

Captain America: Fortunate Son

by Tristan Fuller

Issue: 4 - Numbered Corpses

ONE (4 panels)

Panel 1: The image of trees piercing the sky is reflected in a puddle of reddish-brown water on the jungle floor. The triple canopy woven through the trees above only lets through slivers of sunlight.

CAPTION:
None of us slept. The wet smell of blood
wouldn't let us.

Panel 2: Morning. They pack the campsite in silence, shellshocked. Bu Ky tends to James. He's not looking good.

CAPTION:
Quang is gone.

Panel 3: Nhat Lôc is lying on the freshly packed earth in front of his sister's grave, wrapped in a blanket. He's too tired to cry.

CAPTION:
I know what it's like to be an orphan. To
be ALONE.

CAPTION:
We dug a grave and buried her before
daybreak.

Panel 4: Bob's cold corpse stares at us, eyes wide open, the campsite in the distance behind him.

CAPTION:
We're not digging another.

CAPTION:
Numbered Corpses

TWO (6 panels)

Panel 1: Flashback from previous issue, in black and white. Bob is holding a gun to Lôt's head, manic. The boy is crying.

CAPTION:
We're all thinking the same thing.

Panel 2: Steve packs, getting his gear in order. Greg does the same, silently, a few yards away.

CAPTION:
We don't talk about it. We can't.

Panel 3: Flashback from previous issue. In a flash of light, Bob gets shot in the back.

CAPTION:
'The elephant in the jungle.'

Panel 4: A blood trail snakes from the edge of the campsite into the bush.

CAPTION:
I made sure to drag his body about 30 yards from the campsite.

Panel 5: Flashback. Quinn, holding the smoking gun, eyes wild and scared. A tear rolls down his cheek.

Panel 6: Match-cut from previous panel. Quinn stares into the middle distance with no emotion.

CAPTION:
I'm not sure it was far enough.

THREE (6 panels)

Panel 1: Steve looks over at Quinn. He's seated, holding his helmet. Steve ushers little Lôt towards Greg and Bu Ky before approaching the brooding teen.

STEVE:
Give us a minute, OK? Bu Ky, watch him.

Panel 2: Steve sits down next to Quinn.

STEVE:
Hey, kid. How're you holding up?

QUINN:
Is James gonna be ok?

CAPTION:
No.

STEVE:
Sure, sure. He's getting stronger all the time.

QUINN (SMALL):
Right.

Panel 3: OTS Quinn and Steve. Quinn holds his helmet in his lap. Steve looks at Quinn.

STEVE:
How ARE YOU doing, son?

QUINN:
Fine.

STEVE:
...Right. Just fine. It's all right, Quinn. Everything that happened--

Panel 4: Close on Quinn. He continues to stare at his helmet.

QUINN:
Do you know why I wrote this on my helmet?

QUINN:
In boot camp, they told us that RTOs have a 5 second life expectancy. Once they start shooting--5 seconds. That's it.

Panel 5: Quinn continues.

QUINN:
So that's what I do.

QUINN:
Any time things go to shit, I just breath and count to five, and it's ok again.

Panel 6: Quinn looks dead ahead. We see him in profile.

QUINN:
I don't think I got to 'five' last night.

FOUR (5 panels)

Panel 1: Steve looks off, trying to find the right words. Quinn looks up at him.

STEVE:
I...I remember my first time. This was before Red Skull, before they put me on ice, before EVERYTHING. Some of my squad had been taken prisoner behind enemy lines. Had to get them back.

Panel 2: Close on Steve.

STEVE:
Didn't know the guy. Some gunner, a Shütze or whatever they called them. Didn't know his name. Just some soldier in a trench.

Panel 3: Flashback in black and white. Steve shoots the German soldier. It's not pretty.

STEVE:
It still hurts to think about.

Panel 4: Back to Steve and Quinn.

STEVE:
I...it doesn't get easier. I wish I could tell you it did. It's HARD. EVERY time.

STEVE:
But the hard things have to get done. And you have to be STRONG to do them.

