

SURVIVE TO FIGHT



THE ★ 10TH

**SCREENPLAY
BY RUDI O'MEARA**

**INSPIRED
BY TRUE EVENTS**

THE 10TH

Written by

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Inspired by True Events

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OVER WHITE: 1944

WAR RAGES IN EUROPE WHILE A DIVISION OF DECORATED SKI SOLDIERS FROM ALL AROUND THE GLOBE TRAIN FOR THEIR FIRST HIGH-STAKES U.S. MISSION - BREAKING THROUGH HITLER'S GOTHIC LINE IN ITALY AND SPEEDING THE MARCH TO BERLIN.

INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS.

SLOW FADE TO:

EXT. ELK MOUNTAIN, COLORADO - DAY

A barely discernible pair of MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS struggle up a steep, snow-covered peak in a total whiteout.

Both men are clad in white, carry bulging backpacks, and are tethered together by a length of sisal rope.

HOWLING WIND and HEAVY BREATHING are all we hear as both climbers fight to plant ice axes before each labored step.

SUPER: ELK MOUNTAIN, COLORADO, MAY 6, 1944

The lead climber, SERGEANT MAX BAKER (30s, crooked nose, frozen mustache, the husky croak of a Lucky Strikes man) BARKS into the wind:

MAX

What I wouldn't give for a shot of whiskey and a slap in the face from a pretty girl right about now.

The second climber, PFC JAKE THOMPSON (20s, bright-eyed, clean-shaven, someone forever at home in a blizzard), lifts his ice ax and SHOUTS back:

JAKE

Can't even feel my face.

MAX

Exactly.

Jake LAUGHS out loud. The gale whips the sound instantly away into the aether.

Max pauses, looking lost.

JAKE

Just follow my--

The wind SQUELCHES his next syllables as Jake tromps past Max, gives the rope a firm tug.

In distance, the sound of heavy MORTAR FIRE.

Max carries on after JAKE through the vertigo-inducing blanket of white.

MAX

Are they trying to train us up...

The far-off SHELLING continues on with metronome-like regularity. BANG! BANG! BANG!

MAX (CONT'D)

...or kill us off?

JAKE

There's a difference?

Another fierce GUST nearly knocks Max to his knees. The line goes taut. Jake feels it, slows.

Max reaches back, yanks his canteen from his belt, uncaps it, shakes it. CLINK! CLINK! CLINK! Frozen solid.

Jake reaches inside his jacket, pulls out his own canteen, unscrews the cap, hands it back to him.

Max leans into the wind, takes a gulp, swallows greedily, caps the canteen, hands it back.

MAX

Owe you one.

Grinning into the gale, Jake shoves the canteen back inside his jacket, pushes confidently on.

JAKE

Keep it inside, next to your--

Jake plunges his ax handle into the crust and we hear what sounds like a HEAVY GROAN.

Recognizing the sound immediately, Jake freezes. Max nearly bumps right into him.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Hold it.

(hushed)

Ice bridge.

Suddenly, the thick sheet of snow and ice that they've been traversing disappears with MIGHTY ROAR.

Jake instantly tumbles from view.

Max, tethered to him, falls to his back and desperately tries to kick the heels of his steel crampons into the snow.

He SCREAMS, unable to slow down.

And, in an instant, Max hits the lip of what appears to be a hidden crevasse and tumbles end-over-end into the abyss.

Behind him, we can barely make out the figure of Jake clinging to a wall of ice.

He's hanging from the handle of his ax, which is jammed into a crack in the pale blue face.

The rope between them SNAPS taut. Jake GRUNTS.

Max's body spins like a rag doll below him before slamming into the wall, headfirst. No helmet.

JAKE

Max?

No response. Max's body dangles in the icy air.

Thinking fast, Jake shakes the straps of his pack free one arm at a time. The pack falls from his shoulders, disappears into the void below.

JAKE (CONT'D)

C'mon, Sarge. Snap to.

Nothing.

His arms already trembling, Jake takes one hand off the ax handle, reaches behind himself.

From inside his billowing white jacket, he pulls out a piton hammer, slams the pick edge into the wall.

It holds. He kicks his feet into the wall. Both crampons hold. His feet anchored, Jake pulls the ice ax out.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Gotta cut back on your compositions. You're fucking...

But before he can plant the ax higher, both feet give way and he slides a good ten feet further down the wall.

Frantic, he stabs at the wall with both arms and both legs.

BOOM. He finally stops his fall.

JAKE (CONT'D)

...heavy.

Breathing rapidly, Jake cranes his head down toward the still unconscious body of his partner.

Splayed out, head back, arms held wide, an ice ax hanging uselessly from his wrist, Max looks angelic. At peace. Like a man savoring the deepest of sleeps.

Jake looks back up the wall, pulls the ice ax free, strains to slam it back in higher, looks back down.

And, just as he does, the knot tied to the webbing wrapped around Max's waist slithers undone like a snake.

JAKE (CONT'D)

No, no, no!

The line goes slack. And, in an instant, Max is gone.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED CHURCH, APENNINE MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

Jake JOLTS awake with a GASP.

He's wrapped in a tangled green blanket which drapes to the stone floor from a wooden pew on which two other SLEEPING SOLDIERS lie.

SUPER: APENNINE MOUNTAINS, ITALY, 17 FEBRUARY 1945

Jake's face has hardened. Weathered. His eyes radiate nothing but hate. Anger masking loss.

Another YOUNG MAN leans toward him, places a hand on his shoulder, studies him warily.

This is PFC ERNST KLEIN (early 20s, weathered high cheekbones, an air of privilege, wealth).

Jake stares right through him. Dead inside.

ERNST

(Austrian accent)

Same thing? With Max.

Jake roughly dusts Ernst's hand from his shoulder, stands.

JAKE

Fuck off, fascist.

Ernst steps back, palms out.

ERNST
Can't. Orders.

Ernst turns to leave. Jake rubs his eyes with both fists. Trying and failing to erase the memory.

ERNST (O.S.)
And bring your skis.

EXT. BOMBED-OUT VILLAGE - NIGHT

Jake and Ernst hurry across the frozen ground, dressed all in white. Alpine infantry camouflage.

Around them stand crumbling farmhouses and the occasional US Army transport truck covered in green and gray netting.

ERNST
(hushed)
Up and back the long way.

Jake glowers, exudes nothing but enmity.

ERNST (CONT'D)
Note every position. Every landmark.

Wooden crates of ammunition and wheeled Howitzer cannons are tucked into nooks and crannies everywhere, concealed from aerial reconnaissance.

Oddly, Jake and Ernst are the only two men up. All signs would point to a massive troop presence. But, in the light of the rising moon, they're the only humans we see.

JAKE
Don't tell me my business.

Ernst pauses, looks up. Jake passes him by, pauses perched on a snow-dusted boulder.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I didn't come here to die for your fucking country. I came here to kill for mine.

Ernst LEAPS toward him, bounces off the boulder, lands gracefully on the next hunk of rock, keeps going.

ERNST
Just get as close as you can. Note their readiness.

Jake turns, watches him go.

JAKE
It's the *Wehrmacht*, boy. They're
always fucking ready.

Ernst continues uphill shouldering his rifle and skis.

JAKE (CONT'D)
But you already knew that. Because
you're one of them.

ERNST
Enough.

Jake finally takes off after him with the surefooted grace
of someone raised, like Ernst was, at altitude.

As they jump from boulder-to-boulder, the frozen ground
beneath them goes swiftly whiter and whiter.

ERNST (CONT'D)
You take the east flank. I take
west. Meet in the middle.

Jake nods, veers right.

ERNST (CONT'D)
We need to work on your *schwingen*.
You're too stiff.

Jake bites off his mitten, flashes Ernst his middle finger.

Ernst ignores this, picks up the pace.

Above them, a hulking peak looms.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, SUMMIT - NIGHT

A darkened, snow-covered grove near the summit. The sky is
an inky blue black. Stars glitter through a thin, icy mist.

After a second, the SILENCE is broken by the sound of
RHYTHMIC BREATHING - faint at first, then louder.

Then the steady WHOOSH, WHOOSH, WHOOSH of skis slicing
through fresh snow.

Through the moonlit trees, we see Jake gliding.

His cloth-covered carbine rifle is slung over one shoulder.
It bounces up and down with each firm pole plant.

JAKE
(quietly, to himself)
Fucking Kraut.

Jake crests the rise, skates to his right, picks up speed down toward a low rock outcropping.

He skids to a stop, bends to one knee, yanks his mitten off again, pulls out a pair of binoculars, uncaps them.

EXT. GERMAN MACHINE GUN NEST - JAKE'S POV

Through Jake's binoculars, we see the four GERMAN SOLDIERS.

Two of them are smoking, playing cards.

A third soldier has his eyes glued to the sight of a Mauer 42mm machine gun on a bi-pod mount.

And the fourth soldier stacks shiny belts of ammunition. CLINK! CLINK! CLINK!

EXT. STEEP HILLSIDE - BACK ON JAKE

Jake lowers the binoculars, pulls out a small notebook, looks to the moon, jots down notes.

In the distance, we catch a glimpse of Ernst. He silently points toward the machine gun nest.

Jake nods, closes his notebook.

Ernst lifts his wristwatch. *Let's go!*

JAKE
(hushed)
Yeah, yeah.

Jake pockets the notebook, threads his left hand through the strap on one of his poles.

JAKE (CONT'D)
My *schwingen*?
(beat)
Fuck y--

Suddenly, both men notice a pack of six SIMILARLY CLAD SKIERS glide past the machine gun nest. The lead skier flashes one of the soldiers a silent *Sieg Heil*.

Jake and Ernst both duck for cover, try to blend in as the German patrol continues on. The dreaded 47th Edelweiss.

Jake reaches for his sidearm, draws it slowly, looks to Ernst. Ernst urgently mimes: *Wait. Wait.*

Jake flicks the safety, grips his pistol, cranes his head as the skiers disappear behind a jagged outcropping.

In the distance, Ernst pushes himself back to his feet.

Jake holsters his weapon, grabs his poles, shoves off.

All we hear is the HISS of his hickory skis over the snow.

Up ahead, Ernst does an elegant kick-turn, clicks the crown of his watch, tightens his gloves, grabs his poles.

Jake takes a sweeping left, picks up speed, SLICES downhill in the moonlight.

Ernst descends after him, tucked.

Jake veers right to miss some rocks. Ernst BLASTS past him, clearly the better skier.

Jake ducks in behind him, trying to draft.

Ernst bends left, leaves Jake in his wake, catches some air off the top of a snow-dusted boulder. Lands like an ace.

Jake takes the long way around, follows Ernst into the trees. Their tracks reflect the silver light of the moon.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR, ABANDONED VILLAGE - NIGHT

Back down in the valley, Jake and Ernst walk toward what appears to be a stone barn, carrying their skis.

ERNST

(a whisper)

Seven minutes twenty-four seconds.

Not bad. For a beginner.

Their boots CRACKLE over frozen gravel.

JAKE

(also hushed)

You use gravity to win bits of tin.

I fight gravity to stay alive.

(beat)

Falling fast kinda ain't the point.

Beyond them, past the barn, the wooded valley is painted with moonlight and sharp shadows.

In the distance, a tall mountain of a man steps out of the barn, looks their way, nods.

This is STAFF SERGEANT PAUL PETZOLDT (30s, open face, mischievous grin, rock-calloused hands).

Jake and Ernst veer his way and into the barn. As they pass, Paul leans toward Ernst, WHISPERS:

PAUL
How's his *schwingeren*?

Ernst shrugs his shoulders.

ERNST
(regretfully)
Better.

Paul shoots Jake a puckish wink.

PAUL
(to Jake)
Danger respects technique.

INT. 10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION FORWARD COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT

The hay-strewn barn is bathed in amber light.

A handful of stone-faced OFFICERS stand clustered at the foot of a large topographic map of the valley.

At the center of the space sits a large tabletop model of the surrounding peaks.

The barn door CREAKS closed, and one of the officers, LIEUTENANT COLONEL HENRY J. HAMPTON (30s, thin lips, weary eyes), spins to face Jake, Ernst, and Paul.

COLONEL HAMPTON
Boys.

Jake and Ernst salute, set down their skis.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
How's it look up there?

Paul steps up and takes their rifles, leans them against a nearby wall. Protocol.

JAKE
Well, sir. It ain't pretty.

ERNST
They have spotters and artillery
all along the summit. Every rise.

The two of them approach the model, ZIP open their white hooded jackets, pull out their notebooks.

The diorama before them is comprised of a jagged peak resembling the one we saw earlier. To its left stands a serpentine ridge with one sheer edge.

It's the ridge they just traversed and skied down from. At the foot of it is a placard reading: **RIVA**

COLONEL HAMPTON
General readiness?

ERNST
Prepared. Dug in.

Hampton gestures toward the model.

COLONEL HAMPTON
Show me.

Jake and Ernst thumb through their notebooks, move to opposite sides of the sheer cliff.

The mountain next to it also has a type-written placard beneath it. It reads: **BELVEDERE**.

Jake grabs a small ring-like figurine from the base of the model, looks to his open notebook, places the figurine carefully on the top of the east side of the ridge.

JAKE
They're all over, Sir. Right up to the edge.

Jake and Ernst quickly place figurines all along the summit at somewhat regular intervals.

Colonel Hampton's face stiffens.

ERNST
They will see every move, every man. Every inch of Belevedere.

Three other officers advance toward the model. Their eyes are on Ernst and Jake's fast-moving fingers.

Jake reaches out and nudges one of Ernst's markers a hair.

JAKE
What are you blind? That nest was here.

Ernst slides the marker back to where he placed it.

ERNST
Nein. Here.

Jake yanks it back.

JAKE

Here!

Ernst knocks it back roughly.

ERNST

Hier!

Paul steps up, slams his massive hands down on top of both of their hands.

PAUL

C'mon now, boys.

Jake looks up. Paul grins broadly, lifts his hand.

PAUL (CONT'D)

We're all on the same side here.

Jake lets go of the marker, steps back.

Fine. We're all fucked anyway.

Across from him, Colonel Hampton rubs his stubble-covered chin. The other officers peer over his shoulder.

One stands out. This is MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE PRICE HAYS (late 30s, battle-tested but kindly).

GENERAL HAYS

Well, gentlemen. Suppose that settles it. In less than two days, we'll have the entire Fourth Corp of the Fifth - all three divisions of the 10th - just sitting here in the valley like a bunch of goddamn fish in a barrel.

General Hays reaches a hand out, runs it gently over the steep eastern edge of Riva Ridge.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

To break the German supply lines and make a run for the Alps, for Berlin, we need to take Belvedere.

His bloodshot eyes shift to the adjoining peak.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

And hold it. Or else.

Colonel Hampton points to the German positions scattered all over the top of the ridge.

COLONEL HAMPTON

But, sir, without Riva, without the ridge there's no way in holy hell to hold Belvedere.

(beat)

From where they're sitting, they can call in artillery six ways to Sunday. It'll be a bloodbath.

(gravely)

Again.

Hays gestures toward a series of roads snaking through the valley, over the mountains.

GENERAL HAYS

(forcefully)

Hitler *himself* has ordered every single man and boy on that contemptible mountain to fight to the death to hold the line.

Ignoring Hays, Jake looks back to the model. The glimmer of an idea flashes in his eyes. A crazy idea.

His favorite kind.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

War office says it'll take three weeks. I say more. A lot more. Casualties beyond measure.

(turning away)

The Brits failed. The Brazilians failed. If we fail--

Jake thrusts a hand into the air.

JAKE

Sirs?

They both turn, seeming to have forgotten he was even there.

Jake steps forward, points toward Riva Ridge.

JAKE (CONT'D)

See these positions? Here, here, here, and here.

(beat)

They're all oriented for attack from the west or the north. Not from the east. Or the south.

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Sure, they got eyes on Belvedere.
They got eyes on the pass. But no
one's looking this way. No one's
looking down.

Colonel Hampton cocks his head.

COLONEL HAMPTON

That's with good reason, boy.
You've seen the gradient on this
side of the ridge. It's a goddamn
cliff.

JAKE

I've seen worse. Climbed worse.

Jake looks to Paul. Paul crosses his arms. *Interesting.*

JAKE (CONT'D)

I can take it. Solo.

GENERAL HAYS

Hogwash.

Ernst steps up, studies the model.

ERNST

(pointing, to Jake)

Say, here? Or here?

Jake reluctantly nods. Behind him, Paul cracks a wry smile.

JAKE

Run fixed lines. Pitons. Pre-laid.

