

BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY

Screenplay by Oliver Stone and Ron Kovic

Based on the book by Ron Kovic

Draft 1978

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1 EXT. SALLY'S WOODS - MASSAPEQUA, LONG ISLAND - DAY (1957)

1

THE SUN...leafy trees...summer...

A FACE, angelic, womanly, etched in a broad sunburst, calls.  
A FACE we do not understand or will ever see again.

VOICE

Ronnie... Ronnie?

The last "Ronnie" drawn out, slowing down...suggesting something mystical, now burning out into the sun as:

RONNIE, 10, looks, hears it, crouched - a stubby crewcut, knees patched with denim, his plastic gun in hand, relieved as...

TIMMY runs up, small and vulnerable in a clumsy crouch, a GI helmet on his head, gun.

RONNIE

D'you hear it?

TIMMY

What?

RONNIE doesn't answer. He wonders, then forgets as he HEARS legs tearing through bush fast. Loud FX. Starts, looks,

RONNIE

Let's go, let's go... We got 'em,  
we got 'em!

RONNIE and TIMMY up and moving FAST across trees and tangle; an extended OVERHEAD TRACK drawing out the tension as:

INSECTS BUZZ louder...louder.

TIMMY

Watch out!

...a DIRTBOMB thuds with loud FX on the chest of RONNIE who SCREAMS as TIMMY spins, terrified and:

A HUGE FIGURE hurtles down out of the tree, smacking the ground hard - painted face, sweat, a crown of thorns...

TWO MORE BOYS - JOEY WALSH and TOMMY FINNELLI follow, thudding to the ground, yelling war cries.

RONNIE, fallen to the ground, scrambles to get his Mattel gun up but...

STEVIE is right on top of him, digging his plastic tommygun right into RONNIE's face...he is a big frightening 10 year old and he has blackened his cheekbones in a child's version of an Indian warrior, and in an added touch of the macabre, blackened all his teeth which now shine in a twisted mouth of cruelty and certainty:

1 CONTINUED:

1

STEVIE  
You're DEAD and you know it!

RONNIE looking up into that face as:

The blast of the weapon goes off in RONNIE's face.

STEVIE  
(over)  
Ronnie's dead!

RONNIE - looking up...

HIGH ANGLES - THE WOODS - voice carrying...again

VOICE  
"Ronnie's dead!...Ronnie's dead!"

2 EXT. MASSAPEQUA PARADE (1957) - DAY

2

BOOM! - the huge sound of a BASS DRUM as CREDITS ROLL AND:  
A NUBILE BLONDE with big cowboy boots and gigantic boobs and  
long blonde hair BEATS her drum and

HORNS! MUSIC! and the BAND (marked the "Massapequa Long  
Island High School Marching Band") tears into John Phillip  
Sousa and it's the Fourth of July and

WHACK WHACK WHACK! The firecrackers blast off in red,  
white, blue. An artillery attack over Massapequa and THE  
SUBTITLE READS: JULY 4, 1957.

...and RONNIE rides the shoulders of his DAD in a TRACKING  
SHOT along the crowd, framed in such a way that we have the  
impression RONNIE is floating above the crowd, ecstatic,  
waving his red, white, and blue flag up at the crackers -  
the greatest day of his life.

RONNIE  
Daddy, look at the firecrackers!  
Look!

DAD is muscular, stocky, a kind face, late 30's, thinning  
hair, looking up too:

DAD  
Hey look at that!

In the confusion of the crowd, now coming astride MOM - a  
handsome woman, pregnant, with a somewhat tired face,  
slightly pinched - also waving a flag.

With her 2 YOUNGER SONS and a DAUGHTER SUSANNE, 12. TOMMY,  
6, is pulling on DAD's arm, jumping up and down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

2

TOMMY

Lemme up there Daddy - it's my turn!

RONNIE

No, today's my birthday!...you be quiet.

MOM

Come here Tommy.

RONNIE looking out from his perch at

A FLOAT OF AMERICANA (marked Massapequa USA) motoring down Broadway. Young TEENAGERS populate it like strawberries. Followed by:

THE NASSAU COUNTY MOTORCYCLE COPS - gleaming chrome and black leather, the scouts doing wheelies on the back tires of their machines - crowd APPLAUSE.

MOM has caught TOMMY and spansks him hard on the sidewalk, a quick flash of HYSTERIA.

MOM

What's the matter with you, don't ya ever listen?!

TOMMY has the sullen eyes of the perpetual loser in these quarrels. MOM slaps him up again on the buttocks.

MOM

Answer me!

He stares stupidly at her, as if saying 'hit me again' as

THE CLOWNS dance by behind and a 10 year old GIRL (DONNA) whips up, stops, runs off again, chased by her FATHER.

FATHER

Donna! Come back here...

THE DOVES (Massapequa Women's Auxilary) parade by in white uniforms - the wifery of one of the male organizations.

THE JUVENILE DELINQUENTS, 14-17, of Massapequa look on, at an alienated distance, huddled with their CHICKS near a couple of souped-up convertibles, pointing and smirking at:

THE TOWN POLITICIANS in their cars waving.

TIMMY, dressed up in a Navy uniform, ducks and dodges through the crowd, chased by

STEVIE, in an Army uniform with a COLLIE running and barking at his side - nearly bowling over an OLD LADY who goes "watch out!" and a FAT WOMAN foes "oooooh!"

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: 3

2

RONNIE, now highlighted from a lower angle over his DAD by 1-2-3 fast background explosions of firecrackers (cherry bombs, ashcans, sparklers). Hold. The moment broken by...

DONNA running up, extending her gift wrapped package, excited.

DONNA  
Happy Birthday, Ronnie Kovic!

RONNIE surprised, as his DAD hauls him down to the ground.

RONNIE  
For me?

DONNA  
Yes. Open it!

He takes it shyly as his MOM notices.

MOM  
Oh that's really nice of you Donna.  
Say thank you Ronnie.

RONNIE  
(still surprised)  
T'anks, Donna, but...

His BROTHERS huddle around him, now joined by STEVIE running up with TIMMY.

STEVIE  
What is it, open it willya!

DONNA frowning at the interruption by the boys.

DONNA  
Leave him alone!

RONNIE opening the box.

RONNIE  
Boy...wow!

STEVIE  
(in awe)  
Hey it's the real thing  
Ronnie...feel that!

RONNIE slipping a real \$10 New York Yankees striped blue wool hat over his head with the reverence of a priest handling the crucifix...his eyes peering up from underneath to assuage the impact.

TIMMY  
(hushed tones)  
Just like Mickey Mantle Ronnie.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: 4

2

DAD snaps him up on the side of the head affectionately.

DAD

(to Mom)

Ain't he a little 4th of July  
firecracker in that hat.

MOM

Yeah, he's my little yankee doodle  
Boy.

Her face. A pause. Ron will remember it forever. Mom with  
a firecracker exploding above her eyes.

DONNA motions him with her head - come on. Slyly.

RONNIE, curious, sensing something new and important,  
disentangles himself from his FRIENDS and goes up to DONNA.  
Her lips glowing moist with a mischievous hint of lipstick.

DONNA

Let's sneak out.

RON

(surprised)

What?...where?

DONNA

It's a secret, Ronnie Kovic.

RON looking back, worried if his parents see him.

RON

Mom'll...

DONNA

Come on - it's your birthday.

Takes his hand firmly. Runs him off - as Roman Candles  
explode above.

3 EXT. FIELDS OUTSIDE TOWN

3

The celebration continues in the sky above the town as day  
settles into NIGHT. The Music Theme creeping in. Spring.  
Youth. Suggesting an onrushing force.

RONNIE doing a handstand showing off...

RONNIE

Hey look Donna...

DONNA

Come on Ronnie Kovic, you're always  
showing off.

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED:

3

RONNIE

Yeah, watch this. I could do this forever if I wanted to...

As he switches from a two-hander to one hand. He holds a moment but crumples... DONNA giggles, runs over.

DONNA

You think you're the best...

RONNIE

I'll do it someday, you'll see.

DONNA

Kiss me!

RONNIE

What?

DONNA

It's your birthday. Kiss me.

RONNIE

How?

DONNA

Haven't you ever seen your parents do it?

RONNIE

No...

DONNA

Like this, silly...

A kiss is just a kiss... RONNIE - a face of disgust mixed with puzzlement, fear, loss...should it feel good or bad?

DONNA

Did you like it?

RONNIE

I don't know...I don't know...

He's scared, hides it by jumping up...

RONNIE

Hey, look how many pushups I can do!

As he starts...the camera pulling back from the two children framed in the field with the trees and the sparklers spiderwebbing the sky...

DISSOLVING TO:

## 4 INT. KOVIC HOUSE - NIGHT (1957) 4

A MR. TOOTH DECAY COMMERCIAL plays on the black and white set...moving with SUSANNE out to the backyard carrying food...

## 5 EXT. KOVIC BACKYARD - NIGHT (1957) 5

As SUSANNE comes out with the food, the door banging, we see the FAMILY gathered around the outdoor barbecue, muted -- DAD stoking the hamburgers and hotdogs...

Close on RONNIE looking up at the sky through Navy binoculars.

RONNIE

Hey Mom, look at that! Right there! You see it?

MOM

No. Where?

SUSANNE

(12 years old)  
I see it. Yeah.

TOMMY

(8 years old)  
Yeah...yeah! Look, Sputnik, Mom!

MOM

(now sees it)  
...oh yeah...it's so small...

A SPECK OF LIGHT moving through...the Russian Sputnik, the Music Theme weaving as...

WE MOVE down the FAMILY FACES all looking up...

JIMMY

(4 years old)  
...so high...look the Russian plane.

Back to MOM with the new baby PATTY (2 years old) in her lap making ga-ga noises...

MOM

It's not a plane sweetheart, it's a satellite.

JIMMY

(awed)  
...satellite?

SUSANNE

(pronouncing it)  
Satellite.

(CONTINUED)



5 CONTINUED:

5

Moving to RONNIE...

Dad? RONNIE

Hm? DAD

Why did the Russians beat us into space, Dad? RONNIE

Moving to Dad feeding more coals in -- a glow on his face.

Well, the Russians, they don't even bother feeding their people, they put all their money into making weapons and things like that. DAD

But we're supposed to be the best, Dad? RONNIE

You bet we are but we've been pretty stupid too. We put the Russians back on their feet after World War II and they took Hungary, Poland, half of Europe -- and they still want more... DAD

Communism is an insidious evil, Ronnie, they don't believe in God and if we don't watch out, they're gonna take over this country someday... MOM

RONNIE looking around, and back up at the Sputnik, upset, feeling the defeat personally, the sense of helplessness...

What's "hungry"? TOMMY (over)

That's where your granma comes from. MOM

Granma Kovassovich. SUSANNE

But don't people know? Why don't we stop them? RONNIE (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: 2

5

RONNIE (cont'd)  
 We're supposed to be the best...  
 We can't let them take over our  
 country, Dad, what's wrong?

DAD  
 Well...people're scared of 'em...I  
 think everybody's scared of 'em  
 these days...

RONNIE  
 I'm not. I'm not scared of 'em!

Turning back into the house, angry...

RONNIE  
 I hate the Communists. I really  
 hate them. We're gonna come back  
 and beat them someday...

