

Captain America: Fortunate Son

by Tristan Fuller

Issue: 3 - Childhood on Every Acre

ONE (5 panels)

Panel 1: Black dots, close together. [A macro view of the receiver of Quinn's radio. We can't tell what it is yet.]

QUINN:
Mayday, mayday, mayday.

Panel 2: Zoom out a bit. We can now see that the dots are on the receiver of Quinn's radio. Quinn's speaking into it.

QUINN:
This is RTO Quinn Bechet of the 26th
Infantry Brigade. Please respond. Over.

Panel 3: Zoom out farther. Everyone gathers around Quinn as he speaks into the radio. James is on a stretcher. Steve crouches in the middle of the frame, flanked by his squad; an ersatz Last Supper.

QUINN:
Lo Giang was an ambush. One of our men is
badly wounded; he needs medical attention.

Panel 4: Zoom even farther out, up and away from the huddled group. We're in the trees, looking down at them.

QUINN:
We're stuck in the jungle east of the
hamlet. We need IMMEDIATE medevac at our
location. Please advise.

Panel 5: We're way above the group and the treetops now. The soldiers are just dots on the ground [in the same pattern as the dots from Panel 1.] To the west, Lo Giang and the jungle burn.

QUINN:
I repeat, PLEASE advise. Over.

CREDITS:
Chapter 3: Childhood on Every Acre

TWO (6 panels)

Panel 1: Back to the boys. They all look at Quinn, on the radio, waiting impatiently.

BOB:
 ...Well?

QUINN:
 SHHH.

GREG:
 Maybe you're not dialed in to the right frequency.

QUINN:
 Just give it a SECOND, man--

BOB:
 Jesus. MOVE, kid--

Panel 2: The radio spits out garbled words amidst the static. Quinn's eyes light up.

RADIO:
 ksshk This is Danang Airbase. Reading you loud and clear, soldier. ksshk

QUINN:
 Oh, thank FUCK.

Panel 3: The team celebrates as Quinn hands Steve the transceiver.

QUINN:
 Cap! We've got someone on the line!

Panel 4: Steve talks into the radio, now standing.

STEVE:
 This is Captain Steve Rogers. I'm the CO here. We need a medical airlift. Immediately.

RADIO:
 ksshk Who? ksshk

STEVE:
 sigh Captain AMERICA. Over.

RADIO:
 ksshk What? OH. ksshk Oh GOD--CAPTAIN. ksshk

Panel 5: Steve pushes the receiver as close to his ear as he can, and plugs the other ear with his index finger.

RADIO:
 ksshk Uh...I'm sorry, sir. ksshk We can't..uh, we can't do that. Over. Ksshk

STEVE:
Sorry, son, I think we have some
interference on our side. Repeat that.
Over.

Panel 6: Steve, his eyes wide.

RADIO:
kssshk We can't send a chopper. ksshk

THREE (5 panels)

Panel 1: The Super Soldier gets gut punched by the news over the radio.

STEVE: (SMALL)
What?

RADIO:
ksshk Lo Giang wasn't the only place that
got hit. We don't HAVE any helicopters for
evac. ksshk

Panel 2: Full shot. Everyone looks up at Steve, who isn't talking anymore.

RADIO:
ksshk Even if we DID, no helicopter could
get anywhere CLOSE to your location.
You're in the densest jungle in VIETNAM.
Over. ksshk

Panel 3: Steve looks back at Quang and Nhat Lôc, who have pushed themselves back into a tree [The reader won't know their names until Page 8.]

CAPTION:
There has to be a way out. Can't Let these
men die.

CAPTION:
Can't let these CHILDREN die.

CAPTION:
THINK, goddamn it.

Panel 4: Steve starts to speak again, a hand on his hip.

STEVE:
Where's the closest field hospital from
our location?

RADIO:
ksshk One that's still STANDING? I don't
have that infor--

STEVE:
Then FIND OUT. Over.

RADIO:
ksshk ...yes, sir. One moment, sir. Over.
ksshk

Panel 5: Steve perks up, recognizing the name.

RADIO:
ksshk Ok, it looks like the closest
hospital is innn....Quang Ngai. ksshk

STEVE:
QUANG NGAI.

CAPTION:

DUGAN is stationed there. He was headed there right before this fiasco.

CAPTION:

Right now, that's got to be the safest place in VIETNAM.

FOUR (4 panels)

Panel 1: Steve allows himself a sliver of hope.

STEVE:
Ok, now we're talking. How far is it from here?

