Saving Private Ryan

By Robert Rodat
FADE IN:

CREDITS: White lettering over a back background. The THUNDEROUS SOUNDS OF A MASSIVE NAVAL BARRAGE are heard. The power is astonishing. It roars through the body, blows back the hair and rattles the ears.

FADE IN:

EXT. OMAHA BEACH - NORMANDY - DAWN

The ROAR OF NAVAL GUNS continues but now WE SEE THEM FIRING. Huge fifteen inch guns.

SWARM OF LANDING CRAFT

Heads directly into a nightmare. MASSIVE EXPLOSIONS from German artillery shells and mined obstacles tear apart the beach. Hundreds of German machine guns, loaded with tracers,

pour out a red snowstorm of bullets.

OFFSHORE

SUPERIMPOSITION:

OMAHA BEACH, NORMANDY

June 6, 1944

0600 HOURS

HUNDREDS OF LANDING CRAFT Each holding thirty men, near the beaches.

THE CLIFFS

At the far end of the beach, a ninety-foot cliff. Topped by bunkers. Ringed by fortified machine gun nests. A clear line-of-fire down the entire beach.

TEN LANDING CRAFT

Make their way toward the base of the cliffs. Running a gauntlet of explosions.

SUPERIMPOSITION:

THE FOLLOWING IS BASED ON A TRUE STORY THE LEAD LANDING CRAFT Plows through the waves.

THE CAMERA MOVES PAST THE FACES OF THE MEN

Boys. Most are eighteen or nineteen years old. Tough. Well-trained. Trying to block out the fury around them.

A DIRECT HIT ON A NEARBY LANDING CRAFT

A huge EXPLOSION of fuel, fire, metal and flesh.

THE LEAD LANDING CRAFT

The Motorman holds his course. Shells EXPLODE around them.
FLAMING OIL BURNS on the water. CANNON FIRE SMASHES into the bow.
THE MOTORAMAN IS RIPPED TO BITS
BLOOD AND FLESH shower the men behind him. The mate takes the controls.

A YOUNG SOLDIER
His face covered with the remains of the motorman. Starts to lose it.
Begins to shudder and weep. His name is DeLancey.

THE BOYS AROUND HIM
Do their best to stare straight ahead. But the fear infects them. It starts to spread.

A FIGURE
Pushes through the men. Puts himself in front of DeLancey.
The figure is CAPTAIN JOHN MILLER. Early thirties. By far the oldest man on the craft. Relaxed, battle-hardened, powerful, ignoring the hell around them. He smiles, puts a cigar in his mouth, strikes a match on the front of DeLancey's helmet and lights the cigar.
Delancey tries to look away but Miller grips him by the jaw and forces him to lock eyes. Miller smiles. DeLancey is terrified.
Delancey Captain, are we all gonna die?
Miller Hell no, two-thirds, tops.
Delancey Oh, Jesus...
Miller I want every one of you to look at the man on your left. Now look at the man on your right. Feel sorry for those to sons-of-bitches, they're going to get it, you're not going to get a scratch. A few, including DeLancey, manage thin smiles.

Miller releases his grip on DeLancey who moves his jaw as if to see if it's broken. Miller pats him on the cheek and moves on to the bow.

MILLER
Looks over the gunwale at THE HELL IN FRONT OF THEM.
PAN DOWN TO MILLER'S HAND
It quivers in fear. Miller glances around, sees that none of the men have noticed. He stares at his hand as if it belongs to someone else. It stops shaking. He turns his eyes back to the objective.
THE LEAD LANDING CRAFT HITS THE BEACH
The six surviving boats alongside.
EXPLOSIVE PROPELLED GRAPPLING HOOKS FIRE
From the landing crafts. Arc toward the top of the cliffs.
THE LEAD CRAFT RAMP GOES DOWN
A river of MACHINE GUN FIRE pours into the craft. A dozen men are INSTANTLY KILLED. Among them, DeLancey.

MILLER
Somehow survives. Jumps into the breakers.

MILLER
MOVE, GODDAMN IT! GO! GO! GO!
EXPLOSIONS EVERYWHERE
THE GERMANS On the edge of the cliff. Rain down MACHINE GUN FIRE and GRENADES.

