.

FATHER MURPHY

They don't want a repeat of Oulart Hill. Get the men to fall back. There's more than one way to skin a rabbit.

The rebel pikemen fall back. A couple of redcoat yeomen look out from the doorway they've been sheltering in.

REDCOAT 1

They've had enough. They're falling back.

REDCOAT 2

No, wait. What's that.

We hear a tremendous rumble of hooves then see about twenty head of cattle stampeding towards the Duffrey gate. They're being herded by rebel pikemen. They slam into the redcoat defenders, who retreat in panic. This gives the rebels the opportunity they need and pikemen steam into the town, sweeping all resistance before them.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY - INT. COUNTRY INN - EVENING

Miles Byrne has been entertaining an off duty group of officers with tales of his battles during the 1798 rebellion. Present are Miles, William Lawless, Hugh Ware, John Tennent and John Sweeny

MILES

...and that's how we took Enniscorthy. Shame we had to eat some of the cattle that evening. Didn't seem to be much reward for such sterling service.

TENNENT

A toast. The Cows of Enniscorthy.

ALL

The Cows of Enniscorthy.

SWEENY

Those cattle have seen more action against the English than we have for the past couple of years.

WILLIAM

The Mediterranean fleet is at harbour in Brest. The invasion can't be far off.

MILES

Can't come too soon. I'm sick of crepes. I want some proper Irish food.

EXT. BRITTANY COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Miles and William are riding to Brest.

WILLIAM

Not far now. We should be able to see the fleet over the next hill.

The two riders come to an abrupt halt on a hill overlooking Brest. What they see shocks and horrifies them. The whole garrison at Brest is on the move, and heading East, away from the sea. The huge column of infantry, cavalry and artillery throws a gigantic plume of dust into the air.

Miles and William ride up to a mounted French officer supervising the marching troops.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
What's happening?

OFFICER
Did you not hear? The Army of the North is no more. We're now the Grand Army. We're heading East to fight the Austrians and the Russkies.

The officer wheels his horse around and gallops off in the direction of the marching army.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
You Irish can join us when you're ready.

INT. PETREZZOLI'S OFFICE - DAY

William Lawless barges through the door without knocking and bounds towards Petrezzioli, who is sat at his desk writing a report. He looks up at Lawless over the top of his spectacles.

PETREZZOLI
Captain Lawless?

WILLIAM
I've come to tender my resignation.

Petrezzioli indicates two large stacks of papers on his desk.

PETREZZOLI
You'll have to join the queue. This pile is resigned commissions pending. That pile is requests for transfers to other regiments.

WILLIAM
When I joined the Irish Legion I did so in the belief that we were working towards the liberation of Ireland. It's my belief that that aim has been abandoned.

PETREZZOLI
Not abandoned, postponed. Austria and Russia must be dealt with first, and then it will be Britain's turn.

WILLIAM
Two years we've been waiting. Our people back home are suffering.

PETREZZOLI

I must ask you to be patient for a while longer. France honours its promises.

William does an about turn and heads for the door.

WILLIAM

In a manner and at a time of it's own choosing, it would seem.

PETREZZOLI

Do not worry. When we've dealt with the problems in the East, the fleet at Brest will still be waiting.

EXT. BRITTANY COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

William Lawless and Mary Evans have gone out for a horse ride. They're trotting across a field at a swift canter.

MARY

I'm glad you asked me out. Father's so down at the moment. It's like there's a dark cloud hanging over the whole house.

WILLIAM

Your father isn't the only one. Morale's poor with the whole Legion. Since Trafalgar we've realised we won't be going home any time soon.

MARY

Is it really that bad?

WILLIAM

Twenty ships of the line at the bottom of the ocean. France might be the masters of Europe, but Britannia really does rule the waves.

MARY

You're starting to sound like father.

WILLIAM

We should head back soon. I promised your parents I'd have you back before sunset.

MARY

Race you.

Mary urges her horse into a gallop and races off. Not to be outdone William ges his horse up gallops off in pursuit. William overtakes Mary and jumps his horse over a narrow ditch. Mary also takes the jump, but the horse lands awkwardly and Mary falls from her mount.

WILLIAM

Mary!

William swings his horse around and leaps off, dashing towards Mary who's lying on the ground clutching her ankle.

MARY

Damn it. I think I've hurt my ankle.

William eases off Mary's boot and examines her ankle.

WILLIAM

Nothing seems to be broken.

MARY

If you don't mind me saying so, your examination seems to be rather...thorough.

WILLIAM

I'm a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. I can assure you my interest is purely professional.

MARY

That's a pity.

Mary pulls William towards her and kisses him forcefully. William pushes her away.

WILLIAM

Mary!

Mary kisses William again. This time he doesn't push her away...

EXT. HAMPDEN EVAN'S HOUSE - EVENING

William and Mary ride up to the Evan's cottage on the outskirts of town. It's early evening and Mary's parents come out to greet her as she dismounts.

HAMPDEN

Good grief, girl, you're covered in mud.

MARY

Had a bit of a tumble. Nothing to worry about.

Hampden raises his eyebrows and throws William a quizzical look.

WILLIAM

Mary's horse landed badly jumping a ditch. You should get a cold compress on that ankle.

MARY

We're very lucky that William's a medical man.

HAMPDEN

Will you come in for a spot of supper, William?

WILLIAM

Best not. Lots to do tomorrow. The Legion's finally got its marching orders.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

The Irish Legion is on the move. The hundred or so troops proudly march behind their banner which flutters in the light summer breeze. The marching band plays "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning". Commander Petrezelli is at the head of the column on horseback. We focus on Miles Byrne, William Lawless, Hugh Ware and John Tennent.

HUGH

I hope Bonaparte doesn't sort out the Prussians before we get a chance to join the party.

MILES

Prussians, Austrians, Russians. They're just target practice. I joined up to get a crack at the English.

TENNENT

You're not wrong, there.

WILLIAM

We're soldiers now. We fight who we're told to.

The column marches past us and into the distance.

FLASHBACK - EXT. TUBERNEERING - DAY

SUPER: 4th June 1798

A British division of around a four hundred red coats, with artillery and yeoman cavalry attached is marching down a country lane.

At the head of the column rides COLONEL WALPOLE in full dress uniform. Walpole is talking to one of his officers, who is also on horseback. The column halts at a cross roads.

OFFICER

Rebels have been spotted up ahead.
Shall I order the troop deployed
and send word to General Loftus?

WALPOLE

And let Loftus get to Ballymore
before us? No, we march on.

OFFICER

But, sir, the road ahead is perfect
for an ambush.

WALPOLE

Who is commanding officer here? We
march!

The column marches into a narrow defile. Clay banks rise on either side of the road, topped by hedges. A soldier mutters under his breath to his neighbour.

SOLDIER

That Colonel Walpole will be the
death of us.

Through gaps in the hedges above the column can be seen blurred hints of movement. The troops look round nervously. Pulling back we see the rebel soldiers lying in wait, using the hedges as cover. They are armed with muskets and pikes. Father Murphy and Miles Byrne are among them. Father Murphy breaks cover and steps out in front of the advancing column.

FATHER MURPHY

If you're wanting the road to
Ballymore I regret to inform you
that it is closed.

Father Murphy raises his sword.

FATHER MURPHY (CONT'D)

Attack!

Scores of rebel musketeers rise as one and fire down into the pinned down column. Colonel Walpole is cut down in the first volley. The massed pikemen charge over the bank and into the helpless redcoats. Penned in on all sides the soldiers panic and retreat in a disorderly rout. The cavalry attempt to counter attack but have no room to manoeuvre in the narrow lane.

FATHER MURPHY (CONT'D)

Run them down. Don't let them get
away with the cannon.

A gun crew are attempting to turn round the carriage, but there's not enough room.

GUNNER

It's hopeless. Leg it.

The gun crew abandon the six pounders, but run into a wall of pikemen.

PIKEMAN.

Where're you going? Someone's got to show us how to fire these things.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY - INT. THE LONDON COFFEE HOUSE - EVENING

Miles Byrne, William Lawless, Hugh Ware, John Tennent and John Sweeny are sat in front of a roaring log fire while Madame Lecomte serves them brandies. It's after hours and the chairs are stacked on top of the tables.

MADAME LECOMTE

I see Miles is still boring you with stories of the old country.

TENNENT

We let him drone on. It's better than listening to William complaining all the time.

William lifts his brandy glass.

WILLIAM

I'm not complaining now.

MADAME LECOMTE

It's good to see you boys again.

HUGH

Well we were passing by and couldn't not drop in. Many a high time was spent here.

MADAME LECOMTE

My profits have certainly taken a hit since you Irish left Paris.

SWEENY

We all spent too much money here. Except Miles.

Miles flips John the bird.

MADAME LECOMTE

Where are you headed to now?

Miles taps the side of his nose.

MILES

Military secret. Need to know only.

WILLIAM

It'll be no news to you that we're headed East.

John stands up and raises his Brandy glass.

TENNENT

A toast. Some say she waters down her brandy, but we know that to be a cruel slur. Madame Lecomte.

The group join in the toast.

ALL

Madame Lecomte.

EXT. VERDUN - MORNING

The Irish Legion have marched to the French city of Verdun. They stand in front of the imposing walls of the city. As day breaks and weak Autumn sunshine spills over the far horizon Miles Byrne rides towards us, away from the imposing main gates. He pulls up and confers with his fellow officers.

MILES

The Governor wants us to march through as quietly as possible. Verdun's full of English prisoners. He doesn't want them upset.

We hear the portcullis being raised.

WILLIAM

Did you hear that? The Governor wants us to sneak into the city so his English guests aren't disturbed. What do we think of that ?

HUGH

I think the lazy blighters need waking up.

WILLIAM

I concur. Have the band play "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning." As loud as they can please.

The Legion march through the city gates, with the band playing with much gusto. Heads pop out of upstairs windows. Complaining English voices wonder at the origin of the all mighty cacophony.

ENGLISHMAN 1

Bloody bugging bollocks! What's that awful din?

The Legion proudly march through the streets of Verdun. Miles doffs his hat to the rudely awoken and bleary eyed English prisoners of war.

MILES

Greetings from Ireland, sirs. Top of the morning to you.

ENGLISHMAN 2

Do you have any idea what time it is? This is an outrage.

ENGLISHMAN 3

They're bloody Paddies. French Paddies.

ENGLISHMAN 4

I thought all the Paddies were fighting for us.

The raucous martial music echoes down the narrow streets of Verdun as the Irish Legion marches into the distance.

EXT. MILITARY CAMP - DAY

SUPER: "Mainz Germany 1806"

The Legion has marched to Mainz in Germany and is camped on the banks of the Rhine. Commander Petrezzoli is sat in front of his tent at a table writing a report. William Lawless, Miles Byrne and a few other officers are stood nearby drinking coffee.

WILLIAM

My God, what's that smell?

PETREZZOLI

That, my friend, is the unmistakable aroma of well marinated soldiery. Come and meet our new recruits.

