

Making Apocalypse Now

Episode 9: Meeting Kilgore



Forward

By **CINEMATYLER**

Thanks so much for your support! The scene in which we meet Colonel Kilgore is so rich with interesting visuals that I somehow managed to find a new appreciation for it after seeing it on IMAX when the Final Cut release came out. So many of these little details and vignettes seemed to stand out and give a strong sense of realism to the setting. A great little vignette that isn't so hidden is the cameo of Francis Ford Coppola, Vittorio Storaro, and Dean Tavoularis as the film crew capturing footage for television. I wanted to dig a little deeper into this moment, so I had an assistant help in researching the impact of television news on the Vietnam War and what she found was

fascinating. I'd visited the Smithsonian years ago and had some familiarity with the Vietnam War being the first to be broadcast on a day-to-day basis into Americans' homes, but it was amazing to see just how deep Coppola's line "Just go by like you're fighting! It's for television!" could go. An interesting byproduct of making this Companion PDF was the new understanding and appreciation I got for the journalism aspect of Stanley Kubrick's Full Metal Jacket and how the story was affected by the Tet Offensive. It is really eye-opening to learn how much of an influence the media can have on wartime policy, as well as shaping the reality of a war for citizens with no direct experience of it.

CONTENTS



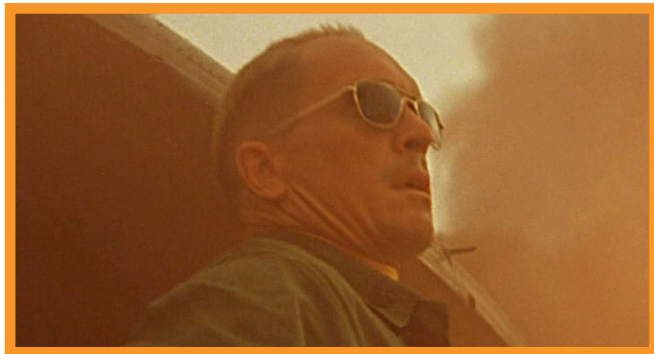
Characters

-Pg 3-



Details/Vignettes

-Pg 4-



Kilgore Script Intro

-Pg 11-



The War on TV

-Pg 13-



Selected Comments

-Pg 19-

CHARACTERS



Francis Ford Coppola:

The Hero. A director coming off the massive success of *The Conversation* and *The Godfather* parts I and II is about to embark on a journey that will test his limits—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Will he change the film industry? Will he survive?



Robert Duvall (Col. Kilgore):

The Obstacle. An actor with roots in the earliest of Zoetrope's projects and who has appeared in Coppola's most celebrated films asks to play a major role in *Apocalypse Now* that goes against his type. His bold personality will shape Willard's first obstacle, but can he create a character destined to be a cinematic icon?



John Milius (Screenwriter):

The Renegade. His bold and sometimes far-out ideas give insight into where his visions of Kurtz and his army came from and how the character evolved over time.



Vittorio Storaro (Cinematographer):

The Genius. An Italian cinematographer apprehensively accepts perhaps the most important role on this team—capturing the images that will tell this epic story. A true student of light and color, Storaro must bring these grand ideas into reality. Failure would bring a potential end to Coppola's career. Can he do it?

Details and Vignettes

MEETING KILGORE

When developing a scene, Coppola would write a series of details and vignettes on index cards to breathe life into the setting. Here are just some of the unique moments that fill out the narrative space surrounding the scene in which Captain Willard meets Colonel Kilgore.

Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse (1991)



Details and Vignettes

MEETING KILGORE

Sea Monster



Film Crew (Left), Dock Evacuation (Right)



Details and Vignettes

MEETING KILGORE

NVA Prisoners



Playing Cards Next To Corpses



Details and Vignettes

MEETING KILGORE

Photographer, PTSD Kid



Civilians Seeing Medic



Details and Vignettes

MEETING KILGORE

Translator Addressing Crowd



Soldier with Candles



Details and Vignettes

MEETING KILGORE

Evacuating Civilians



8mm Cameras in Background



Details and Vignettes

MEETING KILGORE

Playing Football (Left), Airlifting Cow (Right)



Church Mass on Battlefield



Kilgore's Introduction

MILIUS - '69 DRAFT

They wade through the water to the beach where they are met by a heavily armed group of men. Overhead jets swoop by firing rockets - the NOISE mingled with that of the loudspeakers drowns out all else - Willard talks with men - shows them papers - a Sergeant leads them off up the beach - TRACK with them.

