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The Bridge on the River Kwai

By Carl Foreman

Finish work!
Go to hut.
Yeah, that figures.
If the new prisoners see us
digging graves, they may run.
No time for jokes. Finish work!
Dig, dig.
How about putting us
on sick list?
Have a heart, captain.
Put us in hospital.
You no sick. You never sick.
Why you always play sick, Shears?
Don't want one of these
over my head, I guess.
Captain Kanematsu...
...how about a butt?
I give you butt this morning.
Both of you.
That's what I mean.
I want to return the favour.
When a man gives a gift
from the goodness of his heart...
...like you gave me that butt,
I remember it from the heart.
That's why...
...I want you to keep this lighter.
Think I stole it?
It belonged to that English kid
we just buried.
He gave it to me
for a favour I'd done him.
Before I pass on,
I want to do the same for you.
You funny man, Shears.
You go on sick list. Him too.
One of these days Colonel Saito
will catch you bribing him...
...then where'll we be?
Before that happens
we'll be far away from here, chum.
Far away.
Okay, let's knock off.
Here lies...

I forgot who we just buried.
Thomson.
Ah, yes.
Here lies Corporal Herbert Thomson...
...serial number zero-one-two-
three-four-five-six-seven.
Valiant member of the King's Own
or the Queen's Own or something...
...who died of beri-beri
in the year of our Lord, 1943...
...for the greater glory of...
- What did he die for?
- Come off it.
No need to mock the grave.
I don't mock the grave or the man.
May he rest in peace.
He found little of it
while he was alive.
"A" Company, mark time!
Mark time!
Halt.
Into line, left turn.
Stand easy.
We're going to be
busy gravediggers, Weaver.
Well done, well done.
That colonel doesn't know
what he's in for.
You going to tell him the truth?
Of course not.
You're neither an officer
nor a gentleman.
My name is Nicholson.
I am Colonel Saito.
In the name of His Imperial Majesty...
...I welcome you.
I am the commanding officer
of this camp...
...which is Camp 16...
...along the great railroad...
...which will soon connect
Bangkok with Rangoon.
You British prisoners
have been chosen...

...to build a bridge
across the River Kwai.
It will be pleasant work,
requiring skill.
And officers will work as well as men.
The Japanese Army cannot
have idle mouths to feed.
If you work hard,
you will be treated well.
But if you do not work hard...
...you will be punished.
A word to you about escape.
There is no barbed wire.
No stockade.
No watchtower.
They are not necessary.
We are an island in the jungle.
Escape is impossible.
You would die.
Today you rest.
Tomorrow you'll begin.
Let me remind you of
General Yamashita's motto:
" Be happy in your work. "
Be happy in your work.
Dismissed.
Battalion, stand at ease.
Fall out, Major Hughes.
Battalion, stand easy.
Hughes, get the men to their quarters.
See who's sick.
I'm going to have a word
with this fellow.
I heard your remarks just now, sir.
My men will carry on in the way
one expects of a British soldier.
My officers and I
will be responsible for their conduct.
You may have overlooked the fact
that the use of officers for labour...
...is expressly forbidden
by the Geneva Convention.
Is that so?
I have a copy of the convention...

...and would be glad to
let you glance through it.
That will not be necessary.
Sit down, please.
Yes, sir.
I'm going to have a word with Clipton.
Clipton, don't let me interrupt.
- How's the arm?
- Nearly healed.
Sir, this is Commander Shears
of the United States Navy.
How do you do, sir?
We found him and an Australian.
All that's left of the
prisoners who built the camp.
U.S. Navy? Out here?
I am sort of landlocked.
- You lost your ship?
- The Houston.
I made it ashore, but I got separated
from the other survivors.
And your group here?
Mostly Aussies. Some lime-
Some British.
Indians, Burmese, Siamese.
And what happened to them?
They died...
...of malaria, dysentery,
beri-beri, gangrene.
Other causes of death:
Famine, overwork, bullet wounds,
snakebites...
...Saito.
Then there were some
who just got tired of living.
Has Clipton seen you?
Just about to. Come over here,
you can shave later.
All right.
You'll stay with the officers.
We'll find some decent clothing.
Don't bother about me.
I'm not anxious to
get off the sick list.

Besides, this is working kit.
It's the fashion here.
The officers in your party
did manual labour?
I think you could call it that.
I raised that very point
with Colonel what's-his-name.
Saito.
- I think he understands now.
- Is that so?
Yes. I must say he seems
quite a reasonable type.
Well, I must be pushing on.
There's an officer's meeting at 7.
- Give me a list of your requirements.
- Yes, sir.
Anything we can do.
Thank you, sir.
- What is it?
- Never mind.
Go on, say it.
I can think of a lot of things
to call Saito...
...but reasonable, that's a new one.
Perhaps Col. Nicholson
defines the word differently.
Any other points?
- By your leave, sir?
- Jennings?
About the escape committee.
I've spoken with Cmd. Shears-
There won't be any escape committee.
I don't understand, sir.
Lt. Jennings has a plan.
Yes, yes, I'm sure Jennings
has a plan, but escape?
Where? Into this jungle?
That fellow, Saito, is right.
No need for barbed wire here.
One chance in 100 of survival.
I'm sure a man of Cmdr. Shears'
experience will back me up on that.
I'd say that the odds against a
successful escape are 100 to one.

