Falling

3:00 AM

“Stand up!!” shouted the captain.
“Hook up!!”
I can barely hear him above all the noise.
“Equipment check, sound off!!”
“Ten okay! Nine okay! Eight okay! Seven Okay!”
I look out the window to see explosions light up the night sky. My hand trembles. I kiss the crucifix that I had attached to my dog tags and tuck it back in my uniform.
“Green light, go, go, go!!”
Before I know it, it is my turn to go. I grasp the sides of the opening and take a deep breath. The officer yells for me to go, and I launch myself into the night sky. My heart skips a beat as my chute catches in the wind. I am falling. The explosions light up the sky to reveal hundreds of parachutes dropping from their planes.

My eyes dart from explosion to explosion. The crashes of the anti-aircraft guns ring in my ears. I look below and try to make out the blackened figures on the ground. It is as if I am dropping into an endless pit of darkness.

I attempt to swallow the giant lump forming in my throat. I try to spit out any prayers I can, but they all seem to mix together. My mind is racing, my heart pounding. The sounds of the guns are getting louder and the flashes brighter. The ground is rapidly getting closer and closer. A fire is burning below. I glance up to see the rest of my fellow soldiers falling down below me.

Wham!! I hit the ground with a thump. Something cracks and I’m not sure if it’s a twig or my ankle.

I wrestle with my parachute to get it off. The crackle of rifle fire erupts a few hundred yards away. I didn’t land near anyone in my company. I’m by myself, and for the first time in my life I am actually scared. It’s pitch black outside, and I am by myself, and most of all, I’m lost. I don’t want to move; I want to lie down and go to sleep, but I know I can’t.
Grasping my M1 Garand, I start to slowly move along the tree line in hopes of finding someone, especially an ally. I hear the rustle of leaves, and I’m not sure if it’s someone or just the wind. I stop to make sure. As I continue on, I hear the cracking of a twig. I freeze. My heart stops beating.

