

Recruits

By Andy Romero

FADE IN:

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

A playground somewhere in rural America. Two KIDS chase each other, FRANCIS, 9 and DANNY, 10. Down the slide, through the swings, over the seesaw. They each clutch JUICE BOXES with a straw.

FRANCIS

(V.O)

I pledge allegiance to the flag of
the United States of America, and to
the Republic for which it stands, one
nation under God, indivisible, with
liberty and justice for all.

Francis runs, picks up a large STICK from the ground. He holds it in his hands like a RIFLE and pretends to shoot at Danny.

Danny pretends to get hit by one of the imaginary bullets. Francis picks a stone from the floor and launches it into the air like it's a grenade.

FRANCIS

Fire in the hole!

They both dive behind the slide, pretend to take cover and make explosion sounds.

MOTHER

(O.C, shouting)

Danny, Francis. Time to go now.

Francis and Danny look at each other and giggle. They simultaneously down their juice boxes and RUN AWAY through some nearby trees.

FRANCIS

(V.O)

We'd always been inseparable.

Francis STUMBLES on a rock, cuts his KNEE.

Danny stops, turns to see Francis upset and frustrated on the ground. Danny comforts him, rubs his knee, helps him to his feet. Francis smiles, they run away together again into the distance.

FRANCIS

(V.O)

Perhaps what happened was meant to be, like it was always supposed to end the way it did. But I still find that a little difficult to accept, even all these years later.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

SUPER: Ten Years Later

Danny, 20, sits on a chair on the sidelines. A college basketball game is underway. Francis, 19, sits next to him. They're wearing matching YELLOW BASKETBALL JERSEYS. Francis wraps a BANDAGE around Danny's knee.

DANNY

Fuck! Be careful!

FRANCIS

I am being careful. Quit being a little bitch.

DANNY

I'm not being a bitch dude, it popped out of the socket. I'd like to see you make that shot with a bum knee.

Francis fixes the bandage in place around Danny's knee. Danny stands up with a slight limp.

FRANCIS

How's that?

DANNY

Fucked, but it'll have to do.

The COACH, 50's, approaches.

COACH

Mccalister, you ready?

DANNY

Yes sir.

COACH

Green, go get him some ice.

Francis hurries away. Coach puts his hand on Danny's shoulder.

COACH
You got this kid.

A determined Danny looks at the game, then back to the coach.

DANNY
Just feed me on the edge of the D.

Coach smiles, pats him on the back.

LATER - Fast paced action. The ball is passed to Danny on the edge of the three point line. He takes the jump shot, SINKS IT. Buzzer beater.

The game ends. He's won the game for his team. The crowd goes wild, onlookers storm the court in ecstasy.

Francis runs, grabs Danny's face in pure joy.

FRANCIS
I knew you'd do it! I knew you would
you lucky son of a bitch!

DANNY
Hey, when have I ever let you down?

Francis puts him on his shoulders. Everyone celebrates, Francis high fives the crowd.

FRANCIS
(V.O)
He was right, he never did.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DANNY'S HOUSE - DAY

Danny's MOTHER, 50's, sits on the couch. We only see the back of her. She stares at the TV, her hands locked in prayer.

ON THE TV: A news broadcast of the September 11th attacks. A smoking WORLD TRADE CENTER.

Danny enters. He watches the TV, puts a hand on his Mothers shoulder.

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - DAY

It's a mess, your typical late teenage bedroom. Posters of basketball players, bikini models and various bands. Danny sits on the edge of the bed, looks at the BROCHURE in his hands.

ON THE BROCHURE: A picture of a proud looking U.S soldier saluting the U.S flag. Nobel, heroic, handsome.

-- SERVE WITH HONOR, DEFEND OUR FREEDOM

Danny lowers the brochure, looks at himself in the mirror.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

A CAREERS EVENT. Various stalls from various industries. Danny and Francis stand near the entrance observing, both clutching their military brochures.

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, 20's, walks past carrying a bouquet of FLOWERS to a FLORIST STAND. Francis and Danny check her out.

DANNY

You know on second thought, I think I might be a florist.

FRANCIS

In your dreams dude, she'd eat you for breakfast.

