

SURVIVE TO FIGHT



THE ★ 10TH

**SCREENPLAY
BY RUDI O'MEARA**

**INSPIRED
BY TRUE EVENTS**

THE 10TH

Written by

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INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

A bombed-out stone structure open to the sky.

Snow falls to the dirt floor as a lone man, CORPORAL NICK COOPER (late 30s, grizzled, guarded) hangs from a twisted wooden beam with both calloused hands.

A single spartan bedroll sits tucked under a green tarp anchored to the beam via taut sisal ropes.

SUPER: APENNINES MOUNTAINS, ITALY, SPRING 1945

Wearing nothing but a form-fitting white t-shirt, olive fatigues, and muck-covered boots, Cooper dangles as he stares upward into the gray.

His body is coiled like spring. Conditioned. Ready for action, regardless the cost.

And his eyes are empty. Haunted by grief and regret. The eyes of a weary, reluctant warrior.

COOPER

You know it's fucking useless.

A GRAVELY VOICE from off weighs in:

MORELLI (O.S.)

(heavy Brooklyn accent)

Aw, c'mon Coop. Don't be like that.

Cooper pulls his body closer to the beam, chins it, pauses.

Slouched opposite him atop a green crate marked EXPLOSIVES sits a man with an equally rugged, war-weary countenance.

This is SERGEANT MAX MORELLI (30s, unflappable, no-nonsense). He's a plainspoken, street-smart city kid to Cooper's monkish mountain man.

And, like Cooper, he's seen too much. Done too much.

MORELLI

We don't take that piece of shit hunk of rock, we're all screwed.

As Cooper slowly lowers himself back down, his toned biceps barely signal the effort.

Morelli smirks, pulls a silver cigarette case from his shirt pocket, pops it open, pulls out two cigarettes.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
No Highway 64. No Po Valley.

COOPER
Who cares?

Cooper lifts his left hand from the beam, drapes it behind himself, pulls his body back up again with one arm.

MORELLI
No Alps. No Berlin.

COOPER
Fucking suicide mission.

Morelli bites down on both smokes, finds his lighter, FLICKS it open, lights it with a WHOOSH.

MORELLI
(inhaling)
Right up your alley then.

Cooper, his arm barley quivering, lowers himself.

COOPER
What's his name again?

MORELLI
Who?

COOPER
The new guy.

Cooper lifts his thumb and pinkie from the beam, pulls his body back up with just three fingers.

MORELLI
Hays.

Morelli looks to Cooper's free hand, shakes his head, sets the spare cigarette down onto the case of explosives.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
General. George P. Hays.

With his chin near the beam, Cooper shifts his grip slightly, lowers himself again with just two fingers.

Falling snow mingles with gauzy smoke all around him.

COOPER
(zero exertion)
Just what this unit needs. More general haze.

Morelli doffs ash to the dirt floor.

Cooper closes his eyes, heaves his chiseled frame higher.

It's as if he's not even there. Elsewhere by choice.

MORELLI

You don't need to do this.

Perhaps hoping the strain will squelch his pain, Cooper just nods, lowers his body, dangles in the swirling snow.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Seriously. Give it up already.

But Cooper won't. Can't.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Fine. Suit yourself.

As he hangs by two fingers, Cooper's body finally begins to quake ever so slightly.

But he drinks it in. Savors it. Addicted.

SFX: THWIP! THWIP! THWIP!

The sound of tracer fire shredding the air.

An aural figment. A hint of Cooper's past. A searing memory.

Cooper finally loses his grip on the beam, falls to the snow-covered floor with a heavy THUD.

His empty eyes jolt open, stare blankly into the snow.

A million miles away.

Morelli SIGHS, grabs the spare lit cigarette, bends forward, hands it to Cooper.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

How many times I gotta tell you?

Cooper takes the cigarette, lifts it to his lips, closes his eyes again, takes a heavy draw.

Equal parts relentless self-improvement and rigorous, intentional, constant self-destruction.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Wasn't our fault. They fired on our position. Shouldn't have even been there in the first place.

Cooper opens his eyes, lifts the cigarette toward the swirling snowflakes, regards it curiously.

Like it's a cure-all. A balm to blot out the past.

COOPER
Wasn't your fault.

MORELLI
Fine. Keep kicking your own ass ad
infinitem. See if I care.

Cooper lowers the cigarette, takes another heavy draw.

In the corner behind him stand two pairs of long white skis leaning with their bamboo poles against the stone walls.

Next to them: two bulging white backpacks, two pairs of ice axes, carabiners, a pile of pitons, two carbine rifles.

And a mound of winter whites showing their wear. Dotted with blood stains, smoke smudges, and sloppily mended tears.

Well-used alpine infantry camouflage.

COOPER
(blowing smoke)
Who's it this time?

Morelli stands, stomps out what's left of his cigarette.

MORELLI
Perkins. Wilson. Evans. Bass. We
meet them mid-mountain. Pick up the
kid on the way. Stay undetected.
Recon the position, get a good
count. Come on back.

COOPER
Which kid?

Morelli steps over Cooper's body, heads for a crooked wooden door painted a faded blue, throws it open.

More SOLDIERS, most clad in white, crisscross in all directions. A heavy troop presence preparing for action.

All are glaringly younger than Cooper and Morelli.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
The turncoat Kraut. Klein.

COOPER

That's just what's wrong with this unit. Too many moneybags college boys and too many *fucking* Germans.

Morelli turns back around, crosses his arms.

MORELLI

Former Olympian. Downhill.

COOPER

Hun's a Hun.

Cooper finally flicks away his cigarette, rolls over, pushes himself gracefully back to his feet.

MORELLI

Say, why don't you bunk in the church with the rest of us?

(beat)

Where it's not *fucking* freezing.

Cooper heads to the corner to scoop up his whites.

As he does, we notice that the whole place is packed to the gills with munitions and gear. A tinderbox.

COOPER

Prefer the outdoors. *With* walls.

(beat)

To keep people out.

Cooper bends, picks up a sweater, pulls it on, kicks a jacket into his hands, shoves his arms in.

Morelli steps forward, grabs a jacket.

MORELLI

You know...

While Morelli pushes his head into his own white jacket, Cooper tugs on a pair of white pants.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

...one shell from up top and this shithole blows sky-high.

Cooper lifts a heavy pack, throws it on. It must weigh a good ninety pounds. Cooper barely notices.

COOPER

Fine by me.

Cooper snags a pair of skis and poles, turns to go.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Only sleep through the night when I
know I've slimmed the odds of
waking back up.

Morelli rolls his eyes, heaves on his own pack.

MORELLI

Granite junkie mountain man
horseshit. And you know it.

Cooper cracks a weary grin, pulls a pair of white mittens
from the front pocket on his jacket.

Morelli grabs his skis, spins.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

C'mon. Chop, chop.

EXT. BOMBED-OUT VILLAGE - DUSK

Cooper trails Morelli across the frozen ground as more
white-clad INFANTRYMEN (20s) move in the opposite direction.

Both men have their cloth-covered carbines and skis slung
over their shoulders.

MORELLI

Scuttlebutt is Klein trained with
the fearsome *fucking* Edelweiss
before his daddy paid a king's
ransom to bust his ass out of the
Wehrmacht, ship him over Idaho to
teach rich old ladies how to ski.

Cooper tucks his poles under one arm, cinches his pack tight
with his free hand.

COOPER

Like I care.

MORELLI

Kid can climb, too.

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

COOPER

Drafted?

MORELLI

Enlisted. Motivated.

COOPER
Train at Camp Hale?

MORELLI
Nope. Late to the game.

COOPER
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.

MORELLI
Well, orders are orders. Straight from Hays himself.

COOPER
Waste of time.

All signs would point to a massive assault in the making.

But in the fading, amber daylight, the scene is almost pastoral. Tranquil. Oddly idyllic.

MORELLI
Gotta find *some* way to take Belvedere. Hold the high ground.

COOPER
Operation Encore? Because it's a goddamn do-over.

A shake of the head from Cooper. *I can't believe this shit.*

COOPER (CONT'D)
A fucking bloodbath all over again. And with a Kraut in the squad?

MORELLI
Klein knows every insignia, every unit. Every protocol. Weapons.

Cooper glowers, continues on. Morelli hurries after him.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
Could be come in handy once we're up there.

COOPER
Probably a fucking spy.

MORELLI
Could show you a thing or two.
(MORE)

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 (miming ski turns)
 Work on your form.

Disappearing into the shadows, Cooper bats him off.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 You ski like a scarecrow.

EXT. STONE WALL - DUSK

Cooper and Morelli rush across a snowy field toward a 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 MOSES KLEIN (20s, weathered high cheekbones, an air of privilege, wealth). Said turncoat.

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

Cooper barely acknowledges this, presses through the gate with Morelli still hot on his heels.

COOPER
 Shut it. Your mouth, not the gate.

MORELLI
 Sorry. Don't mind him.

Klein stands, looks to Morelli.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 Once a Sargaent, always a Sargaent.

Klein squints toward Cooper's jacket. No insignia.

KLEIN
 But he's a--

MORELLI
 Corporal. Yeah. Demoted out of pure revenge. Chaps his hide to no end.

Klein hefts his skis to his shoulder, hurries off across the snow after them.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 We'll lead to the cornice. Hook up with the rest of the squad. Half takes the east flank.
 (MORE)

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 Half takes west. Don't engage. At
 all. No matter what.

KLEIN
Ja.
 (catching himself)
 Yessir.

MORELLI
 And watch the *deutsche* around that
 one. He's not a fan.

Klein nods, scolds himself silently.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 For obvious reasons.

Up ahead, Cooper spins left, leaps up onto a snow-dusted
 boulder, starts hopping from rock to rock.

Morelli veers into his tracks, follows him up.

KLEIN
 What are our orders once we're up?

MORELLI
 Infiltrate. Observe the enemy.
 Retreat. Figure out a way to take
 this mountain back. Or else.

Cooper and Klein bound from boulder to boulder uphill with
 the surefooted grace of men born at altitude.

Morelli looks less confident. Shakier but working at it.

KLEIN
 Note every position. Each unit.
 Every detail. I understand.

Cooper slows, turns back around.

COOPER
 Kid, don't tell us our business.

Klein slows, lifts his left hand defensively.

KLEIN
 I'm sorry, I--

Cooper leans toward him, surprisingly full of menace.

COOPER

Let's get one thing straight right
the fuck now.

Cooper grabs him by the neck of his jacket, pulls him close.

MORELLI

Coop...

Klein struggles to keep his footing.

COOPER

I didn't come here to die for your
fucking country, kid.

Cooper lets go of his jacket, shoves Klein backward.

But Klein doesn't slip, doesn't falter. Masks his nerves.

COOPER (CONT'D)

I came here to kill for mine.

Cooper turns away, continues uphill.

Morelli slows, shakes his head.

MORELLI

Guess that pretty much sums it up.

Morelli continues past a momentarily spooked Klein.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

But don't sweat it, kid.

EXT. BELVEDERE, CORNICE - SUNSET

As the sun slowly sets behind snow-covered peaks, a line of seven white-clad AMERICAN SKI SOLDIERS glide along the edge of a sheer cornice in total silence.

All we hear is the muted THUMP of each pole plant and the WHOOSH of their skis as they slice through windblown crust.

Each man has a carbine rifle over their shoulder. And the hoods of their winter whites are up.

Behind them, a frozen low-lying fog shimmers and glows with the last light of the setting sun.

In the lead, Cooper slows, points left, turns right.

The four skiers behind him wordlessly bend left, slip slowly downhill as the snow cracks and gathers at their ankles.

Behind Cooper, Morelli bends right too, skates his way uphill with effort. Not a born skier.

Klein follows gracefully. A natural. A pure pro.

To the south stands a long, jagged ridge with one vertical edge dropping thousands of feet to the valley below.

It wraps around the mountain like the steep wall of a massive granite amphitheater.

Lights flicker at regular intervals from German outposts dotted all along its sheer edge.

Eyes oriented our way.

EXT. BELVEDERE, MID-MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

Cooper, Morelli, and Klein lie on their bellies in the snow looking downhill with their skis and packs beside them.

A rising silver moon paints the snow with mercurial light.

Klein holds a battered pair of binoculars to his eyes.

Cooper and Morelli stare down the barrels of their rifles at what appears to be a well-fortified German outpost about forty yards down the windblown snow from them.

Ice-blasted sandbags. Tarpaulin tents. Stacked crates full of mortar shells and ammunition.

Hints of activity. Faraway VOICES speaking in German mingle with the HOWL of the wind.

KLEIN

Three 232nd Infantry. Second-line unit. Four from 1044th Grenadiers.

(beat)

Replacements. Fresh.

Cooper lowers his rifle, reaches out, grabs the binoculars.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

Enough munitions to hold this position for as long as--

COOPER

Quiet.

COOPER BINOCULARS POV:

Inside the reinforced dugout, a handful of GERMAN SOLDIERS cluster around a fire burning in a blackened steel barrel.

Three of them are smoking, drinking coffee from steaming, dented enamel mugs.

Another pair of soldiers have their eyes glued to the sight of a Mauer 42mm machine gun on a biped mount.

The gun is pointed downhill.

And a sixth soldier stacks shiny belts of ammunition: CLINK. CLINK. CLINK.

MORELLI (O.C.)

What do you think?

Cooper lowers the binoculars, looks further downhill where we can barely make out the rest of the American squad reconnoitering the same position.

COOPER

I think they keep sending us up here as fucking bait.

Cooper hands Morelli the binoculars.

Klein narrows his eyes, tightens his grip on his rifle.

COOPER (CONT'D)

See that? Riva Ridge?

Morelli lifts the binoculars, looks.

MORELLI BINOCULARS POV:

On the nearest high point of the craggy ridge that snakes away into the fog, we can barely make out another German position ringed with sandbags.

COOPER (O.C.)

Every single spotter.

The focus wheels in and out as we pick up one machine gun nest after the other all along the sheer edge of the ridge.

Each one is oriented directly our direction.

COOPER (O.C.)

