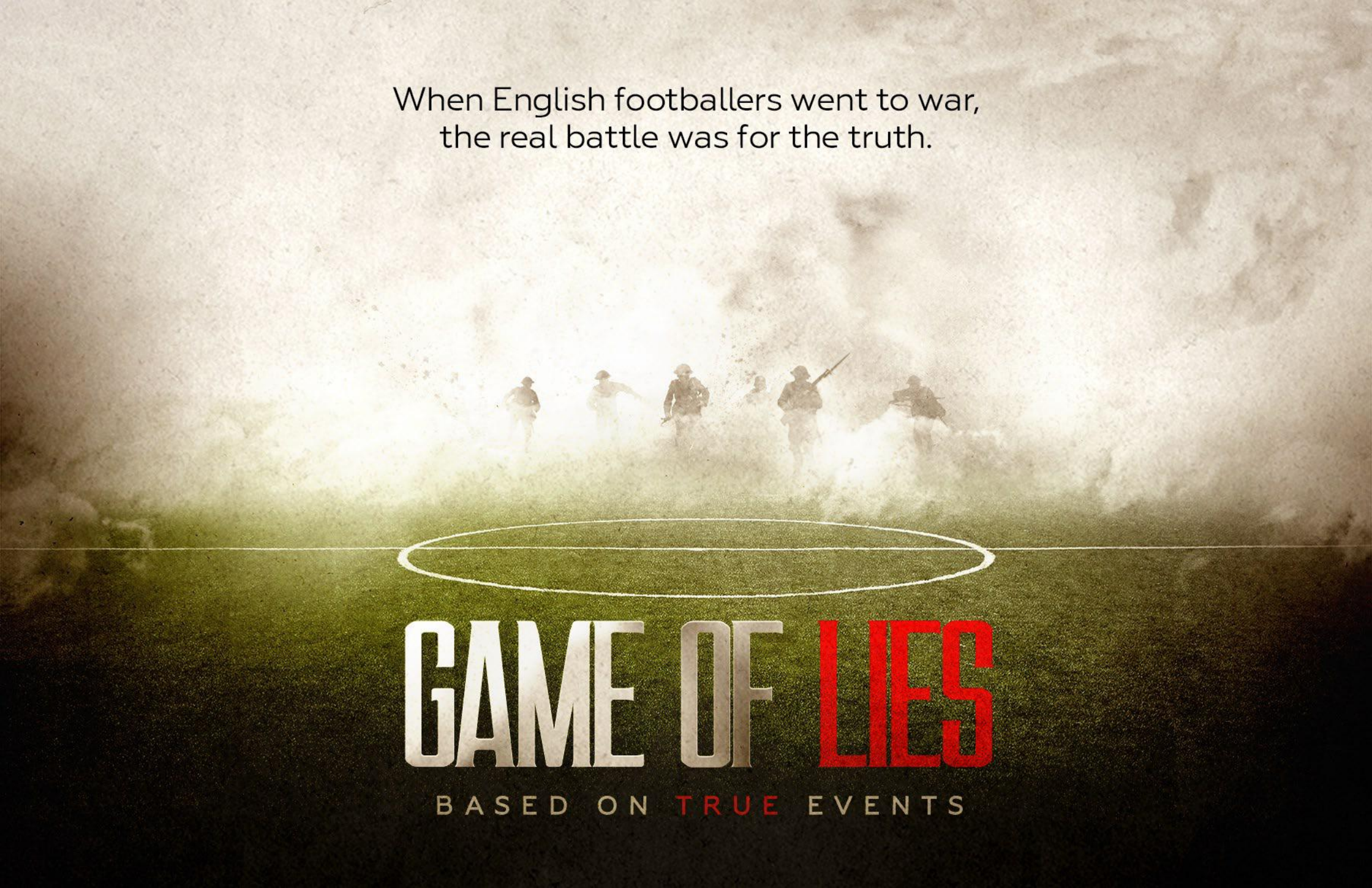


When English footballers went to war,
the real battle was for the truth.

The background of the entire image is a composite. The upper half shows a bright, hazy, and smoky sky, suggesting a battlefield. In the middle ground, several soldiers in military uniforms are silhouetted against the bright light, appearing to be in a trench or a line of defense. The lower half of the image is a dark, green football pitch. A white circle, representing the center circle of a football field, is drawn on the pitch and extends upwards into the war-torn scene, visually connecting the two worlds.

GAME OF LIES

BASED ON TRUE EVENTS



GAME OF LIES

When football legend **Frank Buckley** leads his fellow players into the battlefields of WW1, he begins an intense relationship with a female war reporter. Together they discover that the footballers are nothing more than fodder for the **British Propaganda** machine.



"Some say football's
**more popular
than religion**
these days."

"Well it's got more action doesn't it!"

Conversation between Lily DeVilliers and Frank Buckley
April 1914

Imagine if the top footballers of our time were suddenly transformed from soccer stars to soldiers, and entered the most brutal conflict the world had ever known.

It happened. A century ago.

In 1914, the First World War was in its infancy. But the conflict had already claimed thousands of British lives. The cry went up "why are the players still out there on the football field, when our young men are dying on the battlefield?"

A "Footballers' Battalion" was formed, and the finest professionals in the land signed up.

It was planned as the ultimate recruiting device. It became a catastrophe.

Of the 1800 football superstars who went to War, **600** would never come home.





“Why do we fight and die when we could turn and run? We could just fake a wound, or shoot the CSM in the head.

It's honor, son.

The same thing that tells you not to pull out of a tackle or stick your head into a leather ball as heavy as a brick. It's the same thing that has you run on a shanked ankle all the way to full time, when the pain makes you want to puke. It's not for money. It's not for glory. It's about honor. It's about wanting to get home and play again, with your head held high.”

Private Pat Gallacher
Trainer, 17th Middlesex, Football Battalion

THE SERIES:

GAME OF LIES is an **8** episode World War 1 **drama**, telling the story of **FRANK BUCKLEY**, a former soldier and now an England International footballer, who leads the Football Battalion from its inception, and through the brutal years of war.

For three years, Buckley and his men will lead a double life, playing exhibition games in front of thousands of cheering Tommies, before “rotating” up to the Front to face the horrors of trench warfare.

