

LOVE HAS NO COUNTRY

By

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## ROLL CREDITS

EXT. SOP PONG, LAOS - DAY

NO SOUND

A riverside village. Bamboo and thatch roof huts. A small schoolhouse. A central square encircled by small mud-walled shops. A fringe of steep green hills. Jungle mountains above.

Villagers go about their morning business. Children play in the schoolyard. A squad of ragged Pathet Lao guerillas form up in the square. Rice farmers work their terraced hillside fields with long-horned buffaloes.

The glint of an approaching B-52 bomber high in the sky.

The flash of an explosion in the distance.

A silent bomb hits the surface of the river. Sends a geyser high in the sky.

Everyone ducks and runs for cover.

The inaudible explosions draw nearer, and transverse the village from one end to the other.

Each bomb releases dozens of little cluster bombs that fly through the air and find their way into ditches and doorways and open windows. Some fail to explode and lay hidden in tall grass or crevices or on rooftops.

The bomber fades into the distance.

Guerillas run up and start pulling the dead and wounded from under burning piles of debris. One of them lifts an unexploded cluster bomb off a group of wounded and it blows up in his face.

The rice farmers on the terraced hillside above gaze in horror at the inferno below them.

Then a big C-130 comes soaring down river, releasing metal cannisters that flip through the air behind it in slow motion and burst without sound on the rice fields, leaving clouds of Agent Orange behind.

The C-130 disappears into the west, leaving a trail of brown withered rice fields and choking, retching farmers in its wake.

END CREDITS

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER:

Between the years 1964 and 1973, the CIA pursued a secret war in Laos against native Communist forces. The war was secret, and illegal, but unique in its savagery. And Laos remains the most war ravaged nation in history.

FADE TO:

EXT. BINOCULAR VIEW - MILITARY CONVOY - NIGHT

The scope swings up to a jungle mountain road. In the light of a half-moon, it follows seven unmarked M35 troop carriers as they descend to a broad shallow river.

Packed with little Hmong tribesmen dressed in US Army uniforms, the trucks pull out onto the river bank.

INT. TRUCK CAB - NIGHT

Three men sit in the front seat as the leading M-35 splashes across the swift-flowing river:

CIA Special Ops Agent ZACK BROWN (28) - a tall, rugged African-American with a shaven head - sits on the right side of the cab, clad in worn and dirty jungle fatigues, a camouflage cap tipped over his eyes.

Beside Zack, a plump Laotian OFFICER (37) leans his head back on the seat and snores.

At the wheel, a nervous little Hmong DRIVER (20) chews betel leaf.

EXT. TREE LINE - NIGHT

On the opposite side of the river, a platoon of GUERILLAS in Pathet Lao uniforms and red star caps lie in wait, weapons trained on the advancing trucks.

Above them and to their rear: the bomb damaged hillside village of Sop Pong.

At the center of the attackers' line: KALEA (32), a comely but stern female commissar, LILO (17) a short, sturdy, tough looking boy, and VANG (50), a weathered Pathet Lao commander.

Vang scopes the convoy with a pair of binoculars.

A finger to his lips, he beckons his troops to follow him into the river.

They spread out. Wade through knee-deep water toward the convoy.

IN/EX - TRUCK - NIGHT

Zack, the Lao officer and the driver remain in the cab as before.

Automatic weapons open up. Tracer rounds slam into the metal side of the truck. Screams of pain from the Hmong soldiers in the rear.

The driver and officer flinch, go big-eyed, jerk their heads left and right.

Zack rouses with a start. Consults a map pasted on the dashboard. Clicks on the truck's radio, Shouts into the mic.

ZACK

Bravo to red Leader. Enemy attack.  
Air support, air support!  
Coordinates: 20.9170.101.

Outlined by fire and explosions, Lilo tips a primitive grenade through the cab's window and rolls back into the river.

Zack slams the door open and bails out after him.

BOOM. The grenade goes off. Blows out all the windows. Kills the driver and officer.

EX. RIVER - NIGHT

Out in the shallows, stunned, no sound save for a ringing in his ears, Zack fumbles for his pistol. Aims at Lilo. Fires. Drills a couple of holes in his back.

Lilo drops and floats off down the river like a rag doll.

Zack crawls and kicks his way through the river's smoking, sizzling debris. Bullets smack the water all around him.

EXT. SHORE - NIGHT

On the far side, Zack sticks his head out of the water. Looks around. The ring in his ears cuts out. Sound returns: Explosions. Automatic weapons fire.

A white American and two Hmongs emerge from the river thirty feet away and sprint for the jungle. They don't get ten feet before a squad of gleeful Pathet Laos cuts them to pieces.

When the guerillas run off down the beach, Zack slips out of the water. Crawls toward the darkness.

EXT. JUNGLE - MORNING

In the jungle beyond the river, Zack hears a distinctive whistle. Whistles back.

Three Hmong soldiers, Corporal KAI-PO, Private GEE and Private VORA, emerge from the underbrush.

ZACK

Hey. Anyone else make it?

Kai-Po shakes his head.

Zack seems overcome with sadness and guilt.

EXT. RICE PADDY - DAY

Zack and his Hmongs crouch in the underbrush at the edge of a small flooded rice field.

American jets, helicopters, propeller-driven planes whoosh and roar overhead.

Bombs explode in the distance.

Zack falls to his knees by the side of the paddy. Splashes his face with water.

Gee laughs. Tips his head at a patch of human feces floating six feet away.

ZACK

Aw, shit!

They all crack up as Zack wipes his face on a sleeve.

Then Vora gestures toward the middle of the paddy, where a pretty LITTLE GIRL (8) lies astride a long-horned water buffalo, her head resting on its hump.

Zack and his men smile and wave at her. She smiles, waves back, as if no war exists.

WHAP-WHAP-WHAP

A big Twin-Pak chopper draws near.

Zack flashes a mirror at it.

The PILOT descends to investigate.

Zack and his men wade out into the rice paddy, wave their arms.

The pilot sees them, flares to land.

Then, as Zack and his men cry out in horror, a rocket erupts from under the chopper, streaks across the sky at the little girl and her water buffalo, and blows them to bits.

A MOMENT LATER

EXT. RICE PADDY - DAY

Zack and his men stagger to the helicopter as it hovers just above the rice field, whipping up water.

Two crew members lean out the door to help them board.

ZACK  
(distraught)  
The fuck you kill that little girl  
for?

The crew members gesture that they can't hear him over the roar of the chopper lifting off.

Zack and his men stare back at the bloody rice paddy, tearful, until it falls from sight.

When the rotor noise diminishes, Zack steps up to an enormous Hell's Angels type with a shaven head, beetle brows and a long hanging grey mustache named JIMMY LOVE (56) who appears to be in charge.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Why the fuck did he...?

He gestures at the pilot.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
...Blow up that little girl, for  
God's sake?

Jimmy waves a derisive hand at him.

JIMMY  
 (Brooklyn accent)  
 Hey, he was just followin' orders,  
 you know?

ZACK  
 What? Whose orders, for Christ's  
 sake?

JIMMY  
 Mine.

ZACK  
 And what did your orders specify,  
 if you don't mind my askin', Sir?

JIMMY  
 'Kill 'em all, and let God sort 'em  
 out.'

A deep belly laugh.

INT. SOP PONG - VILLAGE SCHOOL - BASEMENT - LAMP LIGHT

Lantern-lit, the basement appears to be some kind of primitive field hospital. Wounded fighters lie all over the floor, covered with bloody bandages.

Kalea directs a GUERRILLA (20) to carry little Lilo downstairs. Unconscious, the boy bleeds from his wounds.

NURSE ALANA (35), Squat, brusque, ill-favored, grabs the boy from the guerilla's arms. Rolls him onto a rough-hewn operating table. Prepares him for an operation.

Kalea hovers behind him like a worried mother.

NITA AROMDÉE (26), a tall, dark, attractive Pathet Lao doctor - uniform splattered with blood - steps up to the patient.

NITA  
 (Lao, subtitles)  
 Thank you, Commissar Kalea. We'll  
 do everything we can for the boy.  
 Can you please ask Commander Vang  
 when we're pulling out?

Kalea nods and departs with a last anxious look at the boy.

About to fit on a surgical mask, Nita sees Lilo open his feverish eyes, and smiles down at him.

NITA (CONT'D)  
What's your name, boy?

LILO  
My name? It's, it's Li-Lilo.

Nita nods to Nurse Alana, who injects him with an anesthetic.

NITA  
I'm Doctor Aromdée, but you can  
call me Nita, *na*?

Lilo smiles up at Nita as he fades out.

She fits on her surgical mask. Examines the boy's wounds.  
Turns to Nurse Alana.

NITA (CONT'D)  
This is more than I can handle. I'm  
an intern, not a surgeon.

ALANA  
Should I get your father? You think  
it's worth it?

Nita glances down at the boy. Nods.

NITA  
But tell him to hurry. Okay?

LATER

INT. CAVE - LAMP LIGHT

Nita's father, HAVIKA(56), a tall, thin, gentle looking  
Pathet Lao surgeon, stitches up Lilo's wounds.

Through the walls of the basement, jets wail, bombs thump.

LATER

INT. BASEMENT - LAMP LIGHT

Havika removes his surgical gloves. Tosses them into a  
rubbish bin. Turns to watch Nita and Nurse Alana bandage the  
unconscious boy's wounds.

A bomb explodes nearby. Everyone freezes. Another blast. Much  
closer. Followed by another. The roof shakes. Cement debris  
falls to the floor.

Nurse Alana holds her breath. Nita's eyes go wide. Her father reaches out to her.

A blinding flash.

Blackness.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Weeping, blood seeping from a graze on her upper arm, Nita drags her dead father from the smoking ruins of the schoolhouse. Lays him on the grass. Falls to her knees. Kisses him on either cheek. Whispers in his ear.

A MEDICAL ORDERLY emerges carrying little Lilo in his arms. Lays him on the ground. Turns to run off.

NITA  
(Lao, subtitles)  
What do you think you're doing?

The medical orderly stops to face her.

MEDICAL ORDERLY  
Just following orders, *na*?

NITA  
Whose orders?

MEDICAL ORDERLY  
(turning to go)  
Comrade Vang's.

Kalea appears behind Nita. Pats her on the shoulder.

NITA  
Kalea, what...?

KALEA  
(tearful)  
I'm so sorry, dear, but we've been ordered to take only the walking wounded.

NITA  
No!

KALEA  
Enemy reinforcements just landed by helicopter. We move out in five minutes.

Eyes open now, Lilo follows their conversation.

Nita kneels beside him to explain.

