

THE TEXAS RANGERS

BY JOHN MILIUS

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THIRD DRAFT

Part I

"To all you Texas Rangers
Wherever you may be,
I'll tell you of some troubles
That happened unto me.
My name is nothin extra,
So that I will not tell.
Here's to McNelly's Rangers,
You know I wish you well.

'Twas at the age of seventeen
I joined the jolly band.
We marched from San Antonio
unto the Rio Grande.
McNelly he done told us,
Perhaps he thought it right,
We're bound to cross the river Boys
You know we'll have to fight."

The Texas Ranger

--a song of the 1870's

SOUTHERN TEXAS 1875

The ten years following the Civil War left the land poor, ravaged. Cotton was gone and nothing else would grow. Folks depended on wild cattle for food. Poverty made for no law and the land was overrun with thieving Desperados who hid out in Old Mexico. Cattle were rustled, families raped, murdered and burnt out. Beef was worth five dollars a head across the Rio Grande. In Texas, human life wasn't worth a nickel.

RUNNING AWAY

THE PRAIRIE--Vast and unmarked by fences or structures. The grass, long and yellow, seems to undulate like a sleepless sea. Great purple clouds pile up on a distant horizon and the smell of rain is sweet and fresh.

A HORSEMAN--Going full out enters the panorama heading toward the darkening sky. The horse covers ground in a clipped, powerful gait. The rider bends low on the horse's neck and looks back over his shoulder and whips the withers with a leather strap. He mounts a small rise and pulls the animal around in a sliding stop.

The rider is a young man, and he sits on the horse well. He wears an open white shirt, with store bought pants and boots, but has no hat, spurs, pistol or the other equipage of the open plains.

CLOSE YOUNG MAN--LINCOLN ROGERS DUNNISON--He has an easy smile at other times, but now his face is strained with worry. He squints at the endless unbroken distance of grass and makes out a thin wisp of dust. He turns and looks back towards the storm.

DUNNISON (V.O.)

Dear Father--my situation has changed abruptly in life. Just yesterday it seems that I was making good progress as a drummer of medicinal tinctures.

P.O.V. DUNNISON--A faint wisp of black smoke not much more than the dust in the opposite direction can be seen. But this wisp is moving.

DUNNISON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It all came unraveled when I was visiting a client who happened to be a widow of some means, for this country.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He stands in the stirrups and sees the smoke attached to a train, it's thin dark rail line unnaturally crossing the horizon. A hinted smile crosses his visage as he whips his mount down towards it.

DUNNISON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She and I were making a business arrangement.

FLASHBACK TO:

DUNNISON--AN ATTRACTIVE WOMAN--In the final throws of heated

(CONTINUED)

lovmaking. Her shapely leg stretches out and her toe catches the ring of the window shade.

WIDOW (O.S.)

Don't--don't stop--whatever you do.

The shade rolls up with a snap revealing MOUNTED MEN who have just ridden up. They look in. The noise of the shade also brings young Dunnison's head upright.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--Riding hell for leather. The dust forms up behind him, the train still a long ways away.

DUNNISON (V.O.)

Anyway, we couldn't agree on terms when we were rudely interrupted by her suitor who was none other than the local Constable. It is my feeling these two were having a "liaison" and guilt threw the fellow into a terrible jealous rage.

FLASHBACK TO:

THE GLASS--of the living room window blows in from a shotgun blast as Dunnison runs by pulling on his pants. The falling glass reveals darkly clad MEN below.

MAN

Shoot! Shoot him again Rufus!

The widow stands in the doorway clad only in a whalebone corset looking quite fetching. She laughs with vitality and sin and points towards the back porch.

DUNNISON (V.O.)

Believe me Father, he was mistaken in his assumptions!

CUT TO:

THE TRAIN--which is rumbling across the near horizon at a good clip. The boy whips his horse on in a frantic effort to intercept. The train has only a coaler and two cars--one is for baggage. It leaves a long black plume which dissolves into the dark gray of the rain clouds.

DUNNISON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Needless to say I was left with nothing but the money in my belt and a good horse--not my own--that being left at the widow's.

He looks over his shoulder and sees that the dust behind him is gaining. It starts to rain.

DUNNISON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I know I've disappointed you Father. I know you and Mother had such high hopes for me, but this time it was not MY fault.

He draws close to the thundering rails--the coaler slides by him, a MEXICAN FIREMAN watches with indifference--then the baggage car

(CONTINUED)

slides past, and finally the passenger car whose FEW OCCUPANTS rush to the windows.

DUNNISON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Despite what you think of my abilities
and the troubles I've brought you before--

Dunnison stares into the face of a LEAN MAN with a dark moustache in a large black hat. The man stares at the boy. There was a gulf between them, and then the car passes. The railing at it's back offers an opportunity.

DUNNISON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I am learning to acquit myself in this
world on my own.

With that he jumps, catches the railing and swings up onto the platform. A smile breaks across his face as he looks back at the receding horsemen. He waves goodbye and steps into the rumbling car.

CUT TO:

TRAIN TO LAREDO

THE CAR--Is not full, mostly MEXICAN FAMILIES and a few WHITE WOMEN with OLD NEGRO ATTENDANTS. Dunnison is caught in the gaze of the lean man in the black coat and hat. The man sits on the edge of his seat apprehensive, almost about to spring at Dunnison. His eyes are remarkable in that they are devoid of emotion. He looks over Dunnison's shoulder at the horse that is falling behind. The CONDUCTOR comes between them.

CONDUCTOR

You left your horse outside.

They both look as the Riders press on towards the animal.

DUNNISON

I made a swap--but they didn't see it
fair.

This doesn't really explain anything to anybody.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

I do not fret the loss but he had a
forty dollar saddle.

CONDUCTOR

That is not my concern--just pay for
your ticket.

Dunnison fumbles with his belt--all eyes on him.

CONDUCTOR (CONT'D)

Fifty cents--one way--seventy five round--

DUNNISON

One way.

He gives him the fare.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

Uh--there are no other stops between here and Laredo?

CONDUCTOR

Sit down.

DUNNISON

Ladies--

He smiles at some OLDER WOMEN and a MEXICAN FAMILY.

CUT TO:

THE TRAIN--Approaching in the distance--in the foreground FIVE RIDERS under a water tower. ONE of them prances his horse onto the tracks and waves.

CUT TO:

CLOSE DUNNISON--Alarmed--the conductor walks by.

DUNNISON

I thought there were no other stops.

CONDUCTOR

Unscheduled.

He goes to the back and opens the heavy door. Shadows precede the figures boarding, and the chink of spurs can be heard. A look of apprehension crosses the conductor's face as he is suddenly confronted with a mean looking HOMBRE. The man has a scar down through his right eye, wears a wide sombrero, and has two dissimilar pistols belted to his waist, the ammunition glittering. THREE OTHER SIMILAR CHARACTERS follow--each one huge, dirty and armed. They hand the conductor tickets.

MEAN HOMBRE

Bought in San Antone'.

CONDUCTOR

Why didn't you get on there?

OTHER HOMBRE

Cause we got on here--Stupid.

The conductor backs up making a show of counting his tickets. The men sit down, clanking and chinking as the train pulls out. The leader takes out a long black cigar. One of his compadres offers a huge wicked Bowie knife to cut it with.

THE LADIES--In the car are of course alarmed and whisper back and forth to each other. A NEGRO SERVANT seems to be reciting something.

THE LEADER--Licks his cigar in a lascivious manner before cutting it.

OTHER HOMBRE

What's you staring at nigger.

The Negro servant turns away. He helps his charges move towards the front of the car. The men smile and scrutinize each person.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE DUNNISON--He is quite concerned. Out of the frying pan--he looks around and sees the dark stranger. The stranger looks over to the men at the back of the car, appraising them like so many head of beef. He looks at the Negro who is terrified, and to the women. He smiles courteously and then his gaze catches Dunnison. In a quiet fluid motion he slips from his seat to the one next to Dunnison.

STRANGER

Perhaps you have noted something is afoot.

DUNNISON

It seems that way.

STRANGER

You see there is a riot in Laredo and they sent for the Texas Ranger--these fellows don't look like Texas Rangers do they?

DUNNISON

No.

STRANGER

--And you wouldn't be a Ranger would you?
--No didn't think so.

He looks back at the men.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

Yep--they're lookin' for him--that's for sure.

DUNNISON

What do they want?

STRANGER

Why to kill him--'fore he gets to Laredo--
What else? I better talk to them.

He gets up--and strolls back down the aisle. Though he's not a big man, something about him seems to suddenly fill the car. He stops for a second and coughs deeply--a racking, consumptive cough. His left hand comes up with a handkerchief--his right still free. With the cough the bad men come up erect. One of them stands. Their hands gripping the handles of their pistols.

LEADER

McNelly!

The stranger puts the handkerchief in his pocket and comes out with a round badge--a star made from a silver coin. He pins it on his breast pocket. His right hand sweeps his coat back revealing the polished walnut grip of a Colt Navy.

STRANGER

That's right. I'm McNelly--Seems this car is--crowded. You Boys are gonna have to get off.

OTHER HOMBRE

Ain't no stops between here and Laredo.

MCNELLY

That's what I mean Son.

(CONTINUED)

McNelly is about thirty five. The man he speaks to is well seasoned.

LEADER

Four on one ain't no dogfall--Ranger!

McNelly sweeps back his other hand revealing a Colt Navy on his left side.

MCNELLY

I'm wearing two guns Boys. That means some of you are gonna have to die twice.

CLOSE DUNNISON--OTHERS--He can't believe it. A WOMAN covers her eyes, the old Negro Man drops his jaw.

A HAND PULLS IRON.

CLOSE MCNELLY--His gun is already out--he extends it smoothly. The leader's gun explodes--McNelly's coat flicks back. McNelly's gun at eye level now blasts smoke and soot and places the ball through the leader's right eye! He reels over heavily on the others. McNelly shoots another's hat off and misses clean with the third shot. Two of their guns go off shattering a window and an oil lamp--causing a small fire! Things are getting hot. Dunnison pushes himself against a window as a bullet seems to whiz by--but the Ranger just stands his ground and fires again. By now the bad men have dropped down behind the seats. McNelly walks forward, fires twice, shattering wood.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He executes a superb "Border Hand Shift"--flipping his empty revolver into the air and filling his good hand with the other and catching the empty--all the while shooting. But by now the bad men have had enough. They hold their hands up, dropping iron. McNelly raises his gun. Smoke is thick between them. The old Negro swats out the fire in the back with his coat.

MCNELLY

Jump!

He motions to the back door.

BAD MAN

We cain't jump--

MCNELLY

I still got four left.

He waves his pistol. They scurry to the door--they open it. He blasts once through the window.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

Take him with you.

He points at the corpse of the leader. They leap back and drag him through the door. They hesitate. McNelly fires again and walks forward. They jump from the railing. McNelly walks out and kicks the corpse over like so much trash. Smoke rushes out past him. The fire is out and the MEXICAN WOMEN cross themselves. McNelly walks back in holstering his weapons.

MCNELLY (CONT'D) (to train Passengers)

I'm Captain McNelly, Texas Rangers. These Hombres wished me bad fortune--don't expect any more of it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They all cheer. McNelly sits down ignoring it all.

DUNNISON

You got him in the right eye Sir!

MCNELLY

--Was aiming for his left--I guess
I'd become excited--Sit down, Son.

DISSOLVE TO:

ONE RIOT

LAREDO--The train pulls into the station which is crowded with PEOPLE. These people are the town's better citizens. The bad element are obviously at the riot. Laredo in those days was not a big town, but it had a charming Mexican flavor if you favored low adobe buildings painted in pastel colors and a lot of stray dogs and burros. Laredo's MAYOR and a CONTINGENT OF SURVEYORS meet the train. McNelly gets off first, his badge still on his coat.

MAYOR

You with the Rangers?

MCNELLY

I'm the Ranger. What do you want?

MAYOR (looking inside the train)

There's only one of you?

MCNELLY

You ain't got but one riot--Let's see
where you put it.

The crowd surges around with McNelly leading. Dunnison squeezes out of the train and falls in behind.

CUT TO:

FRONT STREET--The crowd with McNelly and the Mayor at the front crosses the railroad tracks and walks towards the Rio Grande. This area is the "red light" district and contains the entertainment businesses--cantinas, bordellos, lawyers. The crowd is quite boisterous gaining confidence as it starts up the street when a shot rings out. Suddenly everyone scatters for the trees and buildings leaving McNelly alone.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He watches from behind several horses. McNelly walks up the street. SEVERAL MEN walk out on porches.

ANOTHER GROUP assembles in the street. A DRUNKEN THUG staggers towards McNelly with a pistol drawn. McNelly doesn't stop but walks right up to the man. The thug thrusts his long barreled Remington into McNelly's stomach.

CLOSE MCNELLY--THUG--They stare.

THUG

I dance fandango with rattlesnakes--
ain't afeared of hellfire. Die you must.

McNelly twists sideways effortlessly and takes the gun away

(CONTINUED)

twisting it out of his hand and hits him across the head with it. Loose balls fall from the cylinder and the man falls heavily. McNelly draws his own pistols, and fires at the men on the porches, making them drop or flee inside. As he shoots, the street is suddenly alive with HORSEMEN. About TEN MEN armed with rifles form a line behind McNelly. OTHERS appear from the sides of the buildings and line up behind the crowd surrounding them. The horsemen are colorfully dressed in wide sombreros and chaps. They are young men and move with military precision.

MCNELLY
Sergeant Armstrong--

A BIG BLONDE HAired MAN on a horse behind McNelly moves closer.

ARMSTRONG
The Company is formed Cap'n.

MCNELLY (to Townspeople)
Now all you who can hear me. I'm
McNelly, Texas Rangers. I gotta' book
here full a warrants from Austin--Show 'em
the book Corporal Rudd.

A RED HAired MAN with a derby hat displays a large book from horseback.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
If your name's in this book you got
two choices. There's a four o'clock
train. Be on it or run after it.

He turns around and walks back through his men.

CUT TO:

SIX KINGS

NIGHT ON FRONT STREET--The saloons are empty, dust and tumbleweeds blow through the pools of light that leak out the doors. Dunnison is feeling the early October chill. He has no coat, nothing but the money in his belt. He walks along and peers into one of the Cantinas. A couple of OLD MEN sit at a far table in a filthy room. In the distance a WOMAN sings "La Golandrina (The Swallow)"--it seems far away, across the river. Dunnison looks into one of the larger establishments. Most of the lights are out, but it is an ornate lusty place, with red walls and cracked paintings of nudes. There's lots of mirrors and wood--and the whole place is made more cavernous by the lack of people. A PORTLY BARTENDER polishes glasses, and in the far corner a GROUP OF MEN seem to be playing cards in a partitioned corner. Dunnison pushes through the swinging doors which slap each other with a paddling sound.

THE MEN--ONE of them winks--he has flashing maniacal eyes. In his hand is a gleaming Colt Peacemaker--cocked!

CLOSE DUNNISON--He throws his hands up. Helpless.

CLOSE MEN--The blonde man smiles sadistically. ANOTHER--leaning back in a chair is darkly handsome.

(CONTINUED)

HANDSOME STRANGER
Put it down Wes--you scared McNelly's
coming back?

Wes spins his gun into his holster.

HANDSOME STRANGER (CONT'D)
You don't look like a Texas Ranger--Boy--

DUNNISON
No Sir--I'm no Ranger--That's the second
time someone--

HANDSOME STRANGER
How come they ain't scared you off Kid?

DUNNISON
My name's not in their book.

HANDSOME STRANGER
Neither is mine--What're you looking for?

DUNNISON
A beer--a good meal and a chance to
better my lot.

HANDSOME STRANGER
Come on over here.

Dunnison walks over. The stranger is indeed incredibly fine of feature, well built, and dressed in the finest Vaquero manner with silver conchos on his wristlets, and a great flowing silk scarf of many colors. He has an absolutely disarming smile and is obviously the boss of this group.

HANDSOME STRANGER (CONT'D)
I suppose you're looking for work?
Sit down.

He pulls a chair out. The blonde man stares at him with the coldest blue eyes he's ever seen.

HANDSOME STRANGER (CONT'D)
What's your name Kid?

DUNNISON
Lincoln Rogers Dunnison.

BLONDE MAN
Lincoln--I don't sit with no one
called that.

HANDSOME STRANGER
Calm down Wes--don't you mind him Kid--
Name's Fisher, King Fisher--and this here's
my friend, Wes Hardin. Perhaps you heard
of him?

DUNNISON
No Sir.

KING FISHER
Just as well Son. Don't know if I can
help you about work Son--but perhaps a
game of chance?

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON
That would be acceptable Sir.

CUT TO:

CLOSE DUNNISON'S HANDS--Cutting, shuffling, and dealing the deck like a riverboat professional.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He looks at his cards, expressionless--He looks out expressionless. He has done this before.

DUNNISON
I raise and take one.

CLOSE DUNNISON.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)
I raise again.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--Raking in his winnings.

DUNNISON
You want me to deal--

FISHER
Go ahead Son.

He cuts and deals.

CLOSE HARDIN--His eyes diamond hard--that sadistic grin again.

HARDIN
I raise.

CLOSE FISHER--He looks at Hardin--then back at the others.

FISHER
You can't read a man with eyes like
Wes--I'll match it. What about you?

CLOSE GAMBLER--He's scared of these men.

GAMBLER
I'm out.

CLOSE DUNNISON--EXPRESSIONLESS.

FISHER (O.S.)
You--Lincoln?

DUNNISON
I'm in.

FISHER (O.S.)
Let's see 'em.

TABLE--The three men lay down their hands--all are different--with Fisher's the best--but what is surprising is that six Kings are represented. They all look up slowly.

(CONTINUED)

FISHER

My-my. That don't beat all. It seems that there are six Kings here and I thought a deck had only four.

HARDIN

I say you're cheating Kid.

He whips out his nickeled long barreled Colt. Equally fast, Fisher grabs it out of his hand but it goes off. Everyone ducks--smoke drifts up. Fisher whips Hardin across the face with the gun sending him sprawling. He turns to Dunnison still holding the gun.

FISHER

Whatta' you expect of someone who shot a man for snoring.

DUNNISON

Snoring?

FISHER

That's right Lincoln. Now it seems that one of you is dishonest.

Fisher shakes his head no-no.

FISHER (CONT'D)

But since you're a stranger and so young with so much life ahead of you, I'll accept what's on the table.

Dunnison pushes it over quickly.

FISHER (CONT'D)

--And your money belt.

Dunnison hesitates. Fisher puts the gun down hard on the table--pushes it over to him. He takes the belt off.

DUNNISON

I'll give you the money but I can't hold my pants up.

FISHER

You got two hands don't you?

He notices for him to get out. Dunnison heads for the door. Suddenly a gleaming silver long barrel appears in Fisher's hand as if by Providence. He fires at Dunnison's feet. Dunnison runs out holding his pants up.

FISHER (CONT'D)

So long Lincoln.

He sits back, smiles the most winning smile and looks over at Hardin who is nursing his face.

FISHER (CONT'D)

John Westley--cheating at cards again.

CUT TO:

JOINING UP

DUNNISON--TWILIGHT--In the light of late afternoon he sits in the back of a wagon filled with supplies. His eyes are sunken, his clothes filthy, hair messed. What was a firm handsome face has the tarnish of defeat.

DUNNISON (V.O.)

If I described the events I've seen, you'd say I was getting them from a dime novel. But Father, the West is more than I bargained for. I've taken a drastic step.

He passes a remuda of horses being worked in by TWO SKILLED HANDS. A tent and covered wagon sit under the cottonwoods, fires can be seen. A HUGE BLACK MAN, THE COOK, barks orders and MEN scurry about.

DUNNISON (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The Ranger Company was camped outside of town--I heard they were expanding their ranks--

CUT TO:

A YOUNG MAN--Actually at this point still a boy of seventeen. Big, raw boned with a capable if awkward look about him. He stands nervously with his tattered Mississippi hat in his hand. One thing that characterizes this lad is that he's durable.

YOUNG MAN

My name Sir is George Durham--

George shifts on his almost bare feet. He stands before McNelly, Sergeant Armstrong and Corporal Rudd. They eat while McNelly chews on a black cigar. The big Black Cook sits next to McNelly.

DURHAM

My father served with you Sir in Louisiana. His name was Jedediah Durham.

He pulls something from his pocket--a medal.

DURHAM (CONT'D)

General Forrest pinned this on my daddy's breast.

He sniffles--breaks down--wipes his eyes.

MCNELLY

It's alright Son--I take your daddy passed on.

DURHAM

He survived the War but he didn't survive Sherman. Sometimes we ate sawdust an' he was a proud man.

MCNELLY

How'd you get so big eating sawdust Son?

Durham looks up sharply.

(CONTINUED)

DURHAM

I learned to steal Sir--I learned good. When my Daddy died he said go to Texas and find Cap'n McNelly. He'll make something of you. So here I am Sir.

SCIPIO (the Cook)

He rode all the way from Georgia on that.

He points to a totally sway-backed old plow horse.

DURHAM

That's Judy Sir.

MCNELLY

If you got here on Judy, you'll do Son. Forty dollars a month and found. Who's next?

