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The Developmental Process of Film & TV

Final Pitch Essay

*Valiant Hearts: The Great War*

*Valiant Hearts: The Great War* is a story of humanity. Through it’s intertwined perspectives, it shows how even in the darkest of hours, life and love still remain. Specifically, this story follows the lives of a people who were impacted by would later be known as The First World War. Through tragedies, horrors, and sacrifice, this narrative crafts a powerful tale of survival, that showcases the resilience of the human spirit in the face of insurmountable adversity. Though the characters may be fictional, their heart-wrenching stories illustrate the strength of the bonds we share, and the relationships that define our lives; ultimately this message still holds true, and resonates with a new generation.

This narrative encompasses almost the entirety of the the First World War, beginning shortly after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and continuing until roughly a year before the end of the war. The story’s setting is mainly France and Belgium, as well as a number of different cities and trenches across the entire Western Front. Despite being epic in scale, the storytelling is very intimate in nature, as it focuses on the lives and interactions between four individuals over the course of the war. These people are Emile, Karl, Freddie, and Anna.

The format of *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* will be six hour, to hour-and-a-half, long episodes, which will form a complete miniseries. The target audience of this miniseries will most likely be the typical HBO customer, but more specifically older males who are interested in history. Since HBO is the style this series will be modeled after, and the fact that HBO has the exact demographic this miniseries targets, this series will be pitched to HBO.

Over the course of the miniseries, the point of view will change frequently between the four protagonists as they interact with each other and try to stay alive. However, despite the perspective change, the story will be told mostly chronological order, except for the occasional flashback. Tonally, this series will follow the style and model set by HBO’s *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*. Much like these previous miniseries, the subject of war will not be glorified, and will attempt to show the realistic horrors of battle, including how this affects those who are impacted by war.

Through this unfiltered look at the grisly reality of the First World War, this miniseries will attempt to bring this history to a modern audience that is mostly unaware of its existence. The First World War is almost entirely overshadowed in history by the larger, bloodier, and more clear-cut conflict of The Second World War; in WWII, the lines and objectives were very clear: The Allies were good, and Hitler was evil. WWI was not clear-cut by any extent, and millions of lives were sacrificed for quite literally nothing. It is in this period of chaos and needless death that *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* will try to show how humanity endures.

The following are brief histories of the character’s lives before the events of the story; these would be interwoven naturally into the main story, and revealed over the course of the series.

**EMILE:** Emile is a simple, middle aged farmer in the city of Saint Mihiel, France. He was born and raised in France, but traveled around Europe in his early adulthood. After meeting the love of his life, a Dutch woman named Paulien, the two returned to France where they began a small farm in Saint Mihiel. However, during the birth of the birth of their daughter Marie, Paulien died from complications, leaving Emile alone to raise the child. Emile then spent the next 18 years caring for and raising Marie, who he considers to be the most precious person in his life. Having been raised within a Roman Catholic home, Emile has a strong devotion to God, and has dedicated his life to serving Him through his raising of Marie.

**KARL:** Karl was born in Germany in 1896, to a family of a Lutheran pastor. His family was cold and conservative, but not unloving. However, the family was too poor to afford a proper education for their children, and Karl was forced to work manual labor odd-jobs to support his family. By the time he 16, Karl left home to find work, eventually arriving at Emile’s farm. Karl worked for Emile as a farmhand for nearly 2 years, and in that time, he fell in love with Emile’s daughter Marie. The two slowly began a relationship, and married in 1913. Marie soon gave birth to a son, who they named Victor. Karl has always been on good terms with Emile, who openly accepted Karl into his family despite their different cultures. By the time war has broken out in 1914, the entire family resides at Emile’s farm in Saint Mihiel.

**FREDDIE:** Freddie is an African American man of Creole descent who born in New Orleans, Louisiana. Having been born into a poor family, Freddie worked many different manual labor jobs around the deep South, until he began working at the port of New Orleans. During that time, Freddie secretly began a relationship with the white daughter, named Margaret, of the wealthy man who owned the company he worked for. Deciding to flee persecution in the US, Freddie and Margaret secretly boarded a cargo ship to Paris where they could be married. The two were happy and prosperous, until war was declared across Europe. During the early weeks of the war, German planes began bombing Paris. It was during one of these raids that Margaret was killed. Having lost the love of his life, Freddie vowed revenge against the Germans and enlisted as a volunteer in the French Army. He later learned that the man responsible for the raid that killed his wife was a German commander named Baron Von Dorf. After discovering this, Freddie became determined to find Von Dorf and exact revenge.

