

Fade in:

INT. BOEING 727 PASSENGER JET IN FLIGHT, NIGHT

SUPER: November 24, 1971. Northwest Airlines Flight 305.  
Somewhere between Seattle and Portland.

Jet engines are screaming. A MAN dressed in a dark suit is tightening the straps on a parachute he wears. His face cannot be seen. The passenger cabin is empty except for a deployed pink parachute spread out over several rows of seats. The man has a heavy bag tied to his waist. A buzzer sounds. He snatches up a telephone on a nearby wall.

MAN

What is it?

INT. COCKPIT OF PLANE, SIMULTANEOUS

It is the pilot, WILLIAM SCOTT. In the background we see two other men in blue uniforms helping fly the plane, and a blond woman in a red uniform. The other men are obviously nervous. The woman's uniform is soaking wet. All of them look exhausted.

SCOTT

Everything okay back there?

INT. BOEING 727 PASSENGER JET IN FLIGHT, NIGHT

MAN

Yes. (hangs up phone)

The MAN pulls on a lever near the rear of the plane. A set of airstairs drop partially open, but not enough to walk down them upright. The wind outside is holding them up. He turns around and starts backing down the stairs, holding the heavy bag with one hand and the stair railing with his other hand. As he does, they begin to drop from his weight and he nearly falls down the stairs.

MAN

Damn it. (recovers himself, gets  
his balance)

We see the MAN continue backing down, and as he does the stairs keep lowering from his weight until he reaches the last step. The noise from the engines is deafening. He sees a few lights on the ground and shivers from the bitter cold. He pulls the heavy bag against his body with one hand, and jerks on the ripcord with the other. A parachute flutters out behind him until it inflates, pulling him away into the darkness. The stairs slam back up toward the jet, and then settle lower as the plane speeds away.

Fade out:

Fade In:

EXT. FARMHOUSE IN MINNESOTA, DAY

SUPER: Morris, Minnesota - 1936

Ten-year-old KENNY CHRISTIANSEN is on the ground building a pair of wooden stilts. His younger brother LYLE CHRISTIANSEN stands nearby munching an apple.

LYLE

That ain't never gonna work, Kenny.

KENNY

Yeah, they will.

LYLE

You made 'em too long. How are you gonna get up on 'em?

KENNY

(hammers final nail into stilts)

Watch me.

Kenny picks up the finished stilts and drags them to the front porch steps. Standing on the porch, he positions the stilts on the ground at the bottom of the steps.

LYLE

They're too tall! You'll never get 'em up. Why don't you cut 'em shorter?

KENNY

Watch.

Kenny takes a couple of steps with the stilts in his hands and jumps up onto the foot pegs. Holding the tops of the stilts, he gets them upright.

LYLE

Wow!

Kenny starts walking around the yard with the stilts, a bit unsteadily, but manages to stay upright. As he turns back toward the house, he starts to fall over.

LYLE

Look out!

Kenny topples over and crashes through the front porch kitchen window. The stilts clatter to the porch.  
CLOSE UP: Kenny on the floor of the kitchen.

Kenny looks dazed. A few small cuts are on his face and arms. Lyle runs into the house.

LYLE

You okay?

KENNY

(groans)

My head hurts.

LYLE

(looks at broken window)

Boy, when Mom and Dad get home  
they're gonna kill you.

KENNY

(rubs head and sits up)

Shut up, Lyle.

INT. CHRISTIANSEN FARMHOUSE, LIVING ROOM, DAY

SUPER: Eight Years Later

Kenny, Lyle, and their parents are sitting around the living room listening intently to an ANNOUNCER on the radio. MOM is darning a sock. DAD is having coffee. The boys sit in front of the radio.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Rumors are circulating in London  
that an invasion of France to  
retake the Continent is only a  
matter of months, or perhaps even  
weeks away. Recruiting offices in  
Minneapolis report that enlistments  
in all branches have gone up  
steadily in the last few days. In  
other news...

Kenny reaches up and turns down the volume on the radio.  
Everyone looks up at him to see why.

DAD

Turn it back up, son.

KENNY

(hesitates, looks embarrassed)

I went to the Army recruiting  
office.