Every man and boy on that goddamn ridge can see every inch of this fucking mountain.

Morelli lowers the binoculars, looks to Cooper.

COOPER

They'll pick up every move we--

From downhill and to their left: POP. POP. POP.

Rifle fire. American.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Goddammit Perkins.

From out of the nearby dugout: a SEARING BARRAGE of machine gun fire shreds the darkness toward Perkins' position.

Cooper leaps to his feet.

MORELLI
No! Stay in position! Don't--

But it's too late.

Cooper instantly takes off downhill through the knee-deep snow toward the German dugout, clutching his carbine.

Klein looks to Morelli. Morelli grabs his rifle.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
Fuck me. Cover us.

Morelli lunges off after Cooper just as Perkins and his men fall quiet. Gunned down in an instant.

EXT. BELVEDERE, DUGOUT - NIGHT

Cooper SKIDS to a stop behind a low rock outcropping, takes aim at the dugout.

Morelli ducks in behind him, HISSES:

MORELLI
The HELL are you doing?

COOPER
My job.

Without a second's hesitation, Cooper CHARGES out from behind the rock, runs full-tilt through the snow, firing with an icy precision:

BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG.

Four German soldiers fall.

The pair of GUNNERS leap around the Mauer, try to spin it back around toward Cooper as he sprints toward them.

BANG. BANG.

From behind the rock, Morelli takes down each gunner.

Still on the run, Cooper yanks a grenade from inside his jacket, hurls it into the dugout.

HISS. BOOM.

Three more bodies go flying.

Cooper pulls his sidearm, disappears into the dugout, firing at close quarters as Morelli tumbles off after him.

BANG. BANG. BANG.

EXT. BELVEDERE, SUMMIT - NIGHT

Back up above them, Klein drops his rifle, grabs the binoculars, trains them on the dugout.

KLEIN BINOCULARS POV:

Morelli finally follows Cooper over the sandbags and into the dugout, disappears from view.

More GUNFIRE. Then: eerie, nervous silence.

Our view shifts left. Carnage.

The entire rest of their squad has been torn to ribbons.

Ink black blood and powder burns color the snow all around their contorted bodies.

KLEIN (O.C.)

Scheiß.

Klein looks right again. Still no sign of Cooper or Morelli.

Then, from far off: a silent FLASH. Then another.

Klein drops the binoculars, leaps to his feet.

KLEIN

Artillery! Eighty-eights!

From the ridge in the distance, two massive 88 mm shells SHRIEK through the darkness, hit just below the dugout.

BOOM. BOOM.

The earth shakes. Snow, dirt, and rock fly in every direction. Night turns briefly to nightmarish day.

Klein, frantic, grabs his rifle, doesn't know what to do.

In the distance, two more FLASHES.

Two more incoming shells WHINE as they rip through the air.

BOOM. BOOM.

Two more impacts, nearly right on top of the dugout.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

No, no, no.

Finally, Cooper and Morelli CHARGE out of the dugout, TRUDGE swiftly uphill through over forty yards of heavy snow.

COOPER

(on the run)

Skis! Now!

Klein spins, throws his rifle over one shoulder, grabs his skis, quickly works his boots into the leather bindings.

In the distance: two more FLASHES. Two more inbound shells.

MORELLI

(to Cooper)

The *fuck* was that all about?

Winded and running on pure adrenalin, each man gears up as more shells land closer and closer:

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

Cooper gets his skis on first, hefts up his pack, scouts the darkness for the fastest piste.

The barrage from across the valley, from the ridge, ceases.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Coop. Your emotions are fucking with you! You getting smoked won't do *any* of us a *lick* of good.

Cooper ignores this, looks uphill, seems to hear something.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Won't bring them back.

Klein looks uphill too, seems to hear it as well.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Dammit, man. All I wanna do is get back to Annie in one peice. Taste her lasagne. Drink a tall--

KLEIN
Aero-sled?

Cooper nods.

COOPER
(to Morelli)
Rope.

Finally, we hear it: the faint BUZZ of a lone propeller.

Morelli bends, grabs his coil of climbing rope, quickly hands one end to Cooper, looks uphill, can't see a thing.

COOPER (CONT'D)
(to Klein)
You're fast, yeah?

Klein nods, cinches his pack, grips his deerskin poles.

COOPER (CONT'D)
We'll follow your line. Don't get
distracted. Don't fire back.

Klein hesitates as Morelli gears up.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Just move. NOW.

Cooper grabs more rope as Klein pushes off, speeds, tucked, rapidly downhill.

Some sixty yards up, a strange looking, bullet-shaped steel craft on broad, ski-like sleds BLASTS through a snowdrift, hurtles downhill toward them powered by a single caged prop.

MORELLI
What the...

Behind the aero-sled: four GERMAN SKI SOLDIERS from the 47th Edelweiss (Klein's old unit) pass the sled, speed downhill.

COOPER
Spread out when we hit the trees.
Crisscross to evade on my signal.
Anchor hitch, chest high.

A hail of MACHINE GUN FIRE kicks up snow all around them.

MORELLI
Got it.

Morelli shoves off with the coil of rope over one arm. Cooper skis right, clutching the other end of the line.

EXT. BELVEDERE, CORNICE - NIGHT

Ahead of them, Klein catches air off the lip of the moonlit cornice, disappears into the frosty air.

With the rope skipping over the snow between them, Cooper and Morelli schuss and weave, dodging bullets from behind.

EXT. BELVEDERE, COULOIR - CONTINUOUS

Both men speed down a wide, u-shaped gully lined with jagged rocks. Cooper is more confident, knows his gear.

Morelli is more tentative. Cautious. Knows a fall here would be deadly for more reasons than one.

Bullets SCREECH through the thin air, RICOCHET off the rock walls, THUD into thick patches of frozen snow melt.

Up ahead: the dark, toothy silhouettes of treeline.

MORELLI

This better *fucking* work.

Behind them: the aero-sled ROCKETS down the gully as the four armed German Ski Soldiers fire at speed ahead of it.

COOPER

On my mark.

Cooper bends further uphill as the gully opens up to a sparse stand of gnarled trees.

EXT. BELVEDERE, TREELINE - CONTINUOUS

Ripping swiftly downhill, Morelli looks right.

COOPER

Now.

Both men veer at each other, cross paths to evade fire. Morelli flakes out more rope just before entering the trees.

The line between the two men SNAPS taut.

Cooper wraps his end around a tree trunk like a rodeo roper gunning to beat the buzzer, ties, lift his hands.

Across the way, Morelli skids to a stop, TUGS the line tight, deftly ties an anchor hitch - leaves the rope strung just about chest-high. Taut as a tripwire.

Both men swing their rifles free, take aim.

Three of the four Germans hit the line hard, rocket backward into the snow. The fourth sees it, swerves clear.

Cooper opens fire on the fallen Germans, dispatches each:

BANG. BANG. BANG.

Morelli aims for the fourth: BANG.

Misses.

Thinking fast, Cooper yanks two grenades from his belt, pulls their pins with his teeth, tosses both into the snow behind the fallen Germans.

COOPER

Leave it! Go.

Morelli, still clutching his carbine, skates off after the lone survivor just as the aero-sled hits the same line.

The impact sends the GUNNER standing atop the back deck soaring overhead.

The sled stops dead right above the live grenades.

Cooper turns, tracks the soaring Gunner with his rifle like a sporting clay, pulls the trigger:

BANG.

BOOM. BOOM.

The grenades obliterate the sled just as Cooper skates off again after Morelli.

He doesn't even look back. Doesn't need to.

EXT. BELVEDERE, LOWER SLOPES - CONTINUOUS

Cooper and Morelli speed down the mountain watching two sets of tracks converge - Klein's and the remaining German's.

No other hints of either.

MORELLI

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

COOPER

I think there's no way in hell we're gonna take this mountain without taking that fucking ridge.

MORELLI
NO, ABOUT THE KID.

Cooper carves a graceful (if somewhat stiff) arc away from him as if he's just out for a leisurely Alpine idyl.

COOPER
He's fast alright.

In the distance downhill, a single GUNSHOT.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Hopefully fast enough.

Morelli looks his way. *Jesus, man...*

Cooper veers back toward him, picks up speed.

COOPER (CONT'D)
One more dead German either way.
(beat)
Guess that's the whole point
anyway, huh?

EXT. BOMBED-OUT VILLAGE, BARN - NIGHT

Back down in the valley, Cooper, Morelli and Klein walk toward a hulking stone barn, carrying their skis.

KLEIN
(to Morelli)
Reckless. Dangerous. Could have
gotten all *three* of us killed up
there. Even if Perkins hadn't--

COOPER
Perkins fired from the low ground.
Never do that.

Morelli stays silent. Their boots CRACKLE over icy gravel.

KLEIN
You BOTH disobeyed orders.

COOPER
And what *almost* killed us are your
fucking friends up there.

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

KLEIN (CONT'D)
You're a menace. A lone wolf! You
care nothing of anyone else.

COOPER
What do you know about it?

Klein slows. Cooper walks on. Morelli pauses.

MORELLI
(to Klein)
I'd watch it if I were you.

COOPER
Just another suicide mission like
all the rest. Those spotters on
Riva. They'll have fucking box
seats to our untimely demise.

In the distance, a lone man steps out of the barn, looks
toward Cooper, nods gravely.

This is STAFF SERGEANT PAUL PETZOLDT (30s, open face, rock-
calloused hands just like Cooper's).

Cooper veers his way and into the barn as Petzoldt eyes
Morelli and Klein, searches for the rest of the squad.

PETZOLDT
Perkins?

Morelli wags his head side-to-side mournfully.

PETZOLDT (CONT'D)
Goddammit.

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 Cooper, Morelli, and Klein.

Cooper and Morelli salute, sets their skis down. Klein
mirrors their every move like a young apprentice.

COLONEL HAMPTON
How's it look up top, Coop?

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

COOPER

Well, Hank. It ain't pretty.

MORELLI

Perkins and his crew opened fire from down-slope. We were able to advance, take the German dugout. But it was too late.

COOPER

They dropped 88s right on top of us from Riva like it was the easiest fucking thing in the world.

All three men approach the model, ZIP open their white hooded jackets, study it closely.

The topography matches what we've just seen near perfectly.

To the right, a steep peak leads to a series of others heading north, northeast.

At the foot of it, a typewritten placard marked: **BELVEDERE**.

The same craggy ridge with one sheer face snakes away from Belvedere. All along it's top: tiny circular figurines that seem to map to the spotters' nests we saw earlier.

It's marked: **RIVA**.

COLONEL HAMPTON

General readiness?

COOPER

Dug in, hard. All five miles.

Klein snaps-to, chimes in:

KLEIN

Prepared. For every eventuality.

Cooper turns his way. *Where the fuck did you come from?*

COOPER

They're the Wehrmacht, boy. They're always fucking ready.

Hampton looks to Morelli. Morelli shrugs.

COOPER

But you already knew that, didn't you. Kraut.

COLONEL HAMPTON

Enough.

COOPER

Hank--

Hampton lifts a hand, cuts him off.

COLONEL HAMPTON

We need to take Belvedere.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Not without Riva first. They have eyes all over the mountain. They'll see every man. Every move.

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). The new guy.

Cooper regards him warily. Almost incredulously.

COOPER (CONT'D)

They're looking down the throats of every defense, every foxhole. Bunch of goddamn fish in a barrel. Sir.

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

GENERAL HAYS

Belvedere is the key to punching into the Po valley, capturing Highway 64, breaking the German supply lines, taking the fight all the way to Berlin.

His bloodshot eyes shift to the steep slopes of Belvedere.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

My orders are to take this damn mountain. And hold it this time. Without it, we can't move an inch.

COOPER

Sir, all due respect--

Colonel Hampton lifts a hand to Cooper's shoulder, pushes past him, gestures toward all of the German positions scattered along the top of Riva Ridge.

COLONEL HAMPTON

(to General Hays)

Coop's right, sir. The positions all along that ridge can call in artillery up and down Belvedere the minute we say go.

Hays looks away, lifts a hand to his stubble.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)

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.

Hays' show of respect surprises Morelli. Buys him briefly.

But Cooper POUNDS a fist on the top of the ridge. Hays startles. Hampton doesn't. He knows Cooper too well.

COOPER

We'll be cut to ribbons, sir. It'll be a fucking bloodbath.

(beat)

Again.

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

GENERAL HAYS

Mark my words, Corporal. We take that mountain and we'll be toasting Hitler's overdue demise by the fourth of July.

(grim pause)

Doesn't matter the cost.

Ignoring Hays, Cooper 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 massacre. Another Press Office nightmare.

Petzoldt looks to Cooper. *Don't listen to them...*

Eyes on the model, Cooper blocks Hampton out entirely.

COOPER

Sirs?

Hays and Hampton cast him a weary gaze.

COOPER (CONT'D)

All those nests, all the spotters,
everyone all along Riva...

Cooper steps up, runs his calloused hand along the top of the sheer edge of the ridge.

COOPER (CONT'D)

...they're all oriented for attack
from the east, west, and north.

Cooper pauses, turns back around. Petzoldt nods.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Not from the south.

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

COLONEL HAMPTON

That's because the south side of
Riva's a fucking wall, Coop. A
cliff two times the height of the
Chrysler Building.

Cooper steps back to the model, like a moth to the flame.

COOPER

I've seen worse. Climbed worse.

Cooper looks to Morelli. Morelli crosses his arms.

COOPER (CONT'D)

We can take it, sir. Suss it out.

Klein steps up, studies the model, points to a steep pitch.

KLEIN

(to Cooper)

Say, here? Or here?

Cooper reluctantly nods.

Behind him, Petzoldt cracks a wry smile.

COOPER

Run fixed lines. Pitons. Pre-laid.

A hint of hope washes across General Hays' face. He reaches out to the lower slopes of Belvedere.

GENERAL HAYS

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, traces a finger up one of the creases in the cliff face.

Unlike Hays, he's got a climber's stubborn horse sense.

COLONEL HAMPTON

Split the rest into, say, four or five teams? Two hundred men on each team. Two here, on the steeper pitches. Two more here and here?

