

For James S. Hartzell Library

STAGECOACH BRAVO

by

Frank McAdams

Golden Award 1979

REGISTERED: WGAw

125

FADE IN

Superimposed against a hot afternoon sky:

VIETNAM

AFTER THE TET OFFENSIVE

A Marine LT. COLONEL, a motor transport battalion commander, with a craggy, suntanned face, silver oak leaf pinned on his utility cap, chomps on an unlit cigar. The Lt. Col. has a deeply worried look. Only his face is seen; he is pacing, back and forth, about to make a decision.

A Second Lieutenant, JOHN GRAVELL, 24, approaches the Lt. Col. who removes the cigar from his mouth. Gravelle has a lean, athletic build, a close cropped Marine haircut. Lt. Gravelle is sweating profusely, breathing heavily. He wipes his brow with the green tee shirt he is wearing.

LT. COL.

You know what has to be done.

LT. GRAVELL

Balls to the wall.

LT. COL.

Not much time, so go right through those fucking bastards!

LT. GRAVELL

Yes sir. Right through em.

LT. COL.

Take your place.

Lt. Gravelle jogs off as the Lt. Col. replaces the cigar in his mouth. He resumes his pacing routine, waiting...waiting...

Lt. Gravelle is in position. Sweat, rolling down his brow and cheeks, waters a worried look.

The Lt. Col. smiles and nods.

Lt. Gravelle answers with a nod and takes a deep breath. This is it!

LT. GRAVELL

Okay, go!

A line of Marines stands. This is an array of young, excited faces, eyes riveted to the coming action. The Marines begin yelling.

Lt. Gravell starts running. He is BOUNCING A BASKETBALL!

Obviously, Lt. Gravell is not involved in combat but still a tension filled sports situation, seconds to go.

Both teams are using a full court press. Lt. Gravell's team is attempting to move the ball downcourt.

The Marine spectators on the sidelines -- that array of young, excited faces -- are screaming for their respective teams.

Lt. Gravell passes the ball. It comes back; he takes a jump shot. He hits. Screams are heard as the ball swishes through the net.

Lt. STEVE NICHOLS, middle 20s, dark hair, takes the ball off and passes to a teammate. Lt. Nichols gets open, takes a pass and tries to work the ball downcourt. He passes again.

A teammate, PFC KINGSTON PRINCE, about 22, black, muscular, moves into the key, then passes back to Lt. Nichols.

Lt. Nichols attempts a drive-in shot. He lays the ball up, loses his balance and falls, grabbing his right foot, tossing around in sudden, twisted, pain.

The ball is rebounded by Lt. Gravell's team. PFC Prince signals for a timeout, but a whistle sounds, ending the game.

Clusters of Marines cheer for the winning team. Others walk away, dejected. Some money changes hands; one Marine is angry.

ANGRY MARINE
One point. Shit!

Other Marines, from the victorious company, begin chanting:

MARINES
We're number one! We're number one!

Lt. Nichols is still down at the far end of the court. Two Medical Corpsmen are attending him.

The Lt. Col. goes over to Lt. Nichols, bends down and says something. He pats Lt. Nichols on the shoulder.

The Lt. Col. walks back upcourt, shakes hands with Lt. Gravell, pats him on the back.

Capt. J.T. EILER, late 20s, medium height, with a utility cap masking part of his face, walks over to the Lt. Col. and offers a handshake. Capt. Eiler is the commander of Bravo Company, which lost the close game.

LT. COL.

Captain Eiler, your boys couldn't handle the full court press.

CAPT. EILER

We still have a chance. One loss won't kill us.

LT. COL.

What about Lieutenant Nichols?

Capt. Eiler throws a brief, but unconcerned, look to the end of the court, where Lt. Nichols is still being attended.

CAPT. EILER

He'll be okay.

The Lt. Col. gives Capt. Eiler a penetrating stare, wondering at this man who has little concern for an injured junior officer.

LT. COL.

You can't afford to lose an officer with a convoy coming up.

CAPT. EILER

It's nothing serious Colonel.

LT. COL.

Be at S-3 Operations in thirty minutes.

The Lt. Col. walks off, leaving Capt. Eiler by himself. Capt. Eiler takes another look at Lt. Nichols and walks away in a different direction.

CUT TO:

INT. S-3 OPERATIONS DAY

The hooch, what the battalion office structures and sleeping quarters are called, is a rectangular affair, composed of wooden supports, canvas sides and a tin roof. Four Clerks are busy with routine office work.

The S-3 office is partitioned in the rear, for an office/conference room. Stretched across the partition is a battle map of the Danang -- Phu Bai area, dotted with colored push pins and red grease pencil markings, enemy movements, ambushes and fire fights.

A BLACK PFC enters. He is a clerk, returning to work after playing in the basketball game, obviously pleased that Headquarters Company won. The Black PFC sits at his desk. Another CLERK, wearing glasses, looks up.

CLERK

Heard one of the officers got
lunched.

BLACK PFC

Broke his fuckin' gord man!

CLERK

Guess Bravo Company is jinxed.

The Lt. Col. enters as the "Poagues" resume their work. The Lt. Col. is followed by the battalion executive officer, Major ALDUS HENRY ASHWORTH, early 30s, "high and tight" Marine haircut, six feet, five inches tall. Major Ashworth walks like a man who is ashamed of being tall, head bowed.

As the Lt. Col. passes the Black PFC, he gives the young man a pat on the shoulder.

LT. COL.

Good game out there.

BLACK PFC

Thank you sir.

Major Ashworth walks by and nods to the Black PFC

MAJOR ASHWORTH

That's the way to play!

The Black PFC hatefully stares at Major Ashworth as the executive officer follows the Lt. Col. into the conference room.

BLACK PFC
Man, he wasn't even there!
(Mimicing)
That's the way to play!

INT. S-3 CONFERENCE ROOM

Capt. JOHN CORLISS, operations officer, late 20s, a career officer, is sitting behind the desk. Behind him is another battle map with similar pins and grease pencil markings. Next to Capt. Corliss is Capt. Eiler, thumbing through a clipboard of intelligence messages. Both men stand when the Lt. Col. enters.

CAPT. CORLISS
Colonel. Major Ashworth.

The Lt. Col. nods and sits near the desk. Major Ashworth takes a seat next to Capt. Eiler.

LT. COL.
Gents, this is going to be
one heavy weekend.

CAPT. CORLISS
Yes sir. Captain Eiler and I were
looking at the intelligence reports.
Something's coming.

LT. COL.
Captain Corliss, I'm worried about
Bravo's convoy on Monday.

CAPT. EILER
These reports have changed since
last week.

LT. COL.
Because they're intelligent.

Capt. Corliss stands. He walks to the wall map and picks up a pointer. He makes a sweeping gesture.

CAPT. CORLISS
The Hai Vanh Pass is going through
some sort of buildup.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
How about contact?

CAPT. CORLISS
Sporadic. Hit and run. The areas
are marked. No pattern.

LT. COL.
What are the chances of the convoy
getting through the pass without
being ambushed?

CAPT. CORLISS
The convoy will be hit. Maybe more
than once.

A short silence falls. Even though the men knew this, the
bluntness makes them think deeper.

LT. COL.
Captain Eiler, who will be in
command?

Capt. Eiler is staring at the map. He is jolted by the question.

CAPT. EILER
Uh, Lieutenant Nichols sir.

The Lt. Col. takes a cigar out of his chest pocket, sticks it
between his teeth and lights it. He expected this answer.

LT. COL.
How about taking this yourself?

CAPT. EILER
I'm preparing for the Commandant's
visit. Besides, I have confidence
in Lieutenant Nichols.

LT. COL.
This is probably going to be the
toughest convoy since Tet.

CAPT. CORLISS
Captain Eiler and I will get the
new radio frequencies at Division.

LT. COL.
Get on that! Al, what about the
Commandant's visit?

MAJOR ASHWORTH

The inspection route is on your desk.
I'm working on the luncheon menu. I
heard the Commandant likes chocolate
ice cream.

LT. COL.

What a contrast, planning a "rough
rider" convoy and chocolate ice cream.

CAPT. EILER

Colonel, I can predict that Bravo
Company will get a high rating.

LT. COL.

We all love ratings. How many G-2
reports before the convoy leaves?

CAPT. CORLISS

Tomorrow afternoon. About 1500 sir.

LT. COL.

Keep me informed.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

The USO show is tonight Colonel.

LT. COL.

Forgot about that.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

There's also a steak fry at the
Staff/O Club.

LT. COL.

Sherman was right. War is hell!

The Lt. Col. stands and looks at the map. The other officers stand.

First Lieutenant CARL BERGEN, the battalion adjutant enters. He
is bald, middle 40s, a former gunnery sergeant. He is carrying
a clipboard.

LT. BERGEN

Colonel, G-1 finally approved the
officer replacement.

LT. COL.

Nice of them, four weeks late.
What are we getting Mister Bergen?

LT. BERGEN

Experienced. He's seen action.

LT. COL.
From which unit?

Lt. Bergen hesitates. He looks around knowing that he is about to announce a bombshell.

LT. BERGEN
The, uh, 5th Marine Regiment.

Major Ashworth and Capt. Eiler exchange quick glances, exposing worried suspicions.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Who in the 5th Marines?

LT. BERGEN
(Softly)
Lieutenant Joshua McCahey.

Capt. Eiler moans. Major Ashworth acts like he knew it all the time but still hates the news.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
It can't be!

CAPT. EILER
Coming back, like a bad penny.

The Lt. Col. sees these reactions. He puffs on a cigar.

LT. COL.
Ah ha! A young Turk with a reputation. So it seems.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
A troublemaker sir. He was here during Tet. Transferred later.

LT. COL.
Obviously. Why?

CAPT. EILER
He was...

Capt. Eiler halts, after getting a stern look from Major Ashworth.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
I'll explain the saga of Mister
McCahey, in private, Colonel.

LT. COL.
As soon as he reports in, I want
to see him. Thank you gentlemen.

The Lt. Col. exits the conference room, leaving Major Ashworth
and Capt. Eiler fuming and frustrated.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD DAY

Coming through a swirl of dust, down an unpaved road, toward
the battalion compound, is a battered and filthy looking jeep.
The driver is Lance Corporal JACK SCHROEDER, about 19, helmet
cocked on his head, M-16 slung on the back of the seat.

Next to L/CPL Schroeder is First Lieutenant JOSHUA MCCAHEY,
late 20s, under six feet, dark hair, wearing not the regulation
Marine utility cap but a faded green baseball cap, almost in
defiance of regulations. Lt. McCahey has the look of a man
who dreads where he is going.

The jeep stops at an intersection. Nearby is an Army $\frac{3}{4}$ ton
personnel carrier. The hood is up; a Driver is pouring water into
the radiator. Sitting in the cab is a knockout American blond,
MARTHA "MARTY" PERREAU, looking sensational despite the tropical
humidity. The personnel carrier has a USO license plate.

Marty glances to the side. Her eyes widen. She sees someone she
obviously recognizes.

Lt. McCahey is nearby in the jeep. The cross traffic clears and
the jeep pulls off.

Marty jumps out of the personnel carrier and takes several steps
before realizing that the jeep is too far down the road. She
brushes back a curl.

MARTY
Sonnuvabitch!

CUT TO:

EXT. BRAVO COMPANY DAY

Gunnery Sergeant HERBERT RAYHORN, 36, a stocky black, exits from the Bravo Company office holding a clipboard. He is wearing the standard jungle utilities, pistol on his hip. He wipes his brow and walks toward the motor pool.

EXT. MOTOR POOL DAY

Sgt. Rayhorn walks into the engine repair area, of Bravo Company, checking the trucks that are on repair. He is alone, making marks on the clipboard, checking truck numbers.

Grabbing a nearby creeper, Sgt. Rayhorn lies on it and slides under the truck.

Underneath the truck, Sgt. Rayhorn is looking at the transmission shaft. He puts down the clipboard and inspects closer.

Suddenly several feet and legs are seen walking around next to the truck. Sgt. Rayhorn pays no mind. He hears voices...

FIRST VOICE

You sure man?

SECOND VOICE

Straight scoop.

THIRD VOICE

If Nichols is hurt, then Captain Eiler will take the convoy.

SECOND VOICE

That raises the price to two G's.

Sgt. Rayhorn stops working. He listens.

FIRST VOICE

The convoy has to stop. We wait for an ambush. It'll happen.

THIRD VOICE

We ding him while the shit is goin' on.

SECOND VOICE

It's gotta be quick.

FIRST VOICE
What if all of us get him?

THIRD VOICE
Split three ways man.

Sgt. Rayhorn is frozen at what he hears. Three Marines are conspiring to shoot Capt. Eiler!

The feet shuffle off and the voices fade.

Sgt. Rayhorn recovers. He moves out from under the truck.

Sgt. Rayhorn walks out into the motor pool, trying to see where the Marines went. There are small clusters of Marines working, nothing suspicious. Sgt. Rayhorn looks around, confused.

EXT. BATTALION COMPOUND DAY

Lt. McCahey's jeep drives through the gate and comes to a stop. Half ton and 12 ton tractor-trailer trucks are lined up on four distinct sections.

Lt. McCahey gets out of the jeep, wearing a .45 on his hip. He takes out a gray officer's Val Pack then offers a handshake to L/CPL Schroeder.

LT. MCCAHEY
Schroeder, why am I thanking you
for taking me to a place where I
don't want to go?

SCHROEDER
It's better than where we've been.

LT. MCCAHEY
Take care and watch the leg. No
more Purple Hearts.

Schroeder hands a small rectangular package to Lt. McCahey. Then he puts the gearshift in first.

SCHROEDER
Lieutenant, this is for you.

LT. MCCAHEY
Now just a minute!

SCHROEDER
For Phu Loc. The guys wanted
you to have it.

The jeep screeches out and heads toward the gate as Schroeder throws back a final, victorious wave.

Lt. McCahey watches the jeep leave. One chapter in his Vietnam tour is completed. The last chapter is beginning. He opens the present.

It is a wrist bracelet, inscribed on the front: LT. J.C. McCAHEY, USMCR. The bracelet is turned over, another inscription: From the 5th Marines. For Phu Loc.

Lt. McCahey is touched. He recovers and sticks the present in his chest pocket. He picks up his Val Pack and starts walking toward the battalion staff offices.

As he walks, Lt. McCahey is glancing around, looking at his old battalion, remembering the days of the Tet Offensive.

Suddenly a whizzing, whining sound is heard, followed by an explosion -- then a second explosion -- rocket and mortar attack! Lt. McCahey heaves his Val Pack under a truck and starts running toward a slit trench.

There is mass confusion; sirens are blaring as Marines are running toward the slit trenches. More explosions pound the compound.

Arriving at a slit trench, Lt. McCahey dives in.

In the trench, Marines are hugging dear earth, believers for the duration of the attack.

EXT. COMPOUND DAY

The attack is over. An all clear siren blares, then dies. Numerous complaints and groans, from the troops, are heard as they routinely climb out of the trench and dust themselves off.

Lt. McCahey gets out of the trench and brushes some dirt off his already dusty jungle utilites. His actions are broken by the voice of Staff Sergeant OLLIE MCCALL, a thin, burned out NCO who has been the victim of two failed marriages, 18 years in the Marine Corps, battles with the system and bourbon, which is why

he is still a staff sergeant.

SGT. MCCALL
Seems they let anybody back in
this outfit.

Lt. McCahey turns and sees an old friend.

LT. MCCAHEY
I'll be a sonuvabitch!

SGT. MCCALL
You were bad enough as a second
lieutenant.

They shake hands.

LT. MCCAHEY
Sergeant McCall, still collecting
road dust?

SGT. MCCALL
And a bad reputation. Hey, we heard
you got blown away. Something about
Phu Loc.

LT. MCCAHEY
Seems I disappointed some people
by surviving.

SGT. MCCALL
And shocked others by returning.

LT. MCCAHEY
Haven't reported in yet.

SGT. MCCALL
We got a new battalion C.O. And
Captain Ashworth got promoted.
He's the X.O. now.

LT. MCCAHEY
I forgot he answers two phones
instead of one.

SGT. MCCALL
You're in time for the steak fry
at the club.

LT. MCCAHEY
White tie or black?

SGT. MCCALL
Green side out. Hey, gotta run
Glad you're back.

LT. MCCAHEY
I'm not.

Sgt. McCall starts walking away. He turns and yells back.

SGT. MCCALL
Hope you didn't forget how to run
convoys!

LT. MCCAHEY
I've retired!

Lt. McCahey looks in the direction of the battalion offices. Time to report in.

INT. ADJUTANT'S OFFICE DAY

The office "Poagues" are cleaning up the mess after the rocket attack. On the floor is a framed cartoon of a tough looking, battle weary, Marine. The inscription reads: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil 'cuz I'm the toughest motherfucker in the valley!" The glass has been broken; the frame is cracked. A Clerk picks up the pieces and stares at the cartoon.

Another Clerk replaces a Japanese fan on a shelf.

Lt. McCahey enters while the cleanup continues. He walks through the office to the desk of Lt. Gerber, who is speaking on a landline (EE-8) phone. Lt. Gerber doesn't notice Lt. McCahey.

LT. GERBER
Get the theatre ready for the show,
seats cleaned and dressing rooms
washed.
(Pause)
And plug the glory holes in the
dressing rooms!

Lt. Gerber replaces the phone and looks up. Surprise!

