

The White Devil

By N. R. Gibson

Chapter 1

The English town of Aldbourne was rainy as usual. A man was waiting in the office as he wore a garrison cap. He hated the monstrosity while liking a peak hat not a blue, red, and white hat. His olive uniform had an eagle badge and four stripes. An older man came in as he stood up and saluted. The man saluted back.

“Be seated, Sergeant major Hughes!” the man replied as he looked at the papers.

The sergeant major nodded and sat, “Yes Major Strayer, I don't care what the men think of me because our drop is approaching.”

“If it's coming, sergeant major,” Strayer said unenthusiastically while writing papers. “English rain is a hazard as we need good weather, and you make the situation worse with morale by making men jump in mud and wrestle.”

“Anzio is the pivotal point...”

“Don't remind me,” Strayer shouted with a headache and pinched his nose while maintaining control, “The event that befell you, is making Hades with the others. I wouldn't take you on if...”

A man in his thirties, wearing a garrison cap with a golden leaf, stepped in. He saluted Strayer who returned it begrudgingly. He seemed to have interrupted the major who was questioning the sergeant major's regimen training. The captain appeared to be in a hurry. Strayer shouted: “What is it, Jerre?”

“Sorry sir, Colonel Sink wants him over an Easy company incident.” Jerre replied. “He's upset that you forcibly made Leonidas come here and not report to him personally. He's fuming.”

“Captain Gross, I..” Strayer looked at his watch. “I'm late for an engagement. Very well, I acquiesced to him, but this is the last time that you D company boys will try this on me again.”

Leonidas got out and marched with the captain, but his mood was foul as he wondered why now. The captain could've let him be roasted for pulling off stunts. Captain Gross said, “I didn't save you Leonidas this time as Colonel Sink thinks you did something bad.”

“He has it out for me as usual.” Leonidas replied coldly. “I did one thing wrong which is pushing men in mud and trying to use live fire exercises on them.”

“I got you picked for Speir's second platoon.”

“That madman?” Leonidas replied in shock. “He is not happy that I pushed his men in the mud.”

“He sees potential in you.” Captain Gross replied with a smile, “The vaudeville act was over the top, but I want you in the second platoon for the invasion.”

The two met a MP who stepped aside. They went into Colonel Sink’s office which auburn haired lady in olive drab was typing. She saluted them as Captain Gross saluted her back. He asked, “Is Colonel Sink in?”

She motioned a moment and checked on him. The wait seemed long in which ladies and men hustled themselves to and forth. Leonidas smirked for he didn't see women in his war in Italy. Captain Gross asked with a smirk, “No women like this in Naples?”

“I didn't have time to chase nurses.” Leonidas laughed. “The Germans kept...”

Chapter 2

“He's in, boys.” The lady replied as she was very spooked. “I saw him like this as the Easy company sergeants tried to mutiny. That was nerve racking as I had to write it up. What did Cowboy do this time? I never knew him to be what he's...”

“Send in the mutineer, Mrs. Cameron!”

“Colonel Sink will see you Sergeant-major Hughes,” Mrs. Cameron replied as her face turned pale.

Colonel Sink was middle aged with a mustache. His hair was more gray than Strayer while he looked at the papers on weather reports. He stopped and said, “I ought to have you shot as the mutiny’s ringleader, Sergeant-major Leonidas Elias Hughes. I can't as Eisenhower forbade unnecessary sacking.”

Leonidas nodded, “I understand, sir.”

“Be happy that I'm assigning you to Dog company.” Colonel Sink shouted. “Captain Gross went to Ike and requested you from me if I demoted you. Be lucky that you have friends to keep you as well as sergeant as I don't understand you. Get!”

A captain with a gold bar on his left collar looked at the new sergeant with neat chevrons on his left forearm. The order was in the paper as he read his exploits. Some of it was outrageous while he looked at him. He said, “All American, more like All American wrecker of Sicily and Naples. Why should I keep you, Sergeant Hughs?”

“Gross saved me, Lieutenant Speirs,” Leonidas replied. “Sir, I never finished a fight at Anzio. I want to finish this fight in a bag or be cut down by the Krauts.”

Speirs looked at the paper, “I need a feared man as the Krauts will make us work. Are you up, Cowboy?”

“I’m always up for it, sir.”

“Good Sarge, we need a man.” Speirs looked at the twelve men assembled as he said, “Recruits, this is Sergeant Hughes, your new squad sergeant, so don’t kill him too.”

The hours went as the men did calisthenics and fire drills. Despite wings on their garrison caps, Sergeant Hughes was unrelenting as he made them endure wrestling and bayonet drills. His proficiency for violence became fuel in their hatred of him. He kept repeating, “Again, I don’t care if you are exhausted. The enemy will kill you. Private Duncan, get on your feet!”

“Yes sir!”

“Who stole my Peaches?!” A man angrily asked the squad, “Peaches are army property!”

“Private Nowak, O’Malley, O’Donnell get your gear now!” Sergeant Hughes bellowed as he turned to the officer. “Name sir?”

“Captain Sobel, I want to know your name.”

“Sergeant Hughes, sir!” Sergeant Hughes replied, “If you write me up for something, I will do the same for interrupting my training regimen that Speirs dictated.”

The men returned as Sergeant Hughes bellowed, “Dump it out, boys!”

The three dumped out their packs. O’Donnell had a can of peaches which made Hughes look bad. The sergeant’s mind was distant and cold as Sobel was fuming. Speirs showed up as Hughes saluted him. Speirs saluted and said, “Why does training stop?”

“Captain Sobel ordered the culprits found, sir!” Sergeant Hughes replied. “He says...”

“Private O’Donnell is up for theft...”

“Sergeant Hughes, what would you do to thieves?!” Speirs bellowed.

“Make him peel potatoes with the squad mates that did nothing.”

“I revoked passes for the first squad and had them peel potatoes Sergeant.”

“Yes sir, captain.” Sergeant Hughes replied. “I see to it personally.”

The squad angrily peeled potatoes. They watched at O'Donnell angrily as he caused it in the theft of the peaches. The scrapping of skins became grating as each one wanted to stop. Sergeant Hughes hawkingly watched them as he hated slacking. One said, “Is he really Irish O'Malley from Oklahoma because he don't look it?!”

