

The Worst Film In Vietnam

Leaving the MACV Photo Team in Feb. 1969, I had hoped to be stateside at least a year, before seeing Vietnam again, but I was wrong. I was back in country during October and November of the same year. This time TDY/TAD in navy terms, or just plain location shooting for civilians; of a scripted movie to be done there. The Army Pictorial Center, in the Queens section of New York City, had changed some in my 2½ years absence, since leaving for DASPO Pac Det in Aug. 1966. The old Field Photo had been dissolved. The few army cameramen that were there, were now assigned to Camera Branch, and subordinate to the dozen or so, GS-10 and GS-11 (DAC) Dept. of the Army Civilian cinematographers on the staff. It was a busy time for the Pic Center. Special Effects had several productions on-going, and I spent time there. The various sound stages were all in use, and lots of location filming as well. I counted in one five week period, that I had worked on seven different productions. Some as short as 90 minutes, loading or re-loading 1000 foot reels of film in the 35mm Mitchell Magazines, or focus puller for crab dolly shots. Other productions, I was attached to, lasted a few weeks to a month.

The 70 Army photographer old Field Photo, had been split in half, when DASPO became its own entity. They had dispersed to Room 5A-470 of The Pentagon, as DASPO Headquarters. To Ft Bragg N.C. as the (CONUS) continental U.S. and Europe Det. Ft. Clayton In the Panama Canal Zone and Ft. Shafter, Hawaii as the Pacific Det. The Vietnam War had further reduced the Army cameramen, so that during early 1969, there were only a handful of Army photographers to support the civilian chieftains. With plenty of work the place was greatly under staffed. We Army photographer were assigned productions depending on the technical difficulty of the scenes being shot that day.

A lot of the productions being shot at APC, were for federal agencies, other than the Army, requiring civilian actors. The Pic Center paid less than union wages. Paying \$80.00 a day for silent parts, and \$120.00 a day for speaking scenes. APC attracted actor on their way up in their acting careers; and those over their peak, and on the way down. It was a one of a kind place, and the only place in the Army, where you could work with civilian actors. It was a fantastic learning experience. Several actors bring back memories.

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One actor had only worked on Broadway. He had never done any TV, commercials or film work before. His movements were directed toward the mezzanine, a hundred feet from the stage, not the camera 10 feet away. The director had to calm down his actions. He flaunted his arms, when he only needed to raise them. Another actor, had done a Campbell's Soup commercial, when the FTC ordered Campbell's to get the marbles out of the soup*. Yet another actor had completed an (HBA) health and beauty aid Ad**. Another actor portrayed a doctor on a daytime soap opera, about three days a month.

One civilian cameraman shot all his interiors at F4.3. On one small set, he pumped 46,000 watts of light onto the set, using 23 juniors, also called duces or 2,000 watt lamps. He then cut the light to the desired F-Stop, using single nets, double nets, half nets, cookies, cutters and Gobo's. Viewing the daily rushes they were incredible. The beauty of the color saturation was unbelievable, and no double or triple shadows from the actors walking around the set.

One production shot on the main stage, dealt with airport security. I sort of remember having dope sniffing dogs on the set. I only worked on this film, probably two days. I never knew who the film was for, the FBI, Transportation Security Agency (TSA), NTSB National Transportation Safety Board, FAA or who? The film rented baggage loading equipment from Kennedy Airport. In the master shot about 20 bags and luggage were put on the conveyor belt, that would normally go from ground level to the plane's cargo hole. At the end of filming, nobody on the set could remember what order the bags were loaded. Nearly a half day's work of lighting and filming were wasted, with the master shot being re-filmed. This was just an inconvenience and precursor to the Vietnam scripted project, I would work on in the offing.

Also in filming was a Civil Service film, concerning the DIMES Management System. It revolved around manhours input, plus wages equalled productive output. It was so technical, the director refused to shoot a single frame of film, without the civil service technical rep on the set. The production used charts and graphs for overhead projector and rear-screen projection techniques. The set was dark when filming. On one shot the civilian cameraman fell asleep, while shooting the scene. I had to wake him up to shut off the camera. Even this boring story, was just a glimpse of what I would encounter in Nam, a few months off.

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Amidst filming major projects, there were overnight trips to Picatinny Arsenal and to Aberdeen Proving Grounds. At Picatinny two civilians popped smoke grenades all day, to see if there was any yellow or magenta in a red smoke grenade. Any yellow or cyan in a green grenade, etc. I thought, what a waste of time and taxpayers money. At Aberdeen, the two man team filmed test firings of probably 15 new guns still in the development stage.

One afternoon, I was told to accompany another SGT to Kodak Labs in New Jersey. Two people were required, because we were taking classified 16mm film for processing. Across the Hudson River, the other sergeant, told me he never got back until early in the morning. A factor we hadn't put into the equation, was the fact that the Pope was to conduct open air mass at Yankee Stadium, at 8 P.M. The Pope in New York, was hot news for the press corp. So hot in fact, that the TV stations had helicopters standing by, to fly the film from Yankee Stadium to Kodak and back to the heli-pad, atop of the Pan Am Building, so they could put it on the 10 O' Clock News. Kodak people told us, they had to mix up all new chemicals, plus regular work load, and get ready for the special Pope footage, and here we come with special handling classified film to be processed. They got us out of there lickety-split. I was back in my room at APC to watch the news at 10 P.M.

Come April, I was off to Ft. Knox, where APC was filming a tank training film. The basic camera was a 35mm Mitchell, either the Standard or N.C. Model. The BNC models were reserved for stage use only. As assistance cameraman, for the GS-11 civilian. I had to lift the 130 pound camera and tripod, to move to new shooting angles of the action.. On a good day we were able to complete 10 scripted scenes, plus add on shots.