SERGEANT

Well - Major Bent's right over
in those huts - or wait a second -
there's our C.O. now.

He points up as Hueys roar overhead.

FULL SHOT HELICOPTERS

Three Hueys swoop in low - they are heavily laden with machine guns - rockets and loudspeakers - The two outside copters hover while the center copter lands raising a lot of dust. It cuts its rotors and the other copters pull up and off to the side - Two armed soldiers jump from the doors and stand with guns ready - Then a tall strong looking man emerges - He wears a well cut and neatly starched tiger suit. It is COL. WILLIAM KHARNAGE - tough looking, well tanned with a black mustache. He crouches over holding his hat in the rotor wash - It is no ordinary hat but civil war confederate cavalry hat complete with plume. He walks out into foreground then stands to his full immense height and with his hands on his hips - he surveys the field of battle - His eyes are obscured by mirror fronted sunglasses.

KHARNAGE

(bellowing)

Lieutenant! Bcmb that tree line
back about a hundred yards - give
me some room to breath.

A Lieutenant and a radioman nod and rush off to carry out the orders - Kharnage turns back to his TWO GUARDS.

KHARNAGE

Bring me some cards.

GUARD

Sir?

Death Card Prop

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE



The War on TV

DID TV CAUSE THE USA TO LOSE?



History

In the time between the beginning of the Vietnam War to the beginning of the United State’s involvement in the war, the number of American households owning a television jumped “from 9 percent to 93 percent.”¹

To combat the “quiz show” scandals of the 50s, 1963 saw the major television networks increase their national news coverage from “fifteen minutes to a half hour.”² To repair their reputation, the networks aired documentaries about what was going on in Vietnam and, when the programs turned out to be profitable, they hired more reporters to be sent to the South Vietnam capital, Saigon.² Seeing as the number of television viewers had exploded, the networks began competing for “the most exciting, dramatic, and attractive stories.”¹ To succeed, coverage would have to take place, for the first time, on the front

lines of an ongoing war.¹ Between 1964 and the height of the war in 1968, the number of journalists in Indochina rose from “two dozen” to “about 600.”³

Number of TV Households in America

Year	Number of TV Households	% of American Homes with TV
1950	3,880,000	9.0
1951	10,320,000	23.5
1952	15,300,000	34.2
1953	20,400,000	44.7
1954	26,000,000	55.7
1955	30,700,000	64.5
1956	34,900,000	71.8
1957	38,900,000	78.6
1958	41,920,000	83.2
1959	43,950,000	85.9
1960	45,750,000	87.1
1961	47,200,000	88.8
1962	48,855,000	90.0
1963	50,300,000	91.3
1964	51,600,000	92.3
1965	52,700,000	92.6
1966	53,850,000	93.0
1967	55,130,000	93.6
1968	56,670,000	94.6
1969	58,250,000	95.0
1970	59,550,000	95.2
1971	60,900,000	95.5
1972	62,350,000	95.8
1973	65,600,000	96.0
1974	66,800,000	97.0
1975	68,500,000	97.0
1976	69,600,000	97.0
1977	71,200,000	97.0
1978	72,900,000	98.0

The War on TV

DID TV CAUSE THE USA TO LOSE?

Field Work

The goal for war journalists was to have a constant stream of output, with Ronald Steinman of NBC writing:

My job, simply defined, was to supply NBC News with an endless story of the war. I understood there would be no letup, no relief day to day as our stories poured from the bureau ... My staff consisted of Japanese, Germans, South Koreans who had fled the north during the Korean War, French, English, Irish, Israelis — and even a few Americans. I had five Vietnamese drivers who owned their own cars, which they often drove out to cover the fighting, especially in the Saigon area. I used many freelance cameramen, often South Koreans who covered parts of the country where NBC News rarely went.⁴

This was very different from the theater shorts that informed audiences during World War II. During the 40s, film crews had to stay in “noncombat areas” and were mainly there to boost morale with positive stories regarding America’s involvement in the war.¹ The press were required to receive their credentials from the military directly and this gave the government the ability to censor the stories that went against how they wanted the war to be portrayed to the public.¹

During the Vietnam War, journalists could cover any military operation that they were able to physically get to and correspondents would often write and record their pieces in the field.⁴ The US Military Assistance Command,



Wait, wrong movie...

