

# WE WERE SOLDIERS ONCE... AND YOUNG

*OGG*  
Based on the book by  
**Lt. General Harold G. Moore (Ret.)**  
and  
**Joseph L. Galloway**

**Screenplay by Randall Wallace**

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Out of BLACK...

VOICE

These are the true events of November, 1965, in the Ia Drang Valley of Vietnam, a place our country does not remember, in a war it does not understand. This story is a testament to the young Americans who died in the Valley of Death, and a tribute to the young men of the People's Army of Vietnam who died by our hand in that place.

(beat)

To tell this story, I must start at the beginning.

1 EXT. A HOT, DRY ROAD - HIGHLANDS OF VIETNAM - DAY

1

SOLDIERS, IN BATTLE ATTIRE move along the road. They are crack troops, hardened and scarred by battle; a double column of men, moving side by side, watching the grass and trees on the flanks of the road.

VOICE OVER

But where does it begin? Maybe in June of 1954, when French Group Mobile 100 moved into the same Central Highlands of Vietnam, where we would go eleven years later.

The soldiers are speaking French. A CAPTAIN and LIEUTENANT, both wearing DeGaulle-style caps, confer-- their words subtitled...

FRENCH CAPTAIN

See anything?

FRENCH LIEUTENANT

No, Captain.

The Captain wipes sweat from his stinging eyes.

FRENCH CAPTAIN

Fucking grass. Fucking heat. Fucking country--

As he rises to wave his men forward, a bullet slaps through the peak of his cap, splashing brain blood over the Lieutenant. Springing a classic ambush from the tall grass on the right side of the Vietminh. Command-detonated land mines explode in the roadway, throwing men into the air and blocking the French vehicles.

**FRENCH LIEUTENANT**  
Sound the rally call!

The bugler behind him starts to blow the battle notes, but a bullet pierces his neck. The first crash of rifle fire and grenades tears into the French ranks, but they are a potent fighting force, more than two hundred battle-hardened veterans. They return fire immediately.

Then the Vietminh spring the other jaw of their trap; a second force rises behind the French and sprays them with automatic weapons fire. Vietminh snipers, roped into the tree tops, pour pinpoint rifle fire onto the road, killing the officers. A mass of Vietminh troops charge from the hills flanking the road. The French fight back; the Lieutenant leads gallantly, directing a machine gun that kills many of the charging enemy; his men are bravely standing their ground, killing the Vietminh who ferociously race into their ranks, shooting, stabbing, slinging grenades. For a moment, the battle is in doubt.

Among the Vietminh is a young officer named AHN. He crouches as the bullets from the French gun crash into the trees around him and tear through his comrades. Some of them shrink back from its fire. Ahn's eyes take on a strange stillness; he fixes a bayonet onto the end of his rifle, and charges.

We follow his charge, through the trees, past the hand-to-hand fighting at the edges of the road, through the smoke and noise, right to the Lieutenant; Ahn buries his bayonet into the Frenchman, shoots the gunners, and waves his soldiers forward. The fight is all but over.

A VIETMINH SERGEANT moves up beside Ahn; the young bugler is bleeding at their feet, his mouth moving soundlessly.

**VIETMINH SERGEANT**  
(Vietnamese, subtitles)  
Do we take prisoners?

**AHN**  
No. Kill all they send, and they will  
stop coming.

The sergeant shoots the bugler, then moves on. Ahn spots the French bugle; he lifts it from the bugler's dead hand, then calls to one of his men, who has just fired a heart shot into a wounded Frenchman.

As the soldier looks up Ahn tosses him the bugle, then looks out over the fields of fire, where all along the road his men complete the massacre of their enemies. Ahn's eyes are distant, as if he can see into the future.

DISSOLVE TO:

2 EXT. A CLEAR BLUE SKY - DAY 2

A U.S. Army transport plane cuts its way through the air, over an American landscape.

SUPERIMPOSE:

Ft. Bragg North Carolina 1962

3 DOWN ON THE GROUND, observers sit in a cluster of jeeps in an open field. One of the observers is GENERAL HARRY KINNARD. He and the others are watching THROUGH BINOCULARS. The JUMP COORDINATOR has a field radio.

JUMP COORDINATOR

Here they come  
(into radio)

We have you on visual. Confirm shortened pull time.

4 EXT. THE PLANE - DAY 4

In its open side door stands a lean officer; he is HAL MOORE. He's wearing a helmet and parachute gear; he holds a radio.

JUMP COORDINATOR (RADIO VOICE)

Hang onto your rip cord, we're running short of 'em.

MOORE

Roger that.

He hands the radio to an air crewman and calmly steps out into the rush of air.

The chute snaps open too quickly; Moore's body jerks like a rag doll as wind catches the parachute silk and snatches it straight back into the huge tail section of the plane.

Suddenly Moore is being dragged along at 150 miles an hour. The earth and the sky are spinning wildly for him, his chute a mess of torn silk and fouled lines.

5 INSIDE THE PLANE, the crew reacts, hitting emergency buttons; 5 but there's nothing in the world anyone can do to save Moore.

6 DOWN ON THE GROUND, THE OBSERVERS see the emergency.

6

JUMP COORDINATOR

He's hung on the tail! Maybe if he  
deploys his backup it'll tear him free!

GENERAL KINNARD

At 150 miles an hour it'll rip his body  
in two.

Moore's a dead man; everybody on the ground knows it.

7 HANGING ON THE PLANE'S TAIL SECTION, AT 150 M.P.H.

7

In solitary, personal danger, Moore keeps his head; he grips  
the lines and pulls himself into the fierce wind, then lets  
go and the lines snap taut, but don't release. He does it  
again. Nothing. He tugs and snaps on a single side of the  
line...and the whole tangled mess breaks free.

8 Now he's tumbling to earth with his main chute streaming; if  
he pulls his reserve and it tangles in the main lines, he's  
dead. The earth rushes toward him at sickening speed...

9 ON THE GROUND, KINNARD and the others watch Moore plummeting  
to his death...

10 MOORE draws a switchblade from his boot, cuts the fouled  
lines away, and pulls the cord of his reserve. His body  
falls INTO CAMERA as the GROUND'S POV, when suddenly his  
chute pops opens, and he settles to earth.

11 He stays on his feet, landing in an easy trot, towing in the  
reserve chute and taking off the helmet as the jeeps and  
ambulances of Ft. Bragg come screaming up to him. He salutes  
the General, hands something to the Jump Coordinator, and  
walks casually to a seat in another jeep.

MOORE

We're gonna have to lengthen the pull  
time.

The Jump Coordinator looks down at the two ripcords, and  
can't believe Moore remembered. General Kinnard shakes his  
head and smiles.

12 EXT. PENTAGON - DAY

12

Over an establishing shot of the Pentagon, we hear the voice  
of a GENERAL.

GENERAL (V.O.)

Southeast Asia is heating up...

Kinnard and two other GENERALS walk down the corridor. \*

GENERAL

The White House anticipates a build up, and wants a victory.

GENERAL 2

Victory? Over what? Cavemen, in black pajamas?

GENERAL KINNARD

We wouldn't be there if they hadn't already beaten the French Army.

GENERAL 2

The French Army? What's that?

They all smile.

GENERAL

The problem in Vietnam is terrain. Jungle, mountains, rivers--manuever is a nightmare. So we've come up with a plan to use helicopters. Leap in and out of battle. Harry, we want you to run the test on this idea.

Kinnard nods; he welcomes the challenge.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

It'll take a hell of a combat leader.

GENERAL KINNARD

I know a young light Colonel named Hal Moore. He led a combat company in Korea. After that he volunteered to test experimental parachutes. \*

GENERAL 2

Experimental parachutes? \*

GENERAL

Sounds like just the guy. \*

Hal Moore drives a station wagon packed with kids and stuffed animals, and towing a U-Haul trailer, along a Georgia highway. Next to him is JULIE, his warm, beautiful wife. The kids--five of them--are singing in the back.

15 EXT. FRONT GATE, FT. BENNING, GEORGIA - DAY

15

Hal stops at the front gate of the military base and hands over his papers; the guards salute and raise the barricade.

As they pass the guard, one of Hal and Julie's boys salutes back to the guard, while CECILE, his five-year-old daughter, makes a funny face at him.

16 EXT. FT. BENNING - DAY

16

The car and U-Haul pass the Ft. Benning jump towers, busy with paratrooper practice. Hal turns into the section of the fort where soldiers' families are provided housing. They stop before a house on a tree-lined street, and the children hop out, excited. Hal watches Julie for her reaction; she turns and smiles at him; she approves.

CLOSE - COMBAT BOOTS - DAY

Cecile wears Moore's combat boots, clomping to the house as she helps her siblings and parents unload the trailer. Hal and Julie see her and smile at each other.

ANGLE - DOWN THE STREET

Two other families are moving in down the street, carrying boxes in from their cars. The fathers are in civilian clothes but have buzz cuts; they are CAPTAIN BOB EDWARDS and CAPTAIN TOM METSKER, both in their late twenties. They wave to Moore, then stop to confer.

EDWARDS

How much you know about our new Colonel?

METSKER

He was in Korea. Has a Masters in International Relations from Harvard.

MAY, Metsker's wife, kisses his cheek as she moves by with a box.

MAY

Get to work.

Edwards looks down the block and sees Moore carrying a massive stack of books into his house. The top volume is HISTORY OF CAVALRY BATTLES.

EDWARDS

Harvard? He's not one of those academic pussies, is he?

METSKER

Hal Moore?

Metsker just laughs and turns away; the laugh unsettles Edwards a little.

AT MOORE'S FRONT DOOR, Moore emerges from his house he sees a flight of helicopters blast overhead in a training run, clipping the treetops. Moore's eyes grab the lead chopper.

17 EXT. FORT BENNING - POV HELICOPTER - DAY

17

Speeding helicopters rush over the hot sandy ground of Ft. Benning. The pilot is BRUCE CRANDALL, a handsome Major in his late 20's. Stenciled on his helmet is his nickname: SNAKESHIT. From his perspective in the lead chopper we see the vastness of the base: rows of barracks, the parade grounds, the endless tracts of training areas.

CRANDALL

Takin' 'em low, Too Tall!

ED "TOO TALL TO FLY" FREEMAN, the gawky 6'8" pilot in the chopper on his right side radios back--

TOO TALL

I'm with you, Snake!

They swoop low, barely over the scrub trees of Ft. Benning.

18 EXT. FT. BENNING - GUNNERY RANGE - DAY

18

Dirty and sweaty, RUSSELL ADAMS and BILL BECK are a machine gun team; Adams is stocky with powerful arms, Beck is lanky. Adams fires the M-60 at a target, demolishing it. A WHISTLE sounds the end of gunnery training. A huge pile of shell casings shows how much they've practiced.

VOICE

Fall out!

BECK  
Finally. Whatta ya wanna do tonight?

ADAMS  
Let's find some girls and go shootin'.

19 EXT. FT. BENNING - HELICOPTER LANDING AREA - DAY

19

Chopper crews and mechanics playing a game of baseball-- except that the ball is a burned-out sparkplug and the bat a greasy suspension rod; the batter is Crandall, wearing his helmet with the eyeshield down, and "SNAKESHIT" painted above it. The game is improvised, something to make more enjoyable the business of helicopter maintenance going on nearby.

CRANDALL  
Come on, gimme your best shot!

Too Tall is on the mound. He goes into exaggerated windup contortions, then fires the plug at Crandall. Crandall swings, driving the plug out into the dust among the scrambling outfielders, leaving the spectators--more of his ground crews--to cheer him. Crandall pops open his visor and starts circling the bases, strut-running backwards, doing his own announcing to the delight of his audience.

CRANDALL (cont'd)  
Snakeshit drives that one to the moon,  
sportsfans! To the moon!

The outfielders tumble and dive and fight over the sparkplug; one of them comes up with it and pegs it to a cut-off man, who fires it toward home.

Crandall has dawdled enough to make it close; now as the relay comes in, he turns to run...

It's close; another pilot catches the plug, as Crandall slides under the tag...

CRANDALL (CONT'D)  
Safe!

TOO TALL  
Out!

CRANDALL  
Bullshit, I was--

He sees two mirror polished jump boots, and looks up to see the chiseled form of Hal Moore, squinting down at him. Crandall gets to his feet, saluting. Moore motions for him to walk with him.

MOORE

What do you drink, Crandall?

20 Moore pulls two cans of beer from his pocket and hands one 20 \*  
to Crandall, leading him on a walk past a line of helicopters \*  
undergoing maintenance. \*

MOORE

Your men call you...Snakeshit?

CRANDALL

An affectionate appellation of my  
comrades-in-arms, Sir. 'Cause I fly  
lower than snakeshit.

MOORE

I have a problem, Snakeshit. And I think  
you're the solution.

CRANDALL

I been called a lotta things, Colonel,  
but never a solution.

MOORE

Air Cavalry. You know what that really  
means? We fly into hostile territory,  
out-numbered, 10,000 miles from home.  
The whole battleground may be no bigger  
than a football field. And if the  
choppers stop coming, we all get  
slaughtered.

Moore's given it to him straight; Crandall just stares.

MOORE (cont'd)

Chopper pilots won't fly into hell for  
strangers. So when the shooting starts,  
you're the ones I want supporting us.

CRANDALL

Why us?

MOORE

You guys look like shit, but your  
equipment is immaculate. Yesterday was  
Sunday, you didn't have to be training--  
but you were. And you have pilots like  
that Too Tall character who are outside  
the limits of Army regs, but they want to  
fly with you...for some reason. Seems  
like they think you're the best.

CRANDALL

That's cause I only recruit the dumb ones.

Moore holds up his beer. Crandall grins, and they click cans.

CRANDALL (CONT'D)

To the Air Cav!

21 EXT. ENLISTED MEN'S SPORT RANGE, FT. BENNING - EVENING 21

Adams, Beck, and a handful of their buddies have gathered on the makeshift range enlisted men use for shooting their own weapons. They're in their civvies now--blue jeans and T-shirts--and Adams has even brought a blue-eyed redneck babe. She's brought a pump action shotgun. \*

Adams moves to the table where his buddies are dumping their private weapons, preparing to shoot; one of them, OUELLETTE, is tuning a transistor radio to a country station. As Adams reaches his buddies, and pulls several other pistols from his satchel to toss onto the table, Beck admires the girl's rear. \*

BECK

Damn, Russell, where'd you find her?

ADAMS

(Still dumping guns)

I ain't never gonna win the Nobel Peace Prize. But I'm gonna get pussy.

Adams walks back over to the girl, and makes a show of helping her position the shotgun. \*

BECK

Hey, Ouellette. Whatta ya get when you cross a jackass with an onion?

Ouellette's busy with the radio; it won't tune.

OUELLETTE

What?

BECK

Usually you just get a onion with floppy ears. But once in a great while, you get a piece 'a ass that'll bring tears to your eyes.

Adams moves back over and picks up a beer, smiling smugly at his buddies. The girl fires, the shotgun sounding like a cannon volley. She works the pump action expertly.

OUELLETTE

Whatta you guys think this new unit's gonna be like?

ADAMS

It's all up to the Sergeant-Major. If he's easy, it's easy.

BECK

Then we're shit outta luck, cause I know the new Sergeant-Major. Name's Plumley.

Adams shakes his head gravely.

OUELLETTE

Plumley..? Sounds like Pansy.

BECK

Let me tell you about Plumley.

All the troopers are listening, this is information that concerns every moment of an enlisted man's life.

BECK (CONT'D)

...I'd been in six months when they assigned me to this Heavy Weapons unit, and the Platoon Sergeant is the nastiest looking motherfucker I ever saw. All scarred up, one bad bastard.

22 IN A QUICK, SUBLIMINAL FLASHBACK, we see Beck in a formation of enlisted men, and his description of the sergeant is apt. 22

23 IN THE PRESENT 23

BECK

We had this green lieutenant, fresh outta university R.O.T.C...

24 IN FLASHBACK, the new Lieutenant addresses his men with arrogant self-assurance. 24

BECK

He tells us he wants us to put on our ribbons, whatever we've been awarded, so he can see what kinda men he's got.

25 IN THE PRESENT, Adams' girlfriend now picks up a personally- 25 \*  
owned .45 pistol and fires a clip, expertly ejecting it and \*  
loading another. \*

ADAMS  
She's got brothers.

BECK  
She's been datin' a Ranger.

OUELLETTE  
What about this sergeant?

BECK  
Oh yeah. So we go back and put on our  
stuff, and reassemble. But the Sergeant,  
he didn't put on his ribbons, so the  
Lieutenant chews him out in front of the  
whole unit, orders him to go pin on his  
dress shit.

The girl fires again. Beck looks back.

BECK  
In about ten minutes, the sarge comes  
back...

26 FLASHBACK; WE SEE THE ACTION...ON A PARADE GROUND 26

The arrogant Lieutenant realizes that men are beginning to  
snicker. He turns to see the Sergeant marching up...

Totally naked. Except for two Medals of Honor around his  
neck.

BECK (V.O.)  
Not one Medal of Honor around his neck.  
Two. Besides that, naked as a jaybird.

The troopers can't help themselves; spasms of laughter  
convulse their ranks. The Sergeant marches straight up to  
the Lieutenant, salutes, and glares at the shamed lieutenant  
until he walks away.

27 PRESENT TIME - EXT. THE FIELDS AT FT. BENNING - DAY 27

The men are listening raptly to Beck's story. Ouellette  
slaps the transistor radio in frustration, and it tunes right  
in.

OUELLETTE  
And that buck naked double Medal of Honor  
winning crazy son-of-a-bitch Sergeant was  
Plumley?

069

BECK

Naw! That was Sergeant McDoon.

OUELLETTE

Then... what the hell's that story got to do with Plumley?

BECK

Because Plumley was McDoon's boss. And McDoon? He was scared shitless of Plumley.

This sinks in on all the troopers.

OUELLETTE

Ooo, shiiiiit...

28 CLOSE ON A NAME STRIP: PLUMLEY. It's sewn onto the broad 28 chest of SERGEANT-MAJOR BASIL PLUMLEY, a tall, rawboned West Virginian with fierce eyes, eternally watchful, missing nothing. As he strides along

EXT. FT. BENNING TARMAC - DAY

He passes a young Sergeant, ERNIE SAVAGE, a friendly country boy with an Alabama accent.

SAVAGE

Good mornin', Sergeant-Major.

Plumley's voice is an ominous growl--

PLUMLEY

What the hell you know about what kinda Got-dam day it is?

Plumley leaves Savage shaken and rounds a corner, to see

29 EXT. HANGAR - FT. BENNING - DAY

29

Gathered outside a giant hangar are two dozen officers. Edwards and Metsker are among them. Plumley scowls at his watch and barks--

PLUMLEY

'Tension!

The officers snap to attention; Plumley's timing is perfect: around the other corner strides Moore. His officers study him. His waist is narrow, the muscles ropey in his neck and arms; his jump boots are glossy, and well broken in.

MOORE

At ease, Gentlemen! Welcome to the new cavalry. We will ride into battle--and this will be our horse.

At that moment a Huey hops over the top of the hangar and plummets to earth, its blades blasting to give the chopper a feather-light touchdown; Crandall, at the controls, salutes and grins from his glass bubble, then skims back skyward. Moore's eyes sweep his officers.

MOORE (CONT'D)

I assure you that neither the new technology nor your status as officers will keep you above the danger. Sergeant-Major Plumley and I come from the paratroopers, where the officer is always the first one out of the plane--because to follow your instincts, and inspire your men by your example, you have to be with them where the metal meets the meat.

The young officers are riveted; in one moment, they know their Colonel. Edwards looks at Metsker, and nods; Hal Moore is a leader.

MOORE (cont'd)

Sgt. Major Plumley made all four combat jumps of the 82nd Airborne in World War Two: Sicily, Salerno, Normandy, and Holland, plus one into Korea.

The young officers look up at Plumley, all 6'2" of him, like they might look at God.

MOORE (cont'd)

He answers to me and to me alone. I hope you like training, gentlemen. Because me and the Sergeant Major, we love it.

30 EXT. TRAINING RUN - DAY

30

Moore leads the officers on a training run, in combat boots, through the stifling heat and marshy ground of Ft. Benning, lecturing while his officers gasp...

MOORE

Three strikes and you're not out! There is always one more thing you can do to influence any situation in your favor--and when you've done it, there's one more thing!...

They splash THROUGH A STREAM; the young officers gasp, but Moore is jogging backwards, calling in an even voice--

MOORE

A leader will either contaminate his environment and his unit with his pessimism, or he will inspire confidence.