A scripted movie scene, may require only 20 seconds of film to cover the dialog. The script writer, might just call for a dolly shot. Say of two men in a cafe having coffee and chatting. The scene number is #53. At the beginning of each shot the film would be clap-stick slated to synchronize sound and film. During the shot the camera travel in from the establishing shot of the two men sitting in a cafe booth, to a tight shot of the booth with the two men drinking. At this point the director fulfilled the scripts obligation. However, no director or cameraman would be satisfied. They would add scenes, such as close-ups of each persons face, and over the shoulder shots, showing part of the back of one man and frontal facial shot of the other person. These add on scenes would be slated Scene 53A, 53B, 53C and 53D.

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In the editing room, the flow of the movie might be disrupted with the adjoining scenes, by the dolly shot in scene #53. The look, the feel or timing may be off balance. The editor, director and or producer, may opt to shorten the dolly shot or deleted it completely, in lieu of the add on scenes, to maintain the continuity and proper tempo of the movie. Thus "Add-on Scenes" are an intricate part of movie production.

The Army photographer, who hasn't been harped at, to get more "Cut-ins and Cut-aways", are few. Filming uncontrolled action, where winding the camera's spring motor, focusing, changing exposure settings, or just running to catch up with the central figures in the action, it's impossible for the cameraman to get 100 percent of the action. The missed portion leaves a "Jump in Action", on the screen. The "Cut-Away", generally refers to crowd shots and facial expressions, to include close up of people's face, eye movements or mouth. Sometimes even other press corps doing their coverage of the event will do. The Cut-In are close up of fingers on typewriter keys, test tubes, IBM cards or anything else the person is handling. These "Cut-in and Cut-aways mask the missing lost action and cover the jumps in action. All this knowledge and standard procedures, would be thrown out the window, when filming the worst movie in Vietnam.

Another major difference of working on stage and scripted films, was the fact that the standard caption book, for scene or roll break down, was replaced with Scene Cards. The Scene Card was a simplified version of captions, using date, film production number, film emulsion. Using the Scene Card good takes were circled. Acceptable takes were put on "HOLD". To identify the "Hold" takes, we put a box over the take, and sometimes an "X". The lab would develop the negative and print only the circled take. Negative cutting would get the film and edit out everything, but the Hold and Circled take. For the movie in Vietnam, even tho it was scripted, I opted for the good old caption book.

I spent nearly a month at Ft. Knox, working on the tank training film. I was pulled off this production to go to Ft. Rucker, AL, and work on a helicopter training film. The Army asst. cameraman got killed, when he walked into rotor blades of a helo. xxx

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I asked about the G.I., that got killed, but the name didn't strike a bell. In DASPO and APC, being assigned to a unit for two months, and not meeting all the personnel was normal. People would be TDY (Temporary Duty) location shooting, while I was back at the Pic Center. Conversely, I was out TDY, while they were back at APC. The son on the old T.V. Series The Rifleman, Johnny Crawford, as an adult, had join the Army and assigned to APC as a cameraman. We were there a full year, before we had a junction in our roads.

I stayed at Ft. Rucker for about two weeks, if we worked at all. The pilot/instructor at the aviation school, who requested the film, said the script was totally wrong. The Army hired a NON-DAC script writer, it was approved by the aviation school, the Pentagon, and all concerned, except for the person that asked for the film, in the first place. After the script approval process, the script write was paid. He wrote the script all about "Fire In The Engines Of The Flying Crane", The instructor stated it was possible, but highly unlikely. If we filmed at all, it was after the director and pilot sat up nights and weekends re-writing the script. This worthless script, was an omen of what would happen in Vietnam.

In May, I was pulled off the helicopter production, to join an all military crew, set to do a R&D film off Roosevelt Roads Navy Base near Puerto Rico. That test was done three different times, because nobody would believe the results. The Marine Corp, said the Marines aren't that bad, and funded additional trials. The Navy Admirals, couldn't believe their pilots couldn't hit the target, and paid for more trials.

By June, I was part of a all military camera crew in Alaska, headed by an EX CBS director, to shoot one of the last "THE BIG PICTURE" TV Series, titled "The Star And The Bear." The film dealt with Native Indians and Eskimo Reservists and National Guardsmen. Their training and role they play in watching the many thousands of miles of arctic coastline, that the active duty military can't patrol. The script was constantly in view and referred to. I don't know if the director, straight off the streets of Manhattan, didn't trust the Army, but every scene was slated and over shot by 200 percent, with lots of add on scenes. Even in scripted productions a 10 to 1 ratio was common. For every foot of film used, nine ended up on the editing floor. For a 30 minute, 16mm film, would require 1080 feet of film. We maybe 20,000 feet of film. More than adequate for "The Star And The Bear", and plenty of stock footage for future productions. This was a stark difference from what I soon would encounter in Vietnam.

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By late July, the team was back from Alaska. I was handed another "The Big Picture Script", also dealing with reservists on their two week active duty, at Ft. Dix N.J., Camp Drum N.Y. and lots of other locations all over the U.S. I took a three man team to Ft. Dix and filmed the scenes called for on the post rifle ranges, spending nearly a week.. Once Ft. Dix was completed, I was pulled from that job. I think the project was shelved for the year. Reservists are normally on two weeks training until Labor Day. It was already August, when the Ft. Dix segment was finished. To travel around the country and film at a half dozen other sites in less than a month, was highly questionable?

I guess, I was assigned to another civil service production? This one the civil service employee had a guardian angel, the soap opera doctor. It was a large production. I spent several weeks on this job, filming on the main stage, at the police dept. at Smithtown, in Suffolk County. Other scenes were filmed at Ft. Tilden and Ft. Totten in the New York area.

One morning, while shooting the Guardian Angel film on the main stage, the crew had taken the morning coffee break. I was doing something with the (blimped noiseless camera) BNC 35mm Mitchell. Looking over to a stairwell, there both actors were, behind closed doors in a heated argument. They were ranting, raving, fists shaking, red-faced screaming at each other. I wasn't sure how to intervene, but I had to halt this authentic dispute. I certainly couldn't take sides, or one actor probably would walk off the production. That would mean trashing, the nearly completed film, hire new actor(s), and start all over, or re-write the script's ending. APC might use animation, stock footage and Special Effects to cover the few remaining scenes. In one way shape or form, I had to stop this fight and try to make amends to this dichotomy.