Durham goes with Scipio--and Dunnison takes his place before the firelight.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

Oh yes--the young man who favors train travel to a good horse. I believe you had business in Laredo?

DUNNISON

My connections proved to be erroneous Sir. They left town--on the four o'clock train.

MCNELLY

Then they were no damn good Son.

DUNNISON

I hardly think Mr. Rockefeller would have given my father a contact of bad character.

MCNELLY

Who is this Mr. Rockefeller?

DUNNISON

An associate of my father Sir, in the petroleum business--some call it "black gold".

MCNELLY

Are your Pappy's in this "black gold" business?

DUNNISON

No Sir--he owns Dunnison Drilling of Pennsylvania--

MCNELLY

That's enough Son--I take it you are rich?

DUNNISON

I was raised well Sir, but have fallen on hard circumstances. You see Sir, I--

MCNELLY

Is it a long story? I'm sure we'll hear it in good time. Do you write like you talk?

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON
I suppose so.

MCNELLY
Good, because I don't.

DUNNISON
You have a fine vocabulary Sir.

MCNELLY
It was a long war and folks like you tend to talk a lot. Forty dollars a month and found. Name?

DUNNISON
Lincoln Rogers Dunnison.

ARMSTRONG
Lincoln?

DUNNISON
Sir--you know nothing of my character.

MCNELLY
We'll find out about that right quick, Boy. Now speaking of character, you write your pappy and tell him I threw Mr. Rockefeller's friend out a' town--and tell your Pappy not to turn his back on Mr. Rockefeller either--That's all--

CUT TO:

DUNNISON AND DURHAM--Sitting on the edge of camp--SOME of the Company are sleeping. AN OLDER RANGER walks over with two bedrolls. Indeed, this is the only middle aged Ranger in the whole company. He is grizzled but has a pleasant demeanor--however he wears two of the latest Colt's revolvers in a manner that denotes a certain danger. He drops the bedrolls before them.

OLD RANGER
Durham and Dunnison. I'm Frank--call me Old Frank--Sleep however you want but don't get too close to that cot over there. That's Sergeant Armstrong's--he's liable to mistake you for a snake.

He leaves.

DURHAM
George Durham from Georgia--I guess we're in this together.

DUNNISON
Lincoln Dunnison.

He shakes his hand.

DURHAM
Lincoln? Ain't that life. --Could a' been Sherman I suppose. You ever sleep on the ground Lincoln?

DUNNISON
I try to find a warm bed and it's contents.

(CONTINUED)

DURHAM

Nothing to it--just dig--yourself a
little hip hole--comfy--.

He kneels by his bedroll.

DUNNISON

What're you doing?

DURHAM

Saying my prayers.

Dunnison watches--Durham finishes and gets under his blankets like he was crawling into a feather four poster.

DURHAM (CONT'D)

Nighty nite.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE PRAIRIE SKY--Streaked with dawn.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He stirs awake to the sound of hoofbeats on the ground. He has obviously not slept that well. Durham is already up--his bedroll rolled and sitting there. Horses are being brought in, a fire crackles, and something sizzles in a skillet. All around MEN stir.

DURHAM

Top of the morning to you Lincoln.

SCIPIO (yelling)

C'mon and get it. You be late an'
all you'll get is the smell.

They both hear a vicious hissing rattling sound and turn their heads.

ARMSTRONG--Pulling himself up on his army cot. He doesn't put his feet down because two large diamond back rattlers are coiled next to his boots. Nobody seems to take much notice. Armstrong himself casually pulls his Henry repeating rifle from his saddle scabbard and pokes at the snakes until they strike at the barrel, expanding themselves and slither away.

ARMSTRONG

C'mon git along there--Shoo--

Having expanded themselves, the snakes quickly slither into the brush.

CLOSE DUNNISON--Amazed.

DUNNISON

Get along there--Shoo?

Suddenly shots ring out in rapid succession. They turn.

MCNELLY--Alone silhouetted against the dawn darkly, fires his guns from his hip into a distant horizon. Armstrong walks past the Boys.

DURHAM

What's he shooting at?

(CONTINUED)

ARMSTRONG

Nothin'--He's emptying his loads. Figure's moisture and such can get into the caps. Load's only good for a day an' a night.

Scipio walks up and takes the two revolvers.

ARMSTRONG (CONT'D) (admiringly)

He don't trust ca'tridge guns but he trusts Scipio. He done raised the Cap'n from a boy.

Scipio takes the guns off to clean, oil, load and prime while McNelly just walks away off towards the horizon staring, his thoughts to himself.

CUT TO:

SKILLET--FULL OF BACON--Another with biscuits, and another with beef frying in bacon grease.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--Eating, his mouth full. He looks at a biscuit, it's light as a feather and tasty. Durham has no problem with food--his tin plate is filled with bacon, beef, everything and it is emptying fast. The boy knows how to eat.

CUT TO:

ROPE CORRAL--The remuda runs around in a hastily set up rope corral. A few MOUNTED RANGERS stand around as THREE BOYS with lariats step out towards the milling horses.

ARMSTRONG

Get me Windy.

RUDD

I'd prefer Scar.

OLD FRANK

I'll take Tabby Cat--the little sorrel.

The three ropers are fine hands and look into the dim light identifying the horses as they go by. With an effortless grace they sling the loop of the lariat out into space, and a horse is pulled up. Sometimes they throw backhanded a particularly graceful motion called a hoolihan. It's now that we see the real nature of these Rangers. None are well dressed or outfitted, and all are somewhat ragged, but two characteristics predominate. They are YOUNG, all between the ages of 17 to 21, and they are skilled. They go about their business in the cool practiced banner of master workmen. Even Rudd and Armstrong are no more than 22 but THEY are men.

CORPORAL RUDD--Brings a nasty looking little mustang up to Dunnison. Durham calls after his Judy. Judy is not hard to catch.

RUDD

You do ride a bit Mr. Dunnison?

DUNNISON

I've done it before.

(CONTINUED)

He hands him the reins. Dunnison looks the horse over. It's ears flatten. He turns him around and the horse relaxes. Dunnison swings quickly up. The horse starts violently but Dunnison spins him around and gains control. Rudd looks on with some appreciation.

DUNNISON

He was afraid of his shadow.

RUDD

Where did you learn that I might ask?

DUNNISON

Alexander the Great. His father Philip gave him a horse no one could ride. Afraid of his shadow. Alexander rode him through all his conquests. His name was--

RUDD

Bucephalus--I know the story.

CUT TO:

NEW BOYS

THE RANGER COMPANY--THIRTY MEN assembled, mounted in a semi-circle around McNelly and Armstrong. McNelly stares off past them, as if he's seeing something happening a half mile away. Before him, spread on a painter's easel is a silk Union Army map of Southern Texas. The area from the Nueces River south to the Rio Grande has been stained brown forming a wedgelike strip.

MCNELLY

--Reason I called up the Company again is what I said'd be. I got money enough from the Governor.

RANGER

What about back pay?

ANOTHER RANGER

I'm due credit for them Comancheros.

MCNELLY

You'll be paid--If I owe it--you'll get it.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

--Now we'll be goin' southeast--below the Nueces--Bandit country.

He points it out with a dried out cat-tail. There is stirring among the group.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

Hell, it's amazing there's still decent folks left there. General Cortinas made a deal with the Spaniards in Cuba for beef and Fisher is filling that contract. He an his outlaw army are taking everything that'll walk--four legged or two--an' killing anything that don't comply.

(CONTINUED)

AN OLDER RANGER steps forward.

OLDER RANGER
We gonna cross the river?

MCNELLY
I'll ride to Mexico City if I think
it right Son.

OLDER RANGER
I ain't signed on to die in Old Mexico.

ANOTHER
I want my bones where my folks can find
'em. We ain't got a chance down there.
I ain't riding against King Fisher and
John Westley Hardin.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He tenses. Durham sits calmly on his nag,
turns.

DURHAM
I'm scared as hell. How 'bout you?

DUNNISON
Don't talk about it.

ANOTHER RANGER
Fisher's got more'n five hundred Bravos.
What'ra we gonna do with thirty--Boys?

MCNELLY
Just ride over to the wagon an' I'll
settle anything I owe you--Any others?

No response.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
--Now this is how it settles. There'll be
vigilantes and maybe Comanches. The Yankee
Cavalry--Well that dog don't hunt. We're
outnumbered, outgunned and the only good
thing is nobody'd figure we got a chance.
Now Governor Coke gave me enough money for
six months campaigning. By the new year,
we'll be dead or out a' work--And don't
expect anyone to say thank you either way.

He looks at Dunnison--rides over.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
What about you Lincoln--you game?

DUNNISON
I'm game Sir.

MCNELLY
Good, let's get to it. Sergeant Armstrong
lead 'em out.

MONTAGE--RANGERS IN FILE--TWO ABREAST--Riding out over an
endless prairie. A rider travels a half mile ahead and behind
while two flanking riders drift along either side of the column.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON (V.O.)
 Don't tell Mother that I've done this--
 it'll only serve to bother--besides as
 soon as I'm back on my feet I'll find
 more appropriate endeavors. --But imagine
 it Father. Finding ME on the respectable
 side of Law and Order.

DUNNISON--DURHAM--Down the line, covered with dust. Durham's
 horse, Judy, is distinctly uncomfortable.

DUNNISON
 Your horse looks tired.

DURHAM
 She's not used to this gait.

DUNNISON
 Works better at a walk?

DURHAM
 So do I--I don't see why every one
 has to get anywhere so fast anyway.

DUNNISON
 You're a philosopher George Durham.

DURHAM
 You think so?

At that point a YOUNG COWHAND rides up besides them. The boy
 looks about twelve, but he's got an easy going experience about
 him.

BOY
 You the new Boys ain't you?

DURHAM
 How old are you?

BOY
 I'm supposed to keep an eye on you
 and fill out your dab.

DURHAM
 What's a dab.

BOY
 A dab's usual three or four Rangers--
 We eat together--scout together.

DUNNISON
 An' you're the experienced old veteran
 sent to show us the ways?

BOY
 Oh hell no I'm only sixteen. I'm the
 youngest one here.
 (to Durham)
 How old are you?

DURHAM
 Lot older than that.

BOY

Cap'n said you was seventeen.

DURHAM

What's your name old man?

BOY

Berry--Berry Smith.

DUNNISON

Like raspberry.

BERRY

Or strawberry--Berry--Enjoying your ride?

BOTH

Sure--Sure thing.

CUT TO:

DUSK--CAMPSITE--The Rangers situated around their wagon, a picket silhouetted on the horizon. McNelly sits in a tent looking out into the coming night. Dunnison sits beside him with paper and pencil.

MCNELLY

"--No idea how these boys will perform. The State of Emergency has prompted our taking the trail before sufficient training." You got that Son?

DUNNISON

"Taking the trail"--uh?

MCNELLY

"Before sufficient training"
(he coughs)

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

"--before sufficient training--"
(coughs)

"--I intend to--"
(coughs)

He goes into a tremendous wheezing cough that drops him to his knee. He grabs at his handkerchief. He racks with the coughs. Sweat instantly covers his face and his body seems to have lost all it's strength. Dunnison leaps to his feet--doesn't know what to do.

DUNNISON

Anything I can do Sir!

He looks outside.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

Sergeant Armstrong!

Scipio is there at the back of the tent. He wraps a blanket around McNelly--pulls out a flask of whiskey.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

What can I do?

McNelly gathers himself together but can barely speak.

(CONTINUED)

MCNELLY (whispers)
 Don't go yellin'--
 (he gasps)
 --My troubles--all over camp.
 (gasps)
 --Tend to your--own Boy.

He sits down on the cot--takes the whiskey from Scipio and drinks. His eyes seem to focus ahead again.

DUNNISON
 You shouldn't be out here in this cold.

MCNELLY
 Don't you tell me who shouldn't be out here Son. Pick up your paper.

He does.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
 Let's see--what'd I say?

DUNNISON
 "Taking the trail before sufficient training."

MCNELLY
 "Yes--Lord hope that we are not attacked soon, as my force would be slaughtered. These are soft kids and we are hardly armed, only iron will and hard training on the march can prepare them for their--destiny."

He stands up.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
 You get that son?

He exits.

CUT TO:

MORNING--EVERYONE SITTING--Around the breakfast fire. Armstrong holds two muzzle-loading double-barreled shotguns. McNelly sits, wrapped in a blanket.

MCNELLY
 The shotgun is your best bet horseback. We shoved that time and again to Yankee Cavalry. Besides--for now it's all we got besides pistols. You will be issued a revolver and one of these--barrels will be cut to twenty four inches--

CUT TO:

CLOSE SHOTGUNS--Barrels being hacksawed off--and loaded with powder and rammed full of nails, tacks, and coarse shot.

A ROW OF WOODEN BARRELS--Several have old hats, sombreros or pumpkins on them.

HORSEMEN THUNDER BY--One at a time discharging their shotguns--which belch fire and thump the ground. Despite what you may

(CONTINUED)

think about shotguns, Reader, most of the Rangers miss. It's one thing to blast a fat pheasant, another to hit something from a galloping horse.

DUNNISON--A good horseman, thunders by and blows the pumpkin from a barrel.

MCNELLY--ARMSTRONG--Taking note.

DURHAM--Rides by, leans out too far on his side and hits the barrel in the center--blowing out barrel staves every which way, but his horse lurches away from him and he hits the ground heavily.

CLOSE DURHAM--Sitting there, he looks at his shotgun. Mud and prairie grass are in the end of the barrel. Dunnison and Berry walk their horses over to him smiling down. McNelly looks on from a distance.

MCNELLY

Don't just stand there, help him up Son.

CUT TO:

THE COMPANY--ON THE TRAIL--Dust blows in the distance, the sun is hot, oppressive and the Boys are tired.

MCNELLY

Battle formation.

RUDD (yelling)

Five abreast! --Five yards between you!

The men assemble into a line across the prairie.

ARMSTRONG

Flankriders--out!

Two riders gallop out on the flanks.

MCNELLY

Durham, Dunnison, Smith--take up the drag.

CLOSE BOYS--Dunnison and the others wheel their horses around and ride to the rear--several hundred yards.

DURHAM

How come we always get to do this?

BERRY

'Cause you're the new Boys.

DUNNISON

What about you?

BERRY

'Cause I'm little.

CLOSE DUNNISON--OTHERS--RIDING--Being cloaked in choking dust. But already something is taking place. The old combination of misery, discipline and youth is beginning to work.

CUT TO:

DUSK--CAMP--Everyone sitting around eating. Scipio walks over from the wagon.

SCIPIO

Payday gentlemen--We is soon entering bandit country so the State of Texas is advancing you all twenty five dollars. If you got a family which most of you don't--I'll help you send this on home 'cause you may get all killed for you get another.

CUT TO:

CAMPFIRES--Everyone about to turn in. Old Frank reads a thick heavy book by the light of a lantern.

DUNNISON

That's a big book.

OLD FRANK

Les Miserables--Victor Hugo--you ever read him?

DUNNISON

No but I speak French.

OLD FRANK

That an' a dime won't buy you a dinner.

He goes back to reading.

A MEXICAN RANGER named SANTOS takes out a deck of cards. He shuffles them crudely. The sound turns Dunnison's head. Durham looks up too.

DURHAM

Well now look at that.

SANTOS

You know how to play Georgia?

DURHAM

Does a hound dog get ticks? What about you Lincoln?

DUNNISON

He looks pretty good at it. I don't know--I'm still using a rope for a belt.

He looks at the rope that has replaced his fine money belt.

SANTOS

Well you got paid Amigo--you're rich.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He looks as innocent as a lamb.

DUNNISON.

If you say so.

DISSOLVE TO:

DARK JESUS

DAY--COMPANY--Riding towards the rising sun. In the distance is a wisp of dust. Dunnison is wearing Santos' fine sombrero, his silver belt and spurs. Santos is wearing Dunnison's previous hat and rope-for-a-belt. His pistol hangs in a holster across his saddle. Durham and Berry follow behind.

BERRY

Somehow I just don't think it was fair.
I ain't saying Honest Abe would cheat,
but it just weren't fair.

DURHAM (looks up, shivering)

'An I was fixin' to get a warm new coat.
--Riders.

CUT TO:

CLOSE MCNELLY--He puts his field glasses up. Armstrong rides up at his side--a Henry repeating rifle at the ready.

MCNELLY

Sandoval--

DUST--Materializes into a RIDER leading two horses. The rider moves with an effortless grace, and his fine horse seems to be as light as a greyhound. He rides up to the Rangers who have halted and spread to the flanks as in their practice. The rider halts knowing this is not a friendly formation, and proceeds at a walk. His horse is spirited and prances deftly, but always in control. The rider is dressed in Vaquero finery--a broad brocaded sombrero--tight breeches and fine leather boots. He wears an ivory gripped Colt single action, and a new Model '73 Winchester lays across a filigreed saddle. A colorful scarf sets off a dashing dark handsome face. He is the image of the Caballero, but he is more--his name is JESUS SANDOVAL, and a darkness and mystery hang over him.

CLOSE BERRY--He looks and turns to the Boys.

BERRY

That's Sandoval--Old Casoose!

SANTOS

It is!

Sandoval takes his sombrero off and bows with a flourish. The dust clearing behind him reveals--two horses--one with a DEAD MAN across the saddle.

SANDOVAL

For you Jefe--

CUT TO:

CROSS--Stuck in a newly dug grave. The Company rides past.

DINNER--TWILIGHT--DURHAM--sits down with the others admiring his full plate. He is about to eat when Old Frank walks up with Sandoval.

(CONTINUED)

OLD FRANK

Alright Boys--Jesus Sandoval--Cap'n wants him to head up your dab. That means you do whatever he says an' make sure his horses are fed and groomed and his weapons cleaned.

They are taken by surprise. They're still kids, especially Berry. The man has a disturbing presence. He seems to move ahead of his shadow. He hands his horse's reins to Berry. The animal is a blooded stallion, black, and clearly superior to any in the Outfit. His secondary mount is nothing to sneeze at either. He goes over to get his food from Scipio. The Rangers all seem to make way for him. He smiles graciously, his dark skin set off by flashing white teeth. The Boys look at each other. Durham wolfs down his food. Old Frank seems amused.

BERRY

He's a killer--

DUNNISON

An outlaw?

BERRY

Way I heard it--was more than that--Sh-h-h-h--

Sandoval comes back--sits down with the Boys--starts chewing on a beef rib.

SANDOVAL

Hey--this man can cook eh?

They don't know what to say.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D) (to Durham)

What is a' matter Kid--the cat he's got your tongue?

DURHAM

I hear you're a killer.

Silence. Sandoval chews on his rib, smiles.

OLD FRANK

Well now, none of us are perfect, are we.

He drinks some coffee.

SANDOVAL

Do any of you Boys know how to play--cards?

DURHAM, BERRY, DUNNISON

Nope. Nope. Nope.

Sandoval shakes his head.

CUT TO:

MORNING--SANDOVAL--Gets on his horse with Berry holding it. He smiles, and wheels around his concho belt flashing with his silver holster on it. Dunnison cinches up a rope around his waist. They mount and follow.

CUT TO:

SANDOVAL--MCNELLY--Ahead of the others riding silhouetted against the sky.

BERRY
They say his family was killed by General Cortinas--a wife and a little girl. They done more than kill 'em too.

Sandoval waves his hat at McNelly and gallops off towards the horizon.

CLOSE THE BOYS--Riding in the dust watching.

BERRY (CONT'D)
He went all Hell bent. Killin' in the night--over there and over here. Some say it's revenge--

McNelly stops--starts to cough and slumps forward in his saddle. Rudd and Armstrong ride out to him.

BERRY (CONT'D)
Some say he just likes it.

The coughing carries back on the wind to them.

CUT TO:

JORNADO DEL MUERTA

RIVER--Meandering through a dusty valley. Cottonwood trees live on its edges. The trees range in color from dull yellows to deep vibrant oranges--a sharp contrast to the dull colored bleak landscape. The Company picks its way along the bank, the men are silent and the rush of the leaves in the wind cover all but the breathing of the horses.

EMPTY HOVELS--Abandoned corrals--a dead skeletal cow. As if all at once the people had decided to leave.

RUDD
Dismount and stand ready.

They do--hoofbeats can be heard. Sandoval appears almost silently like a hawk and dismounts in front of McNelly.

MCNELLY
How many?

SANDOVAL
Six.

MCNELLY
Sergeant Armstrong, Mister Rudd, Casoose and myself--that'll be enough.

ARMSTRONG
We could bring the Company up and surround 'em.

(CONTINUED)

MCNELLY

I wanta' make a fight of it. Them that survives--they'll know how we do things. Bring the new Boys to hold the horses so they can see it too.

ARMSTRONG

Yes Sir--

(calls out softly)

Dunnison, Durham, Smith forward--
Pass it on.

CUT TO:

CLOSE DURHAM--DUNNISON--BERRY--Riding behind the others in the dark before dawn. It's cold and their breath plumes about them.

DUNNISON

You think we'll catch 'em?

DURHAM

Well I ain't so anxious that I'd feel
I missed something.

BERRY

You Boys thinkin' of runnin'?

