

THE THIN RED LINE

by

Terrence Malick

Based on the Novel

by

James Jones

USE FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

To the Memory of James Jones
And Those Who Served With Him

They Live With Us

It was an act of love. Those men on the line were my family, my home. They were closer to me than I can say, closer than my friends had been or ever would be. They had never let me down, and I could never do it to them. I had to be with them, rather than let them down and me live with the knowledge that I might have saved them. Men, I now know, do not fight for flag or country, for the Marine Corps or glory or any other abstraction. They fight for one another. Any man in combat who lacks comrades who will die for him, or for whom he is willing to die, is not a man at all. He is truly damned.

William Manchester, the journalist, writing in Goodbye Darkness about his experience on Guadalcanal. (Like Fife, he walked away from the safety of a hospital in a secure area to return to his company in combat.)

COMPANY ROSTER
(Partial)

"C" CO, UMTB INF

- Stein, James I, Capt, "C" Co Cmdg
- Band, George R, 1st Lt, Exec
- Whyte, William L, 2nd Lt, 1st Pl Cmdg
- Blane, Thomas C, 2nd Lt, 2ns Pl Cmdg
- Gore, Alberto O, 2nd Lt, 3rd Pl Cmdg
- Culp, Robert (NMI), 2nd Lt, 4th (Weapons) Pl Cmdg

EM

1st/Sgt

- Welsh, Edward (NMI)

S/Sqts

- Grove, Ldr 1st Pl
- Keck, Ldr 2nd Pl
- MacTae, Supply
- Stack, Ldr 3rd Pl
- Storm, Mess

Sqts

- Becker, Sqd Ldr Rfl
- Dranno, Co Clk
- McCron, Sqd Ldr Rfl

Cpls

- Fife, Fwd Clk
- Jenks, Asst Sqd Ldr Rfl
- Queen, " " " "
- Thorne, " " " "

Pvts 1cl

- Bead, Asst Fwd Clk
- Dale, 2nd Cook
- Doll, Rflmn
- Earl, "
- Marl, "
- Ash, "
- Bell, "
- Carni, "
- Catch, "
- Catt, "
- Coombs, "
- Crown, "
- Drake, "
- Gluk, "
- Jacques, "
- Kline, "
- Kral, "
- Mazzi, Mtrmn
- Peale, Rflmn
- Sico, "

- Stearns, "
- Suss, "
- Tassi, "
- Tella, "
- Tills, Mtrmn
- Train, Rflmn
- Weld, "
- Wynn, "

Replacements

- Bosche, Charles S, Capt, "C" Co Cmdg

Others

- Tall, Gordon M L, Lt Col, 1st Bn Cmdg
- Haines, Ira P, Maj, Rgtl Srgn
- Gaff, John B, Capt, 1st Bn Exec
- Carr, Frederick C, Capt, Rgtl S-1
- Hoke, Pvt, of Cannon Co
- Witt, Pvt, of Cannon Co

EXT. A WARSHIP AT SEA - 1942 - DAY

A young Admiral receives an encoded message from a radiotelegraph and interprets it for a group of Army commanders aboard a warship. An Army division must be diverted to support the Marines on Guadalcanal, an island which none of them is familiar with but which it appears is of critical importance in maintaining the supply route between the United States and Australia now in the first year of the war. The Army commanders tell him that two divisions are available; each is already at sea. The choice of which to deploy is his and, after a few seconds of hesitation, he makes it. He asks them to return to him some day in the future and to tell him, since he must remain far from the fighting, about their experience in the ordeal to come. Soldiers in the Civil War, he says, spoke of "seeing the Elephant": it was as though in combat a strange, awesome creature would appear, whose features one could not quite describe to anyone who had not seen it for himself. He would like to hear from them what this Elephant is.

INT. BRIG - DAWN

FIRST SGT. WELSH sits in the brig of a warship, talking with PFC WITT, a young man from Breathitt County, Kentucky, a regular and formerly a regimental boxer.

WELSH

I can put you up for a court-martial, or I can give you non-judicial punishment. Your choice, up or down. It's a felony offense to strike an officer -- that includes an NCO.

WITT

It ain't right.

WELSH

We're going to send you to a place where you learn or you don't. They're going to shape you up.

WITT

What did the Captain say?

WELSH

Captain don't want you. Company don't want you.

WITT

You fixed it that way.

WELSH

You were gambling. You got mad because you lost. I've read your record. You been a loser all your life. You don't fool me. You'll never amount to nothing.

(after a pause)

You hit an NCO from another unit, in a war zone. Normally you'd go to Leavenworth.

WITT

Baloney!

WELSH

This isn't a normal situation. I worked a deal. Consider yourself lucky. If this got to Battalion, you'd be court-martialed. Maybe hanged.

WITT

Nonsense.

WELSH

A felony offense, in a war zone. I've had trouble with you since Hawaii. You're a bad soldier. You'd let us down.

Welsh leaves. The steel door crashes shut behind him. Witt turns to the prisoner in the next cell, a man named HOKE.

HOKE

(after a silence)

What a jerk!

WITT

Yeah. Partly he's right, though... I screwed up my life. I thowed away my pearl.

EXT. DECK OF TRANSPORT

A LEGEND appears over a DISTANT VIEW of a lovely South Pacific island: "Guadalcanal, 9 November 1942." Two transport ships of the U.S. Navy have sneaked up from the south in the first graying flush of dawn to deliver fresh reinforcement troops.

For their crews, this is a routine mission and one they know well; but to the men in the hold, the trip is neither routine nor known.

INT. SECOND FORWARD HOLD - DAWN

CORPORAL FIFE, the orderly room clerk, sits against a bulkhead, sick with fear. Beads of moisture cover the steel walls. The fighting men of C-for-Charlie Company pick their wet shirts loose from their armpits, look at their watches and wait impatiently. The bunks are covered with their gear; there is nowhere to sit except in the companionways. On Fife's right, PVTS MAZZI and TILLS clutch their knees.

MAZZI

You think we'll catch a fucking air raid?

TILLS

How the hell do I know? All I know, them crew guys said they din't catch no air raid last time they made this run. On the other hand, time before last they almost got blew up. What do you want me to tell you?

MAZZI

You're a big help, Tills: nothin'. Tell me nothin'. I'll tell you somethin'. We're sittin' out here on this ocean like a couple fucking ducks in these here boats, that's what.

TILLS

I already know that.

MAZZI

Yeah? Well, brood on it, Tills. Brood on it.

In one place a blackjack game has been started. Elsewhere little knots of men have formed and stand or sit talking earnestly to each other with widened eyes while hardly hearing what is said. Every so often an LCI, caught wrong on a wave, BANGS against the hull and REVERBERATES through the closed space of the dim hold, an anguished STEEL CRY. On Fife's left, PRIVATE FIRST CLASS DOLL is standing with CORPORAL QUEEN, a huge, amiable Texan.

QUEEN

Well, we'll soon know what it feels like.

GORDON

What what feels like?

QUEEN

To be shot at.

DOLL

Hell, I've been shot at. Hell, ain't you, Queen?

GORDON

I only just hope there aren't any planes today. That's all.

DOLL

Well, I reckon if I'm goin'a get me that pistol, I better get with it. Those fucks in the next compartment ought be about nervous enough by now. Anybody want to come along?

QUEEN

You'll do better on your own.

Doll stops in front of Mazzi and Tills. He nods at the crowded portholes.

DOLL

Ain't you watchin' the fun?

MAZZI

Ain't interested.

DOLL

I guess it is pretty crowded.

MAZZI

Wouldn't be interested if it wadn't.

DOLL

I'm on my way to get me that pistol.

MAZZI

Yeah? Well, have fun.

TILLS

Yeah; have fun.

DOLL

You guys'll wish you had one, once we get ashore, and run into some of them Samurai sabers.

MAZZI

All I want is to get ashore. And off of this fat sitting fucking duck we all sittin' on out here on this flat water.

TILLS

Hey, Doll, you get around. You think we're liable to catch an air raid?

DOLL

How the fucking hell would I know? We might, we might not.

MAZZI

Thanks.

TILLS

Prob'ly they'll wait to hit us at the beach.

DOLL

(ignoring Tills)

If we do, we do. What's the matter? You scared, Mazzi?

MAZZI

Scared? 'Course I ain't scared! Are you?

DOLL

No.

MAZZI

Okay then. Shut up.

Doll throws back his head and laughs and steps out through the bulkhead.

MAZZI

That guy just ain't hep. He's as unhep as a box.

TILLS

You think he'll get a pistol?

MAZZI

Hell no, he won't get no pistol.

TILLS

Right now, I couldn't care less.
All I want is to get off this
fucking boat here.

MAZZI

Well, you ain't by yourself, Tills.
All I know, I never bargained for
nothin' like this when I signed up
in this man's Army back in the
Bronx before the war. How did I
know they was gonna be a fucking
war, hanh? Answer me that.

TILLS

You tell me. You're the hep
character around here, Mazzi.

MAZZI

All I know, old Charlie Company
always gets screwed. Always. And I
can tell you whose fault it is.
Bugger Stein's, that's who. First
he gets us stuck off on this boat
clean away from our own outfit,
where we don't know a fucking soul.
Then he gets us stuck way down in
fourth pace on the list to get off
this son of a bitch.

At the other end of the companionway, CAPT. JAMES STEIN talks
privately with First Sergeant Welsh.

STEIN

I think our outfit looks pretty
capable, pretty solid, don't you,
Sergeant?

Welsh grins at him insolently. There is a look of dark
foreboding that never leaves his face, even when he grins.

WELSH

Yeah -- for a bunch of slobs about
to get their ass shot off.

Stein does not answer him. Welsh is mad. He is insane, Truly
a madman, and Stein never has understood him. He has no
respect for anything or anybody . But it doesn't really
matter. Stein can afford to overlook his impertinences
because he is so good at his job.

STEIN

Hello, Doll. How's it going?
Everything okay? Feeling a little
nervous?

DOLL

(warily)
No, sir.

Stein nods, dismissing him. Doll salutes and goes on out through the watertight door, wondering what Stein meant.

INT. FORWARD HOLD - DAWN

Furious, Doll makes his way through the forward hold. He does not know how much time he still has. Then, suddenly, he sees a .45 hanging from the end of a bed frame. Three bunks away a group of men clusters around a nervous crap game. He has to make his move now, time is running out. He lifts the pistol off the bunk frame and buckles it around his waist.

VOICES

Hey, you! Hey, soldier!

Doll turns around to see two men, one a PRIVATE and one a SERGEANT, coming toward him. Will they turn him in?

PRIVATE (DRAKE)

That's my pistol you're wearin',
soldier.

SERGEANT (KARL)

He saw you take it off the bunk. So
don't try to lie out of it,
soldier.

Doll forces a slow, cynical grin to spread across his face. Slowly he undoes the belt and passes it over.

DOLL

How long you been in the Army,
mack? You ought know better than to
leave your gear layin' around like
that. You might lose it someday.

Both men stare back at him, their eyes widening slightly as the new idea, new attitude, replaces their own of righteous indignation.

SERGEANT (MARL)

Well, you better not have such
sticky fingers, soldier.

DOLL

Anything layin' around out in the open that loose, is fair game to me. And to any other soldier. Tell your boy he oughtn't to tempt people so much.

SERGEANT (MARL)

Hear that, Drake? You better take better care of your gear.

DOLL

Yeah. He sure better. Or he won't have it long.

INT. LOWER FORWARD HOLD - DAWN

Outside, in the hatchway area, Doll stops and laughs. It was all one big lie! Entering the bunk area on the deck above everything works perfectly for him. On a field pack at the edge of the companionway he sees not one but two pistols. There is not a man in this entire end of the bunk area. That is all there is to it. All Doll has to do is step over, pick up one of the pistols and put it on.

INT. SECOND FORWARD HOLD - DAWN

Doll returns to C-for-Charlie in the second forward hold. Tills, Mazzi and Fife have not moved. Doll steps up with his hands on his hips, his right one resting on the pistol.

MAZZI

Hello, lover-boy. Where you been?

DOLL

Around... Well, what do you think?

MAZZI

Think of what?

DOLL

Nothin'. The war.

He turns on his heel and goes on inside among the bunks.

TILLS

Well, what do you say now, hep guy?

MAZZI

Just what I fucking said before.
The guy's a jerkoff.

TILLS
He's got a pistol.

MAZZI
So he's a jerkoff with a pistol.

TILLS
While you're a hep guy, without a
pistol.

MAZZI
That's right. What's a fucking
pistol? Leave it, Tills; leave it.
You wanna do somethin', go do
somethin'.

TILLS
I think I will.

MESS SERGEANT STORM has gathered his cooks for a bull
session.

WELSH
(grinning crazily)
What are you doing with that
fucking pistol, Doll?

DOLL
What pistol?

WELSH
This pistol.

Welsh grabs the pistol on Doll's hip and, with it, pulls Doll
slowly forward and slowly, the grin fades from Welsh's face.

DOLL
Well, I...

WELSH
And what if somebody comes around
here to Capt. Stein and wants to
search this outfit for a stolen
pistol? 'Ey? Have you ever thought
of that? And what if I then,
knowin' who had it, was forced to
tell Bugger Stein where it was?
Huh? Have you thought of that, too?

DOLL
Would you do that, Top?

WELSH

You bet your sweet ass I would!

Welsh bellows it with startling suddenness right into his face. The CRASH of the landing craft against the hull continues, relentless and unnerving.

DOLL

Well -- Do you think anybody'll come around?

WELSH

No! I don't!

Then, as slowly as it disappeared, the sly, ominous grin comes back over the sergeant's face. He lets Doll go and, all in the same motion, flings the holstered pistol away from him.

WELSH

Clean it. It's prob'ly dirty. Any man'd leave it layin' around's a fuckass soldier anyway.

Wherever his glance falls, the nearby men beneath it stir uneasily and drop their eyes and fall to doing something: adjusting a strap, checking a tie-rope, rubbing a riflestock.

INT. SECOND FORWARD HOLD - DAWN

Fife sits to Bell's right, sunk in melancholy. BELL is a strong, quiet-voiced private.

FIFE

(after a pause)

I read in your 201 file you were an officer before the war.

SELL

You told anybody else?

FIFE

No. How'd you end up a private?

BELL

Because of my wife. I was in the Corps of Engineers, we'd never been separated before, not even for a night. I took it for four months and then I quit. Resigned.

FIFE

Yeah?

BELL

They sent me back to the States. They told me I'd never get another commission, they said they'd see to it that I got drafted, and that I'd for damn sure be in the Infantry. We had eight months together.

FIFE

Why, the sons of bitches! Where is she now?

BELL

Home. With her folks. How old are you, Fife?

FIFE

Twenty-two.

BELL

Well, I'm thirty.

FIFE

Why don't you want any of the guys to know?

BELL

Enlisted men don't like officers.. The only reason I've told you is so you'll know why I don't want it mentioned.

WELSH

(appearing suddenly)

All right, fuckface! Where's that platoon roster I told you to fix up for me?

FIFE

(indignantly)

I already did it! I made it up and turned it in to you, Welsh.

WELSH

You what! You did no such fucking thing, Fife. I don't have it, do I?

INT. LATRINE - DAWN

He signals Fife to follow him around a corner into the latrine. There he backs Fife up against the wall.

WELSH

You think you're a big grown-up man, but you're just a punk kid -- a coward. There's nowhere you can run now. You're in a box. A moving box. You've never learned that your life, and you -- they don't mean a goddamned thing to the world, and they never will.

INT. SECOND FORWARD HOLD - DAWN

Suddenly the KLAXON HORN goes off, RESOUNDING through the CLANGING, overheated hold and deafening everybody -- an immense sound that causes everyone to jump, even Welsh.

WELSH

Get your gear and shape up!

NONCOMS (O.S.)

All right! Off and on! Drop your cocks and grab your socks!

Everybody struggles into their equipment. Bulging in all directions, they find the stairs difficult to navigate.

DALE (2ND COOK)

Geez, my ass is draggin'. All this gear.

STORM

Mor'n your ass'll be draggin' soon.

EXT. DECK OF TRANSPORT - DAY

They emerge at last into the sunshine and fresh sea air on deck. Looking up to the bridge, Capt. Stein sees LT. COL. GORDON TALL, the Battalion Commander. They exchange salute.

By squads and by platoon, the men go over the side and clamber down the four-story-high side of the ship on the nets and into the chain of LCIs that shuttle back and forth from the shore.

EXT. ABOARD MOVING LCI - DAY

The ASST. PILOT salutes them in best naval officer style.

ASST. PILOT

Well, look what we got here. Your outfit's lucky. Old Nippy'll be comin' along in about fifteen minutes.

TILLS

How do you know?

ASST. PILOT

Just got news from the airstrip. Transports must've been spotted. You're getting off just ahead of time. You're lucky.

Fife grabs the gunnel to keep his balance in the jouncing, swaying craft, and looks back at the dwindling ship.

WELD

But won't the fighter planes --

ASST. PILOT

They always get some of them. But some always get through. Jerk the lead!

Ahead, Doll sees the shore and sand beach and coco palms gradually coming closer. Beyond them lies the dark green band of jungle, with the mass and power of the mountains rising behind it to rocky peaks.

PILOT

Grab holt and prepare to land!
Everybody out! No transfer slips!

EXT. GUADALCANAL SHORE - DAY

Suddenly, they are stumbling through the water. The ramp is already rising, as the craft goes into reverse and pulls back out to go for another load. Fife expects some protest, some visible sign of enemy resistance, but not a shot is fired.

They dart across the beach to the line of coco palms, thrashing dryly in the mid-morning breeze. There they rest, waiting for orders from Battalion. Didn't the Army know there were no Japanese here?

If they failed to realize this, what else don't they know? Two SCOUTS come scampering out of the grove up ahead and report to Capt. Stein.

FIRST SCOUT

We went in about a mile, sir.
 Didn't find nothing. Some empty oil
 drums. A burned spot. Hadn't nobody
 been around there for at least a
 week.

Stein nods, puzzled. Suddenly a CRY goes up. One SOLDIER flings up an arm and yells, "There they are!" The CRY is taken up all up and down the beach.

High up in the sun-bright sky, a number of little specks sail serenely along toward the channel where the two ships lie. Presently, a gentle SIGHING becomes audible. Then a GEYSER of water, followed by another, then another, pops high up out of the sea, until at last a stick of three bombs falls almost directly alongside an LCI that is just putting off. When the spout of water subsides, they see there is nothing left of the LCI, only a few figures bobbing in the water who, under the weight of their full packs, rapidly become fewer.

EXT. FIELD DRESSING STATION - DAY

The survivors of the destroyed LCI are landed by a rescue boat not far from C-for-Charlie Company, and gently led or carried up from the beach to a nearby field dressing station. Some of them are still vomiting seawater from their ordeal. C-for-Charlie drifts up toward the dressing station, consumed with a morbid curiosity. DALE, the muscular, intense second cook, with perpetually snapping eyes, makes the only comment.

DALE

They should of let them have it
 with the antiaircraft from the
 ships! They could of got a lot more
 of them. If I'd been there, and had
 my hands on one of them forty
 millimeters, I'd of let them have
 it, orders or no orders. That's
 what I'd of done.

MAZZI

You'd shit, too.

EXT. MANGROVES AND BEACH ROAD - DAY

They trudge through the mangroves to their bivouac, led by the Route Guide from regimental headquarters.

The roads are seas of soft mud, axle-deep on the trucks. It is impossible to march on or in them. The only way for the men to move ahead at all is to travel in two lines, one on either side, picking their way over the great rolls of drying mud, turned back as though by a plow. Staggering, and senseless with exhaustion, they march on. By the time they reach their bivouac, it has begun to rain.

EXT. COCONUT GROVE BIVOUAC - DAY

C-for-Charlie works doggedly to set up camp. The rain comes straight down, unbreathed-upon by any wind, in huge, fat drops so close together that it seems a solid sheet of water. Turning around, Fife sees that some of the men (Marl among them) are playing in the mud, sitting down and sliding around like children in snow, clowning and laughing.

INT. ORDERLY ROOM TENT - DAY

Welsh enters the orderly room tent and nods at Capt. Stein.

WELSH

Sir, the company's allotment of eight-man personnel tents hasn't arrived from the ship.

STEIN

Have the men break packs and put' up their shelter tents.

(as Welsh grins)

Goddamn it, Sergeant, I know it's a ridiculous order, too! Now go and tell them! That's an order!

WELSH

Yes, sir!

EXT. BIVOUAC - DAY

Welsh has given the men Stein's order, with sardonic relish, and they are setting about it.

MAZZI

He's nuts! Plain fucking nuts!

Tills sits on a five-gallon water can buttoning their shelter halves together. Mazzi gathers their combined ten tent pegs, having stretched the wet ropes as best he can.

MAZZI

You think these goddamn little old
pegs going to hold in this muck? I
was company commander of this
company, there'd be a lotta changes
around here, and pretty damn
fuckin' quick. And up yours, Tills.
You about finished there?

TILLS

Look, Mazzi, I want to ask you
somethin'. You think there's any
germs in this mud?

MAZZI

Germs? Sure there's germs.

TILLS

You really think so?

MAZZI

Why, hell yes. Don't you read the
papers? This island's loaded with
all kinds of germs. And where do
you find germs? In dirt. Malaria
germs...

TILLS

(interrupting)

Malaria germs are in the
mosquitoes.

MAZZI

Sure, but where do they get them?
From dirt. There's --

TILLS

No. They get them from other people
who got malaria.

MAZZI

Okay, sure. But where they come
from first? Everybody knows germs
come from dirt and bein' dirty.
You'll prob'ly be sick as a dog
tomorra, Tills.

TILLS

You're a son of a bitch, Mazzi.

MAZZI

Who? Me? What'd I do? You ast me a
question, I answered it for you.

(MORE)

~~see me down~~ MZZI (cont'd)
 You din't ~~see me down~~ and slidin'
 around in that mud, did you? Sure,
 I laughed, I cheered them on. That
 didn't cost me nothin'. Trouble
 with you, Tills, you're a jerkoff.
 You're awys gettin' sucked into
 somethin'. Take a lesson, kid. You
 don't see me gettin' sucked into
 nothing.

Around them, other men are working and other shelter tents
 are going up in long, even lines. The ground is a soggy mire.

Doll, the proud pistol thief, swaggers over to his pal Fife,
 who has just finished putting up the tent which he shares
 with his assistant, PFC BEAD. Bead is a draftee, a healthy
 eighteen-year-old from Iowa, the youngest man in the outfit.

DOLL

We still got a couple of hours
 before sundown. Bunch of us is
 goin' to look at the jungle. Wanta
 come?

FIFE

I don't know if I ought to. The
 sergeant might need me around here
 for something.

BEAD

I'll go, Doll! I'll go!

DOLL

You ain't invited.

BEAD

Whada you mean I ain't invited?
 Anybody can go that wants to, can't
 they?

Doll leaves. Bead is crestfallen.

FIFE

Never mind him.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

A dozen of the men from C-for-Charlie -- among them Big
 Queen, the huge Texan, and Private Bell, the former officer --
 approach the high wall of jungle curiously and gingerly.
 Parrots screech from nowhere, startling them. Huge vines and
 creepers hang from the canopy in great festooning arcs.

Giant tree trunks tower straight up , far above their heads, their thin blade-like roots often higher than a man's head. Other POVs: a skull shrine, a wood carving of a man the features of whose face have been eroded by the weather, a python, strange tropical fruits, some split open by raiding ants.

Suddenly Queen discovers a bloodstained shirt. For a moment he thinks of saying nothing. He could pass it by and none of the rest of them would know. But, noticing his strange hesitation, the MAN next to him sees it too and raises a shout. The other men, who instinctively have spaced themselves out at five-yard intervals as if in a skirmish line, cluster around and peer excitedly.

VOICES

(Gordon's esp.)

Is it American? Fuck yes, it's American. The Japs don't wear khaki like that. That's chino! That's not even Marine khaki! That's Army chino! Well, the Americal Division's here. Maybe he's one of them.

QUEEN

Whoever he was, he was hit pretty bad.

THORNE

Where'd it hit him?

GORDON

It keyholed out the back.

PRIVATE GORDON, one of the men nearest it, leans down silently and picks it up with a thumb and forefinger, as if afraid he might catch a terrible disease from it.

QUEEN

Leave it where you found it.

Without a word, Gordon, who still holds it by thumb and forefinger as if it might contaminate him, turns and swings it and lets it go.

THORNE

Yeah, leave'm lay.

The chow WHISTLE sounds clear and shrill through the trees. It is an intensely familiar, curiously heart-wringing sound.

EXT. MESS TENT - DAY

Tonight C-for-Charlie receives its first dosage of Atabrine. Standing by the Lister bag at the head of the chow line, Storm doles out the yellow pills himself, chaffing everyone good-naturedly, but determined that nobody is going to avoid taking his medicine.

WELSH

What the fuck do you bother so hard for?

STORM

Because, they going to need all the help they can git.

WELSH

They going to need a lot more than that.

STORM

I know it.

The last man in the line has stopped and is looking back at them, listening; one of the draftees.

WELSH

On your way, bud.

STORM

(shaking his pills)

Some of them so dumb they actu'ly wouldn't take them. If I didn't make them.

WELSH

So what? They don't take them, maybe they'll get malaria so bad they'll get themself shipped out and save their useless life.

STORM

They ain't learned that yet. They will.

WELSH

We'll be ahead of them. Won't we? We'll make them fucking take them. Won't we? You and me. We know the secret, don't we? We already know about not taking them. Gimme one.

Storm holds out the box. Without taking his eyes from Storm's face, Welsh reaches down, gets a pill and, thumbing the surface dust off it, pops it into his mouth. Not to be outdone, Storm gets one himself and swallows it as Welsh has, dry.

WELSH

You know what it is, don't you? You realize what's happening... There ain't any choice. It ain't going to get any better, either. This war's just the start. You understand that.

STORM

Yeah.

WELSH

Then remember it, Storm; remember it.

Bell and Fife sit by themselves eating in silence.

BELL

This war is tougher on her than it is on me. Back home there's lights and nightclubs, booze. More to tempt you. I haven't touched another woman since I was called up. Or talked to one. I don't want to feel the desire.

STORM (O.S.)

Chairs on the table! Closing time!

BELL

We believe in each other. You need someone you can believe in.

Dale complains to a willing listener about Storm's mistreatment of him. Not far away, Bead is blowing soap bubbles, dipping a ring in the shaving lather he has whipped up in the bottom of his helmet.

EXT. SLIT TRENCH - NIGHT

The night is filled with the stitch of tropical insects. The men crouch over the weapons in total and unspeakable insularity.

FIFE

I always thought I'd be as brave as the next guy, maybe even braver. But I m not. You told me about your wife. I'm telling you something.

BELL

Everybody's scared.

FIFE

Not Doll, not Big Un. I got to work harder at it than they do. The only reason I'm here is because I was ashamed for people to think I was a coward. I had to find out if I was yellow or not... I never had a wife and kids. I never been to New York. I don't want to die.

SELL

Nobody does.

FIFE

I hope I can get back -- the way I was -- like I came.

They look up at a scuttling noise in the undergrowth, at length discover a coconut crab. (End on CU of crab.)

EXT. COCONUT GROVE - NIGHT

Stein is writing a letter by candlelight when he hears the noise of a Japanese plane high overhead. (Washing Machine Charlie.) Suddenly the earth is SHAKING around him. Panic and an objectless fright seize him, and he surges blindly out of his tent, scrambling toward a nearby slit trench.

Down the long aisle of the coconut groves, the KLAXONS begin their mournful, insistent belching. Above, three weak searchlight beams feebly finger the sky. Now and then they see the single QUICK BLINK of an antiaircraft shell exploding. Finally, there is the SHUTTERING, THIN sound of the motor, or motors, up there in the dark. Then, from the direction of the airfield, come the CA-RUMPING explosions, walking slowly toward them in great giant strides. The klaxons keep up their long, monotonous, insane, GROWLING protest, and the antiaircraft guns PUMP their useless, laughable shells up into the night sky, as the ball-shrinking ROAR of the bombs advances.

Suddenly, there is a huge, ear-filling, impersonal, rushing FLUTTER descending like an express train, then a flash of light. It is strange that only one man is wounded. By all rights, there should be many more. The wounded man is Pfc Marl, the Nebraska dry-dirt farmer. A piece of the daisycutter has whistled into his hole and cut off his right hand as neatly as a surgeon could have done with a knife. When Marl yells, Welsh leaps in with him and puts a tourniquet on him until the medic can get there.

MARL

What'm I gonna do now, huh? How'm I gonna work, huh! How'm I gonna plow, huh? I mean it. What'm I gonna do now, huh? Take it away! Get that damned thing out of here! I don't want to look at it, goddamn it! It's my hand!

The hand is taken away by one of the company MEDICS, who is supposed to be trained at this kind of work but actually is not as yet, and who stops to vomit behind a tree.

WELSH

They make artificial ones. They'll make you one like new.

MARL

Goddamn it, it's easy for you! How'm I gonna work? I'm a farmer.

MEDIC

Can you walk?

MARL

Sure I can walk, goddamn it. Fuck yes, I can walk. But how'm I gonna work? That's the point.

Fife watches, trembling within, as Marl is led off into the darkness to the battalion medical station, the first actual wounded casualty in the company.

MONTAGE - WITT AND HOKE AMONG THE MELANESIANS (GUADALCANAL)

Witt and Hoke have gone AWOL and are living among the Melanesians, unconscious of the passage of the days, of good and evil. The native people live content with what the earth and sea provide them, in peace and harmony. Witt gets to know two of them in particular, an older man and a young woman. He marvels at this society where no one is alone or lives to himself, where all is based on family and clan.

He reveals to Hoke a secret from his past and, under the influence of this revelation, decides to return to C-for-Charlie. Hoke tries to discourage him from setting out but, at length, joins him instead.

EXT. C-FOR-CHARLIE BIVOUAC - DAWN

The men of C-for-Charlie come out into the warm, revivifying safety of the sun and look into each other's stubbled, dirt-caked faces to find they are changed men. Faces glower and eyes burn. Suddenly, Fife hears himself hailed by a man standing some distance off, near the supply tent and leaning against a coco palm.

FIFE

Well, Witt! By God! How are you!

A troublemaker with a touchy sense of honor, Witt has been busted several times and twice sent to the stockade on a summary court-martial. This makes him something of a romantic hero to Fife, who considers him the only friend besides Bell that he has in the whole regiment. He rushes over to shake hands, overjoyed to see him. Witt is just as glad, in his own way. All his friends are in C-for-Charlie, and he likes the reputation he enjoys here. As Witt sees it, everybody knows he loves C-for-Charlie and for Welsh to ship him out, while knowing this, only proves his total contempt for Welsh correct.

FIFE

How'd you find us? You AWOL? I been asking around about you every day, trying to find out were you were. I thought you were in the brig. How long you been hanging around here? Why didn't you come in the orderly tent and get me?

Witt's face hardens, almost as though someone had modeled his features in quick-setting cement and Fife were watching it dry.

WITT

I ain't goin' no place where that poorly son of a bitch of a first sergeant is.

FIFE

Welsh? Yes, well. Well, you know, I think maybe he's changed some, Witt. Since we got here.

WITT

He ain't never going to change. Not in no way.

FI FE

Well, I tell you. It just won't be the same old company, Witt. Going up there without you. I guess that's why I said that.

WITT

(warming up)

Fife, I can tell you. When I think of old C-for-Charlie goin' up there into them Japs without me, it like to breaks my heart. I been in this comp'ny -- what now? -- four years. You know how I feel about it. It's my comp'ny. It ain't right, that's all. It ain't. I belong with the company, Fife, old buddy.

(suddenly morose)

I don't know what I can do about it. In fact, there ain't a damn thing.

FIFE

Well, I think if you went around to Capt. Stein and told him how you feel, he'd arrange a transfer back for you. Bugger knows how good a soldier you are. Never was a question of that. Right now he's feeling pretty warm and sentimental about the company, leading them into combat and all.

