

# Red Tails

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1 CARD: 1

"Blacks are superstitious, subservient, and rank cowards in the dark. They are therefore unfit for combat."

U.S. Army War College Study, 1925

FADE TO:

2 EXT. SKY - DAY 2

We come in on a BEAUTIFUL BLUE SKY. On this backdrop, as we drift among the clouds, we see the HEAD CREDITS for the film.

As the last of the credits FADES from the screen, FOUR CURTISS P-40s flying in an ECHELON FORMATION break frame.

THE CAMERA FOLLOWS the planes as they descend, moving in and out of the clouds. On the screen we see the following:

CARD:

ITALY, 1944

Below the planes is Italian countryside just off the Apennine Mountains; grass, fields. THE CAMERA MOVES UP THE LINE and catches a TRAIN TRAVELING AWAY from "us" on tracks. It's a steam train, but it's built for speed. ITS ROLLING STOCK LOOKS TO BE CATTLE CARS. TOWARD THE MIDDLE OF THE TRAIN IS A FLATCAR COVERED WITH A CANVAS TARP. WHATEVER'S UNDER THE TARP - FOR THE MOMENT - WE CAN'T SEE IT.

3 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 3

The planes themselves are piloted by four young men. All between the ages of 19 and 21. The flight leader is MARTY JULIAN (EASY) - as his nickname implies, Marty's an easy going and sharp minded young fella.

MARTY  
Red One to Blue One. Talley!  
Target, twelve low.

4 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 4

This plane is piloted by RAY KNIGHT (RAY GUN) - born to fly and loves flying. He lives for it. But at the moment he's not sure that Marty's got the correct target.

RAY  
Red One, you sure that's the right  
target? Supposed to be a fuel  
train. Looks like they're moving  
cattle.

5 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 5

Marty responds.

MARTY  
Probably just camouflaged.

6 I/E. NAT'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 6

This plane is piloted by NAT, Ray's wingman.

NAT  
Might be cows. Don't want to  
shoot up cows if I don't have to.  
Let's think about this.

7 I/E. JOE'S PLANE 7

Our fourth plane is piloted by JOE LITTLE (LIGHTNING). Joe's the kind of cat who leads with his emotions; can't help but get into a fight over every little thing. Most times he's just fighting 'cause he likes getting his dukes up.

JOE  
Think long, think wrong. It's  
German. Let's hit it and go home.

8 INT. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 8

Marty gives the order to get cracking.

MARTY  
Punch tanks, guns free. Give them  
hell!

9 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS 9

The pilots "punch tanks;" their external fuel tanks are tossed off and they spiral away. In succession the P-40s bank, gain speed and start a strafing run on the train.

10 EXT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS 10

There are couple of German Soldiers - SPOTTERS - sitting on the tops of the train cars. They scan the skies with binoculars looking for enemy planes.

GERMAN SPOTTER  
Amerikanische Flächen! Klingen Sie  
die Warnung!

The second spotter reaches for an ACTIVATION LEVER. A loud KLAXON sounds.

11 INT. TRAIN/TROOP TRANSPORT CAR - CONTINUOUS 11

We are inside of a TROOP TRANSPORT CAR. There are about twenty or so GERMAN SOLDIERS inside who - as the KLAXON SOUNDS - quickly scramble up an access ladder for the top of the car.

12 EXT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS 12

The train's hauling tail feathers now as the German soldiers quickly exit their car and CLIMB UP TO THE ROOF and take up firing positions. SIX GERMAN SOLDIERS CONTINUE ON TOWARD THE FLATCAR THAT'S COVERED BY THE TARP.

13 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS 13

Marty guns his plane for the train with Joe trailing a good distance off his tail and wing.

The P-40s start hitting up the train. Bullets tear into the train and punch into the ground all around.

The Germans return fire as Marty leads the fliers in. It does the Germans little good. The bullets from the American planes rake the roof, cut up the train top and some of the German soldiers as well.

14 INT. TRAIN/TROOP TRANSPOT CAR - CONTINUOUS 14

Bullets fly INTO and THROUGH the car. The soldiers hug the floor and cover their heads to protect themselves as best they can which really doesn't amount to much at all.

15 EXT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS 15

Whatever is in the REARWARD CARS of the train combusts under the planes' strafing. There is a BIG ASS EXPLOSION which flings fire and debris up into the air like Vulcan tossing away tiresome objects. THE REARWARD CARS DERAIL, FLIP AND SPILL SPECTACULARLY ALONG THE TRACK. The train itself, however, keeps on heading up the rails.

16 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS 16

Joe calls the action.

JOE  
Cows?

NAT (V.O.)  
Said it might be cows.

JOE  
And what'd we hit, high octane milk?

17 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 17

Marty responds:

MARTY

You all see the train is still rolling? Any of you want to quit yapping and get on the engine?

18 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 18

Ray gives an update.

RAY

We're four miles from Rieti. They're going to have some Ack-Ack waiting for us.

19 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 19

Marty makes the call.

MARTY

Follow me around. We'll stop them before they get there.

20 INT. TRAIN/TROOP TRANSPOT CAR - CONTINUOUS 20

The COMMANDING SOLDIER yells to a RADIO OFFICER.

COMMANDING SOLDIER

Radio voran. Erklären Sie ihnen, die wir unter Angriff sind!

The Radio Officer makes the call.

21 EXT. TOWN - SIMULTANEOUS 21

There is a FIRE CONTROL STATION near the railroad tracks just at the outskirts of the town. A FIRE CONTROL OFFICER - the very height of Nazi arrogance - is on the other end of the radio listening to a frantic message from the train. Responding:

FIRE CONTROL OFFICER

Lassen Sie sie kommen. Wir sind zu ihnen betriebsbereit..  
(to his men)  
Jeder, auf Ihren Gewehren!

German FLAK GUNNERS scramble to their positions. As they do, THE CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL A VERITABLE SEA OF ACK-ACK EMPLACEMENTS ALONG THE RAILROAD TRACKS.

22 EXT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS 22

The planes drop down nearly to the ground and race after the train, winding low over the countryside as they come around for another pass. Close to the ground as they are, their relative speed seems all the faster.

COMING UP IN THE DISTANCE IS SIZABLE HILL WHICH THE TRACKS CUT THROUGH VIA TUNNEL.

Just as the planes close on the train, on the flatbed car, a soldier gives a signal and the moorings of the tarp are released. Dramatically, the tarp catches air and blows back to reveal what lays beneath: A COUPLE OF 2CM FLAKVIERLING 38 GUNS. The GUNNERS open fire, and it's like all hell cutting loose.

23 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 23

Marty, at the fore, see the tracer fire angling for them.

MARTY  
Break, break!

24 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS 24

The P-40s break off hard and fast just in time as tracers sweep after them. Nat, flying Tailend Charlie takes a couple of hits, but it's nothing serious. The planes give themselves some distance and regroup.

25 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 25

Marty radios to Joe.

NAT (V.O.)  
Son of a bitch... They're asking  
for hell now.

MARTY  
Lightning, on those guns.

JOE (V.O.)  
Right with you.

MARTY  
Blue One and Two, stay on the  
train!

26 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS 26

Marty throttles up, begins to weave back and forth, and Joe does the same until they're criss crossing each other. The weaving of the two planes makes them nearly impossible to hit. The two planes get right up on the flatcar, then cut loose with their guns. The bullets absolutely and spectacularly destroy ONE OF THE GERMAN 38s, a couple of the soldiers choosing to leap from the speeding train rather than face the certain death of the exploding guns.

27 I/E. NAT'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 27

Trailing Marty and Joe, Ray and Nat sweep up on the train. They race hard to pull close while dodging fire from the remaining 38.

The two men open fire, their bullets streaking for the train. But ahead looms the hill and that tunnel. \*

RAY (V.O.)  
Tunnel coming up.

NAT  
Almost got it...

RAY (V.O.)  
Nat, break!

Ray breaks off his run and pulls away. Nat takes some ACK-ACK FIRE, loses control of his plane and slams into the side of the hill. He's instantly vaporized in a ball of fire.

28 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 28

Ray looks down at the smoldering wreck.

RAY  
Shit!

Ray flies up to join Marty and Joe. THE CAMERA STAYS WITH HIM. IT LIFTS UP AND OVER THE HILL REVEALING A SMALL TOWN WHICH RESTS JUST OFF INTO THE DISTANCE.

29 EXT. TOWN - CONTINUOUS 29

With binoculars at the ready, GERMAN SPOTTERS watch the skies intently. One of the Spotters catches sight of something. He yells to the Fire Control Officer.

TOWN SPOTTER  
Die Serie kommt. Geben Sie ihm  
Bedeckungfeuer!

FIRE CONTROL OFFICER  
Ja. Verstanden.  
(to his men)  
Öffnen Sie Feuer!

The soldiers manning the 38s closest to him open fire. Other guns join in.

30 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE 30

Marty sees the AA fire, calls to the other planes.

MARTY  
...Hell... Ray Gun, soften up  
some of that Ack-Ack. Buy us some  
room.

RAY (V.O.)  
On it.

MARTY  
Bring it around.

JOE (V.O.)  
Let's take it from the front.

MARTY  
Gotta come in too low.

JOE (V.O.)  
We don't have time to fool with  
that other 38. We get the train  
on the next pass, or don't we  
won't get it at all.

As Marty and Joe bring their planes around, Ray opens his throttle and follows the train tracks straight for the town.

Ray flies low and fast, snakes from side to side pitching his shells back and forth at the rows of guns which line the tracks. Guns EXPLODE, soldiers SCATTER, HUG THE GROUND to avoid getting shot...

The Ack-Ack fire is cut way down, but some remains. Marty and Joe weave their way through the orange and red tracers - taking a few hits, but nothing too serious. They bank around positioning themselves down the rails IN FRONT OF THE SPEEDING TRAIN as it finally emerges from the tunnel. Throttling up and flying low, they race for the engine with Joe flying right on Marty's tail.

31 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

31

Marty radios to Joe.

MARTY  
Off my six.

JOE  
You worry about the train, I'll  
worry about me.

32 EXT. SKY - SIMULTANEOUS

32

The two planes head dead for the train engine. Marty, first in line, gives it his guns. Direct hit. THE ENGINE EXPLODES in the manner of a bomb going off. Steel and fire shoot directly into the sky. Marty is ahead of the blast, but Joe - right on his tail - has no choice but to FLY RIGHT THROUGH THE ARIEL CONFLAGRATION.

With the Engine exploded, the inertia of the train carries the other cars directly into the blast. It's a nasty, nasty domino effect - each subsequent car literally adding fuel to the fire. Chain reaction explosions continue down the line of cars, but inertia keeps the burning mass rolling forward with horrific speed.

The Fire Control Officer picks himself up off the ground just in time to see this; fiery death heading right for him.

FIRE CONTROL OFFICER  
Gott im Himmel...

That's about all the more the officer is able to utter before the flaming wreck slams into his position pretty much OBLITERATING him, and all that's around him.

33 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS 33

Joe's plane is punctured by flying train metal. The plane shutters violently and starts on a shallow angle in a downward direction. Joe desperately works the stick trying to get the plane right. Using both hands, he wrenches the stick back and hard to the right. One wing tip SCRAAAPES along the ground before Joe's plane lifts up and begins the long climb back to safe altitude.

34 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 34

Marty calls over to Joe

MARTY  
Red Two...? Lightning!

35 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 35

Joe responds.

JOE  
I'm here. Lost some rudder.  
Leaking a little gas.

36 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 36

The conversation continues.

MARTY  
That was stupid! Never should  
have listened to you. We almost  
got killed!

37 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 37

The conversation continues.

JOE  
Don't hear me complaining.  
Where's Ray Gun? He make it?

38 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 38

The conversation continues.

MARTY  
(into his radio:)  
Subsoil Red One to Blue One...  
Ray Gun, it's Easy. You copy?

39 INT. RAY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

39

WE START TIGHT ON THE INTERIOR OF RAY'S PLANE. The front part of the canopy is shot out, what glass remains is busted and jagged. WE HEAR MARTY calling Ray over the radio.

MARTY (V.O.)  
Subsoil Blue One...? Ray, you  
hear me?

THE CAMERA PULLS BACK and we see Ray bleeding bad from a shrapnel wound to the head. The blood runs down into his eyes which look as though they've caught some glass themselves. Ray clamps his hands to his head trying to stop the bleeding, but it doesn't do much good. The young man is both shocked and scared as his plane angles skyward.

RAY  
...Easy...

Ray gropes around, tries to find his mask so that he can talk into his radio.

MARTY (V.O.)  
Ray Gun, I see you. You need to  
level off.

Finally Ray is able to pull his mask around.

RAY  
Easy, I'm hit!

MARTY (V.O.)  
Level off, or you'll stall out!

RAY  
I can't see... Jesus, help me!

40 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

40

Marty radios to Ray.

MARTY  
I'm trying to help you, but the  
first thing you gotta do is fly  
right. Get yourself level!

Ray extends a shaky hand to his stick and works at leveling the plane.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
Right there. Hold it there. Talk  
to me, Ray Gun.

RAY (V.O.)  
Got something in my leg. Took  
some in the face... I can't see  
anything. Easy, help me!

\*

41 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 41

Joe, into his Radio:

JOE  
He's gotta bail, Easy. This is  
good a spot as any.

42 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 42

Ray talks with Joe and Marty.

RAY  
Not bailing. ...You know what the  
Krauts'll do to a blind, Negro?  
Won't waste a minute on me. Rather  
go down flying.

JOE (V.O.)  
Easy, talk sense into him.

Marty hesitates just a moment. Joe can read his thoughts, and  
doesn't care for them.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Easy, he's blind. He can't fly.

43 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 43

Marty's on his radio

MARTY  
You're leaking fuel, Red Two.  
Head back to base!

JOE (V.O.)  
Easy--

MARTY  
Lightning, head home!

44 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 44

Joe stews for half a beat, then:

JOE  
Red Two, RTB.

Joe peels off, leaves Marty and Ray to work things out.

45 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 45

A frightened Ray calls to Marty.

RAY  
Easy...

MARTY (V.O.)  
I'm right here.

RAY  
You're gonna get me home, yeah?

46 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 46

The conversation continues.

MARTY  
You're going get yourself home.  
I'm just gonna make sure you don't  
get lonely on the trip home. This  
what I need you to do: you gotta  
bank left. I'll tell you when to  
level out.

47 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 47

Ray acknowledges.

RAY  
Left bank...

Ray makes the move. It's rough, jerky... The plane dips and falls more than it banks.

MARTY (V.O.)  
Steady up. Straighten it out.  
Ray Gun, level off!

Ray takes back control of his plane, but he's not even close to having made the turn.

48 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 48

Marty gets back on the line. He remains easy, but some urgency slips into his lingo.

MARTY  
Listen to me: it's just like  
flying a simulator back at  
Tuskegee.

RAY (V.O.)  
...Yeah...

MARTY  
What you can't see, you just feel.  
You've done it a hundred times.  
You can do it one more. Now bank  
it left, nice and easy...

Ray does as told. He eases into the maneuver and manages to make the turn. \*

MARTY

\*

There you go. Right there. Pull back on the stick and give it a little throttle.

Again Ray does as told. Marty gets a look at the undercarriage of the plane. Ray's plane is STILL CARRYING A COUPLE OF BOMBS.

MARTY (CONT'D)

Ray Gun, you're flying heavy. Clear your rack.

49 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

49

Ray fumbles around for the bomb release. He finds it, flicks it. One bomb falls away clean. The other hangs limp from the fuselage, but DOESN'T DROP AWAY ENTIRELY.

RAY

Bomb's away?

MARTY (V.O.)

Still got one in the rack. When we get close to Ramitelli we'll find you some open ground, then you hit the silk. Fifteen minutes we'll be home. Ray Gun...? Ray!

Ray's starting to drift in and out a bit. He drifts in long enough to respond:

RAY

...Yeah. Fifteen minutes...

50 EXT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE - DAY

50

This is the home of our fliers - the 332nd Fighter Group, which is comprised of the 99th Pursuit Squadron (SUBSOIL), the 100th (COUNTER), the 301st (BUBBLES) and the 302nd (DOOR KNOB). The base is very much like a small, but sprawling TENT CITY that's centered around a runway made of Pierced Steel Planking (PSP). For the most part everyone we see at this airbase will be BLACK: the fliers, the crew, the doctors...

About the only white faces we see are ITALIAN LOCALS who drift on and off the base doing some work - grounds keeping and whatnot - and sharing their wares.

Just off the runway by some revetments, we see CHIEF COLEMAN (COFFEE). Coffee's a heavy-set, older (though older is relative as the pilots themselves are at most no older than their early twenties) can-do head mechanic.

Coffee is working on a plane with STICKS - a younger, junior mechanic. Coffee's right hand man - along with a few other MECHANICS. As they work, WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A PLANE ENGINE IN THE DISTANCE.

STICKS

Got one coming in. Looks like she caught a few...it's Lightning.

COFFEE

Figures. Smokin' and brokin',  
same as always.

Joe, his plane waggling and belching smoke, struggles in for what passes as a respectable landing. Once he's down, BOXCAR - his crew chief - hops up on the wing of the plane and rides Joe in directing him as he goes. Once he slows to a stop, Coffee comes around with a snarl. As Joe struggles from his cockpit:

COFFEE (CONT'D)

How about one time you bring home  
my plane without wrecking it?

JOE

Ray Gun got hit. He's flying  
blind. Easy's trying to bring him  
in.

Sticks runs off to a WARNING SIREN, and starts hand cranking it. The siren gradually goes from a low moan to a high whine.

51 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

51

Marty and Ray are flying. Ray's in a bad way. He's lost a lot of blood. He can't see where he's going and hasn't got the strength to fly by instinct. His P-40 starts to slip off course.

MARTY

You're sliding, Ray Gun. Get on  
your right rudder.

Ray continues to fade. His plane begins to angle into a steep dive.

MARTY (CONT'D)

Ray Gun! Pull up!

52 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

52

Ray starts to rouse himself.

MARTY (V.O.)

Pull up! Pull back on your stick!

Ray struggles the stick back. His plane starts to climb.

53 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

53

Marty continues to pilot Ray in.

MARTY

There you go. Keep climbing.  
Right there. Hold it there. Got  
about six hundred miles...

RAY (V.O.)

...I can't...

MARTY

Sorry, brother. Your momma  
doesn't get a gold star from me.  
Five more minutes, then you join  
the caterpillar club.

54 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 54

Ray flies as best he can, but his confidence - like his physical  
strength - is fading.

RAY

Make sure my Good-Bye letter gets  
mailed. Make sure...my boy gets  
his letter.

55 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 55

Marty tries to encourage Ray.

MARTY

You wanted to fly her in, you're  
flying her in. Five minutes.  
Less than that. Just hang on a  
little more.

56 EXT. AIR BASE - SIMULTANEOUS 56

Joe's got some FIELD GLASSES he uses to search the skies. Airmen  
have begun to flock to the edge of the airstrip. Among those  
arriving to Joe are ANDREW SALEM ("SMOKEY") - he's what you would  
call a countrified brother. Contrary to his name, SMOKEY CHEWS  
TOBACCO AND ALWAYS HAS A SPIT CUP HANDY. Always spits into a  
cup. Flight Leader SAMUEL GEORGE ("SUICIDE SAM") - the guy is  
basically, a daredevil with a plane. Also with them is NATHAN  
PICKETT ("CRASH"). A gambler, Crash will put money on the line  
for anything and everything.

SMOKEY

Lightning... What's going on?

JOE

Ray Gun...Easy's bringing him in.

SUICIDE

Where are they?

JOE

I can't see 'em. Weren't that far  
behind me. They oughta be back by  
now.

57 INT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE/CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS 57

The tower is essentially a covered platform built of scrap wood  
that is barely two stories tall. But it is from here the AIR  
CONTROLLERS watch the skies and monitor the radios. Climbing up  
into the tower is Capt. EMMANUEL STANCE ("Sparky"). Stance is  
second in command, the XO of the base. A man in his mid

thirties, he takes well to authority. The AIR CONTROLLER listens intently to his radio like a specialist trying to find the beat of a weak heart.

AIR CONTROLLER  
Ramitelli to Subsoil Red One, do  
you read... Subsoil Red One...?

The response is nothing but static.

AIR CONTROLLER (CONT'D)  
Subsoil Red One, do you read...?

Again, more static. But within the crackle and hiss on the radio, WE BARELY MAKE OUT MARTY'S VOICE. Stance is quick to react.

STANCE  
Right there!

The Controller works to dial in the frequency.

AIR CONTROLLER  
Ramitelli to Subsoil Red One; say  
again. We can barely read you.

We hear, now, Marty's voice more clearly.

MARTY (V.O.)  
Blue One's messed up bad. He's  
still got a bomb in the rack. We  
can't pancake him.

Stance moves to the mike.

STANCE  
Circle a half mile out, and have  
Blue One bail. Medics'll be there  
waiting.

58 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 58

Marty calls over to Ray.

MARTY  
Ray Gun, put her into a left bank.  
Then you're up and out. Ray?

59 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 59

Ray, looking weak, manages to respond.

RAY  
(weak)  
Left bank, then I jump.

Ray banks left. Once he's angled, he struggles to get the canopy of his plane pulled back. For him, in his state, it's like climbing a mountain.

MARTY (V.O.)  
C'mon, Ray Gun. Pop the canopy.  
Get it open.

The effort is too much for Ray. He starts to black out, and in kind his plane angles downward.

60 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 60

Marty follows Ray downward.

MARTY  
Ray Gun...! Pull up! You read  
me? Pull up!

61 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 61

Ray begins to rouse.

MARTY (V.O.)  
Ray...! Get out of it! Pull up!

Ray fumbles for the stick. He pulls the plane up.

62 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 62

Marty continues to instruct Ray.

MARTY  
Left rudder. Keep climbing.  
...Hold it right there. Ray, you  
listen to me: the only thing  
between you living and dying is  
that canopy. Now you get that  
goddamn thing open, you hear me?

RAY  
...Yeah...

MARTY  
Open it, Ray!

Ray reaches out his weak hands and again takes hold of the canopy. He pulls, but again it does not move.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
Open it!

With his last erg of energy Ray pulls. It is enough, barely, to slide back the canopy. Ray takes a blast of air to the face, but if anything it revives him.

MARTY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Hard parts over. Now all you have  
to do is fall. I've seen you  
dance. I know you can do that.

Ray gives a bit of a laugh, then starts to UNBUCKLE HIS SEAT STRAPS. At least, he tries to. But he's so weak even that

little bit of something - getting his straps undone - is too much for him. He comes up short on the action and exhausted.

63 INT. RAMITELLI BASE/AIR CONTROL - CONTINUOUS 63

Stance checks in with Marty.

