

PINKVILLE

By

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FADE IN:

BLACK SCREEN The sounds of people settling down Voices:

VOICE #1

Sound is running Interview with Varnado Simpson

VOICE #2

Roll camera

An explosion of LIGHT as a CAMERA whirs to life. FLASH FRAMES revealing a standard square 16MM SCREEN

VOICE #3

Rolling

Slowly, ghostly, grainy images emerge through the light We distinguish a FIGURE sitting by a window PUSH IN on the screen, as the image slowly EXPANDS

VOICE #3 (cont'd)

Speed

Someone holds a slate into view

VOICE #2

Marker

He snaps the slate, clears it from frame as the image fills the screen. The last flash frames dissipate, the grain smooths out, REVEALING:

INT SIMPSON'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (1989)

VARNADO SIMPSON (Black, late 30's) sits in a gloomy, drab living room with bar-covered windows, facing an OFF-CAMERA INTERVIEWER.

Simpson is distressed. His right hand and leg shake in a nervous tick His face is round, puffy Sweat gleams under his eyes

He holds a book of yellowed NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS in his lap. On a side table we see a cracked picture of a child, perhaps his son.

SIMPSON

Do I think about what happened?
How could I not? It's always there.

He continues to shake as he looks at the book of clippings.

SIMPSON (cont'd)

This is my life.

INT. STANLEY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Another modest living room HARRY STANLEY (40's, Black) stares at the camera. His tall frame has been thinned by poverty.

STANLEY

At night. That's when I see their faces

INT. WIDMER'S KITCHEN - DAY

Another interview, in a kitchen decorated with cheap Americana. FRED WIDMER, 41, but looking fifty, sits holding a burning cigarette. His eyes are haunted

WIDMER

What I mostly remember is how mad I was
Every minute of every day. You woke up
mad, you ate mad. You slept mad

Super: Former members of Charlie Company. 1989.

INT. HODGES' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Another interview. KENNETH HODGES (50's, Black, balding) addresses the interviewer with a Southern drawl, calm, dispassionate

HODGES

No use in thinkin' about it. It was war.
That's all.

INT. BERNHARDT'S LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

A simply furnished living room. The sound of nearing thunder outside. A Vet in his late 40's stares at the interviewer. This is MICHAEL BERNHARDT, angry, intense

BERNHARDT

To tell you the truth, I don't wanna
think about it anymore. Makes me too
angry. What do you care, anyway?
Calley. Medina. Koster. Peers. Thompson.
Who remembers any of them?

As thunder rumbles from outside, SMASH TO--

INT. RECON CHOPPER - FALLING - VIETNAM (AUGUST 1968)

THE SUDDEN SCREAM OF ALARMS AND FAILING ROTORS. WE'RE INSIDE A
CHOPPER GOING DOWN IN VIETNAM, THE JUNGLE RUSHING AT US AT
TERRIFYING SPEED, OUR VIEW SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL.

Our engine and tail rotor have been HIT, the Plexiglas cockpit
SHATTERED by machine gun fire. BLOOD everywhere.

And amidst it:

WARRANT OFFICER HUGH THOMPSON (25), the lone pilot. He grimaces in agony as he tries to desperately fight the fall. Blood soaks his legs and thighs, his fatigues cut by flying glass.

The chopper continues to PLUMMET, the ground nearing, the South China Sea hurling past somewhere in our view, the ground and jungle coming straight at us, as--

THE CHOPPER CRASHES THROUGH THE TREES AND HITS THE GROUND. THE PAIN OF GROUND IMPACT WASHES THOMPSON'S POV INTO RED.

After a beat, THOMPSON'S FACE emerges into view again. Everything is colored in hues of red amidst a surreal silence. Thompson is unconscious. But breathing.

He can hear distant sounds: The crackle of FLAMES in the wreckage. RUSTLING from the jungle. voices, not in English-- the sound of approaching VIETCONG--

Thompson's eyes snap open. But instead of the wreckage around him, he sees--

A SILHOUETTED SOLDIER, impossible to tell who, amidst what looks like a smoke-covered battlefield. lifting A CRYING VIETNAMESE BABY in the air. There is BLOOD all over them both--

INT THOMPSON'S BEDROOM - FORT RUCKER, ALABAMA - DAWN (1969)

--THOMPSON jolts awake from his nightmare, covered in sweat. Outside, dawn has begun to pale the sky.

He turns on a light, wincing from pain in his back. Once strikingly handsome and fit, Thompson now looks haggard, eyes bleary from lack of sleep. We see UGLY SCARS on his legs and calves, the legacy of his crash. The room around him is unkempt, dirty.

Thompson grabs painkillers and a bottle of scotch from the night stand, and washes the pills down with a long, numbing gulp.

He then sets the bottle back down. We see it has been resting on a recent issue of the Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, with the headline:

MASSACRE ALLEGED IN VIETNAM

Thompson barely glances at the paper. He picks up A STEEL BACK BRACE from the floor and slowly, awkwardly, starts to put it on as he watches dawn break over the barren military base outside.

Super: Thanksgiving 1969.

INT. GENERAL WESTMORELAND'S OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - MORNING

Dawn is breaking here, too, as two men meet in a lavish Pentagon office. One of them is GENERAL WILLIAM WESTMORELAND (55), tough, jut-jawed, the Army Chief of Staff. The other is STANLEY RESOR (51), solemn, cautious, the Secretary of the Army.

On the table between them, MORE NEWSPAPERS with similar headlines: HAMLET ATTACK CALLED 'POINT-BLANK MURDER'... ARMY KNEW OF ALLEGATIONS IN '68... COVER-UP CHARGED... One paper has photos of dead civilians from a Vietnamese hamlet called My Lai.

Westmoreland and Resor face each other in an air of grim urgency.

Super: Office of the Army Chief of Staff. The Pentagon.

WESTMORELAND

We need to appoint someone now, Stan.
Ray's the best intel guy we have.

RESOR

State still has concerns...

WESTMORELAND

What concerns?

Resor hands Westmoreland a folder emblazoned with the State Department logo

RESOR

"Insensitivity to civilian problems"
during his command of the 4th in the
Highlands.

Westmoreland sets the report aside without looking at it, walks to his windows, irritable, tense

WESTMORELAND

We don't have time for this...

Off Westmoreland looking toward Washington-- BRIEF FLASHES OF DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE: Swelling crowds of protesters at the National Mall The March Against Death Demonstrators tearing down the US flag outside the Justice Department, putting up a Vietcong banner.

WESTMORELAND (cont'd)

We need a General. Ray gets what's at stake here. He's not a West Pointer, never had jurisdiction over Quang Ngai. No one can claim a conflict of interest

RESOR

He knows Koster

Westmoreland is silent for a beat Then:

WESTMORELAND
That's a bridge he'll have to cross

Off the two men, TIME CUT TO:

INT GENERAL WESTMORELAND'S OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - LATER

Westmoreland and Resor stand as LT. GENERAL RAY PEERS (50's) enters
Peers is aggressive, in-shape, always either chewing or smoking a
cigar He walks with the natural confidence of a former football
player, wrestler, and OSS guerrilla leader.

WESTMORELAND
Have a seat, Ray. You seen these?

Peers nods, angrily indicates the photos of the dead as they sit

PEERS
They should be prosecuted for publishing
'em. Goddamn irresponsible. "Massacre"
We don't even know what happened. Where'd
they get all this, anyway?

RESOR
Someone tipped off that shit-stirrer
Seymour Hersh.

Westmoreland looks at Peers.

WESTMORELAND
CID's been investigating this thing for
some months. We'd hoped to keep it under
wraps until we had some answers

He hands Peers a letter

WESTMORELAND (cont'd)
Here's what started it. It's from an
ex-GI

MOVE CLOSER ON THE LETTER as Peers begins to read

RIDENHOUR'S VOICE
Gentlemen: My name is PFC Ronald Ridenhour
It was in late April 1968 when I first
heard about "Pinkville" and what allegedly
happened there.

INT. RIDENHOUR RESIDENCE - DAY (MARCH 1969)

RONALD RIDENHOUR (21), a former GI with handsome Italian features, sits in his room in his parents' house, writing the letter. Around Ridenhour, the toy soldiers and airplane models of his youth.

RIDENHOUR'S VOICE

I was waiting for transfer orders at the 11th Brigade headquarters when I ran into guys I knew from training. They'd since been assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, Task Force Barker.

EXT 11TH BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS - DUC PHO - DAY (APRIL 1968)

Near a mess hall, Ridenhour sits with THREE YOUNG GI'S-- all numbed out from long field time, with dirty uniforms, pallid faces. Ridenhour looks startled at his friends' appearance.

RIDENHOUR

You guys look like shit. How long you been out there?

CHARLIE COMPANY GI

Almost five weeks.

RIDENHOUR

What?

CHARLIE COMPANY GI #2

'Cause of Pinkville.

RIDENHOUR

Pinkville?

The GI's look at him like they thought he already knew

CHARLIE COMPANY GI #3

You didn't hear?

As the GI'S continue to talk, Ridenhour's expression darkens rapidly. We hear only his continuing narration:

RIDENHOUR'S VOICE

They told me that sometime in March '68, Charlie Company had been ordered to attack a village in Quang Ngai province that was harboring enemy soldiers. It was code-named "Pinkville." The orders were to destroy the village and kill all its inhabitants.

(beat)

What happened I don't know for certain, but plead that you launch an immediate investigation.

INT. GENERAL WESTMORELAND'S OFFICE - NOVEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

Peers looks up at Westmoreland and Resor.

PEERS

We sure this guy's not just some VVAW
punk looking for attention?

WESTMORELAND

It appears something happened in '68.
CID's found records of an investigation
into some civilian deaths during a Task
Force Barker op against the local 48th VC
Battalion . . I wanna know why we first
heard about all this in a letter from a
goddamn PFC

Resor turns to Peers.

RESOR

CID's covering the ground troops. We want
you to focus on the commanding officers,
this investigation that took place in
'68.. What were the mission orders? Who
first made the allegations of civilian
deaths? Who investigated, so on . We need
a report before the statutes expire in
March.

WESTMORELAND

I'm very concerned about the implications
of this for morale, Ray . We're seeing
more disobedience and breakdowns and near-
mutinies in Vietnam now than in the whole
history of the Army.. My staff's worried
this thing could catch fire, build to what
the French went through on the Western
Front in '17-'18.

They consider the implications for a beat. Resor then moves for a
stack of personnel folders.

RESOR

The commanding officers are all out of
Vietnam.

He hands the first folder to Peers.

RESOR (cont'd)

Captain Ernest Medina, in charge of
Charlie Company and the ground operation.

An 8x10 photograph is attached to each file. MEDINA is 33, a tough
Latino with dark, brooding features.

RESOR (cont'd)
Colonel Oran Henderson, commander of the
11th Brigade.

HENDERSON is 47, stoic, with glasses, closely cropped hair.

Resor exchanges a brief glance with Westmoreland as he hands Peers the last two folders, of two stern-looking GENERALS in their late 40's.

RESOR (cont'd)
From the Americal Division... Assistant
Commander, Brigadier General George
Young... and the Division Commander:
Major General Samuel Koster.

Peers pauses as he takes the files.

PEERS
You're aware that I know both of 'em
well... I was at the ceremony when they
took over the Americal, when Sam got his
second star.

WESTMORELAND
I remember I gave it to him.

PEERS
I'm still good friends with Sam.

RESOR
Is that a problem?

Peers looks at him

PEERS
The man liberated a Nazi death camp, for
Chrissakes He's the Superintendent of
West Point

WESTMORELAND
We need statements from everyone

Peers shakes his head, not even sure what to say Then, looking over his folders:

PEERS
And aren't we missing someone: the Task
Force commander, Barker?

RESOR
Lt Colonel Frank Barker is dead Killed
in a helicopter crash a few months after
the operation.

WESTMORELAND

(rising)

Get started, Ray. CID's got one of their top field guys, Andre Feher, running point on this. He'll be your liaison, give you an orientation.

Peers nods, prepares to head out. Resor stops him.

RESOR

One more thing, General: We cannot have the press start whispering that the Superintendent of the US Military Academy is under suspicion in some kind of war crimes cover-up...

PEERS

Alleged war crimes, Mr. Secretary. . . I'll keep it quiet, talk to Sam in West Point

Peers looks to Westmoreland.

PEERS (cont'd)

I'll have this wrapped asap for you, sir

INT. GENERAL PEERS' OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - AFTERNOON

Peers chews another cigar in his darkened office as CID CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER ANDRE FEHER (40's, intelligent eyes) shows him slides.

FEHER

This is Charlie Company in My Lai . . . These pictures were taken by Sgt. Ron Haeberle, a photographer from the 11th Brigade attached to the Company for the day

On screen, BLACK AND WHITE images of a routine infantry sweep. Smoke from preparatory bombardment shrouds many of the scenes.

FEHER (cont'd)

My Lai is really a group of little hamlets, quite isolated from one another. No one man could've seen everything.

A few slides show a BLACK GI being carried to a chopper by his buddies, his face twisted in agony.

FEHER (cont'd)

That's PFC Herbert Carter, the Company's only casualty that day. The after-action report indicates he was hit by a sniper.

INT. PENTAGON INTERVIEW ROOM - LATER

Peers and Feher face SEVERAL FORMER MEMBERS OF CHARLIE COMPANY in rapid succession in a small, windowless interview room in the basement of the Pentagon.

A small light on the table tries in vain to fight heavy shadows in the room as a recorder runs. As always, Peers smokes and chews a cigar. THE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SIX CAPTIVE WOMEN AND CHILDREN is on the table, facing each interviewee

YOUNG FRED WIDMER (early 20's) is first. He's tall, thin, in civvies. He sits nervously, won't face Peers or Feher.

Peers opens, friendly, but eyes closely studying Widmer:

PEERS

Sergeant Widmer, you were Captain Medina's radio operator, entered the village with the command group, is that right?

Widmer's voice is quiet, dead:

WIDMER

It's not "Sergeant," sir. I'm not a soldier anymore. And I was a Private back then

He falls silent. Peers studies him for a beat

PEERS

I wanna be clear about something: No one is asking you to incriminate yourself. We just wanna get an idea of what happened out there.

Widmer nods, unsure.

PEERS (cont'd)

As you entered the village, did you see any civilians being killed... any bodies you believed to be civilians?

A shadow crosses Widmer's eyes. And for a moment, we--

--FLASH TO WIDMER IN MY LAI. Scared, sweating. The village around him is shrouded in smoke, ghostly limbs of trees and outlines of hootches visible. From everywhere, sounds of GUNFIRE. Widmer sees A LITTLE VIETNAMESE BOY staring at him, dazed, bloodied--

In the basement of the Pentagon, Widmer shakes his head slowly "no," a tension in his jaw as he considers the memory

FEHER

State your answer for the record, son.

Widmer now raises his eyes to the investigators. Softly:

WIDMER

I can't... I'm sorry. I can't help you
I thought I could I'm sorry.

Off Peers, studying him--

INT PENTAGON INTERVIEW ROOM - LATER

SERGEANT KENNETH HODGES (20's) faces Peers and Feher. He is still in uniform, stares past the photo, untroubled, stone-faced.

PEERS

Sergeant Hodges, as you led your squad through the hamlet, did you witness the killing of any civilians or see bodies you believed to be civilians?

HODGES

No, sir Only enemy soldiers.

FLASH TO HODGES DURING THE ASSAULT. The part of My Lai around him is on fire, smoke and gunfire filling the air. On the ground, he can see a few scattered dead, dressed on black pajamas. But Hodges' attention is drawn to a small pig lying on the ground, badly wounded. He and the little animal stare at each other as the pig gasps for air--

PEERS

You witness any unlawful acts of any kind?

HODGES

I did not.

PEERS

Never heard any talk among the men?

HODGES

No.

INT PENTAGON INTERVIEW ROOM - LATER

HERB CARTER (early 20's), a big, Black ex-GI in civvies is next. His eyes are glazed over, stoned on something

PEERS

Mr. Carter: you were Charlie Company's only casualty that day. What do you remember about being wounded?

FLASH TO CARTER IN MY LAI. He lies in the dirt, grimacing, his leg and foot soaked with blood. He stares at the sky, where the dark shapes of helicopters glide past ominously, like giant birds of prey--

In the basement of the Pentagon, Carter stares ahead, unfocused, as if he's lost track of time. After a beat:

FEHER

Mr. Carter?

CARTER

Huh?

PEERS

What do you remember about being wounded?

CARTER

Nothin'

Peers studies him for a beat. Then:

PEERS

Did you witness unlawful activity in My Lai?

Carter stares past him with glassy eyes

CARTER /

I ain't gonna rat out nobody

Off Peers--

INT PENTAGON INTERVIEW ROOM - LATER

RONALD HAEBERLE, the former combat photographer is next. He's also a civilian now, in his mid-20's, portly, sulkily face framed by a Prince Valiant haircut. He's brought a LAWYER.

PEERS

There's at least 40 dead in your photos. You never asked how they died?

HAEBERLE

My job was to take pictures. I learned early not to ask too many questions in the Army.

Peers clearly doesn't like the answer or the man. But remains civil:

PEERS

Help me understand something, Mr. Haeberle: Why only color shots of the dead?

HAEBERLE

Always carried my personal camera...
'Suppose I wanted to document what I saw

PEERS

But you didn't turn in the photos after
the mission, never told anyone

HAEBERLE

Safer that way... I've had photos destroyed
just for catching a General smiling wrong.

Peers studies Haerberle for a beat

PEERS

Even after you returned to the US, you
never contacted anyone in the military,
not the Pentagon, the CID.

HAEBERLE

Wasn't my job to get this ball rolling

PEERS

But you were willing to show your shots
for money. to Lions clubs and school
groups all over Ohio--

HAEBERLE'S LAWYER

(interrupting)

The photographs were and remain my
client's personal property. He's free to
do with them as he wishes.

Peers ignores him, turns to the photo of the captives.

PEERS

Who were they, Haerberle? What happened to
them?

*FLASH TO HAEBERLE IN MY LAI. He sees the terrified SIX CAPTIVES
huddled together, surrounded by GI's. He quickly raises and focuses
his camera. snaps the picture*

At the Pentagon, Haerberle returns the distaste in the Peers' eyes

HAEBERLE

I don't know. I just took the picture

INT. PENTAGON INTERVIEW ROOM - LATER

VARNADO SIMPSON (early 20's) faces Peers and Feher, dark circles
under his eyes. Like Widmer, Simpson sits nervously, evades eye
contact. The tick in his right hand is already apparent

PEERS

Did you see any civilians killed, Mr. Simpson?

SIMPSON

I-- I can't recall much anything about that day, sir

He avoids the photograph. Peers notices.

PEERS

Anyone there look familiar?

FLASH TO SIMPSON DURING THE ATTACK ON MY LAI The sounds of gunfire blast at us again amidst heavy smoke. Simpson moves through it, his eyes strange, his face and hands smeared heavily with BLOOD

At the Pentagon, Simpson's eyes remain on the photo. He says nothing. Peers watches the tick in Simpson's right hand.

PEERS (cont'd)

You sleep well at night, Simpson?

SIMPSON

No, sir... Can't say that I do... They come for you when you sleep. Ghosts... Can't kill 'em. Can't kill ghosts.

INT. PENTAGON INTERVIEW ROOM - LATER

PAUL MEADLO (early 20's), an earnest Midwestern farm boy, is Peers and Feher's last interviewee. He's in civilian clothes, dark circles also under his puffy eyes. Meadlo won't look at Peers, Feher, or the photo.

FEHER

Mr. Meadlo. You've admitted in your early statements to the CID that you shot some civilians--

MEADLO

I'm not gonna answer any questions unless I get immunity from prosecution.

Peers glances at Feher.

PEERS

That's progress...

FEHER

No one's asking you to incriminate yourself. Just tell us what you saw.

Meadlo raises his eyes to them.

FLASH TO MEADLO DURING THE ATTACK, holding his M-16, his eyes filled with rage and tears Next to Meadlo stands a YOUNG LIEUTENANT Boyish, with intense eyes: WILLIAM CALLEY (24).

At the Pentagon, Meadlo holds Peers' gaze

MEADLO
Calley... It was Calley. That's all I'm gonna say until I get immunity

INT. PENTAGON HALLWAY - LATER

Peers and Feher exit the interview room into a basement hallway. The General is studying the CID file on Lt. Calley, his mug-shot on top. Even in the photo, Calley's eyes are striking in their intensity.

PEERS
So Calley seems to have been the chief perpetrator.

FEHER
It appears so. Several of his men have implicated him in ordering the shooting of villagers. But we also know Calley was hated by his men, so the statements may be suspect.

PEERS
They hated him? Why?

FEHER
Incompetent and a real asshole apparently-- led his platoon right into a mine-field. Even Medina called him Lt. Shithead.

Peers considers the information for a beat. Then:

PEERS
I wanna see him. Where's Calley now?

FEHER
We've got him in 'Benning, but he's lawyered up, not talking.

PEERS
Let me try. Make arrangements for tomorrow.

INT. PEERS' OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dark has descended over Washington. Peers is still at work, studying the photo of the six captives from My Lai at his desk.

On the walls around Peers, we see citations, photos, and mementos bespeaking a long and distinguished career

Peers' attention is intently focused on the picture of the women and children, his eyes drawn to THE LITTLE GIRL huddled to the side of the group. She is at most ten years old, her eyes alight with terror. And for an instant--

PEERS SEES HER ALIVE IN MY LAI. CRYING AS SHE STARES AT THE SOLDIERS--

Peers snaps out of the scene he imagined. It visibly bothers him.

To clear his head, Peers walks to his windows. As he does, we pass some of the PHOTOGRAPHS on his shadowy walls. Several show a young LT. COLONEL PEERS leading OSS guerrillas with GENERAL JOE STILWELL in Burmese jungles during World War II...

And as Peers stands at his windows, staring into the night, A MEMORY FROM HIS PAST COMES TO HIM. FLASHING BY IN BLACK & WHITE:

AN EMACIATED OLD WOMAN weeps over A SKELETAL BODY wrapped in a thin shroud as YOUNG PEERS and GENERAL STILWELL watch from an Army Jeep. Fog lingers over the scene, obscuring the surroundings. We're in Bengal, India, 1943, even though we don't know that yet.

In his office, General Peers continues to stare into the darkness outside, pondering the memory, his expression unreadable.

INT DETENTION BARRACKS - FORT BENNING - DAY - DECEMBER 1969

Peers and Feher stand in the cell of LT. WILLIAM CALLEY. Deep shadows here, too. Calley sits out of sight, just a figure in the dark. The Lieutenant's aging civilian attorney, GEORGE LATIMER, speaks for him.

LATIMER

My client has already indicated he does not wish to make a statement, General.

PEERS

We can speak off the record.

LATIMER

I'm afraid that's not possible.

Peers studies the figure in the shadows for a long beat. Then:

PEERS

I thought I came to see an officer of the United States Army. I guess I was wrong.

(to Feher)

Let's go.

They turn to leave. But, at the last instant:

CALLEY

I'm not the one you should be talking to,
General

WILLIAM CALLEY leans into the light, his eyes radiating a strange intensity despite his small frame and boyish face

CALLEY (cont'd)

I've committed no sins. All I did was
protect my men and carry out the orders
that were given to me. Why don't you go
talk to the people who gave me those
orders

With that Calley retreats back into the dark Peers looks at Feher

PEERS

I guess orientation is over

EXT. ROAD NEAR HUDSON RIVER - THE NEXT MORNING - AERIAL

Peers' lone BLACK SEDAN crosses a bridge over the Hudson river as snow falls over barren woods lining the road MOVE IN ON THE CAR as it drives up a winding road.

DESCENDING to ground level, we see ahead THE MAIN GATE OF WEST POINT, the school's motto engraved in stone:

DUTY - HONOR - COUNTRY

The grounds of the Military Academy are deserted for Thanksgiving. Stone buildings cast long shadows over snow-covered parade greens

INT. SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE - WEST POINT - LATER

Peers stands in Koster's handsomely appointed office He's brought a small recorder with him Peers is studying one of the few personal mementos in the room:

A PHOTO OF KOSTER during the liberation of the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp. Young Koster is surrounded by weeping, emaciated prisoners. One of them is kissing Koster's hand, grateful

A VOICE behind Peers:

KOSTER'S VOICE

I'll never forget that day... My proudest
as a soldier.