They struggle up A LONG HILL; Moore calls back--

MOORE

He must exhibit his determination to prevail no matter what the odds or how desperate the situation...

Moore keeps running; he isn't winded, he doesn't even look hot. Edwards and Metsker stop for a breather; but they see Plumley coming up, glaring at them as he sweeps up the stragglers, and they run on rather than face him. At the top of the hill...

MOORE

Get some water, gentlemen. You're going to need it.

31 CLOSE ON MOORE, IN HIS UNIFORM

31

MOORE

Have you said your prayers?

He looks stern, unyielding; but his eyes are softer than usual; he's looking at HIS CHILDREN, in the barracks-like bedroom of their home. The children, already in bed, look at each other guiltily.

MOORE (CONT'D)

Come on, I'll say 'em with you.

He moves to one of the sets of bunk beds, and kneels. His children, all five of them, kneel beside him, as he crosses himself; he's a devout Catholic. Julie moves to the doorway to watch; it's a beautiful moment to her.

MOORE (CONT'D)

Hail Mary, full of grace...

His children are repeating the prayer--all except one, his darling, angelic Cecile, five years old.

MOORE (CONT'D)

Cecile, I don't hear you.

CECILE

I don't want to be a Catholic. I want to be a Methodist like Mommy.

Uh-oh, religious rebellion among the ranks.

MOORE

And why is that, honey?

CECILE

So I can pray whatever I want.

Julie nearly swallows her tongue to keep from laughing. Hal glances at her, then hears one of his sons rebuke Cecile...

SON

That's a sin.

MOORE

No, God made you hard-headed, it's not a sin. Cecile... do you want to thank God for our family?

CECILE

Yes sir...

MOORE

Then let's do it. Hail Mary, full of grace...

32 INT. MOORE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

32

Julie is in bed, still holding back laughter as Hal brushes his teeth in the bathroom.

MOORE

I can feel you laughing, even in here.

JULIE

I'm not laughing, I'm marveling.

MOORE

At what?

JULIE

That you could find stubbornness in our children, and think it comes from anybody else but you.

He comes in.

MOORE

Yeah? I'll give you something to marvel at!

He kisses her, tickles her.

JULIE

Shh! The children!

MOORE

How do you think we ended up with five?

He kisses her tenderly. Then he pulls back and looks into her eyes.

MOORE (CONT'D)

When I pray whatever I want to--I thank God for you.

He kisses her again, tender as the Georgia air.

33

EXT. TREE-LINED STREET - FT. BENNING - MORNING

33

Ernie Savage is walking down the street; his steps falter as he sees Plumley coming. Resolving not to be intimidated, Savage perks up and salutes.

SAVAGE

Beautiful morning, Sergeant-Major!

PLUMLEY

So you're a fuckin' weatherman now?

Plumley strides on, to the front of the Moore home. Moore emerges from his house to find Plumley waiting there for him with two styrofoam cups of coffee. He hands one to Moore. They start off together. Moore yawns; Plumley gives him a sideways look. Moore takes a sip of coffee; it's super strong.

PLUMLEY

Made it myself, last Wednesday.

They pass two new arrivals, carrying personal items into one of the officer's houses; they are LT. JACK GEOGHEGAN and his wife BARBARA. Jack is bright-eyed, slender, handsome; Barbara is a dark-haired, blue-eyed beauty, very pregnant.

PLUMLEY

They've sent us some new officers. Real green. Want us to train 'em up.

MOORE  
Must be starting another unit.

PLUMLEY  
Sent new rifles too, the M-16.

MOORE  
Supposed to be a great weapon.

PLUMLEY  
Lotsa plastic. Feels like a b-b gun to  
me. I'll stick with these.

He taps the two .45's he carries. Moore smiles.

MOORE  
You think we're gonna be close enough to  
the enemy to use those?

PLUMLEY  
Whatta you think, Sir?

34 EXT. FT. BENNING SWAMPS - DAY

34

Moore leads his men on another run. They reach a rest stop  
among the trees, where there is water waiting. In the shade,  
Metsker has set up a new PRC-25 field radio. Moore stops to  
watch as his officers stagger by; near the front are two  
young lieutenants, Jack Geoghegan and the red-haired HENRY  
HERRICK.

MOORE  
A leader must remain calm and cool, must  
ignore the explosions, the dust, smoke,  
the screams of wounded, the yells of the--

Just as he's saying this, something stops him--sounds of  
screaming and shooting, American voices, broken, staticky-

RADIO VOICES  
Get some artillery on 'em! We need  
ammo!... Medics!!...

Moore moves toward the radio, as all the officers tune into  
the disturbing sound. Ouellette is using his masterful touch  
to work the controls.

MOORE  
Where the hell is that coming from?

He looks up and sees forty feet of antenna wire strung  
through the trees. Then he and Metsker realize it at the  
same time.

METSKER  
It's Viet Nam, Sir. The new radio's  
picking up atmospheric bounce.

RADIO VOICES  
...fuckers are all over the place!!...

The signal dims out, lost in static. For a moment all is quiet in the Georgia marshes, the young officers realize they've just heard the real war. Moore glares at them.

MOORE  
When Crazy Horse was a baby, he nursed at  
the breast of every woman in his tribe.  
The Sioux Indians raised their children  
that way.

The troopers all look at each other, mystified at Moore's purpose in telling them this.

MOORE  
Sioux warriors grew up calling every  
woman Mother. Every older warrior they  
called Grandfather.

Even Plumley's scowling. Moore's insistent.

MOORE  
They fought as a family.

Now they all get it, though Plumley still frowns.

MOORE  
Take care of your men. Teach them to  
take care of each other. Because when  
this starts--

He points to the radio...

MOORE (CONT'D)  
...each other is all we're gonna have.

As Moore says this his eyes find his new lieutenants, so earnest and green. Moore walks away. Plumley lingers, scowling at the young officers, and growls...

PLUMLEY  
Any 'a you sumbitches calles me Grandpaw,  
I'll kill ya.

Plumley strides off, following Moore.

35 CLOSE - JACK GEOGHEGAN, one of those lieutenants, is leading 35 his men through A SWAMP exercise. They are struggling through water waist deep.

GEOGHEGAN  
Watch your spacing! Come on!

He's first to the other side, directing his men.

GEOGHEGAN (CONT'D)  
Cover, cover, quick! Stay spread enough they can't take us out with one grenade, and tight enough we don't get separated!

Half of Geoghegan's platoon is black, and one black private, WILLIE GODBOLDT, is bringing up the rear. As he makes it to the bank and collapses, Geoghegan barks like Moore...

GEOGHEGAN (CONT'D)  
We were slow. We've gotta get tighter, and tougher. Two miles double-time, let's go!

He leads them off on the run.

In the rear of his line, Godboldt is struggling, and three soldiers--one black and two white--are hassling him.

BLACK PRIVATE  
Gettin' tired, Willie?

WHITE PRIVATE  
Hey Godboldt, you boys are built for speed but not endurance, huh?

Godboldt says nothing; but Geoghegan, drifting to the rear of his platoon, has heard the exchange.

AS HIS MEN REACH THE SHADE, and stop...

GEOGHEGAN  
Everybody, take your boots off!

They don't understand the order, but they obey. Godboldt hesitates.

GEOGHEGAN  
You too, Godboldt!

Godboldt pulls off his boots, and the guys act like his feet smell worse than anybody's.

GEOGHEGAN

Socks, too.

Godboldt obeys. Then Geoghegan kneels and takes Godboldt's hot wet feet in his hands, and carefully examines them, in front of the whole platoon.

GEOGHEGAN (CONT'D)

Willie, draw fresh socks from supply, and keep your feet dusted with powder.

Geoghegan looks at the men who were hazing Godboldt.

GEOGHEGAN (CONT'D)

Everybody! Check each other's feet.

36 INCLUDE - MOORE AND PLUMLEY, watching unseen from the tree line, through binoculars. They see what Geoghegan's doing. 36

MOORE

That young man's a leader.

PLUMLEY

That other feller, the red-headed one, he wants to win medals.

And in Plumley's mind, that ain't good.

37 INT. FT. BENNING, BASE HOUSING - CHILD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 37

Hal is sitting by the bedside of his five-year-old daughter, Cecile, reading to her...

HAL

..."And the Little Star said, 'I just want to shine, as brightly as I can for as long as I can...'"

He sees that she's asleep. He kisses her cheek.

38 IN THE HALLWAY 38

Hal looks in on the boys, touching the hair of each with his lips. He stops at the doorway and glances back at them. Something stops him there; he stares at his sons for an extra beat, and then moves on to his own bedroom.

39 INT. MOORE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 39

Julie lies drowsy and beautiful in her nightgown. She stirs as Hal lies down next to her.

JULIE

I was thinking of starting a group for the wives. Think that's a good idea?

HAL

Hm?... Yeah, sure.

She presses her back to him, and pulls his arm around her.

40 INT. MOORE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

40

Julie rolls over in her sleep, reaching for Hal. But he isn't there, and she wakes. The clock says 3:45.

41 INT. MOORE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

41

Hal is sitting at the kitchen table behind a stack of books: "History of the Vietnamese People," "The Wars of Indochina." The book he is currently studying is in French; he reads the text and turns the page to find a photograph of the aftermath of the massacre of French Group Mobile 100, the slaughter we saw earlier.

His eyes lock on the picture: bodies sprawled everywhere, mangled by bullets, bayonets, machetes, young bodies stripped of uniforms and equipment, bare in the sun.

Moore looks up and covers the picture with note paper as Julie shuffles in and kisses his neck.

JULIE

Can't sleep?

MOORE

My men are so young. They've added a new crop, even greener. And when I look at them, I see our boys.

JULIE

Then you're just the man to lead them.

She strokes his hair and hugs him, trying to give him peace. But there is that picture, under the paper in front of him.

42 EXT. FT. BENNING - TRAINING - MARSHLANDS - DAY

42

Crandall's helicopter settles onto the sandy ground, and he begins to count...

CRANDALL

One!... Two!...

Five troopers are hopping from his chopper, under the watchful eyes of Moore and his officers.

CRANDALL (cont'd)

Three!...

He hits the throttles and the Huey lifts off, as the troopers race smoothly into the jungle-like vegetation. Moore looks at his officers.

MOORE

Pretty good, huh?

METSKER

Pretty good.

MOORE

There's one problem.

Moore waves in the next Huey, piloted by Too Tall.

INSIDE THE CHOPPER

another squad of men is ready to deploy. As the chopper settles in, Lt. Herrick rises to lead his men out the door, but he's met by a stiff arm from Moore, shoving his back into his seat. Moore shouts over the turbine and blade noise, to the sergeant next to Herrick--

MOORE (CONT'D)

Your officer's dead, what do you do?! He just got shot, WHAT DO YOU DO?!

The sergeant--PALMER--is surprised and doesn't react, so Moore shouts to the man next to him--

MOORE (cont'd)

So he hesitated and he's dead, what do you do?! ...Get out of the chopper, get out of the chopper!!

They jump to do so--and, their exit scheme disrupted, stumble over each other and sprawl onto the ground. As the chopper lifts off it leaves the squad a mess; one man even gets caught in the landing skid and drops a few feet into a heap. Moore stands over his troopers and officers.

MOORE (cont'd)

We'll be landing under fire, gentlemen!  
Men will die!

Moore lifts the last man he yelled at--Ernie Savage.

MOORE

Savage, you learn the job of the man above you, and you teach your job to the man below you in rank. THAT GOES FOR EVERY MAN IN THIS OUTFIT! UNDERSTOOD?!!

They get it.

43 INT. MOORE LIVING ROOM - FT. BENNING BASE HOUSING - DAY 43

Julie Moore is hosting a group of Air Cav wives, over a dozen ladies gathered into her small living room, balancing coffee cups and pound cake on their knees. Among them are Barbara Geoghegan from Philadelphia, May Metsker from New Jersey, and ALMA GIVENS, the only black wife there, from Alabama.

JULIE

...And since some of you are new to the Army, and all of us are new to the base, I thought we'd pool our resources and cover whatever questions we have. So let's start with item number one: food. If the commissary is out of something, where's the best place to shop?

BARBARA

I tried Big Star and it's okay. But I keep thinking my water's gonna break right in the check out aisle.

JULIE

So what you do is, you carry a jar of pickles, and if your water breaks you drop the jar on the floor, it breaks, you're covered.

BARBARA

What a great idea!

JULIE

I've got five children, you learn all the tricks.

The ladies laugh and begin to chatter, loosening up. We pan their faces: young women, most of them in their early twenties, struggling to keep their families together as their husbands are off at war. And Julie, stepping up to the task of helping them, feels her confidence growing.

JULIE (cont'd)

I guess that takes care of food shopping. Item number two: laundry.

WIFE  
The base washing machines don't work.  
They're full of sand from the swamp  
missions.

JULIE  
I'll see about that.

WIFE  
I already complained.

JULIE  
Then we'll go to the General if we have  
to.

May, youngest of the group, says in a New Jersey accent--

MAY  
In the meantime the laundramat in town's  
okay, but they won't let you wash colored  
things in their machines.

BARBARA  
At a public laundramat?

MAY  
Doesn't make sense to me, either. But  
I'm telling you, they got a big sign  
right on the front door, says "Whites  
Only."

This brings the meeting to silence. Alma Givens, a  
formidable black woman, starts to snicker.

MAY (cont'd)  
What?

ALMA  
Honey, they mean white people only.

The full weight of it hits May.

MAY  
I never even thought that such-- That's  
awful! Today!...

Alma Givens touches her lips as if to blot off the laughter.

MAY (CONT'D)  
I don't see what's so funny! We'll  
picket that place, they can't get away  
with that!

(MORE)

MAY (CONT'D)

Your husband's wearing the uniform of a country that allows a place to--to say his laundry's not good enough, when he could give his life for...!

May stops herself; she's uttered the unmentionable.

MAY (cont'd)

I'm sorry, I just--

ALMA

That's all right, Honey. But I know what my husband's fighting for, and that's why I can smile. He's not fighting laundry. He's fighting for his country.

Alma has everybody's attention. Her smile is gone.

ALMA (cont'd)

And in the Army it's better than outside, because all that matters here is how brave he is, and there's nobody braver! I know segregated places are something to beat, but everybody fights in his own way. My husband will never ask for respect, and he'll give respect to no man who hasn't earned it. The rest of his family is the same way! And anybody who doesn't respect that can keep his goddamn washing machine--cause my babies' clothes are gonna be clean anyway!

When she finishes it's at revival pitch. Then silence.

JULIE

Well. I guess that takes care of item number two.

Everybody bursts into laughter and shouts of agreement, the whole room alive and unified, a family of sisters.

Barbara Geoghegan stops laughing and grabs at her belly; she knocks over her coffee cup in a spasm.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Okay...okay...we're all calm-- Her water's broken! Somebody get a jar of pickles!-- A car of pickles!-- A car!!

44 INT. HOSPITAL INFANT STABILIZATION NURSERY - NIGHT

44

A baby just a few hours fresh from God lies sleeping in a newborn bassinet, under a pink card lettered GEOGHEGAN.

Hal Moore, wearing a clean uniform, pauses outside the sterile glass of the nursery, and looks at her.

INT. HOSPITAL CHAPEL - NIGHT

45

Moore enters the chapel, searching, and spots Lt. Geoghegan kneeling at a front pew. Seeing the Colonel, Geoghegan, wearing a dirty training uniform, jumps to his feet.

MOORE

At ease. I heard one of my new lieutenants just became a father. Came to say congratulations.

GEOGHEGAN

Thank you, Sir.

Moore sits; Geoghegan takes a seat on the pew beside him. Moore looks up at the candles, and the cross.

MOORE

Didn't mean to disturb you.

GEOGHEGAN

It's all right, Sir.

MOORE

How's your wife?

GEOGHEGAN

Sleeping. So is my daughter. I just wanted to pray for awhile, before I held her.

Moore takes a long look at Geoghegan; he's taken an instant liking to this young man, who has his heart in his throat.

GEOGHEGAN (cont'd)

Colonel... How do you feel about being a soldier--and a father?

MOORE

I hope being one makes me better at being the other. How about you?

GEOGHEGAN

Between college and here, I spent a year in Africa. We built a school for orphans. They were orphans because the warlord across the border didn't like their tribe. ...I know God has a plan for me. I just hope it's to protect orphans--and not make any.

MOORE

Let's ask him.

Moore kneels on the prayer bench, and crosses himself; Geoghegan, surprised, kneels too.

MOORE (CONT'D)

Hail Mary, full of grace...

GEOGHEGAN

Hail Mary, full of grace...

Moore pauses...and departs from the catechism.

MOORE

Our Father in Heaven, before we go into battle, every soldier among us will approach You, each in his own way. Our enemies too, according to their own understanding, will ask for protection, and for victory. And so we bow, before Your infinite wisdom and mystery, and offer our prayers as best we can. I pray You watch over the young men, like Jack Geoghegan, that I lead into battle. Use me as your instrument, in this awful hell of war, to watch over them. And I pray that if anyone must die, that I can give up my life, for theirs. Especially if they are men like this one beside me, deserving of a future in Your blessing and good will. Amen.

GEOGHEGAN

Amen.

MOORE

And oh yes, dear Lord, about our enemies... Please ignore their heathen prayers, and help us blow the little bastards straight to hell.

GEOGHEGAN

Amen to that too, Sir!

On Hal Moore's eyes, as he looks at this fine young man, young officer, young father, newly under his command, we hear the VOICE OF LYNDON JOHNSON...

LBJ (V.O)

It is our duty to defend freedom everywhere.

A montage of America: from Washington, D.C., to small towns, Manhattan streets, farm houses...

LBJ (V.O.)  
And because of this duty...

We see the ACTUAL NEWS FOOTAGE of President Lyndon Johnson making the announcement:

LBJ (CONT'D)  
...I have today ordered the 1st Airmobile Division to Viet Nam.

Julie and the other wives, assembled for another meeting, have stopped to watch the television, and receive the news in silence. Julie's eyes look numb, and far away.

JULIE  
Get out your best dress, ladies-- They're gonna want to celebrate.

The officers--about 20 of them--are in their dress uniforms, and their wives are in their prettiest dresses, all gathered under a party tent beneath the oaks of the grounds outside the antebellum residence of the Commanding General. The men are beaming, smoking cigars; Julie is beautiful on Hal's arm, shaking hands, accepting congratulations. General Kinnard moves up to Hal.

GENERAL KINNARD  
Hal, can I see you a minute?

He leads Hal to a quieter place, under a tree.

GENERAL KINNARD (cont'd)  
Congratulations, Hal, this deployment's quite a tribute to what you've accomplished in such a short time.

MOORE  
Thank you sir. But I didn't hear the President mention a State Of Emergency.

GENERAL KINNARD

That's why I wanted to talk with you.  
Without that declaration, the enlistments  
will not be extended. I'm sorry, Hal.

MOORE

Forgive me, Sir, but let me get this  
straight. We form a division using  
techniques that have never been attempted  
in battle--against an enemy with twenty  
years of combat experience, on their  
ground, twelve thousand miles from our  
ground. And just before the Army sends  
us into the fight, they take away a third  
of my men. The most experienced third,  
including officers.

The small band of Army musicians strikes up Auld Lang Syne.  
Officers and wives turn tenderly to each other.

MOORE

You saw this coming. That's why you sent  
me that new crop of platoon leaders.

Moore struggles to contain his anger, and face the facts.

MOORE (CONT'D)

Korea didn't teach 'em anything.

GENERAL KINNARD

Politicians?

Under the tent, Julie is left alone as other couples cuddle.  
Hal sees this and starts toward her, but Kinnard stops him  
one more time.

GENERAL KINNARD

By the way, Hal. Since we're being  
deployed, they're renumbering the units.  
You're now the commander of the 1st  
Battalion of the 7th Cavalry.

MOORE

The 7th? The same regiment as...Custer?

Kinnard nods soberly. Moore nods and moves toward Julie.  
But she sees something in his eyes as he moves toward her  
from beneath the oaks, their limbs trailing Spanish moss like  
the ghosts of hanged men.

50 OMITTED

50

51 OMITTED

51

51A INT. MOORE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

51A \*

On one corner of the table lies his newly updated "Last Will and Testament." Hal's already signed it. Hal sits at the table, still in his dress uniform. Two books are open in front of him; one is the picture of the slaughter of the French Group Mobile unit he studied before; the other is an artist's rendering of the stripped and mutilated bodies after "Custer's Last Stand."

Moore's eyes scan from one to the other. The pictures are almost identical. In the shadows beyond the doorway stands Julie, in her nightgown. She'd like to hold him and be held, to make love, but knows the time for that is gone.