Buckley is surrounded by the legends of the game, unforgettable characters whose true stories combine high jinks, heroism and self-sacrifice along with darker tales of PTSD, career-ending injuries, desertion, and of course heart-rending tragedies.

But the series is more than a war story, and more than a football story.

Frank meets a young female journalist, a sophisticated highly intelligent woman named **LILY DE VILLIERS**. They are both intrigued with each other, coming as they do from two very different worlds. Lily realizes that Frank Buckley and the Football Battalion could be the story of a lifetime.

But as the War progresses, Lily uncovers a cynical disregard for the footballers’ lives within the higher echelons of the British Propaganda machine. The Press and the Government itself is issuing fake news - an entire century before that term would be used. And as the casualties mount, Frank Buckley realizes his job is not to win the war for “Glory of England”, but to get his men home, somehow, alive.

Based on true events, **GAME OF LIES** is a one hundred year old story that plays like a modern day drama. And while the action has been expanded to add a contemporary relevance and narrative power, the footballers’ extraordinary stories will be told exactly as they happened.

MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL WRITES IN NEXT ISSUE
SUNDAY PICTORIAL
CIRCULATION MORE THAN ONE MILLION EIGHT HUNDRED THOUSAND COPIES.
No. 69. Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper. SUNDAY, JULY 2, 1916. The Paper with the Daily Mirror - Sold at 1d. One Penny.

THE BIG ADVANCE: "ALL GOES WELL FOR ENGLAND AND FRANCE"



An advance by the British in France after preparing the way with smoke bombs.



One of the great gas cylinders on the German trenches.



Our boys after the advance at St. Eloi.



The "Fighting Fifth" after taking the German positions.



The Big Lie

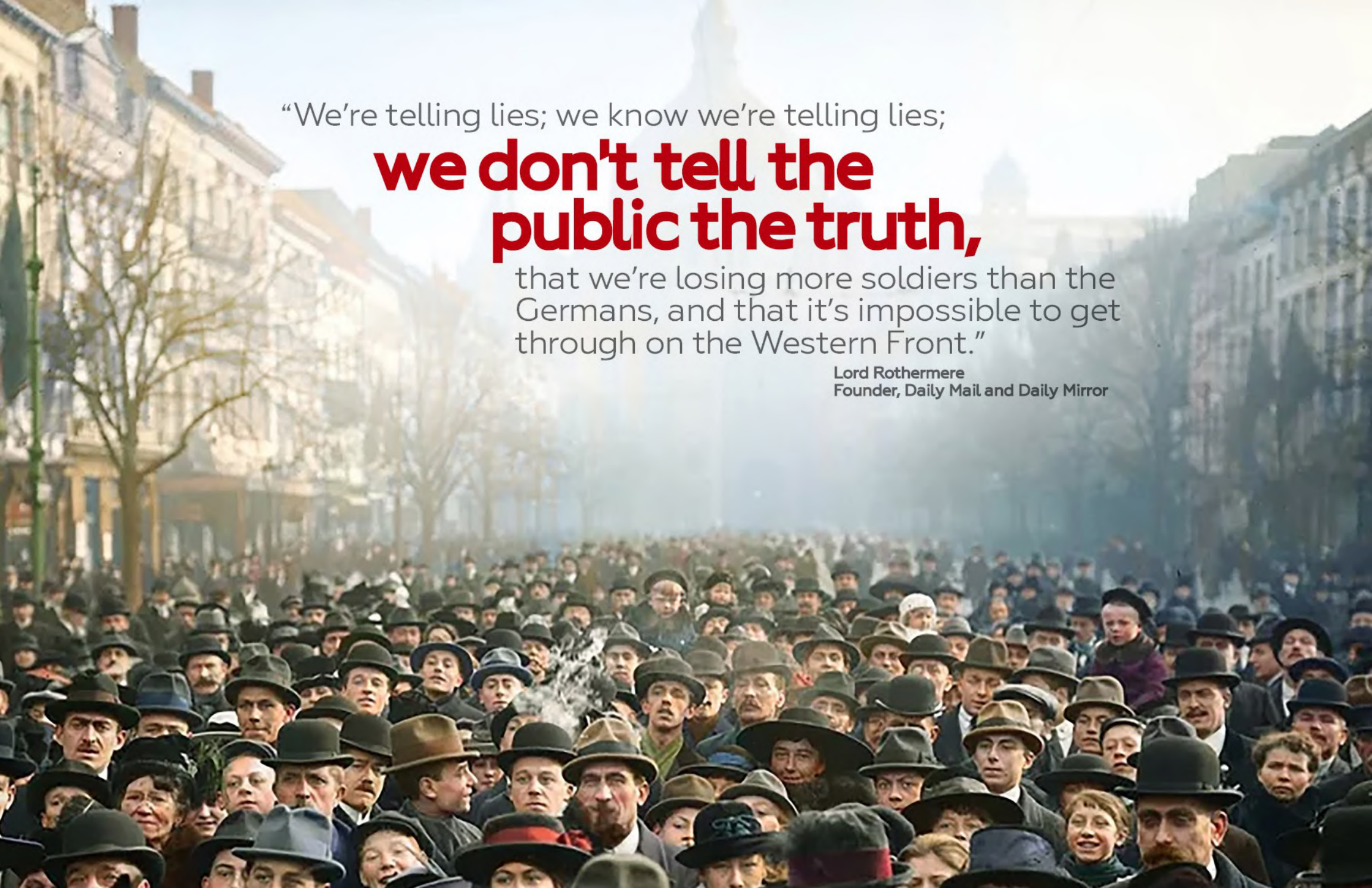
On July 1st 1916, a massive movement of British troops advanced south of the River Somme towards the German trenches. The next morning, the British people awakened to cheery headlines about "The Big Advance". The nation was "thrilled" to learn about the successes of our "gallant soldiers."

It was all a colossal lie.

In fact the British sustained 57,000 casualties that day alone - the worst in British military history.

The misinformation was part of a carefully plotted plan throughout the war involving the Press, the British Secret Service, and the finest writers in the land including Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells and Arthur Conan-Doyle. The public was kept entirely in the dark as to the brutal realities of the war. Reporters' copy was rewritten, edited down or trashed altogether. Photography was carefully controlled, and anyone taking unauthorized photographs from the Front would face a firing squad.