6 INT. MASSAPEQUA MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT (1958)

6

John Wayne in THE SANDS OF IWO JIMA, saying something to a  
 scared young recruit about the Marine Corps and its long  
 tradition.. "You're screwing up my Marine Corps kid - "

THE BALCONY - MOVING DOWN the FACES, we see STEVIE setting  
 the pace smothering his DATE...TOMMY FINNELLI trying to keep  
 up...JOEY WALSH, smiling awkwardly at his DATE as she  
 glances at him...TIMMY terrified, glancing at his DATE,  
 evidently irritated at the hand trying to clutch her  
 shoulder...

and RONNIE totally absorbed in the action on the screen as  
 DONNA glances at him, wondering.

THEIR KNEES bump and RONNIE's knee jerks away as if hit by a  
 fast ball...

RONNIE uncomfortably glances at her.

DONNA slides her hand downwards

TAKES HIS HAND -they hold.

DONNA looks over. RONNIE looks back - background MUSIC and  
 ARTILLERY from the screen mount. His attention distracted.  
 His face changing.

HIS HAND slides off her hand as

SHE looks over. Why?

CLIP - JOHN WAYNE is leading the charge up Surabachi at the  
 end of the film...he is hit!

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED:

6

THE FIVE BOYS all watching now, even Stevie; the FIVE GIRLS with varying degrees of interest.

TIMMY

(leans over, whispers to  
RON)

Hey Ronnie, aren't you sorry you  
missed World War II?

WAYNE is dying, speaking...speaking to

RONNIE, his face lost in the light of the flickering screen, a private world, mysterious - a child's fantasy, fascination with violence, with death...the secret love for a nightmare...WAYNE dies, OVER.

CLIP - THE FLAG is planted on Iwo Jima by the Marines in a reenaction of the famous photograph - accompanied by the Marine Hymn. "From the Halls of Montezuma."

RONNIE has tears rolling out his eyes on the darkness.

7 EXT. MASSAPEQUA LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY (1959)

7

THE PITCHER releases.

THE FASTBALL wings in with a conclusive THUD as RONNIE swings and misses.

UMPIRE

STEE - RIKE!!!!

CHEERS from the stands - as RONNIE looks back at the pitcher in awe; this guy is fast! ...Stepping out of the batter's box to regain his composure.

RONNIE wears the New York Yankees hat, cleats, and a Number 7 uniform (in honor of Mickey Mantle).

CATCHER

(throwing the ball back)

Okay - Jerry - two down, you got  
this guy! He's looking, he's  
looking.

VORSOVICH is the baserunner at third.

VORSOVICH

C'mon Ronnie - you got him, you got  
him, he's chopped meat.

STEVIE the third base coach, plumper, making all kinds of railroad gestures against his chest, at RONNIE.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

7

STEVIE

(unintelligible)

Oh yeah godzagol gimme a ten blue,  
here we go here we go awright  
awright okay okay.

VOICE (OVER)

Shuddup you big lug of fat.

TIMMY the nervous baserunner at first base.

THE OPPONENTS' DUGOUT - all of them on their feet yelling encouragement at their pitcher, belittling RONNIE.

RONNIE'S DUGOUT - DAD is the manager. JOEY, FINNELLI, FANTOZZI - everybody's up on his feet. A big moment in the Little League.

VOICES

C'mon c'mon Ronnie -- get a piece  
of it! Go! Go!

DONNA is in the stands with GIRLFRIENDS. With her is a BOY, 12. A radio is out - playing Del Shannon's "Runaway".

RADIO

"As I walk along I wonder what went  
wrong with our love a love that was  
so strong..."

RONNIE nervously making all kinds of batter gestures outside the box...stepping in.

THE PITCHER looking for his sign, sweating - obviously a big moment. RONNIE waiting -

THE PITCHER winds up...fires.

RONNIE in SLOW MOTION SILENCE swinging into it...connecting...

ANOTHER ANGLE - SOUND - THE BALL CRACKING off the bat...RONNIE swinging through as

THE BALL sails over the head of the CENTERFIELDER who chases it.

THE CROWD cheers and yells - featuring DONNA screaming.

TIMMY crossing the plate.

RONNIE rounding third, slapped on by STEVIE...his brother, TOMMIE, is up in the stands cheering. He runs on, the lyric seems to focus on him as he floats on.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: 2

7

## RADIO

"I'm awalking in the rain tears are  
falling and I feel a pain awishing  
you where here by me to end this  
misery and I wonder, I - awhoo whoo  
whoo whoo wonder why, why why  
...why why"

RONNIE slides home, just ahead of the ball, underneath the catcher.

8 EXT. MASSAPEQUA, LONG ISLAND STREET - DAY (1961)

8

One story houses on apportioned lots, small backyards with laundry lines, a tableau of SMALL CHILDREN wheeling bicycles, a DOG running past...a DELIVERY MAN...a MOM calling from her house ("Michael, Barbara! Come'n see this, you gotta see this...")...a TEENAGER, under his sedan, fixing it up...an OLDER COUPLE, on their porch, hearing it on the radio.. under the pressing, destiny-ridden MUSIC THEME,

the VOICE OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY is growing louder the closer we get -- as if coming from all the televisions and radios on the block.

THE SUBTITLE NOW READS: JANUARY 20, 1961.

## KENNEDY

"Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans -- born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage -- and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world..."

MOVING TOWARDS RONNIE KOVIC'S HOME from the REAR ANGLE -- a house like any other. A backyard with a picnic table, overhanging elm, parallel bars, climbing rope -- into the house...

9 INT. KOVIC HOUSE - DAY

9

Moving with TOMMY KOVIC towards the TV from which the VOICE now rises -- in conjunction with the Music Theme -- to its climax...

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED:

9

The KOVIC FAMILY watches -- DAD, MOM, THREE BROTHERS, TWO SISTERS...the cramped interior features worn inexpensive furniture and a proliferation of Catholic symbols -- crosses, Holy Water, pictures of Jesus, little saying like "Bless My Little Kitchen Lord and Warm It With Your Love"...

KENNEDY

"...in the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility -- I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation."

MOVING past TOMMY KOVIC, 10, stopping to stare, to RONNIE KOVIC, 14, elbows on the floor, watching it, believing it...believing all of it...

CLIP -- KENNEDY - FULL SCREEN

KENNEDY

"...The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it -- and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.. and so my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you -- ask what you can do for your country... My fellow citizens of the world: Ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man..."

ON RONNIE -- visibly moved.

CUT TO:

10 INT. MASSAPEQUA HIGH SCHOOL GYM - DAY (1964)

10

RON, now 17, in the full flower of his adolescence, rolls quickly under his OPPONENT'S arms and drives him upwards in a violent reversing motion that gives RON the upperhand, riding his OPPONENT to the pin in this practice session...

THE COACH, a bullnecked intense man with crewcut and thick bottleneck lenses, blows his whistle...

COACH

Awright! Hit the ropes!

THE SUBTITLE READS: 1964...

TIMECUT TO:

10 CONTINUED:

10

RONNIE in his short hair and wrestling gear, hauls ass up the ropes in a race with the other young WRESTLERS on his team.

COACH  
GO! GO! GO! GO! GO! GO! GO!

RONNIE hits the top, slides down.

COACH  
Again...Kovic! Keep going! You, Powell, you look like a girl! What's this? Are you a Girl Scout or are you a Boy Scout! DO IT! DO IT! DO IT!

RONNIE back up, with a vengeance.

TIMECUT TO:

10A RONNIE AND OTHERS doing pushups on the mat as

THE COACH walks down the line like a Marine drill sergeant, which he resembles, barking -

COACH  
I want you to KILL!! YOU HEAR ME!! KILL You're sweating to win - to win! I want that State Championship, do you want that State Championship...DO YOU! DO YOU!

ALL  
(pumping)  
YES SIR.

COACH  
THEN KILL! PUMP IT! PUMP IT!!

11 EXT. MASSAPEQUA - LAKE - DAY - SNOW (1964)

11

RONNIE AND OTHERS running through the winter SNOW in sweatsuits, breathing clouds of air.

12 INT. KOVIC LIVINGROOM/KITCHEN - DAY (1964)

12

RONNIE, wearing a rubber suit over six shirts and four pairs of pants, and gaunt now, sticks his hand in the Holy Water and crosses himself as he crosses into the kitchen to the refrigerator... past the FAMILY eating an early dinner (meatloaf, steaming mashed potatoes, homemade biscuits, squash with melted cheese, ice tea).. MOM doling out the portions....

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED:

12

MOM

That's a good boy Ronnie... The rice is on the stove...and there's fresh fruit in the icebox...

RONNIE opening the icebox, picking out an apple and juice.

MOM

(to Tommy)

...your brother's a hard worker Tommy. Cause he wants to be the best. Win or lose, as long as you do your best, that's what matters.

(partly to Ronnie)

Win or lose, we're still here, we still love you...

13 INT. RON'S ROOM - NIGHT (1964)

13

MOM holding a PLAYBOY MAGAZINE aloft, angry...an eggbeater in her other hand.

MOM

Where'd you get this Ronnie?

RON

C'mon gimme a break Ma. Stevie gave it to me, it's not mine.

MOM

You know I don't allow this Playboy Magazine in my house!

14 INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

14

MOM chasing RONNIE through the house with the magazine as a club.. an eggbeater in the other hand...

MOM

You have filthy and impure thoughts Ronnie. Come here...come here...(corners him)

RON

I'm sorry Mom. C'mon!

MOM

God's gonna punish you for this! God's gonna punish you. I want you to tell Father Bradley! You hear me! I don't EVER want to see that filthy magazine in this house again!

She whacks him with it on the side of the head...

(CONTINUED)



14 CONTINUED:

14

MOM

Throw it away...

As she gives it to him and storms away. RON sneaks another peak at the centerfold...

RON

Sure Mom...

15 INT. MASSAPEQUA HIGH SCHOOL GYM - DAY (1964)

15

RONNIE and OTHERS working curls on the weights, the veins in his forehead standing out.

COACH

(walking)

More, more! Drive your bodies. If you wanna win, you gotta SUFFER. You wanna be the Best, you gonna have to work for it, you're gonna have to fight like you never fought in your life. You're gonna have to bleed for me, you don't know what sacrifice MEANS. If you wanna be the BEST, you're gonna have to go further'n you've ever gone in your life. You gotta pay the price for Victory. The price is SACRIFICE. SACRIFICE, people!

As, in a particularly sour humor today, he slams RONNIE on the shoulder, in the midst of his curl.

COACH

Right, 4th of July?

RONNIE

RIGHT!

COACH

You gonna cry Kovic! You gonna cry Kovic!

Slamming him again. RONNIE, emaciated, is in a trance state.

COACH

Seven more pounds Kovic. SEVEN!! Everybody, I want you to look at this... I want you to see the baby cry... Are those tears?

Camera getting closer and closer on RONNIE as the coach really slams his gut now, RONNIE hunching over with pain:

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

15

COACH  
 LOOK AT THIS FAT BLOB! CRY CRY CRY  
 YOU LITTLE BABY. That's what we  
 want, we want you people to cry  
 like little babies because that's  
 what you are. YOU ARE NOTHING!!  
 ARE YOU GONNA CRY, KOVIC?

The camera microscoping RONNIE, holding his belly, about to puke.

Then bracing himself, veins standing out in his forehead, rights himself and yells back at the top of his lungs at the coach,

RONNIE  
 I AM A MASSAPEQUA HIGH SCHOOL  
 VARSITY WRESTLER! AND I WILL NEVER  
 CRY...NEVER NEVER NEVER!!!

His face contorted, the camera very tight now as the COACH slugs him in the belly.

COACH  
 YEAH!!!!!!