Petrezzoli and the officers walk over to a clearing in the camp where over a thousand soldiers are assembling. They wear an assortment of ragged and campaign soiled Prussian Army uniforms.

MILES

Prussians?

PETREZZOLI

Poles and Irish mostly. We captured them at Jena.

(MORE)

PETREZZOLI (CONT'D)

Your countrymen were sold to the King of Prussia by George the Third himself.

One of the new recruits recognises Miles. His name is O'BRIEN.

O'BRIEN

Miles Byrne. Is it you? Wexford man. You were at Arklow and Vinegar Hill with Father Murphy.

MILES

And you are?

O'BRIEN

James O'Brien. My Da' worked for your Da'.

MILES

Jimmy O'Brien. How the hell did you end up here?

O'BRIEN

After the '98 we were all supposed to be shipped off to Australia. Got sold to the Prussians instead. Slaving away in salt mines in Silesia we were.

MILES

I don't even know where that is.

O'BRIEN

You and me both.

MILES

You'll excuse me, Jimmy. We need to get you all sorted. See if we can't get you scrubbed up. You stink the lot of you.

INT. THE MINISTRY OF WAR - DAY

General Berthier is at his desk going over reports. There's a knock at the door.

AIDE-DE-CAMP

General Clarke to see you.

BERTHIER

Send him in.

A tall man in general's uniform and a mop of tightly curled blonde hair strides in. Berthier gets up from his desk and greets General Clarke.

BERTHIER (CONT'D)

Henri. Or should I say General
Clarke, Minister of War.

CLARKE

Not for a few weeks.

BERTHIER

I can't wait to get out of here.

Clarke indicates a large pile of documents on Berthier's desk.

CLARKE

You certainly seem to have a full
in-tray.

BERTHIER

That's my special pile. The Irish
Legion.

CLARKE

Still causing problems?

BERTHIER

I thought things would be easier
now General O'Connor has retired to
the country. No such luck. Every
order, no matter how trifling,
leads to a torrent of needless
correspondence and resignations.

CLARKE

As a fellow Irishman I feel their
pain. There were always going to be
teething problems.

BERTHIER

Your father was in the Irish
Brigade. They were real soldiers.
This lot, well... how Petrezzoli
hasn't put a pistol to his head God
only knows.

CLARKE

There are usually ring leaders in
situations like this. Pick out the
bad apples and you can save the
barrel.

EXT. BOULOGNE SUR MER - DAY

Close up of a sign reading "Boulogne". Pull back to see the town with the English Channel beyond. We hear the shrill screeching of seagulls, the roar of waves crashing onto the shore.

EXT. PARADE GROUND - DAY

The new recruits are being put through their paces, marching and practicing manoeuvres. William Lawless, and five other officers stride purposefully across the parade ground to Commander Petrezzoli's office.

INT. COMMANDER PETREZZOLI'S OFFICE - DAY

William Lawless and the other officer's storm into the office.

WILLIAM

What's the meaning of this?

William throws an opened envelope onto Commander Petrezzoli's desk. Petrezzoli picks the envelope up and examines it.

PETREZZOLI

These look very much like orders. Yes, that's exactly what they are. Look, they have the seal of the Ministry of War and everything.

WILLIAM

We're being assigned to the Maritime Prefect in Brest. What is that, even?

PETREZZOLI

It's a very important job. You'll be answerable to the Navy and responsible for harbour security.

WILLIAM

You're sidelining us. This assignment is belittling.

PETREZZOLI

Nonsense. You seem to be thriving on the sea air here at Boulogne. I thought you'd appreciate another coastal posting.

WILLIAM

This isn't what we signed up for. We're soldiers. We demand the respect due to soldiers.

Petrezzoli stands up angrily.

PETREZZOLI

Soldiers follow orders. Immediately and without question. When you can do that, you will have earned my respect.

(MORE)

PETREZZOLI (CONT'D)
 Until that day you and your
 comrades are of no use to me.
 Dismissed.

EXT. VLISSINGEN - DAY

SUPER: Netherlands 1805

The harbour city of Vlissingen, with its imposing naval fortifications stands in sharp relief to the flat marshy landscape of the island of Walcheren, part of the Netherlands. In the foreground pools of brackish, swampy water lap unhealthily against the mud banks and brown weeds. The ominous drone of mosquitoes can be heard.

INT. COMMANDER PETREZZOLI'S BEDCHAMBER - DAY

Petrezzoli is ill and lying in bed. He's feverish and his nightshirt is drenched in sweat. His second-in-command CAPTAIN COURCASSON is sat at a table studying several reports through round thick-rimmed spectacles

PETREZZOLI
 This damn island is cursed. How many of the men have gone down with this "Walcheren Fever"?

COURCASSON
 About half. The sick bays are full to bursting.

PETREZZOLI
 If the English attack now they could sail straight into Antwerp and destroy what's left of the fleet. There's not a thing we could do to stop them.

Petrezzoli lurches forward suddenly and reaches for a bucket that's by his bed. He retches painfully.

PETREZZOLI (CONT'D)
 Water.

Courcasson pours a glass from a pitcher.

PETREZZOLI (CONT'D)
 How goes the formation of the 2nd Battalion?

COURCASSON
 We've mustered 800 men who're fit enough to march. Captain Lacy's been offered the command.

PETREZZOLI

Lucky Lacy. I'd rather face the Spanish than this damnable fever any day.

EXT. BREST HARBOUR - DAY

William Lawless and Mary Evans are having a picnic on a hill over looking the harbour at Brest. William's head lies in her lap and she idly strokes his hair.

The early autumn sunshine highlights the first hints of gold in the billowing trees.

WILLIAM

It's good to get out. Our lodgings are anything but salubrious. I've seen better equipped prison cells.

MARY

You know, father says there's a spare room if you need it.

WILLIAM

That's very liberal minded of him.

MARY

I've not told him about us yet.

WILLIAM

I bet he's got a good idea.

William sits up.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

My accommodation won't be an issue for much longer. I've been meaning to tell you. With the illness and the 2nd being sent to Spain they're short of officers. We're being recalled to Holland.

MARY

Surely you're not going.

WILLIAM

I have to. Orders.

MARY

Since when has that bothered you? Write a letter to the Ministry of War. Offer your resignation. It's always worked in the past.

WILLIAM

If I don't want to spend the rest of my career as a glorified shipping clerk I need to start toeing the line.

MARY

What happened to the dashing rebel I fell in love with? Where's your idealism.

WILLIAM

Grow up, Mary. You're starting to sound like Miles Byrne.

MARY

At least he still believes in something.

Mary starts to angrily pack up the picnic.

WILLIAM

The United Irishmen are finished. The rebellion's over. Done. We've got to get on with our lives.

MARY

I think I'd like to go home now.

WILLIAM

We'd all like to go home.

EXT. VLISSINGEN - DAY

The 2nd Battalion marches out of the town gates to the stirring accompaniment of the regimental band. At its head is Captain Louis Lacy. He cuts a dashing figure at the head of his eight hundred strong battalion.

INT. SICK BAY - CONTINUOUS

Hugh Ware and John Tennent watch from sick bay window as the column marches off into the distance. John's in uniform, but Hugh's still ill with the fever so is just wearing a linen night shirt and leggings.

HUGH

A fine sight. What I wouldn't give to be heading off to Spain with them.

TENNENT

Get yourself well again you can have the commission in an instant, with Louis Lacy's blessing.

HUGH

I thought he'd be over the moon.

TENNENT

Lacy doesn't want to be heading to Spain. He even requested a transfer. Doesn't feel comfortable fighting his own.

HUGH

Lacy's a good soldier. He'll do his duty.

EXT. BREST COACH OFFICE - DAY

William Lawless and the rest of the officers are about to embark on the journey to Vlissingen, where they will rejoin the rest of the regiment. Various friends and sweethearts are at the coach office to bid them farewell, including Mary Evans who's accompanied by her father, Hampden.

HAMPDEN

We'll be missing you, William. Mary especially.

MARY

Father!

HAMPDEN

Is it blind or stupid ? Which do you think I am ? I'll let you two lovebirds say goodbye properly.

Hampden walks off towards a coffee house.

MARY

I hate the thought of you going to that disease-ridden island on the edge of nowhere.

WILLIAM

It's not so bad. Have you ever been to Ballyfoyle on a Saturday night?

MARY

Never. I don't believe you have either.

The stage coach is loaded up and William's fellow officers are starting to board.

OFFICER

Come on, William, hurry it up. Give the girl a kiss and we can be on our way.

WILLIAM

I've got something for you.

William reaches into his pocket and brings out a small box. He hands it to Mary. It's an engagement ring.

MARY

Is this what I think it is?

WILLIAM

We can change it if you don't like it. I was trying to find the right time...

MARY

Shut up and take a knee.

WILLIAM

Mary. The lads are watching.

MARY

William Lawless. Down on your knee!

If the lads weren't watching before, they are now. William takes a knee.

WILLIAM

Mary. I love you. Will you be my wife?

MARY

I can't hear you.

WILLIAM

For the love of God. I love you. Be my wife.

MARY

What do you think, lads?

OFFICER

If you don't want him I'll marry you.

MARY

You'd never do. You've got dandruff and terrible bad breath. It better be you, William.

Mary & William kiss passionately. The officers on the coach all cheer. Mary pushes William away.

MARY (CONT'D)

You better get on the coach or they'll be starting the war without you.

William boards the coach as it pulls away. Mary waves, smiling through her tears.

EXT. MADRID - DAY

SUPER: "Madrid 2nd. May 1808"

A row of French grenadiers firing their muskets in unison with a burst like thunder. As the powder smoke clears we see scores of Spanish corpses littering the square. The flagstones are covered in blood. Carts formed into makeshift barricades burn lazily in the early morning sun. French troops finish off with bayonets those who aren't yet dead.

The firing squad is systematically executing prisoners. Troops from the Irish Legion are loading up carts with corpses. Captain Louis Lacy approaches a grenadier captain of the Imperial Guard.

LACY

What shall we do with the bodies?

GRENADIER

Stack them up to the side of the square. There are going to be a lot more by the end of the day. We'll teach these rebel scum a lesson.

An old Spanish lady all dressed in black has heard Captain Lacy's Spanish accent. She spits on the ground and curses.

OLD LADY

(in Spanish; subtitled)

They killed my son. You are worse than a Frenchman. You are a Frenchman's dog.

GRENADIER

Beat it before I stick a bayonet in your fat arse. What did she say?

LACY

Nothing. She's mad in the head.

GRENADIER

You Irish or Spanish?

LACY

Both.

GRENADIER

Either way, I bet you're glad to be on the winning side for a change.

LACY

So this is what victory smells like.

EXT. VLISSINGEN - EVENING

A winter storm batters the low lying island. Huge waves break over the sea walls and threaten to inundate the already saturated marshland. William Lawless answers the frantic knocking at the door to his lodgings. It's Miles Byrne.