STANCE  
Subsoil Red One, report.

MARTY (V.O.)  
He's got his canopy open, sir, but he can't get his straps off.

STANCE  
Blue One, it's Captain Stance. Do you read me...?

RAY (V.O.)  
Yes, sir.

STANCE  
You have to bail out. Get out of the plane.

64 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 64

Ray acknowledges the order.

RAY  
Yes, sir.

Ray tries again to pull himself from the cockpit. He nearly blacks out from the effort.

STANCE (V.O.)  
Get out of the plane, Blue One. Jump!

RAY  
Can't get my straps...I gotta...I gotta rest a minute.

65 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 65

Marty looks at his fuel gage. It's low. Nearly to bingo fuel.

MARTY  
We don't have a minute.

Marty takes a moment to assess the situation. It ain't good, and he's running out of options. Marty lines his plane up right next to Ray's as if proximity will add emphasis to his words. He flies side by side, nearly wing tip to wing tip with Ray.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
Ray Gun, listen to me. You're going to ease it around, you're going to land--

RAY (V.O.)  
...Can't see...

MARTY  
I'm your eyes. Get your wheels  
down and locked.  
(into his mike)  
Red One to Ramitelli.

66 INT. RAMITELLI BASE/AIR CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

66

The Air Controller gets Marty's call.

MARTY (V.O.)  
Blue One's coming in wheels down.

STANCE  
Is Blue One still heavy?

MARTY (V.O.)  
Yes, sir, but he's too weak to  
bail. Wheels down is the only way  
he's coming in.

STANCE  
Red One, go to channel two.

Stance switches the radio channel. When he speaks, he is not harsh, but he is honest. A soldier making a tough decision.

STANCE (CONT'D)  
Red One, are you there?

MARTY  
Yes, sir.

STANCE  
Easy, you're going to have to let  
Ray go. You did everything you  
could.

Marty can't quite believe what he's hearing.

STANCE (CONT'D)  
Red One, do you copy?

MARTY  
I can't do that.

STANCE  
Easy...if that bomb hits the fuel,  
hits another plane--

MARTY  
That's not going to happen.

STANCE  
Airman, you will not put the  
flight line at risk.

MARTY

With respect, sir, you can meet me  
on the runway with some MPs,  
because I'm bring Ray down. Over.

Stance fumes for half a beat. Then, to one of the AIRMEN in the tower:

STANCE

Get some men. Whatever planes,  
whatever fuel you can get off the  
flight line; move 'em.  
(to another AIR  
CONTROLLER)  
Call all hands.

The Controller calls into a PA mike:

EMERGENCY CONTROLLER

All hands, all hands! Man your  
stations. This is not a drill!

67 EXT. BASE - SIMULTANEOUS

67

As the airmen continue to look on, others around them begin to scramble. FIRE CREWS man their stations. MEDICS start breaking out their packs.

Smokey asks of Joe, who still watches the planes with his field glasses:

SMOKEY

What's happening?

JOE

They're coming around. They're on approach.

CRASH

On approach!?! Are they crazy?

JOE

It's Easy; of course he's  
crazy...but he'll do it.

68 INT. MARTY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

68

Marty talks Ray in who is barely conscious. Though his voice remains calm, we can read the severity of the situation in his expression.

MARTY

You're on the line... Flaps  
down... Cut back on the throttle.  
Up on the stick until my mark.

RAY (V.O.)

...Can't stay awake...

MARTY  
Don't talk. Just fly. Hold it  
there... I'm going to count you  
down. Soon as you touch down keep  
the stick left. Don't ground  
spin.

RAY (V.O.)  
...Don't ground spin...

MARTY  
Stay with it, Ray Gun. Almost  
home. Eight hundred feet...seven  
hundred...six...

69 INT. RAMITELLI BASE/AIR CONTROL - SIMULTANEOUS

69

The Air Controller keeps up communication with Marty as Stance  
and others watch the skies.

AIR CONTROLLER  
Half mile out, six hundred feet.  
Below five hundred...

STANCE  
...Off the stick...

AIR CONTROLLER  
(into mike)  
Ease Ray off the stick, Red One.

70 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

70

Marty talks with Ray.

MARTY  
Come off the stick a little. Four  
hundred feet....

Ray's plane is fast, and it's on a line to overshoot the runway.

AIR CONTROLLER (V.O.)  
Red One, he's high and hot.

MARTY  
Flaps down. Off the throttle.

Ray is too slow with his actions. His plane is going long. No  
way it's going to make it down.

AIR CONTROLLER (V.O.)  
Break off the approach. Break it  
off!

MARTY  
Pull back, Ray Gun. Take her up!

71 EXT. RAMITELLI BASE - CONTINUOUS

71

Ray pulls up. The group watches as the Ray's P-40 does an unintentional buzz of the field. The plane lifts just seconds away from plowing into structures and trees. It wobbles and fights its way back into the air. Marty's plane stays right with Ray, but it sputters as it climbs. For Coffee that's a tell tale sign.

COFFEE

Engine's catching. He's running out of fuel.

SMOKEY

Easy's going to get them both killed.

Another airman, DEKE, pulls out a little picture of BLACK JESUS he carries with him and begins to pray to it.

72 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

72

Marty continues to coach a fading Ray.

MARTY

Bank left. We'll take it around again. I'm on your wing. Long as you hear my voice, you're Jake.

RAY (V.O.)

...Yeah...Jake...

As Ray does as instructed, Marty checks his fuel.

The planes come around again for another attempt. At nearly bingo fuel, one way or the other this is it.

MARTY

Nose down... Right there. Feather back the throttle... Six hundred feet... Five...four...

AIR CONTROLLER (V.O.)

Still high. Get the nose down.

MARTY

Drop your throttle. Three hundred...two... Level off! Kill your throttle!

73 EXT. RAMITELLI BASE - CONTINUOUS

73

The two planes touch down side by side. While Marty's P-40 slides easily down the runway, Ray's plane begins to tip toward it's right wing.

MARTY

Left rudder! Left rudder!

Ray manages to jam on his left rudder. The P-40 slams back on the PSP. It starts to skid toward it's left, but it does not flip, it does not crash. It's an ugly landing, but any landing you can walk away from... Immediately, FIRE CREWS and MEDICS along with the majority of the AIRMEN rush to Ray's plane and begin to pull him from the cockpit. Marty's out of his plane and running over to Ray quick as he can.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
Ray...! Hey, is he all right?

RAY  
Easy...

Marty goes to Ray as he is loaded onto a stretcher. Easy grips him firmly by the hand.

MARTY  
Right here.

RAY  
Easy...  
(Working up a wry  
smile)  
Did I land? Did I make it?

Marty, smiling with relief:

MARTY  
Damn knucklehead. Should've let  
you crash.

CRASH  
Thick skull of his; he would've  
just bounced a couple of times  
anyway.

MEDIC  
Thick skull or not, we gotta tend  
to him.

MARTY  
No surprises, Ray Gun. You get  
healthy.

As the Medics move Ray off, the rest of the Airmen fold around Marty.

CRASH  
That was some grand flying, boy.  
Positively slick.

DEKE  
That was Black Jesus. Not to take  
from what you did, but Black Jesus  
was on your shoulder.

MARTY  
I don't know who did what, but I'm  
happy for whatever help I got.

Marty looks to NAT'S CREW who wait in vain.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
...I lost Nat. Got fixed on the  
target, put it right into a  
hillside.

SUICIDE  
You got Ray Gun down. Be thankful  
for that.

Coffee calls over.

COFFEE  
Easy, your tanks were dry...

Coffee pokes a long DIPSTICK into the tank. We hear it tap the  
bottom of metal.

COFFEE (CONT'D)  
And I don't mean kinda.

EASY  
It'll make for a better story when  
you tell your grandkids.

JOE  
Just born to be a hero, weren't  
you?

MARTY  
Some hero. Too busy shaking like  
a leaf to puke my guts.

Easy breaks out a flask and takes a hard pull on it.

SMOKEY  
Careful with that. You know the  
rules; no liquor until after  
debrief.

MARTY  
Yeah, well, rules say you can't  
talk down a blind flyer, so I  
guess it's a good day for throwing  
out the book all around. Sticks,  
get the film out, and get it to  
the debrief. Tell the old man--

CRASH  
Colonel Bullard's not running the  
debrief. He headed stateside this  
morning. Captain Stance has got  
command.

74 INT. RAMITELLI BASE/BRIEFING TENT - LATER

74

The tent is darkened and being used by airmen for a film session. That is, film from the gun cameras of the planes on the train raid is being shown to the entire group. Captain Stance stands by the side of the screen introducing the footage and making comments.

ON THE SCREEN, FROM A PLANE'S POV, THE CAMERA RUSHES DOWN OVER THE TRAIN AND WE SEE THE TAIL END OF THE TRAIN EXPLODING.

When the train blows, a CHEER goes up from group.

ON THE SCREEN WE SEE ANOTHER POV SHOT - THE TRAIN BEING STRAFED AND THE ACK-ACK GUNS BEING TAKEN OUT.

STANCE  
Excellent flying. You can see  
Easy leading the Thatch Weave in.  
Makes it nearly impossible for the  
thirty-eights to get on them.

ON THE SCREEN WE SEE THE POV FROM MARTY'S PLANE as he comes flying in low, hitting the train doing about 350 miles per hour. Just as he swings over the train, BOOM! As before, there is a huge roar from the pilots - hoots, cheers. Joe reaches over and slaps Marty on the back.

STANCE (CONT'D)  
Low, straight, fast. That's how  
you win the fight.

ON THE SCREEN, WE SEE THE TRAIN ENGINE BEING GIVEN THE BIZ. It looks as if Joe got hit before he managed to get off any rounds. The train explodes, blacking out the screen. Suddenly, the POV rolls over and starts swinging back and forth in a crazy fashion. In response, there's much laughing and catcalls from the group.

STANCE (CONT'D)  
Lightning's usual elegant flying.  
On strafing runs you stagger in  
for a reason.

Pointing at the carnage on the screen.

STANCE (CONT'D)  
That's the reason.

JOE  
...Sir...

STANCE  
Questions?

WE KEY ON WINKY HALL - a well-educated brother. He works himself up to ask:

WINKY  
Does it really matter, sir?

STANCE  
Turn it off. Lights up.

The film is turned off. The lights in the tent are turned on.

STANCE (CONT'D)  
What's your question?

WINKY  
Sir, what we do, how well we do  
it; does it matter? When are they

\*

(MORE)

WINKY (CONT'D)

going to let us fight the Jerries...I've never seen an enemy aircraft... They've got us out here doing low-level flying. It's a garbage detail. No other unit wants it... I don't normally go in for loose talk, but I heard we won't even be doing that for long. Isn't that why the Old Man went stateside?

STANCE

The Colonel's business is above your grade.

WINKY

They're back there deciding if they should shut us down. Is it true?

MARTY

Winky, you're starting rumors.

Tossing his Time magazine to Marty.

WINKY

It's not a rumor. Read and weep.

Marty picks up the magazine. Marty reads, to himself at first.

NEON

Out loud, Easy.

Marty looks to Stance who nods. Marty reads out loud. As he does, WE CUT AMONG THE PILOTS. From the expressions on their faces we can tell THE WORDS HE SPEAKS HITS EACH OF THEM LIKE A SHOT TO THE GUT.

MARTY

"The use of Negroes in the Army Air Corps may yet be halted. A report has been forwarded calling the performance by Negro pilots unsatisfactory. There was said to be a plan to attach the Negroes to the Coastal Air Command, in which they would be assigned to routine convoy cover. This may be all that remains for the Negro pilots who seem to have neither the intelligence nor the proper reflexes for such a complicated task as fighter pursuit. The great--"

WINKY

"The great Tuskegee Experiment to allow the Negro type to fly airplanes has failed."

For a moment there is quiet. It is as if the men's purpose, their reason for being has just been snatched from them. As if to demonstrate his disgust, Smokey spits in his cup.

DEKE

This is no experiment. Nat's gone. That's for real. Ray almost died, that is real.

STANCE

And you figured what when you signed up; they give you a uniform and that's the end of a hundred years of bigotry? You are colored men in the white man's army. It's a miracle you're flying fighters in Italy and not cleaning latrines in Milwaukee.

(looking to Winky)

You want it straight?

75 EXT. MILITARY FIELD - DAY

75

We are at a military field just outside of Washington DC. We see COLONEL A.J. BULLARD - a man in his early thirties - stepping off a Douglas C-47 Skytrain, the military version of a DC-3. He moves quickly toward a uniformed officer - MAJOR GEORGE TATTERSALL. Tattersall is white, but he greets Bullard enthusiastically. Both men move quickly to a large Packard sedan which waits to whisk them away.

STANCE (V.O.)

Yes, the War Department's put us up for review. The Old Man's stateside to fight the fight. He loses, we're done.

76 INT. RAMITELLI BASE/MESS TENT - CONTINUOUS

76

Stance continues to talk with the men. We can see the anxiety on their faces.

STANCE

But if he comes through for us, we better be damn sure we're ready to do the same. Any of you feel like you can't do that, any of you want to wash yourselves out, then Negro please do so. I will have you on the next thing smoking back home so we can make room for men who want to stand and fight.

(beat)

Easy, Lightning, I want your action reports. The rest of you are dismissed.

77 INT. PENTAGON/HALLWAY - DAY

77

We are in a hallway outside of a conference room. Colonel Bullard sits on a bench facing MAJOR WILLIAM MORTAMUS - an old school bigot who drips disdain for blacks. Sitting next to Bullard is Tattersall. Also in the hallway are about ten other WHITE AIDES and OFFICERS. Bullard seems calm, relaxed. The Major, on the other hand, is irritated and fidgets.

A JUNIOR GRADE OFFICER appears at the conference room door.

JUNIOR GRADE  
Gentlemen...

All start to enter the room.

78 INT. PENTAGON/CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

78

A rather nondescript conference room, big on functionality in the way only the US Gov. can do utilitarian. Waiting are: AIR FORCE CHIEF OF STAFF WIN PRECHT, BRIGADIER GENERAL HORNER. The Junior Grade does the introductions.

JUNIOR GRADE  
Major Tattersall and Major  
Mortamus, and Colonel Bullard;  
General Horner.

HORNER  
Gentlemen, Chief of Staff Precht.

PRECHT  
Major. Good to see you again.

Mortamus makes something of a show of being familiar with Precht.

MORTAMUS  
Sir, it's been too long. And if  
you could pass along my regards to  
Abigail for me.

PRECHT  
I'll be sure to tell her.

Indicating for the men to sit:

HORNER  
Majors... We're a little pressed  
for time, and I would say we have  
much to talk about regarding the  
Tuskegee experiment.

While all others sit - the aides around the sides of the room - Bullard - who has not been invited to take a chair - remains standing almost as if he's not part of the proceedings.

PRECHT  
After that Time magazine mess,  
this is no small affair.

Pointed, to Mortamus:

TATTERSALL  
How an unofficial assessment of  
the Tuskegee project made its way  
to a newsmagazine might be worthy  
of its own hearing, sir.

MORTAMUS  
I don't think the quality or lack  
thereof of colored work is a  
(MORE)

MORTAMUS (CONT'D)  
national secret, sir. The colored  
*experiment--*

PRECHT  
Colonel, have a seat, please.

Bullard does as invited. That he's been given even the slightest deference throws Mortamus off for a moment.

MORTAMUS  
It, uh...the experiment was well meaning, but this is a time of war, not for social do goodery.

Lifting files, tossing them back down on the table:

MORTAMUS (CONT'D)  
And study, after study tells us coloreds have neither the intelligence, or the proper reflexes for complicated tasks such as aerial combat.

TATTERSALL  
Sir, it's the same crap we've been hearing--

MORTAMUS  
I understand your bias, Major. You've supported the experiment from the beginning. But you're going to have to suffer this failure.

TATTERSALL  
Major, you claimed we would never find Negroes who could pass a pilot's exam. We found them. You felt we would never find Negroes who could make it through flight school, or survive basic combat. They've done it.

HORNER  
A combat record which...uh, to this point I don't believe the coloreds have scored a single aerial kill.

Bullard, rising to his own defense.

BULLARD  
Sir, we haven't been assigned a single forward mission by the Major. It is damn hard to shoot the enemy a hundred miles behind the front lines. We're given hand-me-down planes, ordered to attack targets that have already been bypassed.

An AIDE steps to Mortamus, points to a section of a report.

MORTAMUS

Sir, there have been any number of reports of the colored pilots breaking formation when attacked--

BULLARD

If I may point out, sir, you cannot make a diving run in formation. You're asking to get shot down, Major. You do understand the principles of dive bombing...sir?

MORTAMUS

What I understand; we have a war that we're fighting. When we lick the Japs and the Jerries, if the Roosevelts still want to teach the coloreds to do tricks... But that comes after victory. Not before it.

BULLARD

A segregated military can't fight for a free world, sir...

MORTAMUS

You have been given every opportunity--

BULLARD

And, a weak America cannot keep the world free. But you sit there with all your doctored up reports and manufactured lies--

MORTAMUS

Respect my uniform.

BULLARD

Believe me, sir, that is all I have respect for. We have completed every low, dirty job the AAC has given us. We've been left to limp along hoping we would go away. We will not go away. Shut us down, or let us fly.

Two very definitive choices. Precht considers them, then:

PRECHT

I would like to see a complete review of the colored fliers service in both the North African theater and--

MORTAMUS

We already have the data, sir.

TATTERSALL

We have your data, Bill.

PRECHT  
Major Tattersall, the  
determination is ours to make.  
That is not a suggestion on how to  
move forward, that's where we  
stand.

The order of the day sinks in all around. Things are not over.  
They are just getting started.

79 INT. TENT - DAY

79

Ray is talking with Joe and Marty. Ray, clearly much better than  
when last we saw him, still looks banged up some. He's got a  
patch over his right eye and a bandage on his forehead. He  
pleads his case to Marty.

RAY  
It's not as bad as all this.  
Looks worse than it is. Patch  
comes off in a week. I'll be able  
to see fine out of one eye...and  
mostly out of the other.

MARTY  
That what you want me to tell  
Stance; Ray Gun's got one and a  
half eyes worth of ability?

RAY  
I landed a plane blind. If I can  
land blind, don't you think I can  
fly if I've got most of my eyes?  
Lightning...

JOE  
Don't get me in this.

MARTY  
If the Flight Surgeon won't clean  
bill you, what am I gonna do?

RAY  
He listens to you. You've got the  
same respect on this base as the  
Old Man. You just go in you talk  
to the doc. Easy, you're the best  
friend I got. Don't do this to  
me.

MARTY  
Don't do what? You've got your 50  
missions. More than that. You've  
earned out. Go be with your wife  
and your boy.

RAY  
I'm over here making money so I  
can support 'em. And I'm somebody  
to boot; I'm fighting for  
something. I go home I'm just  
another nigger making his keep

(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)  
pushing a broom. I'd rather be  
dead than on the ground.

MARTY  
Now you're talking crazy.

RAY  
Honest to the Lord, I'd rather be  
a dead somebody than a nobody  
that's alive. And while you're  
thinking on what to tell Stance,  
think on that.

Ray, dejected, exits. Joe just gives a shake of his head.

JOE  
That's tough, man. That's a  
brute. So turned around he  
doesn't know to get when the  
getting's good. Tell you; I get  
like that, shove me in a box and  
send me home.  
(beat)  
C'mon. Let's get some mess.

Joe heads off. Marty lingers a moment, not so sure of things.

80 INT. PENTAGON/HALLWAY - LATER

80

Bullard and Tattersall are alone together. Tattersall's relieved  
to be done with things. Bullard's frustrated as hell.

BULLARD  
Useless. All this talk, for  
another study. Another inquiry.

TATTERSALL  
"Politics is the art of..." Major  
Kessel's Political Science class;  
what was that quote he used to--

BULLARD  
"Politics is the art of postponing  
decisions until they are--"

TATTERSALL  
No longer relevant.

BULLARD  
No longer relevant.

BULLARD (CONT'D)  
You've got a hell of a memory,  
Tat.

TATTERSALL  
Being the white friend of the only  
black cadet at West Point cleared  
my social calendar and gave me  
plenty of time for studies. If  
nothing else, my good grades are  
proof bigotry isn't all bad.

This gives Bullard a bit of a smile. The only one he's had all  
day. Tattersall, getting serious:

TATTERSALL (CONT'D)  
Mortamus stumbled. Badly. If he hadn't embarrassed the brass by leaking that report to Time magazine they probably would have let you wither and die. His politicking bought you time.

BULLARD  
For what?

TATTERSALL  
Operation Shingle.

Those two words hang for a moment, the significance obvious to the two men, if not to us. Bullard just gives a laugh.

BULLARD  
I'll say this, Tat; even when your hope is false it's sure grand.

TATTERSALL  
I'm serious, AJ. I can get that for you.

BULLARD  
If you stick your neck out how far? I'm not letting you put your career on the line for me.

TATTERSALL  
A little less tin on my uniform's the least of it. If I get you the mission, your men have got to put something on the board. They come through, or Mortamus and the brass will have all they need to shut the whole thing down. Not just Negro fliers. Negroes in combat, period.

Bullard takes just a moment to consider his options.

BULLARD  
You get us the mission. We'll light the board up.

81 INT. RAMITELLI BASE - MORNING

81

It's morning as A TROOP TRANSPORT TRUCK pulls into the base. Airmen spot it, quit what they're doing and gather around. Stance is there to greet the truck. As a CORPORAL gets out of the cab he yells toward the truck:

CORPORAL  
C'mon! Let's go! Move, move, move! Line it up. C'mon, act like you're fighting ready. Attention!

A dozen or so NEW FLIERS spill from the truck. Without being overly comical, the men scramble to attention. The Corporal salutes and addresses Stance.

CORPORAL (CONT'D)

Captain, it is with pleasure I present to you Tuskegee's newest, and finest graduating class.

STANCE

(to the men)

On behalf of Colonel Bullard, welcome to the 332nd fighter group. You're a long way from home, you haven't seen any action, and I know you're probably scared. If you are, then get passed it. Too late to be scared now. Better off thinking of how you're gonna put the fear of God into the Jerries. You're just in time for mess. Your first order is to clean up and get to eating. Dismissed!

As Stance moves away, the other AIRMEN move up to the new fliers. As most were a class or two behind the men already flying, the scene is much like a reunion. Among them are HERBERT LEWIS ("INDIANA"). Young. Nineteen, twenty at most.

NEON

Indiana, get over here. We are surely losing the war if they're desperate enough to let you fly.

INDIANA

I'm good enough to keep right on your tail. If you're nice to me, I might talk the captain into letting you be my wingman.

NEON

Smokey, come meet Herbert Lewis, Jr. A class behind me at Tuskegee.

