

A Few Good Men - Jessep Tells the Truth

By

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Edited by Pink Smoothie

Everyone stands at attention as RANDOLPH enters. SAM is missing.

RANDOLPH  
(to KAFFEE)  
Call your witness.

KAFFEE  
Where's Sam?

JO  
He'll be here.

RANDOLPH  
Lieutenant, call your witness.

KAFFEE  
Defense calls Colonel Nathan Jessep.

JESSEP is escorted in through a side door. He's wearing his dress uniforms, adorned with the appropriate medals.

ROSS  
Colonel, do you solemnly swear that the testimony you will give in this General Court-Martial will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?

JESSEP  
Yes I do.

ROSS  
Would you state your name, rank, and current billet for the record please, sir?

JESSEP  
Colonel Nathan R. Jessep, Commanding officer, Marine Ground Forces, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

ROSS  
Thank you, sir, would you have a seat, please.

JESSEP sits, and looks around the courtroom. KAFFEE stands

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from his seat and begins to ask JESSEP the questions he had prepared. Kaffee is ready to push Jessep to his limit and confess the truth.

KAFFEE

Colonel, when you learned of Santiago's letter to the NIS, you had a meeting with your two senior officers, is that right?

JESSEP

Yes.

KAFFEE

The Executive Officer, Lt. Jonathan Kendrick, and the Company Commander, Captain Matthew Markinson.

JESSEP

Yes.

KAFFEE

And at present, Captain Markinson is dead, is that right?

ROSS looks annoyed, and wants to do an objection.

ROSS

Objection. I'd like to know just what defense counsel is implying?

KAFFEE

I'm implying simply that, at present, Captain Markinson is not alive.

ROSS

Surely Colonel Jessep doesn't need to appear in this courtroom to confirm that information.

KAFFEE

I just wasn't sure if the witness was aware that two days ago, Captain Markinson took his own life with a .45 caliber pistol.

And from the back of the room, SAM enters. He's escorting two young AIRMEN in Airforce dress uniforms. SAM shows the

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AIRMEN to a seat near the front, and takes his place at the defense table.

Over this we HEAR--

RANDOLPH (O.S.)

The witness is aware, the Court is aware, and now the jury is aware. We thank you for bringing this to our attention. Move on Lieutenant.

SAM scribbles something on a piece of paper, KAFFEE walks over, looks at the paper on which are wrttten two names: Cecil O'Malley and Anthony Perez, then turns back to RANDOLPH.

KAFFEE

Yes sir. Colonel, at the time of this meeting, you gave Lt. Kendrick an order, is that right?

JESSEP

I told Kendrick to tell his men that Santiago wasn't to be touched.

KAFFEE

And did you give an order to Captain Markinson as well?

JESSEP

I ordered Markinson to have Santiago transferred off the base immediately.

KAFFEE

Why?

JESSEP

I felt that his life might be in danger once word of the letter got out.

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KAFFEE  
Grave danger?

JESSEP  
Is there another kind?

KAFFEE holds up a document from his table.

KAFFEE  
We have the transfer order that you  
and Markinson co-signed, ordering that  
Santiago be lifted on a flight leaving  
Guantanamo at six the next morning.  
Was that the first flight off the  
bass?

JESSEP sighs, currently annoyed that he was forced in this  
courtroom.

JESSEP  
The six a.m. flight was the first  
flight off the base.

KAFFEE nods and decides to move on. JESSEP steals a quick  
glance at the two AIRMEN sitting out in the courtroom.

KAFFEE  
Colonel, you flew up to Washington  
early

this morning, is that right?

JESSEP  
Yes.

KAFFEE  
I notice you're wearing your Class A appearance in dress  
uniform for court today.

JESSEP  
(continuing)  
As are you, Lieutenant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

KAFFEE

Did you wear that uniform on the plane?

ROSS

Please the Court, is this dialogue relevant to anything in particular?

KAFFEE

The defense didn't have an opportunity to depose this witness, your honor. I'd ask the Court for a little latitude.

RANDOLPH

A very little latitude.

KAFFEE

Colonel?

JESSEP

I wore fatigues on the plane.

KAFFEE

And you brought your dress uniform with you.

JESSEP sighs, more annoyed than he was before.

JESSEP

Yes.