But may I add another word?
Please.
The odds against survival in this camp
are even worse.
You've seen the graveyard.
They're your real odds.
To give up hope of escape...
...to stop thinking about it
means accepting a death sentence.
Why haven't you tried to escape,
commander?
I'm biding my time. Waiting for
the right moment, the right company.
I understand how you feel.
Of course, it's the duty of a
captured soldier to attempt escape.
But my men and I are
involved in a curious legal point...
...of which you are unaware.
In Singapore we were ordered to
surrender by command headquarters.
Ordered, mind you.
Therefore, in our case, escape might
well be an infraction of military law.
Interesting point, sir.
I'm sorry, sir,
I didn't quite follow you.
You intend to uphold the letter
of the law, no matter what it costs?
Without law, commander,
there is no civilization.
That's just my point.
Here, there is no civilization.
Then we have the opportunity
to introduce it.
I suggest we drop
the subject of escape.
Is there anything else?
I think we're
clear on the program.
I want everything to go off smoothly
starting tomorrow morning.
And remember this:
Our men must always feel they are

still commanded by us...
...and not by the Japanese.
So long as they have that idea,
they'll be soldiers and not slaves.
Are you with me there, commander?
I hope they can
remain soldiers, colonel.
As for me, I'm just a slave.
A living slave.
Queer bird. Even for an Ameri-
He's been in isolation too long,
poor chap.
Cut off from his unit.
It should be a lesson to all of us.
English prisoners!
Notice I do not say English soldiers.
From the moment you surrendered,
you ceased to be soldiers.
You will finish the bridge
by the twelfth day of May.
You will work under the direction
of a Japanese engineer.
Time is short. All men will work.
Your officers will work beside you.
This is only just...
...for it is they
who betrayed you by surrender.
Your shame is their dishonour.
It is they who told you...
...better to live like a coolie
then die like a hero.
It is they who brought you here,
not I.
Therefore, they will join you
in useful labour.
That is all.
Officer prisoners, collect your tools.
Bradley, back in your place.
I must call your attention,
Colonel Saito...
...to Article 27
of the Geneva Convention.
" Belligerents may employ
prisoners of war...

...who are fit,
other than officers-"
Give me the book.
By all means.
You read English, I take it?
- Do you read Japanese?
- I'm sorry, no.
If it's a matter of translation,
I'm sure it can be arranged.
You see, the Code states that-
Stand fast in the ranks.
You speak to me of Code?
What " Code"?
The coward's code!
What do you know
of the soldier's code?
Of bushido? Nothing!
You are unworthy of command!
If you refuse to abide by the laws
of the civilized world...
...we must consider ourselves
absolved from our duty to obey you.
My officers will not do manual labour.
We shall see.
All enlisted prisoners to work.
Sergeant Major! Take the men to work.
Battalion, take up tools.
Move to the left in columnar route.
Left turn!
"A" Company, by the right,
quick march.
Eyes right.
Eyes right.
Eyes front.
Quick march, eyes right.
" C" Company, by the right.
What's he up to?
Looks like he doesn't
want any witnesses.
Now, you will be reasonable.
You will order your officers to work.
No.
I will count three.
If by the third count...

...you and your officers
are not on the way to work...
...I will give the order to fire.
He's going to do it.
Believe me,
he's really going to do it.
One.
I warn you, Colonel...
Two.
Stop!
Colonel Saito,
I've seen and heard everything.
So has every man in the hospital.
They're too many witnesses.
You can't call it a mass escape.
Most of those men can't walk.
Is this your soldier's code?
Murdering unarmed men?
You see, Jennings, there are
advantages to being on the sick list.
I'll say this for the old man.
He's got guts.
" Into the valley of death
rode the 600."
How's that, sir?
That kind of guts.
Also the kind they had in 1914...
...when officers fought
with only a swagger stick.
- I see what you mean.
- You don't see what I mean at all.
The kind of guts
that can get us all killed.
Excuse me, sir,
I'd like to go along too.
Arm's almost healed, sir,
really it is.
What about him?
He didn't order us not to escape,
he suggested.
Listen, when a man like your colonel
suggests something, it's an order.
Here we go again.
Colonel Saito says all officers

to punishment hut.
Tell them to go.
Not you.
Come.
Leave him alone!
Leave him alone!
They're going to put him in the oven.
For he's a jolly good fellow
For he's a jolly good fellow...
For he's a jolly good fellow...
And so say all of us...
And so say all of us
And so say all of us...
For he's a jolly good fellow
For he's a jolly good fellow...
For he's a jolly good fellow...
And so say all of us...
Timber!
One, two, three, four.
One, two, three, four.
No, no, no!
Let go!
Let go!
You wish to see me?
I've tried to see you for three days.
It's about the colonel.
He's been shut up in that hut-
I could have you shot.
Those prisoners who tried to escape,
they were in your charge.
I knew nothing about the escape.
It does not matter.
One must respect those who tried.
For a brief moment,
between escape and death...
...they were soldiers again.
But it is insane to try and escape.
Two soldiers shot
and the third drowned.
To what end?
It was an escape from reality.
There is your reality.
This shows the position work
should have reached by noon today.

And this shows the position
of actual progress.
Because of your colonel's stubbornness,
we are far behind schedule.
That is not all.
Enlisted prisoners sabotaged the work.
Yes, I have seen it.
I could have them all shot.
Then who would build your bridge?
Besides, are you sure it's sabotage?
The men don't work well
without their own officers.
My officers will direct them.
Your officers will work beside them.
That's for Nicholson to decide.
As he said,
it's against the rules.
Do not speak to me of rules.
This is war!
This is not a game of cricket.
He's mad, your colonel...
...quite mad.
Sit down, please.
I have decided to allow you
one visit to your colonel.
Thank you.
Tell him that if his officers
will not work...
...I'll be forced
to close the hospital...
...and your patients will
work in their place.
Many will die,
and he will be responsible.
Go and speak to him.
You have five minutes.
Doc's going to see the old man.
Sir...
It's Clipton, sir.
I brought you a few things.
- How are the men?
- Fine, sir, fine.
We scraped together a little meat
and a coconut.

