

DESERT KNIGHTS

The birth and early history of the SAS

by
Stephen Gallagher

2x90'

Part One

1. EXT. KEIR HOUSE, SCOTLAND. NIGHT.

We see a large, white country house in formal grounds, lights blazing from the ground floor windows. We can hear a faint buzz of dinner conversation.

Over the building we super: KEIR HOUSE, SCOTLAND

2. INT. KEIR HOUSE DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

A formal dinner party in full swing, sometime around the late 1920s. The women are in gowns and many of the men are in kilts and medals.

3. INT. KEIR HOUSE UPPER FLOOR. NIGHT.

An empty, unlit corridor. Not lavish, but functional. A BAR OF LIGHT showing under a door.

It goes out.

PAN UP as the door opens a crack and DAVID checks the corridor before emerging. He's a dark-haired boy of about 12, with a dressing-gown over his pyjamas.

4. INT. KEIR HOUSE HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Up at the top of the stairs, DAVID's head cautiously pokes into view.

HIS POV down on the dining room doors as the butler goes in and closes them after... from the sound that's coming out they seem to be making speeches, and there's a burst of applause.

Warily, he makes his way down.

At the foot of the stairs, he tiptoes past the dining room. But just as it looks as if he's in the clear, he hears someone coming.

He dives into the nearest cover just as...

ALICE THE COOK emerges through a door from the kitchens with one of the MAIDS behind her.

ALICE THE COOK
See to it before you go to bed.
Have you spoken to Mr Lunt about
the potatoes?

They can be heard moving off through the house as DAVID emerges from hiding and darts through into the kitchen.

5. INT. KEIR HOUSE KITCHEN. NIGHT.

A KITCHEN MAID returns, wiping her hands, and stops in her tracks to find...

DAVID ransacking the larder.

KITCHEN MAID
Master David!

DAVID is loaded up with a ham, a pie, a jar of pickle, a loaf, a tub of ice cream...

DAVID
Hello, Polly. Give me a hand?

KITCHEN MAID
And get the sack?

DAVID
Better see if you can catch me,
then.

She starts toward him, and he easily dodges her around the big table in the middle of the kitchen.

She's about to call for help...

DAVID
Don't let the general hear you!

The call dies on her lips.

DAVID darts out of the door.

6. INT. KEIR HOUSE HALLWAY. NIGHT.

DAVID emerges from the kitchen and stops in his tracks when he sees...

The BUTLER re-emerging from the dining room, cutting off his route to the stairs.

On seeing him, the BUTLER quickly closes the dining room doors

and whispers...

BUTLER
Master David!

DAVID makes a that's-torn-it face and darts off down a side-passage now with both the BUTLER and KITCHEN MAID joining in pursuit.

7. INT. KEIR HOUSE BELOW STAIRS. NIGHT.

DAVID scuttles down the servants' corridor, barely managing his load, with the BUTLER and the KITCHEN MAID not far behind.

AHEAD OF HIM -- the COOK and the MAID seen earlier come into view, and stop in their tracks.

ALICE THE COOK
(Outraged)
Master David!

DAVID ducks into a right-angled side passage, giving ALICE a straight line of sight to the BUTLER...

Who raises his finger to his lips.

BUTLER
Shhhh!

Moving in silence, both parties meet at the passage and pile down it after David.

8. INT. KEIR HOUSE HALLWAY. NIGHT.

The BUTLER, ALICE THE COOK and the two MAIDS emerge into the hallway by various different doors, all at the same time.

The BUTLER holds up a hand, and they all stop and listen.

All glance upward as, VERY FAINTLY, there's a muffled clumping... as of feet on uncarpeted stairs, heard through walls.

Then all four start forward and hurry up the main stairway with the BUTLER urging them to make as little noise as possible... so they tiptoe in a tight group, in comical haste.

9. INT. KEIR HOUSE UPPER FLOOR. NIGHT.

DAVID appears at the end of the passageway and comes racing down it toward us.

He ducks into his room just as...

His four pursuers appear at the end of the passageway and follow him down it.

But the door is closed by the time they reach it and audibly locked in their faces.

10. INT. BOY'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

DAVID sits on his bed with the feast spread before him, happily ignoring their efforts to get his attention.

BUTLER
(Offscreen)

Master David! Open this door!

No chance. And as he digs in, we super his name...

Colonel Sir David Stirling, DSO, OBE

11. EXT. SCHOOL BUILDINGS. DAY.

A public-school kind of a place. By the design and the vegetation we're clearly not in England. Over this establisher we super

The King's School, Sydney, Australia

12. EXT. WOODLAND BEHIND SCHOOL. DAY.

A row of young CADETS in uniform and colour-coded armbands stand to attention in a clearing as a portly, unathletic SCHOOLMASTER in Commander's regalia strides along, instructing them. He has a WHISTLE in his hand, attached to a lanyard around his neck. A pleasant-looking JUNIOR MASTER, also in uniform, waits close by.

SCHOOLMASTER

At my signal (HE GIVES A SHORT
BLAST ON THE WHISTLE), you will
scatter into the woods. Blues to
the north, yellows to the south.

As the SCHOOLMASTER passes we linger on one of the boys. This is JOCK, dark and good-looking with piercing blue eyes. He has a relaxed and competent air, and wears a blue armband.

SCHOOLMASTER

The object of this exercise is to approach by stealth and to capture as many of the opposing forces as you can. At my second signal (ANOTHER BLAST) we shall return here to count prisoners. Are there any questions? No?

He gives one long blast on his whistle, and the boys scatter as directed.

13. EXT. WOODLAND. DAY.

A couple of BOYS IN YELLOW ARMBANDS come crashing through the undergrowth, using the stocks of their antiquated rifles to clear the way ahead of them.

Once they're gone we PAN UP to find...

Half a dozen of the BOYS IN BLUE ARMBANDS sitting up in the branches of the trees.

JOCK is dirtying one fingertip on the tree bark and using it to draw on a pencil moustache. Then he turns to the others.

JOCK

So, my merry men. Our greenwood adventure begins. Who's got the watch?

OWEN DIBBS

It's been twenty minutes.

JOCK

Long enough.

He briefly and ineffectively scrubs at the dirt moustache and then fishes in the breast of his uniform shirt to bring out...

A WHISTLE identical to that held by the Commander.

JOCK raises an eyebrow as the other boys gawp at his daring.

Then he gives one long blast on the whistle.

DOWN IN THE UNDERGROWTH...

With the whistle note still sounding through the trees, the two BOYS IN YELLOW ARMBANDS groan and show their disappointment before turning to head back.

14. EXT. WOODLAND BEHIND SCHOOL. DAY.

Back at the clearing.

The SCHOOLMASTER strides into the clearing with a face like thunder and the JUNIOR MASTER on his heels.

Pulling back before him, we reveal the BOYS WITH YELLOW ARMBANDS all gathered in the clearing, and no blues at all.

SCHOOLMASTER
Who did that? Who blew that
whistle? Answer me! You!

He surveys the scene and then his eyes narrow as a thought strikes him...

SCHOOLMASTER
Where is Lewes?

JOCK
Here, sir.

JOCK steps out from behind a tree, rifle levelled.

JOCK
You're all our prisoners.

From behind trees to either side of him, the BOYS side of him, more BOYS WITH BLUE ARMBANDS emerge with rifles levelled.

The SCHOOLMASTER stalks across the clearing toward JOCK.

SCHOOLMASTER
Do you think this is a game,
Lewes? Do you think this is a
joke?

JOCK
(Calmly)
Absolutely not, sir.

He puts his face close to JOCK's and glowers. A trace of the dirt moustache still remains. The SCHOOLMASTER's all but lost for words and the best he can come up with is...

SCHOOLMASTER
Wash that face and see me in my
study.

He stalks off. The JUNIOR MASTER gives JOCK a sympathetic shrug and then follows.

JOCK watches them go. He's unworried. Wipes at his face again,

checks his hands to see if the dirt's coming off.

And over him we super:

Lieutenant John Steele 'Jock' Lewes

15. EXT. SCHOOL RUGBY FIELD. DAY.

Another complete change of light and atmosphere. It's a cold, grey day and the pitch is muddy with a match in progress. Over the establisher we super

Regent House Grammar School, Newtownards, Northern Ireland

Down on the pitch...

BLAIR, the tall and gangling school team captain, is running for the line with the ball under his arm. Two of the opposition try to intercept him. He fends them off with great force and they hit the ground hard.

Just short of the line, he's fouled and brought down. The REFEREE has seen it and calls for a scrum.

As BLAIR picks himself up, his teammates gather around him.

TEAMMATE

I've heard them talking, Blair.
They're gunning for you.

BLAIR

Are they, now?

He looks across to where the opposing team are regrouping a few yards away.

They seem to be exchanging conspiratorial words, sending quick glances in his direction.

16. EXT. SCHOOL RUGBY FIELD. DAY.

The scrum comes together, with BLAIR in the thick of it.

The ball is thrown in...

And is ignored as the scrum erupts upwards in one enormous mass punchup.

DETAIL ON BLAIR -- laying around him with brutal force, flattening everyone he hits.

The REFEREE keeps blowing his whistle. No-one pays him any

attention. Mayhem.

17. EXT. BY SCHOOL RUGBY FIELD. DAY.

BLAIR, scrubbed and pink-cheeked, hair brilliantined down and school uniform immaculate, is walking along by the field with his kit in a small leather bag. His step is jaunty, athletic.

FURTHER ON -- the members of the opposing team are lining up to board their 1920s motor bus. They're a sorry sight... bruised, tousled, limping, the odd one snivelling.

BLAIR reaches a waiting car, a Lee-Francis with its engine running. A handsome and mature woman is at the wheel. He opens the passenger door and gets in.

As he closes the door, he looks out through the window at his sorry opponents...

And as the car starts to move, his sorry opponents look back at him.

He doesn't smirk, or look triumphant. It's an unsettling, even stare.

And over him we super...

Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Blair 'Paddy' Mayne, DSO (3 bars)

And after a few moments we CUT TO BLACK and then hear...

WILLIAM JOYCE (V/O)
Germany calling. Germany calling.

18. NEWSREEL MONTAGE/INT. ROOM IN OXFORD. DAY.

Against shots of the Dunkirk withdrawal, wounded British soldiers and prisoners, and scenes of German triumphalism, we hear a German propaganda broadcast complete with shortwave distortion. Diction is slow, clear, measured.

WILLIAM JOYCE (V/O)
To say that the British Empire is
in danger today would be a very
feeble understatement. Never
before has it been in such a
perilous position.

INTERCUT with the newsreel shots are brief, close-up details of an unseen SOLDIER completing the details of his immaculate dress uniform... buttoning a button, buckling a belt, knotting a tie.

WILLIAM JOYCE (V/0)

The debacle at Dunkirk should have served as a resounding lesson against British territorial aggression in mainland Europe. But now Churchill is intent upon creating a new Dunkirk in Northern Africa, delaying the inevitable fall of Egypt at the cost of thousands of British lives.

CLOSE on the SOLDIER's piercing blue eyes as reflected in a mirror, and as he turns from it we GO WIDER and see...

We're in a chintzy drawing room, redolent of the upper middle classes. It's bright outside but the room is gloomy.

WILLIAM JOYCE (V/0)

The Army of the Nile is outgunned and outnumbered, and the days of British influence in the middle east are drawing to their end.

The soldier is the twenty-six year-old JOCK LEWES, now with a real moustache in place of the drawn-on one he sported as a boy. He looks across the room at...

MIRREN BARFORD, 20, leaning against a window-seat or a dresser. The radio broadcast continues with Begin the Beguine.

MIRREN

(Unable to conceal a trace of bitterness)
So. My merry man.

LEWES

Mirren...

She looks away sharply, doesn't want to engage.

After a moment, he crosses the room to her; she holds out for a moment and then suddenly she's clinging to him desperately. She manages not to cry, but that makes her pain seem all the worse.

19. INT. ROOM IN OXFORD. DAY.

A short time later; beyond the doorway, in the hall, we're aware of LEWES talking to Mirren's mother and step-father, MARY and HAMISH. But our attention is on MIRREN as she straightens various framed photographs on the mantelpiece or piano, edging Lewes' picture into prominence.

Their voices blur but odd details break through... "training in

Scotland..." "Ship to North Africa..." "Number 8 Commando..."

Then...

MARY

Mirren! Jock has to leave now!

MIRREN stops in what she's doing.

MIRREN

(Under her breath)

I know.

20. EXT. HOUSE IN MERTON STREET, OXFORD. DAY.

LEWES emerges from the house, carrying a kit bag which he slings over his shoulder before heading off down the street.

21. INT. ROOM IN OXFORD. DAY.

ON MIRREN, not watching him go, but trying to reassemble her composure.

22. EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING, CAIRO. NIGHT.

Establisher, looking up at the flat; lighted windows and sounds of a party.

Super: British Embassy staff apartment, Garden City, Cairo.

23. INT. APARTMENT, CAIRO. NIGHT.

A stand-up party in progress, a mixture of uniforms and civilians of both sexes; all deftly waited upon by MO, the apartment's (male) housekeeper.

DAVID STIRLING, 25, has cornered an attractive young woman who's regarding him with some amusement.

STIRLING

So what do you do?

NURSE

I'm a nurse. What about you?

MO

(In passing)

He chases nurses.

STIRLING

I'm David Stirling. So where do you do your nursing?

NURSE

Scottish Military Hospital. I still don't know what you do.

STIRLING

Sore point, at the moment. We came steaming out here to win the war for Churchill and we don't seem to be doing much of anything.