Although not part of the first wave, the Football Battalion would be sent into the battle zone within days, sustaining horrific casualties over the next few months. Reports of Footballers' deaths were minimized. They were no longer legends of the playing field. They were now ordinary soldiers, fighting for their lives.



“We’re telling lies; we know we’re telling lies;

**we don't tell the
public the truth,**

that we’re losing more soldiers than the
Germans, and that it’s impossible to get
through on the Western Front.”

Lord Rothermere
Founder, Daily Mail and Daily Mirror

THE STORIES:

Although this is primarily **Frank Buckley's** story, and he features prominently in every episode, the idea is to also foreground a different player in each episode. We will meet heroes and villains. Men who fought like lions. Men who retreated. Men who were captured and escaped. Men who faked wounds and survived. And of course, men who died.

Their stories will time shift from life before the war to their experiences during the fighting. And the stories will bleed into other episodes as repercussions evolve.

We will meet **Jackie Sheldon** who organized the worst "match-fix" in football history, and signed up to escape murderous bookies out for blood.

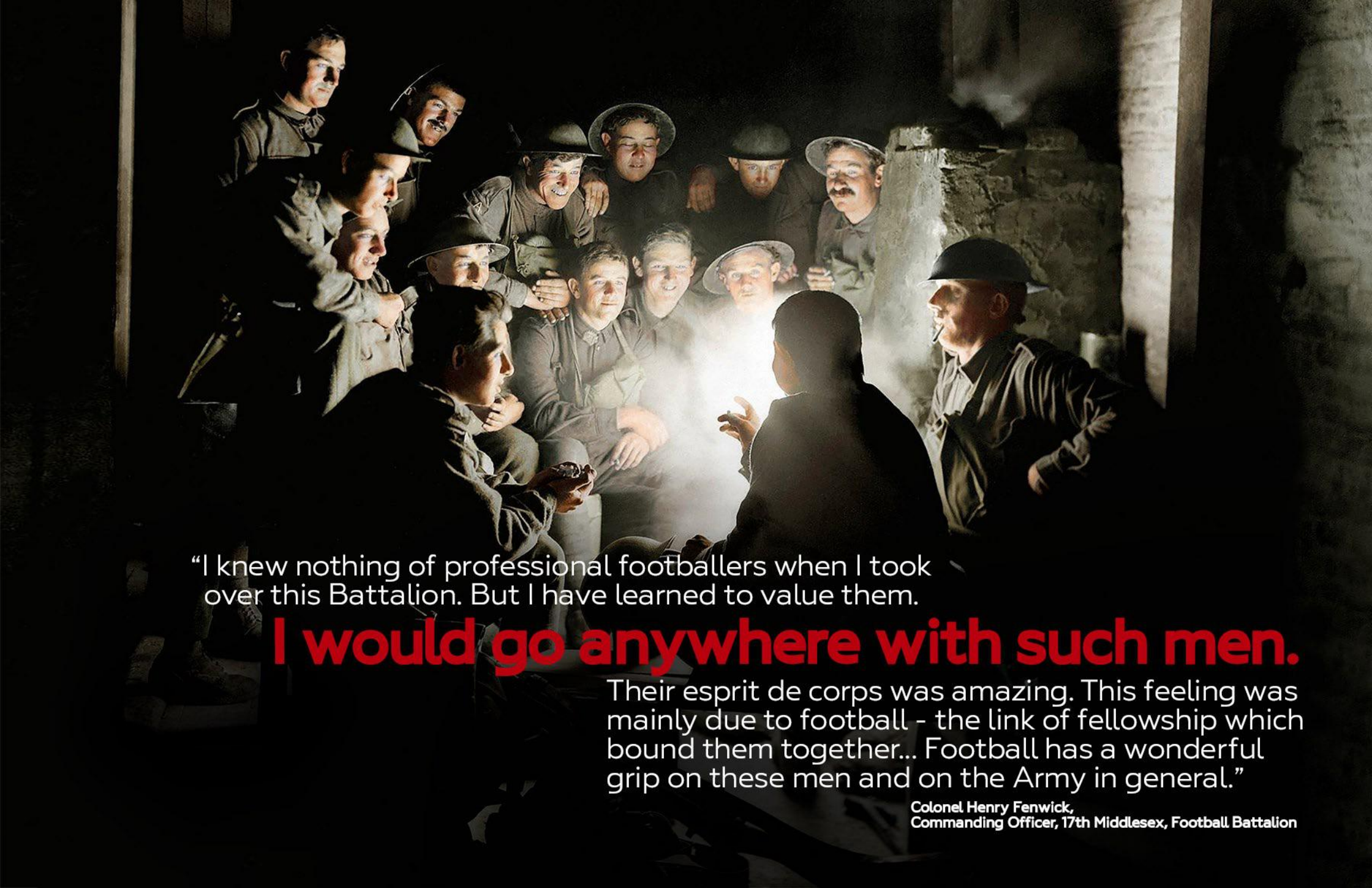
Walter Tull, the first black officer in Army history, who displayed astonishing bravery until falling victim to "shell-shock" - an early victim of PTSD.

Willie Jonas and **Rich McFadden**, inseparable pals from Clapton Orient, who will find themselves trapped in a foxhole. Jonas sacrifices himself to save his friend.

Wilt Nixon and **Oscar Linkson**, two other practical jokers who laughed their way through war, even at the suicidal battle of "Machine Gun House."

And the heartbreaking story of **Pom-Pom Whiting**, the Brighton goalkeeper who went AWOL to care for his wife and new baby, facing arrest and a firing squad.

All of this amidst the dark web of twisted propaganda that **Lily DeVilliers** uncovers that intentionally put these great sportsmen into the most perilous of situations.



"I knew nothing of professional footballers when I took over this Battalion. But I have learned to value them.

I would go anywhere with such men.

Their esprit de corps was amazing. This feeling was mainly due to football - the link of fellowship which bound them together... Football has a wonderful grip on these men and on the Army in general."

Colonel Henry Fenwick,
Commanding Officer, 17th Middlesex, Football Battalion

MAIN CHARACTERS



FRANK BUCKLEY

England International footballer who leads the Battalion, only to discover the country's cynical disregard for his players lives.



MADGE BUCKLEY

Feisty, wealthy widow whose money affords Frank a lifestyle as a country gentleman.



LILY DeVILLIERS

Sophisticated young reporter who uncovers the callous deception at the heart of the British Propaganda Machine.