KAFFEE

And a toothbrush? A shaving kit? Change of underwear?

ROSS

Your honor.

KAFFEE

(to ROSS)

Is the Colonel's underwear a matter of national security?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

RANDOLPH

Gentlemen.

(to KAFFEE)

You better get somewhere fast with this, Lieutenant.

KAFFEE

Yes sir. Colonel?

JESSEP

I brought a change of clothes and some personal items.

KAFFEE

Thank you.

KAFFEE gets a document from his table.

KAFFEE (CONT'D)

(continuing)

After Dawson and Downey's arrest on the night of the sixth, Santiago's barracks room was sealed off and its contents inventoried. Pairs of camouflage pants, 6 camouflage shirts, 2 pairs of boots, 1 pair of brown shoes, 1 pair of tennis shoes, 8 khaki tee-shirts, 2 belts, 1 sweater--

ROSS

Please the Court, is there a question anywhere in our future?

RANDOLPH

Lt. Kaffee, I have to--

KAFFEE

I'm wondering why Santiago wasn't packed.

That landed. On the JURY, RANDOLPH, ROSS ...

KAFFEE (CONT'D)

(continuing)

I'll tell you what, we'll get back to  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

KAFFEE (CONT'D)  
that one in a minute.

JO hands KAFFEE the computer printout.

KAFFEE (CONT'D)  
(continuing)  
This is a record of all telephone  
calls made from your base in the past  
24 hours. After being subpoenaed to  
Washington, you made three calls.

Handing Jessep the printout--

KAFFEE (CONT'D)  
(continuing)  
I've highlighted those calls in  
yellow. Do you recognize those  
numbers?

JESSEP  
I called Colonel Fitzhughes in  
Quantico, Va. I wanted to let him know  
I'd be in town. The second call was to  
set up a meeting with Congressman  
Ramond of the House Armed Services  
Comittee, and the third call was to my  
sister Elizabeth.

KAFFEE  
Why did you make that call, sir?

JESSEP  
I thought she might like to have  
dinner tonight.

ROSS  
Judge--

RANDOLPH  
I'm gonna put a stop to this now.

Jo's handed KAFFEE another printout and a stack of letters.

KAFFEE  
Your honor, these are the telephone  
records from GITMO for August 6th. And

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

KAFFEE (CONT'D)

these are 14 letters that Santiago wrote in nine months requesting, in fact begging, for a transfer. Upon hearing the news that he was finally getting his transfer, Santiago was so excited, that do you know how many people he called? Zero. Nobody. Not one call to his parents saying he was coming home. Not one call to a friend saying can you pick me up at the airport? He was asleep in his bed at midnight, and according to you he was getting on a plane in six hours, yet everything he owned was hanging neatly in his closet and folded neatly in his footlocker. You were leaving for one day and you packed a bag and made three phone calls. Santiago was leaving for the rest of his life, and he hadn't called a soul and he hadn't packed a thing. Can you explain that? The fact is there was no transfer order. Santiago wasn't going anywhere, isn't that right, Colonel.

ROSS

Object. Your Honor, it's obvious that Lt. Kaffee's intention this morning is to smear a high ranking marine officer in the desperate hope that the mere appearance of impropriety will win him points with the jury.

ROSS (CONT'D)

(continuing)

It's my recommendation, sir, that Lt. Kaffee receive an official reprimand from the bench, and that the witness be excused with the Court's deepest apologies.

RANDOLPH ponders this a moment.

RANDOLPH

(pause)

Overruled.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

ROSS  
Your honor--

RANDOLPH  
The objection's noted.

KAFFEE  
(beat)  
Colonel?

Jessep's smiling ... and now he can't help but let out a short laugh.

KAFFEE (CONT'D)  
(continuing)  
Is this funny, sir?

JESSEP  
No. It's not. It's tragic.

KAFFEE  
Do you have an answer?

JESSEP  
Absolutely. My answer is I don't have the first damn clue. Maybe he was an early morning riser and he liked to pack in the morning. And maybe he didn't have any friends. I'm an educated man, but I'm afraid I can't speak intelligently about the travel habits of William Santiago. What I do know now is that he was set to leave the base at 0600. Now are these really the questions I was called here to answer? Phone calls and footlockers? Please tell me you've got something more, Lieutenant. Please tell me there's an ace up your sleeve. These two marines are on trial for their lives. Please tell me their lawyer hasn't pinned their hopes to a phone bill. Do you have any other questions for me, counselor?

