

# The long and the short and the tall essay

Literature



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The Long and the Short and the Tall is a play that explores the conditions and certain situations during the Second World War. The author, Willis Hall, sets up a troop of British soldiers to begin with, who are in the middle of the jungle trying to make their way back to their base camp. Unfortunately, they move further and further away from their camp, so far that they manage to pick up a clear broadcast via their radio transmission which is that of a Japanese broadcast.

To add to this misfortune, the author adds to the situation a group of tense soldiers who realise that they are only 10 to 15 miles away from a Japanese camp. The tension is further mounted by rowdy and at times brutally honest Private Bamforth who has a knack for bad-mouthing just about anybody that comes his way. When a Japanese soldier is taken as their prisoner, the author shows how each man develops in their own way.

The play is full of speeches like all plays, but certain characters such as Mitchem have longer speeches that illustrate the development and intent of their character, in Mitchem's case, the role of the leader. Here is my analysis on all speeches that are not only bigger in their length but have signs of the intent and development of the character:

This speech is by Mitchem and is addressed to Corporal Macleish. Mitchem, who is their leader, addresses Macleish simply because prior to this speech, Macleish who was temporarily in charge of the section felt he had to take action against a mouthy Bamforth who has wound him up. When Mitchem returned from his search of the jungle along with Corporal Johnstone he discovered what he described as a 'monkey house'. When questioning

Macleish on what had been going on his absence, Macleish replied that he had occasion to reprimand a soldier. When asked who, he replies that it was a personal matter and that he will deal with it personally. This angers Mitchem and this is where the speech begins. Mitchem outlines that whilst out in the army with him, personal matters are not part of the package. He then goes on to say, 'While you were settling it in your own way - sorting out your personal matters - you could have seven men, including yourself, with their tripes on the floor'.

What Mitchem tries to outline in this comment is that if Macleish isn't fully concentrating on the task set and is focusing on his personal matters then he and the rest of the soldiers may as well just 'drop dead'.

After this, Mitchem then addresses the rest of the patrol and tells of Macleish's incompetence and how the army has not gained much by it. After this, he says something which is very important, 'I brought you out and I intend to take you back'.

This is important because Mitchem shows that he is not in the army because he wants to run a group of dead men - he intends to get them through and he outlines this.

He then goes on to say what the whole conversation is about, 'I want the man who started all this argument to stand out now'.

He hesitates and when there is no reaction he calmly reacts with a sheer example of the authority he possesses, 'All right. Fair enough. Have it how you want. You'll all be on fatigues when we get back to camp'.

This simply means that they will all be punished because of their silence.

That is the last line of that speech from Mitchem. The author, Willis Hall, put that speech in the play because I think that because this form of long speech from Mitchem comes early on in the play, the author is giving the reader a glimpse of what is to come from the camp's leader Mitchem who has all the authority. He is trying to establish a sense of typicality for Mitchem's character - as the leader who always has a go at his minors for their mistakes.

Overall, this speech from Mitchem really sets the standard for what is to come in the rest of the play - a typical leader who is rallying the troops in any way he can, even if it means disciplining each and every one of them.

Both speeches are addressed to the listening soldiers by Bamforth.

There are two texts from Bamforth that reflect different sides to his character but also share similarities. On page twenty, the soldiers speak of where they would rather be other than on the island. In a small quote before his main speech begins, Bamforth says that he would rather be anywhere but where they are and even goes as far as saying, 'Anywhere but here. Desert Island. One that's loaded with bags of native bints wearing grass frocks. Settle down and turn native. Anything's better than ending up with Tojo's boys'.

In his main speech, Bamforth outlines how easily he would get off the island that the soldiers are on if he could, saying that his fellow comrades could even come and 'wave him off'. He says that he would be comfortable in his boat 'lying back and getting sunburnt with a basket of coconuts', whilst his <https://assignbuster.com/the-long-and-the-short-and-the-tall-essay/>

fellows are being trailed by a 'bunch of Nippos'. He then goes on to say that he sees whilst in the boat 'In the distance, our old comrade in arms and hopeless radio operator, Private Whitaker, making peace with the invading army of the Rising Sun - and the invading army of the Rising Sun is carving pieces out of Private Whitaker'.

These are the last lines of his speech and clearly show a highly infectious and abusive side to a confident Bamforth, confident in the sense that he believes that given the chance he would flee the island. He also adds that looking back at the island he would see in his eyes the incompetent Private Whitaker trying his best to make peace with the Japanese (Army of Rising Sun), but they are carving pieces out of Private Whitaker. This shows a side to Bamforth that establishes him as the 'demoraliser' of the group. The one that always dampens a fellow soldier's confidence whilst at the same time basking in his own humour.

On page twenty one, in another main Bamforth speech, Bamforth shows a different side to his character. The whole speech begins with Bamforth telling of his own interpretation of what the general had told him before his joining to the army. He starts by saying 'It's what we are fighting for. Loose living and six months holiday a year. The General told me that himself. He says to me 'Bammo, my old son, the British army's in a desperate position. The yellow peril's about to descend upon us, the gatling's jammed, the Colonel's dead.' This whole part of the speech shows a lot about Bamforth's character, showing humour, sarcasm and even a hint of Bamforth's racist side (yellow peril).

Bamforth then continues to speak from the general's point of view by adding, 'As if we hadn't got enough to worry about, we've got two thousand Jocks up the jungle suffering from screaming ab-dabs and going mad for women, beer and haggis. We're posting you out there Bamforth to relive the situation'.