**WILLIAM JOYSTON HICKS
AKA "JIX"**

The politician who forms the Battalion, and contrives to keep them fighting.



SPIDER PARKER

Buckley's nemesis on the football field, who becomes his unlikely brother in arms on the battlefield.



WILLIE JONAS

The heart-throb player who will ultimately commit the ultimate act of self sacrifice.



RICH McFADDEN

Brilliant footballer and Jonas' best friend. Will win numerous commendations for bravery - medals he will never live to receive.



POM-POM WHITING

Beloved goalkeeper with a thunderous boot, who will tragically go AWOL to look after his wife and new-born baby.



JACKIE SHELDON

Ringleader of the worst match-fix in football history. Joins Battalion to save his skin, only to become an unexpected hero.



WALTER TULL

First black officer in the history of the British Army, who demonstrates astonishing courage under fire until afflicted with PTSD.

EPISODE ONE

It is the last game of the season. **Frank Buckley** must lead Derby County to victory - or they will be "relegated" down to Division 2. He is interviewed by an intriguing young female reporter - **Lily DeVilliers** - who seems more interested in Frank as a person than as a footballer.

At the stadium, Buckley's wife **Madge** makes a grand entrance, regally enjoying the attention from the public, while his son Jack is swept aloft over the crowds to watch his Dad play. But the game itself is a disaster, the team lose, and Buckley will become a lower level player for the first time. Surprisingly the team owner and chairman - **Mr. Green** - is unfazed by the loss. It turns out that relegation - and a lower wage bill - will actually be good for the club's bottom line.

At home, we begin to understand the demons that are haunting Buckley. As a young man, he had bought his way out of the Army to become a footballer, escaping the fate of his brothers in arms, who were massacred in the Boer War just a few months later.

He also feels like a "kept man." Madge was a wealthy widow when he married her, which now affords him the lifestyle of a country gentleman, unlike his fellow 'minimum-wage' footballers. Frank is haunted by the idea that he's drinking "dead man's whisky."

In Europe, the drums of war are beginning to sound. At the annual Football Association Captain's dinner, Frank bumps into Lily DeVilliers, who introduces him to a mysterious politician known simply as "**Jix**." Jix casually discusses the possibility of war with Germany, whose troops outnumber the British by twenty to one. Buckley is confused. Why is this man so interested in him?

War breaks out just as the new season begins. At the first game against Clapton Orient, the Derby Stadium is filled with pro-war demonstrators, protesting that footballers should "Play the Greater Game" and "Shoot Guns not Footballs." Mr Green forms an unlikely alliance with Madge Buckley, who are both determined that Frank and his teammates should not be coerced into signing up.

During the game, Buckley has a series of violent encounters with the Orient Captain, **Fred "Spider" Parker**. The two men meet after the game to "fight it out like men." But the fight turns into a drag-out knuckle dusting brawl, leaving both men badly injured.

A grand, opulent ballroom with large chandeliers and people in formal attire dancing.

"It's the power in the land now.

**Everybody wants to know
a footballer."**

Lily to Jix
The Captain's Dinner

Lily DeVillers had witnessed the whole thing, and once her reporting hits the front page, **Buckley** and **Parker** are summoned for a potentially career-ending hearing at an FA tribunal. **Jix** is there, and privately offers Frank a way out. He tells him that he is establishing a Football Battalion- an Army unit made up of the finest players in the land - and he wants Frank to lead them.

When she learns of the proposal, **Madge** is furious. She has already buried one husband. She signed up to be a footballers wife, not a soldier's widow. Frank agrees not to enlist but, against his wife's express demands, he heads off to a huge players' meeting at Fulham Town Hall.

The Hall is packed. Led by Jix, and under a haze of cigar smoke, politicians and dignitaries are making a passionate plea to the footballers to sign up for "The Great International." Frank knows what this means - knows that many of the young players will get swept up in the excitement of it all, and will end up dying on the battlefield. Finally, as patriotic fever begins to rage inside the great Hall, he stands up to speak.

Turning to face his fellow players, he rips into the speakers on the podium.

"Can you not see what is happening here? Can you not see the deception? War is not a game." The dignitaries look on with confusion and alarm. Buckley could derail the whole thing.

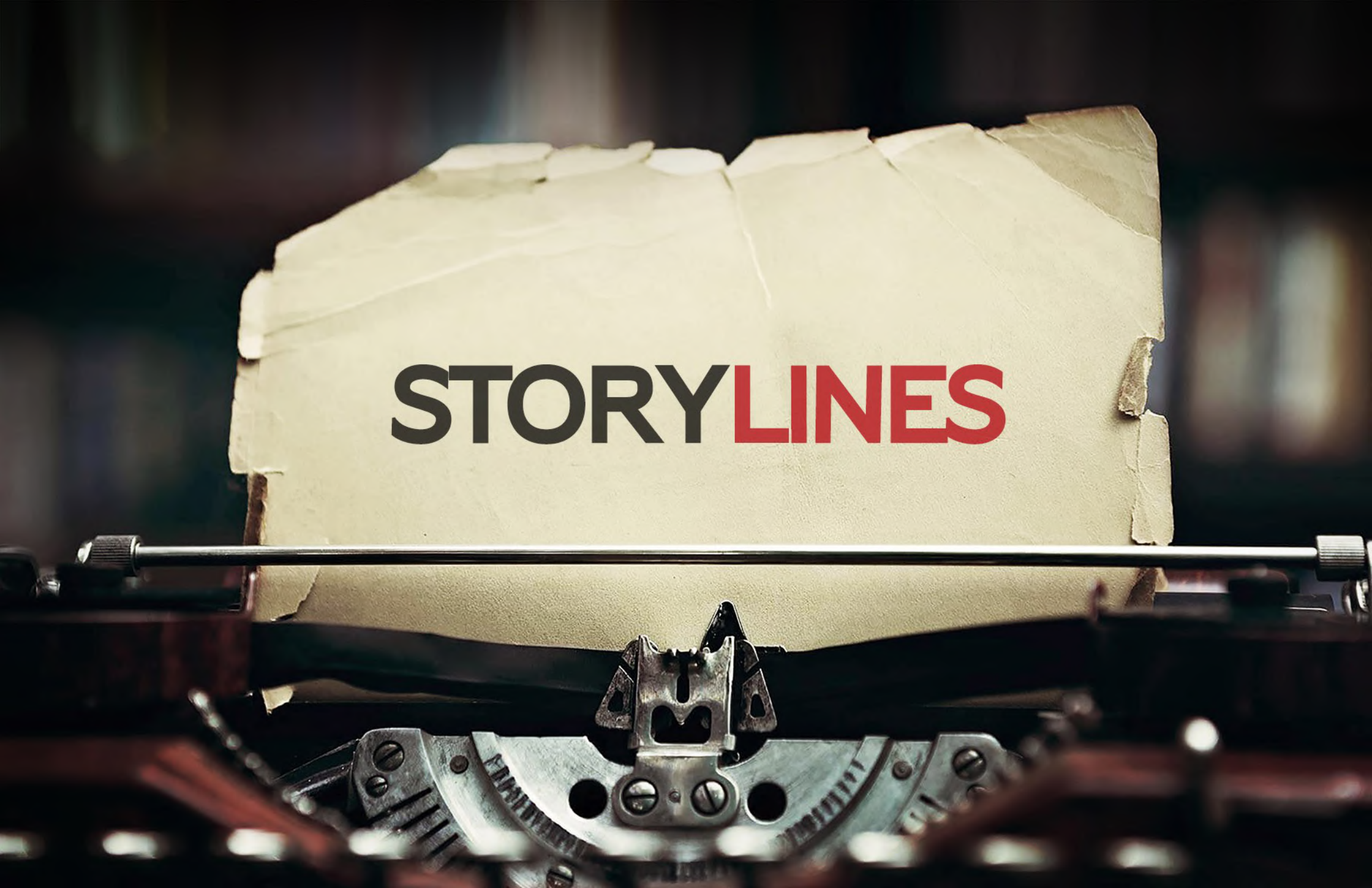
He continues. "I know there are footballers young and old who will enlist. If I could I would stop them. But I can see it in their faces. They will go to war."