GENERAL HAYS

A thousand men. Empty rifles. Fixed bayonets. Not a sound 'til sunup.

COLONEL HAMPTON

At night? You gotta be--

Petzoldt studies the model gravely.

PETZOLDT

That would mean every able-bodied soldier we got. Not just climbers. Everyone. Their packs alone would weigh a good ninety pounds. Dry.

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

GENERAL HAYS

(to Petzoldt)

Scout it?

Petzoldt, not one to shy away from a hair-brained idea (just like Cooper), bites his lip, looks to Cooper.

Cooper nods. *I can do this.*

COOPER

We won't let you down, sirs.

Petzoldt gestures toward Klein.

PETZOLDT

All *three* of you. Together.

Cooper wants nothing of it:

COOPER

No, no, no...

PETZOLDT

Daylight. Six hours up and back, no more. On-belay. Laying pitons the whole way up. Quiet-like. Very.

Cooper draws a breath to protest, looks to Morelli.

He just wags his head, knows when to fold.

PETZOLDT (CONT'D)

Three man scouting crew. No discussion, Corporal.

Cooper flashes Petzoldt an almost violent salute, turns, brushes past Morelli, heads for the doors.

COOPER

(through clenched teeth)

Yessir.

On the way, Cooper roughly snatches up his skis and rifle, stomps forcefully out the doors.

Klein stands frozen, still staring at the model.

Petzoldt turns to Morelli.

PETZOLDT

See that he gets some shut-eye. You're gonna need it.

Petzoldt gives Morelli a head wag, and he starts off after Cooper. Jolted, Klein follows him out.

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

GENERAL HAYS

(to Petzoldt)

Kiska?

Petzoldt silently nods. *Yep*.

COLONEL HAMPTON

Not his fault, sir. Friendly fire. Can't let it go.

Hays EXHALES slowly.

GENERAL HAYS

Well, Hank. Better hope he's got his head back in the game.

(beat)

For *all* our sakes.

EXT. BOMBED-OUT VILLAGE - NIGHT

Morelli and Klein rush after Cooper from shadow to shadow, away from the barn carrying their carbines and skis.

KLEIN

Pitons? Daylight?

MORELLI

Yep.

COOPER

Only way to scout the route without fucking dying.

KLEIN

Are you insane?

Cooper slows, spins.

COOPER

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

Klein charges past Morelli, at Cooper.

KLEIN

They say you're cursed. Unlucky. A danger to anyone who climbs with you, skis with you, fights by your side. I know what happened.

Cooper rears back, **SHOVES** Klein angrily away.

MORELLI

Ease up, now.

Klein keeps his balance. Cooper rushes back at him.

COOPER

Go ahead. Say it. Say what I did.

Morelli weighs his options, stays out of it.

COOPER (CONT'D)

I *fucking* dare you.

Klein **STAMMERS**, holds his tongue.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Just like I thought.

Cooper turns, takes back off.

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

Klein looks to Morelli.

MORELLI
They fired first.

From up ahead:

COOPER
You botch this, you slow us down, I
cut you loose and watch you fall.

Klein blasts past Morelli, knocks shoulders with him.

KLEIN
He's going to get both of us
killed.

MORELLI
Hasn't happened yet...

Up ahead of Cooper, 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).

RIDEOUT
Ladies.

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

COOPER
Any news on our gear?

RIDEOUT
Still stuck in some warehouse back
in Jersey, apparently.

Klein veers past Cooper and Rideout, into the church.

COOPER
Well, we're gonna need some rope. A
lot of it. At least three hundred
and fifty meters.
(MORE)

COOPER (CONT'D)

(beat)

Each.

Rideout catches Morelli's eye, shoots him a look.

RIDEOUT

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

Behind Morelli walk pair of senior officers. Both men are smoking. One has his arm draped over the other.

This is CAPTAIN HARRIS (30s). A fierce, blood-thirsty career soldier with the scars to show for it.

HARRIS

(slurring slightly)

Ninety percent casualty rate?
Unloaded rifles? With a bunch of
fuckin' Germans? Don't make a *lick*
of strategic sense to me.

Harris looks knowingly toward Cooper. These two have a past.

Cooper looks away. Bad blood.

SENIOR OFFICER

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

HARRIS

A disaster waiting to happen. Like
Kiska all the fuck over again.

This stings for Cooper. Summons his guilt. He can't hide it.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, BASE - DAWN

From darkness, light. The first hints of dawn.

Cooper, looking haggard and haunted, follows Morelli and Klein silently through the trees.

Each man shoulders a neatly-wound coil of nylon rope.

SUPER: 15 FEBRUARY, 0600 HOURS

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

From their belts swing battered piton hammers.

All three wear heavy backpacks and barely used standard-issue U.S. Army helmets.

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

KLEIN
(irritated)
Yes, yes.

MORELLI
Feet first, then hands. And climb
with your eyes. If you can't see
it, it ain't there.

COOPER
Don't reach for it.

As they cross a wooden footbridge over a partially-frozen
river, the early morning sunlight shines through the trees,
casts strange shadows through the rising mist.

MORELLI
On the wall, only three things
count: skill, communication, trust.

COOPER
(sarcastically)
Scratch the last two.

Klein looks to Morelli. Cooper elaborates:

COOPER (CONT'D)
Not a peep past the midpoint.
Especially on that scree field.

MORELLI
The traverse.

KLEIN
But...

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

COOPER
Do as we say. Don't get cocky.

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

COOPER (CONT'D)
(to himself, mockingly)
Dead weight worthless.

Cooper reaches behind himself, pulls out a nearly new sidearm, slides the barrel back and forth, snatches a lone round out of the air, pockets it.

Morelli does the same. Effortless grace.

Klein lets his eyes slip from the cliff toward Cooper.

KLEIN

I'm worth you winning this war.

Cooper ignores this, pulls his magazine, pockets it, slips his sidearm back into his holster, pulls a length of fabric from his pocket, tosses it to Klein.

COOPER

Wrap your hammer.

Klein grabs his piton hammer, wraps it in cloth.

KLEIN

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

Cooper and Morelli wrap their own hammers.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

A country that now wants me dead.

Cooper shrugs, reaches into another pocket, tosses Klein one of the bits of rope.

COOPER

Save it for someone who cares.

All three men bind the sections of rope tightly around the heads of their hammers.

COOPER (CONT'D)

(to Morelli)

Bowlines. I'll take lead. You follow with the Kraut.

MORELLI

One line or two?

COOPER

One. And the fixed line. Too complicated otherwise. You want second or third?

Morelli looks to Klein as if sizing up his skill.

MORELLI
Second's fine.

COOPER
(to Klein)
At least fifty feet of rope between
each of us until the traverse.

Klein nods, tries to tamp down his nerves.

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

Klein nods sullenly, rubs his hands together to warm up.
Cooper 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.

Cooper 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.

Morelli looks, sees the farmer going about his day.

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

Klein looks to Cooper, eyes him warily.

COOPER
Go on. Get to it.

In silence, the three of them rope up.

Then, Cooper and Morelli bend, throw open their packs,
hastily remove hardware: pitons, carabiners, etc.

Klein 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.

Cooper and Klein are quicker than Morelli. Skilled. Equals.

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

KLEIN
Which way?

Cooper looks up, points again, hands Klein the rope end.

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

Cooper quickly flakes out a good fifty feet of line, hands the rope to Morelli. Morelli ties on, flakes out more line, hands it back to Cooper.

Cooper looks up, tethers himself to Morelli and Klein.

COOPER
When you're on belay, keep the line tight but not too.

Cooper runs his hands over the rock.

KLEIN
(impatient)
Ja, ja.

MORELLI
Pitons wherever it gets dicey.

Klein nods again, done being schooled by these old-timers.

KLEIN
I can take care of myself.

COOPER
Good, 'cause we ain't gonna.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, MIDSECTION - CONTINUOUS

Cooper grabs his first handhold, starts climbing.

Below, Klein and Morelli watch him studiously, slowly unfurling rope between them.

KLEIN
What is wrong with him?

MORELLI
Take your pick.

Above them, Cooper climbs with a practiced ease.

Morelli turns, side-eyes Klein momentarily.

It's as if weighing the cost of saying more. Elaborating. But then he remembers: *Skill, communication, trust.*

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 Lost his girl, his wife, Maggie.
 Logging truck crossed the line. She
 didn't even know what hit her.

Klein blinks, takes this in. His face shifts. *I didn't...*

Already a good twenty feet above them, Cooper 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. Tests it.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 He went over the edge. Joined the
 Forest Service. Fire spotter holed
 up in a little ten-by-ten cabin on
 stilts above Granite Butte. All
 alone like a *fucking* hermit.
 (beat)
 Thought maybe the Army was his way
 back. Or a way out. For good.

Cooper pulls out his first piton, accidentally drops the cloth wrapped around it. It flutters away in the breeze.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 On the outside he might look about
 as cold, hard, and jagged as a slab
 of *fucking* obsidian.

Cooper 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 until it PINGS, fixed.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 And just as opaque.

Cooper slips his hammer back into his holster, tests the piton, pulls off a pair of carabiners, CLICKS them in.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 But on the inside, he's just like
 the rest of us. A piece of shit
 looking for some way to make good.

Cooper looks down, catches Morelli's eye. Morelli nods.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 Get right with himself again.

Cooper looks back up, draws a deep breath, narrows his eyes, LEAPS for a gutsy, seemingly impossible hold.

But the nub of rock SNAPS loose in Cooper's hand.

And he falls backward into the crease, hits the wall hard.

Morelli braces, rope over his shoulder and around his waist.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Fuck.

The first rope, Cooper's tether, holds at the piton.

Morelli looks to Klein.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

(straining)

So, yeah. Don't do that.

Above them both, Cooper struggles to get his balance, right himself once again.

KLEIN

How long have you been climbing?

Morelli grins.

MORELLI

Before Camp Hale, the tallest thing
I ever climbed was the stairs to
the Fifth Avenue bus.

ON COOPER:

Ego bruised, body not bloodied, Cooper quickly scrambles up and over the boulder only to be confronted by another steep section of wall.

He bends at the waist. Hands on his thighs.

SFX: THWIP! THWIP! THWIP!

Tracer fire again. A sonic mirage. A figment of the past.

His vision briefly blurs. The rock wall slips in and out of focus. Doubles. Triples.

Out of view of his fellow climbers, he violently SMACKS himself in the face with one calloused palm.

Everything jolts back into focus.

COOPER
When all this is over...

He looks back up, blinks, forces his eyes back to the wall, reaches for his hammer and another piton, pounds.

COOPER (CONT'D)
...I'm never climbing with another
living soul...

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

Cooper'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, clips them in.

COOPER (CONT'D)
...ever again.

Cooper, reaches back, searches the frigid air behind him for both ropes, finds each, slips them into the carabiner, leans out over the edge, looks down.

ON MORELLI AND KLEIN:

Klein nods back. Morelli reaches out, starts climbing.

Above them both, Cooper keeps their belay line taut, allows the slack to coil neatly on the rock at his feet.

Unlike Cooper, Morelli is cautious. Methodical. Studied. Not a natural climber. But still skilled.

Klein silently regards his every handhold and foothold carefully. Memorizing every move.

ON COOPER AND MORELLI:

Morelli pulls himself up onto the boulder next to Cooper, clips in, turns, looks down to Klein.

Klein looks up, nods. Starts climbing.

MORELLI
Cut the kid some slack, huh?

Cooper keeps Klein's line taut, thinks about slicing it clean through with his bayonet.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
You know what I mean.

As both men watch him scale the wall with an unparalleled efficiency and grace, Cooper GRUMBLES:

COOPER
Kids these days.

Morelli smirks.

MORELLI
Yep. He's good alright.

In almost no time, Klein heaves his fit frame up onto the boulder next to Cooper and Morelli.

KLEIN
(quietly)
I could get used to this.

COOPER
Good.

Cooper steps aside, gestures up the slope, does his best to mask the fact that his mind may still be elsewhere.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Let's switch. Next bit's yours.

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

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

MORELLI
Eyes?

COOPER
Yep.

MORELLI
Great.

Above them, legs scissored out, Klein looks to his right as Cooper slowly lets out more rope on autopilot.

COOPER
Don't worry. I'm fine.

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

MORELLI
Uh-huh.

Cooper swiftly unfurls more rope.

COOPER
We're going too slow.

MORELLI
Uh-huh.

ON KLEIN:

Klein turns back to the wall, runs his hands over a crevice, finds a spot, reaches into a pocket for a piton, slips the tip into a narrow seam, lifts his hammer.

THUD. THUD. THUD. PING.

The sound is getting louder. More metallic. It seems to echo off of every surface.

Klein slips his hammer back into his holster, pulls himself up another ten feet, casts his gaze down to Cooper, parts his lips as if to call out.

But then, his unbuckled helmet slips from his head and plummets downward toward Cooper and Morelli.

ON COOPER AND MORELLI:

Thinking fast, Cooper 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 past them downward to the pine needle covered ground at the bottom of the cliff with a muted CLANG.

Cooper and Morelli pull themselves back up against the wall.

MORELLI
Too close.

COOPER
Yep.

Above them, Klein does the same. For a breathless moment, all three of them cling to the wall, stone-still.

High above, at the summit, nothing stirs.

Cooper EXHALES slowly, shakes his head, looks to Morelli, lifts a finger to his lips.

Silence from here on up.

ON COOPER AND KLEIN:

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

Beyond the seam: a steeply pitched field of loose scree.

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

COOPER
(hushed)
Watch and learn.

ON COOPER:

Cooper takes off again, threads the seam like a tightrope walker as Morelli, further down, climbs toward Klein.

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

It's getting louder still. Cooper 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.

Cooper pauses, clips in. Looks down toward Klein as Morelli joins him at the foot of the seam.

ON KLEIN AND MORELLI:

Klein starts up the seam.

Morelli rubs his hands together, blows into them. They're burning even though we can see his breath. Bleeding.

Klein traces Cooper's line quickly. Pure poise. Seemingly effortless dexterity.

And, once he's up and clipped in, Morelli digs in.