Peers turns to face his friend, MAJOR GENERAL SAMUEL KOSTER (49). Koster has the rugged, tough features of a career soldier, but kind eyes They shake hands warmly in greeting

KOSTER
It's good to see you, Ray.

PEERS
You too, Sam.

KOSTER
Still takes some getting used to, running things around here... I still feel like a plebe cadet during Beast Barracks sometimes.

Peers smiles Koster motions for them to sit.

KOSTER (cont'd)
There's talk of you going to Korea next, getting your fourth star Long over-due.

PEERS
Thanks, Sam.

The two men study each other for a beat Then:

KOSTER
Well. I know you have questions to ask me.

PEERS
I'm sorry.

KOSTER
It's alright

Peers looks almost embarrassed as he sets up the recorder to tape his friend He then starts it, taking out his notes.

PEERS
Just a few routine questions, Sam...
Let's start with the plans and orders for the assault on My Lai What do you remember?

KOSTER
I remember it was the first combat command for the 11th Brigade under Colonel Henderson. Lt Colonel Barker was in charge of the operational planning.

PEERS
Was that standard procedure, for a Task Force commander to plan and conduct his own operations?

KOSTER

Yes. Barker had received intel that a heavy contingency of the local 48th VC was operating out of My Lai. The plan was to attack during a minimal civilian presence and to neutralize the enemy.

PEERS

Tell me about the village itself?

KOSTER

It was... complicated. There was a long history of resistance in the area. My Lai was one of the first villages to rise up against the French, and many there were sympathetic to the Vietcong.

(beat)

We knew from the beginning that winning hearts and minds wasn't gonna be easy. But we did what we could. I had standing orders that civilians were to be protected at all times.

Peers consults his notes.

PEERS

But the attack was timed for a Saturday morning?

KOSTER

Barker's intel indicated that the civilians left for the market every Saturday around 0700. The attack commenced at 0730.

Off Koster's line, FLASH 10:

INI KOSTER'S CHOPPER - OVER MY LAI - MORNING (MARCH 16 1968)

Sudden, searing color and stark contrasts as Koster observes from a high-altitude COMMAND CHOPPER as the last BARRAGE OF SHELLS hits the southwestern edge of My Lai to secure a landing area for the attack.

As they near the scene, Koster's PILOT radios in:

PILOT

TOC, this is Sabre 6. Nearing Operational Area.

Below them, NINE HELICOPTERS fly toward the village in "V" formation.

As the choppers begin to land, the troops pouring out, much of Koster's view is obscured by smoke from the bombardment.

At first, all is calm on the ground. Then, sudden bursts of GUNFIRE over the radio

GUN SHIP PILOT'S VOICE
(filtered over radio)
--LZ is hot. You're receiving fire!
Repeat: You're receiving fire--

Koster watches as the Platoons of Charlie Company advance through the smoke far below. Soon, the firefight grows. More gunfire. More smoke thickens the air--

INT. SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE - WEST POINT - 1969 - CONTINUED

The sudden calm of West Point as Peers and Koster continue:

PEERS
Did you see any civilian casualties during your fly-over?

KOSTER
No. I first heard about them from Henderson when I returned to Landing Zone Dottie, the Task Force fire base. He'd flown there to deliver two VC prisoners he'd taken into custody.

EXT. LANDING ZONE DOTTIE - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968) /

A barbed-wire fortified fire base some miles from My Lai. Koster, COLONEL ORAN HENDERSON (46), and LT. COLONEL FRANK BARKER (30's, classic drill-sergeant looks) confer, shielding themselves from the downwash of helicopter rotors.

Nearby, TWO VIETCONG GUERRILLAS in black pajamas are being held by American soldiers

HENDERSON
...aeroscouts spotted these guys trying to blend in with some villagers fleeing toward Quang Ngai.

KOSTER
Good work, Colonel.

HENDERSON
Thank you, sir
(beat)
I do have to tell you we've got some civilian casualties... I saw some bodies when we landed to pick these guys up. Looks like they were caught in the prep fire

Koster nods, troubled, turns to Barker.

KOSTER
Was arty on target this morning?

BARKER
Yeah, it did land in that sector. They might've been hit trying to get to the highway

KOSTER'S VOICE
The next day, I got a report from George Young...

INT KOSTER'S OFFICE - CHU LAI - DAY (MARCH 17, 1968)

Koster and BRIGADIER GENERAL GEORGE YOUNG (51) confer. Both men are in their shirtsleeves, the heat of the jungle sweltering.

YOUNG
Sam, there may have been a problem at Pinkville. Watke and Holloday came by this morning and told me one of their pilots had filed a complaint about some wild firing by the ground troops. He says some civilians may have been killed.

Koster's expression grows grim

KOSTER
Look into it, George

INT SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE - WEST POINT - 1969 - CONTINUED

Koster takes a cigar from a box on the table. He offers one to Peers, who accepts. As they light their cigars:

KOSTER
George assigned the task to Henderson, who determined that some civilians were in fact killed in the cross-fire during fighting. But he found nothing to substantiate any charges of wild or indiscriminate firing

PEERS
Were there ever any rumors about rapes or deliberate killings of noncombatants during the assault?

KOSTER
No, no, nothing like that... But in mid-April, the VC started flooding Quang Ngai with leaflets...

INT KOSTER'S OFFICE - CHU LAI - DAY (APRIL 1968)

Koster studies A LEAFLET showing a grinning American GI with blood dripping from his bayonet as he impales a group of women and children. Exclamations in Vietnamese surround the image.

KOSTER'S VOICE

They claimed our boys had purposefully
killed women and children in My Lai

INT SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE - WEST POINT - 1969 - CONTINUED

Koster lights his cigar.

KOSTER

ARVN was sure it was all just propaganda.
Nevertheless, I told George Young I wanted
a formal investigation. The leaflets were
everywhere, and I didn't want people
thinking that we took these kinds of
charges lightly.

PEERS

Who handled the investigation?

KOSTER

Lt. Colonel Barker.

Peers looks up from his notes, frowning:

PEERS

Barker?

KOSTER

Yes. His report supported all of
Henderson's original findings.

Peers considers the information for a beat.

PEERS

Who chose Barker for the job?

KOSTER

Henderson, Young maybe, I'm not sure.

Peers is silent for a moment. Then:

PEERS

Sam. You know that regulations don't
allow for a man to investigate his own
operation.

KOSTER
Of course. But I didn't realize they'd
chosen Barker until I got the report.
His work was very thorough, with sworn
statements from everyone.. There didn't
seem cause for not accepting it.

Peers nods, understanding

PEERS
I need to get a copy of that report.

KOSTER
You don't have one?

PEERS
There's nothing in the CID files.

KOSTER
Let me know if I can help track it down.
You know how rear echelon cowboys can be

Peers nods, then turns off the recorder

PEERS
Alright, Sam... I think that's everything.

KOSTER
Let me know if there's anything else I
can do to help, Ray. I wanna get to the
bottom of this as much as anyone

PEERS
I'm sure everything will be fine. Please
give my love to Cherie. It was good to
see you.

INT. OFFICERS' MESS - FT RUCKER, ALABAMA - EVENING

At Fort Rucker, Hugh Thompson enters the officers' mess. It is crowded
with young pilots. Thompson heads for the bar, walking stiffly because
of his back brace.

As the other pilots see Thompson approach, they file out, leaving the
bar near empty. Thompson sits down, grim, motions for the bartender.

THOMPSON
Scotch. Leave the bottle

The bartender does. Thompson pours himself a tall drink, stares into
the darkness outside. After a beat, the November night DISSOLVES TO:

EXT. THE SKIES ABOVE MY LAI - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968)

ANOTHER AERIAL POV AS CHARLIE COMPANY moves into My Lai amidst heavy smoke. Furious exchanges of gunfire echo from the village.

A LOWER COMMAND CHOPPER appears, observing the assault.

INT. HENDERSON'S CHOPPER - AERIAL OVER MY LAI

A stoic COLONEL HENDERSON observes the smoke-shrouded attack as his pilot, LT JAMES COONEY flies them over My Lai. Next to Henderson we see his radio operator, SGT MICHAEL ADCOCK (early 20's).

TACTICAL OPERATIONS SGT. (V O)
(filtered over radio)
Rawhide 6, this is IOC. We've got a
report of two VC detained off the highway
just south of the Operational Area.

Henderson picks up the radio, acknowledges.

HENDERSON
Copy that, TOC. I'll take 'em

He nods for his pilot to descend toward the highway. As they go lower, Henderson sees SCATTERED BODIES on the ground through the smoke lingering over the area. Off Henderson, DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PENTAGON CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING (1969)

Peers' interview with Henderson is underway in the windowless basement room. The space around them is again heavy with shadows, the photos of the dead on the table between them.

Peers chews his trademark cigar as a recorder runs.

Henderson's manner is stiff and precise. His uniform proudly displays ribbons for several Silver and Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts.

HENDERSON
The bodies were civilians, looked like
they'd been hit by the prep while trying
to get out of the village.

Peers takes out the AFTER-ACTION REPORT of the assault.

PEERS
I have a question about the after-action
report on the assault. Barker indicates
that 128 VC were killed, but only three
weapons were recovered. Only three?

HENDERSON

In Quang Ngai, that was a persistent problem. Before we could get the guns, sympathizers from the villages would grab and hide 'em

Peers mulls over the reply, then picks up Henderson's Report of Investigation.

PEERS

Let's turn to your investigation into civilian deaths during the assault. the first investigation, the one General Young directed you to conduct the day after. How'd you go about it?

HENDERSON

I started by talking with the pilot who'd filed the complaint about 'wild firing,' his name was Thompson

EXT AMERICAL DIVISION AIRFIELDS - DAY (MARCH 17, 1968)

Henderson looks on, concerned, as a visibly distraught HUGH THOMPSON tells his story. The Division airfields loom in the distance.

THOMPSON

There were a lot of bodies down there, sir. A lot of people got killed who shouldn't have. Something's gotta be done.

As Thompson continues:

HENDERSON'S VOICE

But it soon became clear he'd only seen 10-15 bodies, no actual "wild shooting." I got the impression he was pretty green, not much combat experience
(beat)
Still, I flew to see Medina and his men.

EXT CHARLIE COMPANY DEFENSIVE POSITIONS - DAY (MARCH 17, 1968)

Henderson stands with CAPTAIN ERNEST MEDINA (32) At a distance behind them, Charlie Company waits at attention near a small Buddhist cemetery where they've set up camp

HENDERSON

Ernie, you've heard about this complaint?

MEDINA

It's bullshit, Colonel. It was a heavy engagement. Some friendlies may have been caught in the middle, what can I tell ya?

Henderson studies Medina

HENDERSON'S VOICE

I've always believed you can tell from a person's eyes when they're lying... I believed Medina was telling me the truth, but I wanted to be sure...

HENDERSON

I'd like to talk to your men, if you don't mind

MEDINA

Go ahead, sir.

Henderson approaches Charlie Company, scrutinizing the men

Among the tight rows of men, we recognize four of the soldiers Peers and Feher interviewed at the Pentagon: Fred Widmer, Paul Meadlo, Varnado Simpson, and Kenneth Hodges. We also see HARRY STANLEY and ROBERT MAPLES, a Black machine gunner, early 20's.

All face Henderson stoically, as:

HENDERSON

As you were. My name is Colonel Henderson, I'm your new Brigade commander. I'm here because there's been a complaint of wild firing during yesterday's sweep

He stops in front of a few of the men, looks for their eyes, searching for signs of deception.

HENDERSON (cont'd)

Did anybody here observe any violations of the rules of engagement?

The men shake their heads. Henderson stops in front of IWO STONE-FACED GI's.

HENDERSON (cont'd)

You, son?

GI

Absolutely not, sir

HENDERSON

You, private?

GI

No, sir.

Off Henderson--

INT PENTAGON CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY (DECEMBER 1969)

Back on Henderson and Peers in the shadows of the Pentagon:

HENDERSON

There was no averting of eyes or bending of heads. But I've also been in the Army long enough to know about peer pressure. So I called on the men privately. It'd been a tough fight. A few said they'd seen some villagers trying to flee, who might've been caught in the crossfire. But they were proud of the mission and sad if civilians had died.

Peers studies Henderson

PEERS

I don't see any signed statements attached to your report. Why not, Colonel?

HENDERSON

I didn't take any. This was not, as I viewed it, any kind of official investigation. More of a "commander's inquiry" to see if something formal was warranted. And I didn't think it was

Peers mulls over the answer. Then:

PEERS

After the VC leaflets about a massacre in My Lai surfaced in April, Colonel Barker was assigned to conduct a second investigation. Who appointed him?

HENDERSON

I did, sir. With General Young's approval.

Peers holds Henderson's eyes, as:

PEERS

Were you aware that his appointment was counter to Army regulations on investigating suspected war crimes?

HENDERSON

Well, we certainly didn't think of it as a war crimes investigation. It was a response to enemy propaganda. They'd done this before, claiming their casualties as civilians to gain sympathy from the locals.

PEERS

I get that But help me understand: why assign a man to investigate his own operation? In violation of the directives?

HENDERSON

I didn't think of it like that Barker was one of my best officers He took signed statements from the men, the pilots, found nothing unusual. He didn't miss a beat.

Peers places the photograph of the SIX CAPTIVE WOMEN AND CHILDREN from My Lai before Henderson

PEERS

He missed this

Henderson looks at the picture After a beat:

HENDERSON

At the time, I did not have this photograph I could only go by testimony.

Peers continues to study Henderson.

PEERS

Why was no effort made to return to My Lai to investigate?

For an instant, a shadow crosses Henderson's eyes. Then:

HENDERSON

We discussed it.

PEERS

But opted not to go back Why?

HENDERSON

The whole area was infested with mines and booby traps. Charlie Company had already lost several men to them before the 16th, which is why the troops were airlifted in.

Peers studies Henderson for a beat. Then:

PEERS

What were the rules of engagement given to the men? Were you present for the briefing?

HENDERSON

No, but I'd reviewed the op plans with Barker and Medina The settlement was to be neutralized so that it could no longer be used by the enemy

(MORE)

HENDERSON (cont'd)
According to intel, "Pinkville" had been
the 48th's central base of operations for
months

As Henderson speaks, WE MOVE PAST HIM into the shadows of the room,
EMERGING TO--

EXT LANDING ZONE DOTTIE - NIGHT (MARCH 15, 1968)

--where the sun has set beyond the jungle and the American fire base.
Charlie Company is gathered around Medina for the pre-attack briefing.

Medina stands flanked by his three platoon leaders: LT. CALLEY, LT
BROOKS, and LT. LACROSS (all early 20's). Medina's voice continues
where Henderson's left off:

MEDINA
...and there's a large contingent still
present, readying to move north. We
estimate the enemy strength at 250-400, so
it's gonna be a stiff fight. But we'll have
artillery, double coverage by gunships...

We survey the faces of Charlie Company listening. The men are all
sitting on ammunition bunkers, their faces mostly hidden by the dark.
Among them we recognize several from Henderson's line-up, along with
MICHAEL BERNHARDT and HERBERT CARTER, who the next day will become
the Company's only casualty in My Lai.

Super: Landing Zone Dottie. March 15, 1968.

Medina turns to a map of My Lai he's drawn in the sand, indicates:

MEDINA (cont'd)
Here's how it'll go. Alpha and Bravo
Companies will cordon off the area for us
Calley, you will lead the First Platoon in
from the southwest, sweep east ...

Calley nods, his eyes gleaming coldly in the dark.

MEDINA (cont'd)
Brooks, you take the Second in from the
northeast, same deal ... LaCross, you and
the Third will secure a defensive
perimeter around the LZ.

Medina looks at his men, all watching him from the shadows.

MEDINA (cont'd)
All of you: be ready. You're about to get
in the biggest battle of your tour

Off Medina--

INT PENTAGON CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY (DECEMBER 1969)

CAPTAIN MEDINA sits before Peers in the windowless room, the recorder running.

PEERS

What specific instructions did you give for the sweep?

MEDINA

Any tunnels and bunkers were to be blown up, any guns, ammo and supplies seized, any military-age males detained

PEERS

And the civilians?

MEDINA

We expected civilian presence to be low because the market was open. But we had standing orders to protect anyone still remaining. In fact, I remember one of the men specifically asked me if neutralizing the settlement meant everyone there was the enemy. I said of course not. If you were fired upon, to fire back, use common sense.

PEERS

Tell me about the assault.

INT. LIFTSHIP - AERIAL OVER MY LAI - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968)

The liftships descend upon My Lai. The air is heavy with smoke from the bombardment, visibility low.

Medina sits with his men, confident, ready for action. The men of Charlie Company look tense, sweating as they hold their weapons. Next to Medina is FRED WIDMER, his radio operator. Nearby, his command group's Vietnamese interpreter, ARVN SGT. MINH DUONG (20's).

GUN SHIP PILOT'S VOICE

(filtered over radio)

LZ is cold. Repeat, LZ is cold.

THE CHOPPERS TOUCH DOWN AND THE TROOPS POUR OUT. The First Platoon, led by Calley, moves quickly through the smoke. Suddenly, the edge of the hamlet comes alive with gunfire.

GUN SHIP PILOT'S VOICE (cont'd)

You're receiving fire. Repeat, you're receiving fire!

THE LIFTSHIP MACHINE GUNNERS OPEN FIRE with deafening CLATTER.

INT. PENTAGON CONFERENCE ROOM - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

The sudden, shadowy silence of the Pentagon basement again.

PEERS

Where was the fire coming from?

MEDINA

Everywhere. The First and Second proceeded in as planned. I stayed behind with the Third to secure the perimeter. We then moved in after for a final sweep.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - NEAR MAIN TRAIL - MORNING

Medina and Sgt. Minh are interrogating AN OLD FARMER detained in the southern sector of the village. The sounds of firefight echo ahead. Smoke darkens the air, disorienting. Suddenly, amidst the gunfire:

GI'S VOICE

Medic! Medic!

Medina and his group rush in to find HERBERT CARTER in agony, his leg and foot soaked with blood.

INT. PENTAGON CONFERENCE ROOM - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

The contrasting silence again as we return to the Pentagon.

MEDINA

A sniper'd got him, but the wound wasn't critical. I had Carter airlifted out and we continued pursuing the enemy.

Peers considers the response for a beat, then hands Medina a map.

PEERS

Show me the route you took through the village.

Medina draws a path covering the length of the village west to east. Peers indicates the photos of the dead on the table between them:

PEERS (cont'd)

And you saw nothing like this while covering all that ground?

Medina indicates the large group of bodies along the trail.

MEDINA

This large group here? No. As for the others, I can't be sure. There may have been some casualties from the crossfire.

PEERS

Men, women or children?

MEDINA

I don't know There was no time to inspect
them, we were in contact with the enemy

Peers indicates the photo of the SIX CAPTIVE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

PEERS

The men never said anything afterwards?
You never heard any talk, rumors...
fireside chat?

Medina's expression darkens a little

MEDINA

If I'd heard fireside chat about war
crimes, I would've reported them
Crossfire happens in battle It's
unfortunate, but we all know it does

Peers studies Medina, holds his gaze.

PEERS

And these women and children? Were they
caught in the crossfire, too, Captain?

Medina looks back, his gaze never wavering

MEDINA

To be clear: I saw nothing in My Lai that
would've indicated to me that something
out of the ordinary had happened.

Peers considers the reply, then moves for his final question:

PEERS

And, Calley, what sort of reports did
you get from him?

Medina's eyes narrow slightly.

MEDINA

Routine KIA's, General All these
rumors and allegations I don't buy.
(beat)
They were good men, Charlie Company
Every one of 'em

Off Peers and Medina facing each other, A VOICE from 1989:

BERNHARDT'S VOICE

I quit college to enlist

INT. LIVING ROOMS/KITCHENS - DAY - 1989

THE CHARLIE COMPANY VETS' INTERVIEWS FROM THE OPENING CONTINUE.

BERNHARDT, more reflective than angry now:

BERNHARDT

I believed in the war. To me, being a soldier was a phase every man should go through

HODGES, speaking in his pleasant Southern drawl:

HODGES

I'd been with the Army two years when I met the men of Charlie Company. I trained 'em. I was very pleased with how they turned out.

SIMPSON sits in his shadowy living room, his hand and legs still shaking in distress. He glances at the cracked photo of his son.

SIMPSON

I lived here in Jackson. Had a wife and a little kid. But I can't remember my life before Vietnam... can't remember it.

STANLEY looks at the interviewer, smiles.

STANLEY

My mama raised me here in Gulfport... Brought me up to believe that everyone was created equal. May sound crazy here in Mississippi, but that's the God's truth.

WIDMER smiles, too, at first, as he remembers:

WIDMER

I was gonna be John Wayne, enlisted right on my eighteenth birthday
(growing haunted)
I remember flying over from Hawaii, it was a civilian plane... When we exited in 'Nam, I saw one of the stewardesses just bawling her eyes out. I didn't understand it then. But they flew people in and out so they saw both ends, knew better than us what to expect... For us, it was all still a mystery...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PEERS' OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - NIGHT / INT. CID OFFICES -
QUANG NGAI CITY - DAY - 1969 (INTERCUT)

Peers speaks on the phone with Andre Feher. Feher is at the CID field office in Vietnam, set up in a former school building. Around Feher, his office bustles with activity.

Super: December 1969.

PEERS

What? Feher, I can't hear a damn thing.

FEHER

I said, we're having a hard time locating any reports or logs from the period around the assault... Task Force Barker was disbanded soon after My Lai, and the records are scattered all over the place. My staff is drawing blanks at every office from Brigade to Division.

PEERS

Keep digging.

FEHER

I am, but I don't have the manpower, we're also tracking down the survivors... And there, we've had a rather unexpected development.

PEERS

What development?

FEHER

We've found a handful of survivors in the local refugee camps. But several of them have started now recanting their stories about a massacre. They're saying the killings were done by the VC, who forced the villagers to say the Americans were responsible.

PEERS

That could explain a lot, don't you think?

Feher considers before responding.

FEHER

I don't think so, General. These people seem really scared. I think they're telling us what they think we want to hear. I suspect the South Vietnamese government is putting pressure on them through the National Police.

(MORE)

FEHER (cont'd)

They don't want the allegations to be true any more than we do

(beat)

It might be advisable for you to come here. Maybe the presence of a General--

PEERS

I don't have time to come to Vietnam. George Young is flying in tomorrow from his station in Germany and that's it. I have a deadline. Now, while I believe that there may have been some isolated, unfortunate incidents--

FEHER

I'm not so sure about how isolated the incidents were, General. We're hearing a lot of rumors also of--

PEERS

Well, goddamn it, why are you listening to rumors?

Feher remains ever calm and measured

FEHER

I'm merely saying, sir, that some of the information we're hearing raises all kinds of new questions.

PEERS

You let me know when you have answers.

With that, they hang up.

INT. PEERS' OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - THE NEXT MORNING

Peers faces Brigadier General GEORGE YOUNG, another tough, battle-hardened soldier. Young looks tense as Peers starts the recorder:

PEERS

Alright, George, I'll try to make this brief. How familiar were you with the operational plans for My Lai?

Something crosses Young's eyes as he answers.

YOUNG

I only learned about them after the attack was over. When Watke and Holladay came to see me.

PEERS

And as the deputy Division Commander, you were responsible for investigations into civilian deaths?

YOUNG

Yes.

PEERS

And you were familiar with Army directives governing such inquiries?

YOUNG

Of course.

Peers looks at him, frustrated

PEERS

Then what the hell were you doing, George? Why'd you permit Henderson and Barker to investigate their own units, in violation of the directives?

Young shakes his head bitterly, understanding:

YOUNG

So that's how it's coming down? I failed? I covered it up? I was the first person to go to Sam about this, Ray--

PEERS

And he directed you to investigate. You had a responsibility. You knew that something had happened, that at least 20 civilians had been killed and you still allowed Henderson and Barker to cherry pick at their own operation--

YOUNG

I did nothing of the kind, Ray I never approved Henderson or Barker as the investigating officers, nor was I ever shown any reports by them

Peers stares at Young.