By now the entire room has turned silent, every face staring at Buckley.

"And for that reason, I will join them."

It takes but a second for the entire room to erupt in cheers. "**Spider**" **Parker** is next to volunteer, bringing his entire team of players with him. From teams all around the country, players are signing up. Buckley's speech has made all the difference.

As Jix turns away from the crowd, the smile momentarily drops from his face. He sees Lily, standing by the side of the stage. "Is there something wrong?" she asks. "Wrong?" he replies. "One in three of these fellows is not coming home."



STORYLINES



FRANK & LILY

Frank's relationship with **Lily** will be a central storyline as the series progresses. And it's complicated. Frank is an honorable man in Edwardian England. He's committed to his wife, even though he is uncomfortable with his status as a kept-man.

But Lily seems to come from an entirely different world. She's a modern woman- independent, free-spirited, ambitious. The two of them are inevitably attracted, they both know it, just as they both know nothing can ever happen between them.

But as Lily begins digging into the story of the Football Battalion, she begins to uncover some uncomfortable truths. Firstly, her stories are being changed. An entire century before the advent of "fake news," entire fictions are being created about the exploits of the Football Battalion. Photographs are being manipulated including one dreadful picture of a dead player with a football under his arm and the headline "He Died With A Football in His Hands."

And then she uncovers even more sinister information. It's almost as if the footballers are being intentionally thrown into harm's way. Sharing all of this with

Frank just draws them even closer together. She makes frequent trips out to France. But there's always something holding them back.

Finally Frank is injured on the Battlefield, and invalided home. Weeks later he returns to the Front, where she meets him. But something has changed. He confesses to her that when he was lying on the hospital bed, he was unable to get her out of his mind.

But Lily has a confession of her own. She has fallen for another player. **Rich McFadden**. McFadden is a hot-head, always volunteering for the most dangerous missions, always venturing out into No Mans Land to rescue a fallen comrade. She begs Buckley to keep him safe, to not pick him for raiding parties and trench invasions. But Buckley cannot make exceptions for McFadden. "Can't?" he asks himself. "Or won't?"

Lily's story will weave from her romance with Buckley and McFadden, and her immersion into the shadowy world of British Propaganda, the Press machine and MI-7.

**WILLIAM JOYSTON
HICKS MP
(AKA "JIX")**



At the epicentre of the story is Jix, a classic British aristocrat and Member of Parliament, who is charged with forming the Football Battalion. Deeply enmeshed within the upper echelons of power, he recognises the power of football to inspire young Englishmen to take up arms and fight.

But Jix is playing a deadly double-game. On the one hand he embraces the football-soldiers, and becomes a confidante to Buckley and the senior players. But he is also a master manipulator, editing Lily's reports from the battlefield to paint a very different story from the realities of life in the trenches. And he is the connection to the shadowy world of MI-6 and disturbing realities of life inside the corridors of power.

But as the casualties mount, and more and more footballers are killed, Jix comes to recognise his own responsibility for sending an entire generation of footballing heroes into the carnage of war. It is something he will carry on his conscience for the rest of his life.

"Don't be shy gentlemen.
I'm looking for real men.

**Full-blooded
Englishmen.**

Who are the men who would
like to play the greater game?"

William Joyston-Hicks at the first recruitment meeting
for the 17th Middlesex "1st Football Battalion."



THE ORIENT BOYS

Throughout his playing career, **Frank Buckley** has had a nemesis in **Fred "Spider" Parker**. Parker is a cocky, brash, ill-mannered fellow, who also happens to be a damn good player and team captain at Clapton Orient. He and Frank have had many incidents on and off the pitch, including one bare-knuckle fight after a game that leaves them both unconscious.

But when Frank volunteers to sign up for the Football Battalion, it is Parker who is next in line, and demands that his ENTIRE team enlists with him. Parker and Buckley are sworn enemies on the football field, but will develop a grudging truce and respect as the war continues.

Two of Parker's team-mates are **Willie Jonas** and **Rich McFadden**, an inseparable and immensely likable duo. McFadden is single, but Jonas is married - much to the consternation of the female fans who swoon every time he looks their way at home games.

But as the war progresses the two men handle the pressure very differently. McFadden is a force to be reckoned with, heading out into No Man's Land to rescue the wounded, leading raids against the German trenches, always with a ready smile.

