

# ***The Lost Patrol***

*Based on the book  
"We Were Soldiers Once... And Young"  
by Lt. General Hal G. Moore  
and Joseph L. Galloway*

*Screenplay by Randall Wallace*

*March 20, 2000*

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.

FADE IN:

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

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 twelve years later.

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

CAPTAIN

See anything?

LIEUTENANT

No, Captain.

CAPTAIN

Keep them alert.

As the Lieutenant moves forward, stoking up his men, the Captain wipes the sweat from his stinging eyes.

CAPTAIN (cont'd)

Fucking grass. Fucking heat. Fucking country--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A bullet slaps through the peak of his cap and he falls dead. Springing a classic ambush from the tall grass on the right side of the road are the French's enemy, known in this day as the Vietminh. Command-detonated land mines explode in the roadway, throwing men into the air and blocking the French vehicles.

The first crash of rifle fire and grenades tears into their ranks, but the French are a potent fighting force, more than two hundred battle-hardened veterans. They return fire immediately; their bugler blows a warning to the furthest parts of the line.

Then the Vietminh spring the other jaw of their trap; a second force rises behind the French and sprays them with automatic weapons fire. A mass of Vietminh troops charge from the hills flanking the road.

The French officers are professional and courageous, running through the hail of gunfire to steady and direct their men to cover both directions.

Then the Vietminh snipers, roped into the tree tops, pour pinpoint rifle fire onto the road, killing the bravest officers, even the bugler. The Vietminh are as ferocious as they are clever; they race right into the French ranks, shooting, stabbing, slinging grenades. Leading the first charge onto the road is an officer named AHN. He bayonets the French officer we saw earlier, shoots two more of his enemies, and waves his soldiers forward.

A VIETMINH SERGEANT shouts to Ahn above the crash of battle (in Vietnamese, with subtitles)...

VIETMINH SERGEANT  
Do we take prisoners?

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

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 country. Ahn's eyes are distant, as if he can see into the future.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. A CLEAR BLUE SKY - DAY

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

SUPERIMPOSE:

**Ft. Bragg, North Carolina 1962**

EXT. THE PLANE - DAY

In its open side door stands a lean officer; he is HAL MOORE, and we don't see much of him; he's wearing a helmet and parachute goggles, as he tethers himself to the pull lines and calmly steps out into the rush of air.

The chute snaps open quickly--too quickly. Moore's body jerks like a rag doll as too much 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.

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

DOWN ON THE GROUND, two observers sit in a jeep in the open field where Moore is supposed to land. One of the observers is GENERAL HARRY KINNARD; his AIDE sees a warning light flare on his communications panel and says

AIDE

Sir, there's a problem.

They see it through their binoculars...

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

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.

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...

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE draws a knife, 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.

He stays on his feet, landing in an easy trot, towing in the reserve chute and taking off the helmet and goggles as the trucks and ambulances of Ft. Bragg come screaming up to him. Moore is ruggedly handsome.

MOORE  
We're gonna have to lengthen the pull  
time.

General Kinnard shakes his head and smiles.

EXT. PENTAGON - DAY

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

GENERAL'S VOICE  
Southeast Asia is heating up...

INT. PENTAGON CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Lots of brass around a table. One of them is Kinnard.

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

GENERAL 2  
Victory? Over what? Cavemen, in black  
pajamas?

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Kinnard nods; he welcomes the challenge.

GENERAL

It'll take a hell of a combat leader.

GENERAL KINNARD

I think I know just the guy.

EXT. TWO-LANE GEORGIA HIGHWAY, 1964 - DAY

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.

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

Hal stops at the front gate of the military base. Hal 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.

EXT. FT. BENNING - DEPENDENT HOUSING - DAY

Hal drives into the section of the fort where soldiers' families are provided housing. They stop before a collection of structures that make a Motel 6 look palatial. Julie looks from the building to Hal, hoping he must have the number wrong, but he's checking his papers; this is it.

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.

Edwards looks down the block and sees Moore carrying a massive stack of books into his house.

EDWARDS

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

METSKER

He led a combat company in Korea. After that he volunteered to test experimental parachutes.

Down the street one of Moore's sons is carrying in a pair of paratrooper jump boots, slung over his shoulder.

EDWARDS

Experimental parachutes?

METSKER

Does kinda make you think, don't it?

As 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.

EXT. FT. BENNING - HELICOPTER LANDING AREA - DAY

BRUCE CRANDALL, a handsome, late-20's Major, is leading his chopper crews and mechanics in 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.

CRANDALL

Come on, gimme your best shot!

ED "TOO TALL TO FLY" FREEMAN, a gawky 6'8" pilot, 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, drunken outfielders, leaving the spectators--more of his beer swilling 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...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CRANDALL  
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.

MOORE  
What do you drink, Crandall?

INT. FT. BENNING OFFICERS' CLUB - DAY

Two drinks are set in front of Moore and Crandall. They toast, and sip.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 drink. Crandall grins, and they click glasses.

CRANDALL

To the Air Cav!

EXT. HANGAR - FT. BENNING - DAY

Gathered outside a giant hangar are two dozen officers. Edwards and Metsker are among them. Standing at attention is SERGEANT-MAJOR BASIL PLUMLEY, a tall, rawboned West Virginian, his eyes eternally watchful, missing nothing.

PLUMLEY

'Tension!

The officers snap to attention and salute as Moore strides up. 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

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

I assure you that neither the new technology or your status as officers will keep you above the danger.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE (cont'd)  
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 Market Garden, 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.

EXT. TRAINING RUN - DAY

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...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The officers reach the top of the hill; they are drenched in sweat. Moore isn't winded--he doesn't even look hot.

MOORE

Get some water, Gentlemen--you're gonna need it.

EXT. FT. BENNING DRILL GROUNDS - DAY

Enlisted men are waiting on the drill grounds--among them are the 6'2" BILL BECK and the 5'6" RUSSELL ADAMS, best friends, along with THERON LADNER, a draftee gunner. Quartermasters crack open cases of brand new M-16's. Captain Metsker holds the first one aloft.

METSKER

When I was in Viet Nam as an advisor, the enemy carried the AK-47. It was much better than my M-14. But now we have this. The M-16.

The sergeants begin handing them out to the enlisted men; Plumley, standing nearby, seems to have a bad taste in his mouth--but the young troopers are excited to hold these long-anticipated weapons.

BECK

Man, what a great gun!

Suddenly it's quieter than a fart in church. Everybody's looking at Beck--his buddies, Captain Metsker, and especially Sgt-Major Plumley, who steps up eye-to-eye with Beck.

BECK

I mean rifle. I said rifle.

PLUMLEY

Naw. You said gun.

EXT. PARADE GROUND

The men stand in formation facing Beck, who must lead them in the ritual, as Plumley looks on steely-eyed.

PLUMLEY

Unzip!... Draw out!...

The enlisted men unzip their pants and unlimber their peckers; holding their M-16's aloft in their right hands and their dangling peckers in their left, they recite in unison:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ENLISTED MEN

This is my rifle.  
This is my gun.  
This one's for fightin'.  
This one's for fun.

PLUMLEY

Repack!... Zip up!...