“Flash,” I whisper.
“Thunder,” comes the reply.
I sigh in relief and make my way over to the source of the reply.
“Hey man, what company are you?” I ask.
“Easy.”
“Dang, I’m looking for Alpha.”
I squat down in the ditch beside him. He offers me a cigarette but I pass. He starts to crawl out of the ditch and to the other side, so I decide to follow. On the other side is a large pasture and the burning house I saw while coming down.
“Let’s go find someone,” he says.
We slowly make our way across the field and to the house. As we approach, I spot a man lying on the ground, and when I come up to him I notice a puddle of blood along with a large wound in his ribs. I try not to vomit.
“C’mon man. Let’s get out of here.”
We continue to walk when all of a sudden the crackle of gun fire breaks out. I can hear the smacks as the bullets strike the trees around us. I immediately hit the dirt and cover my head, but my companion doesn’t. Bam!! Smack!!
“Ahhhhh!!!” he shouts in pain.
Blood starts to spill from his stomach. He slumps over and holds his side. I start to panic.
“What do I do?”
I crawl over to him and tear open his shirt to take a look. He moans in pain. I fetch a needle and morphine from my pack and stick it in his leg; then I wrap and bandage the wound.
He needs a medic, but we are all alone. Smack! Smack! Two more shots hit the trees. I pull up my rifle and aim toward where I think the shots came from. I can’t make out anything in the darkness. Then the light from the barrels light up. I aim and…pow! Pow! I fire two shots at the light, followed by silence.
Suddenly the night erupts in machine gun fire and I crawl over to a tree to take cover. I can hear the thuds as the bullets smack against the trees. My whole body shakes in fear. Then it all stops. The night goes quiet.
Pow! Pow! Pow! Shots ring out behind me this time. Once again the machine guns return the fire. Allies!
“Hey, over here! Man wounded!”
“Coming!”
Crack! Pow! Shots are fired from everywhere. A guy asks me what my company is and I tell him Alpha. Turns out these guys are Alpha as well.
“Lockman and Smith, flank em’ on the right and put two grenades on that gunner, go!”
I follow Smith and we silently creep around to the right of the enemy. They continue to fire on our previous position.
“Ready?”
I pull out a grenade and prepare to throw it.
“Give it five seconds. Throw.”
I pull the pin and count to five. Both our grenades sail and hit. Bamm!! They simultaneously explode. Germans shouts of pain break out.
“There they go!”
Pow! Pow! Pow! I fire three shots in the direction of the fleeing men. We all start to run towards their abandoned trench.
“Stay low!”
It quickly becomes mass chaos in the trench. The wounded Germans shout at us but we don’t have an interpreter to translate. One of them pulls out his Luger and fires at us. Smack!! It hits a private in the arm. Pow!! Pow!! Someone returns the favor.
“Get the weapons!”
“Line em’ up.”
We put the Germans’ guns and grenades in one pile and the dead Germans in another. Our medic takes care of the injured ones. As for the rest, we try to shut them up.
None of us are really sure what to do with them. I pull out my lighter to check my watch. It's 4:15 in the morning. I yawn.
Adam Brown, our commanding officer, finds our position on the map. After studying it for awhile he announces, “We got a lot of walking to do.”
Three houses later we are still walking, and we haven’t found our command post yet.
I pull out my canteen to take a sip of water when our lead scout comes running back.
“Germans ahead, a whole company!”
We all hit the dirt.
“Up ahead, to the right. Farmhouse.”
We all crawl over to the side of the trail and take cover behind a group of trees.
“Put a few rounds in the upper window,” says Adam.
Our mortar team coordinates the mortars and fires a round. Kaboom!!! It hits the barn beside the house. The miss gives away our position.
“Crap!”
Kabambambam!! MP40 fire rains down on us. We suffer one casualty. Someone calls for a medic, and I cover my head in fear.
Private Smith stands up to get a better view of the house. Crack! A sniper takes him out. He slumps over. I turn away.
“Fire another mortar!”
This time it hits the side of the house, exposing four Germans. We all fire at them and they all drop. KABOOM!! An artillery shell hits a few yards from our left side. Screams flare up.
My heart starts to race, my hand trembles. I begin to pray. Nothing in training has prepared us for this; to see our fellow men dead beside us, to hear the screams of the wounded, and the gunfire of the enemy. All I want is to be back home with my family. Back somewhere safe.
Kaboom! Another shell breaks up my thoughts.
“Lockman get out of there!! Come on!”
I jump out of the ditch. Smack! Smack! More bullets strike the trees.
“Hey put a bazooka round on that house!”
Two privates step in front of the trees and out in the open. One loads the round in the end of it while the other aims. Boom!! The gun goes off. It makes a direct hit on the upper window of the house.
“Cover fire!”
We all start releasing heavy rifle fire on the house.
“Fix bayonets.”
I pull out my bayonet and attach it to the end of my rifle. Adam starts to run toward the house and we all follow. Pow! The sniper takes someone out. We keep running. My legs hurt, but I push on. I try not to run in a straight line. Pow! Someone else falls victim to the sniper’s wrath.
As I approach the house I toss a grenade into the remains of the building. It goes off and I cringe. Crack! Pow! Smack! Shots are fired all around me. A German jumps up from behind a pile of bricks. I turn my gun around and fire at him without thinking. He falls down and I turn away.
“Lockman, search the barn!”
Private Galloway comes along with me.
“I’ll open, you shoot,” he says.
He runs up and kicks down the door, as I fire two rounds inside. Nothing happens. I step in and search around with the nose of my gun. I can’t see anyone or anything. I can hear shouts outside as the fighting continues.
Something moves in the darkness.

“Show yourself!” I shout.

Whammm! Something hits me square in the stomach. I cringe and grasp my stomach. Everything goes black, and then suddenly everything is white. I hear myself hit the floor, but I continue falling. It feels as if I just jumped out of the plane again. I am falling, falling.