NURSE

You're with number 8 Commando.

STIRLING

They've got us here but they don't know what to do with us. Every order gets passed down through twenty layers of fossilised pardon-my-french 'til it's no bloody use to the men on the ground. One day they'll stop fighting the last war and turn their attention to this one.

BILL STIRLING, DAVID's brother, looks in on the conversation.

BILL STIRLING

David's the most dedicated officer we have. He's out there every night, scouring the casino for Germans.

STIRLING

I've got to get my excitement from somewhere. By day it's just one pointless exercise after another.

NURSE

You ought to save something for the enemy.

STIRLING

I may miss the odd parade, but I'm there for the important stuff. I'd have it all managed perfectly if it wasn't for the hangovers in between.

NURSE

I can't do much about your
generals, but hangovers I can
help with.

STIRLING

How?

NURSE

That depends on whether you're
around in the morning.

BILL STIRLING

(Sensing that three's a crowd)
'Scuse me.

He diplomatically spies someone else and moves on.

24. EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK ROOF. NIGHT.

We can still hear faint strains of the party but STIRLING and the NURSE have retreated up here to be alone. They've brought a bottle and their glasses. She has an army coat around her and they sit with shoulders touching. All around them, the low-rise lights of the city.

STIRLING

We're hanging onto Egypt by the
skin of our teeth. See over
there? That's where they'll come
from. Enemy lines are barely two
hundred miles from Cairo.

NURSE

And we're drinking champagne.

STIRLING

I signed up to be a soldier, not
a monk. If Rommel gets from there
to here, we've lost the war. It's
as simple as that.

NURSE

Not the entire war.

STIRLING

Only a matter of time. If we lose
Egypt, Hitler makes a clean sweep
of the Med and the middle east
and we'll be making our final
stand on Dover beach. What's the
matter?

NURSE
Gives me a feeling.

STIRLING
What?

NURSE
I don't know. We could all be
dead by tomorrow... but I can't
imagine wanting to be anywhere
else.

25. INT. NURSES' RESIDENCE, SCOTTISH MILITARY HOSPITAL,
ALEXANDRIA. DAWN.

Grey morning light, all is quiet.

A door is carefully opened and the NURSE, now in uniform, peers
out cautiously.

No-one there. Looking back into the room, she indicates for
STIRLING to follow her out.

Whereas she's crisp and fresh, he's dog-rough in last night's
clothes. His hair's tousled and he winces at the light.

As STIRLING shambles along behind the NURSE, a couple of NIGHT
NURSES pass the other way and chorus together...

NIGHT NURSES
Morning, David.

STIRLING acknowledges them, earning a raised eyebrow from the
NURSE.

26. INT. HOSPITAL TREATMENT ROOM. DAWN.

STIRLING holds a mask over his face as the NURSE opens a valve
on a cylinder.

NURSE
Big deep breath.

STIRLING does as he's told... and his eyes widen at the effect.

NURSE
Again.

He breathes again and then takes the mask away as she shuts off
the valve.

NURSE

How's the hangover now?

STIRLING

That's fantastic. What is it?

NURSE

Pure oxygen.

STIRLING

I'll take a case.

27. EXT. ARMY ENCAMPMENT. DAY.

Darkness. Then...

A canvas flap is pulled aside and light floods into the back of a truck; framed against the encampment that is the base of 8 Commando, near Cairo, stands JOCK LEWES. He's in neat desert gear.

Two other men, JIMMIE STORIE and JOCK CHEYNE, move in beside him and stare into the truck.

CHEYNE

You actually got them.

STORIE

You're a ruddy magician, Jock.

All three heads turn as they hear...

STIRLING

Jock!

An INCOMING ARMY TRUCK has slowed so that STIRLING can jump down from the back. He signals his thanks as the truck accelerates away, and then heads toward LEWES and the others. He's still wearing last night's clothes but now there's a spring in his step and an oxygen-fed brightness in his demeanour.

STORIE

(Cynically)

Allo.

CHEYNE

Here he comes.

STIRLING reaches them.

STIRLING

Are those the parachutes?

LEWES

Tell everyone. Why don't you?

STIRLING lowers his voice.

STIRLING

Sorry. Didn't realise it was such a big secret.

LEWES

I don't want every Tom, Dick and Harry queuing up like it's a funfair.

STIRLING

Where'd you get them?

LEWES

Misdirected consignment. Should have gone to India but turned up here.

STIRLING

Ever done a jump?

LEWES

No. You?

STIRLING

No. (THEN...) Can I join in?

LEWES gives him an ironic look, as if to say that this is exactly the attitude he's been trying to avoid, and moves away. STORIE and CHEYNE start to unload the parachutes.

STIRLING

Jock! I'm serious!

LEWES

So am I.

STIRLING

I know what you're trying to do.

LEWES

Which would be what?

STIRLING

Show them a different way to fight a war. Small units. Highly trained. Capable of independent

operation behind enemy lines. The
shortest possible chain of
command. Minimal interference
from above.

LEWES stops. Looks at him, as if reassessing him... but not
enough to be swayed.

STIRLING
I'm all for that.

Lewes walks on.

STIRLING
So I'm on the jump?

LEWES
No!

28. EXT. PLANE IN THE AIR. DAY.

A plane in flight, a Vickers Valentia.

29. INT. VICKERS VALENTIA IN FLIGHT. DAY.

STIRLING, LEWES and half a dozen MEN from LEWES' detachment are
getting into their parachutes. JIMMIE STORIE and JOCK CHEYNE are
among them. They're in khaki dress shirts and shorts.

STIRLING peeks into a nearby canvas sack. It's full of letters.

STIRLING
This is the mail plane!

LEWES
Best we could do. And then we had
to bribe the pilot with a bottle
of whisky.

This with a wink at one of his men as he turns away from
STIRLING.

STIRLING
(To all)
Anybody here ever done this
before?

All shake their heads. STIRLING holds up the clip on the end of
his static line.

STIRLING
Shouldn't this be fixed to
something?

30. EXT. PLANE IN THE AIR. DAY.

The first PARACHUTIST (LEWES) comes diving out with a bloodcurdling yell, just audible.

31. INT. VICKERS VALENTIA IN FLIGHT. DAY.

The second PARACHUTIST is just leaving, followed by a third as STIRLING moves up to take his place.

He looks down. All the static lines are attached in a bunch to the legs of the seats nearest the door.

With barely a hesitation, he dives out.

32. EXT. PLANE IN THE AIR. DAY.

STIRLING emerges. His chute opens immediately.

In a series of quick cuts we see the chute snag on the tailplane...

STIRLING jerked violently in the air...

The chute ripping free of the tailplane...

STIRLING falling as the chute opens out...

STIRLING jerked again in his harness as the chute fully deploys.

33. EXT. BY AIRFIELD. DAY.

LEWES makes a perfect landing, hitting the ground with the force of a jump from a fifteen-foot wall.

He gets to his feet and, gathering his chute, squints up into the sky to see how the others are doing.

34. EXT. IN THE AIR. DAY.

STIRLING is descending at a scary speed. He looks up.

STIRLING's POV, looking up into the canopy -- part of it is ripped away and flapping uselessly.

STIRLING

Oh, hell.

35. EXT. BY AIRFIELD. DAY.

LEWES, not taking his eyes off STIRLING, ditches his half-gathered parachute and starts to run toward his likely landing spot.

36. EXT. BY AIRFIELD, FROM ABOVE. DAY.

STIRLING's POV as he races along above the ground, descending fast...

Passing right over the running LEWES, who looks up...

And right down into the ground where at the crunching moment of impact we...

CUT TO BLACK.

37. INT. MOVING FIELD AMBULANCE. DAY.

A battered STIRLING is tied to a stretcher with bands of linen or canvas. There's even one across his forehead, to keep his head still and prevent any movement to his spine.

The MEDICAL ORDERLY turns from some task and leans close to STIRLING's ear.

MEDICAL ORDERLY

Can you hear me now, sir?

STIRLING

Yes.

MEDICAL ORDERLY

You're on your way to hospital. Your legs seem all right, but you've injured your back. How do you feel?

STIRLING

Can't see... can't feel my legs... otherwise, I'm a hundred per cent.

38. INT. RADIO STUDIO. NIGHT.

Behind a microphone, script in hand, stands WILLIAM JOYCE, the

propagandist broadcaster nicknamed Lord Haw Haw.

WILLIAM JOYCE

Germany calling. First
Yugoslavia, now Greece has fallen
to the might of German armour.
One by one, Britain, your allies
in Europe desert you. Your
leaders have ordered that Egypt
must be held at any price.

39. INT. ROOM IN SOMERVILLE COLLEGE, OXFORD. NIGHT.

A mixed bunch of UNDERGRADUATES are crowded into the tiny room to hear the shortwave radio, crouching, sitting, sprawling, leaning... young men in tweeds, young women in print dresses.

WILLIAM JOYCE (V/O)

When the Swastika flies over
Cairo and Alexandria, you will
know the human cost of those
words.

We hear the UNDERGRADUATES speak without favouring any particular one.

STUDENT

What do we need the wogs for
anyway?

STUDENT 2

Oil.

FEMALE STUDENT

I don't think we should listen to
this.

STUDENT

Everyone listens to Lord Haw Haw.

STUDENT 2

He's a laugh.

No-one's laughing. But as they're speaking, we favour MIRREN BARFORD. The young woman beside her leans toward her and murmurs...

MIRREN'S FRIEND

Where's Jock, now?

MIRREN

We don't write about the war.

40. EXT. SCOTTISH MILITARY HOSPITAL. NIGHT.

Establisher, with a couple of British warplanes flying overhead.

Super: Scottish Military Hospital, Heliopolis.

41. INT. PRIVATE ROOM. NIGHT.

LEWES taps on an open door, then looks into the room and sees an empty bed with papers and handwritten notes strewn about it.

Crossing to the bed, he picks up one of the notes for a closer look.

From the corridor outside we can hear the slow approach of someone on crutches; LEWES seems not to notice.

The note engages LEWES' interest and he sits on the bed, reading more closely.

After a few moments, STIRLING appears in the doorway, managing a rolled map under his arm.

LEWES looks up, neither guilty nor apologetic.

LEWES
Your handwriting's atrocious.

STIRLING
I know. Need a proper desk.

STIRLING throws the map roll to him, and LEWES catches it.

STIRLING
Spread that out, will you?

42. INT. PRIVATE ROOM. NIGHT.

BIG MAP SCENE. The MAP is spread out across the bed. The area covered is the theatre of war in the North African desert.

STIRLING
Look, Jock. You're a brilliant planner but you're no politician. If I've got any kind of a talent, it's for winning people over.

LEWES

No offence, David, but I don't want to see all my efforts mucked up for nothing.

STIRLING

It won't be for nothing. So they've let you try out a few new ideas. The minute those men are wanted elsewhere, it's over. I'm talking about a proper unit with its own military agenda. Nothing in what you're doing has to change. Just go on doing it for me.

LEWES remains to be convinced.

LEWES

What's the scheme?

STIRLING turns to the map.

STIRLING

Here's the German front line. Wall of steel. Behind that, what have you got? Looooong, long supply lines, and the further Rommel advances, the more they get stretched. That's where he's vulnerable. It's his airfields, his fuel dumps, all his munitions... Now, with your standard Commando operation you take two hundred men, you make a landing by sea, the enemy knows you're coming and your men die like flies. With our way...

JOCK looks at him.

STIRLING

...your way, we parachute in, come out of the desert, slip in at night and do the business and then walk out.

LEWES

How big a unit?

STIRLING

For the airfields, say sixty men with twelve bombs each. Play the numbers right, and come the next

morning there wouldn't be a single enemy plane in the African sky.

LEWES is thinking.

STIRLING

Well?

LEWES

I'm being sent up the coast. Seige of Tobruk.

STIRLING

To do what? Put your ideas into action? Or just go back to being one more pair of hands on a gun?

LEWES rises, and clearly still isn't committed.

LEWES

If you get anywhere with this, talk to me again.

STIRLING

You don't think I will?

LEWES

Based on experience? I think it'll get shot down long before it reaches anyone with the pull to make it happen. But have a go. Why don't you?

He leaves.

43. INT. HOTEL BAR. NIGHT.

Fairly crowded, mostly with lower-rank military and NCOs. PADDY MAYNE is at the bar, draining a glass. EOIN MCGONIGAL and a couple of others from his squad are with him. MAYNE is in full control, but dangerously drunk.

When the glass is empty, he sets it on top of a stack of about six, waving the BARMAN away.

MAYNE

This calls for a swift hand and a steady eye... or is that the other way around?

His comrades can see what's coming and start to attempt to dissuade him...

But he won't be dissuaded. Raising the flat of his hand high, he beangs it down onto the stack of glasses so hard that every single one of them smashes.

A shocked silence and then various sounds from the rest of the bar... derision, disapproval, booing... but MAYNE is unruffled and bangs on the bar for more service.

But then he hears someone speak just behind him, in a cultured accent...

BAR COMMANDO

Don't you wish someone would ship
all these pig-arsed micks home to
shag their goats and grow their
potatoes?

Drunk though he is, MAYNE reacts with dizzying speed.

He spins and takes the man one-handed by the throat, and speeds him backwards through the crowd to slam him against the wall. People and furniture are scattered on the way.

The BAR COMMANDO is pinned and helpless, and choking.

MAYNE

Well, I'm sorry. We can't all be
Evelyns and Randolphs. But then,
we weren't all recruited in some
gentlemen's club in London.

