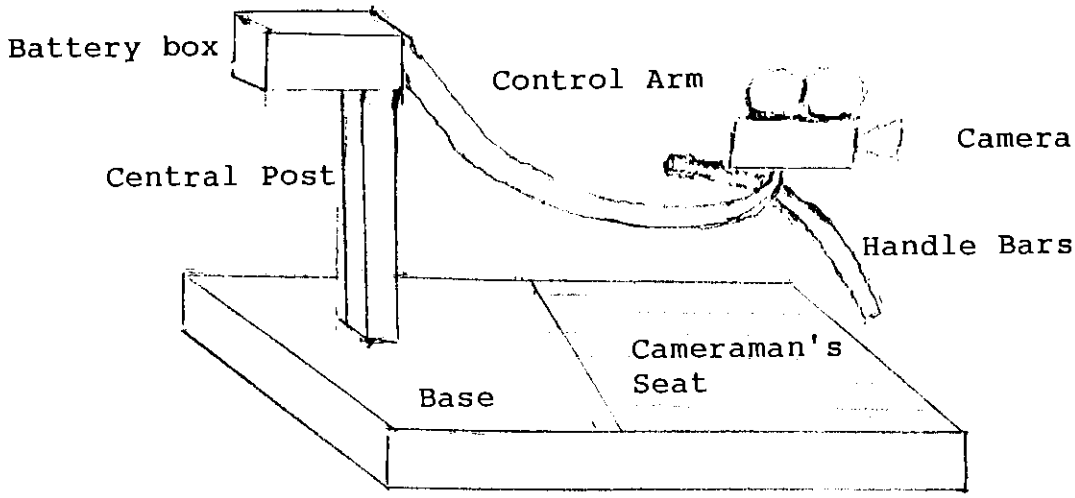
DASPO Buys Tyler Mounts

This drawing was done from 1966 memory. Photos of the Tyler Mount and Mini-Mount are available at the DASPO Website.



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In 1965 Schweppes Tonic aired a long running TV Ad, that was a marvel of pictorial genius, raising more questions than would eventually be answered. In the commercial, it started out with an aerial of a three or four masted scooner in full sail, with a palm tree island in the background. The Ad was one continious shot, starting out at 150-200 feet elevation and maybe 500 feet off the (port) left side of the vessel, seeing the entire scooner Continuing the camera travelled to the rear of the ship, behind the fantail, and in a descending zooming action came up the starboard side of the ship to the bow. There stood an actor/actress, in a close up popped a bottle of Schweppes Tonic, saying somethin like, "Schweppes Tonic for an incredibily different experience."

Over and over, I watched this commercial in amasement. The cam era work was rock steady, as if on a tripod, but the helicopter vibration would be transmitted through the tripod to the camera, making the entire shot shaky, but it wasn't. The Army had battery powered gyro stablizers, that reduced vibration to some degree, but certainly not tripod status.

This Ad posed many other technical challenges. Every time the Ad aired, I watched for editing marks or jumps in action (as described in The Worst Film In Vietnam at this website.) I saw none How were the harsh shadows softened. Did "Grips" out of camera sight flip reflectors around onto the person's face. There were no light flashes or sudden brighting of the actor's face. Did the Ad crew hide lights behind shipboard obstacles and electric cable out of camera sight. The helo pilot and cameraman had to act in total unison, not tandum. In the tight shot, as the bottle cap was popped, there was no helicopter blade prop-wash, blowing the person's hair or garments. The Sync Sound had no helicopter noise The ship at full sail was probably travelling eight to ten knots, to hold the actor/actress in tight center frame, the helo had to move at a corresponding speed as the ship.

Lip-Sync was becoming an art form, American Bandstand would play an artist actual recording. Then when the artist appeared on Bandstand, they would only move their lips to the record. For the commercial, the Ad agency may have reversed this procedure, doing the actual recording in the studio.

