

# The long and the short and the tall

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



The Long and the Short and the Tall is set in the Malayan jungle in the Second World War. The British army have retreated to Singapore at the end of the Malayan Peninsula and the Japanese army are moving down the peninsula advancing on them. The play is about a British patrol sent out from Singapore to discover the movements of the Japanese army. The patrol have stopped in an old mining hut to rest and the play concentrates on the relationships between the soldiers. The author Willis Hall wrote the play in 1958 for the Edinburgh Fringe.

In the audience there would have been many war veterans so Willis Hall had to involve military slang and make the play sound realistic. The play is about human survival stretched to its limits. You can feel the sense of isolation when seven men are trapped in a hut and their only contact with the outside world is a faulty radio transmitter. In the first act of the play the situation hasn't sunk in and all the men are having a banter and a laugh. However, when a prisoner is captured, tempers flare and authority is questioned. The main officers in the play are Mitchem and Johnstone. Mitchem is the sergeant in charge and controls the group.

He is a war veteran and knows what he is doing. He doesn't allow his emotions to affect his decisions and judgement. We don't know where Mitchem is from but judging by his language we can tell he is a northerner. Johnstone is a corporal and is Mitchem's right hand man. Although he is second in command, he does not have as much skill in leading troops as Mitchem. He is an unlikeable character who tries to control the men by using brute force and pulling rank on the others. When the Japanese soldier is

captured Johnstone has no respect for him and doesn't see him as a human being, treating him very cruelly.

Lance-corporal Macleish is a Scotsman who has just recently been promoted to this rank. He is very serious about his role and tries to keep Bamforth in line. Bamforth however has very little respect for Macleish and undermines his authority through a lot of the play. Whitaker, Evans and Smith are three young and inexperienced privates. They are minor character throughout the play apart from Whitaker who is so nervous and jumpy that he does not seem able to cope with the situation very well and even ends up shooting the prisoner by mistake. The basic personality of Bamforth is that he is a very sarcastic cockney.

He is clearly smart and street wise although he has not been educated. He is very cynical about the war and you get the impression that he would rather be in London fighting on the streets. Bamforth speaks his mind a lot more and often rebels against the officers. He often speaks to Corporal Johnston as if he isn't above him in ranks by saying things like " you threatening me, Corp? " The exception to this is Sergeant Mitchem. Mitchem handles Bamforth by being cocky just like Bamforth is to the rest of the platoon. Bamforth's attitude to the N. C. Os, however, is different.

At the beginning of the play Bamforth is very cocky and teases everyone all the time and doesn't know when to stop. He does not have any respect, apart from Evans who is his little welsh sidekick. Evans is not as cocky or outrageous as Bamforth, but will stand up for him, even though he is subject

to a lot of stick from Bamforth. He is very stubborn, especially when it comes to defending himself or the Japanese prisoner. He is almost like a lawyer figure in the hut. Compared to the other members of the platoon, The characters are designed to contrast.

They are all very stereotypical and are very easy to guess what they are going to be like. There is a lot of regional hostility mainly compared by which area has the most fights on a Friday night. When the Japanese soldier comes into the story, the plot changes, especially regarding Bamforth. When the Japanese soldier is captured and held by Johnstone, Evans is given the daunting task of putting a bayonet into his guts. Evans doesn't have the guts do it and the bayonet is passed round everyone. No one has the heart to do it, apart from Bamforth. He says " Give me a hold.

It's only the same as carving up a pig. " This reinforces what we have seen about Bamforth's basic personality at the start of the play; loud, arrogant and joking about. This is also displayed in the songs he sings, the song on page 8 is a happy, jokey song while the song on page 80 is very depressing and sad, much like the theme of the play. As the play progresses, Bamforth is put in charge of the Japanese prisoner. At first, he treats him like a pet by making him do tricks. He says " Flingers on the Blonce". After some misunderstanding the prisoner complies and puts his hands on his head.

After some time in the hut, he shows Bamforth pictures of his wife and children. Bamforth is then shocked when he realises that the prisoner is a human being too and from this point on Bamforth sticks up for the prisoner.

Even when the prisoner has to die, Bamforth is there sticking up for him.

Unfortunately for Bamforth he is outnumbered and the prisoner dies.

Bamforth's language in the play is not as direct as Mitchem's or Johnstone's and takes some understanding. Willis Hall does well to make Bamforth sound very cockney using slang and informal terms.

Many of his speeches are sexist or racist and would shock some of the audience in the 1950s but in today's world it wouldn't be as bad. Willis Hall says the play is about human dignity which is self respect. Although Bamforth is eccentric, this does not necessarily mean he has dignity at the start of the play where he is not really being honourable and just annoying everyone. He does, however, gain dignity by sticking up for the prisoner. You see a side of Bamforth that is different from what we have previously seen earlier in the play.

He is kind towards the prisoner and has more respect for him than Johnstone or Mitchem, his own officers. Bamforth dies with dignity. When he then goes out of the hut and gets shot he can die knowing he has done something right. I think an audience would be surprisingly attached to Bamforth as a character as many of them would probably have known or secretly been like that in the armed forces. However, the ladies in the audience may be a bit offended by some of Bamforth's language towards woman and their sexual purpose.

Although he doesn't appear friendly, Bamforth at times could be a funny and nice person to talk to although probably mocking you in the process. I think

Bamforth's character is very imaginative from Willis Hall. He is the main character in the play and most writers would love to make a character like this. Bamforth heavily adds to the success of the play. In my opinion the play The Long the Short and the Tall is a play about humans killing in cold blood. Can men kill another fellow human being outside of a battle situation? In conclusion, the play was great fun and is one of the best dramas I've ever taken part in.