“He has brown hair and a tough build like a Scotsman, but he has clover eyes.”

O'Malley said, “They call him Cowboy over fancy shootin' I reckon”

“Cold blooded, butcher,” O'Donnell spat. “He killed one fifteen Italians I think, but the Krauts are rumored to be three hundred lost souls.”

“He punched an Italian as they think that he can't hurt no Charlie Pole me” Nowak chuckled and peeled, “They didn't think him killing...”

“I kill Italians and Poles” Sergeant Hughes spoke up. “My Sergeant says that it gets easier once the killing starts. I don't know what we face as I recall rumors of Fallschirmjäger and SS using tongues.”

O'Malley looked funny at him, “Tongues, Sarge?”

“Tongues,” Hughes nodded, “They have longer to understand who they are fighting but me.”

“What's a White Devil?” O'Donnell asked.

“It's the second battalion of my five o'four regiment as I was All-american.” Hughes grinned mischievously, “I got devil because that's what the Wehrmacht called us baggy jumpers besides slittin' necks. Any more needless questions?”

None dared ask it. He said, “As you were.” They grumbled, but they didn't dare raise it to him. The cleaned and peeled potatoes were sent up in buckets to the mess cook while the last sack was peeled and dumped in a waist bin. They spooked to ask how many necks he slit. The sergeant left, but his presence didn't leave.

“We need to go to a Dance hall,” O'Malley grimaced: “I know Corporal Johnson loves the ladies, right Corporal?”

“Right!” Johnson smirked. “I think that we are sinking out with Dog company to one in Aldbourne, and I got us passes. Pass it out, Nowak!”

“Yes, Corporal,” Nowak looked upset while passing out the fake passes; “I don't think that we should antagonize the Sergeant...”

“Don't go scared Pollack on me, Nowak.” O'Malley sighed, “It's just for one night, and we should be back at roll call. Trust me.”

The boys skipped out behind a sleeping Leonidas, traversing the road. They got past the guards who didn't know about hoodwinking. They came inside and picked out pretty women to dance while Nowak settled for a homey woman. O'Malley, dancing with a redhead, chuckled, “See, isn't this more fun than worrying about Sergeant Hughes, Ladis?”

“It is...” Nowak smiled: “My dark hair, date isn't too bad either.”

“Agree, and no rules or Regulations but us enjoying life!” O'Donnell smirked. “We are home free...”

“Jack ass!” A dude felt O'Donnell at his back and felt his foot stepped on. He looked at O'Donnell, “Well, well, well. We got white spades taking our women, boys.”

“Give the Irish a break, All American jerk!” Johnson looked at the group assembled. “Five o'four?”

“Five o'five!” the man angrily looked at him: “We don't like Screaming Eagles screwing us up. Why five o'four devils?”

“They mean me MacGregor, and I thought that they were slaughtering your butt, Scottish bully!” A sharp voice rang out, “I'm glad that we got real vets rather than replacements!”

The man stepped into the light. His uniform showed a Screaming Eagles patch, but the five o'five boys chuckled. A familiar ghost, though dead, became flesh and bone. MacGregor gave a chuckle: “Well I be, I ought that da guns took ya at Cisterna, laddie!”

“That Cisterna garrison tried, but I came back because the officers needed me.” Leonidas smirked at him. “You were as damaged as us Scot at that coral in Naples.”

“Five o'four is badly damaged, laddie!” MacGregor looked off and drank his whiskey, “Not many have survived...”

“What do we have here?!” An MP touted. “I didn't know that we have a veteran in five oh six!”

“Ain’t you supposed to be a tanker?!” Leonidas snickered: “I never knew this, Adair?”

“I got held back and promoted to sergeant,” Adair snorted with disdain and said to everyone. “I hate to do this, but this dance hall is closed. Everyone is back at the barracks now!”

Everyone bellyached. Leonidas looked at his men plus Dog company, “Everyone with me, where is Johnson? He’s got a lot to answer for!”

“He’s...” Nowak meekly tried to reply until a voice sounded loudly.

“He is entertaining two lovely blondes!”

“You got point Corporal at the head of these party crazy fools, or should I say ‘Jane-Crazy Jack’ Johnson!”

Johnson didn’t bellyache at Sergeant and got the front while a word called ‘column of two!’ Dog company moved back to the barracks while a train appeared. It still smoked, made seething noises, and smoke billowed out with sharp hisses. Johnson looked back, “Iron horse at the front, sergeant!”

Sergeant Hughes pointed to two people in front of him with a soft voice: “Nowak, O’Malley! Search the caboose while I see the coal box!”

Nowak and O’Malley checked the caboose at different ends. The others searched the cars while Johnson supervised. Leonidas checked the stack house locomotive and coal car, made sure that no one stayed on. He heard a sound that came from behind. The noise came up which made Leonidas grab a spade. He said, “Friend or foe?”

“Friend!” A voice called. Leonidas saw the man, Captain Jerre Gross, step into the lamp light. He said: “Train robbery, even for you, is new!”

“I don’t know, but I was wrangling up my squad plus seven stragglers of Dog company.”

“He’s right, which I sanctioned.”

“Lieutenant Speirs, I see Amato and Barone with him!” Captain Gross looked angrily at Speirs who stood up for Sergeant Hughes. Gross retorted. “Well, we proved him not assaulting or murdering Italian Americans without cause, but we must not let it happen again.”

Sergeant Hughes looked over: “O’Donnell empty your pockets!”

O’Donnell emptied his pockets of stolen items, which his buddies assisted him out of fear of another potato peeling punishment. Sergeant Hughes looked angrily at O’Donnell while

making it clear to everyone subconsciously. Nowak angrily annoyed, “You got us awarded another night of no passes, but I won't stand for ya stupidity!”

“As you were, Private Nowak!” Captain Gross stepped outside: “O'Donnell got latrine work, and Sergeant Hughes will get a break and enjoy a drink with the sergeants for once tomorrow night.”

In the morning, Colonel Sink came to rally. He looked mad as Hades, and he looked at the 2nd battalion assembled. He started to laugh then he looked at the lot. He smirked: “You boys riled up Colonel ‘Tommy’ Tucker of Five o’five regiment, and he accused us of stealing his boys’ women. How did Sergeant Hughes escape in a Dog company complaint, beats me?!”