PEERS

What? Then what are you--

YOUNG

It doesn't matter what questions you have or what I tell you, they'll have an answer for everything

He looks at Peers intently.

YOUNG (cont'd)
You wanna get to the truth, you better
start digging Before they bury it all

PEERS
What the hell are you talking about?

YOUNG
You know that the House Armed Services
Committee has begun sealed hearings into
My Lai?

PEERS
Of course.

YOUNG
Why do you think they're doing that?

Peers says nothing, continues to scrutinize Young

YOUNG (cont'd)
They're soon calling a witness whose
testimony would be of great interest to
you: Hugh Thompson, the aeroscout who
filed the original complaint--

PEERS
I know who he is--

YOUNG
What you don't know is that Thompson was
under investigation in Vietnam because he
landed in My Lai during the assault and
ordered his men to turn their weapons on
the ground troops

This stops Peers in his tracks.

YOUNG (cont'd)
Go to the hearings, Ray.

With that, Young rises to leave

PEERS
We're not done, George--

YOUNG
Yes, we are . . . And Ray, as a friend: You
go down this road know it's one-way.

Off Peers--

EXT. RAYBURN OFFICE BUILDING - CAPITOL HILL - DAY

Peers approaches the Rayburn office building, nestled next to the Capitol. Nearby, he can see a few HOMELESS VIETNAM VETERANS camped out, warming themselves by a fire. The men look hungry and unkempt, peace graffiti on their dirty fatigues

Peers studies the men with a mixture of emotions, then enters

INT. HOUSE HEARINGS ROOM - RAYBURN BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Peers shows his ID and enters a sealed hearings room where HUGH THOMPSON testifies before a panel of FIVE CONGRESSMEN. The lawmakers are all older, in black suits. The panel is chaired by MENDEL RIVERS (64, balding, hawkish features)

Peers takes a seat in the back. A few high-ranking PENTAGON OFFICIALS are also present. They glance at Peers, a few whisper to one another.

Rivers' voice bristles with hostility as he addresses Thompson:

RIVERS

Let me make sure I've understood you correctly, Warrant Officer... You ordered your men to point their weapons at American soldiers?

THOMPSON

I was tryin' to rescue some people, sir. I told my men to cover me.

RIVERS

But we've already established that you saw no enemy. Only your fellow soldiers, in pursuit of the Viet Cong.

THOMPSON

They didn't look like VC to me.

RIVERS

Let's stick to what we know. You told your men to "cover you" from the American ground troops-- To be ready to fire on them? Let's get that on the record.

THOMPSON

(beat)
Yes

Peers watches, frowning. From Rivers' right, CONGRESSMAN EDWARD HEBERT (68, imposing), joins in, incredulity in his deep voice

HEBERT

Let me tell you, Warrant Officer... I can't conceive that I would ever order my men to aim their weapons at our brothers in arms

All eyes are on Thompson, hostile, accusing He struggles to reply:

THOMPSON

I had... It was my belief that illegal activities were taking place in that village

HEBERT

Oh, I believe the committee is in total agreement with you about that, just not about who was committing them

EXT BACK OF RAYBURN OFFICE BUILDING - CAPITOL HILL - LATER

Peers watches as Thompson leaves the Rayburn building through the back entrance, walking stiffly with his back brace. He stops to take a swig from a flask under his coat. Peers approaches:

PEERS

I need to talk to you, Thompson.

THOMPSON

Already got my fill for the day, sir.

PEERS

Name's Ray Peers. I'm heading a Pentagon inquiry into what happened in My Lai.

Thompson looks at Peers with open disdain

THOMPSON

Oh, that's a good one

With that, he heads to leave. But Peers grabs his arm to stop him

PEERS

You better check the attitude, Warrant Officer, or you'll spend the night at the brig for drunk and disorderly

Thompson glares back with open hostility Peers holds his gaze

PEERS (cont'd)

I've been a soldier for a long time, Thompson. I got a lot of patience. But not for bullshit. I need to know what you saw

THOMPSON

Why should I trust you?

PEERS

You admitted to a court-martialable offense
in a room full of generals. Looks to me
you'll need all the friends you can get.

Thompson considers for a beat. He looks around them, as if afraid
they're being watched

THOMPSON

Not here

EXT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY - LATER

Peers and Thompson walk the barren grounds of Arlington. Thompson
again walks stiffly, glances around, paranoid, as if expecting an
ambush

THOMPSON

They already tried to get me in 'Nam.
After My Lai, they had me transferred to
the rocket belt in Da Nang. Sent me out
every day, hoping I'd get killed

PEERS

Just hold up: Who's "they?"

THOMPSON

Whoever is fuckin' responsible, I don't
know! All I know is: My bird got hit seven
times, but they wouldn't let me out. The
last time I went down, I was alone. Broke
my back, the VC almost captured me. A
fuckin' miracle I made it back...

Thompson sits on a bench, takes another long gulp of scotch.

PEERS

You think you could stay sober long
enough to tell me about My Lai?

Thompson studies Peers for a long time. Finally:

THOMPSON

I was one of the aeroscouts for the
mission. It was me and two other guys in
the chopper, Larry Colburn and Glenn
Andreotta. About twenty minutes into it,
we caught some VC scouts outside the
village, helped transfer 'em to base. But
when we circled back to continue recon, we
could see something wasn't right...

INT THOMPSON'S CHOPPER - AERIAL ABOVE MY LAI - MORNING

Thompson, his door gunner LARRY COLBURN (18), and crew chief GLENN ANDREOTTA (20) fly over My Lai in a small observation chopper. Below them, the air is grey with smoke, some of the hootches on fire.

Through the smoke, Thompson and his buddies see the ghostly shapes of BODIES strewn about in the village. Their expressions darken

THOMPSON'S VOICE

The village was on fire. They were quite a few bodies on the ground, looked like civilians. We couldn't see what was going on. But then--

ANDREOTTA

Shit! Guys, look at that!

On the ground, they all see FOUR GI's in pursuit of THREE VIETNAMESE running for their lives, terrified-- AN ELDERLY COUPLE (70's) and A YOUNG GIRL (6), perhaps their granddaughter

The GI's close in fast. One of them takes A SHOT in the direction of the civilians, but misses.

COLBURN

What the hell are they doin'? Those people are unarmed.

CLOSE ON THOMPSON as he makes a decision:

THOMPSON

We're stopping this.

Andreotta and Colburn exchange a worried glance as Thompson BRINGS THE CHOPPER DOWN BETWEEN THE AMERICANS AND THE VIETNAMESE just as the elderly couple and young girl reach safety inside an old earth BUNKER. Thompson radios the gunships hovering above.

THOMPSON (cont'd)

Danny, Brian, we'd appreciate some help

GUNSHIP PILOT (V.O.)

(over radio, apprehensive)

Uh, copy that, Hugh. Standing by.

Thompson turns to his buddies, nervous, indicates their weapons:

THOMPSON

You cover my ass. I don't know what the hell's going on here, but be ready, OK?

Andreotta and Colburn look at him for a tense beat, unsure. Then, they nod. Thompson climbs into the downwash.

EXT VILLAGE OF MY LAI - RICE FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Thompson approaches LT. STEPHEN BROOKS, in charge of the GI's.

THOMPSON
Hold your men back, Lieutenant. We're
takin' these people out.

Brooks fingers a hand grenade

BROOKS
Just what I was gonna do

THOMPSON
Don't.

He motions toward the chopper, where Colburn has his machine gun
aimed at Brooks and the GI's

BROOKS
Are you fucked, man? What're you doing?

THOMPSON
These people are civilians.

BROOKS
They're VC

Thompson reads Brooks' name off a tag on his fatigues.

THOMPSON
Lieutenant Brooks, tell your men to hold
their fire and stay back.

The two men stare at each other

THOMPSON (cont'd)
Now.

Andreotta and Colburn watch anxiously, sweat dripping down their
faces. Their guns remain on the ground troops. Finally:

BROOKS
Hold your fire, guys. Stay back

Thompson approaches the bunker, which is overgrown with weeds. He
sees the elderly couple and the little girl. They cower back.

THOMPSON
Don't be afraid. You all come with me,
now. I'm gonna get you outta here.

He offers his hand to the old woman. After hesitating, she takes it. The little girl clings to the old woman. Thompson helps them out, then turns to the old man.

THOMPSON (cont'd)
Anyone else in there?

The old man nods, seeming to understand. Thompson peers deeper in. There's at least seven others inside, women, children, elderly, all huddled together, terrified.

THOMPSON (cont'd)
It's alright. No one's gonna hurt you now.

EXT. ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

Peers studies Thompson as the young pilot finishes his story, eyes still haunted.

THOMPSON
There were at least twelve of 'em in there. We lifted them out and flew 'em to a safe area. I don't know what happened to them after that.

PEERS
And you told all this to Henderson?

THOMPSON
Yeah. Also to my company commander right after it happened.

EXT. CENTER OPERATIONS TENT - LANDING ZONE DOTTIE - MORNING
(MARCH 16, 1968)

Thompson has landed at LZ Dottie, and nears MAJOR FRED WAIKE (40's), who's approaching from the Center Operations tent. Thompson is shaking with rage, throws his helmet on the ground before Watke.

THOMPSON
They're going after the civilians there, Major! I'm done with this mission!

WAIKE
Alright, Thompson. Calm down. Come with me.

As Watke takes Thompson aside, trying to calm him enough to get the story:

THOMPSON'S VOICE
He told me he would report it up. Later that night, I went to see Carl Creswell, the Artillery Chaplain...

INT. AMERICAN DIVISION OFFICER'S CLUB - CHU LAI - NIGHT (1968)

A distraught Thompson and CAPTAIN CARL CRESWELL (40's) sit in a secluded corner. Creswell's features darken rapidly, as:

THOMPSON

I'm telling you, Father, they were gonna kill those people, just like the others.

THOMPSON'S VOICE

He promised to report what I'd told him to the senior Division chaplain. I don't know what became of it.

EXT. ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

Thompson looks at Peers

THOMPSON

Creswell's probably still in country if you wanna talk to him. If he's alive.

Peers shakes his head at Thompson's paranoia

PEERS

Let's go back... Why were you so certain Brooks and his men were gonna shoot the civilians?

(beat)

You said "like the others." What others?

Thompson holds his gaze. And Peers can see a sudden darkness seeping into the young pilot's eyes. And he understands:

PEERS (cont'd)

You saw something more...

The pain of some terrible memory flashes in Thompson's eyes.

PEERS (cont'd)

What happened in My Lai?

THOMPSON

You wouldn't believe it

PEERS

Try me.

Thompson gives Peers a grimacing, ugly smile.

THOMPSON

Yeah . And then what? You don't get it:
They already tried to kill me once for
talkin', now they're trying to court-
martial me I ain't sayin' nothin' more .
All I've done is try and do the right
thing, and my life's fucked now . Body's
shot, wife's left me, I don't got nothin'.

Peers studies Thompson for a beat.

PEERS

Where can I find your flight crew from
that day?

THOMPSON

Larry Colburn I don't know. Glenn
Andreotta's in the ground. Shot down in
'Nam-- See what I mean?

PEERS

Soldiers die in war, Thompson. Things get
misinterpreted in battle. You got any
proof to back what you just told me?

Thompson studies the General for a long time. Then, he takes out
A MEDAL from his pocket, a Distinguished Flying Cross.

THOMPSON

They gave me this after My Lai

Off Peers--

INT. GENERAL WESTMORELAND'S OFFICE - THE NEXT MORNING

Peers, Westmoreland and Resor meet.

RESOR

I don't understand I thought you said
you'd have this wrapped quickly

PEERS

I underestimated the job

Peers hands over Thompson's medal with a copy of the citation

PEERS (cont'd)

This is the medal I told you about.
It's the real deal, awarded to Thompson
for "saving civilians during a heavy
firefight between opposing forces."
Colburn and Andreotta also got medals.
But there's no record of the rescue on
the after-action report

RESOR
That's impossible. And Colburn and
Andreotta's citations would've required a
signed eyewitness statement from Thompson.

PEERS
He claims his signature was forged.

Peers looks at Westmoreland

PEERS (cont'd)
Something's wrong here. I need to go to
Vietnam and dig with the CID

RESOR
The scope of your inquiry does not
include the actions of the ground troops.
You have a deadline--

PEERS
I will meet my deadline. And I'm widening
the scope.
(to Westmoreland)
With your permission, sir

Before Westmoreland can answer:

RESOR
Can't you just recall Henderson, hear what
he has to say about all this? Or question
this Lieutenant, what's his name--

PEERS
Stephen Brooks. He's dead, too, killed in
action around the same time as Barker.

RESOR
Oh, and I'm sure that's all a part of the
same grand conspiracy Thompson's outlined
for you. You said he was a drunk.

Peers turns to Westmoreland.

PEERS
Sir, you've asked me to get you answers
You want me to, or not?

A tense beat passes. Then:

WESTMORELAND
Go to Vietnam, Ray.

PEERS

Thank you, sir. I'm also gonna need a staff... 15 for Vietnam, another 15 to remain here in DC to track down more men from Charlie Company--

Resor moves to protest, but Peers silences him with:

PEERS (cont'd)

And I'm taking Thompson with me

INT. CAPITOL HILL BAR - NOON

Thompson is drinking at a secluded table when Peers enters. He sees the pilot and heads over. Thompson is already drunk.

THOMPSON

General. Join for me a drink?

Peers tosses an envelope on the table, doesn't sit.

PEERS

We're going to Vietnam.

THOMPSON

I'm not going anywhere. I got a plane back to Fort Rucker tomorrow.

PEERS

You've been assigned to work with me on the Inquiry. Those are your new orders.

THOMPSON

Forget it. You can throw me in the brig. I ain't going back.

He moves to empty his glass, but Peers pushes it out of reach.

PEERS

I'm getting real tired of this self-pity party... Want someone to get to the truth? I want someone in Quang Ngai who can help me get results... So get your shit together, sober up, and start acting like a soldier again.

With that, Peers walks out. Thompson stares after him. We can see the General's words have rankled him. Thompson moves for his drink, but doesn't pick it up. Yet.

As the young pilot sits, A MEMORY FROM MY LAI FLASHES ON SCREEN:

THOMPSON flying over the burning village, smears of BLOOD now on his fatigues and the fatigues of his crew...

In the Washington bar, Thompson continues to stare at his drink, eyes shaded by the memory

He soon becomes conscious of TWO HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS across the bar Both watching him with dark expressions. They avert their gazes as they see Thompson looking

Off Thompson--

INT. PEERS' OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - NIGHT

Peers is in his office, packing for his trip. For a moment, he pauses to look at the photos and citations on his walls, perhaps thinking of Young's words about a one-way road.

Off Peers continuing to pack, DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PLANE - OVER THE SOUTH CHINA SEA - NIGHT

Peers and Thompson are airborne over stormy, turbulent skies, en route to Vietnam. On the plane with them, Peers' staff of 15... officers from Captains to Sergeants, civilian lawyers and clerks.

Thompson stares outside, brooding. He watches as lighting splits the clouds ahead, his eyes filled with gloom and trepidation.

Peers sleeps, not bothered by the turbulence. MOVE CLOSER ON HIM AND DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROAD IN BENGAL PROVINCE, INDIA - DAY (1943) - IN BLACK & WHITE

YOUNG LI. COLONEL PEERS watches from a parked Army Jeep as the EMACIATED OLD WOMAN mourns over A BODY wrapped in a thin shroud on the side of a rural road. The air is thick with fog in the aftermath of rain, the shroud sticking to the body, revealing shockingly thin, skeletal features

WE NOW REVEAL MORE BODIES around the woman, all identically wrapped in thin shrouds that barely conceal skeletal faces frozen in hunger and torment.

As the woman raises her eyes to Peers, he looks away, to a group of soldiers conferring nearby. Among them is GENERAL JOSEPH "VINEGAR JOE" STILWELL (60), leather-faced, tough, speaking with SEVERAL BRITISH OFFICERS.

WIDEN NOW TO REVEAL that the road ahead is lined with shrouded bodies, as far as the eye can see. British soldiers are using trucks to collect the dead, burning them in the distance on LARGE PETROLEUM-FUELED CREMATION PYRES which bellow out thick, black smoke, further darkening and obscuring the scene

Super: Bengal, India. 1943.

Stilwell finishes speaking with the British, joins Peers in the jeep

STILWELL
 Alright, Ray . . . They're saying the road
 clears up ahead. We should reach
 Calcutta in two hours.

He watches the stark scene for a beat

STILWELL (cont'd)
 They say it's even worse there. The
 toll looks to be four million now

PEERS
 Jesus... All from the famine..

Peers glances at the old woman again, then at his unopened K-rations.
 He moves for the ration pack, but Stilwell stays his hand.

STILWELL
 You give her that, the bandits will slit
 her throat for it.

PEERS
 We're just gonna let her starve, General?

STILWELL
 The Brits are doing what they can to feed
 these people. We have our own job

He holds Peers' eyes

STILWELL (cont'd)
 The best we can do for her is to win the war.

After a long beat, Peers nods. He starts the Jeep, drives them down
 the foggy, death-steeped road. We stay with Peers and Stilwell as they
 disappear into smoke and fog, DARKNESS enveloping us.

*And for a moment, in that blackness, THE FACE OF A YOUNG BUDDHIST NUN
comes to Peers. the image enigmatic, in color, lingering*

Then, she is gone, leaving only the dark, through which we EMERGE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOMS/KITCHENS - DAY - 1989

The Veteran's interviews continue. BERNHARDT'S eyes are distant, as:

BERNHARDT
 Our first month in country was a cakewalk,
 no enemy contact. We had no idea that all
 around us, Hell was waiting.

WIDMER's eyes narrow slightly as he remembers:

WIDMER

It was always booby traps and snipers . . .
We never saw anyone. We heard a lot about
women and children being VC, how they'd
strap on grenades, put glass in soda cans.

HODGES, ever calm:

HODGES

All the men we lost were around Pinkville.
We were there to save those people, but
some of 'em . . . they didn't wanna be saved.

STANLEY, a sadness about him now:

STANLEY

I tried to get to know 'em, you know,
taught myself some Vietnamese . . . Some of
my buddies joked that I spoke better than
the interpreters . . . But Calley . . . He
really hated the Vietnamese. You could see
it in his eyes . . . It was like something
was ticking away inside, just waiting to
bust loose

SIMPSON continues to shudder in distress.

SIMPSON

Tet, man . . . we saw Charlie take on the
whole Division base. The Division! We were
60 miles away and all through the night you
could see the explosions. And I thought,
man, if they can take on the Division, what
can one Company do? Man, that place!
There's just no preparing you for it

Simpson's haunted face DISSOLVES TO:

EXI. QUANG NGAI SCHOOL BUILDING - MORNING (DECEMBER 1969)

Fog and rain shroud the morning. It's monsoon season in Vietnam.

Peers and Thompson, both now in field fatigues, exit the lead vehicle
of A SMALL ARMY CONVOY outside the former school converted into a CID
FIELD OFFICE.

Super: CID Field Office. Quang Ngai City. Christmas 1969.

Thompson no longer has his steel brace, but we can tell his back still
pains him. And he is clearly unhappy and uneasy about being back.

The young pilot glances at the city around them: dilapidating French
colonial buildings choked by endless refugee settlements. The air
echoes with distant, omnipresent booms of artillery.

As the Inquiry staff starts to disembark from the vehicles, Peers and Thompson see AN ARMY JEEP approach through a nearby military checkpoint

The Jeep is carrying BRIGADIER GENERAL JOHN W. DONALDSON (45), a tough, sinewy officer with suspicious eyes. He leaves his vehicle, walks over to Peers. His salute and voice are cold:

DONALDSON

General Peers. I'm John Donaldson, Assistant Commander of the Americal Division. General Ramsey asked me to come by and make sure you have everything you need.

But everything about Donaldson betrays a thinly veiled distaste for the CID operation as he looks over the scene.

PEERS

We're fine for now. Just make sure your staff knows to cooperate with any search or interview requests we may have, General.

DONALDSON

Of course... But I will tell you as I have told the CID: we've searched and re-searched all our archives for anything relating to this unfortunate alleged incident... If there was something to find, I think we would've done so by now.

PEERS

We're still gonna give it a try.

DONALDSON

As you wish. I've arranged for a security detail to accompany you in hostile areas. We'd hate for anything to happen to you or your men during your visit...

Just then, they see Feher exit the old school building with his aide, WAYNE THORNE (early 30's, bookish, with glasses). They're also in field fatigues. Donaldson glances darkly at the CID officers.

DONALDSON (cont'd)

Well... I will let you get settled in. Do call on me if I can be of assistance.

With another icy salute, Donaldson departs. Feher approaches Peers.

FEHER

I see you met our biggest fan. Did Donaldson mention he was Henderson's successor at the 11th Brigade before he went over to Division?

PEERS

No, he didn't...

Feher looks after the departing General.

FEHER

He wasn't a part of My Lai, but there's other rumors about him.

Peers turns to Feher.

PEERS

I'm here for facts, Feher, not rumors. I can understand if Donaldson's unhappy about the investigation. But I will make sure he cooperates.

FEHER

Fair enough. General, I'd like to introduce Wayne Thorne, my right-hand man.

Thompson nods a terse hello during introductions:

FEHER (cont'd)

Wayne-- General Ray Peers, Warrant Officer Thompson-- Welcome to Quang Ngai. I've made arrangements for us to visit an ARVN refugee camp a few miles from My Lai, figured you'd wanna get started right away.

Peers nods. Feher leads them to an awaiting Jeep nearby.

THORNE

The road to the area is closed because of enemy activity, so we're gonna fly in.

As they get in the car, Peers notices that all the soldiers along the streets are also either looking at them with suspicion or averting their eyes. Thompson sees TWO OFFICERS among the spectators who seem to be paying particularly close attention.

PEERS

Doesn't look like you have many fans, Feher.

FEHER

We never do, General.

INT CID CHOPPER - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Our team is strapped in, donning flak jackets and helmets as their pilot prepares to lift them off. Thompson looks nervous. Peers and Feher continue to talk:

PEERS

What's your progress with former Task Force officers?

FEHER

We've located a handful, also a few men from 174th Aviation, which participated in My Lai. But everyone seems to have developed sudden memory problems.

Peers nods. As Thompson looks around the airfields, he sees the TWO AMERICAN OFFICERS again watching them from a distance.

THOMPSON

Looks like someone's doing their own Inquiry on us.

PEERS

Just relax.

THEY LIFT OFF. Thorne stares out the windows as they rise above the city, his eyes widening.

THORNE

Look at that... No matter how many times I see it, I'll never get used to it...

Outside his windows, we see that the entire countryside around the city has been bombed to oblivion. Grey rain washes over vast craters that mark the remains of destroyed villages. Tanks and armored personnel carriers have made further wounds into the land.

Peers watches the sight, too, his expression unreadable.

EXT. REFUGEE CAMP - NEAR MY LAI - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Rain continues as a VIETNAMESE SERGEANT (early 30's) leads Peers, Feher, Thompson and Thorne inside a refugee camp built a few miles south of My Lai.

FEHER

He'll take us to the survivors.

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE crowd A SHANTYTOWN of tin shacks with dirt floors. Narrow, rain-muddied paths crisscross as walkways.

HOLD ON THE FACES of some of the malnourished, war-weary refugees as our team walks deeper. Some are curious, some fearful, others hopeful. the image perhaps echoing the photograph of Koster in the liberated concentration camp that we saw earlier.

Peers then sees an ORPHANED VIETNAMESE BOY, perhaps 6, watching them. We see emotion cross in Peers' eyes as he and the boy look at each other for a beat.

Peers then looks away, focuses on the task at hand.

The boy starts to tail the group, nearing Thorne and Thompson, who walk last. He tugs at Thompson's pant leg. Thompson stops, pauses to awkwardly pat the boy's head.

The boy then notices Thorne's Polaroid camera, says something in Vietnamese. Thorne takes a Polaroid of the boy, delighting him as the image develops. He lets him keep it.

Thompson and Thorne then catch up with Peers and Feher as the Sergeant leads the group to TWO SURVIVORS from My Lai, both men.

Peers and the investigators begin with NGUYEN VAN DANH (63), a frail old man with thin, white hair and weathered, ancient features.