NITA  
Lilo...

The boy grabs her by the waist, glares up into her eyes.

LILO  
Please, take me with you. Please.

NITA  
I... I...

Sobbing, Nita turns to Kalea for help.

Kalea shakes her head, sad, and pulls Nita from Lilo's grip.

LILO  
Take me, take me!

As Kalea drags the distraught Nita off, Lilo tries to sit up. Falls back. Stares after them with bright, feverish eyes, shrieks at the top of his lungs.

LILO (CONT'D)  
You'll pay for this someday! I swear. I'll haunt you to the grave.

EXT. US AIRBASE - THAILAND - AFTERNOON

Out over the Mekong River, a rickety old Air America CV-2 Caribou comes in for a landing.

A group of Allied soldiers clangs down the steps. Hotfoots across the steaming blacktop toward the ad building.

Jimmy pauses at the top of the ramp. Spats a quid of red betel on the pavement. Spots two little Thai airmen. Crooks a finger at them.

JIMMY  
Hey yuz. Come 'ere!

They run toward the plane. Then freeze when BUSTA growls and lunges at them. Only when Jimmy ties the dog to a railing will they step forward.

Jimmy reaches back inside the plane. Hoists up two big rice bags marked "MAMA TOOTKA'S BEST." Tosses them to the airmen.

EXT. THAI CITY - AFTERNOON

Followed by the Thai airmen, Jimmy walks out the front gate of the air base with Busta on a leash. Bangs on the roof of a three-wheeled, canopied motorcycle taxi. Wakes its napping DRIVER.

The airmen sling his rice bags down beside the driver. Jimmy climbs aboard. Busta jumps up beside him.

JIMMY  
Air-Sea Supply Company. Nittayo  
Road. *Leu-Leu!*

The driver nods. Roars off in a mass of other taxis, bicycles, motorbikes and decrepit buses into a swarming tropical city constructed almost entirely of blackened, mold-encrusted concrete.

Past loud, raucous bars with drunk and drugged Allied soldiers and half-naked bar-girls flooding into the street. The wildest bar of all: a place called "MAMA TOOTKA'S."

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Jimmy walks up to an office with "MEL GREGORY, DIRECTOR, AIR-SEA SUPPLY COMPANY" written on the door, bangs it open without knocking, and snaps Busta free from his leash.

MEL (48), a skinny, balding, pinch-faced little man in a tropical linen suit, jumps up from behind his desk in alarm.

Busta growls. Goes straight for Mel. Corners him behind his desk.

Jimmy steps up. Shoves a finger in Mel's face.

JIMMY  
Hey, Mel. You know what? Some of my friends at Langley? They say you been questionin' my Body Counts. So I just thought, 'Hey, I'll bring old Mel some proof.' You know?

Jimmy hoists the rice sack above his head, dumps its contents - 700 dried human ears - on Mel's desk.

He shrieks in alarm.

Busta snarls. Jimmy has to grab him by the scruff of the neck to prevent him from biting into Mel's raised arm

JIMMY (CONT'D)

I pay my Hmongs a dollar for every Commie ear they bring in. Awright? And it's always worked like a charm. But now that you got my proof, I'm gonna call it quits. You know why?

Mel jerks his head back and forth in a panic.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Cuz the other day, I'm up at the firebase. You know? And I spot this little Hmong boy with only one ear. Right? So I ask him. I says, 'Hey, kid, what happened to your ear?' And you know what he says, Mel? He says, 'My daddy cut it off for the dollar reward. And now he's gonna cut off the other one.'

Jimmy pounds the desk with glee, sets the severed ears to bouncing up and down and spilling onto the floor.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

End of story. It's all a fuckin' game.

EXT. HOTEL - AFTERNOON

A taxi deposits Nita in front of a six story luxury hotel on the banks of the Mekong River. Gone the careful, serious, uniformed Communist functionary. Dressed in the latest Paris summer fashion, she looks foxy as hell.

INT. JIMMY'S ROOM - DAY

A room on the top floor with a view of the long-tailed boats on the Mekong River and the jungle mountains of Laos beyond.

In dirty fatigues and jungle boots, Jimmy sprawls, snores, snuffles on a king-sized bed.

Busta wakes beside his master when he hears a soft feminine knock at the door. Jumps off the bed. Trots to the door. Sniffs at it.

Jimmy rises, sleepy-eyed. Staggeres across the room. Squints through the peephole.

Nita smiles at him from the other side.

He throws the door open.

Busta thrusts his nose between Nita's dark naked knees. Licks her skin. She pets his head with a frozen smile.

NITA  
Nice doggie.

JIMMY  
Busta!

Jimmy kicks the dog in his balls. Sends him yelping across the room.

Nita presses her hands together. Raises them to her moist red lips. Then, slow and serene, she bows.

NITA  
*Suwadeeka.*

Jimmy bows in kind. Grins in anticipation.

JIMMY  
*Suwadeekap.*

NITA  
Mr. Jimmy Love?

JIMMY  
In person.

NITA  
I'm your new medic.

Nita's English: fluent, precise. A little French-Asian lilt.

JIMMY  
Hey, they told me you was comin'.  
Said you was the niece of some big  
muckety-muck in the government.

NITA  
Actually, he's my cousin.

JIMMY  
Well lemme tell you. You are not  
what I was expectin'. You know?

Nita affects an impish, ironic quality, as if she might burst out laughing any second.

NITA  
Well, I hope I can take that as a  
compliment.

Jimmy laughs, motions her inside.

NITA (CONT'D)

I was wondering if we might have lunch together. They tell me the food here is excellent.

JIMMY

Sure, maybe later. But you know what? How 'bout a drink first?

She smiles, flirtatious.

INT. JIMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hairy old white Jimmy grunts and wheezes over Nita's beautiful, smooth, golden body. She moans as if in passion. But her eyes stare up at the ceiling, cold, vengeful, full of loathing.

Perched on the edge of the bed, Busta looks on, panting, tongue hanging out, kneading the sheets with his paws.

INT. AIR-SEA SUPPLY COMPANY - DAY

Zack walks into Mel's office. Dressed in casual civvies, he still looks a bit somber.

Mel rises to greet him. Motions for him to take a seat.

Mel

So let me tell you, Zack. I got you a promotion, a big raise, and I put you in for a Distinguished Intelligence Medal.

ZACK

For what?

MEL

Hey, it was a miracle anyone got out of there alive.

ZACK

I tell you. I don't see it that way, man.

MEL

Hey, you want to redeem your ass? I got just the job for you.

ZACK

Yeah?

MEL

Platoon leader. Firebase Juliet.  
Golden Triangle country.

Zack frowns.

MEL (CONT'D)

Got a bad reputation, I know.

ZACK

Who's commander?

MEL

Jimmy Love. You know him?

ZACK

Old fart? Looks like a Hell's  
Angel?

Mel nods.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Seen him blow up a little girl,  
just for the hell of it.

MEL

Yup. Sounds like Jimmy. We'd like  
you to run one of his platoons.

ZACK

You fuckin' kiddin' me?

MEL

That's only part of it. You'll be  
working for me on the side.

A look of understanding crosses Zack's face.

MEL (CONT'D)

Got this miniature radio for you,  
and--

ZACK

Why all the--?

MEL

Can't just fire the sonofabitch.  
His tribesmen, the Hmongs? They  
fuckin' worship him. And the  
military? They dig his macho shit.

ZACK

So you want some sucker to--

MEL

Suss him out. Get the goods on him.

ZACK

Sold. I'm on.

MEL

Jesus! That was quick. Wanna tell me why?

Pause.

ZACK

That little girl.

EXT. AIR BASE - DAY

Nita, Jimmy and Busta cross the runway of Nakhon Phanom Airbase, headed for a big Twin-Huey.

Newly promoted Sergeant Kai-Po and Corporals Vora and Gee follow behind them. Chat amongst themselves in Hmong. Gee carries Jimmy's ten-kilo MAMA TOOTKA rice bag on his shoulder.

Transformed again, Nita wears a floppy jungle hat. Camouflage fatigues. A rucksack with a big red cross on the back.

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

As the helo warms for take-off, Jimmy sits up front next to the BLOND PILOT, Busta and his rice bag at his feet.

Kai-Po and Vora crouch over two big M-60s at mid-chopper. Gee sits on a box between them, prepared to feed them ammo.

Nita reclines in the rear on a big pile of rice bags marked MAMA TOOTKA'S BEST.

Just as the chopper starts to lift off, someone bangs on the fuselage. Jimmy leaps from his seat. Steps back to slide open the door.

Zack stands there on the runway in fatigues and a green beret, chest heaving.

Jimmy looks him over.

JIMMY  
You the New Meat?

Zack nods.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Ain't I seen you somewhere before?

ZACK  
Maybe.

Jimmy nods. Grabs Zack's rucksack. Slings it inside. Gives him a hand up.

Zack's Hmong soldiers grin at him when he steps inside. Pat the new stripes on their shoulders.

Zack smiles and waves back.

JIMMY  
Heard you wanted 'em back with you.

ZACK  
Thanks.

JIMMY  
Nothin' to it.

Jimmy turns from Zack. Heads up to the cockpit. Sits down. Signals the pilot to take off.

BLOND PILOT  
NP Tower, Big Mother Fife Foxtrot  
holdin' short at helipad two-two  
left.

TOWER  
Big Mother Fife Foxtrot, NP Tower,  
two-two left, cleared for takeoff.

BLOND PILOT  
Roger that. Over and out.

Zack exchanges high fives with his Hmongs on his way to the rear. Sits down beside Nita. Looks her over. The sight of her seems to perk him up.

She looks him over as well.

He smiles. Leans in close. Starts to speak.

Nita smiles back. Spins her finger in the air to indicate they should wait till the roar of the engines diminishes.

Unable to talk, they just sit there grinning at each other for a while.

Then, when the chopper lifts off, they turn to look out the window.

Up front, Joe pulls out a flask. Tips it up. Empties it in four loud gulps. Slips an opium bong from his fatigue jacket. Lights up. Sucks deep, deep. Settles back. Shuts his eyes. Falls asleep. Snores long and loud.

EXT. AERIAL - TROPICAL LANDSCAPE - DAY

The helicopter follows the course of the muddy mile-wide Mekong. On the left: endless rice paddies. On the right: mountains so tall that their ridge lines run to dwarf pines.

INT. HELICOPTER

The noise of the engines dies down, but not very much. Zack leans in again, shouts in Nita's ear.

ZACK  
Hey, I'm Zack.

NITA  
Nita.

ZACK  
What're you, some kind of nurse?

NITA  
MD.

ZACK  
MD? Pretty young for that, ain't you?