DANNY

Hey, I've been with older women before.

FRANCIS

Yeah, you're Mom doesn't count.

Danny scoffs.

DANNY

So you wanna check anything else out whilst we're here?

FRANCIS

Why? You having second thoughts?

DANNY

No, no I'm just saying...

FRANCIS

You remember why we're doing this, right?

DANNY

Yeah, for Manny.

FRANCIS

For Manny and his brother. It could of been any of us in those towers.

(MORE)

FRANCIS (cont'd)
I ain't gonna let no middle eastern
son of a bitch take my freedom. Know
what I'm saying?

Francis begins to shadow box. Danny smirks.

DANNY
Terrible form man.

A MILITARY MAN, 30's, walks past them in uniform. Francis quickly stops his shadow boxing.

FRANCIS
Guess we should follow that guy.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A DRILL SERGEANT, 40's, stands at the front in full uniform. Various GUNS and kit lay on the table next to him. A promotional banner to the side reads -- "BE THE BEST". Francis and Danny sit next to each other, about fifty other hopeful recruits in the room.

FRANCIS
(Whispers, to Danny)
Bro is that an M4?

DANNY
Shutup. The guy's talking.

DRILL SERGEANT
So that wraps it up. For those that are interested, I can sign you up today for our recruitment program immediately. Our work overseas is now more important than ever, and I want to end my time here today by saying God bless our troops and God bless America.

Everyone claps and stands up. A raucous applause. Francis and Danny do the same. Francis is clearly more enthusiastic but Danny's feeling it too.

LATER -- The place is almost empty. Francis and Danny sit across the table from the drill sergeant, PAPERWORK in front of them.

FRANCIS
This is gonna be awesome.

Francis SIGNS on the dotted line immediately. Danny contemplates for a moment, his pen hovers over the signature section. He signs. They both hand their papers over to the Sergeant.

DRILL SERGEANT
 Congratulations. You'll be attending
 one of our national training centers.
 Until then, keep out of trouble and
 welcome to the U.S army.

The Drill Sergeant stands, so do Francis and Danny. The Sergeant firmly shakes their hands with a winning smile.

EXT. FORT BENNING TRAINING CENTER - DAY

It's raining hard, the base is a mass of concrete and shadow. Several RECRUITS stand in line, all in uniform beside a bus parked behind them. Francis and Danny stand next to each other, they clutch their backpacks in front of them.

SERGEANT LEONARD, 30's, a fearsome veteran of 10 plus years faces the line of new recruits.

RECRUITS
 (Shouting in unison)
 Yes drill sergeant!

SERGEANT LEONARD
 Now you're all here to protect and
 serve this great country. Before you
 got on that bus, you were civilians,
 but now you are soldiers of the
 United States Army, so you will walk,
 talk and act like soldiers of the
 United States Army. Do I make myself
 clear?

RECRUITS
 Yes drill sergeant!

SERGEANT LEONARD
 Good. Now we work on a buddy system.
 The person to your left will be your
 buddy for the duration of your 22
 week program.

Francis and Danny look at each other and smile.

SERGEANT LEONARD

Your buddy is an extension of yourself and you will treat him as such. Your buddy's feeling tired, you wake his ass up. Your buddy's not pulling his weight, you take some of the slack. Your buddy feels like going home and sitting on his Momma's couch with a bag of Cheetos, you remind him why he chose to be here. Ultimately if your buddy does wish to throw in the towel then that is their decision to make, but you will be there for them every step of the way, because here in the United States Army we work together, here in the United States army, we are a team, Do I make myself clear?

RECRUITS

Yes drill sergeant!

SERGEANT LEONARD

Then let's get to work.

The recruits pick up their belongings. Sergeant Leonard points towards the entrance and ushers the recruits through the door.

SERGEANT LEONARD

Thirty seconds! Move, move, move!

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

The recruits are in two separate lines. They each hastily grab a paper LUNCH BAG from the counter.

SERGEANT LEONARD

Go, go, go!

INT. VIDEO ROOM - DAY

Francis and Danny sit next to each other, they look up at the big screen and smile, they both slurp on a JUICE BOX.