FEHER (cont'd)

This is Nguyen Van Danh. He was the deputy chief of the hamlet. He woke up to the village being shelled, but was able to hide in a cellar during the attack.

Thorne takes Danh's picture and prepares to take notes. Feher nods for the old man to begin. The Sergeant translates concurrently:

DANH / SGT.

He says he came out of hiding after the shooting had stopped.

FLASH TO VAN DANH IN MY LAI. After. The village around him is on fire. Shock pales Danh's face as he stumbles forward, staring at the destruction. We don't yet see what he sees, but hear.

DANH / SGT 'S VOICES

Everything was burning. There were dead people everywhere. families, women, children.

ON DANH in the refugee camp with the investigators, as:

DANH / SGT.

He found his three nephews, four, six, and seven years old, all dead.

Peers nods his condolences. Then:

PEERS

Did he see who was doing the killing?

The Sergeant translates the question Then:

DANH / SGT

No But during the shooting, he could
hear people begging for their lives.

The investigators next turn to TRUONG NGU (46), a small but wiry
farmer with scars covering his arms

FEHER

This is Truong Ngu He'd already left to
work in the fields when the attack began.
He's identified his daughter and niece
from one of Haeberle's photographs

Feher takes out the photograph of the LARGE GROUP OF BODIES on the
main trail in the village and indicates:

FEHER (cont'd)

These two

PEERS

The bodies are face down

FEHER

He knows because he found them

Truong makes a statement to the interpreter

VIETNAMESE SGT.

He says he tried to get to his family
during the attack.

*FLASH TO TRUONG NGU IN MY LAI He's scared Sporadic gunfire echoes
as Ngu makes his way toward his home, using foliage and hootches for
cover. He sees TWO AMERICAN GI's enter his house and pull his
mother, wife, and three children out of hiding*

NGU / SGT. 'S VOICES

*But by the time he got home, the soldiers
were already taking his family away*

ON TRUONG NGU with the investigators, as:

NGU / SGT.

He says he tried to follow, but soon heard
shooting. It went on for a long time.

(beat)

He later found them all dead

Peers studies the man, sympathetic to his loss. He then notices Ngu's scarred arms. And Peers' eyes start to narrow with suspicion.

PEERS

This man's not just a farmer. . . He's been living in the jungle. He could be VC.

Ngu recognizes the word and makes a vehement comment at Peers.

VIETNAMESE SGT.

He admits: yes, he joined the VC after his family was murdered. But he claims he has since left them.

Peers turns to Feher.

PEERS

This man is not a reliable witness. He's a former enemy soldier. And neither of these two saw what happened. We need real witnesses, Feher.

Thompson shakes his head as the General turns to leave. The old hamlet chief pleads desperately after Peers.

VIETNAMESE SGT.

(translating)

Van Danh says you must know. . . the villagers knew something terrible was coming. There were omens. Several months earlier, the river had flooded--

PEERS

I don't have time for omens--

But Danh keeps talking, more forceful, wanting to be heard.

DANH / SGT

He says that when the river crossed Horse Mountain, the Vietcong arrived and took the young men away. They made people dig tunnels and bunkers. . . They said if the people didn't help, they would fire at the Americans and the Americans would come and destroy My Lai.

Peers studies the old man for a beat.

PEERS

Were shots fired from the village that morning?

Danh makes a passionate reply.

VIETNAMESE SGT

No No shots

Peers turns to Feher.

PEERS

How would he know? You just said he woke
up to the shelling What else you got?

Feher indicates north, where a visible gloom hangs over an area

FEHER

The scene of the crime

EXT REMAINS OF MY LAI - LATER THAT DAY

Peers, Thompson, Feher and Thorne stand in the outskirts what is left
of a village of five hundred people. Fog and rain here, too

Near our investigators, a few of Feher's men are at work, taking
measurements and photographs A detachment of American soldiers with
automatic rifles secures a perimeter nearby, courtesy of General
Donaldson Thompson glances at the soldiers, mutters:

THOMPSON

Good thing we're wearing flak jackets. .

Peers gives him a look They enter the ruins. My Lai is now a
desolate wasteland of broken and charred structures, overgrown and
shrouded in mist. Nothing grows... No living people... No sounds of
animals even. A tangible gloom lingers. Thorne shivers.

THORNE

It's like in that Conrad novel: "one of
the dark places of the earth"

Peers exchanges a glance with Feher.

FEHER

Wayne likes to read

They pass the burned remains of a Buddhist pagoda. Thompson keeps to
himself, following along wordlessly

FEHER (cont'd)

We've started forensic surveys of the
hamlet to map the sites in Haeberle's
photographs .. It's difficult because
most of the structures are completely
destroyed and overgrown.

Peers looks toward the fields, where we see THREE LARGE MOUNDS.

PEERS

Is that--

FEHER

Yes. We believe they're mass graves.

EXT VILLAGE OF MY LAI - RICE FIELDS - MOMENTS LATER

Peers and the others near the fields, continuing the survey. As they reach the rain water-filled irrigation ditch at the edge of the field, they can see TRASH strewn about: empty US Army ration boxes, wrappers, soda cans.

Thompson picks up a can, angry, mutters:

THOMPSON

A goddamn sacrilege . .

FEHER

A new patrol passed through here some time ago. This must be their trash.

Peers looks at the mounds, which are more clearly visible now.

PEERS

How many people?

FEHER

Based on the elevation of the mounds, most likely several hundred.

PEERS

Several hundred? All from the day of the assault?

FEHER

We think so. Doesn't look like we'll find many survivors.

PEERS

Why didn't you say anything before?

FEHER

I wanted you to see it for yourself.

Peers stares at the mounds, shaking his head, not believing.

PEERS

No... Our troops wouldn't have done something like this.

Thompson turns to Peers. He's had it.

THOMPSON

They did. That's what I've been trying to tell you! When are you gonna start opening your eyes?

Thompson holds the General's gaze, a darkness seeping into his eyes again

THOMPSON (cont'd)

What if I told you they killed everyone here. Everyone they could find: every VC, every last man, woman, and child.

Peers stares at Thompson. And Thompson sees it:

THOMPSON (cont'd)

You still don't believe it. You're standing next to their fucking graves, and you still don't believe it!

PEERS

That's enough! Our troops don't do things like that. Maybe a few killed some people, but several hundred? Maybe it's mostly enemy combatants in those graves, I don't know... We have reports of dozens of refugees fleeing the village. You saying that's all lies, too?

Thompson looks at him. Simply:

THOMPSON

Yes.

PEERS

You realize the size of the cover-up you're suggesting-- what, so-- every officer from Task Force to Division knew and just kept quiet about it?

THOMPSON

To protect their careers.

PEERS

We're talking about more than a hundred people! Word would've gotten out.

THOMPSON

Word did get out! Isn't that why we're here?

With that, he walks away. Peers stares at the grave mounds, still dealing with the shock of the allegation. And he realizes: the mounds are undisturbed. Peers turns to Feher, lashing out:

PEERS

Why haven't you started opening the graves?

THORNE

We can't, General. It's against Buddhist custom.

PEERS

I don't give a shit about custom! This is a murder investigation. We need to know who's in there and how they died. I want those graves open.

Feher remains calm

FEHER

General, the bodies have been decomposing for over a year. According to some accounts, many of the dead were recovered from burned huts. There's nothing of value left for us to examine.

PEERS

I've seen mass burials before. Bones survive

THORNE

Yes. But the burials are commingled. It would take us weeks to excavate and determine a number, and that still wouldn't give identities. Not the victims, not the killers.

FEHER

Eyewitness testimony is our best chance at finding out what happened

PEERS

Then what the hell are we doing here? There's nothing left to find after 22 goddamn months!

Feher calmly takes out the map of My Lai showing the route Medina marked as having taken through the village

FEHER

We can still determine what Medina really saw when he entered the village

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - MAIN TRAIL - LATER

Peers, Feher and Thorne walk the fog-shrouded MAIN TRAIL that bisects the village north-south. Thompson follows at a distance, still angry. Feher brings the others to a halt.

FEHER

This is where we believe Haeberle
photographed the 20 bodies.

Peers looks around them. AND FOR A BRIEF INSTANT, THE SHOCKING SIGHT
OF THE BODIES FLASHES ON SCREEN.

PEERS

The ones Medina claims he never saw

FEHER

Right

Feher takes out the map and TWO PHOTOS taken during the operation.

FEHER (cont'd)

But look at this. You can see Medina in
the background in these two photos

(indicating)

The first shows the command group shortly
after landing, the second Carter's med-
evac, which took place not very far from
here. That means Medina most likely
crossed the path somewhere around

He draws a line between the two photo locations on the map, crossing
the main trail near where they now stand

PEERS

Let's see.

He walks over to where Medina most likely passed and looks toward
the site of the bodies

AGAIN, THE PAST FLASHES ON SCREEN:

*Thick smoke. The sound of gunfire from all around in the village.
Shadowy figures of Charlie Company soldiers proceeding through the
haze. Time slows down as a FIGURE crosses the trail. MEDINA...
Staring expressionless at the smoke-shrouded BODIES. Above, dark
shapes of choppers circle.*

Then, the silence of the dead village again. Peers walks to Feher

PEERS (cont'd)

He had to have seen them.

FEHER

Makes you wonder what else he might be
lying about...

INT. OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - LATER THAT EVENING

Late A monsoon washes over the jungle outside. Peers and Feher are in the CID offices, taking a break from work over a bottle of scotch. Peers is at the windows, staring into the night.

ON A TV SET in the back of the room, images from the second moon landing play... an astronaut standing next to the American flag planted amidst the moon's lifeless desolation

Peers sips his scotch as he watches the wet darkness outside break from the intermittent flashes of far-away artillery fire.

PEERS

I spent three years in the jungle in
Burma... saw it break a lot of men, the
heat, the rain

(beat)

A lot of my men were Kachin fighters...
They were animists, believed that every
thing in the world, living or dead, had a
soul. And yet... there was such a...
savagery to them. It came out in those
jungles

He looks back to Feher

PEERS (cont'd)

But our boys... you really think it's
possible... what Thompson said?

FEHER

Remember Sand Creek... Chivington?

Peers makes no reply.

FEHER (cont'd)

His Cavalry slaughtered a whole village
of Cheyenne and Arapaho, including the
women and children

PEERS

Chivington's men were drunkards and
psychopaths. Volunteers.

FEHER

They were also under orders... Chivington
had personally called for his men to
"kill and scalp all, little and big." And
they didn't stop there--

PEERS

This wasn't Sand Creek, Feher No one ordered this. And brutality. . . it's always been a part of war Always. . . It's our job, as officers, to be the watchers in the towers

FEHER

"But who watches the watchers themselves?"

PEERS

Glad the job hasn't made you cynical

He rubs his face, tired. Then:

PEERS (cont'd)

You never burn out? Looking at crimes committed by soldiers day after day?

FEHER

It was hard when I started. I was awake every night, drove my wife nuts She finally threatened divorce, made me choose: either quit being so emotionally involved, or just quit Best advice I ever got
(beat)

You married, General?

PEERS

Yes. Second time

We see a sadness come to Peers' eyes Perhaps it's the influence of the scotch, but he opens up a little:

PEERS (cont'd)

My first wife. she died while I was overseas A heart infection. I wasn't able to get back in time to...

He doesn't finish the thought.

FEHER

I'm sorry. That must've been hard.

Peers nods Uncomfortable with the topic, he refocuses them on:

PEERS

Alright, let's get back into it, the gaps in the records you were talking about...

FEHER

Right... We still haven't located any new documents relating to My Lai

(MORE)

FEHER (cont'd)
 Every Task Force, Brigade and Division
 office claims to have nothing. And the 11th
 Brigade remains the only place to even have
 a copy of Henderson's original report.

PEERS
 Maybe there's more there

FEHER
 We've tried several times

PEERS
 Maybe they could use a surprise visit
 from a three-star General, what we used
 to call a blind drop...

As they continue to talk, DISSOLVE TO:

INT CID COMMUNICATIONS ROOM - SIMULTANEOUSLY

A windowless communications room in the bowels of the old school
 building. THE TELEX comes to life and begins to pound out an EYES ONLY
 message to Peers from his team in DC:

TO GENERAL PEERS: EYES ONLY: TEAM HAS LOCATED 10 FORMER MEMBERS OF
 CHARLIE COMPANY. TESTIMONY TO FOLLOW.

The machine next begins to hammer out the ten names. We see HARRY
 STANLEY, ROBERT MAPLES, and JEFFREY LACROSS among them.

As the names appear, we FLASH BRIEFLY TO THE MEN THEMSELVES . walking
 the shadowy hallways of the Pentagon . nervously telling their
 stories to uniformed investigators as recorders run and stenographers
 transcribe No voices yet, only the continuing POUNDING of the telex

Off the message ending--

EXT. 11TH BRIGADE BASE - DUC PHO - THE NEXT DAY

Peers, Thompson, Feher and Thorne walk across the 11th Brigade
 headquarters at Duc Pho, a few Vietnamese statues the only reminder
 of the village that used to be there. Outside one building, our team
 sees two ENLISTED MEN washing away GRAFFITI. The graffiti reads:

KILL A GOOK FOR CALLEY

Feher studies the sight darkly. To Peers:

FEHER
 Welcome to the 11th Brigade

INT 11TH BRIGADE ARCHIVES - MOMENTS LATER

The four investigators meet with SERGEANT KENNETH CAMELL (20's) in the
 Brigade Archives. Peers studies a documents log Camell has handed him.

PEERS

Is this a joke, Sergeant? Every single document we've requested is listed here as "missing" or "destroyed." According to this, you've got no records at all for the Brigade artillery battalion for March 16. How can that be? There were deaths attributed to their prep fire.

Camell looks at Peers nervously.

CAMELL

Well, you see, reporting and record-keeping requirements changed after March '68. A lot of stuff from back then has been destroyed as obsolete. As a matter of routine

PEERS

"Obsolete" "Matter of routine"
(mock smile)
You trying to blow smoke up my ass, soldier?

CAMELL

(paling)
No Of course not, sir... You're welcome to check the files yourself

INT 11TH BRIGADE ARCHIVES - FILE ROOM - LATER

In a vast warehouse, our team sits amidst piles of files, reports and logs. It's clear they've found nothing. Thompson looks up from a file he's studying

THOMPSON

Camell's right. All the flight logs for March 16 are missing. So much for finding the pilots and staff from the 174th.

THORNE

All the logs from the Task Force Op Center have also been purged. Since the Task Force was disbanded, we can't even tell who was at the TOC that day

FEHER

Someone's been very meticulous with "obsolete records"

Peers sets down the file he's been studying, expression darkening

PEERS

Where is that Sergeant?

Camell, who's been standing outside the door, peeks in, wary.

CAMELL

Yes, sir?

PEERS

Were you stationed here in '68, Camell?

CAMELL

No, sir, I took over earlier this year.

PEERS

I've been trying to find any documents relating to an investigation of My Lai by Lt. Colonel Barker. There's nothing. Not even a copy of orders appointing him to investigate. Are you positive you've seen nothing?

Camell looks at Peers, nervous. He doesn't say anything.

PEERS (cont'd)

Give me a pad of paper, Sergeant.

Camell does, frowning. Peers starts writing.

CAMELL

If you're looking for more files--

PEERS

Oh, I'm done with files. I'm writing a note to your C O., explaining we had to take you into custody for obstructing an Army Inquiry.

Peers looks to Feher.

PEERS (cont'd)

We've got enough for a probable cause apprehension, don't we?

FEHER

Sure do.

Peers continues writing his note as Camell starts to sweat. He looks like he's about to say something, but then doesn't.

PEERS

You got something to share, better make it fast.

Camell looks nervously into the hallway outside the file room. Only shadows there. Peers finishes his note and tears it off the pad, when--

CAMELL
 Alright. Around the time that I got here,
 I was given an envelope

FLASH TO CAMELL RECEIVING AN UNMARKED ENVELOPE FILLED WITH DOCUMENTS.

PEERS
 What was in it, Sergeant?

CAMELL
 I-- I'm not sure .. The contents were
 strictly confidential. I was told not to
 put it in a normal file, but to keep it
 separate in a priority safe. I believe it
 was something on My Lai

PEERS
 Because..?

CAMELL
 Because in April or May of this year, a
 senior officer from Intel came by

INT. 11TH BRIGADE ARCHIVES - NIGHT (SPRING 1969)

Camell is alone in the archives, pulling night duty, as AN INTEL MAJOR
 from the 11th Brigade enters. We never see his face, as:

INTEL MAJOR
 I need the envelope, Camell.

CAMELL
 Sir?

INTEL MAJOR
 The envelope from the S-2 safe. I need to
 make a report on it for a CID inquiry

CAMELL
 Yes, sir

Camell goes to the safe and retrieves the envelope. He hands it to
 the Major, who leaves wordlessly. As Camell watches after him:

CAMELL'S VOICE
 When he brought it back, I was sure it was
 missing pages. Then, about September, he
 returned for the file again. This time it
 never came back.

INT. 11TH BRIGADE ARCHIVES - FILE ROOM - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

Back on Peers and Camell, as:

PEERS
Who was the officer?

Camell hesitates, glances into the dark hallway again.

PEERS (cont'd)
Give me the access log for the file

CAMELL
There was no log.
(off Peers' renewed glare)
I was instructed not to keep one.

Peers and the Sergeant face off.

PEERS
I want you to think very carefully,
Sergeant... Who was the officer who
requested that file?

Camell and Peers stare at each other as Camell considers. He finally closes the file room door, sealing them inside.

CAMELL
I can't give you names. Just to say this
reaches high... Real high

INT CID CHOPPER - 11TH BRIGADE AIRFIELDS - LATER

Our team prepares to fly out of Duc Pho. Peers, Feher and Thompson are already in their seats in the chopper. Feher glances at Peers.

PEERS
If only paranoia could secure
indictments, we could all head home.

Feher says nothing. Outside the chopper, Thorne finishes consulting with two members of the CID staff, then climbs in.

THORNE
Good news. Our staff's found Creswell.

PEERS
Father Creswell?

THOMPSON
He's still here?

THORNE
Yeah. He DEROSed, left the Chaplain
Corps, but our guys found him in Saigon.

Off Peers, reacting to the location--

EXI. SAIGON STREET - AFTERNOON

Our team makes their way down crowded streets. Around us, fading European-style buildings, bars and hotels. Army choppers pass overhead in a permanent reminder of war.

As Peers watches the sights, his eyes are drawn to A BUDDHIST TEMPLE across the street. And for a moment, he sees THE YOUNG BUDDHIST NUN there... the face from his dream during the flight over to Vietnam.

Peers blinks to clear his vision. The nun is gone. Thompson notices the General staring toward the temple, studies him curiously

THOMPSON

You alright, General?

PEERS

I'm fine...

Just then, Thorne points to their destination ahead: a small, run-down bar. He compares his notes to be sure

THORNE

That's it... The the address where they said we'd find Creswell

FEHER

That's not a church

PEERS

Really?

As they enter, Thompson again spots their surveillance detail of two officers, this time keeping their distance

INT. SAIGON BAR - CONTINUOUS

At a secluded table, we find FATHER CARL CRESWELL. He looks gloomy and much aged since we saw him in Thompson's flashback. Creswell drinks openly despite his priest's collar. He recognizes Thompson as our team approaches.

CRESWELL

Hugh, is that really you?

THOMPSON

Yes, Father.

He can see Thompson is troubled by his disheveled appearance

CRESWELL

I know. . I don't feel so hot, either.
I've decided to stay here for a while.
As a personal penance.

He takes a long sip of drink as Thompson introduces the others:

THOMPSON

Father, this is General Ray Peers. He's heading a Pentagon Inquiry into My Lai.

Peers studies the drunken priest as they all sit

PEERS

I understand that after speaking with Warrant Officer Thompson, you relayed his account to the Division Chaplain

CRESWELL

That's right. To Lt. Colonel Francis Lewis.

PEERS

What happened?

CRESWELL

He'd already heard some rumors about the mission. He relayed the information up the chain of command, but we heard nothing. Finally, we tried to see General Koster.

INT. COLONEL PARSON'S OFFICE - CHU LAI - DAY (APRIL 1968)

Creswell and LT. COLONEL FRANCIS LEWIS (40's, heavy-set) enter a small office with COLONEL NELS PARSON (40's), the Division Chief of Staff. Parson closes the door after them

PARSON

What was it that you needed, Fathers?

LEWIS

As I said in my message, we'd like to see General Koster about My Lai

PARSON

We're aware of the allegations. They're being investigated

CRESWELL

Good. When do you expect to finish--

PARSON

The investigation is finished when it's finished, and until that time, we're not to talk about it. Understand?

INT SAIGON BAR - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

Creswell looks at the investigators, drinks some more. It clearly pains Thompson to see him like this.

CRESWELL

And that was it. Later on, my messages were not even returned. I gave up.

FEHER

You didn't report the charges to the local Judge Advocate's office?

Creswell stares at Feher like he's from another planet.

CRESWELL

Oh, I've been to that office. . . And each time, I saw charges of out-and-out murder reduced to a slap on the wrist or dismissed altogether. . . As far as they're concerned, there's no such thing as murder of a Vietnamese civilian.

Creswell looks at Thompson

CRESWELL (cont'd)

You still believe the recruitment posters, Hugh?

Thompson says nothing. Creswell shakes his head bitterly.

CRESWELL (cont'd)

No, this whole business reminds me of World War I. . . Commanders flying out by day to watch their troops die, then back for a hot shower and happy hour at the officer's club. . . And General Koster, he lived like there was no war at all. . .

EXT. AMERICAL DIVISION OFFICERS' MESS - NIGHT (1968)

Creswell attends as SIX GI's in white waiter's coats and white gloves serve a lavish dinner to Koster and FIFTEEN STAFF OFFICERS, including General Young.

Wine flows into crystal glasses as lobster and steak are served on fine china bearing the emblem of the Americal Division. The presentation rivals a fine restaurant. Outside the windows, heavy rain falls, the sky intermittently lit by artillery fire.

CRESWELL'S VOICE

He loved lavish dinner parties, even invited us chaplains on occasion.

(MORE)

CRESWELL'S VOICE (cont'd)
But mostly it was to entertain visiting
'dignitaries' from the Pentagon

A COLONEL a few seats from Creswell turns to him

COLONEL
Hey Father-- I've got a supply ship
running late with all this rain.
(indicating upward)
Wanna ask your Boss to do something about
that?

Boisterous laughter around the table at that. Creswell studies the
Colonel, not smiling

CRESWELL
Not sure God is in such a hurry for more
killing, Colonel.

The smiles around the table wither. Especially Koster's

INT. SAIGON BAR - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

Peers studies the priest, skeptical about the story.

CRESWELL
I wasn't invited back after that .

He smiles grimly, looks at the bottom of his now empty glass.

CRESWELL (cont'd)
It's a wonderful little war we've brought
here... And here we are, the chaplains,
blessing the men, the missions, the
weapons... Reminding them of the 'noble
sacrifice' of those gone before them,
with God always on our side.
(beat)
That's what the Nazis said, too.

PEERS
Nazis?

Real anger rises to Peers' face.

PEERS (cont'd)
No one here is a Nazi, Father. Whatever
happened in My Lai is in no way
representative of our troops, this war,
or how we're fighting it. Our cause here
is honorable.

CRESWELL
I was there when the orders for My Lai
were given, General

INT. TASK FORCE CENTER OPERATIONS TENT - LANDING ZONE DOTTIE -
AFTERNOON (MARCH 15, 1968)

Creswell enters a crowded tent where LT. COLONEL BARKER's briefing is about to start. Among the attendees: HENDERSON, MEDINA, and Barker's balding, heavy-set intel chief CAPTAIN EUGENE KOTOUC (36)

CRESWELL'S VOICE

I'd gone over to the Task Force TOC...
just a social call to say hello to the
new Brigade Commander, Colonel
Henderson.

PEERS' VOICE

Henderson was there?

CRESWELL'S VOICE

Yes. They were just getting started...

