

**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.

HITLER IS UNASSAILABLE FROM THE SOUTH.

GERMANY HOLDS ALL OF THE HIGH GROUND IN ITALY.

IN A LAST DITCH EFFORT, THE U.S. ARMY RECRUITS A DIVISION OF DECORATED SKIERS AND MOUNTAINEERS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD.

THEIR MISSION: TO TAKE THE APENNINE MOUNTAINS IN ITALY, HOLD THEM, AND SPEED THE MARCH TO BERLIN.

SLOW FADE TO:

INT. ABANDONED CHURCH - NIGHT

A bombed-out stone chapel partially open to the sky.

Amid a sea of sleeping soldiers, a lone man JOLTS awake with a start. As if roused from a recurring nightmare.

Or a horrifying memory.

This is CORPORAL JAKE THOMPSON (30s, grizzled, guarded) a cold stone wall of a man who's seen too much.

As he GULPS down air, tries and fails to regain his composure, another young man gestures his way.

GERRY  
(hushed)  
Gear up.

The other man, PFC GERRY CUNNINGHAM (early 20s, bright eyes, the nervous air of a restless tinkerer), weaves his way through the pews toward a tall pair of oak doors.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
You're late.

Jake looks to his watch, runs a hand through his stubble, tosses off a green wool blanket, pushes himself to his feet.

It takes effort.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
And bring your sticks.

EXT. BOMBED-OUT VILLAGE - NIGHT

Jake trails Gerry across the frozen ground, dressed in all-white. Alpine infantry camouflage.

He's got a cloth-covered carbine rifle slung over one shoulder and a long pair of hickory skis on the other.

From one hand dangles a pair of bamboo poles with deer skin grips and leather baskets.

JAKE  
Who's it this time?

GERRY  
The Kraut.

JAKE  
Which fucking one?

GERRY  
The new one.

Gerry pulls a pack from his shoulders, thrusts it toward Jake. Jake shimmies into it, on the move.

All manner of climbing hardware wrapped in bits of white cloth are affixed to the pack.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
The turncoat. Klein.

Jake cinches the pack tight.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
Rumor has it he trained with the fearsome fucking Edelweiss before his daddy paid a king's ransom to bust him out, ship him over to Sun Valley, set him up teaching rich old ladies to ski before the shit hit the fan.

All around them: crumbling farmhouses and the occasional U.S. Army transport truck covered in gray and white netting.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
Silvered after Pfeifer at Kandahar.

JAKE  
Enlisted?

GERRY  
Drafted.

JAKE  
Hale?

GERRY

Nope. Late to the game.

JAKE

Then he ain't one of us.

The two men speed past wooden crates of ammunition and wheeled Howitzer cannons tucked into nooks and crannies everywhere, concealed from aerial reconnaissance.

GERRY

But orders are orders. Straight from Hays himself, apparently.

All signs would point to a massive troop presence.

But in the light of the moon, Jake and Gerry are, oddly, the only men we see.

GERRY (CONT'D)

Hotshot knows every insignia, every weapon. Every unit. Every protocol.

Jake nods. Gerry slows.

GERRY (CONT'D)

Probably knows every boy on that ridge on a first name basis.

Jake glowers, continues on.

JAKE

Hun's a hun.

GERRY

Paul thinks he can show you a thing or two. Work on your *schwingen*.

Disappearing into the shadows, Jake bats him off.

GERRY (CONT'D)

You're too stiff.

#### **EXT. STONE WALL - NIGHT**

Jake rushes across a snow-covered field toward a low stone wall with a splintered wooden gate.

Another young man in all-white crouches next to the gate. Same skis. Same poles. Same cloth-wrapped rifle.

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

ERNST  
(hushed, German accent)  
You're late.

Jake barely acknowledges this, presses through the gate.

JAKE  
Shut it. Your mouth, not the gate.

Ernst stands, hefts his skis to his shoulder, hurries off across the snow after him.

ERNST  
I'll lead to the summit. You take  
east flank. I take west. Meet in  
the middle.

Jake spins left, leaps up onto a snow-dusted boulder.

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

JAKE  
Don't tell me my business, Private.

Both of them bound from boulder to boulder uphill with the surefooted grace of men born at altitude.

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

Jake skids to a stop, turns.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
I came here to kill for mine.

Ernst vaults toward Jake, bounces off the boulder he's standing on, lands on the next hunk of rock, keeps going.

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

Jake's dead eyes bore into the back of Ernst's white coat.

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

Ernst continues quickly uphill, saying nothing.

JAKE  
But you already knew that.  
(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)  
(beat)  
Kraut.

Jake finally takes off after him.

ERNST  
A man sees in the world what he  
carries in his heart.  
(beat)  
Goethe. Faust.

JAKE  
See, now. That's just what's wrong  
with this unit. Too many college  
boys. And too many *fucking* Germans.

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

ERNST  
I'll keep time from the summit. Ten  
minutes on the descent, maximum.

Jake veers away, headed east.

JAKE  
You so much as look at me the wrong  
way, I'll put a bullet in your  
head. And no one in this unit will  
bat a fucking eye.

Ernst slows. Jake keeps moving.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
That's the mission after all.

Above, a hulking ridge looms menacingly.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
One more dead German. And don't you  
forget it.

Ernst, speechless, just watches him disappear.

**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 rifle bounces up and down with each firm pole plant.

JAKE  
(quietly, to himself)  
*My schwingen?*

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

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Fuck that.

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

**EXT. GERMAN MACHINE GUN NEST - JAKE'S POV**

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

Two of them are smoking, drinking from steaming metal mugs.

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. RIVA RIDGE, SUMMIT - NIGHT**

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

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

Jake nods, closes his notebook.

Ernst swirls one gloved finger in the air. *Let's go.*

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

Out of nowhere, a pack of six SIMILARLY CLAD SKIERS glide past the machine gun nest below him with torch lanterns attached their shoulders.

The light is shockingly bright. Near daylight bright.

Jake ducks for cover.



In the distance, Ernst taps his own shoulder twice, points, falls to the ground to blend in as the lead skier below them flashes his comrades a silent salute.

Jake burrows himself deeper into the snow as the German patrol continues on.

Embroidered to their shoulders: the insignia of the dreaded 47th Edelweiss. Germany's elite alpine force.

Ernst's former unit.

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 wall of rock.

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

Jake leaps up, holsters his weapon, grabs his poles, shoves off, glides toward Ernst.

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.

#### **EXT. RIVA RIDGE, DESCENT - CONTINUOUS**

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. BOMBED-OUT VILLAGE, BARN - NIGHT**

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

ERNST

Seven minutes twenty-four seconds.  
Not bad. For a beginner.

Their boots CRACKLE over frozen gravel.

JAKE

You use gravity to win medals. I  
fight gravity to stay alive.

(beat)

Falling fast kinda ain't the point.

ERNST

Nothing is more pitiful than the  
bravado of a wounded lone wolf.

JAKE

Fuck me. Faust again?

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

ERNST

Nope. Me.

In the distance, a lone 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 *schwingen*?

Ernst shrugs.

ERNST

Better.

Paul shoots Jake a puckish wink.

PAUL

(to Jake)

Danger respects technique.

#### **INT. FORWARD COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT**

A hay-strewn barn bathed in amber light.

A handful of stone-faced OFFICERS stand in a cluster  
studying a topographic map of the valley.

At the center of the space sits a massive, sculpted, highly  
detailed tabletop sand model of the surrounding peaks.

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

Jake salutes, sets his skis down. Ernst mirrors his every action like a young apprentice.

COLONEL HAMPTON  
How's it look up top?

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.  
All five miles.

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

The diorama before them is comprised of a jagged cliff resembling the one we just saw them traverse. To its right stands a massive, jutting peak.

At the foot of the ridge 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 ridge.

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.

As Jake and Ernst quickly place figurines all along the sheer summit, Hampton looks to Ernst.

COLONEL HAMPTON  
(to Ernst)  
Edelweiss?

ERNST  
Yessir.

Jake does a quick, incredulous double-take.

JAKE  
What the hell's that got to--

COLONEL HAMPTON  
(to Jake)  
Disrespect your adversary at your own peril, Thompson.

Ernst confidently places his final figurine.

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

Three other officers advance toward the model. Their eyes are on Riva Ridge.

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

GENERAL HAYS  
They're looking down the throats of every defense, every foxhole.  
(deep breath)  
Bunch of goddamn fish in a barrel.

General Hays reaches a hand out, runs it roughly over the nearly vertical south face of the ridge.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)  
The only way to break the line, the only way to Berlin, is to take the high ground. Punch into the Po Valley. Cut the Kraut supply lines. Capture Highway 64. Make a run to Bologna, for the Alps...

His bloodshot eyes shift to the steep slopes of Belvedere.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)  
...but the only way to do that is to take Belvedere.  
(MORE)

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)  
And hold it this time. Without that  
mountain, we can't move an inch.

Colonel Hampton waves a hand toward all of the German  
positions now scattered along the top of Riva.

COLONEL HAMPTON  
Sir, the positions all over that  
ridge are defended on all three  
sides. Can call in artillery up and  
down Belvedere the minute we make  
our move.

Hays looks away, lifts a hand to his stubble.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
Without that ridge, without Riva,  
there's no way to take Belvedere.  
Much less hold it.  
(beat)  
The Brits tried. The 442nd tried.  
Even the 15th tried and failed.

GENERAL HAYS  
They weren't The 10th, Hank.

Colonel Hampton POUNDS a fist on the top of the ridge.

COLONEL HAMPTON  
We'll be cut to ribbons. It'll be a  
fucking bloodbath.  
(beat)  
Again.

Knowing he's right, Hays turns toward to the map, to a  
series of roads snaking through the valley.

GENERAL HAYS  
Our orders are to take that  
mountain no matter the cost.  
(deep breath)  
We do, and we'll be toasting  
Hitler's demise by the fourth of  
July. Mark my words.

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

COLONEL HAMPTON  
George, please. After Kiska, we  
can't afford another disaster.

Paul looks to Jake. They share brief moment of shared guilt. Jake stuffs it down, way down.

Hays points back to the model.

GENERAL HAYS

Just hear me out, Hank. See all these nests? All the spotters? They're all oriented for attack from the east, west, and north, not from the south.

Hampton GRUMBLES. *We've been over this...*

COLONEL HAMPTON

That's because the south side of Riva is a fucking wall. A cliff two times the height of the Chrysler Building. And just as steep.

Jake steps up to the model, like a moth to the flame.

JAKE

I've seen worse. Climbed worse.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)

I can take it, sir. Solo.

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 two thirds of our men to the foot of Belvedere 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 nods cautiously.

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

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

COLONEL HAMPTON  
At night? You gotta be--

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

PAUL  
We build a tram line, here. From the summit to the base. To ferry wounded men down and ammo up.  
(beat)  
Can't hold that ridge with only what seven hundred men can hump up in their packs, sir.

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

GENERAL HAYS  
(to Paul)  
Think it can be done?

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

Jake nods. *I can do this.*

JAKE  
I won't let you down.

Paul gestures toward Ernst.

PAUL  
Both of you. Together.

Jake wants nothing of it:

JAKE  
No, no, no.

PAUL  
Daylight. Ten hours up and back, no more. On-belay. Laying pitons the whole way up. Quiet as you can.