SMOKEY

And a class above you in general.

INDIANA

Indiana. Good to meet you. The Captain said something about mess.

SMOKEY

The boy knows how it's done. Eat now, throw up later.

Crash and Suicide spot MAURICE WILSON ("BUMPS" - so called because of all the RAZOR BUMPS along his beard line). Twenty at most by the calender. By the way he carries himself, Bumps seems a bit younger. He's looking around like a lost child.

SUICIDE

You lost, son?

BUMPS

I was looking for Junior Watkins.

CRASH  
Watkins? He got shot  
down...must've been two weeks ago.

BUMPS  
Uly Douglas here?

CRASH  
Furball's dead. Crashed on take  
off. You're just a bad luck  
Chuck, aren't you? Everybody you  
know ends up with a face full of  
dirt.

SUICIDE  
What's your name, son?

Saluting:

BUMPS  
Flight Officer Maurice Wilson,  
Sir.

Pulling down Bump's saluting hand:

SUICIDE  
Yeah, you can just leave all that.  
I'm Suicide, and this here's  
Crash. What do they call you?

BUMPS  
(sheepish)  
...Bumps...

Suicide takes Bumps by the chin and looks over the razor bumps on  
his face.

SUICIDE  
Yeah, well... You'll grow out of  
that.

BUMPS  
Yes, sir.

Offering up a cigarette:

CRASH  
Smoke?

BUMPS  
No, sir. I don't partake.

CRASH  
Drink at all?

BUMPS  
No, sir.

Crash and Sam exchange a look.

CRASH  
Don't drink, don't smoke... No  
wonder your joined the air corps.

(MORE)

CRASH (CONT'D)

You got nothing to live for  
anyway. Grab up your pack, son.  
Seeing how everybody you know is  
dead, might as well bunk with us.

SUICIDE

Just don't bad luck us before we  
get to the tent.

82 INT. COMMUNICATIONS TENT - MORNING

82

Stance is with a COM OFFICER. He is reading a communique that's  
just come over the wire.

STANCE

Has this Op Order been verified?

COM OFFICER

Yes, sir. It's from Colonel  
Bullard.

STANCE

...Christ... Check it again, then  
get the Flight Leaders together.

83 INT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE/MESS TENT - DAY

83

Airmen by the dozens are gathered to eat. Deke enters with Joe's  
eggs. Among those seated at the table are Smokey, Suicide,  
Crash, Deke, Winky, Indiana, and Bumps. At the moment, Neon is  
tearing into a plate of food.

WINKY

What's the matter, boy? You're  
cutting into that steak like  
you're mad at it.

NEON

Farm raised meat, fresh eggs...  
This is as good as it gets.

SMOKEY

When the shootin's done, you come  
stay with me some. I'll show you  
good living.

NEON

Livin' down South? Doing what?  
(putting on a  
southern accent)  
Get a job hearidin' cooows?  
Tendin' them pigs and whatnot?

Deke sits with a plate of food. At the same time he hands a  
PRINTED FLYER to Suicide who reads it: YOUR USO PRESENTS JACKIE  
MANN'S TRAVELING RACE MUSIC REVUE STARING DEBORAH GANNETT - FOR  
COLORED SOLDIERS ONLY. Suicide just gives a smile.

SMOKEY

Suicide, did I just hear him  
confuse my degree in Industrial  
Sciences with...heardin' cows?

SUICIDE

Can't take 'em serious, Smokey.  
Not like these northern boys went  
to a real school.

NEON

New York University? That's not a  
real school?

WINKY

I know you're not making fun of  
Howard.

SUICIDE

Howard, of course, gets a pass  
under all circumstances. But this  
New York...whatever that I've  
never heard of before; do they  
have a football team?

SMOKEY

They don't have a football team.

SUICIDE

A school without a football team  
is not a genuine school. That's  
just smart-talking Negroes sitting  
around wishing they were getting  
some higher education.

This gets some good natured stink eye from Winky as Marty and Joe  
sit.

MARTY

What're we talking about?

SMOKEY

It's an open forum on which post  
high school educational experience  
affords the greatest opportunities  
for a self-starting Negro.

MARTY

That's nothing any of you all  
should be arguing about. What's  
important is getting yourself  
educated. There's not one kind  
that's better than the other.

(beat)

As long as it comes with a  
football team.

Some hoots and howls from Neon, Winky, Crash and some other  
airmen. Cheers from the rest.

WINKY

Don't pay him any attention.  
UCLA. State school. He doesn't  
know any better.

JOE

If you college boys are so smart,  
how come I only did high school

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

and I'm a better flier than all  
you all?

DEKE

Brother, you think about flying,  
and somewhere in the world a wing  
falls off an airplane. So, don't  
get down on us for having degrees.

JOE

Not all of us were privileged with  
college opportunities. A little  
fella named Jim Crow got in my  
way.

MARTY

You don't need anybody's  
permission to get ahead.

With a sharp smile:

JOE

And I don't have to feel bad about  
getting this far being just how I  
am.

CRASH

(to Bumps)  
What about you, boy? Where'd you  
go to school?

All the men at the table stare at Bumps putting him in quite the  
uncomfortable position.

BUMPS

I..I went to, uh...

CRASH

Big voice, son. Use your big  
voice.

WINKY

Don't put him on the spot.

Crash gives an annoyed shake of his head, but moves on. To  
Indiana:

CRASH

How about you?

INDIANA

Mean there's somewhere else to  
graduate from besides Notre Dame?

There's some good natured "ooohs" and hissing from the group.  
Indiana continues with a devilish grin.

INDIANA (CONT'D)

And I say that with due respect to  
the various institutions  
represented here...

CRASH

How is it that a high falutin  
Notre Dame man came to grace us  
with his presence?

INDIANA

Notre Dame's in South Bend,  
Indiana. Any of you ever been to  
South Bend?

"Nos" and shakes of the heads negatively from the group.

INDIANA (CONT'D)

Helluva spot, South Bend. Not a  
thing to do but throw sticks at  
the air, and you've gotta bring  
your own sticks. So, despite all  
the opportunities my engineering  
degree would have afforded me in  
such a swell place, I decided to  
put that on hold, sign myself up,  
and show you all how it's done.

SUICIDE

You talks like you can fly.

INDIANA

And if you fly like you "talks"  
we're all in trouble.

From all around there's more good nature "ooohing." The kid's  
got stones.

SUICIDE

Stay on my wing for more than a  
hot minute; then you can fly.

A CORPORAL enters.

CORPORAL

Flight leaders; fall in. Briefing  
tent!

The FLIGHT LEADERS - Easy, Crash and Suicide - move out.

84 INT. BRIEFING TENT - DAY

84

Easy, Crash, Suicide are in place along with SQUAD LEADERS from  
the other Squadrons: From the 100th an airman nicknamed BAG 'O  
BONES. From the 301st, JAMMER. From the 302nd, ST. LOU. There  
are, as well, THREE MORE FLIGHT LEADERS FROM EACH SQUAD. THIRTY-  
ONE MEN TOTAL (With Ray Gun down, Subsoil is missing a flight  
leader for the moment).

Stance stands next to a covered easel as he address the men. The  
Airmen themselves are fairly lackadaisical in manner. They've  
been through these pre-briefs a thousand times, AND AFTER HEARING  
WHAT TIME MAGAZINE SAID ABOUT THEM, THEY REALLY AREN'T EXPECTING  
MUCH.

STANCE

Sorry to pull you away from mess,  
but we've been handed an Op Order,  
and time is working against us.

SUICIDE

(slightly derisive)  
Attacking another train, sir, or  
are we going to hit up a truck  
convoy?

Stance pulls back the sheet from the easel and reveals a map of Italy that covers the Monte Cassino and the Anzio beach areas. The map is marked with invasion points, beach landings... This ain't no sightseeing trip. ALL THE AIRMEN SIT UP AND TAKE NOTICE. WE CAN SEE IT IN THEIR EYES: THEY ARE ABOUT TO BE HANDED THE REAL DEAL.

STANCE

This look like a milk run? The allied forces are stalled on their drive to Rome here; the Gustav line. They're getting cut to shreds trying to fight past Monte Cassino. CentCom has cooked up a plan to circumvent the line. Operation Shingle: an amphibious landing here; at Anzio.

The pilots get out PENCILS, start making notations on NOTE PADS. They are most definitely paying attention now.

STANCE (CONT'D)

Three landing forces: Peter, Yellow, and X-Ray. X-Ray will attack the coast 6 miles east of Anzio. X-Ray is ours. We've been given the Frag Order to provide air cover for the landing.

JAMMER

We're in the fight, sir?

STANCE

Oh, you are in it. The Old Man got us an opportunity. We will repay him with victory. The skies over X-Ray will be controlled. Is that understood?

GROUP

Sir!

STANCE

Recon tells us to expect German 109s and 190s flying top cover. Weather will be a factor. Expect rain. Prepare accordingly. Two objectives: take out every bandit you can, and put to rest forever the notion that Negroes can't fly. Understood?

GROUP

Yes, sir!

STANCE

Subsoil, you're short a flight leader. If any of you want to make recommendations...?

MARTY

I think Lightning's ready for the slot.

ST. LOU

You looking to break up the Gruesome Twosome?

MARTY

Lightning's done good on my wing, but he rates a shot. And giving him the lead will force him to take some responsibility.

STANCE

You'll need a new wingman.

MARTY

I'll take Ray Gun. The doctor's given him a clean bill. Figure my wings a good place for him to shake out.

STANCE

All right. Subsoil and Counter have the first wave, Door Knob and Bubbles the second. We alternate until the job is done. Full briefing at 0400. On the flight line at 0530. Spread the word. Get your men ready.

The pilots break up and leave.

85 EXT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE/BRIEFING TENT - MOMENTS LATER

85

The Flight Leaders exit the tent. Airmen mill about the tent awaiting word. Suicide, all excited, starts calling to the men:

SUICIDE

Air cover! Anzio! We're going after 109's! Get out the paint, I'm gettin' some kills!

Excitement begins to sift through the airmen. Joe works his way over to Marty.

JOE

They're letting us fight? The Old Man worked a miracle.

MARTY

Here's another one: You got moved up to flight leader.

JOE  
Flight leader? On the level?

MARTY  
I gave you the recommend myself.

JOE  
Right when I think I got you  
figured...

MARTY  
Who says I'm doing you favors?  
Quickest way to get even in the  
military is to give somebody a  
promotion.

JOE  
Who's got the misfortune of  
getting promoted to your wing?

MARTY  
Ray Gun.

Joe's levity fades. Clearly the notion of Ray flying does not  
sit well with him.

JOE  
Ray Gun's half blind. You'll get  
him killed. You understand that?

MARTY  
You need to check in with Stance.

Marty moves off.

86 INT. TENT - MOMENTS LATER

86

Crash and Suicide enter having come from the briefing. In the  
tent are FRESH PACKS OF CIGARETTES AND RATHER SMALLISH BOTTLES OF  
WHISKEY. For the returning Crash and Suicide, seeing these are  
like Christmas in July. Bumps and Smokey are already in place as  
the men enter, Smokey enjoying a touch of his liquor rations.

CRASH  
Look at this. Any day you come  
home to smokes and liquor rations  
is a good day.

BUMPS  
Going on a mission?

Picking up some cigarettes:

CRASH  
As I recall, Bumps, you said  
something about how you don't  
partake. So, if you've got no use  
for--

SMOKEY  
He already gave his rations to me.

As Smokey smiles, Crash and Suicide shoot him some stink eye.

BUMPS

You all going on a mission?

SUICIDE

The mission. Finally going to see some air combat.

BUMPS

I want to go.

Crash takes a hit of some whiskey. It fairly sizzles him in return.

CRASH

Oooh, that is good.

SUICIDE

We're only taking up so many planes. You'll get the next one.

BUMPS

I want--

CRASH

Here's the thing, son, with your rations: Since you don't smoke or drink anyhow, I was thinking maybe we could all just share and share alike--

BUMPS

I want to fly. I'm not scared.

SMOKEY

I don't know anybody said you were.

BUMPS

I'm just... I want to do it; I want to fight.

CRASH

Make it sound like all you're gonna do is go poke some German in the nose. Lemme tell you about the "fight;" there's nothing except to kill somebody, or get yourself killed. One's no good, the other's no better. Trust me; you'll get to both of 'em quicker than you care.

BUMPS

I just...I want to be a good soldier.

Crash, thinking maybe he's come off to harshly he relents a bit:

CRASH  
I know. I know you do. But good  
soldiers don't take much pleasure  
in being one.

87 INT. PENTAGON/OFFICE - NIGHT

87

Bullard and Tattersall wait in the office with all the anxiety of a couple of expectant fathers. They watch the clock and cogitate on what's happening halfway around the world. A COM OFFICER enters holding a communique.

INTEL OFFICER  
Naval ships have begun shelling  
Anzio. Air cover's away. Landing  
is imminent.

The Officer steps away. As he lights up a smoke:

TATTERSALL  
Luck to you.

BULLARD  
Same to you.

88 INT. PENTAGON/OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

88

In another office Mortamus, too, waits. There is bitterness to his mien as if he's hoping for bad things. Another INTEL OFFICER enters to update Mortamus.

MORTAMUS' INTEL OFFICER  
The invasion's underway, sir.

Mortamus just nods.

89 EXT. SKY - DAY

89

We see our Tuskegee Airmen flying in formation through the air. Four planes to a flight, four flights to each squad. All the planes are currently ABOVE the cloud cover. It's sunny. It's nice. But there is a THICK LAYER OF CLOUDS just below them.

90 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

90

Marty checks his compass, checks his watch. Into his radio:

MARTY  
Subsoil Red One: We oughta be  
close. Follow me down.

91 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

91

Following Marty's lead, the planes angle down below the cloud cover, then the planes BREAK THROUGH THE CLOUDS closer to sea level where they are hit with RAIN AND FOUL WEATHER. They emerge right in the heart and heat of battle:

WE SEE GUN SHIPS firing their massive cannons at GERMAN GUN EMPLACEMENTS just beyond the Anzio beach.

We see TROOP TRANSPORT SHIPS with MARINES climbing down rope ladders into LANDING CRAFT.

From reinforced positions we see GERMAN GUNS firing out toward the sea.

92 INT. PENTAGON/OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS 92

We are again in the office where Bullard and Tattersall wait. The Intel Officer again enters with another communique.

INTEL OFFICER  
Air support engaging at Peter and Yellow. Enemy air cover is significant.

BULLARD  
X-Ray?

INTEL OFFICER  
No word yet.

93 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 93

As Marty leads the planes inland, he is barely able to make out something - some *things* really - closing for the converge: Several flights of GERMAN PLANES.

MARTY  
Subsoil Red one; bogeys. Inbound, twelve o'clock.

SUICIDE (V.O.)  
See 'em. They're German.

BAG 'O BONES (V.O.)  
About forty of 'em, coming in fast!

MARTY  
All planes; hold formation.

As the men fly on, as they head for the converge, they grow anxious. We should feel the tension, the anticipation rise.

JOE (V.O.)  
Anytime Red One.

MARTY  
Hold on.

94 INT. DEKE'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS 94

Deke looks to a picture he's placed just below his gun sight. It's the image of BLACK JESUS. He whispers to it:

DEKE  
Get me home, Black Jesus.

95 INT. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 95

Marty again says:

MARTY  
...Hold...

The men hold their positions as the tension rises. Finally, Marty gives the go:

MARTY (CONT'D)  
All planes; if it's flyin' it's  
dyin'... Punch tanks! Guns free!

96 EXT. ANZIO SKY - CONTINUOUS 96

All the planes, near simultaneously, CAST OFF THEIR EXTERNAL FUEL TANKS and cut loose with their gats. The skies above Anzio officially become a scrum of flying machines.

Marty cuts through the Germans firing off tracers at a 109 ahead of him. Just as they are about to hit the 109, A SECOND SET OF TRACERS comes across Marty's canopy to his far three o'clock.

97 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 97

Marty radios to Ray.

MARTY  
Red two, watch my three o'clock!

98 I/E. RAY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 98

Ray realizes he missed a plane coming in off Marty's three.

RAY  
Hell! I'm on him.

99 EXT. ANZIO SKY - CONTINUOUS 99

Ray drops in behind the German fighter and gives her the guns. Tracers ping against the 109 until the 109 begins to belch smoke and spit fire. The 109's pilot is able to throw himself from the cockpit - he's sucked upward RIGHT PAST the pursuing Ray Gun - before the plane smashes into the ground, punctuating the landscape with burst of fire.

WE KEY ON Joe who's on the tail of a 109. He fires at the plane, but misses. The 109 pulls a SPLIT S and heads downward. Joe does the same, THE CAMERA INVERTING WITH Joe as he twists after the plane he's chasing. Joe then drops the hammer, jams the throttle and drives the plane forward. Joe's right up on the 109's tail. Easy shot. Joe takes it. The 109 erupts in flames.

And the insult to the injury? Joe doing a barrel roll over the burning plane before it heads downward.

100 INT. PENTAGON/OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS 100

Again, Bullard and Tattersall await word. It comes delivered by the Intel Officer reading an communique.

INTEL OFFICER  
Yellow Beach reporting in. One  
kill, three losses.... Peter  
Beach; two kills, two losses.

Tattersall can no longer bridle his anxiety. He moves quickly and snatches the communique from the officer.

TATTERSALL  
What about X-Ray?

He reads for a moment, then softly utters:

TATTERSALL (CONT'D)  
...Jesus Christ...

101 INT. PENTAGON/OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS 101

An Intel Officer updates Mortamus basically finishing the info from the previous scene.

MORTAMUS INTEL OFFICER  
...X-Ray reports four losses.

Mortamus looks smug.

MORTAMUS  
Why in the hell they ever thought  
they could send boys to do a man's-

INTEL OFFICER  
Sorry, sir. Four *kills*. I  
misread that. Four kills over X-  
Ray.

MORTAMUS  
How many losses?

INTEL OFFICER  
No losses.

MORTAMUS  
Confirm that.

INTEL OFFICER  
It's confirmed. Four kills. No  
losses.

102 INT. PENTAGON OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS 102

Bullard and Tattersall are jumping up and down, yelling and hugging each other as if they've won a football game.

103 EXT. ANZIO/AIR - SIMULTANEOUS 103

The melee continues, the air itself thick with tracer fire and engine smoke.

WE KEY ON Crash cashing a 109. The 109 heads up INTO THE CLOUDS, and Crash follows. They disappears into a thick fog of soup.

104 I/E. SMOKEY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 104

Smokey, on Crash's wing, radios after him:

SMOKEY  
Crash, I can't follow you in that soup.

CRASH (V.O.)  
Stay on station. Hit 'em when I flush 'em out.

105 I/E. PICKETT'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 105

Crash can barely see the length of his plane's nose in the clouds. That doesn't in the least diminish the thrill of the hunt for him.

CRASH  
You can't hide, boy. You can run all you want, but you can't hide.

Suddenly, TRACERS COME OUT OF THE CLOUD SOUP right for Crash as the 109 becomes visible just ahead of him, still firing as it closes. The tracers rip into Crash's plane sending up a rooster tail of sparks and shorn metal. A second later the plane is consumed by fire. Crash barely has enough time to give a death howl.

106 I/E. SMOKEY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS 106

Over his radio, Smokey hears Crash get it.

Ahhhhh!  
CRASH (V.O.)

Crash...?  
SMOKEY

From out of the cloud cover shoots the German 109. Alone. Smokey doesn't have to be a genius to do the math. He jams the throttle, takes off after the German plane. He cuts loose with a burst of fire. The 109 is done. As if to punctuate the kill, Smokey spits tobacco into a chaw cup.

107 I/E. SUICIDE'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

107

WE KEY ON SUICIDE zipping through the fray ripping off shots at any and all German planes he can see. He's got a running dialogue going as he shoots.

SUICIDE  
C'mon, Jerry. You want some of what I got? I'm gonna learn you a little something.

Neon is having a hard time staying with Suicide.

NEON (V.O.)  
Suicide, slow it down. I can't cover you.

SUICIDE  
Hell if I'm slowing down. You need to speed it up.

And right then some TRACERS TEAR UP PART OF SUICIDE'S WING. It's not a real bad hit, nothing that takes him out of the game, but the damage is clear and evident. Suicide is not having any of that. Looking around for the plane that just hit him.

SUICIDE (CONT'D)  
No you didn't just shoot at me!

Suicide puts his plane into a slide. The PURSUING 109 overshoots him, and then Suicide jumps the throttle and is right on the guy's tail. The German fighter loops over and takes his plane "down to the deck," flying low over trees and the Italian countryside. But none of that is enough to shake Suicide. Quickly, the match devolves from a dog fight into a contest of aerial acrobatics; the two pilots pushing each other harder and harder to see who makes the first mistake. And with just a few hundred feet between the planes and the ground, the first mistake will also be the last.

The two planes slip back and forth, fighting the limited air space as well as each other. One plane will get on the other's six and get off a few bursts, then vice versa. But neither is able to gain advantage.

Finally, paying more attention to Suicide than his surroundings, the 109 CLIPS A WIRE. The pilot tries to maintain control, but like a car hydroplaning, the more it corrects, the worse things get. Finally, the plane careens wildly, it's WINGTIP SCRAPING THE GROUND for a moment before it catches and sends the plane flipping over the grassy field and finally slamming to the earth in a terrific fireball.

108 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

108

It seems, finally, the fight has been taken out of the Germans. The planes that remain peel away from the Americans, fly off to fight another day.

JOE

Subsoil Blue One to Red One;  
bandits are retreating. Do we  
chase?

MARTY

Negative. Hold positions.

109 INT. PENTAGON/BRIEFING ROOM - LATER

109

OFFICERS OF VARYING UPPER RANKS AND DIFFERENT MILITARY BRANCHES are gathered in a briefing room. Bullard, Tattersall and a salty-looking Mortamus are among them. They await the arrival of Precht who receives their attention as he enters and addresses the group.

PRECHT

Gentlemen. The commander of the ground forces at Anzio is requesting additional men and material before he makes a breakout. The landing beaches are taking a hell of a shelling from some K5s up in the Alban hills. But we're holding, and the Germans are retreating. We can declare the Anzio landing a victory.

Applause from the assembled.

PRECHT (CONT'D)

All of your branches performed above and beyond. In particular I would acknowledge the air support over X-Ray beach. Eight Kills, no losses in their first wave. Outstanding Colonel. Pass my congratulations on to your men.

(to all)

Action reports and assessments by fifteen-hundred.

As Precht makes his way from the room, as SOME of the other officers offer congratulations to Bullard, Mortamus can't help but try to get in a parting shot.

MORTAMUS

It doesn't change anything. Eight Germans doesn't change what I think of you and your boys.