Henderson looks over Barker and his Task Force Staff

HENDERSON

I've been studying the past efforts of
this Task Force and I'm unimpressed.
Your Companies aren't aggressive enough in
closing with the enemy. I want results
tomorrow... I want the 48th VC taken out
once and for all

BARKER

They're not gonna be a problem, Colonel.
Our intel's solid. We're gonna clean that
place out. We get one round outta there,
we're gonna level it.

INT. SAIGON BAR - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

Creswell looks at Peers.

CRESWELL

That's when I left. Didn't think we made
war that way, even said so to one of the
staff officers. You know what he
replied? "It's a tough war, Chaplain."

Off Peers and his team, considering the reveals--

INT. PEERS' QUARTERS - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - NIGHT

Very late. A starless night covers Quang Ngai. Peers is in his
quarters, reading AN INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT from his team in DC.

Playing over, VOICES from the transcript: COLONEL WILSON, the chief
interrogator, and HARRY STANLEY:

COL. WILSON'S VOICE

You said you recognize the people in this photograph, Mr. Stanley?

STANLEY'S VOICE

Yeah... That's the group I saw West and his men had 'em.

Off the WORDS, FLASH TO--

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968)

HARRY STANLEY watches as CHARLES WEST, an assistant Squad leader, and SEVEN OTHER GI's have gathered around THE SIX CAPTIVES from Haeberle's photograph. THE YOUNG WOMAN with fresh bruises on her face buttons her shirt while holding her young SON

But the GI's are more interested in THE YOUNG GIRL huddled to the left. One of the soldiers lifts up her shirt with his rifle.

GI

Little VC Whore. Let's see what you got.

The GI starts to unbutton the little girl's shirt, fondling her

GI (cont'd)

You a whore, little girl?

The girl and the women in the group all begin to cry. AN OLDER VIETNAMESE WOMAN (50's) suddenly fights her way forward from the group, screaming at the soldiers--

INT. PENTAGON INTERVIEW ROOM - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DECEMBER 1969

Stanley faces Peers' DC team in another windowless, shadowy room. A recorder runs, a stenographer transcribing simultaneously, as:

STANLEY

I think she was her grandmother or somethin'. I spoke a little Vietnamese so I could understand what she was sayin'.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - MORNING - CONTINUED (MARCH 16, 1968)

In My Lai, Stanley watches the grandmother scream at the GI's. He yells to the men:

STANLEY

Stop it! They're not VC! What the hell are you doing?

The soldiers ignore Stanley. The GI who was fondling the girl starts again. Her grandmother grabs him to stop him. The GI turns to her:

GI
You wanna piece of me, bitch?

INT. PEERS' QUARTERS - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - NIGHT

Peers' eyes narrow as he reads--

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - MORNING - CONTINUED (MARCH 16, 1968)

The GI PUNCHES the old lady in the stomach. The others join in, BEATING and KICKING her. Someone STABS her in the chest.

As the soldiers brutalize her grandmother, the little girl hides behind one of the other women in the group. Finally, the wounded grandmother rises, stumbles in front of the others to protect them, bleeding from her chest.

Just then, the SOUND of someone emerging from the jungle--

INT. PEERS' QUARTERS - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - CONTINUED

Peers' expression continues to darken as he reads

COL. WILSON'S VOICE
That's when Sgt. Haeberle got to the scene?

STANLEY'S VOICE
Yes.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - MORNING - CONTINUED - (MARCH 16, 1968)

SGT. RON HAEBERLE steps out of the jungle. Seeing the captive group, he raises his camera, snaps the picture. And just moves on. The GI's look at each other

GI
Let's waste 'em

Haeberle hears it, but does nothing. Stanley moves forward--

STANLEY
Wait!

BUT THE GI'S OPEN FIRE, MUZZLE FLASHES lighting up Stanley's face--

INT. PEERS' QUARTERS - QUANG NGAI - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

Growing anger on Peers' face as the flashes of distant artillery play over his features, mirroring the gunshots. In his mind, Peers sees--

--THE TERRIFIED LITTLE GIRL a split second before the bullets hit her, the moment lingering, suspended in time.

Peers closes his eyes, erasing the visual. His hands tremble a little as he lowers the transcript.

Peers stares at the pages for a long time. Finally, he places them inside A SAFE in his room, where they join a few other transcripts already inside

COL. WILSON'S VOICE

Why didn't you report what happened to anyone?

STANLEY'S VOICE

(beat)

I don't know.

Peers locks the safe. Doing so, he catches sight of his own reflection off his windows. He stares at it for a long time.

EXT. PEERS' QUARTERS - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - MORNING

Morning. Peers exits his quarters, looking haggard, clearly having slept badly. At a distance across a courtyard, he can see Thompson trying to communicate with THREE VIETNAMESE CHILDREN, all under ten, all in worn, dirty clothes.

Peers watches as Thompson hands the children candy and crackers from his C-rations. The kids run away happy as Peers approaches.

THOMPSON

I've seen 'em come around the last couple of days. Don't really know what they're sayin'. Maybe they went to school here or somethin'. I feel bad for 'em. Wish I could give somethin'. I dunno... more.

Peers looks after the kids, a mixture of emotions again in his eyes.

PEERS

Anything helps. believe me

Thompson glances at the General, curious about his tone. Peers senses him looking.

PEERS (cont'd)

I grew up like that, poor. During the Depression. We lived in Iowa.

(beat)

When I was little, my dad tried to move us to California, start a new life... Didn't work out that way. He left. My mom... she died. Car accident.

Peers seems to get lost in the memory, still watching after the kids.

PEERS (cont'd)

In a way, I was always a refugee until I came into the Army... 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell was my first field commander... The first father I ever really had...

INT. CID OFFICES - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - LATER

Peers and Thompson enter the CID offices to find Feher and Thorne unpacking a box of documents.

PEERS

What's all this?

THORNE

Just came from Camell. Looks like he sent over every remaining Task Force document he had for March/April '68, relevant or not. We even got the mess hall menus...

PEERS

Anything on Barker's investigation?

Feher shakes his head "no." Thompson picks up a set of photos from the day of the assault, which show choppers landing at LZ Dottie to carry Charlie Company to My Lai.

THOMPSON

More of the same old bullshit
"Accidentally misfiled."

Peers joins the others, starts looking through a set of Barker's correspondence with Division-- when they all suddenly hear a COMMOTION go through the staff in the street-side offices.

Peers walks over, finds everyone standing by the windows. Peers turns to one of his clerks, A STAFF SERGEANT (30's)

PEERS

What the hell is going on?

SERGEANT

Sir, it's General Westmoreland. He's here

INT. OFFICE - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - MOMENTS LATER

Peers and Westmoreland enter a former school administrative office. Westmoreland closes the door behind them for privacy.

WESTMORELAND

Sorry about the surprise visit, Ray. I had business in Saigon and thought I'd stop by. You look tired. You alright?

PEERS

Just a pretty sorry picture that's
emerging, sir . .

Westmoreland nods, silent for a beat Then:

WESTMORELAND

There's been a development I need to
tell you about, Ray It can't leave
this room

Peers nods. Westmoreland takes out A LETTER, hands it to Peers

WESTMORELAND (cont'd)

From Henderson. . .

Peers frowns as he takes the letter. As he begins to read:

HENDERSON'S VOICE

Dear General Westmoreland Following the
My Lai operation of March 16, 1968, I
initiated a command inquiry based on an
eyewitness report which suggested that
noncombatants had been killed in "wild
shooting" by ground troops.

INT. HENDERSON'S STUDY - NORFOLK, VIRGINIA - NIGHT (DECEMBER 1969)

Henderson sits in his study, writing the letter in the dead of night

HENDERSON'S VOICE

As I could not substantiate these claims,
I advised my Division Commander that such
acts did not occur. This judgment was
mine, and mine alone.

He looks into the dark for a beat then continues.

HENDERSON'S VOICE (cont'd)

Consequently, I urge the Army, while its
investigations are still ongoing, to
announce its findings and assign
responsibility for these failures to me,
and solely me.

(beat)

Such a decision is urgently needed in the
interest of strengthening the American
people's confidence in its Army, and to
halt the growing disenchantment within
the junior officer corps. Respectfully,
Oran K. Henderson Colonel, Infantry.

INT. OFFICE - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - CONTINUED

Peers hands the letter back to Westmoreland. The two men study each other for a beat, each trying to gauge the other's reaction. Then:

PEERS

My work here is not complete . . And I
have more testimony coming in from DC.

WESTMORELAND

I'm not asking for an answer now, or for
you to halt anything . . . I just needed you
to be aware of this . . . I think some of
Henderson's ideas have merit

PEERS

(beat)
Yes, sir.

WESTMORELAND

Come see me when you're back in DC.

Peers nods. With that, Westmoreland exits, leaving the door open

Peers remains behind, looking after his commander. Thompson soon approaches, curious about the meeting.

THOMPSON

What was that all about?

PEERS

(evasive)
Nothing.

With that, Peers walks away. HOLD ON Thompson as he wonders. After a beat, SMASH TO--

EXT. VIETNAMESE JUNGLE - THOMPSON'S CRASH SITE - DAY (AUGUST 1968)

--the aftermath of the crash that opened our film. Thompson, his uniform soaked in blood, fights to free himself from the wreckage of his chopper, grimacing from the pain in his back and legs, his vision searing in and out of RED.

The wreckage is catching fire, and he can hear the Vietcong nearing through the jungle

Finally, Thompson manages to free himself. He grabs his CAR-15 and crawls out of the wreckage. He tries to get up and run, but his legs won't work

Almost passing out from the effort, Thompson crawls for cover behind a sand dune just as SIX VIETCONG GUERRILLAS emerge from the jungle

Thompson stays low, out of sight, fighting to remain conscious. His vision keeps going in and out of RED, all sense of time slipping. He can see the VC head the other way

Thompson loses consciousness, his vision going completely RED

Again, into that red emerges THE IMAGE FROM THE OPENING OF THE FILM:

A SOLDIER LIFTING A BLOODIED VIETNAMESE BABY IN THE AIR, smoke shrouding the surroundings. But now, through that smoke, we can distinguish BODIES on the ground--

INT. OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - NIGHT (DECEMBER 1969)

--THOMPSON jolts awake from his nightmare on a cot in his quarters in Quang Ngai. Darkness outside.

He is covered in sweat, his heart pounding from the dream. Thompson reaches for the flask on his night stand. It's empty.

Just then-- A SOUND FROM OUTSIDE causes Thompson to freeze:

FOOTSIEPS. Creaking across the terrace. Quiet. Stealthy. Approaching. And then: the sound of something being unwrapped from plastic and dropped on the ground.

Slowly, careful not to make a sound, Thompson gets out of bed, wincing from the pain in his back.

His heart really pounding now, the young aviator makes his way across the dark room to a chair holding his uniform and sidearm. Only an ominous silence outside now.

Wearing only his T-shirt and underpants, Thompson quietly takes his gun and edges toward the door, trying to see outside his windows. Only darkness there.

Thompson unlocks the safety on his gun and opens the door. No one there. Except for a grim gift left at his threshold:

A MUTILATED RAT. Guttled open, with WARRANT OFFICER'S INSIGNIA pinned to it. Off Thompson--

INT. BAR - QUANG NGAI - NIGHT

Thompson sits in a secluded corner, drunk, empty glasses on the table. A VIETNAMESE PROSTITUTE (20) in his lap, grinding against him.

At nearby tables, other GI's also fool around. Christmas decorations glimmer incongruously from the bar walls.

Despite the Vietnamese girl's best efforts, there is only growing self-loathing and pain on Thompson's face over what he's doing, even as he tries to let it go and just enjoy the physical intimacy.

But he can't. As the girl unzips Thompson's pants and reaches for his penis to stimulate it, he stops her.

THOMPSON
No... I'm sorry. I'm sorry...

Thompson gently lifts her off, and pays her. The girl studies him for a beat, not comprehending. Then, she leaves. Off Thompson, staring after her, downing more scotch--

EXT. STREET - QUANG NGAI - LATER

The wee hours of the night. Thompson stumbles back toward the old school building, his earlier concerns about safety lost in a soothing, oblivion-bringing haze.

But along a deserted alley near the old school, Thompson suddenly hears someone following him. He tries to see, but can't, the alley dark, his vision blurred by booze.

THOMPSON
Who's-- Who's out there?

Thompson's vision finally clears enough to reveal A YOUNG LIEUTENANT standing in the shadows. Thompson's instantly wary, ready to go for his gun. But he then sees the Lieutenant looks scared, as well.

THOMPSON (cont'd)
Whaddya want?

LIEUTENANT
You're Thompson, right? You're here with that General?

Thompson says nothing, still wary.

LIEUTENANT (cont'd)
I... I know some things.

THOMPSON
About what?

LIEUTENANT
About My Lai. About why it happened.

INT. OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - LATER

Still dark as Peers, Thompson, Feher and Thorne have gathered around the scared young Lieutenant in a former classroom to hear his story. Peers glances darkly at Thompson, who's sobered up some, but still reeks of scotch.

FREEMAN

My name's Tom Freeman... Everything I'm gonna tell you has gotta be off the record

PEERS

Go ahead, Lieutenant

Freeman looks at the investigators, paranoid and haunted:

FREEMAN

I knew Lt. Colonel Barker. At the time of the My Lai operation, I'd been assigned by Division as a junior intelligence adviser to 2nd ARVN Division in Quang Ngai, the Province Interrogation Center
(beat)

We were supposed to be in charge of the intel for the division, but the show was really run behind the scenes by this CIA guy, Ramsdell. Barker and his intel chief, Kotouc, were both buddies with him, I saw them there quite a bit.

He pauses, troubled. Then:

FREEMAN (cont'd)

Ramsdell was in charge of a CIA program called Phoenix, something they ran with a Special Branch of the National Police...

INT. PROVINCE INTERROGATION CENTER - QUANG NGAI - NIGHT (1968)

FREEMAN sits at his desk, watches as members of the Vietnamese National Police drag in FIVE HOODED VILLAGERS, screaming orders at them, herding them toward the basement

Entering behind the hooded captives, ROBERT RAMSDELL (40's), imposing, in civilian clothes, clearly in charge. Over this:

FREEMAN'S VOICE

They had these lists of suspected VC collaborators, "Blacklists," they called them. They'd go into villages in the middle of the night and grab people and bring 'em in for interrogation. That was done in the basement... You could hear screaming, but us regular Army guys were never allowed down there.

Off SCREAMS beginning downstairs--

INT OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - CONTINUED

Freeman pauses, increasingly haunted. Peers studies the young officer skeptically. He soon continues:

FREEMAN

But there was one time. One night,
Ramsdell came running up and told me to
go find an Army doctor and bring 'em over
immediately. So I did.

INT. PROVINCE INTERROGATION CENTER - QUANG NGAI - NIGHT (1968)

Freeman leads an ARMY DOCTOR down to a basement with naked light bulbs and stained floors. Near a set of small cells, RAMSDELL waits in blood-stained civvies with BARKER and KOTOUK. Ramsdell leads the doctor inside a cell as Barker looks at Freeman:

BARKER

Get back topside, Lieutenant.

Before he does, Freeman catches a glimpse inside the cell:

A NAKED 18-YEAR-OLD VIETNAMESE MAN hangs suspended from ropes. Bruises and brand marks cover his body, and he is bleeding profusely from his mouth. One of his eyes is dislocated from its socket. The other pleads with Freeman as the door shuts--

INT. OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - 1969 - CONTINUED

The sight still remains in Freeman's eyes

FREEMAN

I never saw anyone come out of that
basement. I heard Kotouc liked to get
personally involved in the field, to cut
off fingers--

Peers interrupts, visibly rankled by the details.

PEERS

Why are you telling us this?

FREEMAN

*Because this is where Barker's intel on
My Lai came from. And it was wrong*

He looks at the investigators intently.

FREEMAN (cont'd)

Every Army Intel guy put the 48th VC
battalion 15 clicks west of My Lai, where
they were still recovering from losses
during Tet.

(MORE)

FREEMAN (cont'd)

But based on what the CIA got through Phoenix, they insisted that the battalion was headquartered in the village. These people would've said anything under torture. But Kotouc and Barker bought it all. They'd twice tried to trap the 48th and failed. This was their chance.
(beat)

Ramsdell bragged he had a 'black book' for every village in the province. I know he had one for My Lai--

Peers looks over the young Lieutenant, openly skeptical now:

PEERS

Let me tell you something, Lieutenant:
I'm a former CIA man. And this is not how we do things--

Next to Peers, Thompson is growing visibly impatient.

PEERS (cont'd)

I've done two tours with the company--

FREEMAN

Not here. How do you think the VC were able to retake this whole area so soon after the attack on My Lai? Because we attacked the wrong place. And afterwards, the CIA guys helped cover it all up. To protect their program

Peers is still clearly not convinced. Freeman looks to the others.

FREEMAN (cont'd)

There's a guy you should find. He was in Charlie Company. He was brought to the base hospital in Chu Lai about a year ago, just before his tour was about to end. He was half-dead from jungle rot. The doctors said he should've been brought in months before

PEERS

Why should we talk to him?

FREEMAN

Because they say he had to flee his unit on a supply chopper to get medical treatment, General. Rumor is, they tried to kill him after My Lai because he wouldn't participate

Peers' eyes go almost involuntarily to Thompson

FREEMAN (cont'd)
His name is Bernhardt, Mike Bernhardt

Freeman looks at the investigators intently

FREEMAN (cont'd)
One last thing: You need to be very careful, all of you. Everyone's involved in this. Everyone-- all the way to the top. Nothing went on in the Americal without General Koster's permission

Peers studies Freeman, his eyes darkening at the last remark

PEERS
Thank you, Lieutenant

He nods for Thorne to lead the man out. As Thorne does, Peers turns to Feher and Thompson. Shaking his head:

PEERS (cont'd)
I'm surprised he didn't have Richard Nixon himself ordering the torture . .

Thompson looks at him, fed up.

THOMPSON
Can I ask you something? Why're you so inclined to believe Koster's innocent in all of this?

PEERS
Why the hell are you so inclined to believe him guilty-- because he likes dinner parties? I like dinner parties. I know the man

FEHER
And I'm becoming certain Barker never conducted an investigation or wrote a report. The only people who've ever mentioned it are Koster and Henderson. If they had something better to cover their asses with than Henderson's two-pager, they would've produced it by now

Feher can see Peers doesn't wanna hear it, but presses on.

FEHER (cont'd)
Everyone says they were following orders: The men. Calley. Medina. Barker. Henderson. How high does it go?

Peers slams his palm on the table.

PEERS

My team will find Bernhardt. You just worry about finding some more goddamn eyewitnesses!

With that, Peers storms out. Off Feher and Thompson--

INT OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - DAWN

A grey dawn pales the sky, the shadows over Quang Ngai slowly lifting as Peers sits in his quarters. He stares outside, his expression dark, still clearly rattled by the confrontation.

Peers' phone rings. The caller is Sam Koster, speaking from West Point, where night is falling. INTERCUT:

KOSTER

Ray, it's Sam. Just checking to see if there was anything I could do to help while you're out there.

PEERS

No. This is something I have to do myself.

Koster senses something

KOSTER

Everything alright, Ray?

Peers is silent for a long beat. Then:

PEERS

Just learning a lot of things I never considered possible that I now have to consider...

KOSTER

Feels like a betrayal

PEERS

What?

KOSTER

Learning those things. About men you've grown proud of, grown to love... Breaks your heart.

PEERS

It does.

KOSTER

But you've always been a fighter, done the tough jobs. I've always admired you, Ray

At this, a mixture of emotions crosses Peers' face. Outside their windows, light and dark stand for a moment in an equal balance.

PEERS

Good night, Sam. I have to go.

He hangs up. Off Peers staring at the shadowy dawn, DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CID COMMUNICATIONS ROOM - A FEW DAYS LATER

In the windowless communications room, THE TELEX pounds out:

TO GENERAL PEERS: EYES ONLY: BERNHARDT STILL IN SERVICE. TESTIMONY FOLLOWS.

Off the words--

EXT. BUDDHIST CEMETERY - QUANG NGAI - NIGHT (MARCH 16, 1968)

Fog creeps in over a small cemetery by the South China Sea, where Charlie Company has taken defensive positions for the night. The moon is large and bright in the sky, revealing sleeping bags and tents amidst small Buddhist shrines and burial mounds.

It is the night after My Lai. As we survey the men, we see that most of their fatigues are stained with blood. Some of the men are asleep, others play cards, write letters.

Super: Charlie Company Night Defensive Position. March 16, 1968.

We move past the men to stop on a soldier who stays at a distance from the others. He has handsome, stoic features.

This is MICHAEL BERNHARDT (24). No blood on his clothes. His smooth-shaven features are angry and troubled as he writes in a small diary.

We notice some of the men are looking at him with dark expressions, whispering among themselves.

Bernhardt looks up from his writing to see Medina standing before him, the Captain's features largely hidden in shadow.

MEDINA

What's you writing, bud'?

BERNHARDT

(closing the diary)

Nothin', Cap'.

Medina studies him, his eyes cold.

MEDINA

Better make it that way, Bernhardt. Some of the men are talking. Saying you're thinking about writing your congressman about what happened today.

BERNHARDT

I'm not.

MEDINA (CONT'D)

Good. I'd say nothin' to no one unless you wanna walk point from now on. Understand?

INT PENTAGON INTERVIEW ROOM - DECEMBER 1969

BERNHARDT, now in Sergeant's uniform, sits with Peers' DC team, an air of cynicism about him.

BERNHARDT

I guess I had a reputation as a trouble-maker... I'd written about problems in the Company before. But this time, I never did write. But I walked point... Thought every day I'd get a bullet in the back.

COL. WILSON

Were you present when Colonel Henderson visited the company the day after the attack?

BERNHARDT

No. I was sent away on an errand.

COL. WILSON

You never spoke to him?

BERNHARDT

No. After Pinkville, they just kept us in the field. For months. I think they were betting on us getting killed so no one could ever talk about what'd happened.

COL. WILSON

After you were admitted to the base hospital in Chu Lai, Sgt Bernhardt, did you attempt to make a report?

BERNHARDT

To whom? Everyone already knew

COL. WILSON
And after you returned to the United
States, Fort Dix?

Bernhardt looks over the shadowy faces of Peers' panel

BERNHARDT
What is it with you people . . Who was I
gonna go to without evidence? My word
against Colonels and Generals-- Come
on

Colonel Wilson mulls over the reply. Then:

COL. WILSON
Let's turn to the briefing before the
attack.

BERNHARDT
It was the night before. . . There was a
memorial service We'd lost three men that
day, Sergeant Cox and two others, they'd
tripped a booby trap near Highway 1 . . .

EXT. LANDING ZONE DOITIE - SUNDOWN (MARCH 15, 1968)

Charlie Company has gathered for a memorial service as the sun sets

Everyone's head is bowed as a CHAPLAIN speaks. Near Bernhardt, we see
Paul Meadlo crying bitterly. In the growing shadows around them:
Stanley, Hodges, Widmer, Simpson, and Maples, their expressions raw
with grief and anger. The sermon plays quietly in the background, as:

BERNHARDT'S VOICE
We were all very upset, and it wasn't just
about those three guys. . . One Sunday
morning before, we'd walked right into a
minefield. We were in the middle of it
before someone tripped the first one.

FLASH TO SILENT IMAGES of Charlie Company crossing a field in Quang
Ngai as AN EXPLOSION RIPS APART ONE MAN, then ANOTHER

ALTERNATE BETWEEN SHOTS OF THE MEN AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE AND THE
SAME MEN TRAPPED IN THE MINE FIELD . . . screaming, crying. . . with
BLOOD and bits of FLESH splattered on their faces and clothes as
they try to remain still and not panic.

BERNHARDT'S VOICE (cont'd)
Every time someone tried to move or help
someone else, they'd go up.

One man, BOBBY WILSON, makes a run for it and triggers a MINE which
detonates right between his legs, CASTRATING HIM as Meadlo watches.

Through it all, that surreal silence, even as MEDINA and CALLEY scream at everyone to stay still

BERNHARDT'S VOICE (cont'd)

No one was the same after that...

At LZ Dottie, Charlie Company gathers around Medina and the three platoon leaders as the memorial service wraps. In the shadows, we also see Captain Kotouc, Barker's Intel Chief.