RADIO:
kssk ...A little over 140 klicks SSE, sir.
ksshk

Panel 2: That sliver pierces him like a nail.

CAPTION:
No.

STEVE:
Please tell me there's somewhere closer.

RADIO:
ksshk I wish I COULD, sir. ksshk

Panel 3: Steve is wrestling with the news, pinching the bridge of his nose.

CAPTION:
God DAMN it.

STEVE:
...ok. OK. Tell whoever you have to that we're on our way.

RADIO:
ksshk Yes, sir. And for what it's worth, I'm sorry, sir. My hands are tied. ksshk

Panel 4: A long shot. The jungle dominates the panel, dwarfing the tired soldiers.

STEVE:
Yeah. Well...

STEVE:
We'll update you on our progress when we can.

RADIO:
ksshk Good luck, sir. Over and out. ksshk

FIVE (7 panels)

Panel 1: Everyone in the squad looks at Steve, talking over each other. [No balloon tails; a very cramped panel.]

GREG:
Cap, what's happening--

JAMES:
Is the chopper coming?

QUINN:
What did they say, sir--

STEVE:
They can't send a chopper. Looks like a lot of places were hit hard by the VC.

JAMES:
Are you serious?

BU KY:
Captain, what are--

Panel 2: Steve takes charge, raising his voice.

STEVE:
STOP. Everybody just COOL it. Here's the plan.

STEVE:
We're headed to Quang Ngai. There's a field hospital there; they'll be able to fix James.

Panel 3: Bu Ky speaks, a pained expression on his face.

BU KY:
Captain...There's no way we can walk all the way there.

Panel 4: Steve gestures over towards James, on the stretcher.

STEVE:
Bu Ky...What else is there?

STEVE:
It's what we HAVE to do.

Panel 5: A moment of silence falls on the group as their heads hang low.

Panel 6: Same as previous. Lifting their heads, Bu Ky speaks. Quinn and Greg are behind him.

BU KY:
Ok. Let's go.

QUINN:
...Yeah. Yeah, we're with you.

GREG:
I'm ready when you are, Captain.

Panel 7: Back to a grateful Steve.

STEVE:
Ok. Good.

STEVE:
It's late; we're gonna camp here tonight
and get moving in--

BOB (OP):
Wait.

SIX (5 panels)

Panel 1: Bob sits on the ground, digging a hole in the dirt with his combat knife. He barely looks up.

BOB:
What about the kids?

Panel 2: Steve looks over at Bob, preparing himself to hate what the sergeant has to say.

STEVE:
What ABOUT the kids, Sergeant?

BOB:
I mean, they're not OUR people. No offense, Bu Ky.

Panel 3: Steve and Bu Ky stare at Bob, incredulous.

BU KY:
Sergeant. They're CHILDREN.

STEVE:
They need our HELP.

Panel 4: Bob raises his eyebrows, frustrated (but not surprised) that his CO isn't thinking rationally.

BOB:
So they'll be needing our C RATIONS, too?

STEVE:
Bob, I'm not even going to PRETEND to consider what you're suggesting.

BOB:
I'm just saying, two more mouths to feed. And when they learn what you did to their mom--

Panel 5: Steve cuts Bob off, turning away from him towards the Quang and Lôc.

STEVE:
THAT was an ACCIDENT. And THIS isn't a discussion.

SEVEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: Steve kneels in front of the children. Lôi cowers behind his sister, who protects the boy with her body. Cap offers his hand to Quang.

STEVE:
Sorry about him. Everything's fine. It's all right.

QUANG:
<Please don't hurt him.>

STEVE:
Do you speak English? English?

Panel 2: Quang hugs Lôi tight. She's starting to cry.

QUANG:
<Take me. Not him. Please. We're sorry.>

Panel 3: Bu Ky intervenes, bending down next to Steve.

BU KY:
Captain, you're SCARING them.

BU KY:
<It's okay. We're not here to hurt you. It's okay.>

Panel 4: Quang, now confused, looks up at Bu Ky.

QUANG:
<But--but you TOOK us-->

BU KY:
<To SAVE you.>

BU KY:
<I know he's an American, but he's on OUR side. Please trust me.>

Panel 5: Bu Ky addresses Steve.

STEVE:
Ky, what's happening? What are they saying?

BU KY:
I told them it's alright. That you're one of the GOOD guys.

BU KY:
Go slow.

EIGHT (5 panels)

Panel 1: Steve points to himself.

STEVE:
Hi. I'm Steve. STEVE.

Panel 2: He points at the girl.

STEVE:
What's your name? Your NAME.