TIMECUT TO:

16 INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM - DAY (1964)

16

RONNIE drenched in sweat, is clinched with a wiry OPPONENT with "BABYLON" written on his top.

DONNA, now 17, grown sophisticated and beautiful, her breeding showing, is with A BOY, about 18, evidently from a good family, a little bored with this. With her also, are some GIRLFRIENDS and THEIR DATES

DONNA  
 (intent)  
 Go Ronnie, get him, get him! Kill  
 him!

MOVING TO: TOMMY and STEVE and TIMMY rooting in the stands and

THE COACH nervously pacing the sideline looking up at the clock and scoreboard. This is the State Championship. BABYLON 3, MASSAPEQUA 2 - 30 seconds ticking off.

COACH  
 COME ON KOVIC, GET IN THERE, GET HIM!

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED:

16

BOYS

(on bench)  
Go, Ronnie, go!

RONNIE strains, grunts - springs out of the lock and reverses his OPPONENT. CHEERS sweep the room.

DONNA yelling "hold him!...hold him now!", tense, vicariously sharing with her boyfriend.

DONNA

You got him! You got him!

THE OPPONENT bucks grunting - wild spin and

TWO HEADS bang into the mat as the opponent, yelling with primal force, reverses RONNIE with a brute twist and locks him down...

THE CLOCK ticking out - 4...3...2...1 - BABYLON 4 MASSAPEQUA 2.

PANDEMONIUM

The other teams' FANS going wild.

RONNIE'S COACH slamming his hands down in disgust.

DONNA sharing his defeat, now looking as

RONNIE just lies there on the mat... Camera moving on him...tears rolling out of his eyes, the sacrifice Pyrrhic in his face... He won't rise. The defeat is total -- his and his alone.

17 INT. MASSAPEQUA HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY (1964)

17

VOICE

ATTEN - SHUN!

100 Senior High School BOYS all rise as:

TWO MARINES in full dress blue uniforms and magnificently spit-shined shoes execute a perfect close order two man drill down the middle of the aisle on the way to the platform.

MARINE SGT.

(barking)

TEXT - CLOSE ORDER DRILL

MARINE SGT. addressing the SENIOR STUDENTS from the podium - Marine Corps flag, U.S. flag, table of materials; SCHOOL OFFICIALS behind.

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

17

MARINE SGT.

(polite, very dignified)

Good afternoon - I'm Staff Sergeant Hayes and this is Sergeant Bowers, the United States Marine Recruiting Station, Levittown, New York. We've come here today at the request of your principal, Mr. O'Connor, and members of the faculty to tell you a little bit about the Marine Corps... First of all, young men, let's get one thing straight...

(thrusting out his  
finger)

Not everybody can become United States Marines. We want the best and we will settle for nothing but the best because there is nothing prouder, nothing finer, nothing standing as straight as a United States Marine...

PROFILE - JOEY, TIMMY, RONNIE, BILLY VORSOVICH, DANNY FANTOZZI, STEVIE BOYER - RONNIE all absorbed, buying every word.

MARINE SGT. (OVER)

Now they got the Air Force, they got the Navy, they got the Army, they got the Coast Guard - and if you want to join them go ahead. They got plenty of room... But if you want a challenge, if you want to try something difficult, try to achieve the impossible - try 13 weeks of hell at Parris Island South Carolina and find out if you got what it takes, find out if you really are a man, then the Marines might be what you're looking for.

18 EXT. MASSAPEQUA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY (1964)

18

OUTSIDE THE AUDITORIUM - ACROSS A CAMPUS LAWN - MUSIC THEME

Spring - the onrushing force - in one sense melodic, stirring, in another rushing, pulling, sucking RONNIE from his youth, pushing him on into manhood.

Whirring bugs flashing through the air... DONNA AND GIRLS in spring dresses, shorts, strolling doing gymnastic tumbles on the lawn, others in far background peeking into the windows of the auditorium and running off, giggling.

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED:

18

MARINE SGT. VOICE (OVER)

(distant)

Tarawa...Iwo Jima...Belleau Wood.  
 First to fight, we have never lost  
 a war. We have always come when  
 our country has called...

19 INT. MASSAPEQUA HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY (1964)

19

RONNIE eyes like 'god, yeah!'

SPIT SHINED SHOES....MOVING UP THE STRIPED PANTS - TO

MARINE SGT.

Now Sergeant Bowers and I are gonna  
 open this up for questions. Any of  
 you young men have questions go  
 ahead and raise your hands.

SILENCE

MARINE SGT.

Now come on, don't be afraid.  
 Don't forget a good Marine is a  
 thinking Marine.

STEVIE making a cynical face, at DANNY, BILLY.

MARINE SGT. (OVER)

Stand up...stand up back there,  
 young man.

A PIMPLY KID with glasses hesitating, getting up at the back of the auditorium.

PIMPLY KID

How old do you have to be to join  
 the Marines?

MARINE SGT.

18 years old - but with your  
 parents' consent you can join at  
 17.

Looking around. Pointing. BILLY VORSOVICH standing,  
adjacent RONNIE, OTHERS -

BILLY

(proud)

Billy Vorsovich, sir! - when do I  
 get to wear a uniform like you?

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED:

19

MARINE SGT.

Make PFC out of boot camp, you can be wearing this thing in 13 weeks...any of you young men have any more questions, come up to the stage. Sergeant Bowers and I will be here to answer any questions. Thank you, gentlemen.

20 INT. BOYERS CANDY STORE - DAY (1964)

20

RONNIE, STEVIE, TIMMY, JOEY, BILLY, DANNY finishing their sodas in a booth of the candy store -

RONNIE

I'd like to be just like those guys. They're great!

STEVIE

I think it's all a crock of shit, Ronnie.

RONNIE

You think so? What are you talking about?

TIMMY

My brother's at college at Adelphi, he says there's gonna be a war over there soon in....

RONNIE

Vyet - Nam

TIMMY

Yeah, but it ain't gonna last long he says. The Marines are gonna be the first ones in too.

RONNIE

We don't sign up we're gonna miss it. I'm going in now, not September.

STEVIE

You're crazy!

RONNIE

No, you don't know what you're missing. Our dads went to WWII, this our chance to be part of history.

DANNY

Just like our dads.

(CONTINUED)

TIMMY

I always wanted to be a Marine.  
The Marines are cool man. Jerks go  
to college.

JOEY

I don't know. The Marines are  
crazy. Pop says go into the Navy,  
it's the same money -- and it's  
safer.

RONNIE

Imagine going all the way over  
there -- to Asia? I wonder what  
they look like.

STEVE

Who?

RONNIE

The Viet Cong.

JOEY

They're short little slant-eyed  
guys. Just like the Japs.

RONNIE

I'm not afraid. You know, "Better  
dead than Red".

STEVE

I can't see it. I once shot a  
squirrel with my BB gun down at the  
Woods. It really felt bad. You  
should think about what you're  
doing Ronnie, it could be really  
dangerous. You could get yourself  
killed.

RONNIE

Aw don't worry about me, I'll be  
all right. I'm not gonna get hurt.

TIMMY

(to Steve)  
Where you going -- college?

DANNY

(interjects)  
Mom wants me to go to college.

STEVIE

(defensive)  
So? I wanna do something with my  
life. I can get a degree in  
business administration.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

Yeah, but don't you think we need to defend our country?

TIMMY

Yeah, don't you care about anything but yourself?

RONNIE

They got missiles pointed at us everywhere. ICBMs! They're moving in all around us...in Cuba. They're 90 miles away. They're taking over the whole world. When are we gonna stop them.

STEVIE

Yeah sure but I don't see 'em. They're not here in Massapequa. I'm gonna take care of number one -- me, Stevie.

TIMMY mock snores.

RONNIE

Yeah, you have the right to go to college cause we'll be over there fighting for your rights.

TIMMY

You couldn't make it as a soldier anyway, you're a fatso. (laughs).

STEVIE

Laugh. Wait till you get over there and they're shooting at you. All I'm saying to you guys is...you should think about it, Ronnie, y'know -- just think about it.

RONNIE

Okay Steve, it's all right. Somebody's gotta stay home, we'll do the fighting...

STEVIE

(rising to leave, to his Dad)  
Check's on me, Dad. I'll work it out later okay?

DAD

Okay.

(CONTINUED)



20 CONTINUED: 3

20

STEVIE

(as they walk out,  
burping)Hey Ronnie, who you taking to the  
prom?RON looking through a PLAYBOY on the rack. Notices the name  
on the centerfold.

RONNIE

Uh...Roseanne Lombardo.

STEVIE

Who?

RONNIE

She doesn't live here, she lives  
over in Lake Ronkonkoma.

STEVIE

She's from out of town hunh. She  
gonna stay at a motel?

RONNIE

No...I'm not gonna do any of that  
stuff. Who you taking?

21 EXT. BOYER'S CANDY STORE &amp; STREET - DAY (1964)

21

LONG SHOT -- the GROUP coming out of the store -- a sign  
"Boyer's Soda Fountain and Candy" -- Burger 60 cents, sodas  
35 cents.

STEVIE

Wendy Daniels.

JOEY

Don't get your head stuck in those  
knockers.

STEVIE

Yeah, sure who you taking Lucy?  
She get her braces cleaned yet...As they push and shove each other, horsing around...past  
Sparky the Barber's -- a pole outside with SPARKY cutting  
inside...Giggling boys, the last time they will ever be together,  
they pass on...the camera moving to settle on the "US Marine  
Recruiting Station" as RONNIE'S reflection goes by.

22 INT. MASSAPEQUA A&amp;P - DAY (1964)

22

Windows looking out on Broadway, Massapequa...RONNIE hauling empty cartons down an aisle, intersecting DAD who is a manager in the store, balding, early 50s now, in uniform...

DAD

Ronnie, wouldya take those down to section C and check the stock for more toilet paper. Then break open the dog food -- come on now, let's go, let's go (clapping his hands, irritated).

RONNIE

Awright Dad, awright.

Going. Evidently the job is wearisome to him...MOVING with him down a row of canned goods, RONNIE comes around a corner and suddenly sees:

DONNA AND GIRLS at the magazine rack in the high school clothing of '64.

RONNIE intersects her awkwardly.

RONNIE

Hey Donna, howya doing?

DONNA

Hi Ronnie.

She tries to seem casual, both of them self-conscious.

RONNIE

How's everything?

DONNA

Okay...heard you were going into the Marines?

RONNIE

Yeah.

DONNA

Are you sure you know what you're doing Ronnie?

RONNIE

(silly grin)  
Well...it's better than carrying these boxes around and working in the A&P the rest of your life.

DONNA

You're always taking chances Ronnie, you're always trying to prove yourself...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED:

22

DONNA (cont'd)

(he waits)  
I guess you'll be gone a long time?

RONNIE

(shining)  
I'm going to boot camp next month.  
I signed up for four years. Just  
like you going to college, hunh  
Donna. I heard you were going to  
Syracuse upstate.

DONNA

Yeah, Syracuse...I was gonna go  
into the Peace Corps but they got a  
good college.. but it's far...it's  
gonna be hard...

Pause. RON is having a hard time getting the words out.

RONNIE

I...I was meaning to call you...  
Are you.. are you going to the  
prom with someone?

DONNA

Uh...well he hasn't asked me but I  
think Jed wants me to go with him.

RONNIE

(quick, hurt)  
Oh yeah that's great. Jed's a  
really nice guy isn't he?

DONNA

I heard you were taking somebody  
from Lake Ronkonkoma?