NITA  
(sniffing)  
I'll be running Jimmy's aid station.

Nita turns away from Zack again, as if interested once more in the jungle scenery. But she flits glances at him out of the corner of her eye.

EXT. AERIAL - TROPICAL LANDSCAPE - DAY

The chopper turns west, follows a narrow tributary of the Mekong.

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

Zack pats the rice sack beneath him.

ZACK  
Mama Tootka's? That's the shit we  
used to smoke in Nam.

NITA  
I'm not surprised.

ZACK  
Oh, I get it.

Zack blinks. Nods to himself.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
The Hmong tribe? They're opium  
farmers. Always have been. So when  
we get up to the firebase, they--

Nita stops him with a gesture to keep his voice down.

NITA  
Most probably, they pour these bags  
out into their giant clay rice  
bowls. Fill them up with raw opium.

Zack checks to make sure no one else can hear him.

ZACK  
Right? Then they pile 'em back in  
the chopper. The pilot flies 'em to  
market. And he and our bossman--

Zack pauses to point up at Jimmy, still sound asleep.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
--Take a cut of the profits.

Nita raises a finger to indicate that she has another point  
to make.

NITA  
After they give a share to the  
generals who run our country.

They grin and high five each other. Zack's mood appears to be  
on the mend.

Jimmy wakes to the sound of their laughter. Glares back at  
them. Cups a hand to holler back at Zack.

JOE

Hey New Meat! Keep your fuckin' hands off my girl. Or you know what? I'll rip your fuckin' heart out.

EXT. BAN LOU - DAY

Ban Lou, a large town with a Pathet Lao flag flying from its municipal building, comes into sight.

The chopper picks up speed. Comes in low.

Nita gulps. Eyes go wide.

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

Jimmy gestures toward his Hmongs.

JIMMY

Sergeant? Gimme a little recon by fire, awright?

KAI-PO

Yes Suh.

Kai-Po and Vora fire into the town. Pathet Lao guerillas, pedestrians and school children flee.

Jimmy pulls a dark, slit-eyed, broad-nosed human head from his rice sack by its long lank black hair. While his passengers look on in horror, he flings it out the doorway.

JIMMY

Bombs away!

INT/EXT. PATHET LAO HEADQUARTERS BUNKER - BAN LOU

Standing outside their HQ bunker with several of their fighters, Vang and Kalea hear a helicopter approach, and look up to see a big foreigner lean out and throw an object from its door.

Wide-eyed in shock, Kalea points up toward him as the chopper flashes overhead.

KALEA

Jimmy Love!

The object plops to the ground a few feet from the bunker and rolls toward them. When they recognize it as a human head, they cry out in shock and fury.

Vang points at his soldiers, one of whom has a portable rocket launcher.

VANG  
(Lao)  
Fire, fire!

INT/EXT. HELICOPTER AND ENVIRONS

As spent shell casings clatter to the floor and AK-47 rounds ping against the fuselage, Jimmy throws his head back, bares his teeth, thrusts his clenched fists and pelvis back and forth, and does a victory dance.

JIMMY  
Eee-haw! Eee-haw!

A puff of smoke below. An RPG streaks toward the helo, trailing smoke.

ZACK  
Incoming, five o'clock!

The pilot veers sharply to the left. Aims for a water gap in the bluff.

Jimmy nearly gets tipped out the door.

The RPG misses the chopper by a few feet. Explodes against the wall of the bluff. Shrapnel peppers the fuselage.

Vora gets laced across the middle. His safety belt blown away, he falls out. Bounces to the bottom of the gorge.

The chopper enters the canyon at high speed. Smoke pours from one engine. The other starts to sputter.

BLOND PILOT  
Mayday, mayday, mayday. Papa 3, Big Mother Fife Foxtrot. We are hit and going down. Two klicks due north of Ban Lou, six aboard.

Zack flings Nita back on the rice bags. Covers her with his body. Jimmy straps himself in up front. Turns to Kai-Po.

JIMMY  
Sergeant, secure my dog.

KAI-PO

Yes Suh!

Kai-Po runs up. Grabs Busta's leash. Wraps it around his arm, huddles with the dog and his friends on the floor.

Zack and Nita lock eyes, a kind of "if only" look.

The helicopter hits a shallow stream. Skims along it. Strikes rocks and trees. Ends up at the edge of the jungle.

The pilot lies dead in his seat, covered with glass, impaled by a sharp tree limb.

Zack looks down at Nita, who clings to him like a child.

ZACK

You're okay. You'll be fine.

He grabs her rucksack with one hand, her arm with the other. Leads her out of the flaming wreckage.

The others emerge with only minor injuries.

The chopper explodes. Sends a great plume of smoke skyward. Showers them with debris.

EXT. LOWER MOUNTAINSIDE - DAY

Vang, Kalea, a platoon of excited soldiers, and two sniffing, barking dogs run up a jungle mountainside.

EXT. UPPER MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

As Jimmy's group scurries up through the jungle, Busta starts to sniff and whine. Jimmy motions them to stop and listen.

Laotian voices and barking hounds sound below them.

Jimmy unsnaps Busta's leash. Points down the mountainside.

JIMMY

Go get 'em, Busta. Kill, kill!

EXT. LOWER MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Busta comes flying down on Vang's group.

Kalea motions to the guerillas with dogs to hold off. Reaches out to snarling Busta. Smiles like she knows him, like they were once friends.

KALEA  
 (accented English)  
 Here, Busta. Come 'ere, boy!

Busta tears into her. Knocks her down. Snaps at her neck.

She draws her Makarov. Shoots him in the head.

Smoking pistol still in her hand, Kalea holds the dog in her arms and weeps.

KALEA (CONT'D)  
 Po' Busta, what dat Jimmy do, make  
 you so bad?

EXT. GRASSY RIDGE LINE - SUNSET

Jimmy and his group reach a ridge line covered with tall elephant grass. Stop to listen for sounds of pursuit.

Excited Lao voices rise from down the wooded hill.

A big Jolly Green Giant helicopter roars overhead.

Jimmy fires a smoke rocket into the sky.

IN/EX. HELICOPTER

The MEXICAN-AMERICAN PILOT spots it. Descends. Sees Jimmy waving. Flares to land.

EXT. JUNGLE NEAR RIDGE LINE - CONTINUOUS

Vang's Pathet Lao platoon creeps out of the jungle to the edge of the elephant grass.

Commander Vang spots the helicopter coming. Points up at it.

VANG  
 (Lao, subtitles)  
 Fire!

IN/EX. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

With bullets popping into his fuselage, the pilot decides not to land. Hovers at a hundred feet. Drops an extraction rig.

Zack and Jimmy fasten Nita into it. Signal the chopper to haul her up.

EXT. JUNGLE FRINGE - CONTINUOUS

From their vantage point at the edge of the elephant grass, Vang and Kalea spot Nita swinging on a rope below the chopper.

VANG  
(Lao, subtitles)  
Cease fire, cease fire!

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

Jimmy, Nita, Kai-Po and Gee lie on the metal floor, gasping for breath.

Two CREW MEMBERS pull Zack in through the open door and unleash him from his extraction rig. He flops down beside the others on the floor.

Jimmy twists his head around, looking for something.

JIMMY  
Hey, wait a fuckin' second here.

He glares up toward the pilot.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
My dog!

The pilot looks at him like he might be loco.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Hey, you know what? I ain't leavin'  
without my dog. No fuckin' way.

He gestures to the pilot to turn back. Reluctant, he obeys.

EXT. DOWN THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

The chopper descends to the clearing down the mountain where Busta lies dead. Hovers a few feet above the ground.

Jimmy jumps down. Runs for Busta. Scoops him up. Carries him into the helo. Lays him out. Drops a tear or two.

JIMMY  
I know who did this. And lemme tell  
yuz. Oh, is she gonna fuckin' pay.

Nita turns her face from Jimmy. Hides the evident fact that she has a clear understanding of his meaning.

IN/EX. HELICOPTER - NIGHT

The helicopter veers sharp to the right. Tips halfway over. Powers up the side of a high bluff. Storms over the teak trees at its crest.

A red scar on the green jungle scenery, Firebase Juliet sprawls across a ridge line that separates the valleys of two rivers.

Just as the chopper flares to land, the sky lights up. An explosion echoes off the mountains. Scares everyone on the chopper except Jimmy half to death.

The pilot lifts off. Swoops back over the lip of the cliff in a panic.

Jimmy bellows into the radio.

JIMMY

Red Leader to Apple, over. Tell that fuckin' arty man to belay his practice now. Or you know what? I'm gonna stick his fuckin' head so far down the latrine? He's gonna have to tuck up through his tush to see the light of day.

FIREBASE JULIET - NIGHT

The helo bounces down in a mucky lamp-lit field amid a herd of slick rooting piglets.

As its passengers rise to gather their things, Jimmy turns to address Kai-Po.

JIMMY

Sergeant, take my dog down to the Hmong graveyard.

KAI-PO

Yes Suh!

JIMMY

Bury him there.

Kai-Po looks a bit nonplussed.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

And I want a full military funeral. You got it?

KAI-PO

Suh!

The passengers leap from the helicopter into the mud, splash their boots and cargo pants, scatter piglets every which way.

Nita cups her hand to whisper to Zack.

NITA

So this is the famous Firebase Juliet, *na*?

ZACK

This is it, I guess. Home sweet home.

NITA

Home it may be, but sweet it is not.

A throng of cheering HMONGS with flares and lanterns races across the field to surround Jimmy and bedeck him with flowers.

HMONGS

Jeeeemy, Jeeeemy, Jeeeemy!

INT. COMMAND POST BUNKER - NIGHT

Nita enters a large rectangular bunker, dim-lit, but very clean, with creaky wood floors.

Jimmy sits at his desk, a bottle of whiskey before him.

A pretty little Lao girl named Poo-Ying (18) busies herself making tea in the corner.

While Nita has a look around, Jimmy tips the bottle up.

NITA

Not bad.

JIMMY

Poo-Ying here? She keeps it real nice.

Nita and Poo-Ying bow to each other and raise prayerful hands to their noses.

NITA

*Sabadi.*

POO-YING  
*Sabaidi kab than.*

When Jimmy tips his bottle up again and his attention wavers, they exchange a familiar, meaningful glance.

Then Jimmy sets his bottle down.

JIMMY  
 You'll stay here, too, dear. Only one bed. You know? But big enough for us all.

He makes a grab for Nita.

She fends him off.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 Look at me.

Sticks a finger in her face.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 Look at me!

In the corner, Poo-Ying sniffs and shakes her head, as if she's seen it all before.

