

LAST REQUEST

AT RISE: *A sparse stage suggesting the year 1887. Stage Right, three young SOLDIERS in blue cavalry uniforms slouch in various states of discomfort. Each grips an old carbine rifle. Their eyes are held by a tall wooden pole - Stage Left.*

SERGEANT. (From offstage.) "Ten-shun!

(The Soldiers snap to attention; their rifles fly to their shoulders. The SERGEANT enters from Stage Left. He is a brusque, burly man with a large mustache and the impatient discipline of one who has seen too much killing. Behind him, TWO MORE SOLDIERS escort CARL EDWARD BRADDOCK on stage. Braddock's hands are tied behind his back and he struggles as they untie him, then push his back against the post.)

BRADDOCK. This is not justice! Do you hear me? This is not justice!!

(They bind his hands behind the post. The Sergeant crosses to the Soldiers, who form a line facing the prisoner. The Sergeant reads aloud from a scrolled document.)

SERGEANT. Carl Edward Braddock, you have been found guilty of the willful murder of more than twenty savages, as well as the deaths of nine civilized white settlers. For these crimes, you have been sentenced to death by firing squad. Do you have anything to say on your behalf?

BRADDOCK. I am innocent! The jury was wrong!

SERGEANT. If they were, only you and God will know. *(With contempt.)*
And the men and women you butchered. *(To the soldiers securing his bonds.)*
Secure the blindfold!

BRADDOCK. No blindfold! *(Bitterly.)* I want to see their faces as they shoot me down...

(The two Soldiers finish tying him up, then join the others, Stage Right.)

SERGEANT. As you wish. *(To the firing squad.)* Rifles, Ho!

(The five Soldiers snap their guns up in military precision, taking deadly aim at the prisoner tied to the post.)

BRADDOCK. *(Frantically.)* Wait!!! Where's my last request?! You have to grant me a last request!

(The firing squad hesitates.)

BRADDOCK. I deserve a last request! *(Plaintively.)* In the name of God..?

(A moment passes. The men understand tradition; it is all they can rely on in this desolate frontier. The Sergeant scans the faces of his men, then growls at the Prisoner.)

SERGEANT. What is it you want, Braddock?

BRADDOCK. Thank you. Thank you, Sergeant. *(Takes a deep breath.)* I only ask one thing. A simple thing really...

SERGEANT. Out with it!

BRADDOCK. I just want to be introduced to those brave men who are about to rob me of my life.

(The Soldiers murmur among themselves. Their rifles begin to droop.)

SERGEANT. Out of the question!

BRADDOCK. You'd deny a condemned man his last request?! Have we become savages ourselves?!

SOLDIER #3. Excuse me, sir...but it is customary.

SERGEANT. *(Furious but trapped by custom.)* As you wish. *(To first Soldier.)* Tell him your name, dammit!

SOLDIER #1. *(Hesitates, then whispers.)* Quinn.

BRADDOCK. What was that, son?

SOLDIER #1. Quinn, sir. Private Jacob Quinn.

BRADDOCK. Thank you, Jacob. You've made this day easier for me.

SOLDIER #1. You're welcome, sir. *(To Soldier #2.)* Tell him your name, soldier!