There's the click of a revolver being cocked.

Without releasing the BAR COMMANDO, MAYNE turns his head to look right down the barrel of a gun being held by EOIN MCGONIGAL.

MCGONIGAL

(Calmly, evenly)

I'll shoot you, Blair. You know
I'll do it.

Their eyes lock, and MCGONIGAL's gaze doesn't waver.

Then something changes behind MAYNE's eyes. It's not that he backs down, or sees sense. More as if the program changes, and we'll never quite know why.

He releases the BAR COMMANDO. Straightens himself out.

And then, moving with a drunk's exaggerated care and dignity, he walks out of the bar.

Relief all around. MCGONIGLE follows MAYNE out.

STIRLING

Jock Lewes has set up three complete raids with his men and seen HQ cancel them all. That's what happens when you go through channels.

BILL STIRLING

Well, here's where Hermione comes in. She's been helping me sort out the shambles at Special Operations. What she doesn't know about putting one over on HQ is hardly worth knowing.

STIRLING

How so?

HERMIONE

My husband's Dan Ranfurly.

BILL STIRLING

Sherwood Rangers.

HERMIONE

Ever since he got captured they've been trying every trick in the rulebook to get me sent home. The problem lies with all those dull career men in the middle. Get past them to one of the generals and you've got a fighting chance.

BILL STIRLING

Could you introduce him to Wavell?

HERMIONE

There's no point. After the pasting he's had from Rommel, word has it that General Wavell's being replaced. (QUICKLY) That's not official yet.

STIRLING

So, who's worth seeking out?

HERMIONE

That'll make a very short list.

We continue to hear her speaking over the head of the next scene.

47. EXT. MEHQ -- PERIMETER. DAY.

A wooden guardhouse by the gates, a barbed wire perimeter fence, the main building beyond. Vehicles passing through, papers being checked by an armed SENTRY.

HERMIONE (V/O)

There's General Auchinleck, he's tipped for the new Commander in Chief. But if you can't get to him I'd try for General Ritchie. He's the Deputy Chief of Staff.

PULL BACK to reveal that we're inside the back of a taxi with STIRLING, and he's watching through the open window. There's life and noise on the street around him.

STIRLING's POV on a detail at the gate -- the SENTRY is giving every set of papers a thorough reading.

48. EXT. MEHQ -- GUARDHOUSE. DAY.

The SENTRY waves a supply truck forward and as the vehicle clears our field of view we see...

STIRLING, approaching on his crutches. When he draws level...

STIRLING

As you can see, I'm at a bit of a disadvantage. Be a good sport and nod me on through.

SENTRY

I'll still need to see your pass, sir.

STIRLING

I can't reach my pockets, can I?

SENTRY

Which pocket is it?

STIRLING

Well, the thing is, it's a bit of a rushed appointment. There wasn't actually time to issue a pass.

The SENTRY reaches into the hut for the receiver of a field telephone.

SENTRY

Who's the appointment with, sir?

STANDOFF.

STIRLING

D'you know... now you put me on
the spot, I can't remember.

The SENTRY hangs up the phone.

STIRLING

I'll go back and check.

SENTRY

You do that, sir. Make sure they
give you some paperwork, this
time.

STIRLING moves away on his crutches... past the hut and toward
the perimeter wire.

BY THE HUT. STIRLING looks and sees...

There's a gap between the endpost of the fence and the wall of
the hut, where the post has moved in the ground. There's just
about space for a man to squeeze through.

He glances back toward the SENTRY and then quickly moves to the
cover of a nearby tree.

49. EXT. MEHQ -- GUARDHOUSE. DAY.

The SENTRY hands back some papers to the driver of a STAFF CAR
and waves it on through.

With the car out of the way, he checks the vista for anyone else
approaching.

Something catches his eye.

His POV... three small EGYPTIAN CHILDREN have found Stirling's
CRUTCHES leaning against the tree, and they're trying to work
out how to play with them.

He calls into the hut.

SENTRY

Watch the gate.

Then he heads over to the tree, just a few yards away. The
EGYPTIAN CHILDREN run off before he gets there. He looks down at
the dropped crutches...

Then at the gap in the wire...

And PULL FOCUS beyond the wire to see STIRLING, limping up the steps of the main building.

The SENTRY pulls out his whistle and gives it a loud blast.

SENTRY

That man!

STIRLING knows he's been rumbled and quickly disappears into the building.

50. INT. MEHQ ENTRANCE CORRIDOR. DAY.

Once inside the doors, he pauses for a moment to get his bearings.

Then as someone else passes through the doors, he glances back and catches a brief glimpse of a Military Police vehicle screeching to a halt by the steps.

STIRLING heads off down the corridor, sliding through an oncoming crowd of female CLERKS and TYPISTS... it's break-time and they're all heading somewhere in a chattering group. The Stirling charm automatically switches on as he nods and smiles his way through.

AT THE ENTRANCEWAY -- the SENTRY from the gate plus a couple of MILITARY POLICEMEN enter just as the crowd reaches the doors. It's chaotic for a moment.

We see STIRLING make a sharp turn into the nearest side-corridor.

51. INT. MEHQ CORRIDORS. DAY.

This one's almost empty, but as STIRLING moves down it a YOUNG WOMAN steps out of one of the offices -- she's hurrying, wanting to catch up with the others.

STIRLING

Excuse me. Could you possibly point me in the direction of the Commander-in-Chief's office?

YOUNG WOMAN

Just keep on the way you're going.

STIRLING

Thanks.

He heads on, she heads away...

But he's only taken a few strides when from just around the corner behind him he hears...

SENTRY

Miss? Did a Lieutenant come down
this way?

Without waiting to hear the young woman's reply, STIRLING opens the nearest door and steps through it.

52. INT. MAJOR'S OFFICE. DAY.

The act of closing the door gives STIRLING a shooting pain in his back, and he's stopped in his tracks for a moment until the pain subsides.

He becomes aware that a man is watching him from behind a desk on the far side of the room.

STIRLING

Apologies for barging in on you,
sir. Stirling, Scots Guards. I've
a proposal I need to lay before
the Commander in Chief. Can you
help me out, at all?

MAJOR

Stirling.

STIRLING

That's right, sir. Attached to 8
Commando.

MAJOR

I know you. Do you know me?

STIRLING

I don't believe I do, sir.

MAJOR

No, I'm not surprised. Since you
chose to sleep through all my
lectures in training. You learned
nothing then and you've learned
nothing since.

STIRLING reaches into his pocket and draws out a half-dozen sheets of lined notebook paper, written on in pencil.

STIRLING

Sir... it's vital that I get this seen by someone who's in a position to act on it.

The phone on the MAJOR's desk starts to ring.

MAJOR

Vital, is it? Vital I put that schoolboy scrawl before General Auchinleck? Get out of here, Stirling, before I have you thrown out.

STIRLING can see he'll get nowhere, and time's ticking away... he salutes and leaves.

53. INT. MEHQ CORRIDORS. DAY.

STIRLING limps along, notebook sheets in hand, in increasing pain.

He stops by a niche -- by a fire hose, or something similar -- to rest his back against the wall as he straightens his papers.

He hears a knock from back down the corridor. Leaning out from semi-concealment, he sees...

The SENTRY, entering the office that STIRLING himself just left.

Urgently now, STIRLING looks across the corridor to the door opposite. It carries the letters DCGS.

STIRLING crosses the corridor, knocks, and goes straight in without waiting for a reply.

54. INT. GENERAL RITCHIE'S OFFICE. DAY.

Lieutenant-General SIR NEIL RITCHIE looks up from his desk. STIRLING speaks quickly.

STIRLING

General Ritchie, sir, I apologise for bursting in. Lieutenant Stirling. We haven't met, but you know my father. I've an urgent plan to offer the Chief and there wasn't time for the formalities.

GENERAL RITCHIE

Really.

STIRLING

I believe that with a small force of hand-picked men I can destroy the German air force on the ground before our next offensive.

GENERAL RITCHIE

That's a tall order.

STIRLING

It can be done, sir. This explains how.

He lays the paper on the desk. RITCHIE studies him.

GENERAL RITCHIE

If it's as bold as its author, I suppose I'd better.

He reads the first few lines of the plan.

At that moment, there's a single rap and then the door opens to reveal the MAJOR.

He's about to speak, but the sight of STIRLING stops him in his tracks. And as he gawps...

RITCHIE looks up from the paper.

RITCHIE

Not now.

Thwarted, the MAJOR withdraws.

GENERAL RITCHIE

Sit down.

STIRLING

Thank you, sir.

His thanks are pretty heartfelt. He sinks gratefully onto a chair as RITCHIE starts to read the notes.

55. EXT. BEACH NEAR TOBRUK. DAY.

A beautiful bay at the end of a wadi, marred only by the shell of a wrecked Italian lorry and various boxes and army detritus, all half-buried in the sand.

LEWES, alone, stiff and sore and battle-dirtied, pulls off his shirt as he walks down to the water's edge and then on into the shallows, where he drops to his knees and scoops water up to his

face. He scrubs himself clean, running handfuls of it through his hair.

Then he drops forward onto his hands and plunges his face right in for a few moments, coming back up again in a plume of spray and shaking off the excess. And as he blinks his eyes clear...

From his POV we see DAVID STIRLING, leaning on a walking stick some little way up the beach.

He has three or four envelopes and a small package in his hand, and holds them up.

STIRLING
Brought your mail.

He holds them close to his face and inhales.

STIRLING
Mmm. Perfume.

56. EXT. BEACH NEAR TOBRUK. DAY.

LEWES and STIRLING walk along the water's edge toward the Wadi. STIRLING's limp is now slight. LEWES is glancing through the unopened letters as they go, seeing who they're from, checking the back of one for a return address.

STIRLING pokes at something in the sand with his walking stick.

STIRLING
Typical bloody army. Apparently they shipped a million French letters into Tobruk on the same day they shipped all the women out.

LEWES
Why are you here, David?

STIRLING
Because you didn't reply to my message.

From amongst the letters, LEWES pulls a small unopened envelope and shows it to STIRLING.

LEWES
This one?

STIRLING recognises it. Shakes his head wryly.

LEWES

Not the one with the bloody perfume, I hope.

STIRLING

They've gone for it, Jock. They had me back and gave me a grilling and the next thing I know, it's all on. They've given me a training base near Suez and I get to recruit six officers and sixty other ranks.

LEWES

Congratulations. Who've you got?

STIRLING

Jock, you're first on my list. I can't understand why you won't come on board.

LEWES

What are you calling it?

STIRLING

'L' detachment, Special Air Service.

LEWES raises an eyebrow.

LEWES

Special Air Service?

STIRLING

It's a propaganda name they've been using for some non-existent brigade. Trying to con Jerry into thinking we've got a thousand hairy-arsed paratroopers ready to throw at them. Personally, I don't care what it's called as long as I keep a free hand.

LEWES doesn't comment.

STIRLING

It's not the plan, is it? It's me.

57. EXT. CAMP IN WADI. DAY.

LEWES' accommodation is in a stone ring with a canvas sunshade rigged above it, with room for four or five men. There are

folding chairs, a makeshift table of stone slabs. Another soldier lies reading under a mosquito net. Above him, a half-unravelling toilet roll dangles like a kite tail from a string between posts.

JIM ALMONDS

So what did you tell him?

LEWES

I told him no.

As they're speaking, LEWES is opening the package that came with the mail that Stirling brought him. From it, he takes a small box.

JIM ALMONDS

Whatever you say, Jock. Plan's a non-starter, is it?

LEWES

Plan's a damned good one.

JIM ALMONDS

But you don't want to play second fiddle in your own band. Understood.

ALMONDS rises and moves away before LEWES can react. He hasn't thought of it that way... but the comment is perhaps too close for comfort.

Just at this moment, PAT RILEY sets a mug of tea down for him.

PAT RILEY

Oh, Jock. Mirren sent the ring back, did she?

LEWES

Looks that way, doesn't it, Pat?

PAT RILEY grips his shoulder in sympathy before passing on.

PAT RILEY

Bear up, old man. Plenty more holes on the golf course.

LEWES opens the box...

And takes out a tiny, jewel-like COMPASS that he regards in the palm of his hand.

58. INT. MILITARY PRISON. NIGHT.

Four MILITARY POLICEMEN escort a drunk and staggering PADDY MAYNE down a cell corridor. There's one either side of him with a grip on each arm, one marching before him with the keys, one behind with a baton held ready to strike. There's a strong sense that the moment MAYNE gets his balance and his eyes in focus, he'll be dangerous.

The leading MP steps past an open cell door and stops. The two MPs gripping MAYNE take him inside. The one with the baton stops to write Mayne's name on the blackboard beside the cell door.

IN THE CELL -- MAYNE is dumped roughly onto the bed.

MP

Sleep it off, Paddy.

SECOND MP

You've really done it this time.

They move to leave. One glances back and sees that MAYNE's eyes are opening.

SECOND MP

Quick.

IN THE CORRIDOR -- the two MPs dive out as the man with the keys slams and locks the cell door in a single move...

Just before something hits the other side with an enormous CRASH.

MP

Jesus.

They shake themselves down and walk off, leaving us to contemplate the chalked name on the blackboard...

87306 MAYNE, R B, Lt

59. EXT. SHEPHEARDS HOTEL, CAIRO. DAY.

A TAXI draws up before the hotel. LEWES gets out. He's groomed and his uniform is clean and pressed.

He stops before the hotel entrance for a moment. Then gathers himself and goes in.

