

REQUIEM WAUHATCHIE

BY

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FADE IN:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - NIGHT

SUPER: WAUHATCHIE, TENNESSEE, 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 hooves.

Scared, disorientated, he alters course...stumbles...picks himself up and lurches on as the sound intensifies.

Munk throws a panicked glance over his shoulder - WHAM - he runs headlong into an unseen object. He drops - out cold.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - THE BERM - DAWN

Grey sky. A distant voice croons a lament.

Munk stirs. He squints into the light, senses returning and with them the pain. He feels the welt on his temple, winces.

Above him, a cannon barrel juts out over a defensive berm. It points upwards, knocked from its carriage.

He lies on his back at the foot of the berm which rises several feet above his head and extends just over his length - a scant island of cover on an open slope.

Munk frowns. He tilts to see the canteen on his belt inching its way across his waist - seemingly of its own accord.

Stealthily, he fishes a pair of spectacles from his tunic. A rusty fork follows.

He dons the spectacles, traces the canteen's strap to see it tugged along by a FILTHY HAND protruding from the berm.

Munk jabs the fork into the hand.

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

Munk twists -

STRUTTLE
Thought you was dead!

STRUTTLE, late 40s, matted beard, Union uniform, lies pinned amid a breastwork of corpses. A soiled bandage wraps his head, impairing his vision. The bloated features of a dead man press grimly to his own.

Munk gasps. The berm is a jumble of sandbags and bodies stacked in a tangle of stiffened limbs and soiled uniforms.

He covers his mouth to stifle a gag.

A dry cackle from Struttler turns to a loud choking cough.

Panicked, Munk clamps his free hand over Struttler's mouth.

Struttler sinks his teeth into Munk's flesh. Munk wrests his hand free in a muffled howl of pain.

STRUTTLE
Quit cutting my air!

MUNK
Lord give you a nose.

STRUTTLE
(re: the corpse)
I'm about wishing he hadn't.

Munk snatches up the canteen, tucks it into his tunic. He checks his musket over.

STRUTTLE
Listen, best just stay down. You're not a whore's wink from the line.

MUNK
Just count yourself lucky I don't kill you.

STRUTTLE
Aye, that'd be my luck alright.

A cry of alarm from the Union lines -

A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER tears past the berm, a hail of lead pouring after him. He makes 50 yards...100...150...

Munk watches him go in morbid fascination. Shots taper to silence as the runner slips out of range.

Munk grins. He flashes Struttler a parting look as he steels himself to follow.

MUNK
Mighty grateful for the advice.

KA-BOOM-BOOM-BOOM! A furious cannonade erupts.

Munk hugs the dirt. The volley reaches its target in a series of distant THUMPS. Debris rains down to scattered cheers.

After a long moment, Munk raises his head and stares off in the direction of the explosions.

STRUTTLE
You like crackers?

LATER

Munk stares dejectedly at the cannon above him.

Struttler whistles 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 then?

MUNK
I look trampled?

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

MUNK
I ain't the one playing possum.

STRUTTLE
Say what now? Come closer, times is
hard on an old man's ears.

MUNK
 (re: his bitten hand)
 If the hand's left you wanting I'll
 kindly oblige you a taste of Dixie
 boot leather!

Struttler bares his teeth in defiance.

MUNK
 What d'you say, Old Blue...

Munk rolls a sleeve, eases a hand into the press of flesh and cloth. He feels around, watching Struttler for a reaction.

MUNK
 Might you be the one hiding behind
 me?

Munk stops cold, feeling something unseen. He stifles a gag of revulsion, fighting the urge to pull away.

STRUTTTLER
 No, Sir, try again.

Munk forces himself on. He chokes back his bile. Up to his elbow now, brow creased in growing consternation.

Struttler winces, biting his lip against the sting of pain.

Munk does a slow take on Struttler. His victory soured by horrified disbelief.

STRUTTTLER
 ...Slow bleeder.

LATER STILL

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

MUNK
 (re: the corpse)
 You know him?

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

STRUTTTLER
 ...Wasn't much for talk.

Munk wrestles the dead man's tunic free and drapes it over his head for cover. He continues eating.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - THE BERM - DUSK

SINGING from the Union lines. Struttler whistles along.

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

STRUTTLE

Nothing like a good shindy to stay
the hand...

Nothing from Munk.

STRUTTLE

Musician by trade. Well, I was...I
suppose I still am...

Still nothing.

STRUTTLE

Made regimental bugle player - on
account of my tight embouchure.
That and an unrivalled lack of
accuracy. Not that I'm one to brag.
...Fairly sell my soul for one last
tune. ...Would you be dead?

MUNK

Could that a man be talked from
life...

STRUTTLE

For what it's worth, I'm of the
opinion you ought to surrender.

MUNK

That ain't no word where I'm from.

STRUTTLE

Aye, suit yourself. Freeze for all
I care.

Silence. Brooding. Awkward.

MUNK

I been thinking. Them tight boat-
shoes of yourn ain't seen their
last. Soon as we lose the light,
I'll haul you free. In return, you
bite the wood till I'm
absquatulated. What d'you say, Old
Blue?

STRUTTLE

I ought to have bitten you clean through!

Munk whips back the covering, incredulous.

MUNK

You'd sooner be picked over by crows?

STRUTTLE

Some's held to a higher principle.

Munk catches, dumbfounded. He looks from the cannon to the berm, eyes narrowing with suspicion.

MUNK

You let them fix you up like this?

STRUTTLE

I am honour bound to hold the position.

MUNK

Position? You ain't in no position. What you in is a predicament! Lord have mercy, Old Blue gone lost his wits.

STRUTTLE

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

MUNK

Lord about to get a barrel-full of my gratitude.

Munk cocks his musket, riled up.

MUNK

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

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

Struttler raises his hand, gripping the fork in his teeth he yanks it free -

Munk's head pops over the berm, about to leap over - THWAT!
He shrieks in pain -

Struttler twists the fork into Munk's shin as a hail of
musket fire erupts O.S.

STRUTTLE

Aim high you walleyed cusses!

Munk goes limp. The shots taper away. Struttler stares
hangdog from between his buckled legs.

The canteen drops free to pendulum from its strap. Water
springs from a bullet hole. Struttler opens his mouth,
gulping down the arc of water. A harmonica follows, bobbing
from a length of twine.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Munk lies folded over the mound of bodies piled about the
cannon's wreckage.

STRUTTLE (O.S.)

The Girl I Left Behind Me!

A VOICE rises from the tree line concealing the Union troops.

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...

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

FADE OUT