

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Tom's unit is sitting around the campfire on Stone River Ridge after a hard day's marching. Soft harmonica music can be heard under the crackling of the fire. Tom sips chickory coffee out of a tin mug.

One of his army buddies, JIMMY THOMPSON sits down next to him. Jimmy is eating some rations.

JIMMY

Evenin' Tom.

TOM

Jimmy.

JIMMY

Long day. Man, the Captain likes to push us. For what? We'll finish this war as soon as we fire on them Rebels. Betcha they'll scatter like chickens.

TOM

Yeah, I sure hope that's how it goes. But from what I heard from the Sergeant, this war's been goin on longer than they all thought.

JIMMY

Trust me. My Pa done said as much. God is on our side, that's what he said. And he should know, bein' a preacher and all. Besides, them Rebs already lost Nashville. We'll take Murfreesboro for sure.

TOM

Where you from, Jimmy?

JIMMY

I came up from Arkansas. Soon as they seceded, my family knew we had to make our way up north. Moved to Indiana. Soon as I came of age, I volunteered.

TOM

I don't know too many southern boys who feel sympathetic to the Union.

JIMMY

Well, we're Southern Baptists. But the funny thing is my family's real big on abolition.

TOM
You mean gettin rid of slavery?

JIMMY
Yep. Pa says it's against Jesus'
teachings. Most other Baptists you
speak to would say it's Southern
tradition though.

TOM
Yeah, I always thought it seemed
wrong. But most folks around my
parts ain't got enough money to buy
slaves anyway, so I ain't given it
much thought.

JIMMY
Some folks figure we're fighting
this war about slavery.

TOM
What do you figure?

JIMMY
Maybe. Ain't thought too much about
the big picture and all. Just doin'
my part to preserve our country.

TOM
Yep. Me too.
(beat)
You really think them Rebels ain't
got enough fight in them?

JIMMY
Sure as my roots. I knew plenty of
them "good-ol-boys" growin' up.
Just like a good-for-nothin mutt,
plenty of bark, but no bite.
Specially after you give em a whuppin.

Jimmy gets up.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
I don't know about you, but I'm a
gonna turn in. Gonna be a long day
tomorrow.

TOM
Night.

Jimmy leaves. Tom's brother John, approaches and sits down
next to him.

JOHN
I'm tellin' you, this army life has
sure got me sore.

TOM
I know what you mean.
(beat)
How you figure we're gonna do?

JOHN
Can't say. This'll be our first
time. Best we can do is listen to
orders and keep our heads down.

TOM
I'm kinda scared.

JOHN
Yep.

Just then, the unit's SERGEANT makes his rounds. He
approaches the two young men who snap to attention, saluting
him.

SERGEANT
At ease.

John and Tom relax a bit.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
You two. You're brothers, ain't
that right?

TOM
Yes sir!

JOHN
We enlisted together, sir.

SERGEANT
Well, we can't have you two fighting
side by side. You.

Sergeant points to John.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Go to the south field. You'll be
fighting with that unit.

John salutes, then turns to leave. He puts his hand on Tom's
shoulder.

JOHN
Stay low, little brother.

John picks up his pack and heads away, down the hill towards the other unit. The Sergeant addresses Tom.

SERGEANT

Private Summers, you'll stay here on the ridge. You're the younger one, so it's safer on the high ground.

TOM

Yes sir!

Tom salutes and the Sergeant carries on to other soldiers.

Tom is left alone with his thoughts. He looks anxious.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STONE RIVER RIDGE - MORNING

Tom musters from where he slept by the campfire which is long extinguished. Looking down towards the river, he sees it covered in fog.

Other men are gathered round campsites eating breakfast. A lone hawk circles overhead.

Tom looks to the horizon -- he sees a shadowy mass appearing out of the fog and hears a rumbling. As the gray mass emerges, sunlight glints off of steel muskets. It is a huge battalion of Confederate troops advancing.

