

# **Paths of Glory Film Summary**

## **Paths of Glory by Stanley Kubrick**

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## Context

In *Paths of Glory*, Stanley Kubrick delves into the dirty parts of war that most people like to avoid. When an impossible battle is suggested, viewers learn what people will do for the sake of the reputation and promotion. General Paul Mireau is willing to risk the lives of thousands of men so he can win even more praises from the people. Colonel Dax tries to convince him otherwise but cannot.

When the men cannot get past their own wire, they begin to retreat. Even Colonel Dax gives up on the battle that he already knew they would lose. Paul sees this and tries to get the artillery to fire on his own men and cover up the failure. When they refuse, he becomes angry and decides to have the troops court-marshaled.

Paul at first plans to kill one hundred men, but General George Broulard talks him into killing only three men. Dax is forced to ask his men to choose three people to be murdered. Dax tries to defend the men at the court-marshal, but he is unsuccessful. The men are executed, and everyone is saddened. However, Dax begins to believe in human nature again when he first hears his men heckling a young German singer and later begin to hum with her, because they miss their homes just as she misses hers.

Stanley Kubrick is best known for exploring the dark side of human nature in his films, focusing on war, crime and betrayal. Although he directed a few films first, *Killer's Kiss* (1955) and then *The Killing* (1956) made Hollywood take note of Kubrick. *Paths of Glory* guaranteed him success. Later famous works included *Spartacus* (1960), *Lolita* (1962), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Shining* (1980), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Every film Kubrick has worked on has become an immediate success.

Kirk Douglas owes the beginning of his career to his former classmate Lauren Bacall. While he was still trying to get minor gigs on Broadway, she convinced producer Hal B. Wallis to test Douglas for the lead in her film, and he won the lead role in *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946). He then appeared in the 1948 film *I Walk Alone* with Burt Lancaster, and the two appeared in seven films thereafter. Douglas has appeared in close to one hundred films. He is loved for his strong chin and intense blue eyes.

George Macready plays the role of General Paul Mireau exceptionally well. He specialized in playing truly evil villains and successfully performs again. Mireau appeared in numerous films including *The Green Glove* (1952), *Vera Cruz* (1954), *A Kiss Before Dying* (1956) and *The Abductors* (1957).

BAFTA nominated *Paths of Glory* for the BAFTA Film Award as the best film from any source. The Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists awarded Stanley Kubrick the Silver Ribbon for Best Director of a Foreign Film.



## Summary and Analysis

*Paths of Glory* is set during World War I after France has driven the Germans back from Paris. The trenches stretch five hundred miles, and every few yards that the French have recovered cost hundreds of thousands of lives. General Paul Mireau is visited by General George Broulard, who tells him that they are planning to make a breakthrough to gain the Ant Hill.

George has orders to take the position by the next day, but Paul doesn't want to help. George then tells Paul that he is up for a promotion, and Paul realizes that this could determine his fate. Paul doesn't want to risk his men for his reputation. However, he convinces himself that his men can do anything, even win a seemingly impossible battle, when they are aroused to fight.

The next morning, Paul visits the trenches and meets several of the privates. As they speak, a bomb explodes in the background. One of them continues to repeat everything General Mireau says because he is shell-shocked. When the man admits to be coward, General Mireau punches him and has him transferred. The general then meets with Colonel Dax, who shows them the Ant Hill. When the general says it won't be long now, Dax looks at him skeptically. As Paul looks at the Ant Hill and says it isn't the most formidable example he's seen, multiple bombs go off in front of them. Then Paul tells Dax they will be taking the hill the next day and that he expects over half of the men will probably be killed.

Colonel Dax says that he and his men are exhausted. Mireau says that Dax is the exhausted one and decides to send him away to rest. Dax says that he can't leave his men. The general complains that Dax has never said they can take the Ant Hill, so finally he says it so that he can stay with his men.