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

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

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 doors.

Ernst stands frozen, still staring at the model.

PAUL  
And get some shut-eye. You're gonna need to be sharp.

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

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

GENERAL HAYS  
(to Paul)  
Kiska?

Paul silently nods. *Yep.*

COLONEL HAMPTON  
And lost Baker during the D-Series.

Hays EXHALES slowly. *Thought so...*

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

**EXT. BOMBED-OUT 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 church from earlier.

ERNST  
Pitons? Daylight?

JAKE  
Only way to scout the route properly without fucking dying.



ERNST  
Are you insane?

JAKE  
No skin off my nose. Plenty of  
other decent climbers in the--

Ernst grabs Jake by one shoulder, spins him around.

ERNST  
You're cursed. Unlucky. A danger to  
anyone who climbs with you, skis  
with you, fights by your side.  
First Kiska. Then...

Jake rears back, SHOVES him angrily away.

JAKE  
Go ahead. Say it.

Beat.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Just like I thought.

Jake turns, takes back off.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Enemy of my enemy? Bull fucking  
shit.

Ernst jogs after him.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
You botch this, you slow me down, I  
cut you loose and watch you fall.

Ernst blasts past Jake, knocks shoulders with him.

ERNST  
Out of my way.  
(mockingly)  
Lone wolf.

Jake slows, clenches both fists. Ready to rumble.

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

Still stuck in some warehouse back in Jersey, apparently.

Behind Ernst, Jake tries to tamp down his fury.

ERNST

Well, we are going to need some rope. A lot of it. At least three hundred and fifty meters.

(beat)

Each.

Percy catches Jake's eye, shoots him a look.

PERCY

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

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

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

CAPTAIN HARRIS

(slurring slightly)

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

Harris looks knowingly to Jake. Jake looks away. Bad blood.

SENIOR OFFICER

Like trying to take Tokyo with a bunch of fucking Japs.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Like Kiska all the fuck over again.

This stings for Jake, deeply.

**INT. ABANDONED CHURCH - NIGHT**

As other soldiers read, smoke, trade hushed stories, or pen letters home by candlelight in the distance, Jake lies on a wooden pew, alone, staring at starry sky.

His mind is elsewhere, not on the climb. His eyes are empty, haunted again as if he's trapped in a waking dream.

An inescapable memory of incomparable loss.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, BASE - DAWN**

From darkness, light. The first hints of dawn.

Jake, haggard, follows Ernst silently through the trees shouldering a neatly-wound coil of nylon rope.

He hasn't slept a wink. And it shows.

**SUPER: 17 FEBRUARY, 0600 HOURS**

Daisy-chained carabiners dangle from both man's belt loops and into their pants pockets to dampen the sound.

From their belts swing battered piton hammers.

They each wear heavy backpacks and barely used standard-issue U.S. 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.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Do as I say. Don't get cocky.

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 (CONT'D)

Far as I'm concerned, you're dead  
weight worthless.

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

I'm worth you winning this war.

Ernst lets his eyes slide from the cliff toward Jake.

ERNST (CONT'D)

Think you're so hard...

Jake ignores this, pockets his magazine, pulls a length of fabric from his pocket, tosses it to Ernst.

JAKE

Wrap your hammer.

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

ERNST

I *competed* for my country. Before  
the Germans annexed it.

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

ERNST (CONT'D)

A country that now wants me dead.

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

JAKE

Save it for someone who cares.

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? Give me a break.

Jake chops his hand forward, uphill. *Let's go.*

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

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, 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.

He points to a distant farmer stumbling through the hard dirt, plowing behind a swaybacked horse, wags his head.

Ernst looks, sees the farmer going about his day.

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

Ernst turns, eyes him warily.

JAKE

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.

Jake ties the end of the second rope to another point on his belt before roughly double- and triple-checking it.

JAKE  
Keep me tight.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)  
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. RIVA RIDGE, MIDSECTION - CONTINUOUS**

Jake grabs his first handhold, starts climbing.

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

Already a good fifteen 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.

Jake ignores this, looks back to the wall, 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.

Then, he slips his hammer back into his belt, tests the piton, pulls off a pair of carabiners, CLICKS them in.

His face is a study in flinty self-reliance. A died-in-the-wool soloist. A stubborn maverick.

He looks down, catches Ernst's eye, looks back up, draws a deep breath, narrows his eyes - and then LEAPS for a gutsy, seemingly impossible hold.

The nub of rock SNAPS loose and Jake's 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, right himself. Ego bruised, body not bloodied.

Below, Ernst wags his head. *You're welcome, hotshot.*

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

He bends at the waist. Hands on his thighs.

But he does his best to shake it off, looks back up, surveys his options, reaches for his hammer and another piton.

JAKE (CONT'D)

When all this is over...

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

Jake's legs quiver slightly. His right hand shakes.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)

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

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

JAKE (CONT'D)

Ever.

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

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

Jake gives the piton one last heavy smash:

CLANG!

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.

Jake looks down, YANKS the last tiny bit of slack still left in the line and catches Ernst's eye once again.

This time more modestly. Somewhat chastened. Almost ashamed.

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, does his best to mask the fact that his mind may still be elsewhere.

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

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

Jake wipes sweat from his brow, tries to wall off his emotions - his memories - as he slowly lets out more rope.

But it doesn't work.

By his eyes we can tell. He's elsewhere.

Above him, legs scissored out, Ernst looks to his right as Jake slowly lets out more rope on autopilot.



Ernst reaches for a hold, but the rope is too taut. He looks down, gives it a tug.

Jake, briefly startled, swiftly unfurls more, does his best to mask his distraction.

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

Below him, Jake lifts his watch. *We're going too slow.*

THUD. THUD. THUD.

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

He seems to momentarily clock Jake's fugue state, parts his lips as if to call out.

But before he can, his unbuckled helmet slips from his head and plummets downward toward Jake.

Jake, jolted back to attention, leans his body out from the wall, instinctively 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, shakes his head, starts climbing once again.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, 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.

JAKE  
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. BANG. BANG. BANG.

He's doing everything in his power to keep himself here, to stay present, to keep his memories at bay.

Ernst, perhaps sensing something amiss, follows him swiftly across the face.

On the other side safely, both men 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 above, we can barely make out VOICES. Speaking in German.

Jake gestures to Ernst. *Be my guest.*

Ernst bites his lip, looks up, and then starts cautiously 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.

*Keep it down, kid.*

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--*

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 clifftop, 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 in the valley, Jake and a piss-soaked Ernst hurry to pack up what's left of their gear.

Jake throws the remaining coil of rope over Ernst's shoulder. It lands with a THUMP. 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

Don't forget your hat, asshole.

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

Two hundred men up that? At night?

JAKE

You did it. Barely.

Jake takes a hard left, 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 spatter the  
brains of that stupid 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 stops dead.

ERNST

I know what you did. At Kiska. I  
know what happened to Baker, to  
Max, during the D-Series.

Jake slows.

JAKE

What the *fuck* business is it of--

Ernst lets his eyes fall to the frozen ground.

ERNST

And I'm not German.  
(beat)  
I'm Austrian.

Jake ignores this, keeps walking.

Ernst doesn't budge, doesn't move.

ERNST (CONT'D)

An Austrian Jew.

Jake slows again, turns back around.

ERNST (CONT'D)

There. I said it.

Jake looks away, searches for a harsh response.

Can't find one.

JAKE  
I didn't... know.

Jake turns, picks up the pace again. Ernst follows.

JAKE  
I just thought all you Sun Valley  
ski instructor types were master  
race sons of bitches.

For the briefest of moments, Jake looks almost as though  
his wall has fallen slightly.

His stern soloist bravado, melted fleetingly away.

ERNST  
You should have been a Captain by  
now. Or at least a Lieutenant.

The two men just CRUNCH over the snow in silence. Then:

JAKE  
I killed them all. All twenty-five  
of Harris' men. They weren't  
supposed to be there, on the beach.  
Fired on us, on me and Max first.  
(beat)  
Command always tells you instincts  
will kick-in under fire. Well,  
maybe sometimes that ain't really  
what you want.

Another long, fraught moment of silence as the village  
slowly comes into view in the distance.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Friendly fire. An accident. Wish it  
ever felt that way.

An unexpected detente passes between them.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
We can do this. Have to.

Jake speeds up.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
If we can't secure Riva, everyone's  
fucked. Every single one of us.

As they walk, Jake tries to wall himself back off again.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Ten bucks says it'll work.

**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 briefly 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 sand model.

GENERAL HAYS  
You fall, you die. They see you,  
you die. They hear you, you die.

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

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)  
Single file. 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 of Riva Ridge, in amongst the gathered soldiers.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)  
Trust the man you follow as he  
trusts the man ahead of him. Eyes  
on your second. 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)

I have *complete* confidence in your ability, your intelligence, and your fierceness of will. You are, without doubt, the finest troops I have ever had the pleasure of commanding.

The General turns, strides back toward the model. Every eye in the room tracks him.

The Young Private turns to a nearby buddy, WHISPERS:

YOUNG PRIVATE

Woul'da made a helluva coach.

Hays pauses, runs a hand up the far slopes of Belvedere.

GENERAL HAYS

Once all five teams summit, team leads will rappel back down to the valley and double-quick it up Belvedere to take out key German artillery and rocket installations.  
(deep breath)  
Before go-hour. Or else.

This comes as news to Jake. Unwelcome news.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

Gain the high ground on Riva by daybreak. *Deal* with the enemy. You'll have the aid of spotlights down the valley. But no artillery support of any kind.

He spins to face his men, cracks a weary smile.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

To put that little fascist in a pine box and burn it, we need to take Belvedere. And *hold* it.  
(pregnant pause)  
To take Belvedere, we *need* Riva.

Every assembled soldier responds with a simultaneous:

SOLDIERS

Hooah!

GENERAL HAYS

Always forward. Never stop.  
*Sempre Avanti.*

Behind the model, Colonel Hampton BARKS:

COLONEL HAMPTON  
Alright gentlemen, move 'em out!  
The climb begins at 2300 hours.

As all the rest of the men and General Hays' staff fall out, Hampton gestures discretely toward Jake and Ernst.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
Hang back, boys.

Hampton looks to Jake, deadly serious.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
Once your team's up top safely, we  
need you back down on the double.

Hampton points to a sheer section about halfway up their ultimate goal, up the hulking mass of Belvedere.

The mountain must be at least four thousand feet tall.  
Nearly twice the height of the Riva Ridge.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
This one's a beauty. But I got a  
hunch you two can hack it.

Hays runs his hand over the severe, vertical rise.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
Aerial recon indicates there's  
Kraut rocket battery, a Screaming  
Mimi, here next to an abandoned  
grist mill alongside a waterfall.  
Likely still frozen.

Jake looks to Ernst who looks away.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
Crampons and ice axes. Five hundred  
feet straight up. Get back down  
from Riva. Gear up. Get to the line  
of departure before go-hour, not a  
moment later. Double-time it to the  
falls. Demo the battery. Dispatch  
its crew. Continue your advance.

Hampton eyes the room, leans closer.

COLONEL HAMPTON  
(hushed)  
Hay's son will be at the head of  
the charge up Belvedere.