LT. GERBER
Mac! You made it in.

Lt. Gerber stands and shakes hands. Lt. McCahey sits down. He hands Gerber his Officer Qualification Record (OQR).

LT. MCCAHEY
This place never used to get hit
in the afternoon.

LT. GERBER
Times change. It breaks up the day.

LT. MCCAHEY
It also broke up the office.

Being the professional adjutant, Lt. Gerber begins thumbing through the OQR. McCahey looks around.

LT. GERBER
How was it with the "grunts?"

LT. MCCAHEY
Rough. They take a lot of shit
and nobody cares.

LT. GERBER
Glad to be back?

LT. MCCAHEY
Glad? Five weeks left in Nam and
they cut orders for me back here.

LT. GERBER
Mac, it's slack duty. You'll
ride a desk. Don't worry.

Lt. Gerber continues looking through the OQR. He comes across the awards page. He slows down, reading closely. He looks up with deep admiration.

LT. GERBER
My God. Bronze Star, Navy and
Marine Corps Medal, Purple Heart.
On one operation!

LT. MCCAHEY
Will there be an investigation
into that?

Lt. Gerber pauses. This last statement has a deep meaning to them.

LT. GERBER

Mac, you know how I felt. I didn't want to type the letter.

LT. MCCAHEY

I'm sorry. I know.

LT. GERBER

At one time you were the most talked about Lieutenant in the First Marine Division.

LT. MCCAHEY

I'd like to talk my way out of this battalion.

LT. GERBER

That reminds me. The Colonel wants to see you.

INT. C.O.'S OFFICE DAY

Major Ashworth is sitting in the office's outer section, partitioned by a stained louver section. Major Ashworth is speaking on a landline phone, making notes, as Lt. Gerber and McCahey enter. Lt. Gerber is carrying Lt. McCahey's OQR. Lt. McCahey takes off his baseball cap and looks at the redecorated office; it wasn't like this when he left.

Major Ashworth rearranges the picture of his wife and two children, as the other officers wait for the conversation to end.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Sergeant Renfro, you've got two days to get the chocolate ice cream.

(Pause)

I don't care. Find it!

Major Ashworth slams the phone into the cradle, then notices Lt. McCahey. It is obvious that these two men hate each other. Major Ashworth has contempt at Lt. McCahey's contrasting appearance, the dirty utilities, the .45 pistol, the worn non-regulation baseball cap. Major Ashworth is disgusted!

LT. GERBER

Lieutenant McCahey's OQR Major.
Uh, on the awards page...

Major Ashworth is not listening. He takes the record but continues giving Lt. McCahey a snobby, waspish, once over.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

I never thought I'd be seeing you
back here Mister McCahey.

LT. MCCAHEY

It wasn't my idea Captain, uh, I
mean Major.

Major Ashworth glares at Lt. McCahey, thinking that the slip-up
in rank was intentional, which it was.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Obviously. Your ideas run on a
different track.

LT. GERBER

Sir, if you'll note the OQR, while
Lieutenant McCahey was with the 5th
Marines...

MAJOR ASHWORTH

I'm aware of his former unit,
Lieutenant Gerber!

LT. MCCAHEY

Didn't the Major think I would
survive?

Major Ashworth's jaw tightens. The weak chink in his armor is a
flippant junior officer. Major Ashworth talks through clenched
teeth, trying to control his boiling point.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Get this! I don't like your transfer
back here any more than you. If I
had my way, you'd...

LT. MCCAHEY

...be serving more time in hell
Major? With five weeks left, I
can put up with anything.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Then start by getting rid of that
baseball cap. I want you in a
regulation uniform, with a
Marine haircut!

LT. MCCAHEY
Major, I just reported in from an
infantry regiment. My Val Pack
isn't even unpacked.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
I'm sorry it will be.

LT. GERBER
Sir, the Colonel will want to know...

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Thank you Lieutenant Gerber. Let's
report Mister McCahey.

Lt. Gerber takes his cue and exits, frustrated. Major Ashworth
and Lt. McCahey stare at each other.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Your convoy days are over Lieutenant
Hotshot. We still know how to deal
with troublemakers.

Lt. McCahey follows Major Ashworth around the partition, into
the Lt. Col's office space. It is a large office, lushly decorated
for a combat zone. A cut-down 90 mm tank shell serves as an ash
tray. Behind the Lt. Col. are framed photographs of President
Lyndon Johnson, John F. Kennedy (a signature on this one), and
General Leonard F. Chapman, Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Major Ashworth places Lt. McCahey's OQR on the Lt. Col.'s desk.
Lt. McCahey walks to the desk and stands at attention.

LT. MCCAHEY
Lieutenant McCahey reporting for
duty sir.

The Lt. Col. nods and takes a long look at the junior officer who
has sparked such diverse reactions. The Lt. Col. opens the OQR.

LT. COL.
Stand at ease Lieutenant.

Lt. McCahey breaks from his stand of attention.

LT. COL.
Understand you used to be in
this battalion.

LT. MCCAHEY
Yes sir. Transferred to the 5th
Marines after Tet.

The Lt. Col. continues reading, flipping pages.

LT. COL.
You were in Bravo Company.
Captain Eiler, right?

LT. MCCAHEY
Yes sir.

LT. COL.
How many convoys did you participate
in?

LT. MCCAHEY
Approximately fifty-three Colonel.

The Lt. Col. looks up, surprised at this figure.

LT. COL.
That's a lot of convoys.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
There's more to this battalion than
running convoys.

LT. MCCAHEY
Possibly Major, if one has never
been on a convoy.

Major Ashworth bristles. He starts to reprimand Lt. McCahey but
is quickly cut off by the Lt. Col.

LT. COL.
Al, there are three recent entries
in his awards section. Did you
know about this?

Major Ashworth is taken aback. He stares at the Lt. Col. in
embarrassed ignorance, not wanting to look at Lt. McCahey.

LT. COL.
Bronze Star, Navy and Marine Corps
Medal, Purple Heart. They don't
give the MCM for opening C Rations.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Colonel, I, uh...

The Lt. Col., impressed at these decorations, waves for Major Ashworth to shut up. Major Ashworth is seething!

LT. COL.
How'd you get the MCM?

LT. MCCAHEY
Usual way sir. Somebody saw me do something.

LT. COL.
I was nominated for one during Korea. Paper work got lost. I never got it.

LT. MCCAHEY
You can have mine Colonel.

The Lt. Col. laughs. He closes the OQR and leans back in his chair.

LT. COL.
Al, see that Lieutenant McCahey is assigned to Bravo Company.

Lt. McCahey's easiness is broken. He is shocked.

LT. MCCAHEY
Sir, any company but Bravo.

LT. COL.
Lieutenant, this is my battalion, from the seat where my ass is to the youngest PFC on the perimeter. What's past is history. You began in Bravo Company; you'll end there.

CUT TO:

INT. ADJUTANT'S OFFICE DAY

Major Ashworth barges into the S-1 section, highly upset, walking directly to Lt. Gerber's desk.

Lt. Gerber looks up from a mountain of paper work. His utility jacket is on the back of his chair, his green tee shirt sweat stained in the midday tropical heat.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Why wasn't I informed about
those decorations?

Lt. Gerber slowly stands, not concealing his anger.

LT. GERBER
Major, I mentioned this...

MAJOR ASHWORTH
I'm going to remember this, Gerber,
at fitness report time!

LT. GERBER
Major, you didn't give me a chance!

MAJOR ASHWORTH
That was stupid. Don't you use
your head?

Lt. Gerber starts to say something, then looks around the office. The Clerks have stopped typing, etc. Their heads are not looking at the confrontation but they hear every word, as their immediate superior is being openly reprimanded.

LT. GERBER
Major, I do use my head.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
This is unsatisfactory, Lieutenant!

Major Ashworth turns and leaves as quickly as he entered, leaving Lt. Gerber standing at the desk, embarrassed and angry at the thoughtlessness of his executive officer.

CUT TO:

INT. JUNIOR OFFICERS HOOCH DAY

The hooch consists of six scattered bunks, each framed with mosquito netting. Next to each bunk is a metal locker for clothes. Posters adorn the backs of the lockers and the sides, with such sayings as: Visit Vietnam -- Fun Capital of the World; We Gotta Get Outa This Place; and the famous stock pinup of Raquel Welch.

Lt. McCahey enters, carrying his Val Pack. He looks around and drops the Val Pack next to a stripped bunk. He peels back the mosquito netting and opens a nearby locker.

Second Lieutenant Mike Doralski enters from the opposite end of the hooch. Doralski, 23, looks more like a PFC than an officer. He is lean, close cropped haircut, neat jungle utilities; he has a naive freshness about him.

LT. DORALSKI
Just reporting in?

LT. MCCAHEY
You could say that.

Lt. McCahey unzips his Val Pack, takes his shaving kit and places it on a nearby picnic table that is covered with a regulation blanket. A chess set rests at the end of the table.

LT. DORALSKI
I'm Mike Doralski. Call me Ski.
Been here almost five weeks.

They shake hands.

LT. MCCAHEY
Josh McCahey. Been here one hour.

LT. DORALSKI
You'll get used to it.

Lt. Doralski sits next to the chess set, ready to "indoctrinate" what he thinks is a new replacement.

LT. DORALSKI
(Continuing)
When I first reported in, I was
scared shitless. Gotta few convoys
under my belt now. Gonna be okay.

LT. MCCAHEY
A few convoys. Must be rough.

LT. DORALSKI
You'll get used to it.

LT. MCCAHEY
I doubt it.

Lt. Doralski gives Lt. McCahey a quizzical look.

Two more First Lieutenants enter. The first is JACK GUTTER, 26, smoking a cigarette, sweat stains on his utility jacket. The other is Norm Cross, 27, serious looking.

LT. CROSS
Mac! We heard you got in!

Lts. Cross and McCahey shake hands while Lt. Gutter sits at the picnic table and fiddles with some pieces, feeling coldly at McCahey's sudden arrival.

LT. GUTTER
The prodigal son returneth.

LT. MCCAHEY
(To Lt. Cross)
You look the same Norm.

Lt. Doralski is embarrassed now seeing that Lt. McCahey is well known.

LT. CROSS
How come they sent you back?

Lt. McCahey resumes his unpacking.

LT. MCCAHEY
Somebody figured if I couldn't get greased in a hot zone, I'd die of frustration back here.

LT. GUTTER
What company you get McCahey?

LT. MCCAHEY
B, as in bastard!

LT. CROSS
Captain Eiler! Not again.

Lt. Gutter erupts with a cocky laugh.

LT. DORALSKI
Hey, I'm in Bravo Company.

LT. GUTTER
McCahey here can give you some
pointers Ski. He knows all
about Bravo Company.

Lt. Doralski is even more embarrassed at his original assumption.

LT. DORALSKI
I'm sorry. I thought you were
a new replacement.

Lt. McCahey returns a sly smile.

LT. MCCAHEY
You'll get used to it.

LT. GUTTER
What was it like with the 5th?

LT. MCCAHEY
Worse than the 1st, better than
the 7th.

LT. GUTTER
Rumor has it that you stepped
into some big shit.

Lt. McCahey takes off his dirty utility jacket and throws it on
the floor. There is a bluish operation scar down his left bicep,
the result of a recent wound.

The other three officers notice this immediately, but pretend
not to.

LT. MCCAHEY
Wrong rumor. All the shit was
back here. And I see it hasn't
gone anyplace.

Lt. Gutter shrugs and looks at the chess board. He fingers a pawn.

LT. GUTTER
You remember Scotty Preston?

LT. MCCAHEY
Sure. Platoon honor man in OCS.

LT. GUTTER
Got greased last week. Night
patrol. His own men killed him
by mistake.

Lt. McCahey stops, thinks for a moment, then resumes unpacking,
almost as if the news has no impact.

LT. MCCAHEY
Seems our class has really
taken it.

LT. GUTTER
Jack King and Larry Naber too.
There wasn't enough left of Naber
to put in a pipe pouch.

LT. MCCAHEY
That so?

LT. DORALSKI
My class hasn't lost anyone yet.

LT. GUTTER
It will.

Lt. Doralski sits down and arranges some chess pieces on his side.

LT. MCCAHEY
You're still the same Gutter.
A laugh a minute.

Lt. Cross senses Lt. McCahey's detachment from Gutter.

LT. CROSS
I've got a report to get out.

Lt. Cross starts to leave. He stops at the door.

LT. CROSS
Catch you later Mac.

Lt. Cross exits. Lt. McCahey continues unpacking as Gutter and Doralski begin playing. Lt. Gutter makes a quick defensive move, his mind not on the game.

LT. GUTTER
Convoy's going north Monday.

LT. MCCAHEY
Don't worry about convoys anymore.

LT. GUTTER
A real wagon train this time.

LT. DORALSKI
I'm slated as trail officer.

LT. MCCAHEY
Who's the convoy commander?

LT. GUTTER
Steve Nichols. Or he was.

Lt. McCahey looks up. This doesn't sound good.

LT. MCCAHEY
What happened?

LT. GUTTER
Got hurt. Ain't that a helluva note!
Comes all the way to Nam and gets
hurt in a Goddamn basketball game!

LT. DORALSKI
Maybe Captain Eiler will command.

LT. MCCAHEY
And maybe John Wayne will join
the Marine Corps.

Lt. Gutter moves a chess piece and takes one of Lt. Doralski's.

LT. GUTTER
Ski, this might be your first
road command.

Lt. Doralski moves a piece and smiles.

LT. DORALSKI
Uh, that's called mate.

Lt. Gutter stares at the board, amazed that he has lost.

EXT. COMPOUND DAY

Headquarters Company office is nearby Lt. McCahey's hooch. The screen door opens. Coming down the steps is the company commander, Capt. DAN CARR, 28, a strapping poster board Marine. He is carrying a cassette tape recorder. He walks to a nearby bunker and sits on a sandbagged wall. He fiddles with the buttons and looks at his watch, having something planned.

Capt. Carr looks skyward. He hears something, the faint sound of a distant helicopter. He smiles and begins dictating as the chopper gets nearer.

CAPT. CARR
Hi Jenny. Just got back from a
convoy. Got hit again. The road
dust was so thick we couldn't see
those lousy bastards shooting at us.

The helicopter passes overhead, heading for a nearby landing pad.

CAPT. CARR
(Continuing)
What you're hearing is a Medevac
chopper taking away the wounded.
I'm going back Monday. It'll
be rough.

(Pause)
If the big one comes, you'll be
the last thing I think of.

Lt. McCahey walks by, towel around his waist, carrying his shaving kit. Lt. McCahey smiles, aware of Capt. Carr's "combat experience."

LT. MCCAHEY
Sending a letter home Captain Carr?

CAPT. CARR
Uh hi Lieutenant. Yes.

Slightly embarrassed, Capt. Carr switches off the tape recorder.

Lt. McCahey keeps walking towards the shower hooch, then turns and looks back.

LT. MCCAHEY
Lousy war, but it's the only
one we got!

Capt. Carr glares at Lt. McCahey. He waits for another helicopter that will provide more sound effects for his "combat letter."

CUT TO:

EXT. BRAVO COMPANY DAY

Gunnery Sgt. Rayhorn is standing next to the Bravo Company office. He is staring at his clipboard, thinking heavily about what he overheard.

Sgt. Rayhorn doesn't see Lt. McCahey, cleanshaven, neat utilities, approaching.

LT. MCCAHEY
Gunny Rayhorn!

Sgt. Rayhorn turns, sees Lt. McCahey and beams a smile. They shake hands.

SGT. RAYHORN
Good havin' you back. Comin' with
us Monday?

LT. MCCAHEY
I've been told my convoy days are
over. I'm, uh, looking for
Captain Eiler.

Sgt. Rayhorn pauses. He wonders about telling Lt. McCahey of the conspiracy.

SGT. RAYHORN
He checked out to Division with
Captain Corliss. Something about
new radio requencies.

LT. MCCAHEY
How's Lieutenant Nichols?

SGT. RAYHORN
We'll know soon.
(Pause)
Uh, Lieutenant, I'm glad
you're back.

LT. MCCAHEY
Why? What the hell's going on?

Sgt. Rayhorn is vacillating. He decides against telling Lt. McCahey at this time.

SGT. RAYHORN
There's just a lot of tension
lately.

LT. MCCAHEY
Is it just tension?

SGT. RAYHORN
Yes sir. For now.

CUT TO:

EXT. STAFF/OFFICER CLUB -- LATE AFTERNOON

The Steak Fry. It is being held on the patio adjacent to the Staff/Officer Club. Officers and NCO's are mingling around the grill which Staff Sergeant RONALD RENFRO, late 30s, the battalion chief cook, is presiding. Sgt. Renfro is sucking on a beer, sweating heavily and carrying on a lighthearted conversation with Sgt. McCall, while he is cooking about a dozen steaks.

Other battalion officers and NCO'S are sitting around in chairs next to tables, guzzling mixed drinks or beer in the late afternoon heat as country and western music is heard coming from within the club.

Sitting at one of the tables are Lts. Cross, Gutter and Doralski, already amassing a collection of empty beer cans.

LT. DORALSKI
So what happened during Tet?

LT. GUTTER
We all came of age.

LT. DORALSKI
I meant McCahey.

Lts. Cross and Gutter exchange looks.

LT. CROSS
You don't know anything about Mac?

LT. DORALSKI
I just met him today.

LT. GUTTER
When McCahey reported into this
battalion he was more inexperienced
than you Ski.