**ANNA:** Anna was born in Ypres, Belgium in 1891 to an aristocratic family. Her father Paul is a pioneering Belgian scientist who specializes in engineering. In early 1914, her father sent to school in Paris so she could study to become a nurse. He had been wanted to be a nurse all her life, and took great joy from helping others. Anna always sought out to learn as much as she could, and she was overjoyed to finally learn professionally in Paris. However, after the outbreak of war and the German occupation of Belgium, Anna decided to leave school and return home to be with her family. Unafraid and bold, Anna took car and drove herself from Paris to Belgium. In Ypres, she discovered that her father had been kidnapped and taken prisoner by Baron Von Dorf who was forcing Paul to enhance the German war machine. Determined to rescue her father and use her skills to help the wounded, Anna set out for the front, where she tend to as many wounded as she could.

The following is a layout of the story of the entire series as broken down into six episodes.

**Episode 1 – “*Honor*”**

The first episode will begin with a black screen, as a quote slowly fades in. The quote will read: “*I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine. It is only those who have never fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, for vengeance, for desolation. War is hell. – General William T. Sherman*.” The quote will fade away as a steady stream of black and white newsreels will play, showing the world as it was in 1914. A somber voice over will explain how the world became engaged in a World War as the newsreels depict the scene. Once the voice over has finished explaining how the war began, the newsreel will fade back to black. The sounds of a simple village will be heard as the screen will read “*Saint Mihiel, France – August 1st, 1914*.” The scene opens on Emile’s farm, showcasing the mundane lives of its residents: Emile, Marie, Karl, and young Victor. The family goes about it’s day in peace, working, farming, and preparing for the upcoming Autumn. The tranquility will be interrupted by the arrival of two fully dressed, ornate, French military officers who have come to deport Karl because of his German citizenship. The family is devastated by this demand, and Marie begs with the officers to let her husband free. Emile has to silently hold her back as Karl is taken away. Several days later, as the family is going about its regular duties, a mail currier arrives and drops a letter off at the farm. Emile reads the letter silently and stone-faced, as he sees that is a call to serve for all Frenchmen. He is terrified and frightened of horrors that might await him on the battlefield, but a loyal citizen of France, he dutifully obliges. Before he leaves, he kisses Marie and hugs his grandson. He asks her to please write, and tells her to be strong for Victor. Head held high and spirit strong, Emile heads into the center of town to report for enlistment. At the recruitment center, Emile is given a physical evaluation and asked is he has ever served before. He replies that he has not, and the doctor asks him why he never volunteered. Emile explains that when his wife died, he took on the responsibility of raising his daughter and tending to the farm. The officer, satisfied with Emile’s evaluation and story, sends him to receive basic training. At the training camp, many weeks go by and Emile becomes slowly learns how to fight. During his training, Emile meets a young farm boy named Pierre, who gladly volunteered to serve his country. Emile and Pierre soon strike up a friendship. Throughout the entire training process, the officers keep reminding the soldiers that they are doing a great honor, and that they are fighting to defeat the enemies of France. French nationalism is espoused by every high ranking officer, and Emile is assigned to carry the flag into combat. Once the training is complete, Emile’s unit practices their formations and are deemed ready to serve at the front. All the soldiers are then sent by train to Paris to receive their assignments. On the train, as Pierre naps next to him, Emile writes a letter to Marie. He tells about her how his training has gone, and expresses his fear towards going to the front. As he finishes his letter, the train arrives in Paris, and Emile gives the letter to a postman nearby. As Emile is waiting in the station to be assigned, he sees a black solider being harassed by white soldiers. Emile approaches the gang of hooligan soldiers and tells them that their unit is leaving, the men head out. Emile helps the black solider up, and he introduces himself as Freddie, an African American soldier. The two briefly talk, but the bell signaling their departure rings. The two men shake hands and wish each other luck. Pierre meets up with Emile, and they leave. The unit is then sent to engage the 71st German division commanded by Baron Von Dorf. They arrange in proper formation, with Emile carrying the flag, and charge the enemy. At first, the German assault is only mortars and shells, but once the advancing French Army runs to the bottom of a hill, the Germans open fire with machine guns. This absolutely decimates the French troops, but they keep advancing forward. Emile runs side by side with Pierre, who is shot in the head. Shocked and horrified, but unsure of what to do, Emile continues running forward until he is shot in the shoulder. He collapses from the wound, but is still alive. The scene becomes silent as the smoke clears and the true devastation can be seen across the battlefield. The German troops go through the French dead to capture any survivors. Two German soldiers pick up Emile after they see he is breathing. They carry him behind their lines. As they do, the camera pans to reveal Karl in a German uniform looking horrified, and staring at his father-in-law being taken away. He stands there, frozen, but then rushes off-screen.