Everyone laughed except Captain Gross. One goes, “What will we do with these old vets, sir?”

“I ask Old Tommy that,” Colonel Sink looked at the letter. “We decided that we will duel with football as the basketball team won't play. I selected lots, and your officers will get it and distribute the allotted men. Hopefully, it gets over at sixteen hundred hours today, as you were!”

Captain Gross read his, “Hughes, O'Donnell, Nowak, O'Malley, and O'Reilly of first squad, you guys represent Dog company!”

The football commenced. The two sides played. Nowak and O'Malley kept up the pace while O'Donnell complained. O'Reilly's quarterback stance lacked grit while the five o'five's McGregor watched them finally break even.

“They are holding back, Cowboy!” one five o'five's private called out.

McGregor laughed, “He's too good, mark my words lad. Once he's unleashed, he's a demon to be reckoned with.”

Strayer rubbed his gray hair and looked at his second lieutenant in gym shorts and white T-shirt: “Loose him as a quarterback, Buck.”

“Cowboy,” Compton nodded and pointed at Leonidas in pt gear, “Relieve Talkie and get us a win quickly!”

Leonidas, released from restraint, got behind O'Malley. He smiled while Five o'five boys laughed at him. He motioned everyone and nodded while staring ahead.

“Twenty-one, twenty-two, hike!” He roared.

The ball got thrown at him. He tried to make a play while everything went wrong. He decided to do the unthinkable, running straight to goal. Nowak and O'Malley made a hole that made it a little easier. He managed to hit the goal while the ref looked at his clock.

“Time!” He called.

The boys ran to Leonidas and carried him off. Colonel Sink watched him. He felt bad for it. He sighed as Buck laughed. Strayer giggled too.

“I won this bet,” Strayer checked his notes: “What did Leonidas get?”

“Two hundred and fifty dollars and thirty cents!” A voice sounded.

“Yes Speirs,” Colonel Sink sighed, “I lost a third of the money as five o’five’s Colonel Tommy owed Cowboy money!”

The boys celebrated victory at a dance hall while the sergeants went to Dover. They drank and danced while the enlisted tried to get the woman’s attention. Everyone seemed happy while the earth turned.

Chapter 3

The dance hall sounded lively. Sergeants and Corporals found women to dance with while one sat with a Sergeant and stared coldly at them. The other sergeant that set his date in a chair and joined her, saw the two get up and sat down

He sighed: “Cowboy Should be partying like us, Corbin?!”

“He has his reasons, Anness.” Corbin sighed, “It has a lot to do the first months at Sicily, and he hates the Brits since.”

“He can’t be that hateful to women surely!” Anness looked fearfully at Leonidas.

“Ma’am,” Leonidas nodded at the woman and looked at the other two: “I didn’t like the rude officers that made it a bit more sad.”

Corbin looked stunned, “You sayin’ that you hated Brits for Sicily...”

“It’s easy if you were there laddie!”

“Sergeant Naesh McGregor,” Hughes laughed. “I thought that you were in Roll call?”

“I bought a buddy from the five o’four...”

“Let me speak Scottish sheep eater!”

“Mahoney?” Hughes’ eyes lit up: “I thought that you booked it at Cisterna...”

Mahoney laughed, “Here I thought the same about you lad, I here you made Sergeant-major. Cowboy!”

“I did, one sec.” Hughes looked at the barmaid. “Miss, a beer and root beer please?!”

The barmaid nodded and then returned with the drinks. The scene got more pleasant while music became slow blues. The two laughed at the pompous British officers. They were upset over something.

“You chaps stole our rugby ball!” The officer in a red beret looked at them furiously.

“Let it go Edward.” Another tried to pull him off.

“You chaps should rename your sports,” Edward burrowed his eyes. “It’s rugby not football!”

“That’s Cowboy and Mahoney’s face, you say it too.” The officer noted the GIs’ faces: “Your drunk go sleep it off!”

The dumbfounded officer left before he could get in more hot water. The other saluted which Leonidas replied. Mahoney laughed and slapped his back. He snickered at Leonidas, “His face said it like he saw a ghost.”

“I wouldn’t blame him after seeing your mug,” Leonidas laughed. “I was pale seeing you, what happened to our regiment?”

“Shattered,” Mahoney sighed: “Cut down or killed, but we did our best...”

“Who got me out?”

“I did,” Mahoney recalled, “Angus McGregor, show him your gall!”

“No...” McGregor relented at Mahoney’s stare and showed the photo: “Her name is Mrs. Cameron, and we got married on the first of March.”

“My Joe, she is a ginger!” Leonidas chuckled. “You didn’t tell me this at the bar?”

“That’s none of your business despite what that Pathfinder says.”

“Mahoney is a Pathfinder, why?”

“Redemption,” Mahoney sighed: “I have to go, so you two lads behaved.”

“Us, behave?” Leonidas chuckled, “Good luck, I hope you have better luck than me.”

They laughed while Mahoney left. An officer caught his attention, approached Mahoney immediately. Mahoney wondered if he did military police work by his gait. Mahoney saluted and

waited for the officer to introduce himself. The officer politely returned his salute and smiled, “Are you Italian?”

“On my father's side,” Mahoney replied: “My father was an orphan and adopted into a Southern Irish community, but Leonidas knows it.”

“Why did he attack an Italian GI?”

“By accident,” Mahoney anxiously replied. “He wanted the shell shock guy to hush before he gave us away, and he knocked him out and got him out by stretcher later.”

“Did he actually murdered another?”

“No!” Mahoney kept his cool: “He tried to stop him from telling his cousin in the Fascist army, but the sniper got him!”

“My name is Captain Gross,” Gross said quizzically, “I want to understand the force that I'm unleashing in Normandy.”

“Give him three, and he gets the goal done.”

“That's all Private, I consider it.”

Dog company, the first squad, woke up and trained. Corbin shouted for them to run in PT gear while Leonidas got on with his squad. The company trained while mud splattered on their legs. At home, Leonidas griped at Spiers, “We need a mock battle, Corbin and I can't find the weak link by running.”

“Cowboy, I'm well aware!” Speirs looked at orders: “Captain Gross got us set up today, but Sergeant, you get free reign to work with MacMillan.”

“Good man,” Hughes nodded, “I hope that we win.”