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I had reported in at DASPO Pacific Det., two weeks prior on the 25th of Aug. 1966. On 11 Sep, I was on the attached orders TDY with SFC James Cloyd, to Los Angeles, by the most circuitous route. We flew to Travis AFB, 50 miles East of San Francisco, Then a bus ride to San Francisco, and finally a flight to Los Angeles. This was an unusual trip, just a two man team going to Hollywood, without any camera equipment. I really didn't under stand going to Travis Air Force Base, to the Army Receiving and Processing Det, for our return flight, certainly made no sense. Hawaii was a state, but U.S. Army Hawaii, was still considered an overseas assignment,.Yet we were headed to Tyler Camera Systems in Hollywood, not Fairfield, CA. This detour consumed more time than a direct flight from Hawaii to Los Angeles. I had made enough flights, between the mainland and Hawaii to know the Catagory "Y" air fare was only $145.10 each way.

Renting a car, the two of us left Inglewood and LAX, for down town Hollywood. The time was about 5 A.M. We had been travelling for over 12 hours. Winding our way around deserted streets, we finally arrived at our destination. A two story small office complex, about three blocks from the Capitol Record Building. It was still dark, and we tried to grab a nap in the car. We were both exhausted and hungry. The receptionist arrived hours later, well rested, while we were dead. What a way to start a work day! It was apparent, this building was just the office and mailing address. We were led into a room with a screen and projector.

We were treated to some commercials, this camera system had done. One was a General Motors Ad, filmed along the Pacific Coast Highway, near Big Sur. This area is among the most picturesque regions of California, with mountains, cliffs and ocean. I had seen the Ad on TV many times. The car Ad was an aerial, starting out about a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile off shore, showing the coastline, with a tiny car on the road. The helo and camera races in toward the car, holding in a frontal and above the car as it drives along the hilly, curved road. In all there were about five commercials. Then came the Schweppes Ad. Asking about the Ad, I was told one company executive was the pilot, another the cameraman. They always worked as a team. I figured the Schweppes Ad would have taken 100 trys or (Takes), but surprised to learn, only a little over two dozen takes were needed, to get it right.

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From the office we follow, the Tyler executive on the free-ways. I saw signs stating Studio City and Glendale exits. I had heard of these communities, but I was absolutely lost. We stopped at a small building. The place had less than 10 employees. We met each person. One was a resin,adhesive and epoxies specialists One was valued for his knowledge of metals and alloys. Another was a master at electrical wiring and circuit boards. Every one had special talents to contribute to making the Tyler Mount aerial camera platforms.

Seeing the Tyler Mount set up, it was large. I was skeptical, that it would fit into a "B" Model Huey, but it must, because the "B" Model, was about the largest civilian helicopter made at the time. The Tyler Executive told, SFC Cloyd and myself, that they alway took the door off the helo, when filming. The fibreglass case and padding for the Tyler Mount base, were nearly as large as a pair of full size mattresses, on top of each other. The base outside, the carrying case, was nearly four feet long and three feet wide. The base had padded cushion for the cameraman to sit on. The base had custom made shock absorbers, to eliminate the helicopter's vibration. It had seat belt for the cameraman, and rings to strap the Tyler Mount into the chopper. It also had fold out feet rest, for the cameraman's feet to be outside of the helo.

Behind the cushion area, on the base, was a large hole, into which the central post and control arm fit. When the control arm was seated, it rose above the base, about as high as the camera-man's ears and eyes. In the front of the control arm, were handle bars. We were told, in the first model, Tyler actually used motor cycle handle bars. In the center of the handlebars, was the cam-era mounting plate. They used Panavision equipment, but the mount was adaptable to Mitchell, Arriflex and big TV cameras as well. If I can remember, the camera plate had three mounting positions, forward, center and rear. This took into consideration, the type of camera, cameraman's height and the camera's view finder posi-tion. Behind the center post, was a flat area, onto which the metal battery and counter weight box was connected.