LT. CROSS
Shit, we all were. Even a few Captains
and Majors who'd rather not have that
known.

LT. GUTTER
A Lieutenant is always inexperienced
while a Major isn't.

LT. CROSS
Sergeant McCall took Mac under
his wing, showed him how to run a
righteous convoy.

LT. GUTTER
All hell would break loose when Mac
took a convoy north. Shit, I take
one, it's a milk run.

LT. CROSS
Mac even set a record for the
shortest time to Phu Bai, before
he got a letter of reprimand.

LT. GUTTER
Which is better than no mail at all.

LT. CROSS
It wasn't fair Gutter!

LT. GUTTER
Them's the breaks hoss!

LT. DORALSKI
Damn it, what happened?

LT. CROSS
During Tet, Mac got assigned
to a convoy to Hue, north of
Phu Bai.

LT. GUTTER
A biggie. One hundred and
twenty-five vehicles.

LT. DORALSKI
It ran as one convoy?

LT. GUTTER
Orders. From Division.

LT. DORALSKI
A convoy that big is inviting
an ambush. Why didn't they break
it into serials?

LT. CROSS
The order was that it would run
as one convoy. Mac protested but
Eiler wouldn't listen to him.

LT. GUTTER
So the convoy ran as one package.
Captain Eiler was the commander.
McCahey was pace officer.

LT. CROSS
Everyone knew they were walking
into deep shit.

Lt. Cross sets the beer cans in a line across the table as Lt.
Doralski's interest rises.

LT. DORALSKI
Did they get hit?

LT. GUTTER
Some sniper stuff at first. Other
side of the pass, the pace got
clobbered.

LT. CROSS
Road was blocked. Fire from all
sides. The NVA walked motars
right down the convoy line.

Lt. Cross knocks down each of the beer cans with a flick of his hand. Lt. Doralski watches as the cans fall off the table while the country and western music continues.

LT. DORALSKI
What happened to McCahey?

LT. CROSS
He radioed enemy positions to Captain Eiler, requesting air and artillery.

LT. GUTTER
He ordered his pace gunner to open up on a treeline.

LT. DORALSKI
What's wrong with returning fire?

LT GUTTER
Afterwards, they found the bodies of eight South Vietnamese soldiers in the treeline, presumably killed by McCahey's orders.

LT. CROSS
An investigation followed. We lost nineteen trucks, eleven killed and fourteen wounded. Battalion starts an investigation because eight ARVN'S were in the wrong place.

LT. DORALSKI
And McCahey got reprimanded?

LT. CROSS
"Captain" Ashworth was the investigating officer. He and Eiler hung Mac out to dry. Mac kept trying to find out why those ARVN'S were there.

(Pause)
He wanted to talk to ARVN Headquarters but Ashworth restricted him to the compound. It got ugly.

LT. DORALSKI
What did Captain Eiler do?

Lt. Cross hesitates; he looks at Gutter.

LT. CROSS
Took care of his career. Troublemakers don't make major.

LT. GUTTER

That was a long time ago. Some feel McCahey overreacted.

LT. CROSS

The reprimand was approved. Mac got an unsatisfactory fitness report. Dick Pratt, who was on temporary duty with the 5th Marines got killed. Ashworth and Eiler figured Mac was the perfect replacement.

LT. GUTTER

Every officer who got that slot was either killed or wounded. McCahey surprised everyone by surviving. That wasn't in the game plan.

LT. CROSS

Mac's chances for Captain and making it a career ended there. And he knew it.

(Pause)

Steaks smell good. Your turn to buy Gutter.

Lt. Gutter drains his beer, stands and walks inside to the bar. After he leaves Lt. Cross leans forward and talks in a low tone.

LT. CROSS

I'm gonna tell you something, only cause you're in Bravo Company.

LT. DORALSKI

Whaddya mean?

LT. CROSS

Captain Eiler froze on that convoy. He pulled the handset cord from his radio, claimed he had comm problems, while Mac was under fire.

LT. DORALSKI

What! You gotta be shittin'.

LT. CROSS

off the record?

LT. DORALSKI

Okay. Off the record.

LT. CROSS

Mac learned this from Eiler's jeep driver. The driver was going to give Mac a statment.

LT. DORALSKI
That's unbelievable!

LT. CROSS
The kid got killed on the return
convoy. So no statement.

LT. DORALSKI
A coverup?

LT. CROSS
Don't be so Goddamn naive! You
think every Marine officer is the
perfect leader?

LT. DORALSKI
I suppose not.

LT. CROSS
You show Captain Eiler your backside
and he'll fleece you like a Hong
Kong pickpocket.

LT. DORALSKI
Like how?

LT. CROSS
That three-by-five card file that he
keeps locked in his drawer.

LT. DORALSKI
I've heard about it.

LT. CROSS
That's his memory. If you fuck up,
he writes it down. Keeps a record
for fitness reports.

LT. DORALSKI
What about when you do something good?

LT. CROSS
He'll take the credit for it.
(Pause)
Ski, cover your ass. Mac was a
dedicated officer, one of the best.
But there's no way he'll make Captain
now. How many officers survive a
letter of reprimand in a combat zone?

Lt. Doralski starts to say something but is cut off by Lt.
Gutter returning with another round of beers. Gutter puts the
beers on the table, sits down.

LT. GUTTER

I still say McCahey should have never opened up on that treeline. Should have concentrated fire on other targets.

LT. CROSS

Gutter?

Lt. Gutter takes a long pull from his beer.

LT. GUTTER

I'm serious.

LT. CROSS

Gutter, were you there?

Lt. Gutter stares at Lt. Cross. He can't say anything.

EXT. STAFF/OFFICER CLUB

Sgt. Renfro is at the grill still turning steaks and sipping on a beer. Amidst the loud country music, Major Ashworth approaches.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Sergeant Renfro, did you locate chocolate ice cream for the Commandant's dessert?

SGT. RENFRO

Not yet Major.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

I want this done. How often do you meet the Commandant?

SGT. RENFRO

Probably only once Major.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

You get that ice cream sergeant.

That stated, Major Ashworth walks off toward the bar.

EXT. STAFF/OFFICER CLUB

Cpts. Eiler and Corliss have just entered, carrying mixed drinks. They settle at a table. Capt. Eiler is looking at a Division report.

Major Ashworth approaches the table.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
What's happening at Division?

CAPT. CORLISS
Getting ready for the Commandant.
The battalion got a new radio
call sign.

CAPT. EILER
We're now known as "Stagecoach."

MAJOR ASHWORTH
That makes the convoy Stagecoach
Bravo.

(Pause)
Did Lieutenant McCahey report into
Bravo Company?

CAPT. EILER
Haven't seen him yet. I'll take
care of him. We need a mess kit
repair officer.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Too well do I remember the trouble
he caused. Absolutely no convoy duty.

CAPT. EILER
Right. McCahey will never command
a convoy.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Splendid.

Major Ashworth smiles and walks off, leaving the Captains to
enjoy their drinks as the steaks sizzle in the wartime heat.

CUT TO:

EXT. PERIMETER LATE AFTERNOON

Lt. McCahey is walking, alone, along the Bravo Company perimeter.
He stops in front of a fighting hole, kicks the sandbags and looks
out at the rice paddies.

About fifty yards away concertina wire is strung along the
perimeter. Lt. McCahey sits on a sandbag and lights a
cigarette, trying to figure out what went wrong.

About ten yards from Lt. McCahey is a command bunker, about 15 feet high, an M-60 machine gun on the top level. The gun is being serviced by 23 year-old KINGSTON PRINCE, one of the Marines from the basketball game. Prince, a muscular black, sights McCahey and looks up from his work.

PFC PRINCE
Loo-tenant McCahey, we heard you
been greased!

Lt. McCahey looks up and smiles. Another old friend.

LT. MCCAHEY
A little bloody, but unbowed.
C'mon down!

EXT. PERIMETER LATE AFTERNOON

Lt. McCahey and PFC Prince are sitting on some sandbags, smoking. It is obvious that these two men have gone through something together in the past.

LT. MCCAHEY
You were a Corporal once. What
the hell happened?

PFC PRINCE
Same as you Lieutenant. They
fucked me.

LT. MCCAHEY
That's a loose term for a Marine.
Not your fault huh?

PFC PRINCE
I was there. Guess I'm guilty.

LT. MCCAHEY
Like how?

PFC Prince stares out at the rice paddy, feeling reluctant to spew out his troubles.

PFC PRINCE
Man, why should I be bawling my
troubles to...

LT. MCCAHEY
...A honky officer?

PFC PRINCE breaks into a grin.

PFC PRINCE
Don't put me on man. I remember
you when.

LT. MCCAHEY
Okay, Mister PFC Kingston Prince,
lay it out.

PFC Prince is frustrated. He walks several steps toward the
perimeter wire, turns and faces Lt. McCahey, quite serious.

PFC PRINCE
It ain't like it was before Tet.
This company has problems.

LT. MCCAHEY
For instance?

PFC PRINCE
Start at the top Lieutenant.

LT. MCCAHEY
Captain Eiler?

PFC PRINCE
There it is.

LT. MCCAHEY
What about Captain Eiler?

PFC PRINCE
It's bad Lieutenant.

LT. MCCAHEY
I'm not gonna know if you won't
tell me.

PFC PRINCE
I was with about five other dudes
one night. One of 'em was stokin'
on a joint. He had just lit up.

LT. MCCAHEY
Who caught you?

PFC PRINCE
Captain Judas T. Eiler!

LT. MCCAHEY
Special court martial?

PFC PRINCE
All of us. Captain Eiler lied
on the stand. He said we were
passing the joint around.

(Pause)
Lieutenant, I remember the convoy
during Tet. I know about that man!

LT. MCCAHEY
Didn't you try to explain?

PFC PRINCE
I was up for sergeant. I went to
him, hat in hand, told him I done
nothing wrong.

LT. MCCAHEY
What did he say?

PFC PRINCE
He made some notes, the ones he
keeps locked up in the drawer.
Then he told me to get out of
his office.

LT. MCCAHEY
You gonna feel sorry for yourself
forever?

PFC PRINCE
It ain't me Lieutenant. The man
has destroyed what was once a good
truck company. He told Sergeant
Rayhorn that I should be doin'
three to five in the brig. All that
man wants to do is send people to jail.

LT. MCCAHEY
That he has done -- many times!

PFC PRINCE
It's hard enough going on the road,
ambushes and mines. Then we come
back here and put up with bullshit.

LT. MCCAHEY
I've had to put up with the same
bullshit._

PFC PRINCE
Seems that's all this war does, make
everybody partners in bullshit.

LT. MCCAHEY
You're letting a few shitty officers
give you military constipation.

PFC PRINCE
Lieutenant, that man sneaks around the
hooches at night spyin' on the troops!

LT. MCCAHEY
How bad is it?

PFC PRINCE
Bad.

LT. MCCAHEY
I asked how bad.

PFC PRINCE
You shoulda' stayed in the bush.

LT. MCCAHEY
A "hit" on Captain Eiler?

PFC PRINCE
I didn't say it. You did.

LT. MCCAHEY
How much?

PFC PRINCE
Word has it, two grand.

LT. MCCAHEY
Were these men here during Tet?

PFC PRINCE
I'm not sure.

Lt. McCahey stands, takes a few steps and turns. He's quite
worried now.

LT. MCCAHEY
This is great. Eat the apple and
fuck the corps.

PFC PRINCE
You're a shorttimer Lieutenant.
Maybe nothing will happen.

LT. MCCAHEY
And maybe it will.

PFC PRINCE
I've told it like it is. Whatever
that man gets, it's too good.

LT. MCCAHEY
This is a rumor right now. Between
you and me, okay?

PFC PRINCE
That ain't gonna stop anything.
Lieutenant, the man has a price
on his head!

CUT TO:

EXT. STAFF/OFFICER CLUB -- EARLY EVENING

Lt. McCahey saunters onto the patio, goes into the food line and gets a leftover steak. He smiles at the young Cook behind the grill; Sgt. Renfro has taken a deserved leave. Gathering his food, Lt. McCahey looks for a place to sit. Before he moves a foot, he hears Capt. Eiler.

CAPT. EILER
Lieutenant McCahey?

LT. MCCAHEY
Yes Captain?

CAPT. EILER
Tomorrow, 0800. My office.
Standing tall.

LT. MCCAHEY
Yes Captain. 0800.

CAPT. EILER
Think you can handle the Commandant's
inspection tour?

Lt. McCahey pauses, then puts his plate down. He has made a decision, to tell Capt. Eiler that his life is in danger.

LT. MCCAHEY
Captain, I've found out something.
It's serious and involves...

CAPT. EILER
When it involves Bravo Company,
I'll decide what is serious.

LT. MCCAHEY
Captain, this is...,

CAPT. EILER
Get this, Lieutenant, you have
one of the worst records of any
junior officer. You're in Bravo
Company to ride a desk, nothing more.

LT. MCCAHEY
This isn't about me!

CAPT. EILER
Do your job and shut up. You can
understand that, can't you?

Lt. McCahey stares at Capt. Eiler. So much for telling him
about the plot.

LT. MCCAHEY
Yes Captain. Do my job and shut up.

CAPT. EILER
If you fuck up once during the next
five weeks, they'll be able to smell
your fitness report at Quantico.

Capt. Eiler takes a long drink and returns to his table. Lt.
McCahey takes his food and moves to an empty table, showing
anger for his company commander.

Suddenly all the focus is on the gate of the patio. Lt. Steve
Nichols has just entered -- on crutches! With him is Lt. Gravell
and the Battalion Surgeon, Navy Lieutenant Doctor ALLAN REGNOWER,
late 20s, very non military looking.

Capt. Eiler cranes his head wondering what the excitement is.
Lts. Nichols and Gravell are surrounded by NCO'S and other
officers. One of the Lieutenants takes a pen and begins to
write on Lt. Nichols' cast.

Dr. Regnower walks by Capt. Eiler's table.

CAPT. EILER
Doc, what's going on?

DR. REGNOWER
It's called six weeks in a cast.

CAPT. EILER
Nichols is slated for a convoy
north on Monday!

Dr. Regnower surveys the circle of well-wishers, then looks back at Capt. Eiler.

DR. REGNOWER
He's on the bench until the cast
comes off. Call it a million
dollar fracture.

Capt. Eiler stares with disbelief at his company executive officer. This throws a wrench into his machinery.

At the end of the line of tables, sitting alone, eating his cold steak, is Lt. McCahey. He looks up, briefly, then back to his food.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND EVENING

The $\frac{3}{4}$ ton personnel carrier with the USO license plate approaches the battalion gate. Marty Perreau, still looking sensational despite the tropical humidity, is sitting next to the Driver. Three jeeps, part of the troupe, follow the personnel carrier.

Five Marine M.P.'s are standing sentry duty at the gate. The leader is a barrel chested, tough looking buck Sergeant. The M.P. Sergeant stops the line of vehicles and gives them a once over. Then he waves the USO troupe into the compound.

The vehicles pass through the compound gate and head toward the open air theatre.

The open air theatre is lit like an opening nite. It is a covered structure with wooden supports. There are rows of benches filled with young Marines. The benches angle downward toward the stage.

The first two rows do not have benches but little trenches dug in the ground. The troops in these rows sit on sandbags.

The USO vehicles stop next to the stage as the Marines, many of whom are still filing into the theatre, stand and start clapping.

Marty gets out and throws a big kiss to catcalls and yells.

Capt. Dan "Combat" Carr, who knows so much about tape cassettes, is the first officer to approach Marty. She is carrying a makeup kit and two suit bags.

CAPT. CARR
I'm Captain Carr, Headquarters
Commandant. Can I help you?

MARTY
You're young for a Commandant.

Nearby, Lt. Cross nudges Lt. McCahey. Both men are standing to the side of the audience.

LT. CROSS
Get a load of "Combat Carr."

LT. MCCAHEY
Leading the charge of the bullshit
brigade.

Lt. McCahey takes a long look at Marty. He can't tell yet; she resembles somebody from his past. He strains his eyes.

CAPT. CARR
You're the first American woman
these men have seen in months.

MARTY
Down deep, Commandant, we all
look the same.

Capt. Carr smiles, embarrassed. He tries a different tack.

CAPT. CARR
Can I carry your bags?

Capt. Carr doesn't see Major Ashworth standing next to him.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Thank you Captain. I'll take
over from here.

Capt. Carr turns and realizes that he is outflanked and outranked.

Major Ashworth is all but drooling at Marty.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
I'm Major Ashworth, the battalion
executive officer.

MARTY
Everybody has a title, huh?

MAJOR ASHWORTH
And you are?

MARTY
Untitled. My name is Marty.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Marty? That's a man's name.

MARTY
Not when I use it.

Major Ashworth tries a different angle, sensing that his time
before the show is limited.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
If you haven't a ride back to
your hotel, I can secure a jeep
and...

Marty is looking around. She spots Josh McCahey!

Lt. McCahey recognizes her now. He smiles and waves.

MARTY
My God, I don't believe it!

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Why? I have access to many jeeps.
I'm the executive officer.

MARTY
Excuse me.

Marty moves away, heading towards Lt. McCahey, leaving Major Ashworth with a wounded ego.

Marty puts down her makeup kit, throws the suit bags on top of it and puts her arms around Lt. McCahey. The other officers and enlisted men turn, just as surprised as Lt. McCahey.

MARTY

Josh McCahey! I knew it!