“This exercise is going to be wet.” A voice sounded while they saluted. “Speirs already told you that you work with Lieutenant MacMillan.”

“Yes, Captain Gross!” Hughes said: “I have been told after I gripped up. Sir.”

“Why not down, Sergeant?”

“They can do little.”

“Dismiss Hughes,” Speirs then turned to Gross after saluting. “I hope that we learn something through Cisterna.”

The abandoned town became Cisterna. The enemy created from Easy company made an attack on Cisterna. The replicated noise and artillery spooked everyone. Hughes whispered, “Steady, Johnson...”

“Halloo!”

“Cut the Kraut talk!” Hughes looked for a signal. “Once we get the signal, we do it without screaming. What do you see, Nowak?”

Nowak with his blonde hair looked at a strange man waving after the enemy officer appeared: “MacMillan?”

“Yes,” He motioned everyone, “Everyone move on Lieutenant Meehan!”

Meehan, a fresh dark haired officer, checked his watch while ignoring Winter's concern. He looked at his map while a trap sprung on him and his third platoon. He seemed unphased and saluted MacMillan: “You risers achieved a victory.”

MacMillan smirked at Hughes, “Cowboy has you.”

Winters and second platoon returned, but Leonidas baited himself out as a wounded man. Winters asked the man with a spade helmet: “How hurt are you?”

“Not as much as you are, sir.”

Hughes pointed his Tommy at Winters while the second platoon tried to escape. The escapees got caught up with Speirs who made a comeback. He smiled at Hughes, “Captain Gross lost this bet, by word you are good at it!”

“If Lieutenant Winters checked me, I'm cooked.” Leonidas saluted Winters. “You fought well sir.”

“So did you, don't forget it.” Winters saluted back.

“Off with you,” Speirs chuckled: “I suggest that you and your squad get some grub.”

Everyone got a hot meal. The meal was served with starched potatoes and horse meat with tea or coffee. Everyone grumbled at it while Sergeant Hughes hinted, “Better than maggot dumplings.”

“I thought that Marines drink coconuts from skirted tribal girls or feed it to flamingos?” O'Donnell watched Sergeant Hughes.

“Flamingos are mean, birdies!” A Hispanic man recalled.

“Gonzales or Hernandez?!” Hughes looked at the list

“Hernandez, sir.” Hernandez replied: “I am a radio operator.”

“We need that,” Hughes nodded. “Whatever you think of Marines easy living, it's a farce. Plain and simple!”

Speirs barged in: “PT gear on, now!”

Everyone finished up and put on their gym clothes. Everyone rushed out, even Hughes ran with them. His attitude didn't change during the run. He cussed and swore. He looked at Nowak, “You look sick, you can tap out!”

“No, sergeant I got a sweetheart!”

“Johnson,” Hughes looked at the weary Corporal: “You can transfer to Second Armored to be a peacock to your two ladies...”

“Buck Compton, he still owes me money sergeant!”

Hughes eyed O'Malley, “You can transfer to Ireland and pick out brides!”

O'Malley giggled: “An Irish pride forbids me from pursuing it until I kill enough Krauts.”

“First squad,” Hughes looked back for a moment into the run. “This all can end. No more torment, no more morning risers, no more Sergeant Leonidas Elias Hughes!”

Nowak sang, “Yaaankee doodle went to on a Pooneey”

Everyone replied, “Stuck a feather in his hat and called it macaroni!”

Leonidas paused. The squad broke out singing Yankee Doodle and laughed at the situation. He nodded and ran while trying to out pace some. For once, he felt that he had Hades breachers. Men who were not afraid of anyone but him.

“Hey, Hughes.” A man with an Italian accent stopped Hughes. “I'm Wild Bill, but my older brother Guarnere made it out of Monte Casino. I didn't see him...”

An MP stopped him: “You are drunk Guarnere, let's...”

“Wait,” Hughes looked at Wild Bill: “If I didn't see him, he'd probably met his fate on that awful hill.”

“No, he can't...”

Wild Bill stormed back to the barracks. The MP didn't speak, couldn't ask what happened. Two Easy's boys became enraged with him. One shouted, “You animal, I never saw...”

“War is that,” Hughes nodded. “It breaks us to our core.”

Other guy held him back: “Enough Liebgott, you said your peace!”

“No Bull,” Liebgott angrily said back. “He’s an animal, plain simple!”

“Stack of cards tomorrow changed your mind?”

Both Smirked, “ Sure!”

Chapter 4

“Poker is a pastime where I come from Easy boys.” Hughes smiled while rain poured outside.

“In Oklahoma, we played normal Texas hands. I recall that I got a few wins against the Red Devils.”

The group had three Easy boys and one Fox boy. They expected to clean Leonidas out of his pay, but the sergeant had a few cards up his sleeve. Everyone didn't know it

“Oh really?” Liebgott smirked: “ Gin rummy was a pastime for the factory workers too.”

“How does a ranch hand get good at cards?” Bull smirked.

“Like this!”

Leonidas played three aces and two kings. Everyone tossed their cards while Leonidas counted the money. The pay became poor, and didn't bother Leonidas one bit. He cleaned them out before they knew it. He loved it.

“Another one, you like to clean us out thrice?”

Leonidas shook his head, “ No!”

The next day, the second platoon got up to sirens. They stood ready while Hughes checked the roll call. Captain Gross saluted the at-attention men and smiled, “ Sorry boys, drop has been canceled.”

Everyone moaned. It felt for nothing while the British officers watched with amusement. They each snickered in their red berets. One called: “ Not enjoying the country weather that our folk love?!”

Leonidas showed cards and smirked, “ Remember these, Johnny English?”

“Oh bloody Hades!”

“It's that card cheat!”

“Temper,” Hughes teased. “Our men are watching.”

Captain Gross walked to Colonel Sink's office the next sunny day. Mrs. Cameron opened the door for him, and helped him in. Sink, shocked, stroked his mustache: "I know what you are going to say."

"Our men are going to Mutiny," Captain Gross ranted at Colonel Sink. "Four days, it's been nothing but hurry up and wait after studying Normandy maps and terrain!"

"I know." Colonel Sink smirked.

"General Taylor got promoted," Gross looked curiously at Sink. "You got Sergeant Hughes on mutiny charges?"

"Better," Colonel Sink laughed: "Ike greenlit us. Our task is to head to RAF's Upottery Field immediately after lunch!"

