

THE SUCK

Teleplay by

Edward Zwick & Marshall Herskovitz

based on a memoir by

Stephen McCallister

DRAFT - 12/30/16
THE BEDFORD FALLS COMPANY
INDUSTRY ENTERTAINMENT

FADE IN:

SUPER: FEBRUARY 25, 1968. 13,000 FEET ABOVE VIETNAM

THE BOWELS OF A C-130 TRANSPORT

18 YEAR-OLD DRAFTEES pray, weep, curl in fetal positions as the plane pulls several G's, CORKSCREWING in a steep descent.

MUSIC IN: Jay & The Americans "IT'S A BEAUTIFUL MORNING"

STEPHEN COLE, 19, looking as green as his uniform - is trying not to throw up as the plane BUCKS and HEAVES.

Beside him, also in uniform - DAVID McCANN, also 19, a brawny lineman to Stephen's more cerebral quarterback, stands upright fighting the G's like a kid on a roller coaster.

DAVE

Whoo-eee! YESSSS!

The other recruits peer up at him like he's crazy. Dave looms over Steve, whose head is between his knees.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Told ya you'd puke--

STEVE

No...

DAVE

You always puke.

STEVE

NO--

The plane hits an air pocket and drops another hundred feet.

STEVE (CONT'D)

---- Unnnnnnhhhhhh....

DAVE

Mrs. Hedges class. On the bus.

STEVE

Shut up.

DAVE

Linda Simons slipped in it.

STEVE

Eat me.

Dave grabs the bulkhead, lifts his feet off the metal floor.

DAVE
Saw her tits.

STEVE
Did not.

DAVE
Echo Lake. 11th grade.

Steve lifts his head.

STEVE
Really?

DAVE
Touched 'em.

STEVE
Damn.

SUDDENLY, automatic weapons fire PUNCHES SHRAPNEL HOLES through the aluminum bottom! Draftees SCREAM in terror. Dave dives back onto the steel bench, lifts his legs up.

DAVE
Now that's just *wrong!*

Convinced they're about to die, he and Steve lean into each other so as to make as small a target as possible.

ALL SOUND FADES OUT...

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I mean, how bad could it be?

FLASHBACK TO:

THE STILLNESS OF A QUIANT VERMONT TOWN - WINTER

Like a hallmark card. A light snow is falling. Steve and Dave -- longer hair, civilian clothes -- stand at the threshold of their local Army Recruiting office.

DAVE
Tommy Bulger says it's cool.

STEVE
Tommy Bulger cut off some Vietnamese guys' ear and sent it home as a Christmas ornament.

DAVE

He says there's pussy. All kinds of
bitchin' weapons. We're gonna get
drafted anyway--

Uncle Sam glowers from the recruitment poster: "I WANT YOU."

DAVE (CONT'D)

Plus if we join up together, they
guarantee we'll be in the same unit
(a friendly shove)
Batman & Robin; Superman & Lois Lane!

Steve punches him in the shoulder. Dave punches him back.

SMASH CUT TO:

A 122M ROCKET EXPLODING ON THE RUNWAY!

It's Dave who's puking now as they stumble off the transport.
Finishing, he glares at Steve:

DAVE (CONT'D)

Shut up.

OFFICERS race up SCREAMING at the recruits. The ROAR of the
TRUCKS and CHOPPERS makes it impossible to hear.

OFFICER #1

....FOLLOW ME TO--

STEVE

WHAT????--

OFFICER #2

--ALL YOU MEN--

DAVE

(points to his ears)

I CAN'T--

Nevertheless they keep SCREAMING AT EACH OTHER--

OFFICER #1

--TRANSIT BARRACKS--

Another EXPLOSION, closer.

STEVE

WHERE'S THAT? WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!

OFFICER #1

NO, YOU CANNOT GO BACK!

STEVE
I SAID, WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!

OFFICER #1
DAMMIT, SOLDIER, WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!

An F-4 FIGHTER JET SHRIEKS 20 ft overhead. At the edge of the runway it makes a NAPALM run. Steve watches, mouth agape, as FLAMES RISE hundreds of feet above the burning jungle.

A group of dirty, exhausted VETS hurry past to board the C-130. They wave, giddy to be headed home.

VET #1
SO LONG, SUCKERS!

Steve glances over and sees -- in slow motion -- a truckload of BODY BAGS being loaded aboard.

SUDDENLY -- A ROCKET HITS THE TRUCK! Body bags go FLYING, one RIPS open. He starea in horror.

Still unable to be heard, the officers PUSH and SHOVE the draftees off the runway and out of harm's way.

CUT TO:

A PARTIALLY-DESTROYED CAFETERIA (TAN SON NHUT AIR BASE)

crowded with sweaty, filthy GRUNTS awaiting their flight home. Steve and Dave enter, approach a HOLLOW-EYED GRUNT.

STEVE
Excuse me, is this the transit area
for the 241st?

HOLLOW-EYED GRUNT
No, it's the North Pole. Santa's
village is that way.

Dave stumbles over a body asleep on the ground.

SLEEPING GRUNT
Hey, watch it, bitch!

They pass GRUNTS smoking pot, others exchanging strange ritualized handshakes. Some simply stare off into space, some wear helmets on which they have written, "HELL'S AVENGER," "JUST YOU AND ME, GOD," "BORN TO LOSE," etc.

They squat beside a VET trying to finesse tobacco out of a Marlboro. He's only a few years older but looks... ancient.

CIGARETTE VET
Welcome to the suck.

They watch, fascinated, as he tries filling the torn, humid cigarette paper with marijuana. It falls apart.

CIGARETTE VET (CONT'D)

Screw this.

He gestures to an wall stacked with cartons of Marlboros.

CIGARETTE VET (CONT'D)

All the butts we want but not a single rolling paper-- Friggin' army.

THE DOOR OPENS. A YOUNG OFFICER enters, raises his voice:

YOUNG OFFICER

Listen up-- All flights are grounded until morning. Just have to wait a little longer for the big bird home.

A chorus of GROANS and CURSES. A LARGE BLACK GRUNT gets right in the officer's face.

BLACK GRUNT

IF TH'AIN'T NO INCOMING, HOW COME WE NOT OUTGOING? SOUNDS LIKE MORE POAG-ASS BULLSHIT.

YOUNG OFFICER

--Orders.

BLACK GRUNT

FUCK ORDERS. I'M TWO DAYS PAST MY TIME BACK IN THE WORLD.

YOUNG OFFICER

Is that a marijuana cigarette in your hand, soldier?

BLACK GRUNT

No, Sir, tha's my dick. Wanna smoke it?

LAUGHTER from the audience of grunts.

YOUNG OFFICER

Teetering on the edge, son.

BLACK GRUNT

Whachoo gonna do, Sir, cut off my hair and send me to Vietnam?

WHOOOPS and CAT CALLS. The young officer is intimidated by the roomful of angry short-timers. He musters his dignity:

YOUNG OFFICER
New Guys will receive transpo orders
ASAP. That's all.

He walks out. The cigarette vet appraises Dave.

CIGARETTE VET
...Football?

DAVE`
Right guard, sir.

CIGARETTE VET
Sir? I work for a living, son.

He points to his Sergeant's stripes.

DAVE
Sorry...si-...I mean, Sergeant.

CIGARETTE VET
(to Steve)
Don't tell me, you're the quarterback.

STEVE
0-12, worst record in school history.

CIGARETTE VET`
No cheerleaders here, Superstar.
This place is fucked; Charles proved
that with this offensive.

DAVE`
...Charles?

CIGARETTE VET
Mr. Charles, Chuck, Cong, VC, Gooks...

DAVE
Are they all the same?