SCREE FIELD:

All at the top of the seam together, Cooper, Morelli, and Klein stare out at the steep scree field.

Icy water runs in rivulets down the snow-dusted, jagged shards of loose stone.

Cooper silently snakes his hand through the frigid air to signal a path through it and toward another near vertical section of rock leading to the summit.

Klein seems inclined to momentarily protest, suggest an alternative. But then he thinks better of it.

Cooper looks to Morelli. Morelli nods.

Saying nothing, Cooper steps out, starts the traverse.

Loose rock crumbles at his feet, slips like fine sand with every tentative step.

Klein looks to the summit. One errant sound and they're sitting ducks. He looks back toward Cooper.

Cooper adjusts his line, climbs higher.

The GRINDING of rockfall sounds almost like a rusty chain being dragged through broken glass.

MORELLI
(under his breath)
C'mon Coop.

Cooper briefly loses his footing, starts slipping sideways. A waterfall of broken rock noisily showers down the wall behind him with every staggering step.

Until, with one last desperate lunge, he clears the field, grips the last section of wall for dear life.

Slowly, the avalanche settles.

Morelli looks to the summit. From above, we can barely make out VOICES. Speaking in German.

Cooper gestures to Klein. *Go. Fast.*

Klein bites his lip, looks up, starts quickly across the pitch taking a higher line. A safer path.

Cooper belays him, eyes fixed up top too.

If they're spotted, they're dead.

More scree slides. But Klein crosses the distance in no time, spins, gestures to Morelli to follow.

He does, taking Klein's line, not Cooper's.

Cooper turns back around looks to the last section of wall, knows there's no way no to anchor in higher. Too loud.

Morelli, leaving a rumbling wake of loose stone cascading down the pitch and toward the valley below, leaps up onto the rock next to Klein.

Cooper points to Klein, then the wall.

Klein pulls a piton. Cooper nods 'no', lifts his finger to his lips again. *Silence to the top.*

Klein draws a deep breath, looks up, then back to their last anchor all the way across the scree field.

A fall from here would be certain death for all three men.

Morelli lifts a hand to Klein's shoulder. *You got this.*

Klein nods, reaches for a hold, starts climbing.

Cooper looks to Morelli.

For the briefest of seconds both men seem to finally acknowledge. *This is impossible.*

ON KLEIN:

Also realizing there's no way in hell hundreds of men (mountaineers and soldiers alike) could scale this last pitch safely, Klein pauses, reaches for a piton again.

Below him, Cooper WHIPS his belay line.

The fuck are you doing?

Klein ignores this, places the piton, grabs his dampened hammer, pounds: CLANG. CLANG. CLANG. CLANG.

PING.

The piton is set.

Still, no one stirs above. Klein clips in, carries on.

Again he pauses, pulls another piton.

This time, Cooper doesn't protest. Knows Klein is right.

CLANG. CLANG. CLANG.

Klein hesitates briefly, hammer still poised to strike.

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

PING.

The VOICES go quiet. Klein holsters his hammer, throws his body against the wall.

Below, Cooper and Morelli do the same.

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

Klein fumbles for his sidearm and clip. From below, Cooper urgently waves: *NO! Don't you fucking--*

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

Cooper whipsaws the rope again: *NO you stupid prick!*

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

His face pressed to the stone wall, without his helmet, Klein 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 Klein can do stay out of the way.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - LATER

Back down in the valley, Cooper, Morelli and a piss-soaked Klein hurry to pack up what's left of their gear.

Cooper throws the remaining coil of rope over Klein's shoulder. It lands with a THUMP. He spins on his heels, tightens the straps on his pack, hits the ground running.

MORELLI

That was close. Too close.

On the run, Cooper spies Klein's upside down helmet, kicks it further into the trees.

COOPER

Don't forget your hat, asshole.

Klein, his jacket steaming, stands, spins.

MORELLI

Easy now.

Klein turns, charges off after his helmet.

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Cooper and Morelli sprint back through the trees, their legs cramping from the cold and the climb.

Klein is right behind them.

KLEIN
I had to. There was no other way.

COOPER
You disobeyed my *direct* order.

KLEIN
Two hundred non-climbers would *never* have made it up that pitch without anchors. And at night?

COOPER
You did it. Barely.

Cooper and Klein take a hard right, toward the footbridge they passed over earlier. Morelli, saying nothing, follows.

KLEIN
Even with fixed lines to the scree field, it's too... *technical*.

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

COOPER
Tell me you don't wanna spatter the brains of that stupid Kraut who just pissed all over your fucking ugly mug.

Klein follows Cooper onto the bridge, looks back in his element as he glides from icy board to board.

KLEIN
I was trying to. You *stopped* me.

Cooper bounds from the end of the bridge back up onto the frozen dirt, done with this dead weight.

COOPER
Fuck you.

KLEIN
Fuck you, you clumsy, arrogant, pig-headed has-been. You deserved to be knocked down to Corporal after what you did at Kiska.

Morelli stops dead on the bridge behind them.

MORELLI

Enough!

Cooper slows, turns, fists clenched.

COOPER

The *fuck* business is it of--

Klein charges at him. Morelli rushes to get between them. But it's too late.

Cooper takes Klein down with a solid right hook to the jaw.

MORELLI

Cooper. Coop.

COOPER

(to Klein)

Get up, you bastard.

MORELLI

Nick, please.

Cooper hesitates, momentarily blunted by being called by his first name for the first time in years.

KLEIN

(from the ground)

And I'm not German.

(beat)

I'm Austrian.

Cooper ignores this, spins on his heels, keeps walking.

Klein pushes himself slowly to his feet

KLEIN (CONT'D)

An Austrian Jew.

Cooper slows again, turns back around. He and Morelli swap a quick look. *C'mon Coop, let it go...*

KLEIN (CONT'D)

There. I said it.

Cooper looks away, searches for a harsh response.

Can't find one.

MORELLI

We didn't... know.

Cooper turns, recalibrates, walks on. Klein follows.

COOPER

I just thought all you high-class
ski instructor types were master
race sons of bitches.

For the briefest of seconds, Cooper looks almost as though
his wall has fallen slightly.

His stern soloist bravado melts momentarily away.

KLEIN

You should have been a Captain by
now. At least a Lieutenant.

This smashes through Cooper's defensive armor. Destroys it.

He draws a breath, keeps walking, thinks, changes tact:

COOPER

You wanna know what happened at
Kiska? I killed *all* those boys.

Morelli hurries up, tries to break in. Cooper keeps going:

COOPER (CONT'D)

All of 'em. Harris' squad wasn't
supposed to be there. They fired on
us first. But that doesn't change a
thing. Instinct kicked in. Self-
preservation. The will to survive.
No matter what. And I've regretted
it every single *fucking* day since.

(slow exhale)

We do this, we pull this off, and
hell... I don't know if it'll make
one iota of a difference to the
families of the boys whose lives I
took. But maybe, just maybe, it'll
somehow turn the tide. You know?
Save more men. *Mean* something, at
last. Something good.

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

COOPER (CONT'D)

We *can* do this.

An unexpected detente cements between Cooper and Klein.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Have to.

Cooper speeds up. Morelli looks to Klein, nods. *You okay?*

COOPER (CONT'D)
 (back, to Morelli)
 So we can get you back to Annie.

As he walks, Cooper tries to wall himself off again.

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

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

COOPER
 (back, to Klein)
 And those last two pitons. They
 better hold, kid.

INT. FORWARD COMMAND CENTER - DUSK

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

SUPER: 16 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: Cooper, Klein, Petzoldt, Rideout. Harris.

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)
 Five teams. Two hundred men per
 route. Single file. Empty rifles
 all the way up.
 (MORE)

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)
 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.

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

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

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)
 Each team will bivouac at pre-
 selected sites to train up. You've
 got two days to get your timing
 down. Otherwise, The War Office
 predicts 90% casualties. Minimum.

A stunned MURMUR washed over the space.

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.

(MORE)

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)
 (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 team leads, move 'em out.

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

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

Hampton looks to Cooper, deadly serious.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
 Bagni di Lucca. An old spa town.
 The only building the Krauts didn't
 booby-trap is the old casino. Used
 it as some sort of prison.

In the distance behind them, Klein stands stone-still.

COOPER
 Hank?

COLONEL HAMPTON
 It's all hands on deck for Riva.
 Not just skilled climbers. Flatland
 infantry too. You've got two days
 to whip the lot of 'em into shape.
 There's a marble quarry just down
 the river. Get your crew up to
 speed on the toughest parts of the
 climb. And on the double.
 (beat)
 Otherwise...

He trails off, looks back to the sand model.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
 And once your team summits safely,
 you two... don't engage.

MORELLI

Sir?

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

COLONEL HAMPTON

The ridge is *not* your mission. You and Morelli, alone. Ski back down from Riva. Back behind enemy lines. Across the valley. Through German territory. To the base of Belvedere *before* go-hour.

Hampton 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 atop a frozen waterfall.

Cooper looks to Morelli who looks away.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)

Crampons and ice axes. Five hundred feet straight up. Demo the battery. Dispatch its crew. Continue your advance to the top.

COOPER

But, Hank--

COLONEL HAMPTON

You're a climber and a soldier. But in that order. Got it?

Hampton eyes the room, leans closer.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)

Hays trusts you. Both. Best men for the job, hands-down.

(hushed)

And his son will be at the head of the charge up Belvedere.

This jolts Cooper and Morelli. News to them both.

MORELLI

What?

COLONEL HAMPTON

General Hays' son. He'll be there. Second Lieutenant. B Company.

(MORE)

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)

(beat)

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

Hampton trails off, looks back to the model.

Cooper nods slowly.

COOPER

Understood, sir.

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

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

COLONEL HAMPTON

Dismissed.

EXT. RIVER VALLEY - NIGHT

A long column of 200 WHITE-CLAD SOLDIERS march solemnly along a narrow path next to a broad, partially frozen river.

Cooper and Morelli are up front. Klein is right behind them. All three of them are the only men with skis and ice axes tethered to their packs.

Above, the silver moonlight filters through a faint, gauzy mist casting an eerie glow over the darkened trees.

KLEIN

Hays' son? That doesn't make any--

MORELLI

Get everyone up Riva safely. Ski back down again. Get back to work doing what we're here to do.

KLEIN

Don't engage? Leave our men on Riva? Climb Belvedere, solo?

COOPER

Keep your voice down.

KLEIN

90% casualties?

COOPER

I said, quiet.

Cooper and Morelli swap a quick look. Both are on-edge.

MORELLI

Look at you, taking orders for a change. How's it feel?

COOPER

Shitty.

They both hurry, silently accepting Klein's participation.

COOPER (CONT'D)

(back, to Klein)

And who invited you to this little party, huh?

Klein struggles to keep up.

KLEIN

I've seen you climb. You're going to need my help.

EXT. ABANDONED SPA TOWN - NIGHT

In silence, the entire company precedes slowly down the cobblestone streets of a once luxurious resort town built alongside the river.

Smashed furniture, abandoned art, overturned and splintered roulette tables dot the narrow road in hulking heaps.

Every window is shattered. Boots CRUNCH over broken glass as each man nervously scans each open doorway, every darkened archway with their rifles drawn.

Still in the lead, Cooper reaches a hand inside his jacket, pulls out a small mimeographed map of the village, looks left, points up a winding street.

And, saying nothing, all of the more than 150 young men behind him and Morelli start up the hill.

EXT. CASINO - NIGHT

Cooper slows at the sight of their destination: a formerly palatial stone casino marked: GRAND HOTEL LE TERME.

The front doors lie charred on the stairs. Singed red velvet curtains waft out missing window like imitation fire.

Cooper gestures for the men behind him and Morelli to part ways and scale both sides of the stairs in silence.

At the top of the right side of stairs, with Klein on his six, Cooper pauses, aims, crosses the threshold, and disappears into the darkness.

Morelli, at the top of the left side, gestures to the nearest soldiers. *Five men, after me. On five.*

They all nod.

Morelli looks to Klein, gestures: *You stay right.*

Klein nods.

And, on five, they all follow Cooper in.

INT. CASINO, LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Morelli leads his team into the pitch blackness.

Opposite them, Klein sweeps his rifle side-to-side as he hugs the right wall solo, searching for targets.

Just as outside, the place is a decimated wreck. Valueless chips strewn everywhere. Artwork stolen.

Flocked wallpaper burnt to an ebony crisp. Ravaged.

COOPER (O.S.)
(from up ahead)
Fuck me.

The entire crew emerges into a vast, once opulent gaming parlor turned gruesome torture chamber.

Baccarat tables used as bloody, improvised gurneys.

Bone saws, scalpels, forceps, and pliers arrayed in neatly organized clusters on recently-abandoned silver trays.

Art-deco *torchieres* forcibly bent and violently twisted into garish surgical lights.

Or implements of inquisition.

MORELLI
Oh my god. What is this place?

At the center of the space, a huge, ashen pile of rapidly torched paperwork. Ledgers. Passports. Bank statements.

Official Wehrmacht communiques straight from Berlin.

Swastikas and eagles oddly immune to fiery obliteration.

Evidence.

And, behind it all, heaped along one wall: hundreds of suitcases, all meticulously numbered in white chalk.

Klein, in shock, bends at the sight of something familiar.

He slowly snatches up a yellow Star of David patch from the debris-strewn carpet. It's still attached to a hastily ripped shred of finely pinstriped wool.

He lifts it into the light, looks toward Cooper. Sickened.

Cooper searches for words. None come.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Fuck this. We camp at the quarry.

EXT. QUARRY, SUMMIT - DAWN

Cooper and Morelli stand at the summit of a vast marble quarry carved and blasted out of a mountainside nowhere near the height of Riva Ridge.

Jutting, deeply veined, cuboid slabs of marble cascade down toward a dusty plain dotted with white tents.

Alongside the cut marble, a lichen-dotted cliff face roughly resembling the last bit of the climb. The worst part.

A faint rising sun struggles the burn its way through heavy, moisture-laden cloud cover.

COOPER

This is gonna test all of you to the limit.