The men restore themselves to decency, but Beck's friends glare at him, knowing the group punishment is just beginning.

PLUMLEY

Rifles up!... Run!

The troopers lift their rifles high overhead and tramp off on a long run through the marshes, led by Plumley. Adams and Beck are in the center of the pack, with their buddies.

ADAMS

Great job, Bill. Really great.

BECK

To me, anything that shoots is a gun.

ADAMS

Just shut the fuck up...

CLOSE ON MOORE, IN HIS UNIFORM

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

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

Hail Mary, full of grace...

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOORE

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...

INT. MOORE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

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

He kisses her again, tender as the Georgia air.

EXT. PARADE GROUND - FT. BENNING - DAWN

Moore and Plumley are striding to work; Moore stifles a yawn. Plumley notices...but lets it pass. Then--

PLUMLEY

They're sending us some new officers. Real green.

MOORE

Must be starting a new 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?

EXT. FT. BENNING SWAMPS - DAY

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 field radio. Moore stops to watch as his officers stagger by; near the front are two young lieutenants, the handsome 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. Metsker is working 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.

RADIO VOICES

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

The signal fades 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

Take off your boots! And your socks!

They hesitate, but only for a moment, obeying the order they don't yet understand. Moore is definite.

MOORE

Check your feet. And those of your buddy. Look for blisters, for who needs powder, and clean socks!

He walks among them, a fire raging inside him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE

Drive your men hard! And when you're done, you look at their feet. Take care of them, and teach them to take care of each other. Because when this starts--

He points to the radio...

MOORE

...each other is all we're gonna have.

As Moore says this his eyes find his new lieutenants, so earnest and young.

CLOSE - JACK GEOGHEGAN, one of those lieutenants, is leading 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

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

Most 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

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're 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...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GEOGHEGAN

Godboldt!

Godboldt's ready for a reaming.

GEOGHEGAN

Take off your boots. And your socks.

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

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

Geoghegan looks at the men who were hazing Godboldt.

GEOGHEGAN

Everybody! Check each other's feet.

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

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.

IN THE HALLWAY

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.

INT. MOORE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

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.

INT. MOORE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

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

INT. MOORE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

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.

EXT. FT. BENNING - TRAINING - MARSHLANDS - DAY

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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  
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, a young buck sergeant named ERNIE SAVAGE. He's a friendly country boy, with an Alabama accent.

MOORE (cont'd)  
What's your name, son?

SAVAGE  
Savage, Sir.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE

Well 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.

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

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 SMITH, 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. 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

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

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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

INT. HOSPITAL INFANT STABILIZATION NURSERY - NIGHT

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

INT. HOSPITAL CHAPEL - NIGHT

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE

Let's ask him.

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

MOORE

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.

QUICK CUTS - ACROSS AMERICA - DAY

A collage 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

...I have today ordered the 1st Airmobile Division to Viet Nam.

INT. MOORE HOME - DAY

Julie and the other wives, assembled for another meeting, have stopped to watch the television, and receive the news in silence.

INT. OFFICER'S CLUB - DAY

The Air Cav officers are watching too, listening in silence to the President's announcement. We slowly push in on Hal Moore. His fellow officers nod, happy and excited.

But Moore is not smiling; something is troubling him...

EXT. COMMANDING GENERAL'S MANSION - FT. BENNING - DAY

The residence of the commanding general is a Southern antebellum mansion on manicured grounds within the fort compound. Hal Moore, in his best uniform, strides up the steps to the front door. A starched officer with the manner of a VALET opens the door to admit him.

VALET

Good afternoon, Colonel Moore!

INT. GENERAL'S MANSION - DAY

General Kinnard is at his huge desk, finishing a congratulatory phone call.

GENERAL KINNARD

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, we're looking forward to making all of you proud!  
Thank you, Sir.

The General hangs up, shakes Hal's hand warmly, and motions him to a seat on the leather sofa by the fireplace.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GENERAL KINNARD (cont'd)

Good to see you, Hal, take a seat! Why the long face? This deployment's quite a tribute to what we've accomplished in such a short time.

MOORE

I didn't hear the President mention a State Of Emergency.

General Kinnard clears his throat.

KINNARD

No. He didn't.

MOORE

And without that declaration, the enlistments will not be extended.

KINNARD

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.

Moore sees on Kinnard's face that the old warrior doesn't like this any better than he does.

MOORE (cont'd)

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

Korea didn't teach 'em anything.

KINNARD

Politicians?

EXT. GENERAL'S MANSION - FRONT VERANDA - DAY

Kinnard accompanies Moore out onto the mansion's front veranda.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 salutes, and moves down the stairs beneath the oaks, their limbs trailing Spanish moss like the ghosts of hanged men.

EXT. GEOGHEGAN'S HOUSE - DAY

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.

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

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.

CLOSE - A BOILING POT

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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  
We were missionaries. 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JULIE

I don't know what to tell you...Except this. Before they go, every man in this regiment has to write his will. The Army tells them to. How many 20 year-olds have written a will? But they have. They can deal with killing and being killed like it was...normal. But 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

"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.

INT. MOORE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

On one corner of Moore's desk lies his newly updated "Last Will and Testament." He's already signed it. Hal sits alone, reading. Two books are open on his desk: 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.

EXT. THE AIR CAVALRY CELEBRATION - DAY

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.

The entire battalion marches in with them, Hal Moore and his staff in the lead, all of them wearing the black stetson.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 Ladner.

LADNER

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.

LADNER

What's wrong with the 7th Cavalry?

BECK

The 7th Cavalry was Custer's.

LADNER

...Yeah?...

ADAMS

Custer? The battle of the Little Big Horn?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LADNER

Who won there?

BECK

The Indians. Massacred the entire 7th Cavalry.

LADNER

...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

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

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. We are moving into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

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

MOORE

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. Moore borrows the Chaplain's Bible, puts it on the podium, and places his hand over it.

MOORE

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.

INT. MOORE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

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

OLDER SON

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

MOORE

Everybody, yeah.

OLDER SON

Wow, that's so great!

MOORE

Okay, everybody ready for bed.

CECILE

Daddy, will you read to me?

MOORE

Sure, Honey.

INT. MOORE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

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?

MOORE

War?

In the kitchen, Julie freezes over her washing dishes.

MOORE

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 are. They're gonna try. And I'm not gonna let them do it.

CECILE

Okay, Daddy!

She kisses him, and goes off to bed peacefully.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

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

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.

EXT. MOORE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

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...

EXT. FT. BENNING PARADE GROUND - NIGHT

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.

VOICE OVER

On the same day the 1st Air Cavalry  
Division left Charleston Harbor, bound  
for Vietnam...

EXT. HO CHI MINH TRAIL - DAY

We see the North Vietnamese army starting its march south. They are pushing bicycles loaded with supplies--a perfect conveyance for the jungle trails. Colonel Ahn leads them.

VOICE OVER (cont'd)

...the 66th North Vietnamese Regiment  
departed its home in the North, to move  
through its Cambodian sanctuary to the  
Central Highlands of South Vietnam.