Not strident, Bullard speaks as though he were on a level far above the Major.

BULLARD

Major...we don't care.

110 EXT. RAMITELLI BASE - SIMULTANEOUS

110

We are just off the airstrip. Coffee, Crewmen, Airmen who didn't make the flight - Bumps chief among them - as well as Stance stand waiting for the return of the fliers. Sticks looks over

the skies with some field glass. As the drone of planes begins to come up in the BG:

STICKS  
I see 'em. There they are!

All the men perk up as the planes approach.

111 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS 111

Marty gives the order to his men.

MARTY  
Let's give 'em a count.

112 EXT. RAMITELLI BASE - CONTINUOUS 112

The planes arrive at the base by flight in ECHELON FORMATION. The planes come in low over the base, then break off and begin to do "victory rolls." The men gathered on the ground count them off loud and proud.

AIRMEN  
One...two...three...four...five...  
six...!

COFFEE  
They just shot down the whole  
Luftwaffe, didn't they?

113 EXT. AIR BASE - LATER 113

The majority of the planes have now landed. Like fans at the end of a victorious college ball game, personnel spill out to the planes as they finish taxiing. They swarm and congratulate the airmen as they disembark giving them a hero's welcome. There is wild exuberance all around. Marty tries to handle business; get a count of the fliers.

MARTY  
Bag 'O Bones, you got all your  
fliers in?

BAG 'O BONES  
Doing a head count now.

Neon races over to Marty.

NEON  
Got one, Easy. Shot it right out  
from under the Jerry.

JOE  
One? Winky got three.

NEON  
The hell he did.  
(calling to Winky)  
Winky, why you lying to everybody?

As Neon runs after Winky, Joe catches up with Marty.

JOE  
Easy, how'd we do?

MARTY  
Trying to get a head count. I  
know we got eight Jerries.

Joe can't help but smile. Marty smiles and laughs a laugh that is born of an unimaginable relief. The two men embrace in a hug and slap backs.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
We did it, boy. Let 'em put that  
in Time Magazine. We still an  
experiment?

JOE  
We are a demonstration on how it's  
done, son.

A dazed Smokey walks with Suicide. Joe and Marty are so elevated they initially can't see that Smokey is hurting emotionally.

MARTY  
Eight, Smokey. Got eight of 'em.

SMOKEY  
They got Crash. He chased a Jerry  
into a cloud bank. He never came  
out.

JOE  
Smokey...

SUICIDE  
We know the score when we sign up.  
Can't go complaining when things  
don't tumble our way.

Smokey and Suicide start away. They cross directly pass Bumps who's got a front row viewing for the personal cost of war.

JOE  
They'd never say it, but losing  
Crash has gotta be like a gut shot  
for 'em. If we could do something  
for 'em, that might be a good  
idea.

Marty considers this, then moves off.

114 INT. PENTAGON/LUNTZ'S OFFICE - DAY

114

GENERAL LUNTZ is looking over some paperwork. Something within the reams of shuffled paper he reads through daily has caught his eye. Opening the door to his office, he calls to an OFFICER who is his XO.

LUNTZ  
Lieutenant...

The Lieutenant enters. Luntz holds out the report he's reading to him.

LUNTZ (CONT'D)  
This action report from the Anzio  
invasion: The 332nd are the  
colored fliers?

LUNTZ LIEUTENANT  
Yes, sir.

LUNTZ  
Have this verified.

LUNTZ LIEUTENANT  
We did, sir. When it came in we  
didn't think that...well, it  
seemed beg verification.

LUNTZ  
Get a communique to their  
commander, Colonel...

LUNTZ LIEUTENANT  
Colonel Bullard. He was actually  
recalled back here to Washington.

LUNTZ  
Find him. Get him in here.

115 EXT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE - NIGHT

115

It's late, it's dark. We are just beyond the air base. Suicide and Smokey - along with Bumps - come upon Marty and Joe who, at the moment, are trying to stealthfully extricate some MOTORCYCLES from where they have been secreted away in the brush. THERE ARE FOUR CYCLES ALTOGETHER

JOE  
What's Bump's doing here?

SMOKEY  
Suicide woke him up.

SUICIDE  
The hell I did. Lightest sleeper  
I ever met. Anyway, he's in now.

BUMPS  
We're not supposed to leave the  
base.

JOE  
Thought you said he was in?

SMOKEY  
He's mostly in.  
(to bumps)  
If nobody knows we've left,  
technically we're not gone.

BUMPS  
Where'd you all get motorcycles?

MARTY  
Bought 'em.

BUMPS  
But all pay gets sent home.

JOE  
We got 'em with--

SUICIDE  
With the good will we've earned  
from setting the fine people of  
Italy free from tyranny.

Suicide gives a look to Marty and Joe that says: Ixnay! Bumps  
hesitates.

SMOKEY  
(exasperated)  
What?

BUMPS  
Where are we going?

SUICIDE  
We're taking a morale boost to see  
Love Bunny, and don't even ask  
what's a Love Bunny. Just get on,  
and find out.

Bumps does, and the men ride off.

116 INT. PENTAGON/LUNTZ'S OFFICE - DAY

116

Luntz is at his desk, smoking a cigarette and looking vexed, as  
he reads over paperwork. Bullard is shown in by Luntz's aide.  
Bullard gives a salute as he's introduced.

LUNTZ LIEUTENANT  
Sir, Colonel Bullard.

Luntz indicates a seat which Bullard takes as the Aide exits.

LUNTZ  
Colonel. Cigarette?

BULLARD  
No. Thank you.

LUNTZ  
Nine months overseas, Colonel;  
North Africa, Italy... Good to be  
back stateside?

BULLARD  
It takes a moment to adjust to the  
climate.

LUNTZ

I read the action report from Anzio. Eight kills with your first wave, nineteen all told. That's a right trick. Flying P-40s to boot. Might as well have gone to the fight flying DeSotos. If you don't mind, Colonel, how is it that coloreds who haven't seen a lick of air to air combat are so much better than white pilots?

BULLARD

It's not that we're better. Most of the white fliers get three weeks of flight instruction before they're shipped out. My men trained for six months because nobody wanted them and they had no assignments. They were veterans before they touched foreign soil.

LUNTZ

Got a file as thick as a New York phone book from your Major that says otherwise; says your boys are cowards, says they break formation, cut and run...

BULLARD

I know at least nineteen German pilots who would tell you differently. If they could tell you anything. They can't. They're dead.

LUNTZ

You know my command, Colonel? Allied Air Strategic Bombing; hard targets in Germany. I'm in a hell of a fix with it. The Brits only want to fly at night, which makes their bombing about as accurate as blind men throwing darts. Our boys fly the daylight missions and they're getting cut to shreds. We fly ten, sometimes eleven men to a bomber. I lost thirty bombers in one run over Ploesti. Eighty bombers in one raid over Schweinfurt... The fighter escort I have now is useless. It's bleeding us. I am sick to hell of writing condolence letters to mothers and fathers and wives and children by the hundreds. I'm desperate enough to--

BULLARD

To try using Negro pilots?

LUNTZ

To do what it takes to cut my losses even by a fraction, and if that means using seasoned pilots

(MORE)

LUNTZ (CONT'D)

that no one else wants, then yes.  
Are you interested in putting your  
men under my command?

BULLARD

Do you have film of the air cover  
your bombers are getting?

117 INT. THEATER - NIGHT

117

We are inside a stage theater. Once it was probably nice. Now it's mostly bombed out, barely rebuilt. The audience is packed with BLACK SERVICE MEN. It's hot in the joint, the temperature elevated by something besides the smoke that fills the space. Up on stage, playing for all they are worth, is (according to a BANNER) The JACKIE MANN ALL-STAR MUSICAL REVUE - a big, band outfit of BLACK PERFORMERS led by a Cab Calloway-type band leader wearing a WHITE TUX. Fronting the group is DEBORAH GANNETT aka LOVE BUNNY, a lovely young girl in her twenties who is in the middle of a hot rendition of E BABA LE BA (a couple of other PRETTY YOUNG GIRLS are singing back up). Deborah is what's making the mercury rise. SOLDIERS in the audience are going crazy to say the least.

Marty, Joe, Smokey, Bumps and Suicide fight their way through the crowd over to some seats.

SUICIDE

There she is.  
(shouting)  
Bunny! Bunny, it's Sam!  
(to Bumps)  
That is Love Bunny. That's my  
girl!

BUMPS

Your girl? But you're married.

SUICIDE

Bunny!

A SOLDIER seated behind Suicide yells at him:

SOLDIER

Sit down!

SUICIDE

Boy, I am an airman. I out rank  
you. Shut yer pie hole before I  
have you court martialed.

BUMPS

(to Suicide)  
You're not worried about  
your...your vows and all that?

SUICIDE

Bumps, there aren't any of us who  
couldn't die in a hot second. And  
a man who's liable to die oughta  
be allowed to partake in all life  
has to offer.

BUMPS

But...what if you don't die? What  
if you live?

SUICIDE

I'll cross that bridge when I come  
to it.

Deborah finishes up her song. The place erupts in applause and  
cat calls.

SUICIDE (CONT'D)

Bunny! Sammy's right here for  
you, Bunny!

But every man in the joint yells to Bunny as if she were his  
girl.

118 EXT. STREET - NIGHT

118

We are just outside the theater. FROM A BACK DOOR come spilling  
Marty, Joe, Smokey, Bumps, Suicide and Deborah along with another  
girl, CECE - one of the back up singers. Laughing and having  
fun, they all load up onto the motorcycles and ride off.

As they do, they cross past a couple of WHITE SOLDIERS who watch  
the group go, then take a hard pull on a bottle of booze. The  
look on their faces is nothing but disdain.

119 INT. ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

119

We are in a darkened room where gun-camera footage of AMERICAN  
BOMBING RUNS is being shown on a screen. Basically, it's scene  
after scene of American Bombers being shot out of the sky. Luntz  
giving commentary as the footage rolls.

LUNTZ

Right now the tactic is for the  
cover to fly a front sweep  
formation; knock down as many  
Kraut fighters as possible. But  
while our boys are getting kills  
happy chasing fighters and getting  
swastikas painted on their doors,  
the Jerries slip in behind them  
and tag my bombers.

Luntz turns off the projector and turns on the lights.

LUNTZ (CONT'D)

We need to change the way we  
fight. And we need fliers who'll  
stick with the bombers. I don't  
care if they never splash another  
Jerry fighter. But they've got to  
put my bombers ahead of themselves  
getting kills.

BULLARD

There's nothing we can do about  
losses from ground fire. You know

(MORE)

BULLARD (CONT'D)

that. Losses from enemy air...I believe my boys can get that down to one or two.

LUNTZ

If you can bring home one or two more of my planes on every mission-

BULLARD

Sir, I believe I can cut your losses down to one or two planes. Total.

Luntz takes a beat.

LUNTZ

Colonel, I'm losing...thirty... bombers...a run! The word is that you're arrogant, and your last statement seems to prove it.

BULLARD

If that's the only word people use to describe me, I would say I'm making progress.

LUNTZ

I read your jacket. Four years at West Point. Only colored there in uniform, and no one spoke a word to you. And you still graduated top of your class. I imagine if I were colored, if I never got a fair shake but still managed to hold my own I'd be arrogant, too.

BULLARD

Fortunately for you, sir, that will only be a question to ponder at cocktail parties.

LUNTZ

When the war's over maybe I'll ponder the hell out of questions of race. But right now my only concern is getting boys home. So for all your arrogance...I'm asking you man to man; can you save lives? And you think about your answer, Colonel, because if you tell me you can and you can't I swear I will set you, your men and the entire colored race so far back they will have to re-open the underground railroad.

(pointed, direct:)

Can you help me?

BULLARD

We need new planes. No more hand me downs. If you can get us new planes, we can help your boys.

120 EXT. HOUSE - LATER

120

The group rides up to a house on a street that alternates between bombed out buildings, and mostly intact structures. As the group parks their cycles:

BUMPS

Why do we have to drive all the way out here?

SMOKEY

You are just one quizzical Negro, aren't you?

SUICIDE

All the R&R clubs in town are whites only. If we want a drink, we gotta soldier it up.

Joe knocks at the door of the house. It opens revealing SOFIA. Sofia is a native Italian. She is pretty, but not necessarily beautiful. She and Joe stare at each other for a beat, then Sofia gives Joe a deep passionate kiss. Marty, shaking his head:

MARTY

He doesn't even speak Italian.

121 INT. SOFIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

121

The group is now UPSTAIRS. A couple of bottles of wine are open. They all lounge around lazily, slightly boozily. THE CONVERSATION, WHEN IT GETS STARTED, SHOULD BE AS RELAXED AND INTERWOVEN AS THE GROUP IS. Cece sits with Smokey. Suicide is with Deborah. Bumps is by himself. Marty's just got a bottle of wine, and for the moment he's good with that. Sofia puts a record on an old victrola, cranks it up and lets it play. As she snuggles up to Joe, she says plainly, with a heavy accent:

SOFIA

Sinatra.

JOE

Yeah. Heard of him.

DEBORAH

I'm sorry about Nathan. The times I met him he seemed...you know...decent.

SUICIDE

(dry melancholy)

He was. Crash loved his momma, and never missed church. Germans don't care much about that. ...Though I guess we've killed our share of church going/momma loving Jerries.

Giving comfort, Deborah snuggles more closely with Suicide. Smokey spits tobacco into his cup.

CECE

That's not attractive, you know.

SMOKEY

Watch me swallow it, see how attractive that is.

MARTY

Was a good show tonight, Deborah.

DEBORAH

Do what we can to entertain. We owe you all so much. We hear the stories about all you're doing... The good stories, anyway; the ones in the Negro papers. They tell the truth.

Marty squirms uncomfortably where he sits.

CECE

You okay?

MARTY

Back troubles.

CECE

Lemme see.

Cece crosses to Marty, starts to rub his back. Marty gives a soft, relaxed moan. With a "what about me" tone:"

SMOKEY

My back hurts.

DEBORAH

Well, however it is, everybody's proud of you.

SUICIDE

(playing it up)  
We're just doing our job.  
Fighting for our country.  
Fighting...and dying.

Deborah again snuggles closer to Suicide. Kissing close. She says innocently:

DEBORAH

Bet your wife is proud. And your son, too. How old is he now?  
Six?

Suicide stares at Deborah. All the pleasure drains from him and he starts to get up from where he's sitting.

DEBORAH (CONT'D)

I say something wrong?

SUICIDE

Nah. You said everything right. Bumps, come over here and grow up some.

Bumps and Suicide change places, Bumps just a tad stiff around Deborah. Not knowing what else to say:

MARTY  
(to Suicide)  
Look at you going all soft. Can't do it to your wife?

SUICIDE  
To hell with my wife. You met her you'd know why they'd call me Suicide. Can't do it to my son. A man's not a man unless he's a man to his boy.

DEBORAH  
Aww, now that's a real Negro man right there. How could we not be proud of you all?

Before another word can be said, FROM OUTSIDE THE VILLA WE HEAR SOME CATERWAULING.

DRUNK SOLDIERS (V.O.)  
Niiiggers! Hey, you darkie sons of bitches! Get your asses out here!

SMOKEY  
I think that's for you.

Marty and Joe cross to the window.

122 POV - MARTY AND JOE

122

We see four WHITE SOLDIERS - two of whom we saw previously giving the group the eye - down on the street calling drunkenly to the house.

123 INT. SOFIA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

123

Smokey queries:

SMOKEY  
What is it?

MARTY  
Trouble.

JOE  
Five of us, four for of them. We kick their backsides. No trouble.

DRUNK SOLDIER (V.O.)  
C'mon, niggers! Get on out here!

JOE  
Well, let's get to it.

SUICIDE

Drink up the wine. We can use the bottle for cracking heads.

DEBORAH

Sam, don't go out there.

MARTY

We're not going out there. Does she have a phone?

JOE

You're the one who talks Italian.

MARTY

Avete un telefono?

Sofia indicates to an adjacent room.

MARTY (CONT'D)

Smokey, the military's working the phone lines. You dial up an operator, have them hustle some MPs over here.

As Smokey exits:

DRUNK SOLDIER (V.O.)

Get out here, ya yellow coloreds.

Sofia goes to the window. She screams:

SOFIA

Maiali bianchi! Dovrei strappare verso l'esterno le vostre gole con le mie mani!

In response, a ROCK IS THROWN THROUGH THE WINDOW.

SUICIDE

Well, that did the trick. We gonna fight, or what?

JOE

We got two for fighting. Bumps, what do you say?

BUMPS

...I, I don't--

JOE

Take that as a yes. Three for fighting.

CECE

Hell, I'll fight 'em.

Joe looks to Marty, points a finger at Cece as if to say: See that? A girl would fight 'em. Smokey returns.

SMOKEY

Got some MPs on the line. They're hustling over.

Mimicing Joe, Marty points a finger at Smokey as if to say: See that? MPs, hustling over.

DEBORAH

Help is coming, so let's just...  
Forget about them. This is  
supposed to be a party. Have some  
more wine.

Deborah distributes wine. Joe abstains. He doesn't need any liquor to fuel him at the moment. Cece, shaking her head in disbelief at the way the turn the night has taken.

CECE

You're wearing a uniform same as  
them, they don't even care. You  
all got it twice as hard; you're  
fighting the Double V.

Sinatra's voice ELONGATES as the victrola winds down. Sofia crosses back to it and winds it up again.

JOE

Double V my backside.

CECE

You are fighting two wars. The  
war here, and the fight for Negro  
rights back home.

JOE

Sister, this war; they got guns,  
we got guns. Back home; they got  
guns, we got our moral  
righteousness. I'd trade all the  
moral righteousness in the world  
for a Colt .45. You add a gun to  
the conversation, everything  
changes.

MARTY

Doesn't mean righteousness can't  
win.

JOE

(with a laugh)  
Boy, you are just like Booker T.  
See, ladies, Booker T. Washington  
was the first president of our  
Tuskegee institute. He preached  
the way of racial accommodation.  
He figured if Negroes proved their  
value, the Ofays wouldn't have a  
choice but to give us our rights.  
Any of that sound familiar, Easy?

Joe takes the wine from Marty.

MARTY

Hey.

JOE

Slow it down. We got a long  
night. Now opposite to Booker T.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)  
was W.E.B. Du Bois...  
(to the group)  
You all college boys don't think I  
know any of this smart stuff, do  
you? Do not judge a brother.

The group gives a light laugh. Even though there's science being  
dropped, everybody keeps things light.

JOE (CONT'D)  
But, all right, see... Du Bois  
thought Washington was all full of  
it. Accommodating wouldn't do  
nothing but perpetuate Negro  
oppression. Du Bois was all about  
political action and civil rights.

MARTY  
The Lightning Joe Little of his  
day.

JOE  
He wanted social acceptance by  
developing a small group of  
ascended brothers and sister.  
"The Talented Tenth." Elevated  
Negroes out punching Jim Crow in  
the face. That's how you get  
over: don't wait for somebody else  
to help you up. You get up on  
your own.

MARTY  
The talented tenth.

JOE  
That's right.

MARTY  
Only one problem with that: the  
other ninety percent of the  
brothers and sisters you leave  
behind.

Joe and Marty exchange a look. Smiles are involved, but they are  
challenging smiles.

In the BG WE HEAR SIRENS starting to rise up, and drawing closer.

DEBORAH  
See that? They're here already.

Marty goes to the window.

124 POV - MARTY

124

He sees a couple of Jeeps, driven by WHITE MPS, pull up to the  
scene. There are four MPs in total. The MPs saunter over to the  
drunk soldiers. They all talk for a moment. Then, one of the  
MPs turns to the window:

MP  
Hey, niggers, get your jig asses  
out here!

125 INT. SOFIA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

125

Clearly things are not working out as planned.

JOE  
That's great. That's some good  
problem solving. Should've  
whooped their tails when we had  
the chance.

MARTY  
There's a Brit camp close by.  
Smokey...

Smokey moves for the phone.

JOE  
Yeah, call the Brits on over.  
Let's get a coalition of race  
haters going.

MARTY  
We'll get out of this.

JOE  
By hiding behind some Union Jack  
skirt?

MARTY  
This is not the fight to fight.  
Drunk bigots are nothing.

With his gallows humor fading, Joe points outside:

JOE  
That's not nothing. That's the  
same hate, the same evil Crash  
died fighting. Only it's home  
grown, with white sheets instead  
of Nazi gray. And all your  
intellectualizing is nothing  
against that. Niggers? One time,  
Easy. One time, don't you want to  
take that word and shove it right  
down their...?

Joe reads Marty. He's not going for it. Joe moves quickly to  
Suicide, takes him by the shoulders and nearly pleads with him:

JOE (CONT'D)  
Suicide, you're not scared of 'em.  
You're not scared of anything.  
You and me; we'll go out there and  
teach 'em what a nigger really is.

SUICIDE  
Lightning...

Taking that as a 'no,' Joe moves quickly to Bumps.

JOE  
Bumps, I know you're itching for a fight. To hell with the Germans, boy. Our fight is right there. We get back to base and you tell everybody you busted up some crackers!

MARTY  
Lightning, I mean it! You'll end up in the brig!

JOE  
None of you want to fight? None of you? Christ... Soldiers first, black men second. Ain't that a shame.

A moment as Joe looks from man to man. No one says a word. Again, in the BG, WE HEAR SIRENS just prior to Smokey entering.

SMOKEY  
Help's coming.

Joe drops himself down in a chair. Like a overwound toy that's finally losing its spring:

JOE  
Yeah. Help's coming. Let's just sit on down and wait to get helped.

126 EXT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE - NIGHT

126

Stance stands alone in the night as a TRANSPORT TRUCK arrives. Out of the back hop Joe, Marty, Smokey, Bumps and Suicide. They look tired, semi-drunk... Mostly they look ashamed of their behavior. Stance looks them over, then says harshly:

STANCE  
Just a proud bunch of airmen, aren't you. Couldn't disrespect your uniforms more if you used them to clean floors. If the Old Man were here--

JOE  
Well, he ain't here. He's run off to Washington.

Stance walks to Joe, gets in his face.

STANCE  
You can express your dissatisfaction with the Colonel's actions to him in person. He's landing at 1500.  
(beat)  
Now get out of my sight.

Stance moves away. The men mill for a moment, then begin to break up.

127 INT. RAMITELLI BASE/BRIEFING TENT - DAY

127

The tent is packed full of airmen. They watch intently as Bullard - having made his return - SHOWS FILM similar in nature to that which he was shown by Luntz; Bombers being shot down in air raids. As the footage finishes playing:

BULLARD

Lights up... The pilots flying top cover now are going for every kill they can score. That's how they were trained. That's how they fight. While they're chasing kills, the bombers are left unprotected, and that's a fight not close to being even. Here's how we change up the strategy: You do not forward sweep, and you do not run after Jerries. You stay with the bombers. At all cost, under all circumstance, you protect those planes.