Clutching a silver stopwatch, Cooper turns around to face a nervous bevy of shivering soldiers.

Each are roped up just like Cooper, Morelli, and Klein were on the day of their first ascent.

Although this time, a series of six belay lines have been pre-anchored to the top of the cliff.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Skill, communication, trust.

Cooper looks to Klein standing amid his assembled students.

COOPER (CONT'D)

These are the keys to survival.
But, in this case, it's silence to
the summit. Or else.

Klein steps forward, grabs a line, prepares to rappel.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Rappel down. Six teams. Fixed lines
with pitons to the top. Clip in.
Clip out. Keep moving. Give the man
ahead of you plenty of space. One
man falls, it's manageable. Your
pitons should catch you. But we
can't afford a cascade, yeah?

MORELLI

Traverse at the loose bit. It's
worse on the *actual* route. And it's
all between anchors. So don't
fucking fall.

Klein backs to the edge of the wall, looks to Cooper.

COOPER

Kid here's a whiz. He'll show you
how it's done.

Klein steps off, descends.

COOPER (CONT'D)

We need *each* and every one of you
to beat Klein's best time. Or else
we're all fucked.

MORELLI

No noise. Move fast. Trust the man
ahead of you.

COOPER

This is about an eighth of the full
route. The diciest bit. Figure
thirty-seven minutes, max.

MORELLI

Otherwise, the sun comes up. Jerry
sees you dangling.

COOPER

Bingo. Ninety percent casualties.

MORELLI

Fuck The War Office.
(MORE)

MORELLI (CONT'D)

(beat)

We're The 10th.

Cooper turns around, sees Klein hit the base, prep his gear to clip in and climb.

COOPER

You ready?

KLEIN

Yessir.

Cooper lifts the stopwatch.

COOPER

GO.

Klein LEAPS forward, starts quickly up the wall.

All assembled behind Cooper and Morelli step up to the edge and look down. Petrified and doing their best to hide it.

INSERT MONTAGE:

In a quick series of FLASH CUTS Cooper and Morelli count down climber after climber as they summit. Exhausted.

COOPER

Nope. Too slow.

MORELLI

You can do better than that.

COOPER

C'mon now.

MORELLI

Fuck me. Faster!

COOPER

You call that climbing?

MORELLI

Again.

COOPER

There. You're officially dead.

MORELLI

Sorry, kid.

COOPER

Next!

END MONTAGE.

Back at the top of the cliff, surrounded by soul-crushed climbers (fingers bleeding, limbs trembling) Klein steps up next to Morelli.

We can tell by their faces. All hope of success has faded.

Cooper turns away from them, addresses his men:

COOPER

I know your body is telling you
can't do this. That it's
impossible. That no one can. But
trust me. You can. You must.

He tosses Morelli the stopwatch, rushes past Klein, snatches up a ninety-pound pack and a rope, prepares to rappel.

MORELLI

The hell are you doing?

Cooper steps off, ZIPS loudly downward.

COOPER

This old man's gonna show you
assholes how it's done.

Morelli looks to Klein, reaches a hand inside his jacket, pulls out his silver cigarette case, pops it open.

MORELLI

This should be fun.

EXT. QUARRY, BASE - DAY

Cooper hits the dusty ground hard, ditches his rappel line, clicks the lead attached to the webbing around his waist to the nearest fixed line, looks up.

SFX: THWIP! THWIP! THWIP!

Tracer fire again. An echo of his never-ending grief.

The mountain above slips in and out of focus. Doubles. Triples. Quadruples. Swirls dizzyingly.

EXT. QUARRY, SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

A deeply-tanned, roguish Sergeant, Austrian Ski Champion FRIEDL PFEIFER (20s) steps up behind Klein, WHISPERS under his breath in German:

PFEIFER
Verrückter Amerikanischer cowboy.

His eyes cast down the cliff, Klein nods. Full of respect.

KLEIN
Ja und...

EXT. QUARRY, BASE - CONTINUOUS

Cooper, still reeling, lifts a hand to his head, bashes himself three times in the temple.

COOPER
 (to himself)
 Get yourself the fuck together.

The stone wall shudders back to shape. Materializes slowly.

Cooper looks up, sees everyone staring down at him expectantly. Other than Morelli.

His face, instead, is a contorted mask of dread.

Cooper lowers his gaze, surveys the stone before him. Reaches out. His fingers tremble slightly.

COOPER (CONT'D)
 You can do this. You can do this.

MORELLI (O.S.)
 (from above)
 Ready?

Cooper looks up again, draws a deep breath.

COOPER
 HIT IT.

He lunges out, starts scrambling, spider-like, up the sheer marble wall as if his life depends on it.

As if everyone's lives depend on it.

EXT. QUARRY, SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

Morelli lowers the TICKING stopwatch, lifts an unlit cigarette to his lips.

MORELLI
 C'mon Coop.

Klein is right beside him, counting down the seconds.

ON COOPER:

Climbing with a flowing, seemingly effortless fluency, Cooper moves from handhold to handhold, foothold to foothold like a conductor directing an invisible orchestra.

No wasted energy. No hesitation. Just intuition. Action.

And, as he moves, his carabiner BUZZES up the fixed line, PINGS against an anchor.

Without even thinking, he lets his left hand drift back to clip out and back in again before surging ever higher.

A man entirely at one with his faculties.

EXT. QUARRY, SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

Klein looks to Morelli.

Still with the unlit cigarette clenched between his teeth, Morelli lets his eyes drift to the stopwatch.

TICK. TICK. TICK. TICK.

SCREE FIELD:

Barely winded, Cooper hits the last anchor before the traverse, clips out, clips back in, looks left.

His tether drapes dangerously across a steep patch of loose, snow-dusted marble fragments.

As if trying to recall Klein's route across the scree field back on Riva, he hesitates briefly.

All eyes are on him from above.

BANG. He leaps out onto the pitch. Razor-sharp shards of stone slip instantly out from below his boots.

Like cold, hard quicksand.

Instead of panicking, Cooper VAULTS over the fixed line, sprints in leaps and bounds across the waterfall of loose stone, PINGS into his next anchor, clips out.

His boots slip. Rocks smash into his shins, shower down all around him, drag his body backward.

But, summoning all his strength, Cooper LUNGES toward the last section of solid rock, catches a tiny fissure with his right hand, jams four fingers into the slot.

Dangles briefly. Keeps climbing.

EXT. QUARRY, SUMMIT - MOMENTS LATER

His arms screaming and his legs spent, Cooper **THROWS** his weary body up over the lip of the summit, rolls over onto his back, un-clips, tosses away his tether.

GASPING, he lies atop a thick slab of cut marble.

Morelli lifts the stopwatch, grins broadly, flashes it toward Klein. Klein smiles admiringly.

Graceful even in defeat.

MORELLI

Well now, that's how it's done gentlemen. Twenty-eight minutes, seventeen point--

CRACK.

From somewhere deep inside the marble slab under Cooper's back, something snaps, breaks loose, comes free.

All instinct, Cooper scrambles to his feet.

Morelli drops the stopwatch, eyes wide, as the slab **SHUDDERS** and then TIPS SWIFTLY BACKWARD AWAY FROM THE WALL.

Morelli lunges forward, thrusts a hand out toward Cooper.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Hand. Now!

Cooper's face is frozen, as if his mind can't quite grasp what's happening. Unable to make sense of it.

Klein spins to his left.

Next to him, Pfeifer bends, scoops up the nearest section of fixed line, un-clips it, tosses it to Klein.

Klein catches it, grabs Morelli by the belt, spins him.

Finally, Cooper jumps - just as the massive hunk of rock tumbles away into the void.

Morelli catches Cooper's hand - just as Klein **CLIPS** the carabiner at the end of the fixed line into the carabiner attached the webbing around Morelli's waist.

Together, Cooper, and Morelli fall.

But Klein quickly wraps the fixed line around his own waist, tosses it up over his shoulder, digs his feet in, GRUNTS as he catches both men, arrests their fall.

Pfeifer grabs Klein by the waist, tugs him backward, SHOUTS to all assembled in English:

PFEIFER
HELP US!

EXT. QUARRY, BASE - NIGHT

Together, Cooper, Morelli, and Klein sit clustered around a flickering campfire sharing a bottle of French brandy pillaged from the casino.

Equals finally. Not rivals. Peers. Survivors.

KLEIN
(to Morelli)
How'd you end up over here anyway?

Morelli takes a swig, passes the bottle to Cooper.

MORELLI
I fell for a fucking newsreel.
About Camp Hale.

Cooper smiles, lifts the bottle.

COOPER
Clean air. Healthy living.

MORELLI
Female ski instructors.

COOPER
Deborah Bankhart.

MORELLI
Deborah *fucking* Bankhart.
(beat, to Cooper)
Don't tell Annie.

Cooper swallows, savors the burn.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
Colorado mountains sure beat
Brooklyn in the goddamn summertime.
(beat)
Or Guadalcanal, for that matter.

Cooper passes the bottle to Klein.

Klein looks to him searchingly. Wants to ask.

Cooper notices. His instinct is to look away, evade, crawl back inside himself. Wall-up.

But instead, he draws a deep breath and keeps Klein, now no longer his enemy, locked in his gaze.

COOPER

I've played it over and over again in my head. Every variable. Every scenario. Every other possible way it could've played out. And I still can't make sense of it. Still can't just let it... go.

Morelli's face shifts. He sits forward. Knows where this is headed. Doesn't like it. Not now.

MORELLI

Coop, you don't need to--

Cooper doesn't break eye contact with Klein, continues:

COOPER

We were supposed to be the only landing craft on that section of beach. That side of the island. Goddamn the water was cold. And the dark. Like nothing I've ever experienced. No moon. Just total blackness. And fog. And us, trudging through the cold and the dark. Simple mission. Take the beachhead. Scale the cliff. Knock out the Jap radio station at the top. Join back up with the rest of the 86th. Take the whole damn island. Send the Japs running. Easy, right? But the minute we hit the rocks, the minute we reached the beach, they opened fire on us from somewhere down the beach. From the south. Tracers, bright fucking red. Ripping through the fog like angry fireflies. Every which way. The sound, there's nothing like it. Hand slaps and bolts of red-hot steel smashing into the rocks. Echoing off the water, the cliff. Ricocheting. Bouncing. Blinding. Everyone from our boat was falling left and right. O'Dowell. Lattimer. Poe. West. Miller. All of 'em.

(MORE)

COOPER (CONT'D)

One after the other. These were the boys we'd trained to climb. The ones we'd hauled up Elk Mountain, fished outta frozen crevasses, drank with, smoked with, shot the shit with, crushed at fucking poker, taught how to ski, to rappel. Just lived with. For years by then. And in half a second, maybe less, they're all just gone. For fucking ever.

Morelli sits back, knows he was wrong. *He does need this.*

COOPER (CONT'D)

Morelli and me, we were just the lucky ones. First off boat. How we survived, I'll never know. But there and then on the beach, in the moment, I don't think I'd ever felt a fear like that. Never in my life. Just a deep, profound fucking terror. Never before. Never since. Until today, that is. Up there on that slab of marble.

Cooper nods slowly to Klein. Infinite, unspoken gratitude.

COOPER (CONT'D)

And then the rage came. Adrenalin. Instinct. My rifle, my B.A.R. was still covered in fucking Pliofilm. Keep your actions clear. Watch your second. Don't engage. Fuck that. I just started shooting at anything that moved. And couldn't fucking stop. Firing into the fog at shadows. Ghosts. Mirages, not men. I couldn't see a goddamn thing, no one could. But that didn't stop me. Nothing could stop me. And then I thought I heard words down the beach, over the waves. In English.

He finally looks to Morelli.

Morelli's face says it all. *Go, on. Get it out.*

Cooper turns back toward Klein.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Grenade landed on the rocks right between us. Rolled around. Spun.

(MORE)

COOPER (CONT'D)

Disappeared. Max jumped first. I just froze. He found it, whipped it up into the air. The force of the blast nearly took me to my knees. But I still kept firing. I wasn't afraid anymore. I was fucking *furious*. Full of anger. Wrath. An unquenchable thirst for vengeance for my men. At all costs.

(beat)

And, well...

Cooper's eyes drift toward the fire. He blinks, blinks again. The light flickers and flashes across his face.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Goddamn thing was a fucking pineapple. One of ours. An American grenade. From Harris and his crew. Fifteen kids with their whole lives ahead of them. Gone in a blink.

(beat)

Friendly fucking fire.

All three men stare into the flames. Without words.

Morelli finally reaches into his pocket, pulls out his cigarette case, pops it open, leans it toward Cooper.

Cooper wags his head side-to-side. No *thanks, brother*.

After a second:

COOPER (CONT'D)

(to Klein)

Say, kid. What's your name anyway?
Your *first* name.

Klein finally lifts the bottle, hesitates briefly, MUMBLES:

KLEIN

Moses.

Cooper looks to Morelli. Morelli's eyes widen and sparkle.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

Moses Solomon Klein.

Like a slow-building earthquake rising, a deep, unstoppable rumble of LAUGHTER overtakes Cooper.

He couldn't hold it in if he tried.

COOPER
 (between gasps)
 Well, fuck me and the horse I rode
 in on, kid. Moses?

Even Morelli's SNICKERING now, bent over forward.

COOPER (CONT'D)
 Who better to lead us out of the
 goddamn desert?

MORELLI
 (barely discernible)
Let my people fucking go!

Finally Klein cracks a broad grin, stares into the fire as his two climbing companions fill the crisp night air with carefree, jubilant LAUGHTER.

All nervous fears about what comes next briefly erased.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - NIGHT

Cooper, Morelli, and Klein lead a pack of apprehensive men in total silence through the darkened forest somewhere near the base of Riva Ridge once again.

SUPER: 18 FEBRUARY 1945, 2300 HOURS

Saying nothing, Morelli reaches inside his coat, pulls out his cigarette case, POPS it open.

COOPER
 Put that thing away.

Morelli plucks out a single cigarette, slides in over his ear, just under his helmet. For later.

