

THE

TH



BASED ON ACTUAL EVENTS



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THE 10TH

Written by

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In November of 1937, The Soviet Union invaded Finland with 21 Red Army divisions totaling nearly one million men.

The Finnish Army was able fight the Soviets to a standstill with a force of only 150,000.

Largely by deploying an elite force of mountain troops comprised of decorated skiers and rock climbers.

Their stunning victory inspired the formation of the US 10th Mountain Division, America's first Alpine Infantry unit.

This is the story of their first high-stakes mission.

EXT. ELK MOUNTAIN, COLORADO - DAY

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

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

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

SUPER: ELK MOUNTAIN, COLORADO, SPRING 1944

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

MAX

What I wouldn't give for a shot of
whiskey and a t-bone at The Jerome
right about now!

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

JAKE

What?!

In distance, the sound of heavy MORTAR FIRE.

MAX

Turn a bunch of skiers into
soldiers instead of the other way
around?!

Max pauses, looking lost.

MAX (CONT'D)

Terrible idea!

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

JAKE

Camp Hale? More like Camp Hell!

As Jake slowly tromps past Max, he gives the rope a firm tug to make sure the line is clear.

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

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

MAX
Are they trying to train us up or
kill us off?!

JAKE
There's a difference?!

The line goes taut. Jake feels it, slows.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Any word from Jane?

Another fierce GUST nearly knocks Max to his knees.

MAX
Nope!

Max leans into the wind, stumbles forward.

MAX (CONT'D)
Think she's hoping we fail this
whole deal. Get stuck stateside
until after the show's over.

JAKE
What? And miss all the fun?!

Max grabs the line, pulls himself closer.

MAX
(shouting)
That'd be just fine by me!

Grinning into the gale, Jake pushes confidently on.

JAKE
I dunno, I'm startin' to kinda--

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

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
Hold it.
(hushed)
Ice bridge.

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

Jake instantly tumbles from view.

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

He SCREAMS, unable to slow down.

MAX
Goddammit!

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

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

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

JAKE
No, no, no!

The rope between them SNAPS taut! Jake GRUNTS.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
Max!

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
SARGE!

Thinking fast, Jake lets go of his ax with his left hand and shimmyes the strap of his backpack free. Then, re-grabbing the handle, he repeats the motion with his right arm.

And his backpack slips from his shoulders, disappearing into the void.

JAKE (CONT'D)
C'mon, Max. Wake UP!

Nothing.

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

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

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
I'm gonna get you outta here!

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

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
Son of a--

BOOM. He finally stops his fall.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
MAX! Buddy.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
I can't hold you much--

Suddenly it happens. The knot tied to the webbing wrapped around Max's waist slithers undone like a snake.

JAKE (CONT'D)
No, no, NO!

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

HARD CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED CHURCH, APENNINE MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

Jake JOLTS awake with a GASP!

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

A YOUNG MAN leans toward Jake, places a hand on his shoulder. This is PFC FRITZ KLEIN (early 20s, weathered high cheekbones, an air of privilege, wealth).

FRITZ
(Austrian accent)
Same thing?

Jake stares through him. His face has hardened. His eyes radiate nothing but disdain. Anger masking loss.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

With Max?

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

JAKE

Just leave me alone.

Fritz steps back, palms out. *I surrender.*

FRITZ

Can't. Orders.

(beat)

You know what's wrong with this unit?

JAKE

(harshly)

No, what?

FRITZ

Too much *joie de vivre*. Not enough *esprit de corps*.

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

FRITZ (O.S.)

Oh, and bring your skis.

EXT. BOMBED-OUT VILLAGE - NIGHT

Jake and Fritz scamper across the frozen ground, dressed all in white. Alpine infantry camouflage.

SUPER: APENNINE MOUNTAINS, ITALY, 17 FEBRUARY 1945

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

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

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

JAKE

Wait, slow down. *How close are we supposed to get?*

FRITZ

As close as we can to get a proper visual. Note their positions, their general readiness.

JAKE

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

Jake speeds up, passes Fritz as they leave the village and start uphill into the trees - shouldering rifles and skis.

JAKE (CONT'D)

But you already knew that.

FRITZ

Please, can we just--

Fritz veers away from him, moving with the surefooted grace of someone raised, like Jake was, at altitude.

As they jump from boulder-to-boulder, the frozen ground beneath them goes swiftly whiter and whiter - the last evidence of a recent dusting.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

Plus, we need to work on your *schwingen*. You're too stiff.

To their right, a hulking snow-covered peak looms.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, SUMMIT - NIGHT

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

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

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

Through the moonlit trees, we see Jake, gliding.

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

JAKE

(quietly, to himself)

Well, Max. Sure is a shame you didn't get to meet the new fellas.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
 This one though... I'm pretty sure
 you woulda politely passed.

Skidding to a stop, he yanks one mitten off with his teeth,
 pulls out a pair of binoculars, uncaps them.

EXT. GERMAN MACHINE GUN NEST - JAKE'S POV

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

JAKE (V.O.)
 Swears he's not a Hun.

Two of them are smoking, playing cards.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
 But I got my doubts.

And the fourth soldier is busy neatly stacking belts of 7.92
 millimeter ammunition. CLINK! CLINK! CLINK!

EXT. STEEP HILLSIDE - BACK ON JAKE

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

In the distance, we catch sight of Fritz. He silently points
 toward the machine gun nest.

Jake nods, notes its position in his notebook.

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

JAKE
 (hushed)
 Yeah, yeah.

Jake pockets his notebook, slips his mitten back on, grabs
 the grips of his poles.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 God, remember that time we--

FLASH TO:

EXT. HIGH ABOVE ASPEN - DAY [FLASHBACK]

From the darkness of night to the brilliant daylight of an
 early spring, bluebird day high in the Rockies.

SUPER: HUNTER CREEK, COLORADO, WINTER 1944

A unshaven pack of SKIERS clad in all white descend a steep mountain glade full of glistening, knee-deep powder.

At the front of the pack, Jake and Max carve looping, graceful turns - gleefully WHOOPING it up!

MAX

Now, *this* is living!

JAKE

Whoohoo!

A tall mountain of a man, STAFF SERGEANT PAUL PETZOLDT (30s, open face, mischievous grin) streaks past them - pointing one long bamboo pole toward a small town below the trees.

PAUL

This way, gents! To The Jerome!

Another skier traverses Paul's line with a consummate ease. This is SERGEANT FRIEDL PFEIFER (30s, high forehead, sharp features, a man game for anything).

He's got the most elegant form of all of them. A seasoned pro (with the gold medals to show for it).

FRIEDL

(Austrian accent)

Why, it looks so very much like my home village. Saint Anton.

PAUL

Told ya it'd be worth it!

(back toward Jake)

A steak dinner and a whiskey for a goddamn dollar!

Max falls in behind Friedl, and together the whole crew *schuss* their way downhill toward town.

FRIEDL

(marveling)

Wunderschön.

Max SHOUTS to Jake:

MAX

Gotta work on your *schwingen*, kid.
You're too--

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - NIGHT

Back in the Apennines, back under the cover of darkness, Jake tightens his grip on his poles and shoves off.

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

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

JAKE (V.O.)
Wish we were there right now.

Jake takes a sweeping left hand turn, slicing downhill, picking up speed in the moonlight.

Fritz SHOVES off after him, tucking - clearly the superior skier. Like Friedl, a pro.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Both of us. And the boys, not him.

With only the HISS of their skis cutting through snow filling the frosty air, Fritz and Jake race their way back down the moonlit mountainside.

At first, Jake is clearly in the lead. But then he cuts a hard right to avoid some rocks.

Fritz barrels headlong past him, wasting no energy, barely missing the rocks - an old hand at finding the fastest line.

Jake ducks back in behind him, trying to draft.

Fritz bends hard left, leaving Jake in his wake before catching some air off the top of a snow-dusted boulder.

Behind them, the edges of their tracks reflect the silver light of the moon.

WHOOSH! Fritz lands the jump like an ace and bends hard right, toward the trees.

Jake follows him in.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR, ABANDONED VILLAGE - NIGHT

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

FRITZ
(a whisper)
Seven minutes twenty-four seconds.
Not bad. For a beginner.

Their boots CRACKLE over frozen gravel.

JAKE
 (also hushed)
 You use gravity to win bits of tin.
 I fight gravity to stay alive.

Beyond them, past the barn, the wooded valley is
 ridiculously pastoral - lit too by the light of the moon.

In the distance, Paul Petzholdt steps out out of the barn.
 His former glee has been lightly sanded away.

As they pass him, stepping inside the barn, he leans toward
 Fritz and WHISPERS:

PAUL
 (hushed)
 How's he doin'?

Fritz shrugs.

FRITZ
 Better. Still stiff.

Paul re-conjures a puckish grin.

PAUL
 (to Jake)
 Gotta remember, danger respects
 technique.

INT. 10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION FORWARD COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT

The hay-strewn barn is bathed a honey-hewed light.

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

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

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

COLONEL HAMPTON
 Boys.

Jake and Fritz salute, setting down their skis.

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

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

JAKE
Well, sir. It ain't pretty.

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

The two of them approach the model, zipping open their white hooded jackets and pulling out their notebooks.

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

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

COLONEL HAMPTON
General readiness?

FRITZ
Prepared. Dug in.

COLONEL HAMPTON
(gesturing to the model)
Here, show me.

Thumbing through their notebooks, Jake and Fritz move toward toward the ridge.

The side closest to us is the sheer vertical wall.

And, next to it, at the foot of the jagged peak, is another tiny placard reading: **BELVEDERE**.

Jake steps up and grabs a small ring-like figurine from the base of the model. Looking to his open notebook, he places the figurine carefully on the top of the ridge.

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

Jake and Fritz move quickly, placing figurines all along the summit at regular intervals.

Colonel Hampton's face stiffens.

FRITZ
They will see every move, every
man. All of Belevedere.

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

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

JAKE
What are you blind? That nest was here.

Fritz slides the marker back to where he first placed it.

FRITZ
Nein. Here.

Jake yanks it back.

JAKE
Here!

Fritz knocks it back roughly.

FRITZ
Hier!

Paul steps up and slams his rock-calloused hands down on top of both of their hands.

PAUL
Boys.

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

PAUL (CONT'D)
Maybe we should, uh, split the difference?

FLASH TO:

INT. HOTEL JEROME, ASPEN - DAY [FLASHBACK]

The same motley crew of Alpine ski soldiers from earlier sits shoulder-to-shoulder at the carved wooden bar of this silver boom town hotel. They've all shed their white coats.

SUPER: ASPEN, COLORADO, WINTER 1944

At the center of them sits a deeply-tanned young man with the suave air of an early motion picture star.

This is PERCY RIDEOUT (late 20s, close-cropped wavy hair, rugged good looks). He's flanked by Jake and Max.

Friedl, from earlier, sits just beyond Max.

PERCY

Split the difference? Malarkey!

Just past Friedl, a slightly younger-looking Paul nods slowly toward his still steaming t-bone.

Percy turns toward Friedl.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Friedl, you know I love you. But, medals be damned, there's only one man at this bar who can claim rights for free climbing Grand Teton wearing cowboy boots at the ripe old age of sixteen!

Paul sets down his knife and fork, reaches out and snatches up a shot glass in his rock-calloused hands.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Got so cold he spent the night trapped on a ledge. Summited by carving footholds in the last icy bits with a goddamn pen knife!

Jake, Max, and even Freidl lift their shot glasses too.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Takes a true wing nut billy goat renegade to master the mountain all by his lonesome!

Percy grabs his own glass too, thrusts it into the air toward Friedl.

PERCY (CONT'D)

(to Friedl)

You may be the fastest sonofabitch on two planks. But old Paul there's got you beat goin' uphill, no two ways about it!

All five men loudly CLINK their glasses, sloshing whiskey down onto the bar.

PERCY (CONT'D)

And I got a feeling that's what's gonna count when, and if, we ever get the hell over there.

MAX

Amen to that!

END FLASHBACK.

INT. 10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION FORWARD COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT

Back to the warm light of the barn-like command center.

Jake, looking shaken, nods slowly toward Paul, lets go of the machine gun nest marker, steps back.

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

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

GENERAL HAYS

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

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

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

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

His bloodshot eyes shift to the adjoining peak.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

And hold it. Or else.

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

COLONEL HAMPTON

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

(beat)

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

(gravely)

Again.

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

GENERAL HAYS

(forcefully)

Hitler *himself* has ordered every single man and boy on that contemptible mountain to fight to the death to hold the line. War office says it'll take three weeks. I say more. Casualties beyond measure.

(turning away)

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

Jake raises a hand, eyes on the model.

JAKE

Sirs?

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

Jake reaches a hand out toward Riva Ridge, points.

JAKE (CONT'D)

See these positions? Here, here, here, and here. They're all oriented for attack from the west or the north. Not from the east. Or the south.

(beat)

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

Colonel Hampton cocks his head.

COLONEL HAMPTON

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

JAKE

I seen worse. Climbed worse.

Jake looks to Paul. Paul crosses his arms.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I can take it. Solo.

GENERAL HAYS

Hogwash.

Stepping up, Fritz studies the model too.

FRITZ
 (pointing, to Jake)
 Say, here? Or here?

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

JAKE
 Run fixed lines. Pitons. Pre-laid.

A glimmer of hope washes across Colonel Hampton's face. He reaches out toward Belvedere.

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

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

General Hays follows, nodding warily.