Panel 3: The children are letting their guard down, little by little.

QUANG:
...Nhat Thi Quang.

QUANG:
QUANG.

LÔC (SMALL):
...Nhat Lôc.

Panel 4: Steve offers his outstretched hand to Quang once again. She looks at his hand, unsure whether to shake it or not.

STEVE:
Hi, Quang. Nice to meet you.

Panel 5: She accepts the handshake gingerly.

QUANG:
...Xin chào.

BU KY (SMALL):
That means hello.

NINE (7 panels)

Panel 1: Steve puts his hand out to Lôi.

STEVE:
Hey, Lôi. Xin chao.

Panel 2: Lôi stuffs his face into his sister's shirt, holding tight.

CAPTION:
It's my fault they're homeless.
MOTHERLESS.

CAPTION:
I will make this right. I HAVE to make
this right.

Panel 3: Steve points at the coin attached to a string around Lôi's neck.

STEVE:
Hey, that's a cool necklace. What is it, a
coin?

BU KY:
<He says he likes your necklace. What is
it?>

Panel 4: Lôi peaks out from behind his sister's shirt.

LÔI:
<...Lucky coin.>

QUANG:
<Our mom gave it to him. For Tet.>

BU KY:
It's a lucky coin. His mom gave it to him.

STEVE (SMALL):
Oh.

CAPTION:
Their mother...

Panel 5: Still kneeling, Steve holds his dog tags up.

STEVE:
Hey look, we match. I've got a lucky
necklace too.

BU KY:
<He says that you match. You both have
lucky necklaces.>

Panel 6: The kid smiles, just a bit, and nods his head.

STEVE:

We're gonna get you and your sister
someplace safe. Is that ok?

BU KY:

<We're going to get you to a safe place.>
Dông ý?

LÔC:

...Dông ý.

Panel 7: Steve puts a hand on Lôi shoulder and smiles, not quite successfully hiding the pain behind that smile.

STEVE:

Good. You two stay with me and you'll be
just fine.

CAPTION:

Maybe I've done too much already.

TEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: Night. A makeshift camp has been erected, a small fire in the center. Quinn sits on one end of a log, Steve on the other. The others are in various states of rest. Bob has distanced himself from the group, leaning against a tree and smoking.

QUINN:
Hey, uh, Captain?

STEVE:
What do you need, Quinn.

Panel 2: Quinn hands Steve a comic book and a pen.

QUINN:
Well, I was wondering if...I mean, I've been reading your comics since I was in elementary school.

Panel 3: Close on the comic cover. It's a well worn Kirby-era Captain America comic.

QUINN:
Could you...could you sign it?

CAPTION:
Didn't even know they wrote comics about me. I've been gone so long...

Panel 4: James props himself up on his elbows to join the conversation.

JAMES:
I knew it. He's been waiting to ask you that since DA NANG. What a fanboy.

QUINN:
Hey, QUIT it, man. When's the next time we're gonna be stuck in a jungle with an honest to God superhero?

BOB (OP):
Huhn.

Panel 5: Bob speaks from the shadows, leaning up against a tree, a lit cigarette in his mouth.

BOB:
Some "hero."

ELEVEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: Steve looks over at Bob. Quinn is shocked.

STEVE:
Did you NEED something, Sergeant?

BOB:
Not a damn thing, "Captain."

Panel 2: James speaks up. Bob responds without making eye contact.

JAMES:
Jesus, Sarge. Give it a REST.

BOB:
You don't GET it, kid. I've seen these
superhero types before. Doing whatever
they want. Don't even care about their OWN
PEOPLE.

Panel 3: Flashback. Riots on the streets of Harlem. Tear gas, riot gear, and rubber bullets. Broken windows and screaming protesters. Bob comes face to face with Luke Cage, who towers in front of him.

BOB:
Back in '64, I was a beat cop in Harlem.

BOB:
Some "upstanding citizens" got riled up,
so us boys in blue had to calm 'em down.
Woulda been fine if Cage hadn't shown up.

Panel 4: Quinn is figuring it out, the cogs in his mind spinning.

QUINN:
waitaminute... '64? LUKE Cage?

QUINN:
You were at THAT riot? The one where one
of you people shot that colored kid in
cold blood--

Panel 5: Back to Bob. Triangular shadows flicker over his face in the firelight.

BOB:
You people? Look who's talking, BOY.

TWELVE (5 panels)

Panel 1: Bob pushes himself off the tree he's been leaning against and points towards Steve or Quinn; we can't tell which since they're sitting next to each other.