DURHAM, DUNNISON

Yep.

BERRY

I'll go if you do.

Armstrong turns and rides back to them.

ARMSTRONG (whispers)

You ever heard of quiet! Silence is golden--
Now get rich and shut up.

They plod on.

CUT TO:

DAWN--The wind rushes softly through the cottonwood leaves. The men dismount and hand the reins to the Boys--they follow quietly--weapons gleam in the early light that filters through the trees.

CUT TO:

A SHADED GLEN--The light dancing about through the orange leaves--the strange dichotomy of autumn, bright color and the sadness of decay. Without knowing it, the Boys are suddenly underneath some dark objects. Sandoval points up and they see a HANGED FAMILY. The bodies, MEXICAN--A MAN, his WIFE and SON turn gracefully in the breeze bumping into one another. A burned out house is nearby. McNelly instructs the others silently and they split up--McNelly and Sandoval taking their horses.

CUT TO:

DIRECTLY BELOW THEM--In a corral are twenty or thirty head of cattle--a campfire burns nearby. Six horses are tied to the sage near the camp. Voices can be heard but the wind is from the wrong direction to understand.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE FIRE--The cattle stir, some jump to their feet, others bawl. A wisp of dust crosses on the wind. The MEN at the fire jump up too. ONE of them holds a coffee pot and pulls a gun with his other hand. ANOTHER lights out for the horses and is on one in a bound.

OUTLAW
Injuns! Comanch!

The mounted man wheels, pulling the horse to an arroyo. Suddenly two men stand up from the sage brush to their left. One is Rudd, the other is Armstrong.

ARMSTRONG
Drop 'em! Texas Rangers!

The man with the coffee pot fires wildly at Armstrong who raises his Winchester and shoots him through the mouth. The man drops his gun, grabs his mouth as if he's said something wrong, and falls kicking, never letting go of the coffee pot. Armstrong levers a fresh round and shoots a MAN through his bedroll. A shot rings out from across the campfire, but Rudd's shotgun blows a cloud of dust through the MAN. ANOTHER throws his hands up screaming while TWO on horseback try and make good an escape.

CLOSE BOYS--Eyes wide with horror and thrilled with excitement. One of the horsemen heads towards them to seek cover in the cottonwoods. Before they can react, McNelly flashes past them and blasts the rider with both barrels of his ten guage. What's left of the man slides from the saddle staining crimson. The other rider is quickly overhauled by Sandoval. He throws himself on the ground and curls up as he is circled by the darkly silhouetted Vaquero.

CUT TO:

THE DEAL

MCNELLY'S TENT--The two prisoners are dirt white trash. They stand tied outside McNelly's tent which is pitched in the rustling trees below the poor hanged man and his family. The Company surrounds them.

MCNELLY
These were plain hard working folk like you or your own family. Didn't ever harm no one. Had a nice place here. There's pumpkin over there ready to pick. But there ain't no one to pick 'em. --Now you all look at the trash that done this. Corporal Rudd pick out a burial detail.

ARMSTRONG (indicating prisoners)
For them too?

MCNELLY
No--if I hang 'em I ain't gonna bury 'em.

He goes in his tent.

CUT TO:

THE BOYS--Cutting down the stiff corpses.

SCIPPIO
What's 'a matter Dunnison you too
good to handle the dead. Get your
hand in there.

He sharpens his cooking knives. The prisoners stare at him.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--Cleaning himself off as he walks into McNelly's tent.

MCNELLY
Sit down Boy and take up your papers.

He does--across from him the two prisoners are led in. McNelly
takes a slug from his jug. Scipio sharpens his knives
vigorously outside. The nearest man is pock marked.

POCK FACE
I ain't in that book. You go
to the Devil.

MCNELLY
Oh that so--what's your name?

POCK FACE
Pete Marsele--It's French.

MCNELLY
Look him up Dunnison.

Dunnison opens the book. It's a dictionary.

DUNNISON
He's not in this one.

McNelly glares at Dunnison.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)
Maybe the new supplement.

He opens another book--a Holy Bible.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)
Yes Sir--right here--Pete Marsele--French--
horse thievery--livestock thievery--rape of
a Black Woman--kidnapping--extortion of widows--
indecent exposure--sodomy--

MARSELE
Where was that horse thievery?

There is a profound silence.

MCNELLY
How would you like to keep your name out
of that book--forever? --Live like you
been--take a few head now an' then--sell
'em to Fisher or Cortinas. Rangers'll
see to it you're left in peace.

DUNNISON
But these men are murderers Sir!

(CONTINUED)

MCNELLY

Your Daddy ever tell you when to keep your mouth shut?

(to Marsele)

All I want is a friend Pete. A friend who will tell me when Fisher crosses from Las Cuevas--when, where, and how many.

OTHER OUTLAW

Fisher'll know--'an what about me?

MCNELLY

I only need one friend Pete. What 'a you say?

MARSELE

I say too bad for him.

CUT TO:

OTHER OUTLAW--Mounted on Sandoval's black horse with a noose around his neck.

SANDOVAL

I bet you never had such a fine horse under you.

He whistles--the horse steps out and the man swings.

CUT TO:

NUECESTOWN

THE COMPANY--A small settlement--sod huts and wood houses that seem naked on a long plateau. As they enter the village through adobe gates, the MEXICAN POPULATION swarm out and run before them like game, shouting and singing.

DOORWAYS--The graceful forms of YOUNG MEXICAN GIRLS, whispering to each other.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He hasn't missed it, and if he was thinking of leaving the Ranger Company, perhaps his plans can wait a day or two.

NUECESTOWN GENERAL STORE--A large heavily built structure--more like a stockade than a store. On top of the structure SEVERAL MEN watch with field glasses and rifles. As the Rangers ride up--TWO OLDER MEN step out on to the porch. One has a long black beard and the other uses a cane.

BEARDED MAN

Sol Liechtenstein--Thank the Lord for you Sir.

MCNELLY

We'll camp out on the flat a couple miles so as not to disturb anyone.

LIECHTENSTEIN

Let your men come on inside. They could use a drink and we've plenty of provision, whatever you need--compliments of Captain King.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE DURHAM--He hears this, his frayed jacket conspicuously thin.

MCNELLY

Thank you Sir but my men are paid by the State and they will buy their provision.

CUT TO:

STORE--Huge timbered hall with all manner of things hanging from the rafters. Scipio tends to the canned and dry goods. Dunnison selects a nice belt, and a thick Mexican serape. Durham just looks at the row of blanket coats and then at Dunnison.

A YOUNG WOMAN, about twenty years old, looks up at Dunnison. Her hair is red and full but she parts it so that one side hangs over her face. She looks scared, but Dunnison smiles that smile. She comes over.

DUNNISON

Are you working here?

WOMAN

Yes?

DUNNISON

I'll take these.

He hand pats his items. She reaches for them and he grabs her hand--inspects it--no ring.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

How'd you keep from getting married?
Waiting for the right fella? Could
be me.

She looks down.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

An' now don't be shy--I'm shy myself--
sometimes I'm so shy I have to close
my eyes.

McNelly calls from the other end of the store.

MCNELLY

Dunnison--get over here.

Dunnison winks and hurries off.

DUNNISON

Don't go away.

Durham has watched the whole thing but he really is shy. The girl looks at him and tugs her hair over her face. Scipio comes up loaded with goods.

SCIPIO

What about you Boy? That garment
don't look to hold you in and summer's
almost gone.

DURHAM

I'm a farmer--I don't get cold.

(CONTINUED)

SCIPPIO

You need any money Boy?

DURHAM

What for? --You paid me--I don't need nothin'.

He turns and walks away.

ANOTHER PART OF THE STORE--MCNELLY--LIECHTENSTEIN--Confer with the man who had the cane. The man was strong of frame but now he's shattered and cracked to the core.

LIECHTENSTEIN

Tom Noakes Cap'n.

NOAKES

They took me on Good Friday. I lost my wife--they raped my daughter and took a quirt to her face.

LIECHTENSTEIN

Tom's daughter works here now--Were a full six months before she'd show herself in daylight.

NOAKES

'Till her hair grew long enough--Some scars she ain't never gonna cover.

MCNELLY

Where is she.

They start to turn around.

DUNNISON

I met your daughter already Sir. Maybe it'd be better if we didn't stare at her.

LIECHTENSTEIN

The Boy's right--saart.

McNelly gives him a cold look.

MCNELLY

What about that saddle Sol?

They walk to where a flashy silver conchoed saddle sits on a tree.

NOAKES

It's a Dick Heye saddle--I had sixteen just like it--Same silver conchos.

LIECHTENSTEIN

Had some Dick Heye branding irons too. They burned Tom with one of 'em.

MCNELLY

Could you identify 'em?

NOAKES

No--they was sheeted up like night riders--'cept Martha pulled the hood off them that was after Sarah. Then they killed her. Sarah saw 'em good but I don't think she'll tell you nothing.

(CONTINUED)

MCNELLY

Sixteen Dick Heye saddles Boy. Get a good picture--length of the tapideros, conchos on the skirts. Then Son--go talk to Miss Noakes.

McNelly suddenly bends over coughing.

NOAKES

You alright Cap'n?

He fumbles for his flask.

MCNELLY

I'll be fine--

CUT TO:

TWO PISTOLS--In a glass case--new Single Action Colts, surrounded by knives and hardware. Dunnison stands over the case gazing at them. He waits until Sarah Noakes notices him. She's scared of him.

SARAH

Can I do something?

DUNNISON

The Colt cartridge--revolver.

She comes over.

SARAH

Same as the Army uses.

He doesn't answer--she looks up holding her head so that her hair covers her face.

DUNNISON

Anybody tell you lately how pretty your eyes are. I don't mean to be forward but I'd like to see both of them.

She breathes and pulls back--but he smiles at her and they stare at each other a moment. Then she straightens up--a hint of anger--and sweeps the hair back revealing a thick red scar mark down her eye and across her cheek. Dunnison smiles.

DUNNISON

Beautiful eyes--especially with that hair. I sure do fancy red haired girls and you're about the prettiest I've ever seen. How 'bout that revolver?

She stares a moment more--something has caught with her.

SARAH

That'll be twelve dollars plus the other truck you bought. Fourteen all told--Well?

DUNNISON

Well what? It's worth it.

She starts to reach down.

(CONTINUED)

SARAH
Central fire or rim?

DUNNISON
Central fire will do.

CUT TO:

EVENING--GRASSLANDS--THE COLUMN--Moves ahead--a storm builds in the distance. McNelly lays in the back of the wagon with the canvas rooled up. Armstrong and Rudd ride at his side. Dunnison sits behind him.

MCNELLY
What'd he look like?

DUNNISON
A tall man with dirty leather colored hair and a red beard. Had a heavy deep scar, from his hairline to the point of his chin. Two pistols an' a flat brimmed sombrero--wide.

The Non-Coms take it in.

MCNELLY
--An' about those Dick Heye saddles--

He pauses.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
Empty those saddles on sight. Leave the trash that fall's out of 'em--an' bring the saddles back to camp.

DUNNISON
Suppose someone just bought one of 'em or won it in a card game?

MCNELLY
Then it was stolen goods or the game was crooked.

DUNNISON
Why there must be more than sixteen in this country.

MCNELLY
When we get about twenty I'll tell 'em to slow down. What is your stake in it anyway? Have you grown some kind of conscience for the rest of us?

DUNNISON
I just don't want innocent people--

MCNELLY
Boy--how many innocent people have you seen in this world--'specially between here and the Rio Bravo?

ARMSTRONG
Well I can see you're feeling better Cap'n.

RUDD
You're doing good Lincoln.

(CONTINUED)

MCNELLY

Get me a horse--I don't cotton to lollygag
with a do-gooder all day.

CUT TO:

THE KING RANCH

MORNING--As the Column gallops across the thick grass to the great gates of the Santa Gertrudis Ranch. All around the corrals are makeshift structures, lean-tos, wooden sided tents, hastily constructed adobes and wattle fences with a myriad of chickens, goats and dogs. On top of the main house, which is a square three stories, is a cone shaped tower on which ARMED MEN pace and look out over the horizon. As the Company rides in, they are flanked by SCOUT RIDERS from the Ranch who yell greetings in Spanish.

DUNNISON--DURHAM--BERRY--Ride bunched together.

DURHAM

You live around here don't you?

BERRY

My folks work on this ranch--the Santa Gertrudis, but I was born on El Sauz.

DUNNISON

All Captain King's?

BERRY

All his.

RIDING OUT to meet them is a TALL POWERFUL MAN with flowing silver hair and goatee beard. He rides a fine blooded stallion flanked by MEXICAN RIDERS with Winchesters. He hails McNelly and the two men seem quite happy to see one another.

BERRY (CONT'D)

He was a riverboat Cap'n before the War, when cotton was king. Now there ain't no king save the Cap'n and he takes care of us.

DUNNISON

All these folks?

He indicates the huts and tents.

BERRY

Some of 'em come all the way up from Old Mexico. They all been run off or burned out or just plain scared and hungry.

DUNNISON

Your folks are here too aren't they?

BERRY

That's right--eating Cap'n King's beef--long as it lasts.

CLOSE KING--MCNELLY--They turn towards the big house--the Column following. King looks back across to the Rangers.

(CONTINUED)

KING

They look so young Leander--badly mounted and so damn young.

McNelly nods back at them.

MCNELLY

They're a good bunch--orphans mostly--

KING

--And a few on the run.

MCNELLY

--Little pepper never hurt the taste. Hardly none come from Texas--I don't like my Rangers having to worry about throwing down on their own kinfolk.

He looks out at the reception committee--POOR FARMERS, RANCHERS, MEXICAN HERDSMEN and their squabbling BABIES, scared WIVES and KIDS. McNelly can feel their eyes on him.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

What about all them?

KING

More come every day--it's getting to be what you call--a community.

MCNELLY

They look at me like I was Jesus Christ or at least Moses come to deliver 'em.

KING

--And you?

MCNELLY

I'm dying Richard but I cut a deal with the Devil.

KING

The Devil can be a liar.

MCNELLY

Then to hell with him.

CUT TO:

A LARGE OUTFUILDING--Where the tack and grain is stored, and it's adjacent corrals. Spread out around all this are the people. They are hardy, simple folk who've had the life kicked out of them. They look upon the Rangers all lined up in front of the building and try to measure them. The Boys are young and poor like their own children and themselves, but they are not victims. The Rangers even at this time are men in action, in movement. They have a mission and seeing these people and their dog-like hope can only fill them with some small measure of resolve. King holds his hands up. All are quiet.

KING

The only way we're gonna' get out of this is by ourselves. These Rangers are the first and the last that will be sent to help us. I know you've

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

KING (CONT'D)
believed in me up to now. Thank God
I've never had to be worthy of it--
cause I'm just a cow man like yourselves.
But Cap'n McNelly and these Boys--They
know their business. They'll see us
out of this if you give 'em the tools.

Quiet.

KING (CONT'D)
I'm gonna' ask you all to furnish guns
and ammunition--horses and food--and
before it's over maybe a few lives.

A MAN steps forward.

MAN
I ain't got but one gun.

KING
You ever killed a man? Didn't think so.

WOMAN
What about the Army--the Government's
suppose to protect us.

KING
Ma'am, has the government ever solved your
problems? The government ain't in that
business. They don't care about you--you
don't figure into re-election. Nope I don't
trust 'em, don't trust no Yankee Cavalry
either but I trust Cap'n McNelly.

OTHER MAN
Why?

KING
Cause I got nothin' else left.

CUT TO:

TACK BUILDING--DUSK--Saddles and holsters, scabbards and bridles
are all brought forth, the good ones issued, the old ones weeded
out on long tables. On other tables, people bring all manner of
firearms which Armstrong, Rudd and the others sift through.

MCNELLY
I'll need all the breach loading shotguns
over here--on this table--all the shotgun
cartridges too.

ARMSTRONG
Set up over there by the reloaders.

The place is filled with all kinds of people bringing
pitchforks, knives, axes, ropes.

KING
Cap'n McNelly wants only Colt cartridge
revolvers--if you have one bring it up--
Colt cartridge revolvers.

CLOSE SINGLE ACTION COLTS--Some new(this is 1875), some worn,
lined up with holsters and belts. They are picked up, one to
each Ranger.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE MCNELLY--He looks at a Winchester 1873 repeater, then picks up a Sharps.

CLOSE RIFLES--Being distributed to the Rangers.

KING (V.O.)

All Sharps Rifles .45-70. Any Sharps rifles over here. Don't you want repeaters?

CLOSE MCNELLY--He looks to his Boys.

MCNELLY

I want my Boys to shoot far and hit hard. A man's more careful when he has but one shot. Besides we can get cartridges from the Yankee Army.

RANGERS--Busily sawing off the barrels of the new breach loading shotguns to twenty four inches.

CUT TO:

CORRALS--THE BOYS--Look to their saddles and tack laying on the cut timbered fence. Scabbards are buckled on and old leather replaced. Others tend to the horses which are milling about. McNelly and King walk past--Durham, Dunnison, Berry and others follow. King walks up to another large corral.

KING

Cortez! Andale!

A VAQUERO rides a beautiful Palomino stallion up to them at a gallop, and slides to a dusty stop dismounting and holding the reins. Behind him follows Sandoval, smiling.

KING (CONT'D)

For you Leander.

MCNELLY

I could never afford a horse like this. The State will never pay you back.

KING

Nobody ever gets paid back. If you don't ride him, maybe one of Fisher's bandits will.

McNelly takes the reins awestruck.

MCNELLY

What's his name?

KING

Cajones.

McNelly smiles and swings up into the fine saddle. He seems to grow several feet.

CLOSE DURHAM--DUNNISON--Durham smiles as the Captain spins the mount around.

DURHAM

That's how my daddy must a' seen him.

CUT TO:

A HUGE CORRAL--Filled with the most beautiful horses ever bred. All of them wearing the RUNNING W brand of what will become the greatest ranch in the world.

KING
Go get 'em Boys.

The Rangers leap over the fence, lariats uncoiling. Dust rises as they pick their mounts.

CLOSE BERRY--Drops a hoolihan around a fine paint.

CLOSE DUNNISON--Who's learned to throw a loop with the rest of them as he lassos a big sorrel.

CLOSE DURHAM--Totally lost--just a big strapping farm boy with a rope. He throws and misses--pulls it back. A big leather hand pats him on the shoulder. He turns and looks up at Richard King.

KING
You ain't much of a hand are you Boy?

DURHAM
I spent my life behind a plow.

King takes the rope and steps out into the dust. Durham just stares in dumfounded admiration. King spots a big black gelding and effortlessly snags him.

KING
He's yours now.

A tear rolls down Durham's dirty cheek.

CUT TO:

CAROLINE

SITTING ROOM--With wood panels and brocade--McNelly, Scipio and Armstrong sit sipping after dinner coffee with King and his family. His WIFE, a trim dark haired woman, plays a grand piano and sings. His TWO NIECES sit nearby with several well dressed MEXICAN LADIES and their HUSBANDS.

OUTSIDE--On the porch sitting rigidly with rifles are Corporal Rudd, Dunnison and Durham. Durham points and sees in the gas light Berry and his MOTHER and FATHER walking away. They look at him and keep holding their hands out to see how tall he has grown. Finally, Berry stands back to back with his father while his mother compares them. A LITTLE BROTHER and SISTER tag along. Both boys watch and feel homesick.

DUNNISON
How much longer do we have.

RUDD
Your watch is three hours--you're not half finished.

CUT TO:

MCNELLY--Sitting in a comfortable chair, in a dark coat. He looks handsome and younger. He coughs suddenly and pulls the handkerchief. Mrs. King stops singing and his racking cough bends him over momentarily.

MCNELLY

It's alright--you can go on Henrietta.

HENRIETTA

You're much worse Leander. Why don't you admit it? Stay here and let us cook for you.

She looks at Scipio..

MCNELLY

Scipio'd never stand for that Ma'am.

He looks down.

HENRIETTA

Caroline, Suzanne--be so kind as to take the Boys some coffee.

CUT TO:

COFFEE--CREAM--In a china pot and service being brought out to the Boys. The two young girls are very attractive, vital and embarrassed. CAROLINE, the oldest at seventeen leans down to pour Durham's cup and their eyes meet. Durham is transfixed--for him it is absolute and true love. He's never seen a girl as graceful and well shaped. Dunnison notices too, but Caroline stares right back at Durham. Something chemical or whatever takes place.

CAROLINE

Is that enough?

His cup is sloshing full.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

Cream and some brown sugar?

DURHAM

I've never had it.

CAROLINE

I'm sure you'll like it.

She puts it in, stirs it. He sips--burns himself.

DURHAM

I've never tasted anything so sweet.

CAROLINE

What about you?

Dunnison is quite amused by the whole thing. He smiles his best smile at the other King niece.

DUNNISON

Oh I'm just fine.

CUT TO:

MRS. KING--Singing "Lorena"--A sad haunting beauty to it makes them all realize that here and now is a place, a point in time, they can never return to.

CUT TO:

EMPTY COFFEE CUP--In Durham's hand, his head craned around watching the girls. Caroline sneaks a glance at him. He waves the cup smiling.

DUNNISON

That's three--you'll never get to sleep.