The courtroom is silenced. Jessep's slammed the door.

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CONTINUED: (10)

KAFFEE looks around the room, sees that the world is waiting for him to do something ...

RANDOLPH  
Lt. Kaffee?

KAFFEE says nothing. He glances over to AIRMEN O'MALLEY and PEREZ.

RANDOLPH (CONT'D)  
(continuing)  
Lieutenant, do you have anything further for this witness?

KAFFEE doesn't respond. JESSEP gets up to leave.

JESSEP  
(standing)  
Thanks, Danny. I love Washington.

He says that sarcastically, and turns around and starts to leave, but he's stopped by--

KAFFEE  
Excuse me, I didn't dismiss you.

JESSEP turns around, clearly surprised.

JESSEP  
I beg your pardon.

KAFFEE  
I'm not through with my examination.  
Sit down.

JESSEP  
Colonel.

KAFFEE  
What's that?

JESSEP  
(to RANDOLPH)  
I'd appreciate it if he addressed me as Colonel or Sir. I believe I've earned it.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (11)

JESSEP (CONT'D)

RANDOLPH  
Defense counsel will address the  
witness as Colonel or Sir.

JESSEP  
(to RANDOLPH)  
I don't know what the hell kind of an  
outfit you're running here.

RANDOLPH  
And the witness will address this  
Court as Judge or Your Honor. I'm  
quite certain I've earned it. Take  
your seat, Colonel.

Jessep goes back to the stand.

JESSEP  
(continuing)  
What would you like to discuss now! My  
favorite color?

KAFFEE  
Colonel, the six a.m. flight, was the  
first one off the base?

JESSEP  
Yes.

KAFFEE  
There wasn't a flight that left seven  
hours earlier and landed at Andrews  
Airforce Base at 2 a.m.?

RANDOLPH  
Lieutenant, I think we've covered  
this, haven't we?

KAFFEE gets the two log books from his table as well as the  
piece of paper that SAM scribbled on.

KAFFEE  
Your Honor, these are the Tower  
Chief's Logs for both Guantanamo Bay  
and Andrews Airforce Base. The  
Guantanamo log lists no flight that  
left at eleven p.m., and the Andrews  
log lists no flight that landed at 2  
a.m. I'd like to admit them as Defense

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(MORE)

CONTINUED: (12)

KAFFEE (CONT'D)  
Exhibits "A" and "B".

RANDOLPH  
I don't understand. You're admitting  
evidence of a flight that never  
existed?

KAFFEE  
We believe it did, sir. Defense'll be  
calling Airman Cecil O'Malley and  
Airman Anthony Perez. They were  
working the ground crew at Andrews at  
two a.m. on the seventh.

ROSS  
Your Honor, these men weren't on the  
list. Rebuttal witnesses, Your Honor,  
called specifically to reflite  
testimony offered under direct  
examination.

If you looked closely at JESSEP, you could see a drop of  
sweat.

RANDOLPH  
I'll allow the witnesses.

JESSEP  
This is ridiculous.

KAFFEE  
Colonel, a moment ago--

JESSEP  
Check the Tower Logs for christ's sake.

KAFFEE  
We'll get to the airmen in just a  
minute, sir. A moment ago said that  
you ordered Kendrick to order his men  
not to touch Santiago.

JESSEP

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (13)

That's right.

KAFFEE

And Kendrick was clear on what you wanted?

JESSEP

Crystal.

KAFFEE

Any chance Kendrick ignored the order?

Jessep is taken aback.

JESSEP

Ignored the order?

KAFFEE

Any chance he just forgot about it?

JESSEP

No.

@thelitwritinglab

KAFFEE

Any chance Kendrick left your office and said, "The old man's wrong"?

JESSEP

No.

KAFFEE

When Kendrick spoke to the platoon and ordered them not to touch Santiago, any chance they ignored him?

JESSEP

Have you ever spent time in an infantry unit, son?

KAFFEE

No sir.

JESSEP

Ever served in a forward area?

KAFFEE

No sir.

JESSEP

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (14)

Ever put your life in another man's hands, ask him to put his life in yours?

KAFFEE

No sir.