"Yes, sir!" Gross smirked while heading out while he danced almost.

Hughes checked gear, "Trench knife, M1A1 Thompson, Colt nineteen eleven, C and K rations, socks, parachute and secondary chute, and I miss the Ice Cream."

"Did you miss a Hershey chocolate?!" O'Malley teased.

"No," Hughes smiled. "Special order with a heat resistant shape from my cousin in Rabaul by March."

"I got Black paint!"

A corporal shouted and distributed the Black paint. Hughes laughed while mimicking the Apaches in the movies. He gave a whoop, spooked everyone. They went back to painting faces and giggling. O'Donnell smirked, "We looked like painted ladies, right Connor?"

"My mom had a lovely mug unlike your butt-ugly one!" Connor smirked and got pelted with pebbles by everyone.

Nowak moaned: "I hate these leg bag! Sergeant Hughes, did you wear this Devilish contraption?"

"No," Hughes shook his head. "I never had. It's going to make Hades on the Morale."

General Taylor appeared. Leonidas shouted 'Ten hut!' Everyone saluted him while he saluted. They went to an at ease position and watched him. He smiled at them, the five hundred

strong and more. He smirked:“ Word has come that Germans won't accept us as prisoners if we do commando shenanigans!”

“What should we do?” Connor looked at him curiously.

“No, prisoners, ” Taylor sighed. “We sent missing Italians trained by O’Darby, but we are not taking these murderers as prisoners! Am I clear!”

Everyone shouted:“Sir, yes sir!”

“Hop on the planes,” Taylor grinned,“ I see you all in Normandy!”

Everyone got on. Leonidas placed his gear on his back and joined while ditching calming pills. Captain Gross stopped him. “Leonidas, you are the stick commander as the lieutenant caught malaria.”

“Couldn’t do me a nice one, Captain.”

“Your squad and the next one are ordered new numbers for Stick 66. You are D 0 with a medic Lieutenant.”

“Yes sir!”

Leonidas hopped on and looked at his stick,“ Slight change of plans for operation Albany, our job is still Comte Du Mont. I hate this as much as you, but our training will be tested. Once that light is green, we jump into Hades itself.”

On take off, the plane rattled. The men messed with prayer beads, slept, or chattered teeth. One checked his gear while Leonidas checked his trench knife. Day became night while orange smoke appeared. The pilot dodged it.

“Krauts found us!” The pilot sighed. “They haven’t shot at us, but we are at the swamp part of the Douve river, medic.”

“Should you green it, Ace Eddie?!” Medic called.

“Okay Lieutenant Schultz, I can't endanger the plane here!” “Green light in one hundred and twenty seconds!”

The green light blazed brightly. The paratroopers clipped the chutes on the line, feeling dread and anxiety. Leonidas opened the door, heard a loud roar of artillery flak strafed the sky. He looked at the squad and the next group. He nodded.

“This is It,” Leonidas roared over the noise of engines:“ Call sign now!”

He heard each man shout from D eleven, D twelve, D thirteen. It felt like time had passed. He knew that D twenty must be called. He heard it.

“D Twenty, Sarge!” A man said loudly.

“Green light in three, two, one!” Ace Eddie turned it green!

“Go time ladies,” Leonidas motioned to the jump. “I see you at Comte Du Mont or some cozy French village, go!”

The men dropped out of the plane. The weight jolted them, but none got shot. Leonidas motioned out while he heard an anti-aircraft shot rang in. He didn't flinch and motioned them out. Connor stalled.

“Connor, are you dead?”

“No, Sergeant Hughes!”

“Stand and Jump if you are alive!” Hughes looked at the rest. “If you are dead or alive, you can lay!”

A man screamed in the next shots while Lieutenant Schultz tended to him. O'Malley and O'Donnell are spooked by the screaming. Hughes looked at them: “At least, it's not our own but the enemy, get!”

“You are next Hughes,” Schultz looked at him, “It's an order, jump!”

“I swear that it's a Colonel Sink's prank to test my resolve!”

Leonidas clipped his chute on and jumped out. The jolt shook him, but it felt familiar. The bullets missed him. He didn't see a plane, saw one get blown in his view. He knew that a reckoning was coming. Once he got tangled in the tree, he took a trench knife and cut the straps. He freed himself and dropped to the ground. He listened to the ground for movement and heard it.

“Flash!”

No reply came. He blasted it, and saw a Kraut stumble out dead. He looked around and searched for survivors while darkness blanketly covered him up. He looked left and right, pausing to the sounds of snapping twigs. Once he saw only a Hare. He sighed, meanwhile he heard a noise. He looked to his right.

Chapter 5

The noise startled Hughes. He heard a click-clack which he knew to be friends. He paused to hear it again. It came one time.

“Flash!” Hughes muffled out.

“Thunder!” It came.

O'Malley peered out. Hughes smirked. He lowered his Tommy gun, looked at both sides. The forest seemed quiet. He hated it, and the ambush rattled his brain. He looked at O'Malley.

“How many men do we have?” Hughes whispered at O'Malley.

“Four,” O'Malley thought. “Nowak, Connor, O'Donnell, and me! We hear the noise, and it's rattling our morale.”

“We need to move with no click-clacks,” Hughes pointed toward a town: “We have to be quiet.”

The group traversed the outskirts of town and quietly picked up a few stragglers with passwords along the way. The bridge mouth had a hanging paratrooper or two bayoneted. Hughes motioned for quiet. He went out alone.

Hughes rushed two Kraut guards without their coats on at knife point and slit their throats. Nowak charged one and tried to bayonet him, mimicking Hughes to avenge those comrades. He got him in the stomach. He feared instant death until a knife slit his throat. He knew that knife belonged to Hughes.

“Next time, lunged for his Liver,” Hughes' voice called out quietly. “You did well as a distraction Nowak.”

“T-thank you, sergeant..”

“Rest of you, come on and scrounge for weapons, ammo, and food but no chocolate from Krauts, because we may not get a chance!”

O'Malley, O'Donnell, and Connor worked on the corpses with Hughes. They picked out the food but left the German chocolate alone. The dead GIs had parachutes covering them with ceremonial generosity, but the German Wehrmacht conscripts were left where they died.