Panel 5: Steve puts a hand on Quinn's shoulder. Quinn looks up at Steve.

STEVE:
Do you see what I'm getting at, son?

QUINN:
...Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

FIVE (4 panels)

Panel 1: The pair smile weakly at each other. Bu Ky beckons Steve over from James' bedside.

STEVE:
Good. Now suit up.

QUINN:
Yes sir.

BU KY:
Captain!

Panel 2: Steve crouches with Greg and Bu Ky around James. James is sweating bullets.

STEVE:
What do we have, soldier?

GREG:
Nothing good.

BU KY:
He's BOILING, sir. We have to get him to the field hospital.

Panel 3: Close on Steve, brow furrowed. He is burdened by responsibility.

CAPTION:
Make it look easy, Steve. They're counting on you.

STEVE:
Ok then.

Panel 4: Steve stands and addresses the group.

STEVE:
EVERYONE, with me! Single file. Quinn, you're at the rear. Greg, Bu Ky: grab James. Let's get moving YESTERDAY.

SIX (4 panels)

Panel 1: Day. They walk single file through the jungle.

CAPTION:

We march in silence as the mud tries to suck our boots off. It takes hours to walk a mile.

Panel 2: Sunset. Bu Ky and Greg carry James on a stretcher.

CAPTION:

The jungle reminds us that we're all carrying extra weight now.

Panel 3: Day. It's raining. Quinn, walking, head down.

CAPTION:

Some more than others.

Panel 4: Day. Cap walking, the squad behind him. Sweat beads on his brow. He's carrying Lôt.

CAPTION:

We'll make it to Quang Ngai. We'll make it to DUGAN.

CAPTION:

We have to.

SEVEN (4 panels)

Panel 1: A white panel. Mist.

QUINN (OP):
Jesus. What's that smell?

Panel 2: Figures start to emerge from the amorphous mist. Wisps of orange mix with the white vapor.

BU KY:
Agent Orange. Breathe shallow.

Panel 3: Full figures now, we can see the whole team. (Bu Ky, Greg, Steve, James, and Nhat Lôt.) Bu Ky points.

BU KY:
There. We're getting close.

Panel 4: Establishing shot. We see the team walk in a broad line towards an old, bombed out French church. Anti-aircraft guns crouch between the tombstones. Behind the church is a field burned by the Agent Orange that now floats in the air.

QUINN:
Can't believe there's a church out here.
Should've worn my Sunday best.

EIGHT (5 panels)

Panel 1: We look down at Steve through a window in the church. He looks towards the window, surrounded by tombstones.

GREG:
You sound like you just walked out of
Mayberry.

QUINN:
Where?

Panel 2: Steve looks up, covering his eyes.

GREG:
Mayberry. From the Andy Griffith show?

QUINN:
Never seen it.

Panel 3: We see the hole in the wall from Steve's POV. A shape blocks the lower right corner of the window.

GREG:
How? Its THE Andy Griffith Show. Everyone
watches it.

Panel 4: Same as Panel 2, except the shape is gone.

QUINN:
Some of us actually have JOBS that keep us
busy.

Panel 5: Steve's eyes go wide as he raises his fist, motioning them to stop. He holds Nhat Lôc in his other hand.

GREG:
What? You're 18. What kind of job could
yo--

STEVE:
Everyone quiet. NOW.

NINE (6 panels)

Panel 1: The squad gets low, crouching between overgrown trees and broken tombstones. Steve lets Nhat Lôt go so the boy can walk.

STEVE (WHISPERING):
We've got at least one shooter in the church, maybe more. Top floor.

STEVE (WHISPERING):
Get in cover.

Panel 2: Bu Ky grips his AK-47 (not M16) as he looks up at Steve, taking cover behind a tombstone. Greg is not far off, hiding behind a tree.

BU KY (WHISPERING):
Captain, I think I can see a mortar.

STEVE (WHISPERING):
I see it.

GREG (WHISPERING):
A MORTAR? Are you SERIOUS?