This jolts Jake and Ernst. News to them both.

ERNST

Sir?

COLONEL HAMPTON

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

(beat)

This battery's aimed squarely at  
his team's only route to the  
saddle. If we can't disable it...

Hampton trails off, looks back to the model.

Jake nods slowly.

JAKE

Understood, sir.

Ernst does a slow double-take. Eyes full of fear.

Hampton taps the summit of the cliff with two fingers.  
Knowing that Hay's son's life depends on their success.

COLONEL HAMPTON

Dismissed.

**EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - NIGHT**

Jake and Ernst move swiftly and silently through the  
darkened forest near the base of Riva Ridge.

A deeply-tanned, slightly older man falls in behind them,  
nips a cigarette between his chapped lips.

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

He flashes an open silver cigarette case toward Ernst.

Jake glares at him, full of the same wariness and disdain  
that once harbored for Ernst. Maybe still does.

JAKE

Put that fucking thing away.

Friedl nods, tucks his cigarette case back into his jacket.

FRIEDL

(to Ernst, re: Jake)

I see what you mean.

A cluster of SPOTLIGHT BEAMS abruptly kick up in the distance, down valley. They cast a strange wash of faint light over the treetops and cliff face.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)  
(still to Ernst)  
American cowboy.

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

PERCY  
(to Friedl)  
Ease up there, playboy.

Next to Percy, another young man nods. This is SERGEANT PETE SEIBERT (30s, boyish face, a practical joker).

PETE  
(to Percy)  
You're one to talk.

Behind Pete, grins a man with a cigar clenched between his teeth. This is LIEUTENANT DAVID BROWER (late 20s, a big mountain daredevil with a shock of prematurely gray hair).

DAVID  
(to Pete)  
Percy can't help it.

Another man tucks 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 David)  
He was just born that way.

Gerry from the church, earlier, threads his way through them all with his arms full of K-rations.

GERRY  
Anybody else notice? There seem to  
be an awful lot of medics.

Gerry offers Bill a packet of rations. He demurs.

BILL  
How'd you draw the lucky straw to  
stick back at basecamp?

Gerry presses past Bill, still looking for takers.

GERRY  
Somebody's gotta load ammo onto  
Paul's tram once it's done.

David, also declining rations, looks to Jake and Ernst.

DAVID  
What about these two?

PETE  
Climb up, rappel down?

PERCY  
I'd take that drill any day.

Paul, having not yet spoken a word, lifts a hand to Jake's shoulder, gives it a firm, fatherly squeeze.

PAUL  
Sure as hell wouldn't wanna get  
caught with my ass dangling off  
that cliff once Jerry finds out  
where we came from.

Paul lets go of Jake's shoulder, veers away.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
(back to Jake)  
If things go south, head east.  
Y'all can be my first payload.

As Paul TROMPS into the darkness, David MUTTERS through his cigar toward Bill and Pete:

DAVID  
Crazy wing nut billy goat.

PETE  
Bet that tram's *never* finished.

BILL  
If it ain't, we'll all be stuck up  
there like sittin' ducks.

Gerry slows. The men just stream past him in silence.

GERRY  
See you at the summit?

Only Bill nods back with a quick middle finger salute.

Percy leans toward Jake.

PERCY  
Max woulda loved this.

Jake draws a breath to respond, avoids eye contact.

BILL  
Woulda been all over it.

Jake tries to let this roll off his shoulders, wall himself back up, put on a brave face.

David edges closer, knows to change the subject.

DAVID  
How's the route, really?

Ernst looks to Jake. Jake doesn't respond.

Instead, his eyes are fixed on the slowly descending fog.

ERNST  
Technical.

Percy SLAPS Jake hard between the shoulder blades. The jolt seems to rouse him slightly, bring him back.

PERCY  
Fantastic.

Again, the men fall quiet.

No one says a word as Riva Ridge towers above them all, a jet black stone wall.

**EXT. ROUTE FIVE, BASE - NIGHT**

Jake and Ernst peer up into the darkness at the start of the same route they scouted just the day before.

In the dark, it appears even more daunting.

And 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 on carabiners, adjusts their sagging packs.

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

JAKE  
Everybody empty?

All nod slowly. Not a comfortable feeling.

The faraway spotlights reflect off of the still slowly-descending frozen fog bank.

Friedl leans closer to Jake, WHISPERS:

FRIEDL  
You did this in daylight?

Jake lifts his eyes to the fog.

JAKE  
Yep.

Friedl elbows him in the ribs.

FRIEDL  
*Mutig.*  
(beat)  
Brave. I like it.  
(knowing wink)  
You should come with us, back to  
Aspen. When all this is done.

Jake looks to Ernst, then to Percy. Percy rolls his eyes.

PERCY  
(aping Friedl)  
Zere ve shall built an oasis.

FRIEDL  
*Spaß und Spiele. Mind und body.*

Jake and Friedl share a quick look. Something has shifted between them. The wall between them, briefly down again.

JAKE  
Here's to coming back with both.  
(toward Ernst)  
You want first?

ERNST  
Age before beauty.

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

**EXT. ROUTE FIVE, LOWER REACHES - NIGHT**

Just as before, 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. Alone on the mountain, abandoned to his thoughts. His memories.

JAKE  
(hushed)  
Wish us luck, Max.

He moves gracefully. All efficiency.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
We're gonna need it.

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

Shadows bend and sway, distorted. It's as if the cliff 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.

From above, we hear a muffled CRACK. Jake pauses, looks up.

A loud SCRAPE from above.

Then a THUD. And another, and another.

Jake hesitates. Disoriented.

The rock wall above and below him is just a dizzying jumble of undulating shadows.

Until: SMASH!

A jagged mass of rock hits the wall just above Jake and shatters into a million hefty pieces.

Jake looks down, gestures wildly toward Ernst, HISSES:

JAKE  
Rock!

Ernst looks up, throws his body against the wall.

Jake does the same, flat as he can muster, as debris rains down all around them both.

Something slips from his belt. *His piton hammer?*

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. The heaviest piece.

Jake looks down, locks eyes with Ernst.

Ernst nods.

Jake looks back up, nothing stirs but the shadows.

He steadies himself, checks his line. It's still secure.

He scans the wall again for his next set of holds, climbs until he arrives at a fractured shelf. Where the boulder must have cleft free.

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

And the fog.

In the dim, rippling light, five or six more CLIMBERS move up the line below Ernst.

Turning, Jake 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 rope.

Jake, desperate, grabs for it, misses.

Thinking fast, he stomps on the rope. The piton, hits his boot with a muffled PING.

Jake bends, snatches the piton up, ZIPS it back up the line, reaches back, pads his empty holster for his missing hammer.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Fuck.

Jake quickly 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.

ERNST (O.S.)

(barely audible)

Don't be stupid.

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

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

JAKE

Thank you.

Ernst nods slowly.

ERNST

You too.

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

They both look up.

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

Still nothing from above.

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

JAKE

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 FIVE, SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS**

Jake moves swiftly from rock to rock, handhold to handhold.

The top is within reach but shrouded in icy fog.

Below, Ernst climbs confidently. A few others are splayed out in different locations all the way down to the bottom.

Jake pauses at the end of the line, the last piton Ernst laid the day before. The highest spot they'd reached.

The summit is still a good ten feet up.

Jake draws a breath, checks his footholds, clips himself off the line, begins to climb the last bit free.

Then, pulling himself up over the edge, Jake silently bounds through the snow toward the shadow of a single boulder.

Poor cover.

All instinct, he swings his rifle free, reaches for the bayonet tethered to his pack, slides it into place, tilts his wrist over, looks to his watch.

Way too late.



In the distance, Ernst summits the cliff, runs his way.

He skids to a stop next to Jake. There's barely enough room for the both of them behind the boulder.

Jake points to Ernst's pack, to his bayonet.

Ernst wag his head side-to-side, draws a breath to argue.

Jake lifts a finger to his lips, looks left.

Further off, there's another rock outcropping. Still measly cover, but a little better.

Not enough room for 200 men by any stretch.

Ernst points forcefully downward. *We must wait here. Rappel.*

Jake lifts his wrist, taps his watch violently. *No time.*

And, with that, he takes off running, crouched, for the nearby boulders.

As he does, David summits, looks around wildly.

Ernst hesitates, a rule follower. But then he reluctantly takes off after Jake.

Things are not going to plan already.

#### **EXT. RIVA RIDGE, BOULDERS - CONTINUOUS**

Clutching his rifle and bayonet, Ernst bounds after Jake along the edge of the cliff, toward the boulders.

The fog is so dense we can barely make out their fast-moving, silhouetted figures.

Jake slows, dips behind the outcropping. Ernst skids to a stop, fumbles to affix his blade to his barrel.

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 and another. More and more soldiers sweep by like ghostly rifle-bearing specters.

Jake, spooked by the fog, checks his watch again.

Ernst taps Jake on the shoulder, gestures. *Down. We must...*

Jake wags his head. *Not yet.*

In the distance, behind Ernst, a gradual rise.

The high ground.

He takes off running for it. Ernst, angered, does the same.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, RISE - CONTINUOUS**

On the run, Jake and Ernst 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.

Jake veers toward another rock wall, slows to a stop, runs his sleeve over his drenched face.

Ernst grabs him by the shoulder, pulls him roughly around.

ERNST

(barely audible)

We need to get back down. Rappel.

Jake throws off his pack, yanks his magazine free, jams it into his carbine rifle: CLACK.

JAKE

Not until every single man in this unit's up here safe.

ERNST

That's on them, not you. Not us.

JAKE

I'm not *fucking* leaving. Not yet.

Beyond them: the faintest glimmer of sunrise.

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.

Another man ducks in with them. It's Bill from earlier. He does a double-take at the sight of Jake and Ernst.

BILL

Aren't you two supposed to be--

Jake nods back. Bill keeps running. *That ain't good.*

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

Ernst MUTTERS something quietly to himself. A prayer?

Jake leans his head around the edge.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, RISE - JAKE'S POV**

Up ahead, we can barely make out a line of sandbags. Perched at the center: the dim 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**

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 solidier 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.

They share a quick, knowing look. *Too late to go down now.*

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

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

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

And, off they run.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, GERMAN POSITION - 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. Ernst does the same.

This is what they've trained for, prepared for. But both men look as though they know they shouldn't be here.

Beyond 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 Boy is frozen stiff like a sleepwalker stunned awake after stumbling into a wall.

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

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

Ernst grips the trigger, 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, yes.

But then the German Boy RAKES in a deep breath.

GERMAN BOY  
*Amerik--*

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

The Boy instantly crumples.

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

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

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, MACHINE GUN NEST - CONTINUOUS**

Metal boxes of ammunition and wooden crates of German grenades (aka potato mashers) sit neatly arrayed next to an oversized, hand-crank 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 to the other side of the nest.

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

In the distance: sandbagged German barracks.

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

Jake shoves the wooden stock of the machine gun under one arm, leans his head over, takes aim at 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 deep within:

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

Pete pulls a grenade from his belt, yanks the pin, tosses the clip, lobbs 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 RIFLE FIRE streaks out of from inside 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.

He won't pull the trigger. Can't.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
This isn't Kiska! FIRE!

Jake, jolted back to the now, finally 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! BANG! BANG! Black smoke oozes out.