**Episode 2 – “*Reunited*”**

The second episode will begin with the voiceover explaining the first battles of the war, and how the German lines were pushed back from France back into Belgium; this will be accompanied by graphics depicting the movements. From there the voice will explain how the “race to the sea” created a stalemate that forced troops to dig in, and begin the system of trench warfare. The scene opens on a German camp with words across the bottom of the screen that read: “*German Camp, Neuve-Chapelle, France – March 10th, 1915*.*”* The camp is frozen over, and the troops gather together to stay warm. They drink and sing songs to keep spirits high. The commanding officer, Baron Von Dorf orders the cook to bring his him and his men more food. The cook is revealed to be Emile, who has been taken prisoner by the German forces. As he prepares the officers’ meal, Karl sneaks into the kitchen. Once Emile sees his son-in-law’s face he hugs his tightly and smiles sadly. The two men talk about how they have been, and Karl apologizes for not approaching sooner. He explains that his unit was sent away after Emile’s first battle and are now regrouping with Von Dorf. Karl asks Emile if he has heard from Marie, and he tells him that he has. He hands Karl a letter Marie sent to him. The scene changes to Saint Mihiel, as Marie’s letter is heard and plays out in real time. The letter explains how the German troops occupying Saint Mihiel have treated the citizens, and that Marie hopes that they are treating Emile well. Once the letter is complete, Karl is longs to be home, but is called away by Von Dorf. Karl and Emile say goodbye, and Karl rushes off. A few minutes after he leaves, as Emile is making the meal, the camp suddenly erupts in a flurry of mortar fire. The scene cuts quickly to the British Army firing shells upon the camp, and then to Emile trying to find cover in the German kitchen. The shells destroy the camp, but Karl and Von Dorf are able to escape. A shell lands on top of the kitchen, destroying the roof, and it starts to collapse on Emile. Just as it is coming down, Emile is able to take cover under one of the tables that the Germans had set up. Soon, the shelling stops, and Emile lays in the rubble of the kitchen; unconscious but unharmed. The scene starts as black, then turns fuzzy as Emile slowly gains consciousness. He hears a terrible ringing in hi ears, but he also feels a gentle lick on his face. He opens his eyes to see a German medical dog from the camp, who’s nametag reads “Walt,” licking his face and trying to pull him out. Emile is able to get up and walk out of the rubble with the assistance of Walt. As he exits, he sees the devastation the mortars have had on the camp; effectively leveling it the ground. Having been separated from the German Army, Emile and Walt roam the scarred battlefield trying to find Karl. As they work their way around no-mans-land they see corpses of both German and French troops scattered across the ground. Emile desperately searches for his son-in-law, but concludes that he needs to find the French troops instead. As they walk across the battlefield, it begins to rain, turning the ground to slippery mud. As they walk down a hill, the ground slips beneath their feet, sending them sliding into a wall of barbed wire. Emile is able to wiggle his way free, but Walt becomes stuck. Unwilling to leave the poor animal who saved his life, Emile tries to free Walt but keeps getting cut himself. He calls out, inadvertently alerting a few nearby German soldiers. Emile hears them calling out in German, but just as they are about to catch them, a French solider arrives and cuts both Emile and Walt free. In the confusion, Emile doesn’t recognize the soldier, soon comes to realize that the man who saved them is Freddie from the train station. Freddie, who himself has been separated from his unit, takes Emile and Walt to a safe area where they rest. Later that evening Emile and Freddie talk around a small fire about how they ended up in the war. Emile briefly tells Freddie that he was drafted, but Emile wonders how an African American man ended up fighting for the French. Freddie explains to him about his wife, how they left America to be married, and how she was killed in a German air raid. He tells Emile that volunteered in the French Army because he found out that a German commander named Baron Von Dorf lead the assault, and that he had hoped to find him during the war to exact his revenge. Emile tells him that he is also hunting Von Dorf to find Karl, and the two decide to track down the Baron’s unit together. Emile mentions to Freddie that he overhead the soldiers talking about heading to Ypres next, and they decide to head there as soon as they can; but first, they choose to rest. The camera zooms out to see the full wreckage of the battlefield and the screen fades to black.

