

REQUIEM WAUHATCHIE

BY

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FADE IN:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - NIGHT

SUPER: WAUHATCHIE, OCTOBER, 1863

OTIS MUNK, early 20s, ragged Confederate uniform, hares blindly through the darkness to the flash of musket fire and booming cannon.

Ahead, the rumble of hoofbeats, bearing down.

Munk hurls himself clear, belly crawling to hug the cover of a low berm as a thunder of hooves sweep by.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - THE BERM - DAWN

Grey sky. A distant voice croons a lament.

A filthy hand tugs at Munk's canteen strap.

He stirs, squints into the light, senses returning.

The berm rises little more than a foot above his head and twice his length - a speck of cover in open ground.

He notices the filthy hand straining at the strap - as if trying to pull him closer to the mound.

Munk fishes a pair of spectacles from his tunic. A rusty fork follows. He dons the glasses, watching the hand like a cat readying to pounce -

He jabs the fork into the back of the hand -

STRUTTLE (O.S.)
(muffled)
Stinking cuss!

Munk turns - a pair of bloodshot eyes glower from the mound mere inches from his face.

STRUTTLE, late 40s, bearded, Union uniform, lies pinned amid a breastwork of corpses. The bloated features of a dead man pressed grimly to his own.

Munk gags in shock - seeing now the whole berm is made up of bodies, stacked in a tangle of stiffened limbs and soiled Federal uniforms. He covers his mouth to stifle a cry.

Struttler cackles dryly - it turns to a loud choking cough.

Panicked, Munk clamps his free hand over Struttler's mouth -
Struttler twists, bites him.

Munk wrests his hand free in a muffled howl of pain.

MUNK
You bit me!

STRUTTLE
You cut my air!

MUNK
Lord give you a nose!

In a fit of pique, Munk rips the stopper from his canteen and gulps it down. Shakes the last few drops into the dirt.

STRUTTLE
I weren't about to drink no
stinking rebel piss anyhow.

Munk eyes the top of the mound, thinking...

STRUTTLE
You ain't but spitting distance
from the line.

MUNK
What do you care?

STRUTTLE
I'm cheeks to the wind back here
and them's a long throw from
sharpshooters. Take my word.

A CRY of alarm from the Union lines.

A volley of rifle fire fizzles past - a SCREAM of pain
answers from somewhere on the battlefield.

Munk clutches his musket, reassured

MUNK
(to himself)
They gonna come back.

STRUTTLE
They did already.

Munk throws him a bitter look, sinks back in a sulk.

LATER

Munk rests his eyes. Collar turned, arms folded for warmth.

Struttler whistles gently to himself.

MUNK

Been whistling that same tune since
sun up. Even the birds quit.

STRUTTLE

Birds got places to be. ...Are you
shot?

MUNK

No.

STRUTTLE

Slashed?

MUNK

No.

STRUTTLE

...Trampled?

MUNK

I look trampled?

STRUTTLE

No, Sir. A boney cuss but as likely
a lead-swinging Reb as ever I seen.

Munk bristles, offended.

MUNK

I ain't the one playing possum.

STRUTTLE

Say what now? Come closer I'm hard
of the hearing.

MUNK

(re: his bitten hand)

If the hand's left you wanting I'll
be happy to fix you a taste of
Dixie boot leather?

Struttler gnashes his teeth in defiance.

MUNK

What d'you say, Old Blue, might you
be the one hiding behind me?

Munk eases a hand into the press of flesh and cloth. Feels around, watching Struttler for a reaction.

Struttler glowers back, challenging.

Munk stops cold, feeling something unseen. He stifles a gag of revulsion.

STRUTTLE
No, Sir, try again.

Munk moves on... shudders, brow creasing in concern.

Now Struttler bites his lip, wincing in pain.

MUNK
Is..?

STRUTTLE
Was.

MUNK
How?

STRUTTLE
Cannon.

Munk withdraws his bloodied hand. Looks away, awkward. He pulls off his cap. A moment of shared understanding passes between them.

STRUTTLE
...You like crackers?

LATER STILL

Crows CAW. Rain peppers Munk's face as he gnaws dejectedly on a cracker.

MUNK
(re: the corpse)
You know him?

Struttler bends his eyes for a better study of the dead man.

STRUTTLE
I don't believe so.

Munk frees one side of the dead man's tunic and drapes it over his head for cover. Continues eating.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - THE BERM - DUSK

SINGING from the Union lines. Struttler whistles along.

Rainwater pools atop Munk's covering. He shivers, hugging himself for warmth.

STRUTTLE

Sounds joyous. ...Pity.

Nothing from Munk.

STRUTTLE

Nothing stays the hand like a shindy. Musician by trade - know a thing of what I speak.

Still nothing.

STRUTTLE

Made regimental bugle player - on account of my tight embouchure. That and an unrivalled lack of accuracy with a rifle. I shall miss it - the horn that is. The fiddle some too. Fairly sell my soul for one last song so I would. ...Would you be dead?

MUNK

Could that a man be talked from life...

STRUTTLE

I was saying how-

MUNK

I heard you.

STRUTTLE

I'm of the opinion you ought to surrender.

MUNK

That ain't no word I was raised to know. That a Northern term?

STRUTTLE

Suit yourself. Freeze for all I care.

MUNK

I been thinking, them tight boat-shoes of yourn ain't seen their last. Soon's we lose the light, I'll pull you free. You just bite the wood till I'm absquatulated. Deal?

STRUTTLE

Why I ought to have bitten you clean through-

Munk whips back the covering, incredulous.

MUNK

You'd sooner be picked over by crows?

STRUTTLE

I am bound by duty-

Munk catches, dumbfounded.

MUNK

You let them do this?

STRUTTLE

Some's held to a higher principle.

MUNK

Old Blue gone lost his wits.

STRUTTLE

Weren't for such dedication you'd be dead, certainly you'd be trampled. Me -
 (re: the corpse)
 him, this whole unholy arrangement. Next time you take a knee, thank the Lord for the behind you are currently situated behind.

MUNK

Lord about to get a barrel-full of my gratitude - for the opportunity to avenge my brothers.

Munk cocks his musket, riled up.

MUNK

Sooner die boots to dirt than part ways with my pride.

Snugging his cap into place, Munk rolls to his feet.

In one quick motion, Struttler raises his hand. Tearing the fork free with his teeth he jabs it into Munk's shin.

Munk howls in pain -

A hail of musket fire crackles from the treeline. He slumps, body added to the pile.

The gunfire tapers to silence -

Struttler grits his teeth as he catches a stray.

STRUTTTLER

Aim high you walleyed cusses!

He stares hangdog from between Munk's buckled legs...

...A harmonica slips free to dangle from a length of twine tied to Munk's belt. Struttler grins - every cloud...

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Munk lies folded over the berm.

STRUTTTLER (O.S.)

The Girl I Left Behind Me!

A VOICE rises from the treeline concealing the Union troops.

A harmonica joins, picking up the tune to scattered CHEERS.

CROONER (O.S.)

I'm lonesome since I crossed the
hill/And over the moor that's
sedgy/Such lonely thoughts my heart
do fill/Since parting with my
Betsy...

FADE OUT