52 EXT. GEOGHEGAN'S HOUSE - DAY

52

The Lieutenant's housing is in a block of plain Ft. Benning apartments. Julie knocks on the front door and Barbara opens it.

BARBARA  
Julie! Come in!

JULIE

I brought some Rit dye. You have to make all the underwear jungle green, and I figured you might not have time to get by the Piggly Wiggly.

53 As Julie enters she spots Jack Geoghegan, sitting by the window with his new baby daughter in his arms.

53

BARBARA  
Julie, my husband, Jack--

JULIE

Nice to meet you, Jack, please, keep your seat.

But he's already jumping to his feet, cradling the baby.

JACK

Nice to meet you! The Colonel gave us time off to spend with our families.

Julie smiles softly...and a bit sadly.

54 CLOSE - A BOILING POT

54

with several packets of dye thrown in. Barbara stirs the big pot, dipping up an undershirt to check its color; but her thoughts aren't on the underwear.

BARBARA

You're so prepared.

JULIE

My father was an Artillery Officer. It's just second nature to me now.

BARBARA

I should've been ready.

JULIE

Nobody's ready for her husband to go to war. We just do what we have to, like they do.

Barbara looks through the doorway into the living room, where Jack sits nuzzling the baby. She lowers her voice.

BARBARA

I just don't know if I can. I mean, I will, it's just... I love Jack so much... but he's supposed to be here, with me and Cammie.

Barbara wipes tears from her eyes and holds back more; but Julie's gentle silence encourages her to open up.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

We worked for the church, he could've had a deferment! But now...

JULIE

You're mad at him.

BARBARA

No. Yes.

Julie fishes a forkful of underwear into a strainer.

JULIE

I'm the daughter of a soldier, and the wife of one. But I can't explain 'em. Today when Hal told the other officers to go home to their families, he stayed at his desk, to work. He's the toughest man I've ever known, and the softest, and I've never seen him cry.

CLOSE ON JULIE MOORE. Her eyes tell the story of every woman who has ever watched a husband go off to war..

JULIE (CONT'D)

I don't know what to tell you...Except this. Do you know the most common thing that American soldiers say when they know they're dying on the battlefield?

Barbara doesn't know.

JULIE (CONT'D)

"Tell my wife I love her."

Barbara walks slowly from the kitchen, moves to Jack, and wraps her arms around both him and her daughter.

Julie watches from the doorway, wishing she could hold her husband in the same way.

55 OMITTED (NOW SCENE 51A)

55

56 EXT. THE AIR CAVALRY CELEBRATION - DAY

56

The Air Cav patch, emblazoned with a horse head, is stenciled along with crossed cavalry sabres onto the noses of helicopters racing in formation across Ft. Benning and past the parade ground bleachers full of people.

The Army Band is playing "Garry Owen," a stirring Irish drinking tune that is the theme of the 7th Cavalry.

The American flag and brigade colors with battle streamers curl in the breeze, carried by an honor guard in black stetsons, blue shirts, and tan britches above riding boots.

Two battalions of the 7th Air Cav march in with them, Hal Moore and his staff in the lead, all of them wearing the black stetson.

The wives and families are gathered in the bleachers, along with the dignitaries on the platform, and they are stirred by the spectacle, the drums, the emotion of the moment.

A bugler plays the Cavalry's CHARGE, and Crandall's squadron of Hueys roar in and settle to earth at one end of the field, as a V formation of Phantom jets scream overhead.

A cheer goes up from the men, and then a CHANT...

TROOPERS

Air-Cav! Air-Cav! Air-Cav!

IN THE BLEACHERS, the wives too are caught up in the infectious enthusiasm;

feeling the pulse of the military snare and the punctuated shouts of the men, the black wives begin to dance, and the white wives join them, laughing.

A RIDER on a black stallion, outfitted exactly like a trooper from Ft. Apache, appears at one end of the parade ground; the drummers thunder into sudden SILENCE. The rider moves along the length of parade ground between the bleachers and the troopers, and comes to a halt at Crandall's chopper.

Another cheer goes up from the crowd and the men. OUT AMONG THE FORMATION OF TROOPERS are Adams, Beck, and Ouellette.

OUELLETTE

I don't get it--we gonna take horses on the choppers?

BECK

No, you idiot, it's a symbol. The old becomes the new--or the new is the old--some shit, hell, I don't know.

ADAMS

Great. The 7th Cavalry

OUELLETTE

What's wrong with the 7th Cavalry?

BECK

The 7th Cavalry was Custer's.

OUELLETTE

...Yeah?...

ADAMS

Custer? The battle of the Little Big Horn?

OUELLETTE

Who won there?

BECK

The Indians. Massacred the entire 7th Cavalry.

OUELLETTE

...Cool!

UP ON THE DAIS, crowded with dignitaries, General Kinnard is finishing his remarks.

GENERAL KINNARD

...And we know you will honor your country, your families, and yourselves in your service to all.

He receives polite applause from the families and brass.

GENERAL KINNARD (CONT'D)

Our final remarks will be from Lt. Colonel Moore, field commander of the 7th Cavalry.

The applause is spirited as Moore steps to the microphone. He looks out over his men, at their families...and at Julie.

MOORE

Look around you. In the 7th Cavalry we've got a Captain born in the Ukraine, another from Puerto Rico, a platoon leader from Wales. We've got Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, Hispanics, Cherokee Indians, Jews, and Gentiles--all Americans.

As he says this we pick out some individual faces, like Savage, Adams, Beck, Geoghegan...

MOORE (CONT'D)

Here, in the States, some men in this unit will experience discrimination because of race, or creed. But for you and me, all that is gone. Where we're going, you'll watch the back of the man next to you, as he will watch yours, and you won't care what color he is, or by what name he calls God. They say we're leaving home. But we are going to what home was always supposed to be.

Everyone applauds; the dignitaries love this; the couple of REPORTERS in attendance are scribbling.

MOORE (CONT'D)

So let us understand the situation. We are going into battle, against a tough and determined enemy. I can't promise you that I will bring you all home alive.

The mood changes among the dignitaries; nobody talks of death in send-off speeches. The Chaplain's Bible is lying on the podium; Moore places his hand over it.

MOORE (CONT'D)

But I swear this, before you and before Almighty God. When we go into battle, I will be the first to step onto the field, and I will be the last to step off. And I will leave no one behind. Dead or alive. We will all come home. Together.

Absolute silence. He steps away from the microphone. His eyes find Julie. Everyone there--especially Julie Moore--knows he meant every word.

Only the hot moist wind stirs across the parade ground.

57 INT. MOORE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

57

The family has dinner. Hal, Julie, and all five kids; it's quiet, nobody has much to say. The older boys are excited, especially the eldest, GREG.

GREG

Wow, Dad. All the choppers, huh?  
Everybody moving out together!

MOORE

Everybody, yeah.

GREG

Wow, that's so great!

MOORE

Okay, everybody ready for bed.

CECILE

Daddy, will you read to me?

MOORE

Sure, Honey.

58 INT. MOORE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

58

Hal sits on the couch with his young daughter Cecile. He pulls her onto his lap and starts going through the books beside them on the sofa.

MOORE

Okay, let's see... Winnie the Pooh, these, what is it, Bears? Or...

CECILE

Daddy, what is a war?

War?

MOORE

069

In the kitchen, Julie freezes over her washing dishes.

MOORE (CONT'D)

It...It's something that shouldn't  
...but, it does...happen. It... it's  
when some people in one country try to  
take away...the lives of other people,  
and...well, then soldiers like your Daddy  
have to go over and stop them.

CECILE

Are they gonna try to take your life  
away, Daddy?

Silence; Julie pops in from the kitchen.

JULIE

Come on, Cecile, time for bed.

MOORE

Yes, Cecile, they're gonna try. And I'm  
not gonna let 'em.

CECILE

Okay, Daddy!

She kisses him, and goes off to bed peacefully.

59 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

59

Hal and Julie lie side by side in the darkness.

HAL

I have to be up at 1:30, to be at the  
buses before the men start getting there.  
I'll let you sleep.

She wants to say something; she doesn't know how. They just  
hold each other, in the dark silence of the night.

60 INT. MOORE'S BEDROOM - THE CLOCK, READING 1:30

60

Hal rises. Julie's back is to him as he dresses, and he  
can't see her face; she is awake, and fighting with every bit  
of her strength not to let herself cry, to make his leaving  
harder for him, for her, for their children.

Thinking she is still asleep, he leans and touches his lips  
to the surface of her hair; she knows he's there, and tears  
slide silently across her face and down upon her pillow.

She hears the door close softly, and now she can't stop the  
tears from flowing.

Moore steps from his family's home, into the deserted street. He forces himself not to stop, he tries not to think of the family he is leaving, perhaps forever. He slings his soldier's pack of personal belongings onto his shoulders, and walks down the street, into the night.

The door of the Moore house opens suddenly and Julie rushes out, in her robe. He has gone.

JULIE

I love you...

Buses are waiting; Moore is the first to arrive. Then Jack Geoghegan shows up, followed by a grinning Henry Herrick, who seems enthusiastic about going to war.

FROM THE BARRACKS ACROSS THE STREET, the enlisted men come double-timing, carrying their gear, their boots hitting the pavement like distant thunder.

THE BUS TIRES begin to roll, as the air brakes hiss off. Hal Moore is in the front seat of the first bus, his face gleaming green from the dash lights, his features set toward war.

As the bus passes we see the face of Jack Geoghegan, and he looks like a boy going off to school, glancing back toward home, and his family.

Establishing an encampment in the badlands of Vietnam. It's an Army city, sprung up like a frontier boomtown. Moore and Plumley stride quickly through the camp and enter

Moore and Plumley move into the command hut--a wooden structure complete with a window air conditioning unit--where COLONEL BROWN and an INTELLIGENCE OFFICER are standing over a map.

COLONEL BROWN

Last night ago the enemy hit our camp at Plei Mei.

MOORE

How many casualties?

COLONEL BROWN

None. The enemy force withdrew toward this mountain near the Cambodian border.

MOORE

What do you estimate the enemy strength?

INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

We appraise their numbers as manageable.

MOORE

You have no idea.

COLONEL BROWN

We have no idea.

Moore fingers the map, where a red star marks Chu Pong Mountain, above the Ia Drang Valley.

COLONEL BROWN

Simple orders, Hal. Find the enemy. And kill him.

Moore and Plumley walk out of the command hut. Moore stops, his mind tumbling.

MOORE

They attack with no casualties, then run for the mountains, so we'll chase 'em. That smell like an ambush to you?

Plumley almost grins.

MOORE (CONT'D)

It's a half hour round trip by chopper. So the first sixty men to go in will be all alone for thirty minutes.

Plumley spits tobacco like he was bass fishing. \*

PLUMLEY \*

Want one'a these? \*

He offers a .45 pistol. Moore just shakes his head; but he knows Plumley's right--the fighting could be that close. \*

71 THE AIR CAV ASSAULT - VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY 71 \*

Sixteen Huey helicopters are lined up in formation; Moore's troopers are formed up in their battle gear, He looks them over, and without a word he crosses the red clay ground and steps into Crandall's helicopter, accompanied by Plumley, Metsker, Air Controller CHARLIE HASTINGS, radio operator Ouellette, and MR. NIK, their translator.

EXT. CAMP/INTERIOR CHOPPERS - DAY

Air Cav troopers stream to Too Tall's chopper and to the other helicopters, tucking in, preparing for battle. Physically they are ready, but now the awful, internal part comes. Their mouths are dry from the terror that surges through every soldier before battle. Some tremble from the adrenaline. Some pray. All are wide-eyed and stressed. But every man knows his job, and every man is ready to go.

One trooper, holding a puppy he's adopted, hands it to a huge black enlisted man who's staying behind. \*

72 INT. CRANDALL'S CHOPPER - DAY 72 \*

CRANDALL fires up a big cigar, and shoves the throttles; his chopper lifts into the air; the others follow.

The rest of Moore's men are scattered in companies at pick up zones, awaiting their turn to fly into their first major combat. As the helicopters lift off and stream overhead, it is almost worse for the men left behind, to sit and wait...

VOICE OVER

It was Nov 14, 1965. A Sunday. The assault on Landing Zone X-Ray had begun.

73 INT. BASE CHURCH - DAY 73 \*

The families left behind have gathered to worship and pray for their men. The wives with their children are near the front pews; the church is full. The base CHAPLAIN acts as if it's a normal, upbeat occasion. \*

CHAPLAIN \*

And for our offertory hymn, May Metsker. \*

May, a bit pale, moves to the podium as the pianist plays the first few notes of an old hymn, "The Solid Rock." May says, shakily...

MAY

"My hope is built on nothing less  
Then Jesus' blood and righteousness  
I dare not trust the sweetest..."

The emotion chokes her voice; she stops. The pianist stops. May whispers...

MAY

Sorry...

She nods for the pianist to begin again.

MAY

"My hope is built on nothing less  
Then Jesus' blood..."

She stops again, emotion erupting below the surface. In that horrible silence Julie begins singing the familiar chorus...

JULIE

"On Christ the solid rock I stand"

JULIE AND BARBARA

"All other ground is sinking sand"

ALL WIVES JOINING IN

"All other ground is sinking sand."

Drawing strength from her friends, May leads them on the next verse, her voice growing stronger with every word.

MAY

"When he shall come with trumpet sound,  
O may I then in him be found.  
Clothed in his righteousness alone,  
Faultless to stand before the throne.  
On Christ the solid rock I stand,  
All other ground is sinking sand,  
All other ground is sinking sand."

74 A GECKO, ULTRA CLOSE, clings to a tree; his tongue flicks the air, tasting danger. He scurries to earth, just as a shell screams out of the sky and explodes onto

75 LZ X-RAY - DAY

75

The artillery barrage begins, meant to soften up any resistance around the clearing.

SUPERIMPOSE:

10:17 A.M.

76 HIGH ON CHU PONG MASSIF - DAY

76

In a bunker tucked on the side of the mountain, moving into the lantern light above a table of maps is the fearsome, scarred face of Colonel Ahn. He hears the artillery, crashing down into the valley below. An OFFICER on his staff hurries in.

NVA OFFICER

(subtitled Vietnamese)

The helicopter soldiers are coming.

Exactly as Ahn expected.

AHN

Get them ready.

His officer runs out, to--

77 OUTSIDE AHN'S BUNKER, in an encampment brilliantly camouflaged from the air, is a whole army of North Vietnamese, preparing for battle. We see the People's Army of Vietnam troopers--hundreds...thousands of them. The NVA Officer starts shouting orders.

77

78 MONTAGE - THE AIR CAV FLIES OFF TO BATTLE

78

We see the choppers in the air, in formation...

The individual soldiers... Hal Moore... Plumley... Metsker... Hastings... and Ouellette... Crandall at the controls, with MILLS, his copilot... and Moore again.

In the other choppers, friends look at each other, or try to look at nothing at all.

At first the chopper formation is high, to avoid ground fire. Crandall speaks to Moore as well as the other chopper pilots, through the headset.

CRANDALL

Two miles out. Dropping to nap of the earth...

Crandall noses down, and they race above the trees, toward death and glory. Birds scatter beneath them; the skids of the choppers brush the treetops.

79 EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - DAY

79

Preparatory artillery and rocket fire are lighting up the landing zone; it suddenly ceases.

THE SUN is a huge red ball at the horizon...and racing in from it, with a DEAFENING ROAR, are

EIGHT ASSAULT HELICOPTERS

They flare to cut speed and settle onto the grass.

SUPERIMPOSE:

10:48 A.M.

As Crandall's chopper settles to earth, Moore unhooks his seat belt, switches the selector switch of his M-16 to full auto, and jumps out, his boots the first on the ground. He lands running, leading Plumley and the men from the first wave of choppers across the grass where the recent artillery still smolders. They fire covering bursts from their weapons, charging the treeline, as behind them the first wave of choppers roars off and the second settles in, men jumping out before the skids touch, fifty in all, following Moore.

They reach the trees unopposed, plunge across a waist deep, ten foot wide dry creekbed, and into the scrub brush. As the helicopters lift off behind them, the clearing is left in complete SILENCE.

The silence is unearthly. It is wrong.

Moore takes it in, his senses straining at the silence, sniffing the danger. He signals TONY NADAL, a 29 year-old Captain from Puerto Rico, who sends two patrols to fan out; one moves off cautiously, but the other, led by the enthusiastic Lt. Herrick, moves far too quickly up and beyond the creekbed. Uneasily hurrying behind their green lieutenant are Squad Leader Sergeant Ernie Savage, Platoon Sergeant Palmer and a trooper named BUNGUM.

PALMER

Bungum, I'll be forty years old day after tomorrow, but I don't believe I will live to see it.

BUNGUM

Come on, Sarge, you can't be out here with that kind of attitude. You'll make it.

MOORE gives the hand signal for his command group to circle up on him, and he takes in the terrain: a grassy clearing no larger than a football field, surrounded by brush and trees, beside a sprawling Vietnamese mountain.

OUELLETTE

Hey! I got something! It's a boy!

Plumley moves up to see what Ouellette is pointing his rifle at.

PLUMLEY

Hell, that ain't no boy.

He grabs a trembling North Vietnamese soldier, pulls him up out of the grass. Mr. Nik begins spouting Vietnamese.

MOORE is giving orders to Meisker.

MOORE

Keep the patrols in tight contact.

PLUMLEY

Colonel, we got a prisoner.

Moore moves to the trembling Vietnamese soldier.

MR. NIK

He say he deserter.

PLUMLEY

Bullshit, he's a lookout.

MOORE

Ask him if there's any North Vietnamese around here.

Mr. Nik rattles off the Vietnamese; the prisoner answers, and Mr. Nik pauses, pale.

MR. NIK

He say this area is base camp of whole division. Ten thousand men.

The prisoner has suddenly become talkative; Nik translates--

MR. NIK (cont'd)

Same army that destroyed French at Dien Ben Phu. He say they want very badly kill Americans. Just not been able to find any yet.

Moore and his men look toward the mountain beside them.

MOORE

Call the patrols back. We've got to regroup and engage the enemy as far from the landing zone as--

THE RATTLE OF GUNFIRE breaks the stillness; at first it comes from up the creekbed, where Herrick's patrol has gone; then suddenly the air around Moore is alive with bullets.

MOORE (CONT'D)

Come on, we've got to attack!

Ouellette starts to run toward the creekbed and the gunfire; Moore grabs him, and points toward the edge of the mountain, behind them. \*

MOORE

They'll come that way! \*

He leads his men, running toward the mountain trails. \*

THE AMERICANS' POV plunges the audience into the abrupt chaos; wild, swinging visual pandemonium, intensified by a stunning turmoil of sound--gunfire, shouts, explosions, and the thundering detonations of redlining heartbeats.

They fall to the earth and begin returning fire at the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), attacking from the trees and grass. Moore shouts to Metsker, who is beside him on the radio.

MOORE (cont'd)

What's happening with that patrol?

METSKER

Trying to reach them, Sir!

80 EXT. HERRICK'S PLATOON - DAY

80

Lt. Herrick, a former football player, is eagerly chasing a few NVA soldiers fleeing into the brush.

HERRICK

There they are! Come on!

He fires another burst and takes off in pursuit. Savage thinks it's a bad idea--

SAVAGE

But sir--

Herrick is racing off, and Savage and the other twenty-seven men in the patrol hurry to follow...but the air is cut by the supersonic crack of bullets flying past.

Herrick seems not to notice, until a hole opens in the helmet of his radio operator, and the man falls dead beside him. Herrick stops, as his mind tries to comprehend... He orders another trooper--

HERRICK

You--take the radio--

The man steps forward, and is shot too.

The first blood of battle. The young Americans freeze in shock; then Savage reacts first, firing at the enemy moving out of the trees; he sprays down five men in a few seconds, and other troopers begin to fire grenades from their M-79 launchers, and bursts from their M-16 rifles. Herrick is still intent on chasing the NVA's.

HERRICK (cont'd)

Come on, they're getting away!

PALMER

Sir, look!

He points out the NVA's moving through the trees around them. And another American goes down.

HERRICK

Fall back!

The Americans start to move back in the direction they came, dragging their dead and wounded with them. Savage is bringing up the rear, covering the retreat, firing first left, then right, then to the front; they are under attack from three sides now.

And then they see it--the NVA has closed off the fourth side too. The American patrol is completely cut off, on a knoll with no cover, just the elephant grass.

HERRICK (cont'd)

Come on, I'll get us out of--

A bullet shatters his hip. The medic, CHARLIE LOSE, moves to him. Everyone is crouching, frozen.

PALMER  
Grab the wounded! We'll make a run for that--

A bullet drops Palmer too; he falls beside Bungum.