MILES

William could you come to
Dr. Mokey's house? There's been an
accident.

William grabs a coat and moments later the pair dash out into the wind swept night.

INT. DR.MOKEY'S HOUSE - EVENING

They arrive at DR. MOKEY'S house. He's the town doctor and we're in his consulting room. A Dutch farmer is lying on a table in the centre of the room, moaning in pain. Dr. Mokey turns to face the door as William & Miles rush in, the wind blowing a gale behind them. Dr. Mokey is about sixty with shoulder length grey hair and round wire frame glasses.

DR.MOKEY

Yan here had a wood pile fall on
top of him in the storm. His leg's
pretty badly mangled.

Dr. Mokey pulls back a blanket that's been covering the poor man's shattered limb.

WILLIAM

This leg needs to come off.

DR.MOKEY

You're a surgeon, right?

WILLIAM

I'm a Professor of Anatomy, not a
sawbones. I've only ever performed
this procedure on cadavers. Where's
Lieutenant Leverson ?

Terry holds up a black leather medical bag.

MILES

I've got his instruments. He's in
the sick bay in the grip of the
fever.

William opens the bag. He pulls out a curved blade for parting the flesh and a hefty saw for cutting into bone.

WILLIAM

We'll need brandy.

Dr. Mokey hands him a bottle. William takes a large swig.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Secure the patient.

William cuts away the flesh in a circular motion before the patient realises it. Then William gets to work with the bone saw. The blood flies and the screams start...

EXT. WALCHEREN ISLAND - DAY

English warships are massing off the north coast of Walcheren Island in preparation for a troop landing. Men of war, frigates, brigs and troopships jockey for position, with more arriving by the hour.

We view this through the telescope of the fifty year old Belgian GENERAL OSTEN. He is on horse back along with Commandant Petrozolli. Lowering the telescope he issues his orders.

GENERAL OSTEN
They'll be landing any time now.
Get your men deployed. We'll hold
the English on the beach as long as
we can then fall back towards
Middelburg.

PETREZZOLI
We won't let you down. There's
nothing my men like more than
shooting at the English. It's
almost a national sport for them.

GENERAL OSTEN
Pleased to hear it. Although I must
warn you that these Englishmen are
likely to be shooting back.

EXT. WALCHEREN ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

As the redcoats take to their boats for the landing the cannons from the English gunboats fire on the Irish forcing them to seek cover behind dykes.

Explosions throw up clods of earth and rock around the defending soldiers. William Lawless and Miles Byrne take turns shooting at the advancing English troops.

MILES
Got one. This is like Christmas and
St. Patrick's day all rolled into
one.

Miles ducks down behind the dyke, re-loads, then fires again.

MILES (CONT'D)

Another one.

WILLIAM

They're establishing their beachhead. We won't be able to hold them for long. If Fort Batz falls our right flank will be exposed.

EXT. FORT BATZ - CONTINUOUS

The Dutch gun crews of Fort Batz are firing at the advancing English. A sergeant approaches the forts commander GENERAL BRUCE.

SERGEANT

The English are advancing. Their six pounders are almost in range.

GENERAL BRUCE

I'm not getting killed for a bunch of Frenchmen. Spike the guns and retreat to Ter Veere.

An Irish sergeant scrambles towards William Lawless and Miles Byrne.

SERGEANT

The Dutch have abandoned the fort.

WILLIAM

Already?

SERGEANT

The Prussians are falling back. We're to cover their retreat.

MILES

Great. Who's going to cover our retreat?

EXT. WALCHEREN ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

Soldiers of the Irish Legion are dug in near the small village of West Souburg. They're successfully holding up the English advance. Musket and cannon fire explode around them. A small column of Prussian infantry march towards the defending Irishmen. A Prussian Captain addresses William Lawless.

PRUSSIAN

We've orders to take over. How goes it?

WILLIAM

We're holding them, but as soon as they get those six-pounders in range we're done for.

PRUSSIAN

The General's ordered you back to the fort at Vlissingen.

WILLIAM

Not Middelburg?

PRUSSIAN

We'll get no aid there. The Mayor and the city father's have already sued for peace with the English.

WILLIAM

So much for Dutch courage.

The Prussians take up their positions and start firing at the advancing English.

EXT. VLISSINGEN - DAY

It's pouring with rain as the English troops drag the massive siege guns over the water logged ground and into position. Sappers work on digging trenches and earthworks for the gun emplacements. The occasional shot is fired from the city walls, causing the engineers to duck for cover. Commander Petrezoli and General Osten survey the English positions. Osten collapses his telescope.

GENERAL OSTEN

Flooding the dykes has slowed them, but the bombardment can't be far off.

PETREZZOLI

Those damn British. Like a blood red plague of locusts.

EXT. VLISSINGEN - EVENING

The English bombardment begins. Fifty eight siege guns, ten frigates and a large number of gunboats all fire simultaneously. It sounds like the gates of Hell have opened. The defending guns are quickly silenced by the all-consuming fire. Incendiary Congreve rockets rain death on any infantry unlucky enough not to be entrenched.

The Irish Legion are holding firm against the lethal artillery and infantry fire. Suddenly a cannonball explodes in the trench the soldiers have been firing from.

As the acrid smoke clears we see that the ground is littered with blood and body parts. William Lawless picks himself up. He's covered in blood.

WILLIAM
Oh God. Oh my God.

Miles Byrne shouts over to William.

MILES
Down. For feck's sake get down.

Stunned and in shock, William turns round towards Miles. We hear a musket shot. William is hit below his right eye. The force of the shot spins him round and he falls to the ground.

INT. HAMPDEN EVAN'S DINING ROOM - DAY

Mary is sat at the breakfast table. Her mother hands her an envelope.

MARY'S MOTHER
It's from the Ministry of War.

Mary opens the envelope.

MARY
The whole battalion has surrendered to the English. William's missing in action.

She wipes her eyes, fighting back the tears.

MARY (CONT'D)
A widow. Before I'm even married.

Her mother consoles her.

EXT. VLISSINGEN - DAY

Miles Byrne wearing civilian clothes is hurriedly walking through the streets of Vlissingen. He's carrying loaves of bread and a few supplies. He looks nervous. Red coated English troops are everywhere.

He stays close to the walls, trying not to draw attention to himself. He comes up to a timber framed house and goes through the front door.

INT. DR. MOKEY'S HOUSE - DAY

William Lawless is sat on a leather chair in Dr. Mokey's consulting room wearing a shirt and breeches. He has a stained bandage over the entire right side of his face.

Dr. Mokey is preparing to change the dressing. Miles walks in from the street, nervously looking over his shoulder.

MILES
How's the patient?

DR. MOKEY
We're about to find out.

Dr. Mokey peels off the dressing. The right hand side of Williams face is disfigured by musket ball scarring.

DR. MOKEY
It's healing nicely. You're lucky not to have lost that eye. I'm afraid the musket ball's still in there. Lodged behind the ear.

WILLIAM
Show me.

DR. MOKEY
It's not finished healing yet.

WILLIAM
Show me.

Dr. Mokey hands William a mirror. He studies his face.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Hope it heals up in time for our wedding. Assuming Mary still wants me. What's happening out there?

MILES
Redcoats everywhere. The whole garrison's on its way to England. Even Petrezzoli.

WILLIAM
The 1st. Battalion is finished.

MILES
Not quite. I picked this up from the battlefield.

Miles hands William a small package wrapped in green cloth. William unwraps it. It's the Imperial Eagle from the top of the Legion's regimental banner.

MILES (CONT'D)
I couldn't let the bastards have it.

WILLIAM
Good man. We need to get this to Antwerp.

EXT. WEST SCHELDT RIVER - NIGHT

A rowboat carrying two men makes it's way across the river away from Vlissingen. It's a dark moonless night and the silhouettes of English men-of-war can just be made out in the thick fog. The boat pulls up at the opposite shore. William Lawless and Miles Byrne manhandle the boat onto the stony beach. A couple of French troopers who are on guard duty challenge the pair.

TROOPER 1

Look what we have here. English spies.

William pulls out the Imperial Eagle and shows it to the soldiers.

WILLIAM

No. We're from the 1st. Battalion. Irish Legion.

The trooper studies the Eagle.

TROOPER 1

Welcome back, my friends. Marshal Bessieres himself will be wanting to meet you.

INT. PALACE OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR - DAY

The palace is packed with military personnel and dignitaries. Tri-colours hang from every wall. We see William Lawless and Miles Byrne in full dress uniform to one side of the ornate and richly decorated stage.

William is wearing a black eye patch that covers most of the right side of his face. Napoleon himself addresses the crowd. He holds up the Imperial Eagle of the Irish Legion.

NAPOLEON

What is this? This Imperial Eagle? Some would claim this is a mere bauble. A bird made of brass. Yet these two brave Irish officers risked life and limb to keep it from their sworn enemies. To return it to their Emperor.

An officer indicates to William and Miles that they should take the stage. They stand next to Napoleon.

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)

Some say the Legion of Honour is also a bauble. I ask, is it possible to make men fight by reasoning alone? Never. The soldier needs glory, distinctions, awards.

(MORE)

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)

It is with such baubles that men
are led.

EXT. THE PALACE OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR - DAY

William and Miles are leaving the palace. They both have the Legion of Honour medals proudly pinned to their chest.

MILES

For a "mere bauble" it's bloody
heavy.

A carriage pulls up. Hamden Evans jumps out.

HAMPDEN

William. Sorry we're late.

We see Mary. She walks slowly towards William. She reaches up to touch his black eye patch. William moves her hand away. She persists and lifts it. We see the scarring on the right side of his face. Mary lifts the patch away from William's face and lets it drop to the floor.

MARY

You're a sight for sore eyes.

They kiss passionately. Miles looks away, embarrassed and jealous in equal measure.

INT. MARRIAGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY - DAY

The small church in Landau, Germany, is packed out with soldiers from the Irish Legion. William and Mary have just said their vows.

PRIEST

You may now kiss the bride.

INT. RECEPTION HALL - DAY

The wedding reception is decked out in a sea of green. William and Mary sit at the top table along with Mary's parents and William's best man, Miles Byrne. A glass is clinked and the crowd falls silent. Miles stands to speak.

MILES

A wise man told men that a good
speech should have a strong
beginning and a strong ending. A
great speech should get from the
one to the other with as much
brevity as possible.

John Tennent calls from the side, where he's sat next to Hugh Ware.

TENNENT

So get on with it.

HUGH

Hear hear.

MILES

With that in mind, I'll keep this quick. When I came here from Ireland I didn't have much more than the clothes that I stood up in.

HUGH

They stank to high heaven, as well.

MARY

Shush!

MILES

William saw I was struggling. Saw it better than I saw it myself. He didn't really know me from Adam, yet he held out a helping hand. That hand's been there ever since. I'd just like to say, thank you.

William nods acknowledgment. Mary grasps his hand.