CIGARETTE VET
(to Steve; re Dave)
Is he retarded?
(takes another hit)
...They tell you about Tet?

They look at him blankly.

CIGARETTE VET (CONT'D)
You'll find out soon enough.
Charlie's got nothin' to lose and we
got no way to win.

He passes the joint to Dave, who looks at Steve before taking a hit, coughs, but holds it in. The vet turns back to Steve.

CIGARETTE VET (CONT'D)
Stay alive, superstar. That's the
only game in town.

He stands and tosses Dave a plastic baggie of pot.

CIGARETTE VET (CONT'D)
Can't get it past customs. Enjoy
it, retard.

Dave takes another hit and nods thanks. As he exhales, a stupid grin spreads across his face.

MUSIC IN: Jay and the American's, "THIS MAGIC MOMENT" as:

WE CUT TO: THE LUSH LANDSCAPE OF VIETNAM GLIMPSED THROUGH
THE OPEN DOOR OF A HUEY IN FLIGHT

Dave stares down, transfixed by the beauty. He's baked.
Steve is looking down, too, but his look is more pensive.

CUT TO:

THE BASE AT CU-CHI - HOME OF THE 25TH DIVISION (MUSIC CONT)

The aftermath of the Tet Offensive is evident everywhere.
Smashed buildings, burnt-out equipment, shell craters.

BASE COMMANDER (V.O.)
The Tet offensive has failed.

The BASE COMMANDER addresses the new arrivals. Dave -- still
high -- sways to and fro.

BASE COMMANDER (CONT'D)
The enemy has put all his chips on
the table and he has lost. The Cong
will never again be the same fighting
force; their losses are unsustainable.

A tall grunt with a helmet reading "MICKEY'S MONKEY" pretends
to sneeze while saying "*Bullshit!*" Dave's GUFFAW attracts
the attention of LT. JAMES HALLORAN, 30, a raw-boned Texan.

BASE COMMANDER (CONT'D)
You men represent our response to
the enemy's final, desperate gambit.
We've been playing defense long
enough. We will seize the initiative
and take this war over the goal line.

DAVE
 (under his breath)
 Touchdown! Rahhhhhh...

The tall grunt laughs, offers Dave his palm. Thrilled to be accepted, Dave gives him five. Halloran watches him intently.

BASE COMMANDER
 Squad leaders assemble your men,
 recruits fall in by platoons. And
 may God be with you...

The men disperse to their units; Halloran zeroes in on Dave.

LT. HALLORAN
 Hey, you. Big Boy. What platoon
 you in?

DAVE
 D, Sir.

LT. HALLORAN
 Good. Come with me.

DAVE
 Yes, sir.

They walk in silence for a moment.

DAVE (CONT'D)
 Uh. Where are we going, sir?

Halloran doesn't answer.

The platoon follows. Steve, in the rear, turns to a Native-American grunt -- JOSEPH WHITEFEATHER -- called COCHISE.

STEVE
 What's happening--?

Cochise ignores him.

CUT TO:

THE RUINS OF A LATRINE

Dave stares down into a fetid hole brimming with shit.

LT. HALLORAN
 Know what's in there?

DAVE
 Yes, sir.

LT. HALLORAN
No, you don't... You're in there.

HALLORAN PUTS HIS FOOT IN DAVE'S ASS AND SHOVES--

LT. HALLORAN (CONT'D)
You and your attitude--

Dave flies in, face-first. He stands up, spluttering, covered in filth. Halloran grabs a shovel, throws it into the hole.

LT. HALLORAN (CONT'D)
Clean it out.

He turns to a lanky Kentuckian, 1st Sergeant AUGUSTUS BOONE.

LT. HALLORAN (CONT'D)
Sergeant Boone, put these men to work. I want to take a proper shit at 0600.

He walks away.

HOURS LATER -

The platoon -- bare-chested and sweaty -- is rebuilding the latrine. A sign hangs from the ruins: "YEAH, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF DEATH, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID, FOR I AM THE MEANEST MOTHERFUCKER IN THE VALLEY."

Still in the hole, Dave WHISTLES as he works. An African-American grunt with an impressive 'fro -- CLARENCE JONES II, called SHAKA -- works beside Steve.

SHAKA
What up with New Guy?

STEVE
His name's Dave.

SHAKA
No it ain't.

STEVE
Yes, it's--

SHAKA
--Your name New Guy too, all new guys be called New Guy.

STEVE
But wh--

SHAKA

--Y'all fresh meat. Ain't gonna
live more'n a week, why I need to
learn your names for?

Inside the ruined building, a short Cuban emigre -- VICTOR
NUNEZ---- calls out.

VICTOR

Lookee here--! That oughta teach the
little suckers to sneak in here!

He holds up the SEVERED HEAD of a VC like a ventriloquist.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(pigeon Vietnamese)

"My name Mr. Gook! Me love GI!"

The others ignore him. Victor holds the head to his crotch.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

"Hey, GI, you want suckee suckee?"

BOONE

That's enough, Noonies.

VICTOR

It's Nunez.

A handsome, LONG-HAIRED VIKING -- ERIK THE RED -- approaches
with an equally handsome GERMAN SHEPHERD on a leash. Erik
wears a rope around his neck, knotted into a hangman's noose.

ERIK THE RED

My brothers. Doing the Lord's work...

The platoon AD LIBS "screw you's" as they hug him, dap, etc.
Everybody loves Erik the Red. He opens a canvas satchel.

ERIK THE RED (CONT'D)

Break time.

VICTOR

Where you been, Red? Too much reality
round here these days.

ERIK THE RED

Sorry, bro. Supply line dried up
after the attack.

COCHISE

Damn gooks, don't they know we gotta
smoke...

Erik the Red hands out little baggies of pot; crumpled MPC certificates subtly change hands.

ERIK THE RED
What about you, Shaka?

SHAKA
When you gonna bring me something
get me right?

ERIK THE RED
Sorry, man, not my style.

Sgt. Boone approaches him. He looks angry.

BOONE
What the hell you think you're doing?

ERIK THE RED
Sergeant Boone, you look lovely today.

BOONE
I TOLD YOU--

The DOG reacts to Boone's aggressive approach, BARKING and STRAINING against the leash-- Boone jumps back.

BOONE (CONT'D)
Jesus--!

ERIK THE RED
(to the dog)
Sparky, didn't we have this
conversation? Sergeant Boone is one
of the good guys.

He puts a friendly hand on Boone's shoulder and Sparky instantly stands down. Erik WHISPERS into Boone's ear and slips him his "cut" of the sale.

ERIK THE RED (CONT'D)
For little Pete's college education.

Meanwhile, Steve has come forward and rather than approach Sparky directly. He kneels down three feet away, holds out his hand -- palm facing down -- averting his eyes.

Erik watches in surprise as Sparky allows Steve to pet him.

A DESTROYED JEEP - MINUTES LATER

The men are taking a break. Steve and Erik The Red sit in the shade. Sparky now won't leave Steve alone.

ERIK THE RED
You ruined my dog, dude. Normally
won't let anybody touch her.

STEVE
Spent a lot of time around animals,
I guess.

ERIK THE RED
Farm boy.

STEVE
When I couldn't escape.

They look around at the destruction.

ERIK THE RED
Bad scene last week. Gooks
everywhere. Even inside the wire.
Shit my pants, I'm here to tell ya.

STEVE
Glad I missed it.

ERIK THE RED
Don't worry, there'll be more.

Erik takes out a crumpled, sorry-looking joint, lights it,
offers Steve a hit. Steve shakes his head.

ERIK THE RED (CONT'D)
Seriously?

STEVE
...Never done it.