BUNGUM  
Sarge...? SARGE!??

Another Sergeant stands up.

SERGEANT  
We've got to get out of here!

A bullet slaps into his spine, and he falls dead.

The survivors dive to the earth in absolute terror. For a moment, Ernie Savage is as scared as everybody. Then--

SAVAGE  
Don't anybody move! Stay down!

81 EXT. THE LANDING ZONE - MOORE'S GROUP - DAY

81

Moore's group of men are screaming--into radios, at the enemy, at each other. His shout cuts above theirs.

MOORE  
HEY!

They turn, wild-eyed, to look at him. He says, with icy calm, as quietly as possible above the noise--

MOORE (CONT'D)  
Calm down. Understand the situation, and communicate clearly.

He speaks as if they're inside a classroom--then turns calmly and sprays an M-16 burst into two North Vietnamese racing at them, not twenty feet away, and cuts them down.

MOORE (CONT'D)  
Pull the chain on all the firepower you can put onto that mountain.

As Metsker relays the order, Plumley sprays down two more North Vietnamese running in from the opposite direction. The evidence that they are totally surrounded threatens to panic everyone again, but Moore remains calm.

MOORE (CONT'D)

Alert Crandall that the Landing Zone is under fire.

Ouellette starts talking into the field radios.

82 INT. HELICOPTER - BRUCE CRANDALL - DAY

82

Crandall, piloting his chopper as bullets ping around his cockpit, hears--

RADIO VOICE

...under fire, repeat, under fire.

CRANDALL

No shit.

With Too Tall's chopper just off his side, Crandall flies straight at the Landing Zone, through the hail of gunfire, bringing in the second wave of troopers, who feel sure they will die before they reach the ground.

83 INT. NORTH VIETNAMESE BUNKER - COLONEL AHN - DAY

83

An NVA OFFICER turns from his field phone and tells Ahn--

NVA OFFICER

They've put up stiff resistance precisely where we are attacking!

AHN

Shift immediately to their flanks. Do not let them breathe.

84 EXT. LZ X-RAY - MOORE AND PLUMLEY - DAY

84

Plumley has taken a position back to back with Moore, like buddies in a bar fight. Metsker turns grimly from his radio.

METSKER

Herrick's platoon is cut off and under attack. B Company is holding.

MOORE

They're gonna try to flank us.

Bullets are cutting across the landing zone and into the choppers; the second lift is landing under heavy fire. Moore runs out and shouts to the reinforcements in Crandall's chopper--

MOORE (cont'd)

Get into the trees over there and prepare to be attacked in force! MOVE!!

THE NEW ARRIVALS

race toward the position Moore indicated; several drop from the enemy fire singing across the landing zone. They reach the tree line and fall to the ground. There is no time to dig holes; they lie flat and place spare ammo clips in front of them.

MOORE waves the choppers away--and sees Mr. Nik jump into the last chopper, fleeing. Ouellette, ducking gunfire, catches up to Moore, who grabs the radio handset.

MOORE (CONT'D)

(into radio)

We are taking casualties. Order Doc Carrara and his medical aid station to come in. Don't bother with the tent--but bring a lot of supplies.

85 AT THE CUT-OFF PLATOON

85

Bullets zing around Charlie Lose, the only Medic among the seventeen men cut off on the isolated mound, who is kneeling above Herrick and shoving compresses into his huge wounds.

HERRICK

Savage...don't let 'em get the signals codes. ...I'm glad I could die for my country.

He dies. Medic Lose closes his Lieutenant's eyes.

Bungum is crying, lying next to Palmer; then he hears--

PALMER

Bungum...

BUNGUM

(brightening)

Sarge!

PALMER

...Tell my wife I love her.

Bungum, to his horror, sees Palmer die too.

Ernie Savage sees the panic rising all around him. It's up to him. He grabs the radio and spreads out his grid map.

SAVAGE  
 (into radio)  
 This is Savage. We'll need artillery, to  
 these coordinates...

86 EXT. AMERICAN ARTILLERY, LZ-FALCON - DAY 86

The howitzers are set up in a line, in a position carved out  
 of the jungle.

SUPERIMPOSE:

Landing Zone Falcon  
 Five Miles From X-Ray

The gunners begin to fire in salvo, cascades of flame leaping  
 from the throats of the howitzers.

87 OUT BY THE CREEK BED, AND THE CUT-OFF PLATOON 87

The NVA, highly disciplined and fearless, work their way  
 forward, closing in for the kill. When suddenly a wall of  
 artillery rips into the ground between them and the cut-off  
 patrol.

88 INT. NVA BUNKER - ON THE MOUNTAIN - DAY 88

Colonel Ahn stands in a lantern-lit yet intensely well-  
 coordinated command center, where his men constantly upgrade  
 his map information. An NVA MAJOR relays a field phone  
 report--

NVA MAJOR  
 They are using artillery as a shield! It  
 is accurate, and continuous.

AHN  
 We must overrun them now, when they are  
 at their weakest!  
 (jabbing map)  
 Attack here, here, and here! Overwhelm  
 the landing zone, and we have choked  
 their route of supply and escape!

The officers run out, shouting orders to the troops, massed  
 and waiting for battle. The NVA troops seem endless.

89 ON THE MOUNTAINSIDE 89

500 North Vietnamese, an entire battalion, are already moving  
 down the trails toward the cutoff platoon.

90 EXT. LZ X-RAY - DAY

90

Moore runs in the open, waving the next flight of helicopters to the safest spot. The bullets whizzing by Moore's head sound like a swarm of bees; the ground fire from automatic weapons is so intense that the helicopters don't land, they just hover a few feet above the ground while the troopers jump off, with Moore yelling to their Captain, Bob Edwards--

MOORE

They're trying to run right through us!  
Reinforce Alpha Company, there!

Edwards and his men take off toward the base of the mountain. Moore runs to another chopper, for the medical staff--DOC CARRARA, plus two others (Keeton and Keith).

MOORE (cont'd)

The wounded are behind that mound!

As the doctor and his medical helpers run toward the wounded, Moore turns to run after Edwards, but feels a big hand clap him on the shoulder.

PLUMLEY

Sir, if you don't find some cover you're going to go down, and if you go down we all go down.

As the helicopters lift away, shooting their way out with their door guns blazing, Moore and Plumley race across the open ground toward a termite hill at the edge of the LZ.

EDWARDS AND HIS MEN sprint to the tree line, dropping from their run, and firing.

91 EXT. LZ X-RAY - BEHIND A TERMITE HILL - DAY

91

Moore and Plumley run through the gunfire. Termite hills--hard mounds eight feet high and ten feet wide at the base--are a feature of the landscape; Moore and Plumley reach one of them, where the six other men of his command unit have taken cover; but since they are under attack from several directions, bullets sing around them, striking the mound beside them, kicking up puffs of dust at their feet, zinging by their heads. Ouellette, Moore's radio operator, hands him the handset.

MOORE

(into radio)  
Trojan 6.

EDWARDS (ON RADIO)  
Colonel, these guys are regulars--

92 INTERCUT - The speaker is Captain Bob Edwards, with the thin 92 line of new arrivals. They haven't had time to scratch holes in the ground; they are under heavy attack.

EDWARDS  
--heavily armed, AK-47's and pouches of grenades, with heavy machine guns and shoulder-fired rockets!

A human wave of NVA's slam into Edwards' position, and the fighting is ferocious. As the NVA's reach the American positions, the G.I.'s must stand and take them hand to hand. The noise and confusion are stunning all around Edwards, who must turn and fight for his life--

93 AT THE TERMITE MOUND

93

Moore hears the pandemonium through the radio: the firing and the shouting...

RADIO SCREAMS  
--Medic! I'm hit!  
--Mama! I'm dying...  
--Motherfuckers!

94 INT. NVA BUNKER - ON THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

94

Colonel Ahn is on his own radio, talking to the Major.

AHN  
Have we broken through?

95 INTERCUT - THE NVA MAJOR, ON A COM-WIRE FIELD RADIO

95

NVA MAJOR  
The Americans landed another wave of reinforcements, and they massed precisely where we attacked.

AHN  
Use the creek bed.

96 Ahn lowers the radio; he has a calm intensity like Moore's. 96

AHN (cont'd)  
Their leader is very good. I hope our snipers kill him.

97 EXT. TERMITE MOUND - DAY

97

Bullets are zinging over his head; Moore ignores them, his eyes sweeping from Edwards' position to the right flank.

MOORE  
(into radio)  
Captain Nadal!

98 EXT. THE AMERICAN LINES, NEAR THE CREEKBED - DAY

98

Nadal and his troops crouch in the elephant grass.

NADAL  
(into radio)  
Yes, Colonel?!

99 INTERCUT MOORE, under fire at the termite mound.

99

MOORE  
(into radio)  
Captain Nadal, that creek bed is vital!  
They'll be coming at you! Do not let  
them flank! Repeat, do not let them  
flank!

100

NADAL  
Get gunners on our left! Now!

100

Adams and Beck are with Nadal; their Lieutenant, Joe Marm, slaps their backs.

MARM  
Move!

They race off.

101 FOLLOW ADAMS AND BECK

101

as they run forward, Adams holding an M-60 machine gun (a big, belt-fed beast of a weapon) firing it from the hip, as Beck assists, carrying ammo and the shooting stand. To their right is a second gun team, (Ladner and Rivera).

NVA are visible through the trees, running parallel, racing to flank them, while firing. Another ammo bearer, near Beck, gets hit with machine gun fire and drops screaming--

Beck dives for cover, beside an American soldier on the ground in a firing position; the guy is looking at Beck. Beck looks more closely and sees that the man beside him has a small hole in his forehead; he's dead.

ADAMS

Ammo!

Beck runs to him and they reload the M-60 with a fresh belt of ammo, then stand there together, firing at the attacking waves of enemy...

102 EXT. EDGE OF LZ X-RAY - MOORE'S COMMAND POST - DAY 102

Moore sees his medics overwhelmed already. There are twelve wounded men bleeding onto their ponchos in the grassy area behind the termite mound--and six dead, lying beneath their ponchos a few feet away. And the battlefield medics are dragging more killed and wounded troopers in all the time. Moore turns to Metsker.

MOORE

Tom, raise Medevac. We've got to get our wounded out--

But Metsker interrupts by raising his M-16 and firing; a squad of NVA have penetrated the clearing and are racing at them. Moore and Plumley fire at them too...

Metsker is shot, and drops. Moore and Plumley finish off the charging NVA's, and turn to Metsker. He's hit badly, in the shoulder. Plumley presses a field bandage to Metsker's wound.

PLUMLEY

Medic!

Moore's face is stiff; things are getting desperate. He grabs the radio.

103 IN THE HELICOPTERS 103

Crandall and his copilot Mills are leading the helicopters back to the base when they hear the radio traffic.

MOORE (ON RADIO)

Medevac, this is 7th Cav. Imperative, repeat imperative, that our wounded be evacuated.

MEDEVAC PILOT (ON RADIO)

7th Cav, this is Medevac, and that is a negative. We cannot fly into a hot landing zone. Please advise when landing zone secure.

Crandall shouts to Mills.

CRANDALL

They'll go anyplace except where you need  
'em!

104 EXT. LZ X-RAY - MOORE'S COMMAND POST - DAY 104

Moore curses Medevac beneath his breath, and takes in the desperate situation around him. Bullets from the surrounding fight are singing around them. Metsker lies bleeding among a growing mass of wounded men, while Carrara and his two medics and even some of Moore's officers are trying to save them.

MOORE

Listen to me! This enemy wants to kill us all, and with numbers in his favor he'll swarm us, that's how he thinks! We've gotta put more artillery onto that mountain! Hastings, get the air support in here! NOW!

Moore grabs a radio and grid map, quickly calling in grid coordinates.

105 EXT. FIREBASE FALCON - DAY 105

The American artillery crews jerk the fire chains on their howitzers, cracking fire...

106 EXT. CHU PONG MOUNTAIN - DAY 106

Artillery rounds rain down, blasting NVA troops running down the trails.

107 EXT. LZ X-RAY - MOORE'S COMMAND POST - DAY 107

Artillery rounds are hissing overhead, followed by visible detonations blasting the mountain.

Charlie Hastings, the Air Controller, works beside Moore, furiously calling in coordinates...and

AERIAL ROCKET ARTILLERY HELICOPTERS wheel in, with a whoosh delivering rockets, with shattering blasts, into the NVA troops running down the mountain trails.

FIGHTER-BOMBERS roar across the sky dropping 250 and 500 pound bombs and fearsome napalm canisters.

Throughout, there is the constant close-in noise of RIFLES, MACHINE GUNS, GRENADES and MORTAR SHELLS...

AT THE TERMITE MOUND, it is a scene from hell. Dr. Carrara and the two medics are overwhelmed.

Five feet from Moore, a young trooper, the one who had the puppy, is bleeding to death, convulsing, reaching out... and Moore must ignore him, to keep doing what he must do to keep everyone--anyone--alive.

While on another part of the battlefield...

108 EXT. THE CUT-OFF PLATOON - DAY

108

Savage and the others are hunkered down; an enemy grenade falls to earth and explodes in front of a trooper (Anderson) who jumps up, screaming. Shrapnel is smoking and burning in his face.

SAVAGE

It's phosphorous!

Savage and Bungum trip the trooper and use their bayonets to scrape and dig the burning white phosphorous out of his face. The enemy is suddenly rising out of the grass, attacking them from three directions. Savage grabs two wounded men, (Ramos and Stewart).

SAVAGE (cont'd)

Come on!

He pulls them to the north side of the knoll, where their line is weakest. Savage fires a grenade launcher knocking down two NVA almost on top of them.

The wounded men fight, and we see their individual acts of courage; one takes a round through his right hand, shifts his rifle to his left hand, and continues firing until he is hit a second time; another is struck by a bullet above his heart that exits under his left arm; bleeding heavily, he grabs a rifle and fights on.

Charlie "Doc" Lose, the medic, crawls from man to man, bandaging them under fire. He has no compresses left, so he rips off his T-shirt and uses that on one man.

The North Vietnamese attack ends as unexpectedly as it began. The Americans on the knoll are shot up, bloody.

DOC LOSE

Anybody have any more bandages?

(nobody)

Give me your toilet paper.

They toss him toilet paper packets from their packs, and he uses that to make compresses.

SAVAGE

Redistribute the ammo. Everybody get a weapon that works.

BUNGUM

Will our guys come for us, Ernie?

SAVAGE

Sure they will.

He tries to believe it.

109 EXT. THE TERMITE MOUND - DAY 109

Moore sees his officers working efficiently, and grabs the handset from a radio operator--

MOORE

I want that platoon rescued.

110 EXT. NEAR THE CREEK BED - DAY 110

NADAL

(into radio)

Roger, Sir.

Three platoons have assembled, with bullets flying overhead, and are ready for an assault toward the cut-off platoon. Nadal gives the signal, and Lieutenant Joe Marm leads his men over the top of the creekbed.

111 EXT. BETWEEN THE CREEK BED AND CUT-OFF PLATOON - DAY 111

Immediately Marm's men run into heavy enemy fire; fifteen men go down. Marm's medic, (Calvin Bouknight), crawls under fire, putting himself between the enemy and a wounded white soldier who is aspirating blood; Bouknight gives the soldier mouth to mouth, then is hit with a buzz bomb that blows a hole in his back; he falls dead, over the man he was helping.

Marm runs to Bouknight and drags his body back, as other troopers get to the wounded and dead and drag them back to the shelter of the creek bed.

112 OMITTED 112 \*

113 EXT. MOORE'S COMMAND POST - DAY 113 \*

Moore hears a radio report, and tells Plumley--

MOORE

They couldn't get through to the cut-off platoon. And our north and east sides are wide open.

114 INT. CRANDALL'S HELICOPTER - DAY

114

Crandall is flying in more men. Out in front of them, they can see the artillery and air strikes going, a ring of fire and smoke lashing into the air; the center of the ring, their destination, is like the mouth of hell. A Captain, (Ray Lefebvre) is behind Crandall, leading this wave. Over the radio they hear the jumble of radio traffic, in the fight--

RADIO VOICES

--We're taking fire, taking fire!  
--Get those sons-of-bitches  
--The Lieutenant's down!...

Crandall looks at Mills. No man could be called a coward for refusing to go into that. Mills points at another section of helicopters circling in the distance.

MILLS

Medevacs. Scared to go in.

Crandall changes radio frequencies.

CRANDALL

(into radio)

Medevac, are you inbound?

MEDEVAC PILOT (ON RADIO)

Looks pretty hot down there.

CRANDALL

You can make it. Watch our approach, and follow us in.

MEDEVAC PILOT (ON RADIO)

I don't know...

CRANDALL

Hey, we're in the front, they'll all be shooting at us!

The Medevac choppers slide in behind Crandall's. Crandall leads his section of choppers roaring in at treetop level drawing enemy fire.

115 EXT. THE LANDING ZONE - DAY

115

Suddenly the clearing turns red hot with attacking North Vietnamese. As the helicopters touch down, the NVA's are firing at the choppers point blank, from just outside the length of the rotor blades.

Crandall and the others are swarmed by enemy bullets; Crandall's crew chief is hit; the lieutenant next to Lefebvre is hit in the hand; The Captain is creased in the back of the neck, and his radio operator beside him is hit in the head and killed by the same bullet.

Moore and his men already on the ground race over and start cutting down the attackers. The Captain charges out, and his new cavalymen pile out from the choppers.

Crandall pulls pitch and lifts of. One of the Hueys behind him gets hit by groundfire; bullets tear through the cockpit and chop the control stick free. The co-pilot tries to steer and is shot; the helicopter crash lands. \*

Over his radio, Crandall hears the Medevac leader--

MEDEVAC PILOT (ON RADIO)

Pull out, it's too hot!

Crandall sees them veer off, abandoning the wounded lying on the ground. Crandall veers back to the LZ and lands again, shouting-- \*

CRANDALL

Give us the wounded!

They start piling the wounded aboard Crandall's chopper.

Metsker is one of the wounded, his shoulder bleeding through the bandages; but as he sees the helicopters filling up, he gives up his place to another man.

METSKER

You go, I'll wait for the next flight!

They lift the other man on board, and Metsker stays behind, helped back toward the termite mound by Moore, as Crandall rams his throttle and gets the chopper airborne.

116 INT. CRANDALL'S CHOPPER - DAY

116

It's chaos, the gunners firing furiously, raking the trees, while the copilot, Mills, sees to the wounded crew chief, then looks back to Crandall.

MILLS

They're all hit in the head or the neck.  
Those little bastards can shoot.

069

Crandall sees the Medevac choppers in the distance, retreating from the Landing Zone. He gets onto the radio, and speaks in an official voice.

CRANDALL

(into radio)

Can you patch me through to Medevac command, please?

(beat)

Medevac Command? This is Major Bruce Crandall, air wing, 7th Cavalry. I just wanted to say...FUCK YOU!

117 EXT. LANDING ZONE - DAY

117

Charlie Company is in a shit storm. Their captain, Bob Edwards, is racing down his line of firing soldiers as Lefebvre arrives with his handful of men. \*

EDWARDS

They're still trying to flank us!  
Stretch out along the line!

They lie down in the tree line at the edge of the LZ. Dozens of NVA are coming at them. Lefebvre has only a few men--but they have a machine gun and M-16's, and they are throwing grenades. They cut down the NVA--but the machine gunner gets hit, the replacement radio operator gets hit...and Lefebvre is wounded again. \*

Lefebvre lies on the ground, spewing blood, his right forearm almost shot off. A trooper beside him applies a tourniquet as other soldiers are shot down around them. \*

EDWARDS (cont'd)

(into radio)

We are in heavy contact. In danger of being overrun! Damn! These guys are good! \*

118 INTERCUT AS NECESSARY, MOORE on the radio to Edwards.

118

MOORE

(into radio)

If they get into the LZ, we've had it. Can you hold? \*

EDWARDS (ON RADIO)

All I've got holding my flank is one gun team! \*

119 OMITTED

119 \*

- 120 OMITTED 120 \*
- 121 EXT. ON THE ATTACK TRAILS OF THE MOUNTAIN - DAY 121 \*
- North Vietnamese are still streaming down.
- 122 EXT. ON THE ISOLATED FLANK - DAY 122

Beck and Adams are working their machine gun, Adams firing, Beck assisting, laying down sheets of machine-gun fire wreaking havoc on the attacking enemy. Beck spots an arm, off to his left about twenty yards, reaching up above the grass with a GI canteen in hand.

BECK  
Cover me, Russell!

Adams covers Beck with fire, and he runs over to find a wounded American, with a hole in his chest.