WITT

I cain't do that.

FIFE

Why not?

WITT

Because I cain't. You know it.

FIFE

I honestly think he'll take you back.

WITT

Take me back! Take me back! They never should of made me go!

(MORE)

It's their fault (cont'd) I ain't mine! I
 didn't need no discipline.
 Discipline is what you give a dog!
 I cain't do that. I won't go and
 beg them. I appreciate you tryin'
 to help.

(as Fife nods)

I mean it.

FIFE

I know you do.

Fife goes on carefully, afraid of making him mad.

FIFE

Just how bad do you want to get
 back into the comp'ny?

WITT

You know how bad.

FIFE

Well, the only way you're going to
 do it is to go to Stein and ask
 him.

WITT

I cain't do that. I tell you it
 ain't fair. It ain't fair, and it
 ain't square. Any way you look at
 it. It ain't justice. It's a
 traversty of justice.

FIFE

It's "travesty."

WITT

What?

FIFE

I said you pronounce it tra-ves-ty.

Witt stares at him as if he had never seen him before. The
 storm cloud, with its flickers of impending electrical
 discharges, comes back on his face.

WITT

Take off! I said take off! Leave!
 Get out!

FIFE

I got as much right here as you
 have.

WITT

Fife, I never hit a friend before in my life. Not without givin' them fair warnin' they ain't friends no more. I don't want to start now, either. But I will.

FIFE

What the hell kind of talk is that? What did I do?

WITT

You and me ain't friends anymore. I don't want to talk to you, I don't want to see you. If you even try to talk to me after this, I'll knock you down.

FIFE

I was only kidding with you. I only --

WITT

Take off! Scoot!

FIFE

You're a boxer. I don't stand a chance with you in a fight and you know it.

WITT

That's tough. That's life. Go!

FIFE

I'm going. But you're crazy, for God's sake. I was kidding you. You're my best friend in this outfit. I don't want to fight you.

WITT

(with sadness now)
Take off!

Fife does. He sees that Witt is right and that he did something terribly mean, vicious and insulting, something destructive to Witt's manhood. Guilt closes over him like a mustard-colored cloud.

The men are inspecting a large crocodile that the 2nd Battalion men have captured when Bugger Stein and his driver ROAR up in the company jeep. The men have heard the SOUNDS of mortar and small arms fire off in the hills yesterday and today, growling more angrily today than yesterday.

And yet, when their orders finally come to go up, everybody is astonished and surprised.

STEIN

Corporal Fife, I want every officer and platoon-grade noncom who isn't out on a detail here in five minutes. Get them all. Don't miss anybody. We're moving out, Fife. For the line.

EXT. MUDDY ROAD/OTHER COMPANY BIVOUAC - DAY

Along the route of march, the arteries of runny mud are clotted with stalled trucks. Most are abandoned, sitting silent in the mud, waiting for the big tractors to come haul them out.

The foot marchers pick their way up the steep road, loaded down with full packs and extra bandoliers, each company in a ragged single file. Often one of their number turns aside and falls down. Others simply faint. These are dragged aside by the men behind them.

WELSH

Pick up your feet! On your feet!
Pick 'em up and keep moving!

Fife has the misfortune of falling out when Capt. Stein is nearby.

STEIN

Up you come, Fife! Come on, boy.
You don't want to give up now.

The reaction he gets is startling. Fife does not get up. He leaps up. As if stabbed in the ass with a needle.

FIFE

You! You tell me! I'll be walking when you're on your back! I'll be going when you and all these other guys are on your knees and out!

STEIN

Shut up, Fife!

FIFE

You and any other goddamned officer! I'll walk till I drop dead -- and when I do, I'll be ten feet in front of your dead body! Don't you ever worry about me quitting.

Staggering in his pack, Fife lurches out onto the edge of the road. He does not shut up. Stein does not know what to do. It is up to him to make an issue or not make one.

Fife is past the point of caring. He decides to do nothing. Nobody else seems to care, or pays much attention, they are all too tired. Looking up the road he sees a Melanesian native with a haunted look hurrying past in the opposite direction, away from the front. Then he sees that Sgt. Welsh is watching, a vague smile on his face.

EXT. SUGAR CANE PLANTATION (DRUMSARA) - DAY

They are walking up a line of railroad tracks that runs through a sugar cane plantation when a GUIDE (KIRK) comes around a bend, sees them, and after a couple of deep gasps for air, comes on at a quickened pace, already shouting.

KIRK

Where the fuck have you guys been?
I been lookin' all over hell's half
acre for this outfit! What the hell
have you been doin'? You're
supposed to be on the other side
the river, not here! What the fuck
happened? Honestly, sir, I been
lookin' all over. You're supposed
to be clear over on the other side
the river. That's where they tole
me you'd be.

STEIN

We've been following the road the
other guide showed us.

KIRK

He must of made some kind of a
mistake.

STEIN

He was positive about what he told
us.

KIRK

Somebody up there gave him the
wrong orders. Or told me wrong.

Not a very auspicious beginning. The men glance at each other.

STEIN

What's it like up there?

KIRK

A crazyhouse!

A stirring in the grass, the rustle of the sugar cane, signals the approach of danger. At Kirk's signal, the company stops. He pulls out a grenade and, stepping into the rows of cane, advances toward the source of the noise. He discovers a white cow. (A feral Indo-Chinese pig? They wandered loose, shellshocked.)

EXT. RIVER - DAY

They cross a pontoon bridge (or ford) guarded by a heavy MG. Groups of traffic-control men watch them with curious, sympathetic eyes.

KIRK

You just go on from here.

STEIN

There must be more instructions than that.

KIRK

I don't know nothing about none of that. All I know I was suppose to bring you here.

STEIN

Won't they send another runner for us?

KIRK

Maybe. I don't know. All I know is what I told you.

EXT. MOUNTING ROAD (JUNGLE TO GRASSLANDS) - DAY

MUSIC enters as they begin to climb. Gradually, they come out of the jungle onto the grassy slopes above. S/SGT. STACK, the tough, hard-faced old disciplinarian who leads 3rd Platoon, has suffered a collapse. He the trail with his legs pressed tightly together and his rifle in his lap, shaking all over. The medics have put a tag on him and thrust a stick in his hand.

STACK

Don't go up there! You'll be killed! Don't go up there! You'll be killed!

The entire company has to pass him, one at a time and man by man, in single file, as if passing in some macabre review.

EXT. HILLTOP (HILL 208) - DAY

Toiling, climbing with the wind behind them, they have heard no battle noises. But rounding the last bend and coming suddenly out onto the open hilltop, they find themselves immersed in a vast infernal NOISE and tumult whose source they cannot see. Men scurry here and there on obscure missions, shouting to make themselves heard above the DIN. The center of all their activity is a small group of seven men standing together in grand isolation. They are almost the only men present wearing any insignia, and all of them wear stars or eagles on the collars of their green fatigues.

For all the NOISE, they are receiving very little fire. Now and then a single bullet strikes the ground in amongst them and buries itself or goes SHRIEKING off without touching anyone.

DALE

Are those ricochets? Are they
shootin' at us?

Soon they advance into a dry, treeless ravine. Here, at last, they can see what lies ahead of them, though they still have no sense of where they are or how they are being deployed.

BEAD

Is this the line? Are we on the
line? Maybe they don't see us
either.

Fife looks this way and that, to see if there is something or someone about to shoot at him. He has a singular feeling of exposure, like a man standing on the edge of a mountaintop. When first ONE BULLET and then a moment later A SECOND kick up puffs of dust in front of him, he kneels to the ground and begins to crawl, convinced some Japanese sniper has singled him out to shoot at.

Guilty and ashamed, he raises his head to look around. The rest of the company is standing up walking and already ahead of him. Terrified as he is of standing up and being shot at by some invisible party, he is more terrified of being accused for his cowardice. He begins to jog toward his company, trotting bent over at the waist and carrying his rifle at high port. He smiles at the others on joining them. It comforts him unreasonably to be in their midst.

And it is just here that the second man in the company is wounded, whether deliberately or by accident no one can tell: PEALE, not far from Fife, suddenly claps his hand to his thigh and stops, then sits down holding his leg, his lips trembling, his face white.

BELL

You all right, Peale?

PEALE

I'm hit. I'm wounded. I'm hit in the leg.

MEDIC

Can you walk?

PEALE

I don't think so. I think my leg hurts pretty bad. You better help me. I think it's goin' to be a long time before I can walk again.

Stein is already calling to the men who have stopped to move on, keep going, don't stop.

VOICES

So long, Peale. Take it easy, Peale. Good luck, Peale.

PEALE

So long, you guys. So long. You guys take it easy. So long. Good luck, you guys. Don't worry about me. It'll be a long time before I can walk good. No doctor's goin' to tell me I can walk on this leg. Good luck, you guys!

(to the Medic)

I got me a Purple Heart, and I been in combat. I never even seen a Jap, but I don't care. No doctor's gonna tell me I can walk on this leg for a long time. Come on, let's get out of this. Before we get killed. That'd be hell, wouldn't it?

EXT. GRASSY RIDGE (HILL 209) - DAY

C-for-Charlie takes shelter behind a ridge. Welsh goes around telling them to buddy up for the night.

MAZZI

This Tills. He spent more time on his belly than he did up on his feet. I don't see how he managed to keep up with the rest of us. Ain't that right, Tills? Didn't you?

TILLS

I guess you never hit the dirt any, did you?

MAZZI

Did you see me? You fucking-A, you didn't, Tills. What was the use? Anybody could tell that fire wasn't aimed fire. It was stray stuff from the ridge. Could hit you just as well layin' down as standin' up. Maybe better.

TILLS

And I guess you wasn't never scared even once?

FIFE

I was.

BEAD

So was I. Scared to death! I never been so scared in my life. I'm still scared, right now!

They all laugh, even Stein and Mazzi, the New York hep guy. Only Welsh does not. As if to prove Fife right, there is an instant's FLUTTERING sound in the air, not unlike a man blowing through a keyhole, and three GEYSERS of dirt spout into the air thirty-five yards away, followed instantly by one loud CLAP of sound. There is an ant-like scramble on the little spur, as everyone tries to hit the dirt on the slope away from the surprise. Private Mazzi, if not the foremost, is certainly not the last among them. Tills smiles and shoots him the finger.

TILLS

You wasn't scared! Not even once!

MAZZI

I guess you stood up there like a big fucking hero, fuckface.

They unship their entrenching tools and start digging. Fife goes over to Welsh who is preparing to dig digging. Storm.

FIFE

Hey, First, is this where you guys've decided to dig in? I thought I'd dig in over here with you guys, if it was. I mean, I guess it's as good a place as any.

He unslings his pack. Welsh stops his unbuckling of straps and looks up at Fife with a face as expressionless as granite.

WELSH

Take off. Get the fuck away from me. Stay away from me, kid.

Storm has stopped his work to watch. Fife is carried back a step by the viciousness of the sergeant's retort. Somehow he imagined their approach to combat would soften Welsh's attitude. Welsh stares at him, silent, refusing to be drawn into any discussion. Visibly crestfallen, unable to hide it, Fife turns and moves off carrying his pack by its straps.

STORM

Why don't you treat the kid decent once in a while? He's your clerk, isn't he?

WELSH

I don't mean to wind up playin' nursemaid. I got enough problems to occupy me. Here. You got some dirt. Take the shovel, gimme the mattock.

Mazzi is still infuriated at Tills for giving him the finger when the mortar shells dropped in. It was an unfair advantage because everybody ducked for cover.

MAZZI

Shoot me the finger, will ya? I didn't pick you for a buddy. I don't like to be buddying with a hick from Hicksville who ain't even hep. I got no choice. I treat you right and give you good advice. You ignore it, do something else, always wrong. You won't never learn.

TILLS

Fuck you, Mazzi.

MAZZI

This time, Tills, you tore it. I ain't going to have nothing more to do with you.

TILLS

I could give a shit.

MAZZI

I ain't going to dig with you. I'm going to dig with Sico. I'm going up the ridge, and fuck you. Do your own damn thinkin'!

He can feel Tills looking after him as he walks up to the crest, to join his New York buddies in the 1st Platoon, but he ignores him.

EXT. GRASSY RIDGE (HILL 209) - DAY

Fife finds Welsh alone.

FIFE

Why're you always jumping down my throat?

WELSH

You're finally learning how important you are to the world, kid. Taken you long enough. Hurts, don't it? Shock to the system.

FIFE

You don't believe in nothing, do you?

WELSH

You've still got illusions, kid. You won't for long.

FIFE

What do you believe in, Sergeant?

WELSH

Property. That's what they're all fighting over. Property!

Welsh takes a large Listerine bottle full of straight gin from his musette bag, tips it back and pretends to take loud gargles for a nonexistent sore throat. They look around as PFC Gordon, with his flying fox, staggers up, breathless, with news that sickens them all.

GORDON

They found two guys from George Comp'ny -- I heard it from the runner -- the Japs took 'em prisoner -- stabbed 'em with bayonets, fifty times. One of 'em beheaded -- alive -- with a sword. E Comp'ny found 'im with his hands tied behind his back -- head sitting on his chest. They'd stuffed his dick in his mouth.

The sheer barbarity of the thing sweeps through C-for-Charlie like a cold-water shock.

DOLL

I ain't never going to take a fucking prisoner. I'm going to shoot every one of them comes my way. Preferably in the guts.

QUEEN

The dirty fuckers!

DALE

Okay. Okay. Okay.

The battle round the bend, which they can hear but not see, has continued unabated. Now for the first time, whole groups begin to return from it. The attack has failed. Strangers from the 2nd Battalion drop gasping over the crest of the ridge and lie breathing in hysterical sobs with eyes like drilled holes dark in their outraged, furious, unbelieving faces. They look at C-for-Charlie with astonishment, then hasten on toward the rear.

More and more keep coming in, haphazard, piecemeal, rarely even with their own squads, hollering to them not to shoot, for God's sake, don't shoot. Once inside C-for-Charlie's perimeter, they simply collapse. One boy, sitting in a row of five or six, weeps openly like a child, his forehead and hand resting on the shoulder of the man next to him, who pats him absently while staring straight ahead at nothing with smoldering eyes. A man with semaphore flags signals the rear. None of them knows what the overall situation is, or has any idea of what is taking place anywhere except where they themselves have been. C-for-Charlie, feeling shamefaced, watches quietly with a wide-eyed, awed hero worship, which no one can honestly say he wants to lose, if it means sharing their experience.

The division COMMANDER suddenly appears among them, smiling and talking, and tries to rally their morale.

GENERAL

Whoa! We're not gonna let these Japs whip us, are we, boys? They're tough, but they're not as tough as we are, are they?

PVT. DRAKE

General, you go out there! You go out there, General, you go out there!

EXT. HILL 209 - DAY

As the red-and-white-splashed walking wounded totter rearward in groups, trying to help each other, Storm crawls over to the hole he shares with Welsh.

STORM

There ain't no water left. I seen jeeploads of water cans on the way up from the river. They probably got diverted to the rear.

WELSH

Or poured out on the ground.

STORM

Whichever. People's going to have to eat my supper dry.

Welsh watches the sun drop behind the mountains. Guadalcanal is a green, peaceful island, not unlike Tahiti. Here the night does not fall so swiftly as it did down in the groves below. Far away, Welsh sees dogs and feral pigs feasting on the dead.

BELL'S DREAM- SERIES OF ANGLES (SECOND UNIT) - D/N

Bell dreams of his wife MARTY. He remembers the first time they saw each other, the first time their hands touched. The dream progresses. She stands on a white sand beach, watching a boat sail toward a solitary island. She enters a cave. (In all this we occasionally look over Bell's shoulder but we never see him face on.)

EXT. GRASSY RIDGE (HILL 209) BELL'S SLIT TRENCH - FLARES - DUSK

Bell wakes up with a cry that throws the Sentry in the next hole into a panic. Green flares are falling through the sky.

SENTRY (O.S.)

I can't see anything! I can't see anything!

WELSH

Don't shoot! Don't shoot! Wait!
Don't anybody fire!

BELL

It was me. I had -- a nightmare.

SENTRY (O.S.)

Well, for fuck's sake, try and keep it to yourself! You scared the living shit out of me.

GORDON

Why don't they come? What are they waiting for? Why don't they do something?

The suspense, exaggerated by the THRUM of the tropical night, is unbearable. There is a sudden explosion of RIFLE FIRE from the holes on their right. All around them, men are hollering happily and throwing their GRENADES and FIRING. And in front of them, the empty jungle underbrush sways and RUSTLES as though in a rainstorm, and chunks of bark and wood pop from the trees. The MORTAR and RIFLE FIRE lights up the night, betraying positions, hitting nothing. A few more useless thermite GRENADES are thrown, and then the thick silence resumes.

EXT. HILL 209 - DAWN

At dawn, bearded, mud-stained, grimy and greasy, the men rise in their blue holes and peer around, like the dead rising from their graves on the Last Day. Some of them pour water from their canteens onto their toothbrushes to rush their teeth.

Bead has to take a crap. Without saying anything to anyone, he drops all of his equipment by his hole and, taking only his GI roll of toilet paper, he starts to climb the twenty yards to the crest.

EXT. HILL 209 CREST - DAY

The trees begin three yards below the actual crest. Bead steps into their midst. Halfway through with relieving himself, he looks up and sees a Japanese man with a bayoneted rifle moving stealthily through the trees ten yards away.

The Japanese man sees him too and, turning, all in one movement, begins to run at him, but moving cautiously, the bayonet on the end of his rifle extended. Bead, still squatting with his pants down, gathers his weight under him. In desperation, still not knowing which way to try to Dump, all in one movement, Bead pulls up his pants over his behind to free his legs and dives forward in a low, shoestring football tackle when the Japanese man is almost to him, tackling him around the ankles. This gives Bead time to hitch up his pants again and spring upward once more until, kneeling on his upper arms and sitting back on his chest, he begins to punch and claw him in the face and neck.

Bead hears a high, keening SCREAM and thinks it is the Japanese begging for mercy, until finally he slowly becomes aware that the Japanese man is now unconscious. Then he realizes it is himself making this animal scream. Sobbing and wailing, he continues to belabor the unconscious Japanese with his fingernails and fists. Then he rolls aside, seizes the enemy rifle and, on his knees, raises it above his head and drives the long bayonet almost full-length into the Japanese man's chest. The Japanese man's body convulses in a single spasm. His eyes open, staring horribly at nothing, and his hands flip up from the elbows and seize the blade through his chest. Bead withdraws the bayonet, throws the rifle from him and falls down on his hands and knees and begins to vomit and weep.

EXT. HILL 209 - DAY

GORDON

Have a good shit?

Bead is ashamed and embarrassed by the whole thing, that is the truth, and that is why he doesn't want to mention it to anybody. He gets back through the lines all right, without further questions. But as he approaches C-for-Charlie, he is joined by Pfc Doll, on his way down from 1st Platoon.

DOLL

Man alive! What happened to your knuckles? You have a fight with somebody?

BEAD

No. I slipped and fell.

DOLL

And I 'spose all them little blood splatters come from your knuckles?

BEAD

Leave me alone, Doll! I don't feel like talking! So just leave me alone, hunh? Will you?

They walk on down in silence. Doll has been a little taken aback by Bead's vehemence, a forcefulness he is not used to from Bead. He can smell something when he sees it. Seeing Welsh and Storm, he goes over to them, grinning.

DOLL

What the fuck happen to your boy there? Who the hell he beat up with them skinned knuckles and all them blood splatters on him? Did I miss somethin'?

WELSH

Bead, come over here! What happened to you?

BEAD

Who? Me? Well, I slipped and skinned myself, that's all.

WELSH

Where'd you go a while ago? When you were gone for a while? Where were you?

BEAD

I went off to take a crap.

DOLL

Wait! When I seen him, he was comin' down from the 2nd Platoon's section of line on the ridge.

WELSH

Lissen, kid, I got more problems than I know what to do with in this screwy outfit. I got no time to fuck around with kid games. I want to know what happened to you, and I want the truth. Look at yourself! Now, what happened? Where were you?

BEAD

Well, I went across the ridge, outside the line. A Jap guy came up while I was there and he tried to bayonet me. And -- I killed him.

Bead exhales a long, fluttering breath, then inhales sharply and gulps. Everyone is staring at him disbelievingly.

WELSH

Goddamn it, kid! I told you I wanted the goddamn fucking truth! And not no kid games!

BEAD

Then goddamn you go and look! Don't take my word, go and look for your goddamn fucking self!

DOLL

I'll go.

WELSH

You'll go nowhere, stoolie.
(turning to Bead)
I'll go myself. And if you're lyin', kid, God help your ass. All right. Where is it? Come on, show me.

BEAD

I'm not going up there again! You want to go, go by yourself! But I ain't going! And nothin's gonna make me!

WELSH

Okay. Where is it, then?

Storm puts on his helmet and picks up his Thompson.

BEAD

A few yards beyond the crest, front of Krim's hole. You won't need all the goddamned artillery, Welsh! There's nobody up there now but him!

DOLL

Top, you wouldn't keep me from goin', would you?

Welsh stares at him a moment, then without change of expression, turns away silently. It is obviously a reprimand. Doll chooses to take it as silent acquiescence. And with himself in the rear, the search party starts the climb to the line. Meanwhile, Bead confides his anguish to Fife.

BEAD

He felt it. He knew what was happening. I just lost my head, I was afraid. I could of taken him prisoner, we could of gotten valuable information from him. Everything I ever did I fucked up. I just wish I hadn't touched him. Now I can't never wash it off. Don't kill nobody, Fife! If you can help it! I swear it right now, I'm never going to kill again.

They look up to see the little scouting party has returned.

WELSH

He's there.

DALE

He sure is.

Doll has hunted up the Japanese rifle and brings it back for Bead. He presents it as if presenting an apology offering.

DOLL

Here, this is yours. I scrubbed the blood off with leaves. I wiped off the bayonet.

BEAD

I don't want it.

DOLL

You won it. The hard way.

BEAD

I don't want it anyway. What good's it to me?

DOLL

(laying it down)

Maybe you can trade it for whiskey. And here's his wallet. Welsh said to give it to you. There's a picture of his wife in it.

BEAD

Good Lord, Doll.

DOLL

There's pictures of other broads, too. Filipino, looks like. Maybe he was in the Philippines.

BEAD

I don't want it anyway. You keep it.

But he takes the proffered wallet anyway, his curiosity piqued, in spite of himself. He looks at it.

FIFE

He feels guilty.

DOLL

Guilty! What the hell for? It was him or you, wasn't it? How many our guys you think maybe he stuck that bayonet in the Philippines? How about those two guys yesterday?

BEAD

I can't help it.

DOLL

Why!

BEAD

Why! How the fuck do I know why!

DOLL

Listen -- if you really don't want that wallet.

BEAD

No, I'll keep it. I might as well.

DOLL

Well -- I got to get back up to the platoon.

(admiringly)

I'll say one thing. When you set out to kill him, you really killed him.

BEAD

You think so?

DOLL

I ain't the only one.

He turns and leaves, heading up the slope. Bead sees the others looking at him from afar, as though he were a different person. He is not sure whether he enjoys this or not. He is not surprised when Stein comes over.

STEIN

Bead, I know you've been pretty upset by what happened to you today. That's unavoidable. Anybody would be. I thought you might like to talk about it.

Kirk appears and kneels down behind Bead, waiting his chance to speak with the Captain.

STEIN

You had no choice. You only did what any other good soldier would have done, for our country or any other. I want you to know that, after this war is over, if there is anything I can ever do for you, just get in touch with me. I'll do anything I can to help you.

KIRK

The Colonel's here to see you, sir.

EXT. HILL 209 - DAY

Stein has received unbelievable orders from Lt. Col. Tall, 1st Battalion Commander. Tall is lean, a West Pointer.

STEIN

We can't do that, Colonel!

COL. TALL

There's no way to outflank them. On the left there's the cliff. It falls straight down to the river. The Japanese hold the bungle. It has to be taken frontally.

STEIN

What about the water? The water's not getting up here. My men are passing out.

Tall looks at him, gives a slight nod, then looks away, leaving Stein's question unanswered. Stein looks at his watch. The-next moment, as though under a spell, he explains to his officers and noncoms what their objective is.

They kneel just behind the crest. Stein points out the features of the land that lies ahead of them; they inspect it through binoculars. There are three folds of land, like gentle ocean swells. Beyond them lies Hill 210.

STEIN

We're all going to attack abreast. We've got to cross those three folds of ground. You see? Then, once we're beyond them, we've got to attack the hill.

WELSH

We're supposed to cross that open field?

STEIN

(guiltily)

The Colonel says there's no way to outflank it. We have to take it head on, by frontal assault. We've drawn the worst assignment. Whyte, Blane - you see those grassy ridges at the end of the field? Just at the foot of the hill? When you get to the end of the field, you're to locate and eliminate the hidden strongpoints on those ridges. I can't see any sign of them, but the Japs must have something there, to protect the approaches... We move out in twenty minutes. When you hear the whistles.

EXT. FOLDS OF GROUND - THE ATTACK - DAY

Batteries of 105 HOWITZERS begin to blast away, joined by 81mm mortars and the 155mm guns of the Americal's 221st Field Artillery Battalion, -in the first time-on target attack of the war. P-39s and Air Cobras fly in low to strafe and drop 500-pound demolition bombs on the Japanese positions. Stein looks at his watch. WHISTLES begin to blow up and down the line as C-for-Charlie goes to the attack. The men have no recourse except to begin to move. Minds cast frantically about for legitimate last-minute excuses, and find none. Though they prefer not to believe it, the moment has come.

Nervous fear and anxiety, contained so long and with such effort in order to appear brave, now begins to come out in yelled exhortations and yelps of gross false enthusiasm. They move up the slope, and in bunches, crouching low and carrying their rifles in one or both hands, they hop over the crest and commence to run sideways and crouching down the short forward slope to the flat, rocky field in front.

By the time Stein looks up, 1st and 2nd Platoons are passing out of sight beyond the first of the swells that lies across their line of advance. They are fifty yards ahead and appear well deployed. Close by, directly in front of him, his reserve 3rd Platoon is spread out and flattened behind the first swell. With them are the company HQ and the mortar section. Most of them are looking at him with blazing, astonished eyes.

The 1st Platoon spreads out and flattens itself behind the middle of the three little swells of ground. The 2nd Platoon crouches in the trough behind them. Gordon's little flying fox trembles inside his shirt-front.

Stein moves to the first swell. Young LT. WHYTE peeps over the crest at the third swell. Seeing nothing, he motions for his two scouts to proceed there, using an additional hand-and-arm signal meaning "speed." The BOOMING and BANGING and RACKETING in the air does not seem to come from any one place or several places, but simply hangs and jounces in the air, sourceless. Whyte can see no visual end results of so much banging and exploding. His two scouts still not having moved, Whyte becomes angry and opens his mouth and bellows at them, motioning again. Both of them stare at him as though they thought him insane for even suggesting such a thing, but this time, after a moment, they move. Almost side by side, they leap up, cross the crest and run crouching down to the low area where they flatten themselves. Whyte jumps up, making a sweeping forward motion with his arm, and runs forward, his platoon behind him. 2nd Platoon moves to the top of the middle swell.

Back at the first swell, Stein watches this move and feels a little reassured. He raises himself to his knees, his face and whole patches of his skin twitching with mad alarm, to see 1st Platoon arrive at the last swell and that Lt. Whyte is on the verge of making a bad tactical blunder.

It seems strange to Whyte, truly astonishing, that he has arrived at the third and last fold of ground without a casualty. What are the Japanese up to?

DOLL

Maybe they've pulled out.

Whyte shakes his head. This would be too optimistic. While his men flatten themselves and stare at him with intense sweating faces, he raises himself cautiously on his elbows till only his eyes show, and inspects the terrain. He cannot see anything that looks like Japanese or their emplacements. Whyte is scared, but his anxiety to do well today is stronger.

He takes another look at the terrain ahead -- it is such a short distance to the first ridge of the hill -- and then motions his scouts forward.

Once again the two riflemen stare at him as though they think he has lost his mind, as though they would like to reason with him if they didn't fear losing their reputations. Again Whyte motions them forward, jerking his arm up and down in the signal for speed. It seems eerily quiet, in the aftermath of the barrage, though now and then the mortars behind them GONG away. The scouts look at each other, then, gathering themselves on hands and knees first, bounce up and sprint twenty-five yards down into the last of the low areas and fall down flat. After a moment, in which they inspect and find themselves still alive, they gather themselves again. On hands and knees, preparing to rise, the first one suddenly falls down flat and ounces; the second, a little way behind him, gets a little further up so that, when he falls, he tumbles on his shoulder and rolls onto his back. And there they lie, both-victims of well-placed rifle shots by unseen riflemen. Neither moves again. Whyte stares at them shocked. He has heard no shots, nor has he seen anything move. What is he supposed to do now? There is nobody to tell him.

WHYTE

Come on, boys! Let's go get 'em!

He leaps to his feet motioning the platoon forward. He takes two steps and falls down dead, stitched diagonally from hip to shoulder by BULLETS.

COOMBS

I saw him die! I saw a man die!

Five others of Whyte's platoon go down with him almost simultaneously, some dead, some only nicked. But the impetus Whyte has inaugurated remains, and the platoon charges blindly on. Behind them, over the top of the third swell, suddenly comes the 2nd Platoon in full career, yelling hoarsely. Nine men fall at once. Two die, one of them is their 2nd Lt. Blane, unluckily chosen as target by three separate riflemen.

MORTAR SHELLS begin to drop in onto the 1st Platoon twenty-five yards ahead. First two, then a single, then three together pop up in unbelievable mushrooms of dirt and stones. Shards and pieces wicker and WHIR in the air.

In the 2nd Platoon S/Sgt. Keck, watched by everyone now with Lt. Blane down, throws out his arms and bellows like the combined voices of ten men for them to "Hit dirt! Hit dirt!" Running men melt into the earth as if a strong wind had come up and blown them over like dried stalks. They disappear.

1st Platoon reaches the bottom of the ridge, a long hillock really, and dives into the waist-high grass which skirts it, hiding from the hidden MGs above them and protecting themselves from the enemy mortars. Those who cannot reach the grass are hosed to earth and hiding by the machine guns, or bowled over stunned by the mortars, before they can hide or get close enough to the ridge to escape the fire. The late Lt. Whyte's nineteenth-century charge is over.

Private Bell of the 2nd Platoon lies sprawled exactly as his body has skidded to a halt, without moving a muscle. He closes his eyes and listens. On the little ridges the prolonged yammering of the MGs has stopped and now confined itself to SHORT BURSTS at specific targets. Here and there wounded men bellow, whine or whimper. Bell has never known such eviscerating, ball-shrinking terror.

BELL

Hey, Keck! Hey, Keck! We got to get out of here.

KECK

I know it.

BELL

Can you see them? Can you see where any of them are?

KECK

No.

BELL

What'll we do?

JAPANESE (O.S.)

We know you there, Yank. Yank, we know you there.

KECK

Tojo eats shit!

He is answered by an angry burst of machine gun FIRE.

JAPANESE (O.S.)

Roozover' eat shit!

KIRK (O.S.)

You goddamn right he does!

When the firing stops, Bell calls softly again.

BELL

What'll we do, Keck?

KECK

Listen. All you guys listen. Pass it along so everybody knows. When I holler go, everybody up. Load and lock; have a nuther clip in yore hand. 1st Squad stay put, kneeling position, fire covering fire. 2nd and 3rd Squads hightail it back over that fold. 1st Squad fire two clips, then scoot. 2nd and 3rd fire covering fire from that fold. If you can't see nothin', fire searching fire. Space yore shots. Them positions is about halfway up them ridges. Everybody got it? Then -- GO!

The slope comes to life. Bell leaps up running, his legs already pistoning before the leap comes down to earth. Safe beyond the little fold of ground, which by now has taken on characteristics of huge size, he whirls and begins to FIRE cover. When 2nd and 3rd Squads come diving and tumbling back over the tiny crest, Bell is content to throw himself prone, press his cheek to the earth, shut his eyes and lie there.