A hint of hope washes across Colonel Hampton's face. He
reaches out to the lower slopes of Belvedere.

COLONEL HAMPTON

(to the General)

Move the 87th to the foot of
Belvedere, here. Under cover of
darkness. Laying communication wire
as they go. Then hold.

Colonel Hampton turns back toward Riva Ridge, traces a
finger up one of the creases in the cliff face.

General Hays follows, nodding warily.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
 Split the 86th into, say, four or
 five teams? Two here, on the
 steeper pitches. Two or three here
 and here, or here.

GENERAL HAYS
 Fixed bayonets. Empty rifles. Not a
 sound 'til sunup.

COLONEL HAMPTON
 Follow-on with artillery and
 resupply on mules.

All-in, Paul points to the east side of Riva.

PAUL
 Build a tram line, here. From the
 summit to the base. To ferry
 wounded men down and ammo up.

The room goes so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

The General looks searchingly toward Paul.

GENERAL HAYS
 Think it can be done?

Paul, not one to shy away from a hair-brained idea (just
 like Jake), smiles broadly back.

PAUL
 Sir, I haven't the foggiest.

Paul turns to Jake. Jake nods. *I can do this.*

JAKE
 Gimme a shot. I won't let you down.

Paul gestures toward Ernst.

PAUL
 Both of you. Together.

Jake wants nothing of it.

JAKE
 No, no. He can't-- We can't--

PAUL
 Daylight. On-belay. Lay pitons the
 whole way up. Quietly.

Jake draws a breath to protest. Paul waves him off.

PAUL (CONT'D)
It's that or nothing, kid.

Jake flashes Paul an almost violent salute, turns to leave.

JAKE
(through clenched teeth)
Yessir.

On the way, Jake roughly snatches up his skis and rifle, stomps forcefully out the door.

Ernst stands frozen, still staring at the model.

Paul gives Ernst a head wag, and he starts off after Jake.

As the door CREAKS slowly closed behind Ernst. General Hays' eyes fall to the model once again.

GENERAL HAYS
(quietly, to Paul)
That the boy who lost Baker during
the D-Series?

Paul silently nods.

GENERAL HAYS
Better hope he's got his head back
in the game. For *all* our sakes.

EXT. ABANDONED VILLAGE - NIGHT

Jake and Ernst rush from shadow to shadow, away from the barn carrying their carbines and skis toward what appears to be the bombed-out church from earlier.

ERNST
(under his breath)
There's no way! Pitons? Daylight?

JAKE
(also hushed)
Great. Plenty of other decent
climbers in the unit.

ERNST
No, no. That's not what I--

He grabs Jake by one shoulder, spins him around.

ERNST (CONT'D)
Listen.

Jake rears back, shoves him away, full of anger.

JAKE
 No, you listen. Enemy of my enemy?
 Bull fucking shit. I don't wanna be
 here any more than you do.

Ernst STAMMERS.

Jake turns, takes back off.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 You botch this, you slow me down, I
 ditch you. Cut you loose. Got it?

Ernst EXHALES slowly, tries to catch back up.

ERNST
 It was an ice bridge. It could have
 happened to--

Jake wheels back around, charges at Ernst.

JAKE
 What do you fucking know about it?!

Ernst chooses his next words very carefully:

ERNST
 The mountain took him, not you.

Jake clenches both fists, ready to go.

ERNST (CONT'D)
 It was *not* your fault.
 (beat)
 Now, get out of my way.

Ernst blasts past Jake.

ERNST (CONT'D)
 We have a job to do.

Jake closes his eyes, lowers his fists.

Up ahead of Ernst, we see a ruggedly handsome young man
 smoking with his back to the wall of the church.

This is PERCY RIDEOUT (late 20s, close-cropped wavy hair,
 movie star good looks).

PERCY
 Ladies.

Ernst swings his skis free, leans them against the
 pockmarked stone wall.

ERNST

Any news on our equipment?

PERCY

Nope. Still stuck in some warehouse back in Jersey, apparently. Which suits me just brilliantly.

In the distance, Jake turns back around, slowly approaches, tries to tamp down his fury.

ERNST

Well, we are going to need some rope. A lot of it. At least 350 meters.

(beat)

Each.

Percy and Jake share a quick look.

PERCY

Don't tell me. I don't wanna know.

Behind them walks a gaunt, battle-scarred CAPTAIN HARRIS (mid 30s, a career soldier, not an alpinist).

He's got one arm draped drunkenly over the shoulder of another SENIOR OFFICER. Both of them are smoking.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

(slurring slightly)

Three divisions of fuckin' ice dancers up Belvedere under the cover of darkness with unloaded rifles? Doesn't make a lick of strategic sense to me.

The Officer nods knowingly toward Ernst, BUBBLES:

SENIOR OFFICER

It's like trying to take Tokyo with a bunch of fucking Japs.

As the two of them fade into the distance, Jake, Ernst, and Percy seem subtly shaken. But they hide it well.

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, BASE - DAWN

Jake and Ernst make their way swiftly through the trees shouldering neatly-wound coils of nylon rope.

SUPER: 17 FEBRUARY, 0600 HOURS

Daisy-chained carabiners dangle from their belt loops into their pants pockets to dampen the sound.

From both of their belts swing battered piton hammers.

Both men wear heavy backpacks and barely used standard-issue US Army helmets.

JAKE

Remember, whichever hand you're reaching with, lean that hip into the wall.

ERNST

(irritated)

Yes, yes.

JAKE

Feet first, then hands. And climb with your eyes. If you can't see it, it's not there. Don't reach for it.

They cross a wooden footbridge over a partially-frozen river. The early morning sunlight shines through the trees, casting strange shadows through the rising mist.

ERNST

I know.

JAKE

Just follow my lead. Don't get cocky. And keep your mouth shut.

The two men emerge from the trees, squint straight up.

A tall, craggy, lichen-covered cliff looms over them like a giant limestone tombstone.

Jake reaches behind himself, pulls out a nearly new sidearm.

Popping the magazine free without looking, he slides the barrel back-and-forth. A single round tumbles into the air.

He catches it, slips it back into the magazine before tucking the empty gun back into his holster.

Ernst still stares at the cliff.

ERNST

Had my hopes set on Cortina.

Jake ignores this, pockets his magazine.

ERNST (CONT'D)
To match Friedl's medal count in
the downhill.

Jake pulls a length of fabric from his pocket, tosses it
over to Ernst.

JAKE
(all-business)
Wrap your hammer.

Ernst looks down, pulls his piton hammer, wraps it in cloth.

ERNST
Now, with any luck, St. Moritz.

Jake wraps his own hammer, reaches into another pocket for
two short lengths of rope.

ERNST (CONT'D)
(quietly)
If I don't age out first.

Jake shrugs, tosses him one of the bits of rope.

JAKE
Age out? You'll be lucky if you
last the week.

Ernst catches the rope, and they both quickly bind the
sections of cloth tightly around the heads of their hammers.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Fucking Olympics? What a maroon.

Jake points uphill.

Ernst nods sullenly, rubs his hands together to warm up.
Jake turns, holsters his hammer, starts scrambling.

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, LOWER SLOPES - MOMENTS LATER

At first, the going seems relatively easy. They move from
boulder-to-boulder like kids at play.

Behind them, the valley slowly begins to light up. The sun
finally warming the frozen furrows.

Jake pulls himself onto the top of a broad, relatively flat
slab of rock, turns to survey the peaceful vista below.

JAKE
(sotto)
Look at that idiot.

Jake points to a distant farmer stumbling through the hard dirt, plowing behind a swaybacked horse.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Two giant armies about to go at it
hammer and tongs and he's just out
there, doing his business.

Ernst turns back around, lifts his gaze back to the wall.

ERNST

What is wrong with you?

JAKE

Everything.

Jake pulls the thick coil of rope from his shoulder, tosses it roughly onto the ground. THUMP!

Ernst eyes him warily. Like he's someone with a death wish.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Go on. Get to it.

In silence, the two of them rope up.

Then Jake bends, throws open his pack, hastily removes boatloads of hardware: pitons, carabiners, etc.

Ernst does the same. And, together, they hurriedly wrap everything in socks and bits of cloth and meticulously attach as much gear as they can to their belts.

Jake is quicker than Ernst. He looks like a man disassembling and cleaning a sniper rifle blindfolded.

Pausing, Jake turns. His muffled hardware CLANKS quietly as he quickly undoes one end of his coil of rope.

ERNST

Which way?

Jake looks up, points again, hands Ernst the rope end.

Ernst takes it, threads it into a loop in the nylon webbing around his waist, ties a knot, tugs at it. Firm.

ERNST (CONT'D)

You know, I'm here for the same
reasons you are.

Jake sneers, ties the end of the second rope to another point on his belt before roughly double- and triple-checking Ernst's knot. Because.

JAKE

Save it for someone who cares.

Looking like he'd rather be anywhere else in the world, alone, Jake finishes tethering himself to Ernst.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Keep the rope taut. But not too.

Jake turns, runs his hands over the rock.

ERNST

(impatient)

Ja, ja.

JAKE

Pitons wherever it gets dicey.

Ernst nods again, done being schooled.

ERNST

I can take care of myself.

JAKE

Good, 'cause I ain't gonna.

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, LOWER WALL - CONTINUOUS

Jake turns, grabs his first handhold, starts climbing.

Below, Ernst watches carefully, slowly unfurling the rope between them.

Already a good 15 feet above, Jake pauses at a wedge-shaped boulder jammed like a plug into the seam.

He steadies himself with both feet, leans against the wall, SLAPS the boulder with one hand. Then, he yanks at it from below. It doesn't budge. *Better safe than sorry.*

He pulls out his first piton, accidentally drops the cloth wrapped around it.

The cloth flutters away in the breeze.

Then, working fast, he slides the nail-like length of hardened steel into a crack on the side of the boulder, lifts his hammer.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP. He smashes the the piton into the rock with one eye closed. *Not too bad.*

He slips his hammer back into his belt, tests the piton, pulls off a pair of carabiners, clicks them in and reaches for his next hold.

Unexpectedly, the nub of rock Jake reaches for SNAPS loose and his hand slips. Before he can react, he falls backward and down into the crease, hits the stone wall hard.

JAKE

Dammit.

The first rope, his tether, holds at the piton.

Jake struggles to get his balance, rights himself. Ego bruised, body not bloodied.

Below, Ernst nods. *You're welcome.*

Ignoring him, Jake scrambles back up and over the boulder only to be confronted by another steep section of wall.

Surveying his options, he reaches back for his hammer and another piton.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(hushed, to himself)

When all this is over...

THUD, THUD, THUD. The next piton is set.

Jake's legs are already quivering slightly. Hands shaking almost imperceptibly.

Holding onto the rock with his one hand, he reaches across himself, grabs another pair of carabiners.

He clicks them in, reaches back, searches the frigid air behind him for both ropes.

JAKE (CONT'D)

...I'm never climbing with another living soul.

He finds both ropes, slips them into the carabiner, looks up, continues on.

About ten feet higher, he pauses, places another piton, hammers: BANG! BANG! BANG!

It's getting louder, more metallic, less muffled.

He strains to clip two more carabiners into the bit of metal. But it's nearly beyond his grasp.

CLICK! They're in. And he threads more rope through.

Sweat already beading up on his brow, Jake turns around, hammers in another piton, anchors himself to it.

He looks down, yanks the last tiny bit of slack still left in the line and catches Ernst's eye.

Ernst nods back, starts up the same pitch.

At first, he seems exceedingly tentative. But once he clears the stone wedge, his pace picks up. His movements are swift. Deft. Surprisingly adept.

Ernst pulls himself onto the shelf, rubs his hands greedily.

ERNST
(quietly)
I could get used to this.

JAKE
Good.

Jake steps aside, gestures up the slope.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Next bit's yours.

Ernst steps away, clambers up the next pitch, pauses for a moment to hammer in a piton about ten feet up.

Jake GRUMBLES to himself as he slowly lets out more rope.

Legs scissored out, Ernst looks to his right.

Standing, perched on a nearby ledge, a young IBEX stares back. His belay line snaps once, then twice.

Keep moving.

Ernst turns back to the wall, runs his hands over a crevice.

Below him, Jake checks his watch.

Ernst hammers in another piton, clips in, pulls himself cautiously up another ten feet, casts his gaze down to Jake.

But his unbuckled helmet slides from his head and plummets downward, toward Jake. *No, no, no!*

Jake leans his body out from the wall, reaches his free hand into the air, bats the steel helmet away from the face.

It falls to the pine needle covered ground at the bottom of the cliff with a muted CLANG.

Jake pulls himself back up against the wall.

Automatically, Ernst does the same. For a breathless moment, the two of them cling, stone-still.

Above, at the summit, nothing stirs.

Ernst takes a deep breath, clips in, peers back down over the edge, gestures for Jake to follow.

Jake EXHALES, starts climbing again.

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, UPPER REACHES - CONTINUOUS

Jake pulls himself up next to Ernst, points to a long seam which runs diagonally up the face away from them.

He points to himself, then back to the seam, then raps his knuckles against Ernst's unprotected forehead.

If they weren't tied together, he'd chuck him right off.

JAKE
(sotto)
Watch and learn.

Jake takes off, threads the seam like a tightrope walker.

Another ten feet, another piton. BANG, BANG, BANG.

It's getting louder still. Jake tugs the fabric on his hammer tighter, proceeds.

Another ten feet, another anchor.

Ernst follows dragging his left hand across the face as he goes, just in case.

On the other side safely, they both pause, look up. This is the last bit. Far easier than the first pitch. More gradual. Full of easy holds.

The summit is within view. In the distance, we can barely make out VOICES. Speaking in German.

Jake gestures grandly to Ernst. *Be my guest.*

Ernst bites his lip, looks up, and then starts quickly up the pitch. Jake belays him, eyes fixed up top.

If they're spotted, they're dead.

Ernst pauses, pulls out a piton, unwraps it, looks down to Jake. Jake nods back.

Ernst slides the piton into place, pulls out his dampened hammer, pounds: CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!

Still, no one stirs above. Ernst carries on, upward.

Again he pauses. BANG! BANG! BANG!

He hesitates briefly, hammer still poised to strike.

We hear LAUGHTER above. The sound of four, maybe five men.

BANG!

The piton is set. The VOICES go quiet. Ernst holsters his hammer, throws his body against the wall.

Below, Jake does the same.

From above, the sound of boots CRUNCHING across the snow. Steady, unhurried. The sound of one man walking.

Ernst fumbles for his sidearm and clip. From below, Jake urgently waves: *NO! Don't you fucking dare!*

Ernst slips the clip into the stock, slides the firing pin back, arms the pistol, thumbs the safety off, takes aim.

Jake whipsaws the rope: *NO you stupid prick!*

The FOOTSTEPS stop. A sheaf of icy snow slips from the cliff top, tumbles down toward Ernst.

His face pressed to the stone wall, without his helmet, Ernst grips the pistol.

STOMP. STOMP. ZIP! SIGH.

A gust of gray/white breath billows out from beyond the lip.

And a heavy stream of piss rains down from above. It's all Ernst can do stay out of the way.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - LATER

Back down on the valley floor, Jake and a piss-soaked Ernst hurry to pack up what's left of their gear.

Jake throws the single coil of rope over Ernst's shoulder. It lands with a THUD. He spins on his heels, tightens the straps on his pack, hits the ground running.

On the way, Jake kicks Ernst's upside down helmet further into the trees.

JAKE
(a hiss)
Don't forget your hat, dipshit.

Looking like someone with a long history of having the piss taken (but not being pissed on), Ernst turns and runs after his helmet.

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Jake and Ernst sprint back through the trees, their legs cramping from the cold and the climb.

ERNST
(louder now)
There is no way! The entire 86th up that? At night? Are you insane?

JAKE
Uh-huh.

ERNST
It's... *impossible*.

JAKE
You did it. Barely.

Jake takes a hard right, toward the footbridge they passed over earlier.

ERNST
Even with the fixed lines, it's too... technical.

Jake leaps onto the bridge. It's slippery. Frozen in the shade of the trees.

JAKE
Tell me you don't wanna put a fucking bullet in the fucking face of that fucking Kraut who just pissed all over your fucking ugly mug.

Ernst follows him onto the bridge, looks finally back in his element as he glides from icy board to board.

ERNST
Not particularly, no.

JAKE
Of course you don't. Hun.

Jake bounds from the end of the bridge back up onto the frozen dirt.

ERNST
I'm not even German.
(beat)
I'm Austrian.

Jake picks up speed, ignoring him. Ernst slides to a stop.

ERNST (CONT'D)
An Austrian *Jew*.