INT. NORTH VIETNAMESE BUNKER - NIGHT

Colonel Ahn has gathered his officers in an UNDERGROUND COMMAND BUNKER, carved from the earth, impressively organized. They are looking at a spy's blown up black-and-white snapshots of the arrival of the Air Cav in Vietnam: helicopters, stacks of equipment, and extremely young men. Ahn speaks with his officers in VIETNAMESE, WITH SUBTITLES...

COLONEL AHN

These helicopters...the Americans call these troops Air Cavalry.

Colonel Ahn looks around at his officers, battle-hardened veterans.

COLONEL AHN (cont'd)

We must fight these Air Cavalry soldiers right away, if we can draw them into battle, and annihilate every one of them, this war could be over. But to fight the tiger, you must first lure him from his mountain.

He points to a spot on his maps--large and detailed.

COLONEL AHN (cont'd)

The American Special Forces Camp at Plei Me. We attack it, then pull back and wait for them to come after us.

OFFICER

How do you know they will come?

COLONEL AHN

They are Americans.

EXT. U.S. SPECIAL FORCES CAMP - PLEI ME - NIGHT

Three GREEN BERETS walk from the mess tent after dinner, relaxed, comfortable...until a bullet slaps one of them in the chest, and mortar rounds fall within their perimeter. In a moment the whole camp is alive, the Green Berets reacting quickly; the two check their friend, see he's dead, and race to the lookout posts along their barbed wire, where sentries are already lighting up the night. But they see no targets.

GREEN BERET

Cease fire!

They scan the brush; nothing. Except a few dead Americans.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GREEN BERET

Bastards.

EXT. CAMP HOLLOWAY - DAY

Establishing an encampment in the badlands of Vietnam. It's an Army city, sprung up like a frontier boomtown.

INT. COMMAND HUT - DAY

Moore stands inside the command hut--a wooden structure complete with a window air conditioning unit--as an INTELLIGENCE OFFICER along with several generals go over their latest crisis, pointing to a map.

INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

Two nights ago the enemy hit our camp at Plei Mei and withdrew toward this mountain near the Cambodian border. We've determined this is the best place to hit them.

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. But we have simple orders. Find the enemy. And kill him.

Moore looks at their map, where a red star marks Chu Phong Mountain, above the Ia Drang Valley.

EXT. AIR CAV BASE - OLD FRENCH FORT - NIGHT

The 7th Cavalry is encamped where a coffee plantation used to be, on a hill topped by a square of earthen walls, the remains of an old French fort; around this is an encirclement of barbed wire, guarded by the men of the Air Cav.

Moore and Plumley have climbed onto one of the earthen berms; it's such a peaceful sounding night, with birds and other animals chirping. They scan the darkness.

PLUMLEY

What's that? Not that bird sound, that other little scrape--hear it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE  
Geckos, I think.

PLUMLEY  
Gecko.

MOORE  
Little lizard.

PLUMLEY  
There's other little lizards out there,  
with rifles.

MOORE  
You know, the Frenchmen who built this  
wall, they climbed up here and listened  
too.

The two friends let the night settle in.

MOORE  
The valley we're gonna hit, 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.

THE AIR CAV ASSAULT - VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY

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, radio operator OUELLETTE, and MR. NIK, their  
translator.

EXT. CAMP/INTERIOR CHOPPERS - DAY

Air Cav troopers stream to the other helicopters and tuck 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 adrenalin. Some pray. All are wide-eyed  
and stressed. But every man knows his job, and every man is  
ready to go.

INT. CRANDALL'S CHOPPER - DAY

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 near the flight zone, 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.

BACK HOME - CHURCHES

The wives and families attend church services, and sing HYMNS, which we hear over...

A BLAST OF ARTILLERY, ONTO L-Z X-RAY - DAY

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

SUPERIMPOSE:

10:17 A.M.

HIGH ON CHU PHONG MASSIF - DAY

Colonel Ahn is in a bunker tucked on the side of the mountain. He hears the artillery, crashing down into the valley below.

COLONEL AHN

The helicopter soldiers are coming.

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.

MONTAGE - THE AIR CAV FLIES OFF TO BATTLE

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

The individual soldiers... Hal Moore... Plumley... Metsker... and Ouellette... Crandall at the controls, with MILLS, his co-pilot... and Moore again.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

Four 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.

EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - DAY

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 the first 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 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

Close by, two troopers discover something in the grass.

TROOPER

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

Plumley moves up.

PLUMLEY

Hell, that ain't no boy.

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

MOORE is giving orders to Metsker.

MOORE

Keep the patrols in tight contact.

METSKER

Yes sir.

PLUMLEY

Colonel, we got a prisoner.

The troopers bring up the trembling Vietnamese soldier they have just pulled from the bushes. Mr. Nik has already begun to interrogate the man in Vietnamese, and translates the answers to Moore.

MR. NIK

He say he deserter.

METSKER

He's a damn sentry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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

Come on, we've got to attack!

He leads his men, running toward the mountain and the  
gunfire.

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!

EXT. THE PLATOON - DAY

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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!

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

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  
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  
Get some artillery onto that mountain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

Alert Crandall that the Landing Zone is under fire.

Ouellette starts talking into the field radios.

INT. HELICOPTER - BRUCE CRANDALL - DAY

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

RADIO VOICE

...under fire, repeat, under fire.

CRANDALL

No shit.

He 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.

INT. NORTH VIETNAMESE BUNKER - COLONEL AHN - DAY

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.

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

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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  
(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.

AT THE CUT-OFF PATROL

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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...

EXT. AMERICAN ARTILLERY, LZ-FALCON - DAY

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.

OUT BY THE CREEK BED, AND THE LOST PATROL

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.

INT. NVA BUNKER - ON THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

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.

ON THE MOUNTAINSIDE

500 North Vietnamese, an entire battalion, are already moving down the trails toward the trapped patrol.

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

Termite hills--hard mounds eight feet high and ten feet wide at the base--are a feature of the landscape, and Moore, Plumley and the six other men of his command unit have taken cover behind one; 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.

EXCITED RADIO VOICE  
Colonel, these guys are regulars--

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

EDWARDS (cont'd)  
--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--

AT THE TERMITE MOUND

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

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

INT. NVA BUNKER - ON THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AHN  
Have we broken through?

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

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

AHN  
Use the creek bed.

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

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

EXT. LZ X-RAY - DAY

Moore runs in the open, waving the next flight of helicopters to the safest spot. Bullets are whizzing by Moore's head; 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, NADAL--

MOORE  
They're trying to flank us! Reinforce Bravo Company, there!

Nadal and his men take off in the direction Moore points. Moore runs to another chopper, for the medical staff--DOC CARRARA, plus two others.

MOORE (cont'd)  
The wounded are behind that mound!

As the doctor and his medical helpers run toward the wounded, Moore 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 the termite hill at the edge of the LZ.

EXT. THE AMERICAN LINES, NEAR THE CREEKBED - DAY

Nadal and his newly landed troops run up through the elephant grass. Nadal works his way to CAPTAIN HERREN, who is just being handed the handset by his radio operator.

HERREN  
(radio)  
Yes, Colonel?!

INTERCUT MOORE, under fire at the termite mound.

MOORE  
(radio)  
Captain Herren, that creek bed is vital!  
They'll be coming at you!

HERREN  
We're ready, Sir!

Herren turns to Nadal.