Lt. McCahey is embarrassed; Marty isn't.

LT. MCCAHEY

Christ sake! Marty Perreau,
entertaining the troops.

Lt. McCahey wants to get her away from the gawking crowd. He picks up her suitbags.

LT. MCCAHEY

Uh, lemme walk you to the dressing
rooms.

Major Ashworth is blocking the way.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Lieutenant McCahey, the young lady
can find her way by herself.

MARTY

Aw c'mon! Josh and I knew each
other in school.

LT. MCCAHEY

Only a minute Major. The show must
go on.

Major Ashworth can only stare as Lt. McCahey and Marty walk toward the dressing rooms.

LT. MCCAHEY

Make sure the glory holes are plugged
when you get inside.

MARTY

We already heard. Your battalion
is notorious.

LT. MCCAHEY
Just healthy.

They stop in front of the steps leading up to the stage and dressing rooms.

MARTY
We gotta catch up on each other.
The troupe leaves for Hawaii Tuesday night.

One of the troupers, the M.C., FRANKIE PERDAZZO, late 20s, very Italian looking, flashy suit, rushes up the stairs.

FRANKIE
You're on after the "Kittens" Mart!

MARTY
Be up in a minute.

LT. MCCAHEY
After the show?

MARTY
You're on!

LT. MCCAHEY
I'll be waiting with a jeep.

Marty winks and disappears into the backstage area.

CUT TO:

INT. BRAVO COMPANY OFFICE NIGHT

A desk lamp dimly lights Capt. Eiler's office. As the warmup music for the USO show is heard o.s., Capt. Eiler is intently reading a handwritten statement.

On the other side of the desk is Gunnery Sergeant Rayhorn, perched on a map stool.

Capt. Eiler finishes reading and looks up.

CAPT. EILER
Nobody else knows about this?

SGT. RAYHORN

No sir.

CAPT. EILER

Why didn't you confront these men?

SGT. RAYHORN

They were gone by the time I was out from under the truck.

Capt. Eiler leans back in his chair, deeply worried but trying not to show it.

CAPT. EILER

Can you make any identifications, anything?

Sgt. Rayhorn sighs. He just finished explaining that he physically did not see the men.

SGT. RAYHORN

Captain, I only heard them!

CAPT. EILER

Were they white?

Sgt. Rayhorn grimaces. He has disgust at the insensitivity of his commander, a feeling he has often experienced during 16 years in the Marine Corps.

SGT. RAYHORN

Captain, I can't say for sure.

CAPT. EILER

I have to know if they were white!

Only the warmup music is heard. Capt. Eiler is slowly losing control. He suddenly stands and slams his fist on the desk.

CAPT. EILER

(Continuing)

I want a full investigation! I want these cowards charged with conspiracy to commit murder. I know who they are!

Capt. Eiler is now leaning over the desk, voice rising into screams.

CAPT. EILER

(Continuing)

It's that pot smoking group. We'll
get them this time. I know who
they are!

Sgt. Rayhorn shakes his head and looks at the floor.

SGT. RAYHORN

Captain, my statement is all
you have.

Capt. Eiler is not listening. He sits down and takes out a key.
He opens a drawer and takes out the infamous card file. He begins
thumbing through the three-by-five cards.

SGT. RAYHORN

We haven't got evidence against
anyone.

Capt. Eiler stops. He looks up.

CAPT. EILER

Sergeant Rayhorn, may I remind you
that...

Suddenly Capt. Eiler has forgotten what he was going to say. He
stares at Sgt. Rayhorn.

SGT. RAYHORN

Remind me of what Captain?

CAPT. EILER

Uh, nothing. You can go. And
not a word of this.

SGT. RAYHORN

Yes sir.

Sgt. Rayhorn gives Capt. Eiler a wondering look, then exits.

Capt. Eiler sits alone in the office. He turns off the lamp and
sits in the darkness as the USO music is heard o.s.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE NIGHT

The USO show. Frankie Perdazzo, wearing a 60's style tight, flashy, suit, walks on stage, takes a microphone off a stand amid a fanfare from the band, a group of young Polynesian men who appear more tired than enthused.

The Marines are wild and unruly, clapping and yelling, pointing the "V For Victory," which in underground means, "smoke it."

PFC Prince is sitting with two Bravo Company buddies, "Slip" MAXWELL, another black; and DONNATELLI, a cocky Chicago Italian, the company wise guy who likes to be center of attention. Slip takes out a half pint, takes a pull and looks around hoping that nobody saw him. He passes the bottle to Donnatelli.

Major Ashworth is standing to the side of the audience. With him is the battalion Sergeant Major, JOHN PIKE, an overweight flushed faced man, 27 years in the Corps. Major Ashworth, looking at Frankie on the stage, whispers to the Sgt. Major.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Cut off the mike if this guy makes
any anti-war statements.

FRANKIE

How ya doin' Gyrenes?

The crazy Marines clap louder. Frankie smiles and holds up a hand to calm down things.

FRANKIE

I'm your m.c. Frankie Perdazzo.
They say you Marines have hit more
beaches than Annette Funicello and
Frankie Avalon.

Several Marines boo and hiss. They want the show to begin.

Major Ashworth is tense. He nods to the Sgt. Major who moves closer to the steps leading to the stage.

FRANKIE

Really, we gotta helluva show
for you guys.

Donnatelli stands and cups his hands over the mouth.

DONNATELLI
Get off the stage wop!

Frankie glares at Donnatelli amid the whooping. He gathers in his ruffles, tries another stab.

FRANKIE
How about that! One wop calling
another wop a wop! A wop bobba
loo-bop, a wop bam bam!

More clapping. Frankie has a bit of the audience back. He smiles.

FRANKIE
To start off, we have the "Fabulous
Korean Kittens!"

The band strikes up a fanfare as three Korean WOMEN, swathed in tight dresses, with kitten ears on their heads, hustle onto the stage. Frankie replaces the microphone. The three Kittens approach the mike and go into a medley of songs, doing a remarkably poor imitation of Diana Ross and the Supremes. This sets a new dimension to poor imitations.

- - - The Medley takes place here with reaction shots - - -
from the Marines.

EXT. THEATRE NIGHT

The medley is finished. "The Fabulous Korean Kittens" rush off stage as Frankie returns. Then the Kittens come back for a bow.

FRANKIE
The Fabulous Korean Kittens!

As bad as the Kittens were the Marines are up, yelling off their starving, uncritical, heads.

Frankie waits for the troops to calm down.

Donnatelli, Prince and Slip pass the half pint around.

FRANKIE

Hey, this next honey is just that.
Dripping blond hair, like butter.

Donnatelli, angered again, stands to yell.

DONNATELLI

Avanti! Avanti!

Donnatelli raises his right arm, placing his left hand in the crook of his elbow, jacking up his right arm. This brings more yelling. The troops love this!

FRANKIE

Paisan, your fly is open!

(Pause)

Gotta get everything zipped up
before the next act.

A drumroll comes here, more clapping.

FRANKIE

Without further adieu. You all
know what an adieu is?

(Pause)

That's what you do when she
says don't!

Three strokes on the snare drum. This is followed by moans and groans. The Marines want the act!

FRANKIE

I wanna know something. Does
U.S.M.C. stand for Uncle Sam's
Misguided Children?

There is mild laughing at this one.

FRANKIE

...Or is it Uniformed Shit and
Mass Confusion?

The Marines love this! More yelling and "V" signs. Frankie replaces the mike and takes his leave as Marty, dressed in the sexiest gown in Southeast Asia, enters.

The Sgt. Major, one of the very few in the audience not amused, is still standing next to the stage, flexing jawbones to contain his rage at Frankie, a punk who has maligned the U.S.M.C.

The Sgt. Major grabs Frankie by the arm and takes him off to the side.

SGT. MAJOR
Punk, any more cracks about the
Corps and you're out!

Frankie looks at the hold that the Sgt. Major has on him. He throws up his arm, freeing himself. He smiles.

FRANKIE
I finish every show. And I will
this one. But before I do, fuck
you very much!

The Sgt. Major is stunned! Nobody has ever said this to him. Frankie straightens his tie and walks away.

The lights dim on the stage as Marty goes into her first song. Her voice keeps the audience motionless, glued to every word. Marty has landed; the Marines are well in hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. PERIMETER NIGHT

Capt. Eiler is patrolling the Bravo Company lines. The music from the USO show is heard o.s.

The Marines, on night guard duty, are entrenched two to a hole as Capt. Eiler continues walking. He stops, looks back at the sound of the music. He looks around. Something seems strange.

Capt. Eiler bends down and strikes a match. He looks at a mound of earth. It resembles a newly dug grave. A wooden headstone is at the end. The match goes out.

Another match is struck. Capt. Eiler reads the headstone.

Scrawled on the headstone is: CAPT. J.T. EILER, USMC -- At Rest,
Like All Pricks.

The match goes out. Capt. Eiler stands and realizes he is looking at his own grave. He kicks the headstone. It cracks.

EXT. BRAVO COMPANY NIGHT

Returning to his office, Capt. Eiler is deep in thought, beset with more troubles than he initially thought.

The Lt. Col. is walking by, heading towards the USO show, unseen by Capt. Eiler.

LT. COL.

Going to take in the show Captain?

CAPT. EILER

What?

Capt. Eiler halts, shaken at someone else's voice. On second look he sees the Colonel.

LT. COL.

The USO show, are you going to take it in?

CAPT. EILER

I have some things to check out. Uh, the convoy on Monday. That comes first Colonel.

LT. COL.

I suppose you'll command now that Lieutenant Nichols is hurt.

CAPT. EILER

I haven't made the final decision Colonel. It depends on how well we're prepared for the inspection.

LT. COL.

How prepared are you for the convoy?

CAPT. EILER

No problem Colonel.

LT. COL.

Maybe you should give some thought to Lieutenant McCahey taking the convoy.

CAPT. EILER

Yes sir. I've thought of that.

LT. COL.
I've seen his record. He's the most
experienced convoy commander in the
battalion. Decorated too.

CAPT. EILER
Yes sir. I've heard.

The Lt. Col. continues on his way, cigar clenched in his teeth,
heading toward the USO show.

EXT. THEATRE NIGHT

Marty has finished her song. The Marines stand, giving her a
thunderous ovation. A few Marines are passing around a joint.

MARTY
Thank you...thank you so much!
(Pause)
This next song is for one in
particular and all in general.
General? I'll say private.

- - - Marty begins her final song here. - - -

Lt. McCahey is off to the side standing with the other junior
officers.

The Marines in the audience, many of whom will be on the convoy,
are savoring this last song. For these three minutes Marty is
everything to them, blond, sexy, American and above all beautiful.

When the song ends the Marines are on their feet applauding. The
"Fabulous Korean Kittens" rush on stage taking some of Marty's
applause. But Marty doesn't mind.

Marty and the "Kittens" launch into a Vietnam favorite, "We
Gotta Get Outa' This Place."

CUT TO:

EXT. THEATRE NIGHT

The show is over. The theatre is darkened and most of the
troupe have yet to emerge from the dressing rooms.

Donnatelli comes running from the dressing rooms. Prince and Slip are waiting.

DONNATELLI
It's all set. We bring the booze
and meet them at the hotel.

SLIP
How do we get through the gate?

DONNATELLI
We're the escorts man!

A line of Marines has formed at a newly constructed glory hole. Several Marines are taking turns at peeks into the dressing rooms. Prince and Donnatelli move into the line. Prince puts his eye to the hole.

PRINCE
Oh Princess, how lovely!

Donnatelli is chomping at the bit; he wants a quick look at anything within those hollowed walls. He eases in, gets a good eyefull and breaks into a passionate lip licking smile.

DONNATELLI
My God, what a beautiful bush!

Another Marine, waiting impatiently behind Donnatelli, hears this.

MARINE
Hey Dude, suddenly you're a
nature lover?

DONNATELLI
There are bushes and there are
bushes!

Nearby Major Ashworth is looking for Marty, waiting near the dressing rooms. He sees the line of Marines and knows what is taking place. He turns to the Sgt. Major.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Glory holes! Sergeant Major, clear
those men out of there!

SGT. MAJOR

Yes sir.

The Sgt. Major approaches a Marine and slaps a swagger stick alongside his leg, as if herding some sheep.

SGT. MAJOR

That's it. The show's over.

The Marines grumble and begin to shuffle off.

FIRST MARINE

Fuckin' lifers. They chase us off
so they can have a chance.

SECOND MARINE

Rank has privilege man. Shit!

SGT. MAJOR

Clear the area or you're on report!

By this time Donnatelli, Prince and Slip have moved off to a jeep. They are loading liquor bottles into a case. Then the case is placed inside the jeep.

DONNATELLI

This is what I call patriotic.

SLIP

Yeah, I call it gettin' laid!

PRINCE

Hurry, can't blow our cover!

Frankie approaches the Major. He is carrying a suit bag over his shoulder.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Excuse me, I'm waiting to give Miss
Perreau a ride to the hotel.

Frankie is smug, knowing that Marty has already left.

FRANKIE

A day late Dude!

MAJOR ASHWORTH
I'm the battalion executive officer.
I'm not in the habit of being called
"Dude."

Frankie climbs into a jeep.

FRANKIE
Man, I answer to the USO. I say sir
to no one. Got that Dude?

Major Ashworth is bristling, trying to contain his rage.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
What about Miss Perreau?

FRANKIE
That beachhead left. In one of
your jeeps; ta-ta!

The jeep starts up as "The Fabulous Korean Kittens" come giggling out of the dressing rooms and hurry to the $\frac{3}{4}$ ton personnel carrier, proud that the troops thought so much of them as to reinstate the glory holes.

The mini-convoy leaves as a deeply hurt and angered Major Ashworth sadly watches, realizing the best plans of staff officers are sometimes laid aside.

The jeep with Donnatelli at the wheel, Prince at his side and Slip in the back guarding the liquor, moves into line as the last vehicle. Prince and Donnatelli smile to each other, so far so good.

EXT. BATTALION GATE NIGHT

The USO vehicles are waved through the gate. The tough looking M.P. buck Sergeant turns and sees one last jeep approaching.

Sgt. McCall, .45 on his hip, is walking nearby, smoking a cigarette. He stops and looks at the USO vehicles.

The M.P. Sgt. suspects something. He halts the jeep.

Donntelli straightens up at the wheel, hoping to fake this one out as the M.P. Sgt. approaches.

DONNATELLI
Lemme handle this.

Prince turns and looks at Slip.

M.P. SGT.
Okay turds, what have we got?

DONNATELLI
USO escort to the Grand Hotel.

The M.P. Sgt. gives the jeep a once over; no way. He has seen this before.

M.P. SGT.
Escort my dick! Outa' the jeep,
everybody.

The three Marines get out knowing that the jig is up. They prepare for a hassle.

Sgt. McCall sees the Marines getting out of the jeep. He waits to see what will happen.

The M.P.'s inspect the jeep. They find the case of liquor and take it out. The bottles are taken out -- all good stuff -- Jack Daniels, Crown Royal, J&B, Johnny Walker, (red label).

M.P. SGT.
Escort huh? More like a party
with the showgirls. A little honey
for the old stinger, eh?

DONNATELLI
Man, give us a "hus." All we want
is a night in Danang.

PRINCE
We gotta convoy comin' up.

M.P. SGT.
Fuck the convoy! You turds tried to
run the gate. Now you're smugglin'
booze. That's serious.

FIRST M.P.
Court Martial charges.

The M.P. Sgt. nods and points to the liquor bottles.

M.P. SGT.
Confiscate the evidence.

The M.P.'s gleefully replace the bottles in the case, nodding and smiling to each other. Fortunes of war.

M.P. SGT.
You agents stepped into some
deep kimshee!

Sgt. McCall steps out from the shadows and approaches the M.P.'s.

SGT. MCCALL
I'm Sergeant McCall, Bravo Company
security. What's going on here?

The M.P. Sgt. turns and realizes there may be a problem.

M.P. SGT.
We caught these turds trying to make
it out of the gate with contraband
liquor.

SLIP
It ain't contraband. We paid for it.

M.P. SGT.
Shaddup!
(To Sgt. McCall)
You know these turds?

SGT. MCCALL
From my company.

M.P. SGT.
There's gonna be charges on this.

Sgt. McCall motions for the M.P. Sgt. to step off to the side.
They do; the other Marines watch.

SGT. MCCALL

Can't we settle this reasonably?
These men are needed for a convoy.

M.P. SGT.

It is settled. They're under arrest!

SGT. MCCALL

Look, if the booze is destroyed it
wraps up everything, right?

M.P. SGT.

Destroyed?

SGT. MCCALL

Sure. That way nothing has been
attempted and no reports will be
made out.

(Pause)

You know where these men are going?

M.P. SGT.

Sure. They're going to jail!

Sgt. McCall breaks into a coy smile. He takes out his .45 pistol.

SGT. MCCALL

Sergeant, I outrank you by one
stripe. As company security NCO,
I'm destroying the liquor.

Sgt. McCall squeezes off five well placed shots before anyone
can do anything. The case is now a mixed outpouring of the best
booze, shattered glass and broken plans.

The M.P.'s are about to cry. The M.P. Sgt. is enraged!

Sgt. McCall holsters his pistol and smiles at the three
Marine "suspects."

M.P. SGT.

I'm going to report this. You'll
be standing tall in the morning!

SGT. MCCALL

And I'll report how you planned to
steal their booze fathead!

