

BELGIAN SPRING

by

Anonymous

FADE IN:

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

SUPER: BELGIAN FRONT - LATE 1944

German soldiers, half-tracks, and panzers enter a bombed-out village. Troops patrol the deserted buildings and homes.

One GERMAN SOLDIER spots tire tracks in the dirt of a street that leads away from the village. He traces them to a group of jeeps, troops, and civilians in the distance who march through flat farmland.

The soldier finds the nearest GERMAN CAPTAIN and reports the sighting. The German captain dashes to a nearby Kubelwagen and radios the information. As he talks with his superior, the soldier grabs binoculars from the backseat.

In the viewfinder, he sees two jeeps each are placed at the front and rear of the xxxxxxxxxxscivxxxxx and their escorts.

The German captain gets his final orders and shares them with the incredulous soldier. The captain explains more and the soldier agrees, returns to his village patrol.

The German captain grabs the binoculars to watch the evacuees himself, smirks.

EXT. FARMLAND - DAY

PRIVATE JAKE HOCHLEITER (17) watches the German captain through his pair of binoculars. He rides as a spotter with a late-term pregnant woman in the backseat of the last jeep.

SERGEANT HANK MOBLEY (23) walks on foot beside the jeep.

JAKE

(to Hank)

Sir, tell Cap'n we been spotted.

Hank starts to leave, but Jake stops him.

JAKE

(binoculars up)

Wait! There's two, three half-tracks, but...it don't look like they's comin' this way. Nobody's comin' this way in fact.

Jake observes the scene more: the German captain puts down the binoculars in the Kubelwagen and walks into the village.

JAKE
Looks like they ain't comin'.

HANK
You sure they saw us?

JAKE
Yeah, I'm sure. Some officer was grinnin' at me like some goddamn cat eyein' a cage full of canaries. Better tell Cap.

Hank jogs to the head of the column to join CAPTAIN TOM O'GRADY (32), a hardened soldier with a hardened babyface, who leads the exodus.

HANK
(out of breath)
Jake says the Krauts have seen us, but aren't in pursuit.

Captain checks out their environment. Farmland circles the town and the road bisects it. The fields are surrounded by hills and forest: a perfect place to hide the enemy.

CORPORAL GABE KING (21) walks alongside Captain O'Grady.

GABE
We know what that means.

CAPTAIN
(looking to the hills)
We sure do. Not much we can do about it. Just have to hope our scouts find the trouble up there before we do. Hank...dismissed.

HANK
Yessir.

Hank jogs back to the back of the line.

CAPTAIN
Corporal, we are the fish in this Belgian barrel of farmland.

GABE
That we are, sir.

CAPTAIN

I'd prefer it was a barrel of beer on a Belgian Spring day.

GABE

With a Belgian girl or two for a little bit of company?

CAPTAIN

Sure, why not? If we're still around by Spring.

GABE

You're pretty invincible, sir.

CAPTAIN

It's not me, it's you guys. Cheatin' death like you're cheatin' your old man outta five bucks. Do you boys play poker with Satan himself or something?

Gabe smirks.

GABE

Something like that, sir. We do love to gamble. I don't hear any complaints about your new pipe.

CAPTAIN

That I don't mind. You're just supposed to hate your captain is all. That's how it works.

GABE

(winks)

Nah...

Captain squints into the trees, concerned.

CAPTAIN

Gabe, my gut tells me this will get hairy fast. We can't stay on this road out in the open. What if we hug the left treeline?

GABE

That puts us closer to potential snipers, sir.

CAPTAIN

Snipers on the right will have a harder time hitting us, though.

GABE

The shorter proximity might be too much to handle. As an officer, you'd be the bullseye.

CAPTAIN

Yeah, instead of the bullseye, I'll give them a good look at the bull's ass and kick 'em.

(beat)

It's Captain's turn to gamble now, Corporal.

Gabe cracks up.

DING! DING! POW! Sniper bullets hit the jeeps. Some of the civilians are wounded from the shots.

CAPTAIN

(shouts to all)

All right, everyone behind the jeeps! Allons-y!

Everyone tries to hide behind a jeeps as best they can. It's a bit tight. Captain and Gabe grab cover themselves behind the second jeep in the formation.

BEEP! BEEP! Captain grabs the receiver and takes the call.

CAPTAIN

Captain O'Grady speaking. Over.

(listens)

Yes, sir. We're en route to the valley. Snipers just opened up on us from northern positions in the hills. Pinned down for now. Southern targets are clear to be lit up. Over.

(listens)

Very good, sir. That should work. Thank you. Over and out.

Captain returns the receiver to the radio.

CAPTAIN

That was Colonel. Air cover in about eight minutes.

GABE

What the hell? Since when is air cover offered freely? We'll see when push comes to shove.