ON THE SCREEN: A presentation about the U.S army.

VIDEO VOICE OVER

(V.O)

Since 1775 the U.S army has been the bearer of our nations strength in every crisis or conflict.

(MORE)

VIDEO VOICE OVER (cont'd)
 Make no mistake, the journey you are about to embark upon will not be easy, but you wouldn't be here if we didn't think you were up to the challenge.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

Danny gets his head shaved by the BARBER, 50's. Danny looks over at Francis who is also getting shaved. They both look at each other and laugh. Their thick hair falls to the floor.

EXT/INT - VARIOUS SHOTS

- ASSAULT COURSE -- The recruits work the monkey bars, army crawl under barbed wire. Danny takes a deep breath mid crawl before continuing.

- FIRING RANGE -- Francis and Danny lie prone, both aim down the sights of their rifles. The other recruits are doing the same. They fire at paper targets. Danny hits the bullseye on the chest of the paper target, again and again and again. He's a great shot.

- CLOSED ROAD -- The recruits jog in formation, hold their backpacks above their heads. Heavy rain thumps down on them. Pain, anguish, stoic expressions of perseverance.

- LIVING QUARTERS -- The recruits stand attention by their beds. Leonard walks by and looks at every bed. He looks at Francis, stands inches away from his face and nods. He moves onto the next in line. Francis smiles to himself.

EXT. GRADUATION CEREMONY - DAY

A small makeshift stage with a podium in the center. The other recruits and their family members sit in the audience. The stage is perfectly ordained with flowers and crisp red, white and blue American flags. Leonard stands behind the podium, talks into the microphone.

SERGEANT LEONARD
 Francis Green and Danny Mccalister.

Applause. Francis and Danny walk out onto the stage and shake Leonard's hand. Leonard hands them both a rolled up DIPLOMA. They face the audience, smile and exit stage left.

FRANCIS

(V.O)

We finally made it. We were soldiers
and we were so proud. Everyone was.

Francis and Danny share a hug, they run towards a car parked
across the street, their friends, beers and ready to party.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. AFGHAN DESERT - DAY

SUPER: Afghanistan, 2002

The recruits run in formation, backpacks and full gear. The
sweltering heat is getting to them. Francis leads the way,
followed closely by Danny. Leonard sits in the back of a
HUMVEE which is moving slowly alongside them. He taunts the
recruits through a MEGAPHONE.

SERGEANT LEONARD

Get you're asses to the rendezvous
point! My crippled Aunt could move
faster than this, now pick up the
God-damn pace!

Danny's KNEE gives out. He falls to his knees. Francis
glances behind him, sees Danny on the floor. He turns around
to help him up, the other recruits overtake them.

SERGEANT LEONARD

Green, what the hell do you think
you're doing?

FRANCIS

Helping my training buddy sir.

SERGEANT LEONARD

You were setting the pace. You ain't
in basic now kid now get your ass
back up to the front!

FRANCIS

Yes Sergeant!

Francis catches up to the others, Danny struggles back to
his feet.

SERGEANT LEONARD

Carter, Wayne, assist Mccalister.

CARTER, 20's and Wayne, 20's each take an arm, help Danny to
his feet.

EXT. BASE CAMP - DAY

The sun pounds down on the desert floor. Some of the recruits sit on their beds underneath a canopy.

BUG, 20's, a scrawny man with the mouth of a man twice his size relentlessly puffs on a cigarette.

BUG

And that's why we're all here, not because of terrorism, not because we're the saviors of the fucking world, but because it benefits the big oil companies.

HARPER, 20's, sits on the edge of his bed, shines his boots. He scoffs.

BUG

(To Harper)

What's funny?

HARPER

You really believe that shit?

BUG

Yes I do. Let me ask you a question, do you really believe we're out here just to create peace?

HARPER

I believe it's about standing up for what's right, this is about freedom.

BUG

Freedom? Last time I checked we were in their back yard dog. How many of these farmers do you think had anything to do with the towers going down?

HARPER

Well if it's all such a giant shit show, how come you're even here?

BEAT. It's touched a nerve with Bug.

BUG

That's my business.

END OF EXTRACT