THE AMERICANS
Struggle through the surf. FIRING up as best they can. Making for the base of the cliffs.
INCENDIARY GRENADES, HURLED FROM ABOVE, EXPLODE, SPREADING FIRE

MILLER
Ignores the EXPLOSIONS and BULLETS. Uses hand signals and curt orders.

MILLER
THERE! THERE! HOOKS THERE! FIRE SQUAD, THOSE ROCKS!

THE MEN
Obey instantly. Set the grappling hooks. Take position. Return fire.

THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE
Drown out most voices. Except the SCREAMS OF THE WOUNDED AND DYING.

THE MEN
Know what they have to do. Start up the ropes. Into the teeth of the German defenders.

MILLER
Back-straps his Thompson sub-machine gun. Starts climbing with the first group.

THE CLIFF FACE
The Americans swarm up the ropes.
Taking turns firing up at the Germans.

MILLER SEES A STALLED CLIMBER

HALF-WAY
An American private is HIT. FALLS, taking two others with him. All three land on the rocks below. Another way to die.

NEAR THE TOP
Less steep. They leave the ropes. Free climb, scrambling up the rocks.

MILLER
Joins half-a-dozen pinned down men. Others bottleneck behind them. Miller scans the route and the defenders. Sees an open gap. Deadly. Beyond is a protective overhang. With a clear line to the top.

MILLER
That's the route.

Miller motions to six men huddled near him.

MILLER
Go!

THE SIX MEN
Take an instant to get ready. Then SCRAMBLE into the gap.

MILLER AND THE OTHERS
Do their best to cover them. POUR FIRE up at the Germans. Bad angle. No Germans are hit.

THE SIX MEN
Are CUT TO RIBBONS by MACHINE GUN FIRE. All KILLED. They fall to the rocks below.

SARGE, mid-twenties, experienced, Miller's right arm and best friend, dives into the rocks next to Miller. Sarge That's a goddamned shooting gallery, Captain.

MILLER
It's the only way.

MILLER
Turns to the next half-dozen men.

MILLER
YOU'RE NEXT!

THE SECOND SIX
Move to the head of the gap. Miller moves for a better angle against the machine guns. Calls to JACKSON, a tall, gangly Southern country boy, sharp-shooter.

MILLER

JACKSON, PICK OFF A FEW OF THEM, WILL YOU?

JACKSON

(heavy Southern accent)
You betcha, Captain.

Miller signals others where to direct their cover fire. Turns to the second six.

MILLER

GO!

THE SECOND SIX
Take deep breaths. Head into the gap.

MILLER AND OTHERS BLAST SURPRISING FIRE
JACKSON, NAILS a pair of Germans. MILLER CUTS DOWN two more.

SARGE gets one. Not enough.

THE SECOND SIX
Are RAKED BY MACHINE GUNS. All are KILLED.

MILLER

Turns, looking for the next six. His eyes fall on Sarge and REIBEN who is a cynical, sharp, New Yorker. Reiben smiles.

REIBEN

(heavy Brooklyn accent)
Captain, can I put in for a transfer?

MILLER

Sure, meet me at the top, we'll start the paperwork.

THE THIRD SIX
Moves into place. Sarge and Miller exchange a look. They both see the madness of what they're doing.

MILLER AND THE OTHERS
OPEN UP on the Germans.

MILLER

GO!
SARGE
Rolls his eyes, takes a breath.
Scrambles into the gap. The other
five right behind.

IN THE GAP
BULLETS EVERYWHERE.
Three are HIT. Then another. POTATO MASHER GRENADES bounce
down. EXPLODE below.
THE GERMAN MACHINE GUN swings toward Sarge and Reiben.

Miller
sees them about to get it... MILLER STEPS OUT INTO THE
OPEN.
A perfect target. Captain's bars glinting. FIRING. TRYING
TO DRAW THE GERMAN FIRE.
THE GERMAN MACHINE GUNNER
SEES MILLER STANDING IN THE OPEN. Too much to pass up. He
swings the machine gun away from Sarge and Reiben, toward
Miller.
A ROW OF GERMAN BULLETS approaches Miller...he's an instant
from death.
SARGE AND REIBEN DIVE
Under the overhang to safety.
MILLER DIVES BACK TO COVER, BARELY MAKES IT, HIS BOOT HEAL
IS BLOWN OFF.
UNDER THE OVERHANG Sarge and Reiben untangle themselves.