But Willie Jonas is more sensitive... not afraid, but devastated by the horrors he sees around him. Gradually the pressure takes its toll, and in a heartbreaking true story, he finds himself pinned down with McFadden in a trench. Jonas decides to sacrifice himself for his friend. It is a moment memorialized in McFadden's famous letter from the trenches:

"Willie turned to me and said "Goodbye Mac", 'Best of luck, special love to my sweetheart Mary Jane and best regards to the lads at Orient'. Before I could reply to him, he was up and over. No sooner had he jumped up out of the trench, my best friend of nearly twenty years was killed before my eyes. Words cannot express my feelings at this time."

For his part in the fighting, McFadden is awarded the Battalion Medal of honor. It is a medal that will never be pinned to his chest. He is killed in battle just seven weeks after the loss of his friend.

Ultimately, three of the eleven Orient men who signed up will not return from France. Parker is deeply affected by the loss of the men he cajoled into fighting, and will carry the guilt of what happened for the rest of his days.



“Willie turned to me and said "Goodbye Mac.
Best of luck, special love to my sweetheart Mary Jane
and best regards to the lads
at Orient.”

Willie Jonas to Rich McFadden moments before his death
27th July 1916

THE SCOUNDREL



JACKIE SHELDON is a Liverpool midfield dynamo, who gets embroiled in the most notorious match-fixing scandal in football history.

By 1915, the writing was on the wall. Football was about to be cancelled for the remainder of the war, and all the players were about to lose their livelihoods. As a former Manchester United player, Jackie Sheldon sees an opportunity to make a fast buck before the season ends. In a secret meeting at the Dog and Partridge pub, he connects with former and current teammates and they agree to "square" the game, allowing United to win 2-0 and avoid relegation. Players from both sides would profit from bets placed on the result.

The game itself is a farce, and obviously something is up. The Football Association gets involved, and although Sheldon completely denies any involvement, there is clear evidence pointing towards him as the go-between. He is banned from the professional game, and ends up on the run from murderous bookies.

Desperate to save his skin, Sheldon joins the Battalion, only to find himself at odds with **Buckley**, who despises corruption of any kind. Sheldon will work any angle to survive, placing his own neck above those of his brothers in arms. He's a shirker, a dodger, and is wounded twice under dubious circumstances, taking him away from the battlefield just as the fighting gets fierce.

But a strange transformation happens to Sheldon during his time on the Front - although he'd probably deny it. But some would say he develops a conscience, and ends up becoming one of the bravest young soldiers, risking his life to save others, and ultimately rescuing Buckley from the battlefield. Was he hero or a master manipulator? Buckley is never quite sure, but writes him up for gallantry.

Sheldon survives the war, his tattered reputation restored, and resumes his playing career, only to have it ended once and for all with a leg break in front of 50,000 fans at Liverpool.



“Rules? Don’t make me laugh.

**Winners don't
live by rules.**

We cheat, we fake,
it’s all part of the game.”

Private Jackie Sheldon
August 1916



THE BARRIER BREAKER

Walter Tull is one of the most popular players at Tottenham Hotspur, lighting fast, with a thunderous shot on either foot. He's also one of two black footballers to play professional football, and has had to endure a lifetime of taunts and racist chants. (How little has changed in 100 years.)

But when he joins the Battalion, **Buckley** will have none of that nonsense. During basic training in England Frank is impressed by Tull and promotes him as far as he's allowed - to Lance Sergeant. Oddly enough Walter gets on well with **Spider Parker**, who is a fellow sergeant. Spider might be many things, but he is not a racist.

Walter also proves a valuable aide to Frank. He's a good soldier. Brave, but not foolhardy. Frank learns to trust his judgment. If a night patrol to the German wire is needed he prefers Walter to lead it. There'll be no false heroics, no submission to panic if things went wrong. The two men begin to bond in ways which are impossible to imagine in civilian life.

Back in France Frank starts to notice something in Walter. He shakes. Not during bombardments, but waiting for bombardments. It's not startlingly obvious, but is discernible. Frank realizes Walter is suffering from 'shell shock' - a condition that is only slowly becoming known and still faintly understood.

Walter resists his friend's diagnosis. He knows there is a stigma attached to shell-shock and suspects that for a black man the dishonor will be even worse. He tells Frank that he's just tired. A rest will cure him. He'll get over it.

But Walter doesn't get over it. And as the action continues Frank looks at Walter and sees his friend has been reduced to a cowering wreck. He makes the decision to submit Walter to the medical men, fully aware that for every army officer who thinks such as thing as 'acute mania' (shell shock) exists there are probably 20 who prefer to call it 'cowardice'.

But not the doctor who examines Walter. A humane man, and a pioneer in trauma, **Dr George Robertson** has no doubts that Walter Tull's suffering is genuine and - with skill and patience - treatable.

Walter returns to Britain in late 1916 where he recuperates. Frank visits him while on leave and is amazed and gratified that his friend is on the mend. He's less keen to hear that Tull will soon have the papers allowing him to return to the battalion. Frank thinks it's premature.

As a way of delaying this he recommends that Walter is sent for officer training to the army academy in Scotland. Tull is determined to return, not just as a soldier, but as the nation's first black officer. At first the recommendation is treated as a joke. The army regulations specifically forbid white soldiers to be captained by black men. A colonel literally throws the rule-book at Frank. But Buckley champions his cause - and Walter Tull becomes the first black officer in the British army.

It's a victory for Tull, and for Buckley too. But at what price? In March 1918 Walter Tull is killed in action at Favreuil. His body is never found.

"When they call me names I run faster.

**When they throw banana skins
I play harder.**

Just put a ball at my feet and blow the whistle.
I can shut up a crowd of 30,000 with one kick."

Walter Tull

2nd Lieutenant, 17th Middlesex Regiment





"POM-POM"

Of all the footballers to join the battalion at Fulham town hall, **Frank** is most happy to see **Bob 'Pom Pom' Whiting**. He's the goalkeeper for Brighton and then, as now, goalies are considered to have something missing - in an interesting way. The nick-name is derived from the old 4-pounder naval gun and Bob Whiting has been known as 'Pom Pom' ever since his early days playing football. It's the phenomenal power of his kick. More than one ball has burst on impact. Those that survive the collision with his boot usually end up coming down to earth 60 or 70 yards away!

