

IN HIS STEAD

Written by

Michael Droberg

MSgt USMC (Ret.)

Based on the story by James Williams and  
the novel In His Stead by Judith Sanders.

Inspired by historical events.

BLACK SCREEN

*Super: The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.*

- G. K. Chesterton

FADE IN:

EXT. BAGRAM AIR BASE - DAY

*SUPER: Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan 2006*

Concrete barriers and concertina wire surround rows upon rows of military tents.

An airstrip filled with Chinook helicopters take off and land. A C-130 airplane prepares to take off from a runway behind them. Military vehicles and troops move to and fro.

The mountainous terrain seemingly swallows up the massive base filled with hurried military activity.

EXT. BAGRAM AIR BASE - GUARD TOWER - DAY

Three stories of concrete, steel, and sandbags. Two SOLDIERS (18) with heavy machine guns and trigger-happy fingers watch as a U.S. convoy of Humvees and supply trucks pass through the gate.

TOMMY (O.S.)  
More newbies, perfect!

The soldiers grin, turn their heads to...

SERGEANT TOMMY LANE JR. (20s) blonde hair, blue eyes, lean, mean, fighting machine. Confident, a true personification of the Ranger spirit. He's decked out in full combat load, helmet, flak-jacket, rifle, etc.

TOMMY (CONT'D)  
You got this, right slick?

SOLDIER #1  
(southern drawl)  
I got it, Sergeant.

Tommy pats the young buck on the shoulder, fatherly-like.

TOMMY

I know you're from West Virginia and all, but don't be eyeballing those goats out there. That crap's illegal.

Tommy and the two soldiers chuckle.

SOLDIER #1

Kentucky, Sergeant.

TOMMY

Eh, same difference... and what the hell are you laughing about, numb-nuts? Aren't you from New Jersey?

SOLDIER #2

(Jersey accent)

South Jersey and we ain't Kentucky hillbillies.

SOLDIER #1

Screw you, Rizzo.

TOMMY

Yeah, you just whack it to your two gods, Springsteen and Bon Jovi.

SOLDIER #2

Hey, fuhgeddaboutit!

Tommy steps off with a smile.

TOMMY

Stay frosty!

He makes his way down to...

EXT. BAGRAM AIR BASE - AFGHAN SHOPS - DAY

Tommy walks past small booths with vividly colored tent canvasses.

Black market VENDORS peddle a variety of items: knock-off watches, jewelry, cashmere rugs, DVDs. A vendor raises a fake Rolex as Tommy nears.

VENDOR

You want? Rolex, very nice.

Tommy brushes him to the side with a grin, flashes his knockoff watch.

TOMMY

You sold me this piece of crap,  
Hamid. Shit's already falling  
apart.

VENDOR

You too hard on it.

The vendor picks up his latest hawked DVDs.

VENDOR (CONT'D)

Look, brand new. Still in movies  
U.S. Have everything, action,  
comedy, romance.

The vendor winks at Tommy.

VENDOR (CONT'D)

Perhaps you look for movie with  
something more?

Tommy waves him off.

TOMMY

Getting some sleep, bruh. I'll  
check 'em out later.

Vendor curtly waves.

VENDOR

Okay, my friend.

Tommy approaches...

EXT. BAGRAM AIR BASE - SMOKING PIT - DAY

A makeshift plywood gazebo filled with butt-cans sits under  
camouflage netting.

SOLDIERS stand around, joke, smoke cigars and cigarettes,  
drink coffee and other caffeinated delights.

A soldier puts a cigarette to his mouth, about to light up  
when... pluck.

Tommy takes the cigarette, tucks it behind his ear, keeps  
walking.

SOLDIER #3

Hey!

TOMMY

Thanks, sport.

SOLDIER #3  
You're lucky I like you, Sergeant!

TOMMY  
Go on with your bad-ass self!

This guy exudes coolness, puts a smile on everyone's face. They watch Tommy walk towards Tent City.

EXT. BAGRAM AIR BASE - RANGER TENT - DAY

The massive tent surrounded by Jersey barriers on all sides. A hand-painted plywood sign above the entrance reads: 3D RANGER BN.

Tommy curiously observes a Humvee parked near the tent's entrance. He proceeds into...

INT. RANGER TENT - DAY

Massive, austere, twenty cots lined in neat rows. Rucksacks, towels, other military gear hang off the walls.

Laughter, as four SOLDIERS sit at a makeshift table, play cards. RODGERS (20s) brazen, built like a brick shit-house watches Tommy walk in, dubious smirk across his face. Tommy sees it.

TOMMY  
What?

Rodgers nods towards Tommy's bunk.

TOMMY (CONT'D)  
(mutters)  
What the...

Tommy sees a SOLDIER sitting on his bunk with his back to him, checking his phone. As Tommy nears...

TOMMY (CONT'D)  
Hey! Get the hell off my rack,  
asshole.

The soldier takes a moment to respond.

SOLDIER  
Why don't you make me?

The soldier turns toward Tommy, stone-faced. Tommy's flabbergasted.

Tom walks up to him. What's he gonna do? Clean his clock?

The two men eye each other...

Then, Tommy bear hugs him, laughs. The standoff expressions turn to smiles.

PVT. MICHAEL LANE (20s) tall, lanky, with olive skin and the dark brooding eyes of an Italian godfather laughs as Tommy squeezes him.