**Episode 3 – “*Lost*”**

The third episode begins with the voiceover explaining how the German troops began the war using the Schlieffen plan. The voiceover will talk about how the invasion of Belgium brought England into the war, and how the Germans where able to nearly surround Paris, except for the mobilization of French citizens who drove soldiers to the front via taxis. The screen will then fade to black and the sounds of the hustle and bustle of a city can be heard. The scene will fade in, and across the bottom of the screen the words will read: “*Paris, France – September 6th, 1914*.” This episode opens months before the previously episode, and focuses on a Belgian student named Anna. Anna, who is training to be a nurse, will begin the episode by attending medical classes. During one of the classes, Anna strikes up a conversation with one of her professors about the war, where she mentions that she is Belgian. She also talks about how her father sent her to Paris to study before the war broke out. She returns to her apartment where she receives a letter from her father. He writes that things are getting worse in Belgium since the war, and asks her not to come home. Anna being impatient and headstrong finds a French taxi driver who is fixing his car to head to the front. The driver ultimately abandons the taxi, and Anna is able to fix it. She drives the taxi, and soldiers, to the front. Once she arrives there, she decides to use her skills to help the wounded soldiers. She stays at the front for seven months, helping the wounded and sick. She then overhears one of the French commanders talking about the use of mustard gas in Ypres, Belgium, her hometown. Anna decides she has to return home and heads to Ypres. When she arrives, she goes to her old home where she finds her father kidnapped. She asks one of her neighbors, who tells her that her father was taken by a man named Baron Von Dorf because her father was an engineer who could help the German war effort. As she searches Ypres for Von Dorf and her father, she comes across Emile and Freddie also searching for Von Dorf. This is now the current time from the previous episode. Destiny brought them together, and they decide to travel as one. They are able to discover from French soldiers that Von Dorf and his unit are traveling via zeppelin across the front towards Reims, France. The group follows the trail of the zeppelin to Reims, where they see that it is shot down by enemy mortar shells. Inside the zeppelin, Von Dorf, Anna’s father Paul, and Karl hang on as the zeppelin begins to fall from the sky. Karl is able to grab the steering level and pull the zeppelin up, but it is not enough to prevent it from crashing. Anna, Emile, and Freddie follow the zeppelin as it crashes and search the wreckage. Von Dorf is able to escape with Paul, but Karl is left at the crash site, injured. Emile rushes up to his son-in-law to embrace him, but as he does, French soldiers arrive and capture them all. Karl is taken prisoner by the French soldiers and sent away to a prison camp. Emile pushes against the soldiers to keep Karl with him, but ultimately Karl is sent away. Freddie and Emile are sent back to the French Army, and Anna is assigned to the prison camp to tend to sick and wounded there. Anna tells Emile that she will watch after Karl, and he tells her how grateful he is. The screen fades to black and soon reads “*Verdun, France – February 21st, 1917*.” Time has passes since the zeppelin crash, and Freddie and Emile are stationed at Verdun. Emile sits on his cot and writes to Marie. He tells her about Karl, and how the war has been so far. He finishes his letter and gives it to an officer just as his commander assigns him and Freddie a special mission. The goal is to infiltrate a German base lead by Baron Von Dorf in order to rescue Anna’s father, so as to gather intelligence on the German weapons. Freddie and Emile are sent with a squad of French soldiers and Walt into the fort, known as Fort Douaumont. They are able to infiltrate the fort by capturing a gun turret and sneaking inside. Within the base, they discover plans for more devices and eventually find Paul held in a cell. Freddie is able to break the cell door using dynamite, but this alerts nearby troops. In an attempt to escape, Freddie throws more dynamite, which inadvertently destroys a cache of dynamite. The entire for explodes, and the fate of characters are unknown. Before the episode ends, Emile is able to crawl out of the wreckage. He stands and stares at the ruins of the base, covered in soot, dirt, and blood. He sits down, begins to weep for his fallen comrades and begins to head back to the French base.