And the officers?
Not so good.
They're still in detention.
And Lieutenant Jennings...
Jennings is dead.
- What?
- Killed, attempting to escape.
Also two others,
Corporal Weaver and the American.
Jennings. Poor, brave lad.
I warned him, didn't I, Clipton?
Look, sir, we haven't much time.
I'm going to clean you up a little
while I talk.
I've got something to tell you.
I've just had a word with Saito.
That man is the worst commanding
officer I've ever come across.
Actually, I think he's mad.
Carry on.
Blackmail!
I know, sir, but he means it.
I'm sure he does.
It's a question of face, pure and
simple. And he can't give in.
It's still blackmail.
Sir, you can't stand
much more of this.
Wouldn't the officers be better off
working than suffocating in that hole?
The men are doing a wonderful job.
They're going as slow as they dare.
But Saito's cut their food rations...
...and if he makes
the sick men work...
Well, they're going to die.
That's all there is to it.
Yes, Clipton, I understand. Truly.
But don't you see?
It's a matter of principle.
If we give in now,
there'll be no end to it. No.
Sir, we're lost in the jungle,
a thousand miles from anywhere.

We're under a man who'll stop at
nothing to get his way. Principle!
No one will ever know or care
what happens to us.
Give in, sir. Please!
I'm adamant.
I will not have an officer
from my battalion working as a coolie.
- Time.
- All right.
Please thank those concerned.
Everybody in the hospital
contributed one piece.
Reynolds stole the coconut.
We'll be able to get you
food sometimes.
We've bribed one of your guards.
Goodbye, sir. And good luck.
Many thanks.
Did you say that American
was killed?
Yes, sir. Shot and drowned.
It's insane to plan escapes.
Three men killed, and to what end?
Time!
Here is where we must win through.
Doc just looked at us and shook
his head. Whatever that means.
Means only one thing,
the colonel won't give in.
Well?
It's like this.
Colonel Nicholson
won't give in to force.
It's a question of principle.
As medical officer, I protest
the way he's being treated.
It's a wonder he's still alive.
Should a tragedy occur,
it would be tantamount to murder.
He is responsible.
Not I.
You sick?
Are they both mad?

Or am I going mad?
Or is it the sun?
Attention!
Battalion, attention.
English prisoners.
Let us ask the question...
...why does the bridge not progress?
You know why,
because your officers are lazy!
They think themselves too good
to share your burden.
This is not just.
Therefore, you are not happy
in your work.
Therefore, the bridge
does not progress.
But there is another cause.
I do not hide the truth.
With deep shame and regret...
...I admit to you the failure...
...of a member of the Japanese staff.
I refer to Lieutenant Miura.
He is a bad engineer.
He is unworthy of command.
Therefore, I have removed him
from his post.
Tomorrow we begin again.
I shall be in personal command.
Today we rest.
All work and no play
make Jack a dull boy!
As token of regard
for your efforts in the future...
...I give presents to you all.
Let us be happy in our work.
Company, dismissed.
Battalion, dismissed.
Hey, take a look at this.
Red Cross! He's given us our-
Hey, he's given us
our own Red Cross parcels.
"Tomorrow we begin again. "
Hey, Harry, look!
They're letting the old man out.

Most likely going to give him
another pasting.

Good evening, colonel.

Do you mind sitting over here?

I am having rather a late supper.

English corned beef.

No, thank you.

Produce of Scotland.

I prefer it to sake.

I spent three years in London,
you know.

I studied at the London Polytechnic.

Cheers!

Sorry.

Later, perhaps?

Perhaps.

I was not a good artist.

My father disapproved.

He felt I belonged in the army.

So I changed from art to engineering.

I must tell you, Colonel Saito.

I intend to make a full report
of your activities.

I do not think you
quite realize my position.

- I must carry out my orders.

- Oh, quite, quite.

My orders are to complete the bridge
by the 12th day of May.

- I have only 12 weeks more.

- No doubt.

Therefore, I am compelled
to use all available personnel.

No officers, except
for administration.

But officers are working
along the entire railway.

You know it. I know it.

I'm not responsible
for other officers.

Personally, I'm appalled.

Let's not get excited.

Will you have a cigar?

No. Thank you.

When I said all officers must work...
...naturally, I never meant you,
the commanding officer.
My orders were only intended
for officers below-
No officers will do manual labour.
Please! I was about to say:
I've thought the matter over
and have decided...
...to put majors and above
on administrative duties...
...leaving only junior officers
to work.
No. The Convention's
quite clear on that point.
Do you know what will happen to me
if the bridge is not ready in time?
I haven't the foggiest.
I'd have to kill myself.
What would you do if you were me?
I suppose if I were you...
...I'd have to kill myself.
Cheers.
I warn you, colonel...
...if I am to die,
others will die before me.
Do you understand?
Clipton did mention that.
That won't solve your problem.
I'm sure we can
arrive at a solution.
Please sit down.
Now. Tell me, colonel...
...do you agree that the first job
of an officer is command?
- Of course.
- Good.
Now.
Take this bridge of yours.
It's quite an enormous undertaking.
Frankly, I doubt whether
your Lieutenant what's-his-name...
Miura.
...is capable of tackling

a job of such importance.
On the other hand, I have officers,
Reeves and Hughes for instance...
...who have built bridges
all over India.
The men respect them.
It's essential for an officer
to have that respect.
If it's gone, he ceases to command.
What then?
Demoralization and chaos.
A poor commander I would be if
I allowed that to happen.
Perhaps you are not aware that
the bridge is now under my command.
Really? And may I ask, are you
satisfied with the work?
- I am not!
- You've proved my point.
I hate the British!
You are defeated
but you have no shame.
You are stubborn
but have no pride.
You endure
but you have no courage.
I hate the British!
Pointless, going on like this.
Stay there!
Stand down. Stand down!
Battalion, attention!
Battalion, stand at ease.
Please...
Do you know what is
the date today, colonel?
I've lost count.
It's the anniversary of
our great victory...
...over Russia in 1905.
Throughout East Asia
we are celebrating this date.
In honour of this occasion...
...I have given your troops
a day of rest.