Caroline gets up and with her sister brings the tray.

RUDD

Well--I guess we can change watch early seeing how it's been a long day.

DURHAM

Like Lincoln said--I ain't ever gonna get to sleep. Why I could drink this coffee all night.

The girls arrive with the tray.

CAROLINE

Hasn't he had enough?

DUNNISON

Miss he'll drink coffee til' he drowns if you'll pour it.

Durham blushes--looks down.

CAROLINE

What's your name anyway?

Durham can hardly answer.

DURHAM

George--

DUNNISON

We call him Georgia Miss--and I'm Linc.

Durham looks up.

DURHAM

Linc--that's short for Lincoln, Ma'am. Lincoln's his name. He's trying to live it down.

CAROLINE

You two are a pair to draw to. I'm Caroline, and this is Suzanne, my sister. We're Captain King's nieces and we're awful happy--to have you--protect us.

RUDD

I think it's time for the next watch--Ladies--

He stands up.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON

Yeah--Time to try out my new horse.
(stretches)
What about you George?

George doesn't answer.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

Time to go.

DURHAM

Oh--yes.

He gets up. Dunnison tips his hat to the Ladies, Durham tries to imitate but is embarrassed.

CUT TO:

MORNING--The first hint of dawn, the streaks of light revealing billowing distant thunderheads. Durham stares off at the distance, sitting fully dressed on his bedroll. Dunnison is nowhere in sight. Durham watches the graceful animals running and snorting mist in the huge corrals. He hears something and turns to find Dunnison fully dressed and mounted behind him.

DUNNISON

What're you doing?

DURHAM

Oh--Oh I'm just watching the horses play in the ground fog. I--I couldn't sleep, too much coffee--Wait a bit-- What're you doing up and mounted and all.

DUNNISON

Like I said, I wanted to try out my new horse.

DURHAM

Where you coming from?

DUNNISON

Nowhere particular.

DURHAM

Town! You've been to town.

DURHAM

You sneak off like that--What if you were on watch and there was bandits around? You runnin' in to town to see a girl.

DUNNISON

Don't cast the first stone George-- unless you are without sin.

He rides off.

CUT TO:

THE BACK CORRALS--STILL MORNING--The dew fresh on everything-- The smell and sounds of the Rangers taking breakfast drifts across the corrals. Durham looks across the fence at Judy. The old plowhorse nuzzles him and seems to know this is farewell. Durham senses something and turns. Caroline is about ten feet away watching him. He is surprised but no longer embarrassed.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

I saw you out here alone--I thought
I'd--is this your horse?

DURHAM

She ain't much to look at, but she an'
I been friends for a long time.

Caroline comes up tentatively and pats her on the muzzle.

DURHAM (CONT'D)

I'm getting paid soon--an' if you'd
ask Captain King--

CAROLINE

To take care of her? --I'll take care
of her--as if she were my own.

Durham turns--now a little embarrassed, he unties his fancy new
horse.

DURHAM

I--I really appreciate that Miss.

CAROLINE

Say no more on it Mr. Durham.

He swings up into the saddle, actually looking quite dashing.
He salutes Judy who shakes her head--and he tips his hat towards
Caroline.

DURHAM

Name's George Ma'am--Good Morning.

CAROLINE

Good Morning George.

He rides off and tries not to look back.

CUT TO:

MISSPENT CASES

BARRELS--Setting up against an embankment--once again adorned
with hats of all descriptions.

RIDERS--Flash by and shotgun blasts rip up the staves--all the
barrels are hit--some dead center, a few hats are blown off.

GOURDS--Set at two hundred and three hundred yards, adorned with
fancy Mexican ribbons.

THE LINE OF RANGERS--In classic prone and sitting target
positions firing their heavy Sharps rifles.

GOURDS--Shattering with hits--dust kicking up around them.

CLOSE DURHAM--DUNNISON--Firing--Berry kneeling, watching.

DURHAM

Got it?

Berry nods no.

(CONTINUED)

BERRY

That was just dust--You're too damn low.

DUNNISON

First he wants us to shoot 'em all up close--Now he wants us to shoot 'em far away--Then again, I'd rather they be far away.

DURHAM

I'd rather be far away myself.

DUNNISON

Yeah--I wonder where.

DURHAM

What of it--What if Captain King gives me a job?

DUNNISON

Doing what--drinking coffee? Or rolling around in a haystack with Caroline.

DURHAM

You shut your mouth Lincoln.

DUNNISON

What would you know anyway. Here, have another cartridge.

Durham grabs it from him.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

Aim high young man. Heli, the only way a fella like you can make your way in this world is to marry rich.

He fires, hits the gourd. Berry laughs.

DURHAM

Why you say that Lincoln?

DUNNISON

Linc--Because that's what my father said about me.

He fires.

CUT TO:

THE BOYS LINED UP--At ease, their rifle butts on the ground. McNelly walks down the row.

MCNELLY

Until further orders, all prisoners will be put under the old Spanish Law--La Ley de Fuego.

Sandoval smiles.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

Which means there will be no rescue attempts or interference.

CLOSE BOYS--Old Frank leans over to the Boys.

(CONTINUED)

OLD FRANK (whispering)
Which means there will be no prisoners.

MCNELLY
Any questions?

A KID steps forward.

KID
Captain, this plans to be longer than I figured. I got some stock to look after back home.

MCNELLY
Draw your pay at the wagon.

Dunnison looks at Durham quickly--Durham pretends he doesn't notice.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
--Don't walk up on a wounded man--Pay no attention to a white flag. By the same token you treat the law abiding folks with respect. Don't take their turkeys or hogs no matter how hungry you are. If a man's dog barks at you, you say you're sorry to disturb him.

DUNNISON
You say that to the dog?

MCNELLY
In your case Lincoln, yes.

He walks by.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
I counted a lot of shots between you and Durham.

He turns back.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
--And I didn't see no hits. But I could see your jaws wagging plenty. You must've had such to discuss concerning your marksmanship.

He walks by again.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
Scipio--charge 'em for their ca'tridges--maybe they'll miss less often. Take it out of their pay.

Durham glares at Dunnison who shrugs.

DISSOLVE TO:

LES MISERABLES

MORNING--CAMP--Patrols(scouts) of four or five men leaving in different directions. Armstrong and Rudd give them final

(CONTINUED)

instructions in the distance while Durham watches, kneeling with some biscuits. In the foreground Dunnison plays cards with Old Frank and Sandoval. He is winning and has a stack of coins. Durham picks up his book, "Les Miserables".

DURHAM
What's it about?

OLD FRANK (cold)
Put it down.

He does.

DURHAM
Sorry.

OLD FRANK (catching himself)
It's alright Son--The book's about a fella' who's on the run from the law.

DUNNISON
They catch him?

OLD FRANK
He keeps gettin' away.

DURHAM
How come the Cap'n don't trust us.

OLD FRANK
Hell I wouldn't either. One a' you's no good at nothin'--The other cheats at cards--an'
(to Berry)
You're too little.

DUNNISON
You think I'm cheating?

OLD FRANK
Hell Son, I know you are. I just can't figure out how.

At that moment they hear a horse coming fast. Over the rise pops Sandoval. He slides to stop in front of them. There is an uneasy silence. Scipio comes out of the tent obviously relaying what's happening to McNelly. The dust settles.

DURHAM
Well, what can--we--do for you.

Sandoval swings off effortlessly.

SANDOVAL
Put this saddle on my other horse.

DURHAM
Yes Sir.

He reaches to take the mount.

SANDOVAL
--And saddle your own horses.

They all look up. Dunnison stands.

(CONTINUED)

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

Get some food for two maybe three days
and a full bandolero. Pronto!

THE DAB--Dashing through the sage over a long purple colored plain towards some distant hills and trees. Sandoval is out front on his black horse.

A SMALL CREEK--Crosses their path. Sandoval pulls up short and prances along the edge looking for something.

DURHAM

What're you looking for?

SANDOVAL

More of them.

He splashes out across the creek and the Boys follow.

CUT TO:

A BARREN RANCH HOUSE--Low and squat, made of adobe. A MEXICAN WOMAN and her DAUGHTER stand in a vegetable garden, a YOUNG BOY stands at a gate with an old rifle, and a MAN comes out the doorway as they ride up.

MAN

Ola.

SANDOVAL

Rangers Tejanos.

MAN

I know who you are. You're Sandoval--
Casoose.

He walks up.

MAN (CONT'D)

I was a rebel soldato--on the run. It
was a long time ago.

SANDOVAL

Was it good?

MAN

Si--Come sit with us and eat.

SANDOVAL

Muchas gracias.

CUT TO:

THE DAB--Eating outside on the little porch--rice, beans, a little beef. The woman brings an iron skillet with pieces of fried dough in it--sizzling--the little girl stands next to Durham and Berry watching them.

BERRY

You want some?

The girl just smiles. Sandoval asks in Spanish--but she doesn't answer.

(CONTINUED)

MAN
She cain't talk--touched somehow.
Cain't say a word. Sure has the
prettiest smile though.

BERRY
What's her name?

MAN
Rosalina--she's my yellow rose of Texas.

DURHAM
I sure like that fried dough Ma'am--it's
always been a favorite with me.

The man speaks quietly in Spanish and his wife brings the
skillet to Durham.

MAN
You from the South, Son?

DUNNISON
He's from Georgia.

MAN
Long time--long time ago.
(to Sandoval)
What brings you out here? Painted
Horse Desert. Nothin' out here.

SANDOVAL
I found sign by your creek.

MAN
How many?

SANDOVAL
Five but they go different ways. Stay
close and keep your cattle in your
corrals for awhile.

He gets up.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)
Vamamos Muchachos--Andale Pronto!

CUT TO:

THE DAB--RIDING--Almost dark.

DURHAM
Five banditos--they were really here?

SANDOVAL
Si maybe more. You scared Ninos?

DUNNISON
You've got to understand he's gone
all soft on a girl.

SANDOVAL
Senor George--are you a man in love?

Durham doesn't answer.

(CONTINUED)

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

Is it the first time?

DUNNISON

Knowing him I'd say yes.

DURHAM

First time and last time. Now let's get on with this work.

DUNNISON

Imagine all your life with one woman. Making love to one woman. I can think of nothing more depressing.

SANDOVAL

He really is in love. Senor George-- if you can love one woman your whole life and be happy then you are a great lover and one hell of a man.

BERRY

It would take one hell of a woman.

DURHAM (to Dunnison)

What do you know--you're just going to go through this life like one of these damn weeds.

He makes a gesture to indicate wind blowing tumbleweed all over the place--but suddenly they are aware of Sandoval having stopped. Silence! Sandoval does not look good. He glances at the ground, mutters in Spanish--turning his horse around, he dismounts. He gets down examining tracks and stands up sharply staring at the Boys. Without a word he swings onto the saddle and draws his Winchester from the scabbard. He motions for them to follow, and gallops back to the ranchito.

CUT TO:

THE RANCHITO--Burning and smoldering in the last light of day as the Dab gallops up and slows to a cautious walk. Sandoval quickly scans the horizon and gets off. The Boys all have their rifles at the ready. Durham has a shotgun. About half the walls of the structure still stand, a few open fires still blaze. They dismount following Sandoval--a body lays smoldering in the trampled vegetable garden. As they round the wall, they see an enormous encircled star painted on the wall symbolizing the badge of a Texas Ranger. The star is painted in blood. Everywhere are smeared slogans cursing the Rangers. Durham and Dunnison go through the door to the burnt out other side--there they are confronted with the silhouette of the little girl Rosalina hanging from a stock hook.

SANDOVAL

Don't go over there--stay close to the wall. Senor Berry!

BERRY

Yes Sir.

SANDOVAL

Very slowly go get the horses and bring them in here. Very slowly.

CUT TO:

DARKNESS--SANDOVAL--His eyes like the night--sensing as much as looking. Durham shivers behind him.

DURHAM
They done this 'cause of us.

SANDOVAL
What does it matter--this is what they do.

BERRY
How many you figure?

SANDOVAL
Fifteen maybe twenty.

DURHAM
Will they try to take us?

SANDOVAL
No--not here Senor George.

DUNNISON
Why not?

SANDOVAL
Which one would like to reach into a bag to get a rattlesnake eh?

Suddenly they hear cackles and yells in the darkened desert.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey Rangers--come and see us--Putas.

OTHER VOICE (O.S.)
Rangers--Piss all over you.

STILL ANOTHER (O.S.)
Ain't you got no balls Rangers--
No cojones?

A rifle shot followed by several others spatters off the adobe above them.

VOICE (O.S.)
We get you Rangers--

SANDOVAL (sitting down)
Keep your eyes open.

BERRY
What're you gonna' do?

SANDOVAL
Go to sleep.

CUT TO:

MORNING--Already the vultures are circling. The Boys finish the graves. Durham beats the crosses into the ground with a shovel.

CUT TO:

HORSES--They mount--Sandoval leads them out--back the way they originally came.

DUNNISON
Why're we going this way?

SANDOVAL
Si, it is the way home.

DUNNISON
Ain't we gonna follow them?

SANDOVAL
I was looking for them--I found them.

DUNNISON
But--but what about these people?
--What about this--All of this?

SANDOVAL
En el mejor dia--Muchacho.

CUT TO:

CAMP--The Boys without Dunnison sitting around a fire, staying warm. The sky is grim and Scipio cooks a large kettle of soup.

MCNELLY'S TENT--McNelly is bundled up in blankets sitting up on his cot, trying to spoon down some soup. Dunnison sits at the little table, pen in hand.

MCNELLY
"It is plain to see they are feeling
the effect of our presence."

Dunnison stops writing--thinking.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
What's the matter?

DUNNISON
--"effect of our presence."

MCNELLY
"I have only thirty men and thousands
of square miles but I am constructing a
web of spies so confrontation is inevitable.

Dunnison writes.

CUT TO:

RANGER CAMP--SANTOS AND ANOTHER RANGER--Look up as they see TWO RIDERS approaching. They pick up their rifles. Everyone gets up or stops their chores. The riders are flanked by the security patrol as they come closer. As the men approach, it is plain to see that they are not Rangers. One wears a flowing serape, and the other is PETE MARSELE, the old friend of McNelly's. They pull their horses up just out of pistol range.

MARSELE
We don't come seeking no trouble.
Jest want to see Cap'n.

Old Frank steps forward.

(CONTINUED)

OLD FRANK

C'mon in--Don't do nothin' fast.

They do, and dismount in front of McNelly's tent. Dunnison stands up when he notices the man with Marsele has a scar down his face--and a flat brimmed sombrero--and a red beard.

DUNNISON

That's the man that quirted Sarah Noakes!

DURHAM

Hell, you don't know.

They are ushered into the tent by Scipio.

THE RANGERS--Seven or eight of them that are still in camp are standing around debating about the identity of the visitors when McNelly bursts out of the tent strapping on his pistols.

MCNELLY

Frank--You're acting Sergeant. Scipio give us two days dry rations--Full bandoliers and twenty rounds for revolving pistols. Santos-- You ride to La Parra and get Sandoval and Rudd--

(to Scipio)

Armstrong's due in tonight--Tell him to meet us below Las Rucias.

(to the Others)

Tighten your cinches Boys--Let's get kicking!

CLOSE--BOYS--They ride behind Old Frank. In the distance a mottled pattern of small clouds checkers the sky. McNelly and the two outlaws lead the way.

DURHAM

I don't like that Pete feller.

DUNNISON

The Captain knows what a man is.

BERRY

Yeah--look at the way he treats us.

CUT TO:

WATER HOLE--DUSK--The country is sparsely pocked with mottes of tangled brush. The Rangers rest on a small rise overlooking marshlands and beyond--the sea. The horses drink the brackish water as do the men. It's getting dark. McNelly kneels down and looks out alone. McNelly picks up a fistfull of dirt and lets it drift on the wind direction. The sound of riders is heard. McNelly doesn't turn around as Sandoval, Rudd, Armstrong and the others ride up at the gallop. The two outlaws look at Sandoval and step away. Sandoval looks up--the quilted pattern of clouds, little tufts of cotton cover the whole sky.

SANDOVAL

Jefe--could be a Norther.

MCNELLY

I know.

ARMSTRONG (indicates outlaws)

What do they say?

MCNELLY

It's a cattle raid up to Amargosa. They aim to come back along this side of the marsh.

SANDOVAL

What about them?

MCNELLY

They're gonna catch up with their compadres-- I said we'd pick our targets--That's why they're dressed fancy.

RUDD

Why don't we keep one of 'em?

MCNELLY

I gave my word.

Rudd looks down. Sandoval cleans his fingernails with a little bone handled knife.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

You have any luck?

Sandoval shrugs and motions back to his Rangers. One carries a silver mounted Dick Heye saddle across his horse's withers.

MCNELLY

What happened to the horse?

SANDOVAL

Eat him.

CUT TO:

THE OUTLAWS--Leaving a motte of low brush near the marsh. They ride quickly away to the north. It's almost dark and the Rangers are deployed along the tree-line, their horses behind them. A cold wind whips up the sandy soil.

CUT TO:

THE NORTHER

NIGHT--DURHAM--Tries to sleep with a meager blanket around him while Berry stands watch. Dunnison is well bundled up in his newly store bought coat and bedroll. Durham's blanket keeps blowing off, and his threadbare coat doesn't even go around him. He sits up holding his shivering arms.

BERRY

It's a Norther--comes all the way from Canada. Sometimes it snows or the like. I've seen cattle froze standing up.

This doesn't console Durham.

BERRY (CONT'D)

Should a' bought you a coat.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--MCNELLY--ALONE--Deliberately off on the flank, unprotected from the wind and sleet. Wrapped in his blanket like a stump, he looks down the coast--lightning flashes in the distance. Sandoval suddenly appears crouched next to him.

SANDOVAL
Maybe they don't come.

McNelly doesn't look up.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)
Maybe they never come--Maybe Pete,
he is a liar--

MCNELLY
I hate to think so--Why don't you
find out--

Sandoval is gone like a shadow, disappearing. McNelly coughs into his blanket.

CUT TO:

THE BOYS--DUNNISON--Stands watch in his hat and poncho. Berry tries to sleep and Durham is just trying not to freeze.

DURHAM (to himself)
I can't do this much longer--can't
do this--

DUNNISON
What?

He glares up at him.

DURHAM
If it wasn't for you I'd be warm now.
I--I'd have me a coat. --Now you got
the coat an' my money.

DUNNISON
You're the one that wanted to gamble.

DURHAM
It weren't fair.

DUNNISON
You calling me a cheat?

DURHAM
It weren't fair.

DUNNISON
Yeah--What're you going to do about it?

Durham lunges to his feet--fumbles for his belt.

DURHAM
I'll show you--talk to me like--

Dunnison's Colt flashes out cocked--gleaming in the rain. Everyone freezes. Berry sits up. Armstrong, Santos and Frank stand up from their positions. Armstrong walks over.

BERRY
Put that gun down Linc. What the Hell?

DURHAM
You'd pull on me?

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON

You were going for the same.

ARMSTRONG

Ain't much of a fight see'n how
you've got all the advantage.

DUNNISON

That's right--that's the way I fight
with odds in my favor.

Armstrong walks up and without breaking stride kicks the gun from Dunnison's hand. It flies glittering sleekly into the night rain. They all watch it until they hear it splash in the mud.

ARMSTRONG

How you like the odds now Son?

Durham lunges at Dunnison and grabs him by the hair. Dunnison tries to box but is no match for a hardened farm hand. Durham is not only bigger but has spent his youth wrestling hogs. He beats the living hell out of Dunnison. It's not at all fair. Durham pummels him and mashes his face into the muddy ground. At one point it seems Dunnison might drown. The men cluster around. There's no cheering because it's no contest. Everyone also knows Dunnison had this coming--not just for what they know of him, but for what he is.

MCNELLY (O.S.)

What the hell's going on? Sergeant
Armstrong break it up.

Armstrong pulls them apart. They look up and see McNelly.

MCNELLY (CONT'D) (weak)

Stand to Mister.

Durham stands up--Dunnison pulls himself to his knees.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

What was all this about?

They can't answer.

ARMSTRONG

Answer the Cap'n Son.

DURHAM

--Pulled a gun on me.

MCNELLY

You do that Boy?

DUNNISON

I didn't mean it.

He staggers to his feet.

MCNELLY

Why'd you do that Boy?

DUNNISON

I don't know.

DURHAM

I'd be warm if he didn't take my money
at cards. I'd have me a coat.

MCNELLY

Was it a fair game?

DUNNISON (shamed)

No.

MCNELLY

An' you took his money?

Dunnison almost breaks down.

DUNNISON

Hell Sir--this--this is the best friend
I've got in this world.

He fumbles with his belt--pulls it off.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

He can have all the money I got--Here
George--I didn't mean--I didn't know.

DURHAM

Keep it Linc.

McNelly coughs and pulls himself up--steps over to them.

MCNELLY

You can't buy your way out of this--
Money don't count here.

DUNNISON

If he'd told me--

MCNELLY

He didn't tell you because he was too
proud. Stupid proud. But he was proud
of himself not his money. You don't know
about that 'cause you grew up getting all
the sleep you wanted.

