A FEW GOOD MEN

Synopsis by

Johnny Screenwriter

A plea-bargaining Navy lawyer risks both career and prison if he exposes the commanding officer who ordered the hazing of a screw-up Marine his two clients are accused of murdering.

Lieutenant JG Daniel "Danny" Kaffee, an inexperienced U.S. Navy lawyer, leads the defense in the court-martial of two Marines, Lance Corporal Dawson, and PFC Downey. Both accused of murdering a fellow Marine, PFC William Santiago, at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, which is under the command of Colonel Nathan R. Jessup.

Santiago is a screw-up. He goes outside the chain to bargain for a transfer in exchange for blowing the whistle on Dawson for firing an illegal shot towards Cuba. Santiago's commanding officer, Lt. Jonathan Kendrick asserts to both Jessup and Jessup's executive officer, Lt. Colonel Matthew Andrew Markinson that he can handle Santiago.

When Dawson and Downey are arrested for Santiago's murder, Naval investigator and lawyer Lieutenant Commander Joanne Galloway suspects they were carrying out a "code red," a euphemism for extrajudicial punishment. She requests to defend them but command turns the case over to Kaffee.

Kaffee meets the defendants and finds them to be a little too gung-ho. He tries to both plea-bargain the case, then step down as lead counsel, realizing he was assigned this case due to his reputation for plea-bargaining, indicating someone high up didn't want the case to go to trial and because of that revelation, he proceeds to trial. During trial, it's established code reds are standard at Gitmo, as a means of getting screw-ups to get it together.

Eventually Galloway convinces Kaffee to call Jessup as a witness at great risk to his career. After questioning Jessup about his travel habits and comparing those to Santiago's, he accuses Jessup of ordering a code red on Santiago. Both prosecution and the judge object, but Jessup is caught in a lie. He stated Santiago was to be transferred off base for his safety in case other Marines sought retribution, but also stated Marines are honorable and always follow orders. Kaffee argues if other Marines were ordered to leave Santiago alone and always follow orders, Santiago would have been in no danger and thus, Jessup's argument that Santiago was to be transferred was a lie. Under pressure from Kaffee, Jessep furiously declares "You can't handle the truth!" and dismisses Kaffee as disrespectful of a Marine doing his duty, at which point he admits to ordering the code red. As Jessup angrily justifies his actions on the basis of national security, Ross arrests him, and the defendants are found not guilty of murder.

Regardless, the two Marines are dishonorably discharged for causing Santiago's death through their "conduct unbecoming a United States Marine." Downey does not understand why they are given dishonorable discharges, but Dawson accepts the verdict, and explains to Downey they failed to stand up for those too weak to stand up for themselves. As the two prepare to leave, Kaffee tells Dawson he doesn't need a patch on his arm to have honor. Dawson, who had previously been reluctant to respect Kaffee as an officer, barks "There's an officer on deck!" and salutes Kaffee.

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