Before I could get to their location and attempt to resolve this legitimate fight, one actor politely said, you blew your line. Very calmly, both men raised their scripts and read the dialog in normal tones and vocal inflection. Seconds later, both were screaming and yelling at each other again.

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Hell, these two were rehearsing their line. I was dumbfounded, to see actors, turn on and off, hate, anger and emotions, like a light switch. During my days in New York, I had seen 70 Broadway Shows, and recognized great acting, from many productions, but to see this degree of theatrical dramatic during rehearsals was new and highly unusual. These two definately were fulfilling their obligation to the film's production. Walking into the snack bar, I pondered if Tennessee Williams had written this script, because no Army staff writer could come up with such lines? Lastly, I was pulled off this project, before filming the fight scene. If the live performance was anything like the rehearsal. WOW!!! What I witnessed sure looked real.

By the end of summer, I was called into the Chief of Camera Branch Office, I was selected to film a scripted movie in Vietnam and Thailand. It was mentioned that 1/5 of all goods arriving there were useless. The Army brass were appalled, dismayed and agitated, that fully 20 percent of all war materials, being sent to the war zone were damaged, spoilage, inoperative, ruin, unreparable, pilferage, missing or in other ways unuseable, when it arrived at its destination. In previous wars, sea mines and enemy subs, took great tolls on the shipping lanes; however the Viet Cong had no submarines, nor mines. So this high rate of lost good was alarming, intolerable, out-rageous, raising many eye-brows in logistical circles.

The team was incredible small for a scripted film, only a two man team. An APC staff civilian director and I as cameraman. since I wasn't handed a script, I had to meet with the director, to find out what special equipment we would need. I was told, some interiors, other than that, take the usual stuff. Already a nightmare was forming. Besides our personal suitcases and items, the two of us would have to lift and lug around camera cases, tripods, lights, film and other boxes of supplies and a typewriter. Stateside airports, we'd have skycaps to handle the baggage, but overseas, the two of us would have to handle the 700-900 pounds of equipment alone. Then too, there was no assurance the director would help. This really wasn't within his purview. Landing at Saigon, and elsewhere, it would be the directors job to find a phone and try to line up transportation and housing for us and the equipment. Leaving me to get all the stuff from baggage claim to curb side, by myself.

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Without seeing the script, I knew that in Vietnam, the amount of controlled action, would be severely limited, more wishful thinking, than reality. I envisioned, at least half the script being covered documentary style. That was the reason, I opted for caption books, rather than scene cards. If the script called for just artillery, we could film any size 105's, 155mm, 175mm or 8 inch. If the script required a specific artillery size, that would restrict our flexibility. If possible, depending on the rest of the script, we might re-word the script. I didn't know! I didn't like travelling half way around the world, not knowing what I was doing. In the weeks to come, it seemed we had a shooting outline, than a script.

The term some interiors, was about as general in terminology as one could get. There was no mention of night time filming. I had four 16mm color films to choose from. The industry standard was ECO, with an ASA of 25 for interiors and ASA 16 with an 85C correction filter for outdoors. A medium speed film was MS, rated at ASA 64. In the high speed film department, there were two films. The old ER, that everyone hated to use. Kodak must have rushed it into production, it was bad, but rated at ASA 160 indoors. They later came out with EF film rated at ASA 125. Since everyone hated the ER film, by late 1969, there was still plenty of that film available, and supply people would issue the ER film just to get rid of it. Not knowing if the interiors were warehouses or offices, I order mostly ECO and some EF film. What mix of films I received, I don't remember. To use the high speed film outdoors would require a neutral density filter, plus correction filter, which I sure didn't have for the cameras issued to me.

With interior shot, required lights, not only for illumination but for color balance of the film. I took out two sets of Color-tran Mini-Pro's. These lights were industry standard of the day. Each case had two lamps of 500 or 750 watt bulbs, either bulb would fit in the lamp. It also had two light stands. The case was big enough, for plenty of extension cords, or other miscellaneous items. The problem with these lamps, were each lamp drew 8.4 Amps. That meant, on a 15 Amp circuit breaker or fuse line, only one light could be connected. It wasn't unusual for the building tenants to obtain an electrical education, by the time a film crew departed there building. They knew where the fuse or circuit breaker box was located, and the extent that each electrical line ran within the building.

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Most of these electrical lines were drawing about 12 Amps, before the photo team arrived. This was fine, with a rare incidents of the circuit breaker tripping. With these lights, the tentants had to cut off coffee pots,, ask the secretarial pool not to use their typewriters, unplug small fans, but that never alleviated the problem. Window air conditioners and refrigerators that run intermittently, over loaded the circuit. When the lights went out, the scene was ruin, requiring re-shooting of that scene. It also meant, find out what caused the overload and see if it could be reconciled. In many cases, it took a half hour or longer to find the cause, and get the light back on, and work could resume.

Using a higher Amp circuit was no better in most instances. A 20 or 30 Amp circuit was more dedicated line. In the home, these lines go to the electric stove, the heater/air conditioner and the washer and dryer area. In a building, the same is true. The higher Amp lines are placed where electrical equipment requiring more Amps are placed, thus these lines are also saturated, before the photo team arrives. With four lights, meant four different circuits and hope you had enough extention cords to reach, between wall outlet and the lamp. It was a hassle and a nuisance. On one DASPO job, we had to run extention cords from an adjoining building. In that project the team was shooting an entire week in one large meeting room.

On the 17th of October, the two of us flew out of Kennedy Airport on American Airlines to San Francisco. Then Pan Am to Saigon 28th of November we flew from Saigon to Bangkok, and finally on the 13th of Dec, we HEADED BACK TO New York. Almost two months do this film. On the flight to Saigon, I asked to read the script I was told it was in his suitcase. He also told me, he had an outstanding request from the Transportation Corps, to film any unsafe handling of cargo. That sounded reasonable, as to why the goods arrived damaged. The long flight provided time to think of reasons for bad cargo.