MILES (CONT'D)

And Mary. What can I say about Mary, except William's very lucky she seems to prefer the more mature gentleman. They say love is blind. There's your proof.

Miles raises a glass.

MILES (CONT'D)

You know I'm joking. William and Mary.

ALL

William and Mary.

INT. WEDDING RECEPTION - LATER

In the background William & Mary are surrounded by friends and family as they cut the cake. We focus on Hugh Ware, John Tennent and John Sweeny as they talk to one side.

TENNENT

Married man and Battalion Commander. William's got it all.

HUGH

He'd best make the most of it.
We're marching off to Spain in a
couple of days.

SWEENY

I heard that Captain Lacy's gone
missing. Where the hell is he?

HUGH

Who knows. If I know Lacy he's come
of worse in a duel with some
senorita's irate father.

TENNENT

Whatever's going on down there, I
suspect it'll be no honeymoon.

EXT. SPAIN - DAY

SUPER: "Burgos 1809"

The squadron of troops commanded by Captain Lawless is
marching through the Spanish city of Burgos. We focus on
Miles Byrne, Hugh Ware, John Tennent and John Sweeny. Spanish
civilians view the soldiers with sullen indifference.

HUGH

Not the most enthusiastic of
welcomes. I thought the Spanish
would thank us for freeing them
from their Bourbon oppressors.

TENNENT

He might be Napoleon's brother, but
King Joseph isn't universally
popular.

MILES

Who'd have thought the Spanish
would want to choose their own
rulers.

The column marches into the main square of Burgos. Ahead of
them the remains of the 2nd. Battalion stand to attention.
There are about two hundred men, and they're not in
particularly good shape. A stage has been erected at one end
of the square on which a few local dignitaries are assembled.

One of these is the Governor of Burgos DANIEL O'MEARA. He is
about forty five and from a military background, but years of
being "prone to the bottle" are taking their toll. A banner
reads "Burgos welcomes the Irish Legion."

SWEENEY

Looks like Captain Lacy isn't the only one missing. What's happened to the 2nd? Half of them have deserted.

MILES

The ones that are left don't look to be up to much, either.

HUGH

William's got his work cut out for him.

Lawless mounts the stage and addresses the crowd.

WILLIAM

When a battalion loses it's commander it's like losing a father. I don't know what's happened to Captain Lacy or where he is. None of us do. I do know we have a job to do. That's re-building the 2nd. Battalion. That job starts today.

Governor O'Meara steps forward.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I know Governor O'Meara would like a word.

O'MEARA

My brother-in-law, The Minister for War, has a special place in his heart for the Irish Legion. I myself come from a long line of Irish warriors, so it's an honour to welcome you to Burgos.

O'Meara pulls out a flask from his waistcoat.

O'MEARA (CONT'D)

Slante. And Happy St. Patrick's Day.

Hugh turns and whispers to Miles.

HUGH

That's not for a couple of weeks. He's getting an early start.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE NEAR BURGOS - DAY

A squadron of the Irish Legion are escorting a baggage train of supplies into the Spanish city of Burgos. The sun baked path they are following is about to pass into woodland.

Miles Byrne, Hugh Ware, John Tennent and John Sweeny hold their muskets warily and survey the surrounding countryside.

HUGH

Keep your eyes peeled. If I was setting an ambush it'd be somewhere like this.

TENNENT

Damn guerrillas. Won't ever fight out in the open.

MILES

Hit and run. Wicklow style.

The Irish column moves deeper into the wood. In the foreground armed Spanish irregulars are hiding in the undergrowth.

SWEENY

I hate all this sneaking around.
I'd rather face a proper army.
With nice red coats. Easy to pick out.

We hear a twig crack underfoot. Suddenly about fifteen Spanish guerrillas break cover and fire in unison. Three or four Irishmen go down in the first volley. Hugh Ware is quick to respond.

HUGH

Form up. Both sides of the wagons.
Pour it on.

A vicious firefight breaks out in the wooded glade. The Irishmen's superior training begins to tell and the Spanish partisans fall in increasing numbers as the staccato bursts of musket fire slam into them.

As Miles is re-loading a Spaniard lurches at him with a lethal looking blade. Miles sidesteps and smashes his assailant in the face with his rifle butt.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Well done lads. They're falling back. Keep up the pressure.

The Spanish continue to fall. One of the guerrillas jumps onto a piebald horse that had been tied up behind a bush and gallops away. Miles has the rider in his sights but doesn't take the shot.

TENNENT

What the...? You had him cold.

MILES

Didn't want to hit the horse. I had a piebald like that back home.

TENNENT

Jaysis, Miles. Are you soft in the head.

HUGH

Pick up the dead and wounded and let's get the wagons moving. I want to be in Burgos by nightfall.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE NEAR BURGOS - LATER

As dusk falls they pass through a small village. A piebald horse is tied up outside one of the white washed cottages. John Tennent notices it and points it out to Miles Byrne and Hugh Ware.

TENNENT

That's the horse. The one Miles didn't want to shoot.

HUGH

You better be sure.

TENNENT

Setting. McCann. With me.

Captain Tennent and the two young privates go up to door of the cottage. They rap loudly on the door.

TENNENT (CONT'D)

Open up.

There's no answer. John kicks the door in. There's an old lady who's been putting some plates away. She screams.

OLD LADY

Dios mio!

TENNENT

Whose is that horse out there?

A bearded Spanish man appears in a doorway.

SPANIARD

My grandmother can't hear you. She's deaf as a post. The horse is mine.

TENNENT

That horse was used in a bandit attack earlier today.

SPANIARD

You are mistaken.

TENNENT

Step outside.

SPANIARD

Am I being arrested?

TENNENT

We'll ask the soddin' questions.

They manhandle the Spaniard out of the cottage. Villagers are gathering, wondering what the commotion is.

MILES

What now ?

TENNENT

We'll take him in for questioning.

SPANIARD

Where's the evidence? There are lots of horses like this in Spain.

John Tennent whips round and rifle butts the Spaniard in the stomach. He falls to the ground.

TENNENT

I told you to shut it.

The men of the village start to close in. It's a tense stand off. Miles intervenes.

MILES

That's enough. We all know how this plays out. We beat this man. We beat him until we get a confession. What if he won't confess?

The Spaniard's wife is by him now, helping him to his feet.

MILES (CONT'D)

Maybe we could rig up a cart, half hang his wife there. If that doesn't work maybe his mother. Or a good old pitch-capping, just like in the old days. Is that who we are now?

John turns round to confront Miles.

TENNENT

Spare me the sermon. What do you care? He's just some bloody farmer.

Miles shoves John forcefully in the chest with his musket, knocking him to the ground.

MILES

I'm a bloody farmer!

Hugh and Sweeny get in between the two before the fight escalates.

HUGH

We've wasted enough time. Head out.

Miles turns to the villager's wife.

MILES

Lo siento, senora.

WIFE

Go to hell.

INT. THE MINISTRY OF WAR - DAY

General Clarke is welcoming his brother-in-law Colonel O'Meara. He pours them both a drink.

O'MEARA

Are things so bad that we're rationing now? I'll have a proper drink if you please.

Clarke pours more brandy into O'Meara's tumbler.

CLARKE

Being Minister of War is a heavy responsibility. How are things down in Burgos?

O'MEARA

Lawless seems to have the bandit situation under control.

CLARKE

Ah, the Irish Legion. We'll be needing a new commander-in-chief.

O'MEARA

Lawless would be an excellent choice.

CLARKE

I was thinking someone easier to work with. My own brother-in-law for instance.

O'MEARA

Might that don't be seen as...favouritism?

CLARKE

Bonaparte is busy making his family the head of every royal dynasty in Europe. A small favour for my brother-in-law is permissible.

O'MEARA

I'm not sure it will go down well
with the troops.

CLARKE

The troops, as ever, will do as
they're told.

EXT. THE SEIGE OF ASTORGA - DAY

SUPER: "The Seige of Astorga 1810"

The Irish Legion are digging trenches and building fortifications for the siege of the Spanish city of Astorga. The mid-day sun beats down on the soldiers who are working in their shirtsleeves or going topless. A huge sea of blue-clad activity. Eighteen horse drawn siege guns rumble past, throwing up huge clouds of dust as Commander Lawless, Miles Byrne and John Tennent are inspecting the defences.

LAWLESS

That'll be the siege guns Junot
requested. It won't be long now.
We'll be needing volunteers for the
first into the breach.

MILES

I'll go.

TENNENT

Hell, no. I'm wanting a promotion.
If there are any gongs being handed
out I'm having them. The Forlorn
Hope's mine.

MILES

Medal's no good if you're lying
face down in a ditch.

TENNENT

I'll take my chances.

Hugh Ware joins the group and grabs himself a drink from a pitcher of water.

HUGH

We're all overdue a promotion.
Especially you, William. How that
drunken buffoon O'Meara got the
Commander's job over you is beyond
me.

WILLIAM

I could have you up on a charge for
slandering a superior officer.

HUGH

It's not slander if it's the truth.

EXT. SEIGE OF ASTORGA - EVENING

The massive siege guns pound the walls of Astorga. A breach is slowly but surely opening up. John Tennent and his company of 150 volunteers line the trenches. There's two hundred yards of open ground that has to be covered before the attackers get to the wall. John addresses his troops.

TENNENT

Men of the Forlorn Hope. If you've any regrets about volunteering it's a bit bloody late to be backing out now. You're in the shit right up to your neck, and the only way out of it is over that wall.

He draws his sword. Taking his cue soldiers fix bayonets and load muskets.

TENNENT (CONT'D)

Break a leg.

A whistle blows and a drum beat launches into the rum-dum-dum of the pas de charge.

TENNENT (CONT'D)

At 'em, lads!

The Forlorn Hope charge into a wall of grapeshot and musket fire. Soldiers fall to left and right but the charge doesn't falter. Captain Tennent and his comrades reach the foot of the breach.

JOHN

That was the easy bit. Now we climb to the top and hold it until Captain Byrne and his boys get here with the ladders.

Captain Tennent leads the ascent. Lethal fire rains down on them. Soldiers fall to either side. Reaching the summit, Tennent turns round and salutes General Junot, seemingly impervious to the musket fire coming in from all quarters. Waving his sword above his head, he jumps over the wall and into the fray, followed by his surviving troops.

EXT. THE SEIGE OF ASTORGA - CONTINUOUS

GENERAL JUNOT is supervising the assault on the wall from behind the lines. He's surrounded by his staff officers, including Colonel O'Meara. They're all mounted on horseback.

GENERAL JUNOT

What an astonishing display of
totally reckless bravado. Who is
that man?

O'MEARA

Captain Tennent, sir. I do
apologise. If he lives I'll have a
word with him.

GENERAL JUNOT

If he lives he deserves the Legion
of Honour.

EXT. THE SIEGE OF ASTORGA - CONTINUOUS

Miles Byrne and the rest of the battalion are racing towards
the breach carrying the siege ladders. Miles turns round and
shouts at a drummer boy. It's Edward Masterson, the young lad
who Miles recruited months ago.

