

WHO WILL FIGHT FOR US, EXCERPT

Omaha Beach, France. June 6, 1944. 6:05 a.m.

Matthew Johnson was an African American drafted in 1942. He was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. His objective during Operation Overlord was to parachute into enemy lines and destroy German artillery and anti-aircraft positions and clear out enemy bunkers. Then he and his division would link up with the 7th Armored and 1st Infantry Divisions and assault the town of Marigny. They would receive support from the 7th Attack Group.

Matthew had painted his face a mixture of green, black, and brown prior to the departure of the aircraft carrier. He had befriended a German Jew named Beck Zussman and a black Muslim named Muhammad Al-Sad.

Matthew sat down in the metal seat, awaiting the signal from the pilot to jump out and parachute. Captain Satchell stood up. "All right soldiers, we're jumping behind enemy lines and destroying their equipment," he said.

"Hook up and prepare for drop," Sergeant Woods said.

Matthew got up and attached his rope to a pipe.

"We're getting flak from their positions," the pilot stated.

"You ready, Matthew?" Zussman asked.

"You know it," he gulped out in response.

"Fifty yards out," the pilot yelled. "All right, jump in three...two..."

The fuselage of the plane exploded, jerking Matthew and Zussman out. Matthew's heart raced. He grabbed the string, releasing his parachute. He descended to the beach. He looked around. The blue waters were now a bright crimson. Bodies of men filled the ground. Some were missing limbs, heads, legs. He noticed a corporal reach the ground to pick up his hand.

"Come on, Johnson!" Zussman yelled at him. Matthew clenched his M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle and ran for the tank barrier. He dove for cover, trying to avoid the bullets from machine guns.

"Where are you from?" another sergeant questioned him.

"101st Airborne Division. My plane exploded."

"Well, welcome to the Bloody First. Now we get to cross that barbed wire lining. Do you know how to use a bangalore?" asked the sergeant.

"Yeah, I'll take it," Matthew said, grabbing the long stick of dynamite and rushed to the wire.

“Suppressing fire!” the sergeant called out as he emptied his entire magazine into the bunker.

Johnson took the bangalore, lit the yarn to ignite it, and threw it in the barbed wire. After five seconds it exploded. American soldiers charged through.

“Move, we gotta take the bunkers!” the sergeant said.

“Zussman, we gotta find Al-Sad,” Matthew yelled.

Matthew swiftly turned the corner in the trench, only to be met with gunfire. He hid behind a barrel as bullets pelted into it. Matthew popped up. He aimed his gun down the long trench. He pulled the trigger. All of his bullets were gone. He went back for cover and reloaded. Zussman helped him clear the trench. They ran to some steps by a small dark road. He and Zussman, along with a few men from the 1st Infantry Division, maneuvered down the path.

At a bunker, the sergeant said, “Johnson, bring the flamer!”

“I never got your name,” Matthew said.

“Sergeant Donson,” he responded. Matthew stood at the door of the bunker. He turned the ignition knob, creating a wheezing noise from the napalm heating. He shoved the trigger back, sending bursts of fire into the structure. Some of the Wehrmacht soldiers inside desperately crawled out through the front opening, hoping to fall to their death rather than burn. A soldier raised his rifle at a burning man, but Zussman lowered it for him. “Let him burn,” he said.

“That’s a show,” Zussman said. “That kid looks no older than 20. You see how one man can create that kind of brutality. All from the ideas of hate and a ‘thousand-year Reich.’”

“Yeah, it’s sad,” he responded.

Zussman walked over to the burned body and searched it. “Look at that. A Hitler youth knife and a letter. It says, ‘Brother.’”

The letter was singed at the edges. “You know what, I think I’ll remake this knife. Been needing a new one.”

“What about the letter?” Matthew asked. “Well, let me read it.”

Dear Hans,

Ever since my deployment in the East, I have started to think that Führer's ideas of a German state across the earth is only a fantasy. These Russians are relentless. Yesterday my captain was hanged from a flagpole outside of Lublin. They'd die before they surrendered to us. Every night I think about a day here in Stalingrad. A little girl slit an SS officer's throat, took his side arm, and murdered whomever she could before the pistol ran out of ammo. They have no care for our lives, nor theirs. Only the life of the motherland. Hans, leave your post when you get the chance. Go to Mother. Go back to medical school. You are only 19, with a future ahead of you. The army doesn't need you. Don't get caught in Hitler's propaganda, brother.

Friedrich

“Does it have an address where he wrote it from?” Matthew asked.

“Yeah, Warsaw,” said Zussman.

“That kid's brother is dead or in Siberia. Come on, let's go,” Matthew said.

Zussman and Matthew followed Sergeant Donson and his unit.

“All right, here's the plan. We're going to assault Mordhau Ridge. The Krauts will be swarming us like flies, so move around and don't get caught standing,” Donson instructed. “There are German artillery positions surrounding the cottage. Five, to be exact. We'll take them out as we go. After we destroy the artillery, we'll link up with the 101st Airborne, stop to rest, and assault the town of Marigny. Let's move.”

They piled into trucks and drove off to the Ridge.