ERIK THE RED
(laughs out loud)
Only two ways to get through this --
Get cool or go home in a bag.

Erik offers it again; Steve takes his first hit. Coughs.

ERIK THE RED (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ, hold it in.

STEVE
This is illegal over here, too, right?

ERIK THE RED
Man, you are cherry. Everybody smokes
unless you're on the Horse.

Steve gives him a puzzled look.

ERIK THE RED (CONT'D)
 Horse. Scag. ...Heroin. Never mind,
 just stay downwind of the officers.
 Two bucks a bag, much as you need.
 Grows wild everywhere.

STEVE
 You just pick it?

ERIK THE RED
 (laughs; points)
 See out there? That's Indian country.
 I got lucky, found a hook-up in the
 ville.

Another blank look. Erik sighs.

ERIK THE RED (CONT'D)
 The local village.

Steve stands up abruptly, holding his abdomen.

STEVE
 Uh...

ERIK THE RED
 (knowingly)
 Yeah.... Happens to some folks first
 time they try it.
 (points--)
 There's another head over by the CP.

Steve looks at him blankly. Erik sighs....

STEVE
 Command post!

Steve hurries off.

PIXILATED FOOTAGE (MUSIC OVER)

Like a character in a Mack Sennett two-reeler, Steve scurries
 through the base asking directions to a working latrine.

FINDING ONE AT LAST...

He races in and assumes the position on a long wooden bench.

A moment later, the door OPENS and THREE YOUNG VIETNAMESE
 GIRLS enter and unceremoniously sit on the opposite bench.

Steve stares in open-mouthed, stoned horror.

VIETNAMESE GIRL #1
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
*They have Prell shampoo at the PX at
 Long Binh.*

VIETNAMESE GIRL #2
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
Breck is better. Makes my hair silky.

VIETNAMESE GIRL #1
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
Mine is too wavy. I like Halo.

They steal occasional glances at Steve, who has no choice but to smile back, utterly self-conscious.

STEVE
 ...Hi

They giggle.

VIETNAMESE GIRL #2
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
What do you think of this one?

VIETNAMESE GIRL #3
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
*He's cute. Tell him to stop covering
 his cock.*

VIETNAMESE GIRL #1
 (to Steve; in pidgin
 English)
 Hello, GI... What your name?

Steve can't believe he's actually having this conversation.

STEVE
 Uh. Steve...

A VIETNAMESE WOMAN enters. MAMA TRANH has a formidable bearing and unspeakable tragedy behind her eyes.

MAMA TRANH
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
*EVIL LITTLE CREATURES! YOU THINK
 YOU CAN HIDE IN HERE?*

The girls jump up, terrified.

MAMA TRANH (CONT'D)
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
*You know how many girls want this
 work? Out! NOW!*

The girls back out, bowing, almost in tears. Mama Tranh turns to Steve, smiles, and switches to English.

MAMA TRANH (CONT'D)

You need clean uniform? Boots shined?
....Blow job?

STEVE

Uh. No, thanks.

MAMA TRANH

Then you leave my girls alone.

She turns and walks out, leaving Steve nonplussed.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE HOOCH

Shaka, Cochise, and a few OTHERS are lounging. Dave enters, arms spread, dripping shit, doing a 'monster walk'--

DAVE

I am The Creature From The Black
Lagoon.

SHAKA

Whoa... Get the hell outta here!

Everyone JOINS IN, yelling at Dave to "take a shower," "get lost," "set yourself on fire," etc.

DAVE

But we're brothers! I LOVE MY SQUAD.
I WANT TO HUG ALL OF YOU...

They desperately jump out of his way, calling him names, throwing things at him as Dave LAUGHS uproariously.

MEANWHILE - OUTSIDE THE LATRINE

Steve emerges, very high. He stops to examine his fragmented reflection in a broken window. Everything is fascinating.

Then he SPIES Mama Tranh and Erik The Red huddled in private conversation She hands him A PACKAGE in exchange for cash.

BUT RATHER THAN FOLLOW STEVE, WE STAY WITH MAMA TRANH...

She passes through the gate -- past manned .50 cal machine guns trained on her, navigating rows of barbed-wire...

Down a dirt road into deep jungle and up into low hills, past fields of sweet potato, cassava and marijuana to:

MAMA TRANH'S VILLAGE

Small huts, cook fires, chickens and pigs running loose.

SHE ENTERS HER HUT

Where an TWELVE YEAR-OLD BOY -- her son, DAO -- is waiting.

MAMA TRANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

*No kiss for me? What's wrong with
my big boy?*

Dao looks fearfully into the shadows where A FIGURE sits.

MAMA TRANH (CONT'D)

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

Phuong. I am honored.

In a previous lifetime PHUONG was a professor of philosophy at Ho Chi Minh University. Now his face is a virtual map of thirty years of war.

PHUONG

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

What do you have for me?

Mama Tranh is suddenly supplicant, even submissive.

MAMA TRANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

*Reconstruction day and night. 200
new recruits. 5 more APC's. Every
day helicopters bring more artillery.*

PHUONG

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

They plan a large operation.

MAMA TRANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

The North's big offensive has failed.

Old wounds make it painful as Phuong stands.

PHUONG

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

*Our offensive accomplished everything
we hoped. Now they will throw even
more lives away.*

MAMA TRANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

What about our dead? So many.

PHUONG
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
The price of freedom.

He hobbles over to Dao, puts a hand on his shoulder.

PHUONG (CONT'D)
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
Such a good boy.

She looks at him fearfully.

MAMA TRANH
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
He's a child.

PHUONG
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
And soon he will be a man.

MAMA TRANH
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
Please...

PHUONG
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
*Keep doing what you're told and
 perhaps the child will be permitted
 to stay with his mother.*

He hobbles out. Mama Trinh falls to her knees before a small "prie-dieu" where incense burns before three PHOTOS: her dead husband and two dead sons.

FADE TO BLACK

IN THE DARKNESS - THAT NIGHT

We HEAR the sound of distant EXPLOSIONS.

DAVE (V.O.)
 Steve... You awake?

STEVE (V.O.)
 No.

DAVE (V.O.)
 Are those mortars?

STEVE (V.O.)
 How would I know?

Dave LIGHTS a match. We can barely make out their faces.

DAVE
I think I'm still high. Are you?

STEVE
I'm asleep.

DAVE
We should've gone to Canada.

STEVE
Little late now.

DAVE
We go on patrol in two hours--
(a whisper)
.....Are you afraid--?

Steve is too afraid to confront how afraid he is.

STEVE
Just go to sleep.

DAVE
I can't.

STEVE
Think of something back in the world.

DAVE
Like what?

The match burns out. Once again in darkness:

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It'll be okay, right?

STEVE (V.O.)
...'Course it will.

DAVE (V.O.)
Thanks. I feel better now. G'night.

But Steve can't sleep. He lies awake trying to remember something back in The World.

FLASHBACK TO:

A TEENAGE GIRL'S BEDROOM

Steve's high school GIRLFRIEND sits on her bed unbuttoning her blouse, beckoning to him. He tries to move closer to her but somehow -- in dream time -- is unable to reach her.

SMASH CUT TO:

NEXT MORNING - STEVE'S FINGERS TREMBLE

As he clips a GRENADE to his belt. A sense of heavy dread is palpable as everyone makes ready. Steve smears insect repellent on his forehead. Erik The Red appears beside him.

ERIK THE RED

Rub it in good, the white stands out
in the bush, makes a nice target.

(scrutinizing him)

And tape down those clips.

Meanwhile, Steve watches Sparky The Dog go from man to man, sniffing each of them.

ERIK THE RED (CONT'D)

...He smells anybody new, we start
shooting.