MEDINA

I know you're all angry, and so am I. But tomorrow is our chance to get even. Because we've finally found the enemy.

He picks up a shovel, draws the diagram of My Lai in the sand.

MEDINA (cont'd)

Here... in "Pinkville"

And we now get a portion of his briefing that we didn't see before:

MEDINA (cont'd)

We're gonna wipe this place off the face of the earth. Buildings, wells, livestock. Everything goes, and I mean everything.

A GI speaks up from the crowd.

GI

What about civilians?

MEDINA

There will be no civilians. Anyone left will be an active collaborator.

Calley looks over his men for a reaction. The dead cold of his eyes is reflected right back at him.

MEDINA (cont'd)

According to our intel, the 48th local VC has been using this hamlet as a base to mount operations for months.

INT PEERS' QUARTERS - QUANG NCAI - NIGHT - DECEMBER 1969

Another sleepless night as Peers finishes studying the transcript of Bernhardt's interview, his expression dark. Over this:

COL. WILSON'S VOICE

Medina said any civilians left would be active collaborators?

BERNHARDT'S VOICE

Yes.

Peers places the transcript in his safe, on top of a growing pile, as:

COL WILSON'S VOICE

How many VC did you encounter?

BERNHARDT'S VOICE

None

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHWESTERN EDGE - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968)

CHARLIE COMPANY unloads from the liftships, smoke from the preparatory fire still lingering. The men are all young, few older than 21. All wired and ready to go.

Bernhardt unloads near his Platoon leader, Lt. Brooks, sees Medina speak to a radio:

MEDINA

LZ is cold. Repeat: LZ is cold

GUNSHIP PILOT'S VOICE

(filtered over radio)

Copy that: LZ is cold. LZ is cold.

CALLEY'S PLATOON starts to move toward the village. The men are sweating, tense and paranoid, watching for signs of the unseen enemy that's been blowing apart their buddies. Among them, Stanley, Meadlo and Maples.

Simultaneously, BROOKS starts to lead his Platoon north. Bernhardt follows, nearing MEDINA, who stands with Widmer and Sgt. Minh.

Medina is motioning for his men to form a defensive perimeter, when suddenly--

AN OLD FARMER emerges through the smoke from the burning village, frantically waving his hands at Calley's Platoon, trying to tell them the village is friendly--

CRACK! One of Calley's men shoots him in the head

The others OPEN FIRE reflexively, spraying the treeline. From the choppers above, it's impossible to tell who's firing. Medina's radio comes to life:

GUNSHIP PILOT'S VOICE (cont d)

(filtered over radio)

You are receiving fire! You are receiving fire! LZ is hot, LZ is hot

THE GUNSHIPS OPEN FIRE WITH DEAFENING CLATTER. Bernhardt yells to Medina to be heard over the firing:

BERNHARDT
'Cap, they're wrong! We've got no
incoming! Tell them!

Medina motions for him to leave the line

MEDINA
Hey, Bernhardt, get over here! I saw a
box by the fields when we landed, go
check it out. Could be VC gear

He indicates a WOODEN BOX at a distance near the landing area. In the sky, Bernhardt can already see the next set of liftships approach with the remaining men of Charlie Company.

BERNHARDT
This is wrong . .

MEDINA
Do it now.

Off Bernhardt falling back as ordered, DISSOLVE TO:

INT BAR - QUANG NGAI - NIGHT - DECEMBER 1969

A gloomy Peers sits in a mostly deserted bar, drinking. Outside the windows, a monsoon washes over the streets, turning everything to mud. The wet darkness is pierced only by the distant flashes and booms of ever-present artillery.

Thompson enters and heads straight for Peers upon spotting him.

The young pilot is clearly excited. He sits down, dripping wet, takes out several PHOTOS he's been shielding under his coat . . all from the set Camell sent over to the CID, of the choppers taking off from LZ Dottie.

THOMPSON
I found something, General. Remember how we weren't able to locate people from the 174th? Well, based on the rotor markings on these photos, some of the liftships actually came from the 123rd--

Peers nods, distant, not affected. Thompson studies the General, not understanding.

THOMPSON (cont'd)
I heard you got Bernhardt's testimony. You got air and ground evidence now, so why aren't you--

As Peers looks at the young pilot, something crosses in his eyes:
shame And it hits Thompson:

THOMPSON (cont'd)
 So that's why Westmoreland was here .
 You're thinking about burying all this
 (flaring up)
 To protect the fucking Army--

PEERS
 Everything's not always black or white,
 Thompson! The Army's not some abstract
thing... It's you, it's me, it's every man
 in uniform out there. It's what built this
 country, defends this country...

He holds Thompson's eyes, trying to make him understand

PEERS (cont'd)
 ...It's what I've given my life to And
this hurts it.

Thompson looks at Peers with deep disappointment.

THOMPSON
 Well they sure chose the right man for the
 job .

He tosses the photos at Peers.

THOMPSON (cont'd)
 There-- now you can bury that, too...

He rises to leave, holds the General's eyes

THOMPSON (cont'd)
 Remember back in DC when you said you
 were gonna get to the truth? Well, there
 it is . You're no better than the people
 behind this...

With that, Thompson walks out. Peers stares after the young pilot
 for a beat, then SWIPES his drink off the table in sudden anger

He turns to look at the photos, wrestling with a decision he knows
 must be made.

After a long beat, off the photos, DISSOLVE TO--

INT HENDERSON'S CHOPPER - OVER MY LAI - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968)

Smoke shrouds the village below and gunfire echoes steadily as Henderson flies over My Lai. Our view inside the chopper is wider now. and we see that with the Colonel are not just his pilot and radio operator, but THREE OTHER HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS.

They all watch as, through the smoke, bodies float into view like blood-splattered ghosts, scattered all over the village.

ADCOCK

Fuck me... Sorry, Colonel.

Henderson then sees a large pile of BODIES along the main trail, the ones from Haerberle's photograph. He grows ashen, swallows hard, takes the radio:

HENDERSON

Coyote Six, this is Rawhide 6 What the fuck is happening down there? Get this shit under control immediately.

BARKER'S VOICE

(filtered over radio)

Roger that.

EXT AMERICAL DIVISION AIRFIELDS - MORNING - DECEMBER 1969

A solemn, subdued Peers sits near the Division airfields. With the General are Michael Adcock, Henderson's RTO, and LAWRENCE KUBERT (20's), an Operations Sergeant from 123rd Aviation

ADCOCK

We all saw the bodies... I mean, fuck, there was no way not to see.

PEERS

Who else was on board?

ADCOCK

Major McKnight from operations, Lt. Colonel Luper, artillery, and Lt Colonel McLachlan, I think

Peers nods, turns to Kubert

PEERS

What were your duties, Sergeant?

KUBERT

I was the Op Sergeant in charge of the 123rd's radios at the Task Force TOC.

PEERS

Did you hear Henderson's order?

KUBERT

Yes There was a lot of radio traffic about bodies on the ground, all the aeroscouts had seen 'em. I made special notice of it in my after-action report. Copies went to both Brigade and Division, but I don't know what became of 'em.

(eyes narrowing)

Everyone knew something was wrong with the mission

INT. TASK FORCE CENTER OPERATIONS TENT - LANDING ZONE DOTTIE - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968)

Kubert monitors the radios while watching the darkening expressions of the Task Force STAFF OFFICERS. There's a lot of whispering, aides and junior officers being led out

KUBERT'S VOICE

...all throughout that morning, they kept clearing "nonessential personnel" from the center operations tent

Soon, GENERAL KOSTER enters, looking grim. A STAFF OFFICER comes over to Kubert, takes over the radios. Indicates for him to leave.

KUBERT'S VOICE (cont'd)

When Koster landed, we were all thrown out..

EXT. AMERICAL DIVISION AIRFIELDS - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

Peers looks at Kubert.

PEERS

Could you hear what was said?

KUBERT

No. But later that afternoon, Colonel Henderson landed and came over.

INT. TASK FORCE CENTER OPERATIONS TENT - AFTERNOON (MARCH 16, 1968)

The afternoon following the attack on My Lai. Kubert is back at his post as a tense Colonel Henderson enters, picks up a radio:

HENDERSON

Medina, this is Rawhide 6.

MEDINA (V.O.)
(filtered over radio)
Medina.

HENDERSON
What's your position, over?

MEDINA (V.O.)
We're about 2000 meters east of target

Henderson closes his eyes for a beat. Then:

HENDERSON
I want you to turn around and retrace
your steps. Go back

Kubert exchanges a glance with a few of the other TOC personnel.

MEDINA (V.O.)
Say again, Rawhide 6?

HENDERSON
I want you to return to Pinkville, and get
me an accurate body count . . . Of everyone

Silence over the airways. Then:

MEDINA (V.O.)
Rawhide 6, respectfully, can't recommend
that. We're preparing for night defensive
position--

HENDERSON
Negative, Captain. I want you to return
to the village, and conduct a new count,
determine--

Suddenly, there is a break over the airways. Then:

VOICE
(filtered over radio)
Rawhide 6, this is Sabre 6, what's going
on?

EXT AMERICAL DIVISION AIRFIELDS - MORNING - DECEMBER 1969

Peers stares at Kubert

PEERS
You're certain? Sabre 6?

KUBERT
The old man himself. Koster.

INT. TASK FORCE OPERATIONS CENTER - DAY (MARCH 16, 1968)

Henderson tenses up at the sound of his commander's voice.

HENDERSON

Sabre 6, I am trying to reposition the troops to conduct an accurate body count--

KOSTER (V.O.)

Medina, how many civilian dead do you say you have?

MEDINA (V.O.)

Between twenty and twenty-eight

KOSTER (V.O.)

That sounds about right

Henderson leans in

HENDERSON

Sabre 6, I really think--

Koster cuts him off

KOSTER (V.O.)

Rawhide 6: there's no reason to send them back to that mess, is there? I don't wanna lose any more men today.

After a long beat, giving up:

HENDERSON

I guess you're right, sir.

KOSTER (V.O.)

Medina, keep your existing position.

MEDINA (V.O.)

Roger that, Sabre 6.

Henderson lowers his radio, humiliated

EXT. AMERICAL DIVISION AIRFIELDS - MORNING - DECEMBER 1969

Peers sits silent, troubled. Adcock and Kubert exchange a glance over his expression, not accustomed to seeing a General like this. Then:

KUBERT

There's one more thing, General. There may be a tape.

PEERS

A tape?

KUBERT

Of the radio traffic from that morning, made by the TOC duty officer, he liked to do that for training purposes. I don't know what radios he got, but some people sure were freaked out, that some of it might've been caught on tape.

PEERS

Do you remember the duty officer's name?

KUBERT

Lewellen . I think it was Lewellen.

Peers nods, falls silent again. Adcock and Kubert realize the interview is over, get ready to leave. As they start to head out:

PEERS

Is there a way to determine what Koster saw from the air?

ADCOCK

You'd need a fly-over. He was higher than us, at least at 1,800-2,000 feet.

Off the beat--

INT THOMPSON'S QUARTERS - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - LATER

Thompson opens his door to reveal Peers. The two men stare at each other for a long, tense beat. Then, simply:

PEERS

I need your help.

Off Thompson, still skeptical--

INT RECONNAISSANCE CHOPPER - AMERICAL DIVISION AIRFIELDS - LATER

Thompson and Peers are readying to take off in a small observation chopper, just like the one in which Thompson was shot down. The mood is bristling. After a beat:

PEERS

Thompson, I--

THOMPSON

Let's just get this done.

Peers nods, falling silent. As Thompson is about to start the engine, A WARRANT OFFICER from the Division rushes over. Peers opens his door.

WARRANT OFFICER

General It's not safe for you to fly
over My Lai The area is not secure

In the distance, Peers can see General Donaldson watching them from
the edge of the airfields

PEERS

Then tell Donaldson to give me two
gunships. We leave in five

INT. RECONNAISSANCE CHOPPER - AERIAL OVER MY LAI - LATER

Thompson flies Peers toward My Lai, two gunships escorting them. The
flight is tense, wordless. The young aviator watches both the jungle
and the gunships for signs of danger

As the village approaches, Thompson's expression darkens from the
memories of March 16. He looks at the altimeter

THOMPSON

This is it... Koster's altitude

He circles them over the village It's distant Largely barren of
life, only the three grave mounds standing out in the fields. Peers
watches intently.

FOR AN INSTANT, THE ATTACK SCENE FLASHES ON SCREEN: *The silhouettes
of Brigade and Task Force choppers circle underneath. Below them, My
Lai is on fire. Smoke darkens the air, shrouds everything.*

BACK TO THE PRESENT, holding close on Peers, as:

PEERS

It's possible he saw. But it's not proof.

INT. RECONNAISSANCE CHOPPER - AMERICAN DIVISION AIRFIELDS - LATER

Peers and Thompson land. As they unstrap themselves, a breathless
Feher and Thorne rush to the chopper.

FEHER

General, we've found more survivors.

EXI. REFUGEE CAMP - QUANG NGAI - LATER

Another bleak settlement of tin huts and mud alleys. Peers and
Thompson follow Feher and Thorne to a large AWNING made from CAMO
NETTING, where Army field tables have been set up for interviews.
Light pierces through the net in dramatic beams

Peers and Feher's two staffs are there, working in teams with
Vietnamese interpreters, taking simultaneous testimony from SIX
SURVIVORS A long line of more people wait to tell their stories.

HOLD ON THEIR FACES as Peers stares at the multitude of survivors. His attention is soon drawn to a woman giving her testimony:

HA THI QUY (30), a lone widow with visible scars from the attack. Her face is a mask of unbearable grief as she recounts:

QUY/INTERPRETER

I tried to hold and protect them.. I did everything I could, but I couldn't save them, couldn't. Why? Why did this happen?

Quy looks to Peers for an answer. Her grief and rage are so intense the General has to look away. He stares at the other survivors, sees

TRINH, a 10-year-old girl with sad, haunted eyes; PHAM PHON (30), a farmer who cries as he holds his daughter; NGUYEN THI DOC (70), a grandmother disfigured by burns and bullet wounds. Their voices come to Peers simultaneously in English and Vietnamese:

THE SURVIVORS/INTERPRETERS

(in English and Vietnamese)

my sister was lying there, naked.

I covered her mouth, begged her...

.. shot my children and then set fire to..

SOUND FADES as Peers continues to stare at the scene, overcome.

OUR SENSE OF TIME BLURS. More SURVIVORS take their seats, among them Vietnamese SGT. MINH from Medina's command group, Thorne taking his testimony.

HOLD ON PEERS AS WE DISSOLVE THROUGH MOMENTS FROM THE INVESTIGATION. TIME SLOWING DOWN:

PEERS studying transcripts at night in his quarters. FORMER MEMBERS OF CHARLIE COMPANY walking down Pentagon hallways, testifying before Peers' team. MORE SURVIVORS giving testimony in the refugee camp.

SOUND FADES TO NOTHING. TIME SLOWS FURTHER AS PEERS SEES A VIETNAMESE NUN ENTER THE WITNESS AWNING WITH A LITTLE GIRL. SONG

For a moment, Peers stares at the nun as if seeing a ghost. *her features eerily reminiscent of the nun whom he saw during his dream and again in Saigon.*

And off the sight of her and the child. in utter silence, the dam suddenly BREAKS. And--

EXT VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHERN SECTOR - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968)

--WE'RE THERE. IN MY LAI. SONG, now no more than three years old, stands with her PARENTS amidst the panic that has broken out in the part of My Lai worst hit by the artillery fire. Many homes are burning, others blasted apart

THE VILLAGERS are frantically trying to find shelter in home-made cellars, others fleeing for the highway south of the village.

Song's parents grab her and flee east as they hear the Americans approach, firing--

INT. COMMAND CHOPPERS - AERIAL OVER MY LAI

From their command choppers, BARKER, HENDERSON and KOSTER watch the beginning of the assault as smoke from the fires and bombardment shrouds the scene

INT. SHARK GUNSHIPS - SIMULTANEOUSLY

The gunships that accompanied the lift begin their run over My Lai

The pilots can see Calley's men nearing the entrance to the village proper below, their guns crackling amidst the smoke.

Flying south toward the Highway, A DOOR GUNNER spots A LONE VIETCONG GUERRILLA running below, fleeing from the village

The gunner OPENS FIRE, cutting the man down in the jungle adjacent to the highway

EXT VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHWESTERN EDGE

From his command post near the southwestern edge of My Lai, Medina / acknowledges a radio transmission of the kill.

MEDINA

... Copy that.

He turns to LT. GEOFFREY LACROSS, the rookie commander of the 3rd Platoon, which is holding the defensive perimeter

MEDINA (cont'd)

LaCross, we got VC down near the highway
Take a squad, recover the weapon

LaCross nods and heads over with a few men as Bernhardt approaches Medina with a small wooden box.

BERNHARDT

Found your box. Just a radio and some
medical supplies

MEDINA

Just? It's fuckin' proof

He gets on the horn again

MEDINA (cont'd)
 (into radio)
 Watch your flanks The enemy's here.

INT. THOMPSON'S OBSERVATION CHOPPER - SIMULTANEOUSLY

From their chopper, hovering over My Lai, THOMPSON, COLBURN and ANDREOTTA watch for signs of the enemy They see none.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHERN SECTOR

CALLEY and his men enter the burning village, firing. Everyone's tense, angry Near the Lt. is his radio man CHARLES SLEDGE. Among the others we see: HARRY STANLEY, PAUL MEADLO and ROBERT MAPLES, the Black machine gunner.

CALLEY
 Remember: It's us or them They're
 nothin' but pieces of flesh.

FRIGHTENED VILLAGERS emerge into view through the smoke They try to greet the Americans, bowing their heads in submissive gestures, but--

--CALLEY'S MEN OPEN FIRE. CUTTING THEM NEARLY IN HALF

EXT JUNGLE SOUTH OF THE VILLAGE - NEAR HIGHWAY 521

Near where the jungle meets the highway, LaCross and his men reach the DEAD VIETCONG GUERRILLA, a smoke grenade burning weakly next to the body. No weapon.

As LaCross checks the dead man for documents, his men suddenly OPEN FIRE nearby The Young Lieutenant turns to see them kill FIFTEEN VILLAGERS trying to flee down the highway

LaCross stares at dead. All women and children. He swallows hard, then radios Medina.

LACROSS
 Captain, I've got, uh, 15 KIA here.

MEDINA (V O.)
 (over radio, filtered)
 Copy that

EXT VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHERN SECTOR

Calley's men have split into squads and pairs for their sweep of the hamlet The men are sweating, watching for any movement. All around us, heavy smoke and sporadic gunfire, ghostly shapes of hootches and trees emerging into view

Harry Stanley makes his way forward with his buddy ROY WOOD. Machine gunner Robert Maples is near GREG OLSEN. As Olsen crosses a path, he suddenly sees A TERRIFIED COW come charging at him.

He screams and OPENS FIRE, shooting the animal in the face.

INT THOMPSON'S CHOPPER - AERIAL OVER HIGHWAY 521

Thompson and his team circle over the highway leading out of My Lai. Ahead, they see a group of VILLAGERS fleeing toward Quang Ngai.

Seeing the chopper approach, TWO MEN IN BLACK PAJAMAS separate from the group and run for the fields.

Thompson picks up his radio, signals the gunships above him.

THOMPSON

Danny, Brian, got two VC suspects. Moving to intercept.

He flies over the men and brings the chopper down, Colburn securing the suspects at gunpoint. The VC surrender, stripping off their shirts to show they have no weapons.

EXT VILLAGE OF MY LAI - NORTHERN SECTOR - SIMULTANEOUSLY

LIEUTENANT BROOKS and the Second Platoon enter the northern sector of the village. Among his men are VARNADO SIMPSON and KENNETH HODGES.

This part of the village has not been hit by artillery, and is mostly made up of houses instead of huts. Ahead, the Platoon can see frightened villagers, all women and children.

BROOKS

No prisoners.

Seeing the Americans' cold expressions, the villagers begin to flee. Brooks yells at them in Vietnamese to come back:

BROOKS (cont'd)

Dai Lay! Dai Lay!

As some do, his men OPEN FIRE, cutting them down. The Second Platoon then begins their sweep, searching and burning the houses, screaming VC come out:

BROOKS' MEN

VC di ra! VC di ra!

From one house, two GI's drag out ten-year-old IRINH, her MOTHER, and her sister MUI (14).

Trinh tries to hide behind her mother's skirt, terrified, as the GI's look at them coldly, one checking out Trinh's 14-year-old sister and mother with approval. He turns to his buddy:

SECOND PLATOON GI
Let's not waste 'em yet

The other soldier nods, then indicates the family's WATER BUFFALOES in a stable nearby. As one of them moos at him, the two men begin SHOOTING THE ANIMALS as Trinh watches in horror

She soon can't bear it, and BREAKS FOR IT-- RUNNING BACK INSIDE HOUSE TO HIDE. Miraculously, neither GI sees her flee.

From inside the house, Trinh can soon hear her mother begin to scream outside. Trinh covers her ears.

INT GENERAL KOSTER'S CHOPPER - AERIAL OVER MY LAI

Koster flies high over the smoke-filled village, gunfire crackling steadily from below. Impossible to tell what he sees.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHERN SECTOR

Back in the Southern sector, Calley and his men continue their sweep. Less smoke here. Clearer to see.

Harry Stanley sees a YOUNG VIETNAMESE WOMAN with two children trying to hide. His buddy Roy Wood opens fire in their direction, but misses. Stanley angrily shoves Wood's weapon down.

STANLEY
What the fuck's the matter with you?
That's just a woman with kids.

Wood stares at him, as if the fact is only now hitting him.

STANLEY (cont'd)
Let's send her to Calley for screening
like we're supposed to.

As they do, they see a fellow Platoon member, ALLEN BOYCE, drag AN OLD VIETNAMESE MAN whimpering with fear from his hootch.

BOYCE
You VC, you old piece of shit? Huh? You
don't wanna talk to me? You wanna kill
me, you old fuck?

The old man clearly doesn't understand, merely whimpers in terror. Boyce pushes the man on the ground and BAYONETS him in the back.

BOYCE (cont'd)
You like that, you piece of shit?

As the old man tries to beg and shield himself, BOYCE stabs him repeatedly. Stanley stares, paling from the cruelty.

INT. HENDERSON'S CHOPPER - AERIAL OVER HIGHWAY 521

Meanwhile, Henderson flies over smoke-shrouded My Lai in his command chopper, approaching the highway. With him, again, are his pilot, RTO Adcock, and THREE OFFICERS

HENDERSON
TOC, this is Rawhide Six. Descending for
prisoner transfer

As they do, Henderson sees the FIFTEEN DEAD LaCross' men mowed down. Difficult to tell how they died as he passes

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - TRINH'S HOUSE

Back at her house, Trinh slowly comes out from her hiding place. She can hear distant gunfire, painful MOANING from outside

As Trinh peers out, she sees her sister Mui on the ground. *She's naked*. A GI is on top of her, raping her as he covers her mouth

HOLD ON TRINH as she watches, unable to do anything. A tear runs down her face as she has to witness the terrible ordeal. We only hear Mui's muffled, anguished whimpers, which seem to go on forever.

Then, the GI finishes, puts on his pants and SHOOTs MUI. He then calmly walks away.

More tears streaming down her little face, Trinh makes her way to her sister. But she is stopped by the sight of their MOTHER lying on their veranda, stabbed, blood covering her legs.

She is barely alive.

Trinh runs to her, takes her hand as her mother tries to speak, the words coming out in weak, blood-stained whispers.

FOR A BRIEF MOMENT, TIME SLOWS TO A STAND-STILL AS WE DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. REFUGEE CAMP - QUANG NGAI - DECEMBER 1969

TRINH, that almost catatonic stare in her eyes as she faces Peers and his investigators, a female interpreter translating her words:

TRINH/INTERPRETER
Mother said: Run. Run away and hide, so
you can live, I don't have much longer...
I love you, she said

HOLD ON PEERS as he shares Trinh's anguish, his eyes narrowing with emotion, as WE DISSOLVE BACK TO:

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - TRINH'S HOUSE - CONTINUED (MARCH 16, 1968)

NORMAL TIME RESUMES Trinh holds her mother's hand as she stops breathing. She tries to stir her. In Vietnamese:

TRINH

No. Mama.