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

GENERAL HAYS
 (reluctantly)
 Fixed bayonets. Empty rifles. Not a
 shot. Not a peep 'til sunup.

COLONEL HAMPTON
 Follow on with artillery and
 resupply on mules.

PAUL
 (pointing)
 Build a tram line. From the summit
 to the base. Here. To ferry wounded
 men down and ammo up!

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

The General looks searchingly toward Paul.

GENERAL HAYS
 Think it can be done?

Paul, not one to shy away from a hair-brained idea, smiles broadly back.

PAUL
Sir, I haven't the foggiest.

Paul turns toward Jake. Jake nods.

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

Paul gestures toward Fritz.

PAUL
Together.

Jake wants nothing of it.

JAKE
No way. He can't--

PAUL
Daylight. The two of you on belay.
Lay pitons the whole way up.

Jake tries again to protest. Paul waves him off.

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

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

JAKE
(through clenched teeth)
Yessir.

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

Fritz stands frozen, still staring at the model.

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

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

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

Paul silently nods.

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

EXT. ABANDONED VILLAGE - NIGHT

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

FRITZ
(under his breath)
I don't like it any better than you do!

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

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

He grabs Jake by one shoulder, spins him around.

FRITZ (CONT'D)
Listen.

Jake wriggles free, continues on.

JAKE
No, you listen. You fuck up, I ditch you. You slow me down, I cut you loose.

Fritz EXHALES, tries to catch back up.

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

Jake wheels back around, charges at Fritz.

JAKE
What do you fucking know about it?!

Fritz chooses his next words carefully:

FRITZ
The mountain took him, not you.

Jake clenches both fists, full of fury.

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

Fritz blasts past Jake.

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

Jake closes his eyes, lowers his fists.

Up ahead of Fritz, we see Percy standing at the door to the church. Same devil-may-care movie star good looks.

He's smoking a faintly glowing cigarette.

PERCY
Hello, ladies. Didn't expect y'all
back 'til midnight.

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

FRITZ
Percy. Any news on our equipment?

PERCY
Still stuck in some stupid
warehouse in Jersey, supposedly.

In the distance, Jake turns back around, slowly approaches - trying to tamp down his rage.

FRITZ
Well, we are going to need some
rope. A lot of it. At least 350
meters.
(beat)
Each.

Percy and Jake share a quick look.

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

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

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

CAPTAIN HARRIS
(slurring slightly)
Three divisions of Teutonic fuckin'
ski instructors up Belvedere under
the cover of darkness with unloaded
rifles? Doesn't make a lick of
strategic sense to me!

The officer nods, glares knowingly at Fritz.

SENIOR OFFICER
It's like trying to take Tokyo with
a bunch of fucking Japs!

As the two of them fade into the distance, Jake, Fritz, and Percy seem shaken.

But they hide it well.

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, BASE - DAWN

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

Daisy-chained carabiners dangle clipped to their belts and tucked into their pants pockets to dampen the sound.

From both of their belts swing battered piton hammers.

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

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

FRITZ
(irritated)
Yes, yes.

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

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

FRITZ
I know.

JAKE
Just follow my lead. Don't get
cocky. And keep it down.

Emerging from the trees, the two of them squint straight up.

The tall, craggy, lichen-covered cliff ahead of them looms like a giant limestone tombstone.

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

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

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

FRITZ
Why empty pieces?

Jake lifts two fingers to his lips, pocketing the magazine.

JAKE
(hushed)
One stupid shot and the whole deal
goes to shit.

Jake pulls a length of fabric out of one pocket, tosses it to Fritz.

JAKE (CONT'D)
(still a whisper)
For your hammer.

Fritz nods, and the two of them grab their piton hammers, wrap them in cloth. Jake fishes around in one pocket for a couple short lengths of rope.

FRITZ
(quietly)
You really think this will--

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

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

JAKE
(pointing)
Follow me to that section there.
Then we'll rope up.

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

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, LOWER SLOPES - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
(sotto)
So fucking strange.

FRITZ
(already out of breath)
What?

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

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

Fritz turns back around, lifting his gaze back to the wall.

FRITZ
Someday, we all will.

JAKE
Yeah, maybe.

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

Fritz eyes him warily - like he's someone with a death wish.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Go on. Get to it.

In silence, the two of them rope up - first wrapping a thinner band of webbing around their waists over and over again, and meticulously knotting the ends.

Bending to throw open their packs, they hastily remove boatloads of hardware - pitons, carabiners, etc. - and wrap them in socks and bits of cloth.

Careful not to make a sound, they quickly attach as much gear as they can to their belts.

Jake is quicker than Fritz - like a man disassembling and cleaning a sniper rifle blindfolded.

He turns, his muffled hardware CLANKING quietly, and quickly undoes one end of his coil of rope.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I'll lead.

FRITZ
Which way?

Jake looks up, points, hands Fritz the end of his rope.

Fritz takes it, threads his end into a loop in the nylon webbing and ties a knot, checks it.

FRITZ (CONT'D)
You know, I'm here for the same reasons you are.

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

JAKE
Shut it.

Looking like he'd pretty much rather be anywhere else in the world - alone - Jake finishes tethering himself to Fritz.

Jake turns, runs his hands over the rock.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Now, remember, keep the rope taut.
But not too taut.

FRITZ
(hushed, impatient)
Ja, ja.

JAKE
Pitons wherever it gets dicey.

Fritz nods gain, done being schooled.

FRITZ
(quietly)
I can take care of myself.

JAKE
Good, 'cause I ain't gonna.

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, LOWER WALL - CONTINUOUS

Jake turns, grabs his first handhold, starts climbing - cautiously at first, then with total surety.

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

The second rope, tied to the back of Jake's belt, drapes loosely down between them - the future fixed line.

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

Steadying himself with both feet, he leans against the wall and slaps the boulder with one hand. Then, he yanks at it from below. It doesn't budge. Still, better safe than sorry.

He pulls out his first piton, accidentally dropping the cloth wrapped around it - which flutters away in the breeze.

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

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

After testing the piton's hold, he slips his hammer back into his belt, pulls off a pair of carabiners, and clicks them (linked) into the piton.

Then he loops both ropes (his belay line and the fixed line) through, tests the piton again, reaches for his next hold.

FLASH TO:

EXT. CAMP HALE, REVIEW GROUNDS - DAY [FLASHBACK]

From the sheer cliff face to the dusty review grounds at the center of a sprawling camp complex high in the Pando Valley of central Colorado.

SUPER: CAMP HALE, COLORADO, SUMMER 1944

Amid spartan barracks sits an impromptu wooden stage. And on the stage, a singer. It's actress JANE WYMAN (mid-20s).

She's wearing a bright red sequined gown. And she's got one arm slung seductively around a BASHFUL YOUNG PRIVATE.

Over the HOOTING and HOLLERING of throngs of OVER-EAGER SKI SOLDIERS, Wyman WARBLES a tune from the 1944 musical comedy, "Hollywood Canteen":

JANE WYMAN
*What are you doin'
For the rest of your life?*

The Bashful Young Private does an awkward soft shoe sideways, trying to get away. She won't let him budge.

JANE WYMAN
Have you any plans?

In the crowd, we spy Max and Jake - and Paul and Percy.

Next to them is a fifth man. This is SERGEANT PETE SEIBERT (30s, piercing eyes, a perennial practical joker).

PETE
(loudly singing back)
Nothin' but time on my hands!

Jake smiles, passes Pete an open bottle of beer.

JAKE
There you go.

From the stage:

JANE WYMAN
*I thought that if you
Hadn't anything set.*

In the crowd:

PETE
Ohhh...no, no, no.

JAKE
Ohhh...no, no, no.

Max turns and eyes them both up and down.

MAX
Speak for yourselves!

From the stage:

JANE WYMAN
Maybe we'd get...

Paul, Percy, Pete and Jake all drunkenly finish the line:

ALL
...together!

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, LOWER WALL - CONTINUOUS

The nub of rock Jake's reached for SNAPS loose and his hand slips. And before he can react, he falls backward and down into the crease - hitting the stone wall hard.

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

Jake scrambles to get his balance, righting himself. Ego bruised, body not bloodied.

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

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

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
(to himself)
When all this is over...

THUD, THUD, THUD. The next piton is set. We can barely make out that his legs are already quivering slightly. Hands shaking almost imperceptibly.

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

He clicks them in, reaches back, struggles for a second to find both ropes.

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

But then he finds both ropes, slips them in, continues on.

About ten feet higher, he pauses, places another piton, and hammers. The BANGING seems like it's slowly getting louder, more metallic, less muffled. *Not a good sign.*

He strains to clip the carabiners into the bit of metal.

It's nearly beyond his grasp. But he eventually gets the battered loop in and slips the ropes through safely - ready to make his way upward to the first flat bit.

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

Looking down, he yanks the last tiny bit of slack still left in the line and catches Fritz's eye.

Fritz nods back before starting up the same pitch.

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

Landing at the shelf in no time, he rubs his hands greedily.

FRITZ
(quietly)
I could get used to this.

JAKE

Good.

Jake steps aside, gesturing up the slope.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Next bit's yours.

Without another word, Fritz steps away and clambers up the next pitch, pausing for a moment to hammer in a piton about ten feet up.

Watching from below, Jake GRUMBLES to himself as he slowly lets out more rope.

Pausing, legs scissored out, Fritz looks to his right.

Standing, perched on a nearby ledge, is a young IBEX. It stares back at him quizzically. His belay line snaps once, then twice - Jake urging him on.

Fritz turns back to the wall, running his hands over a crevice to find a solid hold.

Below him, we can barely make out Jake checking his watch. Perhaps realizing they're already taking too long.

Fritz pauses to hammer in another piton, clips in, and then pulls himself cautiously up another ten feet.

Turning, Fritz casts his gaze back down to Jake.

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

Thinking fast, Jake leans his body out from the wall - reaching his free hand into the air. His toes struggle to stay in contact with the rock.

At the last second, and with a firm wave of his hand, he bats the steel helmet out - away from the face.

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

As if suddenly realizing how precariously he's perched, Jake pulls himself back up against the wall.

Automatically, Fritz does the same. For a breathless moment, the two of them cling, stone still. Barely breathing.

Above, at the summit, nothing stirs.

Fritz takes a deep breath, clipping in before peering again back down over the edge and gesturing for Jake to follow.

We linger on Jake's face for a moment before he un-clips and starts climbing again.

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, UPPER REACHES - CONTINUOUS

Jake pulls himself up onto another precarious shelf, next to Fritz. We can tell, Fritz is wiped out. On the verge of total exhaustion.

Jake says nothing - pointing instead to a long, jutting seam which runs diagonally up the face away from them.

He points to himself, then back to the seam, before making a fist and rapping it against Fritz's unprotected forehead.

If they weren't tied together, we can imagine one of them chucking the other one off.

JAKE
(sotto)
Watch and learn.

Jake goes first, threading the seam like a tightrope walker.

Another ten feet, another piton. BANG, BANG, BANG. It's getting louder. He shifts the fabric on his hammer and proceeds.

Another ten feet, another anchor. More carabiners. More rope. On like this until he reaches the end of the seam. He pounds in another piton and anchors himself.

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

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

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

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

Fritz bites his lip, looks up, and then starts quickly up the gradual pitch. Jake belays him, eyes drifting up top.

If they're spotted, they're dead.

Fritz stops, pulls out a piton. He unwraps it, looks down to Jake. Jake nods back.

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

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

Again he pauses. CLANG, CLANG, CLANG. He stops, hammer still perched, still ready to strike.

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

CLANG!

The piton is set. The VOICES go quiet. Fritz automatically holsters the hammer and throws his body against the wall.

Below, we can see Jake do the same.

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

Fritz fumbles for his sidearm and clip. From below, we see Jake urgently waving: *NO! Don't you fucking dare!*

Ignoring him, Fritz slips the clip into the stock with a CLICK and slides the firing pin back, arming the pistol. He thumbs the safety off, takes aim.

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

The FOOTSTEPS stop. A sheaf of icy snow slips from the clifftop - sending a pillow of white tumbling downward toward Fritz.

His face pressed to the stone wall, without his helmet, Fritz grips the pistol - barely breathing.

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 Fritz can do stay out of the way.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - LATER

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

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

On the way, he kicks Fritz's upside down helmet further into the trees.

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

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

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Jake and Fritz sprint their way back through the trees, their legs cramping up from the cold and the climb.

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

JAKE
Yup.

FRITZ
It's... *impossible!*

JAKE
You did it. Barely.

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

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

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

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

Fritz follows him onto the bridge, looking finally back in his element - gliding from icy board to board.

FRITZ
Not particularly, no.

JAKE
Of course you don't.

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

FRITZ
I'm not even German.
(beat)
I'm Austrian!

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

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

Jake slows.

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

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

FRITZ
How would you?

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

FRITZ
What?

Jake picks up the pace again. Fritz follows.

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

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

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

FRITZ
Apology accepted.

JAKE (CONT'D)
And we can do this. We have to.

Jake keeps walking.

JAKE
Hays' son in is in the 87th.

FRITZ
What?

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

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
He'll be at the head of the charge
up Belvedere. If we can't secure
Riva, they're all screwed.
(beat)
Ten bucks says we can make it.

Fritz quickens, trying to shore up his own resolve.