MILES

Louder Eddie. Louder. This is what
we signed up for.

A cannon shell whistles in. Miles and the boy hit the deck as
the explosion throws up a plume of debris. When the smoke
clears we see that the boys legs are horribly mangled.

MILES (CONT'D)

Oh God. Eddie.

EDDIE

Give me the drums.

Miles sits the drummer boy up as best he can. Fighting back
tears and gritting his teeth Eddie resumes the drumming.

EXT. THE SEIGE OF ASTORGA - CONTINUOUS

Captain Tennent and his troops occupy a house that's just
inside the ramparts. They're barricaded in and returning fire
from all available doors and windows. Piles of bodies litter
the top of the wall. It's a vicious bloody fire fight.

TENNENT

Keep it up. It's time you lazy
bastards earned your pay. We keep
this position 'till dawn, we've
won.

EXT. THE SEIGE OF ASTORGA - EARLY MORNING

The first rays of sunlight illuminate the scene of carnage at
the top of the breach.

There's an eerie silence and then a white flag appears on top of the wall. Captain Tennent and his squad warily step out of the house they've successfully defended all night. A Spanish general with his entourage steps out into the courtyard below. He salutes.

SPANISH GENERAL
Bravo, mon Capitan.

Captain Tennent returns the salute.

EXT. THE SEIGE OF ASTORGA - MORNING

General Junot has accepted the surrender of Astorga. The garrison is being led into captivity by the Irish Legion. At their head rides Captain John Tennent. He salutes as he rides past General Junot, Colonel O'Meara and Captain Lawless.

WILLIAM
Not bad for a Dublin wool draper.

GENERAL JUNOT
Captain Tennent is a credit to you all.

O'MEARA
I've always said it.

O'Meara pulls out a hip flask and takes a swig.

GENERAL JUNOT
Are you drinking on duty?

Lawless and Junot exchange glances. O'Meara hurriedly puts the flask away.

O'MEARA
Medication. For my asthma.

General Junot wheels his horse around.

GENERAL JUNOT
Get yourself fit for duty. We've subdued Spain. Next it's Portugal.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE NEAR CIUDAD RODRIGO - DAY

An elderly man of about seventy years of age gallops on horseback towards a small sun baked village. He wears the dog collar of a Roman Catholic priest. Dismounting by a cantina he ties his horse up next to the other horses picketed there.

Inside a small group of men wearing an assortment of dishevelled and sun bleached cavalry uniforms are eating breakfast. They turn round to face the newcomer.

RIDER
Where's Don Julien Sanchez?

BANDIT 1
Who wants to know?

RIDER
Father Curtis. I have a message for
him.

BANDIT 1
You can tell us.

FATHER CURTIS
There's a French supply train
heading out to Fuentes tomorrow.
It'll be lightly guarded.

BANDIT 2
If we see El Charro we'll tell him.
Now if you'll excuse us, Father,
we're having breakfast.

Father Curtis leaves. The bandit's turn towards the dark
haired man in an apron behind the bar who's cleaning
glasses.

BANDIT 1
How did he know where to find "El
Charro"?

DON JULIEN
He's one of Wellington's spies.
From the seminary at Salamanca.

BANDIT 2
Your friend Wellington has eyes
everywhere.

Don Julien puts down the glass he's cleaning and takes off
his apron.

DON JULIEN
My friend Wellington values any
French officers we can capture.
What are we waiting for?

The men leave the cantina and ride away from town.

EXT. SEIGE OF ALMEIDA - DAY

SUPER : The Seige of Almeida

French seige guns lay into the Portuguese fort of Almeida.
Powder smoke swirls around the massed cannon as they pound
away at the walls.

A charged bomb arcs gracefully over the forts walls. It bounces once on the courtyard then rolls into the open doors the fort's main magazine.

Two Portuguese soldiers manhandling a barrel of gunpowder out of the cellar panic and run. The charged bomb lazily rolls down the steps of the magazine into a chamber stuffed to the rafters with powder.

It explodes. William Lawless and Miles Byrne are on horseback and wheel around suddenly as a massive mushroom cloud rises above Almeida. A huge cheers goes up from the besieging French troops.

WILLIAM

Good God. We must've hit their powder magazine.

MILES

Early bath for us, I reckon.

EXT. THE SEIGE OF ALMEIDA - LATER

Portuguese prisoners are being escorted away from the fort. William Lawless strides purposefully towards a field tent. He passes Colonel O'Meara walking in the opposite direction. O'Meara takes a swig from a flask and glares daggers at him. William reaches the tent and pauses at the entrance, adjusting his clothing nervously.

WILLIAM

General Junot. You asked to see me.

JUNOT

Ah, Captain Lawless. Come in.

General Junot pours William a drink.

WILLIAM

On duty?

JUNOT

Rank has its privileges. I've moved Colonel O'Meara over to General Solignac's staff. With the push against Wellington coming up I felt his talents would be better put to use in a more... clerical position.

WILLIAM

You've stripped him of command.

JUNOT

I prefer to not put it in such a dramatic fashion. The fact remains, the Irish Legion will be needing a new Commander.

(MORE)

JUNOT (CONT'D)
I believe the man for the job is
standing in front of me.

William salutes the General.

WILLIAM
Thank you, sir.

JUNOT
Don't let me down, Commander
Lawless.

EXT. COIMBRA - DAY

The French forces have just entered the Portuguese city of Coimbra. The city has been deserted and the only sign of life is French troops breaking ranks and starting to loot the abandoned buildings. Hugh Ware rides alongside William Lawless. Two French troops can be seen awkwardly dragging onto the street a bulky grandfather clock.

HUGH
Where do those idiots think they're
going to do with that?

WILLIAM
Maybe they're collectors.

HUGH
Should we put a stop to this
looting?

WILLIAM
They'll soon realise there's
nothing worth taking. The
Portuguese have taken all the food
Poisoned all the wells. Scorched
earth from here to Lisbon.

HUGH
If an army marches on its stomach,
this one's going to come to an
abrupt halt pretty damn sharpish.

WILLIAM
That's what Wellington's counting
on. Ride back and keep an eye on
the rank and file. I don't want any
of our men getting ideas about
going into the antiques trade.

EXT. THE TORRES VEDRAS LINE - EARLY EVENING

The dying light of the sun illuminates the massive string of walls, fortifications and redoubts that stretches from horizon to horizon.

A Union Jack can be seen flying from one of the towers. British soldiers line the wall top, viewing the approaching French army as it sets up camp. General Junot confers with a few officers. He turns towards Commander Lawless.

JUNOT

Your countryman Wellington has been busy.

WILLIAM

He's no countryman of mine.

JUNOT

Really? I thought he was from Ireland.

WILLIAM

From Ireland. Not of Ireland.

JUNOT

Irish or not, I believe he wishes to stop us reaching Lisbon. Send a small party out when night falls. I wish to test their defences.

EXT. THE TORRES VEDRAS LINE - NIGHT

Miles Byrne, Hugh Ware and a small group of soldiers are hidden in some bushes a short dash from a ten foot high section of stone wall.

There's a trench in front of the wall and a small domed redoubt, from which flies a Union Jack.

Two redcoats stand on top of the wall on sentry duty.

HUGH

Well, you wanted some redcoats to spar with. I'll distract them.

Hugh pokes his head out of the thicket then makes a dash for the wall. He ducks down into the shadows of the trench just as one of the redcoats turns round.

Hugh lobs a rock over the wall. It clatters against some paving slabs.

REDCOAT 1

(Irish accent)

Hey, Jack. You hear something?

REDCOAT 2

You been on the moonshine? The French have just got here. They'll be settling down for a three course meal. It'll be foxes having it away or something.

REDCOAT 1
Lucky bastards. I'll just check.

The Irish Redcoat moves away. Hugh clammers over the top of the trench, grabs the unsuspecting Redcoat 2 from behind and slits his throat with his bayonet.

He drags the body into the shadows as Byrne and the rest of the troop break cover and dash for the wall. They reach the top as the Irish Redcoat returns. He raises his musket and points it at them.

REDCOAT 1 (CONT'D)
Jack. Where are you?

Hugh appears from out of the darkness, his pistol pointing at the soldier's head. He cocks it with an audible click.

HUGH
Jack's gone to a better place. Drop the musket if you don't want to join him.

The Redcoat drops his musket and puts his hands in the air.

REDCOAT 1
You're Irish. Why you fighting for the French?

MILES
We could ask you the same question. Aren't you ashamed to be wearing that filthy red tunic?

REDCOAT 1
I was there at Vinegar Hill. It was the Army or Australia for me. I don't do so well in the heat.

HUGH
What's your strength? How many divisions you got here?

REDCOAT 1
Turn around. Take a look.

The vast British encampment spreads out along the length of the fortifications. Campfires dot the landscape all the way to the horizon. Suddenly there's the loud crack of a musket firing. The Irish Redcoat has managed to get to his firearm and fired it into the air.

REDCOAT 1 (CONT'D)
You better run.

As the men clamber back over the wall Miles grabs the Union Jack that's been fluttering in the breeze.

MILES

I'm having this. I need something
to wipe my arse on.

The men dash back to the French camp, musket shots pinging
around them.

HUGH

Seemed like a nice fella. I'll
still shoot the wee shite dead if I
ever see him again.

EXT. THE TORRES VEDRAS LINE - WEEKS LATER.

A dense fog has descended on the countryside surrounding the
Torres Vedras line. From a distance we see a long line of
French troops with their heads and shoulders poking over the
top of shallow trenches.

On closer inspection it becomes apparent that the troops are
decoys made of straw wearing discarded shakos on their heads.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - LATER

The fog has lifted somewhat. The French army is on the
retreat, marching through the gray, desolate countryside.
Several farm buildings have been set fire to.

Pillars of smoke reach into the sky. In the foreground a
cluster of makeshift crosses mark shallow graves. The Irish
march wearily through the mud.

HUGH

Think those decoys will fool them?

WILLIAM

Might buy us a few hours.

MILES

Look at the state of this place. It
could be the '98 all over again.

HUGH

Bring back memories, eh Miles?

FLASHBACK - EXT. ENNISCORTHY - EVENING

The massed pikemen have just crossed the Slaney Bridge and
are crossing the market square on the way up to Vinegar Hill.
A rebel sergeant calls out to the anxious and worried crowd.

SERGEANT

Get the wounded to the Courthouse.

A man on crutches makes his way to the Courthouse along with his wife and young daughter. The daughter clutches her rag doll, Maisie.

GIRL

No, I don't want to go inside. The bad men will get us. I want to be on the hill.

Miles Byrne sees what's going on and goes over to the girl, crouching down and talking to her face to face.

MILES

Do you see those two men over there?

Miles points to a rebel commander and a priest who are organising the building of barricades over the Slaney Bridge.

MILES (CONT'D)

That's William Barker and Father Kearns. While they draw breath not one soldier will dare cross that bridge. Your Ma' and Da' and Maisie here will be safe.