BECK (cont'd)  
Medic!

No Medic comes, and the NVA is closing on them. Beck grabs the wounded soldier's M-16 and tries to fire it, but the weapon has been damaged and falls apart in his hands. He drags the soldier through the firing, back to a spot where the medic gets to him.

Beck is running back toward Adams when Adams goes down, shot in the head. Beck reaches Adams. Adams is on his back staring up at Beck, the M-60 on the ground next to him. One side of Adams' head is a mess; he's trying to talk but nothing is coming out. The NVA knows they have him and is closing in on the front and right, from thirty yards out. Beck rights the M-60 fast and starts firing at them. Every time he fires, Adams winces.

Suddenly the M-60 jams, with the enemy running at Beck. He flips it over and bangs it on the ground; the jammed shells fall loose; he flips it right side up, slaps the ammo belt back in, slams the feed cover closed and begins firing again. It seems like a lifetime--we do it in SLOW MOTION-- but it takes five or ten seconds. He turns and catches the attacking soldiers chest high with a stream of bullets from the M-60 machine gun.

The enemy firing slacks off; Beck sees Adams' helmet laying in front of him; he can see a bullet hole in it, and blood; he turns it over; what seems like Adams' entire brain falls out in front of him on the ground.

BECK

Medic! ...It's gonna be alright, Russ,  
it ain't nothin'... the choppers'll get  
you out... Medic!

Beck looks at the other gun crew; they've stopped firing because one of the gunners is hit. Just then the Medic moves up to help Russell Adams.

Beck watches as the Medic drags Adams away; then he sees that the gunner is dragging his partner back to the rear. Beck is alone, and the NVA are coming.

He picks up the M-60 again, and starts firing.

123 EXT. CRANDALL'S HELICOPTERS IN THE AIR - DAY 123

In formation, shot up, going as fast as they can go, full of wounded.

AT THE CONTROLS, Crandall hammers at the throttle.

MILLS

It's overheating, Snake.

Crandall slams his hand into the controls.

CRANDALL

Those guys are fighting for their lives,  
and bleeding to death, and those  
chickenshit motherfuckers won't come  
help!

124 EXT. LZ X-RAY - THE TERMITE MOUND - DAY 124

Moore's gaze whips around the periphery of the LZ; they're fighting on three sides. He snaps another order.

MOORE

I want an emergency LZ carved out right  
there. Blow the trees down!

A team of engineers who came in with the reinforcements run across the ten yards of ground and start tying charges against the tree trunks; bullets drop two of the engineers as they work.

125 EXT. AIR CAV BASE - PLEI ME - DAY 125

Crandall drops his Huey, loaded with casualties, onto the ground at Plei Me. They're met by medics and troops still waiting to be lifted into X-Ray. The troops help remove the dead and wounded.

The huge black enlisted man, who stayed behind, wearing only G.I. shorts and boots, is reaching into the helicopter to pick up one of the dead white soldiers; it's the soldier who gave him the puppy. Tears are streaming down his face; he tenderly cradles that dead soldier to his chest and walks slowly from the aircraft to the medical station, as the puppy follows, whining its grief.

Crandall watches this, transfixed; Geoghegan watches too; he's about to speak to Crandall when another of Crandall's pilots, PAUL WINKEL, runs up.

CRANDALL

What are you guys doing here?

WINKEL

Colonel Moore has closed the LZ. He says it's too hot for us to get in or out.

CRANDALL

Send two Hueys to Camp Holloway and load all the ammo you can carry. And get the rest of the pilots over here.

Winkel hurries off. Lieutenant Jack Geoghegan and some of his Air Cav troopers are assembled nearby, waiting their turn to be ferried into the fight, on the helicopters whose floors are slick with blood. Geoghegan moves to Crandall.

GEOGHEGAN

Sir, you gotta get us in there.

CRANDALL

I'm all for that, but I can't let you die getting there.

Winkel returns with the rest of Crandall's pilots; they gather to him, and Crandall tells them--

CRANDALL (cont'd)

They need water, they need the wounded out, but they need ammo more than anything. I'm gonna take back two loads. It's redhot at the LZ. One bullet, one piece of shrapnel, and we turn into a burst of sunshine. I want volunteers.

TOO TALL

Fuck volunteers, you want the best pilot, don't you?

CRANDALL

Too Tall, you big stubborn son-of- a--  
Fuck it, we'll both do it.

126 INT. A SAIGON WAR ROOM

126

Intelligence types--both uniformed and in plain clothes--are sweating and smoking in a radio-filled warm room. A DIPLOMATIC SPOOK in plain clothes is chain-smoking.

DIPLOMATIC SPOOK

I don't like this. First time out, a whole battalion massacred.

ARMY INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

You think this is a massacre?

DIPLOMATIC SPOOK

I think losing a load of draftees is a bad week. Losing a Colonel is a massacre.

ARMY INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

But Moore's still fighting.

DIPLOMATIC SPOOK

He's under strength, against more men than he can count. He's got a whole patrol lost--

ARMY INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

They're not lost. They're just cut off and surrounded.

DIPLOMATIC SPOOK

Then they're lost.

The two men arguing look toward the ranking officer, a General sitting in the shadows, his face lined with worry.

127 EXT. AIR CAV BASE - PLEI ME - DAY

127

TWO CHOPPERS loaded with ammo struggle into the air.

INTERCUT AS NECESSARY, Crandall at the controls of one Huey, and Too Tall flying another. The radio is alive with shouts and screams of a desperate fight. Crandall breaks in--

CRANDALL

(into radio)

Colonel, this is Snakeshit, we have two full loads of ammo.

128 INTERCUT AS NECESSARY, MOORE IN THE LANDING ZONE 128

with bullets cutting the air, and the enemy so close that Plumley and others around Moore are firing at NVA's running at them from the surrounding treeline.

MOORE (ON RADIO)

Snake, it's hot down here. But we need that ammo.

129 CRANDALL 129

Then we're coming.

VARIOUS SHOTS - CRANDALL'S SUICIDE MISSION

Crandall's chopper is in the lead, with Too Tall's right behind. As Crandall starts the approach, heavy groundfire rips into his helicopter.

CRANDALL

Too Tall, we're taking heavy groundfire!

130 TOG TALL 130

(into radio)

What do you want me to do about it, Snake? I kinda thought this might happen.

131 EXT. LZ X-RAY - AT THE TERMITE MOUND - DAY 131

As Plumley stands behind Moore, shielding him with his body and gunning down the individual NVA's who've broken through, Moore is on the radio with Crandall.

MOORE

Approach from the east, Snake!

Metsker, fighting off the pain of his shoulder wound, is manning a radio.

METSKER

Colonel, it's Brigade headquarters! They want you out!

MOORE

What?-- They...what? We can't get out!

METSKER

Not all of us, just you. Saigon wants to debrief you!

Moore can't deal with this nonsense; he sees Crandall and his helicopters coming in--and sees the enemy bullets cutting through the grass at the spot where they're about to land. Moore runs out into the enemy fire, waving to Crandall to set the choppers down at the emergency LZ he's had the engineers clear, where the firing is not so intense.

MOORE

Over there, Snake! Over there!

132 IN THE CHOPPER

132

Crandall sees a man below him, waving.

133

TOO TALL

133

(into radio)

Snakeshit, you see that?

CRANDALL

It's the Colonel! He wants us to land away from the trees.

They swing their choppers to earth where Moore is directing, near the termite mound and the collection of wounded.

134 ON THE GROUND

134

the chopper crews toss off crates of ammo. Moore looks at Crandall; Crandall, sitting in the bubble of the helicopter, has a ringside seat of the desperation of the battle; he can see NVA's swarming right out of the trees, not thirty feet away; they run toward the choppers, firing, and Moore cuts them down. Crandall looks again at Moore; both understand that these may be the last moments of their lives.

MOORE

Get the wounded on! Tom, come on!

His shout is to his friend Metsker, who has been trying to function in spite of his shattered shoulder. Metsker is in great pain, but is helping Moore and the medics lift the severely wounded onto the choppers...

Doc Carrara carries Lefebvre up on a stretcher; he's gravely wounded, and we see, from HIS POV, the chaos and danger of the situation of the wounded... Men shouting, the chopper blades turning above, the chopper crews screaming and loading on the wounded while they fire at the enemy in the trees.

DOC CARRARA

Got another one!

## CHOPPER CREW

We're overloaded! Leave him!

But Metsker, about to step onto the chopper himself, turns and sees that it's Lefebvre. Still from Lefebvre's POV, we see Metsker stop and turn back.

## METSKER

No, it's Ray. He's a lot worse than me!

Metsker helps lift Lefebvre on--and suddenly jerks slightly, his face freezing... Metsker falls into the chopper; the crewmen drag him aboard as they lift away, leaving Moore behind, standing in the hail of gunfire.

135 EXT. MOORE'S COMMAND POST - DAY

135

Moore goes to the pile of gear taken from the wounded and fills his ammo pouches and pockets, grabs extra grenades, jacks a fresh magazine into his M-16, and says to Plumley--

## MOORE

You, me and Ouellette are the only  
reserve we have left.

Plumley loads his pockets too. But then he notices...

## PLUMLEY

It's slackin' up a little.

## MOORE

They're regrouping for another assault.  
Distribute the ammo. And tell Crandall  
we can get one more flight in here.

As Ouellette gets on the radio to repeat the order, his mouth is so dry he can't speak. Moore gives him a drink from his canteen, then hands the canteen to Plumley.

## MOORE (CONT'D)

Give it to the wounded. Everybody's out  
of water, it must be terrible for them...

He looks in the direction of the cut-off platoon.

## MOORE (cont'd)

...And for those guys cut off out there.

136 EXT. THE CUT-OFF PLATOON - DAY

136

The platoon clings to its tiny, tortured piece of earth, as NVA troopers probe at their position.

The cut-off platoon survivors bang away at men running at them from every direction.

Three enemy soldiers have crawled through the grass until they are almost on top of the Americans; now they rise suddenly from the ground right in front of Ernie Savage. Savage jumps upright in surprise and swings his M-16 toward them, only to realize that his rifle is empty.

For an instant eternity, Savage doesn't know what to do. So he smiles and says cheerfully--

SAVAGE

Hi!

All three look at him in momentary confusion; by then he has slipped in a fresh magazine and sprayed them. Savage drops back to the ground, shouting--

SAVAGE (cont'd)

They're crawling up on us! Put your guns flat on the ground and lay the fire into them two or three inches high!

The Americans do just that, firing along the ground, all around them. Then they cease fire, and hear the MOANS of wounded enemy in the grass; they fire again, stop--and hear nothing but the fighting two hundred yards away.

SAVAGE (cont'd)

We better burn the codes.

They collect maps, notebooks, and signal operating instructions booklets from the dead commanders and Savage burns them all, as he and his small band hunker down, determined to hold their ground to the end.

137 EXT. THE LZ - DAY

137

Choppers are landing two at a time; drawing fire...

138 INT. A CHOPPER AS IT LANDS

138

Jack Geoghegan is one of the new troopers riding into the battle; the door gunners are firing back at the NVA, and enemy bullets are already zinging around Geoghegan and his men. Geoghegan unbuckles as the chopper drops toward the ground; he readies his M-16 and leaps out before the skids touch, leading his men across the open field, under fire, shooting at enemy on the ground and in the trees overhead.

139 EXT. LZ X-RAY - BY THE TERMITE MOUND - DAY

139

Geoghegan reaches Moore at his command post.

GEOGHEGAN

Colonel.

Geoghegan's blood is up from the run across the field, the sudden plunge into battle, but he is clear-eyed and steady. Moore looks at this young brave man, with the fresh clean face, not yet stained with the fight. For a moment the earnest, innocent, youthfulness of that face reminds Moore of all the young lives at stake in this battle. Then--

MOORE

Get over with your Company.

Moore points toward the most desperate spot in the line, where Edwards' men have been battling the fiercest assaults.

GEOGHEGAN

Yes sir.

Moore watches as Geoghegan rushes across the open, bullet-riddled Landing Zone, leading his men to the hottest spot on the perimeter.

At that same moment more CHOPPERS ARE LANDING, with more troopers, including a weapons platoon with mortars. The soldiers pile out with their heavy weapons, and Moore runs to meet them.

BETWEEN THE CHOPPERS AND THE TERMITE MOUND

Moore reaches the officer of the mortar platoon.

MOORE

Set the mortars up here!

As the mortar crews start forming a firing pit near the termite hill, Moore takes the radio handset.

MOORE

Captain Nadal--we've got to get to that cut-off platoon.

140 EXT. THE DRY CREEKBED - DAY

140

Nadal's platoon leaders are with him as he draws formations in the dirt, like a football play in a sandlot game.

NADAL

We'll use an echelon left. Joe, it's one of your platoons out there and we don't know where it is, so you guide us. All right...

Joe is Lt. Marm, fresh faced and handsome. Now Nadal revs up at the troopers.

NADAL

That's an American platoon, an Air Cav platoon, cut off out there, and we're gonna go after them! Air Cav! Air Cav!

TROOPERS

Air Cav! Air Cav! Air Cav!

Nadal gives the signal. The men charge out of the creek bed, into the brush and trees between them and the cut-off platoon.

Nadal's men are immediately met by a storm of North Vietnamese running at them.

Nadal, moving forward through the brush, presses the radio handset to his ear, reporting to Moore--

NADAL

It's a shitstorm, Colonel! Looks like they launched an assault at exactly the time we launched ours.

A machine gun burst sweeps across them. All the Americans in the charge are diving for cover, except Nadal; he's trying to charge forward when the umbilical cord of his phone pulls him back and he realizes his radio operator and the other two men with him have all been cut down. Nadal dives to the earth; more of his men crawl up to join them. Nadal is shocked by the loss of his friends; his dying radio operator, SGT. GELL, whispers...

SGT. GELL

...Tell my wife I love her.

He dies; but Nadal has no time to mourn; too many other lives are in his hands. He snaps orders to the other troopers lying near him.

NADAL

Get the radio from his back! Take them all to the aid station!

Just then the machine gun fire sweeps through them again. They roll around, desperately trying to dodge the slugs.

NADAL

Fuckin' gun is chewing us up!

OUT IN FRONT OF NADAL, Lieutenant Joe Marm is one of the Americans pinned down; he sees the NVA machine gunners are dug into a big termite hill, using it for cover.

Marm tries to take them out with a LAW rocket, fired from the shoulder; it impacts on the termite hill but doesn't disturb the gun dug into it. Marm throws a grenade, but it falls short. Marm swears to himself, and ducks as--

The machine gun fire scythes through the grass and overhead. The Americans are caught--unable to move forward or back, just lying there pinned down, until a bullet through the grass will kill them.

Marm pulls the pin on a grenade and holds it in his left hand, keeping his M-16 in his right; he rises to his feet and charges the gun.

The other Americans watch, transfixed as Marm charges through the fire.

Miraculously, he reaches the termite hill, tosses the hand grenade behind it, then clears up the survivors with his M-16. He's done it!

Then a bullet hits Marm's face, and he drops to his knees.

NADAL

No!

Several guys run forward and find Marm with a bullet wound to his neck and jaw. There are twelve dead NVA sprawled around behind the machine gun nest, but there is still heavy firing all around.

The Americans carry Marm back, and join a growing stream of walking wounded flowing back toward the battalion aid station, as the sun has dropped behind the massif, and night is falling.

141 EXT. AIR CAV BASE - PLEI ME - DUSK

141

The sun is disappearing behind the horizon as Crandall sets his chopper down, along with seven others, in front of the last contingent of men and supplies ready to be flown into the battle. A stocky journalist runs up to shout to him, over the hack of the rotors. It's JOE GALLOWAY, a 23-year-old reporter with cameras dangling from his neck.

GALLOWAY

Room for me?

CRANDALL

If you're crazy enough, get in!

142 INT. HELICOPTER - SUNDOWN

142

The helicopter lifts as Galloway piles in; he's thrilled to be going; then he sees that he's sitting on a pile of ammo and grenades. Oh shit. The bullet holes all over the chopper aren't comforting either.

THEY FLY INTO THE GROWING DARKNESS; Galloway leans to Crandall and points down to the dark ground.

GALLOWAY

What is that?

Far below they see a stream of lights moving down the Chu Pong Massif.

CRANDALL

Enemy soldiers. They use candles on the trail. They're moving into position to attack.

It's a sickening sight, how many there are.

CRANDALL (CONT'D)

Here we go...

The ride in is heart-stopping: down into the darkness, clipping the tree tops, the big slow target taking fire from every NVA sniper in the area. The men pile out, the crewmen heaving ammo and five-gallon jugs of water into the grass.

143 EXT. LZ X-RAY - DUSK

143

It is fast growing dark within the clearing. Moore watches the helicopter as medics quickly reload it with wounded--Adams among them--and he speaks on the radio to Crandall, whom he can see in the cockpit.

MOORE

You and your boys have done a hell of a job today, Snake.

CRANDALL (ON RADIO)

Last flight for tonight, Colonel. We'll see ya in the morning.

Crandall takes off into the darkness, green tracers from enemy fire slashing past his chopper. As it lifts away, Moore sees that someone has gotten off. It's Galloway.

He runs up. All the soldiers--Plumley, Ouellette, Moore-- look at him like they can't believe he's there.

GALLOWAY

Joe Galloway, reporter for U.P.I. How's it goin', Colonel?

MOORE

My men are into their second straight night without sleep. And we're greatly outnumbered.

GALLOWAY

With more enemy coming, Sir. We just saw a whole chain of lights, moving down the mountain.

MOORE

I can't guarantee your safety.

GALLOWAY

I know.

MOORE

Where you from, son?

GALLOWAY

Refugio Texas, sir.

MOORE

Well...that's the only thing that's made sense all day. ...Let's get some artillery fire onto those lights!

Moore walks away. Galloway, left alone, looks around at the dangerous darkness.

144 EXT. CAMP HOLLOWAY - NIGHT

144

Beneath a makeshift shelter made of ponchos, lit by red-lens flashlights, the surgeons are working frantically, squeezing blood bags to pump blood into the wounded and tie off the injured arteries and veins.

Beside the MASH unit is another open shelter, where Graves Registration workers are checking dogtags and identifying the dead, for notification of next of kin, again under the eerie glow of red-lens flashlights.

Crandall's and Too Tall's choppers, heavily loaded with wounded, touch down outside the MASH unit.

As the wounded are being off-loaded, Crandall spots the MEDEVAC PILOT who refused to fly into the LZ. They avert their eyes; but one of them, their Commanding Officer, glares at Crandall.

Crandall's hand shakes as he reaches to the switch that shuts down his chopper. It is a sudden, unexpected SILENCE as the blades stop for the first time all day.

The maintenance crews move to his chopper, and stop-- appalled. The floor of the helicopter is covered in blood.

Crandall can barely get out of his seat, he's been in it so long. He stands, and takes a step out. But he's shaking violently. His legs give way. He drops to his knees. And he begins to vomit.

VOICE

Crandall!

Crandall stands to face the MEDEVAC COMMANDING OFFICER, storming up to him.

MEDEVAC COMMANDING OFFICER

You led my people into a hot LZ!

CRANDALL

Somebody had to fly out the wounded.

MEDEVAC COMMANDING OFFICER

Don't play hotshot with me! You know the rules! You suckered us! And I'm warning you, don't ever do it again, or I'll have you busted!

CRANDALL

You've got the balls to face me, but not the balls to face the enemy?

Crandall goes for his pistol, and means to use it. Too Tall grabs for Crandall, and the Medevac Officer runs for cover.

CRANDALL (CONT'D)

I ever see you again, I'll kill you!

Too Tall hangs on til Crandall quits struggling; then...

TOO TALL

Quite a day.

CRANDALL

Tomorrow will be worse. If they make it to tomorrow.

145 EXT. THE CUT-OFF PLATOON - NIGHT

145

Savage and the others are pressed to the ground, where they've scratched out foxholes as best they can--slight depressions in the hard earth. It's quiet; they whisper--

BUNGUM  
(terrified)  
Ernie, it's pitch black, I can't see anything.

SAVAGE  
(into radio)  
Illumination, nine-three-one, zero-one-four.

An illumination shell, fired from the artillery battery miles away, explodes above them and lights up the sky. They see silhouettes--men moving toward them.

The Americans start shooting--and the flashes of their guns help give them light. The NVA's blow BUGLES and run at them in a full-on charge.

The Americans, just a dozen men lying on a little rise of earth, fire carefully, as Savage shouts coordinates into his radio, over the sudden crash of noise.

SAVAGE (CONT'D)  
Nine-three-two, zero-one-five!...