Some of the soldiers check in before leaving on a reconnoiter mission across enemy lines. Before they begin their mission, a few flares are sent up so that they can see. The flares do not draw much gunfire. When one of the privates goes out and doesn't return, gunfire is heard. One of the other two, an officer, nervously throws a grenade and runs back to the trenches like a coward. The other soldier goes further into enemy territory to try to save the private and find him dead. The grenade explosion killed him. When the soldier returns to the trenches, he tells the officer that he killed the private and threatens to report the officer to his superiors.

Suddenly, Colonel Dax comes in to see the report and dismisses the corporal. Dax sees the open bottles of alcohol and orders the report done immediately. Angry at the display, he leaves.

All the officers meet so the general can give them the plans for the battle. They are all concerned that the weather is sunny and that they will have to hold the Ant Hill all day. Later, before going to sleep, a couple of men discuss whether they would prefer to be



killed by machine gun fire or by a bayonet. They say that they're not scared of dying, just of being killed.

The next morning, Paul looks toward the Ant Hill and offers some of the officers a drink. He makes a toast to France. All the men are lined up in the trenches, as Colonel Dax walks through. As they hear the bombs burst and see the smoke, the men hunker down. Someone counts down as they prepare to go over the trenches. Dax jumps to the top and waves them over while going to the front of the battle. Thousands of men jump out of the trenches and begin running toward the Ant Hill. As they run forward, men are shot and fall on every side, but Dax continues leading them toward the Ant Hill.

Paul notices that there are numerous men who are not advancing; instead of participating, they are hiding in the trenches. Paul orders the artillery units to begin firing on their own positions. The artillery commander tries to convince him that is a mistake, but Paul tells him to get to work. The commander says he must have the order in writing, and Paul tells him that he is under arrest. The commander ignores Paul and continues to protect the other soldiers.

Dax runs back into the trenches and tries to get the men out of the trenches. He blows his whistle and tries to climb the ladder but is hit by a man who falls back on top of him. Everyone who is still alive is retreating. Paul sees what is happening and decides to court marshal Dax and his men. The next day, Paul tells Dax that ten people in each regiment will be killed for cowardice. George stands up for Dax and says that most of his men are already dead.

On every other occasion, Dax's men have been brave. They retreated only because it was an impossible situation. Paul believes they were all cowards. Dax tells them to just shoot the whole regiment, but George says they just need one man to make an example.

Dax orders the soldiers to just shoot him, but George decides they should only kill twelve men instead of the hundred that Paul wants dead. Paul wants ten men to be court-marshaled for that afternoon, and Dax is made into the counsel for the defense. George is impressed with Dax and invites him to stay for lunch, but Paul insists that he leave.

Captain Rousseau, the artillery commander, shows up to talk to Paul while he is still with George. Paul says that the commander let some rounds fall short, but he convinces George that he should be transferred rather than court-marshaled. Paul knows the trouble he would be in if everyone knew he ordered fire on his own troops. He leaves George for a few minutes to speak with Dax alone.

On the stairs, Dax tells a man to call in a few of the men to meet him in an hour. Paul tells Dax to be sensible and drop the affair. Since Dax doesn't listen, Paul threatens to break him and ruin his career when this affair is over for showing such little loyalty to the commanding officer.



Dax meets with his men and tells them to arrest one person under their command and bring them in to be court-marshaled that afternoon. Dax meets with the corporal who has been chosen by Lt. Roget because of the earlier incident with the private. All the other men feel that they are being picked on. Dax tells them that they are on trial for their lives, and he directs them on how to act in the courtroom. He then goes to look over his notes.

Finally, the time for the court-marshal arrives, and the soldiers enter to appear before a panel of judges. Dax is frustrated that the prosecutor is not going to read the indictment before questioning the accused, but the panel feels that this would be a waste of time.

Private Ferol is the first up for questioning. He tells the prosecutor that he advanced quite a ways but then was forced to retreat. They try to send Ferol back to his seat, but Dax insists on questioning him. He discovers that Ferol was only with one other private because everyone else was dead. He shows that the line of questioning is absurd because it would be impossible for the two of them to take the Ant Hill alone.