Pom Pom is a born entertainer, good for morale, never grumbles, and despite his ferocious reputation between the sticks, something of a gentle giant. Some soldiers genuinely do hate the Germans. Pom Pom thinks they're probably no different to themselves. Frank always picks him to play in goal for the Battalion XI - where his 'party trick' is using his massive kick to clear the opposition crossbar. "Bloody pointless, but hugely diverting" says Frank. "Like the war" Pom Pom replies.

In May 1916 Pom Pom develops scabies - a common enough disease for anyone sitting in a trench for any length of time. But it means he is sent home and is spared the opening weeks of the Battle of the Somme. At home he recuperates in Brighton and is able to be with his wife for the birth of their fourth child.

The arrival of the little girl changes everything for Pom Pom. He knows in an instance that he cannot return to France. In a move that he doesn't fully understand himself, he deserts. He heads for rural Wales, where he will spend 133 days in hiding.

But even out in Pembrokeshire he is recognized. He gathers his family and drives them in horse and cart to Lampeter where he catches the first train. But he's spotted by a ticket inspector. The military police enter the carriage and Pom Pom is arrested.

Word gets back to Frank that Pom Pom has been found and that he will face a court martial and the likely outcome is the firing squad. Frank pleads the man's case to the army top brass, but he fails to persuade them. Then he tries **Jix** who seems even more hard line. "What effect will it have on public morale executing such a popular footballer?" Frank wants to know. Jix tells him that, to save Mrs Whiting's feelings, Pom Pom will be reported to have been killed in action - a common enough mercy for executed soldiers. And then Frank chances his arm. "I will tell the world what happened." "Then you will be court-martialed" Jix replies. "So be it" is Frank's response.

Jix blinks first though. A week later Pom Pom is given a 9-month sentence of hard labour. He is released and sent back to the Footballers' Battalion just in time for the summer offensive of 1917. He's at Frank's side in June 1917 at Oppy Wood when he is shot in the stomach - a mortal wound. As his life ebbs away he has one thing on his mind. He's convinced that the army will tell his wife that they changed their minds and executed him for cowardice. Frank does his best to reassure the dying and delirious man that such a thing will not happen. Does Pom Pom believe him? Probably not.

"You know me lads. **I've never backed
down in my life,**

on the field or off. I've faced the worst the Bosche
can throw at me. I've been there for every one of you.
But that sweet girl's tears just tore my heart apart."

A letter to his teammates from Pvt Robert "Pom Pom" Whiting





BUCKLEY'S STORY

Frank is a good and vocal leader on the battlefield, just as he was a good leader on the football field. He understands men, knows what motivates them, knows what intimidates them and makes them anxious or scared. The similarities between football and war appear great enough to make it seem that teamwork and tactics can save the day on the battlefield just as they can on the pitch. Certainly, everyone wants to believe it. Frank believes it.

But it's not so. As the armies dig themselves into trenches on the Western Front and the barbed wire is rolled out from the North Sea to the Alps, the character of the war changes. This is war as nobody knows it. Valour, athletic skills, daring, clever tactics are almost irrelevant. The soldiers are becoming pure cannon fodder. Luck, not skill, is what increasingly counts. Leadership becomes about reducing risk, that's all.

When Frank loses a score of men at the Battle of Thiepval, the whole action seemed ham-fisted in conception. A total botched job devised by some armchair strategist. All the men know it. Frank's job is to vehemently deny it. He has to, otherwise the one thing he can still affect - morale - will plummet.

But it's still disconcerting to read **Lily's** relentlessly upbeat newspaper report of the battle. It seems to bear no relationship to what happened. Frank is furious when he sees a photograph of one of his dead men in the newspaper - the man's arm folded around a football with the caption 'He died with a football in his hand'. Lily swears she knows nothing about the photo. Her photographer is nowhere to be seen.

The battalion at least continues to return to England and play football matches - to keep home morale going, to keep recruitment to the Army going. All the men want to participate - not least because it gets them out of the firing line for a few days - and in selecting the team Frank realizes that he's now playing God. Play and survive a few

more days, get left behind and die. The pressure on him is getting too much to bear.

He confides in **Jix** who tells him confidentially that the days of the Footballers' Battalion are nearly over. Frank is relieved and agrees to pick a team to play the King's Eleven in London.

A week later, in the spring of 1916, two years into the war, the government brings in conscription - as Jix was hinting it would do. It's a historic step in the history of Great Britain which has never had a conscript army before. The idea of a purely volunteer army is over. There are too many dead soldiers, and too few replacements. From now on all men between 18 and 41 will be coerced into fighting.

Naturally Frank believes that the Footballers' Battalion is over. It has done its job.

But, astonishingly, he is told by Jix that the Footballers' Battalion will not follow the example of the other Pals'. They are to be maintained - indeed reinforced - with more footballers, conscripted ones this time.

And indeed the journalistic interest in the footballers actually grows. Deprived of football and all other organized sports, the folks back home are starting follow the Footballers' Battalion on the battlefield. They've become a 'human interest' story. 'The Undefeated'. Superhuman stories are credited to them, improbable tales of courage, absurd tales of derring-do, mawkish ones of heroism in death.

Live footballers are good news. Dead footballers are good news. It no longer matters.

Frank is disgusted. But it begins to seem too much for Lily too. Her copy is being radically altered and quotations spiced up or outright invented. They have both become pawns in a double game - a war that feels increasingly futile, and a propaganda exercise which appears increasingly absurd.

Frank is wounded while successfully dragging in a wounded soldier from No Man's Land under enemy fire. He is returned home to convalesce, and his wife steps in taking control, and restricting his contact with Lily, whom she suspects of having designs on her husband.

But when he receives a decoration for heroism after the battle he is cajoled into giving an interview with Lily for the papers. Both approach the task awkwardly and without enthusiasm, knowing how Frank's words will be doctored and changed beyond recognition.

Following Lily's initiative a transcript of the interview is also delivered to The Forward - a Glasgow socialist newspaper which has opposed the war from the outset. No battlefield secrets are divulged, and not a whiff of 'treachery' or trace of defeatism, is contained in the piece. But it still represents an unusually honest account of what life is like for the average soldier on the Western Front. There's none of the usual derring-do nonsense and every reader knows instantly that, yes, this is a real soldier speaking. That it's Frank Buckley, the footballer, is enough to cause a sensation.