**Episode 4 – “*Buried*”**

The fourth episode begins with the voiceover explaining how during trench warfare, the opposing sides would also dig long, complicated systems of underground tunnels in order to sneak past the enemy. The voiceover will also talk about the extra dangers that cave-ins and other issues posed in underground warfare. The screen will then fade to black as the sounds of pickaxes and shovels will be heard. The words at the bottom of the screen read: “*Verdun, France* – *February 22nd,1917*.” The scene will open up on Emile, who is still reeling from the loss of Freddie. He writes a letter to Marie and explains how Freddie’s death has devastated him more than he thought possible. “The loss of my good friend has shaken me to my core,” he writes. He also tells her that Karl is healing fast, and that he plans to visit him on his next leave. The scene is underground in a lantern lit tunnel, and shot in a way that emphasizes the cramped space and claustrophobic environment; the mood should convey that these men are essentially trapped underground. As Emile finishes his letter, his commanding officer arrives and assigns him to rescue a solider who has fallen into the bottom of a tunnel. Emile picks up a shovel, rope, and a lantern and heads into the darkness. The scene then opens onto a surreal vision of a beautiful white woman veiled by a wedding dress. The scene moves in slow motion as she smiles. The woman then slowly fades away as the sounds of bombs are heard, and the scene morphs into a grotesque, chaotic frenzy of debris, blood, and rubble. The camera slowly pans into a dainty pale hand laying among the wreckage. Ringing in the background grows louder and louder until it reaches a fever pitch, and suddenly cuts to silent blackness. The scene slowly fades in to reveal the wreckage of Fort Douaumont; the words onscreen read: “*Fort Douaumont*, *Verdun, France – February 22nd, 1917*.” The camera zooms in as Walt licks Freddie’s face. Walt then drags Freddie out of wreckage. This wakes up Freddie, and he sees that Walt has also freed Paul. The two, miraculously alive, gather their bearings and look for a way out. Back in the tunnels, Emile searches for the lost soldier. He goes down tunnel after tunnel, and only finds dead ends and dead men. Finally, after passing through a pack of rats eating away a corpse, Emile hears the man’s weak cries coming from down a hole. Emile ties himself to the rope, and anchors himself on a nearby rock formation. He slowly lowers himself into the hole and sees the broken man’s shattered legs and chest. He struggles to breath, and Emile comforts him as he dies. In the ruins of the fort, Freddie, Paul, and Walt discover that hidden among the wreckage is a prototype of a weapon Paul had been working on for the Germans: an early version of the modern tank. Paul, realizing that this could be their way of escape is able to fix the prototype and get it started. They get into the tank and fire the cannon towards a pile of rubble blocking their exit. As they fire, the scene cuts to Emile picking up the dead man’s dog tags and burying him. He creates a small grave, and prepares to return to the surface. As he does, and explosion rocks the caverns, collapsing the tunnel that Emile came from, forcing him to go the opposite direction and start digging his way out. He digs for some time, and is able to find his way into a tunnel. He follows the tunnel into a cave underground. In this cave he sees a German soldier hanging by his boot upside down begging for help. Emile, seeing the man’s fear and pain, cuts him free. The German solider thanks him and introduces himself as Klaus. Emile and Klaus decide to work together to escape the tunnel. Back as the fort, the cannon shot destroys the rubble and clears a path for the men to escape. They start