Klein looks, reaches up, buckles his helmet. Cinches it tight just in case. Lesson learned.

Again, only Cooper, Morelli, and Klein march with skis and ice axes tethered to their packs.

A few men back, a GAUNT LIEUTENANT (20s) passes a small metal paint can and brush up toward Klein, motions to the back of his helmet.

Klein takes the brush, draws a thin white slash down the back of his matte green helmet, passes the brush to Morelli.

Morelli does the same, passes the brush to Cooper.

Cooper nods, solemnly draws a matching slash down the back of his own helmet, hands the brush down the line.

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

EXT. ROUTE FIVE, BASE - NIGHT

Cooper and Klein peer up into the darkness at the start of the same route they first scouted just days before.

Next to them, Morelli double- and triple-checks his knots.

Everyone else hurriedly wraps their gear with fabric.

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

COOPER
(back to the rest)
Everybody empty?

WHISPERED ORDERS rumble down the line, man-to-man.

Faraway spotlights kick on and reflect off of a slowly-descending frozen fog bank.

Pfeifer leans closer to Cooper, WHISPERS.

PFEIFER
You did this in daylight?

Cooper lifts his eyes to the fog.

COOPER
Yep.

Pfeifer nods respectfully. Impressed.

PFEIFER
Mutig. Brave.
(knowing wink)
You should come with us, back to
Aspen. When all this is done.

Cooper looks to Klein. Klein does his best to smile.

KLEIN
The place is a ghost town. I think
you'll like it.

Morelli turns back toward Cooper.

MORELLI
You want lead?

COOPER
Age before beauty.

Morelli smirks, clips his carabiner onto the fixed line, starts off with a silent, studious dexterity.

Cooper looks to Pfeifer.

COOPER (CONT'D)
You take clean-up. Get every man up
in one piece. These troops are my
responsibility. Yours now, too.

Pfeifer nods somberly. Yessir.

Cooper lifts his watch. Notes the time. Klein looks up.

Everyone watches in wordless anticipation as Morelli, making no sound whatsoever, disappears into the darkness.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Remember. Take the high line at the
traverse. Fast as you can. Once you
reach the summit, find whatever
cover's up there. Fix bayonets. But
no fire, repeat, no fire until
sunrise. Even if fired on. Pass it.

Again, HUSHED ORDERS wash down the line of men.

Cooper checks his watch again, reaches for his lead, clips his carabiner onto the line, looks up:

SFX: THWIP! THWIP! THWIP!

The same terrifying sound of incoming tracers.

Cooper closes his eyes, wills the figment away, reaches a hand out to the rock face, opens his eyes again, looks up.

Nothing slips out of focus. Everything is crisp and clear.

COOPER (CONT'D)
(to Klein)
Alright. See you up top.

And, with that, he starts off after Morelli.

ON COOPER:

As he climbs, again with an automatic, trance-like prowess - no wasted energy, no false bravado - the rock before him washes by like icy water under the bow of a boat.

He moves dextrously. All efficiency.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Wish me luck, Maggie. We're *all*
gonna need it.

Cooper quickly 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.

But he ignores it, blocks it out. Stays focused.

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

From above: THUMP. Cooper pauses, looks up.

Then a loud SCRAPE from high up.

Seconds later: a heavy THUD. And another, and another.

Cooper pulls his body close to the wall, ducks his helmeted head as a huge boulder hits the wall just above him.

It shatters into a million hefty pieces.

Cooper looks down, HISSES:

COOPER (CONT'D)
Rock!

Already on the line, Klein looks up, hugs the wall too.

Debris rains down all around them both.

Cooper loses his footing briefly, catches himself with his left hand, kicks out both feet for purchase.

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

After a second, from far below, we hear another THUD. Then: a heavy WHAM. WHAM. WHAM. In quick succession.

Then eerie silence.

Cooper looks down, locks eyes with Klein.

Klein nods. *That was close.*

Cooper looks back up, nothing stirs but the shadows.

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

COOPER (CONT'D)
(barely audible)
C'mon, Max. Easy does it.

He climbs on, finally reaching 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 Klein.

Turning, Cooper un-clips, clips 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.

Cooper, desperate, grabs for it, misses.

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

Cooper bends, snatches the piton up, ZIPS it up the line, reaches back, pads his empty holster.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Fuck.

Cooper 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.

KLEIN (O.S.)
(hushed)
That's a terrible idea.

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

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

COOPER

Thank you.

Klein nods slowly.

Cooper turns back to the wall, slides the piton into place, lifts Klein's hammer: BANG. BANG. BANG.

They both look up.

Cooper checks the line. It's secure. But he gives the piton another whack for good measure: PING.

Still nothing from above.

Cooper clicks back in, hands Klein back his hammer. An air of shared purpose now. Brotherhood.

COOPER (CONT'D)

C'mon.

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

ON COOPER:

Seeing the scree field (and Morelli's washed out tracks across it) Cooper pauses. *Almost there.*

The top is within reach but shrouded in frozen fog.

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

Cooper draws a quick breath, clips out, clips in, rushes quickly across the loose stone.

Again, it washes away swiftly, loudly. Threatens to take him with it over the edge and down.

But he's on Klein's old line. Safer. Smarter.

SMACK.

He reaches the last vertical section of rock, sets his carabiner above the next anchor, looks down at Pfeifer cautiously guiding man after man onto the route.

Then he turns and begins his way up the only bit he hasn't done yet. The last pitch only Klein has climbed.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

Cooper tugs himself up over the edge, sees Morelli's hunched silhouette just behind a boulder about twenty yards away.

He crouch/runs toward him, skids to a stop, looks around wildly. There's no easy cover. Just a few sparse collections of snow-covered rock.

Both men wordlessly swing their rifles free, slip their bayonets from their packs, quickly affix them.

Cooper looks to his watch. They're late already.

Way too late.

In the distance, Klein summits the cliff, runs their way.

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

Cooper points to Klein's pack, to his bayonet.

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

Cooper lifts a finger to his lips, looks past Morelli.

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

Not enough room for 200 men by any stretch.

Klein SMACKS Cooper's pack. His skis. *Don't engage.*

Cooper taps his watch violently. *No time.*

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

Morelli looks to Klein. *This fucking asshole...*

Things are not going to plan already.

ON COOPER AND MORELLI:

Both men sprint across the snow, clutching their rifles.

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

Cooper slows behind the outcropping.

MORELLI
(hushed)
Hold on.

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

A menacing miasma.

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.

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

Klein finally skids in next to Morelli.

KLEIN
We have to GO.

Cooper wags his head. *Not yet.*

In the distance, a sloping section of icy rock.

The high ground.

He takes off running for it. Klein, angered, follows.

ON COOPER AND KLEIN:

On the run, Cooper and Klein pass seemingly innumerable Americans 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.

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

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

KLEIN
(barely audible)
NO.

Cooper throws open his shirt pocket, yanks out his rifle magazine, jams it into his carbine: CLACK.

COOPER
Not until every man's up safe.

KLEIN
But our orders--

COOPER
I'm not *fucking* leaving.

Beyond them: the faintest glimmer of sunrise.

A third figure joins them behind the wall.

It's Morelli again. His expression is pained. Oddly fearful.

Another man ducks in with them. It's Rideout from earlier.

RIDEOUT
Route four's ready. Look alive.

Cooper nods back. Rideout keeps running.

MORELLI
(to Rideout)
Wait...

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

MORELLI (CONT'D)
(hushed)
Coop. Don't.

Cooper leans his head around the edge.

COOPER'S POV:

Up ahead, we can barely make out a line of sandbags. Perched at the center: the dim outline of a high-caliber 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.

ON COOPER AND MORELLI:

Morelli wags his head side-to-side. *Don't do this, Coop...*

We hear the SQUEAK, SQUEAK of a canteen lid twisting.

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

Cooper quickly slips out of his backpack, dumps it, grips his rifle, takes off running.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, MACHINE GUN NEST - CONTINUOUS

As Cooper charges toward the nest, Morelli and Klein reluctantly shimmy out of their packs, part ways, follow.

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

Cooper slows, rifle drawn.

Morelli and Klein flank him, hearts thundering.

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

Cooper grips his trigger, takes aim. Klein does the same.

This is what they've trained for, prepared for. But all three 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 stands there frozen, holding nothing but a steaming metal mug and a boar bristle toothbrush.

Cooper 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!

Klein WHISPERS in German:

KLEIN
Stille. Stille.

The Boy turns to see Morelli approaching from his left.

He drops his toothbrush, lifts his hands in seeming surrender. Klein nods. *Yes, yes.*

But then the German Boy RAKES in a deep breath.

GERMAN BOY
Amerik--

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

The Boy instantly crumples.

Klein seems stunned. But, together, he and Morelli scramble quickly up and over the sandbags after Cooper.

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

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.

Cooper and Morelli 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.

Klein ducks behind Cooper, grabs two boxes of ammo, hands Morelli a bandolier.

Morelli threads the bullets in as Cooper 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 German barracks.

Cooper 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 Rideout and Pfeifer and the growing ranks of American soldiers gathering in two bunches on either side of the fortified barracks.

Suddenly, we hear a DESPERATE SHOUT from deep within:

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

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

BANG!

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

BANG! BANG!

Muffled AUTOMATIC RIFLE FIRE streaks randomly out from inside the bunker, ZIPS over machine gun nest.

KLEIN
(loud, to Cooper)

GO.

Cooper grips the trigger, hesitates. Shots WHIZ past them like fireflies or THUD into the sandbags like rocks.

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

MORELLI
This isn't fucking Kiska! FIRE!

Cooper, jolted, 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.

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

The rest of the Americans lob more grenades into the slit.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! Black smoke oozes out.

Cooper finally releases the trigger, falls back in horror.

Morelli takes over.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
Get up. Feed!

From out of nowhere, the German Boy LUNGES at Klein with a dagger in one hand. Klein spins to his left.

The blade grazes his bicep.

The Boy yanks the knife back, lifts it again.

Morelli wheels around, leaps to his feet, scrambles to pull 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.

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

KLEIN
 (too loud)
Danke sch--

THUMP.

A single round hits Morelli in the chest, sends him tumbling backward up and over the sandbags.

Cooper finally JOLTS back into his body.

COOPER
 Morelli! MAX!

Morelli catches his balance, drops his pistol, rapidly pads his chest with both hands.

MORELLI
Fucking fuck that was...

From inside his jacket, he YANKS out his silver cigarette case, hefts it into the air.

MORELLI (CONT'D)
 ...a fucking miracle!

It's only as he twists the case in the open air that we can see that it's been pierced clean through. Front to back.

Morelli lowers his hand, looks to Cooper. Stunned silence.

A deep red blossom of blood flowers from the center of the black dot burnt into the chest of his bright white jacket.

COOPER
 No, no, no.

Morelli collapses.

Cooper lunges across the machine gun nest.

BURP! BURP! BURP!

A German MP 40 (aka 'burp gun') shreds the air all around them, sends burlap and sand flying.

Klein PULLS Cooper back to the ground. To safety.

BURP! BURP! BURP!

The sandbags surrounding them explode.

COOPER (CONT'D)
 Max!

Klein looks left, sees the potato mashers, elbows his way across the dirt past the dead Boy, grabs two grenades, tosses them both toward Cooper.

KLEIN
Focus! Focus!

Klein spins points up and over the sandbags toward the source of the gunfire.

BURP! BURP! BURP!

Cooper shakes his head, tries to will himself back.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
MP 40. Twenty five yards. Maybe
less maybe more.

Cooper looks back. No sound from Morelli.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Twist the end. Pull the cord. Four
and a half seconds, yes?

Cooper's expression is a blank. His eyes empty. Dazed.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
On my mark.

In the distance, we can hear muffled EXPLOSIONS. SCREAMING. SHOUTING in German and in English.

Klein twists the caps at the ends of his two grenades, pulls out thin metal fuse cords.

Cooper snaps briefly back to attention, follows.

They lock eyes.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Now.

They PULL the cords and each grenade HISSES to life, belches out sparks and smoke.

Both men roll over, lob all four grenades up over the edge.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

Silence.

Rideout leaps into the nest next to Klein. Cooper wheels around and nearly plugs him with his sidearm.

RIDOUT

The *hell* are you still--

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

RIDEOUT (CONT'D)

SHIT.

Blood gushes through his splayed fingers.

Klein YANKS a green field dressing kit from his jacket, RIPS it open, TUGS out a wad of gauze.

KLEIN

Let me see. Let me--

Rideout splays his fingers. Blood runs down his neck.

Cooper turns, LEAPS back out of the nest toward Morelli.

ON COOPER AND MORELLI:

His jacket now bathed in blood and the light swiftly leaving his eyes, Morelli still clutches the punctured cigarette case in his right hand.

Cooper slides to a stop on the bloody snow beside him.

MORELLI

That was my Daddy's case.

Cooper RIPS open his jacket, YANKS up his blood soaked sweater, searches for the entry wound. Finds it.

It oozes jet black rivulets in rhythmic streams.

COOPER

Easy now. Easy.

He tries to staunch the bleeding. But it won't stop.

COOPER (CONT'D)

MEDIC!

Morelli weakly wags the pierced case toward Cooper.

MORELLI

Tell Annie I love her.

COOPER

(frantic)

Tell her yourself. MEDIC!

MORELLI

Nope.

Blood GURGLES from the corners of Morelli's mouth as more bullets WHIZ and PING all around them.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Last thing I had of him.

He finally lets go of the case. It slips from his fingers, spins on the bright red snow.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

Only thing that made it back. From
The Great War.

COOPER

MEDIC!

But they both know. No one's coming.

Morelli does his best to smile.

MORELLI

I woulda done the same damn thing
you did. Now, do what the kid says.
Get the fuck outta here.

COOPER

No, no.

Morelli COUGHS faintly. Almost placidly.

MORELLI

It's okay. It's alright.

He blinks, gazes past Cooper toward the lifting fog.

And the bright blue sky beyond.

COOPER

Dammit, Max. Please. *Please.*

MORELLI

Do me a favor. Remember.

Morelli's body convulses. Cooper grips him, won't let go.