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

INT. FORWARD COMMAND CENTER - DUSK

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

SUPER: 18 FEBRUARY, 1700 HOURS

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

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

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

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

GENERAL HAYS
The first three strike teams will
proceed here, here, and here. These
routes, while treacherous, should
be manageable without tether. Two
smaller teams will head here and
here.

(MORE)

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

Thanks to the bravery of a select few expeditionary climbers - you know who you are - these routes will have preset fixed lines nearly to the top.

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

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

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

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

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

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

(beat)

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

Hays pauses for a moment, locking eyes with the same young, Bashful Private who shared the stage with Jane Wyman.

GENERAL HAYS (CONT'D)

Never before have I discussed battle plans with troops to this level of detail. That is because I have *complete* confidence in your ability, your intelligence, and your fierceness of will. You are, without question, the finest troops I have ever had the pleasure of commanding.

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

The Bashful Private turns to a nearby BUDDY and whispers:

BASHFUL PRIVATE
 Woulda made a helluva coach.

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

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

(beat)

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

He turns back to face his men - cracking a weary smile.

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

Every assembled soldier responds with a muted simultaneous:

SOLDIERS
 Hooah!

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

Behind the model, Colonel Hampton gestures.

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

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - NIGHT

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

Friedl is right behind them. He pulls out a silver cigarette
 case and shakes it, open, toward Jake.

FRITZ
 (hushed, to Friedl)
Was? Bist du verrückt? Leg die weg!

FRIEDL
Ah ja. Es tut mir Leid.

JAKE
 English, *bitte*.

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

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

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

JAKE
 Ah, yep.

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

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

Pete (from the Jane Wyman review), shoves his way past Percy. Same wisecracking air of a practical joker.

PETE
 May god have mercy on us all.

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

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

DAVID
 I'd see that picture.
 (beat)
 But I love watching ol' Percy fall
 flat on his face.

PETE
 Happens *all* the time.

PAUL
 Happens *all* the time.

Grinning, Paul brushes past Percy, David, and Pete - headed toward the trees.

JAKE
(to Paul, quietly)
Where you off to?

PAUL
Gotta few miles of cable to string!

FLASH TO:

EXT. PRACTICE WALL, CAMP HALE - DAY

From darkness to the blazing high-altitude sunshine of a scorching hot, early fall afternoon.

SUPER: PRACTICE WALL, CAMP HALE, FALL 1944

Dangling sixty feet up from a sisal rope slung between two sheer slabs of granite are Jake, David, and Paul.

As they inch their way hand-over-hand across an expanse of open air with their boots SCREECHING along the rope, David calmly SPEAKS:

DAVID
You know, when all this is done,
when we finally see some *real*
action, we should all come back
here. You know? See what we can do
to the place. Turn it back into
what it was before.

Paul, barely winded and moving faster than his fellow soldiers, nods in agreement.

JAKE
(straining, to David)
How do you, uh, mean there?

DAVID
Ah, you know. Let the wild places
go back to being wild again as they
should be! Like we are. Like it is
in that old poem. *Song of a--*

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - NIGHT

As Paul TROMPS away into the darkness, David, still with the cigar between his teeth, CONTINUES (quoting):

DAVID
 (hushed)
I crave to risk a rough moraine.

Next to David, Pete quietly takes up the thread:

PETE
Or stand 'tween ice and sun.

Fritz looks to Jake. Jake shrugs. *You wouldn't understand.*

PERCY
*On those great glaciers
 Once again.*

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

PETE
Where rivers are begun.

DAVID
Oh yes, I long to go again.

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

BILL
To cross the great divide.

Just as they reach the bridge, Friedl finishes the stanza:

FRIEDL
To dwell on mountainside.

Above, the looming shadow of Riva Ridge.

The whole crew slows.

BILL
 (after a second)
 Anybody else notice... there seem
 to be an *awful* lotta medics.

They all nod.

EXT. ROUTE FOUR - NIGHT

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

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

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

Bill taps his breast pocket - which bulges in the shape of a rifle mag.

BILL
Everybody empty?

All assembled nod.

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

DAVID
(to Jake)
Who wants first?

JAKE
Age before beauty.

David rolls his eyes, clips his carabiner to the fixed line and starts off with the silent dexterity of a mountain goat.

Next to Jake and Percy, Friedl whispers:

FRIEDL
What will you do when all this is
over?

Eyes on David as he disappears into the blackness, Jake thinks on it for a second.

JAKE
I dunno. Head back to Montana. Work
my daddy's ranch. Fish.

FRIEDL
You should come back with us. To
Aspen.

Jake looks to Percy. Percy nods.

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

Friedl quietly persists:

FRIEDL
There we shall build an oasis.

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

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

Jake clips his line on, starts up after David.

JAKE
 Wouldn't mind a steak and a shot
 right about now.

EXT. ROUTE FOUR, LOWER REACHES - NIGHT

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

SUPER: 18 FEBRUARY 1945, 2300 HOURS

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

David is nowhere to be seen. We can't even hear his
 carabiner gliding over the nylon. It's as if Jake is
 entirely alone on the mountain - abandoned to his thoughts.

JAKE (V.O.)
 (quietly, to himself)
 Well, Max. Wish I could say I wish
 you were here.

Jake moves gracefully. All efficiency.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 Just a bunch of big talkers scared
 shitless. Present company included.

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

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
 Wishing we'd gotten stuck stateside
 after all.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
 Like our gear.

The slope is getting steeper, more technical.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Freezing our asses off. Training
for hypotheticals.

FLASH TO:

EXT. ELK MOUNTAIN, COLORADO - DAY [FLASHBACK]

From the dark of night to a total whiteout.

Amid the HOWLING WIND, Jake clings to the handle of his ice
ax while Max tumbles behind him into the abyss

JAKE
No, no, no!

The rope between them SNAPS taut! Jake GRUNTS.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
Max!

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
SARGE!

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. ROUTE FOUR, LOWER REACHES - NIGHT

Looking ashen, Jake slides his free hand into a crevice,
clicks out, and click back in, above a piton.

Still no sight (or sound) of David up ahead.

JAKE
(still to himself)
At least it was only our side
shooting at us back then.

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

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

Until: SMASH!

A jagged mass of rock hits a bit of wall just above Jake - shattering into its own shadow like a phantom melting into thin air.

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

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

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

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

Above, nothing stirs but the skittering shadows.

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

Instead, he pads his empty holster - searching for his missing piton hammer.

JAKE

Shit!

Exhaling - trying to will himself back into the game - he scans the wall for his next set of holds and continues on.

EXT. ROUTE FOUR, MID-MOUNTAIN - CONTINUOUS

Climbing in silence - the valley below lit by the sweep of the distant spotlights - Jake arrives at a jutting, fractured shelf.

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

Still tethered, he turns and looks out over the valley. Under different circumstances, the view would be magnificent. Instead, it's terrifying.

The calm before the storm.

He turns and looks up, still no sign of David. *Hope he didn't go down with that rock.*

Jake leans out over the edge, looks down. In the rippling light, we can barely make out five or six more CLIMBERS on the line below him, making steady progress.

He un-clips his carabiner, clicks it in above the nearest piton - about chest-high.

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

Jake grabs for it, but misses - the spotlights playing tricks on his eyes.

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

Bending, knowing the clock is ticking, Jake snatches up the piton and zips it back up the line.

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

Thinking fast, he unbuttons his other holster, pulls out his pistol, and reaches into his jacket for a handkerchief.

He wraps it around the gun, flips the butt end of the pistol sideways with barrel aimed at his leg.

Suddenly:

FRITZ (O.S.)
(hushed)
That's a stupid idea.

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

FRITZ (CONT'D)
Here.

Smiling, actually glad to see him - perhaps for the first time - Jake holsters his gun and takes the hammer.

JAKE
(a whisper)
Thank you.

Fritz nods wordlessly.

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

They both look up. Nothing. Then:

FRITZ
Thank you for the warning about the
boulder.

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

JAKE
Gotta get rid of you somehow.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
C'mon.

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

EXT. ROUTE FOUR, UPPER REACHES - CONTINUOUS

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

The top is within reach - but shrouded in icy fog.

Behind him, we can see Fritz climbing swiftly too. A few others are splayed out in different locations all the way down to the bottom.

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

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

Sticking close to the wall, Jake picks up speed. Fritz follows quickly.

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

Once Jake and Fritz reach David, they both squat down - trying to stay in the shadows. He nods, fixing his bayonet.

Jake and Fritz mirror his movements in silence.

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

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

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

They both nod.

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

One false move, one errant step: certain death.

Jake and Fritz watch him, trying to seem stoic.

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

Success?

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

Like clockwork.

EXT. ROUTE FOUR, SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

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

Together, they run through the thickening fog along the edge of the cliff, toward a large outcropping of boulders.

It's as if the entire world has been intentionally blotted out. Erased. The fog is so dense we can barely make out their fast-moving silhouettes.

Slowing, Jake's figure dips behind the outcropping. Fritz follows. They're both winded - but doing whatever they can to muffle their heaving.

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

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

Jake checks his watch. The moisture-covered face reads nearly 4:30 AM.

Fritz taps Jake on the shoulder, gesturing.

Jake nods. And the two of them take off running through the mist, toward the high ground.

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

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

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, RISE - CONTINUOUS

Following Fritz, Jake runs a hand over his face. He's already drenched.

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

Their backs to the rock, Jake and Fritz throw off their packs - pulling out loaded magazines and clipping grenades onto their belts.

Beyond them, we can barely make out the faintest glimmer of sunrise. The slowly growing light seems to only deepen the density of the shroud of fog.

Suddenly, a third figure joins them behind the rise.

It's Friedl. He's barely winded and looking incongruously debonaire - like he's just out for a lovely Alpine wander.

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

All nod back. And he disappears into the fog.

For a few breathless seconds, we linger on Fritz, Jake, and Friedl - just sitting there, blanketed in mist like angels locked out of heaven.

Jake looks to his watch again.

He closes his eyes, draws a deep breath, exhales slowly.

Fritz MUTTERS something quietly to himself.

Friedl leans his head around the edge of the rock.

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, RISE - FRIEDL'S POV

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

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

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

Jake opens his eyes. Beyond the rock, we hear what sounds like the lid of a canteen being opened: SQUEAK, SQUEAK, SQUEAK.

Then: GLUG, GLUG, GLUG. Pause. SWOOSH, SWOOSH, SPIT. Water hits rock with a heavy SLAP. The sound is unbearably, impossibly loud - as if magnified by the mist.

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

Together, the lot of them wait. Catching their breath. Trying to imagine what lies beyond those sandbags.

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

Catching his compatriots eyes, he flashes "three, two, one" with his free hand.

And, off they go!

EXT. RIVA RIDGE, EAST SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

We TRACK on Jake and Fritz. To their left and right, Pete and Friedl split up - flanking the sandbags.

The mist, still thick, seems to be lifting. It's almost like watching an image materializing in the darkroom - more and more contrast, more and more detail with every step.

Crouched, silent, Jake and Fritz cautiously approach the wall of sandbags.

Beyond them we hear the sound of someone SLOSHING some sort of liquid - *coffee? water?* - into what sounds like a metal cup. The sound is, again, overly loud.

Jake lifts his rifle, advancing. Fritz does the same. This is what they've trained for, prepared for. But neither of them seems entirely certain of what comes next.

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

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

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

For a second, he's frozen stiff. Like a sleepwalker stunned to consciousness after stumbling into a wall.

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

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

Fritz nods, aiming. *Don't do it.* He WHISPERS in German:

FRITZ
Stille. Stille.

The German boy turns to see Pete streaking through the shadows around the machine gun nest to his left.

He drops his toothbrush, lifting his hands in seeming surrender. Fritz nods 'yes'. But then the German boy rakes in a deep breath, preparing to scream:

BABY-FACED GERMAN BOY
Amerik--

More reacting than acting, Jake lifts the butt end of his rifle and SLAMS it into the boy's face - shattering his glasses and sending him, crumpled, to the ground.

Fritz seems stunned. But the two of them scramble quickly up and over the sandbags.

Other than the unconscious boy at their feet, they're entirely alone in the nest.

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

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

EXT. MACHINE GUN NEST - CONTINUOUS

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

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

In the distance stands a sandbagged dugout barracks.

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

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

EXT. MACHINE GUN NEST - JAKE'S POV

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

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

Suddenly, we hear a DESPERATE SHOUT from within:

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

Pete instantly pulls a grenade from his belt, yanks the pin, tosses the clip, and 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, tinny AUTOMATIC GUNFIRE streaks out of darkness of the bunker, toward the machine gun nest.

FRITZ
(loud, to Jake)
GO!

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

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

As if awoken from a dream, Jake squeezes the trigger.

A DEAFENING HAIL of machine gun fire scorches the air - instantly shredding the sandbags that line the barracks.

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

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

The rest of the Americans lob more grenades into the SHRIEKING hellhole. BANG! BANG! Black smoke oozes out.

EXT. MACHINE GUN NEST - JAKE'S POV

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

FRITZ (CONT'D)
Get up. Feed!

From out of nowhere, the German boy LUNGES at Fritz bearing a dagger. Fritz spins to his left. The knife blade grazes his shoulder.

The two men struggle. The German boy yanks the knife back and lifts it again to strike.

Jake yanks his sidearm free, fires a single shot.

BANG!

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

Fritz, his jacket torn and bloodied, turns to Jake - seemingly near-deafened by the blast of Jake's pistol.

FRITZ
(too loud)
Danke.

BURP! BURP! BURP!