Reiben
I'll be Goddamned! I'm not dead!
Sarge hollers back to Miller.

Sarge
CAPTAIN, IF YOUR MOTHER SAW YOU DO
THAT, SHE'D BE VERY UPSET!

Miller
I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY MOTHER.
Quick smiles. MILLER AND HIS RANGERS lean out and FIRE.
HIT more Germans.
SARGE AND REIBEN run up the path, under the overhang. Stop
near the top. Pull pins on grenades. Count. Both throw
long, arcing over the crest, perfectly aimed.
THE TWO GRENADES EXPLODE.
Putt out the two worst machine gun nests.

Miller
Crosses the gap. His men follow.

AT THE CREST
The Americans swarm over the top.
FIRING.
TWO DOZEN GERMANS FIRE BACK as they retreat. Abandoning the perimeter defense of the bunkers. The Germans are CUT DOWN.

MILLER motions to WADE, a small, wide-eyed, demolition man who's struggling under the weight of half-a dozen satchel charges.

MILLER
Okay, Wade, your turn.

Wade Captain, I love it when you say that. Miller, Sarge, Reiben and Jackson cover Wade as he races to the first of three bunkers. Dodging bullets from inside. Wade tosses a SATCHEL CHARGE into a gun port. A HUGE, MUFFLED EXPLOSION, rocks the bunker.

MILLER AND SARGE
Survey the field.

SARGE
What the hell were you doing? Drawing fire!

MILLER
Worked, didn't it?

SARGE
You tryin' to get yourself killed?

MILLER
Don't need to, the Krauts go that covered.

Sarge shakes his head at Miller, then he looks over the cliff at the scores of men, their shattered, burning bodies covering the rocks and the beach below. He's clearly affected. Miller coldly glances at the dead and wounded. Then he moves on, leading his surviving men toward the two remaining German bunkers. The SOUNDS OF BIG GUNS and MACHINE GUNS FIRE surround him. DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WAR DEPARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

The SOUND OF CLATTERING MACHINE GUN FIRE SEGUES TO that of CLATTERING TYPEWRITERS. A huge government building stands in the heart of Washington, D.C.

SUPERIMPOSITION:
Very busy. A dozen, somber military clerks work behind desks, quickly and efficiently. No small talk.

A CLERK
Older than the others, sad-eyed, adds a sheet of paper to a large pile in his out-box.

CLOSE SHOT
An outgoing telegram. It reads:
"We regret to inform you...killed in action...heroic service..." This is the paperwork of death.

THE CLERK

INT. LIEUTENANT'S OFFICE - WAR DEPT. - DAY
Seen through the glass wall. The clerk speaks to a YOUNG LIEUTENANT who is visibly shaken by what he is being told. He motions to the clerk to follow and he strides out of the office with the clerk on his heels.

INT. CAPTAIN'S OFFICE - WAR DEPT. - DAY
Again, seen through a glass wall. The Young Lieutenant speaks to a YOUNG CAPTAIN who, like the Lieutenant is clearly bothered by what he's being told. The Captain takes the papers from the Young Lieutenant and strides out.

INT. COLONEL'S OFFICE - WAR DEPT. - DAY
A busy office. Aides and secretaries scurry about. The walls and tables are covered with maps of Normandy and complex deployment charts. A ONE-ARMED COLONEL with a chest full of ribbons pours himself another cup of coffee. He clearly hasn't slept in a long time. The Young Captain, his staff officer, walks in.

Young captain Colonel, I've got something you should know about.

One-armed colonel Yes?
Young captain Two brothers died in Normandy. One at Omaha Beach, the other at Utah. Last week in Guam a third brother was killed in action. All three telegrams went out this morning. Their mother in Iowa is getting all three telegrams this afternoon.

The life drains from the Colonel. Others in the room hear and freeze.

One-armed colonel Oh, Jesus.

Young captain There's more. There's a fourth brother. The youngest. He parachuted in with the Hundred-and-First Airborne the night before the invasion. He's on the front.

One-armed colonel Is he alive?

Young captain We don't know.

The Colonel regains his bearings. Stands and motions curtly to the Captain. One-armed colonel Come with me.