GIRL

Will you be safe up on Vinegar Hill?

MILES

You don't need to worry about me. I'm big enough to look after myself.

The dark mass of Vinegar Hill looms above the village, it's contours picked out by campfires. The windmill overshadows the town like a malevolent crouching giant

END OF FLASHBACK - EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

We're back with the French army pulling back from Portugal. Tennent rides from the rear of the column.

TENNENT

Orders from Marshal Ney. Wellington's skirmishers are getting closer. We're to fall back to bolster the rear guard.

HUGH

I'm getting mighty sick of bringing up the rear. Never thought I'd say it but I'm looking forward to being back in Spain.

EXT. SALAMANCA - DAY

SUPER: Salamanca

The sandstone streets and towers of Salamanca shimmer in the midday sun. Cathedral bells toll in the distance.

INT. THE IRISH SEMINARY - DAY

The Irish Seminary at Salamanca has been appropriated by the French as a military hospital. Wounded soldiers are being helped to their beds. Captain Lawless talks to the head of the Seminary, Father Curtis.

WILLIAM

I must apologise for the intrusion,
Father. We'll try to keep any
disruption to a minimum.

FATHER CURTIS

Sons of Ireland will always be
welcome at the Seminary of
Salamanca.

WILLIAM

Thank you for being so
understanding.

FATHER CURTIS

The resources of the Seminary are
at your disposal.

INT. THE IRISH SEMINARY - LATER

Captain Lawless walks into the cool interior of a deserted church and steps into a confession box.

WILLIAM

Bless me Father, for I have sinned.
It's so long since I've done this.
I don't know where to begin.

PRIEST

Take your time. God is patient.

WILLIAM

I feel like we've lost our way.
I've lost my way.

PRIEST

How so?

WILLIAM

The ideals we had. For an
independent Ireland. They've been
forgotten about.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Instead we're here in this bloody country where nobody wants us. Shooting at bandits. Harassing peasants.

PRIEST

You'd like to go home?

LAWLESS

My wife's pregnant. I found out via a letter. I don't know when I'll get to see them. Would I like to go home? More than anything in the world.

We switch to the other side of the confession box. We see that the priest is Father Curtis.

FATHER CURTIS

God can move in mysterious ways.

INT. BAR IN SALAMANCA - EVENING

William Lawless, Hugh Ware, Miles Byrne, John Tennent and John Sweeny are having a quiet drink.

MILES

One more then I'm calling it a night. Want to be fresh for the march tomorrow.

SWEENY

Miles is getting a round in. Which Saint's birthday is it?

MILES

I said I'm getting one more. You can do as you please.

SWEENY

You tight bastard.

Eight heavily cloaked and armed men enter the bar. The landlord and the few other customers in the bar beat a hasty retreat. One of the men throws back his hood. It's the bandit leader Don Julien.

DON JULIEN

You are men of the Irish Legion?

Hugh reaches for his sword. William puts his hand out to stop him.

WILLIAM

Who's asking ?

DON JULIEN

A countryman.

One of the men moves forward, revealing his face. It's Louis Lacy.

LOUIS

You're still here, amigos. Hoped you'd be back in France by now...

WILLIAM

... and we thought you were dead!

LOUIS

That's not much of a welcome.

HUGH

It's as much as you deserve. What's the story. You're riding with bandits now?

LACY

One man's bandit is another man's freedom fighter. Have you been away from Ireland so long that you need reminding of that?

MILES

This isn't a social call. Why are you here.

LACY

I have an offer. A pardon from the English Government and free passage to Ireland. I have the word of Lord Wellington himself. You can go home.

WILLIAM

Why would we trust Wellington?

MILES

Or accept a pardon from George the Third? I'd rather die.

LACY

Don't be too proud to take this chance. Has France been that good to you? Are you willing to lay down your life for her?

HUGH

If you were really Irish you'd realise that pride is all we've feckin' got.

SWEENY

Pride? Are you really proud of what we've been doing down here? Napoleon's a dictator. I'll follow him no longer. I've had enough.

Sweeny stands up joins Lacy and the Spanish bandits.

WILLIAM

Captain Sweeny. Sit down!

Miles raises a hand, urging William to back off.

MILES

If that's what John wants let him go. We're better off without him.

SWEENY

Come with us, Miles. This is your chance to go home. To get back to where you belong.

MILES

I belong here. With this lot. For better or worse.

LACY

So be it. If we meet on the battlefield I expect no quarter, for none will be given.

WILLIAM

You've not only betrayed us. You've betrayed your country.

LACY

Spain is my country. I've found my home. I pray one day you can say the same.

With that Lacy and his men turn and walk out into the night, taking John Sweeny with them.

INT. THE IRISH SEMINARY - DAY

Those convalescent patients who are fit to march are packing their kit up. Captain Lawless says his farewells to Reverend Curtis.

WILLIAM

I expect you'll be glad to see the back of us.

FATHER CURTIS

Nonsense. Where to next for the Irish Legion?

WILLIAM

Can't tell you I'm afraid. There are spies everywhere.

FATHER CURTIS

In a Seminary. Surely not.

WILLIAM

People are watching. I would be careful, Father Curtis.

FATHER CURTIS

Is that a warning?

WILLIAM

Friendly advice.

FATHER CURTIS

Take care on the road ahead. No matter where it leads.

EXT. THE PYRENEES - THE NEXT DAY

The next morning the Irish Legion resume they're march back to France. The sun is rising above the mountains as they march into the foothills. We can hear a marching band playing "On St. Patrick's Day in the Morning".

INT. THE LAWLESS HOUSEHOLD - DAY

William is sat in the breakfast room feeding his eight-month old daughter porridge. She's sat in a high chair with porridge all round her face and bib.

WILLIAM

Here comes the cavalry. Charge!

William moves the spoon to his daughter's mouth, which remains resolutely closed. The girl shakes her head. Mary walks in with two mugs of coffee.

MARY

Have you not fed Annie yet? Here, let me.

William stands to one side and lets Mary takes over.

WILLIAM

I swear feeding a whole regiment is easier than feeding that girl.

MARY

Thank God they're not packing you off to Russia with the rest of the army.

WILLIAM

Feeding one small child or facing
hordes of rampaging Cossacks. I'm
not sure which I fear most.

EXT. THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW - DAY

A dead horse half buried in the snow. Desperate soldiers try to hack chunks of frozen flesh off the carcass with swords and bayonets. Columns of ragged and destitute French troops trudge through the snow as fierce biting winds whip around them.

On the far horizon we can make out the unmistakable silhouette of Napoleon, surrounded by his generals, as they ride away from the calamity.

EXT. LAWLESS HOUSEHOLD - DAY

The Irish Legion is mobilising. The streets are full to bursting of green uniformed troops mustering for the march East. Colonel Lawless is at the doorstep saying his farewells.

MARY

It doesn't seem long since you got
back from Spain. You'll be careful,
won't you.

WILLIAM

Don't worry. The Russians didn't
beat us. It was the winter. Now
it's fighting season we'll make
short work of them.

MARY

Don't be getting shot at. If you
come back any more messed up I'll
be leaving you. I'll ditch you and
marry Miles. That's a promise.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

You're an evil woman. How I ever
fell in love with you is a complete
mystery.

They embrace and kiss passionately. William takes the reins of his horse from a soldier who's been holding them for him, mounts, and with a last backward glance rides away.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

The whole regiment is assembling in the main square of the German town of Munster.

Miles Byrne, Hugh Ware, and John Tennent are sat at an outside cafe. Their horses are tied up nearby.

HUGH

A fine sight, eh. Makes you proud to be Irish.

TENNENT

Most of them are German, but they're doing a good impersonation of Irishmen.

MILES

Really? They're following orders and completely failing to knock seven shades of shite out of each other.

Colonel William Lawless turns up with four shots of schnapps on a tray.

WILLIAM

Something for the road, gentlemen.

HUGH

Drinking on duty, Colonel?

WILLIAM

Rank has it's privileges.

TENNENT

I'd rather be following you than that drunkard O'Meara any day. Not that I've got anything against drunkards.

WILLIAM

The Minister for War was finally forced to cut his brother-in-law loose.

MILES

We've finally got a boss who's Irish, a patriot, and not a complete arse.

WILLIAM

Well, thank you for your support.

William raises his glass.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

The Irish Legion.

The four men clink their shot glasses together.

ALL

The Legion.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

The Legion are bivouacked in a clearing next to a pine forest. Campfires dot the surrounding fields. Hugh Ware smokes a pipe while Miles Byrne is stirring a pot of stew that's bubbling in a cauldron hung over the flames. A few other younger soldiers are sat nearby. John Tennent passes his hip flask to Miles, who turns it down.

TENNENT

You're not much of one for the drink, are ye.

MILES

If I started I sometimes think I wouldn't stop.

TENNENT

Go on. A wee dram can't hurt.

HUGH

Leave Miles alone. You and William weren't there for the '98. I've seen plenty who crawled into the bottom of the bottle and never come out again.

TENNENT

Again? Why do you fellas keep banging on about the bloody '98?

HUGH

If you were there, you'd know.

Hugh blows out a big puff of smoke that fills the screen.

FLASHBACK - EXT. VINEGAR HILL - NIGHT

SUPER: "Vinegar Hill 21st June 1798"

It's just before dawn. British soldiers wheel six pounder guns into position in front of the looming mass of Vinegar Hill. It's still dotted with the dying embers of hundreds of camp fires.

Father Murphy stands in front of a wall of pikemen, all lit from below in the firelight. Behind them we can see the silhouette of an old windmill, from which a rebel banner is flying.

FATHER MURPHY

Through valour, faith and patriotism we have asserted our God given right to be free. The road we have taken is the road we must follow. If that road ends here, so be it.

Many of the crowd cross themselves.

CROWD

Amen.

As dawn breaks we hear a short burst on a whistle. A solitary cannon fires. We hear the cannonball whistling in and it explodes with a mighty burst.

EXT. VINEGAR HILL - DAY

We're in the thick of the battle. Repeated pike charges attempt to silence the roaring cannon, but are forced back by the vicious barrage. Explosions throw up earth, blood and body parts. Terraced thousands die, shaking scythes at cannon.

A pikeman assembles a group of refugees and attempts to get them off the hill.

PIKEMAN.

Take these pikes and put hats on them. The British will know you're surrendering.

A gunner notices the column of pikes with hats aloft making its way down the hill. He calls over to General Lake, who surveys the scene from horseback.

GUNNER

Sir, they're surrendering.

GENERAL LAKE

Did you see what those bastards did at Wexford Bridge? There'll be no surrender today.

General Lake raises his sword.

GENERAL LAKE (CONT'D)

Fire!

EXT. ENNISCORTHY - CONTINUOUS

The rebel forces headed by Father Kearns and William Barker are holding the Crown forces at the Slanney Bridge. The fighting is fierce and brutal. There's an explosion, and Father Kearns goes down.