The next to testify is Private Arneaud, who also advanced until he was ordered back by Captain Renouart. He advanced to their wire but didn't get any further. The private tells them that he didn't urge on his soldiers because they were dead or wounded once they got three steps out of the trenches.

Dax then begins to question Arneaud. He learns that no one was able to get beyond the wire, and he was only chosen for cowardice because he picked the wrong slip of paper. Dax then tells the panel that this soldier distinguished himself in some of the bloodiest battles of the war and begins to read the citations. However, the panel decides that neither medals nor witnesses of character can be cited in this trial. They want to hear only about the actions of the men on that day. Dax tells him that no one, not even himself, got anywhere near the German wire.

The next corporal never left the trenches because someone fell on him and knocked him unconscious. The corporal tells the panel that there were no witnesses because no one noticed him among all the other dead.

Finally, the prosecutor makes his final statement. He tells the panel that they all witnessed the attack and that it is a stain on the character of France. He asks the court to find the men guilty and impose the set penalties.

Next, Dax makes his plea. He first tells the panel that he is ashamed to be part of the human race. Then, he tells them that he was not allowed to present evidence, that no written indictment was made and that there is no stenographic record of the trial. Dax believes that the court marshal is a stain on France, not the attack. He tells him that a verdict of guilty would be a crime to haunt each of them until they die. He begs them to show mercy on the men.

The defendants are returned to the guardroom while the court discusses the case. Outside, a firing squad is being prepared to do their duty should the verdict of the court-marshal be guilty. Paul sends the men in the guardroom a good, hot meal. Ferol sits



down to eat and enjoy the food. He thinks about escaping somehow but believes that Dax will save them. They try to come up with a plan to escape. After seeing a cockroach, one man becomes jealous because it will see his wife and children before he does.

A priest comes in to tell the men to prepare for the worst. Dax has been trying to help them, but he can't get help from anyone. The priest helps the soldiers to prepare their souls and takes letters to their families. One man feels that he would be a hypocrite to begin praying now, but the priest convinces him to go ahead and pray.

Arnaud decides that his religion is alcohol, and the priest encourages him not to let his heart harden. When he attacks the priest, the others knock him out and have the priest call a doctor. They find out that if Arnaud is alive the next day, he will still be executed, even if he's unconscious.

Dax calls the lieutenant in and talks to him about the execution. He begins to inquire as to how he picked the corporal. Dax needs someone to be in charge of the firing squad the next day, and he asks the lieutenant whether he'll have a problem with that. He requests to get out of the duty, but Dax refuses. Rousseau, the artillery commander, comes to visit Dax.

At a ball that evening, George is in attendance, but Dax interrupts the party to talk to him. George pours a drink and begs Dax not to talk about the issue again. George realizes that they worked hard, but he still believes the execution should happen even though he admits that the attack might have been impossible.

George and Paul don't want to continue being criticized by the papers. He also feels that it will be good for morale to kill the men, and Dax asks if he really believes what he said. George returns to the party, but Dax tells him that the artillery commander was told to fire on the trenches. Dax tells the commander's story and shows the sworn statements from those involved.

Dax points out that three of the general's men were sentenced to be shot the same day that the general ordered his own men to be fired on by the artillery when he saw that his men weren't continuing an impossible attack. George is angry that he is being blackmailed, and Dax points out that the general's attempt at murder will be encouraged by the army. George then returns to the ball.

The next morning, the firing squad goes to pick up the prisoners. They even carry a stretcher for the unconscious Arnaud. When they enter the room, they find the men talking to the priest and trying to make sense of what's happening.

The corporal talks to the sergeant and asks for a drink. The corporal's also pretty excited that he hasn't had a sexual thought since the court-marshal began. He falls and cries, but the sergeant tells him to act like a man so that the newspapermen won't report that he was a coward and hurt his family. The corporal pulls himself together and prepares to go out.