M.P. SGT.

You unlawfully discharged a weapon;

SGT. MCCALL
What were you in civilian life,
a deputy sheriff somewhere?

The M.P. Sgt. takes a step towards Sgt. McCall.

SGT. MCCALL
(Continuing)
Badge heavy dipshits, playin' cop
to keep out of combat. How many
operations you been on?

M.P. SGT.
Pal, you're outa' line.

Donnatelli, Prince and Slip nod to each other, knowing that a
Donnybrook is about to erupt.

FIRST M.P.
Sergeant, you're under arrest.

SGT. MCCALL
Semper Fi, Mac!

Instantly, Sgt. McCall drops the M.P. Sgt. with one well placed
kick in the balls, then lands a beautiful right cross on the
First M.P.

The M.P. Sgt. crumples in screeching agony while the First M.P.
is neatly stretched on his back.

The other M.P.'S move to restrain Sgt. McCall. Then Donnatelli,
Prince and Slip join in. The M.P.'s haven't a chance.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD NIGHT

Lt. McCahey's jeep is moving down a road, heading towards
downtown Danang. Marty is sitting next to him, taking a look
at a hamlet through which they are passing.

MARTY
Will you get in trouble for this?

LT. MCCAHEY
What can they do, shave my head
and send me to Vietnam?

Suddenly Marty is reflective.

MARTY
They could start by sending you
home in one, healthy, piece.

The jeep continues down the road.

CUT TO:

INT. GRAND HOTEL NIGHT

Marty's hotel room and balcony overlook the Danang harbor.
Lights, from Monkey Mountain, on the other side of the harbor
are visible -- a stark contrast to a combat zone.

Lt. McCahey walks out on the balcony. He places two cold bottles
of beer on a wooden table. Marty is inside, hanging up her
clothes.

Soft American music -- The Mamas and The Papas -- is heard
coming from a nearby room. Lt. McCahey sits in one of two
chairs next to the table and gazes at the view.

Marty appears, dressed in a pair of shorts and halter, fetching
for a tropical night.

MARTY
So, McCahey the Marine, how have
you been?

He nods. Marty sits down, puts up her feet on McCahey's chair.
She takes a long pull from the beer bottle.

MARTY
God that's good. We did three
shows today.

LT. MCCAHEY
A few days ago I was pinned down
near a river less than ten miles
from this balcony. Crazy war!

MARTY

I never heard of a sane one.

(Pause)

When did we see each other last?

LT. MCCAHEY

Lemme see. The summer of '67.
We were singing "Ode To Billy
Joe" at some party. You were
dating that jock and had something
going at a studio.

MARTY

Turk Wedgewood. He got cut by the
Rams the same week I was axed at
Universal.

LT. MCCAHEY

Then what?

MARTY

Winners can't cope when they
become losers. We split.

LT. MCCAHEY

You were a real jock dolly!

MARTY

And you were Mister Johnny Get His
Gun. Josh McCahey and his twenty-
five year Marine career.

Lt. McCahey gets up and walks to the edge of the balcony. He
reflects on how things used to be.

LT. MCCAHEY

Nothing stays the same. I'm gettin'
out when my time comes.

MARTY

How about you and Nancy?

LT. MCCAHEY

A "D.J." Three months after I got
here. Almost in time for Tet.

MARTY

I thought she was crazy about you.

LT. MCCAHEY

So did I. Seems all my breaks
come in letters

MARTY

You don't seem the same.

LT. MCCAHEY

I'd be in a helluva fix if I was. (Pause)

Hey, remember when Turk got so drunk we had to push his head out of the window so he could puke?

Marty starts laughing.

MARTY

Yeah. After the USC game. He never could hold his booze.

LT. MCCAHEY

I thought of making a move on you then.

MARTY

I could sense it. Why didn't you?

LT. MCCAHEY

Timing. And Nancy.

MARTY

Think we'd make the same mistakes if we had it to do over?

LT. MCCAHEY

I've made some beauties since!

Marty takes another drink of beer. She gives him an intuitive look.

MARTY

You're in some sort of trouble.

LT. MCCAHEY

Nothing I can't handle. Long story.

Lt. McCahey drains his beer and puts the bottle on the table.

LT. MCCAHEY

(Continuing)

Too nice a night to be boring.

Marty gets up and walks to the railing.

LT. MCCAHEY
How's your brother, Buddy, doing?

Marty is quiet. She gazes out at the lights. He waits for her answer.

MARTY
You didn't know. Buddy was killed six months ago, near Saigon. My folks were told his platoon was ambushed while crossing a stream.

LT. MCCAHEY
My God! I didn't even know he was in the Army.

MARTY
He dropped out of school for a semester. To earn some money. The draft board caught up with him.
(Pause)
Everybody in his platoon was killed.

LT. MCCAHEY
How did your mother take it?

MARTY
Worse than Dad. She just sits in Buddy's room, as if she expects him to come home for dinner.

LT. MCCAHEY
How about you?

MARTY
I'm growing up. But there was a time when I wanted my precious career.
(Pause)
The day Buddy left I had to read for a part. It was more important than seeing him off. I never saw him again.

LT. MCCAHEY
Then what?

MARTY
Everything turned to shit for a while. The studio cut me loose. I pulled myself together and hooked up with the USO. And here I am, talking to an old friend.

Lt. McCahey slowly takes Marty in his arms. She does not resist. He kisses her on the cheek, lightly, then passionately on the mouth. Marty breaks away and puts her head on his chest.

MARTY

This isn't going to solve
any of our problems.

LT. MCCAHEY

It's not supposed to.

He makes another move on Marty. She resists and looks around
at the other balconies.

MARTY

I'm through giving Danang
free shows.

LT. MCCAHEY

You'll be contributing to the
war effort.

MARTY

What is it they say about making
love rather than war?

LT. MCCAHEY

That it's healthier.

Marty smiles and leads Lt. McCahey off the balcony.

INT. HOTEL ROOM NIGHT

Lt. McCahey and Marty are laying in bed, under the sheets. Marty
is resting her head on his shoulder; he is staring at the ceiling.
The room is dimly lit. Music filters in from o.s. -- Mary Hopkin,
"Those Were The Days."

MARTY

I'm leaving Tuesday.

LT. MCCAHEY

I'll try to get away tomorrow. I
should say today.

MARTY

Damn! Why did we have to wait
until now? Everything is so,
so...

LT. MCCAHEY

The expression is "fucked up."

MARTY

Let's take it all the way.

LT. MCCAHEY

Lady, you have a date.

Marty smiles and kisses him.

CUT TO:

INT. BRAVO COMPANY OFFICE DAY

The following morning. Capt. Eiler is at his desk. In front of him are Sgt. McCall, Donnatelli, Prince and Slip.

Capt. Eiler is finishing looking at a statement. His eyes are a testimony of a sleepless night. He looks up.

CAPT. EILER
I have nothing further for you
men. Sergeant McCall, you remain
behind.

Donnatelli, Prince and Slip exit the office.

Capt. Eiler leans back in his chair.

CAPT. EILER
I can't believe this. You marched
out of the Chosin Reservoir with
Chesty Puller. You have a Navy
Cross and this is your second tour
in Vietnam.

(Pause)
Eighteen years in the Marine Corps
and you act like an immature high
school kid!

SGT. MCCALL
Captain, those M.P.'s were going
after the booze. I stopped it!

CAPT. EILER
And started a small riot.

SGT. MCCALL
They had it coming.

CAPT. EILER
You'll be signing a charge sheet
when the convoy gets back. I
should keep you all off the road!

Sgt. McCall has a hateful look, realizing that his commander has no intention of helping.

SGT. MCCALL
I doubt if that will happen.

CAPT. EILER
We'll settle this after the
convoy.

SGT. MCCALL
Yes sir. After the convoy.

Sgt. McCall exits. Capt. Eiler goes back to reading the statement.

INT. BRAVO COMPANY OFFICE DAY

While Capt. Eiler is reading a report, the junior officers enter -- Lts. McCahey, Doralski and Nichols, the latter of whom is on crutches.

CAPT. EILER
You all know that the Commandant
will be inspecting our engine bays
first. I assume we are ready.
Questions?

The officers look at each other. No questions.

CAPT. EILER
We're all so confident?

LT. DORALSKI
Captain, who will command
tomorrow's convoy?

CAPT. EILER
The convoy will be leaving as
scheduled.

LT. DORALSKI
Yes sir. But who will be in
command?

CAPT. EILER
Lieutenant Doralski, we have
pressing items in front of us.
I want you people aware of the
Commandant's inspection.

The officers exchange frustrated looks.

CAPT. EILER
(Continuing)
There's more to running a company
than convoys and medals.

LT. DORALSKI
Captain, the convoy is going to
be one of the roughest, so...

Capt. Eiler has had enough! He slams his fist on the desk,
face displaying rage as he yells.

CAPT. EILER
Don't tell me about rough convoys!
I've been through it all. You weren't
here during Tet. You don't know what
hard combat is like. Why you're...

Lt. McCahey is glaring at Capt. Eiler, remembering the Tet convoy.
Suddenly Capt. Eiler is quiet and gentle. He smiles and begins
stroking a pen.

CAPT. EILER
(Continuing)
My father used to say that there
are only two places where a man
proves himself, in combat and on
the football field. My, uh,
father was an All-American football
player. He played...

Capt. Eiler realizes that he is going off on an unrelated subject.
He stops, clears his throat.

CAPT. EILER
(Continuing)
Are there any questions about the
Commandant's visit?

The room is full of tense silence. Capt. Eiler is staring at
Lt. Doralski.

CAPT. EILER
That will be all.

Sadly, the men exit the office.

Alone, Capt. Eiler opens a drawer and takes out the steel box.
He quickly thumbs through the cards; he takes out one.

In the upper left hand of the card is black lettering: 2Lt.
Michael Doralski. There is a previous entry for "ineffective
radio procedure." Capt. Eiler writes: 6/8/68 -- "Silent
contempt, bordering on insubordination."

EXT. PERIMETER DAY

Lts. McCahey and Nichols are sitting on a sandbagged wall. Nichols is jabbing one of his crutches into the ground.

There is a long silence. Lt. McCahey picks up a stone and throws it out towards the perimeter wire.

LT. NICHOLS
Say something, damn it!

LT. MCCAHEY
Something.

LT. NICHOLS
We have a problem and you have to make jokes.

LT. MCCAHEY
Why not. The problem is a joke.

LT. NICHOLS
Mac, he can't take that convoy.

LT. MCCAHEY
Nick, this has been coming since Tet. Eleven men killed in one day, fourteen wounded. He covered that with Ashworth's help. He'll find a way out of this.

LT. NICHOLS
He's getting worse. I'm worried about him.

Lt. McCahey laughs, shaking his head.

LT. MCCAHEY
Worried about him? What about the troops?

LT. NICHOLS
You've heard the rumors. You know there's a price on his head.

LT. MCCAHEY
Somehow I find that very moral.

LT. NICHOLS
The word is murder, or have you forgotten? Mac, if anything happens to Eiler there will be an investigation. And I'm the executive officer.

LT. MCCAHEY

Is that all you're worried about,
being investigated?

LT. NICHOLS

I have to realize some things. I'm
planning to stay in after the war.
An investigation could...

Lt. Nichols suddenly remembers that McCahey has already been
the victim of an investigation.

LT. MCCAHEY

You're going to tell me what an
investigation does to a career?

LT. NICHOLS

I'm sorry Mac. I forgot.

LT. MCCAHEY

I haven't. It's over anyway.

(Pause)

God when I think of how I tried
to get him to break up that convoy
so we wouldn't get hit. And when
we do, he yanks his mike cord and
lets us get picked off!

LT. NICHOLS

Mac, I know how you feel.

LT. MCCAHEY

Horseshit! How do I feel?

(Pause)

Let the bastard take the convoy
and have the troops get their
pound of flesh!

LT. NICHOLS

And that would solve everything?

LT. MCCAHEY

No. But it would rid the Marine
Corps of Captain J.T. Eiler.

LT. NICHOLS

Mac, I'm going to recommend that
you command the convoy.

LT. MCCAHEY

Ashworth and Eiler have told me
no convoy duty. Let Ski take it.

LT. NICHOLS
Ski hasn't the experience.

LT. MCCAHEY
This will be his chance. It's how
we broke in. Or have you forgotten?

Lt. Nichols takes his crutches, puts them under his shoulders
and starts to hobble away. He stops and looks back.

LT. NICHOLS
I'll make Eiler think it was his
decision. His ego will eat that
up. I'm sorry Mac. There's
nobody else.

Lt. Nichols heaves himself away, back to the office area. Lt.
McCahey is left alone, staring out at the rice paddy. What he
suspected all along is now beginning. The unfairness of it!

CUT TO:

INT. BRAVO COMPANY OFFICE

Lt. McCahey enters Capt. Eiler's office. Capt. Eiler is
embarrassed, as if he wants this meeting concluded as soon as
possible.

LT. MCCAHEY
You wanted to see me Captain?

CAPT. EILER
Yes. I, uh, have been left with
a serious decision.
(Pause)
When Nichols got hurt I was going
to command the convoy.

Capt. Eiler begins fidgeting with items on his desk, anything
to avoid looking directly at Lt. McCahey.

CAPT. EILER
(Continuing)
This inspection has caused a lot
of pressure. It leaves me no
choice.
(Barely Audible)
You're in command tomorrow.

LT. MCCAHEY
Captain, I thought...

CAPT. EILER
Your call sign will be Stagecoach
Bravo.

LT. MCCAHEY
I was told that I would have no
convoy duty.

CAPT. EILER
I never said that!

Capt. Eiler stares at his desk, unwilling to look up.

LT. MCCAHEY
Captain, you told me...

CAPT. EILER
You're to report to S-3 for radio
frequencies and maps, then to
Division G-2. That will be all.

Lt. McCahey doesn't move a muscle; his eyes are frozen on this
man, remembering again that Tet convoy.

CAPT. EILER
I said that will be all.

LT. MCCAHEY
There are two men who know about
you and they're in this room.

CAPT. EILER
Report to S-3!

LT. MCCAHEY
A letter of reprimand, an investigation
and an unsatisfactory fitness report.
Do you lie awake at night thinking about
that convoy during Tet?

CAPT. EILER
I said report to S-3!

LT. MCCAHEY
Funny, I don't hate you anymore.
You're a scared little man.

(Pause)
I hope you have a long life!

CUT TO:

EXT. S-3 OFFICE DAY

Lt. McCahey is leaving the S-3 Operations office after getting his official convoy order. He has a pistol on his hip and is carrying a map case.

While walking towards a jeep, Lt. McCahey is intercepted by Major Ashworth.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Just a minute Lieutenant.

LT. MCCAHEY
I was on my way to G-2.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
I oppose two things about this convoy. First, you're commanding. Second, that Sergeant McCall is going especially after that stunt he pulled last night. I was overruled in both instances.

LT. MCCAHEY
Sergeant McCall is the best X-Ray driver in the division.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
That's your opinion. I consider you both unfit for convoy duty.

Lt. McCahey shows a sardonic smile.

LT. MCCAHEY
Convince Captain Eiler of that!

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Another thing, were you out of the compound last night?

Lt. McCahey pauses. The smile is gone.

LT. MCCAHEY
I took Marty back to her hotel.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
From now on the Grand Hotel is off limits to you. If I hear of you over there I'll have you written up on charges.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

(Continuing)

You seem to make a habit of unsat.
fitness reports, don't you?

Lt. McCahey looks at his watch.

LT. MCCAHEY

Major, I have to be at G-2.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

You're dismissed.

Lt. McCahey gets in the jeep and drives off.

While Major Ashworth is watching the jeep depart, the Lt. Col.
exits the S-3 office. The Lt. Col. walks next to Major Ashworth.

LT. COL.

Well, the most experienced Lieutenant
is taking the convoy. I was worried
about that.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Yes sir. I was just telling
Lieutenant McCahey that he's our
best convoy commander.

LT. COL.

And he has to take that convoy up
and bring it back.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

It could be a gravy train Colonel.

The Lt. Col. takes a cigar out of his mouth and gives the Major
a stare and a harumph!

LT. COL.

Maybe you should should read the
latest intelligence reports. Mister
McCahey is going to have his hands
full.

CUT TO:

EXT. DIVISION HEADQUARTERS DAY

Lt. McCahey exits the Division G-2 office carrying his map case.
He gets into the jeep and drives off.

EXT. GRAND HOTEL DAY

Ten Minutes Later. Lt. McCahey and Marty exit the hotel. She is carrying two beach towels and a picnic basket. They get in the jeep and drive off.

EXT. BEACH DAY

Lt. McCahey and Marty are laying on a beach towel, both in swim suits. Little waves are rapping up on the shore.

MARTY

Maybe it won't be so bad tomorrow.

LT. MCCAHEY

Do you believe that?

MARTY

No, but I thought I'd say it.

LT. MCCAHEY

Dozens of convoys, on all kinds of roads. And this one has gotten to me.

MARTY

A promise. When you get in Tuesday afternoon I'll be waiting with a jeep. I'll buy you dinner before my plane leaves.

LT. MCCAHEY

Where are you going to get a jeep?

MARTY

From an Army Colonel who wants to get in my pants -- and won't!

LT. MCCAHEY

You sure get to know people fast.

MARTY

It's this business. Last week, at Cam Ranh Bay, I had a General come onto to me.

LT. MCCAHEY

And what makes me so different?