Jake slows.

ERNST (CONT'D)
There. I said it.

Jake, for an instant, searches for words. A first.

JAKE
I.. I didn't-- I didn't know.

ERNST
How would you?

JAKE
I just thought--
(beat)
Never mind.

ERNST
What?

Jake picks up the pace again. Ernst follows.

JAKE
I just thought all you glorious
fucking Olympians were master race
sons of bitches.

Jake slows, looking like his wall has fallen slightly. His stern soloist bravado, briefly thawed.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Doesn't mean you're not a spy.

ERNST
Apology accepted.

A hint of a smile from Jake. An unexpected but brief moment of detente passes between them.

JAKE

And we can do this. Have to.

Jake keeps walking.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Hays' son is in the 87th.

ERNST

What?

JAKE

The General's son. Second Lieutenant. B Company.

Ernst stares. It's the first he's heard of it.

JAKE (CONT'D)

He'll be at the head of the charge up Belvedere. If we can't secure Riva, they're *all* fucked.

Jake hurries, tries to wall himself back off.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Ten bucks says it'll work.

Ernst passes him up, tries to shore up his own resolve.

ERNST

I'm tired of your stupid bets. You're never good for it.

INT. FORWARD COMMAND CENTER - DUSK

The barn from the night before is packed to the gills with white-clad light infantry soldiers.

SUPER: 18 FEBRUARY, 1700 HOURS

Nearly everyone in the warmly-lit space sports a heavy pack full of ammo, grenades, and light rations.

There's a nervy, anxious air amongst them all. It's as if Judgment Day has arrived. A day some have openly longed for. A day most have privately feared.

In the distance, we make out a few familiar faces: Jake, Ernst, Paul, Percy. Behind them are a gaggle of soldiers we'll soon come to know.

General Hays stands at the far end of the barn, points to five routes up Riva Ridge traced in red thread pinned to both the topographic map and the model.

GENERAL HAYS

The first three strike teams will proceed here, here, and here. These routes, while treacherous, should be manageable without tether. Two smaller teams will head here and here. Thanks to the bravery of a select few expeditionary climbers, you know who you are, these routes will have preset fixed lines nearly to the top.

He turns to survey the room, allows the seriousness of the situation to sink in and swell.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

Single file. Fixed bayonets. Each man must, and I repeat must, ensure that their weapon is unloaded until the summit. Empty pieces all the way up. No one is to fire a shot, even if fired upon. And that is a direct order.

The General strides around the model, in amongst the gathered soldiers.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

Absolute silence to the summit is the only way to maintain the element of surprise. Any noise, any sound will be catastrophic. Deadly.

(beat)

Trust the man you follow as he trusts the man ahead of him. Tap into your skills. Show this man's Army what an elite fighting force of Alpine infantry can actually achieve.

Hays pauses for a moment, locks eyes with a YOUNG PRIVATE.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

Never before have I discussed battle plans with troops to this level of detail. That is because I have *complete* confidence in your ability, your intelligence, and your fierceness of will.

(MORE)

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)
 You are, without question, the
 finest troops I have ever had the
 pleasure of commanding.

The General turns and strides back toward the model. Every
 eye in the room follows him.

The Young Private turns to a nearby buddy and whispers:

YOUNG PRIVATE
 Woulda made a helluva coach.

Hays slowly runs a hand up the far slopes of Belvedere.

GENERAL HAYS
 Your brothers in the 85th and 87th
 will set off separately to the base
 of Belvedere and wait for our
 signal. Their success, their
 survival, depends entirely upon
 your effectiveness.

(beat)

Gain the high ground behind the
 enemy by daylight. Then deal with
 the enemy. You will have the aid of
 spotlights down the valley. As a
 distraction. But no other artillery
 fire or support of any kind.

He turns back to face his men, cracks a weary smile.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)
 If you're gonna risk your life, you
 might as well do it with the best
 damn company around.

Every assembled soldier responds with a muted simultaneous:

SOLDIERS
 Hooah!

GENERAL HAYS
 Always forward. Never stop.
 (beat)
Sempre Avanti.

Behind the model, Colonel Hampton gestures.

COLONEL HAMPTON
 Alright gentlemen. Move 'em out.
 Take your positions. The ascent
 begins at 2300 hours.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - NIGHT

Jake and Ernst move swiftly and quietly through the darkened forest near the base of the ridge.

A deeply-tanned, slightly older man falls in behind them, pulls out a silver cigarette case.

This is SERGEANT FRIEDL PFEIFER (30s, high forehead, sharp features, a man game for anything).

He shakes the open cigarette case toward Jake.

ERNST
(hushed, to Friedl)
Was? Bist du verrückt? Leg die weg.

FRIEDL
Ah ja. Es tut mir Leid.

Jake looks askance at Friedl, full of the same wariness and disdain that once harbored for Ernst. Maybe still does.

JAKE
(annoyed)
English, bitte.

Friedl nods sheepishly, tucks his cigarette case back into his breast pocket just as a cluster of SPOTLIGHT BEAMS kick up in the distance, down valley.

Sweeping back-and-forth, they cast a strange wash of faint light over the treetops and cliff face.

FRIEDL
(re: the spotlights)
So much for subtlety.

JAKE
That's the Army for ya.

Behind them, on the march, Percy (from earlier) blows into his hands, rubs them together.

PERCY
You know, someday they're gonna
make a glitzy Hollywood picture
about all this.
(beat)
And yours truly's gonna star in it.

Next to Percy, another young man grins broadly, smacks his tanned forehead. This is SERGEANT PETE SEIBERT (30s, a man built for speed, snow, and sun).

PETE

May god have mercy on us all.

Hot on Pete's heels is a much more serious-looking man. This is LIEUTENANT DAVID BROWER (late 20s, a big mountain daredevil with a shock of prematurely gray hair).

He's got an unlit cigar clenched between his teeth.

DAVID

I'd see that picture.

(beat)

But I love watching ol' Percy fall flat on his face.

PETE

Happens *all* the time.

PAUL

Happens *all* the time.

Paul smacks Pete between the shoulder blades, veers away toward the trees.

JAKE

(to Paul, quietly)

Where you headed?

PAUL

Gotta few miles of cable to string!

As Paul TROMPS into the darkness, David, with the cigar between his teeth, MUTTERS to Freidl:

DAVID

You may be the fastest sonofabitch on two planks, but that old billy goat wingnut's got you beat goin' uphill any day.

Freidl smiles, concedes the point. Men of honor.

Next to David, Percy leans in toward Jake.

PERCY

What're you gonna do when this is done and dusted?

Jake draws a breath, looks to his feet.

JAKE

Take over my daddy's hardware store, I guess. If I'm lucky.

Jake looks away, steels himself as they march on.

JAKE (CONT'D)

He passed while we were on the boat over. Heart attack. December 18th. Christmastime. Didn't find out until last week.

Jake's voice wavers briefly:

JAKE (CONT'D)

Letter must've gotten... hung up back at Camp Hale.

Percy and Pete share a quick look.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Mama says the bank's fixing to foreclose on the store unless, by some miracle...

Jake trails off, looks to the moon, glassy-eyed.

JAKE (CONT'D)

She shouldn't have to hack it all on her lonesome, you know?

Both Pete and Percy lift heavy hands to Jake's shoulders.

PETE

She won't for long, kiddo.

Ernst seems taken aback by the crack in Jake's armor. His sudden show of vulnerability. But he doesn't say a word.

PERCY

Yeah, champ. The sooner we blast these bastards back to Berlin, the sooner you'll be back to swanning around Bozeman with the prettiest girl in all of Montana.

(beat)

And I don't mean your mama. Although, now that she's free...

Jake cracks a faint smile, brought back from the brink.

Another man falls in behind our crew. This is MAJOR BILL BOWERMAN (30s, the knuckles of a brawler, the unhurried air of a long-distance runner).

BILL

(to Jake)

All you gotta to is do your best, kid. Win, lose, or draw, that's all that counts.

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

(beat)

And p.s. fuck the bank.

Up ahead, men are crossing the same footbridge from earlier.

Above, Riva Ridge looms. A menacing black wall.

The whole crew slows.

DAVID

(after a second)

Anybody else notice... there seem
to be an *awful* lotta medics.

They all nod.

EXT. ROUTE FOUR - NIGHT

Jake and Ernst peer up into the darkness at a slightly more gradual looking wall than the one we saw yesterday.

There must be at least 150 men waiting anxiously in the vicinity. Everyone hurriedly checks their gear.

Each man wraps nylon webbing around their waist, clips in carabiners, and adjusts their sagging packs.

Bill taps his breast pocket, out of which juts a battered, matte black rifle mag.

BILL

Everybody empty?

All nod slowly. Not a comfortable feeling.

The faraway spotlights reflect off what looks to be a slowly-descending frozen fog bank.

Up ahead, men clip in, start up the cliff.

Next to Percy, Friedl WHISPERS back to Jake:

FRIEDL

So, who is this prettiest girl in
all of Montana?

Jake hesitates for a second, guarded. But then his face shifts ever so much. *Fuck it. Why not?*

He bites his lip, reaches inside his coat, pulls out a battered leather billfold, fishes out a small black and white photo, hands it over to Friedl.

The young woman in the picture is a vision. Jet black hair, almond eyes, high cheekbones. An indomitable air.

JAKE

Two thirds Sioux. One third
Cheyenne. Winona. Means firstborn
daughter in Dakota.

FRIEDL

(eyes on the photo)
Wunderschön. Beautiful. And I, like
Percy, know of which I speak.

Friedl hands the photo back with a wink. Jake delicately slips it back into his billfold. A precious heirloom.

Something has instantly shifted between them. A frost lifted. A wall broken down, however briefly.

Compatriots facing the likelihood of annihilation.

It's a powerful change.

JAKE

Needless to say, Daddy was none too pleased. God rest his soul. But he came around, eventually.

Advancing, David looks to Jake.

DAVID

You want first?

JAKE

Age before beauty.

David smirks, clips his carabiner onto the fixed line, starts off with the silent dexterity of a master.

Eyes on David as he disappears into the blackness, Jake draws a deep breath. His mind is back home.

JAKE

(to Friedl)
You headed to St. Moritz too?

Jake wags his head back toward Ernst.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Because a certain someone's gunning
for your gold.

FRIEDL

No. Instead, I go to Aspen.

Jake looks to Percy. Percy nods.

PERCY
(imitating Friedl)
Precisely like Saint Anton...

Friedl quietly persists:

FRIEDL
There we will build an oasis.
Percy, Ernst, and yours truly.

Percy smiles broadly. The moonlight glints in his eyes and off his pearly whites.

PERCY
(still as Friedl)
Spaß und Spiele. Mind and body.

Jake clips his line on, starts up after David.

JAKE
Well, here's to coming back with
both.

EXT. ROUTE FOUR, LOWER REACHES - NIGHT

Just like Jake said, the early going is a walk in the park. A quick scramble, tethered, over a gentle pitch.

SUPER: 18 FEBRUARY 1945, 2300 HOURS

As Jake climbs, he traces the rope with his eyes.

But David is nowhere to be seen. We can't even hear his carabiner gliding over the nylon.

It's as if Jake is entirely alone on the mountain, entirely abandoned to his thoughts.

JAKE
(quietly, to himself)
Just hold on, Mama.

Jake moves gracefully. All efficiency.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I'll be home soon enough.

As Jake follows the rope across the sloping face toward a steeper pitch, the sweep of the distant spotlights seems to animate the rock.

Shadows bend and sway, distorted. It's as if the pitch were being melted and remade over and over again.

Jake hits a piton, makes sure his feet are steady, clicks out, snaps his carabiner back in above the metal anchor.

JAKE (CONT'D)

If I'm--

Suddenly, we hear a muffled SCRAPE from above. Jake pauses, looks up. Then, in the distance, a loud CRACK.

Then a THUD. And another, and another.

Jake scans the rock wall. It's just a dizzying jumble of undulating shadows.

Until: SMASH!

A jagged mass of rock hits the wall just above Jake and shatters into its own shadow.

Jake yanks himself closer to the face, as flat as he can muster, as something falls from his belt. *His hammer?*

The rock WHOOSHES past him, mere inches from his face, and disappears into the undulating darkness below.

After a second, from below, we hear another THUD. Then: a heavy WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!

Then nothing but silence for a few seconds before a muted WHOMP echoes up from the valley floor.

Above, nothing stirs but the skittering shadows.

Jake steadies himself, checks his line. It's still secure. For a moment he considers calling out to the climber ahead.

Instead, he pads his empty holster for his missing hammer.

JAKE

(hushed)

Fuck's sake.

He scans the wall for his next set of holds.

EXT. ROUTE FOUR, MID-MOUNTAIN - CONTINUOUS

Jake arrives at a jutting, fractured shelf. Below, the valley is lit by the sweep of the distant spotlights.

He pauses, carefully checks what remains of where the boulder cleft free. Everything seems secure. So he tugs himself up and onto the shelf.

Still tethered, he turns, looks out over the valley.

The calm before the storm.

He looks back up, still no sign of David. He looks down.

In the rippling light, five or six more CLIMBERS move quickly up the line below him.

He un-clips, clicks back in above the nearest piton, gives the fixed rope a good tug.

Without warning, the piton anchoring it shimmies free of its hold and spins like a pinwheel secured to the nylon rope.

Jake grabs for it, misses.

In desperation, he stomps on the rope. The piton, hits his boot with a muffled PING!

Jake bends to snatch the piton, ZIPS it back up the line.

His eyes scan the rock for a proper spot to anchor it before he remembers. His piton hammer. It's gone.

He unbuttons his other holster, pulls out his pistol, reaches into his jacket for a handkerchief.

He wraps the kerchief around the gun, flips the butt end of the pistol sideways. The barrel is aimed at his leg.

Suddenly:

ERNST (O.S.)
(quietly)
A hardware store...

Jake wheels around to see Ernst on the ledge right behind him, sporting his cloth-covered piton hammer.

ERNST (CONT'D)
...with no hammers? Atrocious.

Actually glad to see him (for the very first time) Jake holsters his gun, takes the hammer.

JAKE
(a whisper)
Thank you.

Ernst nods wordlessly.

Jake turns back to the wall, slides the piton in, lifts the hammer: BANG. BANG. BANG.

They both look up. Nothing. Then:

ERNST

Thank you for warning me about the boulder.

Jake checks the line. It's secure. But he gives the piton another whack for good measure: BANG!

JAKE

Gotta get rid of you somehow.

Jake clicks back in, hands Ernst back his hammer. A hint of actual camaraderie. Shared purpose. Brotherhood.

JAKE (CONT'D)

C'mon.

Jake takes back off. Ernst waits, gives Jake some space so that they're not on the same set of anchors.

EXT. ROUTE FOUR, UPPER REACHES - CONTINUOUS

Jake jumps from rock-to-rock, handhold-to-handhold.

The top is within reach but shrouded in icy fog.

Behind him, Ernst climbs swiftly. A few others are splayed out in different locations all the way down to the bottom.

Up ahead, mere feet from the summit, David crouches, waiting. He pulls something out of his pack.

It glints in the sweep of the spotlights. A bayonet.

Jake picks up speed. Ernst follows.

Seeing them, David gestures 'shhh' and pulls his rifle from his shoulder, leans the barrel closer to his face.

Once Jake and Ernst reach David, they both squat down to stay in the shadows. He nods, fixes his bayonet.

Jake and Ernst mirror his movements in silence.

Blades set, all three stare up to the lip of the cliff. We can see their breath.

David points to where the fixed line ends. Beyond it is a narrow, pitched fissure that leads up and over the top.

David points to himself, then up the pitch and to the left. Then, he points to Jake and Ernst, pantomiming: *Follow me, then go right.*

They both nod.

David steadies his rifle, clicks his carabiner off the line, pockets his tether, climbs the last bit free.

One false move, one errant step: certain death.

Jake and Ernst watch him, try to seem stoic.

And, just like that, David vanishes. Not a peep. No gunfire. No explosions. No shouting. Nothing.

Success?

Ernst and Jake turn to each other and then set off after David. Another climber hits the landing just as they depart.

Like clockwork.

EXT. ROUTE FOUR, SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

Jake bounds through the gap and up onto the lip with Ernst right behind him.

Together, they run along the edge of the cliff, toward a large outcropping of boulders. The fog is so dense we can barely make out their silhouettes.

Jake slows, dips behind the outcropping. Ernst follows. They're both winded but doing whatever they can to stifle their heaving chests.

Jake leans out, peers past the edge. Nothing. Just a milky glow lit occasionally by the sweep of the spotlights.