The entire system was a fulcrum, with the central post the, "Center of Gravity", The weights countered, the camera up front. The Tyler Mount had to be perfectly balanced. This was a time consuming operation. When the Tyler executive, learned, the two of us had been up all night, they cut short the training session. We followed the boss back to Hollywood.

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The Tyler Mount people, suggested the Roosevelt Hotel, only a few blocks from the office, and right across the street from the Chinese Theatre. Even a cheap run-down hotel was nearly out of our budget. I can't remember if the per diem rate was $16.00 a day, or had risen to $26.00 for meals and lodging. A $30.00 hotel room, meant some meals would be forgotten, even with the two of us sharing a room.

Laying in bed, I wondered why we were here. Was the 25th Inf. Div planning a massive field exercise, before shipping a brigade to Vietnam? Was DASPO planning extensive aerials of the field maneuver. Was DASPO planning to rent of lease one of these mounts for Vietnam. DASPO had a full time team in Vietnam. What a nutty idea that would be.

The pilot and cameraman, helped develope this camera mount. They worked daily as a team. They knew the equipment and each other. When they did a commercial, they rented a helo for the day or week, and worked as a team. that was how they got the spectular shots they did.

In Vietnam, where most of the choppers were, it would be nearly impossible to get a helo for two hours, solely for a photo mission. The DASPO cameramen, would have limited or no experience using the mount. The pilot would be a total stranger. There would be no rapport nor cohesive team work. If DASPO had a Tyler Mount , the Army would only achieve a small fraction of the equipments potential.

The next morning at the plant, employees quickly assembled the three componants of the Tyler Mount, and attached the camera, as we watched. It took these experienced people, about 25 minutes to adjust all the weight, balances and counter-balances the system had. When completed, they could set the camera in any position, and not move. They put the camera in positions, undreamable with a standard tripod or Crab-Dolly. The camera never moved from that ackward position. It was as if the camera was weightless. The two man team, detached the camera, re-set all the weights and counter balancing controls to the neutral setting, and disassembled the mount. It was now our turn to put the mount together.

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For the next two days, SFC Cloyd and myself set up, balanced the Tyler Camera System Mount. The mount weighted close to 300 pounds. Most of that was the battery and counter weight box. Inside a helo, with camera operator, put all the weight on one side of the helo. The helo itself, is a fulcrum, with its own very sensitive "Center of Gravity." With all the weight on one side, would force, the pilot to incorporate counter balancing maneuvers himself.

We had the mount put together in a few minutes. Than came the tricky part of balancing, the entire thing. We were told to point the camera lens directly toward the floor. This would balance the pan axis. This was an unusual camera position. We were told to swing the lens. It should swing like a clock pendulum, equally in both directions. If it swung more to the right, than the left, there was a knob on the side of the camera base plate, that ran on a worm screw. We should turn the knob, until the lens swung equally in both directions.

Next came the tilt control. This was more delicate and more time consuming axis. The mount could handle 80 to 90 pound cast iron Mitchell equipment and large TV cameras, down to five pound Arriflex "S" Model cameras. Plus as aforementioned, the camera mount plate had multiply camera attaching holes to the base plate. The tilt axis had a knob connecting a worm screw also. By turning the knob, we were susposed to balance the up and down tendency of the camera. If we could get the camera to swing as much up as down, we were OK. If not, we might have to change camera mounting positions, and start all over. When we changed camera mount position, we had to go back and re-check the pan axis again. With a regular tripod, the cameraman locked down the tilt control. With the Tyler System, it was designed to be free flowing.

Once the camera mounted on the handle-bars was balanced, the next procedure was to balance the entire control arm and camera. The Arriflex battery was about the size of a 2 Lb. sugar bag and weighed slightly more. The Mitchell "Wild" Motor, took a standard 12 volt car battery. Thus, battery size and weight, were contributing factors in balancing the entire control arm.