BARKER

Father Kearns is hit. Get him back.

Two rebels drop their pikes and help the Father back. He protests.

FATHER KEARNS

It's nothing. It's a scratch.

EXT. VINEGAR HILL - CONTINUOUS

General Lake surveys the scene through a telescope. We can see the massed pikemen starting to abandon their position on the hill. They seem to slide down the hill like one giant spiked organism. Lake confers with a Lieutenant, who sits on horseback nearby.

GENERAL LAKE

Where's Needham? They're getting away.

LIEUTENANT

He's held up in the village.

GENERAL LAKE

Never mind. Send the cavalry up to the top to finish off the stragglers.

LIEUTENANT

They're just camp followers, Sir. Women and children, mostly.

GENERAL LAKE

The horses need a run out. I'm not about to put expensively trained cavalry up against a wall of pikemen.

General Lake wheels his horse around and rides off.

GENERAL LAKE (CONT'D)

Get them to take that bloody rebel flag down as well.

EXT. VINEGAR HILL - CONTINUOUS

The cavalry gallop up to the rise of Vinegar Hill and start slashing at the defenceless camp followers. The slaughter is as indiscriminate as it is brutal.

EXT. ENNISCORTHY - CONTINUOUS

The British have taken the Slanney Bridge. The rebel forces are pulling back. Redcoats storm over the bridge, firing as they go. William Barker is lying on the ground, wounded. A redcoat stands over him as an officer approaches.

REDCOAT 1

He's one of the leaders, sir.

OFFICER

Hand me your musket.

The officer rifle butts Barker in the face, sending a spray of blood and teeth gushing out. He hands the bloodied musket back.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Search every building. Flush them out... and clean that musket when you're done.

A group of yeoman irregulars hear muffled sobbing coming from inside the Courthouse which has been a makeshift hospital. They open the door to the darkened room and can just about make out the scores of injured people inside.

We see the young girl we saw before, clutching her rag doll, Maisie. The girl's mother has her arm round her. The yeoman slams the door shut and locks it.

YEOMAN

Burn it.

The yeomen spread straw out all round the building and set it alight. Inside, the Courthouse is quickly starting to fill up with acrid smoke. We hear the first screams. From outside we see the yeomen silhouetted against the rapidly flowering bloom of the fire as the Courthouse burns.

EXT. VINEGAR HILL - CONTINUOUS

Miles Byrne looks round from amongst the retreating pikemen. He sees smoke and flames rising from the burning Courthouse. He has tears in his eyes as he steels himself and turns away. There's nothing to be done. We see an extreme close up of the girl's rag doll as it smokes and starts to catch, then bursts into flames.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY - EXT. CAMPFIRE - EVENING

Hugh Ware is staring into the flames of the campfire. Several soldiers sit near to him, listening to the tale he's been telling.

HUGH

A whole generation, a whole people, were scarred forever that day. We found out just how far our rulers would go to keep us slaves.

MILES

I'll never forget the '98. Never forgive Vinegar Hill.

John Tennent stands up.

TENNENT

Well, that lightened the mood. I gotta take a leak.

EXT. RIVER ELBE - DAY

Captain Miles Byrne and Captain John Tennent are commanding a squad who are guarding a crossing over the River Elbe. There's a small jetty on either side with a row boat moored on the French side of the fast flowing river. There are ten soldiers standing guard and a gun crew manning a small three pounder cannon.

MILES

I don't know. Why wasn't Jesus born in Spain?

TENNENT

He couldn't find three wise men, or one single virgin. I've got loads of 'em.

MILES

Keep them to yourself.

John calls out to a member of the gun crew.

TENNENT

Hey, Gunther. Know any Cossack jokes?

GUNTHER

Nein.

TENNENT

Germans. No sense of humour.

Miles notices something on the other side of the river.

MILES

Hang on, what's that.

Three men in ragged and campaign soiled French Army uniforms break cover from the woods on the opposite bank of the river and run towards the jetty.

TENNENT

They're some of ours. Bet they've walked all the way from Moscow. Get the boat over there.

Two of the troopers launch the boat and start to row over. Five Cossack horsemen suddenly burst out from the woods and gallop towards the helpless French soldiers.

MILES

Form up. Fire a volley. Get that three pounder loaded.

TROOPER 1

What about our men.

MILES

They'll have to duck.

From in the boat the oarsmen have spotted the danger.

OARSMAN 1

Cossacks! Turn the boat around.

John Tennent fires a warning shot over the heads of the oarsmen.

TENNENT

Don't you feckin' dare. Get over there!

The three pounder fires. It doesn't score a direct hit, but two of the Cossacks are hit by shrapnel. The rest of the raiding party aid their comrades. They retreat back to the woods to lick their wounds. The rowboat reaches the jetty and the grateful French soldiers board it.

MILES

They look like shit. We thought we had it hard in Spain.

EXT. PINE FOREST - EVENING

We're amongst General Blücher's black clad Prussian cavalry as they look down at the French encampment outside the Polish town of Haynau from their hiding place in the woods. They start the attack and charge down the hill with a tremendous rumble of hooves.

The French are taken completely by surprise. They're cut down by the cavalry that weave around their tents as they struggle to load their muskets.

The Irish Legion are just arriving on the other side of the town. The sound of battle can be heard from off in the distance. At the head of the column are Colonel William Lawless and Captain Hugh Ware.

HUGH

Looks like they started the party without us.

A French officer pulls up in front of Colonel Lawless.

OFFICER

Thank God you're here. Blucher's cavalry have just launched a surprise attack.

WILLIAM

Rather unsporting of him. Our chaps were rather looking forward to a spot of supper.

EXT. HAYNAU - EARLY MORNING

The Irish Legion are in the thick of the fighting. They fire volley after volley into the massed Prussian cavalry with devastating effect. Once the artillery comes into play the Prussian's have had enough and retreat.

The Irish have been under arms all night, and as day breaks Napoleon himself rides over a low hill, surrounded by his entourage and silhouetted against the rising sun. Hugh Ware turns to William Lawless.

HUGH

Looks like we had an audience.

WILLIAM

Hope he enjoyed the show.

Napoleon rides up and addresses the assembled troops.

NAPOLEON

Soldiers of Ireland. Some say the Irish are like wild geese. Scattered across the battlefields of Europe. Fighting for any cause but their own.

The soldiers gaze at Napoleon. They are completely won over by his unmistakable charisma.

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)

I say, the Irish have a home, and they have a cause. With this army, and with this Emperor. Vive la France.

A huge cheer goes up from the assembled troops. Napoleon leans into one of his aides and issues a command.

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)

Invite Colonel Lawless to our table this evening. The Irish will form the guard.

INT. DINING HALL - EVENING

The town hall of Lignitz has been commandeered for Napoleon's dinner this evening. Napoleon sits at the head of the table with various general's and aide-de-camp arranged on either side. Waiters ferry in a seemingly endless supply of food and drink.

Colonel William Lawless is talking to GENERAL LAGRANGE, a striking looking man of about fifty with a shock of pure white hair and piercing blue eyes.

LAGRANGE

You Irish certainly gave Blücher's boys a bloody nose.

WILLIAM

It's just luck we turned up when we did.

LAGRANGE

Dumb luck has won many a battle.

Napoleon stands up and clinks his glass with a spoon. The room falls silent.

NAPOLEON

We have made good progress on this campaign, but we need time to regroup. With that in mind, an armistice has been arranged through our friends the Austrians.

GENERAL LAGRANGE.

Our friends for the moment.

NAPOLEON

Our friends until once again we get to beat them on the battlefield.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE DINNING HALL - CONTINUOUS

All entrances to the hall are guarded by men of the Irish Legion. Miles Byrne and John Tennent are stood guard by a door with a window, through which we can see into the hall.

TENNENT

Look at William. He's lapping it up.

MILES

It'll be General Lawless next. That'll please Mary.

TENNENT

I seem to remember you having an eye for Hampden Evan's little girl.

MILES

Not so little now.

TENNENT

You're not denying it, then?

EXT. A FIELD - EVENING

An artillery officer lights the fuse of a massive rocket mounted on a wooden tripod. The fuse catches and the officer withdraws. The rocket roars into the night sky and explodes with a fiery bloom in the night sky. More rockets arc up forming a barrage of light and sound. The field is full of soldiers watching the pyrotechnic display.

SOLDIER

Happy birthday, Napoleon Bonaparte.
Emperor of France and ruler of all
Europe.

Colonel Lawless stands by the edge of the field with his old friends and comrades Miles Byrne, Hugh Ware and John Tennent. They are all wearing the medal of the Legion of Honour proudly on their chests.

TENNENT

Well, we're all Knights of the
Legion of Honour, now.

WILLIAM

It must be a clerical error. I'll
have to go through the paperwork.

HUGH

I always knew it'd be our turn if
we stayed alive long enough.

TENNENT

I'll be glad to see the back of
this Armistice. I'm about ready to
get back to the warmongering.

MILES

Well, there's no shortage of
countries to fight. It seems they
all want a pop at us.

EXT. A BATTLEFIELD - DAY

We're in the thick of the Battle of Lowenburg. The Irish Legion are once again up against General Blücher's cavalry. They've formed an infantry square on high ground and are pouring volley after volley into the circling cavalry. Hugh Ware turns to William Lawless.

HUGH

The square's holding. Their cavalry
can't get through.

WILLIAM

So far. If they bring up those
cannon we're finished.

HUGH

Ever the optimist.

A cannon ball whistles in and explodes amongst the men,
throwing up a torrent of earth and blood. John Tennent rides
up to the gap in the square.

TENNENT

Look lively. Close up the gap.

Another explosion knocks John off his horse. The horse panics
and runs into the back of the defending musketeers, opening
up a further gap in the square. As the smoke clears John
tries to get to his feet. His feet are three yards away. He's
been cut in half by the blast.

TENNENT (CONT'D)

That was a close one...Oh...

More cannon blasts explode amongst the Irish. Lawless rushes
over to the bloody remains of his old friend. Kneeling down
he places his hands over John's starring eyes, closing them.
Hugh Ware shouts out to William.

HUGH

We're getting cut to pieces. We
need to get out of here.

WILLIAM

Help me bury John.

HUGH

There's no time.

William gets out his bayonet and starts digging at the blood
stained earth.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Sod it.

Hugh joins in William's digging. Miles Byrne also helps with
the frantic scrabble to bury their comrade. As Captain
Tennent is interred in his shallow grave a corporal rushes
towards them.

COROPORAL

Sir, we've got orders to retreat to
the woods

WILLIAM

About time.

William mounts his horse. He raises his sword and shouts a command to the men.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Form up. We're retreating to the woods. Turn and fire every thirty steps.

HUGH

You heard the Colonel. Let's move.

The regiment performs a textbook ordered retreat, moving back in good order and firing off a volley every few minutes to keep the cavalry at bay. As they reach the safety of the woods French artillery arrive from over the hill and the Prussian cavalry retreat. The field is littered with Irish dead.