Frank returns to the Front where, at Oppy Wood on the Somme, the battalion is sent up the Front Line and instructed to lead the attack on a heavily fortified German position. Two years before it would have been called a suicide attack and condemned as such. Now it's just another action. And Frank must lead it.

Before the attack, he gives the speech of his life. The battlefield has become the only honest place on earth. The only place he can be understood. The only place he can tell the truth.

The next two hours, he tells his men, are about saving each other. If that means killing the enemy and gaining ground that is what they must do. But they will do it to save themselves and look out for each other. Nothing

else right now matters. Not King. Not Country. Not Empire. Not even the 'folks back home'. Not honour, not valour. Just each other. A team.

It is the worst day in the life of the Footballers' Battalion. A massacre. Frank is found in No-Man's Land two days later, his life draining away. He has leg wounds and stomach wounds. Most of the footballers lie dead on the field or in the trenches they started from. Nothing has been gained. Everything has been lost.

He's stretchered to a field hospital where the surgeon decides there's nothing that can be done for him and turns to another wounded soldier he can save.

Frank is laid out in a field along with the other hopeless cases. A handful of nurses make the dying men as comfortable as possible. At nightfall another doctor using a lantern does a final round of the field to see if anyone is still alive. Frank is, though barely. And the doctor, a football fan, recognizes him.

Back home, Lily connects with Frank for one last interview. They both know that what happened between them can never be repeated. But Frank does want his story told. His playing days are over. But he is determined to stay in football and to become a manager. "I intend to be a new kind of manager. One who understands his players. Not treat them like pawns. Not like they treated us in France."

Frank's bitterness at how the footballers have been used and abused is thinly disguised, and it's why he refuses to join the victory celebrations. He says it would have been more sensible to settle differences by staging an international football match. "Maybe we will one day. England against Germany. Imagine that."

Lily writes it all up and takes it to her editor.

The article is literally spiked. No one wants to know that story.

THE LILY INTERVIEWS

Lily's relationship with the footballers is part confidante and part confessor - and she will conduct interviews with each of the central characters in each episode. This narrative device will be used and exploited differently with each storyline.

In the first episode for example, she interviews Frank Buckley prior to the biggest match of his career, and snippets of that interview are interwoven as the action moves forward. But when she interviews Walter Tull about the abuse he suffered at football grounds as a black player, the interview takes place at the hospital where he's recovering from devastating PTSD after months of battle at the Front.

She will interview Rich McFadden about his relationship with Willie Jonas - whose very presence on the football field would make young women swoon. But it turns out she is interviewing him after Jonas' astonishing act of self-sacrifice: "My best friend of nearly 20 years was killed before my eyes. Words cannot express my feelings at this time."

And when she talks with Pom-Pom Whiting - the lovable goalkeeper who goes AWOL - only later in the episode will we realize she is talking to him in his prison cell the night before his court-martial, with the possibility of a firing squad looming over his head.





EPISODE **BREAKDOWN**

EPISODE ONE: DEAD MAN'S WHISKY

Famous footballer **Frank Buckley** is haunted by the past. But after he meets a young female reporter, he begins to re-evaluate his life, and ultimately volunteers to lead the Football Battalion into battle.

EPISODE TWO: THE SCOUNDREL

After organizing the worst match-fix scandal in football history, **Jackie Sheldon** joins the Battalion to evade the bookies who are after his life. He's no patriot, the Battalion is just a place to disappear, but he immediately goes from frying pan to fire.

EPISODE THREE: THE BIG LIE

Lily DeVilliers manages to get sent to the Front, highly unusual for a woman reporter. But we see the first of her articles evolve along with a front page photo of a dead footballer clutching a football. She begins to realize she is an unwitting pawn of the Propaganda machine.

EPISODE FOUR: BLACK AND WHITE

Walter Tull's story. Frank is Walter's champion and demands High Command commission him as the Army's first black officer. It's a story of courage under fire, but also a PTSD tale. Shell shock was poorly understood in 1916, even more so in Tull's case where it was mixed up with notions about biology and race.

EPISODE FIVE: BLOOD BROTHERS

The **Billy Jonas** and **Rich McFadden** story. The two are inseparable friends since they were kids hence they have a very different bond from the other team members. The two are pinned down in a fox hole by a sniper. He says his goodbye to McFadden, gives his best to the boys at Orient and his love to his wife, then jumps out of the trench to deflect the fire and is killed instantly. The tragedy of Billy Jonas's death on the Somme descends, not only on McFadden, but the entire battalion.

EPISODE SIX: DESERTION

Pom Pom Whiting story. The amiable goalie turns deserter. Back in England, ill from scabies and his wife expecting their 4th child, Pom Pom goes on the lam for months. He is eventually captured and Frank is instrumental in persuading the army not to court-martial him. He's spared the firing squad only to return to France and be mortally wounded.

EPISODE SEVEN: REVENGE

Their trench is shelled with team favorite **Ben Butler** badly wounded in his leg, **Buckley** is called to an aid station and confronted with saving Butlers life and ending his career or...he gives the order to amputate. Butler begs to save his career. He dies the next day.

The battalion want revenge and decide to hit a German trench the next night. Armed with clubs and knuckledusters Frank allows his men to brutally decimate the German trench. It's against his nature but knows he needs to protect morale. Buckley is wounded in the raid.

EPISODE EIGHT: THE END OF A BATTALION

Frank Buckley returns to France after convalescing, now clear they are pawns in Jixs' and MI-7's game of re-writing the truth and covering up their big lie. He is confronted by a desperate, beaten battalion. He returns to deserters, the shell-shocked and men who have murdered prisoners. A mad house.

Tasked with leading the attack on Oppy Wood, Frank gives the speech of his life that leads to the worst casualties of the war yet.

Lily files her final report on the untold story of the Battalion and the truth of what these men endured.

"The next two hours are about saving each other. If that means killing the enemy and gaining ground that is what we must do. Right now, nothing else matters."

Not King. Not Country. Not Empire.

Not even the 'folks back home'. Not honour,
not valour. Just each other. A team."

Major Frank Buckley to the battalion prior to the attack on Oppy Wood
28th June 1917



GAME OF LIES

BASED ON TRUE EVENTS

CREATED BY

Adam Shaheen & John Watkin

WRITTEN BY

John Watkin & Mark Hayhurst

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

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