The Colonel regains his bearings. Stands and motions curtly to the Captain.

One-armed colonel Come with me.

The Colonel strides from the room with the Captain on his heels. The aides and secretaries watch them go.

EXT. FARM ROAD - IOWA - DAY

A black car drives along a dirt road, a cloud of dust rising behind. Passing through an endless expanse of ripening corn.

EXT. RYAN FARM - IOWA - DAY

A whit farmhouse. A barn. A stand of trees. Cornfields as far as the eye can see.

IN THE YARD

A tire swing. A bushel basket nailed to the barn over a dirt basketball court.

A PORCH SWING

Sits empty. Moves slightly.

ON THE GLASS OF THE FRONT DOOR

Four American flag decals. Each one, a man in service.

MARGARET RYAN

Steps out. Around sixty. Her face shows the lines of a life of hard work and motherhood. A good woman.

She wipes her hands on her apron and looks out across the fields. Far in the distance she sees the dust rising behind the black car.

She watches the car get closer, then sees it turn toward her
house. She starts to grow uneasy. As the black car approaches, her breath comes hard. She reaches out and steadies herself on the porch post. The car pulls up to the house. She sees three men get out, one wearing a clerical collar. The first of her tears come.

INT. GENERAL MARSHALL'S OFFICE - WAR DEPARTMENT - DAY
Another busy office filled with aides and secretaries.
GENERAL GEORGE MARSHALL, Army Chief of Staff, stands next to his conference table, reading the Ryan brother' files.

Half-a-dozen subordinates, among them the one-armed Colonel and the Young Captain, wait. General Marshall puts down the file.

GENERAL MARSHALL
(softly)
Goddamn it.
One-armed colonel All four of them were in the same company in the 29th Infantry but we split them up after the Sullivan brothers died on the Juneau.

GENERAL MARSHALL
Any contact with the fourth brother, James?

One-armed colonel No, sir. He was dropped about thirty miles inland, near Ramelle. That's still deep behind German lines.

General Marshall hardens.

GENERAL MARSHALL
Well, if he's alive, we're going to send someone to get him the hell out of there. That's just what the General's staff wanted to hear.

EXT. NORMANDY - CRATER FIELD - DAY
NEAR CONSTANT MORTAR EXPLOSIONS. HEAVY MACHINE GUN FIRE. Miller's Ranger company is pinned down by a superior force of German troops. The Americans hug the bottoms of the craters, FIRING BACK as best they can. BIG GUNS THUNDER in the distance.

SUPERIMPOSITION:
Normandy 1300 hours June 9
MILLER
Trailed by a RADIOMAN, dashes through the fire and dives into a sludge-filled crater. He surfaces, sees
Sarge and Reiben, and reels from a horrific smell. Their conversation is repeatedly broken by FIRING And DUCKING GERMAN FIRE.

MILLER

Jesus Christ! What the hell are we swimming in?

REIBEN

Shit, sir.

SARGE

Fertilizer, Captain, I think we're in a cranberry bog.

REIBEN

Out of the frying pan, into the fucking latrine.

MILLER

Look at the bright side, the Krauts sure as hell don't want to advance and hold this cesspool.

Miller barks to his RADIOMAN.

MILLER

Get Fire Control, we need some artillery...

Radioman Trying, sir.

MORE EXPLOSIONS. They all duck. Reiben's worried.

REIBEN

Sir, what if they send some other company into Caen ahead of us while we're pinned down here?

MILLER

Don't worry, we're the only Rangers this side of the continent, we've got to be first into Caen.

SARGE

Who cares?

REIBEN

I care. Don't you know what Caen's famous for, Sarge?

SARGE

Frogs?

REIBEN

Lingerie.

SARGE

Yeah? So?
THE GERMAN FIRE diminishes for an instant. Miller, Sarge and Reiben immediately rise and POUR FIRE at the German positions. GERMAN MACHINE GUN FIRE RESPONDS and they duck down again.

REIBEN
So, you ever heard of employee discounts? My uncle sells shoes, gets twenty-five percent off everything in the line, got a closet filled with the best looking shoes you ever seen.

MORE MORTAR EXPLOSIONS.