Hughes tossed a shocked Nowak some M1 Garand ammo and chuckled:“ I'll make a man out of you yet, but don't get cold feet!”

The group traversed the Douve river and burned bridges with borrowed German oil. They searched for other survivors before they could take on serious objects. A click-clack made a noise. Hughes paused.

“Flash!”

“Thunder!”

Some engineers appeared, mostly Screaming Eagles who got lost. Hughes looked at them and nodded.

“Lost?”

“Thinks so,” One replied. “We are only a three man team with explosives.”

“We need to block a road to our right,” Hughes looked at the engineer's pack:“ Can you jerry-rigged a blockade?”

“Sure!”

“The non engineers will focus on killing Krauts and preventing escape!”

The group nodded. The tree on the left had an improvised bomb while the second had a different wire. A Wehrmacht staff car led the two Sd.Kfz. 251s and three Opel Blitzes, but a tree collapsed in front of the staff car and the second landed behind the last Opel Blitz. A hail of fire opened up. The men became welcome to a gallery.

The Kapitän in his peaked hat tried to lead his stall helm conscripts to battle. The conscripts fell at his feet then a GI rushed him with a bayonet. The Kapitän froze in fear and felt the bayonet in the liver. He died of blood loss. An engineer tried to click-clack when he heard a reply. A Panzergrenadier tried to trick him and aimed his rifle at him. A shot rang out.

A Voice called out,“ Get the vehicles at opposite ends, quick!”

A Mohawk haired man came to a scene out of a western drama. He kicked a dead GI while looking around. He muffled,“ Flash!”

The corpse replied:“ Thunder!”

“Cowboy?”

“Hya, McNasty.” Hughes laughed. “I wondered when you would show up, horse thief.”

“You look familiar, but that's besides the point!” McNasty whipped out a map and pointed to a Bailey bridge on it: “I need your engineers to be with us to be about twenty-five strong to secure it.”

“Agree, I'm completing my goals of denying enemy retreating outlets.”

The band with McNasty's survivors went to an old white bridge. Hughes led two volunteers from the party to eliminate the guard, which went quicker than expected. He rolled one over and noted the odd helmet and green camouflage. Nowak stared at the corpse

“What is it, Sergeant Hughes?”

"Fallschirmjäger," Hughes noted the corpse's wings. “Get ready for a long day.”

Cowboy Hughes predicted a long light which snipers shot at them. Hughes dug a foxhole, and everyone followed suit. McNasty got one of the survivors to knock out the German with a reply. The Fallschirmjäger became eerily quiet while shelling quieted Hughes' nerves.

“No end,” McNasty yelled.

“Relax, we got time.” Hughes nodded. “Charges are emplaced, McNasty?”

“Sure did, Cowboy.” McNasty grinned proudly: “I used our engineers to rig the bridge just in case.”

“Phew...”

“Ain't I seen you in Tahlequah at one point?”

“I hopped a lot from there to CharleyTown.”

McNasty dropped it while rubbing his Mohawk. The hairline was like a donkey picked for a lice problem, but his face was marked too in black and white. He noticed Cowboy sported three black lines on his chin. The rest was barely untouched save the one continuous line under his eyes. The sniper fire lasted all night.

Cowboy listened as mortars rained on them. The fireworks exploded nearby and ruined morale. He shot a mortar crew who stuck his head up occasionally. He checked the clock and saw the sun go to noon.

“When can the mortar stopped” Nowak yelled over the din: “It's rattling.”

“It doesn't,” Sergeant Hughes remarked. “It's never ending.”

“Is it mass?”

“No O'Donnell, could you tell me your many sins of seducing poor souls and robbing them blind?!”

“Never,” everyone started laughing at O'Donnell's reply, including Sergeant Hughes.

“Nowak, what's your sweetheart's name?”

“Mrs. Fitzgerald,” Nowak smiled with pride. “My dream is to take her home, but I don't know.”

“We got time, so your home will be liberated in no time!”

“My father said that it couldn't fall while he escaped in eighteen twenty-nine from Warsaw.”

“You get home in no time.”

O'Malley angrily said, “Don't falsely fill him up with hope, Sergeant.”

“Do you want to go home to Ireland?”

“No!”

“That's what my grandmother said.”

The men looked over. They absolutely hated the Fallschirmjäger who strutted like peacocks. They wanted to end their snarky existence and send them to their Maker. This business was becoming dangerous while Sergeant Hughes made scores on several Krauts. He made it clear that his death was too soon celebrated.

“I hear that Cowboy punched an Italian recruit for trying to betray him.”

“I hear that he shot one for being noisy.”

“That's a dang lie,” Sergeant Hughes snorted. “The Fallschirmjäger sniper got him as it was a heated affair in Naples.”

The sun set red. Everyone ate rations and admired it quietly while the sniper fire died down. Sergeant Hughes drank hot coffee after a brief rain. He looked into the Douve river and smiled. He saw a crystal river that flowed quietly. He heard quiet gunfire.

“I hate this.”

“What's to hate private,” Sergeant Hughes smirked. “We have the Kraut paratroopers to hate across the creek.”

“It rains, it pours, and the food is trashed.”

“I could settle for a liberty steak right about now.” O'Malley gripped.

Connor said, “Just steak, I murdered some.”

O'Malley chuckled: “I could kill Krauts for some bully meat.”

Sergeant Hughes smirked. “A hot meal would be nice, not a blue plate one.”

“Blue plate”

O'Malley chuckled: “A decent meal for less.”

“If it's decent.” Hughes replied grimly. “I don't care if it's horse meat. Now dig in!”

The group dug in fox holes. Hughes watched across the river while he checked his ammo. He wanted the Fallschirmjäger to get sent to their Maker while he did the shooting. The snipers died down to unusual testing while McNasty's Mohawk hair and white paint shimmered in the moonlight and mortar flashes.

In the morning, planes sounded over in clouded daylight. Sergeant Hughes hushed Nowak and Connor while listening. He knew what was coming. He looked at his fox hole mates.

“I jump over, don't return fire.”

Connor said: “Return what!”

Mustangs sprayed strafe while Leonidas jumped to the next two foxholes to stop O'Malley, O'Donnell, and a couple of engineers from returning fire. He saw McNasty.

“Don't return fire, fools.” McNasty bellowed and ducked. “It's our planes, our planes!”

“Sir?”