HERREN  
Get down or get your ass shot off!

Nadal drops beside Herren. Nadal sees NVA's boiling out of the trees. Nadal and his men start firing. He shouts to Herren--

NADAL (cont'd)  
Holy shit. Who's holding down our left?

HERREN  
Two gunners.

Nadal looks at Herren in disbelief; that's all?...

OFF TO THE LEFT

The short (5'8") Russell Adams and the tall (6'2") Bill Beck are moving 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. They are moving toward the creekbed. 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Beck jumps up as fast as he jumped down and runs forward toward Adams. They're in the open, about thirty yards ahead of the others. Adams keeps moving, firing from the hip; he blows away an NVA aiming through the fork of a tree.

Beck is jumping, dodging, hitting the dirt...moving forward with Adams. A grenade hits right in front of him and goes off; he covers, and is unhurt. He sees the NVA who threw it, on one side of a termite hill. Beck has a .45 and fires an entire clip at the NVA, killing him.

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...

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

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, his intelligence officer.

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.

IN THE HELICOPTERS

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE'S VOICE

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

MEDEVAC VOICE

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

Crandall shouts to Mills.

CRANDALL

Fuckin' Medevac will go anyplace except where you need 'em!

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

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 Carrera 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 run to our flanks as fast as he can, that's how he thinks! Fire support is what will keep us alive. GET ON IT!

Moore grabs a radio and grid map, and his officers do the same.

MOORE (cont'd)

(into radio)

Hit the lower part of the mountain, grid number--

Almost instantly ARTILLERY ROUNDS start hissing over, 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 overhead, 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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. Ten feet from Moore, wounded men are bleeding to death, convulsing, screaming, reaching out...but Dr. Carrera and the two medics are overwhelmed, and Moore must ignore them, to keep doing what he must do to keep everyone--anyone--alive.

While on another part of the battlefield...

EXT. THE LOST PATROL - DAY

Savage and the others are hunkered down; an enemy grenade explodes in front of a trooper named ANDERSON, who jumps up, screaming--

ANDERSON  
My face is on fire!

It is. Shrapnel is smoking and burning in his face.

SAVAGE  
It's phosphorous!

Savage and Bungum trip Anderson 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 turns and starts firing. The surrounded troopers in their little circle fight back as best they can. Bungum fires a grenade from his launcher; it's his last one. He goes crawling around looking for a weapon. He finds three M-16's, and none of them work. Finally he finds a working rifle, and joins the fight.

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.

The wounded men fight, and we see their individual acts of courage; one has his thumb shot off, and keeps fighting;

another takes a round through his left hand, shifts his rifle to right hand, and continues firing until he is hit a second time;

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

EXT. THE TERMITE MOUND - DAY

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

MOORE

I want that patrol rescued. You'll have Marm's platoon to help.

EXT. NEAR THE CREEK BED - DAY

HERREN

(into radio)

Roger, Sir.

Three platoons have assembled, with bullets flying overhead, and are ready for an assault toward the lost patrol. Herren gives the signal, and LIEUTENANT JOE MARM leads his men over the top of the creekbed.

EXT. BETWEEN THE CREEK BED AND LOST PATROL - DAY

Immediately Marm's men run into heavy enemy fire; fifteen men go down. Marm's medic, CALVIN BOUKNIGHT, crawls from man to man, under fire, putting himself between the enemy and the wounded men... then Bouknight is hit in the back, and 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.

EXT. THE LOST PATROL, ON THE KNOLL - DAY

Doc Charlie Lose is crawling toward another wounded man when he is shot in the leg.

SAVAGE

Charlie!

But Lose keeps crawling; when he reaches the wounded man, he gives him a toilet paper bandage, then makes a compress for his own leg.

Suddenly the NVA try another mass assault from three directions.

SAVAGE (cont'd)

Full auto!

They put their M-16's on full automatic and kill most of the attacking NVA. One NVA breaks through and is right on top of Savage's back when Lose rolls over with a rifle and shoots him down. The NVA retreat again. When Savage looks at Lose, he sees him bandaging himself again, a new wound in his left arm.

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.

EXT. MOORE'S COMMAND POST - DAY

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.

INT. CRANDALL'S HELICOPTER - DAY

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. 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 turns around and looks at Lefebvre. No man could be called a coward for refusing to go into that.

LEFEBVRE

Just go on in, Snake, but be quick about it.

Mills, Crandall's co-pilot, points at another squad of helicopters circling in the distance.

MILLS

Medevacs. Scared to go in.

Crandall changes radio frequencies.

CRANDALL

(radio)

Medevac, are you inbound?

MEDEVAC PILOT VOICE

Looks pretty hot down there.

CRANDALL

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

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

EXT. THE LANDING ZONE - DAY

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. The gunners on the chopper are about to fire their M-60's, but Crandall yells--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CRANDALL

No, you'll hit our own guys!

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; Captain Lefebvre 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. Lefebvre charges out, and his new cavalymen pile from the choppers.

Over his radio, Crandall hears the Medevac leader--

MEDEVAC RADIO

Pull out, it's too hot!

Crandall sees them veer off, abandoning the wounded lying on the ground. Crandall stays on the ground and shouts to the medics--

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.

INT. CRANDALL'S CHOPPER - DAY

It's chaos, the gunners firing furiously, raking the trees, while the co-pilot, 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.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CRANDALL

(in 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!

EXT. LANDING ZONE - DAY

CHARLIE COMPANY is in a shit storm. Their captain, Bob  
Edwards, is racing down the line of firing soldiers.

EDWARDS

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

He's grabbing troopers and shoving them down the line,  
stretching them out, as they fire at the swarming NVA.  
Edwards grabs the radio, and shouts to Moore--

EDWARDS (cont'd)

We are in heavy contact. Estimate a  
hundred and seventy-five to two hundred  
enemy. Damn! These guys are good!

INTERCUT AS NECESSARY, MOORE on the radio to Edwards.

MOORE

If they get into the L-Z, we've had it.  
Can you hold?

Edwards is about to answer no, when he sees Lefebvre arrive  
with his handful of men; they lie down on Edward's flank, in  
a fold of ground, in front of the tree line at the edge of  
the LZ.

EDWARDS

Lefebvre's here, we'll give 'em hell!

EXT. LEFEBVRE'S POSITION - DAY

Lefebvre sees dozens of NVA coming at him. He 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. A trooper beside  
him applies a tourniquet. Lefebvre radios Moore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEFEBVRE  
(into radio)  
Colonel, I'm hit bad! I'm turning over  
command to Sgt. Gonzales--

SGT. GONZALES, next to Lefebvre, is at that moment hit in the face with an enemy bullet.

Gonzales grabs his face--but isn't killed; Lefebvre, without knowing Gonzales was just shot, says--

LEFEBVRE (cont'd)  
Sergeant Gonzales, you're in command.

GONZALES  
Roger.

Gonzales ignores his wound, and takes over.

GONZALES (cont'd)  
Medic! Clear the Captain!

EXT. ON THE ATTACK TRAILS OF THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

North Vietnamese are still streaming down.

EXT. ON THE ISOLATED FLANK - DAY

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.