EXT. CAMPSITE - EVENING

There's a somber atmosphere around the campfire that evening. William Lawless stares into the flames wrapped up in his own thoughts. Hugh Ware has been wounded in the retreat and his head is wrapped in bandages. Miles Byrne is cooking a rabbit over the fire.

MILES

We got a kicking today.

HUGH

We've no bloody cavalry. We can hold our own until the guns turn up, then it's game over.

WILLIAM

We'll have Napoleon with us tomorrow along with the Imperial Guard. We should be able to walk into Lowenberg.

Pulling back we see the surrounding fields dotted with the bodies of fallen soldiers. Crows pick at the fresh corpses. A bloody mound of mud is all that is left of Captain John Tennent.

EXT. LOWENBERG - DAY

The French are attempting to re-take the town of Lowenberg from the Prussians. GENERAL BLÜCHER is conferring with his chief's of staff. He's seventy years of age and an old school Prussian with bushy white moustache and side whiskers. He's reading a message that's just arrived from a courier.

BLÜCHER
It's confirmed. Bonaparte's on the
field. Pull back.

A Prussian major protests.

MAJOR
But Sire, we can hold the town.

BLÜCHER
We pull back. We deny the Corsican
bandit the victory he craves.

EXT. LOWENBERG - CONTINUOUS

Colonel William Lawless urges on the troops from horseback as they fire volley after volley into the retreating Prussians.

WILLIAM
They've no taste for a fight today.
Advance.

The battalion begin the advance in good order, stopping to fire off a volley every few minutes. A cannonball comes whistling in and explodes amongst the Irish. Colonel Lawless is thrown from his horse. Captain Hugh Ware dashes over to him. The horse thrashes around in agony, it's innards strewn all over the mud. A grenadier puts it out of it's agony with a musket shot to the head.

HUGH
Colonel. Are you hit?

Hugh rolls him over. William's right leg is a shattered bloody mess.

WILLIAM
Just my leg.

Captain Ware shouts over to six burly grenadiers. He points to a nearby looted cottage that has the front door hanging off it's hinges.

HUGH
Jaysis, what a mess. You
grenadiers. Use that door. Carry
Colonel Lawless back to field
headquarters.

A grenadier rips the door off its hinges and they place William on the make shift stretcher.

WILLIAM
Hugh. Take the command.

The grenadiers carry Colonel Lawless off.

HUGH

Sound the advance. Let's push these bastards back.

INT. NAPOLEON'S FIELD HEADQUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

The village hall the French have been using as a field head quarters is full of military personnel. Napoleon and his generals study a large map that is laid out on an oak table.

GENERAL 1

These Prussians have no stomach for a fight.

NAPOLEON

They refuse to fight when I'm on the field. They don't want to grant me a victory. If I could be everywhere at once I could have them retreating all the way to Moscow.

The door crashes open as an Imperial Guardsman admits the grenadiers carrying Colonel Lawless.

GUARDSMAN

Excellency. We have Colonel Lawless. He's injured.

NAPOLEON

Ah, my Irish Colonel. Bring him in.

The grenadiers place the door carrying Colonel Lawless onto a nearby table.

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)

We seem to have been a little careless, Colonel.

WILLIAM

Apologies, Excellency. I left most of my leg on the battlefield.

A dashing looking officer with a black floppy fringe inspects the mangled limb. This is BARON LARREY.

NAPOLEON

You are lucky, Colonel. Today we have the services of Baron Larrey, my personal surgeon. What do you think, Baron?

BARON LARREY

I think we'll be needing Gertrude and Isabella. Grenadiers, secure the patient.

The soldiers hold Colonel Lawless down. He struggles despite himself. He knows what's coming next. Baron Larrey reaches into his bag and pulls out a lethal looking curved blade.

BARON LARREY (CONT'D)

This is Gertrude. Her kiss is mercifully quick.

Baron Larrey grabs a dangerous looking bone saw.

BARON LARREY (CONT'D)

Her sister, Isabella, unfortunately enjoys a longer embrace.

The grenadiers surround Lawless as they pin him down. He starts to scream.

EXT. THE EAST BANK OF THE BOBR RIVER - DAY

The Legion trudges through mud as torrential summer rain turns the sodden earth into a quagmire. The Bobr River has burst its banks. A stone bridge that lies ahead is partially submerged and impassable. Commander Ware shouts a command.

HUGH

Hold up. We're making camp here tonight.

Captain Miles Byrne rides over to Commander Ware.

MILES

What's the plan?

HUGH

Pray it stops raining.

MILES

Is that it? Half the powder's soaked. If they attack now we've had it.

HUGH

Sorry, Miles, it's the best I've got.

EXT. FRENCH CAMPSITE BOBR RIVER - EVENING

There's been a slight let up in the rain. Hugh Ware, Miles Byrne and a few others are sat by a campfire. Similar campfire's can be seen on the other side of the unusually swollen River Bobr.

MILES

Who's that on the other side?

HUGH

Westphalians. Might as well be on the far side of the Moon unless we can get across that river.

MILES

Carries on like this we'll be swimming it.

HUGH

Aye. I'd like to be in William's shoes. In a nice warm carriage heading back to France.

MILES

William's shoe you mean.

HUGH

That's not funny.

Hugh pulls a serious face for a moment, then they both crack up laughing. Hugh offers Miles a drink from his flask. Miles takes a swig.

MILES

You know what, this is what I'll miss if the fighting ever stops.

HUGH

Sitting round a campfire talking shite?

MILES

E'sprit de corp. Sitting round a campfire talking shite. Ireland will just have to liberate itself. We won't be getting back there in a hurry.

HUGH

We gave it our best shot. No one can say we didn't.

EXT. BOBR RIVER - DAY

The thick of battle. A combined Russian and Prussian force of overwhelming superiority attacks the French position from three sides. The Irish Legion is formed up into a massive square, with its back to the fast flowing river.

They hold back the repeated cavalry attacks with well timed musket volleys. Artillery barrages punch holes in the square, which the Irish quickly fill up. The dead and wounded are quickly piling up at the centre of the square. Captain Byrne rides up to Commander Ware.

HUGH

Fill up the gaps. Look lively.

MILES

One more charge like that and we're done for. That's the last of the powder.

HUGH

It'll be every man for himself.

MILES

It's a fine day to be having a dip in the river.

Commander Ware addresses the men from horseback.

WARE

Gentlemen, we came together because of a dream. A dream of a United Ireland. We got side tracked along the way.

A soldier shouts out.

SOLDIER

Aye, you're not joking. Bloody Silesia.

WARE

Put that man on a charge! Nevertheless, its been an honour and a privilege fighting along side you. Once more we fight or die. For any cause but our own.

The proud remnants of the once mighty Irish Legion take up the refrain.

ALL

Any cause but our own.

A low rumble of hooves rolls like thunder. It comes in like a wall of death as the massed Cossacks charge. The Irish let off one last volley in defiance and then those that can swim turn and dash for the river. Private McCann stands his ground. His friend Corporal Setting calls out to him.

SETTING

What are you waiting for?

MCCANN

I can't swim. Go. I'll hold them.

Setting hesitates, then wades into the river.

SETTING

God be with you.

McCann charges towards the Cossacks with his bayonet. He's felled with a vicious swipe of a sabre.

The regimental standard bearer is cut down by a Cossack. Hugh Ware is nearby and snatches up the banner. He uses it to dismount the rider, ramming it into the Russian's chest.

HUGH

I'll be having that.

Hugh turns and runs into the river, carrying the banner with him. Miles Byrne tries to cross the river on horseback, but the current is too strong and the horse is washed away.

He manages to scramble to the other side of the river, where Westphalian troops help him and the few other survivors of the massacre out of the water. He turns round to the far bank and views the scene of carnage.

Hugh joins him, clutching the water-logged banner. The river runs red with Irish blood.

MILES

You got the Eagle.

HUGH

That's all we've got. All that's left of the Irish Legion.

EXT. PARIS - DAY

A carriage pulls up at a large house in the outskirts of Paris. Colonel Lawless alights with the help of the driver. He's on crutches and not used to walking without his missing leg. He stumbles slightly, then rights himself. His family are waiting for him on the steps to the house. Mary goes to him.

MARY

My poor love. What have they done to you?

WILLIAM

I'm back. Back for good. Most of me, anyhow.

MARY

Have you finished with the war now?

WILLIAM

I think the war's finished with me.

MARY

You've given enough. Time to come home.

EXT. THE RAMPARTS - DAY

SUPER: "Two years later"

Hugh Ware and Miles Byrne are atop the medieval ramparts at Montreuil-Sur-Mer with a small group of fellow war veterans. They're dressed in civilian clothing. Miles is tending to a small fire he's lit, over which is suspended a cast iron crucible. A carriage pulls up. The driver helps William Lawless to step down.

MILES

No Mary?

WILLIAM

She sends her love. Annie's got a school play.

HUGH

It's for the best. She doesn't want to listen to a bunch of old soldiers swapping war stories.

WILLIAM

So, they're winding down the Irish Legion. No grand ceremony?

MILES

The Ministry of War want us out of the picture. No room for Bonapartists in the new France.

WILLIAM

History is written by the victors.

HUGH

We've been told to burn the flags and melt down the Eagles. We thought you'd want to be here.

WILLIAM

No one else?

MILES

We're just about all that are left.

Hugh unwraps the brass Eagles and smashes them to pieces with a mallet. He places the pieces in the heated crucible. They start to melt and bubble.

HUGH

Turns out they're mere baubles after all.

He hangs the banner on a flagpole and sets it alight. The small group salute the flag as it flies and burns in the sea breeze.

EXT. PERE LACHAISE CEMETERY - DAY

We're back in 1850. Miles Byrne places the flowers he's been carrying on the gravestone. The lettering on the grave reads " William Lawless. 20th April 1772 - 25th December 1824."

MILES

Christmas must be a difficult time of year for you.

MARY

Time is a great healer.

MILES

You never settled down with anyone else?

MARY

William was always the only one for me. Maybe one other. That was a long, long time ago...

MILES

I'd best be off. My wife will be wondering where I am.

MARY.

Same time next year?

MILES

I hope so.

MARY

Don't be a stranger, you hear.

MILES

Never that, Mary.

They embrace slightly awkwardly. Miles walks away, the late winter sun throwing long shadows over the cemetery.

INT. MILES BYRNE'S STUDY - EVENING

Miles is sat at his desk, writing. His wife, Frances, calls him from downstairs.

FRANCES

(V.O)

Miles, your supper is getting cold.

MILES

Coming.

Miles takes off his glasses and gathers up the manuscripts he's been working on. He reaches over and picks up a paper weight. It's the Imperial Eagle from the 1st Battalion of the Irish Legion.

He places it on top of the pile of papers he's been working on. Miles stands up slowly, takes a moment to hold his back, and leaves the room.

Light glints off of the Eagle's head.

FADE OUT.

THE END.