Many thanks.
I am declaring a general amnesty.
You and your officers may
return to your quarters.
As part of this amnesty...
...it will not be necessary
for officers to do manual labour.
He's done it!
Somebody deserves a medal, sir.
How many men in your party?
I don't really know, sir.
- You don't know?
- Twelve, usually.
One of the men took sick
this morning, sir.
It took three or four
to help him to the hospital.
And- He took terrible sick, sir.
A corporal should know
how many men he has under him.
Oh, yes, sir.
Have you a nervous affliction?
Stop making those faces.
It may be funny to you,
but it's not military behaviour.
No, sir.
We must put a stop
to these demonstrations.
- I say, Reeves?
- Yes, sir?
Ever built a bridge
over a stream like the Kwai?
Yes, sir, half a dozen of them
in Madras, Bengal...
If this were your bridge...
...how would you get it under way?
Get it under way, sir?
First of all,
I wouldn't build it here.
Oh, why not?
I was trying to tell you...
...the Japanese couldn't have
picked a worse location.
You see those piles?

They're sinking.
We could drive those logs
forever and they wouldn't hold.
Where would you build it?
Further downstream, sir.
Across those narrows.
Then we'd have solid bedrock
on both banks.
Hughes, if this were your bridge,
how would you use the men?
Not the way they're doing it.
It's chaos, as you can see.
Uncoordinated activity.
No teamwork.
Some parties are working
against each other.
Yes.
I say, gentlemen, we have
a problem on our hands.
Thanks to the Japanese,
we command a rabble.
There's no order, no discipline.
- Our task is to rebuild the battalion.
- Yes, sir.
Which isn't going to be easy.
Fortunately, we have
the means at hand. The bridge.
- The bridge, sir?
- The bridge.
We'll teach them a lesson in Western
efficiency that'll put them to shame.
Show what a British
soldier is capable of.
Yes. I see your point, sir.
I know how difficult
it's going to be here...
...where you can't find what you need.
- There's the challenge.
- I beg your pardon, sir.
You really want them
to build the bridge?
You're not usually
so slow in the uptake.
I know our men.

You've got to keep them occupied.

If there weren't any work,
we'd invent some.

- That we would, sir.

- So we're lucky.

But it's going to be a proper bridge.

Here again I know the men.

It's essential that they
take pride in their job.

- Right, men?

- Yes, sir.

Reeves, you're

the key man here as engineer.

Tell me what you want and we'll
get it. Can we make a go of it?

- We'll do our best, sir.

- Fine.

We must draw up our plans...

...then arrange a conference
with Saito...

...and set him straight.

That takes care of all
the procedural matters.

Oh, yes.

The next point is unpleasant
for all concerned, I'm afraid.

Sorry to say, the position
of the bridge was fixed hastily...

...and, I have to add, incorrectly.

Incorrectly?

Unfortunately, yes.

Our engineer has made
a study of the site...

...and decided that the river bottom
there is too soft.

Too soft?

Mud! All the work
has been useless.

- Reeves, will you carry on?

- Yes, sir.

Those piles of yours could be hammered
below water level before they'd hold.

It would collapse
under the first train.

The pressure and soil resistance
figures in tons per square inch.
Reeves, before you get too involved...
Colonel, could we have a cup of tea?
I take it we all agree
that if we're to avoid disaster...
...we build a new bridge, at the site
picked by Reeves, 400 yards downstream.
Let's proceed to the next point.
I decided to alter
the work quota of our men.
- Alter?
- I've increased it.
From 1.5 yards of earth moved
to two.
I'm sure it will
meet with your approval.
Hughes has all the facts.
Would you take over?
I've done a time study
of the entire project.
You see, the available forces
have been badly distributed.
I'd urge we revise the
organization of the working parties.
Just a moment. Colonel, it would save
time if we could work during dinner.
Would it be possible
to have dinner?
Of course.
- Carry on.
- Yes, sir.
If we increase the squads
and specialize their functions...
Now, Colonel Saito,
I have one more point...
Now, there's another important
decision that can't be postponed.
As the British
will work on the bridge...
...only a few will be available
for railway work.
I must ask you to lend us some of your
men to reinforce the railway gang...

...so the final stretch of track can be completed as quickly as possible. I have already given the order. We must fix the daily work quota for your men. I thought to set it at 1.5 yards so as not to overtire them... ...but isn't it best to be the same as ours? That would also create a healthy competitive spirit. I have already given the order. We'll try to surpass that, won't we, Hughes? I think that completes the agenda for tonight. Thank you, Colonel Saito, for your kind attention. Are there any other questions? One question. Can you finish the bridge in time? Frankly, the consensus of opinion is that it's impossible. But we'll certainly give it a go. Don't forget we wasted a month through an unfortunate disagreement... ...for which I was not to blame. Is there anything else? No. Thank you. The meeting is closed.

- Good night.

- Good night.

I hope these Japanese appreciate what we're doing for them. For now I'm not concerned with their appreciation.

- Good night, Clipton.

- Good night, sir.

By the way, I meant to tell you... ...there are trees here similar to elm. And the elm piles of London Bridge lasted 600 years.

- Six hundred years, Reeves?

- Yes, sir.

Six hundred years.

That would be quite something.

I'm looking for an American
named Commander Shears.

- Yes, down on the beach.

- Oh, thank you very much.

Kiss!

Too many eyes.

You give me powders, pills, baths,
injections, enemas...

All I need is love.

It's true.

All you really need is love.

Why are you so sure

you'll get a medical discharge?

Because I'm a civilian
at heart, lover.

And I always follow my heart.

Kiss.

How's that, commander?

Don't call me commander.

It's unromantic.

You're an officer yourself.

How'd you like it

if I called you Lieutenant Lover?

Let's be democratic.

Just call me "sir. "

Yes, sir.

Brass ahoy.

He wants you. He's all yours.

- I'm going for a swim.

- Don't leave me!

- Commander Shears?

- Yes.

My name's Warden.

- How do you do?

- Sorry to intrude-

That's okay, major.

I'm used to it.

Like a martini?

That's very kind.

I think not.

Mind if I have one?