He lets that sink in.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

You think I've been hard on you but
that's the way life is out here. You
got someplace to go back to--We don't.
You can go home an' tell 'em what it
was like. An' you'll lean on being a
Texas Ranger the rest of your life.

Coughs.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

You'll have plenty a' stories and soon
you'll go to believing all the crap you
made up. But these Boys got nowhere to
go--this is all there is Mister. These
ARE the best friends we got in the world
and you don't cheat 'em at cards, or
watch 'em freeze in a Norther, or pull
a gun on 'em.

(CONTINUED)

An awkward silence.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

You come over to my horse and I'll pay you off.

He staggers into the night. Everyone goes back to their posts. Dunnison drops the money belt and collapses. He's crying but he won't show it. Durham picks up the belt and drapes it on his shoulder. He looks up.

DURHAM

Go on Linc--Go talk to him--tell him you're sorry an' get back here--I wanta' get some sleep.

Dunnison can't believe it.

DUNNISON

You--you forgive me George--Berry?

DURHAM

Yeah--You're the best friend I ever had either. Now go talk to him.

CUT TO:

MCNELLY--Leaning against his dark horse. He doesn't look at Dunnison who's behind him.

DUNNISON

My father said I was no good for nothing--So I guess I've got nowhere to go--like the rest of you.

MCNELLY

You may die doing this Son.

DUNNISON

Just as long as it's not you that kills me.

MCNELLY

It might be--Now get out of here--I'm only doing this 'cause we're short of men--You understand?

DUNNISON

Yes Sir.

CUT TO:

BETRAYAL

DAWN--Grey and streaked black moving across great slabs of breaking clouds. The wind whistles cold across the soaked and frozen ground. The sea is flecked with white and sparkles like molten silver. A dark horseman hurtles along the beach, the clipping of the hooves lost in the gusts. It is Sandoval riding for all he's worth.

A RANGER SENTRY--Frozen like a fencepost--Sandoval flashes past waving his hat. The boy is too cold to return the gesture.

CUT TO:

MCNELLY--Covered with blankets laying on the side of a dune. He is shivering uncontrollably and his face is pale. Armstrong and Rudd are beside him, but it is plain there is little they can do. Sandoval gallops up dismounting on the run and stands before them. Other Rangers--including Santos and Old Frank, rush up to hear what he has to say. McNelly looks at them and motions them away. Only Armstrong and Sandoval remain.

CUT TO:

BERRY--DURHAM--Watching from their positions. Durham has Dunnison's good blanket around him while Dunnison leans against a stump in the mud, far from caring about the cold. They watch the men confer--McNelly orders something. Armstrong turns.

ARMSTRONG

MCALLISTER--Santos--rig up a travois for the Cap'n--Some a' you others help 'em.

RUDD

The rest of you to horse and make ready. We will be taking leave of this place.

Everyone goes about the business of quickly breaking camp. Rifles are scabbarded, axes and shovels tied.

DURHAM

We was fooled little Berry. None a' this had to happen.

BERRY

Ain't we gonna boil up some coffee?

DURHAM

No rest for the wicked--

RUDD

With dispatch Gentlemen--With dispatch!

CUT TO:

THE COLUMN--Moving along the open prairie as fast as the Captain can travel. The sun breaks through the clouds.

CLOSE BOYS--DUNNISON--Rides slumped, not saying anything. Sandoval rides up to them.

DURHAM

We're headed due south to the river ain't we Casoose?

DUNNISON

We gonna have a fight?

Sandoval turns and looks him over.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

You blame me don't you?

SANDOVAL

I am disappointed Senor Lincoln--but perhaps you will prove me wrong. I always hope for the good in a man. And if I do not find it--then I look for a tree to hang him on.

(CONTINUED)

A RIDER waves to the Column from the point.

RIDER

Dust! --Dust at the River--Rio Bravo ahead.

DURHAM

Dust! How can there be any dust left in the world.

SANDOVAL

Cattle! Andale!

He gallops off--following Armstrong and about fifteen others. The Boys rush headlong after them.

CUT TO:

RIDGE--Overlooking the Rio Grande. Sure enough there are cattle in the water--dust in the air. The day has suddenly grown hot and sticky. A herd of longhorns, maybe a hundred and fifty are being crossed by BANDIT WRANGLERS. They yell and wave their lariats trying to get the column in the water out onto the opposite bank. Over the ridge thunder the Rangers.

ARMSTRONG

Rifles!

The group as one draw their Sharps rifles as they come off the ridge and splatter through the shallows.

OPPOSITE BANK--THE BANDITS--MEXICAN AND AMERICAN--Jeer and hoot at the Rangers.

BANDIT

Hey too late Amigos!

OTHER BANDIT

Cabron! Putas! Cuiga su Madre!

ANOTHER BANDIT

Piss on you Ranger! Too damn fucken bad for you!

STILL ANOTHER

Next time Ninos go cry to your mother.

CUT TO:

THE RANGERS--Halt at the river's edge--eager to charge across. Santos slips down the embankment.

ARMSTRONG

Santos! Hold where you are!

They endure the full force of the jeering and laughing.

RANGER

Let us cut into 'em Sir.

ARMSTRONG

Ain't suppose to fire--'less they fire on us--

A particularly OBNOXIOUS BANDIT makes the age old motion of the finger, howling and waving his hat with his other hand.

(CONTINUED)

Old Frank pulls his Business Rifle from its scabbard, thumbs back the heavy hammer.

BANDIT

Eat the shit of dogs Ranger! Putas!

Frank hands Armstrong the rifle. Armstrong takes it up to his shoulder. He squints through the vernier tang sight. Fires--a loud do-whump that startles the horses and echoes off the water. The bandit's hand flies off in a red spray. He screams and slumps from his saddle. Armstrong gives the rifle quickly back to Frank.

ARMSTRONG

Did you hear a shot?

RUDD

No Sir.

He looks around.

ARMSTRONG

To the rear Boys--Column of twos.
Fine rifle Frank.

OLD FRANK

Thank you Sir.

ARMSTRONG

Casoose--Stay behind and see if you can pick something off.

SANDOVAL

Si Jefe--I'll need my dab with me.

Armstrong gives him a look.

ARMSTRONG

If you want 'em.

They pull out from the formation.

CUT TO:

LA LEY DE FUEGA

DUSK--PRAIRIE--A great sweep of land cut by numerous little arroyos that funnel down towards the Rio Grande. In the foreground sits Sandoval looking through field glasses. The Boys and horses are hidden below him in a brushed wallow.

DURHAM

How come we got to be out here with no food and it's gettin' cold again? How come it's always us?

SANDOVAL

You don't be careful and you're starting to sound like a grown up man.

DURHAM

The Cap'n was wrong an' we gotta pay.

(CONTINUED)

SANDOVAL

Somebody got to pay--why not you? The Capitan, he trusted an old friend and he was wrong. So you gotta pay. Capitan McNelly, he already pays.

BERRY

Is the Cap'n gonna die?

SANDOVAL

Of course--everybody dies. But I don't think he will die until he is through with what he started, and that ain't yet.

He looks more intently.

DUNNISON

You see something?

SANDOVAL

Si.

He rushes up and looks through another old pair of glasses.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

Look up the sendero to the trees.

P.O.V. GLASSES--TWO HORSEMEN--Coming at a good pace.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He puts the glasses down--an electricity runs through them all.

DUNNISON

Two--coming right here.

SANDOVAL (shrugs)

Luck eh? Keep looking--could be more.

He slides down the wallow like a reptile, and effortlessly swings up on his horse. They follow clumsily as he waits, pulling his shiny Winchester '73 from it's scabbard.

CUT TO:

THE RIDERS--Going hell-bent for the river, hoping to cross before dark. They don't see the horsemen in the wallow until too late. Sandoval and the others rise suddenly to their side like vultures.

SANDOVAL

Alto Muchachos! Nostros son Los Rangers!

RIDER

Hell to you!

They whip their mounts. The Boys raise their rifles but Sandoval is quicker, two shots in rapid succession. The lead horse goes down. Berry and Dunnison fire, their big guns booming deep and flashing from the muzzle. The second rider pulls up sharply, hands in the air. Clouds of white drift back over the Rangers and all is suddenly quiet.

RIDER

Please don't shoot me! Please!

CUT TO:

THE PRISONERS--HANDS TIED--The Boys boost the second one onto the remaining horse. Sandoval watches silently. They pull their horses up to mount.

SANDOVAL
No-no--You must stay here--there
could be more.

DURHAM
By ourselves?

SANDOVAL
You got to learn sometime Muchacho.
I take them down by the river to talk.

There is a cold finality in his gaze. He turns gracefully and leads the horses off.

CUT TO:

DARK--The moon fresh from the storm illuminates a cold prairie. Durham, though wrapped in a blanket still shivers. Dunnison looks through the glasses.

DURHAM
How long since we 'et?

DUNNISON
Will you shut up--don't think about--
and don't talk about it.

BERRY
Cap'n says he don't respect nothin' that
can't go two days without sleep or food--
man or horse.

DURHAM
That make it better?

Suddenly they hear a piercing scream, unearthly, utterly horrible.

DUNNISON
What was that--coyote?

They hear it again--longer.

BERRY
That's no coyote comin' from the river.

Durham gets up.

DURHAM
Casose? Let's go!

CUT TO:

COTTONWOOD THICKET--By the river. The gentle sound of water is interrupted by ghastly screams. The Boys ride up over the bank and below them see:

SANDOVAL--Who has tied one of the men's feet to a cottonwood--at the same time putting a noose around his head and tying it off on his horse. The other man lays in the moonlight with his head beside him. Sandoval urges his horse forward slowly, his smile leering in the darkness. When he sees the Boys--the man screams.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE SANDOVAL--He whips his horse who lunges ahead cutting off the scream. He whistles and his horse comes back.

CLOSE DUNNISON--DURHAM--HORRIFIED.

DUNNISON

Why--why'd you do that?

SANDOVAL

Why?--Why for revenge por Dios mio!

PART II

"And when we reached the Prairie,
Our Captain gave command
'To Arms, To Arms' he shouted,
'And by your horses stand.'
I saw the Bandits comin'.
Their bullets 'round me flew.
And all my strength had left me,
And all my courage too.

We fought for nine hours fully
Before the strife was over.
The likes of dead and wounded
I never seen before.
And when the fight was over,
Los Banditos, they had fled.
We loaded up our rifles
And we counted up our dead."

THE TEXAS RANGER

A song of the 1870's

EGGS--Ten of them frying in a big iron skillet. Next to that are thick rashers of bacon and strips of beef on an iron griddle over hot coals. Beyond are biscuits, piles of thick steaming flapjacks and cauldrons of gravy and coffee. Many hands tend to these fixings but they are all presided over by great Scipio who stands in the early dawn light with a ridiculous soiled French chef's hat. The chuck wagon Rangers include Old Frank, Rudd and Sandoval. All the other hands have filled their tin plates once, and some are in line again.

SCIPIO

I shore do like to see a growin' boy eat.

CLOSE DURHAM--He is extremely concentrated, working a stack of flapjacks and molasses down to reasonable size.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE--THE RANGERS--Calling out for their horses--the lariats spinning in slow motion--leather stirrups-cinches tightened--rounds slipped into leather cartridge belts-canteens filled with hot coffee--men in groups and dabs heading out on scouts--the sun up in broken clouds--The Ranger camp--almost empty.

CLOSE DUNNISON--Scrubbing pots and skillets. Durham chops wood and Berry digs a latrine. Scipio walks over from McNelly's tent with a tray of cups and plates.

SCIPIO

Your job is to take the remuda out to pasture at sundown or when the Boys come in from scout. You get up before daybreak an' round 'em up so they's fresh when we sort 'em after breakfast.

DURHAM

Don't we get to go on no scouts?

SCIPIO

You complaining Son? --I can find some other thing around here for you to do. Them latrines ain't deep enough and the bottoms ain't square.

DURHAM

What if--Casoose--needs us?

SCIPIO

That'll be the day hell done froze up. But if that happens you be sure and let me know.

He turns and stalks off to the tent--stops and turns.

SCIPIO (CONT'D) (to all of them)

Cap'n tends to admire them that claws an' scrapes for their dignity. He don't show much for someone who spends his time throwing it away. Cap'n also holds no truck with a man or horse that can't go three days without food or rest.

He turns and leaves.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON

Where have I heard that before?

DURHAM

Why me?

BERRY (nods at Dunnison)

Cause you're with him--I'm just in it
cause I'm little.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--THE BOYS ASLEEP--DURHAM--Snoring loudly. The campfires are burned down low, a lantern hangs on a wagon, another near McNelly's tent. Footsteps are heard. Boots come into view and stop next to Durham's head. The boot kicks him in the butt--he snorts half conscious.

VOICE

Get up--time to get goin'. Them
horses is spread all over yonder.

The boots walk away. Durham stirs, curses and opens his eyes. No one else is up. He looks up in the sky--a myriad of stars. He nudges Dunnison and Berry.

DURHAM

C'mon you lazy hounds. There's a
man's work to do.

CUT TO:

THE THREE--Riding serenely under the vast canopy of the brightly lit sky--a half moon high above.

BERRY (singing)

"From this valley they say
You are going.
I will miss your bright eyes
an' sweet smile.
For they say you're taking the sunshine--
That has brightened our paths for awhile."

His voice is clear, true and sad--and carries off over the endless steppes. Each one is made homesick because they are still boys.

ALL

"Come sit by my side if you love me.
Do not hasten to bid me adieu.
Just remember the Red River Valley,
And the Ranger who loved you so true."

DURHAM

Look at that moon--You can see the man
laughing at us.

DUNNISON

Wait a minute here.

He pulls his mount up.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

That moon shouldn't be up there.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON
Goes double for him.

CUT TO:

BERRY--HANGING--From the beam of a small adobe room, swinging like an ape making Mexican yells. Aye-Ye-Ye-Carumba! Below him are TWO YOUNG SENORITAS.

CUT TO:

DURHAM--Sitting on the edge of a bed--a SENORITA pulls off his boots.

DURHAM
You ain't gonna' understand this but
I'm saving myself for my true love.

SENORITA
Su novia?

DURHAM
Si--and what I really want to do
is sleep.

CUT TO:

WOODEN HOUSE--Behind the store. Dunnison throws pebbles at the window. It opens.

SARAH
Linc?

She looks out.

DUNNISON
Well now who else would it be.

SARAH
I didn't expect to see you so soon.

DUNNISON
Should I go back?

SARAH
Oh no--you get in here before someone
else wakes up.

DUNNISON
Where's your Pa?

SARAH
Gone to the saloons in Corpus Christi--
won't be back 'til Monday.

He climbs in.

CUT TO:

BERRY--Wrapped up in blankets--sitting in bed with the girls playing his harmonica while one of them plays a guitar.

BERRY
Come and sit by my side if you love me.
Do not hasten to bid me adieu.

(CONTINUED)

The girl sings along softly in Spanish.

CUT TO:

DURHAM--Snoring away while the senorita rubs his back. She listens to the song through the wall, shrugs and starts to curl up. Durham snorts and mutters.

DURHAM

Mas Senorita--un poquito mas abajo.

She rubs him. He resumes sleeping.

BERRY (O.S.)

Just remember the Red River Valley--

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--SARAH--Sitting up in bed staring out at the moon through the window.

BERRY (O.S.)

--And the cowboy who loved you so true.

SARAH

Will you ever find him?

DUNNISON

Who?

SARAH

The man who did this.

She leans around on his shoulder--the scar faint in the moonlight.

DUNNISON

I don't know--I just don't know. He might get away.

SARAH

Don't say that--

DUNNISON

Now darlin' you've got to see things different and I've seen a lot in the last couple of weeks. Lot of life out there.

SARAH

What're you trying to say?

DUNNISON

I guess I'm trying to say that maybe you've been taking all this a night too serious.

He runs his finger down her face through her hair and across her bare shoulder. She kisses him.

SARAH

You'll avenge me Linc--

He kisses her back.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON
Sure--wouldn't have it--otherwise--

SARAH
You won't ever leave me will you?

He kisses her more fervently.

DUNNISON
Oh no--not 'til morning--never.

CUT TO:

THE STREAK OF DAWN--Far to the east, the stars still out.
Roosters cry. A dog barks.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--Asleep wrapped in Sarah. Suddenly the door swings open creaking--light pours in. Dunnison wakes with a start--gasps--a FIGURE, dark, in sombrero, bandolieros, and Mexican boots stands ominous in the doorway. Dunnison rolls for his guns--stops.

FIGURE
You going to try that on me?

The figure is Sandoval.

SANDOVAL
Por favor Senorita.

Sarah pull herself under her blankets.

SANDOVAL
You can never go where I cannot find
you Senor Lincoln. Now Andale! Pronto!

CUT TO:

SANDOVAL--THE BOYS--Riding at a good lope.

SANDOVAL
I come in to see the Capitan with such
good news. Many Banditos and he say
"Make ready"--"To horse" and I think I
better go find my dab eh?

DUNNISON
Does he know?

SANDOVAL
If he knew he would kill you and I am
getting to like you better.

He looks at Durham.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)
What about you Compadre? I thought
you were in love.

DURHAM
I still am.

They break into a run as the dawn comes up on another gathering storm.

CUT TO:

PALO VERDE

A DISTANT TORNADO--It's dark funnel dropping down from basalt clouds. The wind whistles and whines across the tufts of grass and clumps of brush. In the far distance are the marshes and seas.

CLOSE MCNELLY--Watching the twister as he canters along on Cajones, as black as the clouds. The wind whips at his hat with flecks of rain. He wears a dark suit of clothes, a tie, and vest under a black cape. Behind ride fifteen Rangers including the Boys, Sandoval and Old Frank. They crest a small ridge and before them in the distance can be seen a line of cattle on the far side of a marsh. McNelly holds his hand up. Armstrong rides up alongside. The cattle are being escorted by a LARGE PARTY OF RIDERS--many more than needed.

MCNELLY

How many you reckon?

ARMSTRONG

Twenty--thirty--maybe more.

As he speaks, the riders fan out and scatter the cattle with distant gun shots.

CLOSE SANDOVAL--BOYS--They watch the whole thing with great apprehension.

DUNNISON

They're letting 'em run wild.

DURHAM

They don't care--that's why they was so easy to catch.

SANDOVAL

Maybe it's us Compadres who are the ones to get caught.

He pulls his shotgun out and opens it. He plunks two Ten Gauge shells in and shoves it back in the scabbard.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D) (to Durham)

Hey--this is a fine day eh--First you know a woman's love--now this. I hope you live through it Amigo.

RUDD

Single file--five yard intervals!

THE TWO COLUMNS--Separated by a stretch of prairie and marsh of about half a mile. They move along at an anxious trot. Finally the bandits come upon some low brush thickets that border the edge of the marsh. They spread out and dismount amongst these. Behind them is open prairie. The wind blows black clouds by. The sky is turbulent, ready to spawn another funnel.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He turns his stallion and stops. The column pulls in next to him.

MCNELLY

Pull it up tight--

(CONTINUED)

The wind whips across but his voice carries easily across them.

RUDD
Pull in Lads--

MCNELLY
Alright Boys--Them over there's Fisher's finest Bravos. They're waitin' for us with rifles and they got us outnumbered two to one. If we run and get the rest of the Company-- they'll tell it all the way to El Paso. They think they're better than the Law and right now they're laughing it up something good. Just remember this Boys--a little man can beat a big man--if the little fella's in the right and he keeps on 'a comin.

He opens a tin box and takes out a round badge of a lone star.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
Pass it down--

Rudd and Armstrong pass the box down the line.

CLOSE BADGE--Silver with the words Texas Ranger on the edge.

MCNELLY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Made from a silver peso. Pin 'em on.

CLOSE DUNNISON--Pins his on--his hands trembling.

CLOSE DURHAM--Finishes pinning his and looks at it--shiny and bright over his heart.

CLOSE BERRY--Grits his teeth--checks his hat.

MCNELLY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Now just do what you're told and we'll come out a' this. This is the Lord's work so let's get it done. Battle intervals!

RUDD
Battle intervals!

The men wheel and ride back turning at five yard intervals towards the enemy.

THE COLUMN--Facing ahead--the horses snorting--the wind blowing--hats held on by stampede cords.

MCNELLY
At the walk--Forward--

RUDD
Forward!

They move towards the marsh as one.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He looks down the line of pale nervous boys. This is the worst part. They enter the marsh--about six inches deep but firm. The water splashes and is carried on the raging wind. About a quarter mile separates them from the brush. They push on.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He looks to Durham--who looks back at him. The look is abject fear, it says let's run. Durham bites his lip, the horses splash on, now it's hard to hold them back.

CUT TO:

BANDITS--Crouched in the brush--their horses tied behind them. Across the marsh the Rangers come--a sure advance, steady as the tide.

BANDITO

C'mon Ninos! Come to me Amigos.

The others are quiet--for some reason this is not a time to boast. Several lever the brass framed Winchesters and Henrys.

CUT TO:

MCNELLY--He draws his pistol--opens the loading gate and slips in the sixth round--snaps it shut and looks down the line.

MCNELLY

Draw rifles!

RUDD

Rifles!