Then Beck sees another wounded American, an officer, with his hand shot off and his thigh blown apart. Beck scrambles to him, shields him with his body, and presses a field bandage to his wounds.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Again Beck tries the officer's M-16, but it's inoperable, so he takes the officer's .45 and fires it into the jungle at the enemy.

Then Beck hears a shout from Ladner, at the other M-60 machine gun.

LADNER

Beck, Beck, help! Adams is hit!

Beck runs back to 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 fall 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!

To Beck's right, the other M-60 crew is firing. A brush fire, ignited by the hot weapons, is sweeping toward Beck; he stands up, takes a poncho, and beats out the fire.

LADNER

Rodriguez is hit! Help! His guts are on the ground!

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 Russell away; then he sees that Ladner is dragging Rodriguez back to the rear. Beck is alone, and the NVA are coming.

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

EXT. CRANDALL'S HELICOPTERS IN THE AIR - DAY

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!

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

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 Lefebvre run across the ten yards of ground and start tying charges against the tree trunks; bullets drop two of the engineers as they work.

EXT. PLEI ME CAMP - DAY

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. And there is a picture here...

A huge black enlisted man, wearing only G.I. shorts and boots, hands bigger than dinner plates, reaching into the helicopter to pick up one of the dead white soldiers. 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.

Crandall watches this, transfixed; then one of his pilots, PAUL WINKEL, runs up.

CRANDALL

What are you guys doing here?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WINKEL

Colonel Moore has closed the L-Z. 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.

INT. A SAIGON WAR ROOM

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 regiment massacred.

ARMY INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

You think this is a massacre?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

EXT. PLEI ME BASE CAMP - DAY

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 (cont'd)

(into radio)

Colonel, this is Snakeshit 6, we have two full loads of ammo.

INTERCUT AS NECESSARY, MOORE IN THE LANDING ZONE

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'S VOICE

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

CRANDALL

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!

TOO TALL'S VOICE

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

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

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 south, Snake!

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

METSKER

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

MOORE

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

METSKER

Not all of us, just you. They want 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!

IN THE CHOPPER

Crandall sees a man below him, waving.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TOO TALL

(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.

ON THE GROUND

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...

Medics carry Captain 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.

MEDIC

Got another one!

CHOPPER CREW

We're overloaded! Leave him!

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

METSKER

No, it's Captain Lefebvre!

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.

INT. CRANDALL'S HELICOPTER - LIFTING INTO THE AIR - DAY

A crewman checks Metsker.

CREWMAN  
It's Captain Metsker.

LEFEBVRE  
How is he?

CREWMAN  
He's dead.

EXT. MOORE'S COMMAND POST - DAY

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

He looks in the direction of the lost patrol.

MOORE (cont'd)  
...And for those guys cut off out there.

EXT. THE LOST PATROL - DAY

The platoon clings to its tiny, tortured piece of earth, as the North Vietnamese make another assault on it. The Lost Patrol survivors bang away at men running at them from every direction.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

EXT. THE L.Z. - DAY

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

INT. A CHOPPER AS IT LANDS

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.

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

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--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE

Get over with your Company.

Moore points toward the most desperate spot in the line, where Edwards and Lefebvre 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 patrol.

EXT. THE DRY CREEKBED - DAY

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!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 lost patrol.

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; the three men next to Nadal are all 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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. We see him as they do, in slow motion...

Miraculously, he reaches the termite hill, tosses the hand grenade behind it, then cleans up the survivors with his M-16. He's done it! The other Americans are jubilant...

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

The jubilation turns to horror in a half second.

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.

EXT. PLEI ME - DUSK

It is fast growing dark 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!

INT. HELICOPTER - SUNDOWN

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

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.

EXT. LZ X-RAY - DUSK

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

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, Bureau Chief of U.P.I.  
How's it goin', Colonel?

MOORE

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

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.

EXT. CAMP HOLLOWAY - NIGHT

In the medical tent 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 tent, where Graves Registration workers are checking dogtags and identifying the dead, for notification of next of kin.

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 pilots 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 the seat of his chopper, 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VOICE

Crandall!

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

MEDEVAC C.O.

You led my people into a hot LZ!

CRANDALL

Somebody had to fly out the wounded.

MEDEVAC 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

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

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.

EXT. THE LOST PATROL - NIGHT

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, six-eight-zero.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

Zero-three-seven, eight-zero-three!...

Savage shouts the coordinates and simultaneously uses his M-16 in one hand 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

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

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.

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

HERREN'S VOICE

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

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HERREN'S VOICE (cont'd)

...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.

EXT. PERIMETER - NIGHT

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.

TROOPER #1

We'll get 'em, sir.

Moore sees Geoghegan, who smiles.

GEOGHEGAN

They won't get through us, sir.

Moore wishes he had better words to say; he pats Geoghegan's  
shoulder, and moves on with Plumley.

EXT. MOORE'S COMMAND POST - NIGHT

Moore is on the radio to headquarters.

MOORE

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

RADIO VOICE

You'll get it, Colonel. You guys were  
magnificent today. We're all proud back  
here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE

I need that count.

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

EXT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Julie is vacuuming the living room when she looks out her window and sees a yellow cab slowing as it rolls past her house. Julie pauses and watches it stop at May's house, across the street. The cab driver gets out and walks slowly to the front door, and knocks.

Julie is pale and frozen at the window; she knows what this message is.

May opens the door, and the cab driver hands her the telegram, and leaves quickly. May shuts the door.

Julie hears the WAIL of grief come from her neighbor's house.

Julie wants to hide; she wants to crawl into a deep, dark hole someplace, and not come out. And she sees, across the street from her, another wife, standing at her own front window, who has seen the cab too, and knows that it means husbands, fathers, are dying.

Julie looks up the street and sees more women at their windows.

EXT. WIVES HOUSES - DAY

Julie, wearing her best clothes, her church clothes, walks down the street, forcing herself forward.

She stops in front of the house where the cab went, then pushes herself to the front door, and knocks.

After a long pause, May opens the door. She has tried to wipe away the tears and compose herself before she opens the door; now she looks at Julie. Julie looks back, unable to speak...

She doesn't have to. May begins to cry again, and she and Julie fall into each other's arms and weep together.

The telegram is open on the table: "The Secretary of the Army regrets to inform you..."

Behind Julie, Barbara Geoghegan comes up; she too has seen the cab, and has put on her best clothes to come visit May.

EXT. MAY'S HOUSE - LATER

Julie and Barbara are leaving.

JULIE  
I'll come by again tomorrow. And I'll  
call.

BARBARA  
If there's anything we can do...

MAY  
I know.

Julie and Barbara walk down the sidewalk, 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.

Down the street, they see two more cabs.

Seeing the cabs tells them everything. The killing and dying  
have already started. Now the grieving has begun.

INT. YELLOW CAB OFFICE, COLUMBUS, GEORGIA - DAY

The dispatching CLERK, a woman, is sitting at her desk  
working the radio console, telling a cab somewhere--

CLERK  
...on the corner of Main and 5th.

JULIE'S VOICE  
Excuse me.

The clerk, surprised, turns to see Julie.