VOICE

God, oh, God! Why am I here!

Apparently, Keck's plan has worked very well. 2nd and 3rd Squads, having the surprise, have gotten back untouched; and 1st Squad has had only two men hit. Bell is looking right at one of them as, running hard with his head down, the man (a boy, named KLINE) jerks his head up suddenly, his eyes wide with start and fright, and cries out "Oh!", his mouth a round pursed hole in his face, and goes down. Anguished cries of "Medic! Medic!" are beginning to be raised now here and there across the field.

Back at the CP behind the first swell, Stein watches. Seeing that their Captain can safely stand up on his knees without being pumped full of holes or mangled, others are now doing it. He is setting them a pretty good example, Stein thinks, still a little astonished by his own bravery. He calls his two company AIDMEN over.

STEIN

You two fellows better get on up there. I expect they need you.

FIRST MEDIC

Yes, sir.

STEIN

Go by rushes, if you think you have to.

(as they disappear)

I need a runner! A volunteer!

Not a single figure moves to come forward or answers him. Stein stares back at them, disbelieving.

STEIN

I -- can't see what happened up there. I need someone to go up there and find out what's happened.

Charlie Dale, the second cook, appears at his elbow, scowling with intensity, his face dark and excited.

DALE

I'll go, sir.

Stein watches him go trotting off bent over at the waist, then looks back at the rest of them, somewhat restored. There are now twelve men standing on their knees in a group around Stein, trying to see what is going on up front. Fife is not, however, one of these. Fife is absolutely flattened out as he can get, staring at flies stirring in the grass. His rage is broken off short by the buzzing WHISTLE of the soundpower phone that Stein has given him care of.

FIFE

Yes?

COL. TALL (V.O.)

What do you mean, "yes"?

FIFE

I mean this is Charlie Cat Seven. Over.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

That's better. This is Seven Cat Ace. Colonel Tall here. I want Captain Stein. Over.

FIFE

Yes, sir. He's right here.

(to Stein)

Colonel Tall wants you.

Stein lies down and takes the phone. Despite the din, both he and Fife beside him can hear the colonel clearly. Stein has been caught off guard;

he did not expect to be called upon to offer explanations so soon. What he hears astounds him to speechlessness.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

Magnificent, Stein, magnificent!
The finest thing these old eyes
have seen in a long time.
Beautifully conceived, beautifully
executed. You'll be mentioned in
Battalion Orders, Stein. Your men
came through for you. Over.

STEIN

Yes, sir. Over.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

Best sacrificial commitment to
develop a hidden position I have
ever seen outside maneuvers. Young
Whyte led beautifully. I'm
mentioning him, too. I saw him go
down in that first melee. Was he
hurt bad? But sending in your 2nd
too was brilliant. They might very
well have carried the ridge, with
luck. I don't think they were hurt
too bad. Blane led well too. How
many of the emplacements did they
locate? Did they knock out any? We
ought to have those ridges cleaned
out by noon. Hello? Hello, Stein?
Over?

STEIN

Yes, sir. Here, sir. Over.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

Thought you'd been hit. I said, how
many of the emplacements did they
locate? Did they knock any of them
out? Over.

STEIN

I don't know. Over.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

What do you mean you don't know?
How can you not know? Over.

Stein finds himself in a quandary. He cannot admit what both he and Fife know, which is that he knows nothing about Whyte's attack, did not order it, and until now has believed it bad.

STEIN

I'm back here. Behind the first swell. Do you want me to stand up? And wave? Over.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

No. I can see where you are. I want you to do something. I want you to get up there and see what the situation is, Stein. I want Hill 210 in my hands tonight. To do that I have to have those two ridges by noon. The Admiral got up at dawn for this. Come to life down there, Stein. Out.

STEIN

(to Welsh)

Let's move up.

While Stein's Company HQ is trooping forward to the second of the swells, the 1st Platoon continues to lie flat. After the first crash and volley and thunder of mortars they all expected to be dead in five minutes. Now, it seems unbelievable but the Japanese do not seem to be able to see them very well.

The two company aidmen have moved courageously up amongst 2nd Platoon and begun little sorties out after the wounded. In all there are fifteen wounded men, and six dead. The aidmen do not bother with the dead, but slowly they retrieve for the stretcher-bearers all of the wounded.

Bell watches them, astonished. With insouciance, the two of them move up and down the slope of the last swell, bandaging and salting, dragging and half-carrying. MORTAR SHELLS knock them down, MG FIRE kicks up dirt around them, but nothing touches them. They clump untouchably on, helping the sobbing, near-helpless men.

EXT. HILLSIDE (WITT AND HOKE AMONG THE WOUNDED) - DAY

Witt works as a stretcher-bearer. He receives the wounded from the aidmen and does what he can to comfort them. They bleed. They cry. They beg for water. He puts his canteen to their lips; he listens; he smooths their hair. He feels strangely close to them.

The other men look on the wounded with fear and a hushed awe. They keep their distance, though they cannot help but be curious; fresh blood is so very red. It is all obscene somehow.

Something which they feel should not be looked at, but which they are compelled to look at, with guilty darting glances.

EXT. GRASS AT THE FOOT OF THE RIDGE - DAY

It is Doll who sees the first Japanese. Sensing the movement around him as men begin to stir and call softly to each other, he raises his head until his eyes show above the slight depression into which he has sprawled. He sees three figures carrying what could only be a machine gun still attached to its tripod start across the slope back toward Hill 210.

Doll slides his rifle up, raises the sight four clicks and, lying with only his left arm and shoulder outside his little hole, sights on the man in front, leading him a little, and squeezes off a SHOT. The rifle bucks his shoulder and the man goes down. The two men behind jump sideways together, like a pair of skittish, delicately coordinated horses, and run on.

DOLL

I got him! I got him!

Doll has killed his first Japanese. For that matter, his first human being of any kind. He feels an impulse to grin a silly grin and to laugh.

All at once a mortar shell SIGHS down and ten yards away EXPLODES in a fountain of terror and dirt, and Doll discovers his confidence hasn't been helped so much after all. After a moment, he again puts his head up a little. This time he sees four Japanese preparing to leave the grassy ridge and head up toward the top of Hill 210. They come into si Doll from somewhere on the ridge already running. Doll pulls his rifle up into position and fires off FOUR SHOTS. He misses each time. The Japanese disappear into the rocks.

DOLL

Hey, Queen! You there? You see them
Japs leavin' that left ridge?

QUEEN

I ain't been seein' much of
nothin'.

DOLL

Well, why don't you get your
fuckin' head up and look around?

QUEEN

Go fuck yourself, Doll.

DOLL

No, I'm serious. I counted seven Japs leavin' that left-hand grassy ridge. I got me one of 'em.

QUEEN

So?

DOLL

I think they're pullin' out of there. Maybe somebody ought to tell the Captain.

QUEEN

You want to be the one?

DOLL

Why not? Sure. I'll carry the message back to Bugger for you.

QUEEN

You'll do no such goddamn fucking thing. You'll stay right the fuck where you are and shut up. That's an order.

Doll does not answer for a moment. Slowly his heart returns to normal. He offered and he was refused.

QUEEN

They'll get us out of this in a little bit. Somebody will. You stay put. I'm ordering you.

But the thing that is driving Doll, eating on him, doesn't recede. He has a strange tingling all through his belly and crotch. Off to his right there is a sudden burst of MG FIRE his ear now knows as Japanese, and immediately after it a CRY of pain.

DOLL

Sounds like Stearns.

STEARNS

Not my legs! Not my legs! Aidman! Aidman! I'll be all right! Just show me where to go!

The tingling in Doll gets stronger and his heart begins to pound again. He has never in his life been excited quite like this. Somebody has to get that news to Bugger. Somebody has to be a -- hero. And at once he goes,, up in a flash and running, bent over, his rifle in both hands.

A BULLET kicks up dirt two feet to his left and he zigs right. Ten yards further on he zags left. Then, twenty yards further, he nearly collides with Dale, who is just coming up to get their news.

DOLL

Where you going, fuckface?

DALE

I'm s'pose to find out what's going on with you people.

DOLL

They sendin' out cooks? They must be in bad shape back there.

He hurries on past Dale without even looking back. Dale's ears burn with the unprovoked insult. A feral pig flushes from its hiding place in the bushes nearby. Dale SHCJTS at it but misses.

Behind the second little swell Doll runs almost head-on into Capt. Stein. He comes trotting up, bent over, giggling and laughing, so out of breath he cannot talk. Welsh eyes him contemptuously.

STEIN

What are you laughing at?

DOLL

I think they're pullin' completely out of there, sir.

STEIN

Who sent you back here?

DOLL

Nobody , sir. I came myself. I thought it was something you'd want to know.

STEIN

You're right. It is. I won't forget it, Doll.

Doll does not answer, but grins and turns to Fife.

DOLL

That was exciting. More than all the hunting, gambling and fucking I ever done. All rolled up together.

STEIN

God damn it, get down! George, get a man with glasses and have him spot the back of that ridge. I want to know the second anybody leaves it. Take mine.

LT. BAND

I'll do it myself.

Stein gives his binoculars to 1st Lt. Band, his exec, then turns back to Doll and begins to question him about the attack, casualties, the present position of the platoon. While they are talking Welsh looks over the crest at the 2nd Platoon flattened out and looking back this way, watching their commander, who conceivably might order them to go over the crest again.

STEIN

You're not really pinned down, then. I was told --

DOLL

Well, we are, in a way, sir. But, like you see, I got back all right. We couldn't all come back at once. But two or three at a time could make it, I think. With 2nd Platoon firing covering fire.

STEIN

We don't even know where those goddamned fucking emplacements are.

DOLL

They could fire searching fire, couldn't they?

Stein glares at him. So does Welsh. Welsh wants to boot the new hero in the ass: already giving the company commander advice!

WELSH

Cap'n? You want me to go out there and get them men back here for you?

STEIN

No. No, I can't spare you. Might need you. Anyway, I think I'll leave them there a while.

(MORE)

They don't seem to be getting hurt too bad and if we can get up onto that right ridge frontally maybe they can flank it.

LT. BAND

Hey, Jim! Hey, Captain Stein! I just saw five more leaving the left ridge, with two MGs. I think they really are pulling out.

STEIN

Really? Really?

Now he hears a voice behind him and looks around to see Dale staring at him with his narrow close-set eyes snapping bright.

DALE

Captain, are there any more jobs you got for me to do?

STEIN

Yes, Dale. You --

Stein is interrupted by the EXPLOSION of a mortar shell amongst the 2nd Platoon on the swell just ahead of them. Its thronging bang is almost simultaneous with a loud SCREAM of pure fear. A man has thrown himself out of the line back down the slope and is bucking and kicking and rolling with both hands pressed behind him in the small of his back.

WELSH

I don't think they can see us any better than we can see them.

The screaming takes on a new tone, one of realization, rather than the start and surprise and pure fear of before. One of the aidmen rushes out to Jacques and, with the help of two men from 2nd Platoon, tears open his shirt and gets a syrette of morphine into him. In a few seconds he quiets. The aidman shrugs with despair. Stein is white-faced, his lips tight. This is the first of his men he has actually seen wounded.

STEIN

Stretcher-bearers! I believe that's Private Jacques.

LT. BAND

But, Jim. Really, Jim, I don't -- There's other men wounded.

STEIN

God damn you, George, shut up!
Leave me alone!

The stretcher-bearers arrive out of breath. Stein points over the crest to where the aidman still kneels by the casualty.

STEIN

Go get that man.

Hoke, the lead stretcher-bearer, plainly thought someone of the CP group here was wounded. Now he sees his mistake.

STRETCHER-BEARER (HOKE)

We already got eight or nine down there now that we're not supposed to -- We're not --

STEIN

God damn it, don't argue with me!
I'm Captain Stein! Go get that man,
I said!

Hoke recoils, upset. Of course nobody is wearing insignia.

LT. BAND

But, Jim, really, he's not --

STEIN

God damn you, all of you! Am I in command around here or not! Am I company commander of this outfit or am I not! Am I a captain or a goddamned private! Do I give the orders here or don't I! That man may die. He's hit bad. Get him back to Battalion Aid Station. See if they can't do something to save him.

STRETCHER-BEARER (HOKE)

Yes, sir. We got others that're hit bad, sir. That was all I meant. We got three down there might die any minute.

LT. BAND

That's it, Jim. Don't you see?
Don't you think he ought to wait his turn? Isn't that only fair?

STEIN

Wait his turn? Wait his turn? Fair?

LT. BAND

Why put him ahead of some other
guy?

STEIN

Go and get him, like I told you.
Back to Battalion Aid Station. I
gave you an order, Private.

STRETCHER-BEARER (HOKE)

Yes, sir. Come on, you guys. We're
goin' after that guy.

STRETCHER-BEARER (WITT)

Well what the hell're we waitin'
for? Come on, Hoke. Or are you
afraid of gettin' that close to the
shooting?

STRETCHER-BEARER (HOKE)

You shut up, Witt. Let me alone.

The man he has addressed stands up suddenly. With a rapacious
grin he marches up to where Welsh half-reclines.

WITT

Hello, Firs' Sarn't.

Only then do Stein, or any of the rest of the C-for-Charlie
men for that matter, recognize that this Witt is their Witt,
the same that Stein and Welsh combined to transfer out of the
company. All of them are astonished, as Witt has obviously
meant for them to be.

FIFE

By God! Hello, Witt! What're you
doing here?

True to his promise of a few days before, Witt passes his
narrow eyes across his friend as if Fife did not exist. They
come to rest on Welsh again. Welsh seems to peer into him.

STORM

You must be out of your mind. You
must be crazy.

WELSH

Hi, Witt. You in the medics now?
You better get down.

Stein, who has felt guilty about shipping Witt out when he
knew how badly Witt wanted to stay, even though he still
feels he did what was best for his company, says nothing.

Witt ignores Welsh's cautioning and remains standing straight up.

WITT

Naw, Firs' Sarn't, I'm still in Cannon Comp'ny. Where you put me. Only we ain't got no cannons. Who we goin' after over there, Firs' Sarn't?

WELSH

Jacques.

WITT

Old Jockey? Shit, that's too bad.

His three companions have already gone on and are now running downhill toward the wounded man. Witt turns to follow them, but then he turns back and speaks directly to Stein.

WITT

Please, sir, can I come back to the company? After we get Jockey back to Battalion? I can slip away easy. They'll give Hoke another man. Can I, sir?

STEIN

Well, I -- Of course, you'll have to get permission.

WITT

Sure. And my rifle. Thank you, sir.

He exchanges a look with Welsh, who turns to Stein as though to protest this decision. Then, continuing to ignore Fife, he turns and follows after his companions. Stein stares after him. For a man to want to come back into a forward rifle company in the midst of an attack is simply incomprehensible. In a way, though, it is very romantic -- like something out of Kipling.

Fife lies flat and shuts his eyes. Even though he knows that Witt's gesture of ignoring him has to do with their argument of a few days back, he cannot help taking it as contempt and disgust for his present cowardice -- as if Witt with one glance had looked inside his mind. When he reopens his eyes, he finds himself looking into the pleading white face of little Bead a few feet away.

DALE

First chance I hadda be free of
that goddamn Storm and all them
cooks cooking up a bunch of shit
for people to gorge their guts on.
First chance I had to talk to the
Comp'ny C'mander, personally, like
this.

Fife looks at him in astonishment. For one thing, it is a long time since anyone heard Charlie Dale string this many sentences together. He really does seem to be enjoying it, especially watching Storm all flattened out beside Sgt. Welsh.

DALE

People are starting to rekinize me.
(glancing at Storm)
Hour ago that dumb fuck was giving
me orders.

STEIN

We know the Japs have vacated the
ridge on the left. Dale, you go to
3rd Platoon, tell them to move up
and occupy it. Report to Lieutenant
Gore if you can find him. Tell him
I don't want to lose any more men
than he has to. Get back as soon as
you can.

DALE

Aye, aye, sir.

STEIN

I want both you and Doll to stay
with me. I'll have further work for
both of you. You've both been
invaluable.

DALE

Yes, sir.

Dale snaps out a tiny little salute and takes off, running bent over along the low area behind the fold.

STEIN

The ridge on the right is going to
be the trouble spot. The main
strongpoint is there. Doll, you go
back and tell 1st Platoon I want
them to fire cover. Go!

Doll moves off reluctantly. He did not intend, when he first came back, to set himself up as a troubleshooting messenger to dangerous areas for Bugger Stein.

STEIN

2nd Platoon will make the attack.
Sgt. Keck, as 2nd Platoon leader,
you're to lead it.

(guiltily)

You'll take three squads and attack
up the ridge. It won't be easy.
Crawl up the slope as far as you
can get, until they discover you.
Then attack. The rest of us will
move forward to support you. We're
going after them, men.

Keck listens, astonished. It will be a frontal attack,
uphill, under heavy fire.

Meanwhile, Doll passes up through 2nd Platoon, at the third
swell. The men, cheeks pressed to the earth, stare at him
with indifferent, sullen curiosity. He is aware that his eyes
are narrowed, his nostrils flared, his jaw set. He makes a
handsome picture of a soldier for the 2nd Platoon men who
watch him. Then he is up and running. Some bullets kick up
dirt to right and left. He zigs and zags. Finally, just ahead
of him, he sees a hand and arm shoot up into the air, the
hand describing the old circular hand-and-arm signal for
"Gather here." Doll pulls up to find Queen lying placidly on
his side and grinning up at him ruefully, his rifle hugged
against his chest.

QUEEN

Come right in.

EXT. SECOND FOLD TO THIRD FOLD - DAY

Stein begins to move forward. Patches of flesh on his face
twitch uncontrollably. From behind the third swell he will
mount the attack and observe it too. He wonders if the men
can tell his nerves are wearing thin. In the first place he
can never be sure that what he is doing is right, might not
be done better and with less cost in some other way. Danger
flickers and blinks in the air like a faulty neon tube.
Whenever he stands up he might be struck by a bullet.
Whenever he moves a few feet he might be moving under a
descending mortar shell.

He is turning these things over in his mind when Fife holds
the phone up to his ear. He is dumbfounded to hear the
Colonel shouting at him that he is too far to the right.

He is not even given an opportunity to explain his proposed attack.

STEIN

I don't understand. What do you mean -- too far to the right? They've evacuated the left-hand grassy ridge. My 3rd Platoon's moving up to occupy it. Over.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

God damn it, Stein! I'm telling you your left flank's exposed. Do' you know what it is to expose your flank? Did you ever read in a tactics manual about exposing your left flank? Damn it, you've got to move down there! You're not moving! Over.

STEIN

God damn it, Colonel, right now, as you call, we're moving out to attack the right-hand grassy ridge. Over. God damn it.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

Stein, you're too far right already! You're sideslipping to the right alla time. I've decided to commit the reserve company on your left -- with orders to attack! Orders to attack, Stein, you hear? Over.

STEIN

Do you want me to go ahead with my attack? Over.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

What else? What else, Stein? You're not supposed to be down there on a goddamned asshole vacation. Get cracking! Out.

Stein looks over the terrain that lies ahead of them. He points its geography out to Band, Welsh and Keck.

STEIN

The first problem will be getting the men from here across that bareass field to the foot of the ridge. It'll be safer there.

(MORE)

STEIN (cont'd)
 We'll be right up against them, too
 close to hit us with their MGs and
 mortars. There's your ridge, Keck.
 You see?

Suddenly Dale appears, running bent over at the waist in that peculiar fashion everybody instinctively adopts. Rifle and MG FIRE hit the ground all around him, but nothing touches him, and he arrives among them a hero. Everyone within reach slaps him on the back as he makes his way to Stein to give his report.

DALE

They're okay. 3rd Platoon's
 occupied the ridge on the left.

Stein sees a lone figure hurry toward him. It is Witt, with his rifle and some extra bandoliers. At the same time, Pfc Doll returns from his hazardous mission to 1st Platoon. Everything is building toward the moment of truth.

DOLL

Found Queen. They're ready.

STEIN

Dale, if you want to go out with these others when they make the attack, I'll make you an acting sergeant right now and put you in command of the extra squad. Do you want to do that?

DALE

Sure. Sure, sir. If you think I'm capable, sir. If you think I can do it.

STEIN

Okay. I make you an acting sergeant. You'll go with the others. Under the command of Keck here.

DALE

Aye, sir. But don't you have to say hereby?

STEIN

What?

DALE

I said: don't you have to say hereby? You know, to make it official.

In some slow-stirring, labyrinthine depth of his animal's mind Dale seems to be suspicious of Stein's honesty.

STEIN

No. I don't have to say anything
but what I've said. You're an
acting sergeant.

Dale turns to Doll and grins. While Doll gathers his breath and stricken sense of justice, Witt asks permission to join the attack force. He seems to enjoy Welsh's look of exasperation.

WITT

Can I go, sir? I'm ready.

DOLL

Can I go too, sir?

Stein, unable to hide his stunned disbelief, nods his agreement. It gives him a terrible feeling of moral culpability to choose which men to send in. Some of them will surely die, and he does not want to decide which ones. Let Luck choose, or whatever agency runs the lives of men.

STEIN

All right, yes. Thank you, Doll.

Doll crawls away biting the inside of his lip so hard that it brings tears to his eyes. Fife watches him bang his head violently against a rock, his whole body writhing like a snake's. Why does he do things like this to himself? Why can't he keep his mouth shut?

STEIN

All right, Keck. When they're all
there, space them out. Advance by
rushes. You might as well go. We're
counting on you.

KECK

Listen, Cap'n. There's somethin' I
wanted to tell you. That guy Bell
is a good man. Pretty steady. He
helped me get going and get the
platoon out of that hole we were in
after that charge. I just wanted to
tell you.

STEIN

Okay, I'll remember. Take care of
yourself, Keck. I need you.

KECK

I'll take care of myself as good as anybody can around here.

LT. BAND

Give them hell, Sergeant! Give them hell!

The two attacking squads soon separate themselves from the other half of the platoon. Most of them, in their bodily attitudes and in their faces, resemble sheep about to be led to the slaughter pens in Chicago. They wait. Keck has only to crawl to them.

KECK

Okay, you guys. This is it. We're goin' down in groups of four. No point in goin' by rushes, only make a better target stopped. Run all the way. We ain't got any choice. We're picked, so we got to go. I'll take the first bunch myself. I want Charlie Dale with me. Dale? You can organize them guys that's down there. Let's move out.

He starts to crawl to the jump-off point just beyond the knot of officers and CP men, and it is here that the first case of overt cowardice occurs in C-for-Charlie. A big, beautifully muscled man named SICO, an Italian draftee from Philly, suddenly sits down in his tracks and begins to hold his stomach and groan.

KECK

Get up, God damn you, Sico. Or Ill kick you so hard in that stomach you'll really be sick.

SICO

I can't, Sergeant. I would if I could. You know I would. I'm sick.

KECK

Sick, my foot.

WELSH

Hold it', Keck. What is it, Sico?

SICO

I don't know, Sergeant. It's my stomach. Pains. Cramps. I can't straighten up. I'm sick.

As if to prove it he suddenly vomits. He does not even try to bend over and the vomit burps up out of him and runs down over his fatigue shirt onto his hands which hold his belly. He looks at Welsh hopefully out of the dark, tortured holes of his eyes, but appears ready to do it again if necessary.

WELSH

Leave him.

(to Sico)

Come on. The medics will take care of you, Sico.

SICO

Thank you, Sergeant.

Keck seems to want to protest. Witt studies the scene. Welsh's indulgence is curious to him.

WELSH

Don't argue with me.

Sico continues to sit and watch the others pass. He groans audibly from time to time and now and then he gags, but apparently does not feel it necessary to vomit more. His face looks haunted and his eyes tormented.

Keck's men begin to run the gauntlet. Each squad sergeant - first Milly Becker, then McCron -- supervises the jump-off of his men in groups of four. All of them make it down safely except two. Of these, one, a Mississippi farmer named Catt, is killed outright. The other, Pvt Alfredo Tella, hit running, falls, bounces hard and moans like a boy who has taken a spill from his bicycle.

Unfortunately, the Japanese heavy mortars, still firmly seated on the heights of Hill 210, have seen the forward movement of American troops, too. Shells begin EXPLODING their fountains of terror, dirt and fragments as the Japanese gunners finger the area.

EXT. GRASSY SLOPE (KECK'S ATTACK) - DAY

Keck spreads his men out in a line and then gives the order to crawl. The grass is about chest-high here and has a matted, tangled underhayer of old stems. It chokes them with dust, ties up their arms and feet, makes it impossible to see. They crawl for what seems an eternity, expecting the Japanese to open up at any moment. It requires tremendous exertion. Most of them have long since used up all of their water. Halfway up the slope Keck orders them to stop.

For a moment he lies gathering his will power and thinks about their faces. Then, taking a deep breath he stands up straight in the grass.

KECK

Up! Up! Go!

They rise in a line and begin to scamper uphill, FIRING as they go. Almost immediately the MGs begin to HAMMER, and at once men begin to fall. The fury of the Japanese fire strikes them like a wind-tormented hailstorm. The Japanese have been smart and have waited, conserving their fire till they have targets. Four men of McCron's squad go down at once. On the right, a young draftee named Wynn is shot in the throat and screams, "Oh, my God!" in a voice of terror and disbelief as a geyser of blood spurts from his neck. Next to him, another soldier, is caught in the face, perhaps from the same burst. He goes down without a sound, looking as if he's been hit in the face with a tomato. All this is apparently too much for McCron, who has clucked over and mothered this squad for months, and he simply drops his rifle and sits down crying.

Dale, on the left, sees the first emplacement, the first live one any of them has ever actually seen. It is a one-gun job, a simple hole dug in the ground and covered over with sticks and kunai grass. From the dark opening he can see the muzzle SPITTING FIRE at him. So far Dale has not fired a shot. What is the point, when there are no targets? But now, seeing the emplacement, he carefully releases his safety and FIRES a long burst with his Thompson gun, straight into the hole twenty yards away. Before he can release the trigger the gun jams solidly. But his burst is enough to stop the machine gun, at least momentarily, and Dale runs toward it pulling a grenade from his shirt. From ten yards away he throws the grenade like a baseball, wrenching hell out of his shoulder. The grenade disappears through the hole, then BLOWS UP, scattering sticks and grass and three rag dolls and upending the machine gun. Dale turns back to his squad, licking his lips and grinning with beady pride.

MGs still hammer at them from seemingly every quarter of the globe. Men are still going down. They still have not located any main strongpoints. Directly in front of them thirty yards away, there is a winding gully and four-foot cut which extends clear across their front.

Instinctively everyone begins to run for that. They dive in behind its protection pell-mell, sobbing with exhaustion. The exertion and the heat have been too much. Several men vomit. One man gurgles once senselessly, then -- his eyes rolling back in his head -- faints from heat prostration. They lie against the ledge in the midday sun and smell the hot, summer-smelling dust. Insects HUM around them. The fire has stopped.

DOLL

Well, what're we gonna do now?

KECK

We're gonna stay right here. Maybe they'll get some reinforcements up to us.

DOLL

Ha! To do what?

KECK

To capture these goddamn fucking positions around here! What you think?

DOLL

You mean you really want to go on with it?

KECK

I don't know. No. Not no uphill charge. But they get us some reinforcements, we can scout around and maybe locate where all these goddamn fucking MGs are. Anyway, it's better than going back down through that. You want to go back down?

Nobody answers this, and Keck does not feel it necessary to elaborate. Witt studies the ants crawling on the ground.

KECK

McCron's gone. Bell, I'm appointing you acting sergeant in his place.

BECKER

What if the Japs come down here in force and throw us off of here?

KECK

I don't think they will. But we better have a sentry. Doll.

WITT

Somethin's comin'!

DOLL

They're comin'! Somebody's comin'!

As one man the line behind the cut sweeps up and forward, rifles ready.

Forty yards away seven pot-headed, bandy-legged, starved-looking Japanese men are running down-at them across an ungrassed area carrying hand grenades in their right hands and bayoneted rifles in their left. The massed rifle FIRE from the ledge disposes of them quickly. Only one of them is able even to throw; and his grenade, a dud, lands short. When the fire ceases, only two bodies continue to move. Aiming deliberately in the sudden quiet, Witt the Kentuckian puts a killing round into each one of them.

WITT

You never can tell about them boys.
Even when they're hit.

DOLL

Why'd they do it? If they wanted to
throw us out of here, why didn't
they come in force? Why just seven?
It don't figure.

DALE

Maybe they were doing it on their
own. Without orders.

They await a second, larger attack, but only four more Japanese appear. Witt, who is the best marksman in the regiment, quickly SHOOTs three down. Doll and Dale watch in awe. Keck reaches in his hip pocket to pull out a grenade, and-in the excitement he gets it by the pin. He and Bell exchange a look of dizzying, near-fainting terror, then he leaps back from the line and sits back against a little dirt hammock, to protect the others. The grenade goes off with a sickening THUD. They see there is nothing they can do for him. His entire right buttock and much of his lower back have been blown away.

KECK

What a fucking recruit trick to
pull.

BECKER

He jumped away -- so we wouldn't
get hit.

Bell and Doll sit with him while the others go back to the line. They wipe the mud off his face and try to reassure him.

DOLL

We'll take care of you, Keck. I
swear to God we will! Just take it
easy.

KECK

You guys write my old lady, will you? Don't forget. I want her to know I died like a man.

DOLL

Sure, sure. But nobody's gonna haf to write your old lady. You'll come out of this. We got stretcher-bearers with us, remember? Battalion Aid Station's movin' up all the time. They'll have you back to the docs in no time.

KECK

Bullshit. Don't bullshit me. I'm cold.

BELL

There, there. Just take it easy.

KECK

You guys don't forget to write my old lady I died like a man.

He sighs, first sign of the approaching breathlessness of massive hemorrhage.

KECK

I grabbed it by the pin. This fuckin' mud on my face!

Bell wets his handkerchief and cleans Keck's face with it. This seems to make him feel better. Becker turns from the cut to signal the company to send reinforcements.

KECK

Just don't forget to write my old lady I died like a man.

DOLL

Just take it easy. Don't talk like that. You'll make it out of this.

KECK

Horseshit. I'm bleedin' to death. Ain't I?

He looks at Witt, who does not answer but watches him with sympathy.

KECK

See? Maybe it's just as good. I'm all messed upon the crock. What if I couldn't fuck no more? Just don't forget to write my old lady I died manly.

DOLL

Sure, sure. I'll write her. Just take it easy.

Witt comes up. Doll and Bell drift away. Witt is calm and cheerful in the presence of death; he does not look away. He feels a bond with the dying man. The others are solemn, embarrassed.

KECK

Aid Station's never gonna get up here. The medics either.

WITT

You're gonna be all right. Even if you die. You didn't let your brother down... Those flies bothering you?

He whisks the flies away from Keck's face and waits. His eyes express a deep understanding and tenderness.

WITT

We'll remember what you done. We won't forget it. It won't be wasted.

Keck looks at him uncomprehendingly. The others return. The breathlessness has hit him; they know it won't be long.

KECK

I'm cold. Freezin'!

When he stops breathing, the men stand up.

BELL

You going to write his wife?

DOLL

Fuck no! I don't know his old lady. That's the Company Commander's job, not mine. You out of your mind? I ain't no good at writin' letters.

BELL

You told him you would.

DOLL
I say anything when they're like
that.

BELL
Somebody ought to do it.

DOLL
Then you write her.

BELL
I didn't tell him I would.

WITT
(to Doll)
You make me sick.

Squaring his shoulders, he stares at Doll, ready to fight him then and there, in the midst of combat. Doll does not want a fight. Witt turns away in disgust. Charlie Dale comes over.

DALE
All over?

DOLL
Yeah.