JESSEP

We follow orders, son. We follow orders or people die. It's that simple. Are we clear?

KAFFEE

Yes sir.

JESSEP

Are we clear?

KAFFEE

Crystal.

KAFFEE speaks with the quiet confidence that comes from knowing you're about to drop your opponents

KAFFEE (CONT'D)

Colonel, I have just one more question before I call Airman O'Malley and Airman Perez: If you gave an order that Santiago wasn't to be touched, and your orders are always followed, then why would he be in danger, why would it be necessary to transfer him off the base?

And JESSEP has no answer.

Nothing.

He sits there, and for the first time, seems to be lost.

JESSEP

Private Santiago was a sub-standard marine. He was being transferred off the base because--

KAFFEE

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (15)

But that's not what you said. You said he was being transferred because he was in grave danger.

JESSEP

(pause)

Yes. That's correct, but--

KAFFEE

You said, "He was in danger". I said, "Grave danger". You said--

JESSEP

Yes, I recall what--

KAFFEE

I can have the Court Reporter read back

your--

JESSEP

I know what I said. I don't need it read back to me like I'm a damn--

KAFFEE

Then why the two orders? Colonel? Why did you--

JESSEP

Sometimes men take matters into their own hands.

KAFFEE

No sir. You made it clear just a moment ago that your men never take matters into their own hands. Your men follow orders or people die. So Santiago shouldn't have been in any dangor at all, should he have, Colonel?

Everyone's sweating now. Everyone but KAFFEE.

JESSEP

You little bastard.

ROSS

Your Honor, I have to ask for a recess to--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (16)

KAFFEE

I'd like an answer to the question,  
Judge.

RANDOLPH

The Court'll wait for answer.

KAFFEE

If Kendrick told his men that Santiago  
wasn't to be touched, then why did he  
have to be transferred?

Jessep is looking at O'MALLEY and PEREZ.

KAFFEE (CONT'D)

(continuing)

Colonel?

JESSEP says nothing.

KAFFEE (CONT'D)

(continuing)

Kendrick ordered the code red, didn't  
he? Because that's what you told  
Kendrick to do.

ROSS

Object!

RANDOLPH

Counsel.

KAFFEE will plow through the objections of ROSS and the  
admonishments of RANDOLPH.

KAFFEE

And when it went bad, you cut these  
guys loose.

ROSS

Your Honor--

RANDOLPH

That'll be all, counsel.

KAFFEE

You had Markinson sign a phony  
transfer order--

ROSS

Judge--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (17)

KAFFEE

You doctored the log books.

ROSS

Damn it Kaffee!!

KAFFEE

I'll ask for the fourth time. You ordered--

JESSEP

You want answers?

KAFFEE

I think I'm entitled to them.

JESSEP

You want answers?!

KAFFEE

I want the truth.

JESSEP

You can't handle the truth!

And nobody moves.

JESSEP (CONT'D)

(continuing)

Son, we live in a world that has walls. And those walls have to be guarded by men with guns. Who's gonna do it? You? You, Lt. Weinberg? I have a greater responsibility than you can possibly fathom. You weep for Santiago and you curse the marines. You have that luxury. You have the luxury of not knowing what I know: That Santiago's death, while tragic, probably saved lives. And my existence, while grotesque and incomprehensible to you, saves lives. You don't want the truth. Because deep down, in places you don't talk about at parties, you want me on that wall. You need me on that wall! We use words like honor, code, loyalty...we use these words as the backbone to a life spent defending something. You use 'em as a punchline. I have neither the time nor the inclination to explain

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (18)

JESSEP (CONT'D)

myself to a man who rises and sleeps under the blanket of the very freedom I provide, then questions the manner in which I provide it. I'd prefer you just said thank you and went on your way. Otherwise, I suggest you pick up a weapon and stand a post. Either way, I don't give a *damn* what you think you're entitled to.

KAFFEE

(quietly)

Did you order the code red?

JESSEP

I did the job you sent me to do.

KAFFEE

Did you order the code red?

JESSEP

(pause)

You're goddamn right I did!

Silence. From everyone. RANDOLPH, ROSS, the M.P.'s, they're all frozen. JO and SAM are likewise. JESSEP seems strangely, quietly relieved. KAFFEE simply takes control of the room now.