MORELLI (CONT'D)

(struggling)

There are better asses to kick...
than your own.

And, with that, his head slumps slowly sideways. Gone.

COOPER
 Fuck. Fuck. FUCK.

Cooper clutches Morelli's ghostly white, stubble-covered face, lowers his forehead down onto his helmet. Bereft.

There on the bloody snow: Morelli's cigarette case.

Slowly, the sounds of battle return. EXPLOSIONS. SCREAMING. SHRIEKING BULLETS. VIOLENT RICOCHETS.

But it all sounds like it's being heard from under water.

KLEIN (O.C.)
 Up. UP.

From out of nowhere, Klein grabs Cooper by his hood, DRAGS him backward across the snow and ice.

Cooper quickly snatches up the case silver as Morelli's lifeless body lies there, still, in a crimson corona.

KLEIN
 We need to get off this ridge. NOW.

Cooper just watches as his friend, his second - the only man who ever really, truly had his back - vanishes into the haze of battle just as a YOUNG MEDIC leaps into the nest.

To attend to Ridedout, not Morelli.

ON COOPER AND KLEIN:

Back behind the rocks where they left their packs, Klein finally lets go of Cooper, leans around, returns fire:

BANG. BANG. BANG.

KLEIN
 Get down. Cross the valley. Finish our mission. No more cowboy.

Cooper, on the ground, just stares into the distance.

BANG. BANG.

Klein looks down, sees Cooper drifting, lowers his rifle.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
 WE NEED TO GO!

In the distance, the firefight wanes briefly. Goes quiet.

Klein bends to one knee.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
LOOK AT ME.

Cooper finally looks his way.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
What happened doesn't matter. All
that matters is our mission.

Klein grabs him by his jacket, shakes him.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
You're a climber *and* a soldier. We
both are. Now we need to move.

Cooper, a roiling sea of self-recrimination, nods blankly.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Get your pack. Get up.

Another cluster of other soldiers rush by in a blur.

Among them, Pfeifer SHOUTS on the run:

PFEIFER
THEY HAD NO IDEA WE WERE COMING!

Klein looks past him to see ten white-clad Americans quickly marching a long line of GERMAN PRISONERS away from their barracks with their hands held high.

KLEIN
Well, now they do.

Cooper grips the pierced cigarette case in his hands. It glints faintly in the swelling sunlight.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
(to Cooper)
Please, Coop. It's time.

Cooper, slowly coming back into his body, slips the case inside his coat, looks to his bulging pack.

COOPER
Ditch everything but the Comp-B.

Klein does his best to smile, turns toward his pack and Morelli's, rips both open, digs out everything unessential.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, CHUTE - DAY

Having donned their skis once again, Cooper and Klein stand at the edge of a perilously steep chute leading down and away from the summit of the ridge.

Klein quickly wraps his blooded arm with a section of white fabric cut from his jacket. To stop the bleeding.

Behind them, SPORADIC GUNFIRE echoes from in and around each and every German position lining Riva Ridge.

Improvised German counter-attacks already well-underway.

KLEIN

Try to follow my line so that they think it's just one of us.

Cooper's empty eyes wash over the rock-lined chute.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

Remember the route? Once we hit the trees, bend north. Get back to the valley, cross the river, ditch our skis. Keep climbing. Find the falls. We'll run into German reinforcements on the way.

Cooper's face is blank again. Slipping. Fading.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

We need to do this. For Max. For your wife. For my sister.

Cooper finally looks his way. *What?*

KLEIN (CONT'D)

I promised her I'd find them. My parents. After they got me out, the Gestapo took them. My cousins too.

The two men lock eyes, remember the casino. What they saw.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

Like the General says. *Sempre Avanti*. Always forward.

(beat)

Never look back.

The words seem to rouse something in Cooper, bring him back.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

We can do this. Max would have wanted this.

From their left, far down in German territory, we see a series of SILENT FLASHES.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
I need you. You need me. No more
solos. End of--

A SHRILL WHINE cuts him off as a series of massive artillery shells rip through the air toward the summit.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
88s. Go!

Klein shoves off just as four shells hit just behind them:

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

The ground shakes. Snow, rock, and debris soar.

KLEIN (O.C.)
(from down below)
Hurry.

Jolted back to action, Cooper finally pushes off.

And, together they speed down the crusty, windblown pitch and into enemy territory.

At first, Cooper struggles stay in Klein's tracks. But then, just as he did way back in the quarry, Cooper slowly allows muscle memory to kick back in. Instinct.

Acting, not reacting.

Out of nowhere, a six-person squad of nearly identically uniformed GERMAN SKI SOLDIERS from The 47th Edelweiss slip into the gully, traversing toward the summit.

Urgently needed reinforcements.

Klein veers directly their way, pulls his white hood up over his matte green helmet.

From above: more SHRIEKING SHELLS, more VIOLENT EXPLOSIONS.

Cooper hesitates briefly, nearly falls, regains his balance, tugs his hood up, skids off after Klein.

STRAIGHT TOWARD THE ENEMY FORCES.

And, as he and Cooper glide closer, Klein SHOUTS:

KLEIN
*Swei Amerikanische Einheiten nähern
 sich von Süden.*

With studied hand-gestures, he motions: *Split up. Half west, half east. Meet in the middle. Pincer.*

The lead German Soldier nods, mimics Klein's gestures, and (without a second thought) the unit splits up, skis away.

Never in a million years suspecting they were taking orders from American ski soldiers.

COOPER
 (under his breath)
 The fuck are you--

A seventh German Soldier slides out onto the pitch. A RADIOMAN with a hefty backpack sporting whipsawing antennae.

KLEIN
 (to the Radioman)
Du, halt.

Klein side-slides up next to the Radioman as the rest of his squad disappears down the pitch.

RADIOMAN
Was ist los?

Klein reaches a hand into his jacket, pulls a knife from his belt, sinks it into the Radioman's chest, lowers him to the snow with one hand covering his mouth.

Cooper just watches. Stunned.

COOPER
 What are you doing?

KLEIN
 Shhh. I have an idea.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, LOWER SLOPES - DAY

Having made it to the base and having already ditched their skis and poles, Cooper and Klein take cover in a thick grove of snow-covered trees.

Above and behind them: more GUNFIRE.

And more SUSTAINED EXPLOSIONS.

Klein CRANKS the radio, lifts the mouthpiece, BARKS:

KLEIN
Waffenstillstand! Waffenstillstand!
Artillerie stoppen!

Cooper stares at him uncomprehendingly.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Sie schießen auf unsere eigenen
Stellungen. Wiederholen.
 (beat)
Sie schießen auf unsere eigenen
Stellungen!

Klein tosses the mouthpiece, grabs his sidearm, fires twice into the pack, disables the transmitter.

He turns, holsters his weapon.

COOPER
 What did you... The fuck was that?

To the north, the German 88s go quiet. The barrage ceases.

KLEIN
 I told them they were firing on
 their own positions.

Klein spins, runs for the river. In the distance, Belvedere looms large.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
 Come.

EXT. BELVEDERE, LOWER SLOPES - LATER

Back out on their own, Cooper and Klein trudge through a pitched clearing covered in surprisingly deep snow.

The wind is now HOWLING. The light has gone flat.

And the mountain ahead of them is alarmingly quiet. Even the ridge behind them sounds to have settled somewhat.

In whose hands, it's impossible to know.

Both men's teeth chatter as they run with their backpacks full of demolition munitions and their rifles in-hand.

They're both running on empty. Freezing.

KLEIN
 Stay warm. Stay awake. Talk.

Beat.

Cooper walls off, trudges on.

COOPER
Keep moving.

Klein nods, follows, bleary-eyed.

KLEIN
Listen...

POP. POP. POP.

Small-arms fire SNAPS through the SWIRLING wind.

Cooper slows, turns, listens.

More GUNFIRE. Then the THUMP THUMP of mortar shells. Then more RETURN FIRE. Then a series of QUICK EXPLOSIONS.

COOPER
They're moving already. With or
without Riva.

Cooper picks up the pace. They've run out of time.

Klein sprints after him.

KLEIN
...if something happens to me--

COOPER
Shut up.

KLEIN
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:

THUMP. THUMP.

More mortars being dropped into tubes.

COOPER
Back to the clearing. The snow.

KLEIN
What? No.

BOOM! BOOM!

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

THUMP. THUMP.

COOPER

RUN.

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

KLEIN

That doesn't make any--

A third mortar lands right next to Klein.

BOOM!

Klein still hesitates.

COOPER

The snow. It slows them down!

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

EXT. BELVEDERE, OPEN FIELD - CONTINUOUS

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

WHOOSH. BOOM. WHOOSH. BOOM. WHOOSH.

Cooper skids to a stop at a tall wall of jagged concertina wire stretched across the field.

BOOM!

Another shell lands right between Cooper and Klein, blows them both off-course.

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

Cooper stumbles left, falls.

BOOM!

Another shell lands right in Cooper's footprints.

KLEIN

Get up. Get up. RUN.

Cooper 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, Klein spins back around to see Cooper staring, bewildered, at a huge gap in the wall of wire.

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

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

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Stop! Stop!

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

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Minefield.

Cooper looks around wildly. The wind kicks up.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Do not... move.

Klein 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 AMERICAN SIGNAL CORPS SOLDIERS (20s) standing frozen in the snowy field beyond it, just like Cooper.

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 same position as Klein.

HARRIS
Well now, ain't that poetic.

Klein does a quick, desperate double-take.

Cooper, 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.

Klein's eyes dart back toward Cooper.

KLEIN
Careful. Retrace your steps.

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

COOPER

But--

KLEIN

Backward. Slowly.

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

KLEIN (CONT'D)

(still to Cooper)

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?

COOPER

What if--

KLEIN

Quiet. Trust me. Please.

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

KLEIN (CONT'D)

That's it. One step at a time.

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

HARRIS

(toward Klein)

Just let him hang, Kraut.

Cooper looks to Harris, brims with rage.

COOPER

He's Austrian, you piece of shit.

HARRIS

Same goddamn thing.

Cooper continues his slow backward march.

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

COOPER
No it ain't.

HARRIS
(to Klein)
Sonofabitch killed my fuckin' men.

KLEIN
No sir. Your men killed his entire
unit. Neither of you are to blame.

Cooper takes another cautious step. Heart pounding.

HARRIS
(to Cooper)
You cost me my command.

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

KLEIN
That's the price of war, sir.

Cooper slows, can't see anything but white, looks back to Harris' men. They all watch him desperately.

He takes another cautious step.

KLEIN (CONT'D)
Focus. You're almost--

SNAP!

Something CRACKS under Cooper's boot. He swivels his gaze back to Klein, then to the ground.

His right boot is barely outside his former footprint.

COOPER
(barely audible)
Shit. Shit. Shit.

HARRIS
Fuck him. Let's move!

KLEIN
(to Cooper)
Steady.

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

KLEIN (CONT'D)
You can do this.

Cooper winces, slowly lifts his foot.

NOTHING HAPPENS. He's in the clear.

Cooper, his heart racing, bounds the rest of the way out.

Harris, unimpressed, turns back around to his men, BARKS:

HARRIS
(to the Medic)
Alright. Move it, kid. Other way.

Cooper's knees buckle. Klein steadies him.

KLEIN
I should have taken your bet.

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

COOPER
Thank you. Again.

KLEIN
Don't mention it.

HARRIS
(over his shoulder)
You two. Up here, now.

Together, they turn, look again toward Harris and his men.

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

The Medic freezes, looks back.

COOPER
Wait.

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.

Cooper and Klein rush up toward Harris.

COOPER
Harris! There's gotta be another--

The nearest Soldier stumbles backward. CLICK. BOOM! Where he once stood, literally nothing remains. Not a scrap.

Cooper and Klein skid to a stop, horrified.

The furthest Soldier buckles, covers his ears, WAILS as if wishing it all away.

HARRIS
Nickerson. Don't you move a fuckin'
muscle. And that's an--

Ignoring him, the Soldier turns and runs, zigzagging madly. He gets nearly all the way across the clearing SCREAMING.

CLICK. BANG!

His body is thrown into the waiting limbs of a nearby tree like a wet towel.

COOPER
(to Harris)
STOP IT.

HARRIS
All you stubborn goddamn mountain
men. Never fuckin' listen.

The HOWLING wind is blotting out every boot print. Erasing the trail. And the blood.

Harris turns around toward Cooper, pure menace.

HARRIS (CONT'D)
Your turn.

COOPER
No, Harris.

HARRIS
That's Captain Harris to you.

Cooper charges at him.

COOPER
There's *gotta* be another way. We
have orders. Direct from Hank. From
Colonel Hampton. We need to get out
ahead of B Company. Take out a--

Harris GRABS him by his jacket, YANKS Cooper closer. Their faces are only inches apart. Cooper still persists:

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

Harris drops him, pulls his sidearm, wags it toward Cooper and Klein. And then the minefield.

HARRIS
The only way is through.

Klein's nervous eyes dart from Harris' gun to the minefield.

KLEIN
Sir!

HARRIS
(to Cooper)
Me and the Hun'll be on your six.
(beat)
And that's an order, *Corporal*.

Cooper looks to Klein, grips his rifle. And, without saying another word, he slowly sets off into the minefield.

EXT. MINEFIELD - CONTINUOUS

Cooper threads his way through the cut barbed wire, into the snow-covered field, pauses.

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

It's on.

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

Half a second later, Klein fearlessly follows him in.

Faint boot print by faint bloody boot print, the two men carefully make their way deeper into the minefield.

Behind them, Harris mirrors their movements exactly, stepping gingerly into each darkened divot in the snow.

Up ahead, Cooper does his best to steady his breath as he walks, 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.

Cooper and Klein head right. Harris follows silently.

With the distant FIREFIGHT still hotting up up-slope, Cooper 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.

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

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

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

He pauses, reaches a hand into his jacket, slowly pulls out Morelli's punctured cigarette case, grips it in one hand.

Like a talisman. Like a holy relic.

Slowly, meticulously, Cooper 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.

Cooper turns, looks back to Klein. Klein nods back.