JULIE  
I'm Julie Moore. I'm Colonel Moore's  
wife, from Fort Benning. My husband is  
leading the men... whose families are  
getting the telegrams. ...If you'll just  
bring 'em all to me, I'll deliver 'em  
myself so I can...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The woman stares at Julie for a long, long moment. She understands. She reaches to the corner of her desk, where there is a stack of telegrams, twenty of them, neatly arranged.

She lifts the whole stack, and gives them all to Julie.

EXT. YELLOW CAB OFFICE - DAY

Barbara is waiting on the sidewalk as Julie comes out.

BARBARA

How many do you have?

JULIE

About twenty, I think. I just put 'em in my purse, to take out one at a time. I was afraid to look through them. I was afraid...

BARBARA

...You'd see your own name.

Julie nods. Stiffening herself against the task, she reaches into her purse, and withdraws the first telegram, then reads the name with sadness.

JULIE

Sally Lane...

MONTAGE - BRINGING THE NEWS...

EXT. A FRONT STOOP - DAY

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.

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

ANOTHER FRONT PORCH, as Julie lifts the last envelope.

JULIE

The last one. Jo Ann Brown.

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

EXT. GEOGHEGAN'S HOUSE - DAY

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.

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

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. He kneels and looks at the face of one--without wrinkles, without life.

It's the soldier he had to watch bleed to death, while he ran the battle to save the others.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 shoestore 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.

INT. COLONEL AHN'S UNDERGROUND BUNKER-- NIGHT

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

EXT. THE LOST PATROL, ON THE LITTLE KNOLL - NIGHT

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

Close enough?

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

MONTAGE - THE LOST PATROL'S LAST STAND

It is an image out of the great heroic portraits of battle, and it is real: Savage and the rest of the Lost Patrol 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 Lost Patrol...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...

WOUNDED MAN

Wa... Wa-ter...

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

Savage is straining to hear; is something out there? Then Bungum hears it too. His eyes go wide with terror. Savage taps a fingertip to his lips.

They see a figure looming in front of them; Savage is about to shoot, but he sees another, and another... It's a 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 silently slips the safety off his rifle...and opens fire, as do the others. They cut the NVA down.

All the NVA are dead, but a couple of the Americans now lose control from the stress and begin to scream in hysteria.

HYSTERICAL TROOPER

AHH! AHH! AHH!

SAVAGE

Quiet, you'll get us killed!

HYSTERICAL TROOPER

AHH! AHH! AHH!

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 hysterical troopers stop crying.

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

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

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.

HERREN

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 an officer 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.

EXT. NEAR THE CREEK BED - DAWN

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

EXT. THE PERIMETER OF THE AMERICAN LINES - DAWN

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; LT. NEIL KROGER leads another... 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, Kroger, and their recon platoons are surrounded and 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. Moore and the group he's leading plunge into the fight, gunning down attackers with their M-16's.

The American machine gun nests rake the swarms of attacking enemy with devastating fire, beating them back. Moore looks to the opposite side of the L-Z; 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.

EXT. LZ X-RAY COMMAND POST - DAY

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

DILLON  
It's Edwards!

MOORE  
(into radio)  
Trojan 6!

INTERCUT - EXT. CHARLIE COMPANY PERIMETER - DAY

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.

MOORE, AT HIS COMMAND POST hears the rattle of gunfire from 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 helpers 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 (cont'd)  
Order Nadal 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 Nadal's men responding--seventeen troopers heading out in a low crouch, moving fast in short bounds across the open ground under heavy enemy automatic-weapons fire. Four of them go down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

Moore reaches for the radio. His radio operator, Ouellette, slumps over, a hole in his helmet. Moore keeps the 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.

BROWN'S VOICE  
Done. ...How bad is it, Hal?

Galloway passes him, carrying a wounded trooper, and deposits the man with the medics.

MOORE  
It's pretty sporty down here, Sir.

EXT. IN THE AIR, CRANDALL'S CHOPPERS - DAY

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  
(radio)  
Hang on, Colonel, we're comin'!

EXT. LANDING ZONE - COMMAND POST - DAY

MOORE  
(radio)  
Not yet, Snake, it's too hot!!

ON THE PERIMETER - DAY

The fighting is ferocious; the NVA are reaching the foxholes, and much of the fighting is now hand-to-hand.

Edwards is 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--

EDWARDS  
Colonel, I'm hit!

INTERCUT MOORE, AT THE COMMAND POST, UNDER FIRE

MOORE  
(into radio)  
How bad?

EDWARDS  
(into radio)  
Can't move my arm. Request you send my  
exec officer to take over.

MOORE  
Arrington!

LIEUTENANT ARRINGTON, monitoring this call, moves out in a low crouch, across the open LZ, raked by fire.

EDWARDS (ON RADIO)  
They've penetrated, Colonel!

Dillon is on the radio, and shouts to Moore--

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  
Sgt. Major, we can expect an attack on  
our rear.

JOE GALLOWAY

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

AT THE AID STATION

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 his hands and hands Galloway an extra rifle.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

All the men look at Plumley, as he draws out 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.

EXT. AT THE TERMITE MOUND - DAY

Moore steps back to his command post, where his artillery officer and Forward Air Controller 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?

NEAR THE TERMITE HILL, BESIDE THE COMMAND POST

The mortar crews have ammo but are gripping the earth as bullets fly over them. Moore strides up to them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 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.

INT. NVA BUNKER - ON THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

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.

AT MOORE'S COMMAND POST

Everything is near chaos.

RADIO MEN

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--

INT. A SAIGON WAR ROOM

They hear Hastings' voice over their monitors--

HASTINGS' VOICE  
...Broken Arrow!

The diplomatic spook looks at the intelligence officer.

INTELLIGENCE OFFICER  
That's 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

--As the command goes out, carrier flight-crews spring into  
action; carrier jets take off...  
--fighter/bombers take off from air strips...  
--planes already on missions divert their course, to head for  
X-Ray...  
--and American generals and diplomats, waiting in Saigon,  
listen anxiously to reports.

EXT. HAL MOORE, BY THE TERMITE MOUND - DAY

The sound of combat is unbelievable--and all the more  
desperate now. Shouts over the radio... calls to men who no  
longer answer...

OUELLETTE  
C Company! Report!... D Company!  
Report!... Anybody!?

HASTINGS  
Planes are on their way, Colonel.

MOORE  
How long?

HASTINGS  
Five minutes.

MOORE  
We don't have that much time.  
(into radio)  
Counter-attack.

# THE OFFICERS AT THE PERIMETERS

hear this order. What's he talking about? But it stiffens them, makes them aggressive. They rise up from the ground, shooting, holding the North Vietnamese off.

But the Americans are outnumbered too greatly; the NVA's sprint in, overrunning a whole company of Americans. They are streaming into the L.Z., 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.

## JOE GALLOWAY

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 one to twenty thousand! We'll get 'em, sir!  
(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--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE  
You there, Snake?

INTERCUT CRANDALL AND HIS CHOPPERS

watching the incredible maelstrom of battle from a mile out.

CRANDALL  
(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!

EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - COMMAND POST - DAY

Plumley sees Ouellette slumped over and starts to shake him.

PLUMLEY  
Wake up! Fucker's fallen asleep.

MOORE  
No, he's dead...

Just then Ouellette moans.