But her mother is gone. Just then, Trinh hears the sounds of MORE SOLDIERS approaching. With more tears streaming down her face, she sneaks into hiding behind her family's stable.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHERN SECTOR

In the Southern Sector, Calley and his men continue their sweep east, setting hootches on fire and gathering villagers together, angrily dragging some out of cellars, others from their homes.

The villagers meekly follow the orders of the screaming soldiers as the GI's set their houses on fire. They are all led at gunpoint to join others in a group near a watchtower by the MAIN NORTH-SOUTH TRAIL that bisects the village.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - NORTHERN SECTOR

The Second Platoon sweeps of the northern part of My Lai. Varnado Simpson sees A YOUNG WOMAN take off from her hiding place, holding something. Startled, Simpson yells to Brooks:

SIMPSON

Runner!

BROOKS

Take her out, goddammit!

Simpson aims his rifle and FIRES, hitting the woman in the back. She falls down. He rushes over, turns the body over.

Simpson's round has exploded through her chest. She was holding a small child, whose face is half gone. Something snaps inside Simpson from the sight.

Nearby, SGT. KENNETH HODGES grabs a YOUNG GIRL from her hiding place.

HODGES

You little gook whore. Come here...

He pushes her inside one of the houses, tears off her pants.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHERN SECTOR - MAIN TRAIL

As sporadic gunfire echoes from all over the village, TRUONG NGU, the farmer whose testimony Peers previously doubted, tries to reach his family.

As he nears his house, he sees two GI's. He hides, only to see them drag out his elderly mother, his wife and three children, and lead them down the main trail

INT. BARKER'S COMMAND CHOPPER

Barker flies his chopper over the initial assault area, sees bodies strewn about, all women and children. Perhaps more than he expected Barker's expression darkens. He picks up the radio.

BARKER

Medina, what the hell is going on down there? Why aren't your men through?

EXI. MEDINA'S COMMAND POST - SOUTHWESTERN EDGE OF MY LAI

Medina gets Calley on the radio. INTERCUI between the command post and the main trail in the village:

MEDINA

Calley, what the fuck is taking so long?

Calley looks at the large group of villagers nearby. The hamlet watchtower looms in the background

CALLEY

Sir, I've got a large group of detainees here, slowing us down

MEDINA

Get rid of them. And move on

Medina hangs up and turns to his men

MEDINA (cont'd)

This is taking too long. Let's move in

Bernhardt turns to Medina, holds his eyes

BERNHARDT

There's no enemy, Cap'.

MEDINA

Fall in.

He looks to the rest of the men

MEDINA (cont'd)

Let's go!

Some of the men in the third platoon exchange dark glances as Bernhardt joins their ranks. They start to move in.

At the main trail, Calley hands the radio to Sledge, turns to PAUL MEADLO nearby.

CALLEY
Let's do it.

EXT VILLAGE OF MY LAI - NEAR MAIN TRAIL

Truong Ngu is slowly nearing the watchtower area when GUNFIRE begins It sounds like machine guns It goes on for a very long time.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHERN SECTOR

Further east, Harry Stanley, too, distinguishes the long stretches of machine gun fire. He and others from the First Platoon are searching hootches and cellars.

Stanley peers in a cellar to find A FAMILY OF FOUR IN HIDING.

Stanley stares at them. The family stares back, terrified. Stanley looks around him. No other GI's in sight. To the family, in his rough Vietnamese:

STANLEY
Run for the fields. Quick!

The family does. Stanley watches to make sure they get to safety.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHWESTERN EDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Medina's group enters the still-burning area where the troop penetration started. Calley is back on the radio.

CALLEY (V.O.)
(filtered over radio)
Sir, I wanna report 69 VC KIA.

MEDINA
Copy that.
(switching to Barker)
Coyote Six, add 69 VC to the list.

As the command group enters, they see a lot of dead strewn about. Women, children. Many shot at close range. Minh walks over to Medina, mindful of rank but barely containing his fury.

SGT MINH
Captain, why have your men done this?

MEDINA
Don't ask questions, Minh. Those were the orders.

Just then, Medina spots A YOUNG WOMAN trying to flee from her hiding place behind Minh. Medina takes out his pistol and fires at her several times. The woman falls, face down

Medina walks over, turns the body over with his foot. The woman lets out a moan. Medina shoots her several times He then turns to his men

MEDINA (cont'd)

Zippo this place Leave nothing standing

As Sgt Minh and Bernhardt watch, Medina's men get to work. They toss bodies and grenades into some of the remaining hootches, spraying others with gunfire, setting them aflame

Bernhardt doesn't partake. Anguished, he keeps his gun pointed toward the ground. One man notices, looks to Bernhardt suspiciously

THIRD PLATOON GI

Why ain't you firin', man?

Bernhardt raises his gun and goes to one hootch. He sprays a volley inside, aiming his gun so as not to hit anyone who might be hiding

The GI who questioned Bernhardt looks on. And then moves on. Anguish returns to Bernhardt's face. He watches as one of Medina's sets fire to THE VILLAGE TEMPLE

EXI. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - SOUTHERN SECTOR

Calley's platoon continues their sweep east, angrily pulling out more villagers from their hiding places. HA THI QUY is dragged out with her daughter HE and son DUC. The men of Charlie Company look at them warily, with suspicion.

PHAM PHON emerges voluntarily from a cellar with his wife IIET and their THREE CHILDREN. They're all rounded up.

EXI. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - NORTHERN SECTOR

In the northern sector, amidst the smoke and fires of burning homes:

MADNESS. VARNADO SIMPSON scalps a dead woman while a fellow GI cuts a still living LITTLE BOY's throat... Another GI stabs a squealing small pig over and over...

All around us, screaming, begging, crying-- all falling at deaf ears.

INT THOMPSON'S OBSERVATION CHOPPER

As Thompson and his crew return to circle over My Lai, they, too start to see bodies through the fading smoke in the southwestern part of the hamlet. The dead seem to be everywhere. Thompson pales.

THOMPSON

What the hell is going on down there?

INT. KOSTER'S CHOPPER - AERIAL OVER MY LAI

Inside his chopper higher up, a disturbed Koster watches the vast devastation, the smoke spreading everywhere, visible miles away. He turns to his pilot.

KOSTER

Fly me to Dottie I need to talk to the
TOC Staff

Off them circling away--

INT. BARKER'S COMMAND CHOPPER

Barker continues to fly deeper over the burning village, his eyes also darkening at the vast devastation. All the choppers circling around Barker's sweating now, picks up his radio.

BARKER

(into radio)

Medina, I told you to wrap this up.
Get it done Now.

EXI. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - EDGE OF EASTERN RICE FIELDS

Calley and his men have reached the edge of the rice fields east of the village. With them is now A SWELLING GROUP OF MORE THAN A HUNDRED VILLAGERS

Teams of GI's with machine guns guard the group, which includes Quy and her two children, the Pham family, and the little girl SONG and her parents.

THE VILLAGERS all watch as GI's drag an OLD BUDDHIST MONK to Calley. The old man is desperately trying to make himself understood. Just then, Calley's RTO Sledge rushes over.

SLEDGE

Sir, the 'Cap's on the horn

Calley motions for Sledge to wait a second, looks to Stanley, indicating the monk:

CALLEY

What the fuck is he saying?

Stanley approaches, interprets with his limited knowledge of Vietnamese:

STANLEY
 He doesn't understand why you've doing
 this. He says .. the village is friendly
 They're innocent.

The word rankles Calley. He turns to the old monk and SCREAMS at him, blood flushing his face from the effort.

CALLEY
 Innocent?!! You're all VC! Where are the
 weapons, old man?

The old monk whimpers at Calley, terrified by the look in his eyes.

STANLEY
 He says there are no weapons.

Calley HITS the old man in the mouth with his rifle, then SHOOTs him. The villagers all startle and cower together as Calley grabs the radio.

CALLEY
 Yes, sir?

INTERCUT between him and Medina, who is making his way east through the burning village.

MEDINA
 Calley, what the fuck is it with you? I
 told you I wanted you and your men through
 Is that too fucking much to handle?

Rage flares in Calley's eyes again. He hangs up without replying, looks at the large group of villagers. Calley then motions for Meadlo.

CALLEY
 Get over here, Meadlo. We got another job
 to do.

Black machine gunner Robert Maples is also standing nearby. Calley turns to him.

CALLEY (cont'd)
 You, too, Maples. Load up and waste 'em.

Maples looks at the faces of the hundred villagers, stares at Calley like he's lost his mind, makes no move.

CALLEY (cont'd)
 That's an order.

MAPLES
 No.

Calley looks to Stanley, who has his M-16.

CALLEY
Get over here, Stanley

STANLEY
You're outta your mind.

Among the captive VILLAGERS, some start to understand what the argument is about. They look at each other anxiously

Calley stares at Stanley and Maples, hatred in his eyes.

CALLEY
You fucking cowards. You're no better
than the dinks . .

Some of the other Black soldiers in the group react and exchange glances. Calley gets in Maples' face

CALLEY (cont'd)
I gave you an order

MAPLES
(calm)
And I told you: I ain't doing it

Calley now turns his M-16 at Maples. Now, the other Black soldiers step in between the two men.

Calley eyes them darkly, then backs off, turns to Meadlo. Even he looks apprehensive at the magnitude of the slaughter.

CALLEY
You a fucking pussy, too?! These people
killed Bobby, your best friend. Blew his
nuts off-- him and Weber and Cox and
Rutger and Bell! You gonna let them get
away with it?!

Meadlo holds Calley's intense eyes. Then, anger flaring, Meadlo moves forward with his machine gun.

In the group, PHON and QUY both see what is about to happen

TIME SLOWS TO A STAND-STILL AGAIN as Calley and Meadlo aim their weapons at the group, readying to open fire

In the stillness, we survey the FACES OF CHARLIE COMPANY present at the execution. Stanley, Maples, others, staring. A few look at each other, to see if anyone else protests. No one does. No one makes a move. No one interferes.

Among the Vietnamese, we see the FACES OF THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN, some just now understanding, some terrified, some pleading.

Briefly, DISSOLVE TO THE FACES OF PEERS, FEHER, THOMPSON AND THORNE in the refugee camp witnessing the moment with us.

THEN, TIME RETURNS TO NORMAL AS CALLEY AND MEADLO OPEN FIRE

PHON pushes his wife and three children into the irrigation canal--

QUY shields her two children with her body, as--

THE BULLETS HIT, their power at this close range strong enough to tear open bodies and blast apart limbs

Mixed in the carnage, WE SEE FLASHES OF THE LIVES NOW ENDING families, children, husbands and wives... captured in life's ordinary, fleeting, precious moments Then:

QUY IS HIT BY A BULLET in her side and falls into the ditch with her children. Along with her fall dozens, some dead, some alive, some dying. The bodies cover Phon and his family.

Those villagers still able are screaming, begging, pleading. But Calley and Meadlo CONTINUE TO SPRAY THEM WITH BULLETS, trailing along as people fall into the ditch.

Meadlo begins to cry, but keeps shooting

Quy shields her two children with her body as bullets tear into people around them, splattering her with brains and blood. Knowing this might be the end, she whispers, in Vietnamese:

QUY

I love you, children.

Phon also covers his children with his body.

While continuing to spray the ditch with bullets, Meadlo turns to his fellow soldiers, tears streaming down his cheeks.

MEADLO

Why aren't you firing? Why?

The men just stare at him

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - NEAR MAIN TRAIL

In the middle of the village, Medina and his command group arrive at the watch tower. At least thirty, perhaps fifty people lie slain together there, machine-gunned.

Among them we see IRUONG NGU'S MOTHER, HIS WIFE AND THREE CHILDREN. This is another sight from Haeberle's photos, which he stops by to take now. Bernhardt watches the scene, trying to hide his horror.

Medina glances at the bodies without emotion. His men soon bring over AN OLD MAN they've found in hiding. He trembles with fear. Medina motions for Sgt. Minh to translate.

MEDINA

Ask him where the VC are.

Minh does. Translates the man's answer concurrently:

SGT. MINH

He says he doesn't know. They moved north many days ago. Only a few scouts are left.

Medina smiles coldly at the man.

MEDINA

You lyin' to me, papa-san? Bring him here.

Medina moves to interrogate the man in private. Medina's RTO Fred Widmer lingers back with Herbert Carter. They soon hear screaming.

INT THOMPSON'S CHOPPER - AERIAL OVER MY LAI

Thompson and his crew fly low over My Lai. Nearing the fields, Andreotta sees the irrigation ditch with the OVER A HUNDRED DEAD.

ANDREOTTA

Holy. Fucking. Jesus.

And they all stare at the terrible sight. Thompson sees a lone soldier walking among the bodies.

HOLD ON THOMPSON AS TIME AGAIN SLOWS TO A STAND-STILL. DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CID OFFICES - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - NIGHT -
DECEMBER 1969

Just Peers and Thompson now. It's night. They're sitting in the CID offices, the floor dark and deserted around them. Thompson's stares at the floor, unable to face Peers. Peers studies him.

PEERS

Why didn't you tell me this before?

Thompson just continues to stare at the floor. Off him--

INT THOMPSON'S CHOPPER - AERIAL OVER MY LAI - CONTINUED

RESUME ON THOMPSON as he stares at Calley wading forward amidst the dead.

THOMPSON
What the fuck is this? I'm setting us
down

EXT. EASTERN IRRIGATION CANAL - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Among the bodies, Calley makes his way forward, a mad fever in his eyes, his gun ready. He sees an old woman, moaning in pain And shoots her

THE SOUND OF THE SHOT wakes HA THI QUY in the pile of bodies. She is splattered with blood, but only wounded in her side.

She looks to her son and daughter, only to see that both are already dead. Quy begins to weep silent, bitter tears. Nearby, we see Song's parents, also dead.

ANOTHER SHOT startles PHON and his family deeper in the large pile of bodies. His little girl has been hit in the arm, and she is whimpering.

Above, he can see Calley near, also hearing the moans.

PHON gently places his hand over his daughter's mouth. And prays.

CALLEY is still looking for the source of the sound he heard, his gun roving over dead faces. But before he can determine where the sound came from--

A SUDDEN DOWNWASH AS THOMPSON LANDS NEARBY AND STORMS OUT OF HIS CHOPPER.

Calley leaves the ditch to face him. Thompson approaches, furious.

THOMPSON
What the hell is going on here,
Lieutenant?!

Amidst the bodies, Phon and Tiet huddle together over their daughter.

Calley approaches Thompson, blocking his view into the ditch.

THOMPSON (cont'd)
What the fuck is this? Who are all those
people in the ditch?

He tries to see over the embankment, but Calley moves to block him. Thompson sees the blood on his uniform, the madness in his eyes.

Calley reads Thompson's name off the tag in his fatigues:

CALLEY
This is none of your business, Thompson.
Get outta here.

Thompson just stares at the young Lieutenant

CALLEY (cont'd)
I'm the boss here and I gave you an order:
fuck off!

Thompson can see the Calley's hand twitching on his pistol But it's the look in the Lieutenant's eyes that makes Thompson back off.

Thompson walks away, his face reddening from impotent rage and shame

INT. THOMPSON'S CHOPPER - CONTINUOUS

Thompson climbs in Colburn and Andreotta turn to him:

COLBURN / ANDREOTTA
Hugh, what--

Thompson silences them with a gesture, still red-faced and trembling. He LIFTS THEM OFF violently, not sure what to do for a moment Then:

THOMPSON
I'm calling this in.

He radios the gunships as he circles west over the burning village:

THOMPSON (cont'd)
What the hell is going on with Charlie
Company? There's a ditch full of dead
bodies back there!

GUNSHIP PILOT'S VOICE
(filtered over radio)
Say again, Hugh?

THOMPSON
I said: there's a ditch full of dead
civvies back there!

EXT. EASTERN IRRIGATION CANAL

Calley looks after Thompson as he flies away. He gives the ditch one last glance, then turns to his men

CALLEY
Let's move.

Amidst the dead, Phon, Tiet and Quy close their eyes in relief as Charlie Company moves on

INT. THOMPSON'S CHOPPER

Thompson and his crew continue to fly over My Lai, rage and shame still coloring Thompson's features.

Just then, they see BROOKS AND HIS MEN IN PURSUIT OF THE YOUNG VIETNAMESE GIRL AND HER GRANDPARENTS.

CLOSE ON THOMPSON as he makes the decision:

THOMPSON
We're stopping this.

He brings them down, the DOWNWASH stirring the field as he lands between Brooks' men and the Vietnamese huddled in the bunker--

INT. CID OFFICES - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

Thompson looks at Peers in the darkness of the CID office, remnants of the shame still on his face. Peers studies him, emotion in his voice.

PEERS
You saved twelve people You did more
than anyone else that day.

THOMPSON
It wasn't enough... By the time we got
back it was too late

EXT. EASTERN IRRIGATION CANAL - AFTERNOON (MARCH 16, 1968)

Thompson and his crew have landed again near the irrigation ditch filled with bodies. Calley and his men are long gone.

Thompson, Colburn and Andreotta are all in the ditch Thompson searches for survivors as the others have their weapons trained on the surroundings

All around Thompson, smoke-shrouded BODIES mauled by gunfire. It's like a scene out of Hell Thompson's fatigues grow stained with blood as he wades forward

But he keeps going. Because among the dead, he sees A LONE SURVIVOR: LITTLE SONG... Covered in blood, but unharmed, fighting her way out of the pit.

As Thompson picks up the bloodied little girl, Song begins to cry.

And we realize: THIS IS THE SIGHT THOMPSON SEES IN HIS DREAMS.

Off Thompson, DISSOLVE TO--

EXT. REFUGEE CAMP - QUANG NGAI - DECEMBER 1969

--PEERS as he stands with Song and the nun in the witness awning of the refugee camp with Thompson. Gently, hauntedly, the young pilot examines the child he helped save, his eyes tearing.

THOMPSON

We were supposed to protect them...

Peers nods, struggling to contain the emotional turmoil inside him. Feher soon approaches, waits for a beat, then takes Peers aside.

FEHER

General I need to tell you something...
Some of the survivors here are not from
My Lai. They come from the sister
village, My Khe... The village cordoned
off by Bravo Company during the attack.

Peers looks at Feher, understanding

FEHER (cont'd)

A second massacre... Just a few miles
away Maybe as many as 100 dead

Off Peers, taking that in--

INT. CID OFFICES - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - DECEMBER 1969 - CONTINUED

--ON PEERS as he stares into the darkness of the CID offices.

PEERS

(beat)

It used to be possible, keeping the
distance ...

EXT. SAIGON INTERSECTION - MORNING (MAY 1967) - PEERS' MEMORY

*The same street in Saigon where we saw our investigators earlier.
the images now in black & white It is May, 1967, early morning.
Peers, a two-star General, Commander of the 4th Division, is en
route to the American military headquarters in an Army Jeep*

PEERS' VOICE

Stilwell taught me ... You have a job to
do ... you focus on that

*Ahead, traffic has become stalled by A YOUNG BUDDHIST NUN staging a
lone demonstration against the war in front of the Buddhist temple.
This is the nun whose face Peers keeps seeing.*

*She's praying quietly, having surrounded herself with images of the
Virgin Mary and Quan Yin, the Buddhist God of Mercy.*

PEERS' VOICE (cont'd)

Whatever else happens ... isn't your
problem

*Peers impatiently motions for his driver to speed up. They've just
passed the nun when A SUDDEN FLASH OF LIGHT makes Peers look back.*

THE YOUNG NUN IS ENGULFED IN FLAMES, the can of gasoline she has used to immolate herself visible nearby. The flames are the only color in the scene.

Peers stares stunned as THE NUN BURNS, the fire blackening her skin. And yet there is only compassion on her face as the flames consume it, forming a terrible halo around her.

And for a moment, it's as if the nun's eyes meet Peers' through the fire, pleading for him to see her, to care--

PEERS' VOICE (cont'd)

It used to be possible to look away

INT CID OFFICES - OLD SCHOOL BUILDING - QUANG NGAI - DECEMBER 1969

Peers looks to Thompson, emotion in his eyes, darkness around them.

PEERS

...but not anymore Not now

He walks over to a desk holding all the reports and logs he and the CID have collected over the investigation.

PEERS (cont'd)

Accidents happen Mistakes ... But this was murder, pure and simple

He picks up a file.

PEERS (cont'd)

And they dressed it up in this filth

He THROWS the file across the desk, the papers flying out

PEERS (cont'd)

All this garbage.

As Peers starts to throw more files on the floor--

--FLASH TO A MOMENT WE DIDN'T SEE BEFORE... of Peers in his quarters after sealing away the account of the six captives. He's drinking, tears of rage and sorrow flowing openly down his face.

In the CID offices, Peers finally stops throwing around the files, stares at all the paper around him

PEERS (CONT'D) (cont'd)

All this sanctimonious bullshit... They make it sound like everyone should've gotten fucking medals

He falls silent, suddenly realizing:

PEERS (cont'd)

Medals . . .

Peers gets on the floor and starts looking through the pages as Thompson stares. Finally, he finds what he's looking for.

PEERS (cont'd)

Citations submitted to General Koster in
March and April 1968. . .

He shows Thompson. The document is a reply to a letter from Barker, *recommending Medina for a medal for his actions at My Lai*. Koster's decision: DENIED. Peers taps the signature.

PEERS (cont'd)

If he didn't know what really happened,
why deny the award?

THOMPSON

He knew. . .

Off Peers and Thompson, WE RETURN, ONE FINAL TIME, TO:

EXT VILLAGE OF MY LAI - MAIN TRAIL - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968)

Widmer and Carter sit near the pile of bodies on the main trail as the terrible screams of Medina's interrogation continue around them.

Suddenly, Widmer spots movement in the pile of bodies.

A LITTLE BOY stands up weakly from among the group of 20 dead. His arm has been blown off at the elbow. With his other hand, the boy holds the hand of a DEAD YOUNG WOMAN, obviously his mother.

The boy looks at Widmer, not comprehending, his eyes pleading: why?

After a beat, Widmer can't take the boy's look. He aims his rifle. And FIRES. This causes THE BODY OF THE BOY'S MOTHER TO STIR.

WIDMER

Oh, Jesus. They ain't all dead yet.

He turns to Carter.

WIDMER (cont'd)

Gimme your pistol.

Carter does. Widmer walks over to shoot the villagers. He aims at THE BOY'S MOTHER, her eyes pleading pitifully. But as Widmer pulls the trigger, the gun jams.

WIDMER (cont'd)

Shit

He walks back to Carter, hands him the gun.

WIDMER (cont'd)
Can you clear it?

Carter tries, and SETS THE GUN OFF, shooting himself in the foot

CARTER
Ahhhh! Medic! Medic!

He falls on the ground, grimacing. Above, Carter can see the dark shapes of choppers circling Off the helicopters--

EXT LANDING ZONE DOTTIE - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Thompson lands at LZ Dottie, storms out of his chopper toward the Center Operations tent. Before he reaches it, Major Watke rushes to meet him, obviously forewarned.

Shaking with rage, Thompson throws his helmet on the ground

THOMPSON
They're going after the civilians there,
Major! I'm done with this mission!

WATKE
Alright, Thompson. Calm down. Come with
me.

Watke leads Thompson away, calming him, glancing around, trying to determine how many people heard the outburst

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - MAIN TRAIL - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968)

Back at the main trail, Medina rushes over to Widmer and the wounded Carter. There is blood on Medina's uniform now, too, from the interrogation.

MEDINA
What the fuck happened, Widmer?

Widmer indicates the gun, then at the pile of dead.

WIDMER
There was a woman.. I was tryin', you
know.

Medina shakes his head at Widmer's incompetence, then inspects Carter's wound. It's clean through. He grabs the radio

MEDINA
Coyote Six, I need a med-evac near the
village watch tower

BARKER (V.O.)
 (filtered over radio)
 Copy that I'm coming down

INT. HENDERSON'S CHOPPER - AERIAL OVER MY LAI

In his chopper, surveying the environs of burning My Lai, Henderson hears the transmission. He turns to his pilot

HENDERSON
 Fly us over.