Jake finally releases 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 right.

The blade grazes his bicep.

The Boy yanks the knife back, lifts it again.

Jake pulls his sidearm, fires a single shot:

CRACK!

A scarlet wisp of blood mists into the brightening air. And the Boy falls backward, shot in the head.

Ernst, his jacket torn not 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 dirt 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 smoldering pistol. He appears stunned by his own actions. Appalled.

ERNST (CONT'D)

Focus! Focus!

Ernst points.

Jake shakes his head, tries to will himself back.

ERNST (CONT'D)

We don't take out that 40, we'll  
never get down.

Jake nods rapidly, all adrenalin.

ERNST (CONT'D)

Twist the end. Pull the cord. Four  
and a half seconds, yeah?

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 all four grenade handles, pull out thin metal fuse cords.

They lock eyes, yank the cords. Each grenade HISSES to life, belches out sparks and smoke.

Then, on cue, both men turn and lob them up over the edge of the machine gun nest.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Silence.

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

PERCY

The hell are you still--

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

PERCY (CONT'D)

Jesus!

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 as Jake holsters his pistol, lifts his rifle, peers back over the edge.

A single OLDER GERMAN SOLDIER (late 50s) stands in the distance holding a machine gun, bewildered.

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

They had no fucking idea we were even coming.

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

ERNST

Well, now they do.

JAKE

I can't believe--

ERNST

We have to go, now. Rappel. Down!

A frightened MEDIC ducks his head into the nest.

MEDIC

Come, fast.

His face vanishes as quickly as it appeared.

JAKE

Bring the Kraut gun.

ERNST

No! We must--

JAKE

Too late.

Jake grabs a few ammo boxes, jumps over the sandbags, runs. Back in the action. Back in the now.



Percy throws himself to one knee, still bleeding.

JAKE (O.S.)

Hurry!

Ernst reluctantly grabs the gun, leaps past Percy.

ERNST

These are not our orders.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, PLATEAU - CONTINUOUS**

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

Up ahead, the Medic ducks behind the 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 to a stop next to the Radioman.

Jake and Percy follow.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, HIGH GROUND - CONTINUOUS**

Jake eyes the prisoners, stunned.

JAKE

Goddamn. It's just a bunch of boys  
and old men. Whatever happened to--

Ernst turns to him, GASPING.

ERNST

We have to get to Paul. The tram.  
Now that they know we're here.

Ernst trains the gun back toward the barracks.

ERNST (CONT'D)

It's our only way to--

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

MEDIC

(hushed)

Quiet. Edelweiss.

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

MEDIC (CONT'D)

No fire. Repeat. No fire.

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

Jake cranes his head, squints 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, snowy, and still.

But then we hear the sound of FOOTFALL. Boots in unison, CRUNCHING slowly over ice 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.

One of them stops abruptly, 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.

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 German machine gun back on them. Next to him, Jake feeds ammo.

This is their task now.

JAKE

Only if you have a solid target. No  
spray and pray. No instinct.

CRACK. CRACK. CRACK. 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.

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 air above them both.

BOOM! It goes off just overhead. The concussion knocks both men into the rock wall.

Behind them, Ernst's machine gun siezes.

ERNST

*Scheiße.* Jammed.

Jake pushes himself to his feet, grips his rifle, leans around Percy, fires rapidly:

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Percy jolts forward, pulls his Thompson from his shoulder, moves to the far side of the rock, returns fire:

TAKA! TAKA! TAKA! TAKA!

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

Jake, grabs the mouthpiece, SHOUTS:

JAKE  
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.

Jake drops the mouthpiece.

Ernst and Jake duck. Only Percy keeps firing.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Be right back.

Jake leaps to his feet. Ernst pulls him back down.

ERNST  
Are you crazy?!

JAKE  
Yep.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Throw as good as you ski.

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

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

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!

Jake leaps up and over the sandbags, disappears.

Ernst 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.

MEDIC  
Eighty-eights?

PERCY  
(through bloody gauze)  
Not good. Not--

The shrill SCREAM of an incoming shell cuts him off.

**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! Jake scores four direct hits on what remains of the 47th Edelweiss.

The clifftop falls momentarily silent once again.

A single voice cries out in German:

EDELWEISS COMMANDER (O.S.)  
*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  
*Ich gebe auf!*  
(beat)  
I surrender!

An EDELWEISS COMMANDER emerges from beyond the barracks with his hands held high. 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  
He was giving the fuck up!

Jake bounds out of the machine gun nest and makes a run for the barracks, firing with a surgical precision.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

He disappears into the barracks.

In the distance, Ernst sweeps his rifle back-and-forth, finger on the trigger. *Where is he? Where is he?*

Jake suddenly reemerges, on the run.

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

FRIEDL  
(to Jake)  
*Schnell Cowboy! Mach schnell!*

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

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

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

JAKE  
(to Ernst)  
You owe me ten bucks.

Friedl slides in next to Jake as the Medic tears a packet of sulfa powder open with his teeth.

Percy's formerly debonaire visage is a grizzly, gory mess.

FRIEDL  
(to Jake)  
Very brave. *Sehr mutig.*

Jake 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?*  
(beat)  
*Wer ist das?*

Friedl ponders briefly, smiles, lifts the mouthpiece.

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

Friedl covers the mouthpiece, looks to Jake and Ernst.

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

Suddenly Bill and David duck in next to Friedl as the Medic pours sulfa powder into Percy's wound.

PERCY  
Goddamn that hurts!

Over the radio:

EDELWEISS PRIVATE (O.S.)  
*Kübler?*

Friedl bites his lip, looks to Bill and David. *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 oozing face.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)  
Ah, who invited young Gary Cooper  
to the party?

Ernst looks to Jake, frantic.

ERNST  
We need to go! NOW!

Jake nods, still struggling to catch his breath.

Bill leaps up. Fires twice: BANG! BANG!

BILL  
Keep heading east. Toward the  
shoulder. The saddle.

David leans around the rock, fires: BANG! BANG! BANG!

DAVID  
If Paul's got the tram up, you're  
golden. If not--

Bullets THUD and PING into the rock all around them.

Friedl looks to Ernst.

FRIEDL  
Follow me. I know the way.

ERNST  
But--

FRIEDL  
I like this cowboy of yours.  
Fearless and foolish.

Friedl grins, takes off running. Ernst hesitates.

DAVID  
(to Ernst)  
Well, hop to.

BILL  
See you gents up top!

Both men continue firing.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, EASTERN SLOPES - LATER**

Total anarchy.

Wounded men run every which way. Heavy artillery fire  
blankets the entire summit of the Ridge.

A fierce German counterattack is well underway.

On the run behind Friedl, Ernst SHOUTS toward Jake while  
hefting a long 60mm mortar tube:

ERNST  
It was a *direct* order!

Jake, wincing with every nearby blast, HOWLS back:

JAKE  
We didn't. Have. Time. We needed.  
To act! I needed to--

**BOOM!**

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



Jake, terrified, stumbles sideways.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
You only care about you!

FRIEDL  
Enough.

Jake skids to stop. Ernst nearly smashes right into him.

Friedl keeps running.

We can tell, Jake's fading again. Into the past.

JAKE  
I didn't... I just--

Ernst leans closer to Jake, their faces only inches apart.

ERNST  
Never interfere with *my* mission  
ever again.

While men swarm every which way in the distance, Jake lifts his rifle and SLAMS it broadside into Ernst's chest.

Up ahead, Friedl slows.

FRIEDL  
(exasperated)  
We're running out of time.

Ernst, unmoved, simply stares back at Jake.

ERNST  
You're a disgrace to the memories  
of the men you--

A PIERCING SCREAM from somewhere high above cuts him off.

Jake spins to see a single STUKA DIVE BOMBER ripping through the sky toward them.

In the distance, everyone else scatters for scant cover.

The plane strafes the ground around at Friedl's feet:

POW! POW! POW! POW! POW!

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

Jake looks to Friedl, who is miraculously uninjured.

JAKE  
Cover. Run!

Together, all three men turn and race toward a series of blasted-out craters near a stand of smoldering trees.

BANG. WHIZ! BANG. WHIZ!

Rifle fire from somewhere to their left.

Jake and Ernst hit the snow, wheel back around, take aim.

Friedl keeps running, desperate for shelter.

Above: the WAIL of the Stuka returning.

JAKE  
Trees. With Friedl. Go.

Ernst looks to him.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
GO!

Ernst finally takes off, lugging the mortar with him.

Jake stays behind, rolls onto his back, burrows himself into the snow, face-up.

The Stuka descends, HOWLING as Ernst sprints for cover.

Jake lifts his rifle, takes aim at the Stuka, squeezes off a few rounds: BANG. BANG. BANG.

Again, he's firing with more precision than fear.

Acting not reacting. Selflessly.

BANG!

A third shot hits the engine intake.

CRACK!

A second hits the canopy, pierces the glass.

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 echoes back up from the valley below. A dark black cloud mushrooms up.

Jake pushes himself back to his feet.

JAKE

Time to get off this *fucking* rock.

From behind him: CRACK. CRACK. More sniper fire.

Jake sprints, hunched, toward Friedl and Ernst in the trees.

ERNST

Stay low. Stay low.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, DECIMATED FOREST - CONTINUOUS**

Jake ducks behind what's left of a tree trunk. It's barely wider than his torso. Again, poor cover.

In the distance, a lone VOICE cries out in German:

CORPORAL BRANDT

*Amerikaner?*

Jake doesn't budge. Neither do Ernst or Friedl.

Something about the voice seems to rouse something in Friedl. A hint of familiarity.

CORPORAL BRANDT (CONT'D)

Americans?

A 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.

Brandt pauses, 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 back into the air.

CORPORAL BRANDT (CONT'D)

It is an honor to surrender to  
such...

Jake looks back to Ernst. Ernst looks to Friedl as he leans around the splintered base of his tree to get a good look.

CORPORAL BRANDT (CONT'D)  
...worthy adversaries.

Jake HISSES toward Friedl:

JAKE  
Stay put.

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

CORPORAL BRANDT  
Ah, there you are.

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

JAKE  
How many of you are there?

CORPORAL BRANDT  
Just me, I'm afraid.

Suddenly, Friedl steps into the clear, CALLS out:

FRIEDL  
Tobias?

Brandt's eyes whip toward Friedl.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)  
*Ich dachte, das wärst du.*

Friedl steps further forward.

Ernst and Jake nervously take aim at Brandt.

Brandt squints, barely believing his eyes.

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

Friedl lowers his weapon, advances toward Brandt like he's known him for decades. Eons.

Jake tries to stop him.

JAKE  
Don't--

FRIEDL  
(oddly calm)  
He is a very old friend. A protege,  
really. We competed...

THUMP.

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

FRIEDL (CONT'D)  
...at Wengen.

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

CORPORAL BRANDT  
(to Jake and Ernst)  
*Nein. Nein! Ruhe. Calm!*

Brandt's hands are still up.

Knee-deep in snow, Friedl pads his chest. Behind him, Jake and Ernst, in a panic, train their rifles on Brandt.

FRIEDL  
*Es ist ein Wunder.*

Friedl spins to face his comrades, pulls the silver cigarette case from inside 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, collapses.

Jake fires once. BANG!