NITA  
 (moping)  
 What?

JIMMY  
 I'm sorry, you know? That I scared you today.

Nita takes a deep breath. A couple of seconds pass before she can contain herself.

NITA  
 Why? Why'd you do it?

JIMMY  
 Do what?

NITA  
 The head.

JIMMY  
 Oh. Hey. I just wanted to freak 'em out. You know? The commander up there. Old Vang? He's so fuckin' superstitious.

NITA  
You know the Pathet Lao commander?

JIMMY  
Know him? Shit, we was like  
brothers. You know?

Jimmy shakes his head, grimaces at Vang's betrayal.

NITA  
Wait a second. I think I read  
something about that in the  
newspaper. He used to be on the  
government side. Right? Defected to  
the Communists back in sixty-eight,  
sixty-nine? And wasn't there some  
woman involved?

Jimmy snarls. Bangs a fist on his desk. Knocks his whiskey  
bottle over. It shatters on the floor.

JIMMY  
That was no woman! It was my wife.  
Kalea.

Nita flinches, but finds time to exchange another knowing  
look at Poo-Ying in the corner.

NITA  
So, back there? With the severed  
head?

JIMMY  
Put the fuckin' fear of God into  
'em. Let 'em know, I'm--

NITA  
Where... where did you get it?

JIMMY  
The head? Oh, I caught him spyin'  
last week, you know? And my penalty  
for spyin'?

Jimmy draws his sword. Raises it high. Whacks his desk with  
it.

Nita's eyes go big and round.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
You ain't some kinda spy, are you,  
girl?

A roar of laughter as he sweeps the fearful Nita off her feet and carries her through the door to the bedroom.

INT. MESS HALL BUNKER - NIGHT

Nita, Jimmy, and two of his foreign officers sit around a mess table full of Laotian food and booze. Their serving maid: Poo-Ying.

At the other end of the room, a group of Hmong musicians and singers serenade them with unearthly-sounding native music.

The bunker door opens. Zack steps down into the mess hall, makes for the table, waves to all.

ZACK

Hey, I'm Zack. How y'all doin'?

Jimmy gestures for Poo-Ying to pour another dram of whiskey in his glass, then stands at the head of the table.

JIMMY

So how we welcome New Meat?

Everyone jumps up and raises a glass.

THE ENTIRE PARTY

Hoo-ah!

JIMMY

Now, Zack, lemme make the intros.  
Awright?

He assumes a humorous, sardonic expression. Points to BOOM-BOOM (27), a tall, handsome Eurasian.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

First, the brave leader of our  
First Platoon, Special Agent Tham-  
Boon Smith. Otherwise known as  
'Boom-Boom.'

Boom-Boom waves at Zack.

BOOM-BOOM

(Cockney accent)  
'ello, mate.

ZACK

(smiling back)  
Where you from?

BOOM-BOOM

Well, it's kinda complicated, I mus' say. You see, me mum's from Bangkok and me old dad? He's from East London.

ZACK

How come they call you 'Boom-Boom'?

Boom-Boom seems too embarrassed to reply.

JIMMY

Lady's man. You know? Got 'em poundin' on his door every night.

Jimmy laughs. Points to CRACKER (25), a pimply little American with dishwater blond hair.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

And this is the leader of our Third Platoon, Mr. Jethro 'Cracker' McLeary, from Talladega, Alabama.

Cracker nods at Zack without expression.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Cracker? He's Evangelical, you know? And his war cry - 'Let's kill a Commie for Christ!' - is an inspiration to us all.

Jimmy ignores Cracker's scowl, and the others' laughter. Turns to leer at Nita.

INT. MESS HALL BUNKER - NIGHT

Dinner over, bottles half empty, the band plays on. Nita, Zack and the other officers, even Cracker, tip up their glasses, suck on opium bongs, shout in glee.

Jimmy holds up a hand to call a halt to the drunken laughter.

JIMMY

Hullo? Enough of this shit. You know? Enough awready!

He reaches out to pat Poo-Ying on her pretty bottom while she serves him another drink.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

How 'bout it, girl? One of them dances you do?

She hesitates, shy. Glances at Nita.

POO-YING  
 (strong Lao accent)  
 You dance wit' me, Nittaya, na? I  
 got costume fo' you.

The two women sail off into another room to change.

A MOMENT LATER

INT. MESS HALL BUNKER - NIGHT

They emerge barefoot, in colorful native garb and ankle bells.

The band strikes up.

Like a pair of antique Asian dolls, they perform a slow, smiley, head-bobbing dance.

When they finish, the entire party rises as one to clap and cheer.

EXT. JUNGLE FRINGE BEHIND LATRINE - NIGHT

Zack walks out to the bamboo latrine shack. Steps behind it. Makes sure he's alone. Consults his watch. Pulls out a little radio and a pair of ear phones. Slides the aerial up.

ZACK  
 (whispering)  
 Come in, Boston. You there?

Silence while Zack listens to the other person on the line.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
 Plenty. But first, I want you to  
 run a check on his chief medic.

He listens.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
 I don't know. Just a little too  
 good to be true. Know what I mean?

Silence.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
 How you know that?

Listens.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
And he personally endorsed her?

Zack smiles to himself.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Okay, fine. Now about--

Silence.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Well, aside from being a dope  
dealer, an opium addict, an  
alcoholic, and a military  
incompetent, the man is fucking  
insane. You know what he did today?

EXT. AID STATION - DAY

Zack plops through the mud to the Aid Station Bunker. Leans  
in the doorway.

ZACK  
Nita? You in there, girl?

Nita runs up the stairs into the light.

Zack grins in appreciation of her beauty.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
How 'bout a little self-guided  
orientation tour?

NITA  
You think Jimmy will approve?

ZACK  
Fuck Jimmy.

EXT. FIREBASE JULIET - WESTERN PERIMETER - DAY

They start their tour with Defensive Bunker Number 5. The  
Hmong mercenaries inside wave. Smile. Go back to puffing at  
their opium bongs.

EXT. NORTHERN PERIMETER - DAY

Just outside the northern perimeter, a trash dump teems with  
skinny children and old women.

ZACK  
Lookin' for garbage?

NITA  
Maybe. But more likely? Rats.

ZACK  
Oh yeah. You people serve 'em up as  
a special treat. Right?

NITA  
You find us barbaric?

ZACK  
Hey, I don't mind a little  
barbarism.

NITA  
No?

A big grin.

ZACK  
Not if it comes in the right  
package.

She whacks him on the shoulder.

EXT. EASTERN PERIMETER - DAY

A green terraced field of poppies just beyond the eastern  
perimeter. A line of singing women in colorful tribal garb,  
babies slung over their backs.

ZACK  
What they singin' about?

NITA  
They're asking the *Phi* for a good  
opium harvest.

ZACK  
Who's 'the *Phi*'?

NITA  
The *Phi*? They're spirits. They're  
everywhere in these mountains.

Zack bursts into incredulous laughter.

ZACK  
And all that reincarnation shit?  
You believe in that, too?

NITA  
I'm a Buddhist, Zack.

ZACK  
Alright, so tell me somethin'.  
You and me? We gonna meet up in  
another lifetime?

NITA  
It will have to be then.

She shakes her head.

NITA (CONT'D)  
Look, Zack, Jimmy and me...

Zack winces as if struck in the face.

ZACK  
Don't wanna hear about it.

EXT. SOUTHERN PERIMETER - DAY

They walk around to a hill at the south end of the firebase where the Hmong tribesmen and their families live in thatch and bamboo hootches built on stilts.

They pass an open market.

Stop in front of a Buddhist temple. There, a fat, bald, happy MONK (50) in saffron robes and 'chankla' sandals sits on the steps, surrounded by a group of laughing children.

Nita bows to the monk with her hands pressed to her mouth. He rises to welcome her in a like manner.

NITA  
*Sabaidi.*

MONK  
*Nyob zoo.*

NITA  
*Than mikhoanaenoa soalabkan phusai  
sidoa?*

The monk laughs. Stands. Whispers in her ear.

She turns to Zack.

NITA (CONT'D)  
I asked him if he had any words of  
wisdom for the *phusai sidoa*.

ZACK  
What's a phusai sioda?

NITA  
Uh... black foreigner?

Zack seems taken aback for an instant.

ZACK  
Oh yeah? And what're those words of wisdom?

Nita flicks her fingers to indicate a quotation.

NITA  
'All the flowers of tomorrow are in the seeds of today.'

Zack shakes his head in bewilderment.

ZACK  
And can you please ask him what he means by that?

Nita and the laughing monk whisper again.

NITA  
He says, 'Go plant a seed and find out.'

ZACK  
Tell him I'd be happy to. But I'm afraid you won't oblige me.

Nita laughs, wriggles a finger at him, turns toward the monk again to translate.

The monk points from Zack to Nita, slaps his knees in glee.

NITA  
*Phraongdai fan.*

MONK  
*Sividaemn fan. Subtokan!*

Nita laughs again. Waves bye at the monk. Leads Zack off down the road.

ZACK  
So what was that all about?

NITA

I told him what you said, and he said, 'All of life is a dream. So dream on, man, dream on.'

They both crack up.

INT. COMMAND POST BUNKER - NIGHT

Nita and Poo-Ying drag the inebriated Jimmy down the stairs. Into his cubbyhole bedroom. Lay him out on his sleeping mat. Stand over him until he starts to snore.

They step back out to the main room. Sit cross-legged together in a far corner. Exchange a familiar look.

POO-YING

(Lao, subtitles)

So Vang sent you?

NITA

Yes, he and Kalea thought you could use some help. But first things first. Where's your escape exit?

POO-YING

Oh. A tunnel out the back.

She points toward the rear of the bunker.

POO-YING (CONT'D)

And a path through the minefield on the perimeter. Right down to the river. I'll show you tomorrow.

NITA

Most impressive.

POO-YING

Jimmy told me about it. 'In case we ever get overrun,' he said.

NITA

How thoughtful of him.

POO-YING

Yes. And you know what he's got planned for next week? An attack on Vang at Ban Lou.

NITA

No! How'd you get that news?

POO-YING  
Men are so easy to manipulate.

NITA  
Sure. If you're willing to give  
your body and soul to do it.

EXT. PARADE GROUND - DAY

Boom-Boom and Cracker lead Zack toward the parade ground where the three platoons of Love Company await inspection. They halt together in front of Zack's 2nd Platoon.

The Hmongs carry obsolete assault rifles, wear tattered American uniforms, but they flash happy smiles at Zack.

ZACK  
Guess they don't miss their old  
platoon leader too much.

