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THE SACRIFICE

By

MILLER CALDWELL

FADE IN:

EXT 1918 LAVENTIE TRENCH 23RD. APRIL DAY

Mist rolls over the resting Seaforth Highlanders in the Laventie Trench where letters are being read, tea drunk from tin mugs and Sergeant RUARI GRANT (32) passes by giving words of encouragement. He stops briefly beside a private holding three letters.

SERGEANT GRANT

What, more letters for you?

PRIVATE REID

Aye Sarge. 'Am a loved man.

A gentle roar greets Private Reid's comment.

SERGEANT GRANT

Easy lads. The Hun's got big ears.

Sergeant Grant proceeds along the trench. He leaves the trench and walks down the mound to a well trodden pathway. The mist lifts enough for him to see a column of men marching slowly along this flattened ground. They look downtrodden. Some wear bandages on their heads and have an arm held out and on the shoulder of the man in front. He does not seem to recognise them at first. He approaches the column. They are German prisoners of war. Sergeant Grant walks slowly up the road and looks at the dejected men. As he trawls his eyes along the column, he stops and focusses on one man.

SERGEANT GRANT (CONT'D)

Mattias? Mattias Baur?

The German soldier looks up. For a moment he is confused. Then a smile breaks out.

MATTIAS BAUR

Ruari! Oh Ruari you are still alive!

SERGEANT GRANT

And you are too Mattias. Wonderful.

The men embrace warmly.

MATTIAS BAUR  
For me, no more war. I will  
survive now!

SERGEANT GRANT  
I hope to make it too Mattias.  
Then we can work together again.

MATTIAS BAUR  
If only we can. If only.

A Major of the Cameronians looks sternly at the verbal engagement. He orders one of his lieutenants to arrest Ruari. The officer approaches Ruari, draws his hand gun and pulls him back by his collar.

LIEUTENANT  
You are under arrest.

SERGEANT GRANT  
Get off me. I am a Seaforth  
Highlander.

MATTIAS BAUR  
It'z true. Hees a good man, my  
friend. Let him go.

The Lieutenant pushes Matthias Baur forward.

LIEUTENANT  
Keep moving. Raus!

He leads Sergeant Grant away from the Germans at the point of his pistol.

INT NEUVE CHAPPELL BRITISH BARRACKS COURT MARTIAL HALL DAY

Sergeant Grant is seated in front of a table. In front of him raised on a dais is a long table with the Coat of Arms of Neuve Chappelle on the wall behind. A military policeman stands beside Ruari. An orderly opens the door to the Court Martial.

ORDERLY  
Court Martial Rise!

Brigadier SCOTT enters along with monocled Major RIMMER and Captain GARRETT. They take their seats. Prosecutor Captain ARMSTRONG is already at his desk.

BRIGADIER SCOTT  
Sergeant Grant. Do you realize  
the seriousness of the charge  
which you face? That of  
fraternizing with the enemy?

SERGEANT GRANT

I am of sound mind.

BRIGADIER SCOTT

I did not question your sanity. I ask if you realize that fraternizing, if found guilty, requires this court to pronounce the death penalty.

There is a moments silence.

BRIGADIER SCOTT (CONT'D)

Very well, the case against Sergeant Grant please. Captain Armstrong.

Prosecuting Captain Armstrong rises with a brown folder which he opens. He reads from it.

CAPTAIN ARMSTRONG

On 23rd April 1918 at 11.35 alongside the trench at Laventie, Sergeant Ruari Grant was seen speaking to Mattias Baur, an enemy soldier. When arrested Sergeant Buar did not deny speaking to Matthias Baur.

Captain Armstrong then sneers as he speaks.

CAPTAIN ARMSTRONG (CONT'D)

He greeted him like an old long lost friend. The effect of this on his men in the trench can not be underestimated. He was fraternizing with the enemy. That is the case against the accused.

Captain Armstrong takes his place at his table once more.

BRIGADIER SCOTT

You have heard Captain Armstrong's evidence. Do you have anything to say?

Sergeant Grant rises to speak.

SERGEANT GRANT

The dyes used in the printing trade at home come from Germany. Between 1910 and 1914 I went to Germany to secure printing dyes from the manufacturer at Dusseldorf. I went twice a year. That's how I learned to speak German.

(MORE)

SERGEANT GRANT (CONT'D)

I stayed with the Baur family for two nights each time and got to know their family very well. That all came to an end in 1914. I had not seen Matthias Baur since then.

BRIGADIER SCOTT

And when you saw him, what did you tell him?

Ruari sighs.

SERGEANT GRANT

What do you expect...Sir. After all I had not seen a good friend for almost five years. For both of us to have survived thus far in this stalemate war made the encounter all the more unexpected and enjoyable. We spoke of the good times.