Panel 3: The trio spin their heads around, looking towards the church.

NVA SOLDIER 1 (OP):
<MAI! Did you hear that?>

STEVE:
Get down.

Panel 4: We see a NVA soldier standing in a window of the church, looking towards us.

NVA SOLDIER:
<I don't see anything. Are you sure?>

Panel 5: Steve holds a finger up to his lips, looking at Bu Ky.

Panel 6: The NVA soldier turns to walk away. The team clings to cover.

NVA SOLDIER:
<This place is dead. There's nothing-->

TEN (6 panels)

Panel 1: Quinn's radio goes off, making noise as it catches interference.

RADIO:
SSSHSHHhssshhsscome inNkkkshhhhhchhh

QUINN:
Ahh FUCK me—

Panel 2: Steve's eyes go wide as he looks at Quinn.

STEVE:
no

Panel 3: The squad starts taking heavy fire, hiding behind whatever they can. Mortar shells explode around them.

STEVE:
Everyone on the GROUND! Lôc, HIDE.

Panel 4: Bullet's fly from the church.

Panel 5: A hunk of lead rips through Quinn's radio and exits through his chest. Steve reaches for Quinn as he falls to the ground.

QUINN:
kk

STEVE:
QUINN!

Panel 6: Steve holds Quinn.

QUINN:
Jesus Christ—Jesus CHRIST—I can't—

STEVE:
Quinn, calm down. Everything's going to be all right. Just take a deep breath. What's that thing you do? Just calm down and count to five. You'll be all right.

QUINN:
Ok ok ok ok FUCK—

ELEVEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: Quinn, grimacing in pain.

QUINN:
sigh One.

Panel 2: Bu Ky lays down suppressive fire.

QUINN (OP):
Two.

Panel 3: Greg hugs the ground, covering his head as bullets fly above him like gnats.

QUINN (OP):
Three.

Panel 4: Nhat Lôt wails, hiding in the roots of a tree.

QUINN (OP):
Four.

Panel 5: Steve holds Quinn, who's just off panel. He's looking down, desperate.

QUINN (OP):
...
STEVE (SMALL):
...Quinn?

TWELVE (4 panels)

Panel 1: From above, we see Quinn motionless, his mouth slack. He's not counting anymore. Cap is covered in his blood, hunched over him. Gunfire rips through the air above them.

Steve (small): No. no no no no no.

Panel 2: Steve panics, his face inches from Quinn's. He slaps Quinn's cheek, trying to wake him.

STEVE:
Quinn. Just one more. Listen to me. You're
so close. Just one more. QUINN.

Panel 3: He gives up, hanging his head.

STEVE (SMALL):
...Quinn.

CAPTION:
No.

Panel 4: Close on Steve. He looks up; no more messing around. He's mad now.

CAPTION:
Not again.

THIRTEEN (6 panels)

Panel 1: Steve starts barking orders, pointing towards the towards the church.

STEVE:
Bu Ky! Cover fire. Greg, grab a gun and
start shooting.

Panel 2: Mud and blood speckle Greg's face. He looks down at Quinn, eyes wide. Steve rushes past him.

GREG:
Captain, I've never—

STEVE:
NOW, goddammit!

Panel 3: Steve grabs his shield. He's on the move. A hail of bullets swarm around him.

Panel 4: Steve charges towards the shadows in the church. He peers over his shield, looking right at us. Bullets bounce off his shield.

Panel 5: Steve launches his shield, swinging his arm like a sledgehammer.

Panel 6: The shield ricochets off of trees and walls in the church. It hits one of the shooters from behind, at the base of the skull. The shooter is dazed; the other is startled. We still can't clearly see the shooters.

FOURTEEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: He raises his shield, ready to use the edge as a blade. His eyes are crazed.

Panel 2: But wait—close on Steve as he gets a good look at the soldier off panel.