In a large square outside, all the soldiers are gathered to watch the execution. Ferol cries as they walk, but the priest tries to encourage him. As they walk the long path, they pass the cameramen and the officers involved. Finally, they arrive and are tied to their posts as the firing squad takes their places. They also try to wake Arnaud because Paul wants him to be conscious for his execution.

The execution orders are read, and the lieutenant asks the men if they want a blindfold. Ferol accepts, but the corporal refuses. The lieutenant apologizes and then takes his place before the priest does the last rites. Then the firing squad takes aim and fires.

Later Paul and George talk, and Paul tells him that there was splendor to the event. Colonel Dax arrives at George's request. George then reveals that he knows about Paul's orders to fire on the trenches. Paul pretends to be appalled by Dax's accusation. George is glad to hear from Paul that the accusations are untrue, so the public inquiry won't be so bad on him. Paul is angry to become the scapegoat for the affair, and he marches out.

George then offers Dax Paul's job. George tells him that everyone knows he has been after the job from the beginning, but Dax tells him that he would never have planned for that. Dax smarts off to him, and George threatens to place him under arrest unless he apologizes. Dax replies by apologizing for not telling George that he is a sadistic old man. George is disappointed that Dax is sentimental and an idealist. George sees no fault in himself and asks where he has gone wrong. Dax replies, "Because you don't know the answer to that question, I pity you."

As Dax returns to his post, he hears the men heckling someone in a local bar. He goes to the door to see what's going on. The owner brings in a girl from Germany who he is forcing to perform for the men. They heckle and yell as Dax looks on. He tells them that she can sing, and they demand a song. She begins to sing a song in German as they yell. Finally, though, they get quiet and listen as she sings and cries. They all begin to think of those they love and begin to hum along with her, as tears roll down their cheeks. Outside, Dax smiles. He receives an order to move to the front immediately, but he tells the person with the message to give the men a couple more minutes. Then, he walks away and into the other building.





# Characters

## Colonel Dax, played by Kirk Douglas

### Description

Colonel Dax is in charge of the outfit awaiting orders to attack Ant Hill. He has been leading the men for quite some time, and they trust him because of his kindness and his brilliant military mind. Dax is appalled when he hears Paul's plan. Having been in this spot for some time, he realizes the futility of any effort to capture the Ant Hill. He tries to refuse, but he doesn't want to leave his men behind. He finally leads the men in a gallant but ultimately futile effort to capture the Ant Hill.

When Paul decides that men must die for the failure, Dax refuses to let them die without a fair trial. After talking to George, he is able to get the numbers down and represents the accused men before the court-marshal. Dax does a brilliant job at defending the men, but they end up dying anyway because Paul and George want to cover up their mistakes. Dax is depressed over his failure, but as he watches the rest of his men humming along and crying with a German singer, he realizes that there is still hope for humanity.

### Analysis

Colonel Dax is everything that a good colonel should be. He is honest and forthright. He is willing to lead his men into battle rather than stand back and watch others lead them so that he can remain safe. Although Dax seems to have no flaws, he is still a normal man. He cares for his men and wants to protect them, but he is not always able to be successful. When Dax is unable to save his men, he is terribly saddened, but he realizes that he must go on, as they fight the war to the bitter end.

## General Paul Mireau, played by George Macready

### Description

General Paul Mireau is a fame-seeking general who has been hailed as one of the greatest. When he is first called in to see George and realizes that the Ant Hill cannot be taken, he doesn't want to lead the mission. George convinces him that this is the moment to prove his talents as a general.

Mireau refuses to be held back by anything once he has decided to take the Ant Hill. He refuses to listen to reason from Dax. Instead, he decides that the men can and must do the job. When they fail, he tries to have their own artillery fire at them to force them into the field.



When the general's plan of attack fails, he decides that since many men never made it out of the bunkers, they should be killed. He wants to have the survivors court-marshaled for cowardice and shot by firing squad. Through this, he hopes to uphold his own reputation and maintain the morale of the rest of the men. Dax is able to get the numbers of those court-marshaled down to just a few people. Paul hates Dax for this but goes along with the plan so that he can retain his position.