How did you get that?
Where there's a hospital,
there's alcohol.
Yes, of course. Jolly good.
Well, I'll be as brief as possible.
I belong to a rather rum group
called Force 316.
Our headquarters is in
the Botanical Gardens.
- Protecting rare plants from the enemy?
- Not quite.
- Sure you won't have one?
- No, thanks.
We have an interest
in that railway you worked on.
You could give us no end
of valuable information.
Well, I'm leaving
for the States in a few days...
...and I told your people
everything I know.
But you could help us
in a rather special sense.
I know it's a terrible imposition, but
could you possibly come out and see us?
If you want to go over
the whole thing again.
Very kind.
Lord Louis'll be grateful.
- Who?
- Mountbatten.
We're one of his special pigeons.
Shall we say this evening, then?
About 8. I'll send a car.
This evening? Out of the question.
Tomorrow morning then?
About 10?

- **Okay, 10:**
- Thanks very much.
- Cheerio.
- Cheerio.
Good luck.
Thanks.

You're sorry, but
you're going to stand me up tonight.
You couldn't be more wrong.
General salute!
Present arms!
- May I see your pass, please?
- Oh, yes.
Major Warden's bungalow
is at the end of the path.
Good show, Jenkins. Good show!
Come along, Thomson.
Use your knife, man.
On your feet!
Away to the debriefing room.
Come on, move yourselves!
Move quickly!
Very clumsy, Joyce, very clumsy.
Always use your knife
immediately, Joyce.
You see, he's gained the initiative.
Wait a minute!
I'm terribly sorry, sir.
- You're sorry?
- So am I.
- I thought you were the enemy.
- I'm American, if that's what you mean.
- That'll be all, Joyce.
- Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.
- What can I do for you?
- I'm going to see Major Warden.
I'll show you the way. He'll finish
his lecture any moment now.
- That's the end of his lecture.
- Thunderous ovation.
He believes in keeping our training
as close to real life as possible.
- Major Warden, sir?
- Yes?
Good of you to come.
- They took care of you?
- They certainly have.
Thank you, staff.
Well, come along, then.
Col. Green is looking forward

to meeting you.

- Fascinating place, isn't it?

- Didn't know it was a commando school.

We're trying to discourage the use of
that word. Such a melodramatic air.

What do you do here?

Sabotage, demolition,
that line of country.

We're using P.E., plastic explosives.

It's wonderful.

That pop was made
with a lump half this size.

It's twice as powerful as gelignite
at half the weight.

It's quite harmless
until it's detonated.

Thanks for telling me.

It's completely waterproof
and actually plastic.

You can do what you like with it.

This is my place.

Go ahead.

Oh, I'm dying for a cup of tea.

- Would you care for one?

- No, thanks.

- A drink?

- No, thank you.

- Pot of tea for one, please, Peter.

- Very good, sir.

Do you read this?

I taught Oriental languages
at Cambridge before the war.

I never congratulated you
on your escape. Good show!

If your sea rescue plane hadn't
spotted me, I wouldn't be here.

No, I suppose not.

Would you like to see where you were?

All right.

Our information's scanty.

It's based on your report.

We think the camp's here.

Do your people have any idea

what happened to Col. Nicholson?

He had guts. They were about to shoot him and he didn't bat an eye. If you're about to be shot there's not much you can do. Here is the river Kwai, and here's the village where you were helped. Here is the railway. You must be fairly familiar with this area. No, I was out of my head half the time. The railway starts down here in Singapore. Malaya... ...Bangkok, Rangoon. Their idea is to drive on through, into India.

- Where was I picked up?

- Oh, about here.

The Japanese aim to open the Bangkok-Rangoon section by the middle of May. We'll try to prevent them. It's too far for bombers to carry a load. We'll have to go smash it on the ground.

- How?

- Parachute drop, then march. With demolition equipment through that jungle? Our chief problem is lack of firsthand knowledge. You see, none of us have ever been there.

- I don't want to discourage-

- It should be interesting.

Col. Green's given me the Kwai bridge. I'm taking a team in to blow it up. Lucky you. Sure you won't have tea? No, thanks. I don't want to be rude, but I've got a date at 2.

- If there are any questions...

- Of course, I'm sorry. Well, there is only one question, actually.

How would you feel about going back?
Come again?
Under the circumstances
it's a bit much...
...but you have a unique
knowledge for our purpose.
We'd love to have you with us.
That's why you brought me here?
To ask me this?
Well, frankly, yes.
I just got out of there.
My escape was a miracle. Now
you want me to go back! Ridiculous!
This is embarrassing-
I don't belong to you.
I belong to the American Navy.
Actually, Col. Green has taken
the matter up with your people.
- With my people?
- Your Navy's turned you over to us.
A signal arrived yesterday morning
from the Pacific...
...authorizing your temporary transfer
of duty to Force 316.
- They can't do this!
- I'm afraid they have.
It was hard to break it to you.
But they can't do this to me.
I mean it. My Navy's made a mistake!
Look. I'm not a Navy commander.
I'm not even an officer.
The whole thing's a fake. I'm just
an ordinary swab jockey, second class.
When the Houston sunk, I made
it ashore with a real commander.
We ran into a Japanese patrol.
He was killed.
I figured it was just
a matter of time till I-
So you changed uniforms
with a dead man.
I thought officers would get better
treatment in prison camps.
But with Saito, the officers

worked along with the rest.
There's always the unexpected,
isn't there?
I kind of got used
to being a commander...
...so when I arrived
at the hospital...
...I took a look at the enlisted men's
ward and then the officer's ward...
...and I said to myself, " Let's let
it ride along for a while. "
There were certain advantages.
I saw one of them on the beach.
That's the whole story.
The point is, you can't use me.
You want an officer...
...an American Commander Shears
who doesn't exist.
When the Navy learns the truth,

they'll say:

"Ship him home
for impersonating an officer. "
- Once that happens, I've got it made.
- Got it what?
Made! I'd like that drink now.
I'll apply for a medical discharge.
I'll say I impersonated an officer
because I went crazy in the jungle.
I'm getting worse. Sometimes
I think I'm Admiral Halsey.
It's quite a clever plan.
Not only clever, it's foolproof.
If my Navy finds out who I am...
...those orders won't be worth
the paper they're written on.
Isn't this your photograph?
- Where did you get this?
- It took some doing...
...since your people
couldn't identify you.
Finally your C-in-C Pacific
sent us a copy of your service record.
The photograph, fingerprints.