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

**BOOM! BOOM!**

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

Ernst surges forward, falls to his knees, crawls across the snow to check Friedl's pulse.

ERNST  
Medic!

Of course, there isn't a medic for miles.

JAKE  
Let's go. Let's go!

Returning fire, Jake leaps out, grabs Ernst by his collar, drags him backward across the snow, toward a shallow crater.

Bullets TUMBLE and WHINE all around them.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
The mortar.

Ernst stumbles away, scoops up the tube, keeps running.

And, together, they leap into the crater as bullets THUD and SMACK stone, tree bark, dirt, and rock.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, CRATER - CONTINUOUS**

Jake rips his pack off, rolls onto his stomach, presses his chest to the dirty snow.

JAKE  
You alright? You okay?

Ernst nods, stays low, kicks the legs of the mortar out, peers back over the edge of the crater.

Jake squeezes off a couple quick rifle rounds: BANG. BANG.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
In my pack. All I got is two.

Jake lowers his rifle, looks to the sky. They're trapped.

ERNST  
We can't just leave him there.

Ernst dumps two shells out of Jake's pack, leans toward the mortar, twists the eyepiece open, looks.

JAKE  
I know.

Jake's eyes drift to his hands. The both quiver slightly.

Ernst looks back, senses Jake slipping.

ERNST  
Listen to me. Listen!

The sound of Ernst's voice seems to draw Jake back.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
There are no accidents. Only  
choices. Good, bad. Doesn't matter.

Ernst, looks back to the eyepiece just as four more rounds  
THUD into the dirt right behind him.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
Now is your time to choose.

A single bullet barely misses Jake, kicks up more dirt.

Jake drops his rifle, rolls closer.

JAKE  
Guess it's good you ain't a Kraut  
after all.

He scoops up one of the mortar shells, lifts it toward the  
mouth of the tube.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
These guys are starting to get on  
my nerves.

Ernst pulls back.

ERNST  
Registered.

JAKE  
Fire in the hole.

Jake drops the mortar shell. KA-CHINK.

Both men duck clear. BANG.

The shell blasts out of the barrel.

They both crawl up to the lip of the crater, watching.

BOOM!

ERNST  
Four meters right.

Ernst slides back down toward the mortar, lowers his eye  
back the the sight, makes rapid adjustments.

As he does, Jake grabs his rifle again yanks out his clip,  
examines it. His fingers still tremble.

JAKE  
Used to think climbing was the  
cure-all. A silver bullet.

ERNST  
Ready?

Jake SLAMS his clip back in, grabs their last mortar shell.

JAKE  
It ain't.

Jake lifts the shell, winces, drops it in. KA-CHINK!

They both duck.

BANG! The shell blasts out.

BOOM!

Ernst peers back up over the edge.

ERNST  
*Perfekt!*

The two men share a brief look of exhausted relief.

Jake pulls himself back up to the lip of the crater, SHOUTS:

JAKE  
Friedl?

Nothing. No response.

ERNST  
We have to get him.

Jake looks to his rifle, knows Ernst is right.

JAKE  
I'm almost out.

ERNST  
Me too.

Ernst takes one last look to steel his will.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
A man becomes stronger by deciding  
slowly and by holding firm to the  
decision once it's made. Everything  
else just follows.

Jake grips his rifle, ready to charge.



JAKE  
 Nietzsche? Bah.  
 (knowing glance)  
 You ain't the only one who can  
 read. Apparently.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, EAST SUMMIT - AFTERNOON**

Jake and Ernst sprint from the trees and toward another swarming American position carrying Friedl between them in an impromptu stretcher.

As they run, they pass German gun nests, barracks, a pen of anxious-looking WEHRMACHT PRISONERS.

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.

Jake and Ernst slow, looking lost. It's a hellscape.

A GAUNT PRIVATE (20s, empty eyes, dirt- and blood-crusted uniform) passes them, carrying a heavy crate.

JAKE  
 Where's your C.O.?

The Gaunt Private wags his head back past the dugout.

ERNST  
 Medic?

GAUNT PRIVATE  
 (loud, off)  
 Johnston, we got another one!

A young medic in a white helmet JOHNSTON (20s), his arms and hands bathed in blood, looks up from the man whose shoulder wound he's frantically sewing.

JOHNSTON  
 He alive?

JAKE  
 Yeah.

JOHNSTON  
 Conscious?

ERNST  
 Barely.

Johnston looks back down, keeps sewing.

JOHNSTON

Put him over there. Gimme a fuckin' minute, yeah?

Jake nods, looks to Friedl. His sharply angled face, normally deeply tanned, is ghostly white. Phantom-like.

FRIEDL

(to Jake)

*Sehr mutig, mein Bruder.*

Jake and Ernst slowly lower him to the snow.

JAKE

(to Friedl)

You and me and the whole crew. I'm buying first round. At the Jerome, yeah? Mind and body. In Aspen. We'll be there.

Ernst kneels to whisper something into Friedl's ear.

In the distance behind Ernst, amid the rush of soldiers moving to and fro, Jake suddenly spies Paul from earlier.

He can't believe his eyes.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Petzholdt? Paul!

Paul skids to a stop, turns, grins. His hands are covered in thick black grease. And his eyes are wild, ecstatic.

PAUL

You're late.

Ernst slowly stands as Paul charges over to them.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Was starting to worry you two got caught dangling in the wind on that fucking descent.

He pauses, looks to Friedl.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(to Friedl)

Don't worry. Johnston's bedside manner could use some work, but he'll take good care of you.

Friedl wordlessly waves a bloody hand his way as if ordering a round of frosty martinis for the lot of them. Dry.

Paul slaps Jake's back, leaves a big greasy hand print.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Hank's been asking after y'all.

Jake, utterly spent, stares at Paul like he's a figment.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Fixed lines held like a goddamn  
charm. Walk in the park, just like  
you said.

Paul takes off toward an impromptu forward command center.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Well, c'mon now. Hank's waiting!

Jake and Ernst stagger after him, stunned mute.

JAKE  
Colonel Hampton's up... here?

PAUL  
Yeah. Got pinned down pretty bad.  
Ran outta basically everything.  
(beat)  
So Hank got a wild hair and decided  
to climb the whole thing 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* U.S. Army who  
could climb that pitch with a  
ninety pound pack. Headstrong  
sonofabitch.

ERNST  
We need to get back down before--

PAUL  
I know, I know. Don't get your  
panties in a bunch.

Paul turns and rumbles down a crudely built set of wooden stairs through the trees. They all follow.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
You're gonna like this.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, TRAMWAY TOP - LATE AFTERNOON**

The three 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. Greasing flywheels, torquing bolts.

Paul gazes out at the drooping cable like a proud father.

Jake stares at the thing like it's a holy mirage.

PAUL  
And a full eighteen hours ahead of  
schedule, thank you very much.

Behind them, a HOWITZER CREW loudly supplies cover fire:

BANG. BANG. BOOM! BOOM!

Jake shudders reflexively with each concussive blow.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
(over the shelling)  
Twenty-five hundred feet straight  
down to the valley below.

The Engineers give the cable one last heaving tug.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
She'll carry about four hundred  
fifty pounds. Maybe more. I expect  
we can get twenty tons up and down  
this ridge all damn day.

Jake slowly steps up next to him.

JAKE  
Tell me we're not too late.

PAUL  
Not quite. But close.

Paul looks left to see Colonel Hampton lumbering down the stairs toward them, followed by a wide-eyed RADIOMAN.

COLONEL HAMPTON  
(into a handset)  
What? No! No! That is an order,  
son. Midnight tonight. As planned.  
Whether Riva's secure or--

Everyone salutes.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
Over and out.

He tosses the handset back to the Radioman.

Sir.
JAKE
ERNST
Sir.

Colonel Hampton salutes back, angrily.

COLONEL HAMPTON  
(to Jake)  
The hell are you two still doing up  
here, Sergeant?

Jake's old rank.

Sir? JAKE

The Colonel's eyes drift to Ernst.

ERNST  
There was no way down. No way to--

Hampton lifts his wrist, eyes his watch.

COLONEL HAMPTON  
Well, fuck. Good thing you like  
going downhill fast.

He looks back to the tram.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
You two are about to be Paul's  
first quinea pigs.

BOOM!

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

Everyone flinches but Colonel Hampton.

Instead, clears his ears, leans toward Jake.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
And you were right. That climb was  
a hoot. Baker would've been proud.

Jake seems entirely at a loss for words.

**EXT. RIVA RIDGE, TRAM PLATFORM - DUSK**

Jake and Ernst stand inside the rickety tram.

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  
Cunningham will meet you down.  
Provision you up. Crampons and ice  
axes. Two pairs each, just in case.

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

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
The mill. The rocket battery. Fast  
as you can. Before midnight.

Jake eyes the map blankly. Shell-shocked and on fumes.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
If we don't find a way to take out  
that battery, the General's boy and  
his crew are in deep shit.

Ernst just stares.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
B Company's gonna need all the help  
they can get now that every Kraut  
on that fucking mountain knows  
we're coming, yeah?

Jake draws a breath. No words come.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
Head out before the 85th. We have  
crews laying comms wire as we  
speak. Same orders. Do not fire  
until fired upon, you hear?

Jake nods slowly.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
Scale the falls. Blow the battery  
before they shoot and scoot. Join  
back up with the 87th. Take the  
fight all the way to the top and  
down the other side.

He SMACKS his hand against the A-frame struts of tram.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)  
And watch out for mines.

The Colonel pulls a cluster of rifle mags from his breast pocket, thrusts them toward Jake.

JAKE  
Thank you, sir.

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

PAUL  
See you in Valpiano.

The tram GLIDES away into the darkness.

**EXT. TRAM CAR - CONTINUOUS**

Jake and Ernst hold on for dear life as the tram RIPS swiftly downhill, swaying side-to-side.

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

Behind them, on Riva Ridge: sporadic GUNFIRE.

Below them, trees, rocks, and snow WHIZ by. For a long moment, neither man says a word.

Jake's eyes slowly begin to well. It could be the wind. But it's definitely not. He tries to stifle it, hold it in.

From up ahead: the faint BUZZ of a propeller.

Ernst lifts his rifle, spies an approaching fighter plane.

*Ours? Theirs?*

Jake wipes his face roughly, wordlessly hands Ernst a mag, pulls his own empty out, drops it, SLAMS in a second.

The plane is getting closer.

Saying nothing, Jake takes aim, grips the trigger.

They're sitting ducks.

JAKE  
On my mark.

Ernst nods, locks and loads.

ERNST

But--

JAKE (CONT'D)

Aim for the...

The plane abruptly takes a sharp bend, reveals its insignia. American. Army Air Corps.

Both men slowly lower their rifles as 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 plane draws ground fire from German positions all over the mountain. Tracers arc gracefully through the sky.

Jake and Ernst watch as the plane dips and dives and then quickly releases its payload.

The pill-shaped tank tumbles end-over-end toward the top of the mountain, hits the trees, then the snow.

**KA-BOOM!**

A giant orange fireball consumes everything in sight.

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

Lit by the billowing flames, Jake's face turns stony again.

JAKE

That's just wrong.

The planes disappear behind the flaming mountainside.

JAKE (CONT'D)

When the wild dies we die.