CAPTAIN

You said it. Okay, let's clear out whatever's within range right here. You take the front jeep, I'll stay here and then tell the boys in back to do their thing.

Captain gets the attention of Jake, Hank, and PRIVATE BILL QUINCEY (19) who hide behind the rear jeeps. He directs them to watch the hills for snipers and fire at will.

CAPTAIN

Gabe, you take the lead jeep and look for targets.

Gabe nods and moves out. POW! POW! Shots follow him. Captain peeks around the jeep's fender to search the hills. He sees some movement, FIRES with his Thompson, misses.

CAPTAIN

(to Gabe)

See him?

GABE

No. Where?

Captain fires again. The shots are closer to the sniper.

CAPTAIN

Bald spot of the hill at your ten o'clock. He's nine o'clock in the bald spot.

The sniper takes another shot. POW! The fire from the muzzle gives away the sniper's position. Gabe fires. POW!

GABE

(giggling)

Musta been a magician. Now ya see him, now ya don't!

CAPTAIN

Nice job, Corporal.

GABE

Thank ya, sir. I reckon we got, what? Two, three more?

CAPTAIN

Something like that. I hope.

Captain checks on his jeep's occupants. Medic Tim treats an abdominal wound of one of the injured passengers. Another one remains in the jeep, dead.

CAPTAIN

Is it bad, Timmy?

MEDIC TIM

I don't think it is, sir. Just a grazing, I b'lieve.

CAPTAIN

Good.

Three more SNIPER SHOTS are fired at the rear jeeps. Two civilians are hit. Hank is shot in the head. Jake pulls him against the jeep. Hank still moves. No medics are around.

CAPTAIN

Jesus. Timmy, Hank took a shot to the head. Can you get to him?

MEDIC TIM

Sure.

Tim grabs the civilian's hands and holds gauze to the wound.

MEDIC TIM

Just hold this. Appliquer.

The civilian nods.

CAPTAIN

I'll cover ya. Okay...Cover and...FIRE!

Captain stands and fires as Tim runs the long gap between the second and third jeeps, head low. Captain nabs a sniper.

DING! POW! A shot blows out Tim's legs, inches from the third jeep. A civilian drags him the rest of the way. He gets right to work on Hank, tries to ignore his pain.

Captain checks his watch and watches the skies. Heavy cloud cover begins to overtake the clear skies over their position.

CAPTAIN

(to air cover)

C'mon fellas...need ya soon.

BUZZZZZ! The noise comes from a rocket with wings in the skies overhead: a V-1 "buzz-bomb".

CAPTAIN

(to Gabe)

Christ...was that a buzz-bomb?

Everyone watches it fly in a steady, straight path oblivious to everything below it.

GABE

I believe so, sir. It had that godawful sound to it.

CAPTAIN

No, what's godawful is hearing that sound go dead. Then you wait for the axe to fall. That's why they let us go, Corporal.

Once past the hills, the engine's buzz dies and it descends.

They hold their breath, brace for an explosion, but it does not come. They exhale, but still uneasy.

CAPTAIN

Must've been a dud.

POW! POW! POW! More shots are volleyed from the snipers.

CAPTAIN

Oh, for fuck's...! We can't catch a break here.

Captain returns fire, but misses--because it was a careless shot. Gabe peers around the front of the jeep, takes a shot, hits a sniper square in the chest. The corpse falls dead.

CAPTAIN

Nice job again, Corporal.

GABE

Thank you, sir.

The jeep radio BEEPS again. Captain answers.

CAPTAIN

Captain O'Grady. Over.

(listens)

Yes, Colonel.

(listens; defeated)

Very well, sir. Over and out.

He slams the receiver into the passenger seat, pissed. Gabe scurries to him.

GABE

What's up?

CAPTAIN

No air cover. Snow system inbound right for the rendezvous point.

GABE

Mother Nature might blow those buzz-bombs off course, then.

CAPTAIN

Or blow 'em back onto us.

GABE

Always gotta see the glass half-empty, don't ya sir?

CAPTAIN

It's better to be safe than sorry.

Captain is at a crossroads. He sits on the grass, in thought. Gabe pulls his attention away from the hills to Captain.

GABE

Whatcha thinking, sir?

CAPTAIN

Get Jake and Bill up here. We need to get the hell outta here.

Gabe signals for Jake and Bill to join them. The two soldiers make their way from the rear jeeps to the front of the line.

POW! POW! POW! More civilians are shot dead in Jake and Bill's wake as they run for the lead jeeps.

CAPTAIN

(to group)

Gentlemen, we need to keep moving, but not like this. Colonel says a snow storm's inbound. There's also--

BUUUUZZZZZZZZZZ! Another V-1 flies over lower and much slower than the first bomb. All eyes are glued to it.