Another pair of muffled BOOTS echo past them, on the run. Then another. More and more soldiers sweep by like ghostly rifle-bearing specters.

Jake checks his watch. Nearly 4:30 AM.

Ernst taps Jake on the shoulder, gestures. Jake nods.

And the two of them take off through the mist toward the higher ground.

On the way, they pass seemingly innumerable American Soldiers digging in, loading their weapons, pulling grenades out of their packs, praying.

In the distance, everything is silent and still. No sign of the enemy. Not a sound.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, RISE - CONTINUOUS

Behind Ernst, Jake runs his sleeve over his drenched face.

Ernst grabs him by the shoulder, pulls him behind another bit of stone shelter.

Jake and Ernst throw off their packs, pull out magazines, clip grenades to their belts.

Beyond them: the faintest glimmer of sunrise.

Suddenly, a third figure joins them behind the wall.

It's Friedl. He's barely winded and looks incongruously debonaire. Like he's out for a lovely Alpine wander.

Then, a fourth man sweeps into view. It's Bill from earlier. His face a study in flinty grit, he gestures "five" and then spins a pointed index finger in the air.

All nod back. And he disappears into the fog.

Jake looks to his watch again, closes his eyes, draws a deep breath, EXHALES slowly.

Ernst MUTTERS something quietly to himself. A prayer?

Friedl leans his head around the edge.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, RISE - FRIEDL'S POV

Up ahead, we can barely make out a line of sandbags. Perched at the center: the faint outline of a machine gun. It's pointed up to the sky.

From beyond the sandbags, we hear a faint back-and-forth WHISK, WHISK, WHISK. It sounds someone putting the finishing touches on a spit polish.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, RISE - BACK ON JAKE AND ERNST

Jake opens his eyes. Beyond the rock, we hear the SQUEAK, SQUEAK, SQUEAK of a canteen being opened.

Then: GLUG, GLUG, GLUG. Pause. SWOOSH, SWOOSH, SPIT.

Water hits rock with a heavy SLAP. The sound is unbearably, impossibly loud. Magnified by the mist.

Abruptly, a fourth soldier nips in next to Jake. It's Pete from before. His nervous fingers clutch the well-worn wooden grip of his Thompson sub-machine gun.

Together, they wait, catch their breath. Try to imagine what lies beyond those sandbags.

After a moment, Jake lifts his watch again. It's time.

He flashes "three, two, one" with his free hand.

And, off they go.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, EAST SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

Jake and Ernst charge toward the sandbags. Pete and Friedl split off to their right and left.

The mist, still thick, seems to be lifting. More and more contrast, more and more detail with every step.

Jake and Ernst slow, cautiously approach the sandbags.

Beyond them we hear someone SLOSHING liquid in a metal cup. The sound is, again, overly loud.

Jake lifts his rifle, aims, advances. Ernst does the same.

This is what they've trained for, prepared for. But neither of them seems entirely certain what comes next.

Suddenly, on the other side of the sandbags, a solitary figure emerges.

A BABY-FACED GERMAN SOLDIER no more than 16 or 17 years old.

He wears thick, wire-rimmed glasses. No helmet. His jacket is open at the neck. And he holds nothing but a steaming metal mug and a boar bristle toothbrush.

For a second, the German Boy is frozen stiff like a sleepwalker stunned awake after stumbling into a wall.

Jake lifts his fingers to his lips. He's got one eye closed, one eye on his rifle sight.

The German Boy drops the tin cup. It hits the ground with a sharp, alarming CLANG!

Ernst nods, aims, WHISPERS in German:

ERNST
Stille. Stille.

The German Boy turns to see Pete streak through the shadows to his left.

He drops his toothbrush, lifts his hands in seeming surrender. Ernst nods 'yes'.

But then the German Boy RAKES in a deep breath.

GERMAN BOY
Amerik--

Jake lifts the butt of his rifle, SLAMS it into the boy's face, shatters his glasses.

The Boy instantly crumples to the ground.

Ernst seems stunned. But, together, they scramble quickly up and over the sandbags.

Other than the unconscious German Boy at their feet, they're entirely alone in the machine gun nest.

EXT. MACHINE GUN NEST - CONTINUOUS

Metal boxes of ammunition and wooden crates of German grenades (aka potato mashers) sit neatly arrayed next to an elaborate looking radio.

Next to the radio, a kettle RUMBLES on a single burner.

Jake and Ernst sling their rifles over their shoulders, slide the unconscious Boy out of the way, grab the machine gun, run it quickly across the nest.

Ernst ducks behind Jake, grabs two boxes of ammo, hands Jake a bandolier. Jake threads the bullets in, roughly slides the hand crank back-and-forth: CLICK! CLICK!

In the distance: sandbagged dugout barracks.

American soldiers stream from the cliff edge behind them, toward the sides of the open slit in the dugout.

Jake shoves the wooden stock of the machine gun under one arm, leans his head over, takes aim at the barracks.

EXT. MACHINE GUN NEST - JAKE'S POV

Through the sight, we sweep back-and-forth across the sandbags lining the barracks.

There's not a soul to be seen other than Pete and Friedl and the growing ranks of American soldiers gathering in two bunches on either side of the fortified entrance.

Suddenly, we hear a DESPERATE SHOUT from within:

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Amerikaner!

Pete instantly pulls a grenade from his belt, yanks the pin, tosses the clip, lobs the grenade into the breach.

BANG!

A gust of gray smoke billows out of the barracks. More SCREAMING. Two other Americans throw grenades.

BANG! BANG!

Muffled AUTOMATIC RIFLEFIRE streaks out of darkness of the bunker, toward the machine gun nest.

ERNST
(loud, to Jake)
GO.

Jake, frozen, hesitates. Shots ZIP past them like fireflies or THUD into the sandbags like rocks.

ERNST (CONT'D)
Was stimmt nicht mit dir? FIRE!

As if also awoken from a dream, Jake squeezes the trigger:

RAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT!

Machine gun fire scorches the air, shreds the sandbags that line the barracks.

A single GERMAN COMMANDER scrambles up over the sandbags half-dressed, covered in soot, hair singed, arms up.

Jake, seemingly unable to let go, cuts him nearly in half.

The rest of the Americans lob more grenades into the SHRIEKING hellhole.

BANG! BANG! Black smoke oozes out.

Jake lets go of the trigger, falls back in horror.

Ernst takes over.

ERNST (CONT'D)
Get up. Feed!

From out of nowhere, the German Boy LUNGES at Ernst with a dagger in one hand. Ernst spins to his left. The blade grazes his shoulder.

The two men struggle. The German Boy yanks the knife back, lifts it again to strike.

Jake pulls his sidearm free, fires a single shot.

BANG!

A scarlet wisp of blood mists into the brightening air. And the Boy falls backward.

Ernst, his jacket torn and bloodied, turns to Jake, near-deafened by the blast of his pistol.

ERNST
(too loud)
Danke sch--

The muffled sound of a German MP 40 sub-machine gun (aka 'burp gun') cuts him off:

BURP! BURP! BURP!

The sandbags to Ernst's left explode. Sand and burlap fly.

Ernst falls to the floor at eye level with the potato mashers. He pulls himself past the body of the dead Boy, grabs two grenades, tosses them both to Jake.

Jake catches them awkwardly, still clutching his smoking pistol, stunned.

His face says it all: *I just killed... a boy.*

ERNST (CONT'D)
Hey, hey. Focus! I need you here.

Ernst points.

Jake shakes his head to dispel the image. Ernst grabs two more grenades, rolls over onto his back.

ERNST (CONT'D)
Twelve. Maybe fifteen feet.

Jake nods rapidly, all-adrenalin.

In the distance, we can hear more MACHINE GUN FIRE. Muffled EXPLOSIONS. SCREAMING. SHOUTING in German and in English.

Jake and Ernst twist the caps at the ends of the grenade handles, pull out thin metal fuse cords.

They lock eyes, pull the cords. Each grenade HISSES to life, belches out sparks and smoke before Jake and Ernst turn and lob them up over the edge.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Silence.

Suddenly, Percy leaps into the nest next to Ernst. Jake wheels around and nearly plugs him with his sidearm.

PERCY

Quiet. Quiet. We gotta keep--

He cuts himself off, peers over the edge of the sandbags.

POP! A single round catches Percy in the face. He falls to the ground, one hand to his cheek.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Fucking hell that hurts!

Blood gushes through his splayed fingers.

Ernst yanks a green field dressing kit from his jacket, rips it open, tugs out a wad of gauze.

ERNST

Let me see. Let me see.

Percy splays his fingers. Blood runs down his neck.

Ernst does his best to staunch the bleeding.

Behind them, Jake holsters his pistol, lifts his rifle, cautiously looks back over the edge.

A single ELDERLY GERMAN SOLDIER stands in the distance holding a rifle, bewildered.

BANG! A single round fired from somewhere near the barracks, fells the old man.

Jake looks toward where the shot came from to see five or six AMERICAN SOLDIERS marching ten or so STUNNED GERMANS out of their barracks and across the snow.

Jake collapses back into into the nest.

JAKE
 Jesus. They had no fucking idea we
 were coming.

Ernst, busy winding a bandage around Percy's face, nods.

ERNST
 Well, they do now.

Suddenly, a frightened medic ducks his head in.

RUPERT
 Come. Fast.

Meet: RUPERT VON TRAPP (mid-30s, wide eyes, trembling hands,
 someone who should be wearing a stethoscope not a rifle).

And, yes, that Von Trapp.

RUPERT (CONT'D)
 We need to dig in.

His face vanishes as quickly as it appeared.

PERCY
 (muffled by the gauze)
 Bring the Kraut gun.

ERNST
 Are you sure you can--

Percy nods, throws himself up onto one knee, still bleeding.

Jake grabs a few ammo boxes. Ernst grabs the gun, knocks its
 bi-pod arms flat.

JAKE
 (to Percy)
 So much for Hollywood.

Percy does his best not to smile. Ernst leaps past him.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP - CONTINUOUS

With the fog melting away, Ernst, Percy, and Jake run for a
 line of tall rocks to the east of the barracks.

Up ahead, Rupert ducks behind an outcropping next to a young
 RADIOMAN with a long, whipsawing field antenna.

On the way, they pass the shaggy pack of stunned GERMAN
 PRISONERS. They're a profoundly nonthreatening lot of
 haggard pensioners and rosy-cheeked teens.

Toting the still smoking German machine gun, Ernst skids behind a snow-covered rock formation.

Jake and Percy follow.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP, ROCK OUTCROPPING - CONTINUOUS

Jake turns to Ernst, GASPING.

JAKE

They're just... a bunch of old men
and goddamn boys.

Ernst trains the gun toward the barracks.

JAKE (CONT'D)

What the hell happened to the
fearsome fucking *Gebirgsjäger*?

A few feet away, Rupert cups a hand over his mouth and shout/whispers:

RUPERT

Quiet. Lieutenant says the 47th
Edelweiss are just over that ridge.

He points past the barracks, where we now see American soldiers work quickly to put out the smoldering fire.

RUPERT (CONT'D)

Strict orders. No fire. Repeat. Do
not fire.

They all nod. Percy seems to be slipping swiftly into shock. Again, we can see their breath.

Jake leans his head around, peers into the distance.

As the smoke from the barracks dampens, the last few American soldiers make a run for the rocks.

In the gap between the barracks and the machine gun nest, the fog is nearly gone. The sky beyond is bright and clear.

For a moment, everything is silent and still.

But then we hear the sound of FOOTFALL. Boots in unison, climbing slowly, without urgency.

A routine morning patrol.

Jake cranes his head to see a handful of WHITE-CLAD GERMAN SOLDIERS marching with rifles slung over their shoulders.

Almost mirror images of our boys from the 10th.

Suddenly, one of them stops, looks directly at the rocks.

A single AMERICAN SOLDIER, hood up, helmet off, stands frozen in the breach, exposed.

The German nods, waves a hand, never in a million years suspecting that hundreds of American Alpine soldiers were hiding just feet away.

The frozen American calmly waves back. The German patrol continues on, slowly tromping toward the barracks.

After a second, the American slips back behind the rocks.

Anxious seconds tick by. The German troops continue on.

Then, out of nowhere, a single nervous SHOT rings out, echoes across the hillside.

One Edelweiss soldier falls.

Chaos erupts!

The Germans duck behind their own fortifications, fire in every direction, SHOUT to each other in stunned German.

Ernst scrambles to train the machine gun back on them. Next to him, Jake feeds ammo.

JAKE

When I find out who did that--

BANG, BANG, BANG! Bullets graze the rocks right next to his face. Limestone bits go flying.

Ernst cocks the machine gun, returns fire:

RAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT! TAT!

Something metallic tumbles in over the rocks, lands right next to Percy with a CLANG!

It's a German grenade!

Jake looks to Percy. Percy stares back, in a daze.

Jake lunges toward the grenade, snatches it up, tosses it into the blue sky above.

BOOM! It goes off right overhead. The concussion knocks Percy backward into the rock.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 (his ears ringing)
 Jesus, Perce. Look alive!

Behind him, Ernst's machine gun jams.

ERNST
Scheiße.

He yanks the crank lever back-and-forth. Nothing. It's locked up. Overheated.

Jake lifts his rifle, leans around Percy, fires:

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Hearing the sound, Percy jolts forward, pulls his rifle from his shoulder, moves clumsily to the far side of the rock, and returns fire:

TAKA! TAKA! TAKA! TAKA!

His bloody cheek leaves crimson smudges on the wooden stock with every recoil.

Next to Jake, the radioman CRANKS his radio to life.

RADIOMAN
 (into the receiver)
 Affirmative. We're taking small arms fire and--

He leans around the rock. BANG! A bullet hits him in the forehead, sends his helmet flying, kills him instantly.

Rupert, grabs the receiver, SHOUTS:

RUPERT
 We need artillery up here NOW!

Strangely, the Germans stop firing. Slowly, the American side goes quiet too.

Then, from beyond the barracks: KA-THUMP. KA-THUMP.

Mortar shells being dropped into their firing tubes.

JAKE
 I take back what I said.

Ernst drops the machine gun, takes cover. Jake does the same. Only Percy keeps firing.

ERNST
About what?

Two shells explode right behind them: BOOM! BOOM! Dirt and rocks rain down.

JAKE
You not surviving the week.

KA-THUMP. KA-THUMP. Two more shells go in. BOOM! BOOM! Two more shells land.

Alarmingly close. More dirt. More rocks.

ERNST
Hold that thought.

Ernst readies to run. Jake pulls him back behind the rocks.

JAKE
Are you fucking nuts?

ERNST
No, that's your job.

Ernst pulls one of the grenades from Jake's belt, thrusts it into his hands.

ERNST
Throw as good as you climb.

KA-THUMP. KA-THUMP. BOOM! BOOM! Even closer.

Ernst leaps from behind the rocks, runs back toward the machine gun nest. In a daze, Jake just watches. Frozen.

BURP! BURP! BURP!

The sound rouses him. He pulls the pin, ditches the clip, throws the grenade right between the nest and the barracks.

BANG!

Ernst leaps up and over the sandbags, disappears.

Jake levels his rifle, ready to fire. But the enemy is nowhere to be seen.

From over the far edge of the ridge, we hear another resounding KA-BOOM echo up. Then another.

RUPERT
Not good. Not good.

PERCY
 (through bloody gauze)
 Eighty-eights?

From beyond the barracks: the shrill SCREAM of an incoming heavy artillery shell.

JAKE
 Take--

WHAM!

The shell lands between them and the barracks. The ground shudders. A massive cloud of debris billows up.

Just beyond the cloud, we can make out small black batons being lobbed out of the machine gun nest, one after another.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! Ernst scores four direct hits on what remains of the 47th Edelweiss.

The mountaintop falls momentarily silent once again.

Then: KA-BOOM! KA-BOOM! KA-BOOM! Three more 88mm shells HOWL up toward them from the valley below.

BAM! BAM! BAM! Each shell lands well off-target - west of the dugout barracks. The earth shakes.

A single voice cries out in German:

EDELWEISS COMMANDER
Halt! Halt!

For a second, it's not clear if he's screaming into a radio or calling out to the Americans. Then:

EDELWEISS COMMANDER (CONT'D)
Ich gebe auf!
 (beat)
 I surrender.

A solitary EDELWEISS COMMANDER emerges from behind the bunker with his hands up. His whites flecked with blood and dirt, he cautiously steps out into the open.

EDELWEISS COMMANDER (CONT'D)
Ich--

CRACK! A single gunshot. The Commander falls.