to drive the tank out of the area when Freddie sees Von Dorf and his unit. Freddie tells Paul to take the tank back to the French line, and that he has to deal with Von Dorf. Freddie leaves the tank and starts to sneak into the German encampment. In the cave, Emile and Klaus find their way through to an exit, as Emile prepares to leave towards the French tunnels, two German soldiers arrive who had been looking for Klaus. They point their rifles at Emile, but Klaus stops them and orders them to let Emile go free since he save his life. Emile thanks Klaus and returns to the French tunnels. He goes to his commanding officers and presents the dead man’s dog tags. They thank Emile and ask him to bring a cart of supplies to soldiers working further down in the tunnels. Emile heads to retrieve the cart. At the German camp, Freddie sneaks past multiple guards and into Von Dorf’s command room. He searches for the Baron, pistol drawn, but only finds more plans for weapons. Trying to salvage something from his rouge mission, Freddie grabs the plans and sneaks out. A he does, the Baron enters the room and sees Freddie. In the tunnels, Emile brings the cart to the soldiers who are setting up rigs. Emile asks them what they are doing, and they reveal that they are planting dynamite under the German tunnels; the cart Emile brought was full of dynamite. Emile, horrified and sickened, leaves immediately, wanting no part in what considers to be a cowardly and cruel act. The fellow soldiers dismiss him and plant the explosives. As they are about to detonate, the camera pans up through the ground and shows the German tunnel. In the tunnels, the soldiers relax and play cards. One of the soldiers who enters the room just before the explosives detonate is Klaus. The French press the lever, and the entire German tunnel system collapses, burying the men alive. Back in Von Dorf’s command center, Freddie shoots at Von Dorf and misses. Von Dorf returns with rapid fire and hits him in the arm. Freddie, out of pure rage attacks Von Dorf and tackles him to the ground. He begins savagely beating the Baron and pulls his gun out to end him. Tears stream down his face as he prepares to exact his revenge. He points the gun at the Baron’s head and hesitates. Von Dorf, bloody, beaten, and unconscious, stares at Freddie through unseeing eyes, but Freddie cannot bring himself to kill this man; he realizes that doing so will not bring back his wife. He slowly gets up, punches Von Dorf for good measure and spits on him. Freddie wipes away tears, and angrily leaves with the plans. The camera pans to see Von Dorf laying on the ground; a pathetic site. Back at the French base, Emile looks at the awards that were given to him because of the tunnel mission. He throws them on the ground and burns them. He sits silently and smokes a dirty cigarette, clearly hating his role in the sneak attack. Emile continues to sit on the ground, but suddenly hears the sound of a machine and cheering. Emile looks up to see Paul in the prototype tank flying the French flag. Emile asks Paul what happened to Freddie. Just then, Freddie arrives at the base with the plans. The two friends embrace and celebrate Freddie and Paul’s safe return. Emile writes Anna a letter saying that her father is safe. The letter is read by Emile in a voiceover as the scene of Anna and her father’s reunion plays out at the camp. Anna and her father embrace. Emile arrives to congratulate them, and he asks her how Karl is. Anna, who had been acting morose since despite the happy situation, tearfully tells Emile that Karl was killed in an attempted prisoner escape. She then hands him Karl’s dog tag. Emile suddenly hears a loud ringing, and everything else goes quiet. The camera shakes as Emile collapses to the ground and bitterly weeps. The scene then fades to black.