BOOM-BOOM  
Yeah, old Doobie Jenson? Bloody  
'ard driver, that one.

CRACKER  
(Southern accent)  
Heavy dooper, too.

BOOM-BOOM  
An' rather profligate with 'is  
men's lives, he was.

ZACK  
How'd he die?

CRACKER  
'Friendly Fire.'

Boom-Boom swings around to face Zack. Gives him a significant look.

BOOM-BOOM  
Seems he 'ad a fatal fascination  
for Jimmy's li'l Poo-Ying. Know  
what I mean?

Zack seems prepared to ask a question, but Boom-Boom ignores it to address the platoon.

BOOM-BOOM (CONT'D)  
Second Platoon, ten-shun!

The native troops drop their smiles, snap to attention.

BOOM-BOOM (CONT'D)  
Platoon Sergeant, Squad Leaders,  
step forward.

Kai-Po, Gee, and Vora's replacement PANIT (22) come to attention, click their heels, salute.

KAI-PO  
Suh!

GEE  
Suh!

PANIT  
Suh!

Slight, yellow-skinned, Panit looks like he might have some Chinese blood.

CRACKER  
Corporal Panit, this here is your  
new Platoon Leader, Special Agent  
Zack Brown.

Panit steps forward and salutes.

PANIT  
Suh!

Cracker turns toward the platoon again.

CRACKER  
Now I want y'all to welcome your  
new leader.

SECOND PLATOON  
Hoo-ah, hoo-ah, hoo-ah!

EXT. BEHIND LATRINE - NIGHT

Behind the latrine, on the fringe of the jungle, Zack crouches over his radio.

ZACK  
The men on his defensive perimeter  
smoke opium bongs. His outdoor  
market is full of vendors from off  
base. Any one of them could be a  
Pathet Lao informer. His Hmongs aid  
and abet his incompetence, and  
his...

Silence while he listens.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
No, I ain't written nothin' down.  
It's all...

Silence.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Witnesses? Everyone in this fuckin'  
place is a witness.

Silence.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Right.

He starts when he hears the sound of footsteps, the crunch of leaves.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Gotta go now. Over and out.

Zack pockets his radio. Turns to see Nita slip around the outhouse.

NITA  
Who you working for?

ZACK  
You been smokin' opium?

NITA  
I saw you talking into your radio.

Zack hesitates. Mulls his options.

ZACK  
Sorry, girl. Can't tell you that.

NITA  
Why not?

ZACK  
Military secret.

NITA  
A military secret, eh? Then you  
won't object if I tell your  
commander, will you?

ZACK  
Know what? I'd prefer you didn't do  
that.

NITA

I see. Then we can infer that Jimmy is your target, *na*? And since I doubt you're any kind of Communist, I suspect that you're a CIA investigator, looking into his 'eccentric' behavior.

ZACK

You can 'infer' what you want, Nita. But--

NITA

All right. I won't say a word. But you owe me one, Zack.

He nods.

NITA (CONT'D)

And there may come a time when I want to collect.

ZACK

How 'bout right now?

He takes her in his arms. She resists for a moment, then surrenders. After a long, passionate kiss, he leads her into the jungle.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

They fall to the grass. Their bodies move together. On the verge of succumbing, she shivers. Shakes her head. Then leaps to her feet and runs back toward the base.

INT. COMMAND POST BUNKER - NIGHT

Nita and Poo-Ying chat in Lao while Jimmy snores loud and long in the other room.

POO-YING

Come on, Nita, tell me.

NITA

Who do you think?

Nita assumes a comic, pensive expression. Raises her eyes to the ceiling. Lets them drop. Then switches from a grin to a frown in an instant.

POO-YING  
Wait a fucking minute. You're  
not...

Nita cannot conceal her emotion.

POO-YING (CONT'D)  
No! Not with that--

Furious now, Poo-Ying gets right up in her face.

POO-YING (CONT'D)  
Stop acting like some kind of  
Bourgeois bitch, with only yourself  
to consider. I swear, if you blow  
this for that American bandit? I  
will...

EXT. BATHING POND - FIREBASE JULIET - DAY

Jimmy and Poo-Ying stand naked in the water. Poo-Ying scrubs  
his vast grey-haired back with a soapy brush.

JIMMY  
You are fuckin' kiddin' me.

POO-YING  
No. I no lie, Jeemy. That black  
boy, he come spy on you. Mel, he  
send him.

JIMMY  
I'll kill the sonofabitch.

POO-YING  
Get in trouble that way. I got  
better idea. Next time you in  
action? Let Pathet Lao do job for  
you.

Jimmy roars with laughter. Sweeps her off her feet. Swings  
her around. Lets her fly. She flops in the water with a  
girlish giggle.

JIMMY  
My little genius!

EXT. JUNGLE MEADOW - NIGHT

SUPER: The Phou Dendin Valley, five miles north of the Pathet  
Lao base at Ban Lou.

In the light of a half-moon, a large Twin-Pak chopper hovers a few feet above a grassy LZ.

Zack and his platoon of native soldiers leap into darkness, into a storm of dust and waist-high elephant grass.

The helo clatters off while another flares to land.

Zack motions for his men to spread out, and they follow him into the tree line.

EXT. JUNGLE TREELINE - NIGHT

Jimmy stands before Love Company. After a long sip at his flask and a puff at his opium bong, he crooks a finger at his officers.

JIMMY

Okay, New Meat? You're on point.  
Boom-Boom? You're on slack. And  
Cracker? You're tail-end Charlie.

The officers return to their platoons.

EXT. JUNGLE TRAIL - NIGHT

Nita runs up to Zack as he leads the company into the jungle.

NITA

Surprise.

ZACK

Thought you were supposed to be  
setting up your aid station.

Nita rolls her eyes.

ZACK (CONT'D)

But I'm, I'm glad you--

NITA

Why?

She locks eyes with him.

ZACK

You know why. I--

Nita puts a finger to his lips. Steps off to the side of the trail. Pulls him with her.

NITA

Come here. I got something for you.

Sticks a hand in her pocket. Slips out a good luck charm - a bronze Buddha head on a leather thong. Starts to tie it around his neck. But he steps back.

ZACK

Hey, what's this?

NITA

A little extra insurance.

ZACK

And why am I gonna need that?

Nita whacks him on the shoulder.

NITA

You dense? Jimmy put you, his 'New Meat,' the officer who knows least about this terrain, at the head of the column.

ZACK

I did kind of wonder about that.

NITA

Just keep your head down, Zack.

Nita reaches up. Ties the medal to his neck. Tucks it under his bush jacket. Pats him on his stubbled cheek.

ZACK

Nita, this...

He chokes up with emotion.

ZACK (CONT'D)

I swear. This is...

She touches a finger to his lips again.

A few yards behind them, Jimmy views their intimate, emotional exchange. And if looks could kill...

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - MORNING

Armed with automatic rifles, machine guns, mortars and RPGs, Vang, Kalea and their men lie in ambush.

Vang scopes Love Company as it steps out of the jungle into a narrow valley. Grins at Kalea.

EXT. VALLEY - MORNING

Zack walks through elephant grass with his platoon, the rest of the company stretched out behind him.

His scouts stop ahead of him, distracted.

When Zack catches up, they point to the ridge above them on the right.

KAI-PO  
I see light.

ZACK  
What?

GEE  
Sun shine on gun. There, see?

Zack raises his binoculars, spots sun on metal just as Jimmy runs up with his radio man.

JIMMY  
The fuck's the hold-up here?

Zack points to the ridge above.

ZACK  
We got company.

Jimmy scopes the valley ahead and the mountains above.

JIMMY  
Shit.

He stamps his foot. Spits his quid of red betel juice on the ground.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Those fuckin' gooks. They're waitin' for us. You know?

ZACK  
Yup.

Jimmy turns on Zack.

JIMMY  
Some traitorous motherfucker--

Jimmy draws his sword, whacks the air with it, glares at Zack as if he might be at fault.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
--Let the cat outta the bag.

Zack just stands before him. Waits for a command.

ZACK  
So what do we do now?

JIMMY  
What do we do? We about fuckin'  
face, New Meat. Beat feet for the  
LZ.

ZACK  
Yes sir.

JIMMY  
Switch with Cracker. He's point  
now. You're tail-end Charlie. Hold  
'em back while we retreat.

Zack sniffs. Shakes his head in understanding. Heads off to execute his orders.

Jimmy yells after him.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
End of story. It's all a fuckin'  
game!

Jimmy motions for his radio man to step forward. Puts the mic to his mouth.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Apple to Blue Leader. We're in a  
world of shit here. Ambush. Yeah.  
Air cover now. Exfil at LZ. Eight  
hundred hours.

Jimmy gestures to the other platoons.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Retreat, retreat!

Zack's platoon follows in their tracks as they hasten back up the trail toward the jungle.

Somewhere on the mountainside above a mortar fires: POP.

ZACK  
Incoming!

Everyone hits the dirt.

The mortar round whizzes down toward them and explodes nearby: BOOM.

Tracer rounds float down from the heights, zing into rocks beside the trail, whine off into the distance.

Zack and his platoon hold back the enemy while the others race toward the protection of the narrow canyon and its triple-canopy of jungle.

EXT. TREELINE - DAY

Deployed just inside the jungle treeline, Zack's 2nd Platoon faces back toward the valley.

A line Pathet Lao soldiers rises up. Marches through the tall grass. Fires non-stop. Sprints up the gentle incline. Ducks. Weaves. Drops when hit by fire from the Hmongs.

A Lao peasant BOY (16) with a bad complexion and squinty eyes runs toward Zack with an AK-47 at his hip, his mouth stretched so wide in a battle cry that his gold teeth show.

Zack and the boy fire at the same time. Zack hits him in the heart. Gets smacked in the same place. The bullet digs a trough in his flak vest. Blows him back on his ass.

The boy takes another step. Wilts on Zack. Snuffles against his arm like a small hurt child. Dies.

EXT. JUNGLE TRAIL - DAY

Noontime. Jets and attack helicopters roar overhead. Blitz the enemy artillery positions with napalm and 500 pound bombs.

Yet the enemy keeps firing, and ricochets hum about Zack's platoon, kick up dirt, smack into the trunks of trees.

Corporal Panit trips over a fish line tied to a tree stump. It snaps. Panit stares down at it with his mouth wide open. BOOM. When the dust clears? No more Panit.

EXT. LANDING ZONE - DAY

Afternoon. Love Company, exhausted, much diminished, everyone wounded in some way, forms a perimeter on the edge of the LZ, faces back the way it came.

Nita and her medics come around to tend them, and soon she reaches Zack.

ZACK  
You okay?