Further off, behind the rocks, a familiar VOICE:

BILL

Who the blazes did that? He was giving the fuck up!

In the distance, Ernst bounds out of the nest and makes a run for for the barracks, firing wildly.

He disappears into the barracks. Jake sweeps his rifle back-and-forth, finger on the trigger.

Ernst suddenly reemerges, on the run.

From somewhere down the strand of rocks, another FAMILIAR VOICE calls out:

FRIEDL

(to Ernst)

Schnell! Mach schnell!

CRACK! A single round rips through the air just over Ernst's shoulder. CRACK! A second shot barely misses him.

Jake scans the horizon with his rifle. There's no one to be seen. Not even a glint of light or hint of muzzle flare.

Ernst jumps back behind the rock wall carrying the Germans' radio. His chest is heaving. His eyes, wild.

ERNST

(to Jake)

You owe me ten Dollars.

From behind Percy, Friedl slides in next to Ernst.

His formerly debonaire visage is caked in dirt and mud.

FRIEDL

(to Ernst)

Brilliant, brilliant.

Ernst cranks the radio. Friedl lifts the receiver, presses the call button, BARKS into the mouthpiece:

FRIEDL (CONT'D)

Den Angriff abbrechen. Es war ein Fehler.

(louder)

Alles ruhig jetzt. Wiederholen, alles ruhig.

After a moment of STATIC, we hear a VOICE echo back:

EDELWEISS PRIVATE (O.S.)

Wer ist das?

(MORE)

EDELWEISS PRIVATE (CONT'D)

(beat)
Wer ist das?

Friedl ponders briefly, smiles, lifts the receiver.

FRIEDL
(calmly)
*Generalleutnant Josef Kübler. Erste
Gebirgs-Division.*

Both Jake and Ernst stare. Friedl covers the mouthpiece.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)
Skis fast, no form.

EDELWEISS PRIVATE (O.S.)
Kübler?

Friedl bites his lip. *Wrong choice?*

EDELWEISS PRIVATE (CONT'D)
Herr Kübler ist auf dem--

Friedl SLAMS the receiver down, cuts the connection.

FRIEDL
His mother on the other hand...

He finally catches sight of Percy's bandaged face.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)
*Who invited Gary Cooper to the
party?*

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP - LATER

The scene is total anarchy. Wounded men run every which way. Heavy artillery fire blankets the summit. A fierce German counterattack well underway.

SUPER: 19 FEBRUARY 1945, 1800 HOURS

The sun is lower in the sky. And the formerly crisp, cool air has darkened with the smoke from endless volleys of mortar fire.

Jake and Ernst move fast, hefting a scorching hot 60mm mortar tube with its mounts collapsed.

Pete leads, still carrying his Thompson. David is right behind him. Bill's in third.

Rupert and Friedl sprint behind Bill. Percy is nowhere to be seen, presumably being tended to somewhere safe.

PETE

Never felt better than the first day I stuck my hunting boots into the toe straps and pointed 'em downhill. For the next couple of years, no one was happier than--

BOOM!

A German mortar shell lands alarmingly close. The shock wave bounces Jake into the air. But he keeps on running.

Pete, David, and Bill barely flinch.

DAVID

East! East! Gotta clear the eastern face to give Paul and his crew some cover to finish that goddamn--

A PIERCING SCREAM from somewhere high above cuts him off.

Jake spins to see a single STUKA DIVE BOMBER rip through the sky right overhead.

The plane strafes the ground all around them:

POW! POW! POW! POW! POW!

The pilot pulls back the yoke, climbs, disappears into the disc of the sun.

Jake, mesmerized, slows.

BILL

(toward Jake)

Hey hardware store. Price check on aisle six. Pronto!

Together, they run toward a series of blasted-out craters amid smoldering trees.

BANG! WHIZ! BANG! WHIZ!

Rifle fire from somewhere to their left.

Everyone hits the dirt.

PETE

(hushed, to Ernst)

One way or another, I knew then that skiing was gonna be my life.

Above: the WAIL of the Stuka returning.

BILL
 Hate these fucking things.
 (beat)
 Go. Trees.

He gestures for them to run for a nearby stand of splintered trees. They all take off through the snow.

Bill stays behind, burrows himself into the snow, face-up.

The Stuka descends, HOWLING. The others sprint for cover.

Bill calmly lifts his fabric-wrapped rifle, squeezes off a few rounds. He's firing with precision, not fear.

BANG! One shot hits the engine intake, just below the propeller. CRACK! A second hits the canopy, pierces it.

The pilot slumps to one side, sends the plane barreling wing-over-wing, just shy of the ridge crest.

It disappears from view. For a moment, silence. Then, BOOM! A powerful explosion rocks the valley. A dark black cloud mushrooms up.

Bill leaps to his feet.

BILL (CONT'D)
 I ain't big. I ain't fast. But I'm
 ornery. And I love to fucking win.

CRACK! CRACK! More sniper fire. But from where?

Bill runs for cover. Bullets WHISTLE every which way. One grazes his left thigh. He falls.

Pete catches him.

PETE
 Thought you said you coach track.

BILL
 Didn't say I ran track!

Rupert leaps up, pulls himself closer.

Blood rushes down Bill's leg.

RUPERT
 I can fix it. Hurry.

Leaning on Rupert and Pete, Bill pushes through the pain as they rush tree-to-tree through the snow. Pete

Up ahead, David lifts a hand.

They all slow. He gestures 'get down'. They do.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP, DECIMATED FOREST - CONTINUOUS

David ducks behind what's left of a nearby tree. It's barely wider than his torso. Poor cover.

Bill does the same, takes aim. Barely hidden and bleeding.

In the distance, a VOICE cries out:

CORPORAL BRANDT
Amerikaner?

Pete doesn't budge. Neither does Bill. Silence.

CORPORAL BRANDT (CONT'D)
Americans?

A single, hooded soldier emerges from behind a bit of rock. This is LANCE CORPORAL TOBIAS BRANDT (late 20s, steely eyes, aquiline nose).

He's dressed almost exactly as they are. All in white.

He steps forward, he makes a show of setting down his scoped sniper rifle. It disappears into the snow.

CORPORAL BRANDT (CONT'D)
*You are 10th Mountain Division,
yes? Alpine infantry?*

Silence as he cautiously lifts his arms into the air.

CORPORAL BRANDT (CONT'D)
*It is a great honor to surrender to
such... worthy adversaries.*

Pete looks back to his crouched companions. Bill shrugs.

CORPORAL BRANDT (CONT'D)
*What you have managed to achieve...
a tactical masterstroke.*

He takes a step toward them. Pete finally answers:

PETE
Hold it right there.

Corporal Brandt freezes, slowly swivels his head toward the sound of Pete's voice.

CORPORAL BRANDT
 Ah, there you are.
 (beat)
 I most *humbly* surrender.

A faint breeze TUMBLES through the space between them, kicking up snow. A tense moment passes.

PETE
 How many of you are there?

CORPORAL BRANDT
 Just me, I'm afraid.

Suddenly, Friedl sits up.

FRIEDL
 Tobias?

Brandt's head whips toward the sound of Friedl's voice.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)
Ich glaub mich knutscht ein Elch!

Friedl leaps to his feet. Everyone, including Ernst, looks instantly wary. They all take aim.

Brandt squints, barely believing his eyes.

CORPORAL BRANDT
 (in English)
 Friedl Pfeifer? But how can it be?

Friedl lowers his weapon, steps out into the space between them. Rupert tries to stop him.

RUPERT
 No, no.

FRIEDL
 (calmly)
 He is a very old friend. A protege,
 really. I taught his father to...

THUMP.

A single bullet fired from somewhere behind Brandt hits Friedl in the chest. Everyone freezes.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)
 ...ski.

Friedl looks stunned, teeters - a black dot burnt into the chest of his bright white jacket.

CORPORAL BRANDT
(to Pete)
Nein. Nein! Ruhe. Calm!

Brandt's hands are still up.

Knee-deep in snow, Friedl pats his chest. Behind him, Bill and Pete nervously train their rifles on Brandt.

FRIEDL
Es ist ein Wunder.

Friedl spins to face his comrades, pulls the cigarette case out of his jacket, hefts it skyward.

It's only then that we notice that the case is punctured clean through, from front-to-back.

Suddenly, a deep red blossom of blood flowers from the center of the black hole in Friedl's jacket.

Looking confused, Friedl drops the case, crumples.

And a mad firefight ensues.

Brandt is immediately felled. In the distance, his hidden compatriots return fire, lob grenades.

BANG! BANG! BOOM! BOOM!

Bill is thrown skyward, the tree he was behind, obliterated.

Jake and David run toward him. Rupert runs for Friedl.

Returning fire, the three of them grab Bill and Friedl by their collars, drag them across the snow, toward a crater.

The rest of the crew frantically follows them in.

EXT. CRATER - CONTINUOUS

Jake rips Bill's helmet off.

The whole left side of his face is burnt and bloodied. His ear is mangled. He gags on dirt and blood, barely conscious.

Rupert tears Friedl's jacket open, lifts his sweater up, A single, tiny hole in his chest oozes dark red blood.

Friedl, still conscious and oddly lucid, GASPS:

FRIEDL
 My Opi gave me that case.
 (wheeze)
 Such...
 (wheeze)
 ...a...
 (wheeze)
 ...pity.

Rupert rolls him over. An equally tiny exit wound has already stained the snow red.

RUPERT
 Pain? *Schmerzen?*

Friedl grins, nods no. Then, yes. A lot.

RUPERT (CONT'D)
 Hold still.

Next to him, Pete drops his weapon, grabs the mortar and quickly kicks the legs out. He peers back over the edge of the crater to judge the distance.

David and Ernst continue firing.

PETE
 (to Jake)
 God gives his hardest battles to
 his strongest soldiers. C'mon.

Jake drops his rifle, shimmies past David toward Pete.

Behind him, Bill fades in and out of consciousness, MOANS lowly as his eyes blink wildly.

Pete pulls two mortar shells from his pack.

PETE (CONT'D)
 They're all I got.

Jake looks back up over the edge of the crater.

JAKE
 They'll do.

Jake twists the eyepiece, makes minor adjustments. Pete crouches right next to him, ready to let the shell drop.

A single bullet barely misses David, kicks up dirt.

DAVID
 Stop shooting at my mountain!

David leans back over the lip again, opens fire:

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Behind them, Rupert rips open his aid kit, pulls out a thin pipette, gently pierces Friedl's chest, sucks out blood.

Friedl winces, his breath a RASPY RATTLE.

Jake lifts his hands from the mortar tube, HISSES:

JAKE
Registered.

PETE
(quietly)
Fire in the hole.

Pete drops the mortar. KA-CHINK! Pete and Jake duck their heads. BANG! The shell blasts out of the barrel.

Breathlessly, they both jump to the edge of the crater next to David, watching.

BOOM!

DAVID
Four meters right.

Abruptly, Bill sits up, blood oozing from both ears.

BILL
(way too loud)
What the goddamn hell?!

Rupert smiles, stuffs gauze into Friedl's exit wound.

RUPERT
(to Bill)
Stubborn as your mules.

BILL
(still too loud)
To play a good defense, you gotta
like the taste of your own blood!

Jake and Pete prep their one remaining mortar shell. Ernst pauses, switches clips. His fingers tremble.

ERNST
I'm out.

PETE
Think you can make seventy?

ERNST

What?

PETE

Miles per hour. I think I can. With
the right wax.

Pete drops the shell. KA-CHINK! They duck. BANG! The shell
blasts out.

BOOM!

DAVID

Dead-on!

RUPERT

(to Friedl)

Alright, let's get you out of here.

Still conscious but clearly in pain, Friedl nods sadly as if
he's going to miss the best part of the show.

Rupert reaches back, grabs a brown paper packet, rips it
open, drizzles it around the pipette.

Friedl grits his teeth. Sulfa powder. It burns.

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, SUMMIT - DUSK

The seven of them march from the trees and toward another
swarming American position.

It resembles the site of their first battle: machine gun
nest, barracks, a pen of anxious-looking PRISONERS chain-
smoking American cigarettes.

Men and materiel are scattered every which way. Mortar and
artillery craters dot the formerly snow-dusted surface.

Next to the prisoners, behind stacked wooden crates of
ammunition, a single mule stands, BRAYING. At its feet are
six or seven other mules. All dead.

Pete and David haul Bill between them.

Ernst and Jake carry Friedl on an impromptu stretcher while
Rupert continues to carefully suck blood from Friedl's
pierced lung and spit it to the dirty snow.

Jake reaches his free hand inside his jacket, pulls out his
billfold, cracks it open, thumbs out the photo of Winona,
kisses it gently.

A young man, PRIVATE WINTERS (20s, empty eyes, dirt- and blood-crusted face) passes them, carrying a heavy crate.

DAVID
Where's your C.O.?

Winters wags his head back past the dugout.

Jake slips his billfold back into his jacket.

JAKE
Medic?

PRIVATE WINTERS
(still on the move)
Sniper just did our last one in.

As if on cue, the lone mule BRAYS again and collapses, dead.

BILL
(again, way too loud)
What the goddamn hell are you doing
to my fucking mules?!

Amid the rush of soldiers, Paul suddenly materializes!

He pauses, smiles broadly. His hands are covered in thick black grease. And his eyes are wild, ecstatic.

PAUL
Well, I'll be. Just the lowlifes
I've been looking for.

He slaps Jake's back, leaves a big greasy hand print. Jake, utterly spent, nearly drops Friedl.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Hank's been asking after y'all.
(to Ernst)
Your fixed lines held like a
goddamn charm. A walk in the park.

Paul veers toward an impromptu forward command center.

They all follow. Distant GUNFIRE and EXPLOSIONS ripple through the once placid hilltops.

DAVID
(to Paul)
Colonel Hampton's up here?

PAUL

Yeah. And boy were we surprised.
Got pinned down pretty bad. Ran
outta basically everything.

(beat)

So, Hank got a wild hair and
decided to climb the whole deal
himself with a few stragglers from
the 87th. Loaded for bear.

He zigzags past a heaping pile of brass casing and abandoned
German weapons.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I guarantee you he's the only
Colonel in the entire US Army who
could climb that pitch with a
ninety pound pack. Stubborn
sonofabitch.

BILL

(not hearing a word)

What are you doing to my goddamn
mules?!

PAUL

(to Bill)

Don't get your panties in a bunch.

He turns, rumbles down a hastily-constructed set of wooden
stairs through the trees. They all follow.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You're gonna like this...

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, TRAMWAY TOP - CONTINUOUS

The lot of them emerge from the trees at the top of Paul's
hastily constructed, entirely miraculous tramway.

ENGINEERS from the 126th are still putting the finishing
touches on it.

Paul, as if oblivious to the fact that Friedl is in a
stretcher and Bill's face is burnt to a crisp, gazes out at
the drooping cable like a proud father.

PAUL

Ain't she a beaut?

Bill lowers his arms from David and Pete's shoulders, stares
at the tram like it's a mirage.

PAUL (CONT'D)
A full eighteen hours ahead of
schedule, thank you very much.

Behind them, a HOWITZER CREW loudly supplies cover fire:

BANG! BANG! BOOM! BOOM!

PAUL (CONT'D)
(over the shelling)
Two thousand feet straight down to
the valley floor.

The Engineers give the cable one last heaving torque.

PAUL (CONT'D)
She'll carry about six hundred
fifty pounds. Maybe more.
(beat)
I expect we can get twenty tons up
and down this mountain all damn
day. Long as we need to.

Bill gingerly steps up next to him.

BILL
(LOUD)
NO MORE MULES?!

PAUL
No more mules.

Behind them, Colonel Hampton lumbers down the stairs
followed by a radioman.

COLONEL HAMPTON
(into a handset)
What? No! No! That is an order,
son. Midnight. Empty pieces. Fixed
bayonets. You hear me?

Everyone salutes. Even Friedl, weakly.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
Over and out.

He tosses the handset back to the radioman.

ALL
Sir.

Colonel Hampton salutes back, proudly.

COLONEL HAMPTON
How you holdin' up, Bill?

BILL
(loud, bleeding)
Right as rain, sir!

The Colonel's eyes fall to Friedl. Friedl winks, the blood on his lips having dried a dark reddish brown.

RUPERT
(to Hampton)
Lost a fair amount of blood, sir.
Collapsed lung. Clean exit.

Colonel Hampton takes Friedl's hand.

COLONEL HAMPTON
Good thing you still like goin'
downhill fast.

He turns to Jake and Ernst.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
Y'all are about to be our first
payload.

BOOM!

A German 88 artillery shell hits just behind them, sends up a thunderous blue/black cloud.