60. EXT. TERRACE OF HOTEL. DAY.

STIRLING is at a table with clean linen and silverware, papers spread about, working amidst the remains of a full breakfast and grabbing the occasional bite of toast.

He looks up as LEWES drops his gloves on the table and pulls out a chair.

LEWES

If you will swear to me that you won't treat this SAS as some short-term flight of fancy, then I'm in.

STIRLING

What changed your mind?

LEWES

Nothing's changed, I just need to know. I've had enough knockbacks on this idea. I don't want to find I've put my name to another.

STIRLING

Well, let's see. I jumped out of a plane. Got blinded, got crippled. Gatecrashed our own HQ on crutches and risked a court martial. Three trips into enemy territory just to hear you say no in Tobruk. I'll tell you what, Jock. You think of a test of dedication, and this Good Time Charlie will consider it. You want me to swear? Bring me a bible. If that's what it takes, I'll do it.

LEWES shakes his head.

LEWES

It's not necessary. I'm in.

STIRLING

Welcome to the SAS.

LEWES

Just us so far, is it?

STIRLING passes him a paper.

STIRLING

Got a few names together.
Recognise any of these?

LEWES

Lieutenant Blair Mayne. That'll
be Paddy Mayne. I think he's
Eleven Commando. Hard as nails,
fast as lightning. Gave a good
account of himself in the Litani
raid.

STIRLING

Ever met him?

LEWES

No.

STIRLING

This Eoin McGonigal says I should
have a look at him.

61. INT. MILITARY PRISON INTERVIEW ROOM. DAY.

PADDY MAYNE is marched down the corridor and into the interview
room by a MILITARY POLICEMAN barking orders at an ear-splitting
level.

He ends at attention before a table, where sits...

DAVID STIRLING, with his clipboard laid to one side.

STIRLING

At ease.

MAYNE complies. Then, with a slight motion of his head, STIRLING
orders the MILITARY POLICEMAN out. Once they're alone...

STIRLING

Sit down, Lieutenant.

MAYNE takes a beat to assess the situation. Then pulls out the
other chair, and sits.

STIRLING

Do you know why I'm here?

MAYNE nods, very slightly.

STIRLING

Your friend Eoin McGonigall just
joined my unit. He insists I take
a look at you.

MAYNE

Does he, now?

STIRLING

Although a big part of me wonders why. On Cyprus you chased all your fellow-officers out of the mess at bayonet point. Then at base camp you flattened your own CO for interrupting a chess game.

MAYNE

Drunk as a skunk, sir. No memory of the incident.

STIRLING

You're getting a reputation as an astonishing soldier. But I've only got room for reliable men, Paddy.

MAYNE

It's Blair, sir, and I never take a drink on operations.

STIRLING

Do I take it that you're interested?

MAYNE

You may take it that I require some convincing.

STIRLING

You don't think much of our officer class, do you?

MAYNE

No, sir.

STIRLING

Well, neither do I.

MAYNE twitches a smile, and we sense the beginnings of a rapport.

62. EXT. KABRIT CAMP. DAY.

A battered THREE-TON TRUCK comes down a long and empty desert road. No caption yet.

63. EXT. OPEN BACK OF TRUCK. DAY.

Between eight and a dozen men including JIM ALMONDS, PAT RILEY, BOB BENNETT, JOHNNY COOPER, JIMMY BROUGH, REG SEEKINGS are riding with their kit in the back.

Gear change. The truck slows.

PAT RILEY
Heads up. We're there.

All stand and scramble to look...

64. EXT. KABRIT CAMP. DAY.

...and with a revealing CRANE we see the TRUCK slow and stop and stop on the road before...

Two modest-looking MARQUEES with three rolled-up tents lying on the ground beside them. Beyond that, nothing but the wide and empty desert. Miles and miles and miles and miles of it.

And now the caption...

SAS BASE CAMP, KABRIT, SUEZ CANAL ZONE

The wind blows. The men stare.

JIM ALMONDS
How bright a move was this?

Then all look at the sound of an approaching JEEP or similar vehicle.

The JEEP leaves the road and comes to a halt between the men and the camp. LEWES is at the wheel. STIRLING stands up in the passenger seat to address them.

STIRLING

Nice to see you again. Thank you for coming. Welcome to L detachment SAS. I'll be in and out over the next few weeks but you'll be seeing an awful lot of Lieutenant Lewes, here. He'll be in charge of your training and mine as well. Now, you can see that our camp doesn't amount to much yet. I have to tell you that we're not getting the greatest co-operation over supplies. I can also tell you that at the camp just down the road, those New Zealanders have no supply problems at all. I'd say pay them a visit but I don't think there's actually anyone there tonight, is there, Lieutenant?

LEWES

No, just the Indian guards.

STIRLING

Well, there you go. They've got all that lovely stuff. And look at us. Settle in as best you can.

He sits, and the JEEP roars off and circles around the TRUCK to head back the way it came.

The men all look at one another. The message was clear enough.

65. EXT. MOVING JEEP. DAY.

With LEWES and STIRLING on the road, with the Kabrit camp falling into the distance. STIRLING reaches for his clipboard to consult.

STIRLING

You know, when the quartermaster told me I'd have to whistle for supplies, he had a big smile on his face? If that was me I'd be bloody ashamed.

66. EXT. NEW ZEALANDERS CAMP. NIGHT.

The THREE-TON TRUCK, now with a canvas cover in place on the back, approaches the gates of a well-appointed camp. It slows as an INDIAN GUARD steps out to meet it.

BOB BENNETT leans out of the cab and affects a terrible Kiwi accent.

BOB BENNETT
Hi there, mate. New Zealand
division?

The INDIAN GUARD salutes and the TRUCK goes on through.

67. INT. COVERED TRUCK. NIGHT.

Under the canvas, about half a dozen of the men are crouched and suppressing laughter. JOHNNY COOPER is the youngest-looking of them.

JOHNNY COOPER
Wotcher, Cobblers.

Some of them are snorting, the others are shushing them.

68. EXT. NEW ZEALANDERS CAMP. NIGHT.

A lane between two immaculate rows of tents. The headlights of the TRUCK swing into view at its end and the vehicle rolls down the lane, stopping halfway.

Whispering and arguing, the men climb out of the back with unlit flashlights in their hands.

BOB BENNETT
Right. Let's see what's worth
having.

All disperse.

69. INT. TENT. NIGHT.

Dark shapes move between the boxes of supplies, flashlight beams roving around, stopping to look in some of the boxes....

Roving over a pile of blankets.

70. INT. ANOTHER TENT. NIGHT.

This one's accommodation. Folding beds. Mattresses.

71. INT. MESS TENT. NIGHT.

JOHNNY COOPER shines his beam around to see a bar, tables and chairs, even a PIANO.

JOHNNY COOPER moves to it, softly taps a high note on a key, and grins.

JOHNNY COOPER

You'll do.

72. EXT. OUTSIDE MESS TENT. NIGHT.

An MP strolls down the row to where...

The TRUCK stands with its engine idling. BOB BENNETT moves forward from by the cab, blocking his way while trying to keep it from being obvious.

MP

You wouldn't have a light for me,
would you?

BOB BENNETT

Sure.

Patting his pockets, he moves forward so that the MP has to turn with his back to the truck.

The moment his back is turned, the SAS men start darting across the gap between the tent and the back of the truck, each carrying a different item of furniture.

MP

They've got you lot working late
enough.

BOB BENNETT

Tell us about it.

MP

You with the Kiwis?

BOB BENNETT

We go wherever we're sent.

MP

(Noting Bennett's lack of success
in searching his pockets)
Don't worry about it. I'll ask
one of your mates.

But as he starts to turn back, BENNETT suddenly seems to find something.

BOB BENNETT

Hang on...

And as the MP turns away from the truck again, the PIANO goes past.

BENNETT spins it out for as long as he can, then...

BOB BENNETT

Nah. I just remembered. I've
given it up.

MP

Oh, funny. Ha. Ha. Ha.

Shaking his head in disgust, the MP walks away.

As BENNETT watches him go...

The tent right behind him, unconnected to the previous activity, is suddenly COLLAPSED from within and goes down like a spectacularly deflating balloon.

73. EXT. NEW ZEALANDERS CAMP. NIGHT.

The THREE TON TRUCK approaches the main gate, this time from inside the camp. The same INDIAN GUARD moves forward to see it through.

HIS POV on the passing truck... every single one of the SAS men is now crammed into the cab.

He salutes. There's barely room to squeeze their arms up but as one, they all salute back.

74. EXT. KABRIT CAMP. DAY.

We start on a neatly hand-lettered road-facing sign reading L Detachment SAS and then CRANE BACK to see...

The camp, now enlarged and transformed. Sixteen tents in neat, low rows, all dug into the ground and reinforced by sandbags to give some protection in air raids. More vehicles, neatly parked.

Some kind of a scaffolding tower under construction, JIM ALMONDS ascending it to continue the work.

He waves to acknowledge a 15cwt BEDFORD TRUCK as it passes beneath him. In the loadspace sit LEWES, MAYNE, REG SEEKINGS, JOHNNY COOPER, a couple of others.

75. EXT. OPEN BACK OF 15CWT TRUCK. DAY.

All hang on and listen to LEWES as the truck heads around the camp and into the desert.

LEWES

With a military parachute you can hit the ground with the same speed and force as if you'd jumped off the back of a speeding truck.

REG SEEKINGS

Oh, Gawd.

LEWES positions himself across the open tailgate as he carries on speaking.

LEWES

I've tested it out. I'll show you how it's done. Face forward, tuck in, roll when you hit. We'll get the hang of it at fifteen miles an hour and then we'll edge it up to thirty. Any questions?

All but MAYNE are looking doubtful and trying to contain their dismay.

LEWES

Watch me. Speed?

DRIVER

Fifteen.

He drops from the open tailgate, hits the ground, rolls and tumbles for some distance.

JOHNNY COOPER

Bloody hell.

ON JOCK... he comes to rest with his face in the dust. Blinks, spits, starts to rise.

BACK ON THE TRUCK -- the others are staring back at him.

MAYNE

What are you waiting for?

JOHNNY COOPER seems momentarily frozen, but just as he's forcing himself to move...

MAYNE pushes past him and takes up the position.

MAYNE

The longer you leave it, the further you'll have to walk back.

With a wink at JOHNNY COOPER, he goes.

Rolls. Tumbles.

And as JOHNNY COOPER swings into place we CUT TO:

76. EXT. EDGE OF KABRIT CAMP. DAY.

With LEWES' voice heard over, we PAN DOWN from a view of the wide open desert to find...

A gathering of extremely bruised, battered and bandaged SAS men, all showing some conspicuous mark of the rough parachute training. They include MAYNE, MCGONIGAL, SEEKINGS and COOPER, all with heavy packs and ready for a desert march.

LEWES

As a break from your parachute training, we're going for a stroll in the country. The distance is twenty miles, your pack weight is sixty pounds, the aim is to assess the accuracy of your marching and the effectiveness of your water conservation in desert conditions. You have sandbags in place of the explosives you'll have to carry. At the end of the exercise, every man's stride will be measured and his water intake checked. If the results do not satisfy me, we will turn around and do it again. Are there any questions?

None.

LEWES

There is one aim, here. Find your limits and exceed them. Be a scientist of your own pain. Do not help your comrade, and do not ask for his help. Respect the desert and respect yourself. Let's go.

77. EXT. DESERT. DAY.

LOW ANGLE on vast space and silence. Then suddenly...

A boot hits the ground only inches from the lens as all the SAS MARCHERS come rumbling through from behind us, pushing the pace and in tight formation.

ON THE COLUMN... LEWES at its head. He takes something from one pocket and transfers it over to another.

AT THE BACK... a BLISTERED RECRUIT is uncapping his canteen and glugging down water. The next man sees this, and hisses a warning...

Which LEWES hears.

LEWES

Column halt!

All stop.. sweat-streaked, dust-caked, suffering. LEWES walks back to the recruit, who's looking defiant.

LEWES takes the canteen from his hand and shakes it. Doesn't sound like there's much in it.

LEWES

Do you know how much ground we've covered?

The BLISTERED RECRUIT shakes his head.

LEWES

Eight miles and six hundred yards. We're less than halfway and you've wasted your ration.

He hands back the canteen.

LEWES

Go back to camp. Pack up your gear and return to your unit.

He returns to the head of the column, and leads it out...

Leaving the BLISTERED RECRUIT a solitary figure, watching them go.

78. EXT. WADI. DAY.

A steep-sided desert valley with deep shade down one side. The marching column are moving into the shade, shedding their packs. Most are in a bad way. LEWES is comparatively fresh.

LEWES

Twenty minutes' rest. Two ounces
of water.

ANOTHER PART OF THE WADI -- a BIG MAN drops to his knees, sobbing helplessly as he fumbles his way out of his pack harness. The next man observes him.

UNSYMPATHETIC RECRUIT

Keep it down. He'll have you for
wasting water.

BACK WITH LEWES -- as he sits, MAYNE drops his pack beside him. Though not as fresh as LEWES, he's in good shape.

MAYNE

Eight miles and six hundred
yards?

LEWES reaches into his pocket and brings out...

A handful of tiny stones.

LEWES

Every hundred paces, I move a
stone from one pocket to another.
Know the length of your stride
and it's a simple calculation.

79. EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE WADI. DAY.

One of the recruits -- call him the GRIPING RECRUIT -- has concealed himself around a corner. He's got his pack on the ground between his feet and he's opening it.

After a quick check to see if he's being observed, he takes out a sandbag...