NITA  
Me? You're the one who's wounded.

ZACK  
What? Where?

Zack looks down at a wound in his thigh.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Well I'll be goddamned. Didn't even  
feel it.

NITA  
You'll feel it tomorrow, I can  
assure you.

Nita cleans, binds the wound. Injects him with something.  
Smiles. Squeezes his arm, flashes a reassuring smile. Heads  
off on her rounds.

LATER

LANDING ZONE - DAY

The sun hovers just over the mountains. Jets and helos circle  
overhead. The radio crackles. Jimmy grabs the mic from his  
radio man.

UNKNOWN PILOT (V.O.)  
Apple 4-2, Green Team Leader. Mark  
your Bravo Zulu with smoke. Over.

JIMMY  
Roger that, Green Team Leader.

Jimmy gestures for Cracker to throw out a phosphorous grenade  
in the direction of the enemy. It explodes. Sends up a plume.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
I have smoke. Confirm?

UNKNOWN PILOT (V.O.)  
Roger that, Apple 4-2. Got it in  
sight. Over and out.

Cobra attack helicopters roar overhead, strafe and bomb the  
enemy.

A pair of A-1 Skyraiders drop napalm canisters.

Pathet Lao guerillas, engulfed in flames, dance a grotesque jig.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Vang, Kalea and their few remaining guerillas crawl for Jimmy's perimeter. Fire their weapons as they go.

EXT. TREELINE - NIGHT

Just inside the jungle foliage, Boom-Boom and two of his men lie behind a tree, firing at the advancing enemy.

A mortar shell whistles down from above.

They dive behind a fallen tree.

BAM.

BLACKNESS.

The sound of tree limbs and debris smashing to the ground.

EXT. LANDING ZONE - NIGHT

The jungle in flames.

The LZ cratered with smoking bomb holes.

Dead bodies all around.

Jimmy rises from behind the tree where he and his radio man lie. Shouts into the mic.

JIMMY

Apple 4-1 to Green Team Leader.  
Call in the choppers. Dust off in  
five. Repeat in five. Otherwise,  
forget about it, you know?

EXT. SKY ABOVE LANDING ZONE - NIGHT

Five big helos swoop over a nearby ridge.

One of them gets hit by an RPG. Explodes. Falls in flames.

Another, struck by machine gun fire, starts smoking, turns to head back for its base.

EXT. LANDING ZONE - NIGHT

The three surviving choppers flare to land.

Everyone on the American side races for them in a panic.

Zack looks for Nita, frantic. Finds her. Grabs her.

Runs with her and Cracker for the last helo on the ground.

EXT. FRINGE OF LANDING ZONE - NIGHT

Vang, Kalea and their soldiers rise up and charge.

The door gunners on the choppers fire at them non-stop.

But that only slows them down a bit.

INT/EXT. - LANDING ZONE - NIGHT

Crammed full of fighters, taking fire from every direction, the chopper, piloted by a FAT LIEUTENANT, starts to lift off.

Zack and Cracker hoist Nita aboard. Cling to the edge of the doorway.

Bullets ping into the fuselage. Whistle through one open doorway and out the other.

The helo hovers a few feet above the ground. Strains to gain altitude.

FAT LIEUTENANT

That's it. Kick 'em off. We can't bear any more weight.

ZACK

We ain't goin' nowhere.

FAT LIEUTENANT

Negative. Negative. Get off or nobody makes it.

Though bleeding from a wound in his side, Jimmy wastes no time whipping out his pistol and swinging it around at Zack and Cracker.

JIMMY

Jump, you pukes, or I'll blow you're fuckin' brains out.

A 60 caliber machine gun round strikes Cracker in the head. Sprays Jimmy with blood and brains.

While Jimmy wipes his face and eyes in disgust, Zack's Hmongs reach down. Drag him aboard. Hide him among themselves.

The chopper dips its nose. Lumbers off down the valley. Trails smoke. Tracer fire pursues it.

EXT. VALLEY - NIGHT

Wounded in the arm, Boom-Boom digs himself out of the dirt and foliage that cover him. Two Hmongs lie bloodied beside him, with no sign of life.

When Boom-Boom hears the last helicopter depart, he jumps up. Runs after it. Waves with his good arm.

BOOM-BOOM  
Oy, wait, you buggers. Wait, wait!

IN/EX. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

Jimmy spots Boom-Boom below, running after the chopper, waving.

He reaches for a rope and halter hanging on the fuselage wall. Tosses it down to Boom-Boom.

The Fat Lieutenant clocks it and turns around to face Jimmy, furious.

FAT LIEUTENANT  
Hey, I thought I told you! No more weight!

Jimmy grabs a TEENAGE HMONG by the scruff of the neck and throws him out the chopper's open door. He screams like a baby all the way down.

JIMMY  
That oughta do it.

All his recent efforts seem to have worsened his wound, and he winces in pain when he looks down at it seeping fresh blood.

IN/EX. HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Unable to gain more than a few feet in altitude, the helicopter sputters along.

Then one of the Hmongs points toward a high razorback ridge line that looms out of the jungle floor, and everyone gasps.

JIMMY

Aw, fuck.

Smoking, sputtering, the chopper nears the ridge line.

The pilot pours it on.

Everyone holds their breath as the helo skims over the tops of trees, and limbs and leaves scrape its metal hull.

Then their mouths drop in wonder and relief when a vast jungle plain appears before them in the moonlight.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL - DAY

SUPER: Royal Thai Air Force Hospital, Nakhon Phanom.

Hair straggly, lipstick smeared, scrubs soiled, a weary Nita steps out of the ICU ward and trudges down the hallway.

About to step into the cafeteria, she lights up when Zack hobbles toward her on a cane.

All smiles, they hasten toward each other. Wrap their arms around each other. Kiss on either cheek. Then she leads him toward the cafeteria.

NITA

Good to see you up and about. I  
Guess a week in bed is enough for  
you, *na*?

ZACK

Depends on who it's with.

NITA

Shush!

INT. CAFETERIA - NIGHT

They sit at a table together, chatting.

NITA

...Oh, and Jimmy's wound! A lot  
more serious than we thought.  
Intensive Care Unit for at least  
another two weeks. Bad luck, *na*?

ZACK  
Terrible.

They share a happy grin.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - DAY

In tank tops, shorts and flip-flops, Zack and Nita walk down to the grassy riverbank. Zack carries a picnic basket. Nita carries a straw mat. Zack no longer uses a cane, but still limps a bit.

After a look at the fishing canoes and long-tailed cargo boats, they lay down their mat and picnic basket under a mango tree.

Zack peels off his T-shirt, shows off his six pack. Goes goggle-eyed when Nita strips to an itchy-bitsy pink bikini.

ZACK  
So tell me something', Nita. Why're you the only girl in Southeast Asia that wears a bikini in public?

NITA  
Come on, Zack.

She sniffs, shakes her head, mocks him.

ZACK  
I mean, in Nam? Even the whores went into the water dressed up like Victorian ladies.

NITA  
Hey! I studied in France for seven years. France? Where the bikini was invented? And besides, when you get to know me better? You'll see I'm not like other Asian girls.

ZACK  
No?

NITA  
No. I've become a bit... decadent and European.

She takes his hand. Leads him out into the brown, muddy river. Zack wants to follow her out deeper. But she shakes her head. Points to his thigh wound.

While they gesture at each other, a pair of dirty, ragged little native urchins appear on the shore behind them, load up with all their picnic things, and run off down the beach.

Zack and Nita spot them, and splash ashore.

Nita races after them, shrieking threats in Thai, and chases them down.

Zack limps up. Helps her wrestle them to the ground. They kick, bite, scream and curse, but seem too small and thin to put up much resistance.

After Nita deprives them of their booty, she scolds them like a schoolteacher.

NITA (CONT'D)  
(Thai, subtitles)  
Now go on, get out of here. If you  
ever do that again, I will...

Finished with her lecture, she reaches into her recovered handbag. Pulls out some money. Bequeaths it to them with a dry grin and a pat on their heads.

NITA (CONT'D)  
Get lost!

The boys giggle and run off, the money gripped in their hands.

Arm in arm, laughing, Zack and Nita tote their things back to their place on the beach.

LATER

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - DAY

Zack and Nita work to build a castle of sand and mud at the water's edge.

ZACK  
If it falls? It means we won't  
last.

NITA  
And if it stays up?

ZACK  
Together forever.

NITA

*Zut, alors.* I never knew you had that kind of faith, Zack.

ZACK

And what is faith, my dear, but willful ignorance?

NITA

See? I always knew you were a cynic.

A big cargo boat putt-putts close to shore. The waves of its wake strike the castle. Seem close to bringing it down.

Shrieking like excited children, they redouble their efforts. And their little mud castle stands up to everything the river throws at it.

They buttress its walls. Smooth out a little garden. Carve a terrace.

Nita finds two little driftwood fragments. Sets them up in the garden.

NITA (CONT'D)

This is you.

She pokes Zack to get his attention.

NITA (CONT'D)

And this is me, *na*?

Zack looks at her in a certain way.

NITA (CONT'D)

Oh, right.

She finds a smaller piece of driftwood. Sticks it into the sand beside the two larger ones.

NITA (CONT'D)

This is a half-grown one. He's a boy.

Now she gets a tiny stick. Places it beside the other three.

NITA (CONT'D)

This is the baby. She's a girl.

They both look like they could die of bliss.

EXT. NAKHON PHANOM - NIGHT

Zack and Nita leave the hospital. Make their way through the teeming city to a small down-scale hotel. Step inside.

INT/EXT. HOTEL, ROOFTOP, ROOM - NIGHT

They climb the winding stairs, enter their rooftop room. Spare but clean, it has a single bug-buzzing bulb for light. A long filmy white mosquito net flares out over the bed.

But they only have time to give it a cursory glance because a moment after the door clicks shut a tremendous explosion rends the air, shakes the walls, and they rush back outside.

EXT. MILITARY BASE - NIGHT

Over the parapet, across the Mekong River, on the Laotian side, a large military base has gone up in flames.

EXT. ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

Zack stands with his mouth hanging open, too surprised to exclaim, as secondary explosions light the sky. But Nita seems quite unruffled, even when the ammunition dump blows.

ZACK

What the fuck is that?

NITA

Lao Navy base.

ZACK

Navy? Laos is a hundred miles from the sea.

NITA

Yes, Zack, but we have four hundred miles of navigable river.

ZACK

So...

Nita gives him a significant look.

NITA

It will not be long now.

Zack shrugs as if to shut out her words, turns toward their room.

ZACK

Can we just forget about the war,  
for once?

Nita grabs him by the arm, stops him in his tracks, looks him  
in the eye.

