



## CHAPTER ONE

# COURAGE HAS NO COLOR

What is it like to jump out of an airplane?

Imagine.

You are a paratrooper suiting up for a jump. Guys on either side of you are doing the same. One jokes about having a dream that the chutes didn't open. Another one says he's glad everyone paid their insurance.

You stand strong, even though you are loaded down with a hundred pounds of equipment strapped to your body—main chute, reserve chute, and combat gear.

The jumpmaster walks down the line, inspecting each of you, making sure you are properly fitted. Your life depends on it.

The joking stops.

The jumpmaster commands, "Load."

In jump order, your line of troopers—your stick—climbs into the plane. You follow the trooper in front of you to your spot and sit.

Now you are in the air, on the way to the Drop Zone. You're chatting with your buddies above the noise of the plane. "Puke buckets" are always on board, but you don't need one today.

Twenty minutes from the Drop Zone, it's time to get serious.

The red warning light near the door turns on.

The jumpmaster stands and shouts, "Get ready!"

He walks down the line, alerting each jumper with a word in the ear and a touch on the shoulder, making sure each and every man hears him.

You shuffle forward, sticking close to the man in front of you. The man in back of you does the same.

You watch as the troopers in front of you follow each command, quickly disappearing one by one out the open door of the plane.

And now it's your turn.

"Stand in the door!"

Nothing separates you from the sky but one last sliver of floor. The tip of your left boot hangs slightly over the edge.

The wind whips. The white is blinding, bright.

Adrenaline pulses through you.

You look down at a brown and green patchwork quilt of open fields and thickets of trees.

The roar of the engine pulses with the pounding of your heart.

You are over the Drop Zone. It's time.

The jumpmaster bellows, "GO!"

You jump.

You force yourself to focus. Count.

"One thousand, two thousand, three thousand . . ."

Your hand is on the reserve chute, ready if you need it.

*Thwap!* Your main chute opens, and the line snaps tight. You are floating down . . .

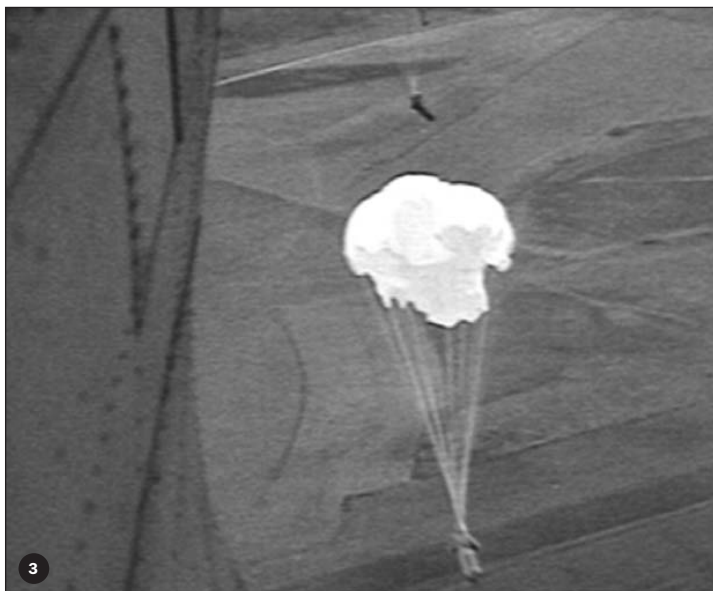
down . . .

down . . .

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***Nothing separates you from the sky but one last sliver of floor.***

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The rumble of the plane and the jumpmaster's shouts are gone.

Your ears fill with a hush unlike any other.

Extreme quiet.

Looking down, feet together, you see the ground through the tiny V space where the toes of your boots almost touch.

Looking up, you see the reassuring inside of your open chute.

Stills from a video of the 555th on a training jump in 1944.