We got this.

Cooper looks ahead again.

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

Cooper EXHALES slowly, closes his eyes, bounds quickly over the barren snow and into the relative safety of the trees.

Safe, he wheels back around, opens his eyes, WHOOPS:

COOPER
We *fucking* did it!

Klein runs toward him, sees the cigarette case in his hand.

KLEIN
See, I told you.

Harris steps up behind Klein. Unimpressed.

HARRIS

What do you want, a fuckin' medal?

EXT. BELVEDERE, NORTH FACE - LATER

Cooper, Klein, and 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 AMERICANS litter the frozen soil.

Were it not for the near constant EXPLOSIONS and RICOCHETING MUNITIONS, the wail of the wounded would fill the air.

Harris fires blindly, lustfully, at anything that moves.

Up ahead, a frozen creek snakes through the trees.

Above it looms the glistening silhouette of a massive frozen waterfall with tiny stone structure at the top.

Their target.

Cooper sees it, slows.

From the top of the falls: five BLINDING FLASHES followed by five HIGH-PITCHED SHRIEKS that slice through the air.

Even Harris slows, dazzled.

Seconds later, five MASSIVE EXPLOSIONS in the distance. The gruesome orange light flickers in his eyes.

HARRIS

Break a leg, gents.

He charges off again as bullets WHIZ and PING through the trees and rocks all around them.

Cooper sees him, SHOUTS:

COOPER

NO. WAIT.

He charges off after Harris, grabs him by the back of his jacket, throws him forcefully to the ground as another ghastly salvo rips from above:

WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH.

COOPER (CONT'D)
 (over the screaming)
 WE HAVE A CHANCE TO SAVE MEN.

With Cooper towering above him lit by five more ENORMOUS BLASTS down-slope Harris just stares.

Momentarily mesmerized by the sheer destructive power.

Cooper steps closer, thrusts a hand down toward Harris.

COOPER (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry, Harris. But I need you.
 I need your help.

WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH.

Five more rockets fire from above.

Harris finally reaches up, takes Cooper's hand firmly.

KLEIN
 (behind Cooper)
 Tell me he can climb.

EXT. FROZEN WATERFALL, BASE - DUSK

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

Three pairs of crampons sit in a heap next to six ice axes.

COOPER
 (to Harris)
 Strap up.

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

COOPER (CONT'D)
 (to Klein)
 Looks like toe-in all the way up.
 Keep your heels down. Your arm?

Klein nods. *I'll be fine.*

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

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

COOPER (CONT'D)
 (to Harris)
 What's B Company's route?

Harris stares blankly up at the wall of ice clutching a single brick of Comp-B (aka plastic explosives).

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

HARRIS
 Search me. It's fucking chaos.

Harris flips the brick over in his hand.

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

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

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

Harris tosses the brick to Klein, bends to grab a pair of crampons, tie them on.

HARRIS
 (to Cooper)
 We're gonna need those anchors.

Cooper cinches his own crampons tight.

COOPER
 Nope.

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

COOPER (CONT'D)
 No time.

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

COOPER (CONT'D)
 We're gonna have to climb this thing old-style. No anchors. No belay. Daisy-chained.

Above, another five rockets FLASH and then WAIL as they zip overhead toward the lower slopes before EXPLODING.

COOPER (CONT'D)
One of us falls, it's on the other
two to keep contact.

Harris' face tightens.

HARRIS
Since when'd you start givin' the
fuckin' orders?

COOPER
Since you ordered me into a
minefield, sir.

Klein bends to scoop up his own pair of axes.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Skill, communication, trust.

HARRIS
You're the last fuckin' person on
Earth I'd trust to--

COOPER
I know, sir. I know.
(beat)
But Hank trusts me and my men. And
that's all that matters.

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

Klein does the same.

COOPER (CONT'D)
(still to Harris)
We gotta take that battery. Give
the rest of the division cover or
else. You hear me?

Klein turns, surveys the glistening wall, points.

KLEIN
(to Cooper)
What do you say? There. Then there?

Cooper traces the route with his eyes.

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

Klein nods.

Harris shakes his head.

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

Cooper turns back toward Harris.

COOPER (CONT'D)
 (to Harris, teaching)
 Look for deep seams. Depressions.
 Watch the bulges.

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

KLEIN
 (also to Harris)
 Test everything. With all this run-
 off, there's bound to be a ton of
 shear. Especially at the base.

Cooper pulls out two strands of webbing from his pocket.

COOPER (CONT'D)
 (to Klein)
 I'll lead. Captain next. Then you.

He tosses Harris a strip.

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

Cooper reaches out to help Harris with his gear. Harris bats his hand away. The two men lock eyes.

HARRIS
 Where's your second? Morelli?

Cooper breaks eye-contact first, looks to Klein.

KLEIN
 Watching over us, sir. Watching
 over us all.

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.

Cooper, 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 Klein, who's just beginning the climb.

Below: their abandoned anchors. Above: GERMAN VOICES.

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

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

His grenades JANGLE.

Cooper 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 fading light glinting off its surface, Cooper HISSES down toward Harris:

COOPER

Eyes up.

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

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

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

The line snaps taut. Klein 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.

COOPER (CONT'D)

The fuck are you--

Ignoring Cooper, 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.

COOPER (CONT'D)
(barely audible)

NO.

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

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

Below Harris, Klein 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 Cooper just as Klein falls.

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

His body SMACKS the ice hard.

Klein 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 Cooper and then PINGING across the open ice between Klein and Harris.

Klein, 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 Cooper.

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

ON COOPER AND KLEIN:

Nearly to the top, Cooper and Klein are nearly side-by-side. Below them, Harris continues steadily upward.

Above them we hear someone BARKING commands in German.

A sudden barrage of MACHINE GUN FIRE from the lower slopes 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.

A 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.

Cooper 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. Cooper freezes.

A GERMAN CAPTAIN in a white hooded jacket pauses at the sight of Cooper's abandoned gear next to the creek.

Cooper HISSES toward Klein to stop. Watching them, Harris slows. Cooper 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.

Cooper 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 Klein.

KA-BOOM.

A single grenade vaporizes the German.

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

The rope between Cooper and Harris goes taut.

Cooper looks down to see Harris dangling, shot in the back.

Harris looks back up, clutching his knife again.

COOPER

Wait! Don't--

Harris' stern face says it all. *Well ain't that just the...*

He gets the blade through the rope swiftly, plummets.

He lands with a muted THUMP almost precisely where the German Captain just stood.

Cooper turns back to the wall, POUNDS the ice with his fist.

KLEIN

Hey, hey.

Cooper 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. Cooper quickly unties his with one hand, drops it into the dark.

Klein does the same.

The VOICES above have gone quiet. The rocket battery, too.

But down below, the battle is heating up.

Cooper takes a couple of deep breaths, having no idea what waits beyond the lip of the waterfall.

Are they too late?

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

Cooper reaches for a grenade of his own.

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

It JANGLES down the ice. Still, no voices from above.

Cooper shifts his shoulders, 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

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

Klein 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.

Cooper 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.

KLEIN

Niemand bewegt sich!

Everybody freezes. Everything goes EERILY SILENT.

But then the soldier with casings drops them. They CLATTER and CLANG mutedly at his feet.

The surrounding GUNFIRE ramps back up, over-loud.

A bespectacled GERMAN COMMANDER moves for his pistol.

KLEIN (CONT'D)

Tu das nicht.

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 Cooper's feet, and into the back of the massive rocket launcher.

COOPER

Step back. Put it down.

A nearby RADIOMAN wearing binoculars around his neck looks to a field radio dangling from a nearby tree branch.

COOPER (CONT'D)

No, no. There's no need to--

Behind Cooper, Klein YANKS a grenade from his belt, flicks away the clip. It hits the scorched rock with a muted: DING.

Everything slows down.

Cooper swivels his gaze back toward Klein. He's standing behind the fully-loaded rocket launcher.

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

COOPER (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 Cooper's leg. He stumbles, fires once:

BANG!

The Kannonier screams, falls backward.

Klein takes aim, fires twice:

POP! POP!

The Radioman falls.

The Commander returns fire:

BANG!

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

Cooper aims, fires:

BANG!

The Commander crumples.

The Private lifts both arms.

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

Klein pulls the pin, throws his grenade.

BOOM!

The young Private disappears in a blinding BLAST.

Cooper wheels around, looks to Klein again.

ZIP!

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

Cooper spins on his heels, lunges back toward Klein.

COOPER

Watch out!

Cooper LEAPS forward, TACKLES Klein, KNOCKS him clear.

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

ZIP!

The Kannonier sends the signal again.

Klein slams into the stone wall of the mill.

Nothing happens.

Klein 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.

KLEIN

COOPER.

Klein vaults forward, falls to the ice, reaches desperately down over the frosty edge.

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

His grenades CLINK together as he sways.

COOPER

Boy, am I glad to see you.

Klein GRABS the cable, STRAINS to pull Cooper's body back up the ice wall to safety.

Behind them, the Kannonier charges away into the darkness.
Klein HEAVES Cooper over the lip, lets the Kannonier run.

KLEIN
(winded)
You. Saved. Me.

Cooper, stunned, just lies there on the ice.

COOPER
Vice versa, kid. Vice versa.

Cooper sits up slowly. His eyes dart to the rocket launcher.

COOPER (CONT'D)
We got a chance here, kid. What
they call back home a Hail Mary.

COOPER BINOCULARS POV:

Through the Germans' abandoned binoculars, we see what appears to be a sizable German bunker further down-slope.

A hive of activity teeming with WEHRMACHT SOLDIERS. At least four separate GUN CREWS mow down advancing AMERICANS.

COOPER (O.C.)
Direction zero, five, two, zero.
Distance 1,200 meters. Altitude
520. Danger close.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - CONTINUOUS

Cooper lowers the binoculars.

Klein hands him the firing mechanism.

Their backpacks lie nearly empty on a snowbank beyond the scorched rock behind the launcher.

The launcher itself is now covered in flattened pucks of Composition B. None are connected to blast wire yet.

COOPER
Think that's within range?

KLEIN
No idea.

COOPER
One full rack. Then we blow it sky-high, yeah?

KLEIN
What about the heat?

COOPER
Dunno. Should be safe?

Cooper looks to Klein, then to the device in his hands.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Sooner we end them, the sooner we
find your family.

Klein reaches out, takes the binoculars, looks downhill.

COOPER (CONT'D)
Save B Company's asses. Take this
whole *fucking* mountain, yeah?

Klein lowers the binoculars, nods slowly.

KLEIN
Fire when ready.

Both men step back.

Cooper gives the dial five quick, forceful twists.

After a split second:

WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

Five rockets rapidly RIP out of the launcher. The ROAR is deafening. The repeated FLASHES, blinding.

Cooper and Klein 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, petrified by their destructive power.

COOPER
Alright. Let's do this.

Cooper drops the detonator, turns, pulls a bundle of blasting caps tethered to ignition wires from one pocket.

And, as the battle below rages on, Cooper and Klein 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. In unison.

Cooper pauses, looks to the trees, nods.

And, together, both men run, hunched, back into the forest as the snow begins to fall once again.

Cooper falls to his knees, scoops up a battered 10-cap blasting machine, threads his wires into the positive and negative terminals, twists both tight.

Klein grabs a second device, does the same.

KLEIN

You're a good man, Coop.

Cooper lifts the key-like handle dangling from the side of his blasting machine, inserts it slowly, looks to Klein.

COOPER

Don't.

Klein grips his blasting machine, inserts his handle.

Cooper hesitates. His fingers quake again. Ever so slightly.

Klein looks to him, leans closer.

KLEIN

I'm honored to be your second.

Cooper 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 a drift right beside Cooper.

It disappears in the heavy snow as quickly as it appeared.

Cooper, frantic, tosses Klein his blasting machine, turns, desperately plunges his arm into the drift before --

BANG.

Everything goes instantly QUIET.

The screen fills with NOTHING BUT WHITE.

Then, eventually: WIND.

FADE TO:

COOPER'S POV:

Slowly, the screen fills again with BRIGHT BLUE SKY. Fluffy white clouds drift languidly by.

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 waking up.

Coming back to life.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY

Cooper 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.

Klein is nowhere to be seen.

In the distance, the ripple of approaching shadows. Men on the move. Purposeful. On guard.

Cooper 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.

COOPER'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 and blood. But somehow familiar.

The MAN (20s) 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

COOPER (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.

ON COOPER:

Cooper tries to lift his arm to salute. It won't budge.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)
 No, no. Take it easy now.

Cooper GROANS, lets his bloody torso go slack.

COOPER
 There's a letter. In his jacket.
 Breast pocket. To his sister. In
 London. I need to--

LIEUTENANT HAYS
 It's okay, Corporal. Your buddy's
 just fine. Burnt up pretty bad from
 all that Comp-B you two laid down.
 But he'll be right as rain.

Lieutenant Hays gently slips Cooper'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)
 Boys here will get you down. All
 fixed up just like new.

Lieutenant Hays stands, clutches his rifle.

COOPER
 (weakly)
 Valpiana. Did we take--

Hays grins, looks away.

LIEUTENANT HAYS
 Listen to this one. Asking if we
 took Valpiana.

We hear weary CHUCKLING from the shadows in the distance as
 Lieutenant Hays looks back toward Cooper, beams.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)
 Yessir. We did. And Gorgolesco too.
 Took it all the way up Belvedere
 and down the other side.

He rubs a hand across his prematurely grizzled face.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)
 Spitfires and P-47 are paving the
 path past Hill 1088 on up to Mount
 Torraccia as we speak.

Looking almost exactly like his father now, Lieutenant Hays
 gazes protectively down toward Cooper, ringed in light.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)
 But that's not your worry now, sir.
 (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:

**THE 10TH TOOK AND HELD RIVA RIDGE
 THROUGH 36 HOURS OF HEAVY BOMBARDMENT**

**BUT CAPTURING BELVEDERE COST
 THE 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 COMPLETED THE
 MISSION IN JUST FIVE**

**AND BERLIN FELL
 JUST THREE MONTHS LATER**

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END