NITA

Listen, Zack. Listen. You can ask  
me anything right now.

ZACK

Anything?

NITA

Yes, and I swear I'll tell you the  
truth.

Pause.

ZACK

You know what? I don't think I'm  
ready for that yet.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Back inside their room, all sound ceases.

Their clothes float away as in a dream.

Nita sweeps the mosquito net open, pulls Zack down on top of  
her.

The blaze outside illuminates their bodies as they make  
silent, slow motion love behind the filmy mosquito net.

When they come, their eyes clamp shut and their mouths fly  
open in wonder and despair.

INT. MEL'S OFFICE - DAY

Zack sits across the desk from Mel.

MEL

Jimmy's onto us. That maid of his  
ratted you out.

ZACK

What?

MEL  
Just got orders from Langley: 'Cut  
the spying. Lose the evidence.'

Zack's mouth hangs open in disbelief.

MEL (CONT'D)  
His grease, man. With the military.

ZACK  
So where's that leave us?

MEL  
Me? I just got posted to Mogadishu,  
Somalia.

ZACK  
No fuckin' way!

MEL  
Yup.

ZACK  
And me?

MEL  
Go kiss Jimmy's ass. Tell him you  
were only following orders. He's so  
short-handed now? He might just  
take you on.

ZACK  
Now why would I want to do that?

MEL  
Hey, you signed up for a year,  
dude. And a year it will be. Either  
here, or Mogadishu.

INT. NITA'S OFFICE - HOSPITAL - NAKHON PHANOM - DAY

Nita sits at her desk. Looks up from a patient's folder in shock when Zack slams open her door and stomps across the room at her in a fury.

ZACK  
Why'd you tell her? Why?

NITA  
Who?

He leans across the desk at her, gets right up in her face.

ZACK  
You know who. Poo-Ying!

NITA  
About what?

ZACK  
Stop playin' dumb.

NITA  
I told her I liked you. What's  
wrong with that?

She rises to her feet, reaches out for him. He slaps her hand away.

ZACK  
You told her I was spying on Jimmy.  
That's what you did. No wonder he's  
been after my ass.

NITA  
I'm so sorry, Zack. I was just--

ZACK  
Fuck off!

He stalks out. Slams the door behind him.

She lays her head on her desk and cries.

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

The chopper flies north along the Mekong with seven passengers aboard:

Jimmy, Zack, Nita, Boom-Boom, a Laotian man named PHUN SIRI (31) and a new American: ALFONSO GARCIA (28).

JIMMY  
(shouting to be heard)  
Now lemme introduce our New Meats.  
Awright?

He points to the stocky pug-faced little Latino.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Agent Alfonso Garcia from San  
Diego, California.

Alfonso dips his head, smiles.

Jimmy turns to the big, fierce-looking Laotian man.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 And this guy? Sergeant Phun Siri.  
 One of the Pathet Lao defectors we  
 been bringin' in to replace our  
 KIA's.

Phun Siri aims a challenging look at his onlookers, daring them to say something about him being a turncoat.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 Now all we gotta do is give 'em  
 their radio code names. You know?  
 Any suggestions?

No one says a word.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 No problem.

Jimmy points to the ugly Latino.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 You? You are--

He pauses for effect.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 Valentino!

After everyone stops laughing, Jimmy points to the savage-looking Laotian man.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 And you? Let's see. You are--

Pause.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 Sweet-Cakes!

When the laughter dies down, Jimmy stands up front to address everyone on the chopper.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 Awright, soon as we're back at the  
 base? We start trainin' for our  
 next mission.

ALFONSO  
 What kind of mission?

JIMMY  
 Skate Duty.

Jimmy sweeps his hand before him, cocks his head and sniffs.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Slack City.

ZACK  
(sardonic)  
Right Jimmy. A cakewalk. Just like  
Ban Lou.

Jimmy points a finger in Zack's face.

JIMMY  
Hey, from you? I don't wanna hear  
nothin'. Awright? You're lucky to  
be here, after your sneaky-ass  
betrayal, and--

NITA  
Excuse me, Jimmy. But could we  
please hear about our next mission?

JIMMY  
Wha? Yeah. All we do is--

Jimmy waggles his fingers.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
'Verify success of attack.'

NITA  
And what exactly does that mean?

JIMMY  
We un-ass at the target zone a day  
after the bombing. Right? We're  
wearin' gas masks. Okay? Then--

ALFONSO  
Hey, what kind of attack we talkin'  
about here?

JIMMY  
Nothin' we have to do, man. Leave  
it to the fuckin' Air Force.

NITA  
So Jimmy, I'm afraid I don't quite--

JIMMY  
M-139.

NITA  
What's that?

ZACK

Nerve gas.

Nita looks like she's about to go into shock. And she isn't the only one.

ALFONSO

Ain't this a little late in the war, Chief? For that kind of shit? I mean, from what I hear, they're about to sign that peace treaty in Paris.

JIMMY

Lemme tell you somethin', man. That motherfucker Commander Vang, in Ban Lou? He killed half my company. Awright? Not to mention my dog, Busta. And I will pursue his ass, and his woman Kalea, to the grave.

ALFONSO

I can dig that. But ain't nerve gas a little overkill?

NITA

Yes. And what of the women and children?

Jimmy points at them all.

JIMMY

You know what we say in Special Ops?

ZACK

Yeah, I know. But I don't like it.

Jimmy points his finger at Zack, smacks his thumb down like the hammer of a .38.

JIMMY

Kill 'em all, and let God sort 'em out.

INT. MESS HALL BUNKER - NIGHT

As rainfall batters the tin roof, Zack, Nita, Alfonso, Boom-Boom and Phun Siri sit over dinner while Poo-Ying refills their drinks. Zack and Nita sit at opposite sides of the table and avoid eye contact.

BAM. The bunker door slams open. They all look up in surprise.

Wet, frowning, furious, Jimmy appears in the doorway. Aims a ferocious look at Nita. Clammers down the stairs. Drags a young Lao boy clad in an American jungle fatigue uniform behind him.

When the boy throws off his dripping fatigue cap, both Zack and Nita go big-eyed.

Zack recognizes him as the boy who tipped the grenade into his truck cab.

Nita recognizes him as the boy she abandoned back in the schoolhouse hospital.

JIMMY

This is Corporal Lilo Racha. He's one of our new Pathet Lao defectors. Lilo, can you speak English?

LILO

Yes, yes suh.

JIMMY

So tell us what you gotta say, kid. Awright?

Lilo takes his time to answer, glares at Nita and Zack, cracks a vengeful smile.

They both get the message and tense up.

LILO

Yes. Two year ago, I study in Vientiane high school. Big Brother, he make me join Pathet Lao. We attack Hmong convoy. Brother die.

He points at Zack. Starts to tremble and sob.

LILO (CONT'D)

This man... this man, he shoot me in the back. I almost die.

Pauses to wipe a tear away.

LILO (CONT'D)

(furious)

This one. Doctor Nittaya Aromdée,

He points at Nita.

LILLO (CONT'D)  
 She Pathet Lao medical cadre.  
 Communist, like her father. He good  
 man. Save my life. But she...

Lilo interrupts himself to point at Nita with loathing.

LILLO (CONT'D)  
 She run away and leave me to die.  
 And they send her to spy on you, I  
 think.

Nita ignores her fellow officers' looks of shock and dismay.  
 Turns to Jimmy.

NITA  
 (official tone)  
 Jimmy, I shall have to speak to you  
 in private now about something that  
 is designated 'Top Secret.' I can  
 divulge it only to you, and only in  
 an emergency situation such as  
 this.

Jimmy chooses not to reply for a moment. Squints up his eyes.

JIMMY  
 Everybody out.

Still dealing with their shock, nobody moves.

Jimmy slams the table with the flat of his hand.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 Out!

ZACK  
 Wait a second. I got as much a  
 right to--

JIMMY  
 Out!

Reluctant, Zack and Jimmy's other officers obey his command  
 and leave the bunker.

Last up the steps, Zack turns to shake his head in anger,  
 sadness and disappointment.

Nita responds with a silent plea for understanding.

LATER

INT. MESS HALL BUNKER - NIGHT

Jimmy and Nita sit together at his table. Jimmy sips at a tall glass of whiskey.

Poo-Ying hides out in a corner.

Rain continues to batter the roof overhead.

JIMMY

So you're some kinda triple agent?  
That what you're sayin'?

Nita nods, tense.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Hullo? You think I'm gonna swallow  
that shit?

EXT. FIREBASE JULIET - NIGHT

Zack and Boom-Boom make their way toward their home bunker. Rain drives down on them with typhoon force.

Zack shakes his head. Waves his companion off. Doubles back toward the command post bunker.

INT. COMMAND POST BUNKER

Jimmy and Nita still sit at his table.

Poo-Ying still lingers in a corner.

NITA

So lock me up, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Hey, you lyin' to me? I don't have  
to lock you up.

Jimmy jumps to his feet. Grabs Nita around the neck with his huge left hand. Bangs her forehead down on the table so hard it knocks his whiskey bottle over and it rolls to the floor.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

All I gotta do?

With his right hand he whips out his sword, raises it high.

While Poo-Ying looks on in horror, he slams it down. Chops a crevice in the wood beside Nita's ear. Sends splinters flying.

A MOMENT LATER

INT. COMMAND BUNKER

Jimmy still holds Nita facedown on the table, but now he looks sad, tearful.

JIMMY  
How could you do it to me, Nita?  
After all I done for you. How could  
you do it? Huh?

He raises the sword again.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Now spill it. Or you know what?  
You're dead meat.

Nita's face goes purple. Her eyes pop out of her head.

WHAM. The bunker door slams open.

Zack stands in the doorway, stares big-eyed at the scene before him.

ZACK  
Let her go, man.

Zack pulls his pistol out. Aims it at Jimmy.

JIMMY  
She's a fuckin' Commie, you stupid  
shit. A spy! Who's side you on,  
anyway?

ZACK  
Let's just calm down, Jimmy. If  
she's dead, how you gonna get  
anything out of her?

Jimmy appears to reflect on his words, but continues to hold Nita down by the neck.

Meanwhile little Poo-Ying picks up a large gas cartridge from beside her cooking stove, creeps up behind Jimmy, raises it high, slams it down on his head with both hands, and he drops like a stone, face first.

Her face contorted with anger, Nita grabs Jimmy's sword off the floor, raises it high, and is about to slam it down on his neck when Zack catches her arm, forces the sword out of her hand, and slips it into his belt.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Come on, let's get outta here.

Furious, the two women stand before him, immovable.

