KASSERINE

By James Leach

Genre: Historical War Drama / Based on True Events

Logline: When inexperienced American forces are shattered by Rommel's army at Kasserine, an Iowa National Guardsman must survive capture, brutal imprisonment, and a desperate forced march across Nazi Germany while holding onto the faith and hope that he will return to his family.

Synopsis

In 1941, Sergeant Harry Harris is a husband, young father, and trombone player with Iowa's 168th Infantry Regiment when America's entry into World War II transforms his National Guard service into a journey toward combat. Leaving behind his wife Dorothy and their young son, Keith, Harry carries with him a Bible and Dorothy's simple plea to keep the faith and come home.

After training in Northern Ireland, Harry and his fellow soldiers deploy to North Africa as part of an American army entering combat against Germany for the first time. Confidence quickly collides with reality. In Tunisia, inexperienced troops, inadequate intelligence, scattered defenses, and confused leadership leave American positions dangerously vulnerable to battle-hardened German forces.

In February 1943, German armor smashes through the American lines around Kasserine. Harry and his comrades struggle to survive against overwhelming firepower as units collapse around them. What was expected to demonstrate America's growing military strength instead becomes a devastating defeat.

Harry survives the battle but is captured by German forces. Separated from his unit and everything familiar, he begins a new war—one measured not in territory gained but in days survived.

Transported to Germany, Harry is imprisoned at Stalag III-B, where hunger, disease, cold, and brutality become part of daily existence. Yet captivity cannot extinguish his determination to return to Dorothy and Keith. Harry eventually risks everything in an escape attempt, making a desperate bid for Switzerland and freedom. The attempt fails. He is recaptured and returned to captivity, knowing the Germans may not give him another chance.

As months become years, the war slowly turns against Germany. Allied armies close in, but liberation brings new dangers.

The Germans evacuate the POW camps, forcing Harry and thousands of weakened prisoners onto a grueling march through the collapsing Reich. Starving and exhausted, the men endure freezing weather, violence, and even attacks by Allied aircraft whose pilots cannot distinguish the prisoners below from German troops.

After twenty-seven months as a prisoner of war, Harry and his fellow captives finally encounter the advancing Russian army. Their German guards disappear and the prison system holding them begins to collapse.

But Harry's ordeal is not immediately over.

The Soviets keep the former prisoners confined rather than releasing them into the chaos of war-torn Europe. Having survived Kasserine, imprisonment, escape, recapture, starvation, and the forced march, Harry finds himself free of the Germans but still unable to go home.

Throughout his ordeal, the promise Harry carried from Iowa has sustained him: keep the faith.

Eventually, the long journey that began with a reluctant soldier leaving his family becomes the story of a survivor determined to return to them. Harry entered the war as a musician who never imagined himself a combat soldier. He emerges from it having endured one of America's most painful battlefield defeats and more than two years of captivity without surrendering the hope that somewhere beyond the war, Dorothy and Keith are still waiting.

Kasserine is the true story of an ordinary American soldier caught in extraordinary events—and the faith, resilience, and determination that carried him home.