**Episode 5 – “*Homecoming*”**

The fifth episode begins with the voiceover explaining how the war was coming in early 1917. The voiceover will talk about the devastation and destruction the war had caused across the Western front, as well as how the winter cold slowed troops advances. The screen will then fade to black as the sounds of rocks being smashed and general work camp noises. The scene will fade into the French POW camp where Karl is being held. Across the bottom of the screen it will read: “*French POW Camp, Reims, France – February 22nd, 1917* *(2 days ago).”* Karl sits in the prisoner barracks and reads a letter he has received from Marie. The letter describes how life in Saint Mihiel has become harsh since the German occupation; food is scarce, the troops abuse the citizens, and Victor has fallen gravely ill. Marie’s letter is read in voiceover as the scene plays out on screen. After reading the letter from his wife, Karl decides he has to escape. Later that evening, Karl overhears fellow German prisoners discussing a plan of escape in German. Karl, being fluent, joins in the conversation and plots to escape that night. Later, Karl is able to steal a pair of wire clippers. He and the rest of the other would be escapees prepare by the fence. Karl cuts the wire and everyone makes a mad dash to escape. The French overseers shine a spotlight on the escaping Germans, but Karl and the others run forward regardless. French troops follow the escapees into the woods, and begin shooting at them. In the chaos, Karl is shot in the leg. He manages to evade the French troops and sneak into an open field. Karl hides behind the bushes and plants, and is able to cross the field. He pulls himself into a tree just as the French troops run past him. Karl hides in the tree until the search party passes, and climbs from the branches of the tree into the open window of an abandoned church. In the church, Karl finds one of his fellow escaped German soldiers bleeding out after having been shot in the chest. Realizing that this may his chance to escape, Karl switches dog tags with the dying man. The soldier soon dies, and Karl flees the church. As Karl escapes, French troops storm the church and find the dead man with Karl’s dog tags. Karl, having successfully escaped, limps into the forest towards Saint Mihiel. The scene then fades to the present as the screen reads: “*Verdun, France* – *February 24th,1917*.” Emile is bedridden with grief after learning of the “death“ of Karl, and asks Anna to go to Saint Mihiel and tell Marie in person. Freddie comforts his friend, and Anna agrees to tell Marie. She then asks Freddie to watch over Emile as she leaves; Freddie, of course, says he will. The camera pans to Emile as he has flashes of memory of Karl, Marie, and Victor as a happy family. Emile weeps silently. The scene then cuts to snowy woods, and the screen reads: “*Vaubecourt, France – February 25th, 1917*.” Karl, who has been on the road alone for three days with no food or water, stumbles through the woods. The camera cuts to his leg, where it shows that he has been able to fashion a makeshift tourniquet to stop the bleeding from his bullet wound. As he walks through the woods, Karl hears the cry of a little girl. Deciding that he has to help her, Karl rushes to the sound and finds the girl surrounded by a pack of angry, stray dogs. Karl grabs some heavy sticks on the ground and throws them at the dogs; he yells and acts terrifying, so the dogs whimper away. The girl rushes over to thank Karl, but he nearly passes out from exhaustion and hunger. The girl, being grateful to Karl, brings him to her family’s cabin nearby, where she explains how he saved her. The girl’s mother is extremely grateful to Karl, and she takes him into her home. Later that evening, Karl awakens in fresh clothes, with his wounds properly dressed, and a hot meal on the table. Karl is frightened and hesitant at first, but rapidly accepts the family’s kindness. The woman tells Karl that her name is Chantal, and her daughter’s name is Esmé. Chantal thanks Karl for saving her daughter and asks him where is he trying to go. Karl tells them his story, and how he is trying to return home to Saint Mihiel. Chantal tells Karl that Saint Mihiel is further down and points him in the right direction. She then offers Karl to stay the night and warm up. Karl, eager to head home but in no shape to travel agrees. However, that evening, as Karl is preparing to sleep, two French officers knock on the door and ask Chantal if they have seen an escaped German prisoner. Chantal and Esmé distract the guards as Karl quickly heads out into the woods again. As he leaves, he looks back at Esmé and sees her smiling. Karl smiles back, and leaves. The next morning, as he is walking down the path towards Saint Mihiel, he hears the sound of car tires coming down the path. He limps to find a hiding spot, but soon hears a familiar voice call his name. He turns around to see Anna and Walt driving towards Saint Mihiel. Anna is overjoyed to see Karl, takes him down the road to Saint Mihiel. As they enter the city, Karl is overjoyed and begins to weep tears of joy, as he is finally so close to home. However, immediately upon entering the city they are captured by the German troops who still held Saint Mihiel. Karl is able to convince the soldiers to not shoot, and is instead taken to the German commander to interrogates Karl and Anna. The scene is tense and dimly lit, emphasizing the power the German commander has over their fates. The commander decides that he needs every body he can get, and preps Karl to return to the front, and stations Anna in the Saint Mihiel infirmary. As Karl is prepped with new gear to return to the front, a French mortar assault destroys the German occupied base. Anna and Karl are separated as she tends to the wounded and he makes a break for Emile’s farm. Walt follows Karl as they head towards the farm. Anna watches Karl and Walt leave and silently smiles as she returns to work.