His pilot nods

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - MAIN TRAIL

Back at the trail, Medina hangs up the radio, unholsters his gun, and walks over to the pile of bodies. The woman Widmer aimed his gun at, is now dead. No movement in the pile

Medina holsters his weapon and walks back to his men and Carter.

MEDINA
 Let's get him ready

INT. BARKER'S CHOPPER - MOMENTS LATER

Barker's pilot starts to land them when the radio comes to life. The caller is Watke, his voice grim

WATKE'S VOICE
 (filtered over radio)
 Coyote six, this Watke I'm on a secure frequency. I got a report here from one of the aeroscouts. You need to know about this

Barker closes his eyes.

INT. HENDERSON'S CHOPPER - AERIAL OVER MY LAI - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Henderson and his fellow officers also near the med-evac site as Barker lands. They see bodies everywhere, then the large group of dead on the main trail. Henderson grows ashen, takes the radio

HENDERSON
 Coyote six, this is Rawhide 6. What the fuck is happening down there? Get this shit under control immediately

BARKER'S VOICE
 (filtered over radio)
 Roger that

INT. TASK FORCE OPERATIONS CENTER - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Inside the center operations tent, General Koster hears the transmission, as well. His expression remains inscrutable.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - NEAR MAIN TRAIL

Barker exits his chopper as Medina and his men approach, carrying the wounded Carter. Haeberle takes photos as the men, Widmer among them, start to load him in. Barker simultaneously goes to Medina.

BARKER

Order a cease fire.

Medina nods, picks up his radio

MEDINA

All platoons: Party's over. Cease fire

He lowers the radio. Medina and Barker look at each other for a beat amidst the carnage. Then:

BARKER

We need to talk. One of the aeroscouts has filed a report.

In the distance, Medina sees Bernhardt watching them.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MY LAI - VARIOUS

And so it ends. The men of Charlie Company walk out of My Lai, leaving the dead and the burning village behind them.

In the village, startled survivors slowly emerge into sight. Very few find their loved ones alive. Mostly, people can only weep for their dead amidst the fires that are burning everywhere.

From the vast pile of dead at the irrigation ditch, HA TI QUY emerges into view, climbing up from under the bodies, covered in blood, inconsolable in her grief over her children.

As she makes her way into the burning village, becoming a silhouette against the fire, a voice from Charlie Company. From 1989:

WIDMER'S VOICE

Should we feel ashamed? Sorry?

INT. LIVING ROOMS/KITCHENS - DAY - 1989

WIDMER looks at the interviewer.

WIDMER

John Wayne never said sorry.

BERNHARDT is growing angry again.

BERNHARDT

You know when someone's shooting at you...
You know. So why then?

STANLEY looks at the interviewer:

STANLEY

It was racism, man, racism. The "Just a
gook rule," that's what they called it:
"The only good gook is a dead gook." But,
you know. They used to say the same
thing about the Blacks and the Indians,
too

SIMPSON looks at the cracked picture of his son.

SIMPSON

You ask yourself: how can a child be the
enemy? But they can...

HODGES faces the interviewer In his ever-calm drawl:

HODGES

The family unit is implicated... It lives,
it breathes, it produces new soldiers
We all understood that. The people who
sent us understood that.

Off those words, DISSOLVE TO:

INT WEST POINT - MAIN BUILDING - EVENING - JANUARY 1970

A party is underway at West Point. Generals mingle as Cadets in
dress uniform serve drinks and hors-d'oeuvre. Peers enters the hall
from outside, carrying his small recorder. He refuses a Cadet's
request for his coat

Super: January 1970.

Peers walks to the main room, spots Koster in the middle of the
crowd. The party quiets, smiles withering. Everyone obviously knows
Peers why he's there. Koster faces his long-time friend

KOSTER

Let's talk upstairs.

INT GENERAL KOSTER'S OFFICE - WEST POINT - MOMENTS LATER

Peers stares at the picture of Koster during the liberation of the
German concentration camp. Koster enters behind him, drink in hand

KOSTER

I'm assuming you have more questions.

Peers turns to face him

PEERS

I'm recalling you before the Inquiry, Sam.
Under suspicion I advise you to get a
lawyer.

They face each other for a long beat

KOSTER

As a friend, I'm telling you: Don't make
that mistake I may have to retire when
this is all over. But no one's gonna hang
me for one VC village. I'll keep my
pension

Peers stares at Koster, startled by the candid admission

KOSTER (cont'd)

What're you gonna keep, Ray? Not Korea,
not a fourth star. All you're doing is
disgracing the Army and destroying
careers. No one wants this to be true
but you

PEERS

It is true

Koster studies Peers, as if sizing him up.

KOSTER

Haven't the Vietcong done much worse? In
Hue? All over that country? They kill
civilians sometimes deliberately

PEERS

We Don't That's the point

KOSTER

Don't be naive, Ray... Take the out
Henderson's offered you.

Peers stares at Koster Soon understanding:

PEERS

You put him up to it...

KOSTER

Did I? That's an interesting idea. But
proof may be more difficult to come by
Kinda like the rest of your case.
(MORE)

KOSTER (cont'd)

What do you got so far? The word of a few ignorant survivors and some disgruntled officers? I know what you know... And with the statues about to expire, it's not enough.

Peers is silent for a beat. Then, he looks Koster in the eye.

PEERS

We found Captain Lewellen.

This Koster clearly didn't know. Peers sets up his recorder, as:

PEERS (cont'd)

Turns out, he kept a copy of the tape he made of the radio transmissions at the TOC.

KOSTER

He wouldn't have gotten all the radios.

PEERS

He got plenty.

Peers hits play. On the tape, we hear the gunship pilot announce "The LZ is cold." Then, the crackle of M-16's and American machine guns. And only those weapons.

PEERS (cont'd)

The tape proves there was never any enemy fire. Only ours.

Koster studies Peers with disappointment. Then, shaking his head.

KOSTER

I don't know when you lost your guts, Ray.

PEERS

Is that what you call it, killing women and children? My guts are fine. It's your soul you should be worried about.

With that, Peers walks out. Off Koster--

INT. PENTAGON BASEMENT OFFICES AND HALLWAYS (MONTAGE)

New interrogations flow by in rapid succession as Peers' teams photograph and interview DOZENS OF WITNESSES from Sergeants to Captains to Colonels in a whirlwind effort to meet the deadline.

The witnesses are all first MUGSHOTTED and then sworn in, raising their hands on a Bible. Some of the usually tough officers look scared and naked. Others are contemptuous. We also see the witnesses leave the Pentagon to face awaiting crowds. Some walk proud and unrepentant. Others try to hide and cover their faces. Among them:

CAPTAIN MEDINA, stoic and proud as ever, as he's MUGSHOTTED, then stands before Peers and his PANEL of officers and civilian attorneys:

PEERS

...recalled under suspicion of murder,
disobedience of orders and regulations,
failure to report felonies

Next, CAPTAIN KOTOUC, Barker's chief of Intel ... ROBERT RAMSDELL, the CIA providence Chief of Quang Ngai

Then, COLONEL HENDERSON, stiff, flinching from the CAMERA FLASH, then standing before Peers and company, as:

PEERS (cont'd)

...violating regulations and directives
pertaining to the reporting and
investigation of war crimes

Following Henderson, MAJOR MCKNIGHT, LT. COLONEL LUPER, and LT COLONEL MCLACHLAN, all present during the fly-over

Next, GENERAL YOUNG, sad, unproud, accepting judgment

PEERS (cont'd)

...dereliction of duty ... suppression of
information concerning the unlawful
killing of civilians

Then, LT. COLONEL REVEREND FRANCIS LEWIS, chief Chaplain ... COLONEL NELS PARSON, former Americal Chief of Staff ... OTHERS from the Task Force TOC... MAJOR FRED WATKE among them.

And finally, MAJOR GENERAL SAMUEL KOSTER. Unflinching, as:

PEERS (cont'd)

...suppressing and conspiring to suppress
information about war crimes and unlawful
killing of civilians ... and for giving
false testimony before an Army Inquiry

INT. PEERS' OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - NIGHT

Peers is in his office, reviewing mountains of transcripts, writing his final report. Feher enters, notices:

FEHER

No cigar, General?

Peers looks up, smiles a little

PEERS

Interferes with the writing. You been
downstairs?

FEHER

Of course. I hear your staff is clocking twelve witnesses a day

PEERS

Getting close to the deadline to file charges... Your job

Feher smiles, then looks at the mountains of documents around Peers. The General notices

PEERS (cont'd)

Don't worry. We'll get this done in time

(beat)

And Andre-- Thank you.

Feher nods, appreciating it. Off the beat--

INT GENERAL WESTMORELAND'S OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - DAY

Peers meets with Westmoreland and Resor to present his report and recommendations. The sun is setting outside, casting deep shadows throughout the room. Both Westmoreland and the Resor look grim as they review Peers' summary

Super: March 14, 1970.

RESOR

You've got two Generals, eight Colonels, four Majors, six Captains, and eight Lieutenants all recommended for court-martials. That's 28 officers!

PEERS

Yes. For a total of 224 serious violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Westmoreland looks at Peers. Holding his eyes:

WESTMORELAND

I guess this is your answer...

PEERS

Yes.

Resor continues read Peers' report. And pales.

RESOR

General, the language-- You cannot use words like this "women and children." "murder." "rape." "massacre." This portion will be made public. It will disgrace the United States Army. You need to find less over-emotional words. Like

(MORE)

RESOR (cont'd)
 "noncombatant casualty." And you gotta
 make some mention of the enemy presence--

PEERS
 (flaring up)
 There was no fucking enemy-- that's the
 whole goddamn point!
 (beat, calmer)
 The only enemy that day was us

At that, Resor rises and walks out, too furious to speak. Peers and
 Westmoreland remain behind. After a beat:

WESTMORELAND
That you could've handled more
 diplomatically, Ray ..

Peers says nothing. Westmoreland looks to the darkening skies outside

WESTMORELAND (cont'd)
 28 officers. And Sam Koster. Jesus ..

After a moment, he turns back to Peers.

WESTMORELAND (cont'd)
 You know, Ray .. I visited the Americal a
 few weeks after March 16. Sam was about
 to leave for West Point. He never said a
 word. Not a hint that anything had
 happened. Very disappointing.

Peers studies Westmoreland

PEERS
 There's something I didn't put in my report

Peers places a sheet from Barker's correspondence file on the table.

PEERS (cont'd)
 I found it among Barker's papers

Westmoreland picks up the document, reads:

WESTMORELAND
 "I commend the Task Force for an
 outstanding operation that has resulted in
 an important victory against the enemy.
 Sincerely, William C. Westmoreland."
 (to Peers)
 Do you know how many of these I send to
 the troops each month?

PEERS

Sir, this letter virtually ensured there'd be no investigation. When the top commander has given an op an official "well-done," who's gonna go against him?

WESTMORELAND

I didn't have time to read every report, Ray

PEERS

I know, sir-- but 128 VC killed, 3 weapons captured? Red flags should've gone up right away

He holds Westmoreland's gaze.

PEERS (cont'd)

You've always said this war is not fought against the women and children... But how are we fighting for their freedom when we've declared entire parts of that country free-fire zones where anyone can be assumed to be the enemy and killed? When any village can be bombed out of existence? When we're torturing people?

Westmoreland looks at Peers, stunned.

WESTMORELAND

Now, Ray--

PEERS

We're going to lose this war; General

(beat)

You have my findings Good night, sir.

He salutes and walks out. Westmoreland remains in his office, studying the dark skies. Off the General, his back to us now, DISSOLVE TO:

INT PEERS' OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - THE NEXT DAY

Peers and Thompson sit in his office, Peers again smoking a cigar.

THOMPSON

So what happens now?

PEERS

The Army has my recommendations. I hope they do the right thing.

THOMPSON

I meant: You gonna stay in?

Peers looks around his office, the medals and mementos of his life-long career. For a moment, sadness crosses his eyes at the thought of all that the Inquiry might cost him.

Then, Peers' eyes stop on a photograph from Burma... of Young Peers with General Stilwell. Peers rises and brings the photo to Thompson.

PEERS

Remember Joe Stilwell, the General I told you about?

THOMPSON

Your "old man..."

Peers gives a little smile at the memories.

PEERS

He was a tough one, a real SOB sometimes... But he loved his men, the Army.

He studies Stilwell and himself in the photo.

PEERS (cont'd)

The last year of the Burma campaign, he got sick... Real sick, something in his gut... You could see the color leave his face from the pain... But he never complained, just fought on, until the end...

(beat)

A year after the war, he was dead. Stomach cancer...

He looks at Thompson.

PEERS (cont'd)

That's how much he loved the Army...

Thompson nods, understanding.

PEERS (cont'd)

You gonna stay in?

THOMPSON

(long beat)

I don't know... There's a spot for me at the Aviation School at Fort Rucker if I want it... I have to think about it.

PEERS

I hope you do.

They sit, in silence now, as REPORTERS VOICES begin:

REPORTERS' VOICES

... fourteen Army Officers will face court-martials on charges they helped cover up a massacre of civilians in My Lai, Vietnam, the Pentagon has revealed.

INT. GENERAL KOSTER'S OFFICE - WEST POINT - NIGHT

KOSTER, unrepentant and proud as ever, studies himself in a mirror as he puts on his full dress uniform, as:

REPORTERS' VOICES

... Major General Samuel Koster, the highest-ranking officer to face charges, has announced his resignation as the Superintendent of West Point...

Koster leaves his office. We follow him, to--

INT. MAIN DINING HALL - WEST POINT - EVENING

--where the FULL CORPS OF CADETS is assembled in parade dress for Koster's farewell address in the lavish dining hall. The walls are covered with murals of the great battles of history. The Indian wars are there, too

Koster, medals gleaming, steps to address the troops from a balcony.

KOSTER

Duty. Honor. Country. These have been the guiding words throughout my career

We hold close on the Cadets' faces as Koster speaks.

KOSTER (cont'd)

You are our future leaders. Never forget that to serve one's country true and faithfully is one of the highest callings. To this end, may good fortune and success come to all of you. Just don't let the bastards grind you down.

The Cadets come to their feet, applauding and cheering. DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AIRFIELDS - FORT RUCKER, ALABAMA - DAY

THOMPSON as he instructs young future pilots at Fort Rucker, the memories of My Lai still in his eyes. Because:

REPORTERS' VOICES

... Lt. General Jonathan Seaman today dismissed all charges against four of the fourteen officers implicated by the Peers Inquiry.

INT. MILITARY COURTROOM - FORT MEADE, MARYLAND - DAY

GEORGE YOUNG, still unproud, stands before LT. GENERAL SEAMAN in an austere military courtroom as Seaman reads his decision:

GEN. SEAMAN

I hereby dismiss all charges against you for dereliction of duty.

Off Young, DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GENERAL PEERS' OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - DAY

PEERS as he studies a photo of himself with Koster and Young at the command change-ceremony for the Americal Division in Vietnam

REPORTERS' VOICES

... General Seaman today announced the dismissal of all charges against Major General Samuel Koster "in the interest of justice," citing Koster's "long and honorable career."

INT. MILITARY COURTROOM - FORT MEADE, MARYLAND - DAY

SAMUEL KOSTER faces Seaman, as:

GEN. SEAMAN

... finding no evidence of intentional abrogation of responsibilities, I hereby dismiss all charges.

Off Koster, DISSOLVE TO:

NEWS FOOTAGE of renewed anti-war PROTESTS around the country. The WINTER SOLDIER hearings in Detroit. TROOPS fighting on in Vietnam.

REPORTERS' VOICES

... Charges against thirteen of the fourteen officers implicated by the Peers Inquiry have now been dismissed. The Army has revealed it is dropping plans to prosecute seventeen former soldiers who participated in the massacre in My Lai. Only soldiers still in active service are now being considered for court-martials.

Off the war raging on in Vietnam, DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GENERAL PEERS' OFFICE - THE PENTAGON - NIGHTFALL

PEERS looking toward the distant Lincoln Memorial as the sun sets over Washington

REPORTERS' VOICES

Lt General Albert O. Connor has dismissed all remaining cases involving former Charlie Company soldiers still in active duty. Verdicts are expected in the court-martials of Captain Ernest Medina and Colonel Oran Henderson.

INT. MILITARY COURTROOM - FORT MCPHERSON, GEORGIA - DAY

MEDINA stands as the president of his court-martial jury announces:

COL. PROCTOR

... not guilty on all counts of murder, involuntary manslaughter, and assault.

Cheers and applause from the spectators as Medina salutes his jury

INT. MILITARY COURTROOM - FORT MEADE, MARYLAND - DAY

HENDERSON faces his jury in Fort Meade

COURT-MARTIAL PRESIDENT

not guilty on all charges

Henderson closes his eyes, then salutes his jury as we DISSOLVE TO:

EXI VILLAGE OF MY LAI - NIGHT - MARCH 16, 1968

Sights of My Lai now. After fires still smoldering as survivors bury their beloved dead, inconsolable in their grief. Over the images:

504 people were murdered by the men of Charlie Company in My Lai on March 16, 1968. Of the 105 soldiers who entered the village, only one was ever successfully prosecuted.

INT. MILITARY COURTHOUSE - FORT BENNING, GEORGIA - DAY

WILLIAM CALLEY stands and faces his uniformed jury as COLONEL CLIFFORD FORD reads the verdict:

COL. FORD

... this court-martial finds you guilty of the premeditated murder of at least 22 civilians, and sentences you to hard labor for the length of your natural life.

Calley salutes his jury, stoic. Off him being led away, DISSOLVE TO:

NEWS FOOTAGE of *pro-Calley* protests from all over the country. PACKED RALLIES... AMERICAN FLAGS flying in half-mast, many upside down... LINES OF CARS WITH "FREE CALLEY" STICKERS on their bumpers. STATE LEGISLATORS meeting. DRAFT BOARDS walking out. as we hear:

REPORTERS VOICES'

... Indiana Governor Edgar Whitcomb has ordered all flags to be flown in half-mast to protest the verdict against Calley ... resolutions urging presidential clemency have been introduced in five state legislatures. ... draft boards in Athens, Georgia, and Huron County, Michigan, have resigned ...

Then, WILLIAM CALLEY, leaving Fort Benning as a free man.

Super: After serving three years of his life sentence under house arrest, William Calley was pardoned by President Nixon.

BLACK SCREEN

A BLACK & WHITE PHOTOGRAPH OF PEERS' OFFICE... empty now. Only the desk remaining, the walls stripped of mementos and decorations

Super: Only portions of General Peers' report were made public. The Army censored much of the testimony and names, and withheld all information about the massacre at My Khe. After the Inquiry, Peers went on to serve as the Deputy Commander of the US Forces in Korea. He never received his fourth star. General Peers retired from the Army in 1973. He died in 1984.

EXI PEERS' HOUSE - KENTWOOD, CALIFORNIA - DAY (1984) /

GENERAL PEERS, shortly before his death... giving an interview to a YOUNG COLLEGE STUDENT on the redwoods-shaded porch of his house. Peers is almost 70, frail, recovering from a recent heart attack. But his eyes are still tough and strong, and as always, he's got a cigar

COLLEGE STUDENT

A lot of people feel the Army deserted you in the end ... Knowing everything, you ever have regrets about being chosen for the Inquiry?

Peers reflects on the question for a long beat. Then:

PEERS

The most important job a soldier has is to protect and defend the innocent and the weak... If we turn our backs on that... if we walk away from that... what have we become... What will we become?

Off Peers and the student looking at each other, DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THOMPSON'S CHOPPER - DEPARTING MY LAI - MORNING (MARCH 16, 1968)

We stay with HUGH THOMPSON, LARRY COLBURN and GLENN ANDREOTTA as they fly little Song to safety, blood on their fatigues from the rescue, heavy emotion on all their faces

Super: Hugh Thompson remained in the Army, continuing to serve as an instructor at the Army Aviation School in Fort Rucker. In 1998, thirty years after My Lai, the Army awarded Thompson, Larry Colburn, and Glenn Andreotta the Soldier's Medal for their heroic intervention during the massacre. That same year, Thompson and Colburn returned to My Lai.

Off THE MORNING SUN washing out the cockpit with light--

EXT VILLAGE OF MY LAI - DAY - MARCH 1998

HUGH THOMPSON, now 55, heavy-set and moustached, and LARRY COLBURN, now 48, meet with TWO OF THE WOMEN they saved from Brooks' men during the massacre

One of the women is PHAM THI NHUNG, now 76 The other is PHAM THI NHANH, now 36. the young girl Thompson saw running into the bunker with her grandparents

The village around them has been rebuilt. A television crew from 60 MINUTES films as the two women greet Thompson and Colburn, taking one of their hands in both of theirs, tearing up as they speak through an INTERPRETER:

NHANH/INTERPRETER

We're proud to welcome you back . . . We're alive only because of you. . . We say thank you, from the bottom of our hearts . . .

Thompson nods, his voice choking with emotion.

THOMPSON

I wish . . . we could've saved more people that day . . . that we could've done more And I want to apologize . . . for my country . . . for what was done to you . . .

He and Colburn begin to cry as they and the survivors hold each other. PULL BACK to see villagers watching, many children among them

Off the embracing figures in My Lai, the SCREEN FADES TO WHITE--

Super: Hugh Thompson was later invited by both the Naval Academy and West Point to give annual lectures about military ethics to young cadets. He died in January 2006 after a long battle with cancer.

INT KITCHENS/LIVING ROOMS - DAY (1989)

ONE FINAL TIME, THE MEN OF CHARLIE COMPANY FACE US, twenty years after My Lai KENNETH HODGES stares at us, unrepentant.

HODGES

Was it moral? Yes, I think we carried out our orders in a moral fashion. No one was to be spared. Those were the orders and we carried them out.

FRED WIDMER, prematurely aged and broken, stares off camera.

WIDMER

I look at it now and it's like-- why did I do that? But when I shot that boy
(eyes tearing)
Fuck you, John Wayne

STANLEY shakes his head.

STANLEY

Ordering me to shoot innocent people-- that's not an order. That's craziness. And I don't have to obey that. Everyone knows that.

SIMPSON sits in his chair, shuddering in distress looking at his newspaper clippings about My Lai.

SIMPSON

I did that... I did that... What else can I say? Yes, I'm ashamed. I'm sorry. I'm guilty. But I did it, you know?

He turns to the cracked picture of his son.

SIMPSON (cont'd)

This is my son... 12 years ago, he was playing outside when two neighborhood boys got into a fight. One of them got a gun. The shot went wild and hit my boy in the head. When I came out, he was already dying. When I looked at him, I saw the face of that little boy that I'd killed... I took this picture to his funeral. And it cracked. So I kept it like this.

He sets the picture gently back on the table.

SIMPSON (cont'd)

What else can I say? It happened.

Super: Varnado Simpson committed suicide in 1997

BERNHARDT looks at the interviewer, still angry.

BERNHARDT

The thing that pisses me off is when people say that this can't happen again, that we remember, that we've come such a long way from Vietnam

(beat)

I keep thinking about this GI from the 11th Brigade. His name was Tom Glen. He'd heard rumors about My Lai, and shortly before he got out, he wrote to the brass at the Americal Division about them. They gave his letter to a Major to look into. You know what he did? Just wrote back that it was all a bunch of bullshit. You know who that Major was? His name was Colin Powell.

DISSOLVE TO:

CLOSE ON PHOTOGRAPHS. Grainy pools of blacks and grays and reds. PULL BACK to reveal we're looking at DIGITAL PHOTOS.

...OF MARINES and a HUMVEE destroyed by a roadside BOMB... A YOUNG BOY in pajamas with his face and head covered in blood. MEN with massive head wounds... A WOMAN AND A CHILD on their knees, hands shielding their faces... Over these images:

REPORTERS' VOICES

...accusations that marines from Kilo Company carried out mass killings of civilians in reprisal in the Iraqi town of Haditha, a long center of insurgent activity... new allegations that the November 2005 incident was covered up by senior officers of the 3rd Marine Regiment... characterized by both the Pentagon and the Bush Administration as an "isolated incident" with no bearing on the conduct of the war...

More images now from the war on terror... the black hoods and naked, brutalized PRISONERS OF ABU GHRAIB... the "ENEMY COMBATANTS" OF GUANTANAMO BAY caged in their orange jumpsuits...

Over these images, a single word appears:

REMEMBER.

FADE OUT