SERGEANT (O.S.)

To arms!

The Sergeant's call rouses the men to scramble-- gathering weapons, putting on their boots. Tom rushes himself to fall into line.

The men take the line on the hill, muskets ready.

EXT. UNION SKIRMISH LINE - CONTINUOUS

Tom is at the ready. His friend Jimmy stands next to him.

JIMMY

This is it.

TOM

At least we got the high ground.

The Sergeant calls out orders.

SERGEANT

Load!

With that, the men tear open the cartridges with their teeth, use their powder horns to fill their rifles, and drop minie balls down the barrel and use their ramrods to pack their muskets. Finally, they prime their hammers and apply percussion caps.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Ready!

The front skirmish line brings their weapons to position and fully cock their muskets. Tom looks down to see the Rebels take position down range.

A beat. Eerie silence. A standoff till--

The rebels charge!

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Aim!

The front line brings aims their muskets at the charging gray troops who are screaming the trademark "Rebel Yell".

Tom can see that the enemy has fixed bayonets. Some rebels pause to fire on the Union line as they get into range. Union comrades who are hit fall around Tom & Jimmy, whose eyes are wide and intense, but they keep their position.

Tom draws down on a rebel who is fast approaching.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

FIRE!!!

A volley erupts from the Union troops. Tom's quarry and other Rebels are hit, dropping to the ground as the mass of gray continues charging.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Reload!

Tom, Jimmy and the front line squat down and reload as fast as they can while the phalanx behind them aims their rifles and releases a volley of cover fire.

More rebs drop. But the enemy line keeps rushing. A third Union phalanx releases cover fire so that Tom's line and the second phalanx can finish reloading. This tactic stops the rebels advance. They quickly form a skirmish line and return fire in a large volley just as Tom's line rises to release more fire.

This time, Tom's line is hit with mass casualties as many of his comrades rise to their feet only to be met with the lead balls of the enemy.

In a panic, Tom drops to his knees, and quickly aims his musket, releasing his round, and taking out a rebel across the field.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Fix bayonets and Fire at will!

The Union men fix bayonets to their muskets, and return fire in a staccato burst as each man cycles through the loading, firing and reloading process as fast as they can. The rebels do the same and the battle becomes chaotic.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Charge!

JIMMY
(to Tom)
Cover me!

Jimmy and most of their company charge the rebel lines with their bayonets. Tom pauses to fire off a shot before joining in.

The rebels abandon their firing line and charge as well, meeting the Union forces in a clash of steel. Men on both sides are stabbed and gored horribly with screams of agony as Tom and Jimmy fight fiercely with instinct.

A cold icy rain begins to fall, soaking the ground with red puddles of rain mixed with blood.

Behind Tom, he hears cannon fire and sees artillery hit the enemy lines with ferocity, sending gray-clad bodies in all directions. This boosts his fighting spirit and he charges forward, spearing a young rebel soldier through the gut. Their eyes meet--he looks to be even younger than Tom.

A moment where the fight leaves Tom's eyes as the young man's life disappears from his own eyes.

OLD TOM (V.O.)
I learned then and there that there
was nothing glorious about battle.
Only killing and more killing.

A bullet whizzes by Tom's head, snapping him back to reality. He smashes a charging rebel with the butt of his rifle, and looks to see Jimmy fiercely fighting rebels as well.

The chaos gives Tom a moment to reload his musket and prime it to fire. He looks to find someone to draw down on and sees a rebel downrange who just stabbed a blue soldier with his bayonet. Tom fires a round into the rebel, hitting him in the chest which bursts with a spray of blood and he drops.

The battle seems to move in slow motion now as Tom scans the battlefield, watching cannon fire from both sides, and casualties mount up.

OLD TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The gray coats did not run, as Jimmy had predicted. The fighting was fierce, and we thought we'd go crazy with the thunder of cannons and screams of death all around us.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Another day. Gray skies with periodic rain.