MARTY

I know you. There's something to be said for the past.

LT. MCCAHEY
And not much for the future.

He looks out at the water, suddenly lost in thought

MARTY
Don't be so fatalistic.

LT. MCCAHEY
Maybe it's because I don't care
the way I used to. All I care
about is seeing you again.

Marty sits up and gives him a serious look.

MARTY
Josh, it's not right for us now.
We both have problems. I don't
know where my next job will be.
Hell, I have an agent who won't
even answer my telegrams.

LT. MCCAHEY
Nothing seems to work anymore.

MARTY
What works is being a survivor.

Marty smiles. He tenderly places his hand on her cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. GRAND HOTEL LATE AFTERNOON

Lt. McCahey and Marty are laying, fully clothed, on the bed,
in each other's arms. An orange twilight -- from the window --
casts a glow into the room.

Marty kisses him.

MARTY
I had fun today.

LT. MCCAHEY
So did I.

MARTY
Now you've got something to
look forward to.

Lt. McCahey looks at his watch. Time has run out.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND NIGHT

Lt. McCahey's jeep enters the compound where the convoy is undergoing preliminary staging: Drivers checking their loads, working on the engines, etc.

Gunnery Sgt. Rayhorn and Staff Sgt. McCall look at a manifest that is spread out on a jeep hood. The area is lit so that the men can adequately read the manifest. Lt. McCahey's jeep pulls to a stop.

LT. MCCAHEY

Slowly we're looking like a convoy.

SGT. MCCALL

The infantry platoon hasn't checked in yet.

SGT. RAYHORN

They're supposed to be here first thing in the morning.

LT. MCCAHEY

Let's hope so. I'm not taking this lash up without security troops.

Sgt. McCall has a serious look, something not connected with the convoy.

SGT. MCCALL

Lieutenant, got a minute?

Sgt. Rayhorn knows about this.

SGT. RAYHORN

I'll finish the manifest and have it at the convoy briefing.

Lt. McCahey nods. Sgt. Rayhorn folds the papers and leaves. Lt. McCahey and Sgt. McCall begin walking the line of trucks.

SGT. MCCALL

Some advice. I'm being investigated for that incident at the gate.

LT. MCCAHEY

I heard.

SGT. MCCALL

You went through something like this. What should I do?

LT. MCCAHEY

Realize that you're in this by yourself. Major Ashworth would love nothing better than seeing you busted. Go to Division Legal.

Sgt. McCall is depressed.

SGT. MCCALL

There was a time when this was a damn good Marine Corps. I feel like it doesn't need me anymore.

LT. MCCAHEY

What it doesn't need are officers of a certain ilk.

SGT. MCCALL

You know my chances of getting through all this.

(Pause)

Look what they did to you.

LT. MCCAHEY

That's why you should fight it. Don't rely on the truth. They'll investigate. The "right" officer will be appointed. They'll hear what they want to and remember what they have to. The truth has a way of becoming shaded.

SGT. MCCALL

Why are they like this? It wasn't that way before!

LT. MCCAHEY

My father once told me that war brings out the best and worst in men at the same time. We're seeing the worst.

SGT. MCCALL

All day long. All day long.

(Pause)

I know one thing now.

LT. MCCAHEY

What's that?

SGT. MCCALL

It's over for me. They're gonna run me outa' the Corps.

LT. MCCAHEY

Not if you fight it.

SGT. MCCALL

It's like this country, Lieutenant. We still fight. But we all know what's gonna happen, regardless of what the Generals contend.

(Pause)

There's a lot to be said for incompetence!

They stop walking. Lt. McCahey wants to say something. He can't.

CUT TO:

INT. JUNIOR OFFICERS HOOCH MORNING

The Day of the Convoy. Lt. McCahey is standing in front of his locker, strapping on his .45 pistol. He puts on the wrist bracelet that L/Cpl Schroeder gave him. Next, he takes the faded green baseball cap and puts it on. He turns and picks up his helmet and flak jacket. He slings a map case over his shoulder.

He walks towards the screen door, turns and gives the hooch once last look. He relives some quick moments then turns and walks out, ready to take command of his last convoy.

EXT. COMPOUND DAY

Lt. McCahey is walking towards the motor pool when Sgt. McCall's "X-Ray Jeep" pulls up. The windshield of the jeep has been flattened on the hood. PFC Prince is in the back, manning a M-60 machine gun mounted on a steel swivel. Prince and Sgt. McCall have goggles on their helmets; both are wearing flak jackets.

SGT. MCCALL

Going our way Lieutenant?

Lt. McCahey smiles and places his gear into the jeep.

On the way they pass several troops on a work detail. The troops are watering down an area, then raking it.

LT. MCCAHEY
What the hell are they doing?

PFC PRINCE
Raking the mud, Lieutenant.

LT. MCCAHEY
What!

SGT. MCCALL
Captain Eiler's orders. I should
say Major Ashworth's. They want
the mud raked for the Commandant's
visit.

LT. MCCAHEY
Maybe we all should be raking
the mud.

SGT. MCCALL
We are.

EXT. MOTOR POOL DAY

The X-Ray Jeep stops next to the convoy line of trucks. Lt. McCahey transfers his gear into the command radio jeep, which is waiting nearby with the Driver, Lance Corporal JOHNNY MARTINEZ, Chicano, early 20s.

The Lt. Col., cigar in his mouth, approaches the command jeep. Lt. McCahey salutes; the salute is returned.

LT. MCCAHEY
Morning Colonel. Nice day for a
ride north.

LT. COL.
You take care McCahey.

LT. MCCAHEY
Maybe it will turn into a joy ride.

The Lt. Col. takes the cigar from his mouth and surveys the trucks and the Marines.

LT. COL.
For the sake of these kids, I hope so.

The Lt. Col. offers a quick handshake and leaves.

Lt. McCahey is watching the Lt. Col. when an infantry Staff Sergeant, LAMONT, approaches. He has thinning hair, wiry looking, wearing a pack with "Ranger Straps" on his shoulders, .45 on his hip, M-16 on his shoulder. Sgt. Lamont salutes; Lt. McCahey returns it.

SGT. LAMONT
Sergeant Lamont, Lieutenant. With
the infantry platoon. Sorry we're
late.

LT. MCCAHEY
Where's your Lieutenant?

SGT. LAMONT
He's dead sir.
(Pause)
His replacement hasn't reported
in yet.

LT. MCCAHEY
You have maps and radios?

SGT. LAMONT
All checked out. Even some of that
plastic explosive. C-4.

LT. MCCAHEY
Report to my truckmaster, Sergeant
Rayhorn. He'll split your platoon
into three security trucks, by squads.

SGT. LAMONT
Anything else sir?

LT. MCCAHEY
Make sure your squad leaders know
the score. We're probably going to
get hit today.

Sgt. Lamont nods and returns to his platoon.

Lt. Doralski, riding in the trail jeep with his Driver, pulls
up to a stop.

LT. DORALSKI
All set Mac.

LT. MCCAHEY
Ski, I want to know of every breakdown.
And keep the back from getting too
stretched out.

LT. DORALSKI

Gotcha!

Sgt. Rayhorn approaches the command jeep.

LT. MCCAHEY

Sergeant Rayhorn, after the infantry squads are positioned, check out the pace truck radio.

SGT. RAYHORN

Aye aye sir.

LT. MCCAHEY

Tell Sergeant McCall to head for the Red Beach staging area.

Sgt. Rayhorn leaves. Lt. McCahey is about to get into his jeep when he hears an all too familiar voice.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Lieutenant McCahey!

Lt. McCahey turns, dreading this, and faces his battalion executive officer.

LT. MCCAHEY

Yes Major.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

This convoy is eight minutes late in departing. The Commandant is expected momentarily.

LT. MCCAHEY

We're just about ready Major.

Major Ashworth takes a long look at Lt. McCahey. The Major sees something that he doesn't like.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

I thought I told you never to wear that baseball cap!

Lt. McCahey takes off the cap and puts on his helmet.

LT. MCCAHEY

It's always been with me on the road Major. I'm partial to it.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

I don't ever want to see you wearing that cap again!

LT. MCCAHEY

Major, it's...

MAJOR ASHWORTH

I mean it Lieutenant! Now get this raggle of trucks out of here. Expedite!

Major Ashworth walks away as Lt. McCahey gets into his jeep and picks up the radio microphone.

LT. MCCAHEY

Martinez, how are you?

MARTINEZ

Ready, Lieutenant.

Lt. McCahey keys the microphone.

LT. MCCAHEY

Stagecoach, Stagecoach, this is Stagecoach Bravo, over.

RADIO VOICE

Bravo, this is Stagecoach.

LT. MCCAHEY

Roger, we're departing Charlie Papa for Checkpoint Two, out.

The trucks slowly move out of the compound, in file, heading toward the staging area.

EXT. ROAD DAY

The convoy leaves the compound heading towards Red Beach.

Coming down the road, heading towards the compound is the Commandant's inspection group, five jeeps including one carrying the Commandant himself.

EXT. COMPOUND DAY

Lt. McCahey's jeep approaches the battalion gate. Standing near the gate are Lts. Cross, Gerber and Nichols (resting on his crutches). They each wave a goodbye, thumbs up, etc. Lt. McCahey manages a faint smile and nods back.

Lt. Gutter is on the other side of the gate. He waves also.

LT. MCCAHEY
Nice of Captain Eiler to show
up as we leave.

MARTINEZ
Pardon Lieutenant?

LT. MCCAHEY
Nothing. A passing thought.

The command jeep moves out of the compound as the column of inspection vehicles enters.

It isn't noticed by the officers in the inspection team, but the pace truck with a .50 caliber ring mount over the cut off cab passes. The driver of the pace truck is Donnatelli. Slip is on the ring mount.

Slip turns around on the ring mount and flips the finger to the inspection team vehicles. It goes unnoticed by all except Sgt. Rayhorn who brandishes a sly grin.

CUT TO:

EXT. RED BEACH DAY

The Staging Area. The convoy is waiting on the side of Highway One. Vietnamese are mingling about, selling wares in every kind of hand held box. They are selling confederate flags (with six pointed stars), lighters, contraband cigarettes, marijuana, skin magazines and bottles of watered down Coca-Cola.

There is another contingent, the refugees -- the children -- begging for "chop chop," food. They will take anything, C-Rations, leftovers, even cigarette butts. And with the slip of an eyelash they will steal anything.

Moving within this flow is a teen-age VIETNAMESE GIRL. She is carrying a baby in her left arm. The baby has a leg missing, a horrible burn scar on the face and a deformed right arm. The Vietnamese Girl is obviously using the baby as a sympathy ploy to beg food. The ploy is working as the Girl is the receiver of C-Rations and cigarettes.

The Vietnamese Girl passes Lt. McCahey's jeep. She stops and looks at him. McCahey says nothing but reaches into his pack and gives the Girl a candy bar. She smiles and continues up the truck, reaping a good morning's work.

MARTINEZ

Damn Lieutenant, did you see that kid?

LT. MCCAHEY

That's Big Sister. She's been working this beat since I got here. She's got a new baby.

MARTINEZ

That baby. What happened?

LT. MCCAHEY

Napalm.

Lt. McCahey picks up the microphone.

LT. MCCAHEY

Sandhurst, Sandhurst, this is Stagecoach Bravo standing by at Checkpoint Two. Request a green after the mine sweep.

RADIO VOICE

Stagecoach Bravo, road sweep is completed. Your ponies are clear to Checkpoint One-Five. Out.

Lt. McCahey holds the microphone in his hand, ready to give the convoy the order to move out.

LT. MCCAHEY

Pace, this is Bravo, over?

EXT. PACE TRUCK DAY

Under the ring mount of the pace truck, behind the cab, is Sgt. Rayhorn, wearing a headset under his helmet.

SGT. RAYHORN
Bravo, this is pace. Standing by.

EXT. TRAIL JEEP DAY

At the end of the convoy is Lt. Doralski's jeep. He hears McCahey's voice.

LT. MCCAHEY'S VOICE
Bravo Trail, this is Bravo.

LT. DORALSKI
This is Trail. Standing by.

EXT. X-RAY JEEP DAY

Sgt. McCall has just taken a can of C-Rations off of a hot engine block. They are well heated. Sgt. McCall begins eating as a Vietnamese BOY, riding a bike, passes a truck which is carrying an infantry security squad.

Without reducing the speed of the bike, the Boy reaches up to the truckbed and snatches a cassette/recorder that belongs to one of the Marines.

The Boy continues pedaling, holding his newly acquired booty as the Marines realize what happened. The owner of the recorder is enraged.

MARINE
You phlanged face, slant-eyed
little gook! I'll...

The Marine attempts to aim his M-16 but a nearby Corporal hits it upward.

The Boy takes his left arm from the handlebars and manages a quick flip of the finger, giving his Asian sentiments back to the Marine.

Sgt. McCall shakes his head at the scene. The radio in the X-Ray jeep crackles.

LT. MCCAHEY'S VOICE
X-Ray, this is Bravo.

SGT. MCCALL
Roger Bravo. I'm halfway back.
Wagon train is ready.

EXT. ROAD DAY

Lt. McCahey looks at his wrist bracelet. This is it. He looks at Martinez.

LT. MCCAHEY
Let's go north!

Lt. McCahey keys the microphone.

LT. MCCAHEY
Pace, this is Bravo. Move out!

CUT TO:

EXT. PACE DAY

The heavy trucks, in unison, carrying supplies and troops rev up their heavily torqued engines. The trucks emit loud, whinnying sounds, belching smoke as they lurch onto the road.

The trucks head out, each in line, keeping an interval, leaving the comparative safety of daytime Danang, heading toward the Hai Vanh Pass and whatever follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND DAY

A line of high staff officers, led by an impressive Four Star General, is touring the motor pool.

The Four Star General -- The Commandant -- stops. The line following him stops. The General walks around a truck; the others walk around a truck. The General gives the truck a hard once over. The other officers look at the truck. It certainly is a truck!

The Lt. Col. is a few feet from the Commandant. The Lt. Col. turns to Major Ashworth.

LT. COL.
Al, send a runner to S-3. I
want a convoy progress report.

MAJOR ASHOWRTH
Right away sir!

Major Ashworth walks to a neatly dressed Corporal. He grabs the Corporal by the arm.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Get back to S-3. The Colonel wants
a progress report. On the convoy.

The Corporal doesn't know what the hell Major Ashworth is talking about.

CORPORAL
Sir, what convoy? I don't even
know where S-3 is!

Major Ashworth is becoming impatient.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
The Operations office. On the
double!

CORPORAL
Major, I'm not assigned here.
I'm the General's driver!

Without an apology, Major Ashworth turns and looks for another messenger.

The Corporal shakes his head, then manages a sly grin.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD DAY

The Summit of Hai Vanh Pass. Lt. McCahey, caked with a generous amount of road dust, is standing near his jeep watching the trucks in a hot, dusty, review.

Lt. McCahey yells to Martinez who is at the wheel of the jeep.

LT. MCCAHEY
Radio Checkpoint Two-Seven!

The trucks continue passing as Martinez keys the microphone.

CUT TO:

INT. BATTALION MESS DAY

The inspection team is ready for noon chow, entering the Staff NCO/Officers room. The officers sit down.

Major Ashworth takes a quick leave, buttonholing Sgt. Renfro. Major Ashworth has the look of a desperate man.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Did you get the chocolate ice cream?

SGT. RENFRO

This morning. I was able to make a deal with some Seabees.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

I don't care how it was gotten. I hope it's not melting.

SGT. RENFRO

No sir. Since it was ice cream, I placed it in the freezer.

Major Ashworth grimaces at Sgt. Renfro's sarcasm.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

If this meal isn't outstanding, you'll pay Sergeant, so help me!

Major Ashworth leaves before Sgt. Renfro can answer. The Sgt. gives the Major a long, hateful, stare.

Putting on a forced smile, Major Ashworth sits down next to another Major, the Commandant's AIDE.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

We have a good messhall here. The Commandant will like the dessert.

AIDE

I hope it's a change. Since we arrived every outfit shoves chocolate ice cream at us.

The color drains from Major Ashworth's face. He smiles and takes a drink of water; he leaves the table again.

Major Ashworth bolts into the mess hall office, looking for Sgt. Renfro.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Uh, Sergeant, we're not going to
serve chocolate ice cream.

Sgt. Renfro does a shocking recoil.

SGT. RENFRO
Major, you said...

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Never mind! Serve the Pineapple
sherbert.

Sgt. Renfro has had it! Totally disgusted, he tries to choose the right words.

SGT. RENFRO
Major, I traded the sherbert for
the chocolate ice cream.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Then serve vanilla with chocolate
syrup!

SGT. RENFRO
I traded that too. All we have is
chocolate ice cream. We have chocolate
ice cream up the ying-yang!

MAJOR ASHWORTH
I want a dessert out there. And
not chocolate ice cream.
(Pause)
If this is fucked up, I'll make
sure it reflects. Understand?

SGT. RENFRO
No Major. I don't understand!

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD DAY

The convoy has moved across a single lane bridge, peaceful enough so far.

Sgt. McCall, road goggles on, pulls his jeep up next to Lt. McCahey, who has a map spread out on the hood of his jeep.

SGT. MCCALL
Almost halfway there. Gonna
be a milk run.

Lt. McCahey smiles, folds the map. Sgt. McCall's jeep, with PFC Prince on the M-60, disappears in a swirl of dust, moving towards the front of the convoy.