MAJOR RIMMER

Did it ever cross your mind that you were acting out of order?

SERGEANT GRANT

And deny my friendship with him? No. No I did what was right in my own eyes.

There is a pause.

BRIGADIER SCOTT

Have you anything else to say?

SERGEANT GRANT

I have done no harm and my conscience is clear.

BRIGADIER SCOTT

I wish I could sleep as soundly as you seem to be able to do.

The Brigadier turns to Captain Garrett and nods then to Major Rimmer and nods.

BRIGADIER SCOTT (CONT'D)

Very well, we shall adjourn for twenty minutes to consider our verdicts.

ORDERLY

Court martial rise!

All rise as the officers leave the court room.

INT COURT MARTIAL HALL LATER DAY

ORDERLY  
Court Martial Rise!

Brigadier Scott closes his brown file. He stares at Sergeant Grant.

BRIGADIER SCOTT  
Prisoner will remain silent as the verdict is announced. Major Rimmer, your verdict.

MAJOR RIMMER  
I have been made privy to your service in the Seaforth Highlanders. It is an impressive war record in which you have served your country proud. Why you lapsed at this most crucial time of the war, I do not know.

Major Rimmer shakes his head then removes his monocle.

MAJOR RIMMER (CONT'D)  
I am satisfied that you did not betray your country. I am equally satisfied that your motive was sincere if naïve and so my decision is to admonish you.

Ruari affords himself a smile but as he does so he sees the Brigadier stare and look disapprovingly at Major Rimmer.

BRIGADIER SCOTT  
Captain Garrett. I am relying on you to show a less passionate and more objective verdict.

Captain Garret notices the stern warning from the Brigadier and clears his throat accordingly.

CAPTAIN GARRET  
I do not doubt the emotion which overcame you when you encountered a former colleague. But in wartime, that colleague was the enemy. Sergeant Grant, this fraternizing, for that is what it was, was seen by your own men. What a poor example.

Sergeant Grant looks concerned at the tone of the Captain.

CAPTAIN GARRETT  
The impact on our troops simply can not be measured.  
(MORE)

CAPTAIN GARRETT (CONT'D)

If we were to let every rank and file member of the army go in search of long lost friends, there would be no war! No soldier to rely on. I find you guilty.

There is a hush in the court room. Brigadier Scott remains seated. He looks at Ruari.

BRIGADIER SCOTT

What a foolish man you have been. Your actions were seen by your troops in the trench and must have had the most demoralizing effect on their conduct. Their sergeant fraternizing with the German enemy! How could they ever respect you again. I also find you guilty. Prisoner stand.

Ruari stands and places his glengarry cap on his head.

BRIGADIER SCOTT (CONT'D)

There is only one penalty for fraternizing with the enemy and I think you can understand how the court in its mercy has come to that decision of guilty. Sergeant, you are immediately stripped of your rank and you will be shot tomorrow at dawn.

ORDERLY

Court Rise.

Ruari sits, places his head on his outstretched arms. His hands are placed in handcuffs and a military policeman takes a knife and cuts away his sergeant stripes on both arms of his uniform.

EXT WALLED GRASSY COURTYARD 1 May 1918 DAWN

A wooden stake stands erect three feet from the wall. Four armed soldiers march to a position ten paces from the post. They are drilled to a halt, ordered to turn right to face the post and ordered to stand at ease. Ruari Grant arrives in a white collarless shirt rolled up at the sleeves. He wears his regular soldier's trousers supported by blue braces. A military Policeman pins a black square of material over his heart. He then marches Ruari to the post. He ties his hands around the post and offers to place a hood over his head.

RUARI

Why shut the light from my eyes prematurely Officer?

The military police officer places the hood in his pocket. He takes a step back and salutes Ruari then marches to the side where he gives the order.

MILITARY POLICEMAN  
Detail shun. Take Aim.

Ruari raises his head defiantly.

MILITARY POLICEMAN (CONT'D)  
FIRE!

(CUT TO)

EXT EDINBURGH CASTLE 1 p.m. DAY

The One O'clock Edinburgh Castle gun goes off.

(CUT TO)

INT SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT 1st MAY 2008

The Scottish Prime Minister, ALEX SALMOND, stands to address the nation.

PRIME MINISTER ALEXANDER SALMOND  
Ninety years ago a Scottish Soldier, Sergeant Ruari Grant of the Seaforth Highlanders, was shot at dawn. His alleged crime was not running away from the enemy but greeting the enemy. A particular enemy who knew him as a friend. It was an error to have reached that Military Tribunal's decision. I order Sergeant Ruari's pardon immediately and any record of that verdict to be withdrawn from military record books.

There is tumultuous applause.

PRIME MINISTER  
After all, was it not Christ himself who called us to love our enemies?

THE SPEAKER  
HEAR, HEAR.

FADE OUT