The muffled sound of a German MP 40 sub-machine gun (aka 'burp gun') cuts him off. The sandbags to Fritz's left explode, sending sand and burlap soaring.

EXT. MACHINE GUN NEST - CONTINUOUS

Fritz falls to the floor - at eye level with the potato mashers. He pulls himself past the body of the boy, grabs two from the box, tosses them to Jake.

Jake catches them awkwardly, still holding onto his smoking pistol, stunned.

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

FRITZ
Now!

Fritz points. Jake shakes his head to dispel the thought (and clear his ringing ears). Fritz grabs two more German grenades and rolls over onto his back.

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

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

In synch, Jake and Fritz twist the caps at the ends of the long metal handles of the grenades - revealing kinked metal fuse cords.

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

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Silence.

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

PERCY

Quiet. Quiet! We gotta keep--

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

POP! A single round slices through the air - catching Percy in the face. He falls to the ground, one hand to his cheek.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Hell's bells that fucking hurts!

Blood gushes through his splayed fingers.

Moving fast, Fritz pulls a green field dressing kit out of his jacket. Throwing it down and yanking it open, he pulls out a wad of gauze.

FRITZ

Let me see! I can--

Percy, fighting though the pain, splays his fingers. It appears as though his cheek has been pierced clean through.

Working fast, Fritz does his best to staunch the bleeding.

Behind them, Jake locks and loads his rifle - and then cautiously looks back over the edge.

As he does, we see in the distance a single ELDERLY GERMAN SOLDIER standing holding a rifle, bewildered.

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

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

Jake collapses back into into the nest.

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

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

FRITZ
 Well, now they do!

Suddenly, a frightened medic - RUPERT VON TRAPP (mid-30s,
 wide eyes, trembling hands, someone who should be wearing a
 stethoscope not a rifle) ducks his head in.

And, yes, that Von Trapp.

RUPERT
 Come. Fast. We need to dig in!

His face vanishes as quickly as it appeared.

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

FRITZ
 Are you sure you can--

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

Jake grabs a few ammo boxes. Fritz grabs the gun - knocking
 its bi-pod arms flat.

JAKE
 (to Percy)
 So much for Hollywood.

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

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP - CONTINUOUS

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

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

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

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

Jake and Percy follow.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP, ROCK OUTCROPPING - CONTINUOUS

Breathing heavily, Jake turns to Fritz - who's busy reorienting the gun toward the barracks.

JAKE
(hushed)
They're just a bunch of old men and boys! What the hell happened to the fearsome fucking *Gebirgsjäger*?

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

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

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

RUPERT (CONT'D)
Strict orders. No fire. Repeat. Do not fire!

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

Jake leans his head around - peering into the distance.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP - JAKE'S POV

The smoke from the barracks has dampened, and the last few American soldiers make a run for the rocks.

In the gap between the barracks and the machine gun nest, we can see that the fog is nearly gone. The sky beyond is bright and clear. Calm, even.

For a moment, everything is silent and still.

But then we hear the sound of FOOTFALL - boots in unison, climbing slowly, without urgency, up the hill. A routine morning patrol.

Jake cranes his head, and we see a handful of WHITE-CLAD GERMAN SOLDIERS marching with rifles slung over their shoulders. Almost mirror images of our boys from the 10th.

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

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

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

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

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

Anxious seconds tick by. The German troops continue on.

Then, out of nowhere, a single nervous SHOT rings out - echoing across the hillside. One Edelweiss soldier falls.

Chaos erupts!

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP - CONTINUOUS

Trading hasty small arms and machine gun fire, the Germans duck behind their own fortifications.

We can hear them SHOUTING to each other in stunned German as Fritz scrambles to train the machine gun on them. Next to him, Jake feeds ammo.

JAKE

When I find out who did that--

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

Fritz cocks the machine gun, returning fire.

Without warning, something metallic tumbles in over the rocks, landing right next to Percy with a CLANG!

It's a German grenade!

Jake looks to Percy. Percy stares back, in a daze. Thinking fast, Jake lunges toward it, snatches it up by its sparking handle, tosses it up into the blue sky above.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)

(his ears ringing)

Jesus, Perce. Look alive!

Behind him, Fritz's machine gun jams.

FRITZ

Scheiße!

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

Jake grabs his rifle, leans around Percy, firing.

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

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

Fritz works on the jammed machine gun while, far off, we hear the Germans RADIOING in the Americans' position.

Next to Jake, the radioman between him and Rupert (who's also firing randomly) cranks his radio to life.

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

He leans his head around the rock - and BANG - his helmet flies off. The shot ricochets off a nearby boulder and the Radioman falls.

Rupert, stunned but miraculously uninjured, grabs the receiver and shouts:

RUPERT
If we don't get artillery up here
NOW we're done for!

Strangely (as if on cue) the Germans stop firing. Slowly, the American side goes quiet too.

Then, from beyond the barracks, the KA-THUMP, KA-THUMP of mortar shells being dropped into their firing tubes.

JAKE
Mortars!

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

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

KA-THUMP, KA-THUMP. Two more shells go in. BOOM! BOOM! Two more shells land - alarmingly close. More dirt. More rocks.

FRITZ
 (to Jake)
 I have to take out that mortar!

Fritz grabs Jake by the shoulder, pulling him back behind the rocks.

JAKE
 What? No!

FRITZ
 Here!

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

FRITZ (CONT'D)
 I need a better angle!

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

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

BURP! BURP! BURP!

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

BANG!

The explosion gives Fritz cover.

Fritz leaps up and over the sandbags, to relative safety.

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

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

RUPERT
 Those our guns?!

PERCY
 (through bandages)
 Wrong side, choirboy.

From beyond the barracks, we hear the shrill SCREAM of an incoming heavy artillery shell.

JAKE
 German 88s! Take--

WHAM!

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

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

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

The mountaintop goes momentarily silent once again.

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

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

A single voice cries out in German:

EDELWEISS COMMANDER
Halt! Halt!

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

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

The German 88s are momentarily quiet.

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

EDELWEISS COMMANDER (CONT'D)
Ich--

CRACK! A single gunshot. The Commander falls.

Further off, behind the rocks, we hear a familiar voice:

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

A ripple of DENIAL AND RECRIMINATION washes over the assembled Americans.

In the distance, Fritz bounds out of the nest and makes a run for where the Edelweiss Commander emerged - firing wildly as he goes.

He disappears behind the barracks. Jake sweeps his rifle back-and-forth, fingering the trigger.

Fritz suddenly reemerges, on the run.

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

FRIEDL
(to Fritz)
Schnell, Fritzi. Mach schnell!

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

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

Fritz jumps back behind the rock wall, to safety - carrying the Germans' radio. His chest is heaving. His eyes, wild.

FRITZ
Who is the crazy one now?!

From behind Percy - who scans the hillside for stragglers, all adrenaline - Friedl slides in next to Fritz.

His formerly debonaire visage is caked in dirt and mud.

FRIEDL
(to Fritz)
Genie mein Junge! Brilliant!

Fritz cranks the radio. Friedl lifts the receiver.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)
(to Jake)
Any choice words?

Jake stares, confused. Friedl presses the call button.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)
(into the receiver)
Den Angriff abbrechen! Es war ein Fehler!
(beat, louder)
Alles ruhig jetzt! Wiederholen, alles ruhig!

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

EDELWEISS PRIVATE (O.S.)
Wer ist das?
 (beat)
Wer ist das?!

FRIEDL
 (calmly)
*Generalleutnant Josef Kübler! 1
 Gebirgs-Division!*

Both Jake and Fritz stare. Friedl covers the receiver.

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

EDELWEISS PRIVATE (O.S.)
Kübler?!

Friedl winces. *Wrong choice?*

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

Friedl slams the receiver down, cutting the connection.

FRIEDL
 His mother on the other hand...

He catches sight of Percy. His face is encircled in a band of dirt-crusts, congealed blood.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)
 (to Percy, smirking)
 Who invited Gary Cooper to the--

FLASH TO:

EXT. HOTEL JEROME, ASPEN - DUSK

Fully-sated and more than a little drunk, Friedl, Percy, Jake, Paul, Max, and Pete suit back up on the street right outside the hotel from earlier.

It's snowing out and the light is fading fast. Their skis and poles jut out of a windblown snowdrift.

Paul is the first to snatch his skis back up. He hefts them over one shoulder.

PAUL

(slurring slightly)

Alrighty then. If we shake a leg,
we can find a place to camp half
way up. Traverse the Couloir by
first light.

PERCY

Hell's bells, Paul. Can't we just
bunk here for the night? I'm sure
ol' Friedl's got some pennies
squirreled away somewhere inside
that pack of his.

Paul spins on his heels, turns to go.

PAUL

Nope! No man of The 10th trades a
moonlit night spent at altitude for
a feather bed indoors.

(mock stern)

No way, no how.

Jake, looking like a man who has finally found his tribe, is
the next to grab his skis and fall-in behind Paul.

JAKE

You heard the wing nut billy goat.
Hop to!

Jake and Max swap a silly, drunken grin.

MAX

Yessir, sir!

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP - LATER

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

SUPER: 19 FEBRUARY 1945, 1800 HOURS

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

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

Pete's in the lead, still carrying his Thompson. David's right behind him. Bill's in third. And Rupert - still in his now dented medic's helmet - sprints right behind Bill.

Friedl is behind Jake. Percy's nowhere too be seen - presumably being tended to somewhere safe.

PETE

Jesus, where the fuck do they keep
on comin' from!?

JAKE

What?!

BOOM!

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

Pete, David, and Bill barely flinch.

DAVID

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

His last three words are barely audible over a sudden,
PIERCING SCREAM from somewhere high above!.

Jake spins to see a single STUKA DIVE BOMBER ripping through
the sky right overhead, strafing the ground all around them!

The plane is so low, we can almost make out the color of
PILOT's eyes before he pulls back the yoke and climbs -
disappearing into the disc of the sun.

Jake, mesmerized, slows.

BILL

Keep fucking moving!

Together, they run toward a series of blasted-out craters
and the trees beyond. The remnants of German 88s blasts.

BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG! Rifle fire from somewhere off to
their left echoes through the trees. They all hit the dirt.

After a second:

PETE

(hushed, to Fritz)
Where?!

Fritz points south/southwest.

In the distance, we can hear the BUZZ of the Stuka returning, readying to dive.

It sounds for a second like the engine has stalled out. Then, the PIERCING WAIL returns.

BILL
Hate these contemptible--
(beat)
Go! The trees!

He gestures for them to run for a nearby copse of splintered trees. They all take off through the snow. But Bill stays behind, buries himself deeper into the snow, face-up.

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

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

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

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

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

Bill leaps to his feet.

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

CRACK! CRACK! Sniper fire. But from where?!

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

Pete catches him.

PETE
Are you hit? Are you--

Rupert leaps up, pulls himself closer.

RUPERT
Thigh! Left thigh!

Bill lifts his thigh. It's a deep gash, but it's been nearly cauterized by the slug. Bleeding, but not bad.

BILL

Well, fuck a fucking duck.

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

PETE

Ain't mines up here too, are there?

RUPERT

I don't think so. Only on Belved--

Up ahead, David lifts a hand. They all slow. He gestures 'get down'. They do.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP, DECIMATED FOREST - CONTINUOUS

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

Bill does the same, taking aim - barely hidden and bleeding.

In the distance, a VOICE cries out:

CORPORAL BRANDT

Amerikaner?

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

CORPORAL BRANDT (CONT'D)

Americans?

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

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

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

CORPORAL BRANDT (CONT'D)

You are 10th Mountain Division,
yes? Alpine infantry?

Silence as he cautiously lifts his arms into the air.

CORPORAL BRANDT (CONT'D)

It is a great honor to surrender to
such... *worthy* adversaries.

Pete looks back to his crouched companions. Bill shrugs.

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

He takes a step toward them. Pete finally answers:

PETE
 Hold it right there!

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

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

A faint breeze TUMBLES through the space between them, kicking up snow. It's a tense moment.

PETE
 How many of you are there?

CORPORAL BRANDT
 Just me, I'm afraid.

Suddenly, Friedl sits up.

FRIEDL
 Tobias?!

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

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

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

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

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

RUPERT
 No, no!

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

THUMP!

A single shot rings out from somewhere behind Brandt - hitting Friedl in the chest. Everyone freezes.

FRIEDL (CONT'D)

Ski.

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

CORPORAL BRANDT

(to Pete)

Nein. Nein! Ruhe. Calm!

Brandt's hands are still up.

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

FRIEDL

Es ist ein Wunder!

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

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

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

Looking confused, Friedl drops the case, crumples.

And a mad firefight ensues!

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

BANG! BANG! BOOM!

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

Jake and David run for Bill. Rupert runs for Friedl.

Firing, dodging bullets, the three of them manage to grab Bill and Friedl by their collars and drag them across the snow, toward a deep crater.

The rest of the crew frantically follows them in.

EXT. CRATER - CONTINUOUS

With Pete, David, and Fritz returning fire, Jake rips Bill's helmet off.

The whole left side of Bill's face is burnt and bloodied. His ear is mangled. He's only barely conscious, gagging on dirt and blood.

Thinking fast, Rupert tears Friedl's jacket open, lifts his sweater up - revealing his undershirt. A single, tiny hole oozes a thin stream of dark red blood.

Friedl, still conscious and oddly lucid, GASPS:

FRIEDL

My Opi gave me that cigarette case.

(wheeze)

Such...

(wheeze)

...a...