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The reasoning behind, so much material being worthless when it got to Vietnam, in many cases were a wide range of culprits. I had personal experiences with some aspects of the logistical horror, having filmed and used convoys as a safe transportation mode. I knew the condition of the Vietnamese roads, that bounced, rattled and jarred any contents on the trucks. I had talked with drivers suffering from piles and hemorrhoids, on the human effects of road conditions, in Vietnam. On the seaport segments, when the MACV Army "A" Photo Team filmed LARC/BARC, Army Tug Boat Harbor Pilots, and Harbor Master (all at this web-site.) I had crawled up Jacob's ladders and cargo nets to film on the rust buckets, the shipping lines employed to transport cargo. Later I shopped at the Persidio of San Francisco Commissary, after a grocery laden ship, blew a boiler, and limped back to port, where they sold bananas for 2¢ a LB, and hamburger meat for 59¢ a Lb. I had witnessed the 3rd Ord Bn, nightly detonation of tons of un-useable munitions. I filmed the ordeal for "Army Photog flys A-37 also (at this web-site.)

Batteries caused a nightmare, that I had personal experiences with. Yet the military bought batteries of every size, shape, voltage and amperage. They had batteries for watches and medical hearing aids, up to vehicles batteries. They had 24 volt batteries for aircraft and helicopter, to Euclid 270 earth movers and bulldozers. Radios and generators took batteries as well as a host of other commerical and military equipment. Of course, the most versatile the "D" Cell battery for flash lights and many other uses. The photo team used the "D" Cell to power the Nagra Tape-recorder. The Nagra took a dozen of these batteries, that should last up to 16 hours. Yet, the G.I. issue "D" Cells barely lasted four hours. Its common knowledge, that old batteries drain themselves of useful life and power, sitting on the shelf. Whether the batteries sat in a depot too long, sat in Manila Bay, the South China Sea too long, awaiting a berthing space at a Vietnam port or what; or if the problem originated at the factory, no one knew; but after a series of half dead G.I. batteries, the team bought P.X. Duracell or Energizer batteries, that lasted about two months, not four hours.

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Another prime consideration for the logistical circles to think about, was the availability of transportation. The steep increase in the tonnage being sent to Vietnam, outstripped shipping line, in-house fleet of ships. Undoubtedly, some shipping companies, leased some ships from world-wide sources. Other shipping companies, set their sights on the "MOTH BALL" fleet to gain capacity. The sea worthiness of many of these ships was questionable, and adequately trained crews to operate the ship, is highly skeptical. I dare say the above, because I've been to sea on seven Navy ships*** for up to two months at sea. I heard the captain of the rust bucket, that brought the LARC's/BARC's to Qui Nhon, tell his crew to get this junk off my ship. Filming from the main deck, everywhere I looked, I saw rust, deterioration, deprivation, dilapidated and disrepair of the ship. I knew the LARC's/BARC's were in a lot better shape, than the tub that got them there. I've been on a ship, the U.S.S. Mitchell, from Oakland to Korea, that nearly capsized in a typhoon. I've been bounced around in the fantail, as 40 foot swells passed under the ship. I was rammed forward, as the bow of the ship slammed into the next wave, and sea sick too. So I'm talking from knowledgeable experience. The ship, I was aboard, up the Saigon River, for the Harbor Pilot story, wasn't in much better shape, than the Qui Nhon ship.

I can tell you, first hand, the vibration, shaking and contortion, a well maintained Navy ship encounter in bad weather, with the pitch and rolling. It's only suspect, the condition of the cargo in a poorly maintained ship? Rusted hatch covers let salt water spray and salt water to penetrate the hole, rusting and corroding vital supplies. Cargo breaking loose from being latched down, banking into and damaging other cargo, or worst the hole filling with water, to ruin the cargo. Even worst a bulk-head giving way, flooding the entire compartment. Then too, there were break downs of refrigeration units, freezers, boilers, and engines, that the crew couldn't repair on the high seas.

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Another point of contention, was the basic military shipping unit, the CONEX Container. A six foot tall, six foot deep, by five foot wide metal box, that was in no way water proof. Many had seen better days, requiring forced entry and closure. The CONEX Container, was used to ship any small items, that would fit into the container, for transshipment or act as a storage shed. Many found other uses. A few sand bags, and it made a nifty bunker. On my first trip to Cam Ranh Bay, one lonely CONEX was the office, acting as control tower, flight operation, base operations and passenger terminal. CONEX uses were only limited by one's imitation, except as a water tight container. CONEX Containers stacked in a ship's hold were apt to get salt water seepage that spoiled its components.

At any point in time, most commercial cargo ships would look deserted. A 300 to 400 foot vessel, would have about a 50 crewman, to operate the ship, in shifts. Thus some crew members would be sleeping at all times. Of those working, the officers, would be on the bridge or assigned areas. The cooks would be in the galley. Engine room personnel would be in their area. Leaving much of the ship's many levels and length, sparse of people, with ample opportunity for break-ins and theft of cargo, stowed in the holds.

Seaport and depot security were lacking in substance, mostly a barbed wire fence, with periodical MP patrols, driving around the site. High visible areas as POL and ammo depots, might be aided with guard dogs, in guarding the merchandise. Most Vietnam depots were exterior holding areas, with hardly any building. This open air storage and scant security, encouraged anyone with resolve to steal and pilfer the government goods.

There were an amalgamation of other reasons and causes for the high lost rate. A void in cold storage units or facilities, caused perishables to spoil at dock side or at warehouse sites. Lack of electricity to maintain freezers and refrigerators cold. Overworked longshoremen and stevedores, who were told, they couldn't go home, until the entire ship was down-loaded. These seaport working troops, tired and exhausted, recklessly operated machinery and equipment in dumb way, that jeopardized, their own safety and put the cargo at risk. A forklift operator would drop a pallet of cement, or other such commodity, breaking open bags. These bags were spilled all over the dockside, and useless.