There is a lull in the fighting. Tom's brigade has regrouped and is camped. A few troops stand watch for snipers. Tom and Jimmy take a moment for rest, dirty and caked with the blood of the enemy.

JIMMY
Man...I'm almost out of ammunition.

TOM
Me too. Just got a few rounds left. But I bet them Rebs got the same problem, if you ask me. That's why we ain't been fighting for a spell.

JIMMY
Yeah. I sure'n hope they don't get reinforcements. I hear that the fightin's still goin' on behind our lines.

TOM
I never expected them to fight so hard.

JIMMY
Yeah...

Their Sergeant approaches. He's bandaged from a minor wound and just as grimy.

SERGEANT
You privates! Ammunition wagon's just arrived. Go unload it!

TOM
Yes sir!

Tom and Jimmy slowly get to their feet, sore and tired. They drag themselves over to where a horse drawn wagon filled with ammo boxes is parked.

EXT. AMMO WAGON - DAY

Tom and Jimmy are carrying a large box off the wagon. They struggle to hold it, walking as quick as they can in the mud.

They pass the Sergeant who barks at them.

SERGEANT

Take that over to B company!

They comply, lugging it over to a unit gathered around. They drop the box in the mud and the troops open it up, taking ammunition.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Keep it going!

Tom and Jimmy stagger back to the wagon.

JIMMY

Man...you figure they could park the wagon any closer?

TOM

Can't keep the troops in one big bunch. Too easy for the rebs to get all at once.

JIMMY

(laughing)

Listen to you, a real military strategist! You ought to go to West Point!

TOM

(chuckling back)

Naw...I'll settle for a battlefield commission.

JIMMY

Yessir! I'll bet the grub's better in the officers' tent! Count me in for that!

They're back at the wagon and unload another box and drop it in the mud.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Gawd! I'm just about tuckered out from all this heavy liftin'!

TOM
Tell me about it.

They pause to rub their sore arms. Cannon fire can be heard in the distance.

JIMMY
Sounds like our guys started back up
with them artillery.

TOM
Could be the rebs, for all we know.

Jimmy squats and lifts his end of the box, standing and holding it.

JIMMY
Come on Tom, let's get this one.

Tom's end is stuck in the mud.

TOM
Hold on, it's stuck.

Tom squats down to dig away the mud from the corner of his box. Another cannon blast, this time much closer, and a whizzing sound.

Suddenly, the end of the box Jimmy is holding drops into the mud, almost crushing Tom's fingers.

TOM (CONT'D)
Dang it, Jimmy! Hold it!

Tom gets back up --

Jimmy is standing there...with no head.

Just the body, arms limp at its side. Blood spurts from a grizzly wound. The headless body topples forward on top of the box, blood spraying on Tom.

Tom gets sick, vomiting, eyes bugged out in terror. The battle starts back up -- relentless shelling from Confederate artillery now.

Shells erupt all around Tom as he loses his composure and runs for cover. But he's caught out in the open.

Chaos as his Union company tries to muster and return fire, rolling their own artillery batteries into position.

Tom sees the Stone River and runs towards it, abandoning his unit. He dives into the water to clean himself off and hide.

He pops up from underwater to see explosions in the distance as his unit takes heavy fire. Slowly drags himself to the riverbank where he lays, shivering and weeping.

A VOICE from a LIEUTENANT breaks the silence.

LIEUTENANT (O.S.)

Stay here.

Tom looks up to see a young officer in his mid-20s, battle worn and grimy. He carries a sidearm.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

I'll get you some dry boots and another uniform. You'll freeze to death if you don't get dry. Meantime, dig yourself in the mud for some warmth.

The Lieutenant heads back towards the action, cocking his pistol. Tom lies there, shivering. He regains his courage and drags himself to his feet where he staggers back towards his unit in the distance.

OLD TOM (V.O.)

I never saw that Lieutenant ever again.