Dave walks up to them, infuriatingly cheerful.

DAVE

Game day! Just stay behind me, stud,
right through the line...

SHAKA

--'cept the dee-fense has AK-47's.

Dave cradles the big M-60, ammo bandoliers criss-crossed on his chest.

DAVE

So do I, man.

Lt. Halloran has joined them. The men gather round.

LT. HALLORAN

The gooks have been walking their
mortars in and disturbing the CO's
sleep. That is unacceptable. We're
gonna push 'em back. We'll walk a
square. Five klicks North, five
West, then home.

(looks at Shaka)

Jones, you're on point.

SHAKA

Why it always the black man gets the
shaft?

LT. HALLORAN

Cause it's harder to see a coon in
the shadows. Just do it.

(MORE)

LT. HALLORAN (CONT'D)

(looks at Dave & Steve)

New Guys... Unless you want your legs blown off and your guts ripped out, do exactly what I say. Otherwise we send what's left of you home in a baggie.

He starts off. Erik The Red and Steve follow.

ERIK THE RED

He won't be happy until we're all KIA -- long as they send a medal home to his mama in his baggie...

IN THE VILLAGE - SAME TIME

Phuong walks past women cleaning rice, children at play. He makes eye contact with several men, who follow him into:

A HUT where Phuong gives an order and they move aside a huge CAST IRON POT, revealing A TRAP DOOR. The men descend into:

A NARROW TUNNEL

It widens into an OPEN AREA where several ARMED MEN await them. LANH, a soldier with a Ho Chi Minh beard greets his friend, THU, sweet-looking with a gap-toothed smile.

THU

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

What took you? We've been down here sweating like pigs.

LANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

Your wife wouldn't let me out of bed.

Clearly, old friends.

INTERCUT - THE PATROL - THE BOONIES

Steve is sweating profusely, weighed down by a huge pack. On point, Shaka cuts his way through the bush with a machete. Nearby a tall, handsome African-American, THOMAS NICHOLS.

SHAKA

Revolution come, that cracker Halloran gonna be the first to go--

NICHOLS

Ain't holding my breath.

SHAKA

Mr. Huey Newton and the Panthers
gonna have their day, oh yesss...

NICHOLS

Right on right on, Clarence.

SHAKA

Tol' you not to call me that.
Clarence my slave name.

NICHOLS

What kinda name Shaka?

SHAKA

Shaka be a great Zulu warrior. Get
your pride on, brother. Damn...

Nearby, Cochise lifts his pants leg; he's covered with
LEECHES. He casually lights a match and BURNS them off.

Then -- in a tour de force shot, THE CAMERA LEAVES THEM AND
DESCENDS INTO THE EARTH, deeper and deeper until it reaches:

THE TUNNELS - WHERE THE SHOT CONTINUES:

As the Vietnamese pass through a hospital, an armory, a
dormitory, we STUDY their young faces: their expressions
mirroring the American grunts: same weariness, same dread.

Lanh and Thu are humping a heavy mortar.

LANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
Why couldn't we just leave this out
there last night?

THU

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
Because the shithead Lieutenant
believes suffering emulates the
sacrifices of Ho Chi Minh and inflames
our devotion to the motherland.

LANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
It inflames my devotion to shove
this thing up his ass.

INTERCUT - THE PATROL - A BLIGHTED LANDSCAPE

What was once thick jungle has been reduced to shattered
limbs and withered stumps like the ashen bones of the dead.
Dave meets Steve's eye, smiles as the patrol moves on.

INTERCUT - THE TUNNEL

Lanh and Thu are sweating just as much as the grunts.

LANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

So a soldier comes upon an old man walking down the road. Behind him, his wife is pushing a bicycle loaded with all their possessions. "Old man," asks the soldier, "why do you walk in front and make your wife do all the work?" "Tradition," says the old man.

(wipes his brow)

A week later the soldier encounters the same couple. Only this time, the wife is in front and her husband is behind pushing the bicycle. "Old man," says the soldier, "why is she in front now and you're the one pushing the bicycle? The old man looks at him and says, land mines."

Thu laughs out loud. LT. DINH whispers harshly.

LT. DINH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)

SILENCE...! They are right above your idiot heads.

The two young soldiers look up, creeped out.

MOMENTS LATER - FROM HIGH ABOVE

The VIETNAMESE emerge from camouflaged holes in the ground. THE CAMERA PANS ominously to the AMERICAN patrol less than 200 yards away. The patrols are on a collision course...!

INTERCUT - THE PATROLS

LT. HALLORAN has a sixth sense -- gives a hand signal. Safeties are clicked off; they proceed almost in slow-motion.

The Vietnamese LT. DINH gives hand signals of his own. His men take up positions. Safeties are clicked off.

SPARKY suddenly stops-- hair standing on end, nose pointed.

Erik The Red RAISES his hand. The Americans crouch.

Stillness.

Halloran scans the jungle, peering into every shadow.

A MONTAGE of faces -- American and Vietnamese -- each man knows the next moment could be his last.

Sweat pours into Dave's eyes.

Steven looks around, acutely aware of every detail: a worm on a leaf. The dew glinting on a spider web. The sun casting visible rays through the moist air.

SUDDENLY - THE JUNGLE IS RIPPED APART by AUTOMATIC WEAPONS!

Erik The Red goes down, his LEGS SHREDED. Sparky is HIT.

Dave throws his body on top of Steve.

STEVE
--GET OFF ME!

CHAOS. Men roll off the trail seeking cover in foliage, scrambling, crawling for their lives, firing blindly.

M-16's are answered by the SLAP of AK's. Branches are cut in two; leaves, bark, splinters rain down. A explosive POP followed by an explosion as Nunez fires a GRENADE round.

On the M-60, Dave BLASTS through a bandolier in seconds.

Steve lies as flat as possible, holding the M-16 over his head and firing blindly.

Halloran screams for his RTO, who hands him the handset.

LT. HALLORAN
BRAVO FIVE. CONTACT AT COWBOY TWO-
SIXER.... WHAT--? DAMMIT!

The ear-hammering NOISE makes it impossible to hear.

LT. HALLORAN (CONT'D)
(to his RTO)
Tell me when you get 'em back...

LT. DINH gives orders to LANH, THU, and a FAT YOUNG SOLDIER.

VIETNAMESE LT DINH
(Vietnamese; subtitled)
Flank them on the right. GO!

He points -- the three soldiers hurry off.

LT. HALLORAN belly-crawls to Shaka.

LT. HALLORAN
They're gonna flank us. Take Big
boy...

Shaka nods, scrambles to Dave, signals 'Come with me.'

ERIK THE RED is now SCREAMING IN AGONY. The Medic tries to get to him but is stopped by withering fire.

ERIK THE RED (O.S.)
OH, GOD, PLEASE, GOD.....MOMMY.....!

Halloran is on the other side of the trail.

LT. HALLORAN
Someone shut him up...!

STEVE is nearby behind a tree; he can see Erik suffering. ROUNDS tear into the bark. He sinks into a fetal position.

DAVE AND SHAKA take up positions on the flank. Lanh, Thu and the FAT YOUNG SOLIDER emerge from the shadows, firing. Dave opens up with the M-60, KILLING the fat soldier.

LANH and THU dive to the ground, drag the fat limp BODY away.

STEVE realizes the center of the fire fight has shifted, he summons up his will and begins to crawl...

He finds Erik lying on his back -- one leg blown off -- ARTERIAL BLOOD SPURTING everywhere. He reaches out -- but Sparky -- bleeding from a wound in his side -- GROWLS MENACINGLY and bares his teeth.

STEVE
No, no, boy, shhhhh...