The G.I.'s themselves were the biggest culprit. Stealing goods to sell on the black market or horse trade, sometimes out of necessity. When the MACV Army "A" Photo Team moved into Room #100 of the Brink Hotel, we needed an air conditioner. All efforts to get one through official channels failed. We sent out our trader, he came back, not with a window unit, but a 20 foot walk in freezer, that was useless to us.

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Fastening our seat belts for landing in Saigon, I wondered if the script writer, had ventured to Vietnam, to survey the situation, or had merely talked with Army brass at the Pentagon.

Our first dilemma came to mind as the plane's wheels touched down. Our work day would suffer and communication, between the two of us, dismantled, because of our ranks. With Civil Service cameramen being GS-11, the director had to be a GS-12. The Federal government was set up as follows. Officers O-1 to O-10 and Civil Service GS-1 to GS-18. I once worked with a GS-13, from the Pic Center. He was boss of Photo Instrumentation. His crew operated high speed cameras. They filmed bullets leaving a rifle, missiles at ignition and lift off etc. The cameras ran at 5000 to 10,000 frames a second, compared with normal motion picture of 24 frames a second. I was told, the GS-13 ranked between a bird colonel and brigadier general. Thus a GS-12 director, would rank between the colonel grade equivalents. No way would an enlisted man, be put in a field grade officers hotel.

Once in Tan Son Nhut civilian terminal, the director phoned MACV for transportation, while I handled the baggage. The director did help with the equipment, once the phone call was completed. We stored the equipment at MACV IO (Information Office), while in the greater Saigon area, including Bien Hoa and Long Binh.. Storing the equipment at MACV, hampered our operations even more. Our driver would have to drive around town picking us up, then drive out to MACV HQS, to get the equipment, before we could start the day's filming.. That meant at least an hour a day lost.

In the nearly two months working on this project, I saw the script cover only a half a dozen times. The first time was at Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) Headquarters, to get coordination and assistance on the scripts's requirements. Then several days later at (USARV) U.S. Army Vietnam HQS, for the same reasons. Once or twice, the director screwed up and accidentally brought the script on location, but it stayed in his back pocket of his pants. I again saw the script in Thailand at MAC-Thai HQS.

When doing the worst experience you ever handled, its only human nature to want to forget the details, and many have been erased from my mind. But somehow, the best and most horrid trials and tribulations linger, while mundane matters are forgotten. I had worked with this director on at least one other project in the studio. He had the propensity to do a good job, but out here in the field, it was like he didn't care. Maybe he hated being away from the family for months. Maybe he missed Thanksgiving at home. What ever he seemed to take out his frustrations on the film. He became very hard to work with.

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When I asked for a scene number, he would scratch his head and spit out any number that came to mind. His favorite numbers were 13 and 31. We used these numbers for everything. If I protested, that we had done that scene on a totally unrelated subject, he'd say make it 13A. Man!. we had used 13A several times also.

At the end of the day, I'd ask, what's on the schedule for tomorrow? He never knew. Several times, I was caught off guard. I had slow speed outdoor film in the camera, when we ended up doing a large indoor scene. When I objected, because the film wasn't right speed, he'd say label the film "PUSH 2 STOPS". in development. God; now I sacrificed perfectly exposed outdoor shots, for the interior shots. What that meant, was that Kodak Labs would Over develop the film by "TWO STOPS". It's a very technical and incalculable difference, between Two stops over exposed and two stops over developed. In either case the film would be washed out and very light, virtually unuseable.

One day, while filming the Saigon Tay Ninh Convoy sequence. We filmed the trucks lined up to pull out. Probably no slate, or scene number, or he said, I'll give you a scene number later. That meant an END SLATE, which was routinely done. It's used, when the cameramen arrived late for an event, and getting the action on film was more important than the slate. This wasn't the case with the convoy sequence. The convoy commander instructed a truck at the rear of the convoy to stop and pick us up. The truck was half empty, with lots of space for us and camera case. We filmed the convoy commander and first few truck pulling out, at convoy intervals of 150 feet between trucks.. We crossed the traffic to get a different angle. Once we were aboard our truck, we needed travelling scenes. The director wanted the travelling shots on the tripod, so that every bounce and jarring of the camera, would be seen, and give everyone watching the film a headache. I wanted to use the body brace, to hand hold the camera, allowing my body to absorb the shock and vibration, but was over-ruled. Conversely a number of times when the scene should have been filmed using a tripod, the director demanded, that the scene be done hand-held. There was no winning with this director's whims and off the wall ideas.

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We probably spent about three weeks filming around Saigon, before heading to Cam Ranh Bay, Da Nang and several other locales in country. One vivid memory, related to indoor shooting. We had set up the lights in a office, to film a typist working at his or her desk. Of course, we had our usual problems with circuit breakers tripping, until we were ready to begin filming. In the middle of shooting the scene, the director glanced out the door to spy a truck passing, with a precarious sitting load, ready to fall. He actually grabbed the pan and tilt handle of the tripod and whipped the camera around to film the truck spilling it's load.

What the people back at APC would see, was a good exposure of the G.I. typing, followed by a swish pan, that ended up out of focus, way over-exposed, by at least two stops, off color, because of no color correction filter, zooming pass windows focusing and change of exposure, to get the truck passing. The scene probably required 20 seconds of screen time to cover the dialog. We might have gotten 10 seconds, before the director yanked on the camera. In the end, did we re-shoot the master scene? No way. Did we shoot any "Add On Scenes" or "Cut-ins or Cut Aways"? Nope we just packed up and left. This was just one of several times an episode like this would happen.

This project was becoming "MURPHY's Law", where anything that can go wrong, will go wrong. Nothing was planned, we worked off-the-cuff. I never had an idea of what we were going to film that hour, until we actually did the film. Often he would change his mind in the midst of filming a scene. Rarely any "Add On Scenes" nor Cut-Ins or Cut-aways. Wrong film for what we would end up filming. We had under exposed and under developed film. We had over exposed and over developed film, plus shaky film to boot. Shaky from not using tripods where they should be employed, or vice-versa.