EXT. PACE DAY

The Pace truck, with Sgt. Rayhorn under the ring mount, rounds a small bend in the road.

Coming down both sides of the road are lines of Vietnamese, carrying their precious belongings.

Sgt. Rayhorn sees this and immediately senses trouble.

SGT. RAYHORN
Donnatelli, down to ten miles.
(On Radio)
Bravo, this is Pace, over?

LT. MCCAHEY'S VOICE
Pace, this is Bravo.

SGT. RAYHORN
We have people streaming out of a
vill up here. Looks bad.

EXT. ROAD DAY

Sgt. McCall has heard the transmission. He signals Prince to get ready.

EXT. PACE DAY

Sgt. Rayhorn takes off his headset, terribly concerned, looking at the fear on the villagers' faces, feeling the silence. He has experienced this before.

SGT. RAYHORN
Donnatelli, if we get hit,
downshift and move out!

Donnatelli signals a cocky nod. He looks up at Slip who is on the ring mount. Slip cocks the .50 caliber gun twice.

The front of the convoy proceeds, quietly enough, as Sgt. Rayhorn studies the area and looks at a map.

Suddenly the Pace truck is hit by a rake of machine gun fire, followed by mortars and more small arms!

The fleeing villagers realize what is happening. Some start running, screaming, while others throw themselves along the roadside.

The Pace truck veers to the right then careens back across the road, out of control. Donnatelli is slumped against the door, hit in the chest and face. The truck stops in front of a banana tree.

Slip is firing away on the ring mount. Suddenly he is hit -- once, twice, three times. He jerks with each hit, then crumples from the ring mount.

Sgt. Rayhorn is on the bed of the truck, holding the microphone in his sweaty hands.

SGT. RAYHORN

Bravo, this is Pace. We're getting hit! At least 2 KIA'S. Enemy with mortars and small arms at 8-7-5, 9-8-6.

EXT. ROAD DAY

Lt. McCahey writes down the coordinates. He signals Martinez to drive on the shoulder of the road and speed to the front.

LT. MCCAHEY

Sandhurst, Sandhurst, Stagecoach
Bravo. We've been hit at the pace.
Mortars and small arms. Enemy at
8-7-5, 9-8-6. Do you copy over?

EXT. PACE DAY

The mortars continue. The road is teeming chaos, blocked with carts, cars and bicycles -- along with bodies.

Marines are taking cover behind the trucks, returning fire, amid screaming and yelling, moans and groans.

A Marine tries to dart up in between the pace truck and the one behind it. He stops and looks around. The Marine sees a Baby lying in the road, fully exposed to fire, crying. He breaks for the Baby as bullets pop everywhere. The Marine picks up the Baby; his helmet falls off. He gets the Baby to cover.

The Marine puts down the Baby and looks back at his helmet, lying in the road. He wonders if he should chance it again.

The Marine takes off, gets his helmet and turns to run back. He is twisted in half by a burst of machine gun fire and by its force is thrown to the side of the road, in a sickening lump, contorted and still.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIL DAY

The convoy is completely halted. Lt. Doralski and his Driver are taking cover next to the trail jeep.

It is obvious that Lt. Doralski and the Driver are scared shitless!

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND DAY

The inspection team is getting into the shiny jeeps for the trip back to Division Headquarters.

Major Ashworth is saying goodbye to the Generals and the Commandant.

The jeeps get into line and begin to leave, flags fluttering in the afternoon breeze. Capt. Eiler stands next to Major Ashworth.

CAPT. EILER

Who had the idea for the strawberry
dessert?

MAJOR ASHWORTH

I did. Planned it for days.

CAPT. EILER

The Commandant sure liked it.

Major Ashworth smugly smiles as the two begin walking toward the staff offices.

INT. S-3 DAY

The Lt. Col. is nervously chomping on his cigar, pacing next to the wall map. Capt. Corliss and Lt. Gerber are sitting on map stools near the radio, listening to the transmissions.

There is an edgy silence as the transmissions are heard, contrasting the safety of the compound with vicarious danger. Repeated gunfire and screams are heard from the radio.

SGT. RAYHORN'S VOICE

Bravo, this is Pace. Can we get those artillery grids cleared, over?

LT. MCCAHEY'S VOICE

Roger Pace. I called it in. The road is blocked back here. Are you still pinned down?

SGT. RAYHORN'S VOICE

Affirm. They're trying to flank us on the right. We need artillery "Asap!"

The transmissions continue. Each man in the S-3 hooch is waiting, sweating for the next turn of events.

Major Ashworth and Capt. Eiler enter.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

The Commandant got off okay Colonel.

LT. COL.

You conveyed my apologies?

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Yes sir. He understood.

CAPT. EILER

Has something happened?

LT. COL.

Lieutenant McCahey's convoy is getting the shit kicked out of it.

Surprised, Capt. Eiler sinks into a nearby chair.

RADIO VOICE

Stagecoach Bravo, that grid has to be cleared by higher ups. It's a "pacified vill." Stand by.

LT. MCCAHEY'S VOICE

Sandhurst, be advised. We are taking mortars and small arms. My pace is pinned down. That vill is not pacified! Again, I request a fire mission at those coordinates. Will adjust.

RADIO VOICE

Stand by Stagecoach.

Silence again. The men exchange looks. Lt. Nichols hobbles in on his crutches. Lt. Cross is with him.

LT. NICHOLS

How bad?

LT. GERBER

Two dead. Pace is pinned down.

Capt. Corliss stops writing on a pad, gets up and plots the enemy position on the wall map.

CAPT. CORLISS

It'll take 20 minutes to clear those grids.

The Lt. Col. stares at the map. Then he turns and looks at Capt. Eiler.

Aware that the Lt. Col. is looking at him, Capt. Eiler stares downward.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD DAY

Lt. McCahey's jeep has moved closer to the front. He gets out, carrying an M-79 grenade launcher, runs up to the Pace Truck, leaps onto the truckbed as bullets pop overhead. Sgt. Rayhorn is huddled behind the cab.

LT. MCCAHEY

Get somebody on the .50. I'll get a squad forward to flank our fire.

Sgt. Rayhorn gives a "thumbs up."

Sgt. McCall's X-Ray jeep moves next to a truck. Prince uses the side of the truck for cover, then opens up with the M-60.

Lt. McCahey huddles with a squad of infantry, giving orders to the Squad Leader. The men move out, covering for each other, moving down the side of the road, getting closer to the enemy.

Lt. McCahey makes a quick run back to his jeep.

CUT TO:

INT. S-3 DAY

More people are crammed into the office, listening to the radio.

Capt. Corliss and Major Ashworth are standing next to the map.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

That area was declared pacified!

LT. COL.

Headquarters forgot to tell the enemy.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD DAY

A Marine Volunteer is on the .50 ring mount. The infantry squad is in place, returning fire.

Lt. McCahey is resting his back against the rear tire of his jeep, microphone in hand, helmetless, trying to coordinate the reluctant artillery. He gives the microphone back to Martinez.

The enemy firing stops as quickly as it began.

An eerie silence comes about. The Marines look around, expecting more firing.

SGT. RAYHORN

"Di-di Mau!" They took off.

LT. MCCAHEY

Stand by everybody!

The silence is now punctuated by crying and moaning, coming from the wounded Marines and villagers.

MARINE
Motherfuckers skyed out!

LT. MCCAHEY
Sergeant McCall, help set up security. I'm going to call in a Medevac for the wounded.

CUT TO:

INT. S-3 DAY

The hooch is still full of officers and enlisted, breathing easier now.

The Lt. Col. takes the cigar from his mouth. He speaks to Major Ashworth without taking his eyes from the wall map.

LT. COL.
That could have been a squad of V.C. Holding up a 55 truck convoy. Shit!

MAJOR ASHWORTH
They've got civilian casualties.

LT. COL.
I don't like this. Request a helicopter from Division. Get up to Phu Bai and secure a prelim report.

The Lt. Col. puts the cigar back in the mouth and exits the office. Major Ashworth is astonished.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
A helicopter going up there?

Major Ashworth turns to Capt. Eiler.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Since this is a Bravo Company convoy, you'll be taking the helicopter.

Capt. Eiler looks up.

CAPT. EILER
A helicopter!

MAJOR ASHWORTH
To Phu Bai. The Colonel wants a
prelim report on the ambush.

Major Ashworth quickly departs leaving behind a stunned Capt. Eiler.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD DAY

Mopping up operations have started. The Marine dead are in a line alongside the road. Nearby are the Vietnamese dead. Two Navy Corpsmen are working on the wounded.

Lt. McCahey is at the front of the convoy looking down the road to the village. Nearby are Sgts. Rayhorn and McCall.

LT. MCCAHEY
How bad did we take it?

SGT. MCCALL
Five dead, including Donnatelli
and Slip. Nine wounded, plus the
villagers.

SGT. RAYHORN
I'll need a driver for the Pace Truck.

LT. MCCAHEY
Take one of the assistant drivers.

Lt. McCahey looks skyward. He is depressed.

LT. MCCAHEY
(Continuing)
We didn't do so well, eh?

SGT. MCCALL
Did you expect something different?

LT. MCCAHEY
I wanted those grids cleared!

SGT. MCCALL
We did okay -- under the conditions.

Martinez yells from the jeep, down the road.

MARTINEZ
Lieutenant! On the radio!

Lt. McCahey leaves the Sergeants.

Sgt. McCall looks towards the village, then to a broad expanse of rice paddy.

SGT. MCCALL
Maybe I should have gone in the
vill with the reaction force.

SGT. RAYHORN
Ah, let the "Grunts" do their job.

SGT. MCCALL
This is a pretty country when you
look at it. Too bad we had to...

Crack! Sgt. McCall is cut off by a sniper's bullet, the force of which knocks him backward.

Everyone hits the deck. There is some sporadic return fire, then quiet.

FIRST MARINE
Sniper! Ten O'Clock.

SECOND MARINE
Where?

Lt. McCahey is sitting on the road, using his jeep as cover. He completes the transmission then looks down the road.

Sgt. Rayhorn is working over the crumpled form of Sgt. McCall.

SGT. RAYHORN
Corpsman!

Lt. McCahey can't believe what he sees.

A Corpsman is working over Sgt. McCall as Lt. McCahey arrives. McCahey sees the seriousness of the wound and senses futility.

SGT. RAYHORN
We were standing here one minute,
then...

The Corpsman looks up and shakes his head. He returns to the other wounded.

Reverently, Lt. McCahey leans over Sgt. McCall and closes the sightless eyes. He takes one of the dog tags, leaves the other.

LT. MCCAHEY
I'm trying to think of his
next of kin.

SGT. RAYHORN
He don't have any. Wife left him
long ago.

LT. MCCAHEY
There's gotta be somebody, a brother,
a sister?

SGT. RAYHORN
There's nobody Lieutenant, nobody.

Lt. McCahey and Sgt. Rayhorn are sitting on the road with Sgt. McCall's body in between.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD DAY

Later. The wounded have been loaded into a helicopter which lifts off and banks northward.

Lt. McCahey approaches the Pace Truck. There is a Replacement at the wheel, in addition to the .50 caliber gun. Sgt. Rayhorn is standing next to the truck.

The X-Ray jeep is nearby. Prince is now in the driver's seat. Another Marine is on the M-60.

LT. MCCAHEY
Graves Registration at Phu Bai
will handle the dead.

Sgt. Rayhorn nods. Lt. McCahey looks down the road at the line of trucks.

LT. MCCAHEY
Let's get outa' here!

Sgt. Rayhorn circles his right forefinger in the air. The whinnying sound of heavy truck engines fills the air. The convoy moves out.

EXT. PHU BAI AFTERNOON

The convoy enters the Phu Bai compound. The trucks lumber slowly in as Marines line the road to look at the bullet pocked sides of the vehicles.

The trail end of the convoy passes. The M-543 Wreckers are both towing damaged trucks.

The Trail Jeep passes. Lt. Doralski is a mirror of the after effects of his first combat, shock and depression.

A group of officers is waiting at the end of an air strip. In the center is Capt. CHARLES OLSON.

The Command Jeep is the fourth vehicle to enter a large field next to the air strip. As soon as the jeep halts the officers gather around.

CAPT. OLSON
I'm Captain Olson. Are you the
convoy commander?

Lt. McCahey, tired and drawn, gets out.

LT. MCCAHEY
Yes. I'm Lieutenant McCahey.

CAPT. OLSON
Glad you made it in. How bad
was it?

LT. MCCAHEY
Six dead. Nine wounded, all
evacuated. Civilian casualties too.

CAPT. OLSON
Enemy losses?

LT. MCCAHEY
Our reaction force had two
confirmed KIA'S.

SECOND CAPT.
That's a bad kill ratio.

Lt. McCahey glares at the Second Capt.

LT. MCCAHEY
Tough shit!

Capt. Olson sees the strain coming out in Lt. McCahey. He motions, with his head, for the Second Capt. to "cool it."

CAPT. OLSON
Your battalion is sending someone in tomorrow. You're to make out a prelim after action report for an investigation.

LT. MCCAHEY
An investigation!

CAPT. OLSON
The area where you were ambushed has been pacified. That's why the grids were never cleared.

LT. MCCAHEY
That cost us. I'll remember that for my report.

CAPT. OLSON
I'm sorry you lost those men.

Capt. Olson leaves. The other officers follow as Lt. McCahey watches them get into a jeep and drive off.

LT. MCCAHEY
Martinez?

Martinez approaches Lt. McCahey.

LT. MCCAHEY
Under a tarp, in the back of the Pace Truck, are some cases of beer. When it gets dark have Sergeant Rayhorn distribute them.

MARTINEZ
You okay Lieutenant?

Lt. McCahey says nothing. He sits in his jeep, takes off his helmet and puts on the faded baseball cap. He begins writing on a clipboard, then stops physically and emotionally drained. His eyes begin to water.

CUT TO:

EXT. PHU BAI NIGHT

Doralski and McCahey are sitting on the Pace Truck tailgate. Periodically, flares pop in the sky and drift downward throwing off a bright, ephemeral, light. Now and then artillery fire is heard o.s.

Both men are drinking beer. Several empty cans are lying in the truckbed. Doralski is very emotional.

LT. DORALSKI
I felt so damn helpless out
there today.

LT. MCCAHEY
Join the club.

LT. DORALSKI
I couldn't even see what we were
shooting at.

LT. MCCAHEY
Just like they taught us at
Quantico, huh?

Lt. Doralski lifts his beer to take a drink, then halts.

LT. DORALSKI
You know, I...

Without warning, Doralski throws away the can, jumps off the truck and runs out into the field, towards the air strip runway.

McCahey watches then walks after the younger Lt.

Doralski is sitting in the field, arms around his knees. He is quietly crying.

Lt. McCahey approaches and sits next to him.

LT. DORALSKI
I guess I'm not going to make it
around here. I let an afternoon
ambush get to me.

LT. MCCAHEY
Ski, did you do anything to
cause the deaths of those men?

LT. DORALSKI
What did I do to help?

LT. MCCAHEY
You couldn't do anything. The road
was blocked. The pace was pinned down!

LT. DORALSKI
I wonder what it feels like, that
last conscious second before you go,
especially when you know.

Lt. Doralski wipes the tears from his eyes and clears his throat.

LT. DORALSKI
(Continuing)
I wonder how many members of Congress,
who are hawks, have combat records?

LT. MCCAHEY
You know, tomorrow will be my first
convoy without Sergeant McCall.

LT. DORALSKI
He's cold at Graves Registration and
they're gonna investigate you.

LT. MCCAHEY
What else is new?

LT. DORALSKI
Mac, it doesn't make any sense.
Nothing works anymore!

Lt. Doralski rests his head on his forearms. Lt. McCahey puts
a sympathetic arm on his shoulder.

LT. MCCAHEY
I know. I think we all know it.

CUT TO:

EXT. PHU BAI MORNING

A helicopter lands on the air strip. The power is cut off as
the blades slowly stop rotating.

Capt. Eiler gets out, wearing a helmet and flak jacket, a .45 on his hip. He is carrying a manila envelope.

EXT. PHU BAI MORNING

The convoy is staged at the end of the air strip as Capt. Eiler approaches Lt. McCahey's jeep. Sgt. Rayhorn is nearby.

CAPT. EILER
I can't stay long Lieutenant McCahey.
Need a copy of your report.

Lt. McCahey reaches into his jeep and produces several pages, paper-clipped together. He hands them to Capt. Eiler.

CAPT. EILER
Of course you realize that this
constitutes a sworn statement?

LT. MCCAHEY
I don't care what it constitutes.
I've done nothing wrong.

CAPT. EILER
We'll be the judge of that.

LT. MCCAHEY
I assume you know about Donnatelli,
Slip and Sergeant McCall?

CAPT. EILER
(Coldly)
Part of combat. Do you have a
list of the dead and wounded?

LT. MCCAHEY
On the last page.

CAPT. EILER
I understand we also lost some
trucks? We're already under complement.

Lt. McCahey is disgusted at Capt. Eiler's lack of compassion.

An enlisted Crew Member, from the helicopter, approaches. Capt. Eiler thinks he is being informed of the departure.

CAPT. EILER
Tell the pilot I'm coming.

CREW MEMBER
Take your time Captain. We
ain't leaving.

CAPT. EILER
Not leaving!

CREW MEMBER
Hydraulic leak.

Capt. Eiler is angered, something not in his game plan.