(wheeze)

...pity.

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

RUPERT

We have got to get you off this mountain!

(beat)

Pain? *Schmerzen?!*

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

RUPERT (CONT'D)

Hold still.

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

David and Fritz continue firing.

Rupert rips open his aid kit, pulls out a thin pipette.

PETE

(to Jake)

Here, help me.

Jake drops his rifle, shimmies past David toward Pete.

Behind him, Bill is fading in and out. He MOANS lowly. His eyes blink wildly.

Pete pulls two mortar shells from his pack.

PETE (CONT'D)
That's all I got!

Jake looks back up over the edge of the crater.

JAKE
Better make 'em fucking count!

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

A single bullet barely misses David.

DAVID
Any time now, boys!

Behind them, Rupert gently pierces Friedl's chest with the pipette, sucks out blood.

Friedl winces, his breath a raspy rattle.

JAKE
(to Pete)
Registered.

PETE
(quietly)
Fire in the hole.

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

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

BOOM!

DAVID
Close! Four meters right!

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

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

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

RUPERT
(to Bill)
You alright?

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

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

FRITZ
 I'm out!

PETE
 (again, quietly)
 Fire in the hole.

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

BOOM!

DAVID
 Dead-on!

RUPERT
 (to Friedl)
 We're going to get you out of here!

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

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

Friedl grits his teeth. Sulfa powder. It burns.

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

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

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

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

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

Pete and David haul Bill between them.

Fritz and Jake carry Friedl on an impromptu stretcher - while Rupert continues carefully draining blood from Friedl's pierced lung.

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

DAVID
Where's your C.O.?

Winters wags his head back past the dugout.

JAKE
Medic?

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

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

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

Amid the rush of soldiers, Paul suddenly materializes.

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

PAUL
Well, I'll be! Just the boys I been
looking for!

He slaps Jake between the shoulder blades, leaving a big greasy hand print. Jake nearly drops Friedl.

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

Paul veers off, toward what appears to be some sort of impromptu forward command center.

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

DAVID
(to Paul)
Wait. Hank's up here?!

PAUL

Yeah! And boy howdy were we surprised! We got pinned down pretty bad. Ran outta basically everything.

(beat)

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

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

PAUL (CONT'D)

I damn well guarantee you he's the only Colonel in the entire US Army who could climb that pitch with a 90 pound pack. Stubborn billy goat sonofabitch!

BILL

(not hearing a word)

What are you doing to my goddamn mules?!

PAUL

(back, to Bill)

Don't get your panties in a bunch.

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

PAUL (CONT'D)

You're gonna like this!

EXT. MT CAPPEL BUSO, TRAMWAY TOP - CONTINUOUS

The lot of them emerge from the trees at what appears to be the top of an improvised tramway.

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

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

PAUL

Ain't she a beaut?!

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

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

Behind them, a HOWITZER CREW loudly supply cover fire: BANG!
BANG! BOOM! BOOM!

PAUL (CONT'D)
(over the shelling)
2,000 feet straight down to the
valley floor!

The engineers give the cable one last heaving torque.

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

Bill gingerly steps up next to him.

BILL
(LOUD)
No more mules?!

PAUL
No more mules!

Behind them, Colonel Hampton lumbers down the stairs
followed by a MEEK-LOOKING RADIOMAN.

COLONEL HAMPTON
(into a handset)
What? No! No! That is an order,
son! Fixed bayonets at midnight,
you hear me?!

Everyone salutes. Even Friedl, weakly.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
Hold that thought!

He tosses the handset back to the radioman.

ALL
Sir!

Colonel Hampton salutes back, proudly.

COLONEL HAMPTON
How you holdin' up, Bill?

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

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

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

Colonel Hampton takes Friedl's hand.

COLONEL HAMPTON
 Good think you like goin' downhill
 fast!

He turns toward Jake and Fritz.

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

BOOM!

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

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

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

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
 You were right, son. That climb was
 a hoot!
 (nodding)
 Max woulda been fucking proud.

Jake just stares back. No words.

EXT. TRAM PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

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

David's up front. Jack and Fritz are in the back. Friedl's on the floor.

All but Jake look nervous as hell. Clearly, his mind is elsewhere. Just... gone.

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

BRUM. BRUM. BRUM!

The engine PURRS quietly.

COLONEL HAMPTON
 (over the engine)
 Medics are already on standby down
 below for that one.

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

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

Fritz eyes the map. It's unfamiliar territory.

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

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

FRITZ
 B Company? Isn't that--

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

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

Hampton circles the position with his calloused fingers.

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
 Head out with the 85th, veer over
 here. Scale the face. Disable the
 battery. Join back up. Take the
 fight all the way to the top.
 (beat)
 And remember, surprise is your only
 advantage. So, move under the cover
 of darkness.
 (MORE)

COLONEL HAMPTON (CONT'D)
 And watch for mines. Here, here,
 and likely here.

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

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

The two words rouse Jake. But only slightly.

Next to Hampton, Rupert SHOUTS from the platform:

RUPERT
 If you see my baby brother, tell
 him I'm alright!

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

On the platform between Paul and Pete, Bill SHOUTS:

BILL
 (still WAY too loud)
 See y'all at the finish line!

The tram car RIPS away into the darkness.

EXT. TRAM CAR - CONTINUOUS

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

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

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

Behind them, on Riva Ridge, sporadic GUNFIRE.

Below, trees, rocks, and snow WHIZ by.

For a long moment, no one says a word.

Then, all of a sudden, Jake's eyes begin to well.

His chest shudders. He's trying to hold it in. But he can't.
 Not now. Not any longer.

FLASH TO:

INT. CAMP HALE, BARRACKS - DAY [FLASHBACK]

A suddenly stone-faced and younger looking Jake slowly folds a pair of woolen trousers and lowers them into an open suitcase balanced on a bunk full of clothing.

Another soldier steps up, eyes on the bed. This is PFC GERRY CUNNINGHAM (early 20s, welcoming eyes, the nervous air of a restless tinkerer).

GERRY
Those his? Max's?

It must be after the accident. After the ice bridge.

Jake nods, saying nothing. His face is devoid of emotion. A wall of cold granite. Already.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Here, lemme help.

Gerry kindly steps up, grabs an olive drab sweater, lays it down on the bunk, folds it precisely.

GERRY (CONT'D)
I remember the day. The day my
notice came. In the mail.

Jake just stares helplessly down at the bunk as Gerry continues methodically folding and packing Max's things.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Ann and I were on our honeymoon,
camping on the Hudson. Upstate.

Jake still just stares. No tears fall.

GERRY (CONT'D)
My dad got it. Traipsed all the way
up-river in full flood to bring it
to me.

Gerry carefully scoops up a handful of opened envelopes. Letters from home. From Jane.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Can't say Ann was all too pleased.

Gerry tucks the letters safely into the case, turns back toward Jake, lifts a hand to Jake's shoulder.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Just like she did, Max would want
you keep going. Don't shy away.
(MORE)

GERRY (CONT'D)
 (beat)
 Don't let it--

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. TRAM CAR - CONTINUOUS

Back in the tram, David lifts his rifle as the BUZZ of a nearing fighter plane approaches.

Ours? Theirs?

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

Fritz clocks it, but doesn't say a word.

JAKE
 (through tears)
 He was just...

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

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

From the bed of the tram car, Friedl WHEEZES.

FRITZ
 (eyes ahead, to David)
 Ours?

David says nothing, unsure. Finger on the trigger.

JAKE
 I could have-- I should have--

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

David slowly lowers his rifle.

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

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

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

David and Fritz watch as the first plane dips and dives, evading. Jake stares silently straight ahead - his tears being blown away into the wind.

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

KA-BOOM!

The tank hits the ground and a giant orange fireball consumes everything in the vicinity - sending up a massive, dark black cloud.

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

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

DAVID

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

The planes disappear behind the flaming mountain.

DAVID (CONT'D)

When the wild dies, we die.

Saying nothing, Jake wipes his salt-crusting face with his blood-stained sleeve.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR, TRAM BASE - EVENING

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

Two ORDERLIES and a MEDIC rush toward the car. As it so happens, the medic Gerry (from the barracks). He gently places a hand on Friedl's chest.

GERRY

Jesus, Pfeifer! What the hell
happened to you?

FRIEDL

(fading)
Ich weiß nicht.

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

FRIEDL (CONT'D)

(delusional)
I lost my... my grandfather's--

He can't continue, COUGHS up blood.

GERRY
 Hey, hey, hey! Don't you worry!
 These boys'll get you all fixed up.
 Good as new!

The two orderlies next to Gerry reach in, lift Friedl out.

Friedl stems his cough, RASPS:

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

Fritz leans in toward Friedl. Jake is still miles away, his cheeks still streaked with dried blood and tears.

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

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

Silence.

Gerry's VOICE cuts in:

GERRY
 (to Jake)
 How you holdin' up?

Jake says nothing, doesn't even bother wiping away the tears. Gerry wraps him up in his arms, guides him slowly down the platform.

David rumbles down after them, looking beat. Done.

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

David's mind too is a million miles away.

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

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

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

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR, STAGING AREA - LATER

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

GERRY
 Well, there goes our thousand year
 surplus of Lucky Strikes!

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

Jake lets his gaze fall to one of the wounded Americans.
 He's got gauze wrapped all the way around his head.

Where the soldier's eyes would be are two red splotches.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 I... I can't--

Fritz slows. He and Gerry share a quick look.

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

As another young GERMAN BOY passes. Jake's bloodshot eyes
 are riveted to him. No disdain, only guilt.

Fritz sees the boy too, stops dead.

FRITZ
 (to Jake)
 Listen to me. I promised my sister.
 I said I'd find them.

Jake turns, looks to Fritz. So does Gerry.

FRITZ (CONT'D)
 My parents. After the
kindertransport, the Gestapo took
 them. I don't know where. We don't
 know where.

Fritz lifts both hands to Jake's shoulders.

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

Fritz squeezes Jake's shoulder. This time, Jake doesn't dust his hand roughly away.

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

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

Gerry smiles knowingly.

GERRY
We all he's useless off belay.

EXT. LINE OF DEPARTURE - LATER

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

SUPER: 19 FEBRUARY 1945, 2200 HOURS

Darkness has fallen again across the entire valley. Beyond Belvedere, a half moon is rising. Spotlights still sweep back-and-forth in the far distance.

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

GERRY
Comin' through. Comin' through.

Men affixing bayonets step aside. Most smoke nervously.

Medics again seem in alarmingly abundant supply.

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

Fritz pulls Jake behind a tree. Oddly, the sound disappears. Fades. No gunfire. No strafing.

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

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

GERRY (CONT'D)
What's it say, Dole?

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

BOB DOLE
Don't even bother.

A leaflet lands on Jake's shoulder. He roughly dusts it off.

BOB DOLE (CONT'D)
What these land grabbers don't understand is that Americans in every generation will lay down their lives for people they'll never meet - for ideals that make life itself worth living.
(beat)
That's the moral and physical courage that makes heroes out of farm boys and city boys like us!

Next to Jake, Gerry pauses.

GERRY
Crazy loon thinks he's gonna be President someday!

Jake veers past him, follows Fritz into the trees.

GERRY (CONT'D)
What baby would want to get kissed by that ugly mug?!

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

GERRY (CONT'D)
Here!

Jake slows. Gerry reaches out, loops one of the straps through the zipper pull on his jacket.

GERRY (CONT'D)
The sum total of what I've learned not being in the Air Corps...

Gerry ties the strap to Jake's pull.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Put leather thongs on your zippers so that you can grab 'em with mittens on! And if your feet get cold, put on a goddamn hat!

Jake nods, clears his throat, draws a breath to speak.

Gerry clocks it, Jake's return.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Hey, there we go!

JAKE
Any... any word from Ann?

GERRY
Not a peep. If I ever thought she
was mad at me, I'd go noisily nuts!

Gerry tightens the straps of Jake's pack. The jolting force seems to rouse him further. Shore him up.

JAKE
Probably just miffed you're still a
lowly Pfc.

Gerry grins, glad to see the old Jake back.

GERRY
Ah, but a Pfc only needs a stump to
hide behind. Lieutenants need a
whole forest to hide their platoon!
(beat)
And that's just not my bag.

He tosses Fritz a zipper pull too.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Nice work up there.

FRITZ
Thank you.

Beyond Fritz, a wide, snow-covered field sparkles in the moonlight.

Gerry shoves his hands into another pocket, pulls out a pair of puffy down mittens, hands them to Jake.

GERRY
Take 'em! Made 'em myself!

Jake rolls them over in his hands like they're precious, exotic artifacts. Treasure.

JAKE
I couldn't--

GERRY (CONT'D)
With duck feathers from some crazy
old lady back in Pianaccio!

Gerry tosses another pair to Fritz.

FRITZ
You don't need them?

GERRY
Nah. Got 'em coming out my ears!
(smiling)
Too much time on my hands!

Gerry turns, heads back toward the throngs marching uphill in the darkness. Jake slips on the gloves, marvels at them.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Arrivederci ragazzi!

As Gerry disappears, ANOTHER MAN passes by. Fritz recognizes him instantly, SHOUTS:

FRITZ
Werner?!

The man slows, turns. His name tape reads: VON TRAPP.

Fritz rushes to him.

FRITZ (CONT'D)
Dein älterer bruder sagt hallo!

WERNER
Is he...

Jake finally clocks the resemblance.