I began to dread going out each morning, asking myself how is he going to mess up the film today? My reputation was on the line. The going rate was \$1000 a screen minute, for 16mm productions. That meant the Army Material Command, who requested this film, had put up \$30,000 for a half hour movie. I was beginning to wonder if I had one foot of useable film. In short nothing was going right. I couldn't wait for the Vietnam segment to be finished, hoping the Thailand scenes would be better.

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Somehow we finished shooting in Vietnam, or so I was told. How was I to confirm that decision, without ever seeing the script. This certainly was a far cry from Alaska, where the script was in constant sight, or the DIMES film, that was so Technical, the scripts were open and in the hands of the Tech. Rep., The director, script continuity person and actor/ narrator, as he read each line of dialog.

The Vietnamese segment was finished, and the two of us kept our cool, without much rancor and open hostilities, toward each other. My mind was an omni, going in 360 different directions at once. I never knew what to expect, and had to ascertain the unexpected. There were certain days, he would say load up with fast film, were going indoor. I'd have fast film in the camera. On the way to the location, he spotted something and halted the vehicle to film outdoors. Probably the most damaging aspect of the entire operation, was when I sacrificed part of good exposed film, by having the lab over develop, the low light interior. That was a real sore point of contention by me. We never returned to re-film those ruin or lost scenes. The transgressions of no film or scene slate, duplicate scene slates and end slates, were flagrant infractions of the rules and standards alone, much less the other serious disregard for movie making standards, that I endured with this director, I could see my career was doomed.

For the umpteenth time on this project, I packed up all the camera equipment, for the short, jet hop to Bangkok, Thailand. Most of our in-country flight took longer, using the turbo-prop C-130;s. Our first destination in Thailand was Sattahip. How we got to Sattahip, from the airport is foggy. Since Thailand autos are small us and the equipment couldn't fit in one car. Then too, neither of us had a Thai Driver's Lisence, and they drive on the other side of the street. Thus, I can only infer, that MACV sent MAC-Thai a (TWIX) electronic message, announcing what flight we were arriving on and have a carryall, or other suitable vehicle standing by to transport us to Sattahip.

Since I was familiar with nearly everything we filmed in Vietnam, and already had personal photos (Available at this web-site) I took very few pictures in Vietnam. Sattahip, I never even heard of the place. It was new and different. those photos are enclosed

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For some goofy reason, the director wanted a long hallway filmed. The hallway, without a doubt was at least 75 feet long. The hall had, in the ceiling florescence lights. By human eye standards, these florescence lamps give off white light, but for film, florescence lights, register as a teal (blue/green) hue, without a special (Wratten Minus 30 filter, which I certainly didn't have, to correct the lighting problem. He wanted the entire hallway in focus. Using the light meter, I could get a reading good enough, about head high to film the scene at F-2.5. The situation was at nearly wide-open apparture, the depth of focus was shallow. If I set the distance on 15 feet, anthing from 12 feet to the camera was out of focus. Equally, the hallway from about 22 feet to the end of the hall, would be out of focus.

The director wanted a G.I. to walk pass the camera to the end of the hallway, with everything in focus. I had to tell him its impossible. Even follow focus wouldn't work. We could keep the G.I. in focus as he walked, but the further he walked down the hall, more and more of the near-by the camera, hallway would go out of focus.

The only way to boost the F-Stop was more light on the hallway. Well we broke out our colortran mini-pro's, and measured off one F-Stop on the lightmeter. We had locked office doors opened, and set the lamp up high in the doorway, just outside of the camera's view. This would look natural. The camera could see the ceiling with the florescence lights spaced about 10 feet or so apart in ceiling. Naturally we tripped circuit breakers. Why I didn't know. It was the weekend and the troops in Thailand didn't work on week ends. That was why the offices were locked. It took for ever to find someone, who knew where the circuit breaker box was located, and re-set the tripped breaker. Then a lot longer to circumvent the reason, why one circuit kept tripping, when the office was empty.

With the photo lamps on, I might have gotten F-8 or so. That really helped the depth of field. But another problem arose. As the G.I. walked pass the camera, toward the end of the hall, our lights cast a deep shadow on the wall, that looked totally weird, and totally unnatural; compared to a soft shadow on the floor, the florescence lamp created. In the end, I think we shot the scene both ways, with our lights as an aid, and the natural florescence lighting; and just crossed our finger, that one might work. In all we had spent over five hours on just this one scene, and that was iffy at best.

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The worst was yet to come. We had filmed the dock activities (see Slides) of the rust bucket ships being off loaded. The camera was loaded with a 400 foot spool of ECO, of which, close to half was exposed. The next morning, the director says, bring the lights. I was hoping, he meant some office or computer room operations, in a confined area. With the equipment loaded, in the truck, the driver takes off, stopping in front of a monstrosity of a warehouse, the size of a football field. Inside we met the (OIC) officer in charge. He leads us up several flights of steps to a balcony overlooking the entire warehouse. Behind the balcony were offices. From this vantage point we were probably 75 feet from the warehouse floor.

Damn, if the director didn't want a lit overall view of the entire warehouse, from up here. My mind shot back to photo school where an instructor stated "the human eye is over 100,000 times more sensitive to light, than the fastest film." Just because we could see the forklifts, running up and down the rows, didn't mean the film could. The light meter needle didn't even move, it was so dark. The only film to do justice here would be Infrared Film. From where we stood it was about 40 feet to the top of the closest shelf. The light from the Mini-Pro wouldn't even light the top of the closest shelf. Even at 500 watts of light, the maximum range for EF Film might be 25 feet. I had much slower ECO.