ST. LOU

Colonel, we signed up to shoot Germans, not baby-sit planes.

BULLARD

One bomber is ten men, 17,000 pounds of bombs on factories, on munition plants, on forward targets... You getting one Jerry so you can paint a notch on your plane doesn't balance that. These are your new orders: if a bomber gets wounded, you stay with her. If she's slow flying, you stay with her. If one of you gets in trouble, you're on your own. The rest of you stay with the bombers. If you stray, if you go off mission your reward will be as swift a court martial as I can arrange.

A couple of smiles from some of the airmen who figure this is just hyperbole. Bullard sets them straight.

BULLARD (CONT'D)

Is that comical to you? Break rank, and you will watch the rest of the war from behind iron bars. Is that clear?

GROUP

Sir!

BULLARD

Max Effort. Every plane flies every mission. We've secured new aircraft. P-51s. The best the air crops's got. We'll start ferrying them in from Bari

(MORE)

BULLARD (CONT'D)

tomorrow. Stance will post the  
schedule.

Smiles all around. It's like they all just got Christmas presents. Like the soldier he is, rousing his men to moral certitude:

BULLARD (CONT'D)

From here forward you change the way you think about how we fight. The kills you score mean nothing. We count our victories by the bombers we get to their targets, by the husbands we return to their wives. The fathers we get back to their children. What has not changed, what will never change: to the last plane, the last bullet, the last minute and the last man we fight. We fight.

128 EXT. RAMITELLI BASE - DAY

128

We come in on a CU of a POST. A hand REACHES INTO FRAME and hangs a list of names. THE CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL dozens and dozens of airmen waiting to see who's made the list. They move almost as a unit and crowd around the list looking for their names.

SMOKEY

Right there, first flight. You and me, Easy. We're bringing the 'Stangs over from Bari.

SUICIDE

Where'my at?

MARTY

...Third flight...

SUICIDE

Third?

SMOKEY

Neon, you're on third flight.  
Deke, first flight.

DEKE

First flight! That's Black Jesus, right there.

BAG 'O BONES

I'm a group leader. How am I not on the first flight?

JOE

What flight am I on?

SMOKEY

Hold up... Bumps, look at that; you're first flight. St. Lou, you're second...

JOE  
Hey, where am I?

Smokey goes through the pages, sees nothing. Joe runs over to the post, flips through page after page after page....

129 INT. COMMAND TENT - LATER

129

Bullard and Stance are going over paperwork. Joe comes rushing in hot as a Saturday Night Special. Bullard doesn't even acknowledge Joe. Stance, however, doesn't much care for the interruption.

JOE  
Colonel, if I could have a word.

STANCE  
Later. We're going through the Frag Order.

JOE  
It's important, sir.

STANCE  
Did you just hear what I--

JOE  
Why am I not ferrying over any of the 51s?

Finally, giving Joe some attention:

BULLARD  
That's your version of important? The whole world at war, and you want to know why you don't get to fly the new planes over.

JOE  
Is there a reason?

BULLARD  
You were on Easy's six during a strafing run. You got caught up in his blast and wrecked a plane. Wrecked *another* plane. You went AWOL from the base to chase skirts...

JOE  
I wasn't the only one, so why am I catching hell for it? Why does everybody have it in for me?

BULLARD  
Everybody's always pressing up on you. Everything's a fight, isn't it? It must be so goddamn exhausting being you. But you just have to keep swinging even when there's nothing to swing at. Advice, Joe Little; give yourself

(MORE)

BULLARD (CONT'D)

a rest. Learn when to fight, when to follow. Because I don't have anything *against* you. I've got high expectations *for* you. So, you not bringing over the P-51s; it's a warning. Your last one.

Joe stews a moment, then leaves.

130 INT. TENT - MOMENTS LATER

130

IN A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS WE SEE Winky mixing up some magic powder: he puts the powder in a cup, pours in a little water, mixes the water into a paste, then begins to apply the paste to Bumps beard area. As he does:

WINKY

Thing is, Negroes; we've got a lot of kink to our hair. Shave it too close, it curls over and grows into the skin. That's how you get your razor bumps. This is a depilatory. Takes the hair off, but when it grows back it doesn't curve as hard. No bumps.

Winky checks his pocket watch.

WINKY (CONT'D)

Leave that on about five minutes. It's going to sting a little, so let me know if it gets too hot. Everybody been treating you well?

BUMPS

Real good. Smokey and Suicide... They been good bunk mates.

WINKY

There's a reason. You give 'em your cigarettes, your liquor rations.

BUMPS

I don't use 'em.

WINKY

That's not the point. Around here cigarettes, liquor; they're what we use to barter. Those motorcycles they have, that's how they got 'em. If you give your smokes and booze to them, it's like you're giving away money.

BUMPS

They're taking advantage of me?

WINKY

Mostly I don't think they want you drinking or smoking. They're not proper habits for a young man. But they're teaching you a few

(MORE)

WINKY (CONT'D)  
things. Only, they didn't quite  
explain all the rules to you.

Re: his face.

BUMPS  
It's starting to burn a little,  
sir.

WINKY  
Give it a couple more minutes.  
You scared?

BUMPS  
If you say this'll get rid of my  
bumps--

WINKY  
Are you scared of dying?

Bumps doesn't answer.

WINKY (CONT'D)  
I am. Any pilot who says he isn't  
is nothing but a liar.

BUMPS  
(re: his face)  
It's getting real hot.

WINKY  
You're all alright. The only  
thing I want, when it comes... My  
father brought me up saying:  
strong black men don't cry. And  
all the...all the hell he ever had  
to deal with; never cried, never  
complained. Just worked hard to  
give my family opportunities. Now  
I get the rib all the time:  
"Winky, you one of them educated  
Negroes. You're too soft." Being  
smart doesn't make you soft. And  
I will I never not be my father's  
son; a strong black man. When  
circumstances finally overtake  
me...I'm not going to cry. And  
knowing how I'll face my end...I'm  
not so scared of it.

Bumps takes this all in. In the process, his completely  
forgotten about the magic powder on his face.

WINKY (CONT'D)  
Your face oughta be about burning  
up by now.

BUMPS  
...Yeah....

Bumps splashes water on his face, washes the paste off.

WINKY  
Let me see.

Winky takes a look. A smooth shave. A few bumps remain, but they are not nearly as egregious as previously. Winky gives a smile.

WINKY (CONT'D)

Yeah. We're gonna have to get you a new nickname.

131 EXT. RAMITELLI BASE - AFTERNOON

131

We are at the outer edge of the runway. Airmen have started to gather in anticipation of the 51s being flown in. Coffee talks with them, schools them as it were on the state of war technology. As he speaks, Joe saunters over to the group looking all salty with himself.

COFFEE

The Germans're some tough customers. Haven't even seen the worst they've got to offer yet. You know Hitler's got some surprises for when we get to Berlin.

JOE

Quit telling 'em ghost stories, Coffee. Act like the Nazis got ray guns and space ships.

COFFEE

They got the V1s. Rocket powered bombs. Why don't you ask the Brits about that?

JOE

And the Brits are shooting 'em down easy as they please. Unless the Jerries can invent something that don't die, there ain't nothing we can't put a bullet in.

Coffee pulls a photo out of his pocket. It is a blurry picture of a jet.

COFFEE

You better hope you can put a bullet in this.

JOE

What is it?

COFFEE

A jet-powered fighter...German... shot down three P-51's last week. If you're smart, you'll hightail it if you see one of these child'en.

JOE

That's the fun part; we don't have a choice.

The SOUND OF PLANE ENGINES begins to rumble in the distance.

RAY  
They're coming in.

The SOUND OF PLANE ENGINES begins to rumble in the distance.

Everyone looks to the skies. Gliding in from high above comes FOUR FLIGHTS of brand spankin' new North American P-51Ds - perhaps the single greatest icon of American air power from the Second World War. It is the state of the art of aircraft design and technology up to that point. The planes have the most rudimentary AAC markings.

Among the pilots making this first flight are Marty, Deke, Bumps and Smokey.

NEON  
Sweet Lord, that is beautiful.

STICKS  
How they flying?

JOE  
How they fly, Bumps?

BUMPS  
Like angels.

COFFEE  
I don't know any angels that carry  
six fifty calibre machine guns.

MARTY  
Got seventy-two hours until the  
first mission. Gonna need 'em all  
marked up and ready to fly.

COFFEE  
I'll soldier up some colors.

JAMMER  
Something good, Coffee.

COFFEE  
Loud and proud. When they see  
you, they'll know you're coming.

132 INT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE/BRIEFING TENT - DAY

132

We've got a large group of men in the briefing tent who listen intently as Stance addresses them.

STANCE  
The bombers will be taking off  
Foggia Air Base, heading for  
today's target: the Ploesti oil  
fields. We have to make the  
Rendezvous Point to the second.  
If we are as much as a minute  
late, the bombers turn back and  
the mission is scrubbed. We will  
not have scrubbed mission on our  
record.

GROUP

Sir.

STANCE

To make the RP on schedule, we have to get seventy-two planes in the air in less than three minutes. Five second intervals between each take off, and we keep to that. Once you're in the air, Dead Reckon to the RP. The bombers operate on a different RF. You won't be able to talk to them at the rendezvous point. One plane will split from the group, approach the bombers on a parallel tact.

133 EXT. RAMITELLI BASE/FLIGHT LINE - DAY

133

We see a good-sized contingent of AIRMEN walking for the flight line. THE CAMERA IS ON THE AIRMEN, so for the moment we can see only them walking. As they do, we hear:

STANCE (V.O.)

Let 'em see your colors and ID you as friendly. Then you get on station, you stay on station.

THE CAMERA ANGELS AROUND as the men approach the NEWLY PAINTED MUSTANGS, Coffee and his crew still putting the finishing touches on several of the planes. Among the markings that stand out are - of course - the tails of the planes which are painted a BRIGHT RED. The color so bright it almost dares an adversary to get their dukes up. These planes are proud, majestic machines made even more so by their war paint. Coffee steps up to the group.

COFFEE

Loud and proud?

MARTY

Loud and damn proud.

134 EXT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE/FLIGHT LINE - MORNING

134

Its early morning, the sun just barely breaking the horizon. The flight line is packed this morning. Sixty-four planes are lined up and waiting all along the flight line. They are in a "J" pattern running the length of the PSP, with the lead planes hooking over to the tip of the runway.

Pilots climb into their planes as their crews make final adjustments of the crafts. ON THE WING OF EACH PLANE SITS A CREW CHIEF.

Into the cockpits the pilots place various good luck charms; a photo of their girl or someone special to them. Deke, again, puts that picture of Black Jesus under his gun sight. We see Smokey STUFFING A RAG IN THE BOTTOM OF A CUP. He then gives it a test by spitting into it.

The airmen secured in their planes, they all look to the control tower. There is an OFFICER standing at the window with a FLARE GUN in one hand. He looks toward ANOTHER OFFICER in the tower who listens intently to the headset he has on.

The airmen all wait...watch...

The gravity of the mission is not lost on a single man. So, too, is it held by the CREWMEN who wait anxiously off to the side of the line. Coffee can barely stand the moroseness of the moment.

COFFEE  
You act like it's a funeral. Let  
'em know you're with 'em, hey.

The Crewmen begin to CHEER the pilots on, wish them well and encourage the pilots to give the Jerries hell.

The officer with the headset throws a signal to the officer with the flare gun. The officer with the gun raises it, then fires. A GREEN FLARE STREAKS UPWARD.

Marty, in his plane, raises a hand in the air and swirls it. At that moment ALL THE PILOTS START THEIR ENGINES. Seventy planes winding up at once. The sounds of both the Creation and the Eschaton pale in comparison.

From that moment on, the flight line becomes a precision machine. Starting with Marty and Ray, side by side, two planes head down the runway, into the air and begin a bank that will take them around the field. But before the planes are even off the ground, the next two are already heading down the runway. Planes along the line keep moving up and moving up. Just before they get to the runway, the planes are topped off by a FUEL TRUCK. The crew chiefs jump off the wings, and the planes rip down the runways again and again and again.

135 EXT. SKY - DAY

135

We've got a BEAUTY SHOT of the Red Tails streaking through the sky. A mighty flight of bad-assed metal birds out to do their job.

136 INT. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

136

Over his radio, Marty gives the order.

MARTY  
Subsoil Red One: Test your guns.

137 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

137

Nearly in unison, the pilots fire off their weapons. A flight of tracers rips through the air. It is an impressive display to say the least.

WE SEE SEVERAL SHOTS of the Red Tails continuing on through the air. THESE SHOTS SHOULD CONVEY THE COVERAGE OF BOTH DISTANCE AND TIME. LOCAL FARMERS watch the planes cut through the sky.

138 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - DAY

138

Marty checks his watch. It's 0700 on the nose. Marty looks around, but he doesn't see the Bombers. Are the Red Tails late to the rendezvous? Did they miss the bombers? Into his mike:

MARTY

Subsoil Red One. Anybody see the bombers?

139 INT. JAMMER'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

139

Jammer responds.

JAMMER

Bubbles Red One; I got nothing.

140 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

140

We can see on Marty's face that missing the bombers is an idea he does not care to contemplate.

JAMMER (V.O.)

Did we miss the bombers?

MARTY

Winky?

WINKY (V.O.)

I Dead Reckon same as you. We're on time, on target.

SUICIDE (V.O.)

Easy, what's the call?

141 I/E. DEKE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

141

Deke spots something: a group of Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses. Their four Wright Cyclone engines keeping each of these massive beasts aloft as they lumber steadily through the air. Excitedly:

DEKE

Subsoil White Two; bogeys, three low!

142 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

142

Marty spots the planes. Relieved, he calls to Ray:

MARTY

Subsoil Red two, sally over and let 'em know we're friendly.

Ray peels his plane off, starts heading down for the bombers.

143 INT. LEAD BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS

143

As Joe has spotted the bombers, one of the LEAD BOMBER'S GUNNERS looks out of his gun port and spots the Red Tails. Calling to the MISSION CAPTAIN:

GUNNER  
 Bogies, nine-high. Counting...  
 Must be 70 chicks. Got one coming  
 down.

MISSION CAPTAIN  
 Everybody, on your guns.

And real quick we see ALL THE GUNNERS of the plane scramble into their positions, chamber their weapons. With all six of their armament ports manned, we clearly see why these planes were called flying fortresses.

144 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

144

Though Ray is supposed to be coming in parallel to the bombers, he starts to DRIFT RIGHT, his guns turning in toward the planes. He looks like he's setting up to fire on the bomber.

145 I/E. LEAD BOMBER - CONTINUOUS

145

The Gunner eyes Ray.

GUNNER  
 He's turning to fire!

MISSION CAPTAIN  
 Put 'em down!

The Gunner brings his weapon to bare on Marty.

146 EXT. MARTY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

146

Marty sees Joe turning in. Calling on his radio:

MARTY  
 Red Two...Ray Gun you're drifting  
 right! Straighten out!

Ray corrects, straightens out. He waggles his wings for the bomber.

147 I/E. LEAD BOMBER - CONTINUOUS

147

The CO-PILOT sees Ray straighten out and waggle his wings.

CO-PILOT  
 Hold your fire. They're ours.

MISSION CAPTAIN  
 Red tails? What group is that?

The Co-Pilot takes up a pair of binoculars gives Ray's plane a looking over.

148 POV - BINOCULARS

148

We see a tight shot of Ray who throws a salute to the bomber crew. IN THE SHOT, RAY IS VERY CLEARLY A BLACK MAN.

149 INT. LEAD BOMBER - CONTINUOUS

149

With a bit of a stunned look on his face, the Co-Pilot lowers the binoculars.

CO-PILOT  
He's colored.

The Captain kinda laughs. The Co-Pilot remains insistent, shoving the binoculars at the Captain.

CO-PILOT (CONT'D)  
The hell if I'm joking. Look!

The Captain takes the binoculars, looks.

CAPTAIN  
Jesus Christ...

CO-PILOT  
They can't all be coloreds.

CAPTAIN  
That one fighter group; all spooks...

CO-PILOT  
And they gave 'em to us? What the hell do we do?

CAPTAIN  
...Shit...

The Captain gets on the radio.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
Tacoma Red One to all planes: our cover's for shit, boys. Everybody eyes open. When we hit the IP, we're as good as on our own.

150 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

150

We see FLYING SHOTS of the Red Tails watching over the Bombers. Because the P-51s are faster than the B-17s, the 51s have to WEAVE BACK AND FORTH above the bombers so as to not put too much distance on the planes. It is an odd and awesome sight, this air armada making its way through the heavens.

151 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - LATER 151

Marty radios the other planes:

MARTY  
Subsoil Red One: We're past the  
IP. Everybody be alert, eyes out.

152 EXT. SKY - LATER 152

The planes fly on. We should be able to sense the growing tension among the men, both Red Tails and Bomber crews alike: they're are in enemy territory now. Bad things could happen at any second.

RAY GUN  
Where're the Germans?

JOE  
You in a hurry?

153 INT. SUICIDE'S PLANE - LATER 153

Suicide is looking around, looking around... All of a sudden he spots something that sits him back in his chair. Above them GERMAN PLANES. A lot of them. They number at least as many as the Red Tails, and they are moving to pounce from the perch.

SUICIDE  
Talley! Bandits, three o'clock  
high!

By the time he gets the word out, the German 109s are racing down toward the bombers from above.

154 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 154

Marty calls an order:

MARTY  
Tighten up! Make 'em scatter.

As the Red Tails PULL IN AROUND THE BOMBERS, the 109s have no option but to scatter, or run into the 51s. The 109s dive below the cover and the bombers, then pull up and circle just beyond the American planes. They hold their position there.

155 INT. CAPTAIN BRYCE'S BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS 155

CAPTAIN BRYCE, a white B-17 pilot is flying Tailend Charlie. He spots the German planes. Bryce flies with his Co-Pilot, FLYNT Anticipating the worst, he radios his crew:

BRYCE  
Bandits! On your guns.

156 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

156

The Red Tails watch the German planes circle.

NEON (V.O.)  
What are they doing?

MARTY  
Waiting for us to chase 'em.

JOE (V.O.)  
And when they figure out we're not going to?

The German planes start to move for the American planes. For a moment they form a tight "wolf pack" and fly with all the speed their open throttles will allow. Despite the fact the planes themselves are inanimate objects, they travel with a certain menace.

MARTY  
They just figured it out. All Planes: punch tanks, pick your targets. Do not leave the bombers!

157 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

157

As the 109s close, the Red Tails PUNCH THEIR TANKS, then fly out just far enough to form a perimeter.

We see the forward flank of the Red Tails and the German's "collide;" the planes coming within contact range, opening fire, then cutting back to remain within close proximity to the American bombers. The action, in fact, should feel PERILOUSLY CLOSE to the bombers.

158 INT. BRYCE'S BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS

158

Inside the Bomber, the airmen don't quite know what to make of the Red Tails and their close cover escort.

BRYCE  
What are these guys doing?

FLYNT  
I suspect they're protecting us.

159 I/E. SUICIDE'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

159

We come back in on SUICIDE chasing off German planes. As always he shows nothing but reckless abandon, and has as much fun as a man can while fighting a war. He gives a running commentary as he lets fly with his guns.

SUICIDE  
There you go...Now what you got to say...Little something for you too, Jerry.

Suddenly TRACERS streak in from behind Suicide, and real quick the fun ends as German plane comes up on his six.

SUICIDE (CONT'D)

Aw, hell.

Suicide tries to steer clear, but the German's got a deflection shot lined up. The tracers arc closer and closer to slamming into Suicide... Suddenly, ANOTHER SET OF TRACERS FILLS THE SKY. They rip into the German plane and send it burning for the ground. Indiana's plane comes zipping down next to Suicide's. The young man throws Suicide a thumbs up, then he expertly flips his plane and heads right back into the fight. Lightly:

SUICIDE (CONT'D)

Well, hell; Indiana can fly.

160 EXT. SKY - SIMULTANEOUS

160

WE KEY ON DEKE who's chasing a 109 away from a Bomber. Once the German is gone, Deke makes a tight turn, finds another 109 directly before him. He rips off a couple of shots. This 109 turns tail and runs away as well. Again, Deke banks, and again he finds a German plane before him - WE GET AN IDEA FROM THIS JUST HOW THICK THE AIR IS WITH PLANES - This time Deke stays on the plane just a bit longer. He lets a stream of tracers go and hits the plane. The moment the 109 begins to spiral away, the German pilot bails out, his body goes sweeping past "our" plane. Deke hasn't much time to savor the victory. A STREAM OF BULLETS RAKES ACROSS DEKE'S CANOPY. AND A STRING OF HOLES PUNCTURE THE GLASS.

161 INT. DEKE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

161

Deke clutches his chest as though he's been hit. He looks at his hand, his chest... No blood. He's okay. It is nothing less than a miracle. He looks to the picture under his gun sight:

DEKE

Thank you, Black Jesus.

162 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

162

WE KEY ON JOE who, as with the other pilots, is chasing off the 109s. He fires, turns. Fires at another 109, then turns from that plane. As Joe turns, he finds an American Bomber directly before him. Joe jams the stick forward. His plane dives hard to avoid hitting the plane.

WE KEY ON Marty who is himself busy chasing German planes from the bombers. Caught up in what he's doing he does not think, nor should he have to think about what his wingman is doing. That is, until TRACER FIRE comes in off his three o'clock. Marty jukes his plane, then looks. A German is coming in hard to his right. Clearly, Ray doesn't see him.

163 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

163

Marty calls to Ray.

MARTY

Ray Gun, watch your three!

The warning comes too late. RAY'S PLANE IS HIT. THE ENGINE BLOWS TEARING A NASTY HOLE IN THE SIDE OF THE PLANE ALONG THE COCKPIT. The plane itself belches smoke and starts downward.

MARTY (CONT'D)

Ray Gun...! Jump, Ray! Bail out!

164 EXT. SKY - SIMULTANEOUS

164

If only bailing out was as easy as just jumping. But no ejector seats in these primitive planes. Ray has to force the canopy open. Damage to the frame keeps it from coming all the way open. Ray's got to shove it...shove it...finally shove it open. Once its clear, Ray tries to pull himself from the cockpit as the plane shutters and goes into a couple of TIGHT FAST SPINS, the action so violent Ray's knocked back down and slammed side to side against the cockpit, whipped around like a rag doll. The plane inverts, goes into an UPSIDEDOWN FLAT SPIN. The negative Gs press Ray hard into his seat as the plane drops downward. Ray tries to force himself from the cockpit, but it's like trying to force himself loose from the top of a free falling elevator.