MOORE  
He got hit in the head with--

Plumley pulls off Ouellette's helmet and a bullet drops out.  
Ouellette stirs.

PLUMLEY  
Slug passed through the helmet, and the liner stopped it!

OUELLETTE  
...Huh?...

MOORE  
Hey, Ouellette! Good to see ya. Now come on.

Moore, Plumley and Ouellette take up firing positions on one knee, facing the mountain and the NVA attackers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Then movement off to the west catches Moore's eye, and he jerks his head around, to look 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

Charlie, call that son of a bitch off!  
Call him off!

HASTINGS

(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 Sgt. Major 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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.

KEETON, a medical sergeant, runs over and injects Nakayama with morphine.

EXT. CRANDALL, IN HIS HELICOPTER - DAY

Crandall sees the jets pounding away; he knows how desperate it is down there, and can't wait any longer. He shoves the controls and guns toward the landing zone.

GALLOWAY, KEETON, AND NAKAYAMA

The morphine doesn't help much; Nakayama still cries out in agony.

GALLOWAY

What do I do?!

They see Crandall's chopper settling to earth.

KEETON

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 Keeton 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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...

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.

VOICE OVER

She gave birth to their daughter, on the day Jimmy died.

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.

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.

ON THE CHARLIE COMPANY LINE

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.

CAPTAIN BOB EDWARDS

has been wounded three times. He's lying next to Lt. Gonzales, who has taken another bullet in the chest.

GONZALES

Captain...tell my wife I love her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDWARDS

...Don't you see I'm hit worse than you are, you dumb son-of-a-bitch?

Then Gonzales realizes Edwards is right; the surprise, and Edward's response, seems to enliven them both.

They realize the noise is dying.

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.

The severely wounded Captain Bob Edwards is pushed and pulled out of his foxhole and carried to the command post by his sergeants, themselves filthy with battle.

VOICE OVER

Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, had begun this day with five officers and 106 men. By noon, it had no officers left and only forty-nine men unhurt after two and a half hours of hand-to-hand fighting.

AT THE COMMAND POST

They realize the sound of battle is dying down all around them. A spooky calm descends on the field.

The men in the Command Post look at each other, and then at Moore. Is it over? Moore doesn't think so.

MOORE

I want four companies to advance 300 yards. Recover any wounded--or dead.

ALL AROUND - VARIOUS SHOTS

Moore's men, filthy and tired, move forward on the field. They receive only sporadic fire, and fire back as necessary.

THE BATTLEFIELD

is a haunting place of heroism and loss... They find a dead trooper locked in contact with a dead NVA, the American's hands around the NVA's throat; they find two Cav troopers linked together, one Black and one Hispanic, having died trying to drag each other back to the lines.

Moore's men begin to retrieve the bodies of their comrades.

MOORE'S COMMAND POST - DAY

Moore is listening to the recon report.

RECON VOICE

Sir, we've advanced three hundred yards,  
and recovered casualties.

MOORE

I want a precise accounting of every man.  
Exactly who we have, and who's missing.

Moore looks out, listening to the quiet, feeling the flow of  
the battle.

MOORE

We've backed 'em off, for just a second.

He grabs the other radio.

MOORE

Herren! Attack now, to save the lost  
patrol! Don't stop to neutralize  
resistance, just punch through hard and  
fast and get those men.

EXT. THE DRY CREEK BED - DAY

Captain Herren and his men are in the relative shelter of the  
dry creek bed, readying to make another assault out toward  
the knoll where the Lost Patrol was clinging to life. Since  
the last two rescue attempts have failed, the mood of the men  
is tense as they check ammo, knives, grenades.

Herren turns toward the killing ground in front of them, a  
sun-parched tangle of tall grass, trees and brush, where so  
many men have already died. He holds his M-16 at the ready  
and moves forward, with LIEUTENANT DENNIS DEAL off to his  
right and the other Air Cav troopers following.

They hear the cracks of enemy fire and the bullets slicing  
the air around them; Herren, Deal 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 Lost  
Patrol should be, but don't see anybody. Deal hollers--

LT. DEAL

Are you guys still there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

Herren, Deal, and the rest of the relief troops move to the lost patrol. 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 Lt. Deal standing upright over him, Bungum yells--

BUNGUM

Get down!

LT. DEAL

It's OK, come on, let's go.

The relief troops hand their canteens to the survivors. Deal 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.

LT. DEAL

Anybody see any other Vietnamese documents?

Deal's men shake their heads. The sun is going down. They begin taking fire.

HERREN

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.

EXT. HORIZON - SUNSET

Night is falling again, on Landing Zone X-Ray.

EXT. MOORE'S COMMAND POST - NIGHT

The members of the Lost Patrol 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The two men look at each other. There are no words. Moore just nods to Savage in salute, and Savage nods back.

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. 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 not yet accounted for.

Galloway moves to Moore.

GALLOWAY

Are these the last of your troopers?

Moore nods. Galloway looks at the Chinook packed with dead.

GALLOWAY

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, the Ukrainian-born DIDURYK.

MOORE

Most of Charlie Company was in those choppers. I want your men to take their place. Come on, I'll show you.

INT. NORTH VIETNAMESE BUNKER - NIGHT

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.

EXT. CHARLIE COMPANY LINES - NIGHT

As a bright, near-full moon rises over LZ X-Ray, Moore leads the last arrivals to the position left by the dead of Charlie Company, where the worst fighting has been.

The Cav troopers moving to the fighting holes stare 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. Two TROOPERS hesitate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TROOPER #1  
You hear that?

TROOPER #2  
Bugles...

As they stoop to climb into the foxholes, they find the walls of dirt are slick and wet.

TROOPER #1  
That's American blood.

TROOPER #2  
Dead man's blood.

The two reluctant troopers are shoved from behind, into the bloody holes. They tumble in and see the shover is Plumley, who looks around at all the troopers scared shitless by the bloody foxholes, and the darkness.

PLUMLEY  
They're not gonna kill us, we're gonna kill them!

Moore slides into the forward foxhole with the leaders of the new arrivals, Captain Diduryk and LT. RESCORLA. The officers are brave and willing; but no one likes the blood in the holes, or the stench of the NVA bodies just outside them.

MOORE  
Better dig in some firing steps. And throw some dirt up on those bodies. Keep the smell down.

Plumley slides into the hole, grinning.

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  
They meant that first order? What idiot would order that, in the middle of a goddamn battle?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Ouellette covers the receiver lest someone on the other end might hear Moore's outburst. Everyone is looking; Ouellette clears his throat.

OUELLETTE

They said, uh, General Westmoreland wants a briefing.

Trip flares go off, and enemy tracers fill the air overhead. Moore grabs the Headquarters radio.

MOORE

(into radio)

I am in a fight and object to this order to come to Saigon! It's stupid and cowardly and I WILL NOT LEAVE MY MEN, AM I CLEAR?

Moore rings off without waiting for an answer. Moore hears enemy bugle calls and whistles, and knows that a new attack, more vicious and determined than any before, has begun:

MOORE

Give us flares!

As the artillery spotters call for flares, Moore tells his new officers--

MOORE

They'll come fast and low. Keep your fire at the height of a crawling man. If they break through, lie back in your hole and spray bullets into their faces.