1) Jumper exits and next jumper prepares to follow

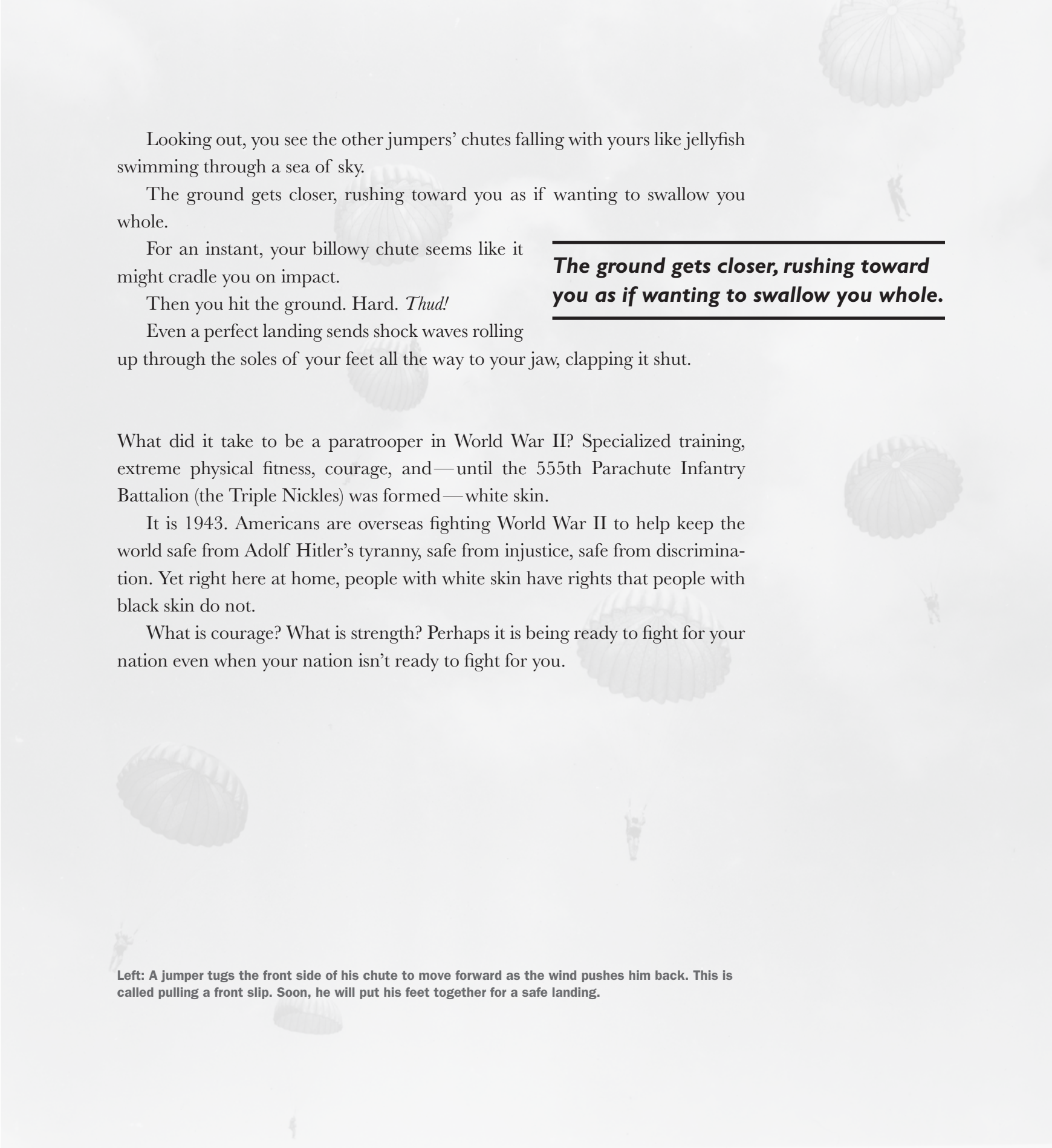
2) Static line pulls the parachute from the pack tray on jumper's back

3) Parachute begins to take shape

4) Parachutes are fully deployed







Looking out, you see the other jumpers' chutes falling with yours like jellyfish swimming through a sea of sky.

The ground gets closer, rushing toward you as if wanting to swallow you whole.

For an instant, your billowy chute seems like it might cradle you on impact.

Then you hit the ground. Hard. *Thud!*

Even a perfect landing sends shock waves rolling up through the soles of your feet all the way to your jaw, clapping it shut.

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***The ground gets closer, rushing toward  
you as if wanting to swallow you whole.***

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What did it take to be a paratrooper in World War II? Specialized training, extreme physical fitness, courage, and—until the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion (the Triple Nickles) was formed—white skin.

It is 1943. Americans are overseas fighting World War II to help keep the world safe from Adolf Hitler's tyranny, safe from injustice, safe from discrimination. Yet right here at home, people with white skin have rights that people with black skin do not.

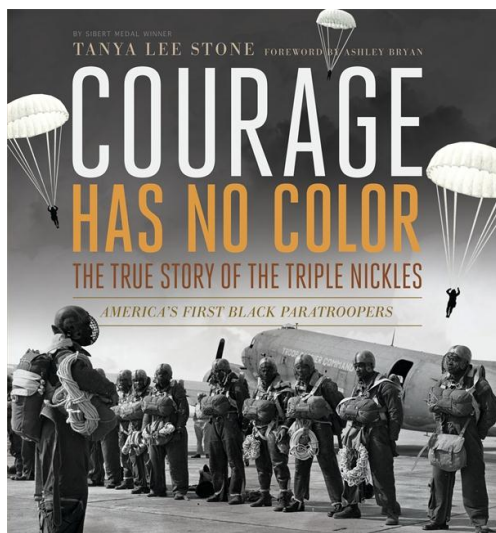
What is courage? What is strength? Perhaps it is being ready to fight for your nation even when your nation isn't ready to fight for you.

**Left: A jumper tugs the front side of his chute to move forward as the wind pushes him back. This is called pulling a front slip. Soon, he will put his feet together for a safe landing.**



At the start of World War II, only one out of every 120 soldiers was black, and most were relegated to service duties. Here, Arnold R. Fesser, an oiler, maintains the moving parts of his ship's engine in October 1944.

**Courage Has No Color, The True Story of the Triple  
Nickles: America's First Black Paratroopers**  
Tanya Lee Stone



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