And empties half of the sand out onto the wadi floor before deftly retying the bag and returning it to the pack. All very rushed and furtive.

80. EXT. WADI. DAY.

Now the men are mostly back into their gear and are plodding back into formation. LEWES walks among them, urging them along.

LEWES
Come on! Picnic's over! Let's
burst a few more of those
blisters!

The GRIPING RECRUIT all but shoves past him in a surly manner, saying nothing.

LEWES takes a couple more paces and then stops, looking down...

Where there's an obvious colour difference between the DUMPED SAND and the desert underfoot.

81. EXT. KABRIT CAMP. DUSK.

Looking down through the parachute tower, where construction has advanced noticeably, we see the marchers arriving back at the camp.

82. EXT. KABRIT CAMP. DUSK.

The marchers crouch exhausted by their packs as LEWES moves from one to another; each hands him his canteen for checking. At one of them...

LEWES
This is almost empty. You've got
to discipline yourself.

As he moves down the line...

GRIPING RECRUIT
You notice no-one checks his
water bottle.

LEWES turns.

LEWES
You've drunk all your reserve and
you're still thirsty? You'd
better have this.

He takes his own canteen from his belt and throws it to the GRIPING RECRUIT.

MAYNE appears behind his shoulder a moment later.

MAYNE

Let me guess. Is it full?

He takes it, weighs it in his hand.

MAYNE

Well, well, well. And you with so much to say for yourself. Come with me. I want to explain something to you.

83. EXT. KABRIT CAMP -- BOXING RING. DUSK.

PADDY MAYNE and the GRIPING RECRUIT with the gloves on, and a crowd around the makeshift ring. MAYNE jabs repeatedly at the hapless recruit's head so that it rattles like a punchball.

MAYNE

Discipline.Discipline.Discipline.

84. INT. LEWES' TENT. NIGHT.

Alone in his tent, by the light of a hurricane lamp, LEWES works on his planning. Brushes a fly away without breaking his concentration.

He takes the COMPASS from around his neck and lays it on the map, adjusting the map's position to match its bearings before marking a line.

85. INT. MESS TENT. NIGHT.

The men are comparing injuries, grouching, and having a beer. MCGONIGALL and MAYNE are playing chess. A gramophone's playing one of Mayne's records, John McCormack singing The Garden Where the Praties Grow.

MCGONIGAL

How many times do we have to hear this?

MAYNE

Only 'til the boys grow tired of it.

MCGONIGAL

They're all bog-sick of it, Blair. It's just that none of them dares to inform you of the fact.

MAYNE

Now, why would that be?

MCGONIGAL

None of them wants a pasting.

MAYNE looks at him over the chessboard with genuine curiosity.

MAYNE

From who?

The record's just coming to an end, and from over by the gramophone we hear a plaintive...

YOUNG RECRUIT

Again, Paddy?

MAYNE gives him a thumbs-up before returning his attention to the chessboard. The YOUNG RECRUIT wearily returns the needle to the start of the record.

MCGONIGAL

I used to like this song, once.

MAYNE looks up from under his brows and winks at MCGONIGAL.

86. EXT. TERRACE OF HOTEL. NIGHT.

Out-of-doors dining. A four-piece band playing something more uptempo, and a space set aside for dancing. Moving briskly, STIRLING weaves his way through the tables to join...

HERMIONE RANFURLY, who lays down the menu and smiles pleasantly when he arrives.

STIRLING

See anything worth having?

HERMIONE

I was just thinking what a peculiar place Cairo is. War work all day and glad rags at night.

STIRLING

To be honest with you, Hermione...

Even as he starts to speak, he's drowned out by the sound of a SQUADRON OF AIRCRAFT passing overhead.

They're loud and low, momentarily drowning out all other sound. VARIOUS ANGLES as all conversations cease; a young man looks

anxiously at the sky, the young woman whose hands he's holding averts her eyes to the ground.

ON THE HORN PLAYER: the band's playing on although they can't be heard. The horn player's eyes are turned up to the sky.

HERMIONE takes her cue from STIRLING, who's taking his seat without any show of concern. As the plane noise recedes, we can hear the band again.

HERMIONE

How's the training going?

STIRLING

Jock's weeding out the second-raters and raising the game for the rest. I'm here to make sure it doesn't all go for nothing.

HERMIONE

It'll be a while before I can help you again. I'll mostly be in Jerusalem.

STIRLING

(Unfazed)

Rats. There goes my spy. Any word on Dan?

HERMIONE

They've moved him to Italy.

STIRLING

Is he well?

HERMIONE

Yes, he is. Win the war for us, David, and then we can all go home.

STIRLING

I'll settle for the chance to make a difference.

STIRLING lowers his voice, leans closer.

STIRLING

The parachute school in England hasn't answered a single request for information. We have to steal all our supplies from our own side. We ask the engineers for an explosive and they tell us, You can have one that bangs or one that burns, but if you want one that does both then it's too big to carry.

HERMIONE

When do you get to see action?

A quick check to see if he can be overheard, then...

STIRLING

The night before our next offensive, the SAS will take out five of the German airfields.

HERMIONE

That soon?

STIRLING

We have to be ready and we must make a mark. Too many people are ready to shoot us down if we don't. And that's on our own side. Compared to them, the Hun's an ally.

The background music changes to a pretty and wistful waltz, and STIRLING throws down the menu without ordering.

STIRLING

Do you think Dan would object if his wife were asked for a dance?

HERMIONE

I doubt it.

STIRLING

He's never seen my dancing.

They rise and move toward the dance floor.

87. EXT. TERRACE OF HOTEL. NIGHT.

STIRLING and HERMIONE reach the floor and start to dance. At tables all around, couples in private and earnest conversation.

HERMIONE

People at home would see all this
and say we must be having a whale
of a time.

STIRLING

Yes, didn't you hear? War in the
middle east is one long party.

HERMIONE

A farewell party.

They dance on in melancholy mood and we CUT TO:

88. EXT. DESERT ROAD. DAY.

A long and lonely desert road, mainly just a cleared strip of
hard ground, with a fingerpost where another trail joins it.

There's a growing rumble as we watch. The fingerpost begins to
shake.

Then the Dolby Surround goes into overdrive as an AFRIKA CORPS
PANZER passes right by in front of us and we look back and
beyond it to see...

An immense force of Panzers and armour spread out across the
desert and all heading in the same direction, raising a wall of
dust, looking like the California land rush of pioneers in THE
COVERED WAGON.

A tank swipes the fingerpost and brings it down.

89. EXT. PLANE IN AIR OVER DESERT. DAY.

A lone RAF Bristol Bombay in an otherwise empty sky, with
parachute door open.

90. INT. RAF BOMBAY IN AIR. DAY.

We're with STIRLING and LEWES at the back, looking up the
fuselage toward the open door where Flight Sergeant TED PACEY
stands ready to supervise the drop. They're in jump gear. Ahead
of them are about half a dozen men, waiting to go.

STIRLING and LEWES have their heads close together. They have to
shout close to each others' ears to be heard above the engines.

STIRLING

The more I ask for, the worse it gets. I can't always be running to General Ritchie for everything. But they only ever spark when he takes an interest.

LEWES

What's the word on the explosives?

STIRLING

I've told them what we need. They're sending us someone who'll tell us why we can't have it.

A red light flashes.

TED PACEY

Stand by. Each man, check your line.

The men stoop and check on the clips that attach their static lines to a floor rail.

TED PACEY

Check it carefully. That is your life line. If it is not connected, your chute will not open. I can then guarantee that you will hit the ground like the proverbial sack of shit.

STIRLING

(To Lewes)

Don't think I know that proverb.

Green light.

TED PACEY

Go.

The men start to exit the plane in very quick succession, each man right on the heels of the last. STIRLING and LEWES have just a couple of seconds left.

LEWES

When's the explosives man coming?

STIRLING

End of the week.

LEWES

That's cutting it fine.

STIRLING

I know.

They're gone.

91. EXT. DESERT. DAY.

A jeep, driven by PADDY MAYNE, heads across the desert toward where...

STIRLING is on the ground, just landed, gathering in the silk as MAYNE draws up beside him.

MAYNE

I see you're still in one piece.

STIRLING

You sound disappointed.

MAYNE

(Cheerfully)

The boys had a little bet on.

STIRLING dumps the chute and silk into the back of the jeep.

STIRLING

Got any glasses?

MAYNE holds up binoculars for him.

92. INT. RAF BOMBAY IN AIR. DAY.

The red light flashes.

TED PACEY

Stand by. Check your lines.

A different stick of men waiting to jump.

93. EXT. OBSERVATION SPOT IN DESERT. DAY.

STIRLING lying on the ground with his back against a wheel, watching the plane through the binoculars. MAYNE half-reclining with his feet up on the dash.

STIRLING

Tell me in all honesty, Paddy.
How are the men taking to the training?

MAYNE

Happy as larks with it, sir.

STIRLING

Really?

MAYNE

Especially with the written
exams. They love those.

STIRLING

(Unaware of any irony)

Good.

94. INT. RAF BOMBAY IN AIR. DAY.

Green light.

TED PACEY

Go.

The first man jumps.

ANGLE ON THE STATIC LINE CLIP -- it snaps with a clunk and the
untethered line snakes out of the open door.

TED PACEY looks down at the sound as the second man exits...

And sees the second clip snap and the line disappear.

TED PACEY is just in time to seize the next man by his shoulders
to prevent him from jumping.

95. EXT. MIDAIR. DAY.

Two figures falling, tumbling in the air in total silence.

96. EXT. OBSERVATION SPOT IN DESERT. DAY.

STIRLING watching through the binoculars.

STIRLING

Something's gone wrong.

MAYNE takes his feet off the dashboard and reaches around for
another set of field glasses in the back of the vehicle.

97. INT. RAF BOMBAY IN AIR. DAY.

TED PACEY looks down through the open doorway in horror.

98. EXT. MIDAIR. DAY

The two figures continue to fall.

One is making a futile attempt to open his parachute manually.

The other can be seen to cross himself as he plummets.

99. EXT. IMPACT SPOT IN DESERT. DAY.

The jeep speeding toward us, raising dust.

It stops. STIRLING jumps out, strides toward us... and slows to a walk.

At which point we PULL BACK to reveal a figure on the desert floor. Only the outstretched legs are visible, the rest hidden by a tangle of silk where the parachute pack has burst open on impact.

The white of the silk is splashed and stained with red.

100. INT. LECTURE TENT. DAY.

The men are assembled. In an unusual show of formality, LEWES calls them to attention as STIRLING enters and stands before them, signalling to them to be at ease. LEWES stands just off to one side.

STIRLING

We've established the cause of the problem. The release clips were unsuitable for the design of the aircraft. Under certain flying conditions a man being pulled into the slipstream can cause them to twist and come open. We're changing all the clips, and parachute training will resume at five-thirty tomorrow morning. Lieutenant Lewes and I will make the first jump. Lieutenant...

With a nod, he hands over to LEWES and walks out.

LEWES takes his place.

LEWES

Any man who wants to leave may do
so now. Without dishonour.

He looks at them.

All stand without moving.

LEWES

Well?

101. EXT. LECTURE TENT. DAY.

The men come pouring out of the tent, an unusually subdued bunch.

LEWES strides away from them and heads over to enter STIRLING's tent.

102. INT. STIRLING'S TENT. DAY.

STIRLING sits in a tipped-back chair by the map table, fiddling with a pencil. He seems moody and preoccupied.

When LEWES enters...

STIRLING

Apparently the fault with those
clips is a recognised problem.
The parachute school at Ringway
had exactly the same experience a
few weeks ago. Unfortunately they
neglected to share it with us.

He throws the pencil onto the table.

STIRLING

So. Two dead. How many want to
quit?

LEWES

None.

STIRLING takes this in.

103. EXT. EXPLOSIVES TESTING RANGE. DAY.

Boom!

We're on the outskirts of the camp, near to the rifle range. An

open-sided tent shelters a makeshift laboratory/workshop. Outside it, an aircraft wing has been laid across a couple of oil drums as a test subject. What we've just witnessed is a sharp and unimpressive localised detonation on the wing. More squib than bang.

STIRLING

(Calling)

Thanks, Jock. Can you show us the damage?

LEWES and ERNIE BOND move in from the sidelines and, at JOCK's nod, lift the wing in order to tilt it and show the damage. A neatish hole has been punched through.

By the lab alongside STIRLING stands a tall MAJOR from the Sappers, their promised 'explosives man'.

STIRLING

See the problem? Jerry could have a patch on that and the plane back in the air within a day.

SAPPER MAJOR

That's the limitation of your material.

STIRLING

Well, we need something better. Just blowing a hole's no use. We need something that combines an explosive and an incendiary.

SAPPER MAJOR

Really.

STIRLING

Yes, really. Because the whole point of it is ignite the fuel in the wing tank and burn the whole plane.

SAPPER MAJOR

And you want all that in a bomb that weighs nothing.

STIRLING

I'm not looking for miracles. Just something that's capable of doing the job.

SAPPER MAJOR

Well, there isn't anything. How small are you trying to go?

STIRLING looks to LEWES, who's now joined them.

LEWES
This kind of size.

He picks up a tiny package that weighs about a pound.

LEWES
Every man needs to carry at least
a dozen.

The SAPPER MAJOR all but snorts and rolls his eyes.

SAPPER MAJOR
Well, somebody here's wasting
somebody's time.

He starts to walk away.

STIRLING
Can't be done, Jock.

LEWES
Apparently not.