The battery box, that counter balanced the entire system, had two sources of weights and counter balancing techniques. The top lid to the box, opened to expose space for the camera battery and a series of lead or steel weights, I don't recall which they were. The weights could be moved forward or backward to balance the entire control arm. On the side of the battery box, was a knob to change minuscule out of balance problems. The knob moved the entire battery box, left or right slightly. All the wiring from the battery box to the camera, ran through the control arm. There were no external cables, or electrical cords to get loose, while flying, without a door on the chopper. Our first time at setting up the Tyler System, took us close to two hours and about 95% balanced.

For the next two days, we set up and dis-mantled the Tyler Mount. Neither of us could get the time less than one hour. Usually, it took 90 minutes, to get the mount close to balanced. Neither SFC Cloyd, nor myself ever got the mount 100% balanced. The closest, I ever came to total balance was probably 98 or 99% I could get, what seemed balanced, and go back five minutes later and gravity had drifted the camera , or control arm out of the position, I had left it.

The handle bars were the least understood element of the entire system. We were there, to learn to set up and balance the contraption, not film anything. Like a motorcycle, where the rider has all the motorcycle controls on the handle bars, the same was true for the Tyler Mount Camera System. One hand grip was the camera start/stop run button. The other hand grip was for motorized zoom control. Another buttom controlled motorized focus. Neither feature were needed, because DASPO didn't have these motors. One feature we were instructed to do, with the Mount, was pan with the entire control arm, not just the handle bars. It was ingrained in our minds to swivel the camera on the tripod for panning action. This swiveling the entire control arm was new to us.

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The third morning, while setting up the mount, a man from the (GAO) Government Accounting Office arrived. He had documents for us to sign. While SFC Cloyd was signing the (GBL) Government Bill of Laden, I saw a price tag of $58,000 for two mounts, plus shipping costs for 1,200 pounds of air cargo. That meant the three shipping cases for each mount, weighted right at 600 pounds each. While setting up the mount, I guessed, they might cost $15,000 to $18,000 each, but at $29,000 each, that was nearly double what I figured.

This mission complete, it was to LAX, to turn in the rental car, and a direct flight to Honolulu. A few days later, DASPO was called to Honolulu Air Cargo/Freight Office. In 1966, Pan Am and United, were the only two U.S. Carriers serving Hawaii. They most ly shared the same cargo building. The DASPO Office was atop of The Ft. Shafter M.P. Station. It took all the available manpower to carry the cases up the WWII barrack's steps. Immediately, the DASPO Commander, wanted to see the new equipment set up. To achieve a 99% balance, took me in excess of 75 minutes.

With the Manila Conference coming up (Story at this website) every man, not in Vietnam, was tasked to chasing Lady Bird and LBJ, all over the Pacific Ocean, The Tyler Mounts were stored for a month or longer.

I wouldn't see the mount again for over two months, while doing what was left of WWII on Wake and Guam (Story at this website On Wake Island, there were no aircraft or helos stationed there. On Guam, SSG Salas had a relative in the reserves or guard, that was a pilot. Thus by hook or crook, we got use of a helo for the afternoon. This time it took nearly two hours, to get the camera mount, about 90% balanced. It was also the last time I worked with the mount.

With fibreglass, miniaturization and light alloy metals, cameras became much smaller and lighter in weight, with Tyler developing a Mini-Mount, that DASPO also bought. I never saw the smaller version.

* The "WILD" motor most Army cameramen remember, was the Bell and Howell 16mm Filmo and 35mm Eyemo. For special applications, the speed could be adjusted from 8 to 64 frames a second, but nor mally ran at 24 frames. The Mitchell Camera had a 110 volt synchronous motor and 12 volt "Wild" motor, where electric cable would be prohibitory, such as filming Emergency Procedures of the Flying Crane and Tank Training film. Both stories at (Worst Film in Vietnam at this web-site.) With the camera operating, draining the battery, caused the camera to run slower, requiring constant adjustment to the camera speed.. I worked with two versions of the "WILD MOTOR" one marked in feet, the other in frames a minute

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