THIRD FOLD TO CUT (WITH BINOCULAR MATTE) - DAY

Stein, through his binoculars, sees the men clustered around the figure on the ground, two hundred yards away. Keck! Then he sees that Sgt. Becker is looking at him -or anyway toward him -- and making the Old Army hand-and-arm signal for "Converge on me." He wants reinforcements. Exertion, nervous exhaustion and fear are wearing Stein down.

STEIN
He wants help... That whole ridge
is a giant honeycomb of MG
emplacements. A regular fortress.
The attack's bogged down. They
aren't enough men. It'd take a full
company.
(to Band)
Twelve men down! I counted every
one of them. My men!... Now he
wants us to send more after them.

Suddenly Stein hears from near the foot of the ridge the first thin, piping YELLS. They sound insane.

What they lack in volume, they more than make up in their penetrating qualities. They come in a series, each lasting five full seconds. Then there is silence.

STEIN

What's that?

BAND

My God!

Band looks back at him with squinted, dilated eyes. From the high grass out beyond them, high and shrill, the series of yells comes again. They are not screams. Stein is able to pick him out easily with the glasses, which brings him up very close, too close for comfort. Pvt Tella -- he has fallen at the bottom of the slope. Now he is trying to crawl back. He has been hit squarely in the groin with a burst of heavy MG fire which has torn his whole belly open. Lying on his back, his head uphill, both hands pressed to his belly to hold his intestines in, he is inching his way toward them.

STEIN

Tella. Medic!

LT. BAND

What are we gonna do?

From below the insane series of YELLS comes again, identical, unchanging. Stein and Band aren't the only ones to hear them. The entire remainder of the 2nd Platoon lying along the crest of the swell have heard him. So has the Medic who is now running bent over along the slope to Stein. Fife pricks his ears. The mortar shells are still falling every minute or two. Sometimes you can hear their fluttery SHU-ING sound for two seconds before they hit; and Fife is completely terrorized by them.

MEDIC

There's nothing anybody can do that'll help him. He'll be dead before they can ever get him back to a surgeon. He's got dirt all over his bowels. Even sulfa won't fix that. In these jungles?

STEIN

How long?

MEDIC

Two hours? Four, maybe? Maybe only one. Maybe less.

STEIN

God damn it, man! We can't any of us stand it that long! Not counting him! And I can't ask you to go down there.

The Medic studies the terrain. He blinks several times.

MEDIC

Maybe it's worth a try.

STEIN

You said yourself nobody could do anything to help him.

MEDIC

At least I could get a syrette of morphine into him.

STEIN

Would one be enough? I mean, you know, would it keep him quiet?

MEDIC

Not for long. But I could give him two. I could leave him three or four for himself.

STEIN

Maybe he wouldn't take them. He's delirious. Couldn't you just, sort of, give them all to him at once?

MEDIC

That would kill him, sir. I couldn't do that, I really couldn't.

STEIN

Okay -- well, you want to try it?

From below the set, unchanging series of YELLS rises up to them, precise, inflexible, a little quavery this time.

STEIN

I hope he doesn't begin to cry. God damn it! My company won't have any fighting spirit left at all if we don't do something about him!

MEDIC

I'll go, sir. After all, it's my job. After all, it's worth a try, isn't it, sir? To stop the yells.

STEIN

God, I don't know.

MEDIC

I'm volunteering. I've been down there before. They won't hit me, sir.

STEIN

You were on the left. It's not as bad there.

MEDIC

I'm volunteering.

Agonized, Stein waits several seconds before he speaks.

STEIN

When do you want to go?

MEDIC

Any time. Right now.

STEIN

No, wait. At least I can give you some covering fire.

MEDIC

I'd rather go now, sir. And get it over with.

They have been lying side by side, their helmets almost touching as they talk, and now Stein turns to look at the boy. He cannot help wondering whether he has talked this boy into volunteering.

STEIN

Okay. Go ahead.

The Medic nods, looking straight ahead this time, then springs up into a crouch, and is gone over the crest of the swell.

It is all over almost before it gets started. Running like some fleeting forest animal, his medic's web equipment flopping, he reaches the damaged Tella, swings round to face him up the hill, then drops to his knees, his hands already groping at the pouch which holds his syrettes.

Before he can get the cap off the needle, one single MG OPENS UP from the ridge stitching across the area. Stein and the remnants of 2nd Platoon watch him jerk straight up, eyes and mouth wide, face slack, not so much with disbelief or mental shock as with sheer simple physiological surprise.

Stein waits. Seconds ago he was alive and Stein was talking to him; now he is dead. Just like that. But Stein's attention is pulled away before he can think more, pulled away by two things. One is Tella, who now begins to scream in a high babbling falsetto of hysteria totally different from his former yells. Obviously he has been hit again, and while one bloodstained hand tries to hold in his intestines, the other gropes at the new wound in his chest.

DISTANT JAPANESE (O.S.)

Cly, Yank, cly! Yerl, Yank, yerl!

The next thing that catches Stein's attention is a figure emerging from the grass fifty yards ahead and plodding steadily toward them. Stein sees that it is his Sgt. McCron, that he is wringing his hands and weeping. On his face two great white streaks of clean skin run from eye to chin, accentuating the eyes, as if he were wearing the haunting makeup of a tragic actor in some Greek drama.

And on he comes, while behind him Japanese MGs and small arms OPEN UP all across the ridge, making dirt puffs all around him. Nothing touches him. At last he sits down beside his Captain.

MCCRON

Dead. All dead, Cap'n. Every one.
I'm the only one. All twelve. Young
men. I looked after them. Taught
them everything I knew. It didn't
mean a thing. Dead. What more can
you do?

LT. BAND

They can't all be dead, McCron.

MCCRON

(in a rage)

I tried to help them! All gone!
They 're all gone! Wynn! Gordon!
Darl! Gwenne! Vincente! Mack!

STEIN

Medic! Take him back. Stay with
him. When you get back there, tell
them we need another medic now. At
least one.

SECOND MEDIC

Yes, sir. Come on, Mac. That's it.
Come on, boy. It'll be all right.
It'll be all right.

MCCRON

They're all dead. How can it be all
right? Why? Why? Why?

He allows himself to be led off by the arm. Stein sighs and turns his attention back to Tella. The Italian is still screaming his piercing wailing scream and does not seem to show any indication that he is ever going to run down. If it keeps on, it is going to unnerve them all. Stein does not know what to do. He cannot send another man out there. A hot, unbelieving, outraged fury seizes him. And just then a large green object of nature on his right rises up and bounds over the crest of the swell, growling obscenities. Before Stein can even yell the one word, "Welsh!", the First Sergeant is careering across the field at full gallop toward the ridge.

WELSH AND TELLA (TRACK WITH WELSH)

Welsh sees everything before him with a furious clarity: the rocky, thin-grassed field running off to the foot of the ridge, mortar-and bullet-pocked, the hot bright sunshine and deep cerulean sky, the incredibly white clouds above the towering high-up horseshoe of Hill 210, the yellow serenity of the ridge before him.

WELSH

Fuck you! Fuck you!

He charges on happily, zigzagging professionally. But when he skids to a stop on his belly beside the mutilated Italian boy, he realizes he has made no plans about what to do when he arrives here.

WELSH

How goes it, kid?

Tella rolls his eyes around like a maddened horse until he can see who it is. He does not stop his screaming.

WELSH

You got to be quiet. I came to help
you. Tella!

Finally the scream stops of itself, from lack of breath, and Tella breathes, causing more blood to run from the hole in his chest. When he speaks, it is only a few decibels lower than the scream.

TELLA

Fuck you! I'm dying! I'm dying,
Sarge! Look at me! Get away from
me! I'm dying!

WELSH

Okay, but goddamn it, do it with
less noise.

TEL LA

How you going to help me?

WELSH

Take you back.

TELLA

You can't take me back! You want to
help me, shoot me!

WELSH

(yelling in the noise)

You're off your rocker. You know I
can't do that.

TELLA

Sure you can! You got your rifle
there! Point it at me! You want to
help me, shoot me and get it over
with! I can't stand it! I'm scared!

WELSH

Does it hurt much?

TELLA

Sure it hurts, you dumb son of a
bitch! You can't take me back.

WELSH

We'll see. You stick with old
Welsh. Trust old Welsh. Did I ever
give you a bum steer?

He is aware now -- he knows -- that he won't be able to stay
much longer. Already he is flinching and jerking
uncontrollably under the fire. Crouching, he runs around to
Tella's head and gets him under the armpits and heaves.

TELLA

Aaa-eeeeee! You're killing me!
You're pulling me apart! Put me
down, goddamn you! Put me down!

Welsh drops him quickly, by simple reflex. Too quickly.

TELLA

You son of a bitch! You son of a bitch! Leave me alone! Leave me alone! Don't touch me! Why are you touching me?

WELSH

(yelling)

Stop that yelling. It ain't dignified. All right, we'll do it this way, then.

Slipping one arm under the Italian's knees and the other under his shoulders, he lifts.

TELLA

Aaa-eeeeee! Put me down! Put me down! You're breaking me in two! Put me down! You'll kill me! You son of a bitch! You fucker! You bastard! I told you to leave me alone! I never ast you to come down here! Go away! Leave me alone! You shiteater! Stay away from me!

Turning his head away and closing his eyes, he begins his desperate, wailing, piercing scream again. Five yards above them on the slope a line of machine gun BULLETS slowly stitches itself across from left to right. With sudden, desperate inspiration, Welsh leaps across the prostrate Tella and begins rummaging in the dead Medic's belt pouches.

WELSH

Here! Tella! Take these! Tella!

Tella stops screaming and opens his eyes. Welsh tosses him two morphine syrettes he has found and begins to attack another pouch.

TELLA

More! More! Gimme more! More!

Welsh tosses him a double handful he has found in the other pouch, and then turns to run. But something stops him. Crouched like a sprinter at the gun, he turns his head and looks at Tella one more time. Tella, already unscrewing the cap from one of the syrettes, is looking at him feelingly, his eyes wide and white.

TELLA

Goodbye! Goodbye, Welsh!

WELSH

Goodbye, kid.

It is all he can think of to say. For that matter, it is all he has time to say, because he is already off and running. Bullets WHIR by his head. He runs and runs and then he falls headlong over the little crest and just lies there, half-dead from exhaustion.

STEIN

Sergeant, I saw the whole thing through the glasses. I want you to know I'm mentioning you in Orders tomorrow. I'm recommending you for the Silver Star. I can only say --

WELSH

Captain, if you say one word to thank me, I will punch you square in the nose. Right here. If you ever so much as mention me in your fucking orders, I will resign my rating two minutes after, and leave you to run this pore, busted-up outfit by yourself. If I go to jail. So fucking help me.

He shuts his eyes and rolls over away from Bugger, who says nothing.

WELSH

Property! Property!

Witt has perceived Welsh's selfless aid to the dying man. They glance at one another. Stein slowly crawls back to Fife and the soundpower phone. His arm is trembling as he takes the receiver. How long can he go on? How much longer can he watch his men being killed in agony like this? His CP force and the remnants of 2nd and 3rd Platoons watch him with white eyes, as though looking to him and hoping he can in some way get them out of this mess, so that they might go on living.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

Why aren't you following up your attack and exploiting it? What's the matter with you, Stein? Those men should be reinforced immediately. What are they doing? I can see them through my glasses. They're just lying behind that ledge. They should be up and out, cleaning out those machine guns. Over.

STEIN

I don't think you understand what's going on down here, sir. We're taking a lot of fire. We've had heavy casualties. I was planning to reinforce them right away; something bad happened. We had a man -- gut shot out on the slope -- he caused quite a bit of upset. That's taken care of now. I'm planning to reinforce now. Over.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

Who was that man who ran out on the slope? Was that what he was doing? Admiral Barr saw him through the glasses; the Admiral couldn't tell for sure but thought he had gone out to help someone. Was that it? The Admiral wants to recommend that man for something. Over.

STEIN

There were two men who went out, sir. One was our senior medic. He was killed. The other -- was one of the privates. I don't know which one yet. I'll find out. Over.
(releasing the button)
And fuck you. And the Admiral.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

Fine. Fine, fine. Now, what about those reinforcements? Over.

STEIN

I have two squads to 1st Platoon, I can send up... I lost Keck, Colonel. One of my best men... Over.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

What the hell do you mean, two squads! When I say reinforcements, I mean it. Throw every man you have in there, and do it now. Commit the reserve platoon and all. Everybody. 1st Platoon too. I see them lying on their fat asses down there doing nothing. Move them by the flank in to the ridge. Get a man to them right now with orders to attack..

(MORE)

Have the 2nd Platoon (cont'd) the center. Go straight up the hill! Envelop them. Do I have to give you a lesson in infantry tactics while your men are getting their asses shot off, Stein? Over.

STEIN

(swallowing his wrath)

I don't think you fully understand what's going on down here, Colonel. I don't think my company alone can take that position. They're too well dug in. They have too much firepower. Colonel, there's a bunker up there, we can't see it, it's chewing my men to pieces. I formally request, sir, to be given permission to make a patrol reconnaissance around to the right of Hill 210 through the jungle. A flanking move. It might save lives. I believe the entire position can be outflanked by a maneuver there in force.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

No! I tell you, no! I want a double envelopment! I order you, Stein, to attack, attack now, with every man at your disposal! Now, attack, Stein! That's a direct order! Over!

His heart suddenly up in his throat, Stein hears himself answer with a sort of numb disbelief.

STEIN

Sir, I must tell you that I refuse to obey your order. I again request permission to make a patrol reconnaissance in force around to the right. The time, sir, is thirteen twenty-one hours twenty-five seconds. I have two witnesses here listening to what I've said. I request, sir, that you inform witnesses there. Over.

The fact is that by now there are many more witnesses, at least half of 2nd Platoon is listening with its ears pricked.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

Stein! Don't pull that guardhouse lawyer shit with me, Stein!

(MORE)

COL. TALL (cont'd)
 I know you COL. Tall (cont'd) lawyer!
 Now shut up and do like I tell you.
 I didn't hear what you just said! I
 repeat my order! Over!

STEIN

Colonel, I refuse to take my men up
 there in a frontal attack It's
 suicide! I've lived with these men
 two-and-a-half years. I won't order
 them all to their deaths. That's
 final. Over.

Someone is blubbering now not far away along the crest, and
 Stein tries to see who it is and can't. Tall is stupid,
 ambitious, desperate to succeed before his superiors and
 fearful the battalion will be pulled back off the line before
 he can. Otherwise he could never have given such an order.
 Stein seems to read approval in his men's eyes. Tall's voice
 is sharp as a razor.

COL. TALL (V.O.)

This is a very important decision
 you're making, Stein. If you feel
 that strongly, maybe you have
 reason. I'm coming down. I'm not
 rescinding my order to you, but if
 I find there are extenuating
 circumstances when I get down
 there, I'll take that into account.
 I want you to hold on until I get
 there. If possible, get those men
 on the ridge out and moving. I'll
 be there in ten minutes. Out!

Stein listens unbelieving, mentally stunned. Moving up, he
 arrives at the wounded man, who proves to be Pfc Bead from
 Iowa, Fife's assistant clerk. Bead is dying.

BEAD

I'm dying, Captain! I'm dying! Me!
Me! I'm dying! I'm so scared!

He closes his eyes for a moment and swallows. Fife comes up
 with the telephone, wide-eyed.

BEAD

I was just laying there. It hit me
 right in the side. Like somebody
 punched me. Didn't hurt much.
 Doesn't hurt much now. Oh, Captain!

STEIN
Just take it easy, son. Just take
it easy.

BEAD
Where's Fife?

STEIN
He's right here, son. Right here.
Fife!

FIFE
I'm here.

BEAD
I'm dying, Fife!

FIFE
I know. Just take it easy. Just
take it easy, Eddie.

BEAD
Will you write my folks?
(as Fife nods)
Tell them it didn't hurt me much.
Tell them the truth.

FIFE
I'll tell them.

BEAD
Hold my hand, Fife. I'm scared.

For a moment, a second, Fife hesitates. Then, realizing with horror that Bead is slipping away, he grips his hand. Crawling closer, he slides his other arm under his shoulders, cradling him.

He has begun to cry, more because he suddenly realizes that he is the only man in the whole company whom Bead can call a friend, than because Bead is dying. Ah, what a poor friend he's been!

FIFE
I've got it.

BEAD
Squeeze. Squeeze.

FIFE
I'm squeezing.

He leans forward and presses Bead's hand against his cheek. Bead gives a little cry.

BEAD

Oh, Fife! Oh, Captain!

His eyes do not go shut but they cease to see. After a moment Fife puts him down and crawls away by himself, weeping in terror, weeping in fear, weeping in sadness, hating himself.

STEIN

Lie down somewhere for a little bit, son. I'll keep the phone for a few minutes myself. There won't be any calls coming in for a while.

EXT. CUT TOWARDS LEDGE - DAY

Back at the cut, Becker's men are growing nervous. Where are the reinforcements? Doll glances nervously at Witt.

BECKER

We're just going to get killed if we stay here. They're not going to just let us set. Bell, take six men, go around to the right of the ledge, see what's up there. We'll stay here and cover you best we can.

Bell sets off with his men. Everything works from the beginning. Finding the cut totally unguarded, they are able to crawl into the midst of the Japanese position and drop grenades down into the rear doors of two covered, camouflaged emplacements they spot down below them; two further emplacements, on the uphill side, are more difficult, but bypassing them and crawling up alongside they are able to pitch grenades into the apertures.

Father up, Bell discovers the Japanese strongpoint, beautifully dug in and with apertures in three directions. He does not see it all at first. When the lead man climbs out, he is RIDDLED fatally by three machine guns. Both Witt and Doll are in Bell's party, but neither of them happens to be the lead man. This distinction is reserved for a man named Catch, Lemuel C. Catch, an old-time regular. He dies immediately and without a sound. They pull his body down and retreat with it, while all hell breaks loose FIRING just above their heads, but not before Acting Sergeant Bell gets a good look at the strongpoint so he can describe it.

BELL

Wait here.

Halting his men a few yards back from where Catch died, leaving his rifle and holding a grenade in one hand, Bell climbs up pokes up his head. The Japanese firing has stopped now. All he can see is the unending grass, rising slowly along a hillock which sticks up out of the ridge. He waits, wondering if he will die, then pulling the pin, heaves the grenade with all his strength and ducks down. The grenade falls and EXPLODES just in front of the hillock, and in the cyclone of MG FIRE which follows, Bell is able to count five guns in five spitting apertures which he could not see before. He notes it all carefully and when the firing ceases, he crawls back down to his men, obscurely satisfied.

BELL

There's five -- five guns.

Whatever it was that made him do it, and he still doesn't know, it makes every man in his little group look at him admiringly . Dale, Doll, Witt, especially Witt. Motioning them on, he leads them back down until the company's main position at the third swell comes into view. To their surprise they have not seen or heard a single Japanese anywhere near the ledge.

WITT

Don't make sense. For them to leave this place unguarded.

EXT. CUT TOWARDS LEDGE - DAY

The mortar ROUNDS continue to drop at random points along the swell with strict regularity. It is amazing how few men they actually wound or kill. Fife hears the soft "SHU-U-U" of the mortar shell for perhaps half a second. There is not even time to connect it with himself, before there is a huge sunburst roaring of an EXPLOSION almost on top of him.

He has a vague impression of someone screaming but does not know it is himself. Fife's body comes to rest in the lap of a H.Q's man who happens to be sitting up.

FIFE

Am I hit? Am I hit?

TRAIN

Y-yes, you are. In the head.

FIFE

Bad? Is it bad?

TRAIN

I c-can't tell. Y-you're bleeding
from your head.

FIFE

Am I?

Fife looks at his hands and finds them completely covered with a glistening red. Gingerly he probes at his skull and finds nothing.

TRAIN

I-it's in the b-back.
(fearfully)
How do you f-feel?

FIFE

I don't know. It don't hurt. Except
when I touch it.

TRAIN

C-can you w-walk?

FIFE

I-I don't know.

Then, suddenly, Fife realizes that he is free. He does not have to stay here any more. He is released. He can simply get up and walk away -- provided he is able -- with honor, without anyone being able to say he is a coward or court-martialing him.

FIFE

I think I better go back. Don't
you? Well -- Good luck, Train.

TRAIN

Th-thanks.

Fife stands up. His knees are shaky, but the prospect of getting out of here gives him a strength he might not otherwise have. At first slowly, then more swiftly, he begins to walk rearward. Just before he breasts the top of the hill, he meets Colonel Tall and a party of his aides.

COL. TALL

Hold on, son. Don't let it get you
down. You'll be back!

Beyond the hill, he passes a barefoot Melanesian in a lavalava who is leading an American soldier with a bandage over his eyes back to the rear.

EXT. THIRD FOLD - CP

Stein watches Bell's party through his glasses, astonished. They did it all on their own!

WELSH

There's less fire coming from the hill, sir.

STEIN

I've noticed that too.

WELSH

They've knocked out some of those machine guns. In fact, they've cleaned out all the Japanese below the ledge.

LT. BAND

Sir? I think the medics can go out, pick up the wounded now.

STEIN

Send 1st Platoon forward. We'll follow them.

Stein is just turning to lead the CP up toward the ledge, to join Becker and Bell and to consolidate their newly won position, when he looks up to see Col. Tall walking leisurely toward him, carrying beneath his arm the unadorned little bamboo baton that is his trademark and romantic whim.

Bell's raid has cleaned out the Japanese below the ledge and established a real line. It has utterly changed the situation, and it is one of those horrible ironies which seem to dog the steps of certain men named Stein-that just at this moment Col. Tall should walk onto the field.

COL. TALL

What are you doing lying down there where you can't see anything?

STEIN

Observing, sir. I just sent 1st Platoon forward to the ridge.

Tall nods. The rest of his party, which includes a young captain named GAFF, his battalion exec, has decided that it might be just as well to be lying flat on the ground.

COL. TALL

I saw them leaving as we were coming along. How many of them were hit this time?

STEIN

None, sir.

COL. TALL

None? Not one?

A mortar round mushrooms, EXPLODING dirt without hurting anybody, somewhere along the rear, and Tall, coming forward to where Stein lies, permits himself to squat on his haunches.

COL. TALL

That doesn't sound much like the situation you described to me over the soundpower.

STEIN

It's not, sir. The situation's changed. In just the last five minutes.

COL. TALL

To what do you attribute the change?

STEIN

Sergeant Becker, sir. When I last looked, half of his men had disappeared. I think he sent them off to try and knock out some of the MGs. They seem to have succeeded.

From somewhere far off a machine gun begins to RATTLE and a long line of bullets strikes up dirt twenty-five yards beyond them. Tall does not change his position or alter his voice.

COL. TALL

Then you got my message to him.

STEIN

No, sir. Becker sent the men off on his own. They went off on their own.

COL. TALL

I see.

The long line of MG BULLETS comes sweeping back from Stein's left, this time only fifteen yards away. Tall does not move but merely squints his blue eyes off at the grassy ridge in silence.

STEIN

They've seen you, sir.

COL. TALL

Stein, we're going over there, all of us, and we're taking everybody with us. Do you have any more formal complaints or demurrers?

STEIN

No, sir. Not now.

COL. TALL

Now we'll do things my way. We'll take everybody over to the ledge. We may take that ridge before nightfall.

STEIN

I think that ridge is quite a way from being reduced, sir.

Tall ignores this remark and stands up to his full height. The conference is over. Tall gives the ridge one contemptuous amused look and starts walking out toward it, still talking to Stein. Slowly, very slowly, Stein stands up to his full height also, then follows Tall out into the field where ten minutes before they would have met a certain death.

Around them, as if sensing something or other is in the wind, the men begin to stir. Whatever else Stein can find to say about him, he nevertheless has to admit that with Tall's arrival on the battlefield a change for the better has come over everything and everybody. Tall has brought with him some quality that has not been here before, and it shows in the faces of the men. Standing up in front of the prone H.Q. Platoon, his little baton in his right hand, tapping it lightly against his shoulder as he frowns in concentration, he orders them forward and shows them how he wants them to advance. He does not exhort them. His attitude says quite plainly that they deserve better than that. Gathering heart, the men rush forward in groups.

EXT. CUT

Becker and Bell, Witt, Dale and Doll wait at the ledge. As the others scramble up to join them, there are a few weak cheers.

COL. TALL

That strongpoint is the key to the ridge. Se -- uh -- Sergeant Bell here is quite right. From their knob there our little brown brothers can cover the whole of the ground in front of our position for a thousand yards. Why they've left it unguarded I have no idea. We must exploit it before they see their error. I know everyone's pretty exhausted and that we've had our troubles getting water up here, but if we can reduce that big bunker, I see no reason why we can't take the whole ridge before nightfall. I'm asking for volunteers to go back up there and knock it out.

Stein, hearing for the first time this news about a further attack, is so horrified he can hardly believe his ears. Surely Tall must know how worn out they all are.

BELL

Sir, I'll be glad to go back again and lead the way for a party.

Immediately off to Bell's right another voice pipes up. Hunch-shouldered, crack-faced Acting Sergeant Dale is making his bid for future fame, future sinecures, future security from army kitchens.

DALE

I'll go, Colonel, sir! What about you, Doll?

Doll nods his agreement, without looking at Dale, and Private Witt comes forward at the same time. Both sit down, much closer to Bell than to Dale, who still squats by himself. Bell winks at Witt, who grins and winks back.

The rather elderly, Calvinistic-looking 2nd lieutenant from 3rd Platoon presents himself. His name is GORE. Then Tall's own exec, young Captain Gaff, puts in his two cents and offers his services.

GAFF

I'd like to lead the party,
Colonel.

COL. TALL

(gazing at him fondly)

All right, John. Go ahead. You'll
be in command. That's enough. Seven
is plenty. In the terrain you'll be
working, more men would only hinder
you, I think. I know more of you
would like to go. You'll have to
wait for another opportunity.

Stein, hearing this, peers at his commander closely and is
amazed to see that Tall is in deadly earnest and not joking
at all.

COL. TALL

Good man, my young exec... You'll
probably find the bunker guarded by
smaller MG posts around it. I think
it is better to ignore these and go
for the strongpoint itself if you
possibly can. The little posts will
fall if the big one is taken.
That's all, gentlemen. Noncoms
return to your positions. I want
the officers to remain. Synchronize
watches with me, John.

A mortar round EXPLODES nearby. At first it appears no one is
hurt, but then Storm is seen shaking his hand as though he'd
touched a hot stove. A single fragment, not much bigger than
a pinhead, has entered the back of his hand. Storm grins.

STORM

I been wounded! I been wounded!

WELSH

(with a sneer)

Okay. You'll get a Purple Heart.

STORM

You fucking A! And don't you forget
to put me in. S'like a wasp sting.
Captain, when can I go to the rear?
I mean, you know, I been wounded.

He raises his hand. When he flexes it, it makes a GRATING
sound. Nobody says anything. Storm continues to look
delighted.

STEIN

You want to go right now?

STORM

Sure.

He looks at his hand again, to see whether it has changed. There is no blood coming from the little blue-rimmed hole and really it doesn't hurt very much, but every time he flexes it they can all hear it grate. Stein nods. Storm may leave.

STORM

Might be a delicate operation to get that fucking thing out of there.

EXT. LEDGE - DAY

Meanwhile, Capt. Gaff's little assault party crawls off to the right along the ledge and disappears around the corner of the hillside. Bell, at the head of the seven men, keeps thinking that he had only volunteered to lead a party back. Irritably, he glances back to motion the others to come on. When he reaches the point where he crawled out above the ledge he stops. Sending Witt ahead, he points the place out to Gaff.

Witt crawls out to take the point. Standing on his knees out away from the ledge, he holds his rifle ready with the safety off. He hasn't shot squirrel all his life for nothing; he hasn't made High Expert on the range for the past six years for nothing, either.

GAFF

Any of you guys know how to operate this thing?

(the walkie-talkie; Bell nods)

Okay, you stay below the ledge, I'll call down the data to you from up above. Once the 81s have plastered that rock as much as they can, we'll crawl out along that low place until we make a line, then crawl up as close as we can through the grass, then throw our grenades. Okay? Okay.

Gaff crawls out into the low place before the first shells arrive. They can hear their soft SHU-SHU-SHU coming almost straight down before they hit, then the hillside EXPLODES into smoke and flame and noise.

Only fifty yards from the bunker, they are showered with a rain of dirt, chips of rock and small pieces of hot metal. They cling to the ledge with their faces pressed against the sharp rock, cursing with hatred the goddamned fucking mortarmen because they might drop a short round, though they don't. Gaff yells down changes of range and Bell relays them by walkie-talkie.

GAFF

Okay! Tell them to stop! I think that's enough. Whatever damage they can do, they've done it by now.

Suddenly the mortars stop falling, in a silence that is almost as devastating as the noise has been.

GAFF

Okay, let's go!

If they are under any hopeful illusion that the mortar barrage has smashed and flattened every Japanese in the strongpoint, they are straightened out on this point right away. As the elderly, morose 2nd lieutenant Gore climbs out first, he foolishly stands straight up, exposing himself to the waist, whereupon a Japanese machine gunner immediately SHOOTs him three times through the chest. Gingerly, they pull him back down behind the ledge.

DALE

Whadda we do now? We can't take him with us.

WITT

We'll have to leave him.

THORNE

You can't leave him here.

DALE

Okay. He's from your platoon. You stay with him.

THORNE

I didn't volunteer for this thing just to sit with him.

LT. GORE

(in a faint voice)

I should have been a chaplain. I could have, you know. I'm an ordained minister. I never should have fooled around with the Infantry. My wife told me.

BELL

We can leave him and pick him up on the way back. If he's still alive.

LT. GORE

You boys want to pray with me?

DALE

We can't, sir. We got to get going. The Captain's waitin' on us.

LT. GORE

(without opening his eyes)

All right. I'll do it myself. You boys go ahead.

Witt does what he can to make Gore comfortable. As they climb out one by one on their faces and bellies so as not to make the same mistake Gore made, the faint voice drones on. Dale goes first, then Doll, with Witt immediately behind him.

DOLL

I wish he had of been a chaplain. They've seen us now. They know we're here.

Bell is the last to go, but he stops at the ledge, feeling he ought to say something, some word of encouragement.

BELL

Well, good luck, sir.

LT. GORE

Thanks, son. Which one are you? I don't want to open my eyes if I can help it.

BELL

I'm Bell, sir.

LT. GORE

Oh, yes. Well, if you get the chance, maybe you can say some little prayer for me. I don't want to embarrass you. It certainly can't do no harm, can it?

BELL

Okay, sir. Goodbye.

As he climbs out, pressing his face and chest as hard into the dirt as he can, the faint voice goes droning feebly on.

GAFF

Is he dead?

DALE

Not yet.

GAFF

Okay, we'll crawl up through the grass towards the bunker. Don't fire or throw your grenades until I give the signal. I want to get as close to the bunker as we can without them seeing us.

They are now strung out single file one behind the other. Bell sees there is another way they could approach the bunker, one that leads up above and behind the bunker.

BELL

Sir, see up there? After that little open space we'd be behind that little rise, and then I think we could maybe crawl all the way around behind them.

GAFF

Yes, right, good. But I don't think there's that much time. What do you say, Dale?

(Dale nods)

That would take at least another hour of crawling. It's too near dark. What do you think?

DALE

I agree with you, sir.

No fuckin' officer is goin' to get Charlie Dale to take no responsibility for what the officer done.

GAFF

Okay. Let's do it.

Slowly Gaff snakes his belly over the lip of the trough and off into the grass, dragging his rifle by the muzzle rather than cradling it, so as not to disturb the grass more than absolutely necessary. One by one, the others follow. None of them knows what sets the Japanese off. One moment they are crawling along in utter silence, each man totally alone and separate and out of contact with the others, and in the next machine gun FIRE is whipping and slashing over and around and all about them. Whatever it was, they now lie separated from each other, unable to take concerted action.

Each man puts his head down and huddles to the ground, praying that he might keep on living. Contact is lost and with it all command and control.

DALE

We're pinned down!