Jake wipes his salt-crusted cheeks again with the back of his blood-spattered hand.

His fingers quake ever so much.

**EXT. VALLEY FLOOR, TRAM BASE - SUNSET**

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



Gerry from earlier rushes up the stairs to meet them. Behind him wait two hulking packs full of gear.

GERRY

Damn, boys. You two look like shit  
on a shingle.

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

Waiting for midnight, for go-hour.

Gerry reaches in, helps Ernst out.

GERRY (CONT'D)

No rest for the wicked, huh?

Jake follows Ernst onto the platform, looks to the packs. Four pairs of ice axes lean against one of them.

GERRY (CONT'D)

But don't you worry. Gotcha all  
packed up neat and tidy.

**EXT. VALLEY FLOOR, STAGING AREA - EVENING**

Jake and Ernst weave their way urgently through the throngs of WOUNDED AMERICANS and GERMAN PRISONERS streaming down from Riva Ridge.

Both men wolf down scavenged bread and sausage, guzzle steaming coffee from a shared canteen.

**SUPER: 19 FEBRUARY 1945, 1900 HOURS**

Gerry struggles to keep up with them as he quickly ties the ice axes to the back of Jake's pack.

Every passing German seems to be smoking.

Hundreds of FRESH TROOPS from the 85th and 87th walk behind Gerry, stone-faced but full of fear.

Jake lets his gaze fall to a WOUNDED GERMAN PRISONER passing the other direction. Gauze wraps his entire head.

Where his eyes would be: two red splotches.

Ernst clocks Jake staring at the wounded German with bloody splotches for eyes, nudges him on.

ERNST

C'mon. Eyes ahead.

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

Another young GERMAN BOY limps by. Jake's eyes follow him.

Guilt slowly clouds Jake's face once again. He's slipping.

JAKE  
This ain't victory.

Ernst reaches a hand out, pulls Jake by his pack straps.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
It's a fucking slaughterhouse.

Ernst stops dead, wheels back around.

ERNST  
Listen to me. Let it go.

Jake looks to Ernst, glassy-eyed.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
I promised my sister I'd find them.

Gerry cants his head. *Huh?*

ERNST (CONT'D)  
After my parents got me out, got me to the States, the Gestapo took them. I don't know where.

Ernst lets go of Jake, turns back around, walks on.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
Like the General says. Always forward. Never look back.

Jake follows Ernst with his eyes.

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

Gerry studies Jake, not quite sure what's going on.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
Plus, I need you. You need me. No more solos. End of story.

Gerry smirks, presses past Jake.

GERRY  
 (to Ernst)  
 Good pep talk.

**EXT. LINE OF DEPARTURE - NIGHT**

Gerry checks every strap, every fastener on Jake and Ernst's packs while they press past the line of departure.

GERRY  
 Had to guess at your sizes. Should  
 be four pairs of crampons in there.  
 Enough Composition B to take down  
 the Taj Mahal. And plenty of ice  
 anchors to scale Mt Fuji.

Darkness has fallen again across the entire valley. Beyond Belvedere, the moon rises through heavy snowfall.

Spotlights sweep back-and-forth in the distance.

Jake and Ernst march on in silence. Men on a mission.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
 Heard Hank thought your route was  
*far* superior.

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

The hulking mountain before them though is deathly still.

Silence. Just the muted CRUNCHING of footfall over snow.

Then, the faint PURR of a low-flying airplane fills the sky.

Jake and Ernst scramble toward the trees. Gerry just stands there with his eyes glued to the gray/black sky.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
 Propaganda.

Oddly, the sound fades. No gunfire. No strafing.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
 Been doing it all damn day.

After a moment, Jake and Ernst reemerge from the trees as a flurry of TINY PAPER LEAFLETS rains down with the snow falling from above.

Jake snatches one out of the air, gives it a quick once-over, crushes it in his fist.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
What's it say this time?

JAKE  
Does it matter?

Another leaflet lands on the ropes slung over Ernst's shoulder. He bats it away, keeps walking.

GERRY  
I could retire on what they must  
spend on ink.

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

GERRY (CONT'D)  
Here.

He loops one of the straps through the zipper pull on the front of Jake's white jacket.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
Sum total of what I've learned not  
being in the Air Corps?

Gerry ties the strap to the pull.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
Put leather thongs on your zippers  
so you can grab 'em with mittens.

Jake smiles back, warmed by the gesture.

GERRY (CONT'D)  
Watch it up there, huh? It's about  
to get mean.

Jake looks to Ernst. Behind him, a vast, empty snow-covered field sparkles in the moonlight. It's almost beautiful.

For a moment, all of Jake's past is wiped away. No regret. No fear. Just the solace of brotherhood.

GERRY (O.S.)  
*Arrivederci ragazzi!*

Ernst eyes Jake as if seeing him for the first time.

ERNST  
There we go. That's more like it.

**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. The wind is now HOWLING.

And the mountain ahead of them is alarmingly dark. Both men's teeth chatter. They're running on empty. Freezing.

JAKE

Stay warm. Stay awake. Talk.

Beat.

ERNST

What was he like? Max?

Jake slows briefly, searches for the right word.

JAKE

Skilled.

Jake continues tromping forward. Always forward.

JAKE (CONT'D)

For a city boy.

Still not a sound from up the mountain. Just the WIND.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Ice bridge over a crevasse gave  
way. I thought I could save him.  
Pull him back--

From high up Belvedere, a quick barrage of MACHINE GUN FIRE.

Both men freeze. Through the falling snow, everything is vague. Just light and shadows.

ERNST

It wasn't your fault.

Three concussive BLASTS rock the air above them:

BANG. BANG. BANG.

JAKE

Cover. Hurry.

They take off on the run through the heavy snow toward a sparse stand of barely visible trees to their right.

**BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!**

With each LOUD EXPLOSION, airborne shells ignite.

Ernst slows again, squints skyward.

ERNST  
Flares?

Jake nods.

Blinding bundles of BRIGHT WHITE LIGHT dangle and sway  
suspended above them from barely visible parachutes.

JAKE  
They see us, we're fucked.

Ernst picks up the pace behind Jake.

The flares make every shape shift and dance. Trees appear to  
bend and sway. Shadows pivot. Rocks disappear and reappear.

Nearing the grove, Jake slows.

Ernst falls in behind him, bends forward, disoriented and  
shivering, gulping down air.

Jake trudges on.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Keep moving.

Ernst nods, follows, bleary-eyed.

ERNST  
Listen...

Slowly, the flares above them begin to fizzle and go dark as  
the snow continues to fall amid the SWIRLING wind.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
...if something happens to me--

JAKE  
Quiet.

ERNST  
There's a letter. In my jacket.  
Breast pocket. For my sister. In  
London. She's the only one who--

A familiar sound from above cuts him off:

KA-THUMP. KA-THUMP.

Mortars being dropped into tubes.

JAKE  
Back into the clearing. The snow.

ERNST  
What? No.

BOOM! BOOM!

One shell hits the ground just to Jake's right. The second lands left of Ernst. More launch loudly from up-slope:

KA-THUMP. KA-THUMP.

JAKE  
Run.

Jake sprints back into clearing, into the waist-deep snow.

ERNST  
That doesn't make any--

A third mortar lands way right next to Ernst.

BOOM!

Ernst still hesitates.

JAKE  
The snow. It'll slow 'em down!

A fourth mortar lands right behind Ernst and finally makes break for it, chases Jake back out into the open.

**EXT. BELVEDERE, OPEN FIELD - CONTINUOUS**

The two of them bound frantically through the heavy snow as mortar shells hit the snow behind them, sink, then explode.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

Jake skids to a stop at the sight of a what appears to be a tall wall of jagged barbed threaded across the field.

BOOM!

Another shell lands right between Jake and Ernst, blows them both off-course.

Ernst gets his footing first, ears ringing, veers right.

Jake stumbles left, falls.

BOOM!

Another shell lands right in Jake's footprints.

ERNST

Get up. Get up. RUN!

Jake 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.

Stunned and winded, Ernst spins back around to see Jake staring, bewildered, at a huge gap in the wall of wire.

It's as though the mortars have cleared the way.

Jake grins, turns, bounds through the gap. Ernst watches, confused for a second. And then:

ERNST (CONT'D)

Stop! Stop!

Just beyond the wire, Jake skids to a stop in the snow.

ERNST (CONT'D)

Minefield.

Jake looks around wildly. The wind kicks back up.

ERNST (CONT'D)

Do not... move.

Ernst turns to his right to see, through the trees, another small clearing bisected by the same wall of razor wire.

But this wire has apparently been cut. And there are three SIGNAL CORPS SOLDIERS standing frozen in the snowy field beyond it, just like Jake.

Between them, a matte green spool of comms wire sits abandoned on the crusty snow.

And a familiar silhouette stands outside the concertina in almost the position as Ernst.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Well now, ain't that poetic.

Ernst does a quick, desperate double-take.

Jake, frozen amid the gale, just stares. It's the man whose men he killed at Kiska.



The man who had him demoted.

The man whose doubts about this entire mission could not have been more clear from the drop.

Ernst looks back to Jake.

ERNST  
Careful. Retrace your steps.

Jake looks down and back. The wind is swiftly erasing his trail, blotting out his footprints. Sanding them away.

JAKE  
But--

ERNST  
Backward. Slowly.

Ernst looks to Harris, then to his men. They're petrified.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
(still to Jake)  
One step at a time. Into each boot print. Nice and easy.

From the slopes above, another minor torrent of GUNFIRE.

*Has the mission been compromised?*

JAKE  
What if--

ERNST  
Quiet. Trust me. Please.

Jake looks away, then back again at his disappearing trail through the snow. He takes a deep breath and steps backward.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
That's it. One step at a time.

Ernst turns back to the men frozen in the field before Harris. One of them, a YOUNG MEDIC (20s) watches Jake anxiously. We can almost hear his teeth chattering.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
(toward Ernst)  
Just let him hang, Kraut.

Jake looks to Harris, brims with rage.

JAKE  
He's Austrian, you piece of shit.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
Same goddamn thing.

Jake continues his slow backward march.

Where his heavy bootprints once were, now there are only faint, hazy divots in the shifting, snowy surface.

JAKE  
No it ain't.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
Sonofabitch killed my fuckin' men.

Jake takes another cautious step. Heart pounding.

JAKE  
Your men fired on my position.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
You weren't supposed to fuckin' be there either, *Corporal*.

ERNST  
Can we please just--

Up-slope, flashes of light fill the sky. A helter-skelter firefight slowly unfurling across the mountain.

Ernst looks to Jake. Each step is torture.

Jake slows, can't see anything but white.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
Almost there.

Jake looks back to Harris' men. The Medic especially studies him closely. Desperately.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
Just a little bit--

SNAP!

Something below the surface CRACKS under Jake's boot. He swivels his gaze back to Ernst, then to the ground.

His right boot is barely outside his former footprint.

JAKE  
(barely audible)  
Shit. Shit. Shit.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
Fuck him. Let's move!

ERNST  
(to Jake)  
Look at me. Look at me.

Jake lifts his gaze. His face is full of fear.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
(calmly)  
No accidents. You can do this.

Jake winces, slowly lifts his foot.

NOTHING HAPPENS. He's in the clear.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
Whaddya want a fuckin' medal?

