

**The Japanese soldier is the most important character in the play.**  
**Show how each soldier is affected by the presence of a P.O.W.**

*To answer the question posed by the title, I will be studying and analysing the following characters in the play "The long, the short and the tall".*

*465- Sergeant Mitchem, R  
839- Corporal Johnstone, E  
594- Lance Corporal Macleish, A.J  
632- Private Whitaker, S.  
777- Private Evans, T, E.  
877- Private Bamforth, C.  
611- Private Smith, P.*

*This play was set in the Malayan jungle during the Japanese advance on Singapore in early 1942.*

*The first character in the play is Corporal Johnstone.*

*From the beginning of the play, it is obvious that Corporal Johnstone's expresses an ignorant attitude towards his fellow soldiers without exceptions, even to some extent Sergeant Mitchem. Then the prisoner arrives. Corporal Johnstone at this time is not affected by the presence of the prisoner anymore than he is affected by the other soldiers; his ignorance is passed on to him and he wants the prisoner dead. Together with being impolite, Johnstone is also aggressive and racist. He is the one who grabs the curious prisoner when he was looking in at the radio and he also the one who insists on killing the prisoner instantly... "Come on then, one of you! Get him quick! Evans! Do for him!" Johnstone shouts out the order as if a professional in killing and condemns every way by which Evans intends to go about killing the prisoner... "Not that way, lad! You'll only bust a bone. Feel it first, then ram it in". After the failure of*

*one soldier in killing the POW, he invites the next to do the work properly. This shows once again Johnstone's ruthlessness towards humanity and currently the prisoner.*

*Later on in the play, after the Japanese soldier had settled on the floor, he decides its time to involve himself a little with his capturers and brings out pictures of his family. Johnstone is obviously affected by the sight of this and eventually rips up the photos for lack of compassion. Johnstone's action towards the Japanese prisoner who is referred to as 'Tojo' shows his aggressiveness and ignorance once again.*

*Another of Corporal Johnstone's character being affected by the POW was when the prisoner reaches for a cigarette. Johnstone noticed the pack is of a British make and points it to everyone's attention. Johnstone views this as a perfect opportunity as the prisoner is accused of 'looting'. He raises his fist but is interrupted by a fellow colleague. Looting is perceived as a serious offence and when Johnstone realizes this he seizes the opportunity and passes racist comments. Since he's Japanese, he's not expected to possess foreign property. The hatred of Johnstone for the prisoner proceeds to the end of the play where he volunteers to kill him..."He's stopping where he is, it's cobbles for him". But another soldier killed him.*

*Johnstone is the only survivor of all the soldiers and takes the prisoner's supposedly looted cigarette from the prisoner's pocket and his white scarf to surrender to the Japanese troop. The fact that Johnstone uses the soldiers white scarf to surrender to the Japanese troop shows that he has no respect for him, even in his death.*

*Sergeant Mitchem is the next character I'm going to write about.*

*Sergeant Mitchem is the one everyone listens to. He is in charge of every soldier under his care and intends to do*

*everything within his power to protect, otherwise do his appointed job.*

*Straightaway on Mitchem's first sight of the Japanese soldier, he knew what he had to do. He understood the importance of a POW to them and to be left alive. Just like Corporal Johnstone and initially Bamforth, Sergeant Mitchem was a racist; he, without any beforehand information, assumes the Japanese prisoner is an English illiterate and he (Mitchem) tries to present his orders to him spoke in broken down phrases and emphasis on the words he wants him to understand..."You speakee English? No speakee!" Also he relies on sign language to ensure that his words are being understood.*

*Sergeant Mitchem's moment with the prisoner doesn't affect him at all as he assures the prisoner that if he does anything to jeopardize his soldiers' lives, he would be killed... "One murmur, Jap, and laughing boy will slit your guts up to your ears". Sergeant Mitchem's racist actions continue towards the prisoner of war as he names him "Tojo". The name Tojo belonged to a prime minister around the time the play was set and as a result of this, the prisoner is labelled by this name.*

*It's quite difficult to establish if or by how much Mitchem is affected by the prisoner because of his professionalism toward his job throughout the play. At first, he decided to keep the prisoner for information and then changes his mind when he realized that "He's no use now" and "He couldn't tell them anymore than they already know".*

*Like every soldier, Mitchem also hates looting and questions every way the prisoner might have obtained the cigarette packet. When the declaration of killing the prisoner came up, Mitchem's mind is already made up as to how and why he should be dispatched. It can be suggested that killing the prisoner does not relate to Mitchem's personal view of Japanese soldier because he's been looting, but his*

*professionalism and dedication to his job as a soldier... “It’s a war. It’s something in a uniform and it’s a different shade to mine”.*

*Lance Corporal Macleish is the next character in the play I’m going to write about.*

*Lance Corporal Macleish is another soldier in the play whose professionalism towards his job, like sergeant Mitchem, didn’t let the POW affect him a lot. On the capture of the Japanese prisoner, Macleish is opposed to killing him as it is against the ‘Geneva Convention’. The Geneva Convention is an international agreement founded in 1906 regulating the treatment of prisoners of war. Macleish knew and understood this rule and therefore refused to mistreat the prisoner in anyway... “You cannot order men to put a bayonet in a prisoner of war! There is such a thing as the Geneva Convention”. However, Macleish made it perfectly clear this was the only reason stopping him from killing the prisoner. “If the need should arrive I’ll use a bayonet with the next”.*