STIRLING moves to catch up with the SAPPER MAJOR as he walks past the test wing.

LEWES follows, despondently placing the small package on the wing before moving to catch up.

SAPPER MAJOR
I can do you a double bomb with
an explosive and an incendiary on
two separate fuses but I'm
telling you now, you won't carry
a dozen of those in a pack. You
chaps are going to have to settle
for something a bit more
realistic.

STIRLING
Lieutenant Lewes even had a go on
his own. Didn't you, Jock?

LEWES
I did.

STIRLING
Bit of an amateur chemist in his
youth.

SAPPER MAJOR

Making bangs in the garden shed
is no substitute for military
expertise...

As he's speaking, there's a FLASH EXPLOSION on the wing some yards behind them.

All three men turn and the SAPPER MAJOR stares as...

The already-burning aircraft wing suddenly FIREBALLS as the fuel inside it ignites.

And as it burns fiercely, hugely, incandescently...

LEWES

I found a secret ingredient.
Engine oil. Means you can make a
sticky mix out of the thermite
and plastic explosive. You don't
need much of either and one
detonator does for both.

A smaller, secondary fireball within the flames.

STIRLING

One man can carry twenty of
those. We thought we'd call it
the Lewes Bomb. Seems only fair.
Don't you think?

SAPPER MAJOR

(Distractedly)

Yes. Of course.

ANGLE ON THE THREE OF THEM through the flames. And we hear another, different voice leading in over picture from the next scene...

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN (V/O)

Very ingenious.

104. EXT. SCAFFOLDING TOWER BY KABRIT CAMP. DAY.

The purpose of the scaffolding tower is now revealed... it's the famous 'wedding ring' drop simulator where men practice their landings in counterweighted harness, their fall guided by men on the ground operating ropes and pulleys.

Observing from a distance is a tight group of people; an RAF GROUP CAPTAIN in the immediate foreground, STIRLING just behind

his shoulder, and two or three RAF AIDES -- two male, one female -- just behind him.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
Very ingenious. I suppose.

He's blithe, not aggressive, entirely at ease in his own certainties.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
Still. I've always said that any idiot can jump out of an aircraft. If anything, idiocy's a positive asset.

The AIDES all smile at the boss's joke.

STIRLING
Parachute training's just one element in what we do here, sir. Our main focus is on what happens once we're down on the ground.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
Ah, well, that's where you'll find that it all comes unstuck.

STIRLING
How so?

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
You don't think you're just going to walk onto an airfield without being challenged, do you?

STIRLING
That's the plan exactly, sir.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
Then you're all as mad as each other.

STIRLING
Perhaps.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
You've been having it too easy out here, Stirling. The desert sun's fried all your brains.

STIRLING
I've never seen a properly-guarded airfield yet. On their side... or ours.

That lands home.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
Oh, you just try it. See how far
you get.

STIRLING
All right, sir. How about RAF
Heliopolis?

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
What?

STIRLING
With a little bet to make it
interesting? Say, ten pounds?
I'll even warn you when we're
coming.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
You're proposing an attack on one
of your own side's airfields?
I've heard everything now.

STIRLING
Not using real bombs, obviously.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
You really are mad.

STIRLING
Oh, I don't know. At least we
won't have the dodgy part to
contend with. Our biggest worry
is always whether the RAF will
drop us in the wrong place.

That hits home.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN
Ten pounds? (TO HIS AIDES) You
heard him. (TO STIRLING) You're
on. I'll be happy to take your
money.

105. INT. STIRLING'S TENT. DAY.

The officers are assembled -- LEWES, MAYNE, MCGONIGALL,
BONNINGTON, BILL FRASER.

STIRLING has a map of Heliopolis spread out on the table.

STIRLING

RAF base Heliopolis. Just to the northeast of Cairo. This is not just another exercise. Bollocks this up and we lose our shot at the real thing.

He moves around behind them.

STIRLING

Teams of ten. Each team will plant its own colour-coded markers where they'd otherwise place a bomb. But to keep it realistic, each man will carry a full pack and minimal rations. Jock?

LEWES

I'm allowing of four pints of water per man. It's ninety miles across the desert from here. We'll be covering the whole distance on foot. Three days, thirty miles per day.

STIRLING

March at night and lay up in the daytime so the spotter planes don't see you. Each team will operate with complete independence. I don't even want you to be seen by each other, let alone the opposition. Now. Does anybody have anything that they want to say?

MAYNE

You must be sorely in need of that tenner.

106. EXT. DESERT FROM THE AIR. DAY.

Flying toward the horizon on the widest view. It's empty, empty, empty, and it goes on forever.

ANGLE ON THE SPOTTER PLANE, as it tips a wing to give the observer a view of the ground.

LOOKING STRAIGHT DOWN -- nothing but desert to see.

107. EXT. DESERT. DAY.

Empty-looking landscape; the faint buzz of the spotter plane as it passes high overhead.

Something moves. The head of JOHNNY COOPER rises from the ground, lifting the hessian sacking that covers and renders him invisible from above.

JOHNNY COOPER

What was that?

Another head rises some yards away.

PAT RILEY

More bloody flies.

And the muffled voice of PADDY MAYNE can be heard from some place of concealment...

MAYNE (V/O)

Get your heads down and stop
wasting your spit.

Both heads lower, and the landscape is empty again.

108. EXT. HELIOPOLIS AIRFIELD, BY WIRE. NIGHT.

MAYNE leads his men to the wire, and peers through it. They're bundled up against the low night temperatures, and carrying captured Italian packs.

MAYNE's POV -- distant hangars, waiting planes, everything quiet.

He gestures. PAT RILEY produces cutters and applies them to the wire.

109. EXT. HELIOPOLIS AIRFIELD, MAIN GATE AND ROAD. NIGHT.

Here it's brightly-lit and heavily-manned. A TRUCK stands in the gateway and is being thoroughly searched.

Observing the scene are the RAF GROUP CAPTAIN and the high-ranking STATION COMMANDER.

STATION COMMANDER

Check underneath as well. Who
knows where they'll be hiding
themselves?

A GUARD drops to the ground and crawls to look under the truck.

The STATION COMMANDER and RAF GROUP CAPTAIN walk along to the next waiting vehicle, where a similar search is taking place. The driver stands alongside it, having his papers thoroughly checked and being quizzed on them.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN

Not a single sign.

STATION COMMANDER

I reckon they've taken one look at the arrangements and been scared off.

RAF GROUP CAPTAIN

Don't let's deliberately underestimate them, eh? I'm no great lover of egg-on-face.

STATION COMMANDER

There's no sign of them in the desert, so they'll have to come by road. There's just no other way.

110. EXT. YARD BEHIND AIRFIELD KITCHEN. NIGHT.

A brawny COOK in stained whites is emptying a slops bucket into a swill bin. When he heads back into the building...

The head of JOCK LEWES, with three-day stubble, pops out of hiding to check the scene...

Then beckons his men forward and past. They flit by him in silence and into the building.

LEWES checks that no-one's behind them, then follows his men inside.

111. INT. AIRFIELD KITCHEN. NIGHT.

The wide-eyed COOK is being held, with a hand clamped over his mouth. As LEWES reaches him...

LEWES

Good evening. L detachment, SAS.
We're on an exercise. You're now part of it. Nod your head.

Seriously spooked, and helped by a hand planted on the back of his scalp, the COOK nods.

LEWES

Good. The guard patrols. How many, how often?

112. EXT. AIRFIELD BY HANGARS. NIGHT.

MAYNE leads his men in a neat line to the corner of a hangar, and signals for them to halt behind him while he drops low and peers around.

ON MAYNE as he sees no resistance and mutters under his breath...

MAYNE

Oh, come on, boys. At least try to give us a hard time.

He gestures his men forward and leads them around the corner of the hangar, and as they separate and disperse we WIDEN TO REVEAL...

A breathtaking number of Royal Air Force planes, in neat rows stretching off into the darkness. The SAS men are scattering amongst them.

With BOB BENNETT as he stops beside a plane, produces a roll of stickers, peels one and slaps it onto the side of the aircraft before flitting on.

WITH MAYNE, doing the same by another. We don't see what's on the stickers yet.

113. EXT. HELIOPOLIS AIRFIELD. DAY.

A COMMAND CAR heads toward the planes and stops by one. Out of the back of it climb the STATION COMMANDER and the RAF GROUP CAPTAIN.

Some of the GUARDS -- the ones that we saw making searches on the gate the night before -- are standing around, looking uncertain and embarrassed.

The RAF GROUP CAPTAIN and the STATION COMMANDER move to look at the plane, with special attention to the area where the wing meets the fuselage.

They stop, stare. Neither is pleased.

At which point we reveal...

Four differently-coloured STICKERS attached to the plane in the same area, each with the word BOMB written large on it.

114. INT. KITCHEN CLOSET. DAY.

Darkness, and then a door is flung open before us to reveal two of the GUARDS, who've just opened it. They're looking straight in at us.

REVERSE ANGLE shows the brawny COOK, bound to a chair. His eyes dart helplessly from one GUARD to the other.

Covering most of the lower half of his face, acting as a gag, is one of the BOMB stickers.

115. INT. MESS TENT. NIGHT.

Noise! Celebrations! The tent is crammed shoulder-to shoulder and someone is pounding out DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS on the stolen piano. At the appropriate point in the song everyone pounds their glasses, fists, whatever they're holding.

A drunken PADDY MAYNE is ominously stacking up glasses on the bar...

STIRLING
Gentlemen! Gentlemen!

STIRLING is climbing up onto a chair. The piano pauses and the noise level drops just enough for STIRLING shout over it.

He holds up a ten-pound-note and calls out...

STIRLING
The next round is on the RAF!

Loud cheers and the celebrations continue.

116. EXT. AIRFIELD BY KABRIT. DAY (MONOCHROME).

A close pastiche of the newsreel-style coverage taken by a war cameraman of the visit of GENERAL AUCHINLECK to inspect the brigade on 13 November, 1941.

In the mute footage with the faint camera motor whirr almost subliminally under it, we see STIRLING introducing AUCHINLECK to the men... LEWES watching from the shadows under the wing of a Bristol Bombay...

And over it we hear...

LEWES (V/O)

General Auchinleck came to watch an exercise today. He's our Commander-in-Chief, and it's through his goodwill that we exist at all. He spent much of the morning with us and he spoke to every man. I can say that together, David and I have fashioned this unit. David has established it without, and I within. His task has been the harder. He has had to overcome frank opposition and deceitful obstruction. But now we stand ready to prove ourselves in our first operation against the enemy.

117. INT. LEWES' TENT. NIGHT.

LEWES has been writing a letter home. At this point he leans back, lays down his pen and rubs his eyes.

118. INT. LECTURE TENT. DAY.

Big scene with the entire unit present. STIRLING stands before them with a big map on an easel behind him. The map shows the African coastline, the targets, the whole area of the operation. Super: 15th November 1941.

STIRLING

Operation Crusader. In three days' time the Eighth Army will mount a major offensive aimed at pushing back Rommel and relieving the siege of Tobruk. The night before the advance, the SAS will attack five of the enemy's airfields with the aim of destroying Rommel's air support on the ground.

This draws an enthusiastic and vocal response... cheers, applause, whistles.

STIRLING glances at LEWES, who flickers a smile of satisfaction at the response.

STIRLING

We'll be aiming for here, this area around Gazala and Tamimi.

Each group will get as near to its target as possible and then we'll go in when it's dark. Once the damage is done, we'll walk out to a rendezvous here, where we'll meet up with a patrol of the Long Range Desert Group. As the name might suggest, they're a bunch of chaps who specialise in desert transport and navigation. They'll drive us out to Siwa -- this oasis, here -- and from there we'll fly back to Kabrit.

He steps away from the map, and faces the men again.

STIRLING

Enough from me. Officers will brief their units. I'll see you at the planes.

The entire tent erupts in a deafening cheer as STIRLING walks out.

119. EXT. 216 SQUADRON FORWARD BASE, BAGOUSH. DAY.

Sound level is kept up as the cheering is replaced by the noise of taxiing aircraft, the undercarriage of a plane wiping through the foreground as we PAN WITH the men of the SAS. They're carrying their kit and are heading off the airfield and toward the service buildings. It's a dull and windy day.

We pick out REG SEEKINGS, JOHNNY COOPER and PAT RILEY, together in a group.

JOHNNY COOPER

Any chance we'll get fed before the day's over?

REG SEEKINGS

Not if we have to queue up behind this lot.

PAT RILEY

Let's head straight for the mess. We can sort beds out later.

They break away from the main procession.

120. INT. 216 SQUADRON MESS. DAY.

All fairly quiet. A STEWARD behind the bar, a couple of pilots leaning on it. Only one or two of the tables are occupied.

RILEY, SEEKINGS and COOPER enter, slightly wary on unfamiliar territory. Spotting the bar, they aim for it.

PAT RILEY

Can we can get something to eat here?

JOHNNY COOPER

And a beer wouldn't go amiss.

STEWARD

Are you visiting us, sir?

PAT RILEY

L detachment, SAS.

This catches the attention of the two PILOTS down the bar.

PILOT

You the chaps in the drop tomorrow?

REG SEEKINGS

Yes, we're those chaps exactly.

SEEKINGS is mocking the accent, but mildly enough for it to pass unnoticed.

PILOT

We'll be your pilots. Rather hoping you'll take a few of those new ME 109's out of circulation for us. Beer all round?

The SAS men hesitate, looking for the catch.

PAT RILEY

Why not?

PILOT

Find yourselves a table. We'll bring it over.