From the higher slopes, German 88s sound off again. It's a bone-rattling DIN.

Jake, his heart racing, bounds the rest of the way to safety as Harris turns back to his men.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
(to his Medic)  
Alright. Move it, kid.

Ernst grabs Jake by the shoulders as his knees buckle.

ERNST  
Should have put money on you.

Jake's chest spasms. A ripple of laughter nearing tears.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
(down to Jake)  
Up here, now. And that's an order.

JAKE  
(to Ernst)  
Thank you.

ERNST  
Don't mention it.

Together, they turn and bound through the snow and wind toward Harris and his men.

Ahead of Harris, the Medic starts hopping from vague footprint to footprint toward the Signal Corps Soldiers.

**EXT. FOREST, CLEARING - CONTINUOUS**

Harris catches sight of the axes strapped to Jake's pack.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)  
Ice axes? This ain't the goddamn--

Up ahead: CLICK!

The Medic freezes, looks back.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)  
*Andiamo, Giordano.*

The Medic lifts his foot, grins. *If it worked for...*

BANG!

He's cut literally in half. The nearest Soldier buckles, vomits, covered in the Medic's blood.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)  
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)  
Nickerson. Don't you move a muscle.  
And that's an--

Ignoring him, the 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.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)  
(to Jake)  
All you stubborn goddamn climbers.  
Never fuckin' listen!

He scans the horizon. Again, the HOWLING wind is blotting out every boot print. Erasing the trail. And the blood.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)  
Your turn, boys.

Jake, his mind reeling, begins to protest:

JAKE  
Sir. No, sir. We have... orders.  
From Colonel Hampton.

Jake lifts his wrist. They're way behind schedule.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
We need to get out ahead of B  
Company. Take out a...

Harris looks at him sternly. *Are you done running your  
fucking trap?*

Jake presses on:

JAKE (CONT'D)  
...a Screaming Mimi battery mid-  
mountain, next to an abandoned--

Harris pulls his sidearm, gestures with it grandly for Jake  
and Ernst to enter the minefield first.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
Well, then. Be my fuckin' guest.

Jake's eyes dart from Harris to the minefield to Ernst.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)  
Me and the Hun'll be on your six.  
(beat)  
And that's an order, Corporal.

Jake steadies his rifle, looks to Ernst. Without saying  
another word, he sets slowly off.

#### **EXT. MINEFIELD - CONTINUOUS**

Jake threads his way through the cut barbed wire, into the  
snow-covered minefield, pauses, looks up.

Higher up in the distance, the THUNDER of battle crackles.

It's on.

Jake looks down to the rifle in his hands. To his surprise,  
his fingers don't quiver in the slightest.

Fearless, Ernst follows him in.

And, faint boot print by faint bloody boot print, the two  
men carefully make their way through the minefield.

Captain Harris mirrors their movements exactly from behind, stepping gingerly into each darkened divot in the snow.

As he walks, Jake does his best to steady his breath, tamp down his nerves, blot out his fear.

Amid the HOWLING gale, all three of them arrive at a convergence near the abandoned spool of wire.

Anxious seconds tick by.

One set of footprints veers left toward the mangled body of the Medic. The other seems to continue on to the right.

Jake and Ernst head right. Harris follows silently.

With the distant FIREFIGHT still hotting up up-slope, Jake finally reaches the site of the second mine.

It's just a barely-discernible, hollowed-out crater of snow. No sign of a body anywhere. Just, gone.

About four feet to the left of the shallow divot, we can make out the faint shadows of the first set of footprints.

Beyond the divot, nothing. Blankness. White.

Jake draws a deep breath, jumps, lands in the boot print with his eyes shut tight. Nothing. He's safe.

He looks back to Ernst. Ernst nods. *Almost there.*

Jake turns back around, silently follows the footprints until they swarm off in a random set of looping arcs.

JAKE  
(under his breath)  
Alright, Max.

Slowly, meticulously, Jake jumps from one hazy impression to the next, wincing with every impact.

PUFF. PUFF. PUFF. PUFF. PUFF.

He's only feet away from from the final crater.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
I'm counting on you.

Between it and the tree still holding the Young Soldier's lifeless body, there's a short bit of open ground.

Jake narrows his eyes, bounds over the barren snow and into the relative sanctuary of the trees.

Safe, he wheels back around toward Ernst, smiles.

Entirely present and stunned to be alive.

Harris, actually impressed, steps up behind Ernst.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Now, what were y'all saying about a  
Screamin' Mimi?

**EXT. BELVEDERE, HIGHER SLOPES - LATER**

Jake, Ernst, and Captain Harris run uphill through the carnage of a burgeoning, seemingly pitched battle.

Mortars fall like autumn hail. Rifle fire streaks downhill from unseen positions all over the mountainside.

Gruesomely WOUNDED MEN litter the pockmarked, frozen 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 anything that moves until, out of nowhere, a PIERCING HOWL and four HIGH-PITCHED SHRIEKS slice through the air above them all.

Harris grabs Ernst, yanks him to the ground.

Jake slows, in a daze.

Five ENORMOUS CONCUSSIONS shred the surrounding men and vegetation to bits. Night turns briefly to nightmarish day.

Ernst covers his helmeted head, buries his face in the dirt to blot out the light. Harris shields his eyes.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

There you go, boys. 21 cm  
*Nebelwerfer* 42.

Another GHASTLY SALVO rips from above. Five rockets, one right after the other. Ernst jams his fists into his ears.

Jake just stares. It's a ghastly sight.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)

(over the din)

Screamin' fuckin' Mimi!

Seconds later: five MASSIVE EXPLOSIONS in the distance.

Ernst sits up, his face covered in dirt.

Captain Harris points skyward into the darkness.

We can barely make out the form of an abandoned stone mill looming above a glistening frozen waterfall.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)  
Break a leg.

Harris leaps away. Jake LUNGES out, grabs him.

JAKE  
No, no. We need men. We need... We need help. I need help.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
Me help you? No thanks.

Captain Harris violently 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 rains down from uphill.

Harris shoves Jake to the ground. To the snow.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
You mean the ones you didn't fuckin' murder?

Ernst rolls over, trains his carbine uphill as five more rockets launch from high above.

WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH.

Over the subsequent FEROCIOUS WAIL, Ernst looks to Jake.

Their faces are lit by the fierce white light coursing out of the rockets as the arc swiftly down-slope.

ERNST  
(loud, to Jake)  
Tell me he can climb.

#### **EXT. FROZEN WATERFALL, BASE - CONTINUOUS**

With the battle blazing across the mountain below and above them, Jake hastily unfurls yard after yard of climbing rope at the foot the wall of ice.

Multiple pairs of crampons sit in a heap next to all eight ice axes.



JAKE  
 (to Harris)  
 Find your size. Strap up.

Jake looks up the gleaming white wall as rivulets of water cascade down it and into a frozen, boulder-strewn creek.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 Looks like toe-in all the way up.  
 Keep your heels down, don't kick in  
 too hard. It'll shatter--

From the top of the waterfall: five quick FLASHES of light, then the now familiar SCREAM of 21 cm rockets raining down.

Jake throws on his pack, takes a quick look at his watch.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 What's B Company's route?

Harris stares blankly up at the wall of ice clutching a single brick of Composition B (aka plastique explosives).

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 Where's Company B of the 87th?

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
 Search me.

Harris flips the brick over in his hand.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)  
 Probably somewhere near the base of  
 the saddle. Midway. Right were that  
 thing's pointed.

Jake dumps a bunch of ice anchors out of his pack.

JAKE  
 If we don't take out that battery,  
 nobody's gonna make it off this  
 mountain. Not tonight, not ever.

Captain Harris tosses the brick to Ernst, bends to grab a pair of crampons.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
 (re: the anchors)  
 We're gonna need those anchors.

Jake cinches his own crampons tight.

JAKE  
 Sir, no sir.

Ernst, already in crampons, slips the brick of Comp B into his pack, straps a length of webbing around his waist.

JAKE (CONT'D)

No time.

Jake grabs two axes, one short, one long, turns.

JAKE (CONT'D)

We're gonna have to climb this thing old-style. No anchors. No belay. Daisy-chained.

Above, another five rockets FLASH.

Another five rockets WAIL as they zip overhead toward the lower slopes before exploding. Scarlet fireballs.

JAKE (CONT'D)

One of us falls, it's on the other two to keep contact.

Ernst's face tightens.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Since when'd you start givin' the fuckin' orders, Thompson?

JAKE

Since you *ordered* us into a fucking minefield, sir.

Ernst bends to scoop up his own pair of axes.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

You're the last person on Earth I'd wanna climb with. Ever.

JAKE

I know, sir.

Jake pulls his alpine white coat on over his pack, tucks it into his belt strung with grenades.

Ernst does the same.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(still to Harris)

But we gotta take down that battery to give the rest of your unit cover or else. You hear?

Ernst turns, surveys the glistening wall, points.

ERNST  
 (to Jake)  
 What do you say? There. Then there?

Jake traces the route with his eyes.

JAKE  
 Yeah. Low dagger, high to that  
 seam. Then criss-cross cross-body  
 there to avoid that traction bit.

Ernst nods.

Harris shakes his head.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
 Turn climbers into soldiers instead  
 of the other way around?  
 (beat)  
 Terrible idea.

Jake pulls off his mittens, drops them.

JAKE  
 Gotta get up there before they  
 shoot and scoot.

We can hear GERMAN VOICES high above barking commands and  
 coordinates. Maybe three or four men.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 Look for deep seams. Depressions.  
 Watch the bulges. And test  
 everything. With all this run-off,  
 there's bound to be a ton of shear.

He pulls out two strands of webbing from his pocket.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 I'll lead. Captain next. Then you.

Jake tosses Harris a strip.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 (to Harris)  
 Hoods up. If Jerry gets a look at--

Jake reaches out to help Harris with his gear. Harris bats  
 his hand away.

The two men lock eyes.

CAPTAIN HARRIS  
 Max was a good man.

This time, Jake does not break eye-contact. No guilt.

JAKE

Yes he was, sir. Yes he was.

**EXT. FROZEN WATERFALL, LOWER REACHES - CONTINUOUS**

To the sound of sporadic GUNFIRE and the intermittent HOWL of rockets, the three men start up the frozen face.

Jake, in the lead, kicks one toe in, then the other. Then, he swings his long ax high, plants the pick in a dark seam, tests it. It holds.

Then he swings his short ax in slightly lower, tests it, pulls himself up, kicks one foot out, smashes it back in higher, pulls himself further, kicks out his left foot.

A length of rope connects him to Harris. And the same rope, tied firmly to each man's waist, arcs down toward Ernst, who's just beginning the climb.

Below: their abandoned anchors. Above: GERMAN VOICES.

Jake moves slowly at first. He cautiously tests every bit of ice, tosses away anything that cleaves free.

Beyond Harris, Ernst plants his ax, pulls himself upward.

His grenades JANGLE.

Jake turns back to the icy wall, jams his long ax higher.

At the same moment, 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

Heads up.

Harris ducks. The cylindrical tube glances off his hooded helmet with a DING, hurtles down toward Ernst.

Ernst, unaware, heaves his torso higher. The casing catches him square in the sternum.