## **Analysis**

Paul is greedy and seeks only his own glory. Although at first he seems to be a reasonable man, he quickly becomes ridiculous once George feeds his ego. Paul feels that he must prove to everyone that he is capable of being the greatest general in the land. Paul rashly agrees to the job and then punishes the men when they fail rather than taking the responsibility himself. In order to keep his own job, he has innocent men murdered so that he can save face.

## **General George Broulard, played by Adolphe Menjou**

### **Description**

General George Broulard is the one who first convinces Paul that he should try this impossible mission. George knows that in order to get Paul on his side, he must feed his ego, and he does this successfully. When the mission goes wrong, Dax and Paul both return to George to tell their sides of the story. Although George refuses to have all the men killed, he does demand that a few die as a lesson, much to Dax's concern. George is not a fair man or a compassionate man, but as he leads the army, he does what he feels he has to do, without regard to the human toll.

### **Analysis**

George is a conniving man who manipulates others to get his own way. First, he manipulates Paul into leading this impossible mission by feeding his ego. Then, he tries to get Dax on his side and promote him, but Dax does not give in to this deception.

## **Lieutenant Roget, played by Wayne Morris**

### **Description**

Lt. Roget kills a man by refusing to go out with him as they search enemy territory. He throws a grenade into the air and hits the man accidentally. Later, he blames it on Sgt. Boulanger. After they are forced to pick one man to send to the trial, he chooses Boulanger so that his mistake will never be revealed.



## **Analysis**

Roget is a coward, and he does whatever he needs to in order to cover up his incompetence and cowardice. Ironically, Roget is guilty of exactly the crime that he sends Boulanger to trial for. He is afraid, and he lets his fear stop him from performing his duty, ultimately killing one of his own men. However, because Roget will do anything to save himself, he is not punished for his actions.

## **Major Saint-Auban, played by Richard Anderson**

### **Description**

Major Saint-Auban is the trial lawyer in the case against the soldiers. He believes that they are all guilty and easily "proves" his case, since no one wants to believe anything else.

### **Analysis**

Major Saint-Auban is cocky and rude as he tries the men. His methods are not fair, and the men are considered guilty from the moment they enter.

## **Private Pierre Arnaud, played by Joe Turkel**

### **Description**

Private Pierre Arnaud is a young private who is sentenced to death. He is terrified to die, and he can't understand why he is being punished.

### **Analysis**

Private Arnaud is scared and shows it more than the other men. He brings the tragedy of the situation to life.

## **Private Maurice Ferol, played by Timothy Carey**

### **Description**

Private Ferol is also sentenced to die. Ferol explains in his testimony that everyone else was dead, so he didn't go out by himself. He is still chosen to die.



## **Analysis**

Through Ferol's testimony, viewers see that the men had good reasons not to get out of the bunker, and we also see the tragedy when they are still condemned to die.

## **Sgt. Boulanger, played by Bert Freed**

### **Description**

Boulanger is a good man who is appalled by Roget's actions as they scout out the area. He wants to tell Dax but knows that he could get in a lot of trouble for it. When it comes down to choosing someone to go to trial, Boulanger is chosen and ends up dying wrongly.

### **Analysis**

Sgt. Boulanger is accused falsely of causing another man's death. He tries to explain that he is innocent when he is sent to trial, but Col. Dax can do nothing for him. Finally, Boulanger comes to terms with his fate and is forced to go to trial and die.

## **Capt. Rousseau, played by John Stein**

### **Description**

Capt. Rousseau is the artillery commander for the group at Ant Hill. He refuses to follow Paul's order to fire on their own bunkers and is thus threatened with death. When George hears that part of the story, though, he lets Rousseau go free.

### **Analysis**

Rousseau plays an important role by refusing to follow Paul's instructions just because he is in charge. After George hears about Paul's actions from Rousseau, he begins to look for a replacement in Dax or someone else. Thus, Paul's career is ultimately destroyed.