It is in this static situation of potential total loss that Pfc Don Doll comes forward as a hero. Sweating, lying pressed flat in an ecstasy of panic, terror, fear and cowardice, he simply cannot stand it any longer. Wailing over and over in a high falsetto one word -- "Mother! Mother!" -- which fortunately nobody can hear, least of all himself, he leaps to his feet and begins to run straight at the Japanese emplacement, FIRING his rifle from his hip at the one embrasure he can see. As if startled beyond reasonable expectation, most of the Japanese fire stops suddenly. At the same moment, Capt. Gaff, released from his own temporary panic, leaps up waving his arm and shouts for the rest to fall back. With Gaff in the lead the rest of the assault force runs for the trough and their lives. Meanwhile Doll charges on, wailing his incantation: "Mother! Mother!"

When his rifle is empty, he throws it at the embrasure, draws his pistol and begins FIRING it. With his left hand he tears a grenade from his belt, stops firing the pistol long enough to pull the pin with one finger, and lobs the grenade over into the camouflaged roof of the emplacement, which he can now see clearly since it is only about twenty yards away, and where the grenade EXPLODES uselessly and without effect. Then, continuing to FIRE the pistol, he charges on. Only when the pistol ceases to fire for want of ammunition does he come to his senses and realize where he is.

Astonished, he turns and runs. Luckily for Doll, he does not turn back toward the others but simply runs blindly off to the right. In this direction the curving ledge is only ten yards away, and he reaches it before the mass of the Japanese FIRE can find him.

From behind him as he runs the ten yards a dark, round, FIZZLING object arches over his head and falls a few feet in front of him. Automatically Doll kicks at it with his foot as if place-kicking a football, and runs on. It bounces away a few yards and EXPLODES in a cloud of black smoke which knocks him down. But when he falls he finds that there is nothing under him; he has fallen over the ledge. His foot stinging painfully, he bounces to the foot of the ledge, landing with a bone-jarring THUD, then rolls another ten yards before he can get himself stopped.

EXT. LEDGE - DAY

For a while Doll just lies in the grass, breathing in groans, bruised, sore, the wind knocked out of him, half-blinded. At the moment all he can think about is that he wants to be with people, so he can put his arms around somebody and they can put their arms around him. With this in mind, he gets up and, grasping the ledge, runs gas pin back along it till he comes to the trough, where he almost runs head-on into the others, all sitting against the rock and gasping breathlessly. Only one of them, Thorne, has been hurt, and he has had his shoulder smashed by an MG bullet. Capt. Gaff speaks before Doll can apologize, make excuses or explain away what he has done. Doll can hardly believe his ears.

GAFF

Doll, I'm personally recommending you to Colonel Tall for the Distinguished Service Cross. You saved all our lives. I never saw such bravery. I'm going to write the recommendation myself, and I'm going to pursue it. I promise you.

DOLL

Well, sir, it wasn't nothin'. I was scared.

He can see Charlie Dale looking at him with a kind of hate-filled envy from where he leans gasping against the ledge.

GAFF

To remember the ledge was off there to the right, that was wonderful.

DOLL

Well, sir, you know, I was with the first patrol.

He smiles insolently at Dale. Gaff is still breathing heavily.

GAFF

So were some of these others. Are you okay? You're not hurt?

DOLL

(fingering his boot)
Well, sir, I don't know.

GAFF

What's that from?

DOLL

A Jap hand grenade. I kicked it away. I better look.

He unlaces the boot. Inside he finds the little piece of metal which has slipped to the bottom like a pebble, but in actual truth, he has not even felt it. He lies, laughing.

DOLL

Hunh! Felt like a rock in my shoe.

GAFF

By God! It's only a scratch, but by God I'm recommending you for the Purple Heart, too. You might as well have it. You're all right -- except for that?

DOLL

I lost my rifle.

GAFF

Take Lieutenant Gore's. We better be getting back. And tell them we couldn't take the objective. Can a couple of you drag Lieutenant Gore?

(to Thorne)

You all right? Think you can make it?

THORNE

I'm all right. But I want to thank you!

DOLL

Don't thank me.

THORNE

I'm out of it now. I'll be going back. I hope I'm crippled a little.

GAFF

Come on, you guys. Let's move. You can talk it over later. Dale, you and Witt drag Lieutenant Gore. Bell, you help the Thorne. I'll take the walkie-talkie. Doll, you rear-guard us. Them little brown brothers, as the Colonel likes to say, are liable to send some people down here after us, you know.

EXT. PATH DOWN LEDGE - DAY

The little party makes its way back. The Japanese send no one after them. Gaff stops at the point where Bell found the little path that might lead up above the Japanese position.

GAFF

I think we can take it! If we get another chance at it tomorrow, I think we can take it. I, for one, am going to volunteer for the assignment. If we crawl on across that open space and get behind the rise, up that path Bell found -- see there? -- we can come around behind them -- come down on them from above. Sergeant Bell was right. From up there we can put the grenades to them -- easier than hell.

WITT

I'll go with you, Captain.

Doll says he will too, and so does Dale. Strangely enough, there is not one of them but who wants to go back with him -- excepting, of course, Thorne who cannot go.

EXT. CUT - BATTALION POSITION - DAY

The soldiers at C-for-Charlie's forward position watch and wait anxiously to see who will return with the assault party, if anyone returns at all. Queen chews his fingernails; the tension is unbearable. Suddenly, they hear the electrifying word: "Witt!" Other names follow: "Doll... Dale... Bell."

Stein watches the weary men crawl, licking their wounds, back into the midst of the company. It is getting close to dark. They find that, in their absence, most of Charlie has, on Colonel Tall's orders, already dug in. The company looks at them with reverence, though it has heard and correctly interpreted their little assault as a failure. As Witt passes by, Welsh smiles at him sardonically.

WITT

You know what I'm afraid of, Firs' Sarn'? That someday I'll end up like you. I hope I die before it happens.

WELSH

I feel sorry for you, kid. A little.

WITT

How's that?

WELSH

The Army's going to kill you.

(taking Witt's measure)

Take care of yourself. Forget the others. There's nothing you can do for them. You're running into a burning house, where nobody can be saved. Why save people that aren't worth saving anyway?

(when Witt does not reply)

There's no other world. Just this one. Your sacrifice won't mean anything. Nobody's does.

(pointing up the hill)

Who decides, when you walk out on that slope, who gets hit, who doesn't? What difference can a single man make in all this -- madness -- this evil?

Witt does not answer but looks at him, turns and goes away.

Lt. Band queries Dale about his experiences. Apart from a natural curiosity, he feels Dale has been a loner in the outfit and could benefit from some expression of friendly interest from an officer.

LT. BAND

Well, Dale, what was it like up there?

(as Dale shrugs)

Didn't you feel anything up there?

DALE

Feel? Yeah, I guess I felt scared. Once we was there, anyway.

LT. BAND

Well, you hardly look it, Sergeant.

DALE

You don't really know me yet, Lutenant.

LT. BAND

But when those men were hit! One died! You knew them!

DALE

Lootenant, I think we done pretty good. Got off pretty lucky. As for feeling, the Service don't pay me no extra "Feeling Pay" for feeling. Like they pay flyers "Flight Pay" for flyin'. I figure I ain't required to feel. I don't plan to feel any more than's absolutely necessary. The minimum feeling.

EXT. BATTALION AID STATION - DAY

Fife walks up to the battalion aid station, his heart dancing with the wild, joyful knowledge that he is wounded and can leave. Then, seeing the more seriously wounded, he suddenly begins to weep, he cannot stop himself.

He sits with a line of grimy, bleeding, groaning men on a hillside, mopping the blood from his forehead. There seem to be hundreds of people running everywhere, all shouting at one another. An orderly attaches a colored tag to Fife's jacket. A DOCTOR leans over and looks into Fife's eyes and then snaps his fingers in front of them.

FIRST DOCTOR

Can't tell. Don't walk. Wait for the stretcher-bearers to take you. Hear me? Don't walk. Answer me. I said don't walk.

Fife is carted away by four beat-looking STRETCHER-BEARERS.

FI FE

Listen, fellows, I can make it all right. You guys should be carrying somebody hit worse than me.

STRETCHER-BEARER

You just take it easy, mack. You been doin' the fightin'. Let us worry about the carryin'.

Good boys, good boys. He relaxes cozily. He will never have to go back there, and it hasn't really been bad at all. For a second, he catches Sico's eye, but with a fine discretion, he looks away.

INT. OPERATING TENT - DAY

But in the operating tent, Fife finds out it isn't going to be at all as easy as he thought. He is put on a vacant table, in front of old DOC HAINES, the Head Regimental Surgeon. Grizzled, Doc Haines works with an unlit stub of a cigar in his mouth, grunting to himself from time to time.

DOC HAINES

Wait. Don't tell me. It's -- Fife, isn't it? C-for-Charlie Company.

FIFE

Yes, sir, Doc.

DOC HAINES

I remember you from when you went up to Post Hospital for that appendectomy. How did that ever turn out? Everything all right now? What have we here now? Head wound, hunh? Can you sit up?

FIFE

Sure! Sure!

DOC HAINES

Easy. Take it easy. You've lost a little blood there. Let's have a look-see. This'll hurt a little bit now... You're lucky. It isn't fractured. You may have, I think, what we call a greenstick fracture, sort of crack, not a break. In any case, there's no foreign objects inside. In a week or so, you'll be all ready to go again.

FIFE

Then -- you don't think I'll be evacuated. Or anything like that.

DOC HAINES

I wouldn't think so.

FIFE

Then I can walk all right now.

DOC HAINES

Do anything you like. Except you should take it easy for a day or two.

FIFE
 (bitterly)
 Thanks, Doc.

DOC HAINES
 This battle'll be over in a day or
 two, you know.

FIFE
 Sure. As soon as this one's over,
 there'll be another one. Right
 after.

From his blood-caked face he grins, feeling it draw his
 cheeks. He knows he makes a good picture of a wounded man
 anyway.

DOC HAINES
 I didn't make the rules, son. I
 just try to live by them.

FIFE
 It's not your problem. If a guy
 ain't hurt bad enough to ship out,
 you can't ship him out, can you? I
 better go.

DOC HAINES
 Good luck, son.

Fife waves his hand without looking back.

EXT. OPERATING TENT - DAY

Outside the operating tent the CAPTAIN who is the Regimental
 S-1 sees Fife and breaks away from a group of other staff
 officers.

S-1
 Hey! Aren't you from Charlie
 Company?

FIFE
 Yes, sir. Yes, sir! I sure am!

S-1
 How's it going up there?

FIFE
 Terrible!
 (maliciously)
 (MORE)

FIFE (cont'd)
 They're knocking the shit out of
 us!

S-1
 How's Lt. Whyte making out?

FIFE
 Dead!

The S-1 Captain recoils a little, as if he has been struck, his eyes disturbed. The others in the group of gossiping officers have turned and are listening too.

S-1
 How about Lt. Blane?

FIFE
 Dead! Keck's dead! Grove's dead!
 Tella, Bead, Catt!

S-1
 Well, what about Captain Stein?
 We're good friends.

FIFE
 He was all right when I left! He's
 prob'ly dead too by now!

He goes off. Then suddenly, for no reason, he begins to blubber again. Falling down on his knees behind a truck, he beats his fists in the mud, beside himself.

At the ledge the high racketing which has hung in the air most of the day ceased some time ago, and only sporadic RIFLE FIRE can be heard now in the distance. As twilight passes into night, the officers discuss the prospects of tomorrow and the men clean their weapons.

Beneath a canopy of hard, bright stars, the men struggle to get a few hours' sleep. Sgt. Welsh walks silently, quietly through their midst. The Japanese dead lie in the moonlight, their pockets turned inside out. They are at peace, while the living burn and rage.

INT. HOSPITAL TENT - NIGHT

Later, in a corner of the large, three-masted, circus-type hospital tent, he finds Storm, sitting on a cot and staring glumly at the blue-edged hole in the back of his hand.

FIFE
 Storm!

STORM

How you doin', kid? You're the first guy I seen from the outfit.

Storm is glad to see Fife, too. Right now any familiar face is welcome in this buzzing, crowded, haunted place.

INT. HOSPITAL TENT - NIGHT

Storm spits on the ground. Some time has passed.

STORM

The adventure of war, the brotherhood, the comradeship, you know -- they can wipe their ass on it. It might be all right for field officers and up, who get to run it and decide what to do. Everybody else is a tool -- with their serial number stamped on 'em. I don't like being no tool. Not, especially, when it can get you killed.

(after a pause)

They used to fight man to man. It was a duel. You could be brave and noble, all that shit. What you were -- your personal qualities -- they counted. Now it's just like two machines grinding each other up. I feel sorry about leaving the comp'ny and coming down here. But shit...

(after a pause)

If this hand don't get me clean away from this fucking Rock, I can go back to being a mess sergeant. I can cook hot food for 'em and get it to 'em. I won't carry it myself. The carriers can do that. Lot of people are going to come out of this war alive, more than get killed -- I want to be one of them.

(guiltily)

I hadn't told nobody else. I want to leave a good impression on the boys. Morale, you know.

Fife's sharp despair leaves him for a moment. He suddenly feels toward Storm as toward a father or older brother.

STORM

Here I am trying to use my hand to get me out of the comp'ny. But the fact is, everybody's on their own. Solo.

FIFE

What do you think they're going to say about it?

Storm stares at him with dark, haunted eyes.

STORM

Since you ain't a doctor, I guess I can tell you the truth.

(flexing his hand)

I got a hunch it ain't ever gonna get me off this Rock.

Around them in the big, dim tent, orderlies stir and move quietly about. Here and there, men groan from within their bandages.

STORM

I can move it. It don't really hurt too bad. But I ain't got any strength left in it.

(after a pause)

You was looking pretty bad up there.

FIFE

(bitterly)

Nothing! Nothing! Not a fucking thing. Not even a fracture.

STORM

It's just tough luck. I'll tell you one thing, Fife. Whether I get...

(raising his hand)

... off The Rock with it or not, I don't have to go back up there to the front with the comp'ny, and I'm not going to. I'm a mess sergeant. I ain't even supposed to be up there. Me and my cooks'll get the kitchen as close as we can, I'll get them guys up hot meals every time I can. But fuck the volunteering shit. They got them hot meals coming to them -- if they can get them. But that's all. No more volunteer fightin'.

(MORE)

I ain't real ~~supposed to~~ (cont'd) ain't
supposed to, and I ain't gonna.

FIFE

I'm the Forward Echelon clerk. I
got to go.

STORM

I'm sorry.

Fife nods. They are silent for a moment.

FIFE

I'm a coward.

STORM

(immediately)

So am I. So is everybody who ain't
a fucking goddamn fool.

FIFE

Some of the guys ain't. Witt, Doll,
Bell. Even Charlie Dale.

STORM

(without hesitation)

Then they're fools.

Nearby a sleeping man screams in his sleep, then falls silent
again.

FIFE

I mean really a coward.

STORM

What did you think I meant?

FIFE

With you it's different.

STORM

No it ain't.

FIFE

I didn't want to be a coward. I
never thought I would be. Just
turns out I am... I been hiding it.

STORM

Well, I didn't want to be one
either, I guess. But I am.

(flexing his hand)

Thank God I don't have to go back
up there, that's all.

FIFE

I do.

STORM

I'm sorry. At least you'll have a couple of days off. This shootin'll be over with by then.

It is clear that Storm is sorry. But his tone points out that, even while he is sorry, all that really has nothing to do with him. Still, Fife feels better. Storm takes being a coward so much more in his stride, and it makes Fife feel less unmanly.

FIFE

All these men around here lookin' at me like I was a hero. I haven't even done my normal duty...

STORM

I don't believe there's many heroes. Ones I seen was crazy. Or got killed. The brave ones always die.

FIFE

Maybe I could come to work for you in the kitchen. I mean, since Dale will be making line sergeant, you'll have a vacancy, won't you?

STORM

Yeah, I guess. Can you cook?

FIFE

No, but I can learn.

STORM

If you can get the Captain to move you to the kitchen force, I'll accept you.

FIFE

Stein'll never let me go. Anyway, I could never ask him.

STORM

It's the best I can do.

FIFE

Yeah. I know, I know.

He twists his neck from side to side and peers around the high, dim, hot-aired tent. A single orderly moves down the line of wounded men, sleeping now, each in a cocoon of mosquito netting.

FIFE

I don't want to let them down. They never let me down. I'd feel like I was hiding.

He walks off. He might as well get it over with. If he waits until morning, he might find reasons not to.

EXT. HOSPITAL TENT - NIGHT

At the door to the tent, an ORDERLY rises to block Fife's path, but Fife pushes on past him.

ORDERLY

Where are you going? You don't have your discharge papers. Stay there. You can't do this!

Storm, following Fife out, steals a couple of rifles and a helmet from an unattended MP jeep.

EXT. CUT - DAWN

Whispers and cautionary stirrings move along the line. In the inhuman, unreal unlight of false dawn, the dirty-faced remnants of C-for-Charlie sift from their holes and gather stiffly into their squads and platoons. Still looking dapper, although he is now almost as dirty as themselves, Col. Tall, with his little bamboo baton in his armpit and his hand resting on his rakishly low-slung holster, strides among the men wishing them good luck. When he arrives at Gaff's group, he squats down.

COL. TALL

I'm giving you another chance at the bunker today, gentlemen. I would have liked to make a night attack, I think we could have brought it off -- But the division commander vetoed the idea. At least I made the offer. I still believe a small party has a better chance than a large one, but with your two casualties you might need another couple of volunteers.

(MORE)

(turning COL to Tall) (cont'd)
I leave you that decision.

Queen comes up to Tall a few minutes later.

QUEEN
Colonel, I'd like to go with 'em.

COL. TALL
Why?

QUEEN
Because of what the Japs done to them two guys from 2nd Battalion three days ago. I ain't forgotten it, either, and I want to get myself a few of them personally before I get knocked off or shot up. I figure Cap'n Gaff's operation'll be my best opportunity.

For a moment, Tall cannot help believing he is being made the victim of some kind of elaborate and tasteless hoax. 1st Sgt. Welsh, for one, has a mind capable of such subtle ridicule.

COL. TALL
Soldier, are you serious? There's a war on here. I'm busy. I've got a battle to fight.

QUEEN
Yes. I mean: Yes, sir: I'm serious.

COL. TALL
Sergeant, I'm a professional soldier. Requests for personal vendetta offend and bore me. If you want to go with Captain Gaff, you'll have to go talk to him about it and ask him. I'm busy. You can tell him that I don't object to your going. Now, goddamn it, go away!

QUEEN
Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!

Shortly afterwards, Gaff approaches his little assault party -
- Bell and Witt, Dale and Doll.

GAFF
Sgt. Queen's coming with us.

The four volunteers are treated to the awesome spectacle of Big Queen looming over them in the dawn, still clutching his shotgun and bandolier of shells which he clung to so dearly all through the terror of yesterday in his U.S.-made shell hole.

DALE

If they don't get us some water up here soon, we ain't none of us going to make it to the top of this hill.

He says it loud enough to be heard by everybody in the vicinity. He rolls over to face the looming shape of Hill 209 in their rear and begins to shake his fist at it.

DALE

Monkeyfuckers! Dirty bastards! Fucking pigs! You got all the fucking water in the world, and you drinking ever fucking drop of it, too. You ain't lettin' any of it et past you up to us, are you! Well, you better get some of it up here to your goddamn fightin' men, or you can take your goddamn fucking battle and shove it up your ass!

His protest REVERBERATES along the ledge, but nobody pays any attention to it. The rest of it tapers away into a mutter, as Col. Tall now saunters over to Gaff, baton in hand.

COL. TALL

John, we'll be back of you. If you can break through, we'll come pouring after. We'll charge at your whistle signal.

Then they are off and crawling along the ledge, which curves away out of sight around the side of the hill, Gaff in the lead.

BELL

Better let me take the point, sir.

Gaff turns back to look at him, the ex-officer, then with an abrupt gesture of both head and hand, admits his small error and signals Bell to go on past him.

EXT. LEDGE WHERE TROUGH BEGINS - DAY

When Bell reaches the point where the trough begins and Lt. Gore died, he stops and they all cluster up. Gaff does not bother to give them any pep talk.

GAFF

You all know the job we've got to do, fellows. There's no point in my going over it again. I'm convinced the toughest part will be the open space between the end of the trough here and the shoulder of the knob. Once we get past that, it won't be so bad. Remember that we may run into smaller emplacements along the way. I'd rather by-pass them if we can, but we may have to knock them out. Okay, that's all. When we get up to them, we ought to have some fun.

He stops and smiles at them, looking each man in the eyes in turn: a happy, adventuresome smile. There are several weak smiles in reply, similar to his own if not as strong. Only Witt's and Queen's seem to be really deep. But they are all grateful to him. Since yesterday, all of them have come to like him very much. He treats them like equals. They would follow him anywhere.

GAFF

Once we get through this mess and back down off the line, I promise you the biggest drunk of your lives. My treat! I'll be leading from here on out. I want to pick the route myself. If anything should happen to me, Sergeant Bell will be in command, so I want him last. Sergeant Dale will be second in command. They both know what to do. Let's go.

EXT. TROUGH TO KNOB - DAY

Suddenly, they are out and crawling along the narrow, familiar trough. Gaff in the lead, each man careful of the spot where the trough opens out into the ledge and Lt. Gore got himself killed.

Gaff looks off toward the strongpoint, but without raising his head high enough to see anything above the grass. Are they waiting? Are they watching? Are they looking at this particularly open spot? He cannot know.

With a sudden gasp, he bounces up and takes off with his rifle at high port, running agonizingly slowly and pulling his knees up high to clear the matted kunai grass like a football player running through stacks of old tires. Not a shot is fired. He dives in behind the shoulder of the knob and lies there. After waiting a full minute, he motions the next man, Queen, to come on. Queen takes off running in the same way, the shotgun in his hands, his helmet straps flagging. Just before he reaches the shoulder, a single machine gun OPENS UP, but he dives to safety. The machine gun STOPS.

The third man, Doll, falls. He is only about five yards out when several MGs OPEN UP. They are watching this time. It is only twenty yards across, the open space, but it seems much longer. He is already breathing in ripping gasps. Then his foot catches in a hole in the mat of old grass and he is down. Oh, no! his mind screams at him in panic. Not me! Not after all the rest that's happened to me! Blindly, spitting grass seeds and dust, he clambers up and staggers on. He has ten yards more to go, and he makes it.

But now all the MGs from the strongpoint are FIRING, hosing down the trough itself, as well as the open space. BULLETS tear over the heads of Dale, Witt and Bell in bunches which RATTLE and bruise the thin bushes. It is now Dale's turn to go, and he is furious.

BELL

Hey, wait! Wait! Don't go yet! I got an idea!

Dale gives him one hate-filled contemptuous look and gets to his feet. He departs without a word, chugging along solidly like a little engine. He arrives behind the shoulder and sits down, apparently totally unmoved, but still bristling with anger. Nothing has touched him.

GAFF

You must be out of your mind!

Maliciously, Dale settles in to see what Bell and Witt will do now. Heh heh. Not that he wants them to get hurt or anything.

Bell demonstrates his idea immediately. When he and Witt have crawled to the end of the trough, the MGs still FIRING just over their heads, Bell pulls the pin on a grenade and lobs it at the strongpoint. But he does not throw it straight across;

he throws it into the angle formed by the ledge and the trough, so that it lands in front of the bunker but away toward the ledge. When the MGs all swing that way, as they do immediately, he and Witt cross in safety before they can swing back.

Clearly, the three of them could have done it just as easily, and when he throws himself down grinning in the safety behind the shoulder, Bell winks at Charlie Dale again. Dale glowers back.

EXT. KNOB AND SADDLE - DAY

Gaff said the rest of the route would be easier once they were past the open space, and he is right. The terrain mounts steeply around the knob which juts out of the ridge and up here the mat of grass is not quite so thick, but now they are forced to crawl. It is next to impossible to see the camouflaged emplacements until they open up, and they cannot take any chances. They all know from yesterday that beyond the knob is a shallow saddle between the knob and the rock wall where the ledge ends, and it is along this saddle which they are to crawl to come down on the Japanese from above.

When they reach the beginning of the saddle, sweating and half-dead from lack of water, Gaff motions them to stop. He has to swallow his dry spittle several times before he can speak. Remembering that the other platoons will charge at the sound of his whistle, he unhooks it from his pocket.

GAFF

I want to get as close to them as we can before we put the grenades to them. Well, fellows, this is where we separate the sheep from the goats. Let's crawl.

He clamps his whistle in his teeth and, cradling his rifle while holding a grenade in one hand, he commences to do so.

EXT. JAPANESE STRONGPOINT (THE ATTACK) - DAY

Slowly, as they crawl, the entire strongpoint becomes visible -- its nearer, right end only twenty-five yards away, and only a very few yards below their own height. And it is just as they can finally see it, that they are discovered by the Japanese.

Five scrawny, bedraggled Japanese men pop up out of the ground holding dark round objects which they lob up the hill at them. Fortunately, only one of the five grenades EXPLODES.

It lights near Dale, who rolls over twice away from it and then lies huddled as close to the ground as he can get, his face turned away. None of its fragments hit him, but it makes his ears ring.

GAFF

Pull and throw! Pull and throw!

Almost as one man, their six grenades arch at the strongpoint. The five Japanese men who popped up out of the ground have by now popped back down into it. But, as the grenades light, two other, unlucky Japanese pop up to throw. One grenade lights between the feet of one of these and EXPLODES up into him, blowing off one of his feet and putting him down. Fragments put the other one down. All of the American grenades EXPLODE.

The Japanese with his foot off lies still a moment, then struggles up to sit, holding another grenade as the blood pours from his severed leg. Doll SHOTS him. He falls back dropping the ignited grenade beside him. It does not go off.

GAFF

Again! Again!

Again six grenades arch in the air. This time there are four Japanese standing when the grenades light, one of them carrying a light MG. The EXPLODING grenades put three of them down, including the man with the Nambu, and the fourth, thinking better of it, disappears down a hole.

GAFF

Go in!

In a moment, all of them are on their feet running. The Japanese have shrewdly taken advantage of the terrain to save themselves digging work. Behind the holes into the emplacements themselves is a natural little low area where they can come out and sit in cover when they are not actually being shelled. Now in this hollow the scrawny, bedraggled Japanese rise with rifles, swords and pistols from their holes to meet Gaff and his crew. At least, some of them do. Others stay in the holes. Three try to run. Dale SHOTS one and Bell SHOTS another. The third disappears in a grand broad jump over the edge of the rock face where it falls clear, sixty or eighty feet to the jungle treetops below. The others come on. And Gaff and his troops, the Captain blowing his whistle, run to meet them, in clear view of the rest of C-for-Charlie down at the ledge below.

Queen kills five men almost at once. His SHOTGUN blows the first nearly in two and tears enormous chunks out of the second and third.

While he struggles to unsling the rifle from his back, he is attacked by a screaming officer with a sword. Gaff SHOTS the officer in the belly from the hip. Bell has killed two men, and Dale two. Doll, who has drawn his pistol, is charged by another screaming officer who shouts "Banzai!" over and over and who runs at him whirling his bright, gleaming sword around his head in the air. Doll SHOTS him through the chest so that, in a strange, laughable way, his legs keep right on running while the rest of him falls down behind them.

Witt peers into a cave. A bat flies out, startling him. A soldier approaches with a flamethrower at the ready.

Witt has SHOT three men, one of them a huge, fat sergeant wielding a black cavalry saber. Taking the overhead saber cut on the stock of his rifle, cutting it almost to the barrel, Witt butt-strokes him in the jaw. Now he SHOTS him where he lies. Suddenly there is an enormous quiet, except for the wailing chatter of three Japanese standing in a row who have dropped their weapons.

Slowly, they look around at each other and discover the miraculous fact that none of them is killed, or even seriously damaged. Gaff has a knot on his jaw from firing without checking his stock. Bell's helmet has been shot from his head. Numbly, they stare at each other.

Queen now advances, snarling, on the three standing Japanese. Taking two by their scrawny necks, he shakes them back and forth, gagging helplessly until their helmets fall off. Then, grinning savagely, he begins beating their heads together.

QUEEN

Fucking murderers! Fucking yellow
Jap bastards. Killing helpless
prisoners! Fucking murderers.

The others stand breathing hard and watching. When he drops them, they fall unconscious, blood running from their noses.

QUEEN

That'll teach them to kill
prisoners.

He turns to the third, who simply looks at him uncomprehendingly. But Gaff jumps in between them.

GAFF

We need him.

Queen walks away without a word. It is then they hear the first SHOUTS from the other side, and remember they are not the only living.

Going to the grassy bank, they see the same field they themselves tried to cross last evening. Coming across it at a run, the rest of C-for-Charlie is charging uphill toward the strongpoint, according to Colonel Tall's plan, coming straight at them, yelling.

Whatever their reason, they are little late. The fight is already over. Or so everyone thinks. Waving and cheering ironically and hooting derision at the heroes, their pretended rescuers, Gaff's men are interrupted by the sound of a MACHINE GUN. Directly below them, in one of the apertures, a single MG opens up and begins to FIRE at 2nd Platoon. As Gaff's men watch incredulously, two men go down. Dale, who is standing nearest to the door of the embrasure which is FIRING, leaps over with a shocked look on his face and throws a grenade down the hole. The grenade immediately comes flying right back out. Everyone hits the dirt. Fortunately, the grenade has been thrown too hard and it EXPLODES just as it falls over the lip of the rock face. The MG below continues to FIRE.

WITT

(to Dale)

Look out, you jerk!

Scrambling to his feet, Witt pulls the pin on a grenade and, holding it with the lever depressed, grabs his rifle and runs over to the hole. Leaning around the right side of it, holding his rifle like a pistol in his left hand with the stock pressed against his leg, he begins to FIRE the semiautomatic Garand into the hole. There is a YELL from below. Still FIRING, Witt pops the grenade down the hole and ducks back. He continues to FIRE to confuse the occupants. Then the grenade blows up with a ROAR, cutting off both the scrabble of yells and the MG, which has never stopping firing.

Immediately, others of the little force, without any necessity of orders from Gaff, begin bombing out the other four holes using Witt's technique: one man FIRING while another tosses the grenades. They BOMB them all, whether there is anybody in them or not. There is a joyous feeling in the safety of killing. Slapping each other on the back and grinning at each other murderously, they call to the C-for-Charlie men below to come on.

Colonel Tall appears at the top of the embankment, followed by Captain Stein. Two of the platoons continue pushing uphill to protect the new position. Tall shakes Gaff's hand.

COL. TALL

Look at them move! We owe it all to you, John. When they saw you make that attack of yours, and win!

(MORE)

It was like you took their hearts
back into them.

The Japanese, two dozen of them, lie scattered around in various positions and postures. Some are still in the process of dying, and a few, though badly hurt, look as if they might live.

DOLL

It was Big Un and his shotgun. He set 'em back on their heels.

Queen prowls back and forth and around the single remaining prisoner, like a loose wolf trying to get at a caged victim. He appears to be waiting hopefully for the Japanese to make any move for which he can legitimately kill him. The prisoner himself looks as though he would not be capable of escaping anywhere, even if there were no one around to watch him.

Filthy and emaciated, he has a bad case of dysentery and is continually indicating to his guards, through a system of signs and pantomime, that he has to relieve himself. He has already messed his pants a couple of times apparently, and all in all, he is a pretty sorry spectacle.

COL. TALL

What happened here?

Tall has turned away in disgust from the living prisoner to look at the two whose heads Queen knocked together. They lie side by side, unconscious. Except for the blood running from their noses, they show no signs of injury or wounds. Gaff merely raises his eyebrows, as though he didn't know either. But Tall can read well enough what has happened, even if he cannot understand the method. They should have been bayoneted, or shot. He doesn't like this sort of thing, but one has to make allowances for men in the heat of combat.

COL. TALL

Some sort of explosive concussion?
No fragment wounds.

(Gaff does not answer)

Well, a dead brown brother is one brown brother less, isn't it? Take good care of the others, men! G-2 will want them. There should be someone around before long.