They do--the heavy Sharps rifles wheeling up catching glints.

MCNELLY

At the trot!

RUDD

Trot!

The horses prance forward--splashing, the men standing in the saddle.

CLOSE--THUMBS ON HAMMERS.

CLOSE OLD FRANK--He puts the reins in his teeth and has a pistol in his other hand.

CUT TO:

BANDITS--They stare tensely--the Rangers now about two hundred yards away and coming on. Wind whips across them. A BANDIT fires.

CLOSE DUNNISON--His mouth opens--a bullet rips through the wind above his head. Muffled pops are on the wind. Water kicks up. He looks to Durham. Durham's face is white with panic. Bullets rip by.

MCNELLY

At the lope!

RUDD

Lope!

They increase to a canter--water spouts up--the firing pops increase like sudden rain. Berry rides straight ahead his eyes closed. Sandoval urges his mount expertly his rifle at the ready. Bullets whiz by thick like a swarm of bees.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE DURHAM--He sees the puffs of smoke obscuring the brush. Rain splashes him in the face. A bullet takes off his hat. He looks around for it wishing he could follow it, but the horses plunge on with a will of their own.

CUT TO:

BANDITS--Firing as fast as they can but the Rangers are coming on--A hundred yards, seventy five. Men scream and break for their horses. Others fire and reload.

BANDIT
Diablos Tejanos! Putas!

CUT TO:

CLOSE MCNELLY--A bullet rips his cape, water spouts in front of him.

MCNELLY
Fire Boys--Fire!

RUDD
Fire!

ARMSTRONG
Fire!

MONTAGE--RANGERS--As if a leopard loosed from a chain--The Rangers raise their heavy rifles and fire. A ragged volley of heavy caliber--a clap of thunder.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He kicks his mount.

MCNELLY
Shotguns Boys--Charge!

CLOSE ARMSTRONG--Coolly drawing his shotgun as he scabbards his rifle--screaming a rebel yell--hurtling forward.

CLOSE OLD FRANK--A pistol in his left, a shotgun in his right howling--charging.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He puts his rifle down looking through the smoke. Pulls his shotgun--the charge carries him. He yells.

CLOSE DURHAM--He looks over the sights of his rifle as his horse is hit. It goes down headlong. He splashes into the water--another horse goes down. He comes up running through the shallow water--horses thundering by. He fires and reloads screaming a rebel yell--charging.

CLOSE BERRY--He rides right up to a BANDITO trying to mount and leans out--shooting him full in the chest with one barrel, then the other--He finally crashes into the horse, toppling like a sack of broken melons.

DUNNISON--He rides straight at a MAN who shoots at him. He fires one barrel--then drops his gun and runs at him with a hatchet. Dunnison tries to control his whirling mount and fires the second barrel but the man ducks it and keeps coming. He raises the hatchet--Dunnison fumbles for his Colt. The man jumps onto him, his face red, contorted with anger as close as a lover. The hatchet flashes between them, hits the shotgun, the

horse wheels about. Dunnison thumbs back the hammer--fires! The man bites and snaps at the air. Dunnison shoves the muzzle under his jaw and fires. He falls away.

DURHAM--Running up the edge of the marsh screaming--horses and shooting everywhere. He hears a horrible scream--turns to see a MAN impaled on Armstrong's Bowie knife. Armstrong, still on his horse, pulls him off his feet and carries him as the man screams his lungs out. A shot whistles by his ear--Durham turns to see a MAN in a fancy sombrero--with a scar down his face and dirty red hair--the man who quirted Sarah Noakes and betrayed them. He fires at Durham from about ten yards and tries to mount his horse. He fires again. Durham stares transfixed and then raises the heavy rifle. It settles and he fires a tremendous blast. The man's head and hat are clouded with smoke and red and he's gone. Durham runs over--looks down. The bad-man's fancy boots kick violently but his head is gone. Durham reloads from his belt. The bandits are all running for the open prairie. He loads, cocks and settles on ONE being pursued by two Rangers. He fires, the horse goes down. The Rangers are upon the thrown rider instantly and he contorts in a cloud of smoke. Durham sees a riderless horse with a Dick Heye saddle--it bears the King Ranch Running W brand. Good enough! He mounts at the run and whips his steed out onto the plain.

CUT TO:

PALO VERDE PRAIRIE--Long and dry with small tufts of grass and the grey sea beyond. The clouds move low and fast as the storm is breaking up and light breaks through. The battle has turned into a running fight as the small figures of bandit horsemen run out across the plain pursued by Rangers.

CLOSE RUDD--Galloping at breakneck speed, his fine mount gaining on a MEXICAN BRAVO. The man fires desperately while whipping at his horse. Rudd pulls close, raises the shotgun leaving the reins free and fires. The bandit's head throws back violently, his arms drop and he bounces along dead this way until he slips from the saddle as Rudd reloads on the run.

OLD FRANK--Overhauls a MAN. He leans out of his saddle as if he's going to bulldog him--and shoots him carefully in the head with his pistol. The man is gone and Frank lashes his mount in pursuit of his partner. He is joined from the side by McNelly whose fine mount easily overtakes the MAN on the other side. Frank motions to the Captain that the man is his and drops back. McNelly fires twice quickly with his revolver and the man slumps holding onto the horse.

DUNNISON--SANTOS--Overhaul a COLORFUL VAQUERO. Santos fires his pistol--the horse spins around, going down. They are on him then overrun him. The Bravo scrambles to his feet firing at them with two guns. Santos shoots back. Dunnison has his rifle out--thumbs back the hammer.

SANTOS

Take him Senor Linc!

He spurs his horse which plunges up to the man who is dodging around. He fires at Dunnison perforating his hat. Dunnison leans out with both hands, and thrusts the rifle point blank into the man's face and fires. A great gout of smoke whips away on the wind--the man is blown spread-eagle into the wet sand on his back.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE BANDIT--HIS DEAD FACE--Mouth open staring wide eyed into the sky, his hat under his head.

CLOSE DUNNISON--Looking equally wide-eyed at the man he's just killed.

SANTOS
Andale Linc!

He wheels his horse, and they vault off in hot pursuit of the others.

DURHAM--Riding hell bent in pursuit of SEVERAL BANDITS. The Rangers ahead of him fire and a horse goes down. They bypass the downed desperado in favor of his compadres. A man unhorsed is not going far. As Durham rides up, the bandit gets to his feet and levers his rifle. Durham pulls up and throws down on the outlaw with his Sharps. They both fire at once. The bullet whips past Durham, but his smacks into the man throwing a mist of wet from the impact. The man staggers. Another impact followed by the noise of the shot sends him sprawling. Durham looks over his shoulder to see Sandoval with his Winchester. They look at the dead man and suddenly only the wind is heard. No more screams or horses or shots. They look around--riderless horses run by--bodies lay starkly on the flat wet sand. The Rangers in the distance and back towards the swamp seem to know the chase is over. A group heads towards them. It is Old Frank, Rudd, McNelly and several others. In the far distance the last few bandits escape. Other riders come in--Durham looks at Sandoval who gives him a deep smile.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--He rides back to the man he killed, sprawled on the sand. He gets off--looks around--from all over, little groups or single Rangers are coming back to the battlefield. He dismounts, looks again at the man and takes off his hat. He holds it in his hand piously for a second, and notices the bullet hole in it. He throws it away and leans down and takes the wide sombrero--shakes the brains out of it and puts it on his head and remounts.

CUT TO:

MCNELLY--Riding back as the others assemble around him. Armstrong comes up from the marsh followed by Dunnison and Berry. Armstrong rides by--looks out at the other riders coming in and wheels his horse around to McNelly's side.

ARMSTRONG
All done Cap'n.

MCNELLY
Casualties?

ARMSTRONG
None Sir--All present and accounted for.

A burst of pride goes across their faces, the tension lets out. They want to whoop and holler, but they hold themselves back. Each face says "We did it--We sure did." They all sit tall, no longer boys and something more than mere men--Rangers!

MCNELLY--He notices Dunnison.

(CONTINUED)

MCNELLY

Nice hat you got there Linc.

Dunnison almost melts.

MCNELLY (CONT'D) (to the others)

Now lookie here what Dunnison's got.
You all do the same. Take something from
'em--spurs, sash, serape. Let their people
in Brownsville know what we've done. This
is a day that'll be remembered--the Battle
of Palo Verde Prairie. Take something to
remember it by.

RUDD

You heard the Cap'n.

MONTAGE--They cheer--laugh--howl or shake their heads--every one
of them.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He rides up to Dunnison and Durham.

MCNELLY

Splendid performance Boys--Well done.

He rides off leaving the two of them.

DURHAM

I killed him.

DUNNISON

Who?

DURHAM

The red-headed bastard that quirted
Miss Noakes. I blew his head off.
I done it for you Linc.

Berry rides up joining them.

BERRY

You need a hat George.

Durham feels his bare head. Dunnison reaches up and unstrings
his new sombrero--hands it to Durham. It's back is stained
crimson.

DURHAM

Kinda dirty.

DUNNISON

It'll dry out.

DURHAM

But it's yours.

DUNNISON

It's a gift.

He takes it, puts it on--tightens the cord so it rides back on
his head.

DURHAM

How do I look?

(CONTINUED)

BERRY

Like a ring-tailed roarer.

DUNNISON

--Half man--half gator and a touch of the earthquake.

They turn and ride away proud. It's a very lucky day and it's wonderful to be alive.

CUT TO:

BROWNSVILLE--The central square by a big fountain. Santos and another Ranger pull the body of a bandito from Scipio's wagon. Scipio himself carries another one. The bodies are stiff with rictus, their faces pulled tight into hideous grins and smiles. PEOPLE rush from buildings--quickly becoming a crowd. The Rangers dump the corpses like sacks of flour on the ground in front of the fountain. Behind, most of the Company sit horse.

MAN

Lookit--that's Dob Klimer.

ANOTHER

It shore is.

OTHER MAN

The one on the end is the Parrel boy.

WOMAN

This is what comes of living with the Devil.

MAN

Yeah--well a lot of these fellas lived here.

A MAN in a suit steps forward.

MAN IN SUIT

Which one is McNelly?

ARMSTRONG

We're all little McNelly's.

MAN IN SUIT

Was there a warrant for this?

MCNELLY

They were caught with stolen livestock.

ARMSTRONG

--And they're all in the Book.

CLOSE DUNNISON--DURHAM--SANDOVAL--Dunnison looks for the man he killed.

DUNNISON (points)

That one.

SANDOVAL

His name was Incarnacion Delgado and he was muy malo hombre. Loco peligroso.

Durham shrugs impressed. Sandoval shrugs. Berry looks out at the crowd.

(CONTINUED)

SANDOVAL

It's not so easy for them no more eh?

CLOSE MCNELLY--The man in the suit is looking over the corpses.

MCNELLY

What's your name Mister.

The man looks up startled.

MAN

I ain't in that book.

MCNELLY

Your name?

MAN

Bellweather--Clyde Bellweather.

Armstrong goes through the book.

MCNELLY

Who do you work for Clyde?

He stammers.

MCNELLY

Where's Fisher?

ARMSTRONG

The Cap'n asked you a question Mister.

He points down the street to several large buildings. McNelly spurs his mount, the others follow close behind.

COAST HOUSE INN--A saloon/hotel/brothel. Sure enough, standing on the wooden veranda is King Fisher and several dandified GUNMEN and GAMBLERS. McNelly stops in front of him. Dust rises and the crowd approaches warily.

MCNELLY

Where were you today King?

FISHER

Minding my business--Captain.

At that moment an attractive YOUNG WOMAN steps through the door. She is well dressed and takes her place at Fisher's arm.

MCNELLY

I brought some of your friends home.
I guess they stayed out too late. You
should look after 'em better.

FISHER

I'll remember this Captain.

MCNELLY

I'll see that you do.

McNelly looks over the men.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

I don't recognize these Boys--
Where's your favorite?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FISHER
Who'd that be?

MCNELLY
John Wesley Hardin--I was hoping
to find him with you. He's got an
appointment with my rope.

Fisher just stares. He's not ever talked to this way,
especially in front of a crowd.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
Who's the Lady?

FISHER
This is my wife.

McNelly tips his hat.

MCNELLY
Ma'am. You've a nice wife King and a
nice place. But you don't have much
of a future.

FISHER
That so--these Boys look mighty young
to be making such bold talk.

He points to Dunnison.

FISHER (CONT'D)
I know you Son--seems you had trouble
keeping your pants up.

MCNELLY
You know Mr. Dunnison?

FISHER
We played at cards once.

MCNELLY
Was it a fair game Lincoln?

DUNNISON
No Sir.

MCNELLY
Then I take it you won.

DUNNISON
Yes Sir--I did.

MCNELLY
You remember that too Mr. Fisher.

He turns his horse and starts down the street. Dunnison's and
Fisher's eyes meet. Fisher's gaze is cold blue, the gaze of a
seasoned professional killer, but Dunnison has esprit de corps
in his--so it's a standoff. At that moment Corporal Rudd rides
up at a gallop.

RUDD
Telegraph Captain--from Rio Grande City.

MCNELLY
Read it Corporal.

RUDD

It's from a Captain Randlett, Ninth U.S. Cavalry. --"A force of thirty bandits crossing Rio Grande at Las Cuevas with upwards of one hundred fifty beeves. Have pursued to International Boundary and await reinforcements and further orders."

McNelly looks back at Fisher who stands his ground.

MCNELLY

Well--the boys we ran into were just to pull us off. Didn't work all that well, but it answers a question.

He rides back a few paces.

MCNELLY (CONT'D) (to Fisher)

Seems like we've located your friend Mr. Hardin. I'll give him your regards.

He turns back.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

Column of two's.

RUDD

Column of two's!

CUT TO:

RETALIATION--LAS CUEVAS

CAVALRY CAPTAIN RANDLETT--A handsome dark featured man standing on a bluff overlooking the river. On the other side are bonfires and much commotion--as what seems like a bandit army carouse and frolic before the impotent U.S. troops. They drive cattle down into the water to see if they'll swim back--then they laugh and jeer as the helpless animals try and turn around in the current. Captain Randlett's men are BLACK TROOPS, who are dismounted and dug in along the trees to his side. An occasional shot flashes and cracks from the other side. A NEGRO SERGEANT comes up to him.

SERGEANT

Major Clendenhen is arriving from Rhingold Barracks with Infantry reinforcements and a Gattling Gun Sir.

RANDLETT

How far out?

SERGEANT

He should be here within the hour Sir.

RANDLETT

Who are those men that just arrived?

SERGEANT

That'd be Captain McNelly with his State Police--Irregular Cavalry.

(CONTINUED)

RANDLETT

Rangers! --Where is Captain McNelly now Sergeant?

SERGEANT

Why in his camp Sir--I believe they is sleeping.

CUT TO:

THE RANGER CAMP--Sure enough the Rangers are asleep. Scipio's wagon has just arrived and a fire is being built. Randlett is brought by Santos to Berry who stands guard outside the Captain's tent.

BERRY

Oh-no Sir you can't wake him up. The Cap'n needs his sleep as we all do. We're gonna cross the river in a couple of hours.

RANDLETT

Cross the river!

CUT TO:

MCNELLY--Eating with everyone else. Beef, lots of it--and more beef cooks on the spits--McNelly looks up at Randlett and his superior, MAJOR CLENDENHEN.

MCNELLY

Then I am to understand you will not support me even if I git in a fix?

CLENDENHEN

I am not authorized to commit this Nation to an invasion of Mexico on your behalf. You cannot dictate the foreign policy of the United States Captain McNelly! Do you understand that!

CUT TO:

THE RANGER COMPANY--Thirty six strong in a column of two's move quietly down to the edge of the river. The darkness hides all but the glitter of weapons and the breath of the horses. The river, running high rushes through the night before them. They reach a beach area covered with broken trees.

ARMSTRONG

Dismount--

RUDD

Line abreast Lads--Hold your own mounts.

Before them is McNelly, Captain Randlett, LIEUTENANTS, and several SERGEANTS. The Company assembles facing McNelly.

MCNELLY

Boys--over yonder is Las Cuevas. That's where they live. They took one hundred fifty Texican beeves. They spilled Texican blood doing it. I'm going to bring those beeves back.

(CONTINUED)

There is a slight murmuring and nervous silence.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

We licked 'em good--you saw to that.
They'll be getting the word about now.
If we can cross and lick 'em again where
they live, where there ain't no place
to hide--Well Boys, I think you know that
would be a fine day.

He turns to Captain Randlett.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

Now the Army here can't guarantee anything--
but if we get into trouble Captain Randlett
here says he won't let us go down alone.

RANDLETT

That's unofficial of course, but I do admire
your Captain's sand.

MCNELLY

Captain Randlett--your sabre Sir.

Randlett draws his sabre and hands it to McNelly.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

Anyone who decides to stay will still have
a job when we get back.

RANGER

Sir--I got a chance to--

MCNELLY

It's alright Son--hold the horses.

OTHER RANGER

I don't want no fight in Mexico.

MCNELLY

Go on Son--it's alright.

Several others join him. Then there is an uneasy silence.
McNelly walks before them and draws a line in the sand with the
sabre like Travis did at the Alamo. Without saying a word
Sergeant Armstrong and Corporal Rudd cross the line. As McNelly
walks forward more men step across--Santos, Berry, Sandoval, a
MAN named DEAF RECTOR. More cross. The sabre goes before
Dunnison and Durham. They look at each other and as one they
cross.

CLOSE MCNELLY--A smile of deep satisfaction. Twenty eight men
plus himself. Only one remains--Old Frank.

MCNELLY

It's alright Frank.

OLD FRANK

Oh Hell Leander--if you put it that way.

He steps across.

OLD FRANK (CONT'D)

--I ain't served with a man as crazy
as you since Cap'n Quantrell.

(CONTINUED)

MCNELLY
Sergeant Armstrong, Corporal Rudd and
Jesus--you swim your horses across. The
rest bring the food and extra ammunition.

They follow him.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
There's wood boats hid in them cottonwoods.

CUT TO:

RIVER'S BANK--The boats assembled and ready.

MCNELLY
Someone's gonna have to swim it and get
a line across. Who's a good swimmer?

ARMSTRONG
I'll swim my horse--

MCNELLY
Too loud--

DUNNISON
I can do it.

They all look at him.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--Stripped to his pants and bare feet, a large coil of
rope in the crook of his arm and a huge Bowie knife tied to his
leg. He puts mud on his face and starts to enter the cold
rushing water. McNelly leans down.

MCNELLY
Tie off and pull three times if'n
it's all clear.

DUNNISON
What if it's not?

MCNELLY
Then I guess we'll try something else.

He shrugs, like--"That's life". Dunnison shrugs back and enters
the water.

CUT TO:

TELEGRAPH STATION--In the trees across from Las Cuevas. Major
Clendenhen, his AIDE, and SEVERAL OTHERS sit around their
Headquarter's tent. A Ranger rides up and dismounts at the run.

RANGER
That thing go through to Austin?

CLENDENHEN
What a' you want to know for?

RANGER
Message from the Cap'n.

CLENDENHEN
Let me see it.

(CONTINUED)

RANGER

Cain't do that Sir--But you can hear it. That thing go through to Austin?

CLENDENHEN

It goes straight to the War Department in Washington young man. Maybe President Grant would like to know what your Captain is up to--Send his damn message.

CLOSE OPERATOR--Tapping away.

RANGER

--"Have commenced crossing at one o'clock. Have thirty men. Will recover cattle. U.S. Troops have promised to cover my return--"

CLENDENHEN

I specifically did not!

RANGER

--"Signed McNelly".

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--Swimming for his life in the black swift current of the Rio Grande in November. The water is cold, fed by the recent storms--and the night is dark and windy. Dunnison doesn't see the logs and tangles of brush that batter him and tangles the rope that he lets out. He goes under, comes up gasping, and grabs ahold of a fallen tree that sweeps him towards shore. He lets out the rope frantically, and breaks from the tree towards the dark shoreline. Finally he feels the bank with his feet and drags himself out.

CLOSE DUNNISON--Exhausted, he scrambles up into the brush, and none too soon. The sound of horses and jangling equipment is heard beyond. He looks through the brush and sees a MAN on a white horse--silver fittings gleam from his attire--a broad sombrero is worn. He is flanked by ten or twelve mounted MEXICAN CAVALRY. They ride away towards Las Cuevas. Dunnison pulls the rope taut trying to unsnare it. He ties it tight around a cottonwood and pulls sharply three times.

CUT TO:

THE BOATS--Of the assault force in mid river guided by the rope. McNelly stands in the front like George Washington. Armstrong and Sandoval swim their horses leading two or three others.

RUDD

Gentlemen we are about to embark on foreign soil.

MCNELLY

Then show the Colors!

Santos unfurls a flag on a pole. The flag is not of the United States but the Lone Star flag of Texas.

RIVER BANK--The boats come ashore--the men scramble out and rush up the beach into the dark brush. The boats are hauled into cover--equipment and food are brought ashore--shotguns and bandoliers, shovels and blankets. Invasion!

CUT TO:

CLOSE DUNNISON--Surrounded by the others wrapped in a blanket. Armstrong moves the flank pickets out silently with hand signals.