Would you care to have a look?
You see, we've known about your actual
rank for nearly a week.
Your Navy's in an awkward position.
In one sense you're a hero...
...for making an escape
from the jungle.
At the same time, they can't
bring you home...
...and give you the Navy Cross for
impersonating an officer.
I suppose that's why they were
happy to hand you over.
You see?
Hot potato.
As far as your rank is concerned...
...we're fairly informal
about that in Force 316.
You'd have the simulated
rank of major.
A simulated major. That figures.
Well...
As long as I'm hooked,
I might as well volunteer.
Good show!
Oh, Colonel Green, sir.
This is Major Shears. He volunteered
to go and help me blow up the bridge.
Really?
Good show!
Jolly good show, major!
Get up to sick bay.
This foot's infected.
Colonel might think I'm malingering.
I'm the medical officer.
Get cracking!
Will someone tell me why
he wants to build a proper bridge?
Don't worry about old Nick.
He knows what he's doing.
Hello, Clipton.
About time you paid us a visit.
Fine job our chaps are doing.
Yes. How's he behaving?

He's been most reasonable
since we took over.

- What's he thinking?
- I haven't the foggiest.
- Thanks, Reeves.
- Right, sir.

What do you think?

Quite a challenge, isn't it?
Are you convinced that building
this bridge is a good idea?

- Are you serious?
- Yes, sir.

A good idea? Take another look.
You don't agree morale is high?
Discipline has been restored?
Their condition has improved?
Are they a happier lot
or aren't they?
They feed better
and they are no longer abused.
Honestly, Clipton, there are times
when I don't understand you at all.
I'll try to make myself clear.
The fact is, what we're doing
could be construed as...

...forgive me, sir,
collaboration with the enemy.
Perhaps even treason.

We're prisoners of war. We haven't
the right to refuse to work.
I understand that, sir.
But must we work so well?
Must we do better
than they could themselves?
If you had to operate on Saito,
would you do your best or let him die?
Would you prefer
we disintegrate in idleness?
Or have it said
we can't do a proper job?
It's important to show them they
can't break us in body or in spirit.
Take a good look, Clipton.
One day the war will be over.

I hope that those who use the bridge
in years to come...
...will remember how it was built,
and who built it.
Not a gang of slaves, but soldiers.
British soldiers, even in captivity.
- Yes, sir.
- You're a fine doctor...
...but you've a lot to learn
about the army.
Hold him! Hold him!
Use your boot!
Get your boot in there, will you?
Good morning!
What on earth
are you people staring at?
Get him with your boot!
I'm sorry I'm late, sir.
Four minutes, to be exact.
You were in need of medical attention?
- Sir?
- I was referring to the nurse.
Very ingenious. Warden was right.
Sit down.
I asked you here to help us pick
the fourth member of your team.
- Ask Mr. Joyce to come in.
- Yes, sir.
Chapman wants Joyce,
but I have my doubts.
He has too much imagination
as distinct from cold calculation.
I've told you...
...in this job, even when it's finished
there's always one more thing to do.
He's the best swimmer in the school.
I'm well aware of your evaluation.
The opinion I want is Shears'.
All right, at ease.
These men are thinking of taking you
for a hike in the jungle.
Yes, sir.
You were an accountant in Montreal?
Yes, sir. Not really an accountant.

That is, I didn't have my charter.
Exactly what did you do?
Well, sir, I just checked columns
and columns of figures...
...which people had checked
before me...
...and other people checked them
after I had checked them.
- Sounds a frightful bore.
- Sir, it was a bore.
How did you wind up here?
In '39 I came over to London to enlist.
Later I volunteered for this work.
- You volunteered!
- Yes, sir. See, the regular Army-
Go ahead, you can be frank.
Well, the regular Army reminded me
of my job in civilian life.
They don't expect you to think.
Think about this.
Are you sure you'd be able
to use it in cold blood?
I know how to use it.
That's not what I meant.
Could you use it in cold blood?
Could you kill without hesitation?
That's a question I've asked myself.
It's worried me quite a bit.
And what was the answer?
I don't honestly know, sir.
I've tried to imagine myself...
I suppose I find it hard to kid myself
that killing isn't a crime.
It's an old army problem.
Well, I think that's all.
Thank you, Joyce.
Am I to go with the team?
We'll let you know.
You see what I mean.
Well, at least he was honest.
None of us ever know the answer to
that question until the moment arises.
What's your opinion, Shears?
Well, he's Canadian.

That fits with the international composition of this outfit.
If he wants to go,
he can take my place!
Well, if you're all agreed on Joyce,
he's yours.
I had an air reconnaissance report on the village.
There's enough clearing to make your jump at dusk.
- You've had parachute training?
- No, sir.
Blast! This is awkward.
Silly, it never occurred to me!
Well, maybe-
He's right.
Arrange some practice jumps for him.
I'll go check right away.
- All right, Chapman, you can run along.
- Yes, sir.
Well, feel like a sniff of air?
Yes, sir.
You don't realize what a plum you are.
Your knowledge of the area,
making friends in that village.
It's almost as if your whole escape had been planned with us in mind.
By the way, here's something that'll interest you. The new " L" pill.
- L pill?
- L for lethal. Instant, painless.
Much better than the old ones.
For capture, of course.
You're telling me
not to be taken alive.
I wouldn't recommend it.
If any of you get hurt or wounded the others will have to leave him behind.
The objective comes first in our work.
You want my honest evaluation?
I didn't want to say in front of them.
I understand, go ahead.
Well, Chapman will be fine.
Ice water in his veins.

Joyce is... He'll be okay.

- It's Warden I don't get.

- Oh? Why not?

Cambridge don and all of that.

It's one thing to play with explosives
like a kid with firecrackers-

He's not without experience, you know.

When Singapore fell, he stayed behind
to blow up a couple of bridges.

Many other installations
before the Japs caught him.

- Fascinating story. He-

- Sir, it's most annoying.

In view of time, they don't think
practice jumps would be worth it.

The consensus is, the most
sensible thing for Shears to do...

...is to go ahead and jump
and hope for the best.

With or without parachute?

Oh, very good!

With or without!

He's in the trees!

Yai says we can't
reach the Kwai your way.

There are too many Japanese patrols.

We'll swing north through heavy jungle.

- Then who's going to lead?

- Yai.

He hates the Japanese.

They took all his men.

Which means we shall have to
use women bearers.

- Women bearers!

- They're capable.

He says it's dangerous
to spend the night here.

There's an enemy post three miles away
so we'll have to sleep in the jungle.

- What about Chapman?

- Yai will bury him and his chute.

Is there something wrong?

I was just thinking. You speak
Yai's language. I don't.

He's going to lead you
to the river by a route I never took.
Will someone tell me why I'm
so indispensable to this outfit?
I know how you feel, but there's
always the unexpected, isn't there?
Tell that to Chapman.
Let's get cracking!
You're lovely.
Lovely.
Be happy in your work!
Yes, sir.
Leeches.
Leeches.
She's telling you to hold still.
She'll take the leeches off your back.
What's a girl like you
doing in a place like this?
I'll teach you to say that in Siamese.
No, that would spoil it.
Too much talk always spoils it.
What's wrong with that thing?
It's taken an awful beating.
I can't get a strong signal.
I'll tell you. It's wet, mildewed!
Like everything else in this jungle.
You might as well dump it!
This is Radio Tokyo signing off.
This is your friendliest enemy
reminding you to take it easy...
...and never volunteer for anything.
If we stay, we'll
be up to our necks.
- I've got it all decoded, sir.
- Read it!
Yes, sir. "One, original
bridge works reported abandoned.
New construction downstream
from first site.
Two, enemy intends to open railway
with passage of special train...
...Bangkok for Rangoon
with troops and V.I.P.
Estimated to arrive target, a. M. 13th.

Three, synchronize demolition
with passage of train.
Four, good hunting. Have fun. "
That's all.
A train and a bridge!
Can we get there in time, sir?
Yai says we're two to three days away.
If we set a faster pace, we could
make it before sundown on the 12th.
It's worth it for the train.
Oh, by all means. Good hunting.
Good show.
Jolly good fun. Jolly good.
If you hadn't fixed the radio,
we wouldn't know about the train.
There's always the unexpected,
isn't there?
- Half a pint, sir.
- Quinine.
Well, we'll complete this later.
- Clipton, we're facing a crisis.
- Yes, sir?
I spoke with Reeves and Hughes.
We can't finish the bridge on time.
We haven't the manpower.
I've asked the officers to help,
but that won't do it.
The officers are working?
I explained the situation and they
volunteered, but it's not enough.
Why not ask Saito for some men?
This is ours. We'll make the most
of our resources.
That's why I came to talk to you.
The sick list.
There's not a man in this hospital
who doesn't belong there.
It's no reflection on you, but
there are always a few malingerers.
Keep an open mind, that's all I ask.
Come along, let's see.
Don't move, don't move.
What's wrong with Haskins?
Amoebic dysentery and black

water fever. Temperature of 104.
Right. I see.
And this man?
Leg ulcers. I may be able to save it
if I do more cutting tonight.
Want to send him out to work?
Don't talk rot, Clipton.
That man there?
His arm's infected.
Most of their wounds
won't heal properly.
I wonder if fresh air and light duties
might do more than being cooped up.
- Light duties?
- It's not our policy to keep a man...
- ... Just because he scratched his arm.
- Not our policy?
A man may not be on top of his form,
but he can still be useful.
Trimmings and finishing jobs.
Stand easy, Baker.
Do you feel up to doing
a little light work on the bridge?
- Anything you say, sir.
- Good show.
You? Nothing difficult.
- I'll try, sir.
- Good man.
Look here, men. It goes without
saying that I'm proud of all of you.
But we're facing a crisis. For those
of you who feel up to it...
...how about lending us a hand?
Fetch and carry, paint here and there?
What do you say?
- Yes, sir.
- Good show. Come on, follow me.
Ten minutes.
Make sure they're all dead.
Come on, Joyce.
Use your knife
or we'll be shooting each other.
Go that way, Joyce.
I could have done it.

I was ready.
Are you hit, sir?
Let's go.
It's superficial. Maybe a chipped
bone, but nothing broken.
- It's my fault, sir.
- Oh, shut up.
I can walk on it.
That's all that counts.
Yeah, but how far and how fast?
We won't know that
till I've tried it, will we?
What are you doing?
I didn't give orders for a halt.
We all need it.
We're still five hours' fast march
from the objective.
Maybe six.
Come on.
If you keep walking,
you'll bleed to death.
- You're going to leave me here.
- If you stop, we stop.
You can't study the layout
of the bridge after dark.
You've got to get there
before sundown.
But, sir, when the job's done, who
knows if we can return by this route...
...or whether we could find you
if we did?
If you were me, I wouldn't hesitate
to leave you and you know that.
He doesn't know, but I do.
You'd leave your own mother here
if the rules called for it.
You'll go on without me.
That's an order.
You're in command now, Shears.
I won't obey that order.
Your heroics make me sick.
You carry the stench of death
like the plague.
Explosives and L-pills