THORNE

Aye, aye, sir, yeah. We'll take care of him.

One of the PRISONER'S GUARDS reaches out with his rifle muzzle and pokes him, tipping him over backward into his own mess. The men around all laugh, and the prisoner scrambles to his feet. He appears to expect this kind of treatment and looks as if he were only putting in time, waiting for them to shoot him.

STEIN

Say there!

COL. TALL

Don't do that, soldier!

THORNE

Okay, sir, if you say so, sir. But he would of killed me in a minute if he'd had the chance.

COL. TALL

I think we've wasted about enough time here.

GAFF

Sir? Sir, I've got a few recommendations for decorations I'd like to turn in to you.

COL. TALL

Yes, yes, of course. We'll get everything for all of them that we can. But later. In the meantime, I want you to know I'm personally recommending you for something, John. Perhaps -- the Big One.

GAFF

Well, thank you, sir. But I don't feel I really deserve that.

COL. TALL

Oh yes you do. Getting it for you will be another problem. But it would be a big thing for the battalion, and for the regiment too, if you did get it. We better get moving out or here. We need to extend our lines to hook up with the other companies and push on toward the top. Would you like to take command of Baker Company, on the left?

Gaff steals a glance at Stein, then nods uneasily. He will not be a party to a snub.

GAFF

Sir, I don't like to be a wet blanket or anything like that, but what about water? If we don't --

COL. TALL

Don't worry about water! John, I don't want anything to break up this attack of ours, now that we've got the momentum. As for water, I've already taken care of that. We'll have some water by -- in a couple of hours. I've arranged for that. We can't stop now to wait for it.

GAFF

No, sir.

COL. TALL

If some of the men pass out, they'll just have to pass out.

(as Gaff nods)

If any of them ask you about water, tell them what I said. Don't bring it up yourself. Don't mention it unless they ask you.

GAFF

No, sir. But they could die from it, you know. Heat prostration.

COL. TALL

They could die from enemy fire, too. They're all tough boys. Okay?

He turns away to wave his baton at some of the men who are still staring curiously at the various dead Japanese.

COL. TALL

You'll see plenty more of those. Come on, let's get cracking. Are we going up this hill or aren't we!

On a sudden impulse, Tall returns to Gaff and, taking his arm, leads him gently away from the others.

COL. TALL

John, I'm convinced the Japanese position can be broken now.

(MORE)

COL. TALL (cont'd)
 All we have to do is keep going and we'll have this hill by sundown. You see the new spirit in these men! I want to take advantage of it before something happens to sap their strength.

(avoiding Gaff's eyes)

To have this battalion relieved in defeat, even to have it reinforced by troops from the reserve regiment if we stall before reaching the top, is -- more than I can stand. Someday you'll know what I mean, John.

He's studied, and worked, and slaved, and eaten untold buckets of shit, to have this opportunity. He doesn't intend to lose it now. He leaves Gaff and, without looking back at him, calls out suddenly to the assembling men.

COL. TALL

I want three runners! Okay. You three. Go back to the rear, as far as you have to go, to find water and bring it back with you. Take whatever you find, at gunpoint if necessary. Don't even report to the regimental commander. Get back here as fast as you can with it. If they stop you, tell them the strongpoint is taken, we're moving uphill. If anyone tries to take any water from you, you're to fight for it, with your firearms.

(to Stein)

You take the center, Captain. Gaff and I will bring the other companies up, on the left and right. Wait an hour for us to get them in place. Then attack! We'll throw everything we've got at them. Once the companies are linked up, we'll move uphill together in a line. Nothing's stopping us. We're going all the way. High ground by nightfall!

He raises his arm in the air, and a CHEER goes up from the group of men around him. Lt. Band looks at him with awe.

COL. TALL

(to Band, privately)

Lieutenant, last night they cut our phone lines back to the rear.

(MORE)

Don't be in any hurry to repair
 them. We attack in one hour! It is
 now twelve thirty-eight on my
 mark... Mark!

While Tall and Gaff go off, Stein takes Lt. Band aside.

STEIN

George, I can't look after
 everything. I'm putting you in
 charge of Becker's platoon, and
 Weapons. It will be like an
 independent command.

LT. BAND

Let us lead it off, sir.

STEIN

(after eyeing him warily)
 All right.

Band smiles his eager smile. An independent command!

Meanwhile, a group of men from C-for-Charlie has gathered
 around the Japanese prisoners, fascinated by the first sight
 of their enemy, living and breathing, though strangely so
 unformidable. Eight more have been rounded up and aced under
 guard with the one Queen spared. They are being interrogated
 by a timid young OFFICER from G-2 and a NISEI INTERPRETER.

The prisoners are a sorry, sick-looking lot. Feeble,
 stumbling, they shamble along appearing to be totally
 benumbed by their experiences and looking as though they
 would not have the energy or the will to escape, even if they
 were guarded by just one GI. All of them are suffering from
 dysentery, jaundice and malaria. Two of them (just why, no
 one seems to know) are stark bare-ass naked. They look like
 some lower grade of animal, with their ribs and shoulder
 bones showing starkly through their yellow skin.

NISEI INTERPRETER

They say they've all been living
 off lizards and the bark off of
 trees for the past couple of weeks.

DOLL

Ask 'em if they was scared.

Doll gives one of them a cigarette as the Nisei translates
 the question. The Japanese man looks embarrassed but
 grateful.

NISEI INTERPRETER

He says they were too sick to feel much of anything. They were sorry to see their captain die.

THORNE

Hey, Jap. Come on, Jap! Tell the truth! Ain't you glad you don't have to fight no more now? Hunh? Ain't you?

The Japanese man he addresses, who obviously does not understand a word, bobs and bows and nods his head smiling numbly.

THORNE

See there! I told you! They don't want to fight no more than we do! What's all this Emperor shit!

TILLS

Just you don't give him your loaded rifle, and then see how much he want to fight.

G-2 OFFICER

We need to get these prisoners back to Regiment as soon as possible. I need a detail.

They ignore him. One of the prisoners, a SERGEANT who declined a cigarette when one was offered him, speaks quietly to the Nisei.

THORNE

What'd he say?

NISEI INTERPRETER

Nothing.

THORNE

What do you mean? I saw him talking to you.

NISEI INTERPRETER

He said that if he acted that way in front of his lieutenant, the officer would pull his gun out and shoot him.

(as Thorne smiles lamely)

He keeps asking me, how can I do this?

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

The prisoners are being led away by their guards, among them Thorne, Coombs, Carni and Kirk. Whooping and hollering, they descend the steep hillside in a sort of nonsensical hysteria of cruel fun, slipping and sliding, booting the prisoners and laughing whenever they fall. When one of the charges falls, so ill that he can hardly move, however, they stop, to discuss the situation.

THORNE

I say shoot the fucker.

COOMBS

You know the Colonel ordered us to get them all back alive.

THORNE

So we'll say he tried to escape.

COOMBS

Him? Look at him.

THORNE

So who'll see him?

KIRK

I'm with Thorne. Remember what they did to our guys on the Bataan Death March.

COOMBS

Shorty gave us personal orders. You know damn well he's gonna check up if one turns up missin'. What if he has Intelligence ask these other guys what happened to their buddy? I don't want to get in trouble, that's all.

The Japanese senses he has a champion in Coombs and bows gratefully.

THORNE

Well, it's either that or carry him. I'm not about to carry no fuckin' Jap all the way back to Regiment. Are you? Anyway, I outrank you. I'm a corporal. I say kill him. Look at him. Be doin' the poor fuck a favor.

KIRK

2nd Battalion found where they'd been eatin' one of their own men. Strung him up from a branch like a deer. Took strips off his back, two inches wide. They eat people.

Carni steps forward and puts in for the first time. He has been thinking it over, the pros and cons.

CARNI

Coombs is right. Shorty's sure to check up if one is missin'. If we shoot him or lose him, he'll be on our ass like a bullwhip. Might even court-martial us.

Thorne stares at the Japanese man, then shrugs and grins ruefully.

THORNE

Okay, I guess you're right. It looks like we carry him. All right then! Come on! I'll take a leg! Who wants the rest of him!

EXT. CP - DAY

Fife and Storm have returned to the company. They are treated as objects of extreme curiosity, even in the midst of the battle. Men who've come back from the gone! Questions fly in from all sides. Everyone in the company who has not been hurt beyond the normal minor bruises and cuts carries the guilt of a well man who, through no fault of his own, has not suffered.

STORM

They didn't do a fucking thing. Didn't even put a bandage on the fucking thing! Them doctors are tough. They're not lettin' anybody get out of anything if they can possibly help it. The shit's hit the fan, boys. Govmint don't have to lock you up behind bars.

Fife reports to the CP to discover that he is out of a job. CORPORAL WELD mans the sound-power phone, though of course it is not working. Weld is now Welsh's Forward Echelon clerk.

FIFE

What're you doing with my phone?

WELD
Hello there, Fife!

Weld looks at him with a cold-eyed, insolent smile. It is strange what a little authority and a couple of stripes can do for a man. Weld is a big, unfriendly-looking soldier; Fife has always been a little afraid of him. He is obviously not about to turn loose of his newly acquired status if he can help it.

WELSH
What do you want, kid?

FIFE
I came back from the aid station.
I'm supposed to report in.

His anger cannot even begin to overcome in him his sense of lostness, war terror and terrible aloneness.

WELSH
Okay. So you've reported.

FIFE
What's Weld doing with my
telephone?

WELSH
Corporal Weld is my Forward Echelon
clerk. Them other two punk assholes
there are his assistant runners.
Here, fuckface!
(holding a paper out to
Weld)
Take this over to Culp in Weapons.

WELD
Right, Sarge!

He takes the paper and turns around, throwing out his chest.

WELD
Train! Here!

WELSH
I said TAKE it!

WELD
Right, Sarge!

He leaves. Welsh turns to Fife with his crazy, sly-eyed grin.

FIFE

You knew I might be coming back.
You knew I was --

WELSH

Knew you were comin' back! How the hell would I know you were comin' back? I thought you were walkin' off lookin' for a bush to die in. I got a company to run here. You think it can wait for you? If you'd had any fucking guts or brains, you'd of got yourself evacuated off this Rock, with a wound like you had.

FIFE

You can't do this to me, Welsh! By God, you can't! You can't take and--

WELSH

I can't, can't I! Look around you! It's done! It was done last night while you were at the aid station. You can't blame me if you didn't have guts or brains enough to --

FIFE

Goddamn you, I notice you didn't make anybody mess sergeant in Stormy's place!

WELSH

(grinning insolently)
Storm asked me to wait -- he thought he might be comin' back.

Why does it make his heart sink to find he is no longer Welsh's clerk? Why doesn't he rejoice?

FIFE

Goddamn you, Welsh! Goddamn you, you son of a bitch!

WELSH

I'm getting tired of teaching you punk asshole kids that you don't mean a goddamn thing to the world. Not to the country, not to the war, to nobody. This Army's going to spend you like dollar bills.

(MORE)

You can all ~~WELSH~~ (cont'd) by day, one by one -- and it won't mean a goddamn fucking thing to anybody as long as there's replacements. Who the fuck do you think you are? You think you mean anything to this comp'ny?

Welsh could not have chosen a more wounding thing to say. He knows it and falls silent for a moment, as though ashamed.

WELSH

You punks are all learning now -- and Oh does it hurt! This war's only starting. Behind this comp'ny there's ten others like it, stretching clear back to Washington, all of them dedicated to getting you up here full equipped to get your asses lowed off. You're just part of a machine. You're a cog. You can't do a fucking thing about it. This ain't no war, this is a regulated business venture.

(after a pause)

You don't know no more about it than a pig knows about Sunday.

Since yesterday Welsh has the same drawn, haunted face and wrinkled, too-bright eyes they all wear, but unlike them, he feels triumphant -- triumphant because everything has turned out exactly as he anticipated, thus leaving him with no real shock or trauma, rather with his iron contempt intact.

FIFE

You don't believe in nothing, do you, Welsh?

WELSH

Property! I'm the only sane man in the fucking outfit.

FIFE

You bastard!

Fortunately, Lt. Band appears at just this moment. Welsh leaps up to shout "Attention!" while he, Weld and Fife all snap to.

LT. BAND

You don't have to call attention every time I show up, Sergeant. I've told you that.

(MORE)

Certainly not. BAND (cont'd). Well!
Hello there, Fife! So you made it
back. We're glad to have you back
with the old outfit. Have you seen
my helmet?

Band takes off his helmet and shows Fife where a Japanese
bullet has passed through the shell. Fife listens to him in
silence.

FIFE

Well now, that's remarkable, sir! I
wish I could have seen my helmet. I
never saw it.

Fife's voice shakes with fury, and Welsh grins to himself.
Everybody in the company has already heard about Band's
helmet.

LT. BAND

It's too bad you couldn't have kept
it for a souvenir. Well then!
Corporal Fife! I guess we better
decide what to do about you, then,
Fife. Hunh? Since Weld here is now
corporal and clerk, we can't very
well demote him back to private.
Neither can we have two clerks. And
since Weld is older than Fife,
besides being considerably less
well-trained I don't see how we can
send him off to take second command
of a rifle squad.

All Fife's anger runs out of him like water as he realizes
the tack Band is taking, and he decides, too late, that he
could have been much nicer about Band's helmet. Terror
balloons in him as he remembers that hellish exposed slope
down there.

LT. BAND

Soo -- How would you like to become
second in command of a top-rated
rifle squad, Fife? Sergeant Jenks's
squad of the 3rd Platoon has no
corporal. You'll see plenty of
action! I guarantee it!

WELSH

Sir, Sergeant Dranno back at Rear
Echelon has been devilling me to
give him someone to help him. He's
had a lot of work over casualties
since this action.

(MORE)

And he's got more than I do. ^{WELSH (cont'd)}
 Fife here has more clerical
 knowledge than anybody in the
 company except for Dranno.

LT. BAND
 All right! Now you have a choice,
 Fife! Which do you prefer?

FIFE
 I'll work for Dranno.

LT. BAND
 All right! When do you want him to
 leave, Sergeant?

WELSH
 Today.

LT. BAND
 There you are, Corporal! Okay. You
 can go.

NEW ANGLE

Fife walks off nodding, but once he is alone, the rebellion
 comes. All of his fury returns, his fury at Welsh, his fury
 at Band, his fury at the world. Fuck them. Fuck them all.

VOICES
 Moving out in ten minutes! Check
 your ammo! Fix bayonets!

He knows what he feels is unrealistic; he knows he will
 regret it immediately; he is sure he is signing his own death
 warrant; but in spite of the fear and terror which fill him
 in equal parts with fury and sorrow, he will not go back
 there to work for Dranno. He finds Band still with the first
 sergeant.

FIFE
 Lt. Band, sir, I changed my mind.
 I'd like to stay. I'd like to go
 with the rifle squad.

Welsh's face turns so red it appears his whole head will
 burst, but he says not a word in front of Band. The
 Lieutenant gives Fife a curiously sharp look which makes Fife
 wonder if he has not been actually and actively seduced. But
 it is too late now.

LT. BAND
 Okay. Report to Jenks's squad.

As Fife anticipated, no sooner does he leave than he immediately regrets what he has done. The only real pleasure was the look on Welsh's face.

EXT. CP AREA - DAY

Ten minutes ago Becker's men were laughing and proud. Now, suddenly, they are quiet, their eyes starry with fear. Becker comes to Lt. Band with a deeply frowning face.

BECKER

Lieutenant, I was wondering if you couldn't put my platoon in company reserve. My boys've had it tougher than any of the other platoons. They've had more casualties, and are more under-strength. They deserve a break.

(after a pause)

It ain't fair to put my boys out there all the time.

Band might have acceded to the request if Becker had not spoken. Now he jerks his head up to stare at him.

LT. BAND

Fair? What's not fair? What's fair got to do with it? No, I'm afraid I'll have to deny your request, Sergeant. Your platoon is the best we've got. They've got more experience, they're tougher, they belong out in front.

BECKER

Is that an order then, sir?

LT. BAND

I'm afraid it is, Sergeant.

BECKER

In other words, the more of us get killed gettin' experience, the more of us got to get killed usin' it.

LT. BAND

As I said, fair has nothing to do with it. Unfortunately. In a war everything useful has to be used. Here it's me who decides what is most useful where. Any other questions, Sergeant Becker?

BECKER

No, sir.

LT. BAND

Then that's all.

BECKER

Aye, aye, sir!

Becker scuttles away in a blind rage. Poor man, Band thinks, believing he has handled it pretty well.

LT. BAND

Sergeant!

Becker swings around. He is only fifteen feet away. Nobody else is close enough to overhear what Band now says.

LT. BAND

I want to tell you something, Sergeant. Do you know why our platoon's going up first? Do you know why they're moving out first today in this attack? Because I volunteered us for it.

BECKER

You what!

Becker crouches almost as if to charge him. Band raises his eyebrows. Becker is too old a hand not to know what this means.

BECKER

Sir!

LT. BAND

That's right. And do you know why I did? It was because I felt, with our superior combat experience, we'd be more useful. To Regiment, to the Division, to everybody.

BECKER

Is that all, sir?

LT. BAND

That's all, Sergeant.

EXT. WATER HOLE - DAY

2nd Platoon has discovered a little water hole. The men lie around it on their bellies drinking the muddy water up greedily, until Doll wades out into the middle of the hole and pulls a dead Japanese soldier up from the bottom by the scruff of his neck. All of them recoil in disgust, all except Dale.

DALE

Everybody's got to drink a little enemy blood. Some time or other.

BECKER

Let's go. Bell's squad up on the right! Dale's squad up on the left! Make a line, make a line! Lock and load!

EXT. FLANKS (BURNT SLOPES) OF HILL 210 - DAY

Jenks's squad will lead it off. Mazzi kisses a mortar round and drops it down the tube, as they begin to lay down FIRE on the slope above them. Fife sits watching a pair of blue butterflies bounce above the grass tops. As he gets himself ready, he can hardly believe what is happening to him. It takes every ounce of courage he has not to turn and run. As they start to crawl away, his teeth are chattering and he is shaking like a leaf from head to toe.

JENKS

Come on, damn it! Get movin'!

Fife's heart beats wildly as MUSIC comes in through the Japanese drums. He realizes this is his moment of truth, his moment to become a soldier, a man. How precious this despised world seems to him, now that he stands on the verge of leaving it forever! Thorne's cries and moans when he go's down nearby unnerve him further. Why can't he keep his mouth shut? Fife did.

Gradually, a new courage swells inside him, a joy. He tries to do better, helping Jenks keep the squad together, pretending he is not unnerved, that he is not thinking of all the unreckonable ways to get killed. Fear drops away from him like a shroud, and miraculously he is free.

The speed and power with which C-for-Charlie moves up Hill 210 is more than even Tall hoped for. Within fifteen minutes, they have hooked up with the other companies and the whole line is bowling along uphill.

The Japanese they flush from their holes and various emplacements, which literally honeycomb the ridge, are almost without exception the same starved-looking, sick, emaciated types they found at the strongpoint, only now most are burned or blackened by the fires that have spread across the slope.

EXT. FLANKS OF HILL 210 - DAY

A YOUNG SOLDIER turns to Witt.

YOUNG SOLDIER

I never been shot at before. Is this what it sounds like?

WITT

This is what it sounds like. We're bein' shot at.

Witt sees the Colonel far below. Until today, he has never really much liked Tall, finding him a cold fish-eye of an intellectual textbook soldier. But today he loves them all, passionately, with an almost sexual ecstasy of comradeship. Even Bugger Stein and Welsh come under the magnanimous aura of his warm affection today. The idea of service to humanity, of comradeship, of the solidarity of men, is slowly perishing from the world, but in Witt it still runs strong.

Watching the first wave move up the hill, he feels the mysterious quality of deep, manly friendship which can exist between men who share the pain and death, the fear and sadness of combat -- the happiness, too. For there is happiness. Happiness in doing your best, happiness in fighting by the side of your friend, happiness in feeling the highest in yourself may be drawn forth at last.

Witt mutters under his breath. If Tall had let Bugger proceed with his outflanking move, they might have saved themselves a lot of good men. He turns to Bell.

WITT

I could've kept tella from getting killed. Catch, Gordon. I wasn't able to help a one of them! I can't be everywheres at once!

VOICES

What's holding you up? Keep moving!
What's holding you up?

A wandering squad of Japanese COUNTERATTACKS the Weapons Platoon as they are coming up behind, catching them completely off guard. There aren't supposed to be any Japanese around here. Finally, they are compelled to run.

Buttplate in one hand and carbine in the other, Frankie Mazzi swings around backward to crash through the face-whipping screen of leaves. Once through, he swings to turn face front again, and suddenly feels himself speared, caught, and then held. He knows what it is, but he can't think clearly enough to do anything about it. Some thing has grabbed hold of his ammo belt near his right hip bone. Unable to believe it, plunging and cursing and listening to rifle bullets SNICKERWHACK through the brush around him, he remains tethered, still holding buttplate in one hand and carbine in the other. And he knows he will still be here when they come for him, shoot him, cook him, and eat him.

When two men from the mortar section push past him running hurriedly and obliviously, he begins to call in a feeble, moronic, plaintive voice the same word over and over.

MAZZI

Help! Help! Help!

To his eternal shame, it is Tills who comes back for him. Eyes glaring wildly also, running hurriedly in a crouch, he comes up, surveys the scene, and frees him. Mazzi has been pushing and plunging forward all the time. Tills merely shoves him backward two feet and the snag comes free. Then making a lip-lifting mock of a grin, he spits brown from the quid in his jaw, and runs on.

When they come out into the bright, eye-beating light of safety behind their own still-advancing lines, they see the other members of the squad already setting up, resetting the bubble levels.

MAZZI

Just don't think it makes me like
you any better.

TILLS

Done thank ut makes me lack yew any
butter.

Mazzi stares at him with hatred, certain he will tell.

Meanwhile, Stein watches his men work their way around an MG emplacement.

WITT

We took out that emplacement, sir.
We can go ahead.

Witt could throw his arms around his commander in an ecstasy of loving comradeship. Except that it might get taken the wrong way.

STEIN

Good job, Witt. Why don't you stay here and have yourself a rest?

WITT

I ruther be with the comp'ny, sir. I mean, you know, with the platoons. I always feel like maybe I could help somebody, you know? Maybe save somebody.

It is the first time he has ever told anyone his secret. Stein stares at him quizzically, and Witt curses himself. He learned long ago in his life never to tell anybody anything about what he really felt -- what made him do it now?

STEIN

Okay. Report to Becker. Tell him I just appointed you acting sergeant.

WITT

But I'm not even in the comp'ny, sir, officially.

STEIN

We'll worry about all that later.

WITT

Aye, sir.

STEIN

Looks like we're in luck today, Witt.

Witt looks at him a moment, then nods and crawls away. Now, before Stein can give the order, the platoons move out on their own. Stein runs forward among them.

STEIN

Go on! Go on! Don't stop now!

He hears his own voice bellowing and he knows nobody can hear him, but he cannot stop it, and he cannot stop waving his arms. The men charge up until the crest of the hill comes INTO VIEW.

STEIN

Hot damn! Hot damn! Come on! Come on! We got to get up there.

He starts off through the grass running. Everything everywhere seems to be ungovernable chaos with the FIRING, the SHOUTS.

STEIN

Keep your distance! Twenty yards!
Form a line!

Jenks's squad are on their feet before the grenade shower has even EXPLODED. They run uphill, hollering and yelling. Fife scampers along with them, panting and sweating. Nothing touches him. On his right, the usually imperturbable Jenks lets out a long, shrill, screeching, quavering rebel yell. Three men go down hollering in the rush. Nothing touches Fife.

Then, suddenly, they are in! Over the crest and in! -- the other two squads right behind them, running hard but cautiously between long, lovely lines of trees, leaping emplacements like the ones they once looked at with awe and wonder, gasping and weeping and, once in a while, dying. They are in!

EXT. JAPANESE BIVOUAC AREA - DAY

Fife has no trouble shooting. When he first sees the scrawny, tattered, scarecrow yellow men FIRING their rifles and MGs intently, he can hardly believe it and feels astonished. When he sees one Japanese in a hole whirl with a grenade in his hand and stare at him wide-eyed, he SHOOTS him through the chest and watches him fall. Then he looks around for more targets and sees a Japanese running, trying to make the jungle. Head down, arms pumping, he runs in total despair, like a man on a too-swift treadmill which is carrying him backward. Fife leads him just a hair and SHOOTS him through the left side just below the armpit, shouting with elation as the man tumbles with a yell just feet away from the jungle and safety.

When Stein reaches the crest of the hill, he beholds a scene which will remain with him the rest of his life. His bloodthirsty platoons have burst into what is clearly a Japanese bivouac area. The tall jungle trees have climbed up out of the gulches and established themselves here on this crest. The Japanese have cleared out all the undergrowth so that what is taking place here now is taking place as though in some park. The only thing that is not like a park is the glue mud which is everywhere the ground. In this natural setting, Stein's platoons are SHOOTING and killing Japanese in what appear to be carload lots.

There are no tents visible, but there are surface shelters of branches and sticks which the Japanese have made themselves, and there are underground dugouts. The first are being SHOT to pieces or knocked apart with rifle butts. The underground shelters are being BOMBED OUT with grenades.

Stein sees at a glance there will be no way of getting these men organized for quite some time. A crazy sort of blood lust, like some sort of declared school holiday from all moral ethics, has descended on them. They can kill with impunity and they are doing it. Several Japanese plead for their lives. One sits meditating as though preparing himself for death.

Queen runs laughing and bellowing on, arriving back in time to SHOOT a Japanese officer who, rising from a hole and whirling his sword on high, runs at them screaming to die for his Emperor. Queen tears the scabbard away from him, jams the sword in it, sticks it all in his belt and rushes on.

VOICES

Queen's back! Romp and stomp!

QUEEN

Show me them Japs!

Fife scampers along SHOOTING every Japanese he can see, filled with both terror and elation. Then Jenks goes down with a loud squawk and a rifle bullet through the shoulder.

JENKS

You take the squad.

Now Fife has the squad to himself, and the responsibility, and finds he loves it, and all of them. A new confidence has surged up in him, a manliness; a wild, reckless joy.

The whole area is honeycombed with rifle pits and MG emplacements, and it was obviously the Japanese commander's intention to sell it very dearly. But now, having heard such great enemy firing on their flanks and even in their rear, the Japanese begin to come up out of their holes and surrender, sick, haggard, beaten-looking men, obviously terrified at the treatment they expect to receive at the hands of their enemy. Those who make the mistake of coming up with their weapons in their hands are taken care of immediately.

The others, who come out empty-handed and hands up, are socked, punched, beaten, prodded and hammered with rifle butts, but rarely -- only in a few instances -- are they actually killed. But nobody likes them very well, and those who refuse to do as they are told are SHOT out of hand by tense-faced, nerve-racked men who want no fucking nonsense. One by one, the MGs are silenced. Some of the riflemen elect to SHOOT it out and die in their pits. Others leap up and run for the jungle leading to their own rear, if such a term as "rear" applies in this crazy campaign. Few reach it. The whole thing goes quickly.

When they arrive at the center of the bivouac, they find the majority of the Japanese KILLING themselves with grenades, guns or knives, which is just as well because those who do not surrender immediately are SHOT or bayoneted.

Stein looks around to see the other companies pouring in from the left and right flanks. The main fight is over. C-for-Charlie has borne the brunt of it and gained the victory. A few of the men sit down and weep.

COL. TALL

Well, Stein, we did it, son! We did it!

Colonel Tall strides up to Stein and shakes his hand. There is further handshaking with the sergeants.

STEIN

Excuse me, sir. What about the water? Have you --

COL. TALL

I'm sorry about that, Stein! Now what do you think are the chances of a counterattack? I still hear gunfire over on the left.

The moping up proves to be a pretty big operation. There are still many unreduced emplacements scattered across the bivouac and the hillsides beyond it. Many of the Japanese prefer to die rather than be captured. Some are too sick even to surrender, and simply sit by their guns FIRING them until they are killed. Those who have surrendered are overcome with a deep shame and sorrow. End on: rice cooking or some domestic scene, perhaps on a wind chime or a figure of the Buddha sitting in obscurity beneath a stand of cocoa trees.

EXT. JAPANESE BIVOUAC AREA - DAY

Charlie Dale comes to Witt with a bone to pick. Witt is sitting on a rock, staring emptily down the hill, sorrowful, exhausted and terribly dry. The stocky Dale, with his perpetually hunched shoulders and powerful long arms, marches up and stands himself directly in front of Witt to have his say. The SHOOTING is still going on.

DALE

I got somethin' I want to tell you, Witt.

WITT

(absentmindedly)
Yeah? What's that?

DALE

You shouldn't ought to talk to me like you did. I don't want you to do it anymore. That's an order.

WITT

What? When?

DALE

Back there at the strongpoint this morning. You remember, Witt.

WITT

What did' I say?

DALE

You called me a jerk when I tossed that grenade down that one hole and that Jap tossed it back out. That's no way to talk to me. I'm a noncom now -- it ain't dignified. In any case, I'm orderin' you not to do it no more.

Witt looks as if he has been stung by a bee.

WITT

Arngh, come off it, Charlie. I known you when you was a lousy second cook. A not very good one at that. I ain't takin any orders from you. You can shove them acting stripes up your ass.

DALE

You called me a jerk!

WITT

Well, you are a jerk! A jerk! A jerk! What's more, you're stupid! You should of known better than to anyway, I'm an acting sergeant too myself! Stein made me one an hour ago! Now, peel off!

DALE

I'm not a jerk. And you wasn't no acting sergeant when you done it. Anyway, I was made before you so I still outrank you. And I ain't scared of you... Besides, it don't look good in front of the men, Witt.

His voice softens as he thinks of the new thing. He says it as if they were two majors belying up to the Officers Club bar.

WITT

Men, my ass! Dale, I never hit nobody without I warn them first. That's my policy. Well, I'm warning you. Get away from me, stay away. If you ever say another word to me, I'll whip your ass.

DALE

I think I can whip you.

WITT

Then have a go! Have a go!

DALE

There's too much work to do around here right now. The mopping up's just starting. I don't want to miss that.

WITT

Anything you want! Knives, bayonets, fists, rifle butts, shooting!

DALE

Fists'll do. I don't want to kill you --

WITT

You couldn't!

DALE

I know you been a boxer -- all that shit. I can still whip you.

WITT

Yeah?

Witt advances on him, raising his rifle butt as if to stroke him in the side of the head with it, but Dale backs off. He raises his own rifle, which is bayoneted, into fighting position.

DALE

Maybe I couldn't whip you. But you'll know you been in a fight.

WITT

Come on! Come on! Talk! Talk! Talk!

DALE

There's too much serious work to do right now. I'll try you later, buddy.

WITT

Any time!

Dale turns and walks away. Witt sits down, trembling with a cold rage. Whip him! There isn't a man his size in the regiment who could whip him. And he doubts there is anybody in the regiment who could whip him at bayonet fighting. As for shooting, he has been high gun in every regiment he's served with for the past six years. Don't look good in front of the men. Shit!

Meanwhile, Dale goes to work over the Japanese with a stolen pair of piers, wrenching the gold teeth out of their mouths. His sharp, red eyes dart left and right.

EXT. JAPANESE BIVOUAC AREA - DAY

They are carrying Thorne away on a stretcher.

THORNE

I'll be back! It'll take more'n a flesh wound to keep me from coming back to C-for-Charlie. I don't care where they send me! I'll be back if I have to stow away on a replacement boat!

All the guys are shaking hands with the other guys from the other companies, grinning at each other out of guys b from faces. Many are curious about the Japanese. Carni, looking through a billfold, displays a picture of a dead soldier's girlfriend.

CARNI

Maybe his sister.

Mazzi and Tills glance at each other. Mazzi wonders if Tills has told anyone what happened down the hill. It infuriates him that he cannot enjoy the victory as wholeheartedly as the others.