Everyone flinches but Jake. It's like he's not even there.

The Colonel leans in toward him, tries to bring him back.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
And you were right, son. That climb
was a hoot.
(quietly)
Max woulda been proud.

Jake just stares back. No words.

EXT. TRAM PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Jake, Ernst, and David stand inside the cramped tram car.

David is up front. Jack and Ernst are in the back. Friedl lies on the stretcher on the pine plank floor.

All but Jake look nervous as hell. Instead, his mind is elsewhere. Gone. Blasted away by the carnage, constant shelling, and death.

Paul reaches in, YANKS a cord to start the tiny gasoline engine at the rear of the car.

BRUM. BRUM. BRUM. BRUM. BRUM.

The engine PURRS.

COLONEL HAMPTON
Medics are already on standby down below for that one.

He pulls out a map, angles it at Jake and Ernst.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
Now, provision up. Get a bite. Then double-time it here before go-hour.
(pointing)
Lower slopes of Belvedere.

Ernst eyes the map. It's unfamiliar territory.

Jake still seems a million miles away, as if he's watching this all play out from a vast distance.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
There's a rocket battery. Screaming Mimi. At the top of a steep pitch, here. You'll like it. About 400 feet pretty much straight up. If we don't find a way to put that thing on ice, B Company is gonna have a *helluva* time clearing Valpiano.

ERNST
B Company? Isn't that--

COLONEL HAMPTON
Yeah. Hays' son.
(beat)
They're gonna need all the help they can get.

David, up front, doesn't like the sound of this.

Hampton circles the position with his calloused fingers.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
Head out with the 85th, hoof it here. Scale the face. Disable the battery. Join back up. Take the fight all the way to the top.
(beat)
And remember, surprise is your only advantage.

(MORE)

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
 Move under the cover of darkness.
 And watch for mines. Here, here,
 and likely here.

He lifts his finger from the map, slaps his other hand hard against the A-frame struts of tram car.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
 Like the General says, always
 forward. *Sempre Avanti*.

The two words rouse Jake. But only slightly.

Next to Hampton, Rupert SHOUTS from the platform:

RUPERT
 If you see my brother, tell him I'm
 alright. I'm okay.

Behind Rupert, Paul pulls a lever. The tram car cuts loose with a loud metallic CLANK!

On the platform between Paul and Pete, Bill SHOUTS:

BILL
 (still WAY too loud)
 Meet you bastards at the fucking
 finish line!

The tram car RIPS away into the darkness.

EXT. TRAM CAR - CONTINUOUS

Alone for the first time in hours, Jake, Ernst, and David hold on for dear life as the tram car RIPS swiftly downhill.

Between them, Friedl gazes skyward. His breathing is steady but labored. The blood-crusted pipette sticks out of his chest. But his face seems oddly placid. Content.

Above, the thick, greasy cable GROANS under their weight. The sheave wheels CLACK. The engine PURRS.

Behind them, on Riva Ridge: sporadic GUNFIRE.

Below: trees, rocks, and snow WHIZ by.

For a long moment, no one says a word.

Then, all of a sudden, Jake's eyes begin to well. It could be the crisp wind. But it's not.

His chest shudders. He tries to hold it in but he can't. Not now. Not any longer.

Up ahead: the faint BUZZ of a propeller.

David lifts his rifle, spies an approaching fighter plane.

Ours? Theirs?

Jake doesn't notice. Instead, heavy tears stream down his cheeks and whip away into the darkness.

Ernst clocks it, doesn't say a word.

JAKE
(through tears)
He was just...

Ahead, the plane is getting closer. David takes aim.

JAKE (CONT'D)
...a boy.

From the bed of the tram car, Friedl WHEEZES:

ERNST
Ours?

David says nothing, uncertain. Finger on the trigger.

JAKE
I could have-- I should have--

Suddenly, the plane takes a sharp bend, reveals its insignia. American. Army Air Corps.

David slowly lowers his rifle.

The P-47 Thunderbolt ROARS past them, toward Belvedere. Attached to its belly: a pill-shaped tank.

Two more P-47s STREAK by, fall in behind the first. They're both carrying the same odd-looking payload.

The first draws ground fire from German positions all over the mountain. Tracers arc gracefully through the sky.

David and Ernst watch as the first plane dips and dives, evading. Jake stares silently ahead, weeping.

The first plane releases its payload. The pill-shaped tank tumbles end-over-end toward the top of the mountain.

KA-BOOM!

The tank hits the ground and a giant orange fireball consumes everything in the vicinity.

The next two planes do the same. BOOM! BOOM! A terrifying spectacle of destruction.

Lit by the billowing flames, David's face hardens.

DAVID

I'm all for putting that little
bastard in a pine box and setting
it on fire. But this?

The planes disappear behind the flaming mountainside.

DAVID (CONT'D)

When the wild dies, we die.

Jake roughly wipes his salt-cruled face with the back of his blood-cruled hand.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR, TRAM BASE - EVENING

The tram car slows to a stop at another wooden platform at the base of the ridge.

Two ORDERLIES and a MEDIC rush toward the car. The Medic gently places a hand on Friedl's chest.

This is PFC GERRY CUNNINGHAM (early 20s, welcoming eyes, the nervous air of a restless tinkerer).

GERRY

Shit damn, Pfeifer. What the hell
happened to you?

FRIEDL

(fading)

Ich weiß nicht.

Beyond them, ARMED TROOPS from the 85th and 87th swarm up to the line of departure, fixing bayonets on empty rifles.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)

(delusional)

I lost my... my grandfather's--

He can't continue, COUGHS up blood.

GERRY

Hey, hey, hey. Don't you worry.
These boys'll get you all fixed up.

The Orderlies reach in, lift Friedl out.

Friedl stems his cough, RASPS:

FRIEDL
(delirious)
Spaß und Spiele. Mind and--

Ernst leans in toward him.

ERNST
(tenderly)
Ja, mein Freund.
(beat)
We will meet you there.

Jake is still miles away. Shell-shocked. Haunted.

Friedl manages one last pained wave as the Orderlies whisk him away through the river of oncoming soldiers.

Silence.

Gerry puts a hand on Jake's shoulder, grips it firmly.

GERRY
(to Jake)
Watch yourselves, okay?

Jake says nothing, doesn't even bother wiping away the tears. Gerry nods, guides him slowly down the platform.

David rumbles down after them, exhausted.

ERNST
(to David)
Wait, wait. Come with us.

David wags his head side-to-side, fishes out what's left of his cigar, nips it between his teeth.

DAVID
(somberly)
Can't. Gotta fall in with the 87th.
Take it to the top.

David's eyes drift to the still smoldering forest before he turns and slowly tromps toward the masses.

DAVID (CONT'D)
And then I'm gonna find a nice
quiet spot to finally smoke this
shitty cigar.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR, STAGING AREA - LATER

Gerry weaves his way through throngs of WOUNDED AMERICANS and GERMAN PRISONERS streaming down from Riva, all smoking.

GERRY

Well, there goes our thousand year supply of Lucky Strikes.

Hundreds of FRESH TROOPS from the 85th and 87th move in the opposite direction, stone-faced and obviously full of fear.

Jake lets his gaze fall to a WOUNDED PRIVATE. Gauze wraps his entire head. Where his eyes would be: two red splotches.

JAKE

I... I can't--

Ernst slows, shares a quick look with Gerry.

Across from them, more German prisoners march side-by-side down from the ridge. Thousand mile stares.

Another young GERMAN BOY passes. Jake stares at him. Guilt crumbling into furious anger.

JAKE (CONT'D)

This isn't what I... It's a fucking slaughterhouse.

Ernst stops dead.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Christ. What's the use? I came here to see if I could hack it. Make it. Survive. Get back home. Who fucking cares? I murdered that kid. I can still see his face, his eyes. Smell his blood. Hear the sound he made when he--

Ernst grabs him, shakes him hard.

ERNST

(to Jake)

Listen to me. Listen. I promised my sister. I told her I'd find them.

Jake looks to Ernst blankly. Gerry cants his head.

ERNST (CONT'D)

My parents. The Gestapo, they took them. I don't know where.

Ernst grips Jake's shoulders.

ERNST (CONT'D)
We can do this. You can do this.
Max would have *wanted* this.

This time, Jake doesn't dust his hand away.

ERNST (CONT'D)
Plus, for the first time, you
actually *need* me.

A faint shift ripples across Jake's face. Like he's coming back into his body. Reawakening once again.

Seeing it, Gerry grins.

GERRY
(to Jake)
We all know you're shit off belay.

EXT. LINE OF DEPARTURE - LATER

Jake and Ernst follow Gerry swiftly toward the Line of Departure. They're both roped-up, and wolfing down whatever rations they could scrounge at the base of the mountain.

SUPER: 19 FEBRUARY 1945, 2200 HOURS

Deep darkness has fallen again across the entire valley. Beyond Belvedere, the moon rises. Spotlights still sweep back-and-forth in the far distance.

SPORADIC GUNFIRE and MUTED EXPLOSIONS ring out now and again from the top of Riva Ridge.

GERRY
Comin' through. Comin' through.

Men affixing bayonets step aside. Most smoke nervously.

Medics again seem in alarmingly abundant supply.

Suddenly, the faint PURR of a low-flying airplane fills the darkened sky. Everybody scrambles.

Ernst pulls Jake behind a tree. Oddly, the sound fades.

No gunfire. No strafing.

After a moment, men reemerge from the trees as a flurry of TINY PAPER LEAFLETS rains down from above.

A passing soldier with a slight limp snatches one out of the air, gives it a quick one-over, crushes it with one hand.

GERRY (CONT'D)

What's it say?

The soldier, SECOND LIEUTENANT BOB DOLE (21, sunken eyes, jet black hair, corny grin), scowls.

BOB DOLE

Doesn't matter. Propaganda.

A leaflet lands on Jake's shoulder. He lets it slip to the ground, stomps on it.

BOB DOLE (CONT'D)

What they don't understand is that all of us, every generation, will lay down our lives for people we'll never meet for ideals that make life worth living.

(beat)

That's the sort of courage that makes heroes out of farm boys and city kids alike.

Next to Jake, Gerry slows, rolls his eyes.

GERRY

Thinks he's gonna be President someday.

Jake veers past Gerry, follows Ernst into the woods.

GERRY (CONT'D)

What baby would want to get kissed by that ugly mug?

Gerry thrusts a hand into one of his jacket pockets, pulls out two small leather straps.

GERRY (CONT'D)

Wait. Here.

Jake pauses. Gerry leaps forward, loops one of the straps through the zipper pull on his jacket.

GERRY (CONT'D)

Wanna know the sum total of what I've learned not being in the Air Corps?

Gerry quickly ties the strap to Jake's zipper pull.

GERRY (CONT'D)

Put leather thongs on your zippers
so you can grab 'em with mittens.
And, if your feet get cold, put on
a goddamn hat.

Jake nods, clears his throat, draws a breath, smiles back.

GERRY (CONT'D)

That's the way.

As he looks down at his zipper pull, Jake seems to will
himself back into the game. Tamp down his nerves.

JAKE

Any, um... Any word from Ann?

GERRY

Nope. If I ever thought she was mad
at me, I'd go noisily nuts.

Gerry tightens the straps of Jake's pack. The jolting force
seems to rouse Jake further. Shore him up.

JAKE

Probably just pissed you're still
pulling down Pfc's pay.

Gerry grins, glad to see the old Jake return.

GERRY

Yeah. But a Pfc only needs a stump
to hide behind. Lieutenants need a
whole forest to hide their platoon.
(beat)
And that just ain't my bag.

He tosses Ernst a zipper pull too.

GERRY (CONT'D)

Nice work up there, by the by.

ERNST

Thank you.

Beyond Ernst, a wide, empty, snow-covered field sparkles in
the moonlight.

Gerry shoves his hands into another pocket, produces out a
pair of puffy down mittens, hands them to Jake.

GERRY

Take 'em. Made 'em myself.

Jake rolls them over in his hands like they're precious, exotic artifacts. Treasure.

JAKE
I couldn't possibly--

GERRY (CONT'D)
With duck feathers from some crazy old broad back in Pianaccio.

Gerry pulls out another pair, tosses them to Ernst.

ERNST
You don't need them?

GERRY
Nah. Got 'em coming out my ears.
(smiling)
Too much time on my hands.

Gerry turns, heads back toward the throngs still marching nervously uphill in the darkness.

Jake slips on the mittens, marvels at them.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Arrivederci ragazzi.

As Gerry disappears, another man passes by. Ernst recognizes him instantly, SHOUTS:

ERNST
Werner?

The man slows, turns. His nametape reads: VON TRAPP.

Ernst rushes toward him.

ERNST (CONT'D)
Dein älterer bruder sagt hallo!

WERNER
Is he...

Jake finally clocks the resemblance.

JAKE
Yeah, yeah. Yes. He's alright.

ERNST
He told us to tell you that he's alive and well.

The man, WERNER VON TRAPP (30) lets both shoulders fall.

WERNER
Oh, thank god.

JAKE
Saved more than a few of our asses
up there.

A look of deep relief washes over Werner as he continues on.

WERNER
(to Ernst)
Danke schön.

Ernst nods.

ERNST
(up, to Werner)
Be careful up there, yes?

WERNER
(over his shoulder)
Du auch.
(beat)
You too. Both of you.

Together, Ernst and Jake tromp away toward the snowy field.
As they go, Ernst swivels his head, stares at Jake.

JAKE
What?

ERNST
(faint grin)
Nothing.

They plod on in silence. Then:

ERNST (CONT'D)
It's just good to have you back.

EXT. BELVEDERE, LOWER SLOPES - CONTINUOUS

Back out on their own, Jake and Ernst trudge through a pitched clearing covered in surprisingly deep snow.

The moon is still rising. And the mountain ahead of them is alarmingly calm. Even Riva Ridge has largely gone quiet.

ERNST
What was he like?

JAKE
Who?

ERNST

Max.

Jake slows, not wanting to go there.

JAKE

Listen--

Jake EXHALES slowly, picks up the pace.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Skilled.

(beat)

For a city--

Suddenly, from high up Belvedere, we hear a rapid barrage of heavy ARTILLERY FIRE.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BOOM! BOOM!

JAKE (CONT'D)

Trees. GO!

They run through the heavy snow toward a sparse stand of trees to their right.

BOOM!

With each LOUD EXPLOSION, airborne shells ignite.

Ernst squints skyward.

ERNST

Flares?

Blinding bundles of BRIGHT WHITE LIGHT dangle and sway suspended from barely visible parachutes.

Nearing the grove, the two of them slow, GASPING.

The flares make every shape shift and dance. Trees appear to bend and sway. Shadows pivot. Rocks disappear the reappear again randomly.

ERNST (CONT'D)

Tell me about Montana.

JAKE

It's big. Open. Sky as far as--

Another VOLLEY from above cuts him off.

Jake and Ernst scan the horizon. They're still on their own. Maybe that's a good thing. Not a rich target.

Three artillery shells land not far from them in alarmingly rapid succession.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Then, from seemingly closer, the familiar sound of mortars being dropped into tubes. KA-THUMP! KA-THUMP!

Jake and Ernst freeze. One shell hits the ground less than 25 feet away. The second lands even closer.

More launch loudly from up-slope. KA-THUMP! KA-THUMP!

JAKE (CONT'D)
The clearing. Run.

Jake turns and runs back into clearing and the deep snow.

ERNST
What are you doing?

A third mortar lands way too close. Ernst still hesitates.

JAKE
NOW!

A fourth mortar lands right behind Ernst, kicks up a heap of snow, dirt, and rock.

Ernst finally makes break for it.

EXT. BELVEDERE, OPEN FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The two of them bound frantically through the snow.

Behind them: THUMP (pause) BOOM!

A huge cloud of snow shoots every which way.

THUMP (pause) BOOM!

Mortar shells hit behind them, sink, then explode. The snow seems to be slowing them down.

Jake skids to a stop at the sight of a what appears to be a tall wall of jagged barbed wire just ahead.

JAKE
Wait, no. Concertina.

BOOM!

A mortar shell lands right between Jake and Ernst, blows them both off-course.

Jake gets his footing first, ears ringing, veers right.

Ernst stumbles left, falls.

BOOM!

Another shell lands right in Jake's footprints.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Get UP you lazy sonofabitch. RUN!

Ernst claws his way back to his feet, charges off in the other direction.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Three more shells pound a straight line directly through the concertina wire. And then the firing abruptly ceases.

SILENCE.

Stunned and winded, Jake spins back around to see Ernst staring, bewildered, at a huge gap in the wall of wire.