TOMMY

Holy shit.

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL

Okay, okay.

Tommy releases him.

TOMMY

What the hell are you doing here?

MICHAEL

My unit's headed to Leatherneck,  
just passing through.

TOMMY

With the Marines, huh? Mom and Dad  
know about that?

MICHAEL

Nah, didn't tell Sarah either.  
Didn't want them to worry.

TOMMY

You get her pregnant before you  
left?

MICHAEL

We'll see.

Tom smiles, scopes Michael out.

TOMMY

Where's your gear?

MICHAEL

In the truck.

TOMMY

We're in a war zone, you know.

Michael pats the pistol strapped to his leg.

MICHAEL  
This is all I need.

Tommy shakes his head.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
Ya heard from--

*KA-BOOM!*

Alarm klaxons *WAIL*. *GUNFIRE* erupts. Chaos outside. The proverbial shit hits the fan.

Tommy and the three Rangers rush to their gear, quickly put it on.

TOMMY  
Lock and load.

The four Rangers head for the door. As Tommy passes Michael...

TOMMY (CONT'D)  
Stay here.

Michael confused, caught off guard. Doesn't know how to react. More *GUNFIRE* outside, he cowers.

EXT. BAGRAM AIR BASE - RANGER TENT - DAY

Black smoke billows into the sky.

TOMMY  
Gate breached! Gate breach, go, go, go.

Tommy throws arm signals as the Rangers advance toward the threat.

Michael rushes out to his Humvee. Nervously slaps on his protective gear and helmet.

MICHAEL  
Shit, shit, shit.

He grabs his rifle, chases after Tommy.

EXT. BAGRAM AIR BASE - GUARD TOWER - DAY

Dust and debris begins to settle. The guard tower stands lurching at a 45 degree angle.

A car set ablaze at the base. A handful of INSURGENTS rush through the silenced gate.

Pockets of SOLDIERS exchange fire with them, duck behind cover.

Tommy and his fire team advance. Tommy shoulders his weapon, aims...

*BAM!*

An insurgent falls.

The remaining insurgents whip around, exchange fire with the advancing Rangers.

Two more insurgents collapse, eat pay dirt.

*BANG!*

Rodgers is hit in the leg. He falls hard.

RODGERS

Fuck!

Tommy drags him behind a barrier. Michael finally catches up.

TOMMY

Pull out your medpack!

Rodgers yells in anguish.

Michael fumbles with his first aid kit, opens it. Tommy rips open a pack of gauze, places it on Rodgers's wound.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Here, keep pressure on it.

Tommy moves Michael's hands over the wound.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

This ain't shit, Rodgers! You hear me?

Rodgers nods, holds in the pain.

Tommy peers over the barrier. An INSURGENT with an explosive vest on rushes toward two SOLDIERS.



*BOOM!*

Blood, guts, pink mist.

MICHAEL  
What the fuck!

Michael's frozen, fear in his eyes.

TOMMY  
Stay here, you'll be alright.

Michael nods. Tommy pats him on the shoulder, looks into his eyes for a beat.

He nods to his remaining comrades. They advance again.

More INSURGENTS pop out from between tents.

*TAP! TAP!*

Lethal shots from Tommy and his boys. Mushrooms of blood sprout from two more insurgents.

Tommy and his boys charge by.

Michael sees a MEDIC running towards the chaos.

MICHAEL  
Medic!

The medic turns direction, heads toward Michael. He crouches down, attends to Rodgers.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
You got him?

MEDIC  
Yeah, go.

Tommy rounds the tent and sees another SUICIDE BOMBER heading toward MEDIC #2 attending to two wounded SOLDIERS.

Can't shoot, too close. Tommy waves his Rangers back, they obey.

Just then, Michael catches up, watches Tommy sprint ahead.

SUICIDE BOMBER  
Allahu akbar!

Helpless, the medic and wounded soldiers look on with terror.

Tommy takes a quick glance behind him. He sees his brother, nods. He turns his attention back to the bomber.

TOMMY  
Hit the deck!

The bomber focused on his targets, has no time to react.

Tommy catapults onto the bomber's back locking him in a tight embrace.

In an instant, they roll into a narrow drainage ditch beside a concrete barrier.

*BOOM!!!*

A violent explosion sends earth and fire rocketing into the sky.

The sulfurous yellow ball, an animated inferno-like dragon's breath, expands and overflows from the ditch.

MICHAEL  
Tommmmyyyyyyy!!!

Michael drops to his knees. His long primal scream echoes and blends with...

*TAPS* plays as we pan up into the clear blue sky.

*MAIN TITLE: In His Stead*

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

*Super: Hardscrabble, Pennsylvania, one year later.*

*TAPS* continues, winds down. We come down from the blue skies and see the chaos of battle exchanged for the somber view of gravestones.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

A picture of Tommy Lane hangs from the rear view mirror. A hand reaches up, gently touches it.

TOM LANE SR. (40s) tall, olive skin, burly, a distinguished older version of Michael. Has a commanding presence about him.

He runs a hand through his salt and peppered hair. Motor grease visible under his nails.

He glances at the gravestones with hollow eyes, focusing on one in particular that reads: THOMAS LANE JR., SGT U.S. ARMY, AFGHANISTAN, JAN 10 1981 - NOV 8 2006.

Tom fires the truck up.