Artillery flares pop overhead, throwing light on waves of attacking NVA's. As his troopers fire back with rifles and machine guns, Moore grabs his Command Post radio--

MOORE

Dillon! Tie in the sectors tight as a duck's ass! Rig grenades and trip flares, they're gonna hit us all night long!

As the North Vietnamese fight their way closer, crouching and firing and moving into the killing zone, Moore and Plumley throw grenades, then fire their weapons, shooting down NVA's swarming over them. The bodies stack up in front of the American fighting holes, and still the NVA's keep coming.

The fighting becomes hand to hand; Lt. Rescorla uses the big Ranger knife he carries to gut one man and slice the throat of another;

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Moore empties the clip of his M-16, and as he jams in a fresh clip he senses, even now, the surge of the battle. He yells to Captain Diduryk...

MOORE

They threw everything into that first charge! Let's jump 'em!

He surprises everyone except Plumley by leaping out and going on the attack. Plumley jumps forward with him, and the other Americans follow.

The North Vietnamese attackers, from their POV, are caught off-guard by the firepower of the Americans suddenly out of their holes and running at them. Moore and the others cut down the NVA's in the middle of the field; those at the treeline back off and take cover. Moore signals his men to halt, and grabs his radioman.

MOORE

Put artillery into the trees. Get back to the holes!

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. Sniper fire still cracking around them, 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...

A STACK OF TELEGRAMS

as many as before, placed into Julie's hands.

MONTAGE - JULIE AND BARBARA, TELLING THE WIDOWS

They make the rounds again, from door to door, telling the young women who open them that their husbands will be coming home in coffins.

And the new widows all seem to know the news, the moment they open the door...

The MONTAGE ENDS on a front porch, when Julie reaches into her purse again, and pulls out a final telegram.

JULIE

The last one...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She reads the name, and the grief shoots into her eyes, her face freezing into a mask of pain. Barbara reacts...

BARBARA

Oh Julie, Julie...it's yours.

JULIE

No. It's yours.

INT. GEOGHEGAN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

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

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.

EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - COMMAND POST - NIGHT

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; finally Dillon approaches.

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

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.

Silence. There's nothing to say. Then Ernie Savage, slumped with the rest of the Lost Patrol 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

You ain't.

Moore doesn't smile. And then he does. He stares off at the mountain again.

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. All they've done since the beginning is show us how tough they are. They're not ready for how tough we are. ...Issue the rest of the ammunition. And tell the men to fix their bayonettes.

EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - OUT ON THE PERIMETER - NIGHT

All along the line, the exhausted troopers receive ammunition and the whispered order to fix bayonettes. The order surprises them, and yet distracts them from their despair.

EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - OUTSIDE THE PERIMETER - NIGHT

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.

EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - FRONT LINE - DAWN

The sky is turning pink, casting a glow over the quiet battlefield, covered with the dead.

INT. NVA BUNKER - ON THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

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.

EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - CHARLIE COMPANY LINES - DAWN

Moore is at the forward fighting hole. He watches the sun crack the horizon with yellow light, and fires his pistol, setting off

AN EARSPLITTING ROAR

The Americans unleash The Mad Minute, a barrage of rifle and machine gun fire across the landscape. It's an awesome moment. NVA snipers, totally invisible before, drop from the trees all around; some fall, some hang 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. Then

THE ARTILLERY BARRAGE begins. It's a moving wall of explosions, walking toward the enemy. And behind it--

Moore switches his M-16 to full auto. The others do the same; then, with a yell, Moore jumps from the fighting hole and leads the charge of the 7th Cavalry, toward the enemy.

THE LAST CHARGE - DAY

There are pockets of North Vietnamese barely ten yards from the American perimeter, still dug in behind termite hills, trees, and in foxholes.

It's almost as if Moore wants to be killed; he's in the front, firing as they run across the field already littered with dead.

THE NORTH VIETNAMESE have braved artillery before; they expect it. But what they are not prepared for is the sight of the screaming Americans running into and through them. The NVA have no defenses, no fighting holes dug. Moore and his men, firing M-16s on full auto, cut through them.

The NVA's don't crumble; but as they rally in the rear to meet the charge...

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

There is no more resistance.

EXT. THE KILLING GROUND - DAY

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.

Rescorla and his men are policing the battlefield. Rescorla also sees Moore go, then he lowers his eyes... he 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.

Rescorla hangs it around his neck, and moves on.

EXT. THE MEDICAL AREA - DAY

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.

EXT. THE RELIEF COLUMN - DAY

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.

Rescorla meets the wide-eyed POINT MAN.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POINT MAN

My God, there's enemy bodies all over this valley! For the last thirty minutes we've been walking through bodies. What happened here?

Rescorla doesn't know how to tell him.

EXT. LZ X-RAY - COMMAND POST - DAY

LT. COLONEL ROBERT 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.

INT. NVA BUNKER - DAY

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.

AT THE L.Z. - DAY

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 American artillery.

He walks away.

EXT. LANDING ZONE X-RAY - DAY

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.

EXT. LZ X-RAY - BY THE HUEY HELICOPTERS - DAY

Galloway shoots a few final photos of weary soldiers dragging themselves to the helicopters;

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

then he 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 then makes the sign of the cross over the bodies.

VOICE OVER

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 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.

INT. CRANDALL'S CHOPPER - DAY

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?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE

That my men died. And I didn't.

And then Hal Moore weeps, for the first time since he was a boy.

EXT. CAMP HOLLOWAY - DAY

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.

EXT. CRANDALL'S LANDING PAD - DAY

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?

EXT. IA DRANG VALLEY - DAY

At Landing Zone X-Ray, McDade and his fresh troops have loaded up tons of weapons collected from the dead NVA's. The last of the Huey's has lifted off, carrying them. McDade is talking with his officers.

MCDADE

We've been ordered two miles west, to Landing Zone Albany. The Hueys are ferrying the captured weapons back to camp. So we walk.

OFFICER

Didn't Moore say--

MCDADE

We can't stay here, they're gonna have a B-52 strike all around this perimeter. So saddle up.

The officers move out, leading their men into the jungle.

INT. COMMAND TENT - CAMP HOLLOWAY - DAY

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's last job was at a desk in personnel! 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,

INT. U.S. ARMY HEADQUARTERS - SAIGON - DAY

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

INT. A FORMAL HEADQUARTERS OFFICE - DAY

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 Lt. Deal found beside the Lost Patrol.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 (cont'd)

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...

EXT. LZ X-RAY - DUSK

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 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

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.

EXT. AIRPORT - AMERICA - DAY

Hal Moore comes home, and Julie and the five children surround him with kisses. And Julie Moore, hugging her living husband, weeps in his arms.

IN ANOTHER PART OF THE AIRPORT, 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.

MOORE'S VOICE OVER

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.

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...

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.

EXT. PHILADELPHIA GRAVEYARD - DAY

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.

HAL MOORE, WALKING ALONE...

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 L-2 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 (cont'd)

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 Lefebvre, and being shot dead as he does so...

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...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOORE'S VOICE OVER (cont'd)  
...For it is the memory of them. And I  
would not wish to live in a world without  
such men as these.

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...

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