It's almost as though the mortars have cleared the way.

Ernst grins, turns, bounds through the gap. Jake watches, confused for a second. And then:

JAKE (CONT'D)
Hold--

CLICK. BOOM!

Just beyond the wire, Ernst steps on a landmine. His body is instantly tossed into the air.

Dirt, snow, scraps of fabric, and Ernst's helmet rain down to the ground. His body lands with a muffled THUD.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Ernst!

Jake runs full-bore back through the snow, to find Ernst lying face-down, contorted, in the gap in the concertina.

Jake ditches his rifle, falls to his knees.

JAKE (CONT'D)
No...

He cautiously turns Ernst over. Strangely, Ernst's face is the picture of calm. the moonlight glints in his eyes. He COUGHS lightly, speaks:

ERNST
Whoopsie daisy.

JAKE
Oh, thank God. Thank god you're--

It's only then that Jake notices Ernst's right leg is a tangled mess. Blood everywhere. Wool pant leg tattered.

Jake throws off his rope coil and pack, scrambles for his med kit, a tourniquet, anything.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Where does it hurt? Where does--

ERNST
(perplexed)
Nowhere.

JAKE
I'm gonna--

ERNST
Odd.

JAKE
Quiet.

Ernst tries to speak. Nothing comes. Nothing works.

Jake grabs his knife, cuts a section of fabric from his jacket, wraps it around Ernst's mangled leg, searches for a stick. Anything to make a proper...

ERNST
My... hammer. Piton hammer.

JAKE
Yeah, YES.

Working fast, Jake ties the fabric around Ernst's thigh, loops the hammer into it, twists. Normally, the pressure would make a man scream bloody murder.

But Ernst is calm. Too calm. His eyes glaze over.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Wake up. Stay with me!

ERNST
(fading)
Ich glaube nicht...

JAKE
It's going to fucking work.

ERNST
I don't mean the tourniquet.

Jake scans the treeline to their right. In the light of the flares, he thinks he sees men on the move.

JAKE
The 85th. They're right over--

ERNST
Go to them.

JAKE
I'm not gonna leave you!

What's left of the snow around them is a bloody mess.

ERNST
There is a letter. In my breast pocket. For my sister. In London. Tell her I loved her. That I died without--

JAKE
You are NOT dying on me. Gotta get you to St. fucking Moritz. Now that Pfeifer's out, you're a lock.

Ernst grins serenely, accustomed to Jake's edicts.

Jake grabs Ernst's helmet. It's shot through with shrapnel. The moonlight shines right through it.

ERNST
(mimicking Jake)
Don't forget your hat, dipshit.

Jake half-laughs, half-cries. He gulps it back down.

JAKE
I'm gonna pick you up. Carry you to the trees. It's gonna hurt like hell. But you gotta stay quiet. Keep calm.

ERNST
I *am* calm.

Jake nervously eyes the trees. The men he thought were there are gone. A trick of the light.

JAKE
 (lying)
 The 85th is right over there.
 They've gotta have a medic.

Ernst is slipping. His lips are going gray. His face is already draining of color.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 Tell me again. Your plans.

ERNST
 (slurring)
 Plans?

Abandoning his pack and rope, Jake delicately HEFTS Ernst up off the ground and onto his back. Both of Ernst's legs dangle lifelessly.

He doesn't cry out. Doesn't make a peep.

JAKE
 (straining)
 With Freidl and Percy. In Aspen.

ERNST
 Build a... Build a chairlift to
 replace the boat tow. From the base
 to midway up Ajax.

Jake takes a couple of slow steps through the snow, toward the trees. Behind him: a trail of Ernst's blood.

JAKE
 (pained)
 Keep... going.

ERNST
 Then a second to the top. Sundeck.

JAKE
 Mmm-hmm.

The trees are getting closer. In the distance more SHELLING. Still no return fire.

No one from the 85th.

ERNST
 Longest lift in the...

Ernst trails off. Drifting, drifting.

JAKE
Stay with me.

ERNST
(barely audible)
Percy's got it all mapped out.

Jake shakes him slightly, tries to rouse him. No dice.

JAKE
(quietly sing-song)
Come along,
We'll sing a song.

Ernst nods his head ever so slightly.

ERNST
(pained)
On our way to battle,
Each step is slow.
Still up we go.

JAKE
(louder)
The weight of my pack
is breaking my back.

ERNST
Thru shot and shell,
we'll give 'em hell.

JAKE
It's higher, still higher.

He pauses, waiting for Ernst. Nothing.

JAKE (CONT'D)
(his voice breaking)
It's higher, still higher.

Still nothing.

Silence. No breathing.

Jake reaches the trees, carefully lowers Ernst to the ground. With the impact, Ernst comes briefly back to.

ERNST
(delirious)
Spaß und Spiele...

Jake holds Ernst's color-blanching cheeks. His eyes are open but miles away.

ERNST (CONT'D)
Take the letter.

JAKE
I can get you--

Suddenly, from somewhere higher up the mountain, a FEROCIOUS FIREFIGHT finally erupts.

The upper slopes CRACKLE to life with a swirling tempest of machine gun and mortar fire in both directions.

ERNST
Please, take it.

A thin bead of blood runs down Ernst's forehead.

Jake blots it out with his sleeve, swivels his body back down, next to Ernst's. They lean against the same tree.

Above, tracers streak through the sky like falling stars.

ERNST (CONT'D)
Schön.

The two of them stare into the blackness flecked with fire.

After a second, Jake turns to Ernst to speak. But Ernst's eyes are empty. His chest is still. He's gone.

A turbulent storm of emotion washes across Jake's face. Anger. Fear. Self-recrimination. Inescapable loss.

He begins to sob again. This time, violently.

Barely able to see, barely able to control himself, he reaches a hand slowly inside Ernst's jacket for the letter.

Then, out of nowhere, a VOICE:

CAPTAIN HARRIS (O.S.)
Quit yer fuckin' blubberin'.

Jake wheels around to see the gaunt, stubble-covered face of Captain Harris from earlier.

Harris steps in, roughly YANKS away Ernst's dog tags.

Jake looks down to the envelope in his hand. The paper is smudged red.

Harris points ahead with the hand clutching Ernst's tags.

Saying nothing, Jake turns to see:

EXT. FOREST, CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Three YOUNG AMERICAN SOLDIERS stand frozen in the middle of another clearing just past more concertina wire.

This bit of wire has been meticulously cut, presumably by the young soldiers.

One of the soldiers wears white helmet. Jake almost calls out to the YOUNG MEDIC, forgetting for a moment that it's too late. Ernst is gone.

All of the young men up ahead are frozen in-place.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

(a whisper)

Where's your goddamn gear?

Jake gestures. From the higher slopes, German eighty-eights sound off. It's a bone-rattling DIN.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)

Well?

Jake nods, runs a blood-covered hand across his face, makes a break for his pack.

On the way out, he manages not to look at Ernst.

On the way back, Ernst's lifeless body all he can see.

Crouched again next to Harris, Jake looks to see the Medic hopping from footprint to footprint across the snow, toward the Young Soldiers.

Suddenly: CLICK!

Everyone ducks. Nothing happens. A *dud*?

The Medic lifts his foot, grins.

BANG!

He's cut literally in half. The nearest Soldier vomits, covered in the medic's blood.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)

(too loud)

God fuckin'--

The nearest Soldier stumbles backward. CLICK. BOOM! Where he once stood, literally nothing remains. Not a scrap.

The furthest Soldier buckles, covers his ears, WAILS as if wishing it all away.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
 (to the young soldier)
 Soldier. Don't you do it. Don't you
 move a goddamn muscle. That's an--

Ignoring him, the Young Soldier turns and runs, zigzagging madly. He gets nearly all the way across the clearing when:

CLICK. BANG!

His body is thrown into the waiting limbs of a nearby tree like a wet towel.

After a moment, silence.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
 (to Jake)
 All you mountain men think you can
 do every goddamn thing all by your
 lonesome. Never fuckin' listen.

He stands, scans the horizon. The coast seems clear.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
 C'mon.

Jake, his mind racing, begins to protest:

JAKE
 Sir. No, sir. I have orders from
 Colonel Hampton.

Jake glances at his watch. He's way behind schedule.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 I need to get out ahead of B
 Company of the 87th. Take out a...

Harris looks at him sternly. *Are you done running your
 fucking trap?*

Jake presses on:

JAKE (CONT'D)
 ...a Screaming Mimi. A *Nebelwerfer*
 battery on a cliff above--

Harris lifts a hand to cut him off, gestures grandly for Jake to enter the minefield first.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Well, then. Be my fuckin' guest.

Jake's eyes dart from the minefield back to Harris.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
Just follow the footsteps. The
right ones. I'll be on your six.
(beat)
And that's an order, Private.

Jake steadies his rifle, stands. Without saying another word, he sets off. We FOLLOW slowly.

EXT. MINEFIELD - CONTINUOUS

Jake threads his way through the cut barbed wire, into the minefield, pauses.

Higher up in the distance, the THUNDER of battle rages on.

Jake looks down to the blood-stained envelope still in his hand. He draws a breath, slips the envelope safely into his jacket, takes one step forward. Then another.

Captain Harris mirrors Jake's movements exactly from behind, stepping gingerly into each darkened divot in the snow.

As he walks, Jake's eyes well again. But he doesn't sob, doesn't make a sound. The tears just fall from his cheeks to the debris-strewn hard pack below. Can't control it.

At first the path is quick, just one foot after another.

Then, the two men arrive at a convergence. One set of footprints veers left toward the mangled body of the Medic. The other continues on to the right.

Jake veers right. Harris follows silently.

Holding his breath, the distant FIREFIGHT still droning on up ahead, Jake finally reaches the site of the second mine.

It's just a hollowed-out crater of snow, dirt, and rock. No sign of a body anywhere.

About four feet to the left of the crater, we can make out the faint imprints of the first set of footprints. Beyond the crater, nothing.

Jake draws a deep breath, jumps, lands in the boot print with his eyes shut tight. Nothing. He's safe.

He teeters, looks back to Harris. Harris shrugs. *What do you want, a fucking medal?*

Harris gestures for Jake to move it.

Jake turns back around, follows the footprints until they swarm off in a random set of looping arcs.

JAKE
Sorry, Daddy.

He slowly, meticulously jumps from one footprint to the next wincing with each impact.

PUFF! PUFF! PUFF! PUFF! PUFF!

He's only feet away from from the final crater.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Sorry I never...

Between it and the tree still holding the Young Soldier's lifeless body, there's a short bit of open ground.

JAKE (CONT'D)
...got to say...

He draws a quick breath, narrows his eyes, bounds over the barren snow, safely back into the trees. He pauses.

JAKE (CONT'D)
...goodbye.

Harris, impressed, follows. He stops right next to Jake.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Now, what were you saying about a Screamin' Mimi?

EXT. BELVEDERE, HIGHER SLOPES - LATER

Jake and Captain Harris run uphill through the carnage of a seemingly pitched battle.

Mortars fall like autumn hail. Rifle fire streaks downhill from unseen positions all over the mountain.

Gruesomely WOUNDED MEN litter the pockmarked, rocky soil. Were it not for the near constant EXPLOSIONS and RICOCHETING MUNITIONS, the wail of the wounded would fill the air.

Captain Harris fires at nearly anything that moves until, out of nowhere, a PIERCING HOWL and four HIGH-PITCHED SHRIEKS slice through the air.

Harris grabs Jake by the strap of his pack, yanks him down to the ground.

Five huge CONCUSSIONS shred the surrounding men and vegetation to bits. Night turns briefly to nightmarish day.

Jake covers his helmeted head, buries his face in the dirt to blot out the light. Harris shields his eyes.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
There you go, boy. 21 cm
Nebelwerfer 42.

Another GHASTLY SALVO rips from above. Five rockets, one right after the other. Jake jams his fists into his ears.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
(loud over the din)
Screamin' fuckin' Mimi!

Seconds later: five MASSIVE EXPLOSIONS in the distance.

Jake sits up. His face is covered in dirt. His eyes are full of terror. Captain Harris points up into the darkness.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
Break a leg.

Harris leaps away. Jake LUNGES out, grabs him.

JAKE
No, no, no. I need men. I need... I
need help. I can't do it alone.

Captain Harris tears himself free. Over his shoulder, we can see more SOLDIERS running for cover.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Where are the rest of your men?

BURP! BURP! BURP! A hail of German machine gun fire swarms them from up-slope. Man after man falls.

Harris pushes away, rapidly fires uphill. BANG! BANG! BANG!

CAPTAIN HARRIS
You're lookin' at 'em!

Jake rolls over, takes aim. In the distance, muzzle flares. Harris charges toward them.

Jake closes one eye, fires quickly. BANG!

A single round from up ahead grazes Harris' shoulder. He barely registers the hit, continues onward.

From out of nowhere, another soldier leaps past Jake. This is SPECIALIST ALEX HILL (20s, rail-thin, jittery).

ALEX
(slight stutter)
Crazy sssssonofabitch.

He hurls two live grenades (one from each hand) into the darkness up ahead of Captain Harris.

BOOM! BOOM!

The German gunfire ceases.

Jake, all-instinct, leaps up and runs after Alex and Harris into the shredded trees.

EXT. GERMAN SLIT TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Harris jumps into a fortified slit trench, wheels around, plugs two INJURED GERMANS as they crawl weakly away.

Behind him, a lone GERMAN GUNNER scrambles to his feet. His face is half missing and covered in blood.

Alex fires a single round.

It BUZZES just past Harris' ear, hits the gunner squarely in the center of what's left of his forehead.

He falls hard.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
(to Alex)
Watch it, runt.

ALEX
Ya, ya, yes, yessir.

Jake steps up.

All three of them anxiously scan their surroundings.

JAKE
Tell me you two can climb.

EXT. CLIFF FACE, BASE - CONTINUOUS

With battle RIPPLING WILDLY across the mountain below and above them, Jake quickly unfurls rope at the foot of a sheer 400 foot cliff wall.

From the top of the cliff: five quick FLASHES of light, then the now familiar SCREAM of 21 cm rockets raining down.

Jake throws off his pack, takes a quick look at his watch.

JAKE
(to Alex)
You're B company?

ALEX
No, no. C. C Ccompany. 85th.

JAKE
Where's B Company?

Alex stares blankly up at the wall above them.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Where's Company B of the 87th?

ALEX
I, I, I dunno.

Harris dumps sulfa powder into his own wound.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Leave the fuckin' kid alone. We gotta keep moving.

JAKE
No, you listen to me. If we don't take out that battery, nobody's gonna make it off this mountain. Not tonight, not ever.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Shut your trap, Private.

Jake reaches into his pack, pulls out a handful of pitons, tosses them to the dirt like useless matchsticks.

Above, another five rockets FLASH.

JAKE
Sir, no sir! We're out of time.

He tosses his piton hammer to the ground. It lands on his abandoned pitons with a CLANG.

JAKE (CONT'D)
We're gonna have to climb this thing old-style. No anchors. No belay. Daisy-chained.

Another five rockets WAIL as they zip overhead toward the lower slopes before exploding. Scarlet fireballs.

JAKE (CONT'D)

If one of us falls, it's on the other two to keep contact.

Alex's face tightens.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Since when'd you start givin' the fuckin' orders?

JAKE

Since you *ordered* me into a fucking minefield, that's when.

Alex's eyes flare at Jake's insubordination.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Listen, boy. I know what you did. During the D-series.

(beat)

Max was a good man. My friend.

JAKE

Mine too, sir.

(beat)

Now we gotta take down that battery, give the 87th cover together or else. You hear me?

Alex nods vehemently, dropping his pack with a THUD.

ALEX

Yessssssssir!

CAPTAIN HARRIS

(to Alex)

You're gonna need your fuckin' grenades, runt.

Alex flares his white jacket open, revealing a belt laden with grenades. There must be at least 15 of them.

ALEX

Do, do, do a good dddeed dddaily!

(beat)

And be prep...prep...pared!

Harris shakes his head.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
 Turn skiers into soldiers instead
 of the other way around?
 (beat)
 Terrible idea.

Jake pulls off the mittens Gerry gave him, turns his eyes to the cliff, studies it.

We can hear GERMAN VOICES high above barking commands and coordinates. Maybe three or four men.

Jake points up the near-vertical wall.

JAKE
 See that seam? Just follow it.
 Hand-over-hand. One hold at a time.
 Don't get greedy. Just let the
 mountain tell you what to do.

He bends to his pack, pulls out three strands of webbing.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 I'll lead. Captain next. Then you.