Sparky watches warily, ready to attack as Steve uses his belt to TOURNIQUET Erik's shattered leg. It's too late, Erik is bleeding out. In seconds he is dead.

AND THEN, AS QUICKLY AS IT BEGAN, THE FIREFIGHT IS OVER...

The sudden SILENCE is disorienting.

STEVE - ears ringing -- looks at Sparky, who's PANTING HARD, confused by the pain. He holds out his hand, palm down, as he did once before, and the dog allows him to come close.

Sparky's side is matted with blood where A PIECE OF SHRAPNEL is lodged, its tip sticking out. Steve tries to touch it but the dog SNAPS at him. He doesn't know what to do.

LT. HALLORAN crab-walks to Sgt. Boone.

LT. HALLORAN
Look for blood trails, C.O.'s gonna want a body count. Big boy--?

Dave looks dazed, disoriented.

DAVE
I...got one... I think.

LT. HALLORAN
Clarence?

SHAKA
I tol' you, it's Shaka.

LT. HALLORAN
I don't care if it's Malcolm Fucking
X. Did you or did you not hit
anything?

SHAKA
Two, maybe.

LT. HALLORAN
We'll say four confirmed and two
probables.

BOONE
Gotta dee-dee-the-hell outta here...

RTO
Fog's closing in -- Medevac won't
make it in.

Halloran looks at Steve, who kneels over Erik The Red's body.

LT. HALLORAN
We'll hump him out.

STEVE
(looks at Sparky)
What about...her?

LT. HALLORAN
Shoot her.

Steve stares at him in disgust.

CUT TO:

STEVE CARRIES SPARKY OVER HIS SHOULDERS

Sparky is panting, eyes glassy. Medic has given her a shot.

STEVE
How long will the morphine last?

MEDIC
Hopefully until we make it back.

Nearby, it takes four men to hump Erik The Red's body.

SHAKA

--How much you think he weighs?

BOONE

I don't know, two-fifty, two-sixty.

SHAKA

Damn. I'm carrying a hundred pounds.

VICTOR

Chucha tu madre, there's four of us,
we're each carrying sixty.

SHAKA

You only carrying half a leg--

LT. HALLORAN

Clarence, can you possibly shut up?

SHAKA

It's Shaka.

LT. HALLORAN

Whatever you say, boy.

Shaka seethes at 'boy.' DAVE catches up to Steve.

DAVE

Want me to take him for a while?

STEVE

No. And it's a her.

He grimly walks on.

MEANWHILE - IN THE TUNNELS

Lanh and Thu push a cart with the young soldier's body.

THU

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
We'll bring him to his village for a
proper burial.

LT DINH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
Not tonight.

THU

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
Why not?

LT DINH
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
 Tonight we hit them again.

As Lt. Dinh walks away, Lanh whispers to Thu.

LANH
 (Vietnamese; subtitled)
 We've been fighting for 1000 years.
 Now he's in a hurry...

THE HOOCH - LATER THAT NIGHT

The SOUND of mortars landing elsewhere. A pall in the room; everyone is upset about Erik The Red's death. Shaka is putting adhesive tape over the name tag on his uniform, once and for all obscuring the name, "C. Jones."

COCHISE
 Bad juju, man.

VICTOR
 Yeah. Sammy was good people.

BOONE
 Who's Sammy?

VICTOR
 Sammy O'Hara. That was Erik the Red's name.

BOONE
 Really? No shit. Gonna miss him.

VICTOR
 Me, too. Best weed in the 'Nam.

Dave sits down next to Steve, who's staring up at the ceiling.

DAVE
 His stomach just opened up and everything poured out.

STEVE
 What are you talking about?

DAVE
 The guy.

STEVE
 What guy?

DAVE
 The gook I shot. I keep seeing it.

STEVE
I don't want to talk about it.

DAVE
You think for sure he's dead?

STEVE
Dave--

DAVE
Sorry.

TIME CUT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Steve is unable to sleep. Once again, we FLASHBACK to:

THE TEENAGE GIRL'S BEDROOM

Steve's hand reaches for the buttons on his GIRLFRIEND'S blouse -- but just as he's about to get there--

BOONE (O.S.)
Drop your cock and grab your socks...

Steve opens his eyes to find Boone looming over his cot.

BOONE (CONT'D)
Ordered to report to Area 22, ASAP.

Steve squints in the harsh daylight.

THE BASE - LATER

As Steve passes the HOSPITAL, his attention is drawn to the REAR-VIEW of a young NURSE, her uniform hugging the curve of her ass as she smokes a cigarette. In that way that women do, she feels his inappropriate gaze and turns to face him.

The entire front of her white uniform is COVERED IN BLOOD. She stares at him. He averts his eyes and moves on.

CUT TO:

A HIGH WALL TOPPED BY BARBED WIRE AND SIGNS: AREA 22 - "ATTACK DOGS, NO ENTRY!" "DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS...OR THE DOGS"

Steve stands at the gate, unsure how to proceed. Calls out.

STEVE
Hello....? Anybody there?

VOICE
No.

STEVE
I was told to report here.

VOICE
So report.

STEVE
Can I come in?

VOICE
Is it locked?

STEVE
(tries the gate--)
No.

VOICE
So what's your problem?

STEVE
...What about the dogs?

VOICE
They just ate somebody, it's okay.

Steve gingerly comes through the gate. So far so good.

INSIDE A LARGE HOOCH

Steve finds a roomful of DISHEVELED GRUNTS lying about in the midst of a heated disagreement. DANNY KOVAVACIC - a meaty White boy from Chicago's westside - argues with ZEKE MCCLEAN -- a pasty Goldwater zealot from Idaho who's building A CASTLE entirely out of CARTONS of Marlboros.

KOVAVACIC
You can't burn his body--

MCCLEAN
It's what he wanted, man.

KOVAVACIC
He wasn't a Viking. He was Irish.

JAKE EPSTEIN, Yale '66, with long hair, headband & love beads, chimes in.

JAKE
Ireland was conquered by the Vikings in the 9th century so it's entirely possible his gene pool was Icelandic.

Jake takes one of the MARLBORO CARTONS off the castle but McClean grabs it back.

MCCLEAN
That's the drawbridge, man.

JAKE
A thousand pardons.

Steve dares speak up.

STEVE
Excuse me, I'm looking for Lieutenant
Link...

They pay no attention to him. A vicious ATTACK DOG, one of
several, ambles over to SNIFF his leg, then walks away.

FRANKLIN SEARLES -- a well-spoken Black kid, went to Catholic
high school -- has joined them, along with MARK "DETROIT"
HARRIS, alumni of Philadelphia's Juvenile Hall '63-'68.

SEARLES
How would you get hold of the body
anyway?

MCCLEAN
Steal it, how do you think?

SEARLES
You are friggin' crazy.

MCCLEAN
And you have no respect for the dead.

Detroit is removing tobacco from a Marlboro -- but the paper
TEARS in the humidity -- as we've seen before. He tries to
fill the mangled cigarette with pot, but it's hopeless.

DETROIT
Damn this shit.

Steve dares interrupt once more--

STEVE
Is...Is the Lieutenant around?

KOAWACIC
He's playing golf.

STEVE
Oh.

JAKE
--What is your problem, soldier, why
are you here? Can't you see this is
a tragic moment?

MCCLEAN

We've just lost one of the finest soldiers ever to serve in this unit.

SEARLES

Also our drug dealer.

STEVE

Sorry. You're talking about Sammy?

SEARLES

How do you know--?

STEVE

I brought Sparky back.

The guys instantly LEAP to their feet, all talking at once --
 "you saved Sparky!" "We love you, man" "Put your feet up."