RONNIE

Yeah...no...ahhh you know I don't  
know, I don't have time for that  
stuff, going to proms. I gotta lot  
of stuff to do 'fore boot camp...

Pause.

DONNA

Well, if you're there...maybe we  
could dance...one time.

RONNIE

Yeah...maybe...that would be nice.

The OTHER GIRLS whispering, intimidating him.

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED: 2

22

RONNIE

Well, I'll see you 'round before I  
leave...

DONNA

Okay...

He pulls away.

She goes, equally awkward.

TRACKING RONNIE as he comes to the STOCK ROOM, looks back.

She is going with her FRIENDS.

He goes in the STOCK ROOM, angry. He blasts a cantaloupe  
against the wall.

23 EXT. MASSAPEQUA HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT - RAIN - (1964)

23

RAIN pouring down on Massapequa.

THE SENIOR PROM - Lights, singing, dancing, cars. Beatles'  
Music.

24 INT. RON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - RAIN

24

RONNIE in his room alone, hunched on his bed packing a  
carton with childhood mementoes, baseball photos, bats,  
gloves, the Yankee baseball hat DONNA gave him...Mel Allen's  
VOICE on the radio getting more and more excited.

RADIO

Okay two down...Kubek on third,  
Richardson's leaning far off the  
bag at first and Mantle's got two  
big strikes on him now with the Red  
Sox ahead 3 to 1 here in the bottom  
of the sixth...the windup now...the  
pitch...

(sharp FX of the baseball  
bat cracking)

THAT'S A HIT!...the Mick...wait!  
wait, it's going, going...it's  
GONE... over the centerfield  
fence, 455 feet, the Mick has hit  
it right out to the park and LOOK  
at that crowd!... on its feet and  
NUMBER 7 is coming round third  
base, his 491st home run, from  
Commerce, Oklahoma, isn't he great!  
I can't think of one man who means  
so much to the championship Yankees  
as Number 7...

25 INT. CORRIDOR - SAME NIGHT

25

RONNIE is shuffling out the door, barefoot...something of his childhood hanging in the air, but unable to feel the same emotions...despondent...

PASSING his BROTHERS' ROOM - TOMMY, now 14, picking at a guitar string, singing a DYLAN lyric..."The Times They Are A Changing"... JIMMY, the other brother, 12, listening.

26 INT. LIVINGROOM - SAME NIGHT - RAIN

26

MOM in the bedroom, DAD watching the news, a newspaper in hand, dozing, exhausted from work. Waking now as RONNIE shuffles in, watching the NEWS CLIP - an Infantry COLONEL is being interviewed at a base camp someplace, TROOPS moving or convoying in the background; shades on his eyes, a green baseball cap over close-cropped hair, a revolver in his shoulder holster, thick forearms:

COLONEL

...no question 'bout that. The 82nd Airborne and the First Cavalry Division are the newest concepts in mobile warfare. One division is worth about 2 1/2 Russian and six Chinese divisions...

NEWSMAN

But how well do you think the individual soldier will hold up in Vietnam, Colonel?

COLONEL

I've never seen anything like it. I been in World War II - in Korea, these boys - they're gung ho, they wanna eat nails - the finest combat troops we've ever had! It's an honor to lead them.

RONNIE has sat down facing his DAD. A pause between them.

RONNIE

What do you think, Dad - about that?

NEWSCASTER

Do you think, Colonel, the war here will be over soon?

(CONTINUED)

DAD

Oh...I don't know  
- 13,000 miles -  
it's a long way  
to go to fight a  
war -

COLONEL

Well, that's a  
hard question to  
answer. But  
without being  
overconfident,  
I'd say at the  
outside, yes --  
about a year -  
Course it's a  
guerilla war so  
you can't  
force...

RONNIE

But if we give  
them Vietnam,  
they'll take the  
rest. That's the  
way they are.  
It's the domino  
theory, Dad.  
They'll nibble us  
up piece by  
piece. We gotta  
stop them  
someplace.

NEWSCASTER

But do you think  
these people -  
the Viet Cong -  
who've fought the  
Japanese and the  
French and lived  
in these caves  
and tunnels for  
thirty years - do  
you really think  
Colonel...

DAD

(sighs)  
Maybe...I just  
hope they send  
you to Europe or  
Korea or  
someplace safe...

COLONEL

I think that  
anything that  
lives in a tunnel  
can be weeded  
out. It takes  
time and  
patience, and the  
support of the  
people back home  
- and the support  
of the press -

RONNIE

They can't Dad!  
They gotta send  
me to Vietnam for  
13 months, that's  
the way it is -

NEWSCASTER

Colonel, do you  
mean...the Press  
is not...

DAD

Well, maybe  
they'll put you  
on garrison duty  
someplace...an  
embassy?

RONNIE

Yeah, but they  
won't Dad!  
Every Marine has  
a tour over  
there, it's not  
like the Army  
(stronger now)  
What's wrong  
with everybody  
around here?

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE (cont'd)

Don't you  
remember what  
President Kennedy  
said, Dad, we're  
not gonna have an  
America anymore  
unless there's  
people willing to  
sacrifice. I  
love my country,  
Dad.

MOM has come out into the livingroom.

DAD

I know Ronnie, I  
know.

COLONEL

I mean that...an  
important part in  
this war  
effort...is the  
attitude of the  
home front...

ANOTHER ANGLE - DAD doesn't want to think about it, looks  
away. RONNIE deeper in frame is exasperated - this mute  
climate, this failure to beat a drum on the home front, this  
early silence and sadness about the war...

MOM

It's your  
decision Ronnie,  
it's up to you  
whatever you  
decide, we're  
behind you.  
We'll pay for you  
Ronnie but you be  
careful.

NEWSCASTER

We...we all  
know...

She tries to kiss him on the cheek but RON'S eyes are  
unsatisfied, on his DAD.

(CONTINUED)

26 CONTINUED: 3

26

RONNIE  
 Dad, do you  
 understand what  
 it means to me to  
 be a Marine?  
 Ever since I've  
 been a kid, Dad,  
 I've wanted this,  
 I've wanted to  
 help my country.  
 (pause, the  
 rain)  
 ...and I wanna  
 go. I wanna go  
 to Vietnam. I'll  
die if I have  
 to over there...

COLONEL  
 ...remember one  
 thing now. Up in  
 Hanoi they don't  
 allow newspapers  
 and televisions  
 to cast any  
 doubts on  
 the...system -  
 the military  
 system.

The silence. Why is life so anti-climactic at moments like  
 this and words mean nothing?

DAD  
 Not a nice night  
 for the prom...

NEWSCASTER  
 Well, I...

COLONEL  
 ...and it seems to me sometimes we  
 forget that.

NEWSCASTER  
 Well, Colonel the basic question is  
 do you think the South Vietnamese  
 Government is a viable political  
 entity that can stand up to...

COLONEL  
 If we didn't think so we wouldn't  
 be here now would we -  
 (Chopper starts coming in  
 overhead, drowning out  
 sound)

27 INT. RON'S BEDROOM/BATH/HALL - NIGHT (1964)

27

RONNIE is kneeling in front of the MIRROR with the CRUCIFIX  
 in his BEDROOM ("Let the Beauty of Jesus Be Seen In Me")

RONNIE  
 ...sometimes God I'm so confused,  
 sometimes I think I'd like just to  
 stay right here in Massapequa and  
 never leave...but I gotta go.  
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)



27 CONTINUED:

27

RONNIE (cont'd)

You gotta help me Jesus...help me  
to make the right decision...I  
wanna do the right thing...

THE RAIN lashing against the bedroom window, suggesting a  
plea to a barbaric god. RONNIE inside on his knees.

28 EXT. KOVIC HOUSE &amp; STREET - NIGHT (1964)

28

LONG SHOT - DOOR to RONNIE'S HOUSE suddenly opening. A  
shaft of light - RONNIE tearing out into the rain.

29 EXT. MASSAPEQUA HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT (1964)

29

THE LIGHTS OF THE PROM - MUSIC - "MOON RIVER" ...RONNIE,  
soaking, runs up - out of breath. Looking. Advances.

30 INT. MASSAPEQUA HIGH SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT (1964)

30

THE DANCERS - A BAND - slow dancing...MOVING ALONG STEVIE  
and his DATE, JOEY, FINELLI, VORSOVICH, FANTOZZI, TIMMY -  
and DONNA dancing with JED - now stops amazed as WE MOVE TO  
RONNIE advancing through the dancers, dripping wet, seeing  
DONNA, a trace of insanity, desperation in his eyes...the  
DANCERS stopping, looking at him surprised...as he totally  
ignores JED, his eyes never leaving DONNA...coming up to her

RONNIE

Would you dance with me, Donna?

DONNA

Sure...yes...

He takes her in his arms and they dance...

TRACKING THEM past the other dancers -

...He is not a good dancer, but a wealth of feeling carries  
him.. her head on his shoulder, eyes filled with  
feelings...turning. His head on her shoulder, eyes open...a  
forever dance.

DISSOLVE TO:

31 EXT. VIETNAM - LATE DAY - (1967)

31

SUBTITLE READS: CUA VIET RIVER, VIETNAM - OCTOBER, 1967

RAIN is slanting down in monsoon sheets describing a grey  
tableau of a FISHING VILLAGE spread over several DUNES along  
the South China SEA, bordering on a RICE PADDY.

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED:

31

ANOTHER SECTION OF THE VILLAGE, a TINY HAMLET sits in a woodline astride the inland paddy.

The WIND is sowing confusion.

The fresh-faced LIEUTENANT listens over the radio and barks orders at RON over the wind.

LIEUTENANT  
Red Platoon's receiving fire on the northwest edge of the ville. NVA suspects are coming this way...

RON alert, listening now to the imagined sound of distant gunfire...

LIEUTENANT  
(points)  
...set your squad in a line along the dune...

He's very excited, repeating his orders.

LIEUTENANT  
I think we got 'em, I think we got 'em this time Sergeant?

Their POV -- through the rain -- the village. Hard to see anything.

A GRAVEYARD.

In the distance, some movement in the village.

LIEUTENANT  
(very excited now)  
You see? Look, they got rifles. Can you see the rifles? ...Can you see them?

RON looking very hard through the rain.

RON  
Yes, I see them. I see them.

LIEUTENANT  
(puts his arm around him)  
Tell them when I give the order, I wanna light this ville up like a fucking Christmas tree --- okay!!!  
Get going!

Turning back to his radio, overly keyed.

KOVIC running down the line, sinking in the sand, his baggy poncho flopping over the gear on his back.

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED: 2

31

Suddenly, SEVERAL FIGURES break from the huts, running.

As RON runs down the straggled LINE OF MEN, someone starts firing from the end with his M-16. Now the whole line suddenly erupts, pulling their triggers without thinking, emptying everything they have into the huts across the graveyard.

RON yelling, trying to get his men to stop the fire.

Voices screaming in the distance.

RON looking at the LIEUTENANT running up the line yelling across the sand.

LIEUTENANT

What happened! Goddamn it, what happened! ...Who gave the order to fire? I wanna know who gave the order to fire!

Everybody is looking at everybody else with that peculiar awkwardness of a platoon without real leadership.

RON

We better get a killer team out there, sir.

LIEUTENANT

All right, all right Sergeant, get out there with Molina and tell me how many we got...

The VOICES continue to scream from the village, an eerie wailing amid the noise of rain.

RON moving to assemble FIVE MEN.

The LIEUTENANT on the radio; there seems to be increased fire from the distance, coming across the radio. Incipient panic building...

RON leading his five men across the dunes into the edges of the village...