Fife does not take part in the poking and looking and souvenir hunting because the corpses make him feel queasy and vaguely guilty.

He watches only for a moment, then he has to turn away. What is wrong with him? If the rest of the guys can be this tough, why can't he?

The scavengers move quickly. Nearby one slips a watch off a dead Japanese lieutenant. But really everyone is too tired, too beat and thirsty and exhausted, to care about the loot. Later, of course, they will all regret it. Doll comes up to Fife with a big smile.

DOLL

The Colonel wanted to know who it was up there at the front of the charge, with Jenks's squad. The Captain said it was you. Colonel said, that man is a fire-eater, the Japs better watch out. He wanted to know your name and if you were a sergeant.

Bell turns and looks at Fife. Someone else smiles, causing Fife to blush. At last he feels their equal, a good man, capable of truth and sacrifice. Fife watches the clouds move serenely across the wide tropical sky. His triumph has made all things beautiful to him again.

EXT. JAPANESE BIVOUAC AREA - DAY

The blow falls late that afternoon. C-for-Charlie has cleaned out the bivouac area and captured a number of heavy mortars as well as two 70mm field guns and been placed along the crest they have captured. The fierce heat is beginning to abate and the first signs of evening appearing, when Colonel Tall calls Stein off to himself.

COL. TALL

Stein, I'm relieving you of your command.

His young-old Anglo-Saxon face is set in stern lines. Stein can feel his heart suddenly beating in his ears, but he does not say anything. He cannot honestly say he hasn't anticipated it.

COL. TALL

Lt. Band will take over for you. I've already told him. So you won't have to.

STEIN

(after a silence)
Yes, sir.

COL. TALL

It's a hard thing to do, and a difficult decision to make. I just don't think you'll ever make a good combat officer. I've thought it over carefully.

STEIN

Because of what happened yesterday morning?

COL. TALL

In part, in part. But it's really something else. I don't think you're tough enough. I think you're too soft. Too softhearted. Not tough-fibered enough. You let your emotions govern you too much. I think your emotions control you. As I said, I've thought it over carefully. In a war people, have to get killed. There dust isn't anyway around it, Stein. A good officer has to accept it, and then calculate the loss in lives against the potential gain. I don't think you can do that.

STEIN

I don't like to see my men get killed.

COL. TALL

No good officer does. But he has to be able to face it. Sometimes he has to be able to order it. In any case, it's my decision to make and I've already made it.

STEIN

In a way, it's a compliment then, isn't it, Colonel?

COL. TALL

There's no point in making a scandal. I don't want it in the records of the battalion while I commanded it, and there's no point in your having it put down against you on your records. This has nothing to do with cowardice or inefficiency.

(MORE)

I'm going to let you apply for reassignment to the Judge Advocate General's Corps in Washington for reasons of ill health. You're a lawyer. You had malaria yet?

STEIN

No, sir.

COL. TALL

Doesn't matter, really. I can fix that. Anyway, you probably will have it. Also I'm recommending you for the Silver Star. I will recommend it in such a way that it will definitely not be refused.

Stein feels an instinctive, angry desire to protest the medal, and half-raises his hand. But then he lets it drop.

COL. TALL

You might as well have the Purple Heart, too.

STEIN

Why?

COL. TALL

For one thing, I notice a pretty deep scratch on your left cheek from hitting those rocks back there yesterday. If that's not enough, I also note a couple of blood streaks from scratches on your hands, underneath all that mud.

He stares at Stein expressionless. Stein suddenly wants to weep.

STEIN

Aye, aye, sir.

COL. TALL

I think it's best if you go back right away, with the next batch of wounded and prisoners. It's no good for you to keep hanging around. The quieter we keep this, the better it will be for all.

STEIN

Aye, sir.

He salutes and turns away.

A group of stretcher-bearers is descending down to where the jeeps are finally making their way up the forward slope of Hill 210, and Stein joins them, helping with the stretchers. No one in C-for-Charlie has seen him leave.

But the word gets around quickly. In spite of Tall's wish to keep it quiet, all of C-for-Charlie -- and, for that matter, the entire battalion -- knows within fifteen minutes that Stein has been relieved. Many of the men and noncoms are very angry.

DOLL

We got to make a protest.

BECKER

Who to? The Colonel? He'll throw us in the can for even thinking such a thing.

In the end it all tapers away to nothing but bitter mumble. But if the others are willing to assuage their consciences this way, Witt does not feel he can let it go at that.

WITT

What's the matter with you? This battalion is going to hell on a sled. Band! For comp'ny commander? I believe I know how to rekinize a comp'ny commander. He ain't one. Neither was Stein. He just become one in the past two days, and look what's happened. They're kicking him out! Well, I don't wanta be in this battalion no more. Not without the Cap'n. Not as long as Shorty Tall's in command!

Witt paces off in a mood of supreme, disgusted fury. A cold, implacable Kentuckyness has come over him. This business with the Captain has put a cap on things.

EXT. COMPANY CP - DAY

Pulling his sharp chin down into his thin neck and setting his narrow shoulders stolidly, he reports himself to the new company commander at the CP shortly before dusk.

TRAIN

What are you doing here, Witt?

WITT

Minding my binness.

That goddamned Welsh is there, of course. Band is sitting six feet away from him, eating the last of a can of C-ration.

WITT

(to Welsh)

Private Witt requests permission to speak to the comp'ny commander.

Witt does not let his eyes waver from the Sergeant. Welsh stares at him grimly. Then he turns his head.

WELSH

Sir, Private Witt requests permission to speak to the company commander.

LT. BAND

Okay. Sit down, Witt, sit down. Make yourself com-fort-able. But you're not "Private" any more, you're "Acting Sergeant" Witt. I heard Captain Stein made you one this morning. You seen my helmet, Witt?

WITT

No, sir.

Band bends and picks up the helmet. He sticks his finger through the hole and waggles it at Witt.

LT. BAND

That's something, isn't it, hunh? Shot it right off my head.

WITT

Yes, sir.

LT. BAND

I never knew these things ever really protected anybody. I'm going to keep this, the shell anyway -- take it home with me. But sit down, Witt, sit down.

WITT

I prefer to stand, sir.

LT. BAND

(his eager smile
vanishing)

Oh? All right, Witt. What was it you wanted, Witt?

WITT

Sir, I want to tell the Comp'ny Commander that I'm returning to my old outfit, Cannon Comp'ny. The reason I wanted to tell the Comp'ny Commander was so that if the Comp'ny Commander noticed I wasn't around, he'd know why.

LT. BAND

Well that isn't necessary, Witt. I think we can arrange to have you transferred. Don't worry about being AWOL. You've been a pretty valuable man the last couple of days.

WITT

Yes, sir.

LT. BAND

You know, we're short of noncoms. Tomorrow I intend to make all the temporary ranks permanent.

A bribe. Witt can smell Welsh watching with supreme disgust. Band's eyes suddenly narrow above his still-smiling mouth.

LT. BAND

You still want to go? All right, Witt. I guess there's really no way I can stop you officially. Anyway, I wouldn't want a man in my command who didn't want to serve under me.

WITT

It's not that, sir.

(it is a lie, at least partly)

It's that I don't want to serve in a battalion -- that does to guys what this battalion did to Captain Stein.

He deliberately does not mention Colonel Tall. Band studies him.

LT. BAND

Okay, Witt. But I feel that's not up to us to judge. Every army is bigger than any single man in it.

WITT

Yes, sir.

LT. BAND

That's all, Witt. Oh, Witt!

(as Witt turns back)

Perhaps you'd like a letter to present to your company commander in Cannon Company attesting to where you've been the past two days. If you would, I'd be glad to write one for you.

WITT

(impassively)

Thank you, sir.

LT. BAND

Sergeant, write a letter saying To Whom It May Concern that Witt has been with this organization the past two days in the thick of the fighting and has been recommended for decorations.

WELSH

I hadn't got a typewriter.

LT. BAND

Don't argue with me, Sergeant! Write the letter! Take this sheet of paper and write the letter!

WELSH

Aye, sir. Weld! Take this paper and go over to that stump and write me a letter. You got a pen?

WELD

Yes, sir!

WELSH

You heard what to put in the letter?

WELD

Yes, sir!

WELSH

Okay. Move! And don't call me "sir," fuckface.

Welsh sits down and folds his arms and looks at both of them, Witt and Band. Then suddenly he grins his crazy mad, furry-eyed grin at both of them. Somewhere in that labyrinthine mind of his, he is obviously lumping them together and letting them know it.

When the letter is written and signed -- it takes only a few moments -- Welsh hands it over. But when Witt takes hold of it Welsh suddenly clamps his thumb and forefinger together, not letting it go. When Witt exerts some pressure, Welsh holds on, grinning that stupid, insane grin down into his face. But when Witt lets go and is just dropping his arm, Welsh lets go too, and the paper almost falls to the ground. Witt has to catch it.

LT. BAND

There's no need to go now, Witt.
It's practically dark. You can wait
till tomorrow.

WITT

I ain't afraid of the dark,
Lootenant.

Witt stares hard at Welsh, then he leaves. He is angry at himself for wanting the letter. He should of left it, or refused it in the first place. He didn't really need it. Screw them all, the cheap bastards. Not a one of them has lifted a finger to help poor old Stein. And if Band thinks he can buy off Bob Witt with a sergeancy, or an offer to stay overnight and maybe reconsider, he doesn't know his guy. He wads the letter up and throws it away.

EXT. COMPANY CP - DAY

Band has sent Weld away and is alone with Welsh.

LT. BAND

Sergeant, I can't help noting a
tone of subtle ridicule in
everything you say. For some time
I've felt you're not always
properly respectful to the company
officers.

WELSH

Sir, you can have my stripes and my
job whenever you want them.

He means it, and Band knows he means it.

LT. BAND

Sergeant, don't ever get the idea you're indispensable.

WELSH

Lieutenant, nobody knows better than me exactly how dispensable every man in this outfit is.

Band feels himself outmaneuvered and decides not to push it further.

EXT. COMPANY CP - DAY

Bell and some of the other men plead with Witt. Fife does not plead but, sitting apart, stares evenly at him. Witt will have to be the first one to speak, and he chooses not to.

BELL

Why don't you just stay? You know you'd like to. If they get hold of you back in the rear, they'll throw you in the stockade.

WITT

Not me... I won't never come back in this battalion long as Shorty Tall commands it. No, sir. Much's I might like to. That Shorty Tall better stay away from me, or I'll punch his head in.

BELL

(as Witt walks off)

You can't go back there tonight anyway. You fool! You'll get your ass shot off by some trigger-happy sentry. Hardhead!

EXT. COMPANY CP - DUSK

Sgt. Welsh stands in front of a portion of the company, reading an announcement from Col. Tall.

WELSH

This is from Colonel Tall: "Our victory gives us the highest reasons for pride. It will prove a milestone in the battle for Guadalcanal.

(MORE)

WELSH (cont'd)
 We have sustained the highest casualties in the division and have captured the toughest objective. Tomorrow the division commander will arrive to make a personal inspection of the line. After the inspection we are to be relieved by a battalion of the division's reserve regiment. I have secured for the battalion a week's rest off the line."

Tall stands off from his CP by himself, listening in the gathering dusk. He smiles to himself as he hears the distant cheers. He flatters himself that he knows pretty well how enlisted men work -- he ought to after fifteen years -- and the news of the week's relief far more than offsets any natural irritation over the inspection.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DUSK

Witt is descending the hillside in lonely bewilderment when he meets Ash, the wounded 3rd Platoon scout, who grins at him from the side of the trail.

ASH

I'd of had you, Kaintuck, if you was a Jap -- long ago!

WITT

They leave you here?

ASH

I would of slowed them up. I don't really mind. Medic fixed me up before they left. I got plenty of ammo and Welsh left me his pistol. They'll be somebody along for me evenshully.

He seems about three-fourths drunk from shock, morphine and the pain of his bandaged wound, which he displays for Witt.

ASH

Right in the knee. I'm out of this war for good, Witt. But what the hell're you doin' down here?

WITT

Some binness.

He looks around, marvelling to find the terrain where they lay so long in fear and trembling, now so peaceful, the pure sky breathing on the land, the earth going her tranquil way.

ASH

Well, give all them boys my best.

WITT

You can come with me if you want.
I'll help you along.

ASH

Nah, it's nice and quiet and peaceful here. Anyway, I'd slow you up. Somebody'll be along for me.

WITT

I'll remind them.

ASH

Okay.

Ash watches the dusk close around the vanishing figure of the proud Kentuckian.

FADE TO:

EXT. DOWN FROM HILLS (DRUMSARA BIVOUAC) - DAY

They come down from the hills and out of the jungle with their haunted faces and pool-deep, sea-dark eyes, lugging every ounce of booty they can carry and looking more like Bowery scavengers than soldiers.

No sooner are they at their bivouac in a coconut grove by the sea than they begin getting blind, crazy drunk. It is a wild mass bacchanalian orgy that will go on for days.

VOICES

Freedom! We won! We whipped their
ass! Hooooeee!

They are hardly down out of the trucks before the bottles, left behind here by various men and catalogued carefully by Storm, are out and being utilized. MacTae, the supply sergeant, in an excess of guilty love, has pitched all of the company's pyramidal tents and even set up the cots in them complete with their blankets and mosquito bars. The kitchen fly is up and the stoves are lighted. All the weary warriors have to do is clamber down and start drinking seriously, as soon as they can draw their marked bottles from Storm's locked chests.

BECKER

Avoid the sea. There's sharks out there. In these islands they worship the shark.

Bell sits alone while the others carouse, hunched over a sheet of paper with a carpenter's pencil, writing a letter to his wife. (Much of his letter may play against scenes of Marty, back in the States, in Florida or perhaps in Hawaii. He remembers the first time they saw each other, their first touch or first kiss.)

BELL (V.O.)

You're everything that's soft and tender, Marty. I love you. You have no edges. You're like the snow, that comes down and makes everything pure and bright and clean. Everything dies on this island, but everywhere you go they live.

A soldier with a fiddle plays "Midnight on the Water." The cooks toss grenades into a stream and collect the fish that bob to the surface. Storm then creates for the company such a fish fry that it makes the more fragile-minded weep for home. All of them are a bit mad. The combat numbness, with its starry eyes, drawn faces and thousand-yard stare, has not yet left them. Those who did not have the foresight to stock whiskey away drink Aqua Velva mixed with canned grapefruit juice from the kitchen supply.

By nightfall almost everybody has vomited one or more times. Several men get down on their hands and knees, in the moonlight shining tranquilly down into the coconut groves, and bay at the moon like wolves or hounds. Another group of ten or twelve take off all their clothing and, bareass nude, run tripping and dancing across the open field beside the bivouac to swim in the Matanikau in the moonlight. And there are at least nine fist fights. When the KLAXONS sound later on several men stumble into the wrong slit trenches, while one actually dives into a latrine.

BELL (V.O.)

You spread life and peace around you. You come like the rain to everything that's dry inside me and like a starved root. You're the sky and the clouds, you're what there is beyond all this. You make my blood sing, Marty. I don't see how anything could keep me from you. I go through the earth to you.

(MORE)

I touch you ~~but~~ (cont'd) long as
 you're with me, there's nothing I'm
 afraid of.

INT. MAZZI'S TENT - DUSK

Inside Mazzi's tent everybody is busy knocking Lt. Band.

KIRK

Fucking stupid fuck of a
 lieutenant! Volunteered us! Taking
 chances with us! Fucking with us!
 You tellin' me he wasn't glad when
 they relieved the Captain? He could
 hardly keep from smiling. His mouth
 was doin' like a worm.

MAZZI

So tell him! What the fuck's the
 good of sittin' around here yackin'
 about it?

Carni, slack-faced with malarial fever, and the leader of the
 little Greater New York group of hep guys, looks over at him
 and asks in a voice hollow with fever and cynicism:

CARNI

Why the hell don't you do it
 yourself, then?

TASSI

Yeah, why don't yah?

KIRK

Yeah, why not? All's you got to
 lose is that P-F-C you might get on
 the next promotions list.

MAZZI

(getting up drunkenly)
 All right, by God I will.

He marches out of the tent and staggers through the coco
 palms toward Band's HQ tent. The others follow him at a
 distance, sniggering happily, content to let him take the
 dangerous chance alone. All, that is, except Carni, who
 cannot get out of his bed.

EXT. BAND'S HQ TENT - DUSK

Despair, hatred and unredeemable misery rage in Mazzi's heart
 after the humiliation of his rescue by Tills.

It had to be that fucking Tills! So far Tills has not told anybody, but he might.

DOLL

(intercepting him)
You hated the Captain till they sent him away. You said he didn't know what he was doing.

MAZZI

Fuck you.

DOLL

What're you going to Band for? You wanta tell somebody off, why don't you find the Colonel?

KIRK

Watch out, Frankie! You could get in trouble!

MAZZI

Fuck it! I don't care one way or the other. I don't fucking care. Worse it is, the better!

(toward the tent)

Come out, you son of a bitch! I said came out, shiteater! Come out and find out what the men in your outfit think of you, Band! You want to know what we think of you? Glory hunter! Come on, volunteer us for somethin' else!

From Band's blacked-out tent just the faintest hint of light creeps out to the waiting men outside. Inside the tent nothing seems to move. Other men have begun to gather around too now, their grinning teeth white in the bright moonlight. Aware of them, Mazzi rages on, marching back and forth and swinging his skinny arms, compounding insult and profanity with great artistry.

MAZZI

You're a prick, Band! A schmuck! C'mon out, I'll take you myself! Everybody in this outfit hates your guts! Did you know that! How does it feel! How does it feel!

Finally the light in the tent goes out. Then the flap is thrown back and Band stands in the doorway leaning on his hand on the canvas. He sways ever so slightly, but says nothing. Slowly the men begin to drift away awkwardly. The fun is gone.

MAZZI

You think that fucking hero helmet means anything longside the good dead men that are really dead?

KIRK

Let's git back to some ser-yous drinkin'. Come on, Frankie.

MAZZI

And that's what we think of you! So court-martial me!

He stalks off proudly. Band feels sick. To think he loved them all like children! Mazzi's tight little Greater New York clan congratulates him all the way back to the tents, crowding around him to slap his back and shake his hand. Now that Band's silent face is no longer before them, the fun has come back.

MAZZI

I sure got him told! I sure got him told! And he never said one word back!

Then suddenly he sees Tills's mocking, lip-lifting face square in front of him and is startled into a new hollow apathy. He tries to brave it out, chuckling hollowly to his new satellite Carni.

MAZZI

I sure got him told!

CARNI

You sure did!

Tills spits brown out of the side of his grin.

TILLS

You never got nobody tole nothin'. Nothin' a tall. I know.

MAZZI

Don't you tell no lies, Tills!

TILLS

Lies? I'm only going to tell what I know. When I feel like it, exactly to the minute. That's the way it s gonna be.

Tills smiles crookedly. Mazzi turns away in horror.

INT. WELSH'S TENT - DUSK

Welsh and Storm are drinking too, but they appear cold sober.

STORM

Don't matter how much training
you've got, how careful you are,
it's a matter of luck whether or
not you get killed. It don't make
no difference who you are, how
tough a guy you might be, how much
you know -- if you re in the wrong
spot at the wrong time, you're
going to get it.

(heavily)

I don't care no more. I don't care
about nothing. First time I ever
felt this way.

He finds it very serious, almost a tragedy. Welsh's reaction
astonishes him.

WELSH

Sounds like bliss.

(after a moment)

I don't really feel it yet. The
numbness. Not like the rest of you
do. Maybe I just knew what to
expect. Maybe I was frozen up
already. I know it's the only thing
that saves you.

(with his sly-eyed grin)

Maybe if you work on it, you can
make it a permanent state. I'm
going to try.

Storm looks up, like a sleepy, bait-wise sea turtle.

STORM

Not me.

WELSH

I like all this shit, Storm. I like
being shot at. Guess I'll just go
till I drop in my tracks or some
Jap gets me. They can bury me while
I laugh.

Welsh watches the insects crashing mindlessly against the
lantern that hangs from the centerpole. He starts to get up
and keels over on his face.

EXT. BIVOUAC - NIGHT

Somewhere in the midst of this great bacchanalian orgy Doll', Fife and a few other men have stumbled into Queen. Queen is raving -- drunk, miserable and alone.

QUEEN

I shouldn't ought to have knocked those boys' heads together. Did you see how the Colonel looked at me? Did you see? Maybe those boys wasn't the ones, personally, that did the ball-cuttin'. What'll I do now? Maybe they didn't know nothing about it. Maybe they was against it. Forgive me!

DOLL

He was eatin' mud before. He ate a peck of dirt. He's gone.

Queen throws himself down in the mud and begins to weep, whimper and howl, biting his clenched knuckles and staring at Doll and Fife with the wild eyes of a rabid animal, raving half in incomprehensible gibberish, half in lucid phrases.

OTHER MEN (O.S.)

Give him air. Don't get close to him. Let him breathe. Don't shine that light in his eyes!

QUEEN

Forgive me! I done what I shouldn't ought to have done. Some things you can't take back! Help! Get away from me! I don't belong with you!

He weeps and whimpers and goes on biting his knuckles, writhing as though in an epileptic fit. Looking in his eyes Fife feels, more than yesterday in combat, the horror of war; its power to poison the soul, its systematic reduction of men to animals.

QUEEN

Forgive me!

OTHER MEN (O.S.)

Let him go! Stand back! What the fuck kind of swipe was he drinkin'?

INT. DIVISION HOSPITAL - DUSK

Welsh comes to find himself in a small section of the division hospital reserved for first three graders. Storm has come to visit him and is smoking a cigar. The colored ticket for evacuation is already attached to the foot of his bed.

WELSH

So it was you that got me hauled up here!

His crazy eyes glint with an insane feverishness. Storm cannot tell whether it is the malaria or simply Welsh's personality.

STORM

Knock off, First Sarn't. Just be quiet and they're going to ship you out of here. You got malaria. You're bein' evacuated.

WELSH

You'll never get away with it. You'll never beat me out of my job, Storm. I'm too smart! Anyway, you may be okay in the kitchen -- you've got no head for administration. I know you!

From down the aisle the frail young 2ND LT. DOCTOR who runs the ward comes running with a wardboy.

2ND LT. DOCTOR

Now you just take it easy, Sergeant. You've got a temperature of a hundred and five and two-tenths.

WELSH

You're in cahoots with him!

For answer the Lieutenant shoves him back on his pillow and puts a thermometer in his mouth, at which point Welsh bites the thermometer in two, throws it on the floor, leaps out of bed and runs out the tent flap and back to his company.

EXT. AIRFIELD (SOUVENIR MARKET) - DAY

In the morning the whole of C-for-Charlie descends en masse to the airfield, spreads out over the undamaged or least-damaged areas of it, and begins bargaining with the Air Corps, trading souvenirs for the Scotch that the flyers bring in each day from Australia with the generals' supplies, the milk, meat and cheese.

It is like a vast Arab souk, a thieves' market, and the bidding is fierce. A silk battle flag, preferably bloodstained, is worth at least three Imperial quarts. A "Samurai saber" is always worth five. Money is practically meaningless to everyone except the airmen.

BELL (V.O.)

(with MUSIC)

The world seems crazy without you.
Away from you the world is unreal,
like a country you're leaving
forever and never coming back to.

(after a pause)

I look up in the leaves, I listen
to the crickets, I feel like
anything could be a sign from you.
When I'm with other people I feel
homesick for the mountain air I've
breathed with you. Loving you keeps
me pure.

(after a pause)

We're like two trees that have
grown together -- like ivy on a
wall. Nothing means anything
without you.

(after a pause)

Will peace ever come? I want to
stay changeless for you, Marty. You
get something twisted out of your
insides by all this filth and blood
and noise. Keep me through this
terror, Marty. Keep me through the
madness. Keep me through the blood.
Darling, hold me close tonight. I
love you.

EXT. DUSTY ROAD NEAR THE AIRFIELD - DAY

Drifting away bored, Fife sees Storm and Doll, Queen and a few other men tramping down the dusty road toward Rear Echelon HQ.

FIFE

Where you going?

DOLL

We heard Captain Stein's around here somewhere waiting to be shipped out.

Fife decides to join them. Together they set out to pay their respects to their company commander whom they once hated but now admire, and to tell him goodbye.

INT. STEIN'S TENT - DAY

They find Stein at work in his tent sorting what few papers he has. Their arrival takes him by surprise.

FIFE

Hello, Captain. When you leavin'?

STEIN

Tomorrow. I'm going to New Zealand by plane.

DOLL

How'd you find your bags? We looked, we couldn't find ours.

STEIN

I spent the last three days hunting them down. They gave me the use of a jeep. I enjoyed driving around.

DOLL

You ready to go?

Doll seems to have taken it upon himself to speak for the others.

STEIN

Whenever they tell me... I would have come to visit you but I felt like being alone.

He takes a bottle off the little camp table and offers them all a drink. There is only one glass in the tent so they all take it straight from the neck of the bottle. When Stein sees how appreciative they are, he reaches into his bags and hauls out the three bottles he intended to take with him on the plane and gives them to them. Under the influence of the liquor, they soon are all talking at once, all babbling away together. Stein feels curiously detached.

DOLL

We want to thank you, sir, for asking to make that flankin' move and watching out for us -- for keeping us together. We're sorry to see you go. We feel like you got a rotten deal.

STEIN

I'm not sure you're right. You never know if you're doing any good. That's the hard part. It doesn't matter. I don't care. I'm glad to be going.

FIFE

There's still time, we ought to all go and make a protest --

STEIN

What for? What good would it do? Anyway I want to go. You wouldn't want to take away my chances of getting evacuated, would you?

"No," they chant in unison. For God's sake, they wouldn't want to do that.

STEIN

Leave it alone. Let it lay.

Why should he want to stay? Everyone is dying to get out. It is the only sane thing to want. And yet he knows there is something he found here that he will never find back there. He knows it, and they know it, though none of them could say what it is.

STEIN

Why should I care? Washington's full of women. It's the big boom town now. With my campaign ribbons and medals, I ought to make out pretty well. I could do worse.

Stein exchanges with Storm -- a look of secret knowledge. Storm, like him, means to be one of those who lives if he possibly can. And Storm, like him, does not feel at all guilty.

EXT. STEIN'S TENT - DAY

When they have left Stein stands in the door of the tent and watches them straggle off with their whiskey, unshaven, dirty, still in the mud-slicked fatigues from the battle.

Later, when the planes come over, he sits quietly in the dark, without any fear, and listens to the BOMBINGS.

EXT. BIVOUAC - DAY

At the bivouac the drinking starts before breakfast. They crawl out of their net-covered cots and have a good stiff dolt of Australian Scotch. Breakfast is the only roll call of the day by order of Shorty Tall; after that they are on their own.

EXT. BIVOUAC (MAIL CALL) - DAY

The men crowd wildly around Corporal Weld as he passes out the mail. Those who have reason to fear their names might not be called linger back in the shade of the palms, where they do not risk embarrassment or awkward questions. Fife considers Bell a lucky man.

FIFE

Six letters!

BELL

That doesn't seem like so many.
She's got plenty of time to write.

Fife is feeling pretty cocky as the whiskey quietly grows inside his splintered nerves. He has found out that he is really much braver than he thought, and this gives him real boy. It isn't so hard to be a real soldier after all.

With Jenks dead, Corporal Fife has become Sergeant Fife, leader of the 2nd Squad 3rd Platoon. He has saved at least two of them once apiece and at least three of them have saved him. He feels a fierce protective love for each and every one of them. But there is one thing that still rankles him, and that is the way that fucking son of a backbiting bitch Joe Weld treated him in front of Welsh that day. Stealing his job like a sneak thief. Then smiling at him that way.

EXT. HQ TENT - DAY

Joe Weld and Eddie Train, the stutterer whose lap Fife landed in in terror, and the new kid Crown are sitting out drinking with two of the cooks when Fife saunters up to them, mouth pursed, tongue rubbing slowly over his teeth, his arms dangling.

WELD

Oh -- uh, hello there, Fife. We were just --

FIFE

Sergeant Fife to you, Corporal. And don't ever call me anything else!

Weld looks startled for a moment. Then his look of startle turns into a placating smile.

WELD

Well, I guess you really earned the title, Sergeant. The hard way. I for one sure don't --

FIFE

Don't ass-kiss me, you cheap fuck.

WELD

Now. Now, see here.
(scrambling to his feet)
I never done...

He does not get to finish because Fife steps in and knocks him down without a word -- without a sound, in fact, except for the smack of his fist on the cheekbone.

WELD

Hey! Hey! I was just sitting here drinking and talking and minding my own business.

FIFE

Get up, cheap fuck! Get up, job stealer! Get up, and I'll knock you down again.

First nearby, then further off, he hears uncaringly the happy cries of "Fight! Fight!" and the SOUND of men's feet running.

WELD

I don't want to fight you. I didn't steal your job.

(MORE)

WELD (cont'd)
 It was Weld who told me corporal.
 Nobody knew you was coming back. I
 don't want to fight you, Fife.
 (repeating it slyly)
 I just want --

He doesn't finish. Instead, he makes a wild, lunging leap for Fife's middle, to grapple. It doesn't succeed. Joyously, Fife steps in again and left-hooks him. This time it is more accurate, and on the jaw. It sends Weld rolling away wildly to the ground, where he props himself on his elbows, shaking his head. When he rolls over to sit up, Fife dives on him.

It is as though a sudden scrambled lightning bolt of happy maleness and joyous masculinity has g lit Fife's skull, blinding him with glory. On top of the groggy Weld on the ground, he cuffs and pummels. Growling and cursing high in his throat and crying "Job stealer!" over and over, he punches with both fists and total abandon at the face below him. Finally they pull him off of him.

FIFE

Lemme go!

Somebody helps Weld up. His nose is broken and bleeding. Both eyes are puffed almost shut.

Blood runs from his mouth between his broken lips and he looks bewildered.

Fife, standing unheld now and in command of himself again, though breathing hard, stares at him feeling both happiness and consternation at the destruction he has caused. He is proud of himself, but he hasn't really meant to hurt anyone. Train and Crown take the swaying Weld by the arms to lead him away.

FIFE

Hey! Hey! Don't do that! Don't go!
 Let's have a drink. No hard
 feelings!

Fife marvels at how frail and hollow he seems, this man who once stirred such a sinking fear in him. From ten yards away Weld stops and looks back at him. He is weeping and at the same time trying not to. He seems to be searching his fuddled head for the very worst thing he can think of to call Fife.

WELD

You -- You clerk!

FIFE

Okay. Be a jerk!
 (turning to the two cooks)
 Either of you guys want some?

He grins at them. Both of them, though they are bigger than Fife, shake their heads in silence. Fife walks along rubbing his bruised hands. Around them the men are beginning to disperse now that it is over.

DOLL

Did you hear that? He called you a clerk. What he is. You showed the fucker.

FIFE

Leave me alone.

Fife's eyes flash with anger; he does not wish to be congratulated. Doll does not take offense but, with a delicate nod, lets the subject drop. He sees Fife is limping.

DOLL

What's the matter?

Just then a MESSENGER comes up from Rear Echelon, gasping for breath.

MESSENGER

Col. Tall's been promoted. They're shipping him out. Gaff and Lt. Band too. The whole lot of them. We're going back up!

EXT. PALM GROVE - DAY

Down in the palm grove Col. Tall talks with a small group of newsmen. He has somehow come into possession of a jewel-encrusted Samurai sword and carries it under his arm in place of the baton. Captain Gaff and Lt. Band are with him, each with his personal baggage. A jeep waits nearby, and a movie camera records the scene.

COL. TALL

(smiling broadly)
 Of course I'm glad of the promotion. But it will be painful to leave these men. I feel they're in good hands, though. They've been bloodied. They've tasted victory.

A group of C-for-Charlie men watch from a distance. While they are fond of Captain Gaff, his departure to glory -- word is out he will be put up for the Medal of Honor -- leaves them with a certain bitterness.

As for Old Shorty, who, after all, is being promoted because of their shed blood, nobody really cares very much that he is leaving. They aren't even watching as he is driven off.