TIME CUT --

The Winstons' "*Color Him Father*" blasts from a 50's juke box that has somehow made its way to Vietnam. Erik the Red's wake has begun and it's lit--

The room is packed and redolent of cigarettes and pot. Grunts dance with Nurses, Vietnamese girls, with each other, with the dogs. A large HOOKAH bubbles, its several hoses in use.

Erik the Red's HELMET sits atop a CLOTH DUMMY used to train attack dogs. One of them is in fact chewing on its leg.

MCCLEAN

Hey! Get lost, that's Erik's effigy!

Steve stands with Jake who swigs from a bottle of Courvoisier.

JAKE

--never had a dog in my life... I just heard dog handlers got three months extra training and I figured the war would be over by then.

STEVE

But I don't know anything about what you guys do--

JAKE

It's cool, one of us'll go with you your first few patrols. You'll either be dead or you'll figure it out.

Kovawasic dances past, hands each of them a cigar.

KOAWACIC

Cuban, man. Ho Chi Minh's private stash.

One of the Vietnamese girls pulls off her shirt. Not to be outdone, Detroit pulls off his shirt. They dance together.

STEVE

How do you get away with all this?

JAKE

We're the Dog Platoon, man, nobody messes with us, they're scared of even coming in here. The dogs are Gods to be feared and worshipped. They are Cerberus taking us into the Land of the Dead and bringing us back alive.

STEVE

So I'm guessing you went to college.

JAKE

Halfway to my M.A. before they drafted me. I should be teaching Coleridge to co-eds.

STEVE

Did everybody here go to college?

Jake laughs and points out each member of the squad in turn:

JAKE

Yeah, Detroit went to the Advanced Institute of Petty Larceny. When he gets out he plans to sing backup in Motown except he can't sing. McClean has a degree in Conspiracy Theory. Ask him about the Grassy Knoll. Kovawacic wouldn't recognize a school unless he set it on fire. Which in fact he once did.

Searles dances up to them.

JAKE (CONT'D)

But Searles, here... This is an intelligent man. Except when it comes to automobiles--

SEARLES

I'm telling you, 5.6 seconds.

JAKE

In your dreams. Nothing but a Cobra
can beat 6 seconds.

SEARLES

Stingray 427. Put more on it, Jew
Boy, you people got all the money...

Steve is distracted as the nurse Steve ogled on his way over --
LILY SINCLAIR -- enters, pushing a bicycle.

He can't help but stare. Their eyes meet. She gives him a
bemused look before being wrapped into a bear hug by McClean.

MEANWHILE, IN HALLORAN'S PATROL HOOCH

A far cry from the festivities of the dog patrol. Dave sits
on his bunk, restless and depressed.

DAVE

Hey, Nonnies, any idea where Steve
went?

VICTOR

Who?

DAVE

Steve.

VICTOR

You mean the other New Guy? Said he
was going to Vegas for the weekend
and not to wait up...

OUTSIDE THE HOOCH - MOMENTS LATER

Dave watches the artillery firing into the night. Hearing
VOICES, he goes to investigate:

SHAKA, NICHOLS and TWO WHITE GRUNTS are huddled together,
heating a spoon of bubbling BROWN PASTE over a tab of C-4.

DAVE

Hey, guys...

SHAKA

GETYOURFATWHITEASSOUTTAHEREHONKEY
'FORICUTYOUFROMYOURDICKTOYOURBIG
TITTIES!!!

Dave mumbles an apology and backs away.

MEANWHILE - IN THE VIET CONG CAMP

Little more than a few lean-to's surrounding a meager fire. Lanh and Thu squat over small bowls of rice. In the distance, THE SKY LIGHTS UP as artillery shells hit.

THU

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
He wanted to be a priest.

LANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
Who did?

THU

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
Ho. The fat boy.

LANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
No kidding. I took his boots.
(shows them off)
Nice, eh?

THU

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
You took his boots?!

LANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
Better than those shit sandals.
What? You think he'll need them in
the afterlife?

THU

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
I don't want some fat ghost haunting
me.

LANH

(Vietnamese; subtitled)
Superstitious peasant.

MEANWHILE AT THE DOG PATROL HOOCH

Things have spiraled out of control, if such as thing is possible. Everybody's drunk, stoned or both. Detroit is leading them all in what will someday be called *karaoke*.

Lily sits on her bicycle, smoking. Steve plucks up the courage to approach her, made easier because he is shit-faced. Then again, so is she.

STEVE

So...you're a nurse.

LILY

Yes. I am a nurse.

STEVE

Cool.

LILY

Oh, yes. I am completely cool. And you are a soldier.

STEVE

Yes. I am.

LILY

Which is not as cool. But you saved Sparky's life. Which is cool.

STEVE

You know Sparky?

LILY

I operated on him.

STEVE

You're a surgeon?

LILY

No. But the real surgeons were busy saving humans.

At a loss for what next to say, Steve examines her bike.

STEVE

Nice bike. Schwinn.

LILY

A noble brand.

STEVE

Chain's a little loose.

LILY

Yes. I noticed that riding over.

STEVE

I could operate on it for you.

LILY

You're a surgeon, too?

STEVE

Only when the real soldiers are hiding from the gooks.

Sparks are flying -- but McClean butts in with a young Vietnamese girl in tow. HE is magnificently drunk.

MCCLEAN

Young warrior, for your service to our dear comrade Sparky, we have deemed you heir to Erik the Red.

(re the girl)

This is Cam. She is a genuine virgin -- if you believe in Santa Claus. In Viking lore, the slave girl is a vessel for transmission of the life force from the deceased chieftain to his heir. ...You are a virgin, right?

Steve glances over at Lily, discomfited. She's enjoying his predicament.

STEVE

Uh. Well...

LILY

Go for it.

MCCLEAN

First he has sacred duties to perform!
Erik deserves a proper send-off.
Come--- Valhalla awaits!!

*

As he drags Steve away. Lily waves a sweet goodbye.

A WRECKED HUEY

Sits unattended on the airstrip. McClean works a torque wrench to dismount the 7.62mm chain gun.

STEVE

What are you doing?

MCCLEAN

Shhhhh... M-134. Finest death-dealing machine on earth. 6000 rounds-per-minute.

He HOISTS it onto their shoulders and they set off.

THE BASE IS EERILY QUIET IN THE MOONLIGHT

They giggle like the teenagers they are.

STEVE

I know for certain this is against the rules...

They stumble forward with the weapon.

A SANDBAGGED BUNKER ON THE PERIMETER

McClellan loads the chain gun. Steve has had too much to drink.

STEVE
I don't feel so--

He leans against the sandbags.

MCCLELLAN
Do NOT puke on the weapon.

He digs in his pocket, takes out a little film cannister.

MCCLELLAN (CONT'D)
This'll help. Here...

STEVE
What is it?

MCCLELLAN
Good for what ails you. It's all natural. Chew 'em up good...

STEVE
(his mouth full)
--Wha' is it?

MCCLELLAN
Mushrooms.

McClellan racks the slide and FIRES! It's the LOUDEST THING Steve has ever heard. TRACERS ARC ACROSS THE NIGHT SKY...

MCCLELLAN (CONT'D)
To the beyond, Erik, good friend!

ALARMS SOUND. As McClellan RAINS FIRE into the dark jungle, SOLDIERS come running, half-undressed, carrying their WEAPONS.

OFFICER #1
...Where?

MCCLELLAN
In the boonies just beyond the wire!

OFFICER #1
Could be another offensive.
(to his RTO)
Alert Saigon --

GRUNTS take up defensive positions and begin to FIRE in the same direction. ARTILLERY soon joins in.