Jake tosses each man a strip of webbing.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 Strap up. Ditch your whites. If
 Jerry gets a look at--

Jake reaches out to help Harris with his gear. Harris bats his hand away.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
 Like I'm gonna fuckin' trust you to
 rope me up.

EXT. CLIFF FACE, LOWER REACHES - CONTINUOUS

To the sound of sporadic GUNFIRE and the intermittent HOWL of rockets, the three men start up the face.

Jake, in the lead, moves gingerly up the seam. Just a few inches wide, the fissure zigzags back-and-forth up the wall like a bolt of lightning.

A length of rope connects Jake to Harris. They're about ten feet apart. The same rope, tied firmly to each man's waist, arcs down toward Alex, who's just beginning the climb.

Below: their abandoned gear. Above: GERMAN VOICES.

Jake moves slowly at first. He cautiously tests every bit of rock, tosses away anything that cleaves off.

Beyond Harris, Alex lunges for a gutsy hold. His grenades JANGLE. But he makes it. *Danger respects technique.*

Jake shakes his head, turns back to the wall.

He jams his right hand into a section of the fissure and pulls just as something catches his eye from above. It's long and metallic, tumbling through the air.

An empty rocket casing?

As it WHOOSHES past him, the moonlight glinting off its surface, Jake HISSES down toward Harris:

JAKE (CONT'D)

Heads up.

Harris ducks. The cylindrical tube glances off his helmet with a DING, hurtles down toward Alex.

Alex, unaware, shoves his torso upward. The casing catches him square in the sternum.

The shock of the impact registers briefly on his face before his hands let go completely.

The line snaps taut! Alex dangles, tethered to Harris.

Harris buckles, holds onto the wall, kicks one foot out, wedges himself against the seam, shakes his left hand free.

JAKE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Ignoring him, Harris reaches behind himself, unsheathes his bayonet, lifts the blade.

Suddenly, five more rockets BLARE from above. The light of their jets bizarrely warp every shadow, every crag.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(barely audible)

No.

Harris reaches down to cut the rope between him and Alex.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Don't you *fucking* do it!

Below Harris, Alex strains. His fingers stretch desperately out for the rock, trying to get a grip.

Harris drags his knife across the line. The line severs swiftly, goes slack.

Harris looks up to Jake just as Alex falls.

Alex slaps and stabs at the wall, finally gets a grip on tiny sliver of stone. His body SMACKS the wall hard.

In a kinetic flurry, Alex scours the surface in front of him with his bloodied hands, finds two solid crags, jams his fingers into them.

Safe but untethered.

From above, more VOICES.

More casings rain down, barely missing Jake and then PINGING across the stretch of open rock between Alex and Harris.

Alex starts back up the wall, choosing his line carefully.

Harris calmly sheathes his blade, climbs toward Jake.

It's all Jake can do to keep from cutting him loose.

EXT. CLIFF FACE, MIDPOINT - CONTINUOUS

About half way to the top, Jake and Alex are nearly side-by-side. Below them, Harris continues steadily upward.

Above them, we hear MEN WORKING. *Preparing to reposition the battery? Wiring another load?* Hard to tell.

From somewhere down below, a sudden barrage of CANNON FIRE blasts the clifftop. Heavy rounds likely from an American M18 send shards of limestone raining down.

All three men hug the wall. Rubble pummels their helmets. Above, the Germans SHOUT, take cover. Sandbags ooze sand.

A VOICE from above cries out:

VOICE (O.S.)
Kontakt.

Five more rockets STREAK from the clifftop, down toward the source of the cannon fire. Five massive fireballs fill the forest floor with blinding light.

The TUMULT is mind-melting. The entire cliff seems to shudder and shake with the sound.

Jake grips the wall, looks down.

At the base of the cliff: a GEBIRGSJÄGER PATROL on the run, machine guns drawn. Jake freezes.

A GERMAN CAPTAIN in a white hooded jacket pauses at the sight of Jake's abandoned gear.

Jake gestures to Alex to stop. Watching them, Harris slows. Jake points down toward the German Captain.

Harris' eyes follow.

Frozen stiff, all three of them see the German Captain nudge their seemingly identical jackets with his rifle muzzle.

He stiffens at the sight of Jake's pack. And then, spying the pitons and coil of rope, he lifts his gaze.

Jake scrambles for his sidearm.

The German Captain raises his rifle, fires once.

BANG!

The bullet catches Harris in the back.

The German Captain takes aim at Alex.

KA-BOOM!

A single grenade vaporizes him.

Alex flicks the pulled pin from his finger and re-grips the wall. One slot on his belt is empty.

Suddenly, the rope between Jake and Harris goes taut!

Jake looks down to see Harris dangling, bloodied, struggling to cut himself free before he loses consciousness.

JAKE

Wait! Wait. Don't--

Harris gets the blade through the rope and plummets into the darkness. He lands with a muted THUMP almost precisely where the German Captain just stood.

Jake turns back to the wall. *Goddammit!*

Alex slaps the wall with his hand. Jake looks up, holsters his weapon, continues silently on.

EXT. CLIFF FACE, SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

The two men slowly reach the summit.

Frayed sections of rope dangle behind them both. Jake quickly unties his with one hand, drops it into the dark.

Alex does the same.

The VOICES have gone quiet. The rocket battery, too.

But down below, the battle rages on.

Jake takes a couple of deep breaths, having no idea what waits beyond the lip.

Alex reaches a hand to his belt, grabs another grenade, lifts it to his mouth, bites down on the clip.

Jake reaches into a pocket, pulls out a grenade of his own.

He pantomimes lobbing them over and then charging. Alex nods, grabs another grenade, knocks the clip loose.

It JANGLES down the rock face. Still, no voices from above.

Jake shifts his shoulders, silently mouths: *three, two, one.*

They both pull their pins, hold their grenades for a precarious few seconds, and then hurl them up and over.

BANG! BANG!

And over the top they go.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - CONTINUOUS

Jake swings his rifle around and starts firing blindly. Alex does the same, one grenade still wedged between his teeth.

Ahead stands a smoldering, five-barreled rocket launcher. Empty casings litter the scorched ground behind it.

Alex slows to a stop on the blackened limestone.

Jake skids, looks right.

In the distance stand four stunned GERMAN FIELD SOLDIERS. One of them holds an armful of brass casings. Another holds what looks to be some sort of detonator.

For an overlong second, they all just stand there, frozen. Everything goes EERILY SILENT.

But then the soldier with casings drops them. They CLATTER and CLANG loudly at his feet.

The surrounding GUNFIRE ramps back up, over-loud.

A bespectacled GERMAN COMMANDER moves for his pistol.

JAKE
Don't do that...

The Commander hesitates.

The young man with the detonator, a KANNONIER, grips the the ignition dial. A thick metal wire runs from the detonator, through Jake's feet, and into the rocket launcher.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Everybody, just take it nice and--

A nearby RADIOMAN wearing binoculars around his neck looks to a field radio dangling from a nearby tree branch.

JAKE (CONT'D)
No, no. There's no need to--

Suddenly, from behind Jake, Alex pulls the grenade from his teeth, spits out the clip.

PING!

Jake swivels toward him.

Alex is still standing in the back blast zone. If they fire even a single rocket, he'll be burnt to a crisp.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Wait.

In the distance: CLICK!

The Commander flicks his holster open.

And all hell breaks loose!

The Commander pulls his gun, fires:

BANG!

The bullet grazes Jake's leg. He stumbles, fires once:

BANG!

The Kannonier screams, falls backward.

Alex drops his grenade, lifts his rifle, fires twice:

POP! POP!

The Radioman falls.

The Commander returns fire:

BANG!

The bullet catches Alex's shoulder, knocks him sideways. He stumbles backward, toward the cliff edge.

Jake aims, fires:

BANG!

The Commander crumples.

The Private lifts both arms.

Jake's eyes lock on his. He doesn't want to harm another boy, another kid.

Alex pulls the pin, throws the grenade.

BOOM!

The young Private disappears in a blinding BLAST.

Jake looks to Alex.

ZIP!

Jake's eyes WHIP to the Kannonier, bloodied, as he CRANKS the dial on the firing mechanism.

Jake spins on his heels, lunges back toward Alex.

JAKE

No!

Jake TACKLES Alex out of the back blast zone.

Alex, dazed, stumbles backward, trips over the ignition wire and falls, windmilling, over the cliff edge.

ZIP!

The Kannonier sends the signal again.

Jake skids to a stop right behind the battery.

Nothing happens.

Jake turns his head, looks to the Kannonier.

The Kannonier twists the dial yet again.

Still nothing.

It's only then that we notice that the wire winding across the ground is suddenly taut.

And it runs directly over the cliff!

Jake falls to the ground, reaches desperately over the edge.

Alex dandles above the 400 foot drop, tethered to the ignition wire wrapped around his right boot.

His grenades CLINK together as he sways.

ALEX
(suddenly zero stutter)
Well, that's just about the nicest
thing anyone's ever done for me.

Jake quickly HEAVES Alex back up to safety.

Behind them, the Kannonier sprints off into the darkness.

Jake just lets him run, smiles faintly to himself.

JAKE
I got an idea.

EXT. GERMAN BUNKER - ALEX'S POV

Through the Germans' abandoned binoculars, we see what appears to be a sizable German bunker.

The place is teeming with WEHRMACHT SOLDIERS. At least four MACHINE GUN CREWS are busy mowing down advancing AMERICANS.

ALEX (V.O.)
(still not stuttering)
Direction zero, five, two, zero.
Distance 1,200 meters. Altitude
520. Danger close.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - CONTINUOUS

Jake clutches the detonator, peers over Alex's shoulder.

JAKE
Think that's within range?

Alex hands him the binoculars.

ALEX
How am I supposed to know?

Jake grips the binoculars, looks to Alex.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 Hell if I know. Must be like the
 goddamn hiccups!

Jake smirks, lifts the binoculars, looks down-slope.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 Used to hate that fucking store.
 Never wanted to see another penny
 nail as long as I lived.
 (beat)
 Now, there's nowhere else on God's
 green Earth I'd rather be.

Jake hands Alex back the binoculars, lifts the detonator,
 grasps the dial.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 Alright. That's B Company down
 there. We're gonna have to risk it.

Alex continues staring down toward the German bunker.

ALEX
 (calmly)
 Fire when ready.

Jake gives the dial five quick, forceful twists.

After a split second:

WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

Five rockets RIP out of the launcher in rapid succession.
 The ROAR is deafening. The repeated FLASHES, blinding.

Jake and Alex watch as the rockets arc upward and then sweep
 downward, MOANING LOUDLY.

Seconds later, five massive, synchronized explosions THUNDER
 back up the mountainside.

A direct hit.

The bunker and everything in the vicinity is obliterated.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 AGAIN!

Jake DROPS the detonator, THROWS the release latch, sends
 all five smoldering shells catapulting onto the ground.

Alex SPRINTS to grabs another shell, turns back, loads it. Then another and another and another.

Jake CRANKS the positioning wheel, aims the launcher toward another German bunker further uphill, pauses.

Alex SMASHES the last shell in.

ALEX

Like stealing candy from a baby!

Jake LIFTS his binoculars, calls out coordinates:

JAKE

Direction zero, seven, three, zero.

Distance 1,600 meters.

(beat)

Altitude 760.

But something in his voice sounds wrong. A hint of regret.

Alex DIALS in the azimuth and elevation, tosses Jake the detonator. He catches it, hesitates briefly.

ALEX

Go!

Jake GRIPS the device, ashen not exhilarated.

JAKE

(quietly)

I... Wait.

Alex snatches the detonator away. CRANK! WHIZ!

Five more rockets BLAST from the battery, one after the other. Again, it's impossibly bright.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! **BOOM!**

Five more direct hits.

A second bunker annihilated. Shredded bodies dot the dirty snow. Smoke-darkened flesh. Blood everywhere.

Instead of looking victorious, instead of seeming ecstatic, Jake appears stricken. Guilt-ridden.

Horrified by his own destructive power.

JAKE (CONT'D)

This can't be the only--

THUMP.

Something long, matte green, and SPARKING lands on the ground at Jake's feet and rolls around him in a lazy arc.

Jake watches as the POTATO MASHER slows to a stop at his feet. *Shit, shit, shit!*

He drops the binoculars, SHOUTS:

JAKE (CONT'D)
Gren--

BANG!

Suddenly everything goes QUIET.

The screen is instantly filled with NOTHING BUT WHITE.

Then, slowly: WIND.

No more explosions, no gunfire. Just the HOWLING GALE of an impenetrable whiteout.

EXT. ELK MOUNTAIN, COLORADO - DAY [FLASHBACK]

Two barely discernible figures slowly materialize as they trudge their way uphill, tethered together.

MAX
(loud over the wind)
Yeah, I dunno, kid.

Max slows, runs a gloved hand over his frozen mustache.

MAX (CONT'D)
You fall, you get up. You reach for
a hold. It's not there. It breaks.
You learn. Try again, just smarter.

In the distance, a single HOWITZER BLAST. The first of many.

MAX (CONT'D)
Like Petzoldt says.
(beat)
There are old climbers and there
are bold climbers.

Behind Max, Jake pushes forward, drives his ax into the ice.

MAX (CONT'D)
There aren't too many old, bold
climbers. Yeah?

No response. Just HEAVY BREATHING and the WHIPPING WIND.

Max slows, looking lost.

MAX (CONT'D)
 Or somethin' like that. Anyway...
 (beat)
 ...what I wouldn't give for a--

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY - JAKE'S POV

Suddenly, the screen fills again with BRIGHT BLUE SKY.
 Fluffy white clouds drift languidly by.

It's no longer night. What appears to be snow or ash rains
 down from above.

And the howling wind is gone. Replaced instead by BIRDSONG.
 The sound of the natural world reawakening.

Coming back to life.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY

Jake lies on the ground, gazes up toward the sky.

The blast zone is now a snow-dusted crater. The rocket
 launcher sits at an odd angle, like a toy discarded by an
 angry child.

Alex is nowhere to be seen.

In the distance, the ripple of approaching shadows.

Men on the move.

Jake doesn't budge. Can't.

The approaching shadows scatter. One of them undulates
 across the snow.

Closer, closer, closer until --

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Medic! Think we got a live one.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY - JAKE'S POV

Silhouetted against the same brilliant blue sky and lightly
 falling snow: a man's face.

It's upside-down, helmeted, smoke-smudged, and flecked with
 dirt. But somehow familiar.

The MAN leans closer, on bended knee. He reaches a hand out, checks for signs of life, smiles.

MAN

That was some show y'all put on up here last night. Some show.

The man's face slips in and out of focus. But then we catch it, his nametape:

HAYS

JAKE (V.O.)

(hoarse)

You're... *him*.

(pained breath)

Hays--

LIEUTENANT HAYS, the General's Son, nods slowly, salutes.

LIEUTENANT HAYS

B Company reporting for duty.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY - ON JAKE

Jake tries to lift his arm to salute. It won't budge.

LIEUTENANT HAYS

No, no. Take it nice and easy now.

Jake GROANS, lets his mangled arm go slack.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)

These boys'll take *good* care of you. Get you down. All fixed up.

Lieutenant Hays stands, clutches his rifle.

JAKE

(weakly)

Valpiano. Did we take--

Hays grins, looks away.

LIEUTENANT HAYS

Listen to this one. Asking if we took Valpiano.

We hear weary CHUCKLING from the shadows in the distance. Hays looks back down toward Jake, ringed in light.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)
 Yeah, boy. We did. And Gorgolesco
 too. Took it all the way up
 Belvedere and down the other side.

Hays rubs a hand across his prematurely grizzled face.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)
 But that's not your worry now.
 (broad smile)
 You're goin' home, my friend.
 You're goin' home.

And with that, he steps away.

All we see is sky.

FADE TO WHITE.

OVER WHITE:

THE CAPTURE OF BELVEDERE COST THE 10TH
 MOUNTAIN DIVISION 923 CASUALTIES.

192 MEN WERE KILLED IN ACTION.
 730 WERE WOUNDED.

AND ONE WAS TAKEN PRISONER.

THE 85TH BORE THE BRUNT
 WITH OVER 470 KILLED AND WOUNDED.

TOTAL GERMAN CASUALTIES REMAIN UNKNOWN.
 BUT OVER 400 GERMAN SOLDIERS WERE TAKEN PRISONER.

THE ORIGINAL WAR OFFICE PLANS PROJECTED THE
 OFFENSIVE WOULD TAKE MORE THAN THREE WEEKS.

INSTEAD THE 10TH TOOK BELVEDERE
 IN JUST FIVE DAYS.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END