Still not sure whether this is a wind-up, the three head for the tables.

Behind the bar, the STEWARD is uncapping bottles and pouring the beers into glasses on a tray. As the PILOT turns back to face him...

STEWARD

Since when have you been anyone's waiter?

PILOT

Since they gave me a suicide
squad to look after.

At that moment, the doors open and more SAS MEN pour in.

STEWARD

You're going to be busy.

121. INT. CONTROL TOWER. DAY.

Views over the airfield. STIRLING in conference with a BRIGADIER
over newly-unrolled weather charts.

BRIGADIER

The wind's rising and there's an
increasing chance of rain.

STIRLING

If the Eighth army don't
postpone, then neither can we.

BRIGADIER

I'm not advising you to postpone.
I'm advising that you call it
off.

STIRLING

I can't do that.

BRIGADIER

You can't land men and equipment
in a thirty-knot gale and expect
them not to be scattered all over
the desert, either. It's your
decision, but that's my advice.

STIRLING

Thirty knots? Is that definite?

BRIGADIER

Fifteen's the maximum windspeed
for a parachute landing.

STIRLING

I'll need to discuss it with my
officers.

BRIGADIER

I'll be here another hour. Let me
know.

He rolls up the weather chart and goes.

122. EXT. 216 SQUADRON FORWARD BASE, BAGOUSH. DAY.

A noticeable wind, as before. PADDY MAYNE is striding purposefully along. He passes BOB BENNETT and a couple of SAS men heading toward the mess.

BOB BENNETT

Will you take a drink with us,
Paddy?

Nothing diverts him from his stride as he heads toward the Control Tower.

123. INT. CONTROL TOWER. DAY.

MAYNE comes in to find STIRLING in conversation with LEWES, BONNINGTON, FRASER and McGONIGAL; all look to him as he enters.

MAYNE

What have I missed?

McGONIGAL

David's been advised to call it off.

MAYNE

For what reason?

STIRLING

Bad weather for the drop.

MAYNE

My boys won't like that.

STIRLING

Nobody likes it, Paddy. The question is what we do.

LEWES

I know exactly what will happen if we don't go ahead.

FRASER

The SAS will be yet another bright idea that came to nothing.

BONNINGTON

If it's a matter of the risk, maybe you should put that to the men.

STIRLING

I intend to. But what do you think they're going to say? They're like dogs at a leash.

MAYNE

I say we go.

He's so emphatic, they all look at him.

MAYNE

Nothing the desert throws at me can be worse than Jock's training. I've stuck through that for one reason, just like everybody else. I'm here to fight a war. If we're going to dodge that, then why be here at all?

STIRLING's still unhappy. He moves to the window and looks out at the sky.

STIRLING

Doesn't look too bad to me.

He looks back at the others.

STIRLING

Maybe we'll get away with it.

124. EXT. AIRCRAFT IN FLIGHT. NIGHT.

The aircraft is bucketing around in a serious storm.

125. INT. AIRCRAFT IN FLIGHT. NIGHT.

Everything's washed in red light.

The NAVIGATOR appears and beckons to STIRLING, who makes his way forward. It's not easy -- he has to grab at handholds to keep himself from being thrown about.

STIRLING reaches the cockpit and leans in to talk to the PILOT, leaning close and shouting over the noise of the engines.

STIRLING

How's it looking?

PILOT

I'll never see the ground flares through this.

STIRLING

Are we lost?

PILOT

Not entirely. I got a fix on the coastline. If you're determined to go...

Before he's finished speaking, the sky lights up with a flash and an explosion that rocks the plane.

PILOT

They've seen us. I'm going to five hundred feet. Drop in six minutes.

126. EXT. FX PLANES IN SKY. NIGHT.

The aircraft takes evasive action, diving away as anti-aircraft shells explode around it. And as we fall back from this aircraft...

A SECOND AIRCRAFT passes before us.

127. INT. SECOND AIRCRAFT IN FLIGHT. NIGHT.

A different interior layout, washed in green light.

LEWES moves to address a group of waiting parachutists that includes JOHNNY COOPER and PAT RILEY.

LEWES

Get your lines ready. We won't get much of a warning.

BIG JOLT. All thrown violently, and as they recover...

LEWES

That was a hit. Everyone all right?

He looks toward the cockpit, from where one of the aircrew holds up nine fingers. LEWES returns his attention to his men.

LEWES

It's blowing a Force Nine out there. They'll give us a wind direction just before we go. Follow the back bearing on your compasses to find the man before you.

Another bang, another rocking.

LEWES

We'll be out of this soon.

128. EXT. FX SKY. NIGHT.

Silence. Looking down on clouds rushing by at speed. It's a moonless night, so this will have to be a stylised version of darkness... not total, but etched in deep shades of blue.

ON STIRLING as he descends in parachute harness, scanning below him, looking for the ground.

LOOKING DOWN - the cloud suddenly clears and there's the ground rushing toward us for no more than a second and then...

MAXIMUM SCREEN CONFUSION and CHAOTIC JARRING with a sound of heavy impact and a moment of darkness and then...

STIRLING being dragged on his back across stony desert by the parachute harness, just as if hooked onto the back of a speeding truck, struggling and fighting with the release, bumping and gasping and being thrown around, and then suddenly...

STIRLING is free of the harness and rolling to a stop...

And the PARACHUTE CANOPY is sucked away into the darkness, never to be seen again...

And then STIRLING slowly, painfully gets to his feet. He switches on a flashlight and looks around him...

Nothing but darkness and dust and howling wind.

Then he turns about sharply as, through the wind, he hears something coming toward him...

A sound like rippling canvas and a high-speed slithering over stony ground...

He shines the flashlight toward whatever this might be...

And then flinches back as a PARACHUTE CANOPY blows right past him, dragging an inert body that flops and bounces like a puppet as it goes.

Before he can act, it's gone from the range of his beam.

129. EXT. THIRD AIRCRAFT IN FLIGHT. NIGHT.

Another of the aircraft, flying through a rain of tracer bullets.

The port engine takes a spectacular hit and trails fire.

130. INT. WOUNDED AIRCRAFT. NIGHT.

LIEUTENANT BONNINGTON climbs over ERNIE BOND to reach the flight deck, where...

He finds CHARLIE WEST, the pilot, battling to keep control despite the windows and the panel having been shot out.

CHARLIE WEST

Forget about the drop. I've no idea where we are. I'm going to head due East and hope it gets us home.

131. EXT. WOUNDED AIRCRAFT IN FLIGHT. NIGHT.

The Bombay goes into a banking turn as anti-aircraft fire explodes all around it.

132. EXT. DESERT. NIGHT.

In a sandstorm PADDY MAYNE cuts himself loose from his chute, and then raises a hand in an attempt to protect his eyes as he shines his flashlight around.

133. INT. WOUNDED AIRCRAFT. NIGHT.

Still on the flight deck...

BONNINGTON

We're losing height.

CHARLIE WEST

We've got one engine and we're shedding fuel. I'll have to put her down.

134. EXT. WOUNDED AIRCRAFT IN FLIGHT. NIGHT.

The plane banks perilously toward the ground and as it's descending from sight (ie, without seeing it crash) we CUT TO:

135. EXT. DESERT. NIGHT.

JOHNNY COOPER walking alone, with a flashlight pointing at the ground ahead; he stops and raises the beam, waving it from side to side.

Ahead, in the darkness, a tight cluster of about half a dozen beams clicks on at once.

With visible relief, JOHNNY COOPER makes for them.

WITH JOCK AND THE OTHERS, as Cooper approaches...

LEWES

It's going to take us all night
to find the gear and each other.

COOPER reaches them.

LEWES

If we're no more than five or ten
miles off-target we can still do
the business.

JIMMY STORIE

And are we?

LEWES

(Evading the question)
Who's still missing?

136. EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE DESERT. DAY.

The sky is dark and grey and it's raining heavily.

PADDY MAYNE, soaked to the skin but oblivious to it, trudges up a hill to high ground. He's limping slowly, and he's dragging a heavy equipment bag one-handed. He looks as if he's at the limit of his energy. Trudge, drag. Trudge, drag.

SOME WAY AHEAD OF HIM -- in the shelter of a slight declivity, nine SAS MEN, with REG SEEKINGS and BOB BENNETT at the front of them, are huddled together under a canopy that's been improvised out of sticks and three blankets. It all looks somewhat primitive and very miserable. Water's leaking everywhere.

MAYNE reaches the end of his climb and stands before the men. With one final heave, he drags the equipment bag forward and dumps it before them.

MAYNE

Detonators.

REG SEEKINGS

They've had it, Paddy.

BOB BENNETT

So have we.

MAYNE stands there with the rain pounding down on him, ignoring it, drenched by it.

MAYNE

How many grenades have we got?

They all just stare at him miserably.

MAYNE

Come on. We can still have a go.

He looks around. It's almost like the gods are pissing on him in a Kurosawa movie.

Finally, he gives in and crawls under the canopy with the others.

UNDER THE CANOPY -- everyone shuffles a bit to make room as MAYNE settles in their midst.

BOB BENNETT produces a flask, which he offers.

BOB BENNETT

Will you take a drink now, Paddy?

Resignedly, growling his disappointment, MAYNE accepts the flask and takes a swig from it.

MAYNE

I hope Eoin's mob had better luck than this.

137. EXT. DESERT. DAY.

CLOSE on ENORMOUS RAINDROPS bouncing in a puddle, in which is half-submerged the face of...

EOIN MCGONIGLE, dead in the rain.

WIDER -- his body in the desert, still in its parachute harness, the torn and sodden parachute canopy all hung up on a camel thorn bush.

And CRANE BACK to reveal...

At least half a dozen other, similar bodies at various

distances, all killed on landing.

138. EXT. DESERT. DAY.

No rain.

LEWES reaches into his shirt, pulls out the COMPASS that he wears -- his present from Mirren.

He checks his bearing, squints at the sun, then turns and walks back to where...

One of his men, JOCK CHEYNE, sits propped against a rock. He's wrapped in a blanket and surrounded by the other men. Closest, with a hand on his shoulder, is JIMMIE STORIE. CHEYNE doesn't look in good shape.

LEWES

No better?

JIMMIE STORIE

I can carry him, sir.

CHEYNE's face screws up at a shaft of pain.

LEWES

I don't think so.

With a movement of his head, he indicates for STORIE to join him for a private word.

STORIE gives CHEYNE's shoulder a squeeze, and CHEYNE manages a smile in response. Then STORIE joins LEWES and they turn away from the others.

LEWES

We all know the score. Even if it were safe to carry a man with an injured back, I wouldn't allow it. He'll have more chance as a prisoner of war. You know I'm right.

STORIE

Yes, sir.

LEWES

Say your goodbyes.

139. EXT. DESERT. DAY.

Same place, a short time later.

Each of the men shakes hands with CHEYNE before walking away. CHEYNE is bundled in blankets, with food and water set out on a rock beside him. STORIE is the last of them.

CHEYNE's point of view on the men walking away into the desert. None looks back. But STORIE surreptitiously wipes his eyes.

ON CHEYNE, watching them go... bundled in his blanket like a hooded monk.

He looks hollow-eyed, ancient, ageless.

140. EXT. DESERT WITH WOUNDED PLANE. DAY.

The plane that we last saw falling from the sky now lies in ruins after a serious but survivable crash landing.

PULL BACK from it to find...

A GERMAN PATROL TRUCK.

About eight SAS men including LIEUTENANT BONNINGTON and ERNIE BOND along with the pilot CHARLIE WEST are being ushered into the back of it at gunpoint by GERMAN DESERT TROOPS. They have their hands on their heads, and none has come out of the crash unscathed. As the last of them climbs in...

We see into the truck, all of them sitting despondently, and then the doors are slammed on them.

141. EXT. RENDEZVOUS POINT. DAWN.

The early light of dawn. A LOOKOUT with binoculars scans the horizon from the top of a camouflaged truck.

LOOKOUT

I have a sighting.

His commander, DAVID LLOYD OWEN, climbs up beside him and takes the binoculars.

HIS BINOCULAR POV -- STIRLING and one other man, SERGEANT TAIT.

DAVID LLOYD OWEN

I believe that's Stirling.

LOOKOUT

I bet you he's the last of them.

LLOYD OWEN gives him a faintly reproving look.

LOOKOUT

If he is, that'll make forty men
lost out of sixty-two, and not a
shot fired. I bet Rommel could
use a few more like him.

ON STIRLING AND TAIT -- still walking toward them out of the
dawn.

142. EXT. RENDEZVOUS POINT. DAWN.

LLOYD OWEN tips whisky into four enamel mugs of tea. TAIT and
the LOOKOUT are waiting, and help themselves.

LLOYD OWEN picks up the two remaining mugs and carries them over
to where STIRLING sits on a crate or folding stool, under an
improvised awning beyond which we have a view of the desert's
expanse.

He hands STIRLING a mug and sits beside him.

DAVID LLOYD OWEN

Not a complete success, I gather.

STIRLING

More like a string of disasters.
We lost the weapons, we lost the
food. We found the bombs but not
the fuses. Wouldn't you think
we'd at least be bright enough to
drop the two together? The only
thing we've proved is that it's
possible to move around behind
enemy lines.

DAVID LLOYD OWEN

You don't need to jump out of a
plane to do that.

STIRLING

The parachuting's the part I'd be
happy to lose. But you can't do
the damage if you don't reach the
target.