...The Voices, the screams continuing... RON knows something is wrong, the rain beating on his face as he moves cautiously to the lip of the hut...

MOLINA is alongside him... They both turn into the hut and see it at the same time...

MOLINA

Oh God! Oh Jesus Christ!

RON's eyes convey the horror.

32 INT. HUT - DAY - RAIN

32

The floor of the small hut is covered with CHILDREN, screaming and thrashing their arms back and forth, lying in pools of blood, crying wildly, screaming again and again. They're shot in the face, in the chest, in the legs, moaning and crying...

RON

Oh Jesus...

The LIEUTENANT'S VOICE now blasting in on the radio...

LIEUTENANT

Tango Two, how many you got?

An old, OLD MAN in the corner with his head blown off from his eyes up, his brains hanging out of his head like jelly...

RON keeps looking at the strange sight, he's never seen anything like it before.

A SMALL BOY, next to the old man is still alive, though shot many times. He's crying softly, lying in a large pool of blood. His small foot has been shot off almost completely and hangs by a thread.

- LIEUTENANT

(voice)

What's going on? What's going on up there?

MOLINA

(voice)

You better get up here fast Lieutenant. There's a lot of wounded people up here.

A SMALL GIRL moaning now, shot through the stomach.

RON feels crazy, weak, helpless, staring at them...

The other THREE MARINES are looking, staring down at the floor like it's a nightmare, like it's some kind of dream and it really isn't happening...

RON suddenly erupts, jerking the green medical bag off his back, ripping it open and grabbing for bandages... Trying to help the gut-shot girl, tamping the blood.

RON

Let's help them. Help them!...  
It's gonna be okay... It's gonna be okay...

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED:

32

He moves to the next body...

...and the next, trying to help, trying to speak but he can't. His fingers searching for the holes the bullets have made, bandaging each as quickly as he can, his shaking hands wet with the blood. It's raining into the hut and a cold wind sweeps his face as he cries now, crying and still trying to bandage them up...

The LIEUTENANT runs up with the OTHERS...radio voices are more and more urgent in the background...

RON

Help me! Somebody help me!!

The LIEUTENANT looking, not quite understanding.

LIEUTENANT

Where are their rifles?

MOLINA

There're no rifles...

A blank look on the LIEUTENANT'S face. He screams to his men.

LIEUTENANT

Well help him then!

The MEN stand in the doorway but they do not move.

LIEUTENANT

Help him, help him. I'm ordering you to help him.

But THE MEN are not moving and some of them are crying now, dropping their rifles and sitting down on the wet ground, weeping with their hands against their faces.

SEVERAL MEN

Oh Jesus, oh God, forgive us.

MOLINA

Forgive us for what we've done.

LIEUTENANT

(screaming)

Get up... What do you think this is! I'm ordering you all to get up.

Some of them slowly crawling over the bodies, grabbing for the bandages that are still left.

The LIEUTENANT now outside the hut on the radio.

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED: 2

32

LIEUTENANT

Hello Cactus Red. This is Red Light Two. We need an emergency evac... We got a lot of.. ahh...civilian wounded. A lot of friendly wounded out here...

The RADIO VOICE blasts back at him, A COLONEL in a chopper somewhere above...

COLONEL

(voice)

Neg on that... We got heavy NVA fire on northwest and southwest sides of ville.. coming toward you...now... pull back to the trench in the dunes at XYZ grid...repeat... Leave the civilian wounded and get your butts back on the dune. NOW. Over out...

The fire is picking up intensely... The dusk coming down fast... The LIEUTENANT running back into the hut...

LIEUTENANT

AWRIGHT...YOU HEARD HIM...GET YOUR BUTTS OUTTA HERE...GET BACK TO THE DUNES... WE GOT A COMPANY OF CHARLIES IN THE VILLE...LET'S GO...

Some of THE MEN moving...some not!

LIEUTENANT

YOU MEN. YOU GOT TO START LISTENING TO ME. YOU GOTTA STOP CRYING LIKE BABIES AND START ACTING LIKE MARINES...

He's shoving THE MEN, pleading with them, scolding them... A demented look to his young face...

LIEUTENANT

You're men, not babies. It's a mistake, wasn't your fault. They got in the way. DON'T YOU PEOPLE UNDERSTAND -- THEY GOT IN THE GODDAMN WAY...

RON now standing, being pulled by the LIEUTENANT, his eyes on the little boy with the foot hanging by a thread...

...on the little girl, gut-shot, dying...

He knows he must leave. He has no choice... The LIEUTENANT yelling in his ear...

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED: 3

32

LIEUTENANT  
 DON'T YOU PEOPLE UNDERSTAND -- THEY  
 GOT IN THE GODDAMN WAY. KOVIC COME  
 ON. NOW.. NOW...

RON breaks, leaving, not looking back...but does, forced to,  
 one more time. From the doorway...

The KIDS...looking at him, begging for help...

He tears himself away...

33 EXT. VILLAGE - DUSK

33

The rain is stopping but darkness falls, THE MEN of the  
 PLATOON straggled in a messy line, hustling back to the  
 dunes... The fire picking up...

VOICES

(lost)  
 Pull back! Pull back!

VOICE

GET BACK. IT'S A FUCKING  
 COMPANY!!!

VOICE

ZIBOTSKY. WHERE THE FUCK ARE  
 YOU!!!

Shots ring out...somebody somewhere screams. An EXPLOSION  
 follows. A mine? A booby trap? Who knows?

VOICE

Where's Duderhoffer!!!

A SOLDIER comes crashing out of the darkness, intersecting  
 RON, his helmet falling off, poncho stuck in the sand...

SOLDIER

They gonna blow the village...  
 They got 155s coming in!!

RON moving on, looking for his squad in a stupor....

RON

...Baker?...Jones?

No answer. Shapes lost in the darkness. Somebody is hit...  
 The deep tom tom of 155 shells picking up on the horizon  
 over the angry sea... The huge shells blasting into the  
 village...

RON seeing a line of MEN forming in a trench along the  
 dunes.. putting out fire.

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED:

33

Looking back at the village. The hut in which THE CHILDREN lie is obscured by a nearby 155 round sending up a ball of dust and debris...burying all evidence of the crime...

Incoming fire now...RON feels it, hits the ground, looking back... A MAN is hit somewhere close, crying...

MAN

GOD FUCK I'M HIT. MEDIC MEDIC.

Fire is going out...RON hesitates...can't fire on the village...but there's a SHAPE coming now...fast...right at him...

it must be NVA because RON was the last one out...

RON seeing him with widened eyes, wondering, nerves break from his eyes...

THE SHAPE coming right at him -- fifteen yards, ten...

Close now on RON -- as he loses a burst of automatic fire...

THE SHAPE hit, lurching, but not going down...

RON going for the kill, riddling THE SHAPE with fire...

THE SHAPE crumples in the sand...

A VOICE immediately yells out...

VOICE

WILSON!! WILSON'S HIT...

TWO MARINE shapes run out from behind a dune close to RON towards the SHAPE he just fired at...

RON stares, unbelieving...

...as they pull WILSON back across the sand by his pant legs...the others providing cover fire...

RON moving now towards...THE SHAPE...

...can this nightmare end? ...The 155 shells now wiping the village into rubble and memory behind him...

...and then the face of WILSON, thorny ugly face with red hair and a huge adam's apple, revolving in the last light of the sun dropping across the South China Sea...the eyes staring up...

the throat, shot through the throat, filled with blood...the pain...the pain in the eyes...

RON staring down...

(CONTINUED)



33 CONTINUED: 2

...somewhere WILSON's eyes cross his before he dies gurgling in his blood...

HARD CUT TO:

34 EXT. VILLAGE - DUNES - ANOTHER DAY - SUN

34

SUBTITLE READS: CUA VIET RIVER, VIETNAM - JANUARY, 1968

The opposite kind of day. Bulging, blaring, eradicating yellow heat, yellow sun broiling everything in the landscape... Figurines like shrimp on a sizzler moving towards a HAMLET set on a paddy...

RON in the lead. The look of his eyes tells us he doesn't care anymore... The look is dead, haunted...

The MEN are strung out behind and to the side of him in a loose flanking movement, their expressions stunned by the heat...

as they pass the burned out village where THE CHILDREN died, it sits astride the dune, alongside the charred cemetery... a nasty looking village filled with hatred and death in the air...as is its sister hamlet inland astride the paddy, to which they now destine themselves...

...The solitary SNIPER FIRE erupts from the woodline aslant the village...

A MAN is hit...

THE MARINES are crouching in the rice paddies...radio noises.. artillery strikes called...

...a huge paddy snake shoots past RON who wearily assembles his squad...

RON  
Move it up, move it  
up...now...let's go.. it's one  
fucking sniper...let's get him..  
let's go...

He's up...moving across the paddy like John Wayne, his big western shadow attracting all the light...

...as the first bullet takes him in the front of the foot...like some stupid ass geek here he goes crashing down in the rice and the water...bleeding from the heel...looking back...

...radio support...but this is no ordinary sniper day...the FIRE distinctly picking up.

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED:

34

There's a platoon, maybe a company of NVA lodged in that woodline and it's increasingly clear...

...to the LIEUTENANT who's calling in air...and wants to pull his MEN back out of the exposed paddy...

VOICES

(relaying)

...PULL BACK...PULL BACK...

...but RON won't listen...

RON

Fuck no. Let's get these fuckers.  
We got 'em. WE GOT 'EM  
Lieutenant...

Blood on his shredded boots...the back of his heel blown out, he is a fallen hero now...the million dollar wound...but not enough...his eyes blazing with inner madness...one more...one more try at redemption...for the KIDS...for WILSON...for whatever is left of his shrunken Catholic soul...

A CHOPPER flies somewhere above, firing madly into the woodline. A RADIO VOICE is screaming insane nonsequiturs over RON's ear...

The chopper smoking, barreling downwards over the dune... a whoosh of heat and flame...

Conversational images...the LIEUTENANT's face...yelling something on the radio... then hit in the upperbody, crumpling...

as if it were all normal and it was a sidewalk somewhere and we were playing stickball again...

Overhead Angle -- RON shifting on the ground...the sudden silence all around, the wind shifting across the paddy, eerie in its innocence. Like boys long ago. Playing in a wood... Time out...

RON having his conversation with THE MEN in the paddy.

RON

What's wrong with you guys...hunh?  
There's only three of 'em out there... They got the Lieutenant, let's get 'em...

As he moves forward now on his knees firing, the rifle jammed with sand and paddy grass, he pops the jammed bullet out, tries to jam another round in...

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED: 2

34

RON

Let's go, let's go...into the  
woodline...

Crouching up on his crushed heel, firing... The rifle jams  
one more time...

RON

...we got 'em, we got 'em.

SOUND - THUNDER -- OVER RON'S RIGHT EAR...the sound of the  
bullet entering...

...Maybe a face glimpsed, somewhere in the  
woodline...oriental eyes...young, scared, a thatch of black  
hair...then gone, rifle retreating behind him into his hole  
like the tail of a snake...and it's all gone, forever...

BLACKNESS -- a sharp FADE IN over a short harsh SUCKING  
SOUND on a FACE (RON), the eyes staring through a filthy  
skin mask, bewildered eyes...then

MOVEMENT, delayed, as the BACK OF RON'S HEAD thuds into a  
low angle on the ground...again that harsh suck of air...

Face (RON) -- desecrated, hardly able to breathe... a  
distant voice over the sucking-sound.

VOICE

Kovic? Kovic? ...you okay?