DUNNISON

--Was a fancy dressed chap--big sombrero
lots of conchos.

MCNELLY

And there was Cavalry with him?

DUNNISON

Yeah with tall hats.

MCNELLY

That'd be General Flores.

ARMSTRONG

That means they're all in on it.
This is War.

MCNELLY

Nope--this is a police action--War's
another thing--Alright! Listen here--
Count off.

RUDD

Count from the right.

The Boys count off trying to keep it quiet.

MCNELLY

Even numbers are First Rank--odd Second--
Every dab take a shotgun and bandolier.
Pass it down and Let's move out.

CUT TO:

RUDD--Crouched in the brush--moves his hand--Scouts run forward followed by the main body. A ground fog drifts over the bean field and cactus that border the settlement. Mariachi music drifts across.

FENCE--Made of cactus and mesquite. Armstrong and Sandoval glide up on horseback throw lariats over the gate and quickly pull it down. They ride through as others leap over in a fast advance.

CLOSE DUNNISON--DAB--Durham carries the shotgun. They move with the others as they've practiced. The fog is thick where they are coming from--a gully that leads to the river. The music is much closer. Suddenly they come upon several adobe huts lit by a fire and lanterns. They emerge from the fog to startle some PEASANTS who are just as surprised. A WOMAN pats out tortillas and doesn't change her rythm. A MAN grabs a machete, ANOTHER breaks and runs into the fog. Durham fires--the man falls into infinity--another shot rings out and another. A scream.

DURHAM

I--I had to do it.

Sandoval is suddenly rushing by on his powerful mount, his pistol trailing smoke--then he's gone. Old Frank emerges from the fog and motions them forward. The man drops his machete and starts to pray. The woman beats out the tortillas, a CHILD watches from behind her.

(CONTINUED)

DURHAM (CONT'D)

I had to.

FRANK

You get him?

They move into the fog.

CLOSE MCNELLY--Who emerges onto a levee where the fog seems to stop. Before him is the adobe walled settlement of Las Cuevas. It is built as a defensive fortress but the walls are low on this, the weak side. Numerous lights and GROUPS OF MILLING PEOPLE can be seen. Between him and Las Cuevas are innumerable cattle and horses--some of them in pens. The music stops, another shot rings out--a rifle. Horsemen thunder by in the distance. McNelly looks down the line at his Rangers as they emerge from the fog. Armstrong rides up to his side.

MCNELLY

Get down in the brush and spread out. Shoot on my command. Kill 'em all--don't pick and choose.

The Rangers take positions below and behind the brushy levee. The order is passed down. More shots ripple out--answered by a few booms of the .45-.70's. A MAN falls in the settlement. MEN rush about trying to get horses--only the horses are all in front of the Rangers.

MCNELLY

Lay into 'em Boys! Fire at will!

RUDD

Fire at will!

The ragged volley rips through the night--a few horses go down. The BANDITS fire back--the whole settlement is cracking with reports and flashes. There is much screaming in Spanish.

CLOSE DURHAM--He leans his rifle over the levee and fires. Dunnison reloads. Berry fires.

BERRY

I got one!

They have the advantage of the bandits being silhouetted by the lit buildings with the hanging lanterns behind them--and so the Rangers can see their targets and their sights. The bandit's fire is high and whistles overhead. But the CHIEFTAINS are organizing and a GROUP OF MOUNTED MEN come screaming up at them. Armstrong rides across the levee firing with his Winchester. Sandoval follows and the bandit rush follows them.

RUDD

Hold! Hold Lads!

The Horsemen bear down--they ride past the Rangers in the brush and up the levee.

RUDD (CONT'D)

Now!

Durham stands up and blows a BRAVO off his horse at point blank range--turns and takes ANOTHER with the second barrel. All the other shotguns boom out--BODIES fall and scream. A nearby

(CONTINUED)

Ranger is shot off his feet by a passing HORSEMAN. Berry fires at him taking his horse down while Dunnison pulls Durham down.

DUNNISON
Get down damn you!

RUDD
Fall back--Fall back! Form a
skirmish line!

They cover as the outer Rangers rush back reloading and form into a loose line in the brush. The enemy charge is broken but a fresh group of about FORTY RIDERS fans out screaming and waving sabers and pistols.

MCNELLY
Sergeant Armstrong volley fire!

ARMSTRONG
All Ranks kneel!

The charge thunders towards them. They are at the edge of the fog. The horsemen crest the levee. The Ranks are concealed behind brush.

ARMSTRONG (CONT'D)
First Rank fire!

They fire at the splendid targets displayed like a shooting gallery. Horses and men scream and tumble, but the mass comes on.

ARMSTRONG (CONT'D)
Withdraw and load--Second Rank fire!

CUT TO:

RANGERS--MONTAGE--Their faces trying to find their sights--the guns kicking in a sharp volley. BANDITS--torn from their saddles--Horses scream and go down.

CLOSE ARMSTRONG.

ARMSTRONG
Second Rank--withdraw! First Rank fire!

CLOSE DUNNISON--DURHAM--BERRY--SANTOS--FRANK--They blast into the charging horde.

CLOSE RUDD--He fires his repeater from the flank.

RUDD
Steady Lads--look to your right Lads.

ARMSTRONG
Second Rank--fire!

Again the thunderous volley--this time it's too much. Men and horses are blown flat. In a few seconds almost thirty men and animals are dead or wounded. The remaining have no heart for it and flee screaming.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He sees a greater danger. MEXICAN CAVALRY and BANDITS are riding out to the flanks trying to go around the Texans.

(CONTINUED)

MCNELLY

To your flanks Mr. Rudd--Sergeant
Armstrong take them back to the river!

Armstrong is there, big and powerful against the smoke and fog.

ARMSTRONG

First Rank pull back to the river.
Second Rank cover them flanks.

They fire at long range, but it keeps the Cavalry at bay as they disappear into the sanctuary of the fog.

CUT TO:

RIVER BANK--where they landed. The Rangers swing axes frantically--cut down trees, brush. Others dig with shovels, Bowie knives, hands. Still others guard the position staring out into the foggy night. Sandoval drags a tree by the foreground where the Boys are. Armstrong, unmounted, sharpens stakes with an axe. The Boys dig in one of two diagonal trenches going down to the water's edge. A shot or two sounds occasionally--lost in the fog.

ARMSTRONG

Casoose--take your dab out on down the river bank. Don't let them come around through the shallows.

The Boys jump up and give their shovels to others.

ARMSTRONG (CONT'D)

Durham! Take a shovel.

He does. Armstrong shakes his head like they were trying to get out of digging when each one wants to dig to China. They follow Sandoval, who is on horseback dragging a tree out onto a lonely spit cut off from the land by a shallow channel. Fog rushes by.

CUT TO:

COMMUNICATIONS TENT--HEADQUARTERS COMPANY--Across the river. Clendenhen, OTHER OFFICERS wait as a BLACK STAFF SERGEANT takes down the message on the telegraph.

SERGEANT

It's from the War Department directly.

CLENDENHEN

Gentlemen, we can assume President Grant is standing by.

A CAVALRYMAN gallops up over the hill. Desultory firing and yelling can be heard from the river. The man dismounts at the gallop--he and his animal coming into the tent.

CAVALRYMAN

Sir--The Captain told me to tell you that them Texans is engaged.

More firing.

CLENDENHEN

Read it.

(CONTINUED)

SERGEANT

Hold present position until negotiated settlement can be achieved. Do not-- Repeat--Do not allow U.S. Troops or Citizens to escalate hostilities.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--Digging with his knife--Durham works the shovel and Berry digs scoops with his hands. Sandoval stands looking out into the night.

DUNNISON

Wait--you hear something?

DURHAM

Just my stomach grumblin'.

DUNNISON

No--I mean it.

He stands up. Berry does too. Sure enough, there's splashing out there. Dunnison grabs his Sharps. Sandoval raises his Winchester. Durham stands up. Dunnison fires--a great orange blast and gout of smoke takes away in the fog. Sandoval and Berry fire with rifle and pistol.

DURHAM

Stop--Stop--Listen!

OTHER VOICE (O.S.)

Captain Randlett United States Army!
You've shot one of my men. Cease Fire!
Cease Fire!

DUNNISON

You believe 'em?

He raises his rifle--cocks it. They turn to see McNelly on the bank.

MCNELLY

Help 'em in damn it! You think them bandits know the Cap'n's name?

Berry, Durham and Dunnison rush out into the foggy shallows and where FIGURES are splashing. Sandoval stands ready trusting no one.

CLOSE MCNELLY--Standing ominously in his Rebel Officer's cloak--

CUT TO:

BLACK ARMY TROOPS--CAPTAIN RANDLETT--All shirtless or in Union suits shivering under blankets next to some coals that are carefully kept from becoming a fire. ONE of them is laid cold by the river's edge under a wet serape, a victim of friendly fire, like Stonewall Jackson.

RANDLETT (breathing hard still)

--None of us are supposed to--that's why-- we have--no uniforms. Swallowed half the river--Would of all gone under weren't for your man there--

(CONTINUED)

He nods to Scipio, who wrapped like an Indian, stares stoically out toward the enemy.

MCNELLY
Scipio swims like a gator.

SCIPIO
--Shouldn't a' left me over there.
I could a' gone in that boat--

MCNELLY
Boat might a' broke.

SCIPIO
Aw shut your mouth.

OLD FRANK
They gonna try an' take us Cap'n?

MCNELLY
They have to--already lost face. Got
no cojones if they don't.

RANDLETT
Got a Gattling Gun laid in on the other
side--need a mark to shoot at.

CUT TO:

Captain Randlett with a BIG SERGEANT carrying a large keg of powder wrapped in oil cloth slickers.

MCNELLY (CONT'D) (to Armstrong)
Put it all over the wood and surround
it with straw and anything dry. Make
sure there's a big pile in the center.

He turns to Randlett.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
Now you go on back and tell your Gun Boys
that when they see this light up--They gotta
give me two hundred rounds all over and around
us. Two hundred and not one more--as fast as
they can crank.

RANDLETT
Some of you'll be in the way.

MCNELLY
Why you think I dug them pits. Now
git going--two hundred rounds.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE MOON--Seen through wisps of fog as it starts to lift.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON
You believe in Heaven, Berry?

BERRY
Right now I shore do.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON

Suppose this is it--like the Alamo--
an' all you had was one night with the
Ladies. Well it was good.

DURHAM

Yeah an' look at what we been through
already. I can't imagine God sending
me an' Judy all the way from Georgia to
die here in Old Mexico.

DUNNISON

No George, I can't see him going to all
that trouble. If it makes you feel better.

BERRY

Whyn't you shut up.

DUNNISON

Why?

BERRY

Cause here they come.

They look out and see what seems like hundreds of torches
emerge from the distant fog. All of a sudden the air is alive
with screaming in Spanish and bullets whipping overhead like
hornets.

DURHAM

Torches--they got torches.

DUNNISON

That's so we can shoot at them--stupid.

He does--the whole line opens up. Both trenches loose a ragged
volley and not a few torches go down. Suddenly the thunder of
hooves shakes the ground.

RUDD (O.S.)

Fire at will Lads! Fire at will!

They fire and reload as fast as they can. The torches turn into
shapes and grow closer, shapes become dark fleeting FIGURES of
horses and MEN seeming to glide ghostlike over the ground as if
they are flying. Occasionally ONE turns and tumbles almost
gracefully. Sharp crackles and spikes of fire leap out of the
shapes--and wood shatters and twigs snap.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He stands calmly at the head of the V of his
defenses. He fires his pistol carefully until it's empty.
Scipio and Old Frank fire Winchesters as quick as they can
lever. THE HORSEMEN are almost on them.

OLD FRANK

Get down Cap'n!

Bullets rip up the wood around him. Scipio pulls him down as a
horse vaults over. Frank shotguns the RIDER screaming off into
the night. McNelly draws his second pistol--MORE HORSEMEN vault
the barricade. Rudd blasts ONE with a shotgun, hacks ANOTHER
down with his knife. Santos pulls a RIDER down and kills him
with his shovel. He takes his guns and empties into ANOTHER.
Everywhere is screaming chaos--a horse crashes down kicking and

(CONTINUED)

pinning screaming MEN underneath who in turn rip at each other with flashing knives. Enough HORSEMEN have cleared the barricade and they turn to pounce and fire on it from the rear when McNelly fires his revolver into the powder piled in front of him. The flash is bright and blinding and roars up the wood igniting some of it. It lights up Santos who is run through by a LANCER and falls.

CLOSE ARMSTRONG--He fires his shotgun screaming.

ARMSTRONG

Get down! Get in your holes Boys!

CLOSE DUNNISON--Who shoots down a horse crashing through the water. The light illuminates him. He fumbles for his pistols as MORE RIDERS splash between him and the bank. Durham runs out and pulls him down and swings his rifle by the barrel taking a MAN off his horse with a loud crack. Durham pulls Dunnison back into their hole.

CUT TO:

GATTLING GUN--Positioned on the opposite bank. A crack BLACK GUN CREW at the ready. The fire rises up and starts to go out quickly. Torches are seen everywhere. A tree burns briskly. Randlett stands with his saber.

RANDLETT

Fire.

SERGEANT

You sure?

RANDLETT

Fire!

They fire into the maelstrom, the shots a steady cadence as the GUNNER turns the crank.

CLOSE DUNNISON--Laying on his back. Heavy bullets whip by and thud into the sand and mud all around him. A horse crashes down on them--the RIDER scurries to his feet--Dunnison blasts him with both guns. ANOTHER flashes by, turns--Barry thrusts his arm out and fires--the man screams and rides away.

CUT TO:

MCNELLY--SCIPIO--OLD FRANK--Crouched in their trenches. A MAN falls in and is quickly knifed. The screaming now is "Vamos!". These men are not soldiers, they are thieves and they want no more of this. The horses vault back over. The firing continues--then stops--sporadic fire from the Rangers. The night is lit by the burning trees. McNelly gets up.

MCNELLY

Look around you Boys--They're gone!

CUT TO:

THE HORSEMEN ARE GONE--Retreated into the safety of darkness. Now only the agonizing cries of the wounded are heard over the sound of the river--cries for help, for mother, cries of desperate anger and pain.

CUT TO:

DURHAM

I guess they had enough.

BERRY

For now.

A sparkling behind them turns their heads. In the water, a MEXICAN BANDIT thrashes about in some mysterious death agony. He growls and spasms, almost biting himself. It is the man who Durham brained with his rifle butt. Berry goes over to him though the water.

DURHAM

Shoot him Berry.

But before the boy can raise his gun, a blast of smoke and point of fire double him over. The Mexican still thrashes growling. Berry turns around crying like a child--gasping sobs.

DUNNISON

Berry--No! Berry--

He runs and grabs him. Durham gets to him too, but sees the Mexican twist. He smashes down on him with the broken rifle--pieces of wood and brains flying in the water. He beats him with the barreled action like a hammer.

CLOSE DUNNISON--BERRY--Berry goes on his hands and knees, tries to crawl out of the water sobbing, Dunnison helping him. He breathes hard like he can't get enough air and then shakes as he falls into the water biting the air. Then he's still. Now the sobs are Dunnison's, as if all of this is finally on his shoulders. He breaks down on top of Berry's dead body. Durham stands over frustrated, tears rolling down his cheeks--what's left of the bloody rifle he drops. In a rage he pulls his revolver and fires into the dead Mexican--at the water--at Las Cuevas.

RUDD (O.S.)

What's going on out there? Cease fire!
Cease fire Lads!

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)

You ain't got it to spend--They'll be back.

MCNELLY (O.S.)

Pull in the line--tighten it up--Casualties
Mr. Rudd?

They pull Berry's body up into their hole.

DISSOLVE TO:

DAWN--THE FOG--Floats low above the fields and thinly over the river. The sky is pale in the east. Dunnison and Durham stare blankly out at the carnage exposed by the light--horses, men in black clumps--twisted in impossible agonies. A flight of teal rush by on the river, their wings making a whispering noise. Toads and coots make their morning sounds.

CUT TO:

MCNELLY--Looking down his line. He takes a sip of whiskey, breathes better. Rudd scans the far treeline with his binoculars.

CUT TO:

RANDLETT--Looking through his binoculars. The Gattling Gun at the ready, SCORES OF BLACK INFANTRY with their long tom Springfields dug in on the bank with their sights elevated and ready. Major Clendenen sits on a horse on the bluff--everyone watching, waiting.

CUT TO:

SANDOVAL--Riding down the river bank on his fine black stallion. He splashes up to the Boys.

DURHAM (indicates horse)
How'd he get through it?

SANDOVAL
I hide him good. Capitan wants me to go look for some banditos and see if we can find his friend among the dead.

DUNNISON
What friend?

SANDOVAL
Pete--Pete Marsele--Capitan hopes we find him.

DURHAM
He said he sent you--What's this "We" business.

SANDOVAL
I think you owe me Amigo.

CUT TO:

THE DAB--In the broad sunlight walking the battlefield while the toads croak, the robins wake up, and the fog burns off. They are so naked it doesn't matter and they walk upright like hunters with guns laid over their arms like they were following a bird dog. There are bodies strewn in the sand and grass--everywhere. A man pokes his head up. Durham raises Berry's rifle--the man crosses himself and Durham goes on. Sandoval notices something, the Boys come over. It is a dead white horse and not far from it is the body of the Grandee that Dunnison saw ride in. His head is twisted as if he broke his neck when the horse went down--otherwise he looks somewhat peacefully asleep. A bee hums around his open mouth. Dunnison kneels beside him--his belt and conchos gleam and sparkle.

SANDOVAL
El Jefe General Flores--take his pistol.

Dunnison pulls a shiny engraved top-break Smith and Wesson from his holster.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)
Leave the other one in his hand--that is how he died.

Indeed the mate is clutched in his death grip.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)
Vamanos!

They leave--Dunnison looking back at the fallen leader.

CUT TO:

THE PISTOL--In Dunnison's hand--he shows it to McNelly proudly.

SANDOVAL

The pistol of General Flores.

MCNELLY

Let's see that.

He takes it, looks it over--pearl grips with a Mexican eagle carved on them. He puts it in his own belt.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

Get on back to your posts.

They turn--though Dunnison is somewhat flustered.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

Durham, Dunnison.

They turn.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

You did good work--I'm sorry about Private Smith--We'll do our best to get his body back to Texas.

DURHAM

Thank you Sir.

They leave.

MCNELLY (to Rudd)

Make sure I mention those Boys in dispatches. I was first mentioned in dispatches to General Forrest himself. I wasn't any older than they are.

He looks around.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

--And it wasn't such a devil of a fight.

Suddenly Armstrong comes galloping back and vaults the barricade, his powerful horse almost shaking the stillness.

ARMSTRONG

Riders! Here they come Cap'n!

They all look out, but instead of the expected onslaught come THREE MEN bearing a long white flag.

CLOSE THE BOYS--They stop and look as the riders walk in.

RUDD

Flank dab--go and meet 'em.

DURHAM

Not again.

DUNNISON

Whatta' you expect.

THE CLEARING--In front of the trench, choked with dead--the heart of the battlefield. The three men are Americans.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE--THE BANDIT EMISSARIES--All are American. The LEADER has a note under the hammer of his rifle and a white flag tied to the barrel. He is a balding man quite big and well dressed in Mexican finery. The OTHER TWO are slick customers, dandified punks with sneering countenances, and silver trimmed gun belts. All are mounted on blooded stock and well fed. Armstrong walks out from one end of the trench with Sandoval behind him on horseback. The Boys come from the other end where they meet.

ARMSTRONG
Who is he Casoose?

SANDOVAL
He is Doc Headly--and he is in the book.

DOC HEADLY (to Sandoval)
I know who you are--You're the Devil's bastard.

SANDOVAL
I'll cut your head off one night--with a little knife.

DOC HEADLY
You ain't McNelly.

ARMSTRONG
You got something for Cap'n--You give it up.

DOC HEADLY
This from the Chief Justice of the Sovereign State of Tamaulipas. It is addressed to the Commander of the invasion forces and that ain't you.

ARMSTRONG
Hand me that letter.

DOC HEADLY
How many men you got--you are few--we are many.

Suddenly they feel the presence of McNelly who walks up behind Casoose.

MCNELLY
We got enough men to ride from here to Mexico City.

DOC HEADLY
Ride? You got no horses?

MCNELLY
You got enough.

DOC HEADLY
You have invaded Mexico and killed our beloved Alcalde--and taken his pistol. Eighty of our citizens lay dead--

ARMSTRONG
It'll be eighty three if you don't stop jawin'--The letter.

(CONTINUED)

He hands the whole rifle to Armstrong, who passes it on to McNelly.

Dunnison steps towards him.

DOC HEADLY
It is La Capitulation.

MCNELLY
No habla Capitulation.

DOC HEADLY
Surrender.

MCNELLY
We don't have that word in Texas--

He hands the note back to Armstrong and Headly--keeps the rifle.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
I want all stolen stock delivered to Major Clendenhen on the Texas side.

DOC HEADLY
You do this for cattle?

MCNELLY
I further want our stock killed in this disagreement replaced.

DOC HEADLY
Disagreement--it's a goddamn war.