STEVE:
SERGEANT, that's enough--

BOB:
Goddamn CRIMINALS. You people think you're
above the LAW.

Panel 2: Quinn stands up and shoves his nose inches away from Bob's.

QUINN:
Who? Superheroes? Or us BLACK folk? That's
what you mean, isn't it?

Panel 3: Bob looks dead at us, his lips curled in a snarl.

BOB:
Let's just say, if Cage wasn't
bulletproof? I woulda shot that boy in the
HEAD.

Panel 4: Quinn lunges at Bob.

QUINN:
Fuckin' PIG--

Panel 5: The two tussle. They grapple each other. Steve and Greg are swooping in to break it up before it becomes a real fight.

BOB:
Get this fuckin MONKEY off me--

STEVE:
SERGEANT! Stand DOWN!

THIRTEEN (6 panels)

Panel 1: Steve restrains Bob, who spits at Quinn. Greg pushes Quinn back.

GREG:
Quinn, man, he's not worth it!

QUINN:
Seems PLENTY worth it to me--

STEVE:
I said that's ENOUGH!

Panel 2: Steve pushes Bob away from him.

STEVE:
You--You are WAY out of line. Stand down
or I'll have you court marshaled so fast
your head will spin.

BOB:
Is that right? You and whose army?

Panel 3: Back to Steve. His quiet anger is diffused with disappointment.

STEVE:
You know I don't need an army, Bob.

STEVE:
Stand down. That's an ORDER.

BOB:
...Yes, sir.

Panel 4: Bob has lost, and you can tell he doesn't like losing. He quietly fumes, clenching everything.

STEVE:
Oh, and Bob? Thanks for volunteering to be
lookout while the rest of us sleep.

BOB:
What? I didn't--

STEVE:
Yes, you DID. Understand?

BOB:
...My pleasure.

Panel 5: Steve checks on Quinn and Greg. Quinn's walking it off; Greg is playing defense.

STEVE:
Quinn, you ok?

QUINN:
Captain, I...yeah. Yeah, I'm GOOD.

Panel 6: Steve stands near the fire as it burns down to the last embers, putting himself between Quinn and Bob.

STEVE:

Good. Get some sleep. We've got a long day tomorrow. Until then, we get along. Ok?

QUINN:

Yes, sir.

BOB:

...Yes, sir.

FOURTEEN (6 panels)

Panel 1: Black.

SFX (SOFTLY):
AAAAAAAAAA

Panel 2: Steve's eyes snap open as he wakes to distant screams.

CAPTION:
Screams.

Panel 3: Night. In the jungle. Steve jolts upright and looks around the campsite. The fire is dying. Everyone is waking slowly, roused by the screams. Bob is conspicuously absent. Bu Ky is alert.

GREG:
What was that? Did anyone hear that?

QUINN:
Jesus Christ, WHAT, man? Can barely sleep
and now THIS--

BU KY:
QUIET. Where are Bob and the girl?

Panel 4: Steve looks behind him, towards the scream.

CAPTION:
Where--

SFX (SMALL):
AAAAAA

CAPTION:
No.

Panel 5: Steve crouches, already on the move, giving orders.

STEVE:
Quinn, stay here with James. Bu Ky, with
me.

Panel 6: He creeps through the trees away from the campsite, fast. Bu Ky is behind him, a little farther away.

CAPTION:
I know that scream. I've heard it so many
times before: from the lips of little boys
with stars on their clothes, decades ago.

FIFTEEN (6 panels)

Panel 1: Tiny feet peek out from the darkness. Steve sees them and stops dead in his tracks.

CAPTION:
Involuntary. Instinctual. Hopeless.

CAPTION:
I run towards the sound and pray that the
screaming will stop.

Panel 2: Nhat Quang lies motionless on the ground, her throat slit.

CAPTION:
It does. It always does.

Panel 3: Steve drops to his knees, trying to stop the bleeding from Quang's neck with his bare hands. Blood smears everywhere. Bu Ky stands behind him.

STEVE:
Get me something to stop the bleeding.
Now.

BU KY:
Captain—

STEVE:
A tourniquet or a bandage or a goddamn
shirt or—

BU KY:
Captain—

Panel 4: Steve barks an order over his shoulder.

STEVE:
I said NOW.

Panel 5: Bu Ky puts a hand on Steve's shoulder. Steve looks down, face covered in shadow.

BU KY:
Captain. Look. We're too late. I'm sorry.

Panel 6: Full shot. Steve is small in the oppressive, humid night.

CAPTION:
No. Not again.

