

BOUNCING BETTY

Screenplay

by

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BLACK SCREEN

Huey helicopter rotor blades wallop the air at a distance. The sound of their laboring intensifies upon approach.

A static-laden radio transmission--

HUEY CO-PILOT (V.O.)
Alpha, be advised: one-one-niner has a visual. Engineer batallion en route to LZ, over.

R.T.O. SOLDIER (V.O.)
That's affirm, one-one-niner. Alpha standing by.

FADE IN

EXT. VIETNAM - RICE PADDY FIELD - DAY

TIGHT on the camo pattern cover of a combat helmet.

Scrawled across the pattern in black ink - "MAKE WAR NOT LOVE". Tucked inside the helmet band - an ace of spades playing card and an M-16 bullet.

The glistening, sun-battered face under the helmet is that of RYDER (22), an infantry grunt with a tour's worth of jungle soil trenched in every skin crease.

An o.d. rucksack burdens Ryder's back, canteen pouches and an ammo belt hang from threadbare fatigues, an M-16 in his grip. Ryder stands stock-still. His bloodshot blue eyes squint past a spray of rotor-swept murky water toward--

THE DESCENDING HUEY HELICOPTER

scatters mud and reeds inside a waterlogged parcel of marsh - one of dozens fortified by a square-shaped grid of earthen dikes.

At a safe distance past the Huey's dipping skids, a line of mucky INFANTRY SOLDIERS spans an embankment - every man on one knee, M-16s ready. A treeline of sugar palms borders the paddy field at the foot of verdant hills.

Ryder peers through the rotor stir, holds a concentrated stare on the aircraft cabin.

The boots of two COMBAT ENGINEER SOLDIERS splash into the the paddy field from the grounded Huey. Donning fatigue caps and flak vests with gear dangling from the webbing, the Engineers trudge side-by-side toward Ryder.

Push past the approaching Engineers to reveal a third, similarly-accoutred combat engineer - BROCK (22), a black man with a compact physique.

Brock slushes out of the Huey's shadow, spies Ryder.

Ryder's brow rumples as he recalls--

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. VIETNAM - BASE CAMP - DAY

FLASHBACK. Through a whirling haze of red dirt kicked up by Huey traffic, Brock emerges, flanked by a zigzag of SOLDIERS who fix equipment, haul ammo, fill sand bags.

In stark contrast, Brock is the newbie; clean-shaven, close-cropped hair, fatigues and face unblemished by the brutal sun, a pristine duffel slung over one shoulder. He moves forward tenuously. His guiltless eyes pan the camp.

Brock paces past a group of weary LRRP SOLDIERS caked in jungle remnants. His spotless name patch stands out.

IN THE BASE CAMP BARRACKS AREA

Brock approaches a line of structures fashioned from wood and canvas and mesh screening, fortified by stacks of sand bags. Amongst them--

RYDER'S BARRACK

Three shirtless, roughneck GRUNT SOLDIERS - all of them white - smoke, chug beers, joke, chat in the dusty heat.

Their smiles falter as they lock eyes with Brock. They track Brock with scoffing stares.

Brock continues past the men; nothing he hasn't seen or managed before. His eyeline finds the entrance to the barrack. A burly figure emerges from the shadow of plywood and canvas - Ryder.

Ryder leans against the door frame. A Confederate Flag hangs from a bunk behind him. He spots Brock.

Ryder blows a trail of cigarette smoke from his mouth, raises a beer can to his lips for a gulp. His steely stare never veers from Brock.

Brock holds on Ryder - not about to start anything, but not about to defer either.

BACK TO:

EXT. VIETNAM - RICE PADDY FIELD - DAY

Brock halts in front of Ryder, registers his face.

EXT. VIETNAM - BASE CAMP BARRACK - DAY

FLASHBACK. Ryder - eyes aglare at Brock - lowers his beer can, wipes his mouth, spits in front of the newbie.

BACK TO:

EXT. VIETNAM - RICE PADDY FIELD - DAY

Brock's look dips to Ryder's jungle boots. Brock crouches to his knees in front of Ryder for a closer view of the earthen mass on which Ryder is standing. Brock retrieves a bayonet from his belt as he focuses on the mass.

EXT. VIETNAM - SIN CITY DISTRICT STREET - NIGHT

FLASHBACK. Brock - bathed in shards of neon from signs above shanty bars and brothels - stumbles drunkenly along a buzzing street, a precarious grip on a bottle of mystery liquor. He pauses to regain balance and take a swig.

BACK TO:

EXT. VIETNAM - RICE PADDY FIELD - DAY

Brock lifts his dirt-caked bayonet from the earthen mass below Ryder. Brock leans in, cranes his neck for a better look. He now sees he has dug completely around the makings of a bouncing betty landmine on which Ryder stands.

Brock peers closely under Ryder's boots. He sees a three-pronged detonating plunger caught between two boot cleats. Brock looks up at Ryder. The men eye each other.