Heavy ROCKET EXPLOSION nearby now... Shots everywhere...  
Somebody else is hit.

His hand digging in the sand, clenching it...

VOICES

JESUS FUCKING CHRIST! ...Let's  
getouttahere, let's GO!

RON'S EYES -- as he's suddenly lifted like a sack of hay  
and...thrown over a shoulder -- and a big BLACK MARINE is  
humping him back across the paddies, screaming, pumping  
himself up...

BLACK MARINE

MOTHERFUCKERS! MOTHERFUCKERS!

The SKY... The malignant SUN rattling upside down from...

RON'S EYES...dangling up alongside the shoulder of the BLACK  
MARINE...

Faster and faster IMAGES now...

35 INT. MOVING ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIER - DAY

35

The dark inside of the metal monster...rattling, bumping, grinding gears... a nest of WOUNDED MEN rolling like snakes strapped to their stretchers...

VOICES

Get me outtahere...you fucks...you hear me!

Moving to RON...to a YOUNG KID cupping his intestines...another VETERAN SERGEANT vomitting...

YOUNG KID

Oh God Jesus! Mom...Mom, don't let me die, please don't let me die!

36 EXT. VIETNAM - AIRFIELD - NIGHT (1968)

36

RON on a litter with tubes and bottles shoved in his nose and arms, being transferred into a large C-130.

37 INT. VIETNAM - C-130 PLANE - NIGHT (1968)

37

THE INTERIOR OF PLANE is stacked with wounded MEN - more wounded than he could ever have imagined.

PLANE flying...a MAN thrashing with gauze wrapped around his head and eyes.

He is thrashing like a fish, like he was buried alive six feet under ground and was screaming to get out...senseless words.

MAN

...tha...tha...tha...tha tha tha!

(then)

AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

RON tensing.

VOICES

SHADDUP, SHADDUP YOU HEAR!...SHUT THE FUCK UP!

MAN

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

38 EXT. PLANE - NIGHT

38

THE PLANE rocks in the bumpy night somewhere over Asia, lost in a fog of hell...scudding threadbare clouds lit by a raging moon.. from inside the plane - FX like a pack of demons all howling at once.

39 INT. INTENSIVE CARE WARD (DANANG) - NIGHT (1968)

39

FAST IMAGES CONTINUING:

HOSPITAL WARD - confusion, 40-50 cases lining a CORRUGATED ALUMINUM HUT - THE MEN still covered with mud, shredded fatigues, filthy tourniquets, abdominal packs clutched to their stomachs by filthy hands, vacuum bottles swinging from the bottoms of their stretchers, dirty chest tubes stuck clumsily through their skins; the NOISE deafening. In foreground:

MEDIC 1

(moving)

Got twelve hummers here and six rotisserie cases, let's go let's go!

MEDIC 2

(to Medic 1)

Give him 250 milligrams Thorazine IM every 4 hours till he's asleep...Just get him to sleep!

MOVING TO RON - framed by a screaming BLACK SOLDIER next to him. Ron still has the tubes and needles in his arms, groggy,

RON

...somebody?...

A MEDIC, above another LITTER CASE, flicking off data on a sheet with a pencil.

MEDIC 3

(to Medic 4)

...congestion liver and lungs...acute pneumonitis...extensive acute renal tubular necrosis - bilateral...got that?

Intersecting RON.

RON

...somebody...something's wrong with me...

MEDIC 3 quickly inspects his body.

RON

(trying to enunciate clearly)

...they have to operate, soon as possible.. please. - Will you tell them?

His voice is weak. MEDIC 3, without a word or look, turns away.

RON

(raising his voice)

Will you tell them?

SUDDEN THRASHING from the BLACK MAN in background. A NURSE rushing into frame.

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED:

39

NURSE

His heart. Get the machine!

As she hurries off, a CORPSMAN rushes over and jumps on the BLACK MAN's chest, putting his knees right on it and pounding the chest with a fist.

A DOCTOR and the NURSE push the heart pump machine over

CORPSMAN

It's stopped!

The DOCTOR hands a syringe to THE CORPSMAN who plunges it into the BLACK MAN's chest like a knife, as the DOCTOR grabs a long suction cup attached to the machine and places it carefully over the patient's chest.

CORPSMAN

I think he's gone.

The DOCTOR motions THE CORPSMAN off, hurriedly, as he climbs up on top of the body.

ANOTHER ANGLE - the face of the BLACK MAN is now puffy like a balloon, saliva rolling from the sides of it - staring, the whites of his eyes rolling upwards.

DOCTOR

(screaming)  
Turn it on!...NOW!

SOUND - SNZZZZZZZZZZ!

The BLACK MAN bucks straight up from the bed towards the ceiling in a grotesque dance. Then, falls back...

THE DOCTOR leans back, relaxing. The tension easing out.

DOCTOR

(over his shoulder)  
...I took the Packers at minus seven.

ANOTHER ANGLE - THE NURSE pulling the sheet over the CORPSE. CORPSMEN looking abstractedly at the dead man.

CORPSMAN

Shit, Packers don't have a chance.

RON shifting his eyes quickly as a HAND comes down over his forehead.

A PRIEST appearing, almost miraculously, right above him.

PRIEST

How are you?

Rubbing RON'S forehead slowly and softly.

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED: 2

39

RON

I'm okay Father...when...when will they operate?

THE PRIEST - the face deeply tired; he has done it many times before - so often that he doesn't really relate to the individual in front of him anymore.

In a pedantic tone, marked by a Bronx accent:

PRIEST

The doctors are very busy right now, there are many wounded today. There is not much time for anything here but trying to live. So you must try to live my son...

(soft)

...try to stay alive...try to stay alive... and we will pray. Are you ready?

RON suddenly understands. A jolt of the eyes. But then it gives way to the Marine in RON...hardening reflex.

RON

(a glow in his eyes)  
I'm ready Father.

ANOTHER ANGLE

PRIEST

I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever...

Rubbing oil on RON'S forehead and now pressing:

HIS CRUCIFIX to RON'S LIPS...RON hesitantly reaches up and kisses the cross...absolute fear starting to crawl into his eyes.

PRIEST

(over)

...liveth and believeth in me, shall never die... We brought nothing into this World, and it is certain we can carry nothing out The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away...

40 INT. OPERATING ROOM - NIGHT (1968)

40

RON CLOSE - on an operating table. Analytic lighting...

A MASK now placed over his face...

PRIEST

(over)

...blessed be the name of the Lord

(CONTINUED)

40 CONTINUED:

40

RON

(very weak)  
 ...You going to operate now?

ANOTHER ANGLE - DOCTORS, NURSES...a VOICE, muted and subterranean speaking THROUGH A MASK:

VOICE

Yes. Now son breathe deeply into the mask.  
 You'll be fine...just fine...there you go..  
 there.

41 INT. BRONX VA WARD &amp; HALL - DAY (1968)

41

THE SUBTITLE READS: BRONX VETERANS HOSPITAL - APRIL, 1968

The sun just shining in through the windows...sound FX -- THE STEADY DRIPPING of a plastic bag -- urine overflowing onto the floor...plip plop... The ward is silent and filthy...SEVERAL DRUNKS doze in chairs or on the floor...a beat before the drill begins...A FOURTH AIDE crosses, animating us into the:

42 INT. ENEMA ROOM - DAY

42

THREE BLACK AIDES are loudly playing poker on the toilet bowl.

AIDE

What the fuck, motherfucker -- that's my  
 fucking ace.

The FOURTH AIDE, also black, sticks his head in, trying to roust them out.

FOURTH AIDE

Hey Eddie, need some help in room 13.

EDDIE

Wait a fuckin' second man.

FOURTH AIDE

His catheter's plugging up, he's backing up  
 into his kidneys.

EDDIE

I said I'd be there when I'd be there. Gimme  
 a fucking break. Gimme two cards Smitty.

43 INT. HALLWAY

43

THREE AIDES are picking up the paralyzed DRUNKS, some of them fallen from their chairs, and wheel them back to their rooms. Empty liquor bottles in paper bags rattle around. AIDE FIVE picks up one of these bags.

(CONTINUED)



43 CONTINUED:

43

AIDE 5

Let's go! Come on -- Landers! Hopkins!  
Move it out...look bright.

As he drinks the rest of the bottle surreptitiously.

A SIXTH AIDE opens a PANTRY CLOSET to discover a PARAPLEGIC shooting up a QUADRAPLEGIC dosed out. The needle is sticking up out of his arm.

PATIENT

(barely cognizant)

Hey motherfucker, take the needle outta my  
arm man.

AIDE 6

(taking the needle out)

Hey Gray, now didn't I tell you not to be  
doing that shit to him in the A.M..

44 INT. RON'S ROOM - DAY

44

The noise and activity level is starting to pick up as AIDE TWO now wheels ONE OF THE DRUNKS back into RON'S four-man room.

The men themselves reflect a change in the atmosphere, wearing headbands and some hippie-type clothing, smoking dope, pipes, handshake caps, a new cynicism in the men we have not seen in Vietnam.

NURSE WASHINGTON, black, in her twenties, moving towards a bed, intersecting PATIENT 1, tossing a worn piece of bread over the radiator.

PATIENT 1

(excited)

Hey there he goes again!

A flurry of movement.

PATIENT 1

That fucking rat's getting bigger everyday.

NURSE WASHINGTON

That rat ain't gonna bother you you don't  
bother it.

PATIENT 1

That's why I'm feeding it.

The NURSE taking a cork out of a metal contraption in PATIENT 3's neck and sticking a long rubber tube in where the cork was, hardly paying attention.

(CONTINUED)

44 CONTINUED:

44

NURSE WASHINGTON

You jes keep feedin' it and everything's  
gonna be jes fine...

FRANKIE, a wiry Irish type in his thirties, bounces in clicking his fingers.

FRANKIE

Hey Kovic, awake up -- come on...six o'clock  
special.

45 INT. ENEMA ROOM - DAY

45

TEN TWISTED MEN, all tied down to their striker frames with their rear ends sticking out and bedpans under them, are packed in the small room like sardines; some of them lined up vertical along the walls, some pretending to sleep, refusing to admit this whole thing is happening to them, others with cigarettes dangling from lips transistor radios to their ears, others complaining loudly, legs and arms spasming.

PATIENT 2

Help! I got a headache.

PATIENT 1

Hey Eddie, my stomach feels so bloated.

EDDIE

Just quiet down there, Eddie gonna take care  
all you boys...

as he and FRANKIE hurry back and forth placing bedpans under rear ends, a cigarette dangling from FRANKIE'S lips, whistling between the lines... THE MUSIC THEME creeps in...

FRANKIE

Okay, okay let's go. Bernstein, whatsa  
matter with you today, didn't you eat... You  
drinking enough water, I told you you got's  
to flush out those kidneys...that's the way,  
Feneday, that's the way... oooh look at that  
ass, Hopkins, you been sitting on it again,  
ain't you...

Jangling pans, undoing little clips on the rubber tubes, jumping around, a big can of soapy water above each head and a tube coming down from it, which Frankie sticks into each man...

RON - waiting, miserable. FRANKIE moving up behind him, changing the rubber gloves on his hands, squirting lubricant on his fingers.

FRANKIE

My man Kovic! Mister Fourth of July...

Rams his hands up into his rear end, whistling "Yankee Doodle Dandy"...

46 INT. RECREATION ROOM - DAY (1968)

46

The TV is on to the Chicago 1968 Democratic Convention and the streets of Chicago.

A PARAPLEGIC freaking out, tumbling out of his chair and trying to crawl, screaming, eyes like a mad dog, salivating.