The shock of the impact registers briefly on Ernst's face before his axes slip free of the ice and he falls.

The line snaps taut! Ernst dangles, tethered to Harris.

Harris buckles, holds onto his ax handles, kicks one foot in, wedges himself against the ice.

Then he lets go of one ax with his right hand.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
What are you doing?

Ignoring Jake, Harris snakes his wrist free of the ax strap, reaches behind himself, unsheathes his bayonet.

Suddenly, five more rockets BLARE from above. The light of their jets warp every shadow, every crag.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
(barely audible)  
No!

Harris reaches down to cut the rope between him and Ernst.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Don't you *fucking* do it.

Below Harris, Ernst spins. Both his axes dangle from his wrists as he desperately kicks at the ice with one foot.

Harris drags his knife across the line. The line severs swiftly, goes slack.

Harris looks up to Jake just as Ernst falls.

Thinking fast, Ernst grabs both ax handles, stabs his blades at the wall until one finally catches.

His body SMACKS the ice hard.

Ernst flips his shorter ax around, SLAMS the pick in at chest height, struggles to stab both crampons in tight.

He's safe for now but untethered.

From above: more VOICES.

More casings rain down, barely missing Jake and then PINGING across the stretch of open ice between Ernst and Harris.

Ernst, swearing under his breath, starts back up the ice wall, choosing his line very carefully.

Harris calmly sheathes his blade, grabs his anchored ax, climbs slowly toward Jake.

It's all Jake can do to keep from cutting him loose.

**EXT. FROZEN WATERFALL, MIDPOINT - CONTINUOUS**

About half way to the top, Jake and Ernst are nearly side-by-side. Below them, Harris continues steadily upward.

Above them we hear someone BARKING commands in German.

From somewhere down below, a sudden barrage of MACHINE GUN FIRE blasts the abandoned stone mill. Heavy rounds send shards of ice and plaster raining down.

All three men hug the ice. Rubble pummels their helmets. Above, the Germans SHOUT, take cover. Sandbags ooze sand.

Another VOICE from above cries out:

VOICE (O.S.)  
*Kontakt!*

Five more rockets STREAK from the beyond the mill, down toward the source of the machine gun fire. Five massive fireballs fill the forest floor with blinding light.

The entire waterfall seems to shudder with the sound.

Jake holds onto his ax handles for dear life, looks down.

At the base of the waterfall: 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 next to the creek.

Jake HISSES toward Ernst to stop. Watching them, Harris slows. Jake points down toward the German Captain.

Harris' eyes follow.

Frozen stiff, all three of them watch as the Captain nudges their anchors with his rifle muzzle, lifts his gaze.

Jake lets go of his left ax, 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 Ernst.

KA-BOOM!

A single grenade vaporizes the German.

Ernst flicks the pulled pin from his finger and re-grips his ax handle. One slot on his belt is empty.

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 waterfall, POUNDS it with his fist.

ERNST

Hey, hey.

Jake looks up, holsters his weapon, re-grips his ax.

#### **EXT. SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS**

The two men slowly reach the frozen crest.

Frayed sections of rope dangle behind them both. Jake quickly unties his with one hand, drops it into the dark.

Ernst does the same.

The VOICES above 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 of the waterfall.

*Are they too late?*

Ernst reaches a hand to his belt, grabs another grenade, lifts it to his mouth, bites down on the clip.

Jake reaches for a grenade of his own.

He pantomimes lobbing them over and then charging. Ernst nods, knocks the clip loose, spits it out.

It JANGLES down the ice. 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 lob them up and over.

BANG! BANG!

And over the top they go.

**EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - CONTINUOUS**

Jake drops his axes, swings his rifle around to the front.

Ernst mirrors his every action.

Next to the abandoned stone mill sits a smoldering, five-barreled rocket launcher. Empty casings litter the scorched ground behind it.

Jake turns, 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 electric firing mechanism.

ERNST

*Niemand bewegt sich!*

Everybody freezes. 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

(passable German)

*Tu das nicht.*

Ernst cocks his head, surprised. The Commander hesitates.

The young man holding the firing mechanism, a KANNONIER, grips the the ignition dial.

A thick cable runs from the device, through Jake's feet, and into the back of the massive rocket launcher.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Just step back. Put it down.

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--



Behind Jake, Ernst YANKS a grenade from his belt, flicks away clip. It hits the scorched rock with a muted: PING.

Everything slows down.

Jake swivels his gaze toward Ernst, standing behind the fully-loaded launcher.

If they fire a single rocket, he'll be burnt to a crisp.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Wait.

In the distance: CLICK!

The Commander flicks his holster open.

Everything speeds back up.

The Commander pulls his gun, fires:

BANG!

The bullet grazes Jake's leg. He stumbles, fires once:

BANG!

The Kannonier screams, falls backward.

Ernst takes aim, fires twice:

POP! POP!

The Radioman falls.

The Commander returns fire:

BANG!

The bullet catches Ernst's shoulder, knocks him sideways. He stumbles backward, toward the edge of the frozen waterfall.

Jake aims, fires:

BANG!

The Commander crumples.

The Private lifts both arms.

Jake's eyes lock on his. He doesn't want to kill another boy, another kid.

Ernst pulls the pin, throws his grenade.

BOOM!

The young Private disappears in a blinding BLAST.

Jake wheels around, looks to Ernst again.

ZIP!

Jake's eyes WHIP to the Kannonier, bloodied, as he CRANKS the dial on the electric firing mechanism.

Jake spins on his heels, lunges back toward Ernst.

JAKE

Watch out!

Jake LEAPS through the air, GRABS Ernst, TOSSES him clear.

Ernst, dazed, skids sideways as Jake slips backward across the ice and tumbles, windmilling, over the edge.

ZIP!

The Kannonier sends the signal again.

Ernst slams into the stone wall of the mill.

Nothing happens.

Ernst turns, looks to the Kannonier.

The Kannonier twists the dial yet again: ZIP! ZIP!

Still nothing.

It's only now that we notice that the cable winding across the clifftop is suddenly taut.

And it runs directly over the edge of the frozen waterfall.

ERNST

Jake.

Ernst vault forward, falls to the ice, reaches desperately downward over the frosty edge.

Down below, Jake dangles above the 500 foot drop, tethered to the ignition cable tangled around his right crampon.

His grenades CLINK together as he sways.

JAKE

Whoops.

Ernst strains to pull Jake back up the ice to safety.  
 Behind them, the Kannonier charges away into the darkness.  
 Back up top, GASPING, Ernst just let him run.

ERNST  
 (winded)  
 You. Saved. Me.

Jake, stunned to be alive, just lies there on the ice.

JAKE  
 No accidents. Only choices.

Ernst's eyes slowly drift to the rocket launcher.

ERNST  
 You thinking what I'm thinking?

**EXT. GERMAN BUNKER - JAKE'S POV**

Through the Germans' abandoned binoculars, we see what appears to be a sizable German bunker further down-slope.

The place is teeming with WEHRMACHT SOLDIERS. At least four MACHINE GUN CREWS are busy mowing down advancing AMERICANS.

JAKE (V.O.)  
 Direction zero, five, two, zero.  
 Distance 1,200 meters. Altitude  
 520. Danger close.

**EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - CONTINUOUS**

Jake lowers the binoculars.

Ernst hands him the firing mechanism.

Their backpacks lie nearly empty on a snowbank beyond scorched rock behind the launcher - which is now covered in flattened pucks of Composition B.

None are connected to blast wire yet.

JAKE  
 Think that's within range?

ERNST  
 No idea.

JAKE  
 One full rack. Then we blow it sky-high, yeah?

ERNST  
What about the heat?

JAKE  
Dunno. Should be safe.

Jake looks to Ernst, then to the device in his hands.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Sooner we end them, the sooner we  
find your family.

Ernst reaches out, takes the binoculars, looks downhill.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Save B Company's asses. Take this  
whole fucking mountain, yeah?

Ernst lowers the binoculars, nods slowly.

ERNST  
Fire when ready.

Both men step back.

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 Ernst cover their ears, 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.

Both men just stare, more in shock than awe.

Petrified by their own destructive power.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Alright. Let's do this.

Jake drops the detonator, turns, pulls a bundle of blasting  
caps tethered to ignition wires from one pocket.

And, as the battle below rages on, Jake and Ernst quickly and surgically stab blasting caps into each puck in silence.

It's like watching a duo playing a complicated sonata four-hands on a grand piano. Synchronized. All efficiency.

Jake pauses, looks to the trees.

And, together, both men run, hunched, back into the forest as the snow begins to fall once again.

Jake falls to his knees, scoops up a battered 10-cap blasting machine, threads black and white wires into the positive and negative terminals, twists both tight.

Ernst grabs a second device, does the same.

ERNST

You're a good man.

Jake lifts the key-like handle dangling from the side of his blasting machine, inserts it slowly, looks to Ernst.

JAKE

Don't.

Ernst grips his blasting machine, inserts his handle.

Jake hesitates. His fingers quake again. Ever so slightly.

Ernst looks to him, leans closer.

ERNST

I'm honored to be your second.

Jake nods slowly. His hand steadies.

He draws a breath to speak. But before he can: THUMP.

A GERMAN GRENADE hits the tree trunk above then, jangles down the branches, tumbles into the drift right beside Jake.

It disappears in the heavy snow as quickly as it appeared.

Jake, frantic, tosses Ernst his blasting machine, turns, desperately plunges his arm into the drift before --

**BANG.**

Suddenly everything goes QUIET.

The screen fills with NOTHING BUT WHITE.

Then, eventually: WIND.

FADE TO:

**EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY - JAKE'S POV**

Slowly, 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 coming back to life.

**EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY**

Jake lies on the ground, gazes toward the sky. Mangled.

The blast zone is now a snow-dusted crater. The rocket launcher sits at an odd angle, damaged beyond repair.

Ernst is nowhere to be seen.

In the distance, the ripple of approaching shadows. Men on the move. Purposeful. On guard.

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. Got another live one here.

**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 easy now.

Jake GROANS, lets his bloody torso go slack.

JAKE  
There's a letter. In his jacket.  
Breast pocket. To his sister. In  
London. I need to--

LIEUTENANT HAYS  
It's okay, Corporal. He's just  
fine. Barely a scratch, if you can  
believe it. Burnt pretty bad from  
all that Comp B. But he'll be right  
as rain. Eventually.

Lieutenant Hays gently slips Jake's dog tags back inside the  
collar of his singed white coat.

He doesn't clip them, doesn't take them. Leaves them be.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)  
These boys'll get you down. All  
fixed up like new.

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)  
Yessir. 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 going home, my friend.  
You're going home.

And with that, he steps away.

All we see is sky.

FADE TO WHITE.

OVER WHITE:

CAPTURING BELVEDERE COST THE 10TH  
MOUNTAIN DIVISION 922 CASUALTIES

730 MEN WERE WOUNDED IN ACTION

192 MEN NEVER CAME HOME

OVER 400 GERMAN SOLDIERS  
WERE TAKEN PRISONER

WAR OFFICE PLANS PROJECTED THE  
OFFENSIVE WOULD TAKE 23 DAYS

THE 10TH TOOK BELVEDERE  
IN JUST FIVE DAYS

AND BERLIN FELL  
ONLY THREE MONTHS LATER

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END