EXT. JUNGLE ROAD (A MONTH LATER) - DAY

The scene shifts to the jungle again. A solitary figure humps along under his combat pack with slung rifle and bandoliers, thin and frail-looking, his head sunk deep into his helmet shell. Storm, from his stove, sees the single figure coming up the road.

EXT. STORM'S MESS TENT - DAY

Storm shakes Witt's hand fervently. From beneath the helmet, in shadow, Witt's hard implacable eyes peer out like the eyes of some ferret-like animal. They have not seen each other in over a month.

STORM

Let me give you some food. You look hungry, Witt.

Storm serves him all the fried Spam, dehydrated mashed potatoes, and stewed, dehydrated apples his small belly can hold. Then he breaks out an Imperial quart.

STORM

How'd you find us? What the hell are you doing up here? Like this? All by yourself.

WITT

I'm headin' back to the comp'ny.

He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

STORM

You're what?!

WITT

(with a grin)
Going back. Shorty Tall got promoted.

STORM

You must be out of your mind.

Witt's eyes turn slowly in their sockets to stare at him.

WITT

No, I ain't.

STORM

In the first place nobody knows where they are. They're way to hell and gone off on their own someplace.

WITT

I can find them. Somebody's got to know.

STORM

You must be off your rocker.

WITT

Why? It's the comp'ny, ain't it? Tail's promoted, ain't he?

He looks straight at Storm out of his black Kentucky eyes.

STORM

Have a nuther drink.

WITT

Thank you, I will. It's good to see you, Stormy. What are you doin' up here feeding all these strangers?

STORM

I tried to catch up to the comp'ny, but we missed them. Couldn't go any further -- and these guys was here. I figured I might as well feed somebody.

WITT

Well, I guess it's a good deed. It was good for me, anyway. I been hiking three days.

Storm looks around the ridge and shrugs again.

STORM

Angh, for two cents I'd go with you.

WITT

Come on along.

STORM

I don't know what these dumbasses would do if they didn't have me around to take care of them.

WITT

We'd have some fun.

STORM

The truth is, I don't like to get shot at.

WITT

Ever body to his own taste. I thin I like it. But honestly, I wouldn't be doin' this if it wasn't the old comp'ny.

Storm looks at him skeptically but lets it pass, and Witt sets out again, well aware of the effect his odyssey is creating.

NEW ANGLES

Witt shakes Storm's hand a final time. He has lingered to have a couple more drinks.

WITT

We're going to find out after this war is over what we fought for, if it was for freedom or so's a bunch of people could get rich and ruin the country and never call things by their rightful names. Yessir!

(taking Storm by the shoulder)

Like my Aunt Kay says, the fat hogs have got loose in the creek and tromped everything up. That's what's happened.

(spitting)

We worked to build this country. They stole what we built and messed up what was there to begin with, belonged to everybody. The big companies have got control of our work, our pay, our bank deposits, our public lands and our govment. They've dug holes.

(MORE)

We're dumb as the Indians. American democracy's been bombed. We're living in the ruins. Them that comes after is going to have to be content with what we spoiled.

(his voice grows thick)

You ever had a garden? They're pulling up the young plants and watering the weeds! People don't see what's happening. They got ways of keeping it secret. But I seen it, easy as falling off a log. They don't fool me. No, sir! I paid the price, and I seen the show.

Who is closer to the truth -- Welsh, with his disillusioned view of things (which Storm and, in varying degrees, the rest of the company share) or Witt, with his idealism?

STORM

They fooled you plenty. What're you going up there for? I can see doing it because they make you. But ready and willing!

Witt is not sure what Storm is driving at, or why suddenly he has taken this new tone. A moment ago they were the best of friends.

STORM

Company don't care about you. Company's just a shell. A hotel. People come and go. You going to get shot at for a hotel? After you're gone, they're going to have other guests. You don't owe them nothin'. You believe in somethin' that don't believe in you.

Witt wonders if Storm is insulting him. He brought it on himself, though, didn't he? He won't make the same mistake again.

WITT

I made a mistake getting into this discussion.

He gives Storm back his jar of liquor, turns and walks off.

STORM

Boy, they're just playing you like a fiddle in a band. You're just the kind they like to get.

(as Witt continues on)

(MORE)

They don't ~~STORM~~ (cont'd) about you!
 Don't even know that you exist.
 They're going to eat you up and
 have you for dinner.
 (shouting after him)
 Jackass! Briar! And fuck your Aunt
 Kay!

WITT
 (to himself, spitting)
 Cook!

Witt goes off in solitary splendor toward the line. Storm watches until he disappears from sight, then kissing his wounded hand and laughing with delight, he does a little jig. A long column of troops winds through the grassy field ahead of Witt. Trucks, jeeps, a tank. He catches a ride on a truck.

EXT. JUNGLE (MOWBRAY/GUADALCANAL)- DAY

Witt is walking down a road through the jungle, humming to himself, when he hears the SNAP of a spent bullet in leaves overhead. He stops and looks up. There is the faint, angry WHIRR of a second bullet. He looks up and down. He is quite alone here, exposed and vulnerable.

EXT. JUNGLE (OTHER ANGLES) - DAY

He sees a group of flying foxes, stirring uneasily in their roost. He sees a stranger fig, choking the life out of a tall hardwood. The grass about him throbs with CRICKETS. He feels the cold presence of fear, like someone standing behind him. He could still turn back. His eyes glisten. Now MUSIC comes in, like a call of summoning love.

Further up the road he encounters a Marine SNIPER.

EXT. COPRA PLANTATION - DAY

C-for-Charlie is camped by an abandoned copra plantation. A sentry hears a rock HUM past him and, startled, FIRES off a couple of wild rounds. He stops when he hears himself hailed from the jungle in a strong Kentucky accent.

WITT
 Charlie Comp'ny! Charlie Comp'ny!
 Hold yore fahr! It's Witt!
 (with sly humor)
 Acting P-F-C Witt! Of Cannon
 Comp'ny!

Fife looks up. Other heads snap around. They see it is indeed Witt. He has trekked all the way up to the line to find them. There is a great deal of backslapping, laughter and handshaking. Everybody is overjoyed to see him, to know that he would search them out like this just to be with them. They show him their new mascot: a cuscus.

Welsh and Witt have a conversation here.

EXT. PLANTATION VERANDA - DAY

Fife goes up to Witt and smiles. Squinting his eyes and putting his head a little to one side and grinning, he says:

FIFE

Hello, Witt. Or are you still not speakin' to me?

Witt grins back. He seems to sense some change he likes. They are alone on the plantation's dusty veranda. Chairs and tables surround them, with other vestiges of some domestic life before the war: a home, destroyed.

WITT

No. I guess I'm talking to you now.

FIFE

Because if you're not, I thought we might as well have it out right here and now.

Fife grins. Witt nods, still grinning. Apparently he has heard about Fife's new fighting prowess.

WITT

Well, we could do that. I still think I could take you. But you got a pretty good right hand from what I hear. If you tagged me with that right hand, you might could whup me. Awys pervaded I couldn't keep away from it, a course.

FIFE

There ain't really no need though --
(grinning)
-- now. Since you're talking to me.
Is there?

WITT

Not really.

FIFE

What do you say we have a slug of swiipe instead?

They laugh and shake hands, friends again. Fife's eyes sting with tears of gratitude.

WITT

Been a long time since we had a talk -- hadn't it? What's the new commander like?

EXT. COPRA PLANTATION - DAY

Witt looks at the other men, in the same ecstasy of loving comradeship that he felt for Capt. Stein the afternoon of their assault on the Japanese bivouac. The CAMERA, FOLLOWING his gaze, lingers on them, admiring them one by one. Little do they suspect how they are gathered in the Kentuckian's heart -- even Welsh, who stares at him in a mixture of amusement and scorn.

He listens as a young NEWCOMER dictates a letter to a friend.

NEWCOMER

She don't know I can't write, but she knows I can't write good, so throw in some mistakes.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. KENTUCKY FARMS AND FIELDS - DAY

Witt, in what must be vision, sees the farms and valleys of Kentucky -- people are going about their work, raking hay and putting it up in barns -- a land of peace and truth, bright with an unearthly light.

A woman appears. Gracious, noble, she looks out on those scenes, a smile on her lips. She might be some individual whom Witt has known; his sister or mother. She is all that is not strife or war or senseless death. She is peace, she is hope.

SHARP CUT TO:

EXT COPRA PLANTATION - DAY

A Japanese mortar BURSTS overhead. Fife quakes with horror.

VOICE

Not my legs! Not my legs!

DOLL

Check your ammo!

C-for-Charlie cringes under a fierce counterattack. The Japanese heavy mortars are lobbing in treebursts, and there is nowhere to hide. From time to time a man rises up to draw a piece of coconut tree from his flesh; the fragments are thrown down from above with the force of the shrapnel itself and finally do more damage.

Animals rush through the trees and across the tangled bungle floor, as though fleeing a fire. Cockatoos, lorikeets. The afternoon air sparkles with shredded vegetation. This new battle is fiercer, more horrible and confused than the first. (To convey the men's heightened sense of fear we shift for a brief while from 35mm to 65mm film stock.)

EXT. COPRA PLANTATION - DAY

Fife claws the ground. All the confidence has gone out of him; he is right back where he started. It takes every ounce of courage he can muster not to break and run, just to stick it out. He can do it and he does, but it costs him more than it does the others, like Doll or Bell. He has to work harder at it. It seems he isn't what he thought he was. Courage will never be a possession with him.

Doll orders his squad around. The inexperienced men flinch and gasp at each BURST from the mortars.

DOLL

We clot it and it's here. There ain't a fucking thing we can do about it... Lock and load!

Fife watches him, amazed. Since his experience at the bunker, a new sense of paternal responsibility has blossomed in Doll.

EXT. COPRA PLANTATION - DAY

The company's sparrow-mouthed, long-nosed NEW LIEUTENANT gives the phone back to Corporal Weld. Neither he nor anyone else seems to have the least idea where the enemy is or what is going on. Half a dozen men from another unit flee past them, some without their helmets. They say nothing to C-for-Charlie -- merely glance at them with great white eyes, and pass on.

NEW LIEUTENANT
 Somebody -- the commander says
 somebody needs to go up there --

Beyond the plantation a red clay road runs straight off through the jungle. One or two men crane their heads to look up it.

NEW LIEUTENANT
 (wondering if they heard
 him)
 Somebody needs to go forward and
 find out how close they are. We
 need to block that road. Till they
 can send more people up.

BELL
 We need to get out of here, sir.
 Right now. Did you explain the
 situation to him? Does he know
 where we are? We're sittin' ducks
 out here.

The Lieutenant tries to get battalion HQ on the phone again, but now the line is dead.

WELD
 They cut the line.

NEW LIEUTENANT
 (very shaken)
 Volunteers. I need volunteers.

The men look at each other. Those who came forward before -- Doll, Dale, Queen, Bell -- lie paralyzed today.

Witt studies the deserted road ahead. He knows that whoever goes up there is likely never to come back.

NEWCOMER (O.S.)
 I'll go.

Witt turns. A NEWCOMER has spoken up, a green recruit like Bead, a stranger to them all. Now Witt recognizes him as the man he heard dictating the letter the night before. MUSIC enters.

The stranger quakes all over, astonished at himself. Witt frowns. He turns and looks at the others. His brothers! Again it comes to him; the hotly joyous, almost sexual enjoyment and acceptance; the joy of not caring anymore.

WITT

Sir, I've had more experience than that man.

The others look in amazement as Witt crawls over to the Lieutenant.

NEW LIEUTENANT

I haven't seen you around before.

WITT

I want you to know I think the whole thing's a bad idea, though. If they come through there in any strength, Lootenant, they're going to knock your roadblock to hell and flinders even if we was a whole platoon. We couldn't hold them. But I want to go.

The Lieutenant shares the other men's astonishment.

NEW LIEUTENANT

You don't have to go, private. If you don't want to. Others will volunteer.

Besides the young stranger, no one else has; they all know it. And Witt can still get out.

WITT

No -- I want to go, sir. If somethin' bad happens, I want to be there so maybe I can help. Besides, nothin' bad may happen at all.

COOMBS

I'll go with Witt, Lieutenant.

Coombs looks at Witt as though he thought this way they might have a chance to talk. The long-nosed New Lieutenant nods.

NEW LIEUTENANT

You'll need another man.

He looks around. Again there are no volunteers. Fife has no intention of sticking his neck out, but when Witt's glance accidentally crosses his, he suddenly speaks up.

FIFE

I'll go.

The words are out of his mouth before he knows it. Witt frowns. (Cover Welsh's reactions as well.)

NEW LIEUTENANT

Be careful, Witt.

WITT

Yes, sir.

Witt gets his orders. He listens, then goes off with a cheerful air that the other men find incomprehensible. Coombs follows, then Fife. None of them looks back.

The young man who volunteered, when he understands the look in the other men's eyes, is glad his offer was not accepted and that he did not renew it, however embarrassing his failure to do so might be. Nor does it trouble him that two other men are going in his place.

EXT. DESERTED ROAD - DAY

The three volunteers make their way forward.

WITT

You never know when to keep your mouth shut.

Witt studies the road ahead from the position they have taken up alongside it. Fife trembles. He wants to weep, but he is afraid to. Everything is going so fast, so far. For a moment nothing happens. Then, ominously, the mortars fall silent. Fife feels it again -- the cold, empty fear -- like a hollow, a void, where his confidence once lay his pleasure in himself. It makes him feel sick. And it stays with him.

Witt looks around. A NOISE in the undergrowth on their right, barely perceptible at first, gradually grows more distinct.

Coombs peers forward, alarmed by a FAINT CRY. Ignoring Fife, he looks at Witt only. Witt says nothing.

Coombs raises his head again. The concussion of a late mortar round sends him reeling.

All at once, fifty yards ahead of them, they see a whole battalion of Japanese soldiers materialize from the tree line.

Hundreds of fresh troops appear, camouflaged with the branches of trees and bushes -- nothing like the gaunt, starving, poorly-equipped figures C-for-Charlie has encountered prior to now. The American soldiers look more emaciated than the Japanese do.

Witt sees they have no chance of getting back together. Calm and with a curious air of concentration, he turns to Fife.

WITT

Go back. Tell them what we saw. Say they're coming up right behind the mortars. Battalion strength.

FIFE

Why me? Let's both go.

Witt thinks about it for a moment. The Japanese advance quickly, silently; this will be a surprise attack.

WITT

There's no time. You go. Tell that new lieutenant to get everybody back. Tell him they got heavy machine guns. Tell him, where he's sittin' right now, they'll eat him up. I'll hold them off.

Witt nods. There is still the same odd, cheerful air about him. Fife gives him a little salute, and then he leaves.

Coombs is dying, and he knows it. He turns to Witt.

COOMBS

Geez, I never felt like this before at all. What you guess it could be from, like this? No bullets, no blood. Just around my chest it's so hard to breathe. Hold me, would you. Let me look at you? Till the end? Till it's over?

As Witt watches the Japanese approach, he begins to hear the same MUSIC which came to him on the road as he was headed up to the line; the same mysterious summons of fraternal devotion. This is the fulfillment he has prepared himself for.

EXT. COPRA PLANTATION - DAY

Fife runs like a desperate man, breaking a way through the branches with his rifle, until he reaches the company.

FIFE

Go back! Get back! Quick!

EXT. DESERTED ROAD - DAY

Witt waits until the Japanese are practically on top of him before he OPENS FIRE. They are caught by surprise. Clearly they had not expected to meet resistance so soon. A small Japanese soldier with a .31 Caliber machine gun strapped to his back advances toward him. He cannot reach back and fire the gun himself; his job is merely to serve as a tripod for it. Seeing Witt, he throws himself on the ground and digs in like a badger. Other Japanese soldiers dash forward to squeeze the trigger. One by one Witt shoots them down; quickly, decisively, with daring and skill. Soon mortar rounds begin to fall among the enemy soldiers. He looks back over his shoulder. Perhaps Fife has reported their position; perhaps the Japanese will stop and he'll get out of this.

EXT. COPRA PLANTATION - DAY

Several hundred yards away the men of C-for-Charlie listen in bewilderment as they pull back.

MEN OF C-FOR-CHARLIE

Why don't he come back? Where's
Coombs? I just hear one gun. What's
happening? Why can't we go back?
Why can't we help him?

They glance at the new man, whose life has been spared.

WELD

The line's fixed, sir.

NEW LIEUTENANT

(shouting into the phone)
Fire mission. Grid Five Mike One
Niner. Enemy in the open. Danger
close.

Welsh is the last to fall back. He looks in Witt's direction.

WELSH

Fool!

EXT. DESERTED ROAD - DAY

Witt darts up and down the Japanese line of advance, FIRING until he runs out of ammunition.

While he is reloading a YOUNG JAPANESE, almost a boy, runs forward and grasps the machine gun's trigger. The man who is flattened beneath it rises from the ground, twitching his shoulders left and right to make the fire traverse.

Witt dodges through the trees. The BULLETS shriek and hum as they pass. From time to time he drops to the ground, hiding, cunning and crafty, like a jungle animal.

The human tripod vats up and follows him quickly, with the triggerman close behind.

YOUNG JAPANESE
Slendull! Slendull, soju!

Witt does not move. To give your life gladly! To lay down your life for your friends!

The Japanese soldiers come up, surrounding him. There is no chance he can escape now. When they are nearly on top of him he lunges out at them, and they SHOOT him down.

EXT. COPRA PLANTATION - DAY

Fife listens, numb with terror, as American artillery rounds SCREAM overhead. His grimy face is streaked with tears. Before him on the ground lies a perfect seashell.

EXT. DESERTED ROAD - DAY

An abrupt silence announces that the battle is over. Witt lies beside a Japanese soldier.

MEN OF C-FOR-CHARLIE (O.S.)
He might of got away. Look over
there.

They draw closer to Witt's body.

EXT. DESERTED ROAD - DAY

Fife, Bell, Welsh, Queen and Doll are gathered under the spell of their comrade's death. Fife feels tie with them all. Even with Charlie Dale. Even with the slain Japanese who lie here and there like shoeless, sleeping children. It is as though he had died himself and were watching the scene like a ghost, from the other side.

FIFE
You're not alone. Can you hear me?

He sits with his friend and holds his hand and does not utter another word. He looks intently into the dead face. At last he puts Witt's hand down and walks away, alone.

EXT. DESERTED ROAD - DAY

Now Welsh is standing over the dead man.

WELSH

Where's your pride now?
 (he turns to a medic)
 Bury that soldier.

EXT. WITT'S GRAVE - DAY

Witt is buried at the edge of the straight red road. They dam his rifle in the ground, set his helmet on it and tie a dogtag to the triggerguard. Fife's terror passes gradually over into a longing for life and peace. The sun gleams through the trees overhead, through the wild bananas and huge looping lianas.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Fife is walking to morning chow with Bell when he turns his ankle on a half-dried rut in the road and goes down with a thud.

BELL

You all right?

He has to hop along to take the weight off the injured ankle, resting his hand from time to time on Bell's shoulder. The pain is exquisite. MacTae, the supply sergeant, comes up.

MACTAE

You're white as a sheet! What the hell happened to you there?

FIFE

I stepped on it wrong.

MACTAE

You been to the medics with it? No? Really? You're out of your everlovin' mind! You can get evacuated on that.

(excitedly)

I know guys w yo got shipped out on a lot less than that.

(MORE)

Let the docs see it, show it to them up at Division.

FIFE

What if they turn me down?

MACTAE

What have you got to lose? You won't be any worse off than you are now, will you?

But Fife feels there is something else, a serious moral problem.

MACTAE

Are you kidding? Man, if I had somethin' like that, I'd be up there like a shot! Trouble with me, I'm so fucking healthy I ain't never gonna get myself shipped out!

Fife looks at Bell. He seems to want one of them to tell him that he should stay, but they cannot think of a reason to.

MACTAE

I wouldn't hesitate a second... If it's as bad as what I just saw, it could get you out of here. If it's as bad as what I saw, you got no business in the infantry.

EXT. COMPANY AREA - DAY

A detachment of Japanese prisoners is passing by when suddenly Queen steps out in front of them. The guards look at one another, uncertain what they should do. None is bold enough to challenge the huge veteran.

Queen stares into the face of one of the prisoners, a man half his size. The Japanese is dazed and exhausted. He looks out at

(Page 178 of the original missing)

FIFE

Well, if it will help it, sir -- I guess I am.

Haines shrugs, and again his eyes glint. He turns to the orderly.

DOC HAINES

Admit this man for evacuation.

Fife is afraid to believe it, lest something happen to change it. Just like that. Just like that, and he is out. Out! Out! Why does he suddenly feel so guilty, so alone?

The evacuation order is si calls and stamped. As he is going out the flap Doc Haines calls out to him.

DOC HAINES

You're a sergeant now, I see. You were a corporal before, weren't you?

Fife nods.

EXT. EXAMINING TENT - DAY

Outside the tent Bell slaps him on the back. Fife tries to look joyful -- Bell seems to expect it -- but somehow he cannot. Things are going so fast. Already a new destiny is upon him.

EXT. SUPPLY AREA - DAY

Fife and Bell sit on a packing crate in a supply area.

BELL

How can you even think twice about it?

FIFE

I got my squad. They depend on me. I don't want to let them down. They never let me down.

BELL

They'd all tell you to go. They'd tell you to get as far from this Rock as you possibly could. What do you want to stay for? Everybody's using every loophole they can think of. You've got it made. Get out.

FIFE

This is the first time in my life I ever belonged to something -- where I had a place, a real job.

Bell nods. MUSIC enters.

BELL

You think you're going to keep up with each other, but after a while you don't. Maybe you get a Christmas card now and then. After a while it stops.

Faintly and far away, the KLAXONS start up, signalling the approach of the evening air raid. Neither of them gives any thought to seeking cover, or even looks up.

FIFE

I was afraid up there. It was as bad as ever. I was lying there and those treebursts were coming in -- I thought I wasn't going to get up. I thought they were going to have to send the MPs after me.

(looking off)

I thought I'd licked it. Once and for all. That I wouldn't be afraid n more. It's going to keep coming back. I'm going to have to fight it every day of my life.

(after a pause)

I don't want to run from a fight. Only thing, I still want to have a wife and kids... Witt was my best friend.

BELL

You make other friends.

Fife feels a sudden love of home, a greed for life and deliverance. He does not want to go back broken and burned out. He loves the Army. But he hates it too -- the corrupt, ignorant, monotonous rut that everybody is in, the indignities they all must suffer -- the sick green horror of war most of all.

FIFE

If I go back I'm finished. I'll go over the hill or go crazy, one.

BELL

Maybe you're not a soldier.

Bell looks at Fife and smiles.

EXT. SHORE - DAY

Fife walks along the shore, alone. Crabs scuttle back and forth on the seething wet sand. He sees the broken shells, the wavy lines of wrack, a germinating coconut. Is life like the sea, brutal and relentless? Does it know, or care, whom it smashes on the rocks?

EXT. HQ AREA (MAIL CALL)- DAY

At mail call Bell gets the letter he has been waiting for from his wife. They have just broken off for noon chow, and Corporal Weld has come around with a batch of new mail. When he opens it and sees how it begins, he knows what it is. She has been doing it. She's been doing it. He feels sick all over. His legs are shaky and his hands and arms are shaky. He sits down on a coco palm log.

Doll sees him and comes to his side. MUSIC enters.

BELL

She wants a divorce. To marry him.
She says she's fallen in love and
she wants that love while she can
have it. She's asking my
forgiveness.

(tapping the letter)

It's all so calm and proper. You
could show it to your mother.

(after a silence)

She says it like she was going out
to buy a new dress!

Trucks of new replacements are coming in. The green men study the veterans of C-for-Charlie with open-mouthed awe.

INT. HQ TENT - DAY

Bell has come with the letter to CAPTAIN BOSCHE, the new company commander. They are alone. The reaction he gets from Bosche is astonishing, even to him in his state of despair. As he reads, the Captain's hands begin to shake until the letter rattles. His face becomes as white as a sheet of his own memo paper with a rage so great that it seems to bunch his hard round little face into a tight little ball. Somehow Bosche gets command of himself again.

CAPT. BOSCHE

You know, of course, that you do
not have to accede to this request.

(MORE)

Your wife ~~CAPT. BOSCHE~~ (cont'd) or
 separation without your official
 permission.

(as Bell nods)

Something else. With a letter like
 this in your possession, you have
 the right to stop all allotments,
 all payments, all government
 insurance policies.

BELL

(tiredly)

I want to give it to her. I wanted
 to ask you if you'd draft an
 official letter from you for me,
 giving her the permission.

CAPT. BOSCHE

I don't understand. Why do you want
 to do that?

BELL

Well, I guess it's just that what's
 the point of being married to a
 woman who doesn't want to be
 married to you?

Captain Bosche's eyes have narrowed to slits, and with them
 he stares at Bell profoundly.

CAPT. BOSCHE

Well, there are all sort of
 attitudes and opinions, I guess.
 That's what makes the world go
 round. You've got nothing to be
 ashamed of.

BELL

Will you draft the letter for me,
 sir?

CAPT. BOSCHE

I certainly will.

Bell turns to go.

CAPT. BOSCHE

Oh, Bell!

(holding out a sheaf of
 papers)

This came in yesterday, for you. I
 held it up a little because I
 wanted to write my own endorsement.

(MORE)

I just thought that now might be a good time to give it to you. It's an order for a field commission appointing you a First Lieutenant of Infantry.

BELL

Really?

CAPT. BOSCHE

Really. I assumed that you would want to accept it. I've already written my endorsement.

BELL

Can I think it over?

CAPT. BOSCHE

Of course. Take all the time you want. You've had several big things today. And if you want to change your mind about that other matter, that will be all right, too... Be strong.

BELL

Thank you, sir.

EXT. HQ TENT - DAY

Outside the tent, Bell has given Doll the news.

DOLL

If you take it, they'll post you somewhere else. No telling where you'll end up.

Bell gone? Bell too? Doll feels alone and afraid.

BELL

Means more money. The comp'ny's not the same any more. All these new men, half of them I don't know their names. S'not the outfit that landed on this island. Feels all different. I mean, Dale, an ex-cook! Platoon Sergeant?

DOLL

Yeah. Thorne said he was coming back. He never did.

EXT. HQ AREA - DAY

His duffel bag packed, Bell stands watching a Melanesian woman. The next day he will be sworn in and transferred. Storm, it turns out, is leaving with him. He is glad to get out alive, and not the least bit guilty. As the jeep pulls away, Welsh sends him a salute.

Doll sits alone at the other end of the bivouac. Bell has given him an address on a scrap of paper, but who knows if they will ever see each other again or whether anything will be the same after this war? He looks around at the new, unfamiliar faces. Will this be his fate, to watch his friends leave him one by one?

EXT. EVACUATION HOSPITAL - DAY

Welsh stands outside the hospital. He looks at the ground a moment, then flips his cigarette away and goes inside

INT. EVACUATION HOSPITAL - DAY

Welsh sees Fife and wanders over to his bed.

FIFE

What're you doing here, First?

WELSH

I had to bring somebody his gear.
So you're finally makin' it out,
hunh, kid?

FIFE

Yeah.

WELSH

When's the ship leave?

FIFE

Three days.

WELSH

You're smart. Get out while there's
still time.

FIFE

You know, First. I been thinkin'.
Maybe I ought to stay.

WELSH

You what?

FIFE

Well, yes. I mean, you know, I'm gonna miss the comp'ny. And it's -- it's sort of like running out. In one way.

Fife does not want to leave this island a coward or a sneak. He expected to be admired for it; instead Welsh leers at him in silence, his mad eyes gleaming.

WELSH

Sure, kid, I think if you feel like that, you oughta come back.

FIFE

You think so? I thought I might slip out of here tonight maybe.

WELSH

You should.

(then grinning his slow,
sly grin)

You want to know why I busted you -- out of the orderly room? You thought it was because we thought you weren't coming back, didn't you? Well, it wasn't. It was because you were such a lousy fucking bad clerk, I HAD to do it!

If he could, Fife would hit him, he is so furious. He knows he wasn't a bad clerk. But he is lying on his back and before he can get up Welsh is gone, down the aisle and out through the flap.

FIFE

You fucking bastard! You're sick!
You feel sorry for yourself!
Bastard!

The orderlies rush down the aisle to calm him. Silently, struggling not to, Fife weeps tears of rage and desperation.

EXT. AIRFIELD (DRUMSARA) - DUSK

MUSIC enters as three days later Fife boards a cargo plane. No one from the company is present to see him off; they are all far away, on the other side of the island. He bobs like a cork in a sea of men he does not know.

EXT. AIRFIELD (DAINTREE) - DAY

Captain Bosche addresses the assembled company.

CAPT. BOSCHE

Now I know you men are making and drinking this goddamn swipe. That's okay by me. Any man in an outfit of mine can get as drunk as he wants to every night, as long as he's ready -- and in shape -- to make reveille and carry out any assignment he's given. If he can't do that, he's gonna have trouble, and from me. Personal.

(a pause)

Now I prefer to think of myself as a family man. And that's what we all are here, whether we like it or not. A family. I'm the father and -- I guess that makes Sergeant Welsh here the mother.

(there is some laughter)

And whether you guys like it or not, that makes all of you the children in this family. Now a family can only have one head, and that's the father. Me. Father's the head, and mother runs it. That's the way it's gonna be here. If any of you guys want to see me about anything, anything at all, you'll find I'm available. On the other hand, I'm gonna be busy makin' a living for this family, so if it's not important, maybe mother can handle it. That's all, except for one more thing. We're into training now, as all of you know. You all know what kind of training it is, too. Well, I'm making this training just as tough on everybody as I possibly can. Including me. So expect it. Now that's all -- Except one more thing. It'll be a long time before we get home. The war is not going to be over by next Christmas. We'll probably have to circle the world, and you'll probably go back by way of New York. So let's stick together.

(MORE)

CAPT. BOSCHIE (cont'd)
 I want you to know that as long as
 you guys back me up, I'll back you
 up. All the way, and with anybody.
 With any outfit, and any army.
 Japanese, American, or what have
 you. You can count on that.
 (pausing again)
 And now that's really all!

The tough little guy has not smiled once, even at his own
 jokes. Everybody likes him. Even Welsh seems to like him.

EXT. HQ AREA - DAY

A week later Sgt. Welsh stands in front of the company,
 wearing a full field pack.

A YOUNG LIEUTENANT
 Sergeant Welsh, our scheduled
 transportation has been delayed.
 The trucks were diverted to another
 unit. What do you suggest we do?

WELSH
 We'll go out the way we came, sir.

The lieutenant nods, and they exchange a salute. Welsh turns
 to face the men, standing in ranks next to their equipment.

VOICES
 First platoon, all present and
 accounted for... Second platoon,
 all present and accounted for...
 Etc.

WELSH
 All right -- move! Move!

EXT. ROAD TO BEACH - DAY

The men of C-for-Charlie march to the beach -- past a herd of
 cattle, past a Melanesian woman who gazes at them from beside
 a stream. Another company goes by, headed up toward the line.
 Stalks of red ginger glow amid the strangler figs and vines.
 Outside a leaf chapel, a group of Melanesians are singing.
 The stream where Dale stooped to drink the bloody water flows
 clear again. Some suggestion that in time the earth will
 cleanse itself.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Their route leads them past the new cemetery. Plodding along, gasping in the airless humidity, the cemetery looks very green and cool to them. The area has been well drained, and blue-grass has been planted on it. Quartermaster men move here and there, keeping it up and tending it. Big sprinklers send their long gossamer jets swirling through the air above the crosses. Already grass rises from the grave mounds.

EXT. BEACH (WANGETTI) LCIs - DAY

They arrive at the beach. LCIs ply the waters between the beach and the big ships that wait offshore to receive them. Melanesian stevedores work among the stacks of crates. A sailor standing on an oil drum, signalling the ships with semaphore flags.

THE END