EXT. VIETNAM - SIN CITY DISTRICT STREET AND BAR - NIGHT

FLASHBACK. BROCK draws a long swig from his liquor bottle, turns his attention toward rhythmic MUSIC and the festive ruckus of SOLDIERS hooting and clapping OFFSCREEN.

He squints in the direction of the noise. It pulsates from the open door of a lively bar mere paces from him.

Brock stumbles into the doorway. His blurry eyes try to pinpoint the source of the action--

EXT. VIETNAM - SIN CITY DISTRICT AND BAR / INT. BAR - NIGHT

The revelry inside the bar crescendos. Brock's view pans across drunken SOLDIERS - all white, ear-to-ear grins. They guzzle beers, drag from cigarettes, grip stacks of MPC bills, pull levers on slot-machine-style games.

A group of grinning SOLDIERS clap, hoot, cheer, and encourage as they all look in the same direction. Brock follows their look and sees---

A GO GO DANCER

A stunning, sexy Vietnamese girl (20s) in a skimpy sequin bikini; long black hair, flawless skin. She gyrates in perfect rhythm with an ALL-MALE BAR BAND who pluck twangy surf guitars and knock out a primal drum beat.

The Go Go Dancer smiles suggestively, steps from side to side, swishes and sways her hips, spins around and waves her arms above her head then slides them around her exquisite body curves. The soldiers shout for more.

Brock's look shifts from face to face of the soldiers who admire the Go Go Dancer. He catches the eyes of--

RYDER

behind the hollering group - beer in one hand, cigarette in the other. Ryder's glare is trained on Brock.

A Grunt Soldier - one of the three Brock spotted near the barrack at the base camp earlier - stands next to Ryder. Ryder leans into the soldier's ear, says something to the man but his scowling eyes never waver from Brock.

The Grunt Soldier turns to look toward Brock. The whirlwind of party activity continues around them as they glower at Brock.

Brock - not aggressive but not fearful - scans the bar a last time, meets a smattering of glaring faces, and understands that he is not welcome nor would he even desire to step inside the bar.

Brock locks eyes with Ryder, takes a step back into the gleam of neon and darkness in the street.

BACK TO:

EXT. VIETNAM - RICE PADDY FIELD - DAY

Brock's focus turns from the plunger caught in Ryder's boot cleats back to Ryder's face as he rises from the mucky berm that surrounds the exposed landmine.

INT. BASE CAMP BARRACK - NIGHT

FLASHBACK. Brock bumbles past rows of beds choked by plywood and olive drab canvas. He barely acknowledges a Confederate Flag hanging from a bunk.

Brock lumbers toward his bed - in a shadowed corner. He raises the liquor bottle to his lips for a drag, but pauses mid-step and lowers the bottle, eyes trained on--

BROCK'S BED

A thick length of manila rope fashioned in the shape of a noose rests ominously on the bedsheet.

Brock stares at the noose; as if he stares beyond the noose. His look is of disgust, frustration, anger, disappointment, disillusion.

BACK TO:

EXT. VIETNAM - RICE PADDY - DAY

Brock stands directly in front of Ryder. The men eye each other. Brock raises a length of rope between them - fashioned in a loose loop shape, resembling a noose. Ryder looks at the rope, looks back at Brock.

BEHIND A MUD EMBANKMENT

The span of Infantry Soldiers - one behind the other - kneel in the murk several meters behind Brock. Their faces are tense as they look on.

BROCK

slips the rope over Ryder's head. He guides the rope around Ryder's shoulders, down to Ryder's waist. Brock gently tightens the slack on the rope.

He locks eyes with Ryder as he steps back toward the line of Infantry Soldiers.

INT. BASE CAMP BARRACK - NIGHT

FLASHBACK. Brock stands at the edge of his bed, his thousand-yard stare trained on the noose.

BACK TO:

EXT. VIETNAM - RICE PADDY - DAY

Ryder studies the line of Infantry Soldiers, tries to look less defeated than he feels.

Brock approaches the line of Infantry Soldiers, kneels into the murk - first in line before all of them. He grips a length of rope that leads from the knot around Ryder's waist and over to him and the group of Infantry Soldiers.

Brock secures his grip, eyes toward Ryder. Ryder eyes Brock. With full force, Brock and the Infantry Soldiers tug the rope backward in unison.

Ryder's body rockets forward.

A powerful explosion erupts from the earthen mass under Ryder's feet - mud, water, and smoke cannon into the sky.

ON A MUDDY EMBANKMENT IN THE RICE PADDY

A large chunk of black rubber from the sole of Ryder's boot tumbles and settles.

IN THE MURK OF THE RICE PADDY

Ryder - sprawled out on his stomach - rises from the dark water, surveys his person; he is alive, unharmed. He looks toward the line of Infantry Soldiers, spots Brock.

Brock emerges from the murk, having been thrown back by the force of the blast. He exhales, eyes on Ryder.

Ryder looks at Brock; the man who could not have mattered less to him just saved his life.

Brock stares back at Ryder; The question *would he have done it for me* does not even enter his mind. He did his job.

FADE TO BLACK