JAKE
Yeah, yeah. Yes. Right as rain.

FRITZ
He told us to tell you that he's
just fine!

The man, WERNER VON TRAPP (30) lets both shoulders fall.

JAKE
He, uh, he saved more than a few of
our asses up there.

A look of deep relief washes over Werner as he continues on.

WERNER
Danke schön.

Fritz nods, wags his head toward Jake. *Welcome back.*

FRITZ
 (up, to Werner)
Sei vorsichtig da oben, ja?

WERNER
 (over his shoulder)
Du auch.
 (beat)
 You, too.

Together, Fritz and Jake tromp away toward the snowy field.
 As they go, Fritz swivels his head, stares at Jake.

JAKE
 What?

FRITZ
 (faint grin)
 Nothing.

They plod on in silence. Then:

FRITZ (CONT'D)
 It's just good to have you back.

EXT. BELVEDERE, LOWER SLOPES - CONTINUOUS

Further across the pitched clearing, back out on their own, Jake and Fritz trudge through a pitched clearing covered in surprisingly deep snow.

The moon is still rising. And the mountain ahead of them is alarmingly calm. Even Riva Ridge has largely gone quiet.

FRITZ
 What was he like?

JAKE
 Who?

FRITZ
 Max.

Jake slows, not wanting to go there.

JAKE
 Listen--

FRITZ
 I never met him.

Jake picks up the pace.

JAKE
 Skilled.
 (beat)
 For a city--

Suddenly, from high up Belvedere we hear a rapid barrage of heavy ARTILLERY FIRE.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BOOM! BOOM!

JAKE (CONT'D)
 The trees! GO!

They run through the heavy snow toward a sparse stand of trees to their right.

BOOM!

With each LOUD EXPLOSION, airborne shells ignite.

FRITZ
 Flares!

Blinding bundles of BRIGHT WHITE LIGHT dangle and sway in the air suspended from barely visible parachutes - flooding the mountainside with an eerie glow.

Nearing the grove, the two of them slow, GASPING.

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

FRITZ (CONT'D)
 So much for the cover of--

Another VOLLEY from above cuts him off. Only this time, the BOOMS are deeper, heavier.

Jake and Fritz scan the horizon. They're still on their own. Maybe that's a good thing. Not a rich target.

Three artillery shells land not far from them in alarmingly rapid succession.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Then, from seemingly closer, the familiar sound of mortar fire. KA-THUMP! KA-THUMP!

Jake and Fritz freeze, trying to suss out their source and trajectory. One shell hits the ground less than 25 feet away. The second lands even closer.

More launch loudly from up-slope. KA-THUMP! KA-THUMP!

JAKE (CONT'D)

RUN!

Jake turns and runs back into clearing and the deep snow.

FRITZ

What are you doing?!

A third mortar lands way too close. Fritz still hesitates.

JAKE

COME ON!

A fourth mortar lands right behind Fritz - kicking up a heap of snow, dirt, and rock.

Fritz finally makes break for it.

EXT. BELVEDERE, OPEN FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The two of them bound frantically through the waist-deep snow holding their rifles above their heads.

Behind them: THUMP (pause) BOOM!

A huge cloud of show shoots every which way.

THUMP (pause) BOOM!

Mortar shells hit the snow behind them, sink, then explode. The snow seems to be slowing them down.

Jake skids to a stop at the sight of a what appears to be a tall wall of barbed wire up ahead of them.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Concertina!

BOOM!

A mortar shell lands right between Jake and Fritz, blowing them both off-course. Jake gets his footing first, ears ringing, veers right.

Fritz stumbles left, falls.

BOOM!

Another mortar shell lands right in Jake's footprints.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Get UP you lazy sonofabitch! RUN!

Fritz claws his way back to his feet and 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 stops.

SILENCE.

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

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

Grinning, Fritz turns and bounds toward the gap. Jake watches, confused for a second. And then:

JAKE (CONT'D)

No, no. Wait!

CLICK. BOOM!

Already beyond the wire, Fritz steps on a landmine. His body is tossed into the air like a sack of potatoes.

Dirt, snow, scraps of fabric, and Fritz's helmet rain down to the ground. His body lands with a muffled THUD.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Fritz!

Jake runs full-bore back through the snow, to find Fritz face-down, contorted, lying in the gap in the concertina.

Jake ditches his rifle and falls to his knees.

JAKE (CONT'D)

No!

He cautiously turns him over. Strangely, Fritz's face is the picture of calm. Smiling, the moonlight glinting in his eyes, he coughs lightly and speaks:

FRITZ

Whoopsie daisy.

JAKE

Oh, thank God! Thank god you're--

It's only then that Jake notices that Fritz's right leg is a tangled mess. Blood everywhere. Wool pant leg tattered.

Jake throws off his rope coil and pack, scrambling for his med kit, a tourniquet, anything.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Where does it hurt?! Where does it hurt?!

FRITZ
(seeming surprised)
Nowhere.

JAKE
I'm gonna get you outta here!

FRITZ
Strange.

JAKE
Quiet!

Fritz tries to speak. Nothing comes. Nothing works.

Jake grabs his knife, cuts a section of fabric off his jacket, wraps it around Fritz's mangled leg and searches for a stick - anything to make a proper...

FRITZ
My... hammer. Piton hammer.

JAKE
Yeah, YES!

Working fast, he ties the fabric around Fritz's thigh. Then, he loops a piton hammer into it, twisting. Normally, the pressure would make a man scream bloody murder.

But Fritz is calm. Too calm. His eyes are glazed.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Wake up! Stay with me!

FRITZ
(fading)
Ich glaube nicht...

JAKE
It's going to fucking work!

FRITZ
I don't mean the tourniquet.

Jake frantically scans the treeline to their right. In the light of the flares, he thinks he sees the silhouettes of MEN on the move.

JAKE
The 85th. They're right over--

FRITZ
Go to them.

JAKE
I ain't gonna leave you!
What's left of the snow around them is a bloody mess.

FRITZ
There is a letter. In my breast
pocket. For my sister. In London.
Tell her I loved her. That I died
without--

JAKE
You are NOT fucking dying on me!
Fritz grins serenely, accustomed to Jake's orders.
Jake grabs Fritz's helmet. It's shot through with shrapnel.
The moonlight and the flares shine right through it.

FRITZ
(mimicking Jake)
Don't forget your hat, dipshit.

Jake half-laughs, half-cries. He gulps it back down.

JAKE
I'm gonna pick you up. Carry you to
the trees. It's gonna hurt like
holy hell. But you gotta stay
quiet. Keep calm.

FRITZ
I *am* calm.

Jake nervously eyes the trees. The men he thought were there
are gone. A trick of the light.

JAKE
(lying)
85th is right over there. They've
gotta have a medic. Hell they're a
dime a fucking dozen up here,
right?

Fritz is slipping. His lips are going gray. His face is
already draining of color.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Tell me again. About your plans.

FRITZ
(slurring)
Plans?

Abandoning his pack and rope, Jake delicately HEFTS Fritz up off the ground and onto his back. Both of Fritz's legs dangle lifelessly.

He doesn't cry out. Doesn't make a peep.

JAKE
(straining)
With Pfeifer. Aspen!

FRITZ
Ah, yes. Build a lift to replace the boat tow. From the base to midway up Ajax.

Jake takes a couple of slow steps through the snow, toward the trees leaving a trail of Fritz's blood.

JAKE
(pained)
Keep... going.

FRITZ
Then a second to the top. Sundeck.

JAKE
Mmm-hmm.

The trees are getting closer. In the distance more SHELLING. Still no return fire.

No one from the 85th.

FRITZ
Single-passenger. Longest in the...

Fritz pauses - drifting, drifting.

JAKE
Stay with me!

FRITZ
(barely audible)
Percy's got it all mapped out.

Jake shakes him slightly, tries to rouse him. No dice.

JAKE
 (quietly sing-song)
*Come along,
 We'll sing a song.*

Fritz nods his head ever so slightly.

FRITZ
 (pained)
*On our way to battle,
 Each step is slow.
 Still up we go.*

JAKE
 (louder)
*The weight of my pack
 is breaking my back.*

FRITZ
*Thru shot and shell,
 we'll give 'em hell.*

JAKE
It's higher, still higher.

He pauses, waiting for Fritz. Nothing.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 (his voice breaking)
It's higher, still higher.

Still nothing.

Silence. No breathing.

Jake reaches the trees, carefully lowers Fritz to the ground. With the impact, Fritz comes briefly back to.

FRITZ
 (delirious)
Spaß und Spiele...

Jake holds Fritz's color-blانched cheeks. His eyes are open but miles away.

FRITZ (CONT'D)
 Take the letter.

JAKE
 I can get you--

Suddenly, from somewhere higher up the mountain, a FEROCIOUS FIREFIGHT finally erupts.

The upper slopes CRACKLE to life with a swirling tempest of machine gun and mortar fire in both directions.

FRITZ
Please, take it.

A thin bead of blood runs down Fritz's forehead.

Jake blots it out with his sleeve, swivels his body back down, next to Fritz's. They lean against the same tree.

Above, tracers streak through the sky like falling stars.

FRITZ (CONT'D)
Schön.

The two of them stare silently into the blackness flecked with fire.

JAKE
Beautiful.

After a second, Jake turns to Fritz to speak. But Fritz's eyes are empty. His chest is still. He's gone.

A turbulent storm of emotion washes across Jake's face. Anger. Fear. Self-recrimination. Inescapable loss.

He begins to sob again. This time, violently.

Barely able to see, barely able to control himself, he reaches a hand slowly inside Fritz's jacket for the letter.

Then, out of nowhere, a VOICE:

CAPTAIN HARRIS (O.S.)
Quit yer fuckin' blubberin'!

Jake wheels around to see the gaunt, stubble-covered face of Captain Harris from earlier.

Harris steps in, roughly YANKS away Fritz's dog tags.

Jake looks down to the envelope in his hand. The paper is smudged red.

Harris points ahead with the hand clutching Fritz's tags.

Saying nothing, Jake turns to see --

EXT. FOREST, CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Three YOUNG AMERICAN SOLDIERS stand frozen in the middle of a clearing just past another section of concertina wire.

This bit of wire has been meticulously cut, presumably by the young soldiers.

One of the soldiers wears white helmet. Jake almost calls out to the YOUNG MEDIC, forgetting for a moment that it's too late. Fritz is gone.

All of the young men up ahead are frozen in-place.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
(a whisper)
Where's your goddamn gear?

Jake gestures. From the higher slopes, German 88s sound off. Even from this distance, it's a bone-rattling DIN.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
Well?!

Jake nods, runs a blood-covered hand across his face, makes a break for his pack.

On the way out, he manages not to look at Fritz.

On the way back, Fritz's lifeless body all he can see.

Crouched again next to Harris, Jake looks to see the medic hopping from footprint to footprint across the snow, toward the young soldiers.

Suddenly: CLICK!

Everyone ducks. Nothing happens. A dud!

The medic lifts his foot, grinning.

BANG!

He's cut literally in half. The nearest soldier vomits, covered in the medic's blood.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
(too loud)
God fuckin'--

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

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

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
 (to the young soldier)
 Soldier. Don't you do it. Don't you
 fuckin' move! That's an--

Ignoring him, the young soldier turns and runs, zigzagging madly. He gets nearly all the way across the clearing when:

CLICK. BANG!

His body is thrown into the waiting limbs of a nearby tree like a wet towel.

After a moment, silence.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
 (to Jake)
 All you fuckin' mountain men think
 you can do every goddamn thing on
 your own! Never fuckin' listen!

He stands, scans the horizon. The coast seems clear.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
 C'mon.

Jake, his mind racing, begins to protest:

JAKE
 Sir. No, sir! I have orders from
 Colonel Hampton.

Jake glances at his watch. He's way behind schedule.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 I need to get out ahead of B
 Company of the 87th. Take out a...

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

Jake presses on:

JAKE (CONT'D)
 ...a Screaming Mimi. A *Nebelwerfer*
 battery on a cliff above--

Harris lifts a hand to cut him off, gestures grandly for Jake to enter the minefield first.

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

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

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)

Just follow the footsteps. The
right ones. I'll be on your six.

(beat)

And that's an order, Private.

Jake steadies his rifle, stands. Without saying another word, he sets off. We FOLLOW slowly.

EXT. MINEFIELD - CONTINUOUS

Sagging under the weight of his pack and coil of rope, Jake threads his way through the cut barbed wire, into the minefield and pauses.

In the distance, the THUNDER of battle rages on.

Jake looks down to the blood-stained envelope still in his hand. He draws a breath, slips the envelope safely into his jacket, takes a step forward. Then another.

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

As he walks, Jake's eyes well again. But he doesn't sob, doesn't make a sound. The tears just fall from his cheeks to the debris-strewn hard pack below.

At first the path is quick, just one foot after another.

Then, the two men arrive at a convergence. One set of footprints veers left toward the mangled body of the medic. The other continues on to the right.

Jake veers right. Harris follows wordlessly.

Holding his breath, the distant FIREFIGHT still droning on up ahead, Jake finally reaches the site of the second mine.

It's just a hollowed-out crater of snow, dirt, and rock. No sign of a body anywhere.

About four feet to the left of the crater, we can make out the faint imprints of the first set of footprints. Beyond the crater, nothing.

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

Teetering, he looks back to Harris. Harris shrugs. *What do you want, a fucking medal?*

He gestures for Jake to move it.

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

JAKE
(under his breath)
Wish me luck.