## **German Singer, played by Christiane Kubrick**

### **Description**

The German singer performs in a bar at the end of the film. She is scared and alone, as she is forced to sing for a group of men who speak a different language and heckle her. As she sings, she continues to cry, as she remembers the home she loved.



## Analysis

The German singer's performance links the men to the enemy. Although they hate her at first, they can relate to her longing for home and begin singing with her before her performance ends. She shows that all people are the same, with the same wants, needs, hopes and dreams.



# Themes

## Race for Glory

The race for glory has selfishness at its core and destruction as its end. Paul and George are both focused on their own glory and agree to try the impossible task of taking the Ant Hill to the detriment of thousands of men. Unlike these men, Colonel Dax is not at all worried about his personal glory. Instead, he truly cares about his men. He wants to keep them safe and alive throughout this war, so he tries to stop the attack. When he can't, he at least agrees to lead the attack so that his men can feel that they have some hope.

George and Paul's race for glory ends in the deaths of thousands of men. Then, several more are executed because they were unable to get out of the trenches. Paul forces these men to pay for his own mistakes so that he will not lose face and can again go in search of glory for himself. Paul's selfish search for glory results in only death and persecution for the soldiers under his command.

## True Leadership

True leadership has very little to do with power. George and Paul have a lot of power, but they have no real leadership since they only have selfish goals. They care only for their own glory, but Dax actually cares for his men.

Only out of caring can true leadership develop. Colonel Dax fights alongside his men, and in that way, he bolsters their hopes and leads them into the impossible battle. Dax realizes that acting as if he's too good to participate with the men will only scare them and keep them from going to battle at all. Additionally, Dax has built trust with his men. This trust forms the basis of his leadership. Even though he can't save the men who are being executed, they know that Dax will always put forth his best effort to do what is right for them. He knows the keys to true leadership and instills confidence in his men.

## Similarities of All People

Although people may seem extremely different, they are also very much alike. The men feel that the Germans are the ultimate enemy. They believe that it isn't possible that these people could have similar thoughts and feelings to what the men and their families feel everyday. When the men finally listen to the German girl singing in the bar, they realize that, like them, she is homesick. While she sings about her home and family, she cries, and the men sing and cry along with her. People around the world are really very much alike, with the same feelings and emotions. War has the power to dehumanize both the enemy and, as George and Paul exemplify, our own soldiers. As Dax recognizes, it is essential to recognize the humanity of all people, even in war.

## Style and Cinematography

*Paths of Glory* is an intense war film that asks tough questions. When the military makes the terrible mistake to go ahead with an impossible mission and risk so many lives, the men are the ones who pay. Six are executed for the mission's failure.

Tough questions must be asked, as viewers watch the events unfold: Who should be held accountable for these decisions? Why are the men murdered? Why has Dax been ignored as he tries to stop the mission and represent the men?

The actors in this film are exceptional. Kirk Douglas does an excellent job playing the part of the brave Col. Dax, who stands up for what he believes. Douglas pulls off this fiery role and brings life to the film with his portrayal. He truly carries the movie and brings it to life.



# Motifs

## War

War is a sadly a part of human life. Problems abound in the world, and when they get too big, war eventually begins. Most people have some experience with war, either through the media, through friends and relatives or through their own experiences. This film strikes a cord for people throughout the world, whatever their experience of war.

This film is set during World War I. The military has been holding out near the Ant Hill, but they have no chance of actually taking it. When some of the generals decide to make a name for themselves, they set out on an impossible mission to take the Ant Hill. As the soldiers try to follow their directions, they are either killed or cannot get out of the bunkers. For their failure to do the impossible, the soldiers are ordered to choose one from each group to be tried for the failure. Despite Col. Dax's best efforts, the men receive the death penalty for their regiment's failure.

This tragic event occurs because of the war, but more than this, it occurs because the foibles and failures of human beings become intensified through war. The power-hungry and uncaring nature of the generals might cause harm or financial ruin to others during peacetime in some other context, but because the context of the film is war, the flaws of these generals take their toll in human lives.