A JEEP skids to a stop and Jake jumps out. He grabs Steve and throws him in.

JAKE

Just got word. We lift off in ten...

A HUEY IN FLIGHT - SILHOUETTED AGAINST A FULL MOON

Halloran's platoon, packed in like sardines. Steve is wedged beside Jake and a new dog named REX.

MOMENTS LATER - THE HUEY LANDS ON A MOONLIT HILLTOP

Halloran's patrol scrambles out to take up fighting positions.

Steve follows Jake and Rex - but something's not right. The jungle appears to GLOW and SHAPE-SHIFT in the moonlight. He tries to clear his head, but when he looks at Rex, the animal seems to be SMILING AT HIM.

Lt. Halloran points to a spot on a map with Sergeant Boone.

LT. HALLORAN

They were sighted here... We put down behind them. Set an ambush here, coordinates 7341945.

As the patrol spreads out, Steve finds Dave, hugs him.

STEVE

DAVE--! Oh, Dave...

DAVE

Missed you, too, buddy.

STEVE

Something's wrong, Dave. something's VERY wrong...

DAVE

It's okay, I got your back.

Jake catches up to them, rubbing his temples.

JAKE

Why in God's name couldn't I have stuck to beer? Where's the doc, I need aspirin.

(hands Steve the leash)

Here...

STEVE

W-W-What do I do?

JAKE

It's a dog, man. Jesus.

He hurries off.

TIME CUT - MOMENTS LATER

Imagine the jungle in full moonlight. Now imagine it filled with people trying to kill you. Now imagine people trying to kill you while you're on point, tripping on psilocybin...

Trees are monsters, fronds are snakes, bats are pterodactyls. Steve thinks he sees something moving. Maybe. Maybe not.

STEVE

Uh... Guys...

He raises his hand. The patrol instantly STOPS and crouches.

LT. HALLORAN

...Where?

They peer into the jungle. Nothing.

HALLORAN

Gotta be Gooners.

Halloran signals for the men to take up positions.

Everyone focuses in the same direction.

Victor SWATS a mosquito, inadvertently TRIGGERING his M-16.

Naturally, everyone else begins to fire!

Dave mans the M-60 alongside Shaka.

DAVE

Do you see anything?

SHAKA

Hell no.

DAVE

Then what are we shooting at--?

SUDDENLY -- ANSWERING FIRE FROM DEEP IN THE JUNGLE!

BOONE

Aim for the muzzle flashes.

HALLORAN

(to his RTO)

Give me arty one klick south of 23 degrees, co-ordinate 687940!

He scrambles away to check the men.

STEVE is tripping, freaked out. He lies on the ground holding Rex around the neck as much for comfort as for control.

The RTO scuttles back, tries to be heard above the din.

RTO
Base says we're firing at--

HALLORAN
WHAT--?

RTO
Base SAYS--.!

HALLORAN
WHAT--?

RTO
(SCREAMING)
WE'RE SHOOTING AT OUR OWN GUYS!

HALLORAN
I CAN'T---

Dave is standing nearby; he decides to help--

DAVE
(SCREAMING)
HE SAYS WE'RE SHOOTING OUR OWN GUYS!

HALLORAN
Oh, Jesus...
(yells)
Cease fire! STOP FIRING, DAMMIT!

The men finally stop. Halloran YELLS into the jungle.

HALLORAN (CONT'D)
...WHO THE HELL'S OUT THERE?

A VOICE
THE PEOPLE YOU'VE BEEN SHOOTING AT,
ASSHOLE. WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?

HALLORAN
BRAVO 2. IDENTIFY YOURSELF.

A VOICE
DELTA 1. LT. SANCHEZ AND 2 WOUNDED
THANKS TO YOU MOTHERS...

HALLORAN
Oh, Christ...
(MORE)

HALLORAN (CONT'D)
(to the RTO)
Redirect arty to coordinate 687911.

RTO
But that's the other way...

HALLORAN
I KNOW THAT!

RTO
BUT THERE'S NOBODY OUT THERE--!

Halloran sees the look of incredulity on Dave's face.

HALLORAN
JUST DO IT!

The RTO calls in the air strike. Halloran turns on Dave.

HALLORAN (CONT'D)
What are you looking at?

DAVE
Nothing.

HALLORAN
What did you see?

DAVE
Nothing.

HALLORAN
Nothing, SIR.

DAVE
Nothing, sir.

HALLORAN
You wanna die tonight?

DAVE
No, SIR!

HALLORAN
Then get out of my face.

BACK AT THE BASE PERIMETER - MOMENTS LATER

McClellan watches, awestruck, as the pyrotechnics begin...

MUSIC IN: Sonny and Cher's "The Beat Goes On"

Cobra gunships fire ROCKETS, F-4's drop HIGH EXPLOSIVE, and B-52's drop 500 lb BOMBS...

On absolutely nothing.

IN THE TUNNELS

The earth SHAKES. Slabs of dirt COLLAPSE around Thu and Lanh. Thu plugs his ears and we begin to glimpse the depth of his vulnerability. Today we would call it PTSD.

THU
(Vietnamese; subtitled)
No more, please... I can't--

Lanh puts his arms around his friend.

LANH
(Vietnamese; subtitled)
Close your eyes. They'll be gone soon. Shhhh....

IN THE VILLAGE

Mama Tranh cowers beneath a table holding her son.

BACK AT THE PERIMETER

McClellan nods in satisfaction. A proper Valhalla, indeed.

CUT TO:

THE C.O.'S OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

Halloran stands at attention beside LT. SANCHEZ. Sitting behind his desk, debriefing them, is MAJOR TODD HOWELL.

MAJOR HOWELL
-- That's when you spotted the enemy?

LT. HALLORAN
Yes, sir.

MAJOR HOWELL
Estimated strength?

LT. HALLORAN
Company at least. They had mortars, sir.

Sanchez hides his look of incredulity. Howell turns to him.

MAJOR HOWELL
-- And that's when you engaged?

Sanchez pauses. Halloran's career depends Sanchez's answer.

LT. SANCHEZ

Yes, sir.

Halloran closes his eyes in relief

MAJOR HOWELL

Did you contact Lt. Halloran's
platoon?

LT. SANCHEZ

(looks at Halloran)
Sir, they contacted us.

MAJOR HOWELL

To direct your fire?

LT. SANCHEZ

....Yes, sir.

MAJOR HOWELL

How would you estimate the body count?

Halloran and Sanchez exchange a look.

HALLORAN

One confirmed, Two probables.

HALLORAN'S PLATOON HOOCH - SAME

Dave is sitting on his bunk, tying his shoes.

SUDDENLY, a pillow case is thrown over his head and he's
STRUCK IN THE FACE by the butt of an M-16.

Dave DROPS like a stone as TWO ANONYMOUS FIGURES begin to
KICK THE SHIT OUT OF HIM. He manages to get to his knees
before their combat boots BREAK two of his ribs.

ANONYMOUS FIGURE #1

(a harsh whisper)

We heard you like to talk...

Blood stains appear on the pillow case where his mouth is.

DAVE

(moaning)

No..... I don't....talk.

ANONYMOUS FIGURE #1

Keep it that way.

His attackers walk away, leaving Dave moaning on the floor.

BACK IN THE C.O.'S OFFICE - SAME

Howell is on the phone now as Halloran and Sanchez look on.

MAJOR HOWELL
Platoons Bravo and Delta made contact
last night with two companies, sir.

Sanchez and Halloran exchange a look. Two companies?

MAJOR HOWELL (CONT'D)
They performed admirably. Three
confirmed and four probables... Only
two of ours wounded.
(looks at Sanchez)
...Expected to recover?

Sanchez nods.