The director didn't care about yesterdays footage being trashed or going back to change film. Man, I wished I carried a few extra empty 400 foot film cans. But, the director didn't worry about the exterior shots, he wanted this warehouse today, and now not later, after I changed film, but NOW! All the director could say was "Label the film push 2 stops". I think I counted 20 rows of shelves, each about five feet wide, with aisles for forklifts. That made this building 200 feet wide, and even longer. There was no way to light this building.

I finally had to ask the director, "Who in the hell is going to edit this mess?" His reply was, "I'll be in the editing room every day, or I'll do it myself." By now some Army officers, hearing the commotion outside, came out of their offices to see what was happening. At this point, I was ready to tell the brass we were filming using "COLOred Infrared, and use the lights to build contrast, just to see if they could deduce the senility of that statement. Like idiots, we both set up the lights, just to save our stupid asses.

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For the non-photo minded people, trying to light this warehouse was tantamount to, at midnight using four flashlights to light a baseball game, and claim the field was lit. To say, you could see if the pitch was a strike or ball, To state if the pitcher balked or not. Claim the runner at second was safe. That the outfielder could see the fly ball, using four flashing etc, etc. Trying to light this warehouse, with the equipment we had was ludicrous. My mind shot back to the cameraman that shot every thing at F-4.3, how would he light this mess.

What an asinine approach. Hell, during the four hours we wasted ,setting up the stupid lights, I could have returned to where we stored the equipment, and changed film. Doing so; would have spared the previous day's precious exterior footage, and given an earnest attempt of justifical results on the warehouse scene, with our woefully infelicitous illumination, by using EF or ER Film. It took four hours, of tripping circuit breakers, during routine office hours. The use of ECO meant the destruction of the good footage, and still miss this warehouse scene, by a wide margin. In short both days were wasted.

Even worst yet, this was it, just the master scene, no add-on scenes, no cut ins or cut aways. Nothing on the warehouse floor of the forklifts and personnel working, nothing from the ground level. In the director's words, "It's a wrap." In a rush to get out of the place, I picked up the camera on the tripod, putting them on my shoulder, as I had done so many times with the much heavier Mitchell cameras at Ft. Knox and Ft. Rucker. In the free hand I picked up the camera and tripod cases. The director carried the light sets, following suit.

Once outside, while my eyes were still adjusting to the daylight, the director screams, "Shoot It, Shoot It", pointing to some forklift, that was about to spill his load, all over the road. Now, without the outdoor correction filter, and the aperture wide open, he wants me to just swing the camera around and start filming. At this point the film being off color, was the least of the worries. I zipped the aperture to F-11 and tried to level the tripod head, but the director kept yelling Shoot--Shoot---Shoot. As I zoomed in, for a tight shot the whole frame was on a 45° angle. Everyone back at the Pic Center, watching the daily rushes, would have to tilt their heads, to view the action on the screen.

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After two weeks at Sattahip, it was back to Bangkok, for a MAC (military charter flight) back to Hawaii. In boarding these planes, the Air Force seats, families, officers and civilians in the front. Lastly, the enlisted personnel are seated in the rear of the aircraft. At least, I didn't have to sit with the director all the way back to Hawaii. I had a long flight to ponder what might be pending.

No way was this hodge-podge of unrelated, disassociated, with every foot of film exposed and or developed in every way but correctly, go unnoticed. Without seeing or hearing from the Pic Center, I knew, we had NO MOVIE, just exposed film. Shaky footage, cockeyed on the screen scenes, no add-on or cut in and cut-aways, to hide the jumps in action. I really questioned whether, there was one useable foot of film in the entire mess. The future days would be interesting. I would have notoriety alright, being involved in the biggest flop in APC history, while sporting the deepest, darkest suntan in New York in the middle of December.

The Army had two other forms of slating a scene. Both were mighty appropriate on this project, but used timidly. The first was the "WAVE-OFF" This was used, because the camera's run button was pushed accidentally. The cause could be as simple as a pen or keys in the pocket, pressing the run button. Every MOPIC man has had accidental film runs. Once the cameraman realized the mistake, he ran his hand up and down in front of the lens, while the camera was running, to signify the mistake. I used the wave-off several times on the shoot nearly dumping the load shots.

The other slate was the up-side down slate. It was so rarely used, it was never quite for sure if the people viewing the film knew its meaning. It meant the photographer was filming the scene under protest. With 13 years, behind the camera, I had used the inverted slate, no more than four times, but fully half of those were dedicated to this project.

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The Pictorial Center had two of Hollywood's marvelous inventions to aid in the artistic creations of the big screen. The first was the color timer, to adjust and correct any in balance in the film using filtration. I never saw this item of equipment in use, but probably used to correct minuscule variations in the color between ECO, MS and EF emulsions, and or even batches of the same film.. In any case, the talent of the lab operator and the capability of the color timer, would be tested, to make anything of the garbage I submitted.

The other in dispenseable item was the optical printer, capable of performing many of Hollywood's tricks and illusions, including Pop-On and Pop-Off, as in converting foreign films to English, using sub-titles. Horizontal, vertical and diagonal wipes, lap dissolves, intentional double exposures, split screen, multi-images, off center correction and kalidoscope effect, day for night effect and much more. This machinery and operator, would also be taxed to the limit to create anything of what we sent back.

I wasn't back in New York five days, before being called on the carpet, to explain my actions. Walking into the room, there sat the Army Pictorial Commander, another colonel, boss of Producer's Branch, Chief of Director's Branch, and my own Chief of Camera Branch. The first question, I well remember, was, "Why hadn't I followed the script?" I told them, I never had a copy! When I asked to read the director's copy on the flight to Vietnam he said it's in his suitcase in the belly of the plane, and that he never carried the script while filming. After another question I told them, I was just trying to follow the director's instructions, but he kept changing his mind. Another question dealt with exposure. I heard one colonel state something I never heard before. He said over-exposed washed out shadows, while over development, the film retained the shadows. Another on the panel asked if that was true for reversal film. The colonel assured him it was. The last question related to the cockeyed film on the screen. When I told them, the director informed me, that he had an outstanding request from the Transportation Corp, to film unsafe handling of merchandise. All the heads turned to each other. I heard the panel members say, something like, that's par for the course, and that sounds about right. I was dismissed.