MARTY (V.O.)

Ray Gun, get out!

No good. Ray can't get out from under this rock as it screams toward the earth. But the stress on the plane begins to tear it apart. ONE WING FLIES LOOSE AND RIPS UPWARD INTO THE AIR. That's enough to free the plane from its flat spin. It rights and whips round and round. Ray struggles...forcibly ejects himself from the plane which continues to spin ABOVE HIM.

Ray free falls for a few seconds before his chute billows open in the manner of a sprouting, white flower.

But it's not over. THE SECOND WING TEARS FROM THE PLANE. Now the fuselage drops and heads down like a sinking ship, the prop driving the what's left of it RIGHT FOR RAY. Hanging in the air, drifting, there's nothing Ray can do. No way for him to move. The fuselage races toward him, the prop looking like a vengeful buzz saw... Then, at the last second, the plane PITCHES AND CUTS RIGHT AROUND RAY, the prop wash kicking him in the air, but doing no serious damage.

165 I/E. JAMMER'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

165

Jammer spots Ray's chute.

JAMMER

Bubbles Red One to Subsoil Red One; his chute's open.

166 EXT. FIELD - SIMULTANEOUS

166

Ray lands with a hard thud, is dragged a bit by his billowing chute. He scrambles to get himself free of the silk and cords, and just does so as some GERMAN SOLDIERS come running up on him

with their guns at the ready. Ray tries to stumble away, but the German's aren't having that. They scream at Ray:

GERMAN GROUND SOLDIER  
Bewegen Sie nicht! Bleiben Sie, wo  
Sie sind!

The moment is very hectic. Very chaotic. WE SHOULD VERY MUCH GET THE SENSE THAT ONE WRONG MOVE, ONE WRONG WORD SPOKEN AND RAY IS GOING TO GET SHOT. Ray tries to surrender, but one of the SOLDIERS steps up and SLUGS RAY WITH THE BUTT OF HIS RIFLE. Ray goes down, bleeding from a gash to the head. They react to the black man, laugh...

167 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

167

FLAK BEGINS EXPLODING in the sky leaving black clouds of smoke marking their detonations. IN ADDITION TO THE EXPLOSIONS THEMSELVES, WE SHOULD HEAR THE ZIP OF SHRAPNEL as it rips through the air after it is formed by the exploding shells. This field of black clouds and hot metal marks the path of the Bombers.

168 I/E. LEAD BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS

168

As the Bombers head into their attack alley, the MISSION CAPTAIN and his CO-PILOT give commands.

CO-PILOT  
Approaching the target.

MISSION CAPTAIN  
Open the bomb bay doors.  
Bombardier, you've got control.

169 I/E. LEAD BOMBER/BOMB BAY - CONTINUOUS

169

From INSIDE the darkened bomber the bomb bay doors open. As light floods into the space, we can see the RACKS OF BOMBS that are now ready to rain down on the target.

170 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

170

As the Bombers head into the alley the German fighters back off. They circle waiting for the Bombers to finish their run and emerge from the heavy flak.

171 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

171

Joe watches this curious sight.

JOE  
They stopped fighting.

MARTY (V.O.)  
They can't chase the bombers  
through the Flak, and they don't  
care about us.

172 EXT. GROUND - SIMULTANEOUS

172

The bombers rain their devastation down on a MILITARY INSTALLATION. We can see the bombs going off in succession as they strike the target area again and again and again.

173 EXT. SKY - SIMULTANEOUS

173

As the Bombers do their unpleasant chore, the fighters - both the Red Tails and the Germans - circle at points separate from each other and clear of the flak. They are much like boxers in their neutral corners awaiting the sound of the bell. In this case the "bell" is A GREEN FLARE which arcs upward from the German positions. It's a signal that the ACK-ACK fire is about to curtail. Once it does, as the bombers clear the bombing alley, the German planes throttle up and head right for them.

174 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

174

Marty puts out the order:

MARTY  
All planes; back on station!

175 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

175

The Red Tails, same as the German planes, get back into the fight. Immediately both sets of planes head for the converge: the American bombers. As before, for the Red Tails it is a nearly insane scramble to chase away the Germans who are absolutely tenacious in their resolve to drop the bombers. The Red Tails skills are hard pressed as the Bombers exit the alley and start for home. The German's knowing that the opportunity to score kills is receding by the second.

Also, the planes have to DODGE FIRE FROM THE BOMBERS' GUNNERS as well. Constantly WE HEAR pilots radioing others to "check your fire." It's an obstacle course the fighters have to run full throttle.

And it is easy enough, while they're doing all that, to become fatally distracted. At the moment Winky is in the process of falling into just such a predicament. He is so focused turning back a German plane he's not cognizant of a fighter that's creeping up behind him, lining Winky up in his sights. The German plane begins to send a wash of tracers for Winky. But before the German can adjust to the target, ANOTHER SPAY OF TRACERS rips into the German fighter and sends it spinning away with a trail of smoke behind it. And speeding INTO FRAME, taking up a spot behind Winky is his wing man: Bumps.

176 I/E. BUMP'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

176

Bumps radios to Winky:

BUMPS  
Got 'em! Got one!

WINKY  
There you go, young man!

177 I/E. BRYCE'S BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS

177

Almost free and clear of the bombing alley, Bryce's plane doesn't quite make it. AN EXPLODING FLAK SHELL TEARS A HOLE IN THE SIDE OF THE BOMBER. One of the CREWMEN takes a hit from the shrapnel. He's thrown across the interior of the plane, and goes down in pain. He's NOT dead, but he is wounded in the arm. As is the B-17. One of the engines is HIT and CATCHES FIRE. Bryce barks orders to his FLYNT.

BRYCE  
Cut two! Feather three!

178 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

178

Joe spots Bryce's bomber slowing down.

JOE  
Red one, got a bomber dropping off.

MARTY (V.O.)  
See it.  
(Over his radio:)  
Subsoil Red One to Bubbles Red One. Get the bombers home, Jammer. We'll stay with this one.

JAMMER (V.O.)  
Bubbles Red One, Roger.

179 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

179

Marty, along with Joe and Neon - on Joe's wing - cut back for Bryce's Bomber. There are TWO 190s closing on the bomber. The Red Tails give them a sign with a shot across their bows that cuts off their approach and sends them veering from the bomber at a sharp angle. The Red Tails coming in so fast, they inadvertently buzz the bomber. Marty easily chases one of the 190s off, but the other is a bit more tenacious. The German comes around for another pass on the Bomber. Joe, daring as ever, puts himself right between the German and the Bomber. The two planes race for the converge, BOTH FIRING THEIR GUNS. The 190 lands a few hits on Joe, but the pilot doesn't have the stones to stay on course. He veers off, and knowing he's out numbered, flies away. Joe is left with, yet again, another slightly busted and smoking plane.

180 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

180

Marty is, to say the least, disappointed in Joe's tactics.

MARTY  
Lightening! You can't win playing a game of chicken.

JOE (V.O.)  
You can if the other guy's  
chicken.

MARTY  
Take it back to base. Explain it  
to Coffee.

As Joe flies off, Marty radios Neon:

MARTY (CONT'D)  
How's the seventeen?

NEON (V.O.)  
She's got one engine gone, one  
barely making RPMs. He's not  
going to make Foggia.

MARTY  
Let's get him to Ramitelli.

181 I/E. BRYCE'S BOMBER - CONTINUOUS

181

Bryce and Flynt are working hard at keeping their plane aloft as  
Marty flies up, waggles his wings.

FLYNT  
Captain... Follow him?

BRYCE  
It's follow him, or ditch.

182 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

182

The B-17 drops in behind Marty and Neon as they head for home.

183 EXT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE - EVENING

183

The other pilots have already made their way home as Marty and  
Neon land ahead of the B-17.

184 I/E. BRYCE'S BOMBER - CONTINUOUS

184

As the bomber rolls to a stop, Bryce starts to go through his  
check down. As he does, Flynt looks out the cockpit window. He  
sees Marty and Neon pulling themselves from their cockpits. He  
sees Coffee and his crew beginning to gather as Bullard and  
Stance arrive. What he sees...a whole lot of black men.

FLYNT  
Captain...

Bryce looks...sees the black Airmen.

BRYCE  
At least we know we're not in  
Berlin.

Owens starts to open the hatch.

BRYCE (CONT'D)  
What are you doing?

OWENS  
Getting a medic for Goose.

BRYCE  
Shut the hatch.

OWENS  
...Captain--

BRYCE  
Shut it!

Owens takes a beat, then shuts the hatch.

BRYCE (CONT'D)  
Nobody goes out there. That's an order.

KELLISON  
Goose is bleeding.

BRYCE  
Break out the kit and patch him up.  
(to Flynt)  
Get on the radio to Big Fence. Have 'em fly somebody out here to get us.

FLYNT  
Fly out here where? I gotta go out there to find out where we are.

BRYCE  
We're at the nigger airbase! You tell 'em to get us out of here!

185 EXT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE - SIMULTANEOUS

185

Standing off a bit from the bomber are Bullard, Stance, Marty, Joe, Neon, Coffee and Sticks. They all stand and stare at the bomber, waiting for men who - it becomes apparent - are not going to exit the plane. After a long beat:

STICKS  
I don't think they're coming out.

MARTY  
They gotta come out.

COFFEE  
They don't gotta do nothing.

NEON  
They're going to sit in there all night? Doesn't make sense.

BULLARD  
Coffee, can you do work on a 17?

\*

COFFEE  
Think we can rub some dirt in it, sir. And if we can't find the dirt, we'll soldier some up.

BULLARD  
Get 'em fixed, and get 'em home. It'll be better all around.

NEON  
Sit in a plane all night. What kind of sense does that make?

MARTY  
Think if I explain that to them how cold it gets at night--

BULLARD  
What exactly are you planning on saying that'll do your talking any better your P-51s did today? Leave 'em how they are. They'll get along.

As the group starts to break up.

NEON  
Let's go get mess.

MARTY  
I'll be there in a minute.

186 INT. TENT - MOMENTS LATER

186

Marty enters his tent. He looks like a guy who's carrying the weight of this world and a few others on his back. He takes a bottle of liquor rations, then lowers himself to his bunk. Marty takes a drink, then utters plaintively:

MARTY  
...I'm sorry, Ray Gun...

187 INT. RAMITELLI BASE/MESS TENT - NIGHT

187

Among airmen playing cards, eating and generally hanging out are Smokey, Deke, Indiana, Neon and Suicide. Bumps is also present, and Winky is close by reading. Neon is still stuck on the bomber crew spending the night in the plane.

NEON  
They've got nothing to eat but maybe some K-rations... You tell me how that makes sense sitting in that bomber.

SUICIDE  
"Bigotry doesn't make sense."  
Somebody write that down. Now I

(MORE)

SUICIDE (CONT'D)

know why you're head is so damn  
big; it's all full up with good  
thinking.

INDIANA

I got something.

Indiana gathers up food from everyone's plates and piles it on  
his own plate.

SMOKEY

What in the hell...?

INDIANA

Be back.

Carrying the plate, Indiana heads off.

SUICIDE

The boy is touched.

(to Bumps:)

Hey, Bumps. Set me up with a pack  
of smokes.

BUMPS

I don't think so. Not for  
nothing. Now, if you've got  
something of value you'd like to  
trade we can have that  
conversation.

SMOKEY

"Have that conversation?" Shoots  
down one plane and he...? Boy, we  
took you in and treated you like  
our own, and don't get any thanks  
or gratitude for it.

BUMPS

Thanks and gratitude you can have.  
Just not whiskey and cigarettes.

As others laugh in support of him, Bumps shoots a grin to Winky.  
Smokey picks this up.

SMOKEY

Winky, what the hell did you do to  
this boy?

WINKY

Gave him an education. Nothing  
stands up against that.

Carrying a plate of food, Joe finally arrives and sits at the  
table.

DEKE

Late to the party, Lightning.

JOE

I got hung up with a little  
something.

Joe takes a moment, then smiles a broad smile.

JOE (CONT'D)  
I sank a destroyer.

Some disbelieving laughter from the group.

JOE (CONT'D)  
I did. I sank one. Was limping home, saw her all by her lonesome like she got split up from a convoy or something... So, I introduced her to the bottom of the sea.

WINKY  
How? You weren't carrying any bombs.

JOE  
I shot it.

Everybody just stares at Joe. Not a one of them believes what he's saying. Selling the soap:

JOE (CONT'D)  
I shot it with bullets. I shot it and it went right down. Blew up first, then it sank.

SUICIDE  
Well...I can't hardly wait to see the film of that; you shooting a destroyer and sinking it.

SMOKEY  
(laughing)  
Blowing it up.

SUICIDE  
Blowing it up, and then sinking it. You got film, right?

Oh yeah. The film. Joe just kinda looks around at all the unbelieving faces.

JOE  
Hell, yes, I got the film. Pass me the hot sauce.

They all laugh. Indiana comes back in and sits down.

DEKE  
Where you been?

INDIANA  
Took all those pork chops, put 'em right under that bomber. See how long they sit in there when they start smelling some grub.

Everybody gives a good, long laugh. Except for Joe who hits the group with a cold fact.

JOE

Except, now your pork chops are sitting on the flight line, and you've got nothing to eat.

Indiana sits a beat, then GETS UP AND HEADS BACK OUT. Suicide gives a shake of his head.

SUICIDE

He is absolutely touched.

188 I/E. BRYCE'S BOMBER - NIGHT

188

The crew is down in the belly of the plane. They huddle, shivering, looking tired and hungry. Owens gives Goose's jacked arm a looking at as Goose moans. It's still bleeding.

OWENS

Goose needs fresh bandages.

BRYCE

He's all right.

The crew sits silently for a moment. Silently enough you can almost hear teeth chattering. Then:

FLYNT

Cold as hell out here.

(beat)

It's cold as--

BRYCE

Heard you. ...Out there doing God knows what to the plane.

KELLISON

I think they're fixing it.

BRYCE

Shut up!

RYAN

They got stoves in the tents. See the smoke coming out of the pipes? ...That's gotta be from a stove.

Once again Bryce says nothing. Finally Ryan starts to move for the plane's hatch.

BRYCE

Where you going?

RYAN

Goose needs a medic.

BRYCE

You get away from that hatch.

Ryan does no such thing.

BRYCE (CONT'D)

Gunner, I swear to Christ when we get back I will bring you up on charges.

RYAN

For what? For getting a man tended to?

FLYNT

Tended to by shines? Where the hell are your principles?

RYAN

What are you trying to prove? That you're so stubborn you'd rather let a man bleed out than get help? You have my congrats, Captain. You sure put the coloreds in their place.

Ryan opens the hatch, then starts to help Goose from the plane. He's followed by Owens, Kellison, Flynt and two others. Only Bryce and TWO MORE CREWMEN remain on the bomber. Bryce growls at the men as they exit the plane.

BRYCE

Every one of you is going up on charges. Leave this plane, you will be disciplined! You hear me!

189 INT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE/MESS TENT - SIMULTANEOUS

189

Having gotten on in the evening, the men continue to unwind. Some ELLA FITZGERALD plays - "I'm Just a Lucky So and So." In on the drinks and CARDS now are Joe, Deke and Neon along with Smokey, Suicide, Bumps and Winky. Marty has now joined the group. Deke is relating the days miracle:

DEKE

You can see the bullet line right across my canopy. Oughta be dead. Oughta be. Don't have a scratch. That's Black Jesus.

JOE

Go on with that.

NEON

Deke can't believe how he pleases?

JOE

Believe in what? Some...voodoo religion?

Head to the Heavens:

DEKE

Forgive him, Black Jesus. He knows not what he does.

SMOKEY

What's wrong with Jesus being  
Negro?

JOE

I got no problem with Black Jesus  
or White Jesus, except that there  
ain't no Jesus, so it don't matter.

Putting what's left of his pork chop on Joe's plate:

SUICIDE

When the Lightning strikes, you  
can warm that up for me.

BUMPS

You really don't believe in God?

JOE

The whole world trying to kill  
itself, and you ask that?

MARTY

He just talks tough. I think he  
likes the sound of it.

JOE

Believe how you please. I'll save  
my faith for something that does  
me good..

Joe lays out the cards. Trip queens. Good enough to win the  
hand.

JOE (CONT'D)

Right like that. That's right.  
Where's Black Jesus now? Out  
cooling it with White Buddha?

Some groans from the men as Joe takes the pot. One by one their  
attention goes to the FRONT OF THE TENT. Standing there, with  
some trepidation, are the white fliers. For a beat, neither  
group says anything. Then:

RYAN

We've got a man, could use some  
looking at.

WINKY

Sure, Charlie. We'll get him  
taken care of.

Winky and Suicide cross over. They lead Goose and the two other  
UNNAMED CREWMEN away. Ryan, Owens, Kellison and Flynt remain.  
Marty steps to them.

MARTY

How you all fixed for chow?

FLYNT

Haven't had a lick since 0330.

MARTY

I think we can do you something square.

OWENS

Sir, we'll take whatever food you've got, and drink anything too thin to eat.

190 INT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE/MOVIE TENT [SEE FILM] - LATER 190

Marty, Joe, Deke, Smokey, and twenty more Red Tails sit in a darkened tent watching Joe's gun camera footage as he heads toward the destroyer, blowing it up. Neon and Bumps sit with Ryan, Owens, Kellison and Flynt.

The movie ends as they all hoot and laugh and jump on Joe. THEN, AS THE LIGHTS GO UP:

SMOKEY

Luckiest so and so I've ever seen.

JOE

All your college smarts, they never taught you how to shoot a boat?

FLYNT

You coloreds are crazy good!

JOE

The word's Negro.

KELLISON

Whatever the word, you're crazy good.

FLYNT

Well, I tell ya, we were damned surprised to see "Negroes" flying fighter escort.

MARTY

They didn't tell you before the mission?

OWENS

If they would've we wouldn't have gone. ...With respect, sir.

FLYNT

It was unexpected, is what the Lieutenant means.

KELLISON

A crime's what it is; you all not getting your due. You all are some pretty good fliers.

NEON

Well ain't that a pip? Got every one of your bombers home, and we're just pretty good.

FLYNT

It's not a question of grit. Grit, you got. But your flying... That was pretty good, but not top of the class.

JOE

Why don't you take us to school.

FLYNT

Well... Couldn't see everything. We were making our run and all...

DEKE

The first thing that comes to mind is fine.

KELLISON

Coming out of an attack...

FLYNT

That's one: some of you, when you're breaking off an attack, takes you too long to get yourselves back to center. Give the Jerries an opening like that, they'll take it.

MARTY

Takes a second to get your bearings. Gotta figure out which way is up.

OWENS

What about your dog tags?

The group just kinda stares. Owens takes off his tags. Looping the tags's chain over his thumb:

OWENS (CONT'D)

Hang your tags from your gunsights, like this. You always know which way is down. It'll buy you a couple of seconds.

FLYNT

But a couple of seconds at three hundred miles an hour is the difference between who flies and who dies. And when you're making a run at a plane, try coming in inverted. Gives you some giddy up when you break off. The vets never gave you any lessons off the chalkboard? Wagon wheel, Stall Spiral, Shondell maneuver...?

MARTY

We're segregated. We couldn't learn from veteran white pilots, and there were no veteran Negro pilots to teach us. Everything we know we've learned under fire.

FLYNT

They just built you to spill, didn't they? Tell you what; another cup of coffee'll buy you all we know.

191 EXT. RAMITELLI BASE - MORNING

191

The bomber crew, fronted by Flynt is just beyond their plane. Bullard and Stance are present as Coffee breaks things down for the bomber boys.

COFFEE

Stitched up the hydraulics best we could. It's field surgery, but as long as you take it at a stroll it oughta get you home.

Marty hands Flynt a couple of thermoses full of coffee.

MARTY

For the trip back.

FLYNT

Just so you know, the next time we go out on a mission we're requesting you Red Tails.

The men exchange salutes, then the bomber crew heads for their plane.

192 INT. BOMBER - CONTINUOUS

192

Flynt and the rest of the crew climb into the plane. Bryce is inside looking tired, cold and hungry. Flynt gives him a howdy-do.

FLYNT

Morning, Captain. How'd you sleep?

BRYCE

That coffee?

FLYNT

It is. But you wouldn't want any. It's colored coffee.

KELLISON

Negro. The word is Negro.

THE SOUND OF ROARING PLANE ENGINES TAKES US TO:

193 EXT. SKY - DAY

193

As we come into the scene the Red Tails are already engaged in protecting a SQUAD OF BOMBERS FROM GERMAN PLANES. As previously, the action is thick and furious as the Red Tails dart around the bombers while they chase off German fighters.

WE KEY ON SMOKEY shooting a plane before him - spitting in his chaw cup to punctuate the kill - then making a tight spin shot on a passing plane.

194 I/E. BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS

194

The PILOT sees a GERMAN PLANE closing off their nine o'clock. Calling to his GUNNER:

PILOT  
Gunner; nine o'clock!

The German plane begins to fire at the Bomber. Just as it gets off a few shots, TRACERS streak in from the 109's three o'clock - from behind and parallel to the bomber. The tracers T-bone the 109, split it in half, and send the two halves FLIPPING VIOLENTLY AWAY IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS. Marty's plane COMES INTO FRAME parallel to the Bomber. It's Marty who has shot down the German. Marty throws a casual salute to the bomber pilot, then peels hard to the side and, with Deke on his wing, gets right back into formation around the planes.

195 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

195

WE KEY ON Suicide coming head on toward a 109 that's bearing down on a bomber. As the two planes head for the converge, Suicide - wild flyer that he is, and as Flynt previously instructed - FLIPS HIS PLANE AND CONTINUES ON INVERTED. He cuts loose with his guns. The German plane catches fire, it's wing snaps off. Suicide, inverted, easily peels sharply away from the burning wreckage with just a tug on his joystick.

196 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

196

Joe comes in on a 109 that's making a run at a bomber. He locks up a shot, and pulls his trigger. However, ONLY THE GUNS IN HIS LEFT WING FIRE. They're not enough to do the job.

JOE  
Hell! Guns are jammed. Neon...?

NEON (V.O.)  
Right here.

197 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

197

Neon throttles up, flies fast and hard right past Joe. Without throttling down, he gets on the 109s six and cuts loose with his guns just as the 109 comes to bare on the Bomber. A long and unrelenting stream of bullets tears into the 109. The bullets pining and sparking off the plane's frame. The 109 spits smoke

and catches fire. The German pilot wastes no time opening his canopy and jumping from the plane. Then, deftly, Neon pulls a wing tip pirouette to get back in the action, THE CAMERA STAYING WITH HIM ON THE SAME AXIS AS HE SPIRALS AROUND. Neon ripping off a few shots at passing 109s as he goes.

But where there is victory there is, too, loss. Bumps, flying wing to Winky, gets target fixation while pursuing a German fighter. He does not notice a German plane racing up behind him. The German plane fires. Bumps' plane takes a hit to its tail section. The rudder is shot up. The resulting damage forces Bump' plane into a hard turn and sends it on a trajectory which is AWAY FROM THE BOMBERS. Bumps works hard to regain control, but he does not until he is well adrift from the American group like a lone sailor lost at sea. And sticking with the metaphor, the Germans attack like sharks in the water. They slash back and forth at Bumps as they do flybys. Their tracers are their teeth. Bumps does all he can to fight back. He manages to score a couple of hits on one of the planes. But it's clear that - alone and with a damaged plane - time is not on his side.

198 I/E. WINKY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

198

Winky gets Bumps distress call:

BUMPS (V.O.)  
This is Subsoil Blue Four, I'm in trouble.

WINKY  
Coming around.

MARTY (V.O.)  
Blue Three, stay with the bombers.

WINKY  
Easy, it's Bumps!

MARTY  
Stay with the bombers. That's an order!

199 I/E. BUMP'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

199

Bumps fights with valor, but he fights in vain.

BUMPS  
Help me... Somebody help me!

WINKY (V.O.)  
Bumps, bail out! Get out of the plane.

By now Bumps's plane is burning and he himself is badly wounded. He pulls on the canopy, but can't get it open. He's not going anywhere.

WINKY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Jump!

With all the stoicism he can muster:

BUMPS  
...I'm not going to cry, Winky.  
Won't do it.

200 I/E. WINKY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

200

Winky listens to this last transmission from Bumps.

BUMPS (V.O.)  
Not gonna cry. Winky...? Winky!

Winky PULLS HIS HEAD SET OFF to silence Bump's words. Maybe Bumps will fight back the tears, but Winky can barely keep them from rolling down his eyes.

201 EXT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE - DAY

201

Mission over, the Red Tails are in various stages of return; some just landing, others already de-planing. Marty crosses after Winky who is marching solemnly toward his tent.

MARTY  
Winky... Winky!

Winky turns to face Marty, but he gives Marty all the regard of a perfect stranger.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
The orders were to stay with the  
bombers.

Marty waits for something from Winky, some kind of outburst or display of emotion. The fact that Winky gives him nothing...that just infuriates Marty.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
I just kept you from getting court  
martialed.

WINKY  
Anything else, sir?

MARTY  
...No...

WINKY  
Am I dismiss--

MARTY  
Go!

Winky heads off. Marty stands and stewes. Not from anger, but from a wounded pride that has been run through and through. He turns to a nearby Joe:

MARTY (CONT'D)  
Let's get a drink.

JOE  
I'll soldier up some rations.

MARTY  
I don't want rations, I want a  
drink.

202 EXT. STREET - EVENING

202

We are in an Italian town. From the number of UNIFORMED SERVICE MEN on the streets, clearly this area is a draw for military men. It's Marty, Joe, Suicide, Deke, Indiana and Smokey out walking and talking. Suicide's got a FLYER which bills another show for Deborah.

SUICIDE  
She's doing a show not but three  
miles from here.

SMOKEY  
Last time we went to see Love  
Bunny, you punted.

SUICIDE  
I wasn't ready for all that talk  
she was throwing me about  
responsibility..

MARTY  
Comes with the uniform. You're  
not ready for it, find another way  
to earn your keep.

The airmen throw looks to each other. Slightly snidely:

DEKE  
Yes, sir.

As they cross past a OFFICERS ONLY R&R CLUB, Joe sees some GERMAN OFFICERS being escorted inside by WHITE AMERICAN SOLDIERS. It is a sight he can't hardly process.

JOE  
Look at that. Officers Only club,  
but they let the Germans in.

DEKE  
They're officers. Military  
courtesy.

JOE  
I'm an officer.

MARTY  
Forget it.

Joe goes up to the guard at the door, who stops Joe.

GUARD  
Whites only.

JOE  
I'm an officer.

GUARD  
Not in here you ain't.

MARTY  
I said forget it, Joe.

The group heads on, Joe lingering just a bit, then moves on.

203 EXT. R&R CLUB - EVENING

203

Based on the empty glasses at the table, the men are clearly in the middle what has been a night of much drinking. Marty in particular has laid back a few. As Deke arrives with another round of beers:

JOE  
I feel like getting me one of those jet jobs...it's a singular wonder I haven't shot one of 'em down by now.

SMOKEY  
That is a singular wonder right there. Milwaukee's absolute finest.

MARTY  
I think after the war I'm going to make it my profession.

SUICIDE  
Brewing liquor?

MARTY  
Just drinking.

JOE  
(signifying)  
Nice, isn't it, getting a good drunk on. You don't have control, so nothing's your fault. The bottle takes the blame for everything.

INDIANA  
What about you?

JOE  
What about me, what?

INDIANA  
After the war what are you--

JOE  
"After the war." Everybody says "after the war," like it's some kinda...some special place we're all gonna get to when the shootin's done. My pop fought in the big war. He was a Hellfighter, you know?

DEKE

The Harlem soldiers.

JOE

He came back talking about "after the war." He saw how it was in France; people not caring much about race. But after the war was worse than before the war, 'cause after the war he knew what it was like to be treated equal. But he came home to no job, no prospects... Nothing.

SMOKEY

What'd he end up doing?

JOE

Crawled into a bottle spent the rest of his short miserable life crushed up in there trying to carry the weight of the world on his ordinary back.

MARTY

You're signifying.

JOE

You're the one drinking, talking about "after the war." Tell you right now; this is my "after the war." Staying here in Italy. Marrying Sofia. Gonna live nice.

DEKE

That's giving up, skipping out. I go in for that.

JOE

That's 'cause you go in for fairy tales. I should do what; be like Easy? Tries to save the entire Negro race and gets drunk every time he finds out he can't.

MARTY

You need to be careful with that, brother.

JOE

Can't save everybody, *brother*. Sometimes people gotta do it for themselves. Hell, I'm not going to get into it with you.

SUICIDE

Nothing says you two have to "get into it" all the time anyhow.

MARTY

We get along just fine. ...As long as he does things my way.

JOE  
Or you could do 'em mine.

MARTY  
How about this: you keep doing  
things your way, I'll do them  
mine. Meet you somewhere in the  
middle.

Joe and Marty tip glasses to each other. Actually, Marty tries to tip his glass, but does a poor job of it. Having gotten more than a bit tipsy himself, his aim is off and he sloshes his drink.

SMOKEY  
Slow down there, soldier.

DEKE  
We should be getting back.

JOE  
Go on ahead. I'm going see Sofia.

MARTY  
Lightning...

JOE  
I'll be back before our pass is  
up. Just let me run go see my  
girl for a minute.

Marty gives Joe a pat to the shoulder as he and the others start to head off. Joe remains for a moment, finishes his drink. But we get the sense it's not so much for the enjoyment as it is to steel himself.

204 EXT. WHITES ONLY R&R CLUB - LATER

204

Joe is approaching the whites only R&R club into which he previously saw the German officers being escorted. There is a WHITE OFFICER just outside the club. He eyes Joe as Joe moves toward the door. Posturing like a tough-guy:

CLUB OFFICER  
They didn't teach you how to read?

Joe slows down enough to say, real even but very threatening:

JOE  
Just 'cause somebody gave you a  
uniform doesn't make you a  
fighting man, 'K? So why don't  
you run get some help before I  
crack your backside.

Joe pushes right past the officer who's tough-guy front is replaced by incredulity.

205 INT. WHITES ONLY R&amp;R CLUB - CONTINUOUS

205

The club is fairly full up with officers. The vast majority are AMERICAN, however there are a few GERMAN OFFICERS present as well. Joe enters the club. The moment he does, all eyes are on him. The looks he gets are of astonishment as Joe moves for the bar, speaks directly to the BARTENDER.

JOE  
I'll take a beer.

The bartender looks at him nervously. Joe looks toward the Germans:

JOE (CONT'D)  
Pour it.

Not knowing what else to do, the bartender pours a beer and sets it on the bar. Before Joe can reach for it, a couple of military MPs enter the club sporting billy clubs which they hold steady, but grip tightly with an eagerness to put into use. The MP doesn't need to say a word. His intentions are clear.

Joe looks to the MP, then reaches for his drink. The MP brings down his club on the bar between Joe's hand and the glass.

Joe turns and looks behind him. The white officers look on with disdain. Except for the Germans. The Germans, they smirk. All of this is so very humorous to them. And that's the cut that kills. Joe takes a moment, then starts to go for his drink. The MP raises his club, then brings it down toward Joe with a vengeance.

206 INT. STOCKADE - NIGHT

206

Joe sits alone in what amounts to a jail cell. He lays back on a cot as though the whole of the world has worn him out. The man is beat in every sense of the word. Nothing horrible, but he truly looks as though he's been given a going over. The door to the cell OPENS. A couple of MPs usher Marty in. Joe immediately tosses him disdain.

JOE  
I'm not trying to hear it.  
Whatever high minded Negro  
philosophy you've got, just take  
it on back home. And if you want  
to test me, open your mouth and  
see where things go from there.

Marty takes up a seat, but doesn't say a word for a long beat. The silence wears on Joe. Finally:

JOE (CONT'D)  
The Old Man gonna wash me out?

MARTY  
Don't know. You're grounded for  
now. Hope that was one hell of a  
good beer.

JOE  
Nazis getting served, and us  
having to keep on shuffling?

MARTY  
Wrong or right, we've got regs to  
live by. And you busting them, it  
gets you what?

JOE  
A good feeling, Easy. Right here.

Finally Joe gets up, gets angry. Joe raps his right hand over  
his heart.

JOE (CONT'D)  
A throb that says I didn't choke  
on what they were feeding me.  
How's your heart feel?

MARTY  
Some other time I would have stood  
with you shoulder to shoulder.  
But you put a minute's worth of  
righteousness ahead of the whole  
war. Same as always you get into  
the wrong fight for the wrong  
reasons.

JOE  
Your reasons are any better? You  
kept Ray Gun flying when you knew  
he was half blind. Your best  
friend, and you sent him out to  
get shot down. Lost a good man,  
'cause you think you've got the  
world licked. That's on you, boy.  
You carry that scar the rest of  
your life.

Joe goes back to laying on the cot.

JOE (CONT'D)  
Lived your whole life; one big,  
lousy Atlanta Compromise. Go sell  
that somewhere else. You're  
wearing me out.

Marty really doesn't have much else to say. He starts for the  
door, knocks on it... As he waits for it to open, Marty turns  
back to Joe.

MARTY  
You're as good a pilot as we've  
got. You should be on the stick.  
From here on, every time you're  
not flying, every time somebody  
else gets killed, know they were  
taking your place.

JOE  
Don't you put that on me.

The MPs open the door up and Marty exits. Joe yells after him:

JOE (CONT'D)  
You take it back! Take it back!

207 INT. CLUB - NIGHT

207

We are in a night club. We see Deborah - AKA Love Bunny - step to a microphone on stage.

DEBORAH  
I would like to dedicate this to all our boys wherever they are fighting. But especially, I would like to dedicate this to the brave men of 332nd Fighter Group.

And Deborah begins to sing a rich, soulful and torchy version of "SPRING WILL BE A LITTLE LATE THIS YEAR." As she sings, we go into the following MONTAGE:

WE SEE Joe sitting in his cell. He's got nothing but time to think about his actions, and their consequences.

WE SEE a grounded Joe now working base maintenance. At the moment, he and others on a MAINTENANCE CREW are shoring up one of the revetments. As Joe works, A FLIGHT OF RED TAILS TAKES TO THE AIR. The planes fairly mock Joe as they fly off.

WE SEE the Red Tails escorting bombers. They are actively engaged in fighting off German planes. As always, the combat is dogged and determined from both sides. Though the Red Tails score a few KILLS, it is not without cost. WE SEE DEKE'S PLANE take a few hits. IT DOES NOT GO DOWN, but the plane itself is shot up badly.

WE SEE Deke's wounded plane, smoking badly, coming in for a landing. She hits the runway hard and fast, skids, tilts... The wing catches the ground. The plane flips, tumbles across the PSP and catches fire, but not badly so. Airmen - led by Joe - RUN for the plane. They work to EXTRACT DEKE. And they do so not a moment too soon. Deke's plane FLASHES OVER. It is consumed by flame. The resulting conflagration is reasonably impressive, but not ridiculously overdone. More realistic than fantastic.

WE ARE IN A HOSPITAL ROOM. Deke's in bed bandaged up. At the moment he is sedated, or asleep. Joe, alone, sits with Deke. He is slumped in the chair as he looks at his comrade. We can see the weight of this near loss wearing on him.

WE SEE a beauty shot of the Red Tails up in the sky escorting bombers to their target.

WE SEE several of the Red Tails - Marty, Neon, Indiana, Smokey and Suicide - walking down a street in an Italian town. As they walk, a couple of WHITE AIRMEN note the black fliers. One of them, CHESTER, moves quickly over to the group. Far from being belligerent, he is quite pleasant. As he extends a hand to Marty:

CHESTER  
Red Tails? You're Red Tails, yeah? Chester Barnes, 2nd Bombardment group. You flew top cover for us. Best damn flying I

(MORE)

CHESTER (CONT'D)

ever seen. We didn't lose a single plane. Not one. We owe all you all a drink. C'mon. Meet the bomber crews.

We are inside a whites only R&R CLUB. We see white BOMBER CREWS drinking. Chester leads the Red Tails into the club, announces to the white fliers:

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Hey... Hey, boys; it's the Red Tails.

The white crewmen look to the Red Tails. Far from the jeering one might expect from inebriated whites, a LOUD CHEER goes up from the group. Men race forward to shake hands and pat the backs of the Red Tails. We can see the disbelief in the eyes of the Red Tails. This is clearly not the kind of thing that happens every day...if ever.

WE ARE ON THE RUNWAY OF THE AIR BASE. Joe and other MAINTENANCE WORKERS are hauling away the wreck of Deke's plane. As they do, Joe notices something caught up in the charred wreckage. IT IS DEKE'S PICTURE OF BLACK JESUS. The picture is NOT BURNED. NOT IN THE LEAST. A happy accident? A miracle? JOE TAKES THE PICTURE FROM THE WRECKAGE and gives it a good, long looking over.

We are in a WHITES ONLY R&R CLUB. We see white BOMBER CREWS drinking with the Red Tails. Marty looks around at the airmen, black and white, drinking, talking and swapping stories. THIS IS INTEGRATION IN ACTION. This is maybe one good thing in an otherwise horrid war. Marty is handed a drink. He is about to drink it down, when he stops himself. Thinks better of it. He sets the drink aside with the conviction of a man determined to turn a page in his life.

WE ARE AGAIN IN THE CLUB with Deborah as she finishes the song. Once done, she says sweetly:

DEBORAH

God bless you, boys. Get home soon.

208 INT. MESS TENT - DAY

208

WE START TIGHT ON A SINGLE DOG TAG THAT IS HELD IN A BLACK HAND. The tag reads RAY KNIGHT, then lists his military information. THE CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL a white soldier, MILLER, who has just handed the tag to Marty.

MILLER

Four of us were being transferred to a German POW camp when we escaped. Was Ray's idea to split up. Figured we had a better chance that way. Any patrols saw him with us...well, pretty obvious he wasn't German. Deal was: if Ray made it back and we didn't he'd get our tags to our unit. And if it was the other way around...

MARTY

Thank you for getting this back to us.

MILLER

Ray was a good guy. Wasn't for him, we wouldn't have made it. If you could do the me favor; to whoever it matters, tell 'em for me...tell 'em Ray was a soldier.

Miller heads off. Marty is left with his thoughts.

209 EXT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE/FLIGHT LINE - DAY

209

As we come into the scene we see Luntz stepping off a C-47 Skytrain with CAPTAIN CAMPBELL, a white bomber pilot. They are greeted by Bullard and Stance.

LUNTZ

Colonel. Good to see you again. This is Captain Campbell with the 5th Bombardment Wing.

CAMPBELL

Colonel.

LUNTZ

We have some talking to do. Thought it might be best if we did it together.

210 INT. RAMITELLI BASE/BRIEFING TENT - DAY

210

There are maps laid out on a table in the room. At the moment, Luntz is going over them with Bullard, Stance and Campbell.

LUNTZ

The 15th is taking over the Berlin sphere from the Brit's 8th air force. Orders are to hit Berlin hard in advance of a heavy ground push toward Germany.

(pointing at the map)

This is Berlin's primary heavy arms facility. Shut that down, you shut down Jerry's ability to shore up a Berlin defense. The Captain's wing is leading the bombardment.

BULLARD

(to Campbell)

Berlin!?! You have recon on the area?

CAMPBELL

Intel puts almost 400 heavy flak guns in the target area; nests of AA on every flight path into the city. In the air, expect everything the Luftwaffe's got;

(MORE)

CAMPBELL (CONT'D)

100s, 109s, 190s... Possibility  
of 262s. They've been sighted  
over Berlin.

LUNTZ

(genuine regret)  
Colonel, none of that is your  
concern. You'll escort the  
Captain's bombers to the IP  
outside Berlin. The 31st'll take  
up escort from there.

BULLARD

Is there a reason?

LUNTZ

The flight is sixteen hours round  
trip. For the fighters it has to  
be taken in stages.

STANCE

With external fuel tanks, the 51s  
can make it. I guarantee our  
pilots can.

CAMPBELL

Sir, speaking for my men, at the  
very least we'd prefer the Red  
Tails take the leg where we'd need  
protecting.

LUNTZ

It's not the Red Tails' fight.  
Not this one. First US mission  
over Berlin: from a propaganda  
stand point there's going to be a  
lot of attention paid to  
this...and a lot of ink spilled.

BULLARD

And Negro pilots aren't part of  
the story.

LUNTZ

How do you think it would get  
written up if the mission failed?  
Don't give your enemies  
ammunition.

BULLARD

Thank you, sir, for protecting us  
Negroes from ourselves.

CAMPBELL

General, you're asking me to put a  
thousand men in the air over  
Berlin. Every one of them's  
willing to die for their country.  
But they deserve their chance to  
live. If the Red Tails don't fly,  
we won't go.

LUNTZ

That's insubordination, Captain.  
Am I hearing you right?

Campbell realizes he's got no options.

CAMPBELL  
This is horse shit, sir.

Dismissive, like that's just about the most juvenile thing he's ever heard.

LUNTZ  
Three years of war, and you're just now coming to that?  
(to Bullard)  
This is coming from way above me. If you didn't have my respect I wouldn't be talking to you face to face. But we don't win this war, all my regard, everything you and your men have done...none of it means a thing. I'm sorry.

Luntz exits. Stance steps to Bullard.

STANCE  
Colonel--

BULLARD  
(resigned)  
Get the captain back to his plane.

Stance heads out with Campbell. Bullard is alone for a long, cold beat. All he's done, all his men have done and it seems that it will amount to little. Marty enters with Ray's dog tag.

MARTY  
A moment, Colonel?

Bullard nods.

MARTY (CONT'D)  
This was brought 'round by a soldier. He and Ray Gun were prisoners together. Ray didn't make it. ...When I put Ray back into rotation, he wasn't fit. But he wanted to fly and he wanted to fight, and I couldn't be the one to wash him out.

BULLARD  
We've got a mission coming up. I want you to put Lightning back on your wing.

MARTY  
I let Ray fly. I shouldn't have.

BULLARD  
I heard you. Put Lightning back on your wing.

MARTY  
Is there a reason? It's not that I don't want him, but you made it very clear--

BULLARD

It doesn't really matter. That's the reason.

(beat)

You made the right decision with Ray. Somebody wants to fight badly enough they'd trade their life, there's not much you can do otherwise.

211 EXT. RAMITELLI BASE - MORNING

211

The pilots, in flight suits and with their Mae Wests and parachutes, head for the flight line. The men are very lackadaisical in manner. For many of them, what's the point of being sharp? They're just going on a milk run. Marty says to a passing Indiana:

MARTY

Indiana, get your Mae West on.

INDIANA

It's a milk run, Easy. If Uncle Sam don't care enough to give us real work, why should you?

Indiana walks on. Marty thinks about saying something to him, but ultimately thinks better of it. Really, what's the point?

Joe catches up with Marty.

JOE

Hey, pour you a drink when we get back.

MARTY

I'll pass.

JOE

I'm trying to say thanks for getting the Gruesome Twosome back together. It's the best way I know how.

MARTY

Appreciate it. But I think I'm going to take the cure. At least for the duration.

JOE

(smiling)

Miracle of miracles... You're not drying up just 'cause Joe Little gave you a talking to? Hell, you wouldn't admit it if you were. Can I pour you something on V-Day?

MARTY

A little something on V-Day. I think that'll be all right.

The pilots continue on to their planes. We stay with Joe as he climbs into his plane. As he gets himself situated, from a

pocket he takes DEKE'S PICTURE OF BLACK JESUS. As Deke had done, he affixes it just below his gun sight.

212 EXT. SKY - DAY 212

IN A SERIES OF SHOTS:

WE SEE THE RED TAILS flying in formation, streaking through the air.

WE SEE THE RED TAILS make contact with a BOMBER SQUADRON.

We SEE SEVERAL FLYING SHOTS. As previously, the shots should represent the passage of time and distance as the Red Tails escort the bombers toward the IP.

213 EXT. SKY - DAY 213

The Red Tails fly on with the bombers. In time, they reach the IP; the spot where they are to exchange escort duties.

214 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 214

Marty puts out a call to the other Red Tails.

MARTY

Subsoil Red One to all Planes.  
We're closing in on the IP. Eyes  
out for the 31st.

215 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS 215

The Red Tails continue to fly with the bombers. There is no sign of any other planes waiting to rendezvous with them. In a short amount of time, it becomes clear there is no relief for them.

216 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 216

Marty radios the other planes.

MARTY

Subsoil Red One. Anybody see any  
fighters from the 31st?

SMOKEY (V.O.)

Not a lick.

MARTY

We on target, Winky?

WINKY (V.O.)

By map and dead reckoning, yes  
sir. They should be here to  
relieve us.

ST. LOU (V.O.)

Going on six minutes past the  
rendezvous, Subsoil. The Bombers  
(MORE)

ST. LOU (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
are eating fuel, Easy. Do we call  
it?

Marty thinks, considers the right move.

JOE (V.O.)  
Easy, it's Berlin. You know I  
don't believe in much, but I  
believe we just got handed an  
opportunity.

Marty gives a shake of his head. He knows he's being talking  
into something.

MARTY  
Winky, we have enough fuel to make  
it to Berlin and back?

WINKY (V.O.)  
We've got the fuel. But sixteen  
hours round trip... It'd be one  
for the books.