MAJOR HOWELL (CONT'D)
Good work. You men are excused. I
need your reports by 1700.

MUSIC KICKS IN: Lovin' Spoonful's "What a day for a daydream."

MAJOR HOWELL (CONT'D)
(still on the phone)
Dave, I think we'd better make that
Six confirmed and eight probables.
We hit them pretty hard with air
support afterward.

ON THE OTHER END OF THE LINE

COLONEL DAVE BYERS is in a Command Post in Saigon.

COLONEL BYERS
That area is crawling with VC.
Especially after Tet. I don't see
how this was less than three
companies.

MAJOR HOWELL
That's a very good point, sir.

OUTSIDE THE C.O'S OFFICE

Lt. Halloran and Lt. Sanchez are walking away.

LT. HALLORAN
I owe you one, amigo.

LT. SANCHEZ
Up yours, dickhead.

He walks off in the other direction.

CLOSE ON - A TELETYPE PRINT-OUT CARRIED BY A CLERK

Into a briefing room at THE PENTAGON. GENERAL MCFARLAND sits with representatives of CIA, DIA, NSA, and STATE DEPARTMENT.

GENERAL MCFARLAND

(reading the teletype)

A major engagement outside Cu Chi. Saigon reports three companies of VC. Twelve confirmed and eleven probables.

CIA OFFICIAL

Our data suggests a company of VC would never be without NVA support -- this is at least a regiment.

NSA OFFICIAL

We have unconfirmed aerial recon of the 241st operating in the area.

DIA OFFICIAL

Doesn't make sense to have twelve confirmed kills with a smaller number of probables. Got to be at least fifteen.

GENERAL MCFARLAND

--Plus those damned NVA always take away their dead.

DIA OFFICIAL

He's right. I say we go with fourteen confirmed and twenty probables.

CIA OFFICIAL

This is exactly the kind of victory we need the country to know about after Tet.

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL

I'll leak it to The Post. General, I think you should do the press conference.

GENERAL MCFARLAND

If you think so, Bob.

THE BASE HOSPITAL - SAME

Dave stumbles in as Lily is walking out. His face is a bloody pulp and he holds his ribs.

LILY
 Whoa there. Hang on, soldier.
 (grabs him)
 Put your arm around me...

She helps him inside.

LATER - DAVE IS ASLEEP IN A HOSPITAL BED.

Steve looks down at him, concerned.

STEVE
 Hey, buddy.

Dave opens his eyes. He's doped up and groggy.

LILY
 I gave him a shot.

STEVE
 Looking pretty rough, pal.

Dave tries to smile through cracked lips.

STEVE (CONT'D)
 Got a friend here wants to see you...

SPARKY -- a bandage around her waist -- JUMPS up, puts her massive paws on Dave's chest and starts to lick him.

DAVE
 Gehimoff.

STEVE
 What?

It's hard for Dave to form words.

DAVE
 Wibs...

STEVE
 WIBS?

DAVE
 HURHS!!!!

Steve realizes Sparky is hurting Dave's ribs.

STEVE
 Oh. Sorry. Down girl...
 (peers at Dave)
What happened--?

DAVE

Pa - rol.

STEVE

Patrol? What patrol?

DAVE

Lass.....Nigh.

STEVE

Nothing happened last night, I was there. Who did this to you?

Dave looks around to see if anyone is listening.

DAVE

Hall...ran.

STEVE

Shit.

DAVE

(almost in tears)

Wanna...go...ho--me.

The meds are really kicking in. Steve looks up at Lily.

STEVE

Any chance he's outta here with a million dollar wound?

LILY

Dream on.

Steve leans down, whispers to Dave.

STEVE

We're gonna get him. I promise.

Dave nods and drifts off.

LILY

He's gonna be okay. Beverly Hills dentist got busted for partying with his own nitrus oxide, ended up getting drafted. He's good.

STEVE

(looks around; shakes his head)

It's all....so.....nuts.

LILY

Gotta learn to love the suck. If you don't you're not gonna wanna re-up.

She smiles beatifically. He looks at her. Is everybody crazy?

LILY (CONT'D)
Still wanna fix my bike?

CUT TO:

THE DOG PATROL HOOCH - LATER

Steve is working on Lily's bike.

Detroit is lip-synching The Temptations, "GET READY." He knows all the dance steps and he's actually pretty good. Searles is on his cot reading "The Confessions of Nat Turner."

Kovawacic and McClean play wastebasket basketball.

KOAWAWACIC
Russell passes to Havlicek. Havlicek takes a twenty footer--

MCCLEAN
Off the rim. West has the rebound. He drives the lane... SCORES--!

Mama Tranh and one of the "Hooch Girls" are cleaning up after last night's bacchanal.

HOOCH GIRL
(Vietnamese; subtitled)
They live like pigs.

MAMA TRANH
(Vietnamese; subtitled)
It is a primitive culture.

Jake is trying to roll a joint -- working the tobacco out of a cigarette then trying to stuff pot into the humid, crumpled paper. It SCATTERS all over the floor. He groans.

JAKE
Balls balls balls. Anybody holding?

DETROIT
Nothing but sticks and stems.

SEARLES
We need another hookup. Damn.

JAKE
Fercahkteh army gives us all the smokes we want, meanwhile the Surgeon General says smoking gives you cancer. But pot -- 'Oooh, that's bad for you.' Vietnam is bad for you, man...

He tosses the carton of Marlboros. They land beside Steve.

SEARLES

Big Tobacco helped financed LBJ's re-election. They're implicated in JFK's assassination, along with Howard Hughes and the Mafia.

JAKE

Oh, God, not Howard Hughes again...

Steve has been filling up Lily's tire with a hand pump. He picks up a loose cigarette and stares at it, thoughtfully.

SEARLES

Scoff all you like-- Howard Hughes lent Donald Nixon \$200K. ...Why?

JAKE

(imitating Nixon)

"Pat only wears a good republican cloth coat. I tell her she would look good in anything."

As they argue in the b.g., Steve INSERTS the FILTER END of the cigarette into the nozzle of the bicycle pump. Idly, he pushes the plunger down. To his surprise, all the tobacco goes flying out, leaving the paper firm and intact.

MAMA TRANH (O.S.)

Do this again.

He looks up, finds her staring at the cigarette in his hand.

STEVE

Do what again?

MAMA TRANH

With pump.

Steve takes another cigarette, does it again. Mama Tranh looks around, kneels beside him, whispers.

MAMA TRANH (CONT'D)

We need to have conversation.

STEVE

About what?

MAMA TRANH

Money. Girls. Anything you like.

From her blouse she hands him a large baggie of pot.

MAMA TRANH (CONT'D)

Tomorrow we talk.

She hurries out, leaving Steve with the bag of pot. Everyone is so immersed in what they're doing, no one has noticed.

Steve picks up one of the empty Marlboros and easily LOADS IT with a handful of loose pot. He twists the end: a perfect filter-tipped joint. Pleased, he does another.

After a moment he realizes THE MUSIC HAS STOPPED. He looks up and sees the rest of the platoon staring at him in wonder.

JAKE

What do you think you're doing--?

STEVE

I'm sorry, I just took the bicycle pump and put the filter tip in--

Jake picks up the perfect joint, turns to the others.

JAKE

The man is a genius. Edison and the light bulb, Franklin and the kite...

He gestures to McClean's CASTLE OF MARLBOROS -- enough to make thousands of perfect joints, puts his arm around Steve.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Mr. New Guy, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

CLOSE ON Steve's face. Confused. Intrigued. Excited.

SUPER: 1st TOUR: DAYS SERVED - 3 / DAYS REMAINING - 362

FADE OUT:

