

Interlude
By Jeffery Greb

Just as suddenly as it began, the shelling ceased.

As the roar of explosions faded, he could hear the sounds previously muffled: men screaming in pain, calls for help, shouts of consternation.

Rolling onto his back, he remained supine for a moment before sitting upright on the ground. He fished a nearly empty pack of Camels out of his pocket and extracted a bent cigarette. His hands trembling, whether from terror or cold or both he could not tell, he maneuvered it between his lips. His Zippo would not light, so he shook it violently and repeatedly. *Goddamn cold*, he thought, trying the lighter again to no avail.

When he enlisted in the Marines, he had pictured Asia as a stiflingly hot jungle, probably from the newsreel footage of Marines storming beaches on their march toward Japan. If he had felt able, he might have chuckled at his naiveté. All he would have had to do to correct this misconception would have been to look at a map to see how mountainous the region was. He was not the only one unprepared for the cold, however; all of X Corps lacked the proper gear for this advance. He put the useless Zippo back in his pocket and shakily slipped the cigarette into the crumpled pack. He had seen blood freeze in open wounds; how could he expect a lighter to work?

This whole thing was FUBAR. The advance had been rapid and more successful than anyone expected, until they'd reached this goddamn reservoir and faced a counter-attack. They couldn't last much longer. Casualties were high, although they were even higher for the enemy. Human wave after human wave had been repelled, and there seemed no limit to their willingness to absorb such losses. Neither side was prepared for minus 15 degrees, though he thought it bothered us more than them. Scuttlebutt was that X Corps would be evacuating soon. It could not come soon enough.

He was starting to consider hunting about for some chow or at least a cup of Joe, when somebody screamed "Incoming!" and he flipped onto his belly and tightly clutched his head.