Savage keeps the radio in one hand and uses his M-16 with the other to shoot down two NVA almost on top of them.

The artillery rains in. Between it and the rifle fire, the NVA's are beaten back. Savage yells--

SAVAGE (CONT'D)  
Save your ammo! Cease fire!  
Anybody hit?

The men are wild-eyed with terror, Bungum hyperventilating.

BUNGUM  
Ernie...

SAVAGE  
We're gonna make it. Stay down, and save your ammo. We're gonna make it.

Savage lifts the radio, and speaks softly, hopefully...

SAVAGE (CONT'D)

Captain, it's dark out here... So if you  
guy's are coming, better let us know so  
we don't shoot any of our own guys.

146 INTERCUT - MOORE'S COMMAND POST, NADAL AND MOORE listening 146  
to this; they've been trying to figure a way to get to them  
tonight; Nadal answers, struggling to be positive...

NADAL

(into radio)

Savage...we can't make it tonight.

147 THE CUT-OFF PLATOON - The others are looking at Savage--and 147  
they know what he's hearing. And none of them believe  
there's any way they can hang on through the night.

NADAL (ON RADIO)

...But don't worry, you'll make it.  
You've already won this fight. We'll get  
to you in the morning.

SAVAGE

Yes sir.

Savage signs off.

BUNGUM

We're dead. We're all dead.

SAVAGE

We can make it, if we can hold out  
through the night. Just keep cool. Bear  
down. We'll make it.

148 EXT. CHARLIE COMPANY PERIMETER - NIGHT

148 \*

Geoghegan and the others have dug in. All around, they watch  
the falling darkness, and the ominous silence.

MOORE AND PLUMLEY walk the perimeter. Men who feel defeated  
suddenly perk up as their Colonel joins them on the line.

MOORE

Great job today, men.

A soldier turns and smiles; it's Geoghegan.

GEOGHEGAN

They won't get through us, sir.

Ouellette is on the radio; he hands Moore the handset.

OUELLETTE  
Rear Headquarters, Sir.

149

RADIO VOICE  
How is it out there, Colonel?

149

MOORE  
We are surrounded but we are holding. I want a confirmed count of our dead and wounded.

RADIO VOICE  
You'll get it, Hal.

MOORE  
I need that count.

Moore hangs up. He sees a full moon rising. He pauses for a moment, thinking of Julie. Just then Geoghegan tenses.

GEOGHEGAN  
Here they come.

GODBOLDT  
Here who comes?

PLUMLEY  
Who the hell do you think? Illumination!

A flare pops overhead, lighting NVA moving through the darkness. The Americans on the line open fire, and suddenly the enemy comes swarming toward their line.

150 INT. MOORE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - FT. BENNING - DAY 150

Julie is vacuuming; when she shuts off the vacuum motor she hears a wail of grief coming from the house next door. She looks out and sees a yellow cab pulling away; the crying continues...

151 EXT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - DAY 151

Julie moves up and knocks on the door. May opens it, shattered, holding the telegram. Julie knows from the look on her face exactly what it is.

Julie moves inside; May falls into her arms, weeping.

MAY  
A telegram!... A telegram! A cab delivers a telegram! The Secretary of the Army regrets--

She can't go further. Julie hurts as if the telegram was hers, and in a way it is. May pulls back, struggling to gain control.

MAY

I need... I need to make some calls, I...

JULIE

Let me help.

MAY

No, I-- need to do this alone.

JULIE

I'll be next door.

May nods. Julie wants to help, and she has no words.

152 INT. MOORE'S HOUSE - FT. BENNING - DAY

152

Julie walks in, nearly collapsing with grief for May's tragedy. And then there is a knock on the door. Julie looks out. Parked in front of her house is a yellow cab--and at the door is its driver. Through the curtains of the front door Julie can see that he holds a telegram in his hand.

Panic sweeps through her body; she moves behind the window curtains and hides. The cab driver knocks again, the sound like thunder through her brain.

She grabs at the vacuum and turns it on to try to drown the sound; he rings the doorbell.

She can't hide any longer; she switches off the vacuum and opens the door.

CAB DRIVER

Miz Moore?...Colonel Moore's wife?

Julie can only nod. He lifts the telegram.

CAB DRIVER

I need help finding an address...

JULIE

You...you stupid...JACKASS! YOU KNOW  
WHAT THIS IS!! DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT YOU  
JUST DID TO ME?!

The tears and anger are bursting through her eyes. He stares at her, and steps backward in shame. He's a veteran himself.

CAB DRIVER

I don't like this job. I'm just trying to do it.

He starts away.

JULIE

Wait.

She goes to him and takes the telegram. She sees the name, and winces with pain.

JULIE

I'll take it to her.

He nods his thanks and starts to get into his cab.

JULIE

And tell the cab company--if you get any others, just bring them to me.

153 EXT. TREE-LINED STREET - FT. BENNING - DAY

153

Julie walks down the street. Barbara Geoghegan, two doors down, is handing her baby to a neighbor and hurries to Julie.

BARBARA

Julie, I just went by to see May.

As Julie keeps walking, Barbara looks at the telegram in her hand.

BARBARA

No chaplains or counselors, just cab drivers.

JULIE

The Army wasn't ready.

BARBARA

I'll go with you.

They head up a walkway to a door; they knock. The door opens, and a woman sees them, her face realizing...

154 EXT. TREE-LINED STREET - FT. BENNING - DAY

154

Julie and Barbara, wrung out from their mission, walk slowly back toward Julie's.

JULIE

I was afraid...she would hate me.

BARBARA

Because your husband's the leader?

(beat)

He didn't start the war, Julie. And he didn't make 'em go. They all knew this could happen. So did we.

As they draw close to the Moore's house, they see a cab pulling away. With fear slowing their steps, they move down the walk. On the porch by the front door is a stack of twenty more telegrams.

Julie and Barbara are frozen. Julie lifts them, like a jar of poison.

JULIE

I'll do this.

BARBARA

No, I'll help you.

JULIE

We'll do one at a time. We won't look, okay?

BARBARA

Okay...

Julie stuffs them into her purse, then, stiffening herself to the task, she reaches in and withdraws a telegram, reading the addressee name with sadness...

JULIE

Sally Lane...

MONTAGE - BRINGING THE NEWS...

155 EXT. A FRONT STOOP - DAY

155

Julie and Barbara leave the home of one of the new widows. They stand out on the porch, and take a deep breath. Julie pulls another telegram from her purse...

JULIE

Alice Gray...

They move off again.

156 IN SLOW DISSOLVES we see the same thing happen twice more...and come out of the montage on

156

157 ANOTHER FRONT PORCH, as Julie lifts the last envelope.

157

JULIE (CONT'D)

The last one. Jo Ann Brown.

They both feel guilty relief...then move on.

158 EXT. GEOGHEGAN'S HOUSE - DAY

158

Julie and Barbara, finished now, stop outside Barbara's house.

BARBARA

Julie? You think there'll be more telegrams tomorrow?

(beat)

If there are...come get me.

159 EXT. LZ X-RAY, BEHIND THE COMMAND POST - NIGHT

159

The overworked medical group is struggling to keep a dozen wounded alive. Doc Carrara looks up from the wounded trooper he's working on, to see Moore standing there.

DOC CARRARA

A dozen wounded we couldn't get out...

MOORE

Crandall will be back in the morning.  
How many bodies still here?

DOC CARRARA

At least two dozen.

Doc nods toward the space behind the medical area, where two dozen bodies lie neatly on the ground, the moonlight glancing off the ponchos that cover them.

Moore moves out among them. So many--and more, many more, back at the base camp. Young men he led; young lives, and early deaths, and he led them here.

Moore says a silent prayer. Then he becomes aware of Galloway moving up to him.

MOORE

You have a death wish, Galloway?

GALLOWAY

No sir.

MOORE

Then why did you come?

GALLOWAY

Because I knew they would be here.

He means the dead Americans. Moore looks at him for a long moment, and then looks away, across the rows of dead soldiers in their ponchos.

MOORE

How come you're not a soldier, Joe?  
You've got the guts for it.

GALLOWAY

I come from a long line of soldiers. My daddy. My grand-daddy. Two of my great grand-daddies were soldiers--hell, it's how I came to be. They each lost a leg in the Civil War: great-granddaddy Galloway lost his left, and great-granddaddy Reid lost his right. They met in a shoe store in Galveston--and then met once a year every year after, on the same date, in the same store, to pick out one new pair of shoes for the two of them. One had a daughter, one had a son--my grandparents.

Moore does something he didn't think he could do on this night: he smiles.

GALLOWAY (cont'd)

Galloways have been in every war this country has ever fought. When it came to this one... well I didn't figure I could stop a war, but I thought I might try to understand one. And I could do it better aiming a camera than I could aiming a rifle.

Moore looks out over the dead soldiers again.

MOORE

I hope you live through this one.

Moore starts to walk away.

GALLOWAY

Colonel? ...I hope you do too.

Moore looks at him, and moves back to the Command Post.

160 INT. COLONEL AHN'S UNDERGROUND BUNKER - NIGHT

160

Colonel Ahn has gathered his top officers together; twenty men, clear-eyed and professional. They are like the home team huddled in the locker room at half time, when the game is going their way. Ahn is positive, intense, direct.

AHN

We fought well today. We tested their tactics and learned their capabilities. Their artillery is effective, so we must get so close they can't use it. We will grab them by the belt buckle.

161 EXT. THE CUT-OFF PLATOON, ON THE LITTLE KNOLL - NIGHT

161

The patrol on the knoll is even more alone in the darkness, as the enemy moves in around them, firing tracers. Savage is shouting into the radio, calling in artillery.

SAVAGE

Right twenty!

Fragmentation shells burst behind the charging enemy.

BUNGUM

Closer, Ernie!

SAVAGE

(into radio)

Right twenty more!

Artillery rounds scream in, leveling the attackers. Two shells fall almost on top of the Americans, the blasts bouncing them off the ground. Savage and Bungum keep their faces buried as spent shrapnel clatters down around them. Then they lift their heads gingerly.

SAVAGE (CONT'D)

Close enough?

They hear the bugles again; the NVA charge, through the night.

162 MONTAGE - THE CUT-OFF PLATOON'S LAST STAND

162

It is an image out of the great heroic portraits of battle, and it is real: Savage and the rest of the cut-off platoon make their stand, a circle of men surrounded on a small round knoll. Their dead are lying within their circle; their wounded have their weapons bound into their hands with bandages and toilet paper; and even their Medic, Charlie Lose, wounded twice already, is fighting.

The bravery of the North Vietnamese is just as striking. They run through artillery blasts that shatter most of their comrades--and yet their numbers are so great that many of them reach the American circle, where they are met with rifle fire, and grenades, and pistol shots, and bayonets.

OVER THIS, we hear the sound of the hymns from the Southern churches, singing like prayers...and DISSOLVE TO LATER...

The field around the knoll is littered with North Vietnamese dead. We PAN them and reach the cut-off platoon...still there.

Now it is so black they can't see. Ernie and the others lie there, terrified. Silence. No water, their lips parched. One of the wounded croaks for water.

Medic Lose crawls to him, and tries to keep him quiet. All the men are terrified.

Savage, lying filthy and dust-covered, is straining to hear; is something out there? It's so dark he can see nothing but the stars in the sky. Then he sees a silhouette, blotting out stars; an enemy soldier is moving up. Bungum sees it too; his eyes go wide with terror.

They see another figure, and another... It's a whole North Vietnamese patrol, advancing through the darkness. But they don't see the Americans, who are so filthy and covered with dirt from the artillery barrages that they blend right in with the ground, especially in this darkness.

The whole enemy patrol walks right among the Americans! Savage slips the safety off his rifle...CLICK. The NVA hear it, but before they can react Savage opens fire; he and the other Americans spray the NVA.

All the NVA are dead, but a couple of the wounded Americans are moaning with pain and fear.

SAVAGE  
Quiet, you'll get us killed!

The moaning doesn't stop.

SAVAGE  
Look! We've made it!

He points to the horizon. The first pink rays of dawn appear in the east. They've lasted the night. The troopers stop crying.

162 SAME TIME - EXT. LZ X-RAY - MOORE'S COMMAND POST

162

Moore, holding his M-16, is crouched on the ground with Plumley, Nadal, and two other Captains.

MOORE

We'll attack with three companies in a wedge formation. Move off from the creek bed and go hard and fast til we reach the knoll. Make sure Savage knows--I don't want any Americans shooting each other.

NADAL

Who do you want at the point?

MOORE

I'm leading the assault. Dillon, you're in charge of the LZ.

DILLON, a brave but young officer, is hesitant...

DILLON

Colonel... This is the nerve center of the whole battle. Didn't you tell us when a commander jumps into a fight he becomes just another rifleman?

MOORE

Yeah. I also trained you to do my job. Those are my men out there, and I'm going to get them.

Moore leads his men across the Landing Zone, keeping low because sniper fire is already cutting the pink air of dawn.

163 EXT. NEAR THE CREEK BED - DAWN

163

Moore and his men reach a position by the creek bed; and then Moore stops, and listens.

NADAL

What is it, Sir?

MOORE

It's dead quiet. Nothing's wrong ...except that nothing's wrong.

OUELLETTE

Maybe they've had enough.

MOORE

They've walked through machine gun fire, artillery, and napalm. They're not gonna quit now.

He takes his radio, and calls Dillon at the Command Post.

MOORE (cont'd)

Matt, have all companies send recon patrols forward of their positions. They're up to something.

164 EXT. AMERICAN PERIMETER - NEAR THE TREE LINE - DAWN 164

Scouting parties of Americans, three or four men in each party, begin to move forward carefully, through the tall grass and the trees... Geoghegan leads one group. We follow Geoghegan's group, who have moved ahead forty yards when--

HUNDREDS OF NORTH VIETNAMESE, their bodies camouflaged with grass and brush so that they blend right into the landscape, rise up from the earth and begin firing. Geoghegan and his men fall to the ground and start spraying fire from their M-16's; Geoghegan shouts into the radio--

GEOGHEGAN

We have enemy attack! In force!

Geoghegan's men and the other recon platoons are fighting for their lives...

The Americans still dug in on the perimeter lay down a stream of fire, and artillery falls; all hell breaks loose.

165 EXT. AMERICAN PERIMETER - AT THE CREEKBED - DAWN 165

North Vietnamese boil up the same way attacking the creekbed, trying to overrun the Landing Zone from that direction too. Moore and the group he's leading plunge into the fight, gunning down attackers with their M-16's.

Bill Beck slides into position with his M-60, and he and the other American gunners rake the swarms of attacking enemy with devastating fire, beating them back. Moore looks to the opposite side of the LZ; the intensity there is increasing, with bullets cutting through the clearing.

MOORE

They're attacking us from all sides. I gotta get back to the Command Post.

PLUMLEY

Soon as the shooting dies down we'll--

But Moore is already running through the fire; Plumley goes after him.

166 EXT. LZ X-RAY COMMAND POST - DAY 166

Moore and Plumley, bullets zinging around them, reach the command post; Dillon hands Moore a radio handset.

DILLON  
It's Edwards!

167 INTERCUT - EXT. CHARLIE COMPANY PERIMETER - DAY 167

Captain Edwards is on the radio to Moore--and the attackers are swarming right to the edges of the fighting holes before they are cut down.

EDWARDS  
They're inside the artillery! I need--

Edwards gets shot in the back. He falls face first.

168 MOORE, AT HIS COMMAND POST hears the rattle of gunfire from 168 Edward's position, then nothing.

MOORE  
Bob--? Bob?!--

The other end of the radio is dead.

Bullets are raking the LZ. It looks terrible now. Field medics are carrying wounded into the aid station behind the termite mound, where Doc Carrara and his two medics are already overwhelmed with the wounded, squeezing blood bags to get blood into a convulsing trooper, as Carrara works feverishly to tie off ruptured arteries.

Moore forces himself to concentrate, to keep his head. The noise of battle is unbelievable. Moore turns to Dillon and shouts over the noise--

MOORE  
Put the artillery right on the line! And order Bravo Company to send a platoon across the clearing to reinforce Charlie Company!

Dillon shouts into the radio, and on the far side of the clearing they see Bravo Company responding--seventeen troopers heading out in a low crouch, moving fast in short bounds across the open ground under heavy enemy automatic-weapon fire. Four of them go down.

The situation looks even worse. Terrified troopers drag their wounded and dead buddies into the aid station, screaming as they pass Moore--

TROOPERS  
We're being overrun!

MOORE  
Nah, boys, we're gonna win this fight.

Enemy fire from rifles and heavy machine guns shreds the elephant grass and sweeps over the battalion command post and aid station. Leaves, bark, and small branches flutter down on Moore and the others. NVA's run into the LZ and Moore and his men cut them down.

169 EXT. AMONG THE NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS - DAY

169

A young North Vietnamese soldier crouches with his comrades amid the chaos of battle, but this particular soldier is in a certain kind of wide-eyed battle trance, like we saw in Ahn in the opening scene. As his comrades duck from the artillery, he leaps to his feet and begins to run through it.

We FOLLOW HIS RUN, past dead comrades, blasts of artillery, through the hand-to-hand fighting at the lines, the camera HIS POV as if the bayonet at the tip of his AK-47 were thrusting him forward. He penetrates the Landing Zone, and races across it...

HAL MOORE stands at the termite mound, his back to the charging NVA soldier. Plumley is firing at other NVA coming in from the side, and doesn't see this soldier...

Moore remains calm, the radio handset to his ear, and talks with forced calm.

MOORE  
(into radio)  
Colonel Brown, request you prepare another company of reinforcements for movement as soon as it can be accomplished without undue risk.

COLONEL BROWN (VOICE)  
Done. ...How bad is it, Hal?

The young NVA rushes at Moore, closer...closer... At the last instant, Moore turns and fires directly into the lens--into the face of the onrushing soldier.

MOORE  
It's pretty sporty down here, Sir.

Galloway passes Moore, carrying a wounded trooper, and deposits the man with the medics.

170 EXT. IN THE AIR, CRANDALL'S CHOPPERS - DAY 170

Crandall is leading a flight of choppers toward the LZ, and it's looking worse than ever, explosions erupting in a circle of hell far below them.

CRANDALL  
(into radio)  
Hang on, Colonel, we're comin'!

171 EXT. LANDING ZONE - COMMAND POST - DAY 171

MOORE  
(into radio)  
Not yet, Snake, it's too hot!!

172 ON THE PERIMETER - DAY 172

The fighting is ferocious; the NVA are reaching the foxholes, and much of the fighting is now hand-to-hand. \*

Edwards is barely still alive, though shot in the back. He rolls over and finds his left arm won't work. He reaches for the radio, and calls-- \*

173 OMITTED 173 \*

174 OMITTED 174 \*

175 MOORE AT THE COMMAND POST, UNDER FIRE, hears Edwards. 175 \*

EDWARDS (ON RADIO)  
They've penetrated, Colonel! \*

176 Dillon is on the other radio, and shouts to Moore-- 176 \*

DILLON  
They're hitting D-Company too! These are V.C., black uniforms, full battle gear!

Moore hears this report, and says to his team--

MOORE  
Now they've brought in a main force battalion of Viet Cong.

Nobody around Moore says anything; it's like they've just heard their death sentence. Moore is icy.

MOORE (CONT'D)

Sgt. Major, we can expect an attack on our rear.

177 JOE GALLOWAY

177

lies in the middle of the landing zone, near the mortar crews who are firing furiously as their SERGEANT shouts--

MORTAR SERGEANT

Straight up! They're right on top of us!

Galloway struggles to take pictures; he catches a few of a young Japanese-American, who grins at the camera even as he loads shells into the mortar tubes.

GALLOWAY

What's your name?

NAKAYAMA

Nakayama! I got a baby being born today!

As Galloway tries to note down the name, the man next to Nakayama is shot; as Nakayama kneels over him to try to stop the bleeding, the elephant grass comes alive, bullets skimming two feet off the ground. Galloway hugs the earth, terrified that to move anything would be to get it shot off. Then he feels the toe of a combat boot jammed into his ribs, and can't believe somebody is kicking him. He twists in surprise to see Sgt. Major Plumley, all 6'2" of him standing tall in the hail of gunfire.

PLUMLEY

You can't take no pictures laying down there on the ground, Sonny.

Plumley is fearless--he's even grinning. Galloway, stunned, jumps up and for a comical moment he tries to take pictures, his hands shaking; but Plumley snatches him by the collar and pulls him back toward the aid station.

178 AT THE AID STATION

178

a bullet hits and kills the wounded man that Doc Carrara is working on. The Doc and medics realize they are about to be overrun. Plumley arrives with Galloway and positions him on the ground, takes the camera from him and shoves an extra rifle into his hands.

