BINLEY’S SPEECH ABOUT WAR AND PEACE

From the Tank: Fray Bentos Story

A brave soldier. That’s what they called me. I wasn’t brave when I was lying there; feet tangled tight in barbed wire and lying there in the blood drenched mud surrounded by the mangled bodies. Broken limbs and faceless men. Just lying there – some with the shocked and fear still written across their expressions. I wasn’t brave. All I could hear was the screeching and screaming sounds of explosions mixed with the cries of men slowly and painfully succumbing to their miserable death. Then the thudding noise of the machine guns drumming and peppering against pointless targets. I screamed out. I shouted for help. I cried, but no one came.

Then I heard a voice. I couldn’t see them, but I could hear them. He was whimpering. Something was wrong with his leg. I couldn’t understand what he was saying. I could hardly see or hear through the ringing and pain in my head. But I knew that he was there. Mutter, Vatter… I couldn’t recognise much more. I kept talking to him. Telling him that everything was going to be alright. That we’d get back. I don’t know how long I was lying there talking rubbish to him. Out there you can’t even disguise between night and day. And then it all went quiet. I couldn’t hear him. I screamed out to him over and over again...but nothing.

I got angry. I started pulling at the barbed wire, tearing into my skin and ripping bits of flesh from my hands. I couldn’t do it. The more I tried, the more tangled I became. Then I started kicking violently and screaming out of control until I managed to tear the barbed wire from the ground. I started crawling as fast as I could through the mud and water. I could hardly see what was in front of me. I didn’t even realize what I was putting my hands into…until I looked down and saw one hand sunk into the stomach of decaying corpse and my other hand about to fall into the skull of the remains of another. I screamed and was violently sick before I collapsed face first into the mud. That’s when came up. That’s when the life was sucked out of me. I just laid there already dead. I didn’t even notice the rats biting into my ears and my bleeding fingers. A brave soldier. That’s what they called me. I wasn’t brave.

Do you know why I enlisted? It wasn’t honour. It wasn’t pride. I had nothing. For me it was a choice between the regular beatings, prison or this. I thought at least doing this I could earn a bob or two. They never said anything about what it would be like. How it would chew away at you. It is an honour to die for one’s country. But is war really an honourable game? And will it ever bring good?