MARTY  
Subsoil Red One to all planes. We  
stay with the Bombers. We're  
going the distance.

WE CUT AROUND TO THE OTHER PILOTS as they express their  
enthusiasm: "Say hey, Mr. Hilter!" "Going to Berlin!" "Let's  
give 'em hell!" And so on.

Marty, to Joe:

MARTY (CONT'D)  
Give 'em a sign, Red Two.

217 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

217

Joe peels off and flies parallel to the lead bomber - CAMPBELL'S  
B-17. He wags his wings, then flies on.

218 INT. CAMPBELL'S BOMBER - CONTINUOUS

218

Campbell's Co-Pilot, DUPREE, asks:

DUPREE  
What's that about?

CAMPBELL  
I think we've got the Red Tails  
for the duration.

DUPREE  
And sometimes God answers payers,  
huh?

219 EXT. SKY - LATER

219

WE HAVE A SUCCESSION OF BEAUTY SHOTS of the Red Tails and the bombers heading for Germany. It's a massive, impressive show of force.

220 I/E. SMOKEY'S PLANE - LATER

220

Smokey keeps watching the skies.

SMOKEY

We've been all over German. Where are the Germans?

SUICIDE (V.O.)

They pulled back their defenses. They're saving it all for Berlin.

MARTY (V.O.)

Off the radio, both of you.

221 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - LATER

221

As the planes continue on, Joe sees something looming in the distance. It is like an ominous cloud which floats closer.

JOE

Subsoil Red Two; bogeys, twelve o'clock. A gang of 'em.

MARTY (V.O.)

They're Germans.

222 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

222

WE SEE NOW a swarm of German 109s and 190s. There are easily A HUNDRED PLANES which gives them about thirty more than the Red Tails. It is an air armada led by a 190 that's nose cone is painted a BRIGHT WHITE. And in that white are painted A LONG AND REPETITIVE SERIES OF LITTLE AMERICAN FLAGS indicating all the planes he's shot down. Let's call this guy the WHITE BARON, and there should be in every sense about "him" that he is truly a bad ass.

223 INT. SMOKEY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

223

Smokey notes the number of planes.

SMOKEY

Well, they just brought everybody, didn't they?

224 INT. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

224

Marty makes the call.

MARTY

We don't lose a bomber. Not one.  
Follow me!

225 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

225

And then it's on. The Red Tails drop tanks, pick targets and go forth to do work. The Red Tails, the Germans; they cut in and among each other giving chase, then returning to the bombers. Never have the Red Tails looked sharper, more focused. Their formations remain tight. To a man they remain disciplined. For the most part, the German attack - no matter their numbers - are ineffectual.

Mostly.

The White Baron, however, fights ferociously. We see him cut down one Red Tail, and then another. One of the shot up Red Tails manages to bail out. The other never has a chance as his PLANE EXPLODES. With the way cleared, the Baron makes a move on a Bomber. Marty sees the White Baron's handiwork and isn't about to let it pass unanswered.

226 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

226

Marty calls to Joe.

MARTY

Lightning...

JOE

Right here!

With Joe on his wing Marty heads after the Baron, literally cuts the Baron off with a wall of bullets that is impassible. The Baron turns back away from the bomber, and Joe starts to give chase. Marty calls him back.

MARTY

Let 'em go. Stay with the bombers.

227 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

227

Joe pulls back as FLAK BEGINS TO BURST all around filling the skies with dark puffs of deadly metal. Clearly the Bombers are approaching their targets. Even at that, the fire is thicker and heavier than we have previously seen. The Germans are intent on protecting their home turf.

228 INT. CAMPBELL'S BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS

228

With the Flak going off, DuPree gives Campbell the what's what.

DUPREE

Approaching the target.

CAMPBELL  
(into his radio)  
Sequoia One to all planes, we are  
in the alley. Everybody on  
Target.  
(calling back)  
Bombardier, you've got control.

229 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

229

The Bombers head into their alley as the Flak continues to burst all around. It grows thicker, more deadly the deeper into the alley the Bombers fly.

MARTY  
Red Tails, pull back.

230 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

230

The Red Tails pull clear of the Flak. The White Baron, however, seems to hold no fear of the anti-air defenses. He wades into the Flak after the American Bombers.

231 I/E. SUICIDE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

231

Suicide can't believe what he's seeing.

SUICIDE  
Son of a bitch. Look at this  
joker.

INDIANA (V.O.)  
Let's go explain it to him.

232 INT. BRYCE'S BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS

232

While Suicide and Indiana work their way over, the BOMBARDIER clocks his target.

CAMPBELL BOMBARDIER  
On target. Bomb's away.

He hits his TRIGGER and lets the bombs fall.

233 INT. HEAVY INDUSTRIES PLANT - MOMENTS LATER

233

The bombs begin to fall on the plant. Bomb after bomb after bomb. The building, first, succumbs to the munitions. Then the stockpiled TANKS and HEAVY GUNS are caught up in the seemingly unending blasts.

234 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

234

Suicide, with Indiana on his wing, head into the Flak. Demonstrating extreme confidence, ability - or just insanity - they dart in and out of the Flak clouds and around the bombers.

The action is NEARLY DIZZYING as they anticipate and avoid the Flak, then compensate to skirt the American bombers and the fire the gunners are laying down for the Baron. Having done alllll that, the pair close on the Baron himself.

Working more in tandem than as leader and wing, Suicide and Indiana cut loose with their guns. They deliver a hail of tracers thick enough to chase the Baron from the Bombers. For Indiana and Suicide, that's not nearly enough. They've had plenty of The Baron's deadly antics and are looking to shut him down. Clear of the Bombers, they remain in pursuit. They are on the guy like a lawyer on a lawsuit as the Baron slips, jukes and jinks through the sky. Indiana gets a little too confident. The Baron lets him slip by, and gets a few shots off. All of which Indiana manages to dodge.

235 I/E. INDIANA'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

235

Suicide calls over to Indiana:

Indiana! SUICIDE (V.O.)

INDIANA  
I'm all aright. This guy thinks  
he's somebody, huh?

236 INT. BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS

236

Campbell calls to his Bombardier.

CAMPBELL  
What's the damage?

CAMPBELL BOMBARDIER  
There's a section to the north  
still standing. We've still got a  
rack, sir.

CAMPBELL  
We're taking another pass. You've  
gotta thread the needle this time.

CAMPBELL BOMBARDIER  
Copy.

237 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

237

Marty sees Campbell's plane circling back for the target. At the same time, five German planes - INCLUDING THE BARON - come around to target the bomber.

MARTY  
Got one coming back around.

JOE (V.O.)  
That Jerry's staying on 'em.

MARTY  
I see him. Suicide, Smokey; you  
and your wings you're with us.  
(MORE)

MARTY (CONT'D)

Bubbles Red One, get the bombers home.

JAMMER (V.O.)

Roger that, Subsoil.

As Jammer leads the Red Tails away with the departing bombers, MARTY, JOE, SUICIDE, SMOKEY, INDIANA AND WINKY remain to cover Campbell's plane. Immediately, the Red Tails go to work on the German planes keeping them at bay. Though they outnumber the German's by one, the White Baron requires the double team of Marty and Joe to be effectively neutralized. And though the two Red Tails can keep him from bomber, they can't land a hit on him. The three go back and forth in a violent aerial ballet of spins, air brakes, air skids, and slaloms trying to gain the upper hand.

MEANWHILE, Campbell's bomber heads again into the alley. Flak is bursting all around. The fire more concentrated and precise now that there is only one plane to deal with. Despite that, Campbell keeps his bomber on an even keel as the Bombardier releases what remains of his payload.

238 INT. HEAVY INDUSTRIES PLANT - SIMULTANEOUS

238

The last of the bombs falls on the plant. The resulting devastation is thorough. Explosions, fire... Everything you'd expect from massive bombs getting dropped on a steel works.

239 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

239

As the Baron gives the slip to Marty, Joe throttles up, trying to land a shot on the Baron's six. But he over pursues, the Baron putting on his air brakes and - seemingly - coming to a near stop in the air as Joe shoots right on past the plane.

And just that quick, the situation has reversed. Now it's Joe that's being chased by the 190, jinking the tracers that are zeroing on his six.

Marty comes in and starts shooting at the Baron. He chases the Baron off of Joe and keeps up the pursuit. But as he does, the Baron does a tight turn as he opens up his plane's prop. Marty's 51 follows, and quickly the two are CIRCLING after each other to the point its impossible to tell any longer who's leading and who's really chasing. What's clear; the pilot who can turn in the furthest will be on the tail of the other and have a clean shot.

240 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

240

Joe can see the Baron trying to pull around on Marty.

JOE

Easy, he's going for your six!

Joe steers for the planes, but TRACERS come in over his canopy. He's got to steer clear to dodge a German plane which then continues to pursue him.

JOE (CONT'D)  
Suicide, Easy needs some helping  
out.

241 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

241

No matter he's in a tight spot, Easy knows the orders of the day.

MARTY  
Stay with the bombers.

Easy-- JOE (V.O.)

MARTY  
Stay with them!

Marty and the Baron continue their gut wrenching churn on each other. The stress is obvious on Marty. The blood rushes from his upper body and pools in his legs. His vision clouds and he comes close to blacking out. He turns his 'Stang as far as physics will allow finding just one degree more of curvature. He cuts tightly around and brings his guns to bear on the Baron. Marty cuts loose on the 190, his bullets ripping into the side of the German plane. The bird pukes smoke and begins to list. It's going now where, but down. To be sure, MARTY REMAINS IN PURSUIT. The Baron, knowing he's done, pulls himself from the cockpit, and throws himself from the plane. However, as he does, he becomes CAUGHT UP IN THE TAIL SECTION OF THE PLANE - the fabric of his pack latching onto an aileron. We see the PILOT trying to pull himself free, but it's a futile attempt as the plane angles downward AWAY FROM CAMERA and toward the ground pulling the Baron with it and to his death.

The remaining German planes, as if they know they've been bettered, fly off.

SUICIDE  
Look at those ladies; running for  
home.

JOE  
That was some slick flying. You  
gonna let me buy you that drink?

MARTY  
Told you: V-Day.

242 I/E. SMOKEY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

242

With a victor's smile:

SMOKEY  
Hell, it's like V-Day. Hit the  
Jerries right in their backyard,  
and sent 'em running. If the war  
ain't over, it's the next best  
thing.

Smokey goes to spit in his cup. The moment he does, BULLETS TEAR THROUGH HIS CANOPY. Smokey is hit badly. He never had a chance.

243 I/E. INDIANA'S PLANE - SIMULTANEOUS 243

Indiana reacts to this kill shot.

INDIANA  
What the hell...

SUICIDE (V.O.)  
Smokey!

244 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS 244

Streaking past almost faster than the eye can see are three MESSERSCHMITT ME.262 JET FIGHTERS. It's these which have put the hit on Smokey.

As Smokey's plane drops burning toward the ground, the men watch the jets rip away and disappear into the distance. The only thing that identifies them are their WHITE CONTRAILS.

245 I/E. WINKY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 245

Winky, as do the others, eye the departed jets.

INDIANA (V.O.)  
What in the hell was...

WINKY  
Two-sixty-twos. Jet propelled  
airplanes.

JOE (V.O.)  
What?

WINKY  
Jet engines. They've got about a  
hundred miles an hour on us. They  
can out-fly us, out-shoot us...

SUICIDE (V.O.)  
What do we do, Easy?

246 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 246

Marty says nothing. In the distance, we can see the curve of the jets' contrails. They're coming back around.

INDIANA (V.O.)  
They're coming.

SUICIDE (V.O.)  
Easy...

MARTY  
Stay with the bomber.

WINKY (V.O.)  
We can't fight Jets.

JOE (V.O.)  
You heard the brother. Stay with  
the plane!

The five remaining fliers fan out, try to form a cordon around the bomber. But they cannot maneuver, they cannot bring their guns to bare nearly fast enough to get off a shot at the jets.

One of the jets closes on the bomber, takes a rapid pass and LETS RIP WITH A STRING OF GUNFIRE.

247 I/E. CAMPBELL'S BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS 247

One of the CREWMAN IS HIT as the bullets cut through the metal of the fuselage.

248 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS 248

And then, just as quickly as they appeared, the jets race off again. As before, all that's left to mark their presence are the contrails.

249 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 249

There is a tense moment as the Red Tails watch the skies for the Jets.

MARTY  
Anybody see 'em?

250 I/E. SUICIDE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 250

Suicide spots the fresh contrails.

SUICIDE  
Off my three!

251 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS 251

The jets come screaming in, and once more the Red Tails do what they can to mount a defense. It's a game effort, but it ultimately comes up less than short. One of the jets lays a HIT ON INDIANA'S PLANE, while another jet STRAFE'S THE BOMBER.

252 INT. BOMBER - CONTINUOUS 252

The bomber takes the bullets. AN ENGINE IS HIT AND CATCHES FIRE.

CAMPBELL  
Shut down number two. Full power  
to one and four.

253 I/E. SUICIDE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 253

Suicide radios Indiana whose plane is spinning out of control.

SUICIDE  
Get out of the plane. Bail!

Indiana fights his way from his cockpit, jumps clear of the plane and opens his chute.

EASY (V.O.)  
He's away. He's clear.

254 I/E. WINKY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS 254

Winky takes note of the Jets' tactics.

WINKY  
Easy, the jets have to chop  
throttle when they're coming in on  
the bomber. Let them get in  
close, we've got a chance.

JOE (V.O.)  
They get by us the bomber's done.  
She can't take another hit.

WINKY  
You got another way, now's the  
time.

EASY (V.O.)  
Everybody, on the perch.

The Red Tails pull up, gain altitude well above the bomber.

255 INT. CAMPBELL'S BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS 255

One of the GUNNERS sees the Red Tails pulling away. He calls to Campbell.

CAMPBELL GUNNER  
Cap... The Red Tails are running  
scared!

CAMPBELL  
The hell they are! Just stay on  
your gun.

Campbell to himself:

CAMPBELL (CONT'D)  
C'mon, fellas. Don't make a liar  
out of me.

256 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

256

The Red Tails are "on the perch." They've got altitude, and that gives them about as much advantage as they're going to get. They wait, tense, for any sign of the jets. A sign comes in the form of a SINGLE SWATH OF CONTRAILS racing for the bomber.

257 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

257

Joe spots the Contrails.

JOE  
Got one closing on the bomber's  
six.

EASY (V.O.)  
Winky, Suicide...

258 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

258

That's all the more instruction the two pilots require. They put their planes into a MODIFIED SPLIT-S; they roll and dive hard. They use gravity like it's God's throttle giving them speed to match the Jets.

259 INT. CAMPBELL'S BOMBER - SIMULTANEOUS

259

The TAIL GUNNER spots the closing jet, calls out:

TAIL GUNNER  
Got one closing.

CAMPBELL  
Can't out run him!

The Tail Gunner OPENS FIRE, but can't get a bead.

TAIL GUNNER  
He's coming in too fast.

Just as the jet reaches firing range, both Suicide and Winky let go with their guns. They give the 262 a brutal chop that RIPS OPEN THE JET, ignites it's fuel and ends its participation in the fight forever more.

CAMPBELL  
What happened? You get him?

TAIL GUNNER  
The Red Tails. We got the Red  
Tails!

260 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

260

Joe spots the contrails of a jet making a run at the bomber.

JOE  
On the Bomber's three. I got him.

As did Suicide and Winky, Joe puts his 'Stang into a dive. The plane whines and strains as it makes a perpendicular line toward the jet. In range, Joe gives it the works. This 262 fails no better than the previous. A WING IS SHORN OFF. Having lost its stability, it SPINS VIOLENTLY like a rocket powered top before being engulfed in it's own burning fuel.

261 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

261

Still high on the perch, Marty spots the last jet making it's run. Like a man ready to do work, he growls at the contrails:

MARTY  
Let's go, you son of bitch.

Marty puts his plane into a dive. He races for the closing jet. He puts a finger to his trigger... Pulls it back and gives the jet both guns. BUT AFTER JUST A FEW SHOTS, HIS GUNS JAM.

JOE (V.O.)  
Easy...!

MARTY  
Gun's jammed!

262 I/E. JOE'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

262

Joe doesn't even think. He just reacts. He jams his throttle, gives his 51 all that she's got and PULLS UP INTO THE JET'S PATH. It's that game of chicken we saw him play once previously. And any pilot who's ever flown knows how deadly that can be.

SMOKEY (V.O.)  
You're on a dead run, Lightning!

JOE  
We're not losing a bomber.

MARTY (V.O.)  
Break off!

JOE OPENS FIRE WITH HIS GUNS. THE JET DOES THE SAME.

When Joe speaks again, it is with the placidness of a man who knows, in his heart, his actions are true.

JOE  
You keep doing things your way...

The planes continue to close. Their respective gunfire begins to land on each other, begins to do damage to both plane and man.

JOE (CONT'D)  
I'll do 'em mine...

The planes keep shooting, keep hitting each other.

Joe looks to the picture of Black Jesus before him.

JOE (CONT'D)  
Meet you somewhere in the middle.

The Jet shreds in the face of Joe's fusillade. It is a victory, but it is a pyrrhic one. Both Joe and his plane are by now badly wounded. As he spills blood, his plane spills fuel and flames. JOE TRIES AS HARD AS HE IS ABLE TO WORK THE STICK, CHANGE THE COURSE OF HIS PLANE, BUT THE BIRD IS TOO BUSTED TO RESPOND. What remains of Joe and his 51 fuse with the remains of the jet. It becomes, for a moment, some kind of plasma that streaks across the sky in two directions, then begins to fade away.

All the airmen - the Red Tails - the bomber crew - can hardly believe what they've seen.

263 I/E. MARTY'S PLANE - CONTINUOUS

263

Marty stares for a long, disbelieving moment at the fire in the sky. Then, screaming to the empty space before him.

EASY  
Where's his chute? Where's  
Lightning's chute?

WINKY (V.O.)  
...No chute...

EASY  
It's there! Look for it. Find  
his chute!

SUICIDE (V.O.)  
Easy, we've got to get the bomber  
home.

MARTY  
We don't leave until we find it!

SUICIDE  
Easy... Easy! Stay on mission!

Those words, words which he as himself spoken too many times, are enough to pull Marty from the pain of loss. He gives the order which the other men are already aware of.

EASY  
RTB. Back to base.

264 EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

264

As the bomber, escorted by the remaining Red Tails, heads for the horizon, we:

FADE TO:

265 EXT. HOUSE - DAY

265

WE ARE TIGHT ON A DOOR. A black hand REACHES INTO FRAME and knocks on the door.

The door opens, revealing Sofia. Standing outside of her house are Marty and Suicide. Sofia smiles when she sees Marty. But as she looks at him, as she sees the pain he holds she knows that something is not right. She gets it. Joe's not coming back. She staggers, grabs at the door frame. Marty is there to catch her and hold her as emotion spills from her.

266 I/E. JEEP - LATER

266

Suicide is driving. Marty rides next to him. Marty says, more to himself than the others:

MARTY

After the war...

SUICIDE

What's that?

MARTY

Lightning used to mock me for talking about "after the war." Sofia; she was his "after the war;" his good thing. Lightning was right. After the war's the same as before the war.

Suicide's got nothing to add to that. The two drive on.

267 INT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE/TENT - DAY

267

Marty's in his tent, laying on his bed, lost in thought. His losses wearing on him. Marty looks to some liquor rations which rest on a shelf. You can almost hear something inside him begging to take a hit of whiskey to dull his pain. Before he gets the chance Suicide appears at the door of the tent.

SUICIDE

Easy, you need to come out here.

Easy gets up, follows Suicide from the tent.

268 EXT. RAMITELLI AIR BASE - MOMENTS LATER

268

We are just inside the entrance of the base. As Smokey and Marty arrive, AIRMEN have already gathered. Among them our are remaining familiar faces: Suicide, Winky, Deke, Bullard, Stance, Coffee, Bag 'O Bones, St. Lou, Jammer...

Just pulling onto the base is a Jeep. Seated in the passenger seat is Ray. He's looking a little worse for the wear, but he's already been patched up. Clearly he's made a stop at a hospital prior to his arrival. But he's alive.

RAY

Look at you all standing around  
like there ain't a war to fight.  
Good thing I got myself back here  
before Hitler ends up in Brooklyn.

MARTY

Ray Gun...? Ray!

RAY

Now, if I can land a plane blind,  
don't you think I can get out from  
under the Jerries if I've got most  
of two eyes to see with?

Marty nearly folds over with emotion. Ray is right there to  
embrace him. With all the emotion a man can express:

MARTY

I'm sorry, Ray. ...I'm sorry.

RAY

Hold on, brother. Just hold on.  
Still got a lot of work to do.  
We're going to win this fight.  
We're gonna win it.

As the two men continue to grip each other, OVER THIS WE HEAR:

LUNTZ (V.O.)

Honor, duty, sacrifice...

269 EXT. PARADE GROUND - DAY

269

We are on a military parade ground. The entire group of Red  
Tails - officers, airmen and crewmen - are in dress uniforms  
standing at attention. Paying tribute is General Luntz. Among  
those on a dais with the General are Tattersall and Captain  
Campbell.

LUNTZ

These are the pillars of military  
service. It is that which we  
strive for, that which we commit  
to, and that which we give in the  
pursuit of both. Those we honor  
today, those who have sacrificed,  
were pioneers of adventures so new  
that you who stand here now may  
still be considered forerunners in  
the movement that has given you a  
place among the fighting men of  
the sky. It is an adventure born  
from the blood of soldiers of  
every creed and speech and color.  
It is the most powerful force in  
the world; the strength of the  
American people. Though the flesh  
yields, ours is a spirit which  
cannot die. It is the spirit of  
freedom, born again with each new  
generation that walks with the  
(MORE)

LUNTZ (CONT'D)  
liberties guaranteed by the  
sacrifice of others.

FADE TO:

270 BLACK

270

OVER THIS WE SEE THE FOLLOWING CARDS:

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT SENT 450 BLACK PILOTS INTO COMBAT DURING  
WORLD WAR II, OF WHOM 66 - OR MORE THAN 1 OF EVERY 7 - GAVE THEIR  
LIVES.

THE RED TAILS FLEW 1,578 MISSIONS AND LOST NO ALLIED BOMBERS TO  
ENEMY FIGHTERS, THE BEST RECORD OF ANY ESCORT FIGHTER GROUP.

"THERE ARE MANY WHITES WHO WERE FOR US AND HELPED US EVERY STEP  
OF THE WAY. I AM THANKING ALL THOSE WHO HELPED AND FORGIVING ALL  
THOSE WHO DIDN'T."

CAPTAIN SPANKY ROBERTS, RED TAILS