GALLOWAY

But Sir...I'm a non-combatant.

PLUMLEY

Ain't no such thing today, boy.

Galloway takes a position among the others. Bullets still sing overhead, but no one is firing at them just yet.

All the men look at Plumley, as he draws out his two .45 pistols, one in each hand, and cocks both.

PLUMLEY (cont'd)

Gentlemen...prepare to defend yourselves.

The medics, the wounded, and Galloway especially, are wide-eyed at the moment. They scan the surrounding brush, trees, grass; they are at the rear of the perimeter, the place that has not been attacked in force since the battle began.

For a moment, they see nothing but brush, and hear nothing but the sound of the battle in other parts of the field.

And then they come: HUNDREDS OF NORTH VIETNAMESE, screaming, firing, charging toward the Americans.

Moore lowers the radio, steps up beside Plumley, and raises his M-16.

The Americans begin to fire. At first they just pour out a stream of bullets into the wave of NVA's, but as their rifle magazines and pistol clips become exhausted and they must reload, their fire begins sporadic, individual...

The NVA attack reaches the Americans... Moore sprays down a man, changes magazines, and sprays down another; Plumley shoots a man in the belly, another in the chest, another in the face... The wounded Americans shoot... And Galloway, the non-combatant, untrained for this job, yet committed to it now, fires too.

The fighting becomes a melee, all chaos and violence...

And the NVA's are gone, lying dead all around, or crawling back the way they came, gut-shot, bleeding, dying.

179 EXT. AT THE TERMITE MOUND - DAY

179

Moore steps back to his command post, where his Dillon and Hastings are hunkered down, feverishly working the radios. In the middle of all this, Moore senses something else--

MOORE

Why aren't the mortar crews firing?

180 NEAR THE TERMITE HILL, BESIDE THE COMMAND POST

180

The mortar crews have ammo but are gripping the earth as bullets fly over them. Moore strides up to them.

MOORE

What's wrong?

MORTAR SERGEANT

The tubes are red hot! We're gonna cook a round off inside the tubes and blow us all up! And we can't cool down the tubes cause we're outta water!

Moore turns to the mortar tubes; with bullets singing all around his head he opens his fly and starts pissing on a hot mortar tube. The stream of urine turns to steam...and cools the tube. \*

The mortar troops look at each other; they jump up and follow their Colonel's example, some pissing on the tubes while others feed shells and resume firing. \*

180A EXT. CHARLIE COMPANY LINE DAY OVERHEAD POV OF EDWARDS 180A \*

Edwards has been wounded three times. He's lying next a Lieutenant, ARRINGTON, who has taken a bullet in the chest. \*

ARRINGTON \*

Captain...tell my wife I love her. \*

EDWARDS \*

...Don't you see I'm hit worse than you are, you dumb son-of-a-bitch? \*

Then Arrington realizes Edwards is right; the surprise, and Edward's response, seems to enliven them both. \*

180B QUICK PAN to Jack Geoghegan, nearby....

180B \*

A shoulder-fired rocket hits the man next to him; Geoghegan sees the NVA close by. \*

GEOGHEGAN \*

They've got a rocket team behind that anthill! \*

GODBOLDT \*

The Captain and Arrington are both hit! \*

Geoghegan sees he's right; his POV scans the situation; it's up to him. \*

GEOGHEGAN

Cover me!

He charges out of the fighting hole, toward the mound.

GODBOLDT

Lieutenant, no!

SLOW MOTION: Geoghegan races forward; Godboldt can't stop him, so he charges too. The NVA rocket team is reloading; The Americans on the line shoot down two more NVA running up. As the NVA rocket team fires again, first Geoghegan, and then Godboldt, dive for cover, then Geoghegan runs on. He reaches the mound.

GEOGHEGAN

Willie! Grenade!

Godboldt hurls a grenade behind the mound. It wounds the three NVA who are there.

BEHIND THE MOUND, the wounded NVA wait with their AK-47s pointed to either side, ready to shoot Geoghegan no matter which way he comes.

He runs OVER THE TOP of the mound, shooting all three. He races back to the line. Godboldt starts to follow, and gets hit.

TROOPER

Godboldt!

GEOGHEGAN

I'll get him!

Geoghegan runs back out toward Godboldt...

181 INT. NVA BUNKER - ON THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

181

Colonel Ahn is watching his maps, getting reports.

NVA OFFICER

We are through their lines, on all sides!  
 Congratulations, Colonel. You have  
 beaten the Americans.

182 AT MOORE'S COMMAND POST

182

Everything is near chaos.

DILLON

Colonel, the perimeter is collapsing.  
Company C is being overrun. A and B  
can't hold.

Moore is upright in the gun fire, now raking in waves across  
the clearing and the command post. The din of battle is  
ferocious around him. But as we focus on Moore, the  
SURROUNDING SOUND DIMINISHES from his SUBJECTIVE POV...he  
tunes the noise out in his mind, and looks around at the  
battle... What should he do that he's not doing? What is he  
doing that he shouldn't do?... He turns to his Air  
Controller, CHARLIE HASTINGS.

MOORE

Hastings--Broken Arrow.

Everyone in the command unit looks at Moore, and Hastings  
nods and speaks into his field radio.

HASTINGS

Broken Arrow! Repeat



183 INT. A SAIGON WAR ROOM

183

They hear Hastings' voice over their monitors--

HASTINGS (ON RADIO)

...Broken Arrow!

The diplomatic spook looks at the intelligence officer.

ARMY INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

That means an American unit is being  
overrun. It calls every combat aircraft  
in for support.

DIPLOMATIC SPOOK

My God, there's no hiding it now.

VARIOUS SHOTS - BROKEN ARROW

- 184 --As the command goes out, carrier flight-crews spring into 184  
action; carrier jets take off...
- 185 --fighter-bombers take off from air strips... 185
- 186 --planes already on missions divert their course, to head 186  
for X-Ray...
- 187 --and American generals and diplomats, waiting in Saigon, 187  
listen anxiously to reports.

188 EXT. HAL MOORE, BY THE TERMITE MOUND - DAY

188

The sound of combat is unbelievable--and all the more desperate now. Shouts over the radio... calls to men who no longer answer...

MOORE

C Company! Report!... D Company!  
Report!...

Nothing comes back.

HASTINGS

Planes are on their way, Colonel!

189 AT THE PERIMETERS

189

The NVA's sprint in, overrunning a whole company of Americans. They are streaming into the LZ, when...

A fighter-bomber flashes in from overhead and drops two napalm canisters right in the middle of the NVA's.

All over the battlefield, all around the surrounded Americans, the planes race in and blast the NVA's with napalm and bombs.

190 JOE GALLOWAY

190

is in the medical area, as the doctors go back to helping the wounded. Joe is stunned by the fighting he's just done; dead NVA lie around him. He doesn't know what to do next.

He sees fire slapping into the termite mound near Moore's head (the Command Post is only twenty feet from the medical area). Galloway grabs a fresh magazine of ammo, jams it into the M-16, and fires into the trees where the enemy snipers are. The sniping stops.

Galloway turns and looks at Moore, and Moore is looking back at him; both men realize that Galloway has become not just an observer but a combatant too.

Near Moore, Charlie Hastings, the Air Controller, is shouting into his radio, describing targets... The planes flash in, blowing hell out of everything surrounding them. Hastings turns and shouts to Moore--

HASTINGS

We have planes stacked up every thousand feet, from seven to thirty-five thousand!  
We'll get 'em, sir!

(MORE)

HASTINGS (cont'd)  
 (into radio)  
 32-15! 18-7!...

The bombardment is encircling their perimeter with a wall of explosions; but bullets are spitting all around, and Hastings is having trouble handling all the traffic; the planes are coming in fast.

Moore is on another radio, shouting to Crandall--

MOORE  
 You there, Snake?

191 INTERCUT CRANDALL AND HIS CHOPPERS

191

watching the incredible maelstrom of battle from a mile out. Too Tall, in his chopper, looks over at Crandall; it's hairy.

CRANDALL  
 (into radio)  
 Tell us when, Colonel!

MOORE  
 Hang back til' there's a lull!

Crandall desperately wants in; he sees the explosions within the ring of battle; his friends are dying; grief and anger wet his eyes, and he pounds his controls in frustration.

CRANDALL  
 God dammit! God dammit!

192 EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - COMMAND POST - DAY

192

Moore, Plumley and Ouellette take up firing positions on one knee, facing the mountain and the NVA attackers. A tracer hits Ouellette and ricochets off his helmet; As Moore turns to see Ouellette slump over, another movement catches Moore's eye, and he looks up, straight into the noses of two F-100 Super Sabre jet fighters. The lead aircraft releases two shiny, six-foot-long napalm canisters, which slowly begin loblollying end over end toward the Americans.

We see them in SLOW MOTION. They are falling right at Moore, and may wipe out the entire American command center, in the critical moment of battle.

Moore jumps up, waving his arms and screaming at Hastings--

MOORE (CONT'D)  
 Charlie, call that son of a bitch off!  
 Call him off!

HASTINGS

(into radio)

Pull up! Pull up!

The second jet is directly over the command post--its napalm ready to drop right on top of them...but at the last instant it banks off.

The napalm canisters dropped by the first plane slam into the ground and explode, spreading sticky liquid fire over a group of Americans in their little foxholes.

Moore sees his own men dancing in the fire; Plumley, Galloway, and every other American there is horrified, but none so much as Hastings, the Air Controller.

And not only is the napalm burning their own men, but the fire has spread around the ammo dump--all this on top of the enemy attack, with bullets zinging through the command post. As Plumley jumps to beat the fire away from the crates of live ammunition, Moore grabs Hastings, who is so stunned he can't speak or move.

MOORE

Charlie! Listen to me! You're keeping us alive! Don't worry about that one. Just keep them coming.

Hastings, with trembling hands, lifts his maps and radio.

HASTINGS

Seven-oh-two, attack against the tree line, north side of perimeter...

The jets dart in again, with flashing napalm and bombs.

As the flame from the errant napalm cannisters dies down enough, Galloway and several others run to help the burned troopers. Galloway falls to his knees beside a charred man who is screaming in agony. It is Jimmy Nakayama.

AN INSTANT FREEZEFRAME OF JOE'S PHOTOGRAPH

showing NAKAYAMA and his buddies, under fire, but flashing V for Victory signs. Now--

THE PRESENT, AND JOE is horrified, seeing this once smiling face now scorched and mutilated.

GALLOWAY

Medic!

A Medic runs toward them, and is shot in the head.

A medical sergeant (Keeton) runs over and injects Nakayama with morphine.

193 EXT. CRANDALL, IN HIS HELICOPTER - DAY

193

Crandall sees the jets pounding away; he knows how desperate it is down there. He radios Too Tall.

CRANDALL

They can't wait any longer!

TOO TALL

I'm with you, Snake!

Crandall shoves the controls and guns toward the landing zone. His other choppers follow.

194 GALLOWAY AND NAKAYAMA

194

The morphine doesn't help much; Nakayama still cries out in agony. They see Crandall's chopper settling to earth.

GALLOWAY

We've got to get him to the airlift!

Galloway grips Nakayama's charred ankles, and the wounded man SCREAMS; the boots and flesh crumbled in Galloway's hands, and he feels the bones beneath. Stiffening himself to the task, Galloway helps the medic carry Nakayama to the helicopter zone, as bullets buzz through the air like supersonic bees.

They reach the helicopters, and set Nakayama down. The screams, the bullets, the roar of the helicopters...it all crashes around Joe's ears, but he hears none of it...except those screams.

The helicopter crews and the ground troopers are off-loading ammo and making room for the wounded; Galloway sags beside Nakayama.

VOICE OVER

On that same day, as Jimmy Nakayama's screams cut the air above the sound of battle, his wife was screaming in childbirth, half a world away...

195 INTERCUT - A TINY ARMY BASE HOSPITAL IN TEXAS where Jimmy Nakayama's wife, with a smiling picture of Jimmy on the table beside her, gives birth to a baby girl. 195

VOICE OVER (CONT'D)

She gave birth to their daughter, on the day Jimmy died.

196 BACK ON THE BATTLEFIELD, JOE GALLOWAY watches Jimmy Nakayama's charred body being loaded onto a helicopter, praying him away into the hands of Crandall, and God. 196

The helicopter roars into the gunfire and the sky. It is a magnificent picture, but Joe doesn't even think about that. And he's lost all sense of danger. He turns slowly and moves back to the termite hill.

He finds his camera, lying beside his rifle. He stares down at both.

He picks up the camera. Reloads it with film...and moves off.

197 ON THE CHARLIE COMPANY LINE (BOB EDWARDS' COMPANY) 197

They are being overrun, but the airstrikes hit so close, so relentlessly, and, along with the resistance of the Americans fighting hand to hand, beat back the enemy attack.

Joe Galloway is there with his camera, and shoots pictures instead of bullets; we INTERCUT the POV of his still camera with FREEZEFRAMES of the pictures he gets of men fighting hand-to-hand.

Suddenly, the fighting has come to a stop, ending as quickly as it started. The enemy dead are stacked two and three deep in front of the Americans. Galloway gets pictures of this too.

The Americans stare out, waiting; but no attack comes.

198 OMITTED 198 \*

199 OMITTED 199 \*

200 MOORE'S COMMAND POST - DAY 200 \*

Moore looks out, listening to the quiet, feeling the flow of the battle. Ouellette moans and stirs; Plumley pulls off his helmet and a spent bullet drops out.

MOORE (CONT'D)

We've backed 'em off, for just a second.

He grabs the radio.

MOORE (CONT'D)

Nadal! Attack now, to save the cut-off platoon! Don't stop to neutralize resistance, just punch through hard and fast and get those men.

201 EXT. THE DRY CREEK BED - DAY

201

Captain Nadal holds his M-16 at the ready and moves forward, with the other Air Cav troopers following.

They hear the cracks of enemy fire and the bullets slicing the air around them; Nadal and several others fire in the direction of the enemy but don't stop to flush them out; they keep pushing ahead.

They pick their way through blown-down trees, anthills, and scrub brush. They reach the spot where they think the cut-off platoon should be, but don't see anybody. Nadal hollers--

NADAL

Are you guys still there?

Savage sits up, and waves; it's as if the ground has come to life; all the artillery has blown dirt and dust over them, so they look like part of the earth.

Nadal and the rest of the relief troops move to the cut-off platoon. They find all twenty-nine; nine dead, thirteen wounded and heavily bandaged, seven unscratched--all incredibly filthy, exhausted, and so parched for water that their lips are cracked. And still in shock; seeing Nadal standing upright over him, Bungum yells--

BUNGUM

Get down!

NADAL

It's OK, come on, let's go.

The relief troops hand their canteens to the survivors. Nadal notices something on the ground, and picks it up: a diary in the hand of a dead NVA soldier. It's delicate, quite beautiful, filled with graceful script in Vietnamese.

NADAL

Anybody see any other Vietnamese documents?

Nadal's men shake their heads. The sun is going down. They begin taking fire.

NADAL

Let's go.

They pick up the wounded and then the dead. Lieutenant Herrick is the last man they lift. They move out, back toward X-Ray and the American perimeter. Bungum looks at the men helping him walk...

BUNGUM

This ain't over.

202

202 EXT. HORIZON - SUNSET

Night is falling again, on Landing Zone X-Ray.

203

203 EXT. MOORE'S COMMAND POST - NIGHT

The members of the cut-off platoon arrive at the medical area behind the termite mound, and drop to the ground; other troopers carry in the dead. All the stress of the last days starts to flood over Ernie Savage; he's about to break down when he sees Moore standing beside him.

The two men look at each other. There are no words. Moore just nods to Savage in salute, and Savage nods back.

Plumley moves over to Savage.

PLUMLEY

Nice day, Sergeant Savage.

Galloway watches as Crandall and his squad drop off a fresh group of troopers; they look surprisingly clean in contrast to the others, so filthy with battle. Edwards and Arrington, both still alive, are loaded onto Crandall's chopper. Near the med tent a big CH-47 Chinook helicopter is being packed with a huge load of dead. Moore watches, as Plumley hands him an accounting.

PLUMLEY

Forty dead. And two unaccounted for.

Galloway moves to Moore.

GALLOWAY

Are these the last of your troopers?

Moore nods. Galloway looks at the Chinook packed with dead.

GALLOWAY (CONT'D)

They're going out faster than they're coming in.

He's right; the dead outnumber the new arrivals. The arrivals see it too: as the doors of the Chinooks close, blood seeps out of the hinges. Moore sees his new men are sick and frightened. He turns to their Captain (Diduryk).

069

MOORE

Most of Charlie Company was in those choppers. I want your men to take their place. Come on, I'll show you.

204 INT. NORTH VIETNAMESE BUNKER - NIGHT

204

Colonel Ahn is surrounded by his officers, studying charts, planning; he steps out of his bunker and sees the moon rising. For a fleeting moment, he appreciates the beauty.

205 EXT. CHARLIE COMPANY LINES - NIGHT

205

As a bright, near-full moon rises over LZ X-Ray, Moore and Plumley lead the last arrivals to the position left by the dead of Charlie Company, where the worst fighting has been. They climb into the fighting holes. Moore feels something wet and slick on his fingers, where he touched the wall of the hole; it's blood. He stares at the space between them and the mountain, a vista of tall grass and shattered trees, surreal in the moonlight. Weird, echoing sounds float across the field. NVA bodies lie dead and stinking just outside the fighting holes.

PLUMLEY

Better dig in some firing steps. And throw some dirt up on those bodies. Keep the smell down.

Plumley looks at Moore.

PLUMLEY

Kinda makes you wish you'd signed up for submarines, don't it?

The new men are pale, in the new blood and the moonlight. As they start to dig in, Ouellette moves up with Moore's radio.

OUELLETTE

Colonel, Brigade headquarters wants you lifted out on the first chopper at dawn.

MOORE

What idiot would keep ordering that, in the middle of a goddamn battle?!

Ouellette covers the receiver lest someone on the other end might hear Moore's outburst.

OUELLETTE

They said, uh, General Westmoreland wants a briefing.

Moore grabs the Headquarters radio. \*

MOORE  
 (into radio)  
 I am in a fight and object to this order  
 to come to Saigon! I WILL NOT LEAVE MY  
 MEN, AM I CLEAR? \*

Moore rings off without waiting for an answer. Out beyond  
 their line, distant whistles and bugle calls echo eerily down  
 the mountain. The hopelessness of the situation seems to  
 ooze up from the dark ground. \*

MOORE  
 We have two men unaccounted for. The  
 worst fighting was here. They must be  
 out there somewhere. \*

Moore looks out toward the killing ground in front of them.  
 Haunted, terrifying in the darkness. \*

MOORE  
 I'm leading a recon out to find them. \*

PLUMLEY  
 I'll go with ya. \*

205A EXT. IN FRONT OF CHARLIE COMPANY LINES - NIGHT

205A \*

It's horribly spooky as Moore, Plumley, and four others step  
 from the holes, their M-16s ready, and move forward through  
 the bodies of the dead NVA. Every corpse looks undead, every  
 shadow looks like a sniper, every sound seems like a rifle  
 safety being clicked off. Then-- \*

PLUMLEY  
 Colonel... \*

Plumley has found two Americans lying out in the killing  
 ground among the NVA bodies--a black soldier and a white one,  
 lying entwined. Plumley lifts the black one, and Moore  
 stoops to pick up the man under him, who fell trying to carry  
 the first soldier to safety. As Moore turns him over and  
 sees who he is, his eyes are stabbed with pain... \*

206 CLOSE A FRONT DOOR, AS JULIE KNOCKS

206 \*

Barbara opens the door, to see Julie holding a telegram. The  
 pain on Julie's face silences Barbara. \*

JULIE  
 They brought... another... \*

BARBARA

Oh Julie, Julie...it's yours.

JULIE

No. It's yours.

207 INT. GEOGHEGAN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

207

Julie and Barbara sit on the couch, Barbara holding the baby. Maybe it's all the grief they've already experienced that makes Barbara seem so accepting of her news.

BARBARA

I thought I had beaten it. I thought we'd seen the last one.

(beat)

Do you want...coffee?

JULIE

No... Barbara, I...

BARBARA

You know, I watched everybody react in their own way. I didn't know how it would be with me. Now I still don't.

JULIE

You're so brave. You're so much braver than me.

BARBARA

Nobody's braver than you, Julie.

JULIE

I'm not brave. When that first cab driver came to my house, I was praying that it be a mistake, that it be anybody else but me. And I don't think I'm ever gonna forgive myself for that prayer.

Barbara reaches for Julie and hugs her.