The planes flew off. The men shook out the dirt and banged their heads. Leonidas stood tall while staring at the planes flying off. Nowak looked at it.

“Was it planes or arty that nearly killed you?”

“Arty,” Sergeant Hughes replied: “Report O'Mally!”

“None dead!” He hollered, “Though two have bruised ankles.”

“Not gonna fly,” Sergeant Hughes snorted: “We are lucky, too lucky.”

“Some blues,” McNasty bellowed. “I want to shoot the somebi...”

“Krauts in our rear!”

The noise of German shouting aroused the men to point guns about face with the river behind him. They smelled a stench of fighting wagging while tension went high. Two Krauts

came out waving white flags. McNasty and Hughes walked up slowly from the trenches and approached them. McNasty rubbed his scalp and looked at the German officer.

“What do you want, sir?”

“Passage to the bridge!”

“Sorry Kraut, the bridge is out!”

“You Yanks are bad liars!”

Hughes understood some of the languages while watching the frightened looks. Some conscripts showed fear while some feigned conquest. Hughes looked at the officer.

“How long until the Yanks get here?”

“Cowboy no...go ahead.”

“How long until they come?”

Officer bellowed:“...Let us pass now dummkopf!”

“Come and take our heartbreak.” McNasty angrily replied back. “We’ll kill you if you try.”

“Dummkopfs the pair of you!”

Hughes laughed:“ Come and take that heartbreak bridge!”

“Fine!” The German officer replied.

Both sides returned to their posts. Hughes motioned to his men to prepare for battle, and Nowak and others got any weapon ready. After three days of misery, they wanted those Wehrmacht troops in their shiny uniforms and helmets to know pain.

Germans made a battle cry of “For the Fatherland!” and charged on the fox holes. Leonidas turned into a hellhound while pointing and spraying his Tommy gun at the Krauts. It felt good to him.

Nowak struggled with a Kraut and stabbed him with his trench knife to the neck. The Kraut made a hiss and fell back, terrifying poor Nowak. O’Malley and O'Donnell became Irish geese and sniped Germans coming too close. The Krauts fled to the joy of the defenders

Leonidas approached Nowak as he shivered. Nowak made a yelp and saw Leonidas giving him a pat on the shoulder. He looked at the dead man with fear.

“How do you live with it and love women, Sergeant Hughes?”

“I don't know about women,” Hughes replied. “Killing gets easy when you have motivation.”

“I hope-”

“Good shot, Nowak.” McNasty smiled at him. “You four made Cowboy proud.”

“We still have a lot to do.”

Hughes moved wounded out. Few medics are working while the guns faded. Then the noise came, and Leonidas looked up at the new boys in webbed gear who came in. These from probably Utah Beach are what the Krauts were fleeing from.

Hughes sighed: “Nightmare is just beginning.”

“Why are you like that?” McNasty wondered. “We won the day and beat the Krauts back.”

A soldier called out: “He supposedly survived Cisterna.”

“Sorry Lot,” McNasty nodded, “I'm lucky that he's an experienced rascal!”

“Me too, Sarge!”

Hughes got on a Jimmy truck with other lost paratroopers and rode to the assembly point. He noticed a column in which he saw ragged men. He knew that they looked tired and exhausted, but war took no breaks why should they take any breaks.

The night came while Hughes rested on the truck best he could. He could hear the artillery in the distance, but his body awoke to new sounds, hope. It was fleeting in his mind.

Chapter 6

The quiet hushed voices Hughes heard came from a distance. Familiar order of the military came to him while he felt despair. He saw other companies reforming which he managed to make out faces while disembarking. One man approached him. Hughes saluted.

“Lieutenant Speirs, I'm lucky that you survived the jump, but where's the Capt'n?”

“Dead...”

“It was his time to go.”

A voice yelled out: “Do you wish that it was you?”

“Knock it off, Johnson!” Captain Speirs ordered. “We have a veteran in our midst.”

“Surrounded by seasoned soldiers.”

Paratroopers surrounded Hughes. He was a celebrity to them, and he was looking at them. No longer running, they passed through Hades and became men. Hughes too would run with them back to Hades.

The French sleeping town had respite. Yet, the paratroopers were lining up to meet out a foul soup, and one man checked his Tommy gun. The man cleaned and checked for errors. His subordinate whispered.

“Sergeant Hughes, why do you fuss over the gun?”

“I don't want jams, Nowak.”

“Ah..”

“Lad, it's time that ye fight.” A paratrooper grinned: “We should rush them.”

“Steady, Easy goes in first, and then Dog company goes in next.” Hughes whispered out.

The men waited in the damp, cold. They chafed while the Fox company was pulling up. Easy had it good as its company was the first to enter. Now, they have to wait for the show to start. Hughes waited. The silence turned tense while everyone jumped into place. Then the Easy company ran in.

“Steady,” Hughes whispered out. “It will be our turn, and we will be those happy few too.”

Everyone said: “Sir!”

Once Easy company got pinned down, Hughes was first to enter. He paused and motioned Johnson to go around who nodded. He trained his Thompson while meticulously looking over his shoulder. A Kraut rifle was pointing at Johnson, but he heard a Kraut grenade go off.

Johnson whispered: “Cowboy?”

“Behind you.”

Johnson nodded: “Welcome back.”

Noise paused it, and they readied their weapons. Hughes killed a German with his pistol as he was too close for his comfort. Everyone was shocked, but they continued to rid the town of Germans. Hughes ran by a German but shot him while running off.

“He is in a mood.”

“It's cowboy.” O'Malley chuckled quietly: “When he is not, I would be scared.”

“Devil would quiver O'Malley.” Johnson smirked. “I know that death made a mistake in revoking his life.”

“Devil would choke at his awful sight.” O'Malley grinned: “I would bet that Hades would freeze from Hughes’ touch.”

“His smile would shed the soul.”

“Spooky Newark, real spooky.”

Everyone nodded. They trudged down the alley as Hughes led. The others carefully tread the area while some cleared houses. Some of the squad busted in and found a family as Hughes walked in. He gave candy bars to three of the kids. The kids took it and ate it ravenously while Hughes rubbed a boy's head.

“Food seems to be it.” O'Malley smiled.

“All nations should feed each other.”

“They don't Newark.” O'Malley sighed. “They get lucky if Germans don't take their food.”