DAVID LLOYD OWEN

Well, pardon me for stating the
obvious, but the answer to that
one's staring you in the face. My
boys drove all the way here with
empty wagons to take your boys
out. Wouldn't it make sense to
let us bring you in as well?

STIRLING

I'd thought of that. Too slow.

DAVID LLOYD OWEN

Think a bit more. Anywhere in the desert you need to be, we can get you there. We're a hundred per cent accurate and we're used to moving around under the enemy's nose. We can lie up while you operate and be right there ready to take you out again.

He rises.

DAVID LLOYD OWEN

Or you can just keep repeating your mistakes. Like the rest of the dinosaurs in this antiquated army. Your choice, Stirling.

He walks away...

Leaving STIRLING to consider what he's said.

CLOSE ON STIRLING as, eyes narrowed, he downs the whisky-laced tea.

143. EXT. EIGHTH ARMY HQ. DAY.

A 'tent city' with lots of activity. We can hear typing, field telephones ringing, orders being shouted; CLERKS are criss-crossing with files and messages and OFFICERS are hurrying back and forth purposefully.

Super: Eighth Army Headquarters, Near Siwa Oasis

Around a corner and into the thick of this appears STIRLING, still in his stubble and dusty desert gear. As he walks through them slowly, people step around him as if he isn't there.

Then from behind him he hears...

MAJOR

What exactly are you doing, Stirling? Are you trying to earn yourself an Iron Cross?

STIRLING turns to face the hostile MAJOR that he briefly encountered in MEHQ. There's a file under his arm, and he's paused on the way somewhere.

MAJOR

This is exactly what I expected.
Do you honestly imagine that I've
been trying to make your life
difficult for my own personal
pleasure?

He steps closer and lowers his voice.

MAJOR

I have two sons in this army. God
save them from officers like you.

He pushes on past.

144. INT. EIGHTH ARMY HQ OPS TENT. DAY.

At the centre of all the activity, GENERAL RICHIE is looking
over a big table-map with the positions of the various forces
flagged with movable markers. Spotting STIRLING, he breaks off
his intense conversation with the officers surrounding him.

RICHIE

Stirling! Over here.

STIRLING

General Richie, sir, I have to
report...

RICHIE

No time now. Put it in writing.
Did you get a chance to observe
the coast road while you were out
there?

STIRLING

Very briefly on the way to the
rendezvous, sir.

RICHIE

Did you see any tanks or
artillery moving through?

STIRLING

No armour, sir just regular
supply vehicles.

RICHIE

Very good. That's all.

He returns to his conversation with the other officers, some
point having been proven by Stirling's information.

STIRLING finds himself invisible again.

He can't believe his luck. He glances around... then moves to withdraw before anything more can happen.

145. EXT. EIGHTH ARMY HQ. DAY.

Hurrying through the tent city, STIRLING makes his way to...

JOCK LEWES, having a mug of tea at an open-air mess table; seeing STIRLING, he throws the dregs onto the ground and returns the mug, before moving to catch up with STIRLING a few strides further on. They talk while on the move, glancing around like a couple of spies in hostile territory.

STIRLING

We're still in business, Jock.

LEWES

How do we manage that?

STIRLING

The offensive's in trouble and we're the least of their concerns.

LEWES

They'd be having less trouble if we'd made a better fist of it.

STIRLING

No point squawking about it now. Here's what we do. We take the men we've got --

LEWES

All eighteen of them --

STIRLING

We get straight back in there and mount another operation and this time, we make it count.

LEWES

What if Cairo says no?

STIRLING

They can't stop us if they don't know where we are.

146. INT. DILAPIDATED STOREHOUSE, JALO. NIGHT.

Super Long Range Desert Group, Jalo Base

By the light of a hurricane lamp, STIRLING is briefing LEWES, MAYNE and BILL FRASER. All are bearded and scruffy. They're in a place that's been captured from the Italians and severely knocked-about in the process. The windows have been blown out, and through the openings we can see the camp of the remaining SAS men.

STIRLING

Our base here in Jalo is courtesy of Brigadier Reid. He's agreed to supply us and support us and, most important of all, not to make any mention of our presence to the General Staff in Cairo. In return, I've promised we'll form three parties and knock out these airfields that threaten his advance to Agedabia.

He points out the airfields on the map.

MAYNE

No parachuting this time.

STIRLING

No, we get to ride there in comfort. You know what's at stake. It's not just the future of the SAS. It could be the tide of the whole war.

147. EXT. SIRTE AIRFIELD. NIGHT.

With DAVID STIRLING and JIMMY BROUGH, a party of two; STIRLING in a depression in the desert with an open pack, prepping Lewes Bombs, as JIMMY BROUGH scrambles over the lip of the depression and slides down into place beside him.

Suddenly a plane (an Italian Caproni bomber) passes low overhead, so low that they duck down and hug the ground for fear of being hit by the undercarriage... it's like being buzzed by a UFO. They're right at the end of the runway.

In the aftermath of its passing we super: Sirte Airfield, 14th December 1941

STIRLING

Well?

JIMMY BROUGH

That was the last of them.
There's not a single plane left
on the field.

STIRLING

Well, it's definite, then. They
must have spotted the trucks.

JIMMY BROUGH

Couldn't be more to do with you
kicking that sleeping sentry up
the arse, could it?

STIRLING

I didn't kick him up the arse, I
fell over him. He was lying right
in my way.

148. EXT. DESERT WITH CAMOUFLAGED TRUCKS. NIGHT.

LEWES spreads a map on the bonnet of a (captured) Lancia truck.
JIM ALMONDS helps him to anchor it down. The others (including
JIMMIE STORIE, BOB BENNETT and SGT LILLEY) gather around.

JIM ALMONDS

What are we looking for?

LEWES

We can't put bombs on planes that
aren't there. We'll go for a
backup target.

BOB BENNETT

There's no other airfield for
miles.

LEWES

There's this, look. At Mersa
Brega.

JIM ALMONDS

That's just a roadhouse.

LEWES

Which makes it a stopover point
for supply trucks and a meeting
place for officers. We can do
some damage, maybe even shanghai
a few generals.

JIMMY STORIE

What about the planes?

LEWES starts rolling the map.

LEWES

By the way they were heading, I reckon they were moving them all to Tamit for safety. And you know what's at Tamit.

149. EXT. TAMIT AIRFIELD PERIMETER. NIGHT.

Moving in the darkness, MAYNE and his party of eight (including REG SEEKINGS and JOHNNY COOPER) run forward and drop to the ground. It's a cold night.

Super: Tamit Airfield, 10.30pm.

They speak in low voices.

MAYNE

You sure about this?

SEEKINGS

I can smell the aviation fuel.

MAYNE

You've got a better nose than I have.

JOHNNY COOPER runs his hand over a concrete stump in the ground.

COOPER

Paddy! This could be a runway marker!

MAYNE moves to look. He's not convinced.

MAYNE

I'd be happier with something a bit more definite...

ALL DIVE TO THE GROUND as, no more than a couple of dozen yards away, the door of a NISSEN-STYLE HUT opens and spills light out into the night as an ITALIAN AIRMAN emerges. Buzz of conversation from within, then the door is closed and the blackout is again complete.

ON THEIR FACES, as they rise from the dirt.

MAYNE

Stay where you are.

He rises and goes forward alone. The others look at each other,

bemused... what does he think he's doing?

150. EXT. BY HUT. NIGHT.

Now we can see faint chinks of light around the door and windows where the blackout isn't perfect. MAYNE approaches stealthily, machine gun at the ready.

By the wall of the hut, he stops and listens. A faint buzz of chatter, some German, some Italian. They are not singing Puccini.

MAYNE moves to the door, and...

Boots it open.

151. INT. HUT. NIGHT.

About thirty Germans and Italians, mostly pilots. They're reading, drinking, playing cards; all heads snap around to see PADDY MAYNE framed in the doorway.

Taking in the setup at a glance, MAYNE starts spraying the hut with machine gun fire.

Chaos. Mayhem. Screams, tables being upturned, men diving for cover. They've no chance.

152. EXT. DESERT. NIGHT.

SEEKINGS, COOPER and the others stare in dismay.

COOPER

Stone me. He's gone mad.

153. INT. HUT. NIGHT.

Utter, close-quarters, unmerciful carnage. MAYNE is machinegunning the last of the survivors.

Then he swings the gun up and shoots out the light before withdrawing.

154. EXT. BY HUT. NIGHT.

MAYNE backs up close to the hut, checking around him before venturing away from it, and as he does so we hear...

MAYNE

There you go, Eoin.

The alarm is being raised as he heads back to the others.

155. EXT. DESERT. NIGHT.

TRACER FIRE is ripping through the night in every direction. MAYNE reaches the waiting men, but doesn't stop.

MAYNE

Come on. Fall back.

They scramble up to follow him.

156. EXT. DESERT. NIGHT.

From a vantage point some distance from the airfield, MAYNE and the others watch the activity around the huts. Lots of headlights and opened doors breaching the blackout.

SEEKINGS

Just a small point, Paddy.
Wouldn't it have been better to
put the bombs in before we
announced ourselves?

MAYNE looks at him with scary, dead-pool eyes.

157. EXT. DESERT ROAD. NIGHT.

STIRLING is dragging a heavy branch out into the middle of the road.

He dumps it there and then crosses to join JIMMY BROUGH, in a spot screened from the road by some rocks.

JIMMY BROUGH

Rendezvous signal?

STIRLING

Better than jumping out and
finding we just flagged down the
enemy.

They settle to wait. STIRLING's pensive.

JIMMY BROUGH

It's gone eleven. I can't hear
anything. Maybe Paddy had no
better luck than we did.

STIRLING

Luck always turns. The trick is to stay in the game long enough to be there when it happens.

JIMMY BROUGH

You learned this at the Casino, did you, sir?

STIRLING

You know perfectly well that I lost my shirt on a regular basis.

Both their heads suddenly turn as a FLASH lights up the sky to the West. The sound of distant explosions is like thunder.

They rise, and see the play of lights on the horizon. STIRLING takes a step forward, his face showing a relief that he hardly dare feel.

STIRLING

Thank God for that.

158. EXT. TAMIT AIRFIELD. NIGHT.

Bullets are flying, all hell's let loose, the sky's on fire, planes are exploding.

REG SEEKINGS slaps a bomb on a Stuka and then runs on to the next. Where before they were working in darkness, they're now working against a brilliant backdrop of fire.

MAYNE has taken his pack off and is on one knee beside the last of the planes, rummaging in the bag.

REG SEEKINGS

That's it, Paddy. We're done.

MAYNE

I need just one more bomb.

REG SEEKINGS

I'm out of them.

MAYNE

I'm damned if I'm leaving the last plane in one piece.

Throwing his pack aside, he climbs into the cockpit.

REG SEEKINGS

Paddy! We've got to go!

A HUGE explosion -- fuel dump sized -- causes him to flinch down for a moment. He looks down the field.

Spectacular destruction. Burning planes. Doors blowing off bunkers as underground ammo dumps go up. Men running around in a panic, some firing wildly.

IN THE COCKPIT -- MAYNE kicks the instrument panel until it loosens and then takes hold of it and starts to rip it free with his bare hands.

BACK WITH SEEKINGS -- something hurtles from the plane beside him and lands with a crash at his feet.

It's the entire INSTRUMENT PANEL, trailing wires and dangling components.

MAYNE leaps down from the cockpit and then he and SEEKINGS head off the airfield.

More of the mayhem. More bangs.

Silhouetted against the flames, we see the entire team of SAS men come together at the edge of the airfield and fall in behind PADDY MAYNE.

159. EXT. MERSA BREGA ROADHOUSE. NIGHT.

A contrasting moment of silence and calm, an establisher of the building with a row of SUPPLY TRUCKS parked side-by-side along by it.

Super: Mersa Brega Roadhouse, Coastal Road

Without warning, several of the trucks explode in a Mexican wave.

Men come running out of the main building, some in their shirtsleeves, some with weapons.

Around the row comes the LANCIA TRUCK with LEWES and his party on board, mounted Breda and Bren guns ablaze, machineguns firing in all directions, sweeping all before them.

160. EXT. DESERT. NIGHT.

MAYNE and his men scramble over a rise, and we crane up and look beyond them to see...

FX SHOT of the entire airfield in the distance with burning planes, burning buildings, continuing fuel explosions...

161. EXT. BY DILAPIDATED STOREHOUSE, JALO. DAY.

The men swarm around a small truck as it pulls into camp with BILL FRASER and his three men on the back of it. Everyone else has scrubbed-up by now, but these men are fresh from the desert. STIRLING pushes through the crowd to be the first to FRASER.

STIRLING

Paddy's lot swept the board,
Bill. How'd it go with you?

FRASER

I regret to report to you, sir,
that owing to our limited supply
of explosives we had to leave two
of the aircraft intact. So that's
just the thirty-seven we managed
to destroy.

A deafening cheer goes up.

162. INT. DILAPIDATED STOREHOUSE, JALO. NIGHT.

Outside the storehouse, in the area of the encampment, the men are celebrating, playing drinking games, arm-wrestling, singing, and generally letting rip.

Hipflask in hand, STIRLING strolls into the part of the storehouse that is his makeshift operations room. The celebrations continue just outside the window openings.

STIRLING drops into his chair behind the map table, allowing himself to feel some satisfaction. Then...

He becomes aware that he's not alone.

Across from him, LEWES is sitting quietly in the shadows. He's not one for letting rip.

LEWES

I think we can fairly say that
the boys gave them hell.

STIRLING

I think we can fairly say that
it's just the beginning.

END OF THE FIRST PART