JULIE (CONT'D)

You know I told you I'd never seen my husband cry. I've realized something...he's never seen me cry either.

And now they both let go of all their tears--for themselves, for everyone who's lost a husband, a son, a father in war.

208 EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - COMMAND POST - NIGHT

208

SUPERIMPOSE:

4:22 A.M. The Third Day

The Landing Zone seems quiet by comparison--just the distant screams from the perimeter and the sporadic snap of sniper fire. Beside the medical tent, Colonel Moore holds the lifeless body of Jack Geoghegan cradled in his arms, as he would hold his own son in the same circumstance. The body of Willie Godboldt, the black soldier Geoghegan tried to save, is lying next to them, and Moore squeezes Godboldt's dead hand. The other soldiers of the Command Post watch reverently, as Moore weeps, all the pain washing over him. He cradles Geoghegan's body and looks up at Plumley...

MOORE

He died keeping my promise.

DILLON

Sir...they've ordered us out. All of us now. They say they'll march reinforcements in.

Moore lays Geoghegan's body softly to earth, and rises. He looks around at his battered, depleted command group.

MOORE

They don't understand. We can't get out.

He looks off toward the mountain, where he knows Colonel Ahn is plotting.

MOORE (CONT'D)

He's out there, waiting for that. The minute he sees helicopters leaving with live soldiers, they'll be all over us. And he'll have his massacre.

There's nothing to say. Then Ernie Savage, slumped with the rest of the cut-off platoon in the medical area, stands and approaches Moore.

SAVAGE

Sir...request permission to rejoin the line.

Moore, stirred by Savage's courage, nods; Savage says nothing to his men, just lifts his weapon and moves off into the night. The rest of his men, even the wounded, follow him.

Moore stands watching them go. He looks around the perimeter, sensing, calculating, feeling. Plumley moves up and stands beside him. Galloway's there too, silent.

MOORE

None of us have slept for three days. We started understrength, and now we've lost more casualties than any regiment, north or south, at Gettysburg. Our enemies are fresh, and their numbers are growing. You ever wonder what Custer was thinking, once he realized just how tough and determined the Sioux were?

PLUMLEY

Sir, Custer was a pussy.

Moore looks at Plumley...his hero.

PLUMLEY (CONT'D)

You ain't.

Moore doesn't smile. *USP* And then he does. He stares off at the mountain again. The banshee sounds of bugle and whistle calls echo down to them. \*

MOORE

Right now, they're planning the attack that'll finish us. They'll keep nibbling at us all night, then come at dawn, with everything they have. That's what I'd do, if I was him. \*

(beat) \*

Issue the rest of the ammunition. And tell the men to fix their bayonets. \*

209 EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - OUT ON THE PERIMETER - NIGHT 209

All along the line, the exhausted troopers receive ammunition and the whispered order to fix bayonets. \*

210 EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - OUTSIDE THE PERIMETER - NIGHT 210

Beyond the American lines, the North Vietnamese--great masses of them--move into position for the final assault. NVA snipers are working their way into the trees. It's amazing to watch them do it; silently, moving lithe bodies like snakes into the upper branches, hidden among the foliage; tying themselves into position, readying rifles. And the main body of NVA infantry prepares for its charge. \*

211 EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - FRONT LINE - DAWN 211

The sky is turning pink, casting a glow over the quiet battlefield, covered with the dead.

212 INT. NVA BUNKER - ON THE MOUNTAIN - DAY 212

Colonel Ahn is coldly sober. He stares at his maps, with his forces massed to converge on the weak spot of Charlie Company, the exposed place he's attacked all along. A young, tough officer, an NVA captain, salutes him and hurries out. \*

213 EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - CHARLIE COMPANY LINES - DAWN 213

Moore is at the forward fighting hole. He watches the sun crack the horizon with yellow light, and knows this is a morning for massacre... \*

ON THE NVA LINE, the tough captain looks over his troops, deployed for the assault, and lifts his hand to set off the final charge... bullets cut into him! Moore and his men are charging into them! The NVA are caught by surprise, the Americans slamming into them, firing weapons at full auto. And every American on the line is firing at the same time, high into the trees. \*

Snipers in the trees drop from their perches and get caught in their rigging. Other NVA's, having crawled close to the American lines, jump up from the grass and try to run, and are cut down. \*

THE NORTH VIETNAMESE are not prepared for the sight of the screaming Americans running into and through them. The NVA have no defenses, no fighting holes dug. Moore and his men, cut through them. \*

The NVA's don't crumble; one of them shouts a warning over his radio before he dies. \*

Moore leads his men on, changing clips as they run. \*

IN THE NVA REAR, men rally to meet the charge; their AKs, machine guns, and rocket launchers ready. They see Moore and his men coming, and are about to wipe them out when... \*

CRANDALL AND HIS HUEYS come ripping by, skimming a few feet above the earth, just over the heads of Moore's men and firing their M-60 door guns, and gatlings, spewing death.

MOORE AND HIS MEN run for 500 yards; they reach the base of the mountain, and stop.

There is no more resistance.

213A INT. COLONEL AHN'S UNDERGROUND BUNKER - DAY

213A \*

Ahn and his aides studies study his charts, as the NVA Officer rushes in. \*

NVA OFFICER \*

Colonel! The Americans have broken through our lines! We have no soldiers between them and our command post! \*

Ahn does not panic, but wastes no time. He rolls up his charts, and his aides hurriedly do the same, gathering them to abandon the command post. \*

214 EXT. THE KILLING GROUND - DAY

214

It is a field littered with enemy dead, sprawled in bunches across a torn and gouged land; broken bodies, torn uniforms, shattered weapons littering the landscape. Galloway moves among the dead, taking pictures.

He comes upon Moore, standing alone, looking over the field, tears welling in his eyes. Galloway lifts his camera...then lowers it, without taking the picture. Moore moves back toward his Command Post.

Savage and others are policing the battlefield. Savage reaches into the grass and picks up something shiny, and strange:

A BUGLE

A big, battered old army bugle, carrying a French manufacturing inscription; it is the bugle taken from the French when they were massacred.

Savage hangs it around his neck, and moves on.

215 EXT. THE MEDICAL AREA - DAY

215

Crandall is landing, with the rest of his choppers, settling in unopposed. Through the glass bubble of his cockpit he looks at Moore, and tosses him a salute.

Moore and Plumley zip up the body bags that contain the mortal remains of Jack Geoghegan and Willie Godboldt.

Ouellette, at the radio, interrupts...

OUELLETTE

Sir...reinforcements are approaching.

216 EXT. THE RELIEF COLUMN - DAY

216

A column of fresh American troops is marching overland, led by a recon platoon; they enter X-Ray, and the fresh troopers are stunned by what they see: bodies of enemy dead, stacked like cordwood alongside the trail, in piles six feet high.

There are also incredible piles of captured enemy weapons and gear.

Nadal meets their wide-eyed leader, LT. COLONEL MCDADE.

MCDADE

My God, there's enemy bodies all over this valley! For the last thirty minutes we've been walking through bodies. What happened here?

Nadal doesn't know how to tell him.

217 EXT. LZ X-RAY - COMMAND POST - DAY

217

McDade approaches Moore, and salutes.

MCDADE

Congratulations on your victory here, Colonel Moore.

Moore looks at McDade with barely concealed disapproval.

MOORE

We need to step up our harassing artillery fire and keep the air strikes coming on the slopes.

MCDADE

(smiling)

Don't worry, we can handle it.

MOORE

They've retreated, but they're not gone.

MCDADE

We'll take care of it.

MOORE

Intelligence marks two other landing zones on our maps. But they can't be defended. Don't go to them.

MCDADE

We've got it, Colonel. You guys better get going! Headquarters is anxious to see you.

218 INT. NVA BUNKER - DAY

218

Colonel Ahn's bunker is deserted, except for Ahn. His men have picked clean every bit of paper, they've stripped the bunker of everything; they're leaving.

Ahn looks back at the empty bunker--with respect. He turns and walks away--but nothing in him is defeated.

219 AT THE LZ - DAY

219

A HUGE CHINOOK HELICOPTER settles down, loaded with reporters, photographers and television crews, under escort of the divisions public-affairs officer.

Joe Galloway, grimy, numb and half-deafened by two days of battle, stands at the landing zone watching his fellow reporters step out and look around, trying to make sense of it all. Spotting Galloway, they move to him, just as artillery rounds scream overhead, impacting on the mountain above them; the flock of reporters flop to the ground.

Galloway stares down at them, realizing the gulf that now exists between him and others of his profession.

GALLOWAY

That's friendly artillery.

He walks away.

220 EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - DAY

220

The replacements are walking among the hundreds of enemy dead, picking up huge stacks of weapons, near the spot where Charlie Company made its stand.

Not far from them, the last of the American wounded are climbing onto the Hueys that will ferry them back to hospitals and, ultimately, back to combat. The wounded pass the bodies of their dead fellow troopers, awaiting the long trip back home.

Near the termite mound that marked the command post, some trooper has shoved a tiny American flag onto a shattered tree trunk; REPORTERS shoot snapshots of it; others cluster around Moore.

REPORTER 1

What was the key to your victory,  
Colonel?

REPORTER 2

Tell us how you feel.

Moore looks at them. He tries to speak. But he doesn't have the words for the truth. He just walks away.

221 EXT. LZ X-RAY - BY THE HUEY HELICOPTERS - DAY

221

Galloway shoots a few final photos of weary soldiers dragging themselves to the helicopters; emphasized by Galloway's still shots, we see Edwards (wounded), Beck, Savage, Nadal, getting on choppers. Then Galloway picks up his own rifle and pack, to leave. He spots Moore, standing by the helicopters landing to take the dead, and approaches him.

GALLOWAY

Colonel, I just came to say...

But Galloway can't find words either. He looks away, trying not to show the tears welling into his eyes. Moore salutes Galloway. Galloway nods, returns the salute, and moves to a waiting Huey--but he doesn't get on yet.

He sees Moore watching his last three dead--Geoghegan's body being the last--loaded onto a chopper.

Moore looks around the field one last time.

VOICE OVER

The American replacements counted over a thousand NVA bodies.

The reinforcements' Chaplain sets up a small display of Buddhist prayer flags and incense sticks, and then makes the sign of the cross over the bodies.

VOICE OVER (CONT'D)

How many more of their comrades were dragged away, or never found, is uncertain. But the Vietnamese believe that if a man is blown apart, then his soul must walk the earth. So many were killed by fire and artillery that the Vietnamese are afraid to return to the place of the battle, and to this day it is known as "The Valley of the Screaming Souls."

Galloway gets onto the chopper. Plumley, Hastings and Ouellette step on behind him. Galloway looks back as Hal Moore, with all of his men, living and dead, already off the field, steps onto Crandall's helicopter. We see his boot as it lifts off the soil.

222 INT. CRANDALL'S CHOPPER - DAY

222

Moore looks down at the battle-scarred earth and shattered trees. He sees Galloway watching him, and knows Galloway has seen the tears welling in his eyes.

MOORE

I'll never forgive myself.

GALLOWAY

For what?

MOORE

That my men died. And I didn't.

And then Hal Moore weeps, for the first time since he was a boy.

223 EXT. CAMP HOLLOWAY - DAY

223

The big Chinooks settle down. The troopers step off, incredibly filthy and exhausted.

The soldiers of the camp look at these men with something approaching awe. Then, with no one giving the order, the Cav troopers dress their lines and march off together.

224 EXT. CRANDALL'S LANDING PAD - DAY

224

Crandall lands. Moore steps out of the helicopter; there is no one there to greet him.

Plumley steps from the chopper, as Crandall and Mills get out too.

MOORE

Sergeant Major. Are the wounded--

PLUMLEY

All at the hospital. The Colonel's been without sleep for four days. Wouldn't he like some rest?

224A BATTERED EARTH - THE GECKO

224A

emerges from his hole and climbs onto a scortched tree.  
Beyond him, LZ X-RAY is battle-scarred and quiet.

\*  
\*  
\*

225 OMITTED

225 \*

226 INT. COMMAND TENT - CAMP HOLLOWAY - DAY

226 \*

Moore has fallen asleep on a cot; he wakes to find the tent full of activity; the radios are crackling, the command tent full of concerned men.

MOORE

What's going on?

MAJOR

Apparently...McDade's battalion was ambushed, moving to the new landing zone.

MOORE

Ambushed?! How--

MAJOR

Apparently, while they were marching they got strung out and--

MOORE

Marching?!

Nobody wants to look Moore in the eye. They hear the radio voices from the fighting, confused, terrified...

RADIO VOICES

Where are they?! Where-- what--

MOORE

They're panicking! What's McDade doing?

OFFICER

He has all his officers up at the front of the column...

MOORE

McDade just came off a desk job! Somebody's got to go in and pull them out!

Moore grabs his rifle and his gear. He's running for the door when he collides with Colonel Brown, entering.

COLONEL BROWN

We've ordered Diduryk's company to saddle up. General Westmoreland's sent for you. The Secretary of Defense is in Saigon and wants you to brief him on your battle.

The radios still crackle with the chaos of the unfolding massacre--and Moore has the terrible realization that his superiors aren't going to let him go back out,

227 INT. U.S. ARMY HEADQUARTERS - SAIGON - HALLWAY - DAY 227

Hal Moore stands straight up, in his battle fatigues, in a Colonial hallway. GENERAL WESTMORELAND steps out and gives him a huge smile and a handshake and ushers him into

228 INT. U.S. ARMY HEADQUARTERS - SAIGON - FORMAL OFFICE - DAY 228

ROBERT McNAMARA and several Generals and Washington aides are there.

GENERAL WESTMORELAND

Mr. Secretary, this is Colonel Moore.  
Colonel Moore, the Secretary of Defense.

McNamara is beaming, and shakes Moore's hand warmly.

MCNAMARA

Colonel, you have the thanks of your whole country--especially mine, and that of the President. You've won a victory that's inspired us all. And made us sure of our ultimate victory.

MOORE

My men...are the finest who ever wore the uniform.

MCNAMARA

We know that! And they dismembered the enemy. 79 dead, against 1800 to 2000 enemy? That's in the range of 22.8 to 26.2 to one!

For a moment, Moore can't get a word out. He reaches into a pocket and withdraws the small, beautiful book Nadal found beside the cut-off platoon.

MOORE

One of my men...found this on the battlefield. Vietnamese. I had it translated.

(he reads)

"Oh, my dear, my young wife. When the troops come home after the victory, and you do not see me, please look at the proud colors. You will see me there, and you will feel warm under the shadow of the bamboo tree."

The General and the Diplomat don't understand; they smile, thinking Moore is understandably befuddled.

GENERAL WESTMORELAND

We're requesting 40,000 more troops, and because of what your men have proven, we expect the President to look very favorably on our request. We'll run these little bastards back home.

Moore struggles to find the words.

MOORE

I just...I want you all to understand...how well my men fought. How proud of them I am.

MCNAMARA

Yes, yes, of course we do--

MOORE

But if I were the leader of the other side...I would have been proud of them.

Dead silence; they're not sure what Moore is trying to say, or if they want to hear it.

MOORE (cont'd)

They pushed 2000 men through artillery and napalm. And those 2000 came willingly. They ran right at the muzzles of our guns. We took them hand to hand. And we won. But they didn't see it that way. They didn't go away. They just backed up and came again.

(beat)

We won't run the little bastards home, Sir. They are home.

McNamara is no longer smiling, nor is anyone else.

On Moore, as he looks at them...we DISSOLVE TO...

229 EXT. LZ X-RAY - DUSK

229

It looks empty, except for the dead North Vietnamese.

But as we PAN we see NVA soldiers appearing like ghosts congealing out of the twilight, silently picking up their fallen comrades.

And at the termite hill, where Moore had his command post, is Colonel Ahn.

Ahn looks around from the perspective Moore had, projecting himself into his enemy's mind. Ahn sees the dead bodies of his men, so close by; the bullet marks in the termite mound; the American blood on the ground, where the wounded and dying lay. Ahn says to one of his staff officers--

AHN

He was brilliant. As smart as he was brave. They all were.

He notices the tiny American flag, stuck into the shattered tree trunk. Ahn admires it, but shakes his head sadly.

AHN (CONT'D)

Such a tragedy. They will think this was their victory. So this will become an American war. And the end will be the same, except for the numbers who die before we get there.

His soldiers, carrying their fallen brothers, melt back into the mists and vegetation, as does Colonel Ahn. In but a moment, it's as if they were never there.

229A EXT. MOORE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

229A \*

The windows are lit against the damp night. The street outside is empty as a graveyard. \*

229B INT. MOORE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

229B \*

Three of the children are making playful noises upstairs. Julie sits with her eldest son, Greg, reading "The Little Star" to Cecile... \*

GREG \*

"... and that was the most beautiful night since the creation of the earth." \*

JULIE \*

Okay, brush your teeth. \*

CECILE \*

Aw, Mom-- \*

JULIE \*

No whining, let's go! \*

Cecile heads upstairs. \*

OUTSIDE, A CAB slides to a silent stop on the street. \*

INSIDE, Julie picks up a ripped pair of jeans and starts repairing the knees. There is a KNOCK at the door. And it's too late for visitors. Julie looks outside and sees the cab there. Her heart stops.

JULIE  
(calling upstairs)  
Kids... get in bed.

KIDS  
(from upstairs)  
Mom...

JULIE  
Get in bed!

Another soft knock. She moves to the door. She can't look. She opens the door.

It's Hal.

He moves in and takes her into his arms.

The kids are peeking from the top of the stairs. Julie's face is still buried in Hal's chest. Then she says the words she has prayed to say --

JULIE  
Children!... Your daddy's home.

230 INT. AIRPORT - DAY

230

Bill Beck helps Russell Adams from the plane. Adams is in a wheelchair, his head bandaged, half his brain blow away. No one at the airport pays them any attention at all, as they move down a long corridor, alone.

MOORE'S VOICE OVER  
Some had families waiting. For others, their only family would be the men they had bled beside. There were no bands, no flags, no honor guards to welcome them home. They went to war because their country ordered them to. But in the end they fought not for their country, or their flag. They fought for each other.

231 JOE GALLOWAY is in a newsroom back in America; all around him journalists are writing about sports, politics, society; life seems normal to them. Joe's eyes are haunted as he types... 231

We see images of the young men fighting and dying at X-Ray.  
Men like Beck and Adams, as Adams takes a bullet in the head  
and Beck picks up his machine gun to fight on; Joe Marm,  
charging the enemy alone, and then being shot in the face.

069

232 EXT. CONNECTICUT GRAVEYARD - DAY

232

Hal and Julie Moore stand with Barbara Geoghegan at Jack's grave. A cold wind is blowing, the sky is gray. They are alone. But they are together.

233 HAL MOORE, WALKING ALONE...

233

It's years later, but he looks very much the same: graying hair, yet his face is still chiseled, his body still lean and tough. He's in civilian clothes now. It's another cold, gray day, and he is

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - AT THE WALL - DAY

Moore walks along the wall, past thousands of names cut into the stone of the memorial. And played out upon the wall, as if projected there from Moore's soul, are his memories: Moore standing in the middle of LZ X-Ray with bullets cutting the air as he waves and screams to ward off the jets dropping napalm; the canisters falling on his men, engulfing them in fire; and Joe Galloway struggling away from the flames, holding the charred legs of Jimmy Nakayama...

MOORE'S VOICE OVER

I wish I could find words that would keep War from ever happening again. We who have seen it will never stop seeing. In the silence of the night, we will always hear the screams...

He moves up to the joint of the V, the center of The Wall, where the names of those killed earliest in the war are inscribed. On Panel 3-East he sees the names of his men. His face reflects in the polished granite, as if their names are chiseled on his face.

MOORE'S VOICE OVER

But I would not choose to stop. For I would not be without those men, even if all I have left of them is the memory of their sacrifice...

In his memory, projected on the wall across their names, are more flashbacks: Tom Metsker giving up his place on the helicopter to The wounded Captain, and being shot dead as he does so...

234 And then we see the last moments of Jack Geoghegan, fighting in Charlie Company's most desperate moments. Willie Godboldt goes down, out ahead of all the others, and Geoghegan charges forward to save him. He lifts Godboldt, starts back toward the American lines, and is ripped by bullets, going down...

MOORE'S VOICE OVER

...For it is the memory of them. And I  
would not wish to live in a world without  
such men as these.

235 The images slowly disappear, absorbing into the wall,  
leaving Hal Moore's face reflected on the polished black  
stone that bears so many names, as we FADE OUT... 235

Before the final credits, crawling up the screen are the  
names of the men killed at X-Ray and Albany. All of them.

THE END

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