REIBEN
Just picture some French number been spending all day, every day, making cream-colored, shear-body negligees with gentle-lift silk cups and gathered empire waists, what the hell you think she wears at night?

MILLER
Reiben, how the hell do you know so much about lingerie?

REIBEN
Lingerie is my life, sir. My mother's got a shop in Brooklyn, I grew up in it, from the time I could crawl, we carry Caen lingerie, it's the best there is, it's all I been thinking about since the invasion.

Another pause in the German shelling. Reiben rises and 

BLASTS

HIS B.A.R, then ducks as the GERMANS RETURN FIRE.

MILLER
There's a war on, good chance they're not still making lingerie in Caen.

REIBEN
Oh, Captain, they'll always make lingerie, it's one of the three basic needs of man -- food, shelter, silk teddies. Miller Dream on, private.

REIBEN
Happy to, sir.

Radioman Captain, I've got Command, they want you back at H.Q., right away.
MILLER

Maybe the war's over.

A MORTAR SHELL EXPLODES VERY CLOSE. After the debris stops falling, Sarge and Reiben rise, spitting out sludge. Reiben looks dubiously at Miller.

REIBEN

I don't think so, Captain.

MILLER

(to Radioman)

Stay at it until you get fire control.

(to Sarge)

Keep 'em down, wait for the navy.

SARGE

Yes, sir.

Miller waits for a pause in the MORTAR BARRAGE, then scrambles out of the crater and takes off in a crouch-run.

EXT. NORMANDY - FIELD H.Q. - 19TH INFANTRY - DAY

Chaos. Under fire. INTERMITTENT MORTARS, SOME BIG GERMAN SHELLS and fairly close SMALL ARMS FIRE.

MILLER

Runs over the broken ground and makes it to the sandbagged H.Q. He stumbles down the make-shift stairs.

INT. H.Q. SANDBagged BUNKER - DAY

Sand and dirt falls with the closest of the EXPLOSIONS which continue through the scene. Miller salutes a Major.

MILLER

Miller, Company B, Second Rangers.

Major Go on in.

Miller goes deeper into the H.Q. bunker where he finds a dozen officers with as many aides, runners and radiomen. Very busy. A field map dominates the center of the small space.

The men in the room note Miller, a few nod to him respectfully. He's clearly someone special.

COLONEL SAM ANDERSON is in command, talking on a field-phone.

He's about fifty, firm and steady, the calm at the eye of the storm. He sees Miller and motions for him to wait.

COLONEL ANDERSON

(into field-phone)

...I understand your problem, but if we don't get those tanks off-loaded
by 0600, we're going to have an entire division up at Caen with its ass hanging out of its pants...

A LIEUTENANT steps up to Miller and hands him a sheet of paper.

Lieutenant Captain, here's your company address list.

   MILLER
   My what?

Lieutenant For letters to the families of your killed-in-action.

Miller hands the list back to the Lieutenant.

   MILLER
   Find a chaplain.

   COLONEL ANDERSON
   (into field-phone)
   ...alright, let me know when.

Anderson hangs up, speaks to an AIDE.

   COLONEL ANDERSON
   Have the Second and Third Regiments hold at St. Michel until we get those tanks. Aide Yes, sir.

Colonel Anderson turns to Miller.

   COLONEL ANDERSON
   Report.

   MILLER
   Sector four is secured, we put out the last three German one-fifty-fives, found them about two miles in from Ponte du Hoc.

   COLONEL ANDERSON
   Resistance?

   MILLER
   A company, Wehrmacht, no artillery, we took twenty-three prisoners, turned them over to intelligence.

   COLONEL ANDERSON
   Casualties?

   MILLER
   Fourty-four, twenty one dead.

An instant of SILENCE, all hear, none look.

   MILLER
   They didn't want to give up those one-fifty-fives, sir.

   COLONEL ANDERSON
It was a hard assignment, that's why you got it.

MILLER

Yes, sir.

COLONEL ANDERSON

Where are your men now?

MILLER

Pinned down, a mile east of here, waiting for some help from the navy guns.

COLONEL ANDERSON

I'm sending Simpson to take over for you, the division is going to Caen, you're not coming with us, I have something else for you.

MILLER

Sir?