Silence sweeps over the group as the engine cuts off at their zenith. It hits the plain a hundred years ahead of them. The explosion shakes the ground, many fall down.

CAPTAIN

Those things.

(pause)

So. Here's my suggestion. We split up. Jake, you and Bill take everyone but the jeeps into the hillside. Gabe and I will stay down here and cover the jeeps and we both move in a parallel path to the valley rendezvous.

Bill raises his hand. Captain nods at him.

BILL

With the jeeps, that's like danglin' a carrot on a string in front of a starving rabbit for those snipers. I'd rather protect the carrots.

Jake chimes in.

JAKE

That's right, partner. You and me got the sharpest eyes here. We ain't gonna lose no carrots. I say we escort the jeeps.

CAPTAIN

Gabe...what do ya think?

GABE

Captain, I think you should go up there alone. I'd like to help protect the ground transports. The scouts can be your escorts.

CAPTAIN

Worst case scenario, I lose you boys and all I've got a few scouts to get us thirty miles on foot. Then what?

The guys stay quiet, in thought. Jake answers.

JAKE

We just ain't gonna lose the carrots, cap'n!

Everyone grins and they bristle with energy to make the plan work.

BILL

I think we have a plan, sir.

CAPTAIN

Move out.

HILLSIDE - MINUTES LATER

Captain leads the group of civilians into the vegetation browned by autumn. Two scouts flank him, rifles in hand, their eyes dot about the sea of branches to spot snipers.

TREELINE

Gabe, Jake, and Bill walk alongside the four jeeps that divert into their own tight formation.

POW! DING! Gabe, Jake, and Bill keep their heads low. A shot has hit the jeep's back gas can. Fuel leaks out of the bullethole. Gabe rushes to plug it with his finger.

HILLS

One of the scouts spots the shooter. He kneels, aims, and takes him out of commission.

CAPTAIN

Good eye, soldier. Hopefully that does it for them.

TREELINE

Gabe struggles with the leaky hole.

GABE

Jake, Bill...chew me some gum so we can plug this thing.

Jake grabs some gum from his breast pocket and chews it. Then he hands it to Gabe, who plugs the hole. The pregnant woman in the jeep smiles at Gabe, he smiles back at her.

POW! POW! The guys run to the left of the jeeps and kneel, guns raised.

GABE

Ambush...let's clean up.

POW! POW! POW! All three take precise, calculated shots at the hillside. POW! POW!

HILLSIDE

Captain and the scouts rush ahead of the march to spot the shooters. They stop, aim, fire. Stop, aim, fire. The enemies drop like flies. POW! POW!

TREELINE

Gabe, Jake, and Bill hear the fire fight in the bush. They get bold and get closer to the trees to see better. They continue to fire.

BUUUZZZZZZZZZZZZ!!! ALL MOVEMENT comes to a stop. The sound grows LOUDER, even as they watch the bomb fly past them.

TREELINE

Gabe, Jake, and Bill watch the bomb fly out of sight. The sound of the engine dies, but they can see the flame of the engine exhaust and the bomb continues on course when it should descend with gravity. Bill scratches his head.

Gabe turns and sees a SECOND BOMB drop twenty yards behind them. None of these guys are ready for their story to end.

BOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!! Earth, flesh, vegetation, and shrapnel fly through the air.

HILLSIDE

Captain and the evacuees have been sprayed with dirt and debris, but they are unharmed. The emotional toll kicks in.

Captain brushes off the dust and moves to a better spot to view the damage. He sees smoke rise out of a black crater. Only bits of blood and sinew give the scene any color.

Most of the civilians are in shock, but others weep over lost loved ones.

Captain's men are gone. He drops his Thompson and slams his helmet against a tree trunk. He collapses to the ground.

He stares at the crater, then down the treeline to the valley. He holds his head in his hands and weeps.

CAPTAIN

(to himself)

Where did we go wrong? Where?

He sits, silent. He fumbles through his pockets to grab and light a cigarette. Tears gather in his eyes.

After a few moments, he spots movement in the crater. His eyes widen with hope and stumbles down the hill to her.

TREELINE

In the rubble, the pregnant woman struggles under debris. Except for a few cuts and scratches, she seems unharmed.

CAPTAIN

You're okay. Umm...

(translating)

C'est bien. Nous sommes bien,
madame. Sécurité.

She looks in his eyes and nods. He tries to move her, but she screams in pain. He eases her onto the ground. She screams, this time it's more intense. She grabs his hand, squeezes hard, and looks in his eyes.

CAPTAIN

Oui?

She nods. Captain's eyes widen and tears gather once again.

CAPTAIN (V.O.)

I forget who now, but someone
once wrote that a baby is God's
opinion that life must go on.

(beat)

Spring in Belgium brought new
life and peace to the this old,
deadly war.

THE END