SIXTEEN (6 panels)

Panel 1: Bu Ky and Steve look back as they hear Quinn shout. Instinct takes over.

QUINN (OP):
JESUS, Sarge—

LÔC (OP):
<HELPPP>

STEVE:
Go around. Stay low.

Panel 2: Steve runs through the jungle back towards the campsite. We can see silhouettes around the dying fire.

BOB (OP):
Aghh FUCK little mook BIT me—

Panel 3: OTS Steve, we see Bob holding Lôt by the throat with a pistol to the boy's head. Bob's hand is bleeding.

BOB (OP):
I swear to God—just stop struggling—

Panel 4: Close on Steve.

STEVE:
Bob. Put the gun DOWN. That's an order.

Panel 5: Bob waves his gun around, wildly gesticulating.

BOB:
NO. No more orders. Not from you. All you've done since we got stuck in the fuckin bush is give orders. You don't know where we're going. You don't understand this war.

Panel 6: Steve negotiates. Bu Ky crouches in the darkness, watching.

STEVE:
What I understand is that I'm your SUPERIOR OFFICER. Put the gun down and let the kid go.

STEVE:
Lôt, just look at me. Everything's going to be all right.

SEVENTEEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: More talking. Lôc is weeping; snot runs down his face.

BOB:
Don't you get it? I'm trying to SAVE us.
We're not gonna make it out of this
goddamn jungle if we keep giving our
rations to these MOOKS.

Panel 2: Steve is slowly trying to creep closer.

STEVE:
So, what? Now you're a babykiller?

BOB:
Cut the boy scout routine. I'm not the one
who made this kid an ORPHAN.

Panel 3: The words hit Steve like a punch to the chest. Bob points the gun at Steve, gripping Lôc tight.

BOB:
Let me finish what I started. I will get
my men out of this jungle, with or without
you, "Captain."

Panel 4: Steve and Bob look off panel as they're interrupted by a—

SFX:
click

Panel 5: Greg sits near the fire, the camera pointing at Bob.

GREG:
oh.

EIGHTEEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: Bob swings his gun around to shoot at Greg. Steve pushes the sergeant's arm upwards and he misses.

BOB:
Give me that camera NOW—unggh—

SFX:
BANG

CAPTION:
Have to get him on the ground—

Panel 2: Steve and Bob fight. Silhouettes in the dark. The gun flips out of Bob's hand.

CAPTION:
Can't let him hurt Lôt—can't see him—

Panel 3: Bob was lucky; he's on top of Steve. They both look at the gun as it skids to a stop, right in front of Lôt.

CAPTION:
No—the GUN—have to get to it before—

Panel 4: Bu Ky runs towards them, emerging from the edge of the firelight. Bob starts rushing towards the gun.

STEVE:
Get the GUN—

Panel 5: A hand wraps around the pistol grip.

NINETEEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: Bob has the gun and Lôi again.

BOB:
Move and I pull the trigger.

Panel 2: Steve screams at Bob. Bu Ky stops a few feet behind Steve, now dead in his tracks.

STEVE:
GODDAMN it, Bob! This isn't what we DO!

Panel 3: OTS Steve and Bu Ky, we see Bob.

BOB:
What was it that you said?

BOB:
It's what we HAVE to do.

Panel 4: Close on Bob. Blood splatters on his face.

SFX:
BANG

Panel 5: Bob tilts his head. Blood drips out of his mouth.

BOB:
what?

TWENTY (5 panels)

Panel 1: Bob goes down. Behind him, Quinn is holding a smoking gun. Greg is on the ground behind Quinn, still holding his camera.

QUINN:
I-I-oh jesus, I-

Panel 2: Steve rushes to Lôt and holds him close, rocking him. The child wails. Bob lies on the ground next to the boy, his chest ripped open by hot lead.

STEVE:
Don't look. It's ok.

LÔC:
QUANG!

LÔC:
<Where is my sister? Where is she?>

Panel 3: Steve looks back at Bu Ky, panicked.

STEVE:
What's he saying?

BU KY:
He...he want's to know where is sister is.

Panel 4: Squeezing his eyes shut, Steve holds Lôt even tighter.

CAPTION:
Not again.

Panel 5: Same as previous, but more zoomed in. Just Steve's shoulder and Lôt's chin. We see the coin around Lôt's neck catch a glint of light from the fire.

CAPTION:
"Remember Charlie, Remember Baker. They left their childhood on every acre. And who was wrong, and who was right; It didn't matter in the thick of the fight."
-- Billy Joel