MCNELLY
This is a police action--war is something worse. You have until noon to comply in full.

DOC HEADLY
Or?

MCNELLY
Or I'll give you one hour's notice before we attack.

HEADLY
You attack?

DURHAM
That's what the Cap'n said.

Headly takes out a jug from his saddlebag--pulls the cork and tips it up. He drinks long then offers the jug to Armstrong.

HEADLY
You want a smile?

ARMSTRONG
We don't drink on duty.

McNelly turns.

MCNELLY
I see no future in bandying words with a drunk.

(CONTINUED)

The Rangers back up--only McNelly turns his back on them. The three bandits back up and ride away.

CUT TO:

A BOAT--Makes a landing on the Ranger's beachhead. Captain Randlett steps out with SEVERAL BLACK TROOPS--they carry huge pots and sacks of food. The Rangers cheer.

POT--SIMMERING--With stew over a good fire. Scipio stirs and looks out at the Boys with a smile. First in line is Durham.

MCNELLY--Leaning against a tree--eating his stew. Randlett stands next to him with a note.

RANDLETT

What's your answer Captain?

MCNELLY

Linc Dunnison! Come here Son.

Dunnison does--fumbles in his vest for his paper and lead pencil. He gets it.

DUNNISON

Yes Sir.

MCNELLY

"Near Las Cuevas Mex., November 20, 1875. I shall remain in Mexico with my Rangers and return at my discretion when work is done. My compliments to the Secretary of War and tell him to go to hell. Signed Captain Lee McNelly, Officer Commanding, Texas Rangers."

DUNNISON--DURHAM--In their hole--on the line, rifles ready. Captain Randlett and two of his men look out with them--Randlett through his field glasses.

DURHAM

Sir?

RANDLETT

Yes Son.

DURHAM

You're going back over soon?

RANDLETT

I'm afraid I have to.

DURHAM

Will you take Berry.

He nods at the bank where five bodies are covered.

RANDLETT

I'd have to take them all--I don't--

DURHAM

He's got a family in El Sauz. Don't let him stay in the ground here.

RANDLETT

I'll see what I can do.

(CONTINUED)

Suddenly there's dust in the brush at the far side of the clearing. Before Randlett can raise his glasses--cattle break out trotting, being driven by MEXICAN PEASANT DROVERS.

Cattle-- RANDLETT (CONT'D)

Our cattle! DUNNISON

King Ranch cattle--I can see the brand. DURHAM

We won! RANDLETT

Yee Haw-w! DURHAM

MONTAGE--RANGERS--Howling in delight. Throwing their hats in the air. The last is McNelly who even manages a smile.

CUT TO:

THE STOLEN HERD--Crossing the Rio Grande, stretched out from bank to bank. All along the way are MEXICAN PEASANT COWBOYS and mounted Texas Rangers. On the United States bank are the troops, mostly Black and shiny faced. Their faded blue hats are thrown back on their heads, and they stand and cheer as the Rangers swim their horses up with the cattle, and get out shaking water. As Dunnison and Durham come up, we see they are leading a horse with Berry's stiff body wrapped up in blankets--tied over the saddle. The Black soldiers cheer, grab their hands, and put them on their shoulders.

Nice work Texas. SOLDIER

You make us proud Boy. OTHER SOLDIER

I wish I was with you Reb. STILL ANOTHER

They'll remember you--Ranger. AND ANOTHER

And the word seems to catch--all their tongues, in the air--"Ranger"--"Texas Ranger". And the Boys are wearing their stars. A YOUNG KID named CALDICOTT carries the guidon with the flag and it's one Lone Star.

CUT TO:

MCNELLY--Sitting his horse on a little ridge in front of them all. They stand next to their mounts. The soldiers are crowded around in the background.

Things'll be different in the Nueces strip. From this day on, ordinary folks'll be able to live and grow and do the things people got a right to do. You can be proud of that. MCNELLY

(CONTINUED)

Durham's hand shoots up, followed by Dunnison.

RUDD

I guess he misses Captain King's coffee.

They all laugh and Durham laughs the loudest.

CUT TO:

THE GATE--SANTA GERTRUDIS--Dust in the distance--stock coming in. Captain King and his VAQUEROS ride out from the house to the main gate. They are followed by his daughter and two nieces. Captain King scans the oncoming herd with field glasses.

KING

Well I'll be damned--those Boys brought 'em back. Looks like all of 'em.

CAROLINE

Can I see Uncle?

He hands her the glasses. She looks and lowers them. Then she thinks about it, and turns her horse and rides towards the house.

KING

Is she sweet on one a' them Boys?

A VAQUERO shrugs.

CUT TO:

PENS--The cattle milling about as they're moved into a large corral. The Boys, expert now, have no trouble with them. King rides up to Sandoval who is in charge.

SANDOVAL

Capitan McNelly, he is travelling with the Rangers.

KING

Well you send word back that they'll be one fandango waitin' for him.

SANDOVAL

He's kind of sick. I don't think he's going to dance much.

King looks out over the steers. Dunnison rides up.

DUNNISON

What're you going to do with 'em Cap'n?

He signals.

KING

Rodrigo--Peralta!

His TWO VAQUEROS look over.

KING (CONT'D)

These are the only stock we ever got back from banditos. It's a new day--so cut half the left horn from every steer. Set 'em free to wander for the rest of their lives.

DISSOLVE TO:

CORRAL--The gate thrown open. The vaqueros yell and wave their ropes and the steer run out onto the endless expanse of the King Ranch--only it all seems to happen in a dream, slow motion, the voices disembodied. All of it seems somehow remembered as if what happened at the river can never be completely forgotten and time is colored by it.

PART III

"And all of us are wounded,
Our noble Captain slain.
The sun, it shines now sadly
Upon the bloody plain.
As brave and great a Ranger
As ever rode the West,
Was buried by his Comrades
With a bullet through his breast.

And now my song has ended,
I guess I sung enough.
The life of any Ranger,
You see, is very tough.
And if you have a mother,
And she don't want you to roam,
I advise you by experience, Boy,
You better stay at home."

The Texas Ranger

--a song of the 1870's

THE FANDANGO

BUNKHOUSE--The great barracks like structure near the barn--this is where the ranch hands, as many as eighty at a time live during roundups. The six Rangers are led inside by Sandoval and King. Durham turns to him.

DURHAM

Sir? Are there going to be Ladies present at supper?

KING

Why yes Son--Why?

DURHAM

We're all ragged and such--unfit for Ladies the way we are.

KING

That's what the hot water's for.

DURHAM

Well I'd feel out a' place--I just can't be sittin' at no linen table like I am, Sir.

KING

The rest of you feel that way?

RANGERS

No.

DUNNISON

You stay here George--We'll get someone to bring your food over.

DURHAM

I'd sure appreciate that.

King leaves shaking his head.

DISSOLVE TO:

TWILIGHT--DURHAM--Sits in a tub of hot water and watches through the window as the others walk over to the big house. He scrubs his back with his brush, pours himself more hot water, and sits back to relax.

CLOSE DURHAM--His eyes close and he sits back in the tub.

DISSOLVE TO:

IMAGES--That drift across his subconscious mind: The riders coming at them ghostlike, through the fog--He and Berry counting out bullets and laying them out--Horses writhing and vaulting over--Dunnison and him bending Berry's stiff body over his saddle and tying it. Finally the dark figure of McNelly, his cape blowing in the rain as he took them forward.

CUT TO:

NIGHT--CLOSE DURHAM--His eyes open. He hears a door bang shut at the big house. He looks out the window and sees a FIGURE in

(CONTINUED)

the darkness carrying a lantern towards the bunkhouse. It's now that he realizes he's in darkness, he's been asleep, and forgot to light a lantern. The distant big house glows with light from its windows, and its warmth only makes him aware of his loneliness. The door to the bunkhouse opens.

DURHAM
Who's there.

CAROLINE
George?

He can't speak. He sees her face in the light of her lantern.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
Light your lantern George.

He fumbles.

DURHAM
You won't look now will you?

He gets the lantern lit. She walks right up towards him.

DURHAM (CONT'D)
Stay there--stay there! I'm naked,
stark naked!

CAROLINE
I brought you some clothes. They belong to Uncle. That's what you were worried about wasn't it? That I'd--I mean we would see you all dirty and poor.

DURHAM
You can't see me this way. Stop or I'll blow out the lantern.

She puts the clothes down on a bunk.

CAROLINE
Then you'll have to come get 'em. There's no secrets between you and me George Durham.

DURHAM
Turn your back.

She shrugs and turns around. He gets out of the tub wrapping himself in a blanket like an Indian. He hobbles over, grabs the clothes--holds them against himself.

DURHAM (CONT'D)
I'll put 'em on right quick--Be over there if that's what you want.

She turns around, looks at him. They stare at each other. She steps to him and throws her arms around him and kisses him full on the mouth. He tries to hold up his clothes and blanket, but he kisses her back. It's a long passionate kiss filled with frustration and young lust--but finally it ends. She steps back, he holds onto his blanket, and she runs out. He is left standing there in the empty bunk house.

(CONTINUED)

DURHAM (smiling)
Ain't life something--go from the Gates
of Hell to the Steps of Heaven without a
change in the weather.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE GREAT ROOM--Of the big house--festooned with Japanese lanterns and colorful ribbons. The room is packed. The Ranger Company, and the PEOPLE of the Nueces Strip spill out onto the porches and front yard. All the MEN are in their finest, even if it's borrowed, and the SENORITAS are a delight to the eye. Henrietta plays the piano and sings with Rudd--a stomping rendition of "Dixie". Captain Randlett is forced to sing along, but in the yard, a platoon of the 24th sing "Battle Hymn of the Republic".

CUT TO:

GEORGE DURHAM--On the veranda--looking stately in a dark wool suit with Caroline on his arm. The two look at each other yearning as if no one else is there.

CUT TO:

FANDANGO--Being danced by all. Captain King and Henrietta whirl about the center gracefully. Off to the side Dunnison dances with a beautiful red haired woman with an interesting mark on her cheek, Sarah Noakes. Many a man's eyes fall upon her as she glides by with the handsome Ranger.

SARAH

Well, ain't you jealous? You're not gonna' let them steal my eye are you?

She looks at her dance card.

DUNNISON

No--oh no--never--

SARAH

You'll never leave me will you Linc?
Not really I mean. I'll always be
fondest of you. You'll never leave me.

DUNNISON

No--not until the next dance.

A TALL RANCHER steps towards them to tap on his shoulder.

CUT TO:

VERANDA--Captain King and Henrietta dance outside--and breathe the cool air. They look at each other a moment, it's a long time since the last Fandango. Suddenly they are aware of Durham and Caroline, who are standing before them. Durham looks nervous.

KING

Well you having a good time Son?

(pause)
What is it?

DURHAM

Can we talk by ourselves?

(CONTINUED)

Henrietta takes Caroline by the arm and they walk off and watch.

DURHAM (CONT'D)

Rangerin'--I'm not cut out for it.

KING

But I thought you loved the work an' Cap'n McNelly?

DURHAM

Sir--I am a McNelly--I'll be a McNelly all my life and when I die I plan to find the Cap'n and ride with him if he's still runnin' an Outfit. But Cap'n ain't gonna' ride no farther in this world.

KING

What're you looking for?

DURHAM

A job. I came here from Georgia on my horse Judy. I never hurt no one, just wanted to make work for myself--a decent life--and all I've done--is--kill people.

KING

You ever work stock?

DURHAM

Sir, I only know how to plow and shoot.

He pats his pistol. King looks down, thinks about it.

KING

You're a fine boy George--and I could use someone to ride in the buggy with me. That is until you learn cattle-- See the bookkeeper in the morning Son. Sixty dollars a month.

They shake hands. Caroline runs over beaming and hugs him. Durham is embarrassed as is King. Henrietta approves.

DURHAM

One more thing Sir--

KING

One thing at a time, Son.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--sitting with TWO SENORITAS and a few Rangers. Sarah Noakes glides by between the tall Rancher and a WEALTHY STOCK BUYER. She winks at Dunnison who bows his head as if tipping his hat. Armstrong watches her.

ARMSTRONG

What a fine lookin' woman.

DUNNISON

Too rich for the likes of us.

Armstrong shrugs--thinks about it. A great cake is rolled in by Caroline, King's daughter, and his other niece. Everyone crowds

(CONTINUED)

around it. On the cake it reads in chocolate icing-- "TO MCNELLY'S RANGERS FROM THE THREE MISS KINGS". Everyone cheers and Sandoval slices it up.

CUT TO:

THE LOCAL MUSICIANS--Aided by Henrietta, play a slow Scottish jig. It is peculiar and haunting. Several try and dance to it, only Rudd seems successful.

RUDD

It's a jig--am I not correct Madame?

HENRIETTA

You are correct--it's Scottish--can anyone do a jig? Richard--

KING

Not me I'm too drunk.

DURHAM

I can do it--It's the only dancin' I know.

They turn around. George Durham looks about five years older--he's no longer even a trace of a boy. He takes Caroline by the hand.

DURHAM

My Daddy taught me.

By God--he's graceful and skilled. The haunting nature of the melody becomes faster and more complex, and so does his dancing. But Caroline responds in kind, and whirls about with an unexpected flair. People clear out of the way--and suddenly as the tempo increases, the dance becomes something more. It is the dance of life--of man proud, arrogant, and a bit foolish--and woman mysterious, sensual and deceptive. Yet they are linked, especially these two--and in this dance their entire lives can be glimpsed from passionate sexuality to procreation to tender care to violent argument to the passage of time and age. It is all in the dance which goes faster and faster.

MONTAGE--The faces of all who know them, and see something eternal in their motion--King and Henrietta who know this is a mating dance--Dunnison, Sandoval, Old Frank--who see their comrade pass to another place before them--and finally McNelly who sits in the background, pale and dying and watches the reaffirmation of life.

DISSOLVE TO:

HORSEMEN PASS BY

LONG--THE FANDANGO--MONTAGE--The dancers whirl and seasons change--bare trees--the hint of snow--still the dancers twirl and the ground is green with spring and mud as the dancers fade away leaving only the fresh green prairie and a RIDER approaching.

CLOSE--The rider is Dunnison dressed in black--his leather has a shiny patina. He is a Texas Ranger, his youth has fled, replaced by a hardened manhood.

(CONTINUED)

THE RANCH--Dunnison rides up to the big house at the Santa Gertrudis. George Durham stands on the veranda in a wool suit. He doesn't even wear a gun. Old Frank sits in a rocking chair with his feet up on the rail. Dunnison ties his horse.

DUNNISON

You look prosperous George.

DURHAM

You too Linc--Hear you made Corporal.

DUNNISON

Yep--an' they made Casoose a Sergeant. Cap'n Armstrong says we'll be a pair to draw to.

DURHAM

Cap'n Armstrong?

Dunnison smiles, looks at Old Frank.

DUNNISON

Well what about it--you ever finish that book?

FRANK

What book?

DUNNISON

"Les Miserables"--the fella get away or did the Law catch him?

OLD FRANK

He got away--grew old--

He smiles thinking about it.

OLD FRANK (CONT'D)

The Cap'n wants to see you Boys-- He's been waitin'.

They take their hats off and go in.

CUT TO:

HENRIETTA KING--Standing outside a doorway and hall.

HENRIETTA

He spurs Linc--were you born in a barn?

He fumbles to remove his spurs.

DUNNISON

Don't know what's got into me--Sorry Ma'am.

He stands up.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

Ma'am?

HENRIETTA

What is it Linc?

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON

What's he wanta' see ME for? I thought he hated me.

HENRIETTA

No Lincoln, you're dead wrong. He liked you, maybe the best of all--You see, Captain McNelly was a man who lost everything--his wife and family--the War. And you two were something he found.

She opens the door.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Now keep quiet.

She leads them into a gaily colored room with flowers. McNelly pale, drawn and dying sits up in a bed at the window watching the sunset. Scipio, haggard and worn, sits on a chair at the foot of the bed. Armstrong sits outside in a rocker with a shotgun.

MCNELLY

Come on over here--into the light Boys.

HENRIETTA

I'll get a lantern, Leander.

MCNELLY

No, I like this time of day. God you two look grand. Ain't life somethin'.

They don't know what to say. A tear rolls down Dunnison's face and he sniffs.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

What's that for? When it comes your time Linc, you'll be lucky to be as proud as I am. Death can't be so bad Son--no Ranger's ever come back to bitch about it.

They smile. McNelly laughs and coughs.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

I--I just wanted to see you two before I heard something else you done wrong.

They nod uneasy.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

I keep thinking of General Stonewall Jackson and what he said--"Let us go across the river and rest under the trees."

He looks out the window--a tear rolls down his gaunt cheek. Henrietta motions for them to leave--they start out. He turns back--stops them.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

Boys--I'll be waiting there for you--
Dismissed--

CUT TO:

A GRAVESITE--At the center of the King Ranch cemetery. Six Ranger pallbearers--Rudd, Armstrong, the Boys, Old Frank and Jesus Sandoval lower McNelly's coffin into the ground. At the head of the grave is a huge granite headstone which still stands today. Next to it is another recent grave--the stone reading--"BERRY SMITH 1859--1875 TEXAS RANGERS--A DASHING HORSEMAN, A TRUE FRIEND, A FEARED ENEMY". All of the KING PEOPLE and all the Rangers attend, plus MANY from the surrounding countryside including Captain Randlett and a CONTINGENT OF BLACK 24th INFANTRY. When the coffin is lowered, a military firing squad fires the usual salute. Scipio, overcome by grief throws himself into the grave crying hysterically and mumbling something about his little boy.

CLOSE--DURHAM--DUNNISON--They help pull Scipio out.

SCIPIO

Ain't nowhere--nowhere to go. He freed me--free to do what--I ain't got nowhere to go Cap'n--

Henrietta takes him and wipes the tears from his eyes and comforts him like a child while the BUGLER plays taps. Captain King reaches down and drops a folded Confederate flag on the coffin.

DISSOLVE TO:

ADIOS COMPANEROS

CORRALS--OLD FRANK--DUNNISON--Old Frank is packing his horse as Dunnison rides by.

DUNNISON

Where you going Frank?

OLD FRANK

Missoura'.

DUNNISON

What for?

OLD FRANK

My brother and I run a business up there.

DUNNISON

Oh yeah--what's he in?

OLD FRANK

We rob trains for a living.

DUNNISON

What!

OLD FRANK

Name's James, Frank James--you might a' heard a' me an' my brother Jesse.

DUNNISON

You're telling me the truth aren't you?

(CONTINUED)

OLD FRANK

You'll believe anything but--Yes I'm
telling you the truth.

DUNNISON

What were you doing--

OLD FRANK

Hiding out--letting things cool down.
'Cept it turned out the most dangerous
work I ever done in my life. Cap'n
told me that, but I didn't believe him.
Damnedest thing I ever done.

He swings into the saddle.

OLD FRANK (CONT'D)

If you're ever up in Clay County--leave
your badge in your pocket. You going up
to San Antone'?

DUNNISON

Yep--looking to find Wes Hardin and Pete
Marsele.

OLD FRANK

Get your things together. We can ride
that far.

DUNNISON

I gotta' say goodbye to someone.

CUT TO:

DUNNISON--Standing hat in hand in front of Durham and Caroline.

CAROLINE

You know I know you, Linc. You'll never
have a place that's warm to eat supper
in. Oh the gals they'll love you, all
handsome tall and strong, but you'll always
ride away. So when the wind pushes you
this way, I want you to know we'll always be
a home for you.

She looks at George.

DUNNISON

I hope the wind does push me this way--
like some weed that rolls around.

CAROLINE

You brought him back to me and I'll always
be grateful.

DUNNISON

No--it's the other way around--but he'll
never tell you.

He formally embraces Caroline and Durham. They look at each
other--he swings up into the saddle.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNISON (CONT'D)
Adios Compadre.

DURHAM
Vaya con Dios.

He tips his hat and rides.

CUT TO:

THE GATE--OF THE KING RANCH--Greatest Ranch in the world.
Dunnison and Old Frank ride through and out onto the prairie.

DUNNISON (V.O.)
"So Father I wish I could have been
more of what you and Mother wanted--
but I'm what I am--And I am your loving
Son." Linc Dunnison--Corporal of Rangers--
Texas 1876.

THE END

EPILOGUE

John Westley Hardin--Was captured after a gunfight on a train in Florida by Captain Armstrong and Sergeant Dunnison, Texas Rangers. He served out a sentence at Huntsville Prison, and was killed in an El Paso gunfight in 1896.

King Fisher--His power broken by the Rangers, he tried his hand at politics, but was shot by his own men while attending the opera in San Antonio.

George Durham--Married Caroline, and became the beloved and respected Foreman of the King Ranch. He lived well into his eighties.

Lincoln Dunnison--Became a Captain of Rangers and a United States Federal Marshall in New Mexico. Settled in Texas, where he became a successful oilman. Later, an influence in Texas politics.

Frank James--Survived his outlaw brother, and was granted amnesty in 1882. Lived to a ripe old age entertaining at carnivals and fairs.

Pete Marsale--Was never found.

The Texas Rangers--Exist today under the Texas Department of Public Safety. They are without question the finest and most colorful Law Enforcement Agency in the world.