Bamforth then goes on to conclude 'So before I had time to relieve myself, here I was'. This whole speech also gives a sense of brutal honesty, the fact that they are more or less lost in the middle of the jungle with the 'yellow peril' about to descend upon them. The part of the speech about Bamforth there to relive the situation is again a sense of sarcasm from Bamforth.

Overall, for Bamforth, I think that his character is very humorous for the reader with his wise-crack one liners and his disrespect for his superiors also makes things very interesting, but overall the author makes it clear that the other side to Bamforth is filled with sarcasm, racism, and he almost cowardly about his attitude to the war. I believe this simply because he says that he would flee the war immediately if given the chance.

Also, Bamforth is only funny to the reader when he is mocking his fellow troops but at times it is blatantly demoralising. An example of this is one scene in the play when Bamforth jokes that Evans's girlfriend is probably in the mountains with 'a big yank'. Bamforth also uses his imagination to portray what he believes is the truth as shown in his main speeches on pages twenty and twenty one.

This is another long speech from Mitchem who is engaged in conversation with Macleish. Mitchem reflects on the problems with men and the world,  
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leading on to say that 'bints' (women) are the problem to it all. Macleish then prods the matter by enthusiastically telling Mitchem to continue. As Mitchem's main speech begins, he speaks of how ordinary blokes would be called up for the army and they wouldn't want to go. He continues by saying that the bloke winds up with a woman and delves further into the matter by saying, 'She whips him up the dancers once and that's the end of that. She likes the colour of his uniform and that makes him feel big'.

He tries to build up to the fact that women are what influence men into joining the army. Mitchem then adds humorously, 'Six months before he was sitting behind a desk, copping on a weekly, picking his nose and chatting up the pigeons on the window-sill'. Extending to this he adds that before the bloke knows it he's off on a boat with his 'woman' watching from the boat deck who has a bitsy hanky and tears clogging up her powder. He adds 'My hero stuff'. This is important because what Mitchem is trying to say is that a man to a woman in a situation such as that is their hero, their man going out to fight for the country. He then concludes, 'So there stands Charlie Harry, five foot four in his socks, feeling like he's Clive of India, Alexander the Great and Henry Five rolled into one'.

Overall, the whole speech is put there by Willis Hall simply because it shows that even though Mitchem is the leader and he is the one that has to be calm and be able to motivate the troops, at the same time, he also sees the reality that men haven't joined the army to give their life away or to have it in danger but do it because they have women that look up to and expect them to go. Mitchem shows in the whole of the speech that he even he can be opinionated and the author, Willis Hall, clearly tries to show this.

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This speech from Mitchem is the longest of the entire play and it is because of this, that the first part is addressed to Bamforth whilst the second half, to the rest of the troops.

The first part connects directly from Mitchem's other speech on pages twenty four and twenty five and is addressed to Bamforth in probably the most direct and aggressive manner of the entire play. It is all connected with the fight that Bamforth nearly started with Macleish, and it is here that Mitchem addresses the matter with Bamforth about his attitude to the army.

He begins the speech by saying that he has been watching Bamforth from the very beginning of his joining to the army, he emphasises the fact that Bamforth tries to be the rebel of the group by saying, 'The barrack-room lawyer. The hard case'. He then adds that the fact of the matter is, is that the hard-case stuff does not work with him because he doesn't work according to the book himself.

'But if you want to try and come it on with me I'll tell you, here and now, that I can be a bastard. I can be the biggest bastard of them all'.

This shows an almost aggressive side to a Mitchem who is clearly trying to get his point into Bamforth's head. This period also shows that Mitchem is almost willing Bamforth into 'trying it on with him' because he then adds, 'I've got three stripes start on you. You're a non-runner son'.

What Mitchem is basically trying to say here is that he is the one who has all the authority - he can hit Bamforth if he wants, he can take Bamforth off the



camp and he can more or less do anything else that he wants because he has the most authority as he outlines with his 'three stripes start'.

The second half of the speech is more in line with what Mitchem is more in-tuned with, giving orders. This is all pretty ordinary but Mitchem shows typical leadership by demanding exactly what must be done starting with the fact that they need to go back to the route they came from, which is fifteen miles to the camp. He also stresses throughout this period of speech that he wants five yard intervals. He includes, 'There'll be no talking'.

This shows a concerned side to Mitchem who acknowledges that hardly any sounds can be made. Overall, this speech is interesting because it is a sheer reflection of other speeches from Mitchem, the Sergeant that is always giving out orders but this time some of it is made personal with the whole Mitchem vs. Bamforth affair. Mitchem thinks that Bamforth is bad for the army but the bottom line is that they are all there in the middle of the jungle and so that is why I believe that Mitchem moves on to commanding his troops so easily after his aggressive speech to Bamforth.

The author put this speech where it was because he had to make the reader believe that even though Bamforth has a big mouth, even he could not speak against Mitchem. On the other hand he shows importantly for the first time, what Mitchem really thinks of Bamforth. The penultimate line of this speech is 'So you keep it five yards - dead. Anybody any questions?'

Conclusion

On the matter of the play and how far its story goes, I believe that from start to finish the play can be interpreted as an evolution - an evolution of characters whose true colours begin to surface when an outsider or enemy comes into the situation. Bamforth and Mitchem develop as two different roles, Mitchem as the leader and Bamforth as the demoraliser who defies his superiors.

Bringing my analysis to a close, Mitchem and Bamforth were both intended as the main characters of the play for the depth of their roles but what author Willis Hall really portrays well is how they express themselves - through their honesty and the fact that they acknowledge the reality of the situation which is what makes the story so interesting.