**Episode 6 – “*Glory*”**

The sixth episode begins with the voiceover explaining how the French battle strategy of attrition in 1917 was essentially to run suicide missions and throw as many men at the enemy in order to overwhelm them. The voiceover will talk about how thousands were slaughtered for essentially no gains at all. The scene will then fade to black as the frenzied and chaotic sounds of a battle are heard. The scene opens on a bloody battle as the words across the bottom of the screen read: “*Nivelle, France – February 26th, 1917*.” Emile is still sick after he learned of Karl’s “death” and has been severely traumatized and depressed since then. Freddie has been sent to another unit and Emile’s regiment have been sent to reclaim part of the city of Nivelle. However, many soldiers are weak with hunger, disease, or injury. The fully regaled French officers however, do not care for the plight of the soldiers and demand that they push forward with an assault. One officer approaches the sick Emile and demands that he find 10 men who can fight. Emile retorts by saying that everyman is either sick or wounded and cannot properly fight. The officer dismisses his claims and demands that Emile pick 10 sick men then. Emile horrified, but loyal, follows the commander’s orders and puts together a unit of 10 men who are all wounded and sick. Back in Saint Mihiel, Karl and Walt rush through the city towards Emile’s farm. As they run, they avoid mortars and mustard gas being laid upon the city. They run to the top of a hill where they look down on the farm. To his absolute horror, Karl sees a mustard gas shell hit the farm and spread the poisonous fumes across the entire land. Karl, who was lucky enough to have received a gas mask at the German base, rushes into the farm to try and find his family. He shoves his way through the broken remains of his home and searches desperately for a sign. As he makes his way through the shattered wood and debris, Karl hears a faint voice calling out; it’s Victor calling for help. Karl hears his son’s calls, and breaks his way through a weak wall. He sees Victor wearing a gas mask and Marie huddled on the floor. Karl screams in devastation and tries to pull Marie out of the deadly gas. In desperation, he takes off his own mask and places it on her face. Karl drags his wife towards the exit as the toxic fumes burn his lungs and eyes. He struggles with each laborious, but soon makes his way towards the farm door. With his last amount of strength, Karl shoves the door open and throws Marie and Victor out of the gas. As he starts to lose consciousness, Karl sees Marie begin to move, and he succumbs to the gas. Back in Nivelle, Emile and his ragtag unit push forward with the assault. The officers stand behind the soldiers and scream to move forward. The unit presses on, and with each movement, the men are mercilessly picked off one-by-one. The assault is a suicidal massacre with blood, body parts, and mud flying in every direction. The only cover Emile and his remaining men can find in behind mountains of rotting corpses. The men are terrified to die, but the officers scream to push forward. The officer in front of Emile then pulls out his pistol and bellows that any man who doesn’t move forward is a coward and a traitor and will be shot on sight. Emile looks at his men and sees the fear within their eyes. He sees a young boy, no older than twenty, with a bloody face and broken leg standing near the front of the line. The boy looks between the officer and the machine guns and weeps bitterly; he knows that will die, be it from one side or the other. The boy sees his fate and is terrified. Emile sees the frightened child, and in an act of pure desperation, hits the officer over the head with his shovel to make him stop. The officer crimples from the blow, and Emile sees the steady, scarlet trickle of blood pooling around the man’s head. Emile, looks around at the other soldiers, and falls to the ground covering his mouth with his hand, realizing what he has done. The other soldiers look back at Emile, and realize that their lives have been spared another day. The sound cuts out, and the scene fades to Emile in a jail cell awaiting a court marshal. He looks up through the window bars and to the sunlight streaming through. He then lowers his head, and accepts his fate. Back in Saint Mihiel, Walt runs into the gassed farm and pulls the unconscious Karl next to Marie and Victor, who are both now awake. Marie tends to Karl and tries to awaken him, but has no luck. Walt then runs from the farm to the remnants of the German base, now under French control, to find Anna. He barks like mad at her, and soon brings her to Karl. Anna arrives and begins treating Karl, but determines that he needs to go to a proper infirmary. Along with Walt, Marie, and Victor, Anna loads Karl into her car and drives him to the base. They arrive at the infirmary and try to wake Karl. He slightly opens his eyes and sees Anna, Marie, and Victor around him. His vision is blurry, but he can see them. The sound is muted and Karl closes his eyes as the screen goes dark. The black screen then slowly fades in as the sounds of a medical office are heard. Karl slowly opens his eyes, and sees Marie, Victor, and Anna around his bed. Marie and Victor embrace him, and weep tears of joy. Karl, so full of happiness and joy cries with his family. He thanks Anna saving his life, and Walt happily jumps on his lap. Karl hugs the dog lovingly and thanks him too. The family is reunited and happy. Just then a currier arrives at the infirmary and asks for Marie. He then hands her a letter. As the letter is about to be read, the scene changes to Emile in the jail cell. The music is a light and somber piano that plays under the rest of the episode; it is powerful and heartfelt. A guard calls for Emile and leads him out into a courtyard. The sun is just rising, and it is a peaceful and tranquil morning. The guards slowly walk with Emile out into a field as the voice of Emile reads the letter in voiceover. The letter reads: “Dearest Marie, as the war ends for me I have no regrets. I have seen too much horror. I hope fate has been more merciful to you. Our time on Earth is brief, and mine has been filled with so much joy, that I can only be thankful for how much I have been blessed. Most specially for the wonder you brought into my life. This letter is my last. I’ve been found guilty of a military court for the death of an officer. It was not my intention to kill him. War makes men mad. Though I failed Karl, I know my sacrifice has not been in vain. I fought for my country and my liberty, my honor is assured. Since it is the will of God to separate us on Earth, I hope we’ll meet again in heaven. Keep me in your prayers. Your loving papa. Always.” Throughout the letter being read, the scene cuts between Emile walking through the field towards an execution post, and scenes of joy between all of the characters. As he walks towards the post, Emile passes Freddie, who sadly but honorably salutes his friend as he passes. Emile sees the tears streaming down Freddie’s face. As Emile grows closer and closer to the post, he sees visions of the people in his life; first Walt and Anna, then his wife, and finally Karl, Marie, and Victor. Emile is tied to the post and blinded before the letter ends. As the letter reaches the final sentence, the soldiers take aim. Once Emile says “Always,” the screen goes black and the sounds of a firing squad are heard. The final scene of the series is of Marie, Karl, and Victor standing by Emile’s grave in a massive cemetery filled with wooden crosses. The family stands at the grave as the sun sets, and the screen slowly fades to black.