COLONEL ANDERSON

There's a Private James Ryan who parachuted in with the Hundred-and-First near Ramelle. I want you to take a squad up there. If he's alive, bring him back to the beach for debarkation. Take whoever you need, you've got your pick of the company.

MILLER

A private, sir?

COLONEL ANDERSON

He's the last of four brothers, the other three were killed in action. This is straight from the Chief of Staff.

MILLER

But, sir...I...I...

COLONEL ANDERSON

Spit it out, Captain.

MILLER HESITATES, THEN:

MILLER

Respectfully, sir, sending men all the way up to Ramelle to save one private doesn't make a fucking, goddamned bit of sense.

(beat)

Sir.
The other officers freeze, listening without turning.

Colonel Anderson glares at Miller.

COLONEL ANDERSON
You think just because you hold the Congressional Medal of Honor, you can say any damn thing you please to your superior officers?

Miller considers the question, then smiles.

MILLER
Yes, sir, more or less.

Colonel Anderson looks as if he's about to bite Miller's head off, then he smiles, too.

COLONEL ANDERSON
Alright, I'll give you that. Continue.

MILLER
The numbers don't make sense, sir. His brothers are dead, that's too bad, but they're out of the equation. Sending men up there is bleeding heart crapola from three thousand miles away. One private is simply not worth a squad. Colonel Anderson, this one is. He's worth a lot more than that. Which is why I'm sending you, you're the best field officer there is.

Miller Shrugs.

MILLER
Yes and no, sir, what about Morgan? Fine officer, regular church goer, writes poetry, he might like a mission like this.

(beat)

And he's taller than me.

Colonel Anderson listens with amused tolerance, but it's time to get back to business.

COLONEL ANDERSON
That's enough, Captain, you have your orders. Major Thomas will fill you in.

Miller knows when to back off. He salutes.

MILLER
Yes, sir.
Miller and Colonel Anderson exchange a private look.

COLONEL ANDERSON

Good luck, John.

MILLER

Thank you, sir.

Miller joins Major Thomas at one of the smaller map tables. Colonel Anderson watches Miller for an instant, then notices the other officers in the tent watching. A glare and they go back to work.

EXT. BATTLESHIP - DAY
A MASSIVE BARRAGE of fifteen-inch shells BLASTS from the deck of the enormous ship.

EXT. CRATER FIELD - CRANBERRY BOG - DAY
HUGE EXPLOSIONS. The big naval shells SLAM into the German position on the far side of the cranberry bog crater field.

IN THE CRATERS
Miller's Ranger company ducks and covers. The BARRAGE SUBSIDES. The Rangers rise, FIRING, leap-frogging from crater to crater, advancing against the remaining Germans who return SMALL ARMS FIRE.

MILLER
Crouch-runs and dives into a crater with Sarge.

MILLER
Put on your traveling shoes, Sarge, we're heading out.

SARGE
Caen?

MILLER
I wish. You and I are taking a squad up to Ramelle on a public relations mission.

SARGE
You? Leading a squad?

MILLER
Some private up there lost three brothers, got a ticket home.

SARGE
What about the company?

MILLER
Simpson.
SARGE
Simpson? Jesus Christ on a fucking pogo stick!

MILLER
I want Reiben on B.A.R; Jackson with his sniper rifle; Beasley, demolition.

SARGE
Beasley's dead.

MILLER
Okay, Wade. Translators?

SARGE
Fresh out.

MILLER
What about Talbot?

SARGE
Twenty minutes ago. Miller Damn, I'll go see if I can find another one. You get Reiben, Jackson and Wade, meet me at transport.

SARGE
Yes, sir.

They wait for a lull in the firing, then scramble out of the crater and crouch-run in opposite directions.

EXT. TRANSPORT H.Q. - NINETEENTH INFANTRY - DAY
Just in from the beaches. DISTANT ARTILLERY AND EXPLOSIONS. Nothing close. Dust. Confusion. Vehicles of every sort moving out. Tanks, half-tracks, troop trucks. In the middle of the mess, a cigar-chewing SUPPLY SERGEANT works at a make-shift desk made out of crate. He yells at a PRIVATE.

SUPPLY SERGEANT
GET THOSE GODDAMNED HALF-TRACKS OUT OF THERE!

Private They're blocked in!

SERGEANT
THEN UNBLOCK 'EM!

SARGE