CAPTION:

Wait—

Panel 3: OTS Steve. We finally see that the two soldiers are tweens, a boy and girl. Cap's shield had hit the boy, who's trying to regain his wits. The girl is looking up at him, shocked and terrified, as she drops her weapon.

CAPTION:

How old—I can't—

Panel 4: Reaction shot of Steve. He's lowering his shield slightly, shocked.

CAPTION:

—they're just KIDS—barely Quinn's age—

Panel 5: Cap remembers his rage, setting his jaw.

CAPTION:

QUINN.

FIFTEEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: Medium on the kids. They're paralyzed with fear.

CAPTION:
But...Look at them. Terrified.

Panel 2: The weight of this decision crushes Steve.

CAPTION:
I can't. I WON'T.

CAPTION:
That's not what we DO.

Panel 3: He speaks quietly to the kids.

STEVE (SMALL):
Just go. It's ok. I won't hurt you.

Panel 4: They look at each other, without understanding. They don't speak English.

Panel 5: Steve screams at them.

STEVE:
GO!

SIXTEEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: Startled, they scramble through a hole in the church wall into the destroyed jungle.

Panel 2: They run between tree stumps and tombstones into no man's land, towards a line of trees on the other side.

Panel 3: Same angle, they've covered more ground.

Panel 4: Same angle. The girl erupts in an explosion. She's stepped on a landmine.

SFX:
BOOM

Panel 5: Reaction shot of Steve.

SFX:
AAAAAAAAAAAA

CAPTION:
That scream. Not again.

SEVENTEEN (5 panels)

Panel 1: The boy looks at where his friend used to be. All that's left is red mist.

Panel 2: He looks back at Steve. He thinks this is Steve's fault.

Panel 3: The kid runs even faster now, away from Steve.

Panel 4: Steve sinks Steve sinks to the muddy ground outside the church.

Panel 5: OTS Steve. He watches the mist drift over the paddy.

EIGHTEEN (4 panels)

Panel 1: Steve sits in the mud, leaning against the wall of the church.

Panel 2: Same angle. Steve drops his head. Bu Ky walks towards Steve.

Panel 3: Same angle. Bu Ky, his head cropped out of the frame, puts a hand on Steve's shoulder.

BU KY:
...we have to go now, Captain.

Panel 4: Same angle. Steve speaks, looking straight ahead.

STEVE:
He didn't make it, did he?

NINETEEN (4 panels)

Panel 1: Bu Ky hands him Quinn's dog tags from off panel.

BU KY:
...I'm sorry, Steve.

Panel 2: Close up on the dog tags in Steve's hand. A Coca-Cola bottle cap hangs from the chain between the tags.

Panel 3: Steve looks at it, his expression blank.

Panel 4: He looks back out at the mist.

STEVE (SMALL):
Right.

TWENTY (6 panels)

Panel 1: Steve walks with purpose back towards Greg, James, and Lôc. Bu Ky follows. Greg is huddled over Quinn.

GREG:
Captain, what happened? Are you—

STEVE:
Let's go. We're only a few clicks from
Quang Ngai.

GREG:
But...what about Quinn?

STEVE:
Quinn is GONE.

Panel 2: Steve spins around, lashing out at Bu Ky. Greg looks up at them.

GREG (SMALL):
what?

BU KY:
Captain—

STEVE:
The dead STAY dead, soldier. It's MY job
to make sure the living keep on living.
And so help me God you will FALL IN LINE.
Understood?

Panel 3: Long shot, we see everyone. It's tense.

STEVE:
GOOD.

Panel 4: He crouches in front of Nhat Lôc, who is cowering between the roots of a tree. Steve offers his hand to the boy.

STEVE:
We still have a chance to save James.

Panel 5: Steve walks towards us, holding Nhat Lôc. Bu Ky and Greg look at him from behind.

STEVE:
I will NOT lose anyone else. Let's go.

Panel 6: Close on Steve's chest as he's walking. We don't see his face. Quinn's dog tags dangle around his neck.

CAPTION:
"We left in plastic as numbered corpses.
And we learned fast to travel light." --
Billy Joel