DAD

You did what?

MOM

Kenny!

Kenny stands up and asserts himself.

KENNY

I want to join the Army. The  
paratroopers.

DAD  
(points to Kenny's brother)  
Lyle, go to your room.

LYLE  
Dad!

DAD  
Do what I said.

Lyle gets up reluctantly and leaves the room, but listens in  
from the hallway.

DAD  
Son, we've never said anything  
about the way you are. But you  
can't join up.

KENNY  
(firmly)  
Why not? You did.

DAD  
That was different.

MOM  
You know perfectly well why, Kenny.

KENNY  
Just say it Mom. Because I'm a  
homo, right?

MOM  
Don't say that!

Mom puts her hand over her mouth, starts to cry.

DAD  
You know we love you, Kenny. But  
it's against the law. They ask you  
about it. If they find out, they'll  
kick you out with a dishonorable  
discharge. You might even go to  
jail. Then where would you be?

KENNY  
They won't find out. I won't tell  
them. I won't tell anyone.

DAD  
It's out of the question.

KENNY

(takes a folded paper from his pocket and hands it to Dad)

DAD

What's this?

KENNY

I'm not eighteen yet. The recruiter says he can get me in, but you guys have to sign this permission form first.

DAD

(examines paper, shakes head)  
Are you sure this is what you want?

KENNY

Yes.

DAD

(signs paper, hands it with the pen to Mom, who quickly scribbles something and hands it back to Dad)  
I just hope you know what the hell you're doing.

Dad hands the paper back to Kenny, who puts it in his pocket. Mom gets up and leaves the room crying.

DAD

Just one thing, though.

KENNY

What's that?

DAD

Don't get caught, boy.

EXT. ARMY BASE, DAY

Kenny Christiansen is standing in a line with other paratroopers dressed in full Army gear and wearing parachutes. The men are packing more than a hundred pounds of gear and can barely move. One by one, each man is pushed from behind by another man from the ground crew, up a ramp and onto a jump plane. Kenny finds a seat inside the plane with the others. The last man to board is the JUMPMAS-TER, who is wearing a parachute but carries no other gear.

JUMPMASTER

Alright, ladies. Settle down and shut up. We'll be airborne in a minute. You will follow my instructions to the letter or I'll shove your ass out the door without a chute! Understand?

PARATROOPERS

(in unison)

Yes, sergeant!

EXT. ARMY BASE, DAY

We see the plane taking off and gaining altitude quickly.

INT. JUMP PLANE, DAY

JUMPMASTER

On your feet! Hook up!

The Jumpmaster opens a side door in the plane. Another soldier, his ASSISTANT, goes down the line of men and checks each static line individually, ensuring it is hooked up properly for exit.

ASSISTANT

Ready to go, sergeant!

JUMPMASTER

(shouts over noise from engines)

Let's go! And try not break your necks!

One by one, the paratroopers leap from the plane. We see canopies opening one after another.

EXT. A LAKE, DAY

Instead of landing on the ground, Kenny splashes down into a shallow lake near the landing zone. Two other men do the same. The heavy gear drags him under the water, but he quickly releases his gear and frees himself of the parachute. He breaks the surface and sees the other two men. They are struggling in the water. He frees both men of their chutes and gear and pulls them toward the shore. An OFFICER runs to the edge of the lake.

OFFICER

Get out of there!

Kenny helps the two men ashore. They are choking on the water they swallowed and collapse to the ground. Kenny comes to attention.

OFFICER

Who are you, soldier?

KENNY

Private Christiansen, sir.

OFFICER

How the hell did you guys end up in the fucking lake?

KENNY

(stands stiffly at attention)  
I'm sorry, sir. The wind caught my canopy.

OFFICER

(stares with disdain at the two soldiers still choking on the ground)  
All right. Back to your unit. And tell someone to get out here and see if they can retrieve all that gear you left at the bottom of the lake.

KENNY

Yes, sir.

Kenny starts to walk back toward the area where most of the other men landed.

OFFICER

Christiansen!

KENNY

(turns and comes to attention again)  
Yes, sir?

OFFICER

(nods to Kenny)  
Good job helping your buddies out of the lake there.