PARA

Agggggh...they're here! They're HERE!!!

PATIENT 4

(mocking)

Who's here, Leon...? Who? ...Gooks?

PATIENT 5

...Get 'em...get 'em!!

PATIENT 4

Chieu Hoy! Chieu Hoy!

PATIENT 6

SHADDUP WILLYA.

PATIENT 3

AGGGGGHHHHHHHHH.

RON and the OTHERS trying to concentrate on the TV NEWS --

INSERT - CLIP - CHICAGO CONVENTION FOOTAGE - 1968

The PROTESTORS are battling violently with the police...

The faces of the men watching...some angry (fuck that shit man! They outta die, man...take that whole fucking bunch and put 'em in Nam for one fucking week, fuckin' assholes) some like RON just unbelieving...

The faces of the angry young generation, chanting "the whole world's watching. The whole world's watching!" The signs saying "Stop the War" and "U.S. Out of Vietnam" and the BEARDED YOUNG MAN yelling something about cops being "pigs" and "fuck the government that kills with your dollars"... An American flag is burning.

RON watching, angry, joining the others.

RONNIE

"Love it or leave it", you bastards!

47 INT. RON'S ROOM - DAY (1968)

47

TWO DOCTORS, one of them older in his forties, and NURSE WASHINGTON around RON in his bed.

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED:

47

DOCTOR

(sympathetic)

...We want to make it very clear to you, Ron, that...the possibility of your ever walking again is minimal -- almost impossible.. Probably you'll be in a wheelchair for the rest of your life...Do you understand what I'm saying?

ANOTHER ANGLE - RON focusing on the DOCTOR.

RON

(low-key)

I'm gonna walk again. No matter what you tell me Doctor, I know I'm gonna walk again.

DOCTOR

(hesitantly)

Well, good luck, Ron... If you need anything please don't hesitate to call. We're here to help you.

They turn away.

48 INT. HOSPITAL GYM - DAY

48

RON doing pullups, furiously determined. SIX OTHER MEN are on the mats, also working out, AIDES stretching them, one of them JIMMY, a black militant in his twenties, Jimi Hendrix hairdo, coming over to RON, coaching him.

JIMMY

Come on Kovic, thataway, get up there. What'd you do twelve yesterday? Let's see if you can do better...Y'almost got it... come on, keep going...

CUT TO:

RON pushing two 25 pound weights alternately over his head, JIMMY watching him.

JIMMY

You're one crazy Marine Kovic, so gung ho and everything, but you don't know shit about what's going on over here in this country... It ain't about Vietnam man... Why we fighting for rights over there when we don't got no rights at home, man, it's about Detroit and Newark man, it's about racism man, about you can't get a job at home... Vietnam's a white man's war, a rich man's war...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

48 CONTINUED:

48

JIMMY (cont'd)

You gotta read some books man, there's a Revolution going on, Kovic, the brothers are getting it together and if you ain't part of the solution, then youse part of the problem...gotta get hip man.

RON finishing the weights, doesn't seem to have listened...

RON

Hey Jimmy strap me into the wheel willya?

TIMECUT TO:

48A RON rising up on braces between parallel bars for the first time -- in front of the same TWO DOCTORS who told him he couldn't walk.

He's struggling.

RON

Hey Doc, look...I'm walking...I'm gonna walk outta this place Doc, you'll see.

JIMMY

Come on, that's enough for today.

49 INT. RON'S ROOM - NIGHT

49

Dim shadows...RON lies on his bed on his belly watching as

A BLACK HOOKER slides her dress off in the shadows.

HOOKER

(whispering)  
Got the bread?

A rustle of paper money. She climbs up on top of PATIENT 1, unseen, not far from RON...pause.

HOOKER

...like this?

PATIENT 1

Yeah...yeah...just suck my tits...

HOOKER

Honey, anything you want...

On RON.

50 INT. HOSPITAL GYM - DAY

50

RON, using aluminum Canadian braces with chest and leg attachments, is moving cockily around the floor. All arms, he's confident, bouyant. It's like walking again!

(CONTINUED)

50 CONTINUED:

50

JIMMY

Okay, Ronnie now, easy now, don't do too much at once, don't go too far...

Obviously he is pushing the limit but he keeps on, and as he makes a fast move, suddenly he COLLAPSES AND FALLS...a LOUD CRACK from his leg like the branch of a tree breaking off.

ANOTHER ANGLE -- RON lying on the floor, puzzled. His right leg twisted under him at a curious angle, but he doesn't feel a thing. JIMMY runs over.

RON

O fuck! What's wrong!

JIMMY

(to AIDE 3)  
Harry, get the doc.

RON

(starting to panic)  
What the hell was that sound? O jeeesus, the bone is coming right through the skin, o motherfucker...

51 INT. RON'S ROOM - DAY (1969)

51

SUBTITLE READS: SIX MONTHS LATER

RON is in a circle electric bed with chest cast and broken leg swollen to twice its original size, paler, weak and filthy looking, unshaven. Two plastic tubes are attached to a BATTERED MACHINE that keeps clanking and pumping loudly -- one tube running a clear fluid into the leg, the other carrying a bright red out...

NURSE WASHINGTON comes over with valiums and a cup of water. Without warning, RON erupts angrily.

RON

I've been laying in my own shit for the last three hours. I've been pushing my call button and nobody comes. Why can't I have a bath? Why can't the sheets be changed in this goddamn place, why can't the goddamn vomit be wiped off the goddamn floor once in a while!

NURSE WASHINGTON

Don't you raise your voice to me Mr. Kovic, you watch your mouth.

RON

Look at my leg! It's twice as big as it ever was! When are you people gonna help me! I wanna see the doctor now!

(CONTINUED)

51 CONTINUED:

51

NURSE WASHINGTON  
He's not available now. He's too busy.

RON  
He's always too busy.

THE SECOND AIDE, a young black militant, street tough, intersects, sarcastically jovial.

AIDE 2  
What's eating you now Kovic, you going off the deep end?

RON grabs the AIDE hard.

RON  
FUCKING SHIT! What do I have to do to make you people listen to me. I wanna be treated like a fucking human being!

He suddenly slaps the valium out of the NURSE'S hands.

RON  
I don't want this fucking shit. You wanna keep me drugged all the time so I don't know what's going on. THIS PLACE IS A FUCKIN' SLUM.

AIDE 2  
We gonna amputate that leg you go on like this.

RON  
All I'm asking is to be treated like a Human Being. (the AIDE chuckles). I'm a Vietnam Veteran. I fought in Vietnam and I gotta right to be treated decently.

AIDE 2  
Vietnam? ...Vietnam don't mean nothing to me man or any these other people. You can take your "Vyet...Nam" and shove it up your ass!

Walks out, cackling.

Moving to RON -- an incredible pause. He's about to do something very violent, grasps the water pitcher to throw it when suddenly the MACHINE next to the bed CUTS OUT (FX). He stops, worried.

RON  
Hey.

NURSE WASHINGTON  
(calling to the AIDE)  
Marvin!

(CONTINUED)

51 CONTINUED: 2

51

The SECOND AIDE comes back, pissed. Together with WASHINGTON, he tries some buttons, levers. Puzzled, he kicks it. Nothing.

AIDE 2

(to machine)  
Fucking asshole!

Kicks it again harder. A RATTLE but no movement. RON freaking, pathetically pleading now.

RON

What's he doing! What's he doing!  
(to the NURSE, whining)  
Please get the doctor willya, please  
Washington. I don't wanna lose this leg.  
Please get the doctor! PLEASE.

TIMECUT TO:

51A A YOUNG DOCTOR (THIRD DOCTOR) -- not seen before -- comes up, optimism in his face. The SECOND AIDE and NURSE WASHINGTON are ultra-polite now.

DOCTOR

How you doing Eddie, now let's see what's wrong with this...

Checking the machine as RON waits, scared.

AIDE 2

Well, I tried to help Mr. Kovic, Doc.

RON, desperate, grabs the DOCTOR as he brushes the bed.

RON

Look Doc, I'm trapped in this bed, I've been here for six months. They're telling me if they don't get this pump working, they're gonna cut my leg off. I want my leg Doc. What do we do! What do we do?? First of all, do we have another pump Doctor...do we have a pump anywhere in the city...in the country?

DOCTOR

Well, it's the only one we have Eddie.

RON

No. It's Ron...Ron Kovic, Doctor...

DOCTOR

Ron! Sorry...sorry, it's the war in Vietnam, Ron. The cutbacks. The Government's just not giving us the money we need to take care of you guys. We're doing our best...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



51 CONTINUED: 3

51

DOCTOR (cont'd)  
 (contemplating the machine, shaking  
 his head)  
 ...it's really too bad, it's not fair at all.

RON  
 Listen Doc...I've really tried hard to keep  
 this leg, y'know, really hard...I've done  
 everything...and I'm trying to be calm,  
 y'know...really calm...what do we do????

DOCTOR  
 Yes, I completely understand...maybe we can  
 rig a substitute, let me see if there's  
 something in the basement...

TIMECUT TO:

51B RON lies there alone...the MACHINE silent...nothing happening --  
 looking up at the ceiling in a sweat, his drenched hair spreading a  
 stain across the dirty, greyish pillow...hoping...

Suddenly a CLANKING SOUND and the MACHINE starts up -- by itself...

RON looks over at it -- bewildered, scared...

52 EXT. KOVIC HOUSE &amp; STREET - DAY (1969)

52

THE SUBTITLE READS: MASSAPEQUA, NEW YORK - 1969

A CAR DOOR SLAMS and DAD, balder now in his late 50's, comes around  
 the front of the car and opens RON's door, sliding the WHEELCHAIR  
 out of the back seat.

JIMMY  
 (now 15)  
 Mom! Ronnie's home...

PATTY  
 (now 13)  
 Ronnie!

VOICES  
 (repeating the message)

LATE AFTERNOON, Septemberish...MUSIC THEME now suggesting the  
 beginnings of a new process, a Fall theme...

A MOVEMENT through the lawn and house - voices, vibrations  
 relayed...

TOMMY and JIMMY and PATTY emerging from varying angles, moving  
 towards the car to help...

53 EXT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

53

Taking note...people ceasing their labors on their front lawns and casting curious looks, some from behind curtains, KIDS in the street playing touch football, stopping...nothing seems to have changed on the block except for automobile styles.

RON, his leg healed, into the wheelchair - though strong and efficient, there is still a struggle to it, a tension, a hint of saying 'let me do it, I can do it...you see,' all overly polite.

RON

Wow, it's good to be back in the neighborhood. Did you paint the house Dad, everything looks different. Hey Major, come here boy...(a mutt coming over) Hey, I haven't seen you in a long time.

His DAD watching, calm as TOMMY, 18, comes up -- almost unrecognizable from before with long hair, bare feet, a hippie look.

RON

Hey Tommy, how ya doing. Wow you really got big...I can hardly recognize you.

TOMMY

Hey Ronnie! Welcome back.

Hugging him.

RON

You're really growing up, so good to see you...Hey Jimmy!

As Jimmy, 15, also with long hair, shy, comes over.

JIMMY

Hi Ronnie. Good to have you home, are you out for good now? Do you have to go back?

RON

Yeah, for good, forever, come here you little squirt!

Enfolding him in a hug as PATTY, 13, joins it.

PATTY

Hiya Ronnie.

RON

Hi Patty...look at him...is that Jackie?

JACKIE, the smallest brother, 7, ambling out...