## No-win Situation

Some situations have no winners. In *Paths of Glory*, viewers are asked to evaluate just this type of situation. The men have been ordered to perform an impossible mission. If they refuse, they are likely to die, and if they obey, their death is certain.

When the men make their decisions, the results are just as expected. Many die, and the few who live finally give up or get stuck in the bunkers as men fall on them. They are then entered into yet another no-win situation.

After these men survive the attack, they are required to choose one man from among each group to go on trial for the failure. All these men had good reasons for not advancing, but the judges do not think their reasons are good enough. After surviving such a terrible battle, these men are sentenced to die for the mistakes of their commanders.

## Greed

Greed is a powerful force in the hearts of men. The worst of all types of greed is the greed for glory. Paul and George are both greedy to receive their own glory no matter





what the cost. They are willing to risk the lives of the men to try impossible missions that if successful will prove that they are the greatest generals of their time.

Paul and George destroy lives and families because of their selfishness. When they tell Colonel Dax their plan, he alone is brave enough to stand up to them. Although he is considered one of the best men in the military, he is not willing to risk his men's lives. When he finally has no choice but to follow orders, he bravely fights along with the men he loves.

In the end, Paul's greed for glory is greater than George's. When the mission begins to fail, Paul tries to have his own artillery destroy the bunkers so that the men will be forced forward, leaving no evidence of defeat. When that fails, he tries to have all the men killed. In the end, George only allows a few men to be sentenced for the failure, but even those deaths are unjust.

# Symbols

## The Ant Hill

The Ant Hill is a major enemy stronghold that has not been taken yet but is extremely important to the war effort. When George first suggests the idea of taking the Ant Hill to Paul, Paul quickly exclaims that it can't be done. Paul finally agrees to try after George gives his ego a boost.

The Ant Hill is symbolic of an impossible task. There is no way that the troops can take the Hill because the enemy has the advantage of raining shells down on the advancing men. Despite the greatest optimism, the troops have no chance of taking the Ant Hill. As the men go out to attempt the impossible, both Dax and the viewers realize that the battle is over before it even begins. No amount of bravery by the men will allow them to conquer the enemy in this situation. Thus, men die for the failure of the commanders.

## The Six Men

Once the mission is declared a failure, Paul tries to get the artillery to shell their own men so that he can force their advance and hide his horrible failure. When the artillery leaders refuse, he decides that someone must pay. He wants all the men to be court marshaled, but Dax and George convince him to just have six men go to trial.

These six men represent all the men in their troops. They are all brave and have even won medals during the war for their achievements. Most were not able to get out of the bunkers simply because the dead men kept falling on top of them. Their arguments are impossible, though, because the panel of judges has already decided to convict the men. These six men also represent different parts of society. Some of them came from wealthy families, while others came from poor villages. In the midst of their trials, they come to trust each other and lean on one another despite their backgrounds.

## The German Girl

After the men are executed, Dax returns to get the rest of the troops together so that they can follow their next orders. As he walks back, he hears the men yelling for entertainment in a bar, and he stops to watch and listen. The bar owner brings out a German girl who knows no English and is forced to sing for the men. She sings a sad song, as she seems to remember home. As she begins to cry, the men quiet down and stop heckling her. Instead, they begin to hum along with her and cry for their homes and their lives.

The German girl is symbolic of the love and homes that the soldiers miss desperately. After years overseas, they have been trying to put home out of their minds so that they will not miss it so desperately. When the girl begins to sing, they realize that they still

miss those they love. They also realize that although she is German, she is human, with loves and sorrows just like them.



## Essay Questions

Why does Broulard want the men to try to take the Ant Hill?

Why does Paul Mireau accept the job?

What is Dax's reaction to the plan to take Ant Hill?

How do the troops react to the orders to take Ant Hill?

Why does a man die on a spy mission? How is this important to the story later?

How does the battle turn out? Who do you think is responsible?

What is Paul's reaction to the outcome of the battle?

What do George and Paul decide to do after the battle is over? Why?

How does Dax try to help the men? What happens in the end?

What helps restore Dax's faith in people? How is this scene significant?