*Although, Macleish does his job ‘by the book’, he got a little sentimental toward the prisoner because of his own brother’s probable condition. Just like the Japanese prisoner, Macleish believes that his brother could be in the same situation and would like to think he’s being treated according to the Geneva Convention. He leapt to the prisoner’s defence when he was informed that he was going to be killed. He tries to convince Sergeant Mitchem it’s neither proper nor professional to kill a POW... “You can’t kill him! The man is a prisoner of war!”. He came up with other alternatives to killing the POW. In my opinion, Macleish feels defensive toward the prisoner because of his brother and would to think he is being humanely treated.*

*Further into the play, the POW was accused of looting. Macleish reacted violently toward the POW, but when he*

*understood that it was received from Bamforth, he felt guilty. Despite his violence, he refused to kill the POW when the time arrived. Perhaps because of his professionalism or fear for his brother's life.*

*Private Evans is the next character in the play.*

*At first, Private Evans seemed fascinated by the Japanese soldier. When the P.O.W was accused of looting, he didn't retreat from punishing him. However, another soldier vouched for the prisoner by saying he gave him the cigarettes, making Evans feel really guilty. He tries to make up for it by comforting the prisoner saying... "You can stick them together again. Pot of paste and a bit of fiddling and they'll be right as rain". Also when the time arrived for the prisoner to be killed Evans refused to do it just like he did when the prisoner was first introduced.*

*Private Smith is another character in the play.*

*When the prisoner was first captured, Smith didn't want to do the dirty job himself and tells someone else to... "For God's sakes do it, Taff. Put the poor bastard out of his misery". This shows that he doesn't care much about the prisoner. When the chance of the death of the prisoner arrived, Smith was, like some other soldiers on the side of dispatching him but not themselves. He is questioned on his decision and replied, "I just take orders. I just do as I'm told. I just plod on".*

*Private Whitaker is the next character in the play I'm going to examine.*

*Private Whitaker is the reason the Japanese soldier entered the shelter in the first place. He left the radio on the set in clear view. Initially, Whitaker was afraid of the Japanese soldier.*

*Whitaker is interested in different and interesting things. While in N.A.A.F.I, {canteen run by Navy, Army and Air forces Institutes} he possessed a gadget watch which was stolen. When the soldier was accused of looting, Bamforth who was trying to protect the POW's life compares him to Whitaker.*

*In the end, Whitaker was responsible for the death of the prisoner. "God... Oh God..." He pulled the trigger unintentionally when the soldier refused to obey his orders... "Sit down you stupid man, or I'll put this bullet into you..." This was in protection of the troops' life... "We've got to get back, I've got to get back".*

*Private Bamforth is the next character I will analyse.*

*Private Bamforth is greatly affected by the presence of the POW. Initially, on the arrest of the Japanese soldier, Bamforth was keen on killing him... "It's only the same as carving up a pig". He expresses racist actions towards the soldier immediately... "Stand still, you nig".*

*However all this instant resentment of Bamforth to the Japanese soldier soon diminished when the prisoner is settled and Bamforth is put in charge of him. To Bamforth and probably every other soldier in the shelter, the prisoner is perceived as a trivial thing until Bamforth's attempt to ensure that the POW is not in any situation to do something unintelligent turns into amusement for him... "Flingers up on blonce, Dlop fingers...". The sneering of the prisoner's accent shows once again Bamforth racist side.*

*As the play proceeds further, Bamforth seemed to get more involved and friendlier with the prisoner. When 'Tojo' shows pictures of his family to him, he saw a new side of Tojo and we saw a whole new aspect of Bamforth. Bamforth who sees the prisoner as worthless now perceives him as almost a human being... "He's almost human this one is". The aggressive blithe Bamforth is obviously affected by the*

*presence of the POW.*

*When the prisoner is accused of looting, Bamforth instantaneously sprang to the defence of the prisoner even though he knew how hateful his soldiers felt toward looting. He was disgusted by the sight of the torn pictures belonging to the prisoner and lashed out furiously at his fellow soldiers... "You bastards. You even had to rip his pictures up. Aw... Dry up, you Welsh Burk". He sides with the prisoner against his own troop and friends and even uses Private Whitaker; a colleague, to justify the fact that the prisoner might have collected the cigarette packet as a souvenir. They are just as bad as each other.*

*How the POW affects Bamforth is also shown when Bamforth offers some of their valued water to the prisoner. Everyone refuses, as they see no point because the prisoner is going to be gotten rid of. However, Bamforth intended to forfeit his share in order to satisfy the prisoner's needs; Bamforth had turned from hostile to hospitable. Furthermore, when everyone were informed that the prisoner was to be killed. Bamforth is stunned and willing to jeopardize his own life and profession and his patrols' in order to save the prisoner's... "It's me or him".*

*In my opinion, Bamforth is the most affected character of all in the play. On first sight of the prisoner, Bamforth's original instinct was to kill the prisoner instantly but once he got to know the prisoner a little more via communicating with him despite difference in language he lowered his guard toward him. As a result of this friendliness, Bamforth even puts his own life on the line to save a POW's. For this enormous transformation to have happened, a genuine part of Bamforth must have been touched.*

*The effect of the presence of the POW on some, if not*

*all, of the soldiers cannot, therefore, be overemphasized.*