RON

Boy, you're all looking great. Look at you. Tommy, you working out, look at those muscles...

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TOMMY

Yeah, it's all that polevaulting. I read that story about you on the front page of the Massapequa Post, d'ya see it?

RON

How many pushups can you do?

DAD

Here...lemme...

RON

(overly polite)

Yeah? No, no Dad that's okay...that's okay.

Wheels the chair forward himself as DAD tries to help, moving a few feet up the lawn. A tension in the air, subtle as RON feels himself the center of attention and doesn't want it, not now.. looking off at the NEIGHBORS watching. He turns back, shy.. pointing to the WOODEN RAMP leading from the lawn to the porch.

RON

You built that Dad?

DAD

Yeah.

PATTY

All by himself.

RON

It's really beautiful Dad.

SUSANNE, 23, comes up...

SUSANNE

Hi Ronnie, it's good to have you home...

RON

Hey Susie...wow look at you. You look so pretty...boy you're looking really great.

A kiss rather than a hug. SUSANNE more than the others registering the fact of the chair with her large mournful eyes, a strained, high-strung young girl... He looks at her breasts. She shies...

RON

So where's Mom?

A flick of his eyes catching it -- the door banging...

TOMMY

In the kitchen. Where else? Making dinner...

MOM is standing there outside the kitchen, looking at him (before he has seen her), her eyes flicking from the wheelchair...

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53

moving now across the lawn...looking older, wearier...

RON

Hi Mom.

MOM

Ronnie (closer) Ronnie!

RON

It's so good to be home Mom...better than seeing me in the hospital hunh?

MOM

It's good to have you home Ronnie.

She leans over and gives him a hug, not quite a full embrace, something reluctant about it, something missing, she's trying to give but doesn't quite know how. A long moment. Their eyes, their faces...

ANOTHER ANGLE -- the FAMILY drawing around him like a portrait.. like a shield...EIGHT PEOPLE and A DOG...a feeling he must say something...

RON

It's really great to be home...it's really great...hey there's Angie...Grace how ya doing...

The NEIGHBORS starting to close in now.

RON

Dominick...hey it's so good to see all of you...Mrs. Castiglia...

He sees MOM shaking her head from side to side, twisting up her eyes and trying to hold it back with her teeth but can't...she suddenly sobs...breaks from the circle...

RON

Mom...please...

She goes back to the house, SUSANNE following.

SUSANNE

Mom.

RON

Hey Mr. Fantozzi...how ya doing? Margie...

Trying to be bright, cheery...surrounded by the NEIGHBORS now, greeting everybody as we pull away.

54 INT. RON'S BEDROOM/BATH/HALL - DAY

54

RON wheeling into his old BEDROOM, TOMMY and DAD with him.

Not much has changed -- the mirror and crucifix, welcome home cards, flowers, but depressing, cramped, harking back to another age when the room seemed larger and filled with dreams.

DAD

(bypassing into the bathroom)  
Fixed up a bathroom for you...put a wider doorway in...ramp...levelled out the shower stall. (opening the stall).

ANOTHER ANGLE -- RON next to a carton in a corner, lumped full of toys, baseball bat, catchers mitt, toy gun -- holding the New York Yankees hat Donna gave him.

RON

Oh thanks...thanks Dad...

55 EXT. BACKYARD - ANOTHER DAY (1969)

55

The BARBECUE is going...the old swing, the seesaw...JIMMY MOVING from the kitchen in his baseball uniform, bypassing RON in new clothes, the baseball hat on his head, sitting at the table cramped with the FAMILY eating...

RON

(to Mom, Dad, heated)  
...they burn the flag, they demonstrate against us. They have no respect. They have no idea what's going on over there, Mom. There are people sacrificing and getting killed everyday over there and nobody back here seems to care, it's a buncha shit!

MOM

Ronnie! Don't use that language in front of the children. I agree with everything you say but...

RON

Where were they when we needed them Mom.. when we were out there everyday...when we were getting hit. You got my letters! What rights do they have? I served my country -- and they just take from it. They just take,..."love it or leave it" that's what I think...

ANOTHER ANGLE -- Pause. TOMMY, finished eating, gets up. A strained look on his face.

TOMMY

I gotta do some homework. I'll see you Ron...

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MOM - giving him a sharp look as he leaves. A silence. DAD has his eyes down as he drinks his coffee, an obtuse quality, hard to judge what he's thinking.

RON  
- and then the other side is angry 'cause we're not winning the war. How can we win in a situation like that - how can we win?

Hears the sound of his own voice, tired of it.

RON  
What's wrong with Tommy?

MOM  
Nothing...

DAD  
Nothing...

RON  
Nothing? Come on - (pause) what, is anybody listening around here? ...Tommy! ...Tommy!

TOMMY stops reluctantly at the porch, looks back, then down...

ANOTHER ANGLE - the faces. MOM is troubled.

MOM  
Tommy's gonna fail English he don't start working on himself.

SUSANNE  
(to RON)  
He doesn't believe in the war...

An edge to her low-key manner, evident she doesn't agree with RON either.

RON  
What?

SUSANNE  
...he thinks we're doing the wrong thing over there...he thinks it's all a mistake.

RON - an 'oh' look on his face -- rolling towards TOMMY...

The family silent, expecting a blow up...

RON  
Tommy? ...what's the problem? You just walk out? You don't talk anymore?...you don't think we're right in being over there Tommy?

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55 CONTINUED: 2

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TOMMY

(reluctant)  
Come on Ron.

RON

Come on, what, I say anything you don't like?  
Spit it out, Tom...do you believe in the  
demonstrators?

TOMMY

(on the edge)  
I just don't...I just don't -

RON

What!

TOMMY

Well I just don't think it's right...for you  
to say it's a bunch of shit... I don't think  
it's right.

RON

Whaddya mean, what are you trying to say  
Tommy...? Spit it out...you wanna burn the  
flag, you wanna tear down our country..."love  
it or leave it" Tommy, "love it or leave it".

TOMMY

(increasingly nervous)  
I think they...they're trying to say they..  
("yeah?")... They don't want more people to  
come back like you...

RON

Oh yeah...that's great of 'em, that's easy  
but where were they when our country needed  
'em, where?... "love it or leave it", Tommy.

TOMMY

(in pain, on the verge...)  
You served your country Ronnie...but what did  
you get out of it -- look at you now...I'll  
see you Ron...

He exits. MOM yelling at him over RON, who sits there, a blank  
angry look on his face...

MOM

What does he know! What does Tommy know  
about anything...  
(to Ron)  
He's a good boy but he's hanging around those  
creepy long hairs who take drugs, they smoke  
pot...

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SUSANNE

That's not true Mom! That's not the reason....

MOM

What do they know, Susie, what do they know! Have they ever worked for a living? When Ronnie was Tommy's age, he was working the A&P nights, he was....

FIXING on RON's face - his anger challenged, yelling in at TOMMY,

RON

I volunteered Tommy! I don't think you know what you're talking about Tommy, you don't know! Where you ever there! Where you ever there! "Love it or leave it" Tommy! ...Mom I can't believe what Tommy said.

56 EXT./INT. BOYER'S HAMBURGERS - DAY (1969)

56

A Fantasy. The Camera in semi-slow motion moving on the huge figurine of a WOMAN, holding a hamburger aloft... A Waltz on the Muzak...stained cathedral windows and plastic space balls hanging from the ceiling shaped like hamburger planets... Microphone orders... Signs, banners everywhere..."Win A Trip to Miami with any purchase larger than \$9.89"... "Free Baby Food -- Bring Your Baby"... "Special Discounts for People Over 80"...

...the WAITRESSES, all teenagers, moving in space costumes, their names written in phosphorescence across their backs... The mars burger, the mercury, the venus, moon shot, space cakes... A place one senses will never survive the late great madness of the '60s but for a time there...you had to believe...

Over this march through the fantasy we hear young STEVIE BOYER'S voice etching in the reason why.

STEVIE

(over)

...It's part science part hunch Ronnie -- I put up a place in Hapauge last year, no super highway, no supermarket, the boonies right, the heart of America... about eighty seats right? No, I - say, I want 150 seats... My operations guy yells at me, you're crazy Steve! ...I says to him, schmuck -- think big! Stevie's Golden Rule Number One -- the Monotony Factor -- the higher the level of monotony in a town, the more people want to eat and hang out. Rule Number Two -- the Expansion Factor -- business always expands to tax the facilities provided. Put two cash registers in even if you only need one now...put in 150 seats now, not 75.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



56 CONTINUED:

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STEVIE (cont'd)

And you'll see, you're challenging - the manager, you're challenging the town which is grateful for your belief in them.. and you're even challenging the customer... The proof: My Hapauge Boyer's grossed 85 grand last six months and now my competitor's rushing in to build...but I was first and the people always remember that. The people are loyal...

...the camera now coming to rest on STEVE BOYER, showing RON through his impeccable KITCHEN AREA, past white-aproned teenage EMPLOYEES, the GIRLS in tight uniformed purple mini-skirts... We find him a self-assured, well-dressed (in late sixties mod) executive fresh out of business school, puffed with the right edge of prosperous baby fat, selling the dream to the bewildered RON..

yet he seems older than RON, as if RON missed a beat on his generation...indicating a row of HAMBURGER PATTIES, all doughnut shaped with holes in the middle, COOKS' hands preparing them...

STEVE

You probably think this is just a hamburger Ron...an' you're right. A patty is just a piece of meat -- but it can be a piece of meat with character... See...here...? The doughnut hole in the patty? My idea gets us eighteen patties to the pound 'stead of sixteen... Saves about 40,000 a year.

...moving towards another pair of HANDS stuffing the patties with condiments and covering it with a pickle...

STEVE

...you plug the hole with lettuce, tomato, chopped onion, spices, our secret sauce.. cover the whole thing with a pickle, see.. here, try it...you don't see this at McDonald's on Sunrise Highway...got a drive-in window too. First one in Long Island!

CUSTOMERS' FACES shuffling up to the counter one after the other, receiving the nicely packaged result.

STEVE handing RON his burger, eyeballing a YOUNG WAITRESS who walks by in a tight mini. He leers after her...

STEVE

...clean, cheap and fast. Feed the family for \$3.95. And check out those chicks, willya? I got 'em all wearing those new mini-skirts. It was my idea. It's good for tips and the customers always come back. Yeah...I like it short and tight...

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RON's eyes avoiding the WAITRESS, tasting the burger which isn't bad.

RON

I remember when you used to rent us your toys. Yeah, you were always pretty smart Stevie... I still owe you a twenty bucks for that baseball glove.

STEVE, basking in it, checks out his french fry batter.

STEVE

Forget it. Hey, I always took care of you Ronnie, didn't I?

RON

Yeah sure you did Steve, you ripped me off every chance you got...(sees Steve's face) No, Stevie, I'm only kidding (laughs).

STEVE

I thought about you over there, I really did. I read all about it in the Massapequa Post. How's your Mom? Your Dad?...Still working at the A&P...

(Ron nods)

Yeah...like my old man...he's still got the candy store. Doesn't believe I'm doing this great. Hey you don't mind if I ask you a personal question Ronnie?...

(waits, Ronnie knows what it is)

...but can you...can you...you know...you know what I mean?

RON

I'm okay.

STEVE

Oh wow -- great! I thought so...at least they didn't get that.

RON

Yeah...

STEVE pats another passing WAITRESS 2 on the ass.

STEVE

Me I like it short and tight.

RON laughs with him.

RON

...heard you got married?

STEVE

(a little ashamed)

Yeah, Wendy Daniels.

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