

RETREATING

Drama/War Screenplay Sample by Patrick Laffoon

*CONTEXT: What's left of a crippled American Army unit attempts to make a retreat deep in enemy territory after WWII's famous Battle of the Bulge. The new ranking officer struggles to gain the trust of his soldiers.*

**EXT. FRENCH COUNTRY ROAD - DAY**

A blizzard. PRIVATE DUNCAN looks under the hood of a truck while CORPORAL HAYES watches. PRIVATE MCCARTHY and PRIVATE WILKINS stand guard, weapons drawn. They're all covered in mud and blood. Dark smoke billows out from the truck's engine, clashing with the eternal white around them.

DUNCAN  
(coughing)  
Yep... It's fucked.

HAYES  
Shit. Smoke's going to blow our cover, even in this goddamn snow.

THUD. Hayes rams the butt of his Thompson into the truck.

HAYES  
McCarthy, Wilkins, start shoveling snow on the engine. Put out that smoke.

MCCARTHY  
With what?

HAYES  
Use your fucking helmets, I don't care, just do it. That's an order!

McCarthy and Wilkins get to work.

DUNCAN  
Do you think we should maybe find some cover? Sir?

HAYES  
Let's wait for the recon team to get back, see what our options are. I don't want to stop moving. We can't stop.

The men continue to shovel snow into the engine, but the clever smoke finds its way into the air anyway. Hayes lights a cigarette.

WILKINS  
Sir? Are we close?

HAYES  
I don't know...

MCCARTHY  
What do you mean you don't know?

HAYES  
I don't know where we are, okay?!  
Things got a little hectic back  
there. Or do you not remember  
being painted with our  
lieutenant's innards?

MCCARTHY  
Yeah, but-

HAYES  
I am just following orders,  
McCarthy, so I suggest you do the  
same. Right now we need to worry  
about getting out of here without  
being seen.

Duncan notices two FIGURES in the distance, moving through the  
deep snow. He points.

DUNCAN  
Sir...

HAYES  
That them? 'Bout goddamn time.

Hayes puts out his cigarette.

BENEDETTI (O.S.)  
Hey! We found something!

RAMIREZ (O.S.)  
A village! This way!

DUNCAN  
Shelter.

Hayes pulls Duncan aside. Wilkins and McCarthy continue to  
scoop snow into the engine.

HAYES  
(whispering)  
I don't want to get stuck holed up  
in some bombed out church or  
something. They'll find us.  
Let's keep-

The sound of VEHICLES rumble in the distance.

HAYES  
Wait, wait, wait... You hear  
that?

They listen. The sound gets LOUDER.

DUNCAN  
Trucks, maybe armor.

HAYES  
Off the road! Now! Grab your  
gear and move! Duncan, you're  
with me. McCarthy, Wilk, take up  
the rear.  
(then)  
Benny, we're coming to you guys!  
Let's go!

They start to clear out. McCarthy puts his helmet back on and  
grabs his carbine before catching up to Hayes and Duncan.  
Wilkins forgets he still has snow in his helmet so he dumps it  
all over himself as he moves out.

WILKINS  
Shit.

**EXT. SNOWY FIELDS - LATER**

The six men trudge along in knee-deep snow as the blizzard  
continues. PRIVATE BENEDETTI and SPECIALIST RAMIREZ lead the  
way, followed by Hayes and Duncan, then Wilkins and McCarthy.

HAYES  
How far is this village, Ramirez?

RAMIREZ  
Another klick maybe. We think we  
saw a building through the trees  
up ahead.

BENEDETTI  
It was hard to tell with the snow.

MCCARTHY  
Hey, Hayes, uh, sir, why didn't we  
wait a minute to see who was  
coming back there?

HAYES  
Can't take any risks right now.

MCCARTHY

But what if those were our boys?  
We'd be riding along with a  
gasoline cowboy right now instead  
of hoofin' it through this  
miserable shit.

HAYES

I told you, it's better not to  
risk getting seen. We're in enemy  
territory. Have to keep moving.

MCCARTHY

And where are we moving to,  
exactly? You don't even know  
where the fuck we are!

WILKINS

Mick...

HAYES

We're heading toward whatever  
village this is so we can get our  
bearings.

MCCARTHY

Then what? The goddamn sky is  
falling right now. Best case  
scenario, we end up huddling in  
some French barn that smells like  
shit. Worst case scenario, we  
turn into fuckin' popsicles for  
the Krauts to find!

HAYES

This isn't a discussion, private!

DUNCAN

Shut it, McCarthy.

McCarthy stops marching and throws his rifle into the snow.

MCCARTHY

No! This is bullshit! I watched  
two of my friends die today, and  
I've come close to bitin' the dust  
more times than I count. And now  
we're retreating? Why?! And to  
where?! I'm not freezing to death  
out here because some 90-day  
wonder boy tells me to!

Hayes throws down his rifle and runs up to McCarthy, like a  
big dog chasing down a little yippity mutt that's all bark  
and no bite. He grabs McCarthy by the jacket.

HAYES

If you don't want to follow my orders, then that's fine by me!

Hayes shoves McCarthy down into the deep snow.

HAYES

You can head back to the road and find out what's there!

Hayes turns to the rest of the squad.

HAYES

You're all welcome to join him, if you'd like. But allow me to spoil the surprise for you: it's death! Krauts! A whole goddamn platoon of 'em who'd love nothing more than to give you a goodbye cigarette and fill your thick skull with hot Nazi lead!

(then)

So, would anyone like to join him? Hmmm? Anyone ready to become a gold star in their mother's window?

Hayes looks at each and every squad member. Nobody speaks and they can almost hear the snow falling. Duncan hands Hayes his rifle. Hayes turns to McCarthy, who's now brushing off snow.

HAYES

So, what'll it be, private? You want to go see what's over that hill all by yourself?

MCCARTHY

No. Sir...

HAYES

Alright then.

(a beat)

Ramirez, Benedetti, lead the way!

McCarthy picks up his rifle and follows.