go well together.
It's one thing or the other.
Destroy a bridge or destroy yourself.
This is just a game, this war.
You and that Colonel Nicholson.
You're crazy with courage. For what?
How to die like a gentleman,
how to die by the rules...
...when the only important thing
is how to live like a human being!
I'm not gonna leave you
here to die, Warden...
...because I don't care about
your bridge or about your rules.
If we go on, we go on together.
Good old Yai.
All right.
Come on.
Let's get closer.
Still sorry we brought you along?
- Feeling better?
- Yeah.
You're in command again, you know.
Thank you, major.
I can't understand it.
It's such a solid, well-designed job.
Not like the bridges
the enemy usually throws together.
Look.
Those poor devils down there.
Imagine being forced to build that
in the condition they must be in.
They've got a British officer
working on his knees.
The Japanese seem
to be enjoying it too.
If he knew we were here,
it might boost his morale.
If not for the train, we could
set a time fuse and be miles away.
Since we don't know
what time it'll cross tomorrow...
...we'll have to do the job manually.
We'll set the charges

against the piles...
...about three feet underwater,
I should think...
...and run the main wire
downstream to the plunger.
The problem is where to hide it.
Our side of the river is
obviously used by the Japanese.
They'd spot it at once.
Look. Do you see
those fallen tree trunks?
And the grey rock just below them
on that little beach?
- Yes, sir, I see them.
- That's our key position.
The wrong side of the river...
...but it's the only hiding place
within feasible distance.
As soon as the bridge goes up...
...whoever's there
will have to swim back.
It won't be a pleasant swim.
Sir, I was the best swimmer
in my course.
It looks like
your line of country, then.
Thank you.
Shears, pick a spot on our side
of the bank where you can cover Joyce.
Yai will be with you
so you can occupy the Nips...
...if they make trouble for Joyce.
On the theory that
there's always one more thing...
...I'll set up the mortar here
to create an additional diversion.
Perhaps I might even take
a few potshots at the train.
All clear?
Any questions? Right, you'll
start as soon as it's dark.
They're sure to have
sentries on the bridge...
...so you'll have to float

the stuff down from upriver...
...which means building a raft.
Yai.
Yai will take three women to help you.
One will stay here with me.
All right, get cracking!
You know, if it wasn't for my ankle,
I'd take Joyce's assignment.
You think he'll be all right?
I think so. Want me to handle it?
I'd let you stay up here
with the mortar if I could.
I'm sorry.
When it's over, I hope
you get that medical discharge...
...and not the hard way.
Thanks.
Load.
Beautiful.
Yes, beautiful.
A first-rate job.
I had no idea it would
turn out so well.
Yes, a beautiful creation.
I've been thinking...
Tomorrow it will be 28 years to
the day that I've been in the service.
Twenty-eight years in peace and war.
I haven't been at home more
than ten months in all that time.
Still, it's been a good life.
I love India.
I wouldn't have had it any other way.
But there are times...
Suddenly you realize you are
nearer the end than the beginning.
And you wonder...
You ask yourself...
...what the sum total
of your life represents...
...what difference your being there
at any time made to anything...
...or if it made any difference
at all, really.

Particularly in comparison
with other men's careers.
I don't know if that
kind of thinking's healthy...
...but I must admit I've had
some thoughts on those lines...
...from time to time.
But tonight...
Tonight...
Blast.
I must be off.
The men are preparing
some sort of entertainment.
Lovely.
If you were the only...
Girl in the world...
And you were the only boy...
Nothing else would matter...
In the world today...
We could go on loving...
In the same old way...
A Garden of Eden just made for two...
I'm sure I speak for all of us...
...when I say this has been
a most enjoyable evening.
Most of you move on tomorrow
to a new camp and new construction.
It's a pity you won't see the first
practical use of this bridge.
You'll be glad to know
that the completion...
...of this link in the railway...
...will enable us to transport
the sick and disabled...
...to the new camp by train.
Colonel Saito has kindly
permitted me to stay behind...
...with Major Clipton
and the sick men...
...and we'll rejoin you
in a few days' time.
Now that your work here is finished...
...I suppose many of you
feel somewhat let down.

That's quite understandable.
It's a very natural reaction.
But one day, in a week,
a month, a year...
...on that day when, God willing,
we all return to our homes again...
...you're going to feel very proud
of what you've achieved here...
...in the face of great adversity.
What you have done should be...
...and I think will be...
...an example to all our countrymen,
soldier and civilian alike.
You have survived with honour.
That, and more.
Here in the wilderness...
...you have turned defeat
into victory.
I congratulate you.
Well done.
To the king.
You're in business.
Now, you got everything? Stem,
ammunition, pack, canteen, knife.
I'll be directly across the river.
The professor says there's
always one more thing to do.
I can't think of what it could be.
Except to wish you
a long and happy life.
Thank you.
What's happened?
The river's gone down.
You can see the wire.
The charges!
Don't wait for the train.
Do it now!
If Saito is correct, the train
will arrive in 5 or 10 minutes.
If you don't mind,
I'll watch from up on the hill.
Why? It's better from the bridge.
It's hard to explain, sir.
I'd rather not be a part of it.

As you please. Honestly, sometimes
I don't understand you at all.
As you once said, sir, I've got
a lot to learn about the army.
Good morning.
River's gone down in the night.
What's he doing?
Colonel, there's something
rather odd going on.
I think we better have a look around
before that train comes across.
He's gone mad.
He's leading him right to it!
Our own man!
I was right. There is
something going on.
You've got to do it, boy!
You've got to do it now!
Have you a knife? I just realized
the bridge has been mined!
Mined!
Good boy!
British officer!
Here to blow up the bridge.
- Blow up the bridge!
- Yes, sir. British commando orders.
- Blow up the bridge?
- Yes. There's no time!
No, no! Help!
Kill him! Kill him!
Let me go, sir!
You don't understand!
Kill him! Kill him!
Kill him, Joyce!
You!
You!
What have I done?
Madness!
I had to do it!
I had to do it.
They might have been captured alive!
It was the only thing to do!
Madness!
Madness!