Gulping, he slowly, meticulously jumps from one footprint to the next - wincing with each impact.

PUFF! PUFF! PUFF! PUFF! PUFF!

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

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

JAKE (CONT'D)
I'm gonna need it.

And, with that, he bounds blindly over the barren snow, safely back into the trees.

Harris, impressed, does the same.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
(after a moment, winded)
Now, what were you saying about a
Screamin' Mimi?

EXT. BELVEDERE, HIGHER SLOPES - LATER

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

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

Gruesomely WOUNDED MEN litter the pockmarked, rocky soil. Were it not for the near constant EXPLOSIONS and RICOCHETING MUNITIONS, the wail of the wounded would fill the air.

Firing at nearly anything that moves, Captain Harris sprints past all manner of horrors.

COMMANDING OFFICERS crouch holding their own entrails. INFANTRY MEN missing fingers and ears search the bloody snow for their lost weapons.

Severed limbs stick out of the snow at odd angles. Terror.

Then, out of nowhere, a PIERCING HOWL followed quickly by four more HIGH-PITCHED SHRIEKS in rapid succession.

Captain Harris grabs Jake by the strap of his pack and pulls him with him down to the ground.

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

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

CAPTAIN HARRIS
There you go, boy. 21 cm
Nebelwerfer 42.

Another GHASTLY SALVO rips the air - five rockets, one right after another. Jake jams his hands over his ears.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
(loud over the din)
Screamin' fuckin' Mimi!

Seconds later: five MASSIVE EXPLOSIONS in the distance.

Jake sits up, his face covered in dirt. Captain Harris points up into the darkness.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
That's your target, son. Break a
fuckin' leg.

Captain Harris leaps away. Jake LUNGES out, grabs him.

JAKE
No, no, no! I need men! I need... I
need help! I can't--

Captain Harris tears himself free. Over his shoulder, we can see more SOLDIERS running for cover.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Where are the rest of your men?

BURP! BURP! BURP! A hail of machine gun fire swarms them from up-slope.

Captain Harris pushes away, firing rapidly uphill.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
(loud)
You're lookin' at 'em!

Jake falls to one knee, takes aim. In the distance, muzzle flares. Harris charges toward them.

Jake closes one eye, fires quickly.

A single round from up ahead grazes Harris' shoulder. He barely registers the hit, continues onward.

From out of nowhere, another soldier - SPECIALIST ALEX HILL (20s, rail thin, jittery) - leaps past Jake.

ALEX
(slight stutter)
Crazy llllloon!

He hurls two live grenades (one from each hand) into the darkness up ahead of Harris.

BOOM! BOOM!

The German gunfire ceases.

Jake, stunned, leaps up and runs after Alex and Harris through the trees.

EXT. GERMAN SLIT TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Harris jumps into a fortified slit trench, wheels around, plugs two INJURED GERMANS as they crawl weakly away.

Behind him, a lone GERMAN GUNNER scrambles to his feet. His face is half missing and covered in blood.

Alex fires a single round.

It BUZZES just past Harris' ear - hitting the gunner squarely in the center of what's left of his forehead.

He falls hard.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
(to Alex)
Jesus, you fuckin' runt! Watch it!

ALEX
Ya, ya, yes, yessir.

Jake steps up.

All three of them anxiously scan their surroundings.

JAKE
Tell me you two can climb.

EXT. CLIFF FACE, BASE - CONTINUOUS

With battle RIPPLING WILDLY across the mountain below and above them, Jake quickly unfurls his rope at the foot of a sheer 400 foot cliff wall.

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

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

JAKE
(to Alex)
You're B company?

ALEX
No, no. C. C Ccompany. 85th.

JAKE
Where's B Company?!

Alex stares up at the wall above them. It's clearly the most technical surface he's ever seen (much less climbed).

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

ALEX
I, I, I dunno!

Harris dumps sulfa powder into his own wound.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Leave the fuckin' kid alone. We gotta keep moving.

JAKE
No, you listen to me! If we don't take out that battery, nobody's gonna make it off this mountain! Not tonight, not ever!

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Shut your trap, Private!

Jake reaches into his pack, pulls out a handful of pitons, tosses them to the dirt and snow like useless matchsticks.

Above, another five rockets FLASH.

JAKE
Sir, no sir! We're out of time!

He tosses his piton hammer to the ground. It lands on his abandoned pitons with a CLANG.

JAKE (CONT'D)
We're gonna have to climb this thing old-style. No anchors. No belay. Daisy-chained!

Another five rockets WAIL - zipping overhead and toward the lower slopes before exploding. Scarlet fireballs.

JAKE (CONT'D)

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

Alex's face tightens.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Since when'd you start givin' the fuckin' orders around here?

JAKE

Since you *ordered* me into a fucking minefield! That's when!

Alex's eyes widen at Jake's insubordination.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Listen, boy. I know what you did. During the D-series.

(beat)

Max was a good man!

JAKE

Yes he fucking was!

(beat)

Now we gotta take down that battery, give the 87th cover together or else! You hear me?

Alex nods vehemently, dropping his pack with a THUD.

ALEX

Yessssssssir!

CAPTAIN HARRIS

(to Alex)

No, boy. You're gonna need your fuckin' grenades.

Alex flares his alpine white jacket open, revealing a belt laden with grenades. There must be at least 15 of them.

ALEX

Do, do, do a good dddeed dddaily!

(beat)

And be prep...prep...pared!

Harris shakes his head. Jake pulls off the mittens Gerry gave him, turns his eyes to the cliff.

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

Jake points up the near-vertical stone wall.

JAKE

See that seam? Just follow it.
Hand-over-hand. One hold at a time.
Don't get greedy. Just let the
mountain tell you what to do.

He bends to his pack, pulls out three strands of webbing.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'll lead. Captain next. Then you.

ALEX

Wwwhy mmme last?

JAKE

Because you're the lightest. Even
with all that TNT!

Jake tosses each man a strip of webbing.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Strap up. And ditch your whites. If
Jerry gets a look at--

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

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Like I'm gonna fuckin' trust you to
rope me up!

EXT. CLIFF FACE, LOWER REACHES - CONTINUOUS

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

Jake, in the lead, moves gingerly hand-over-hand along the seam. Just a few inches wide, the fissure zigzags up the wall like a bolt of lightning.

A length of rope connects Jake to Harris. They're about ten feet apart. The same rope, tied firmly to each man's waist, arcs down toward Alex, who's just beginning up the climb.

Below: their abandoned whites, the rest of Jake's rope, his gloves, and Alex's pack lie in a heap. Above: between salvos, the GERMAN VOICES are getting louder.

Jake moves slowly at first, cautiously testing every bit of rock, tossing away anything that cleaves off.

His arms burning, he pauses, looks down to Harris.

Beyond Harris, Alex lunges for a gutsy hold, his grenades jangling. But he makes it.

Jake shakes his head, turning back to the wall.

He jams his right hand into a section of the fissure and pulls just as something catches his eye from above. It's long and metallic, tumbling through the air.

An empty rocket casing?

As it WHOOSHES past him, the moonlight glinting off its surface, Jake HISSES down toward Harris:

JAKE (CONT'D)

Heads up!

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

Alex, unaware, shoves his torso upward just in time for the casing to catch him straight in the sternum.

The shock of the impact registers briefly on his face before his hands let go completely.

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

Harris buckles, holding onto the wall.

Below him, Alex spins in the open air. He's conscious but stunned, looking like his brain is still processing what just happened.

Harris kicks one foot out, wedges himself against the seam before shaking his left hand free.

JAKE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?!

Ignoring him, Harris reaches behind himself, unsheathes his bayonet, lifts the blade.

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

JAKE (CONT'D)

(barely audible)

No!

Harris reaches to cut the rope between him and Alex.

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

Below Harris, Alex strains - his fingers splayed desperately out toward the rock, trying to get a grip.

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

Harris looks up toward Jake just as Alex falls.

For a second, he slips silently through the air. Then, Alex slaps and stabs at the wall - finally getting a grip on tiny sliver of stone. His body smacks the wall hard.

In a kinetic flurry, Alex scours the surface in front of him with his bloodied hands, finds two solid crags, jams his fingers into them.

Safe but untethered.

From above, more VOICES.

Then, more casings rain down. One after another, they tumble through the darkness - barely missing Jake and then PINGING across the stretch of open rock between Alex and Harris.

Alex starts back up the wall, choosing his line carefully.

Without a hint of remorse, Harris calmly sheathes his blade and climbs toward Jake.

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

EXT. CLIFF FACE, MIDPOINT - CONTINUOUS

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

Above them, we hear MEN WORKING. *Preparing to reposition the battery? Wiring another load?* Hard to tell.

From somewhere down below, a sudden barrage of CANNON FIRE slashes the clifftop. Heavy rounds likely from an American M18 send shards of rock raining down.

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

A VOICE from above cries out:

VOICE (O.S.)

Kontakt!

Five more rockets STREAK from the cliff-top, down toward the source of the cannon fire. Five massive fireballs fill the forest floor with blinding light.

The TUMULT is mind-melting. The entire cliff seems to shudder and shake with the sound.

Jake grips the wall, looks down.

At the base of the cliff: a GEBIRGSJÄGER PATROL on the run, guns drawn. Jake freezes.

A GERMAN CAPTAIN in a white hooded jacket pauses at the sight of Jake's abandoned gear.

Jake gestures toward Alex to stop. Watching them, Harris slows. Jake points down toward the German Captain.

Harris' eyes follow.

Frozen stiff, all three of them watch as the German Captain nudges their seemingly identical jackets with the muzzle of his rifle.

The man stiffens at the sight of Jake's pack. And then, spying the pitons and coil of rope, he lifts his gaze.

Jake scrambles for his sidearm, careful not to lose his foothold.

The German Captain raises his rifle, fires once.

BANG!

The bullet catches Harris in the back.

The German Captain takes aim at Alex.

KA-BOOM!

A single grenade vaporizes the German Captain.

Alex flicks the pulled pin from his finger and re-grips the wall. One slot on his belt is empty.

Suddenly, the rope between Jake and Harris goes taut!

Jake looks down to see Harris dangling, bloodied, struggling to cut himself free before he loses consciousness.

JAKE

Wait! Wait. Don't--

Harris gets the blade through the rope and plummets into the darkness. He lands with a muted THUMP almost precisely where the German Captain just stood.

Jake turns back to the wall. *Goddammit!*

Alex slaps the wall with his hand. Jake looks up, holsters his weapon, continues silently on.

EXT. CLIFF FACE, SUMMIT - CONTINUOUS

The two men slowly reach the summit.

Frayed sections of rope dangle behind both of them. Jake quickly unties his with one hand. It drops away into the darkness.

Alex does the same.

The VOICES have gone quiet. The rocket battery, too.

But down below, the battle rages on.

Jake takes a couple of deep breaths, having no idea what waits beyond the lip.

Alex reaches a hand down to his belt, grabs another grenade, lifts it to his mouth, bites down on the clip. He looks more like a kid bobbing for apples than a soldier.

Jake reaches into a pocket, pulls out a grenade of his own.

He pantomimes lobbing them over and then charging. Alex nods, grabbing another grenade and knocking the clip loose.

It JANGLES down the rock face. Still, no voices from above. *Where the hell'd they go?*

Jake shifts his shoulders, steadying the rifle slung over them, and then mouths Alex: *three, two, one.*

They both pull their pins, hold their grenades for a precarious few seconds, and then hurl them up and over.

BANG! BANG!

And over the top they go.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - CONTINUOUS

Jake swings his rifle around and starts firing blindly. Alex does the same, one grenade still wedged between his teeth.

Ahead stands a huge, smoldering, five-barreled *Nebelwerfer* rocket launcher. Empty casings litter the ground behind it, which is scorched a dark black.

Alex slows to a stop right behind the launcher.

ALEX
(muffled)
There's nobody ffffucking--

Jake skids to a stop, looks to his 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 ignition device.

For an overlong second, they all just stand there, frozen. Everything goes EERILY SILENT.

But then the soldier with casings drops them. They CLATTER and CLANG loudly at his feet.

The surrounding GUNFIRE ramps back up, over-loud.

A bespectacled GERMAN COMMANDER moves for his pistol.

JAKE
Don't do that!

The officer hesitates.

The young man with the detonator, a KANNONIER, grips the handle of the ignition device. A thick metal wire runs from it, through Jake's feet, and into the rocket launcher.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Everybody, just take it nice and--

A nearby RADIOMAN wearing binoculars around his neck looks to a field radio dangling from a nearby tree branch.

JAKE (CONT'D)
No, no. There's no need to--

Suddenly, from behind Jake, Alex pulls the grenade from his teeth and spits out the clip.

PING!

Jake swivels his head back toward him.

Alex is still standing in the back blast zone. If they fire even a single rocket, he's done for.

JAKE

Wait.

In the distance: CLICK!

The officer flicks his holster open.

And all hell breaks loose!

The Officer pulls his gun, fires.

BANG!

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

BANG!

The *Kannonier* screams, falls backward.

Alex drops his grenade, lifts his rifle, fires twice.

POP! POP!

The Radioman falls.

The Officer returns fire.

BANG!

The bullet catches Alex's shoulder, knocks him sideways. He stumbles backward, toward the cliff edge.

Jake aims, fires.

BANG!

The Officer crumples.

The Private lifts both arms.

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

Alex pulls another grenade, flicks away the clip.

PING!

He pulls the pin, throws it.