CAPT. EILER
My orders are to return as soon
as possible.

CREW MEMBER
Yes sir. We radioed that in. Your
outfit said you can return with
the convoy.

CAPT. EILER
Now wait a minute...

CREW MEMBER
Just passing the word sir.

Capt. Eiler looks around, dreadfully speechless. Sgt. Rayhorn and
Lt. McCahey exchange looks.

LT. MCCAHEY
We'll be leaving as soon as the
road is swept for mines. You can
ride with me.

Capt. Eiler recovers. He puts the papers in the envelope.

CAPT. EILER
That won't be necessary. I'll
ride in one of the security trucks.

Several Marines are staring at Capt. Eiler.

CUT TO:

EXT. PHU BAI DAY

The convoy moves out, heading for the gate of Phu Bai and
the road back.

Capt. Eiler is sitting in the cab of an infantry security truck. He wipes his brow.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD DAY

Far Down the Road. Three Vietnamese Boys are kneeling in a sandy area. Two are filling sandbags with their hands, the third has a shovel.

The younger boys, PHOUNG, wearing a swim suit; and DON, head shaven, are laughing.

Suddenly Hoang stops working with the shovel. He sees something. Phoung and Don see how frightenly still Hoang is. They turn.

Three North Vietnamese Soldiers come through some thick brush. They are dressed in gray shirts and trousers, wearing pith helmets.

One of the Soldiers picks up a shovel. He cracks it across Phoung's head, knocking the boy to the ground.

Phoung is dazed. He gets to his hands and knees. Before he can stand, the North Vietnamese Soldier takes out a pistol, points it near Phoung's ear and pulls the trigger.

The blast sends Phoung back to the ground, motionless.

The First North Vietnamese Soldier looks at the other two boys. He nods to the other Soldiers.

A Second Soldier cocks a rifle.

Hoang and Don know their time is near. When they hear the click of the rifle bolt, they break and run.

The Second Soldier aims the rifle and fires.

The bullet hits Hoang in the middle of the shoulder blades. He twists and falls. Hoang tries to get up. Halfway to his feet a second shot slams his body back into the ground.

Don has broken free and is running through foilage as he hears more shots in b.g.

He comes to a road and continues running, along Highway 1.

Finally he collapses in a clump of brush and trees. Although he is trying to control himself, Don is crying. He brings his legs under his chin and rests his forehead on his forearms. As his heavy breathing lessens, he starts vomiting. His body shakes.

The sound of trucks is heard o.s. Don looks up and sees a dust swirl in the distance. The convoy is approaching.

EXT. ROAD DAY

Don is still shaken as the trucks pass. He stands and frantically waves a warning. He shakes his head.

The trucks go by in a swift and dusty passing. A Marine throws a can of C-Rations at Don.

The can lands on the ground. Don stares at it, looks at the trucks.

EXT. PACE TRUCK DAY

Sgt. Rayhorn is under the ring mount. So far, so good.

EXT. COMMAND JEEP DAY

Lt. McCahey is looking at his map. He picks up the microphone.

LT. MCCAHEY
Sandhurst, this is Stagecoach
Bravo, over.

RADIO VOICE
Bravo, this is Sandhurst, over.

LT. MCCAHEY
Roger, pace is approaching Check
Point Five and rolling. Out.

INT. SECURITY TRUCK DAY

Capt. Eiler pokes his head out of the truck cab. He looks up and back, biting his lip.

INT. TRAIL JEEP DAY

Lt. Doralski picks up the microphone.

LT. DORALSKI
Bravo, this is Trail, over.

LT. MCCAHEY'S VOICE
Trail, this is Bravo.

LT. DORALSKI
Roger, we cleared Check Point
Five-Eight. Train looks good.

EXT. ROAD DAY

A barricade is lying across a narrow point in the road as the convoy gets closer, beyond a bend. The barricade is composed of a tree trunk wrapped in a barbed wire, supported by X-shaped cross beams at strategic places.

The jungle roadblock remains there as the sounds of the approaching convoy get louder.

EXT. PACE DAY

The Pace Truck rounds the bend.

Sgt. Rayhorn is momentarily stunned when he sees the barricade. He covers and yells to the Driver.

SGT. RAYHORN
Run it! Run it!

The Gunner on the .50 caliber mount swings his gun around. So far nothing has happened.

The truck hits the barricade with a dull crunch and begins pushing against it. Sgt. Rayhorn keys the microphone.

SGT. RAYHORN
Bravo, this is Pace. We have a
barricade up here.

LT. MCCAHEY'S VOICE
Pace, run it! Keep the road clear!

Mortars and machine gun fire erupt. The .50 caliber Gunner
returns fire. Several Marines on the first security truck
open fire.

SGT. RAYHORN
Bravo, we're under fire. Enemy
using small arms and mortars...

INT. COMMAND JEEP DAY

Lt. McCahey is holding the microphone, looking at his map. He
continues listening to the radio.

SGT. RAYHORN'S VOICE
Coordinates 0-0-3, 8-3-7, over.

LT. MCCAHEY
Pace, this is Bravo. I copy. Get
through that barricade. Break --
Break. Sandhurst, Sandhurst, this
is Stagecoach Bravo...

INT. SECURITY TRUCK DAY

Capt. Eiler hears the firing and mortar explosions. He looks
down the road.

The convoy is at a stop as the small arms fire and explosions
get louder.

CAPT. EILER
Ambush! Why are we stopping?

DRIVER
Road's blocked Captain.

CAPT. EILER
My God, we're sitting ducks!

EXT. ROAD DAY

The Driver of the Pace Truck is showing frustration. The barricade doesn't budge as the firing continues.

A Marine on the security truck, behind the Pace, is hit. He topples from the truck. Then a Second Marine is hit.

Sgt. Rayhorn is directing the .50 caliber Gunner to new targets.

CUT TO:

INT. S-3 OFFICE DAY

The same group of officers and enlisted is gathered around the radio.

Again, the Lt. Col. is working a cigar around in his mouth. He is looking at the map, plotting the ambush zone.

LT. COL.

What about air and artillery?

CAPT. CORLISS

On the way.

LT. COL.

This time they better get there.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

These things take time Colonel.

LT. COL.

Time? Yesterday we lost good kids because of time. Do we need to lose more?

EXT. ROAD DAY

Lt. McCahey's jeep is moving along the shoulder of the road, getting closer to the Pace Truck.

The X-Ray jeep has stopped in a strategic position. Prince directs his Gunner to a target.

Lt. McCahey passes the X-Ray jeep and flips a "thumbs up" to Prince.

Back at the Pace. The barricade is still in the middle of the road. The Pace Truck backs off and crunches into the barricade again.

More Marines are taking hits under the intense fire. The mortars continue.

Lt. McCahey jumps onto the safe side of the running board of the Pace Truck. He instructs the Driver.

LT. MCCAHEY
Reverse! Take it back!

The Driver nods. The Pace Truck slowly backs off from the barricade.

Wounded Marines are being carried rearward as the trucks retreat to a safer position.

Sgt. Lamont, the infantry platoon sergeant, huddles with Lt. McCahey.

LT. MCCAHEY
We need a satchel charge in the center of the barricade. How quickly can you make up one?

SGT. LAMONT
With some C-4, a few minutes. Who's gonna place it?

LT. MCCAHEY
If you don't get a volunteer, let me know.

Sgt. Lamont returns to his men to make up the satchel charge.

Capt. Eiler is dodging forward, in between trucks. Suddenly he sees Lt. McCahey.

Lt. McCahey has taken cover on the side of his jeep with Martinez. Lt. McCahey is talking on the radio.

LT. MCCAHEY
We can't wait! We're gonna try
and blow it in place!

CAPT. EILER
What the hell have you gotten
us into?

Lt. McCahey has disgust at Capt. Eiler's obvious concern for himself. Lt. McCahey returns to Sgt. Lamont.

Capt. Eiler is now taking cover behind the jeep, looking around.

Next to Sgt. Lamont is a dark haired, slim, baby-faced Marine who weighs about 140 pounds on a heavy day -- the Volunteer -- PFC WATKINS.

SGT. LAMONT
Watkins here was the first to
volunteer. There were two others.

Lt. McCahey gives Watkins an admiring look.

LT. MCCAHEY
Know what has to be done?

WATKINS
A beeline to the barricade with
the satchel charge. Try to get
as close to the middle as possible.

SGT. LAMONT
It's a 12 second fuse. It has to
be dumped between eight and ten
seconds after you start. Or else
you go with it!

Watkins nods with confidence.

LT. MCCAHEY
Go in on an angle. You'll be
covered. Drop the charge on the
run and take cover on the other
side of the road.

Watkins takes off his flak jacket. The three move to the front fender of the Pace Truck. Sporadic firing and mortar explosions are still taking place.

Watkins looks at the satchel charge. Beads of sweat glisten on his forehead. He looks at Sgt. Lamont.

WATKINS
Kramer has a letter of mine. See
that it gets mailed?

Sgt. Lamont nods. Lt. McCahey pats Watkins on the shoulder.

Watkins makes the Sign of the Cross and slowly wipes his hands on his trousers. He pulls the fuse cords!

Watkins takes off, running towards the barricade.

The M-60, from the X-Ray jeep opens up.

The Pace Truck Gunner opens up with the .50.

Lt. McCahey and Sgt. Lamont helplessly watch.

Watkins gets closer to the barricade.

Sgt. Rayhorn, fists clenched, has his eyes glued to the little Marine.

SGT. RAYHORN
C'mon, kid, c'mon!

Watkins is almost at the barricade. He slides the charge under the center in the smoothest of motions. He continues running to the far side of the road.

Several shots are heard. Watkins twists and falls into a culvert.

The barricade gushes into a violent explosion -- wire, wood and bamboo go everywhere.

Lt. McCahey and Sgt. Lamont look up after the debris clears.

The barricade has been broken. The road is clear!

Two Marines break from the cover of the trucks. They rush to the culvert. The First Marine picks up Watkins and puts him in a fireman's carry. They rush back to the truck cover.

Lt. McCahey and Sgt. Lamont watch as Watkins is rested against the side of a tire. A Corpsman begins working.

Watkins slowly opens his eyes and looks around.

WATKINS
Bastards got me! Didn't think
they shoot that good.

The Corpsman looks up and smiles.

CORPSMAN
Some shock. He's hit in the leg.
Million dollar wound.

LT. MCCAHEY
We'll get outa' this area then I'll
call a Medevac.
(To Watkins)
Take the rest of the day off.

Watkins smiles.

SGT. LAMONT
Let's saddle up!

EXT. ROAD DAY

The convoy moves out and crunches over the pieces of what was once an impassable obstacle.

EXT. ROAD DAY

Farther Down The Road. The convoy slows as the trucks pull off the road.

SGT. LAMONT
Fire teams out! We still got
all kinds of people around here.

As the Marines set up a landing zone security, Lt. McCahey walks a short distance, off the road, and pops a smoke grenade.

Colored smoke fizzles out of the canister and drifts skyward as the sound of a Medevac helicopter gets closer.

When Lt. McCahey returns to his jeep, Capt. Eiler is waiting.

CAPT. EILER
In view of the urgency of my report,
I'll have to hitch a ride on the
chopper.

Lt. McCahey realizes the obvious intention.

LT. MCCAHEY
Captain, there's only enough room
for the wounded.

Capt. Eiler is worried but also determined to get out of this hot area.

CAPT. EILER
I won't take up much room. I
have to get back.

LT. MCCAHEY
I'm the convoy commander. Only
the wounded go on that chopper!

CAPT. EILER
I'm getting on Lieutenant!

LT. MCCAHEY
You do and I'll report it!

The helicopter sets down in the landing zone. The wounded are quickly led out and placed aboard, litter cases first, walking wounded next.

Capt. Eiler, holding the manila envelope, makes a move towards the helicopter. Lt. McCahey grabs him.

LT. MCCAHEY
Captain, if you get on that
chopper, I'll...

CAPT. EILER
Take your hands off me!

The two men stare at each other. The wounded Marines are just about loaded. The Helicopter engine gets louder.

Capt. Eiler jerks free and takes off desperately trying to make the helicopter.

Realizing now that there is little he can do, Lt. McCahey turns and walks back to his jeep. Suddenly two shots ring out.

Capt. Eiler drops his envelope and goes down.

Lt. McCahey turns and sees what happened. He looks around.

MARINE

Snipers!

The helicopter lifts off and heads toward Danang as Lt. McCahey rushes to Capt. Eiler.

Sgt. Rayhorn and Lt. McCahey arrive at the crumpled form.
They give each other knowing looks.

SGT. RAYHORN

Did you hear where the shots came
from?

LT. MCCAHEY

Wasn't even watching.

Sgt. Rayhorn looks back towards the trucks. A Corpsman is running out.

SGT. RAYHORN

Makes no difference now.

Lt. McCahey is bending over Capt. Eiler as the Corpsman arrives.

LT. MCCAHEY

Relax Doc; nothing can be done.

CORPSMAN

Shit. Right through the neck!

LT. MCCAHEY
Obviously a sniper.
(Pause)
Get a litter team out here.

Lt. McCahey and Sgt. Rayhorn look at each other as a stretcher team approaches.

EXT. DANANG ROAD DAY

The convoy turns off Highway 1, heading towards the compound, moving slowly. The Marines are showing the strains of the harrowing two days.

Lt. McCahey, in his jeep, takes off his helmet and wipes his brow.

EXT. COMPOUND DAY

The battalion staff is waiting as the Pace Truck enters the compound.

The Lt. Col., standing next to the gate, throws a small salute at Sgt. Rayhorn and the Gunner. Both men return the salute.

Major Ashworth is next to the Lt. Col. on one side. Capt. Corliss is on the other. Nearby are Lts. Gerber, Gravell, Cross, Gutter and Nichols (on his crutches).

Lt. McCahey's jeep is approaching the gate. He strains his neck looking for an Army jeep.

The trucks continue rolling into the compound. As they do, they pass an Army jeep, parked inconspicuously on the side of the road. Marty is at the wheel.

Lt. McCahey smiles and waves as his jeep passes. Marty breathes a sigh and waves back.

The command jeep comes to a stop. Lt. McCahey gets out and takes off his flak jacket. His appearance is much like that when he reported in from the 5th Marines.

Sgt. Lamont approaches Lt. McCahey. They shake hands. Lt. McCahey hands Sgt. Lamont a piece of paper.

LT. MCCAHEY

For Watkins. Some notes from what I saw. Use it for a citation.

SGT. LAMONT

Yes sir. Gonna recommend him for a Bronze Star.

LT. MCCAHEY

Bullshit! A Silver Star. Maybe a Navy Cross. The awards people will knock it down anyhow. And get the kid a promotion.

Sgt. Lamont nods, salutes and returns to his men as the Lt. Col. approaches. The trucks are still entering the compound.

LT. COL.

Been a rough two days Mister McCahey?

LT. MCCAHEY

I've had easier Colonel.

LT. COL.

You got the job done. Can't fault that. We'll clear up this pacified village thing later.

(Pause)

Sorry about Captain Eiler.

LT. MCCAHEY

Yes sir. You'll have my report tomorrow.

LT. COL.

I kept the chow hall open. Your men can have a hot meal.

The Lt. Col. nods and walks over towards Sgt. Rayhorn.

Lt. McCahey turns and takes his map case from the jeep. He is folding the maps when Major Ashworth approaches.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

I'm ordering a full investigation into Captain Eiler's death.

Lt. McCahey continues stuffing the maps into the case.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

(Continuing)

That landing zone was secure. No
snipers were reported.

LT. MCCAHEY

Didn't know you were there Major.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Don't get flip McCahey! You know the
chances of getting shot in the back on
a convoy.

LT. MCCAHEY

I've never worried about it. Officially
Captain Eiler was shot by a sniper while
trying to board a Medevac, against my
orders as convoy commander!

MAJOR ASHWORTH

What? Why you...

Lt. McCahey flips his helmet into the jeep. Several officers
gather around, waiting to see what will happen.

LT. MCCAHEY

He was my company commander so
I won't include the coward bit.

(Pause)

Seems nobody saw where the shots
came from, or how many.

Lt. McCahey reaches into the jeep and pulls out the notorious
baseball cap. He puts it on.

Major Ashworth sees the baseball cap -- rage!

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Lieutenant, take off that cap!

Lt. McCahey smiles and turns, heading towards the gate.

MAJOR ASHWORTH

Lieutenant McCahey, get back here!

Lt. McCahey keeps smiling -- and walking.

The Lt. Col. turns and sees what is happening.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
I said come back here Lieutenant!

Major Ashworth is about out of control, screaming at the top of his lungs.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
I'll have you court martialed!

The Lt. Col. approaches Major Ashworth, takes him by the arm and leads him out of the motor pool. By this time Major Ashworth is babbling to himself.

MAJOR ASHWORTH
Court Martial! Investigation!
The baseball cap!

Lt. McCahey walks out of the compound, across the road and walks to Marty's jeep.

MARTY
You want to drive?

LT. MCCAHEY
You seem to be doing fine. Uh, is there a story behind how you got this jeep?

MARTY
Yes. But it's boring.

LT. MCCAHEY
A pity. War is hell.

MARTY
Hop in. Dinner's on me.

Lt. McCahey gets in. The jeep pulls out.

EXT. ROAD DAY

The jeep moves down the road, heading towards downtown Danang -- and a dinner before a plane leaves.

FADE OUT

THE END