NITA  
What? You'll let this monster live?

ZACK  
He's my commanding officer. I kill him? The CIA will hunt me to the grave.

NITA  
You let him go? I'll hunt you to the grave.

ZACK  
No you won't.

NITA  
And why not?

ZACK  
You love me.

She bursts into tears.

EXT. TRAIL ABOVE RIVER - NIGHT

Despite their struggle down a crumbling switchback trail in a torrent of rain, and despite Poo-Ying's obvious disapproval, Zack and Nita find time to bicker with each other.

ZACK  
You was just usin' me the whole time, right?

NITA  
Maybe, at first, yes. But later I--

ZACK  
I knew who you were. It was just--

NITA  
I can never forgive you, Zack, and your CIA, for what you did to my father, my people.

ZACK

And I'll never forgive you, Nita.  
For what you did to the boys in my  
platoon.

NITA

Your 'boys' were Hmongs. Traitors  
to their own country.

ZACK

Traitors? You Laotians always  
treated the Hmongs like shit.

NITA

What? I cannot even--

Nita halts in mid-sentence when Poo-Ying loses her footing in the mud, rolls over the cliffside, grasps for a vine, and swings out over the abyss, wild-eyed, shrieking in fear.

Zack grabs her arm, tries to drag her back up onto the trail, but she slips from his grasp, falls backward, and wails like a terrified child till she smacks the river below.

Nita falls to her knees in the mud and rain and sobs her heart out.

EXT. THE TRAIL ABOVE - NIGHT

Kai-Po and Gee scout down the trail in heavy rain, following Zack and Nita's tracks.

Jimmy (head bandaged), Boom-Boom, Alfonso and a platoon of Hmong enlisted men follow them, all well armed. One of them lugs a radio. Several carry flashlights.

JIMMY

Take five! Bring me that fuckin'  
radio!

EXT. RAPIDS - MORNING

On the banks of the swollen river, Zack and Nita struggle to build a homemade bamboo raft in the rain.

When they hear their pursuers near, they shove off into the swollen river, though their raft seems a bit rickety.

EXT. RIVER BANK - MORNING

Jimmy and his men reach the misty riverbank just in time to see Zack and Nita whirl off down the rapids.

JIMMY  
Stop, you sonofabitch. She's a  
fuckin' Commie. A spy!

When Zack offers no response, Jimmy signals his men to fire on the raft.

EXT. RIVER - MORNING

Bullets zing into the river around Zack and Nita. They throw themselves overboard and dive deep.

The flooded river sweeps them downstream, out of range of the automatic weapons fire.

EXT. RIVER BANK - MORNING

When Zack and Nita disappear into the rain and mist, Jimmy gestures to his radio man. Grabs the mic.

JIMMY  
Black Fire 3 to Giant 7. Target in  
the river, headin' downstream.

He hands the mic back to his radio man, then motions to Boom-Boom.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Gimme some smoke, man.

Boom-Boom shakes his head, looks regretful, then fires off a phosphorus flare. It falls over the river, burns through the mist like the sun. But the couple and their raft have disappeared round a bend.

IN/EX. HELICOPTER - MORNING

Lilo rides behind a YOUNG PILOT, with a hand perched on his shoulder.

He jerks his head, points to a pair of hazy figures swirling downstream in the rapids.

LILO  
There, there!

EXT. RIVER - MORNING

A loud roar echoes down the gorge. Zack and Nita whip their heads around in fear. A Cobra Attack Helicopter with rocket pods underneath streaks out of the mist and rain at a hundred feet.

ZACK  
Dive, dive!

They plunge deep underwater.

INT. CHOPPER - CONTINUOUS

YOUNG PILOT  
Where's the target?

LILO  
There! Can you not see them?

The pilot stares at where Lilo points. Sees nothing but an empty raft. Shakes his head.

LILO (CONT'D)  
Trust me. Just fire there.

The pilot fires his machine guns and two rockets.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Zack floats down the river alone, surrounded by fallen trees, dead animals, floating bamboo peasant huts.

Then Nita emerges from the rain and mist.

Zack spots her. Swims toward her.

They grab hold of each other. Let the current have its way with them.

There comes a time when they can swim no longer. Their eyes grow dim. They swirl toward the bottom.

With a last desperate effort, Zack swims upward, drags Nita behind him.

When they reach the surface at last, they focus on something remarkable:

A bamboo and thatch-roof village perched on a terraced hillside, only a little way downstream.

They both close their eyes, shake their heads in disbelief. Yet when they open them again, the village still rises before them.

It's Sop Pong, the same that we saw bombed in the beginning.

INT. HUT - MORNING

Nita wakes in a coughing fit. When it passes, she opens her eyes, finds herself on a bed of rotted straw. Rain splatters on the roof above her. The swollen river sounds below.

She looks across the dirt floor of a small, square room toward an open window, through which she sees nothing but rain and mist.

To her left a fire crackles in an old stone fireplace. To the right Zack leans against a bamboo wall, sullen.

NITA  
Where are we?

ZACK  
Damned it I know.

NITA  
How long did I sleep?

ZACK  
Thirty-six hours.

NITA  
Anybody here except us?

ZACK  
Nope. But they ain't been gone long. Maybe just waitin' for us to leave.

INT. HUT - NIGHT

Firelight. Zack and Nita sit apart. Nita begins to weep.

NITA  
Poo-Ying, she was such a tough little girl. You know? I thought she was indestructible.

ZACK  
I'm sorry.

NITA  
Are you really?

ZACK  
You know, one of the things I  
learned in war? Even your enemies,  
they're human, too.

Nita gets up. Sits down beside Zack. Lays her head on his  
shoulder. Closes her eyes.

INT. HUT - MORNING

Zack and Nita lie huddled together near a fading fire.

Zack cocks his ear to a noise outside, where the rain  
continues.

A Pathet Lao guerilla pokes his head in the open doorway,  
quickly pulls it out.

Another guerilla does the same.

ZACK  
We got company.

NITA  
I noticed.

They both stand up.

NITA (CONT'D)  
Stay here. Let me handle this.

She steps to the entrance of the house.

NITA (CONT'D)  
(Lao, subtitles)  
I am Secret Agent Nittaya Aromdée,  
Pathet Lao Identity Number S87092.  
This man is my prisoner.

The two guerillas enter the house laughing, slapping their  
thighs in glee.

NITA (CONT'D)  
What are you laughing about?

The FIRST GUERILLA (19) raises his fists toward the roof of  
the hut, shakes them, shrieks with happiness.

FIRST GUERILLA  
(Lao, subtitles)  
Cease fire, cease fire!

The SECOND GUERILLA (17) holds a hand out, puts his fingers together, signs a make-believe document.

NITA  
What?

FIRST GUERILLA  
We signed a peace treaty in  
Vientiane.

Zack runs up to Nita.

ZACK  
What? What'd he say?

Overcome with emotion, Nita takes a moment to reply.

NITA  
The war... it's over!

Zack takes her in his arms, laughs for joy. But Nita doesn't seem so sure of her feelings.

NITA (CONT'D)  
So what about--

ZACK  
Us?

She nods.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
How about a truce?

She looks like she can't believe her ears.

NITA  
A truce?

Zack smiles.

ZACK  
Yeah. Why not? I'm tired of  
fightin'. Aren't you?

Nita jumps all over him like a twelve year old.

The two guerillas look on goggle-eyed, mouths hanging open, as if unable to fathom why she might want to show affection for her former enemy.

NITA  
A truce, a truce!

EXT. JUNGLE CLEARING - DAY

Rain continues to fall.

The two guerillas guide Zack and Nita into a clearing where Vang, Kalea, and their guerillas have set up camp.

Vang and Kalea rise, come to meet them.

NITA  
(Lao, subtitles)  
Is it true?

Kalea runs up to Nita.

KALEA  
Yes, Nittaya. Can you believe it?

They laugh, embrace, dance around together.

Nita gestures toward Zack.

NITA  
So he's... not a prisoner.

Vang sneers.

NITA (CONT'D)  
He's... he's to be released, right?

Vang raises his pistol. Points it in Zack's face.

VANG  
We'll say we hadn't received the  
news yet.

Nita whips out her gun.

Vang hears it. Turns from Zack.

Nita shoots him in the head.

He drops his pistol. Falls dead.

Kalea shrieks, pulls out her gun, aims at Nita with a trembling hand.

Zack swoops down, grabs Vang's pistol off the ground, fires at Kalea.

Kalea starts to crumple. Raises her pistol.

NITA  
No, Kalea, no!

Kalea aims at Zack.

Nita and Zack fire as one.

Kalea drops face first in the mud.

The guerillas in the background just stand silent, too shocked to react.

Nita looks down at Kalea with pity in her eyes.

Zack grabs her by the arm, and they flee into the jungle.

The guerillas take a few seconds to collect their thoughts and fire at them. And when they do, they aim high.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - MORNING

A bright sunny day.

Zack and Nita run down a levee, their rucks bouncing up and down on their backs.

A long-tailed boat with a dragon prow starts to pull out into the river.

Nita hails its dark, wizened old tiller man.

He looks them over. Scans the top of the levee. Nods at last. Waves them aboard.

Zack throws their rucks down. Takes a seat in the prow.

Nita speaks to the helmsman in Lao. Slaps some money in his hand. Makes him laugh about something.

He cranks up his antique motor, putt-putts out into the river.

Nita crawls forward. Takes a seat beside Zack. Looks back the way they came.

An expression halfway between joy and sorrow crosses her face. She turns to Zack.

NITA  
(whispering)  
Goodbye, Laos.

Zack nods in sympathy.

NITA (CONT'D)  
How do you say in English? 'I burnt  
all my--'

ZACK  
'--Bridges.'

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Makes two of us.

She nods.

NITA  
So what's next?

ZACK  
Damned if I know.

NITA  
Well, wherever we end up? Think of  
it this way.

She puts her arm through his. Looks up at him.

NITA (CONT'D)  
Love has no country.

ZACK  
No?

She shakes her head.

NITA  
(sincere)  
No. It's a whole world in itself.

They laugh together, staring into each other's eyes.

EXT. HILL ABOVE THE RIVER - DAY

Jimmy and his men, including Boom-Boom, who looks distraught seem happy, stand on the hill above the river with a view of the boat, the tiller man, and the lovers.

Sneering, then grinning in pleasure, Jimmy motions to a Hmong soldier holding an RPG.

JIMMY  
Fire!

The RPG rocket flies for the rickety old long-tailed boat in silence, in slow motion.

The camera rises into the sky as the boat, the tiller man, the two young lovers, the great muddy river, all fall away into the green curve of the earth.

THE END