BOOM!

The young Private disappears in a single BLAST.

Jake looks to Alex.

ZIP!

Jake's eyes WHIP to see the *Kannonier*, bloodied, turning the handle on the firing mechanism.

Jake spins on his heels and lunges back toward Alex, knowing he's about to be burnt to a crisp.

JAKE

No!

Jake TACKLES Alex clear.

Alex, stunned, stumbles backward, trips over the ignition wire and falls, windmilling, over the cliff edge.

ZIP!

The *Kannonier* sends the signal again.

Jake skids to a stop right behind the battery.

Nothing happens.

Jake turns his head, looks to the *Kannonier*.

The *Kannonier* twists the handle yet again.

Still nothing.

It's only then that we notice that the wire winding across the ground is suddenly taut.

And it runs directly over the cliff!

Jake falls to the ground, reaches desperately over the edge.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - JAKE'S POV

Dangling by one wire-tangled boot, his grenades CLINKING together, Alex sways calmly above the 400 foot drop.

ALEX

(suddenly zero stutter)

Well, that's just about the nicest thing anyone's ever done for me!

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - CONTINUOUS

Jake desperately heaves Alex back up to safety.

Behind them, the *Kannonier* sprints away into the darkness.

GASPING, Jake spies Alex's dropped grenade on the scorched earth next to the ignition wire. The pin is still in it.

Instead of grabbing it, pulling the pin, and lobbing it toward the fleeing German, Jake smiles faintly to himself.

JAKE

I got an idea.

EXT. GERMAN BUNKER - ALEX'S POV

Through the Germans' abandoned binoculars, we see what appears to be a sizable German bunker.

The place is teeming with GERMAN SOLDIERS. At least four MACHINE GUN CREWS are busy mowing down advancing AMERICANS.

ALEX (V.O.)

(still not stuttering)

Direction zero, five, two, zero.

Distance 1,200 meters. Altitude

520. Danger close.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - CONTINUOUS

Jake clutches the detonator, peers over Alex's shoulder.

JAKE

Think that's within range?

Alex hands him the binoculars. Jake surveys the scene.

ALEX

How am I supposed to know?

JAKE

And how are you talking?

Alex shrugs. *Hell if I know!*

JAKE

Alright, that's gotta be B company down there.

Jake hands Alex back the binoculars, lifts the firing mechanism, grasps the handle.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Gonna have to risk it.

Alex continues staring down toward the German bunker.

ALEX
(calmly)
Fire when ready.

Jake gives the handle five quick, forceful twists.

After a split second:

WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

Five rockets RIP out of the launcher in rapid succession.
The ROAR is deafening. The repeated FLASHES, blinding.

Jake and Alex watch as the rockets arc upward and then sweep downward, MOANING LOUDLY.

Seconds later, five massive, synchronized explosions THUNDER back up the mountainside.

A direct hit.

The bunker and everything in the vicinity is obliterated.

JAKE
MORE!

Jake DROPS the firing mechanism, THROWS open the release latch, sends all five smoldering shells catapulting backward onto the ground.

Alex SPRINTS to grabs another shell, turns back, loads it. Then another and another and another.

Jake CRANKS the positioning wheel - aiming the launcher toward another German bunker further uphill.

Alex SMASHES the last shell in.

ALEX
Ready!

Jake LIFTS the binoculars, calls out coordinates:

JAKE
Direction zero, seven, three, zero.
Distance 1,600 meters. Altitude
760.

Alex DIALS in the azimuth and elevation, tosses Jake the firing mechanism. He catches it without even looking.

Both men LEAP clear.

JAKE
Fire in the--

CRANK! WHIZ!

Five more rockets BLAST from the battery, one after the other. Again, it's near-blindingly bright.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! **BOOM!**

Five more direct hits.

A second bunker annihilated.

JAKE (CONT'D)
(ecstatic)
Now, that's what I'm--

THUMP.

Something long, matte green, and SPARKING lands on the ground at Jake's feet and rolls around him in a lazy arc.

Still holding onto the firing device, Jake watches as the POTATO MASHER slows to a stop at his feet. *Shit, shit, shit!*

He throws the firing mechanism and SHOUTS:

JAKE (CONT'D)
Gren--

BANG!

Suddenly everything goes QUIET.

The screen is instantly filled with NOTHING BUT WHITE.

Then, slowly: WIND.

No more explosions, no gunfire. Just the HOWLING GALE of an impenetrable whiteout.

EXT. ELK MOUNTAIN, COLORADO - DAY [FLASHBACK]

Two barely discernible figures slowly materialize as they trudge their way uphill, tethered together.

MAX
(loud over the wind)
Yeah, I dunno, kid.

Max slows, runs a gloved hand over his frozen mustache.

MAX (CONT'D)
Sometimes you just gotta keep
going. You fall, you get up. You
reach for a hold, it's not there.
It breaks. You learn. You try
again, just smarter.

In the distance, a single HOWITZER BLAST. The first of many.

MAX (CONT'D)
Like Paul says, there are old
climbers and there are bold
climbers.

Behind Max, Jake pushes forward, drives his ax into the ice.

MAX (CONT'D)
There aren't too many old, bold
climbers. Yeah?

No response. Just HEAVY BREATHING and the WHIPPING WIND.

MAX (CONT'D)
So it matters havin' someone trusty
on the other end of the line. Same
thing with this whole deal, the
war. Everybody deserves to be free.
And sometimes the truly free and
wild like you and yours truly need
to tuck ourselves in with the rest
of the pack to try and pry back
that freedom for people halfway
around the globe that we couldn't
have less in common with if our
lives depended on it.

Max slows, looking lost.

MAX (CONT'D)
Or somethin' like that. Anyway...
(beat)
What I wouldn't give for a--

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY - JAKE'S POV

Suddenly, the screen fills again with BRIGHT BLUE SKY. Fluffy white clouds drift languidly by.

It's no longer night. What appears to be snow or ash rains down from above.

And the howling wind is gone. Replaced instead by BIRDSONG. The sound of the natural world reawakening.

Coming back to life.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY

Jake lies on the ground, gazes up toward the sky.

The blast zone is now a snow-dusted crater. The rocket launcher sits at an odd angle - like a toy discarded by an angry child.

Alex is nowhere to be seen.

In the distance, the ripple of approaching shadows. Men on the move.

Jake doesn't budge. Can't move.

The approaching shadows scatter. One of them undulates across the snow.

Closer, closer, closer until --

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Medic! I think we got a live one!

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY - JAKE'S POV

Silhouetted against the same brilliant blue sky and lightly falling snow, a man's face.

It's upside-down, helmeted, smoke-smudged, and flecked with dirt. But somehow familiar.

The MAN leans closer, on bended knee. He reaches a hand out, checks for signs of life, smiles.

MAN
Boy howdy! That was some show y'all
put on up here!

The man's face slips in and out of focus. But then we catch it, his nametape:

HAYS

JAKE (V.O.)
 (hoarse)
 You're... *him*.
 (pained breath)
 Hays--

LIEUTENANT HAYS, the General's Son, nods slowly, salutes.

LIEUTENANT HAYS
 B Company reporting for duty, sir.

EXT. ROCKET BATTERY - DAY - ON JAKE

Jake tries to lift his arm to salute. It won't budge.

LIEUTENANT HAYS
 No, no. You take it nice and easy
 now, you hear?

Jake GROANS, lets his mangled arm go slack.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)
 These boys'll take good care of
 you. Get you down. All fixed up.

Lieutenant Hays stands, clutches his rifle.

JAKE
 (weakly)
 Valpiano. Did we take--

Hays grins, looks away.

LIEUTENANT HAYS
 (off)
 Listen to this one! Asking if we
 took Valpiano!

We hear weary CHUCKLING from the shadows in the distance.
 Hays looks back down toward Jake, ringed in light.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)
 Yeah, boy. We did. And Gorgolesco
 too. Took it all the way up
 Belvedere and down the other side.

Hays rubs a hand across his prematurely grizzled face.

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)
 But don't give it another thought,
 huh?

(MORE)

LIEUTENANT HAYS (CONT'D)

(beat)

You're goin' home, kid. You're
goin' home.

And with that, he steps away. All we see is sky.

FADE TO WHITE.

OVER WHITE:

THE CAPTURE OF THE BELVEDERE COST THE 10TH
MOUNTAIN DIVISION 923 CASUALTIES.

192 MEN WERE KILLED IN ACTION.
730 WERE WOUNDED. AND ONE WAS TAKEN PRISONER.

THE 85TH BORE THE BRUNT, WITH OVER 470 KILLED AND WOUNDED.

TOTAL GERMAN CASUALTIES REMAIN UNKNOWN.
BUT OVER 400 GERMAN SOLDIERS WERE TAKEN PRISONER.

THE ORIGINAL WAR OFFICE PLANS PROJECTED THE OFFENSIVE
WOULD LIKELY TAKE MORE THAN TWO WEEKS.

INSTEAD, THE 10TH TOOK BELVEDERE IN JUST FIVE DAYS.

FADE TO BLACK.

INSERT MONTAGE:

-- Archival footage of Friedl Pfeifer schussing elegantly
through the trees on Aspen Mountain --

JAKE (V.O.)

Friedl lost a lung but survived.
And eventually found his way back
to Colorado, where he started The
Aspen Ski School.

-- Archival footage of Pete Siebert standing knee-deep at
the summit of a snow-covered peak --

JAKE (V.O.)

Pete made it home in one piece too.
And started up the Vail Ski Resort
- just a hop, skip, and a jump from
our old home base at Camp Hale.

-- Archival footage of Percy Rideout clowning around on the
Sundeck at Aspen with Friedl by his side --

JAKE (V.O.)

Ol' Percy landed a Bronze Star, a Silver Star, and a Purple Heart. And he followed Friedl to Aspen, where he helped turn the sleepy silver mining town into a world-class skiing destination.

-- Archival footage of David Brower scaling the face of El Capitan as the sun rises over Yosemite Valley --

JAKE (V.O.)

David nabbed a Bronze Star and came home to California, where he took the reins of The Sierra Club - transforming it from a hiking club into a conservationist powerhouse.

-- Archival footage of Paul Petzoldt tromping across an alpine meadow ahead of a line of scruffy teenagers --

JAKE (V.O.)

Petzoldt put his crazy love of the great outdoors to good use and founded NOLS, the National Outdoor Leadership School - the world-leader in outdoor education.

-- Archival footage of Gerry Cunningham and his wife Ann working inside their warmly-lit Boulder workshop --

JAKE (V.O.)

Gerry made his way back to Colorado too. And, together with his wife Ann, started the world's first mail-order catalog for high-quality mountaineering gear - named Gerry.

-- Archival footage of Rupert and Werner von Trapp singing on-stage with their now famous siblings --

JAKE (V.O.)

Both Rupert and Werner returned to Vermont, where they continued to tour extensively with the Trapp Family Singers.

-- Archival footage of Bill Browerman jogging through a stand of trees with a team of college sprinters --

JAKE (V.O.)

Bill ended up back home in Oregon, where he coached track, won four NCAA championships, trained up thirty plus Olympians, and started a little shoe making company.

(beat)

Called Nike.

-- Archival footage of Bob Dole in a baby-blue suit campaigning for his very first senate seat --

JAKE (V.O.)

And Bob Dole survived the assault on Belvedere but was grievously wounded just days later, losing the use of one arm. He did run for president twice. No dice.

(beat)

But as Leader of the Senate, he made sure The 10th Mountain Division kept its original name when it was reactivated in 1985.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. AMERICAN CEMETERY, FLORENCE, ITALY - DUSK

Together, an aged and limping Jake (now mid-30s) and a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN dressed in all-black stroll through a mist-shrouded military cemetery.

SUPER: 10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION CEMETERY, ITALY, FALL 1960

Row upon row of neatly-arrayed white marble crosses stretch on across a verdant plain lined with leafy trees.

The woman, Fritz's sister LOTTE (mid-30s), slows.

Behind her, a stooped ELDERLY COUPLE also dressed in black thread their way through the headstones. She reaches back, takes their hands, leads them on.

In the distance, a single well-tended grave with a bright white marble headstone. But this one is different.

A Star of David instead of a cross.

JAKE (V.O.)

I was eventually able to track down Fritz's sister, Lotte.

Lotte guides her parents toward the grave. Fritz's grave.

Jake hangs back.

JAKE (V.O.)
And her parents, thank God.

Fritz's sister and his parents, KLAUS (late 50s) and LEAH (late 50s), pause, reach out, and gently run their fingers over the sharp edges of the marble star.

Grief-stricken but swelling with pride.

JAKE (V.O.)
They were liberated from the
Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp...

Fritz's father wipes away a tear, thrusts a hand into his jacket pocket, pulls out a small stone, places it on top of one of the six points - just above Fritz's name.

Fritz's mother and sister do the same.

JAKE (V.O.)
...by the British 11th Armored
Division back in the spring of '45.

Lotte turns, looks back to Jake, gestures kindly for him to join them graveside.

JAKE (V.O.)
Just in the nick of time.

Barely holding back tears himself, Jake crosses the manicured grass with one hand in his pocket.

Pausing at the headstone, he pulls something from his pocket, gently sets it down next to one of the stones, taps it twice with his rock-calloused fingers.

JAKE
(quietly)
*Sempre Avanti, my friend. Sempre
Avanti.*

He lifts his hand to reveal a battered steel piton. It glints faintly in the dimming light.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END