“I can dream.”

“It is a nice one.” O'Malley sighed: “It may never happen.”

“Search the house for Kraut snipers.” Hughes ordered while switching to a Colt revolver.

The squad checked the rooms. Each room was empty which spooked the squad. The group split up to where one searched a room. Mouse ran by Newark, but he didn't scream. Hughes checked on him then crept to the next room. The gunshot and click spooked everyone.

The squad found a fallschirmjager dead. Hughes looked in the closet with his pistol which they were not shocked. Hughes didn't show disgust or sadness while he fixed his pistol. Nobody asked questions while blood was pooling. Hughes looked at them.

“Is the town secured?”

“No sergeant.”

“Then secure it, O'Malley.”

The squad and him marched out spaced across the street. That fear hung over them, some paused at the alley. Hughes looked at it and went up with Newark and Johnson having his back. Hughes paused and listened while he moved a few steps.

“Come on, First squad.”

Johnson then moved by Hughes with his Garand ready. He was upset since he wanted to be back in the English countryside, not this mud. The French town was thick with fog as the Americans head hunted Germans. Hughes saw nothing as he lowered his rifle. Speirs gave a signal to his relief

“Rest.”

“Yes, French gals.”

“Corporal!”

“I gripe at you, Sergeant Hughes.”

Johnson grumbled as he looked at Hughes and stayed put. The squad joined up with other squads of Dog company while Hughes sat by a lamp and rested his head by it. He ignored a reporter or two while everything became a blur to him. He went into a fog and seemingly slept while peace lulled him. He saw an officer which was a reminder of the fleeting peace.

“Up to it Hughes! We got places to be.”

“Yes Lieutenant Speirs, I handle it.”

Hughes pointed five of his squad to follow him. They made foxholes outside of town while Hughes worked with a private. He looked exhausted while Hughes looked over. He looked at the private.

“Listen kid, I know that Newark's family name is Polish, but I need that fire.”

“Sergeant, how do you do it?” Newark fidgeted with fear. “Killing these Krauts.”

“You must expect that your death may come and cry havoc.” Hughes grimly replied: “You are a paratrooper now, and they kill men that are special operations or paratroopers, remember it when the Wehrmacht comes for you Newark.”

“I'm scared, Sergeant.”

“We all are afraid at some point in our lives.” Hughes sighed and patted his shoulder. “My sergeant told me that our sacrifices will not be in vain.”

“I won't fail, sir...”

Hughes patted him on the shoulder. They took turns resting while it was a brief moment. The moon hidden by the clouds looked ripe for rain. He heard noise from the hill and pointed his Tommy gun at it. He looked at the helmets which he knew could be fallschirmjagers. He hollered.

“Stop fools, stop!”

The runaways lifted their hands. He pointed a rifle at them and saw an American uniform with eagle patches which made him curious. He touched it with a pistol drawn and checked him. He checked his buddies too as he was curious.

“What is coming over those hilly woods?”

“Krauts, Sergeant...” A private replied exhaustedly. “This group had two lightings and a fist though I saw some fallschirmjagers and tanks too coming over it...”

“No good, go tell Colonel Sink now.” Hughes looked at two of his squad mates. “Johnson and O'Malley go with them!”

“What do we do if it goes wrong?”

“Focus on escort.”

“Sir, yes sir.”

Corporal and private escorted the fugitives away to HQ. Hughes watched while the soft sunrise masked a storm. He felt a chill in his spine that he would die. The chill seemed to rise up his back, but he controlled it at last. He readied his Tommy gun for what was coming.

“Dawn is coming, so get ready!”

Everyone replied, “Yes, sergeant!”

Enemy panthers sounded in the distance. The sound was ominous with the panthers coming over the hill which racked the nerves. The sound was grating machinery that some paratroopers wanted it to stop. Hughes saw men frightened, but he looked ahead. He heard those fateful words:

“Fox company is routed!”

Hughes shouted: “Where's Lieutenant Speirs!”

“At an abandoned Church sir!”

“Run right!” Hughes shouted and said: “Double time!”

A paratrooper said, “This is desertion, sergeant!”

“Run corporal Johnson, we don't have time!” Hughes looked at the others. “Run it, now!”

The men ran hard right. They heard gun fire from a half track while Hughes motioned them on. The group managed to reach friendly lines though the ones with E on their shoulders were unhappy. Hughes stood up close to a sergeant.

“Name sergeant?”

“Dobson, you seem lost!”

Hughes smiled: “You look Texan, Cowboy?”

“Hmph, most call me rustler or cowpoke.” The sergeant grinned. “Stay on the left.”

The squad formed on the left with extra ammo and helped stall the Germans cresting the hill. The Wehrmacht conscripts barely appeared, but the tanks and heavy armor made an appearance.

The sight became nerve racking. Hughes saw a bazooka armed lieutenant and corporal hit the belly of an armored behemoth. The beast stopped in its tracks. He saw figments at the church.

“That must be Lieutenant Speirs.”

“What do we do, sergeant?”

“We have to reach them, Newark.” Hughes replied and pointed his Tommy gun. “Get ready.”

“You stay, sergeant.!”

The paratrooper had a lieutenant’s silver star. Hughes noted his look while saluting him. He was armed with a M1 Garand not a pistol, but Hughes admired him. The lieutenant said:

“You and your men should stay here.”

“Is this an order lieutenant?”

“No, it's a suggestion sergeant as you are committing suicide.”

“Lieutenant Speirs is in there air,” Hughes shouted at the lieutenant. “Get me on charges, but I’ll be cursed if I don’t try to save my officer.”

“Stay alive, I don’t know how much time we have.”

“Name sir?”

“Lieutenant Dick Winters, sergeant—?”

“Leonidas Hughes sir, my mother named me after a Spartan and a Confederate officer sir.”

“Good luck, Sergeant Hughes.”

Sergeant Hughes motioned his squad and ran out. The group moved under heavy gunfire as they made out figments. Men escaped the convent as Hughes made out the eagles on their left shoulders. He smiled at the sergeant and handed him a clip while motioning them to run to the woods. Hughes looked back and covered fire while he looked at the figment of Newark. A voice arrested his attention.

“You are lucky that you are a good sergeant.”

“Sir, the men missed you.” Hughes said without saluting.

“You are lucky too.”