

# Synopsis of *War Horse* the play, by Nick Stafford

## 2013 UK & Ireland Tour version

### August 1912

The production starts with **LIEUTENANT NICHOLLS** sketching the countryside of Devon. An auction begins, conducted by **CHAPMAN CARTER**. The bidding quickly rises between **TED NARRACOTT** and his brother **ARTHUR NARRACOTT**. Ted, who has been drinking, finally makes the winning bid of 39 Guineas. Back at their farm, **ROSE NARRACOTT** is furious that her husband has wasted the mortgage money. She puts **ALBERT NARRACOTT** in charge of bringing the horse on so that when he's grown they can sell him. Albert feeds the foal, names him **JOEY** and teaches him a special whistle call.

### July 1914

Two years pass and one night, Ted tries to put a collar on Joey because he has bet his brother Arthur 39 Guineas that Joey can plough a furrow in seven days time. If he loses, Arthur gets the horse. Albert starts to train Joey, introducing him to the collar, the bridle, the reins, and finally the plough and Joey eventually pulls the plough to victory.

### August 1914

A peal of church bells means the war has begun. In the village they are enlisting men and offering to pay £100 for an officer's horse; Ted sees an opportunity to make money and sells Joey to Nicholls. Albert is desperate when he discovers what his father has done and offers to join up, but at 16 is too young. Nicholls promises that Joey will be well cared for. Albert says goodbye to Joey and swears they will be together again. Arthur gives his son **BILLY NARRACOTT** a knife that both he and Billy's grandfather used in wars.

### November 1914

Nicholls and Joey are posted to France along with **CAPTAIN STEWART** and his horse **TOPTHORN**. They spot enemy infantry but just as they are ready to charge, machine-gun fire breaks out and Nicholls is killed.

### Christmas Day 1914

Back in Devon, Ted and Rose give Albert a bicycle for Christmas. Arthur brings a parcel for Albert that he has picked up at the post office. Albert is at first thrilled to find Major Nicholls' sketchbook, with drawings of him and Joey; then Rose reads the letter telling him Nicholls has been killed in action and Albert realises he must have been riding Joey. Albert tears a picture from the sketch book and dashes off on his new bike to enlist.

### March 1915

Captain Stewart tells Trooper Billy Narracott, who is shaking violently with nerves, to ride Joey into battle. Other horses run into barbed wire, but Joey and Topthorn keep going.

Albert has joined the Yeomanry and he arrives in France. **SERGEANT THUNDER** tells him the Yeomanry has been disbanded, so he's now in the infantry. Captain Stewart and Billy have been taken captive by German soldiers; they are searched and Billy's knife is found, when he tries to retrieve it, **PRIVATE KLAUSEN** kills him. **CAPTAIN FRIEDRICH MÜLLER** calms the situation. **PAULETTE**'s farm is occupied by German soldiers, here Friedrich introduces her young daughter **EMILIE** to the horses. Muller decides to take the dead Ambulance Orderly's uniform and pretend that Müller is dead; Joey and Topthorn are now used to pull ambulances.

### Christmas 1916

Emilie and Muller make a pact to always try and keep the horses from danger. Albert and his pal **DAVID** must face the front line of battle – David doesn't make it to the other side. Paulette's farm is nearly destroyed and so she decides to run away with her daughter; Muller and the two horses join them. Klausen, now promoted to Lance Corporal, leads on two exhausted horses pulling a huge gun. Friedrich recognises him and knows he is dangerous. Klausen realises the Ambulance Orderly is really Friedrich, and says Joey and Topthorn will have to help pull the gun.

### November 1918

Topthorn is weakened with exertion. Albert meets Emilie on the battlefield and when there is a gas attack, he tries to protect her using his mask. Topthorn collapses and dies. A British tank appears and Muller is killed. Joey is forced to flee and leave his dead friends. He runs into barbed wire in No Man's Land. **GEORDIE**, a Sentry in the British trench and **MANFRED** a German in the opposite trench both see the horse and, waving white flags, they both go out to help Joey. They toss a coin to decide which side will keep him. Geordie wins.

### 11 November 1918

Albert has been blinded by the gas, but is told he will recover. Geordie and Thunder lead Joey in and he is inspected by **VETERINARY OFFICER MARTIN** who prepares to shoot Joey. Albert makes his special call and Joey reacts. Finally, the two are reunited. A bell chimes eleven times, signalling the war's end and Albert and Joey finally return to Devon.