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Leaving the room, I thought to myself, this must be only the first round; how long will it be, until I'm called back again? This was far less questioning, then I envisioned or expected. I had gotten off relatively easy. A moment or two later, it hit me. The questions were as if they heard it all before, and they just wanted my latest version. This director must have done similar stuff with other Army cameramen, and the panel just wanted to see, if I could add any new elements. But what would the director gain, what would his motive be to deliberately ruin or sabotage a project? It was if the panel knew the answers, before asking the questions! Any civilian cameraman, would have packed up and returned to New York, leaving the director in Vietnam, by himself. Believe me, I thought about doing just that, often.

With the Vietnam saga behind, it was onto very few new venture. The project boards of production status, read COMPLETED or EDITING, with no new projects being listed. The rumor mill and scuttle-butt, had it that the Pic Center was closing. That the Pentagon hadn't asked for, nor Congress authorized funds to keep the place active for the up-coming year. The base closure, with its associated (RIF) Reduction in Force, meaning personnel, was one way the Civil Service Commission fired under achieving civil service employees.

In the ensuing months, I hardly ever saw or spoke to the director. If we passed in a hallway, it was merely greetings and salutations. We never mentioned or discussed the film, Vietnam or Thailand. I never saw one foot of film, nor the script.

In the final dieing days of the Pic Center, I was sent to the film vaults, with instructions to destroy all the film stored in the vaults. Each vault held in the vicinity of a 1000 reels of film, of every size, ranging from 100 foot spools to 1200 foot reels. From the floor to the ceiling on three sides of the vault, were racks of film. Racks of film were also stored in the center of the vaults, leaving only a walkway. Still photographer frequently obtain an 8X10 print of their work, but us MOPIC people never got a copy of their work.. This was a golden opportunity, to collect some of my footage, before it hit the grinder. The films were labelled by project number and a few cans had the cameraman's name. While looking for my own film, I saw many cans marked DCS-200, which I reconized as DASPO project numbers. Knowing many of the DASPO's people, I started grabbing their film cans as well as my own

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With less than half of one vault searched, I had two boxes of film, but no way to store or transport the film for safe haven. The great mass transit system of New York, I found it more a liability, rather than an asset to have a car, to get around. If I had a car, the trunk and all passenger area, would have been filled with film cans, not just the 40 reels, or so salvaged and at this website. As such, I carried one box to the subway station, then to the overnight lockers at the Port Authority Bus Terminal. I wasn't about to spend a months wages renting a car, to save film, I rightly wasn't sure what to do with, except save it from destruction.

The assets of APC were divided among three installations. About half of the producers and directors, were offered positions at Huntsville, AL. The rest (RIFFED) or took much lower positions elsewhere within the federal government.. Myself, an officer or two and several civilian cameraman, along with some equipment were assigned to White Sands Missile Range. With either Ft. Gordon, GA or Tobyhanna Depot, PA was the receipt of the remainder.

* In 1969 Campbell's Soup Ad Agency did a commercial. In the Ad, the actor dipped the spoon just under the surface of the soup, but got only broth. To elevate the meat and vegetables higher in the bowl, the Ad Agency put marbles in the bottom of the bowl. Now when the actor dipped the spoon into the bowl of soup, he showed broth, meat and vegetables. I saw the Ad on TV and heard the FTC decree on the news, ordering Campbell's to get the marbles out of the soup as false advertising. The actor was now employed on the stage at APC, taking a ribbing.

** In the HBA commercial, which ran a long time on T.V., the actor was selling razor blades. The theme of the ad was with or without shaving cream, you would get a great shave. In the commercial, he shaved one side of the face with shaving cream. The other side he dry shaved. Then using a credit card across his face to hear the stubbles. In the ad, the actor said, it was the best shave he ever had. On the set at APC, he confessed it was the worst shave, and even nicked himself several times. I think I remember, him saying it took 17 days to do that commercial. When he nicked himself, it took several days for his face to heal. If it was a bad take, the production was halted, for 24 hours, until his beard grew enough to shave again.

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*** During the Kennedy administration, with Robert McNamara Sec. of Defense, he didn't like the military's comptroller system, and implemented "Industrial Funding." It was so complicated, disproportionate, or the instruction poorly written, that some bases used the system, while others were excluded. I remember, the system was so preposterous, that for a short time, in Field Photo, us G.I.'s were given time cards.

Then at Ft. Knox, I was told, the producer and project was charging the Armor School, \$150.00 a day for my services. I was so awe-struck, I hardly heard the DAC cameraman at about \$225.00 and the director at, roughly \$300.00 a day. As an E-6, after taxes and social security, my monthly pay check, was barely \$200.00, but the project was getting \$750.00 a week for my use. At lunch, I counted nine Pic Center people, working on the project; including equipment truck drivers, grips and gaffers.

These scandalous fees were to cover the Pic Center's 4.3 million annual operating budget. Even the stages were rented to the client. The main stage was valued at \$100,000. If 10 films used the main stage, it was \$10,000 stage rental per film. It's funny, the Navy and Air Force Photo Centers weren't touched. What this Industrial Funding did, was price the Army Pictorial Center, right out of operation, and attributed to the \$1000.00 a screen minute cost for a film.

**** U.S.S. Mitchell (APA) 21 days Oakland to Inchon Korea
U.S.S. Lipan (ATF-85) 65 days Pearl Harbor to American Samoa and return.
U.S.S. Berkley (DDG) 5 days off California
U.S.S. Westford County (LST) 5 days off California
U.S.S. Okanagan (AKA/APA) 5 days off California
U.S.S. Fechteler (DD-870) 5 days off California
U.S.S. George Eastman (YAG-39) 45 days Pearl Harbor to The Central Pacific and return.

William Foulke
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APC/DASPO/ MACV Photo Team
Written Mar.-Apr. 2005