Vietnam (MACV) provided transportation to journalists allowing for these field pieces.³ Film crews could regularly be found in combat zones, showing the American public a more “realistic” look at what the soldiers were going through.¹ The danger was real—over sixty journalists lost their lives during the war.³ Many others who weren’t interested in risking their necks for a story would stay in the safety of South Vietnam’s capital, Saigon, and get their stories “from the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office’s daily briefings.”³

Difficulties

Aside from the obvious danger involved in reporting from the field, there were plenty of difficulties in bringing an accurate portrayal of the war to television. According to Major Michael C. Mitchell, many of the correspondents lacked a proper education in the historical

The War on TV

DID TV CAUSE THE USA TO LOSE?

context of the war and were usually overseas for six months at most causing inaccurate and biased reporting.⁵ Many struggled to understand and report on the meaning of events as they happened in rapid succession.

Even though the equipment was advanced for the time period, it was still less than ideal to capture events spontaneously.



I did it again...

Steinman writes,

We had heavy Auricon sound cameras with 400-foot magazines that held about 12 minutes of film, a thin strip of magnetic tape on it to record sound. In the field, crews carried extra rolls of film and newly charged batteries with a black bag to empty

the used magazine and replace it with fresh film. (Reloading film in combat was, to say the least, particularly difficult and dangerous.) Including a shoulder brace, the whole rig might weigh as much as 36 pounds — formidable, especially in the jungle or on a mountain ridge during a firefight. Each cameraman also had a small, indestructible Bell & Howell 16 mm windup camera that held three minutes of silent film. Sometimes the sound man carried a heavy recording deck, often with reel-to-reel tape, and portable battery lights.⁴

The film couldn't be processed or edited in Vietnam, so news teams would send their footage to Tokyo, Japan, to be quickly developed and edited and then the footage would be flown to the US.³ Journalists would send notes along with the footage including what the story was about, what was on each roll of film, and if other networks were in the same location when the footage was recorded—to provide an incentive to push the story out quicker.⁴ The most important stories would be broadcast directly from Tokyo via satellite.³ Because of the delay from the footage being shot to the story being ready for air, most scenes of combat were not usually shown as breaking news or tied to a specific event and, instead, tended to be used more as background imagery.² Very rarely did journalists actually get to see the finished version of their own stories after editors and producers worked on them, but they did get daily reports with feedback on their work.⁴

Most of the time, news stories involved a reconstruction of events that took place previously and the act of reconstructing these events allowed for bias to creep in. The time

The War on TV

DID TV CAUSE THE USA TO LOSE?

constraints of television broadcasts caused complex issues to be oversimplified.⁵ As with all visual media, the nature of television allows for the possibility of a journalist's own "preconceived notions" slanting the story. This was true not only for the journalists, but for everyone involved in preparing the story to air—every stage from script to filming to editing "allowed for the possible injection of personal bias" whether they knew it or not.⁵ The networks themselves also had a major effect on the portrayal of events. Other news outlets such as print didn't have to deal with the regulations of the Federal Communications Commission and appeasing commercial sponsors like the broadcast networks did.²

The visual nature of television caused networks to favor visual content—especially combat footage—ignoring other events that were less dramatic but equally important.² The public wasn't as interested in the Vietnamese themselves, which led to journalists being motivated to focus on exciting combat footage that showed "Americans, who were usually engaged in unspecified, but seemingly successful, military activity."²

The Tet Offensive

The Tet Offensive—often cited as the turning point that led to the Viet Cong's victory—was a series of organized strikes by the North Vietnamese on South Vietnam's territories. Tet was misrepresented across all mediums in the United States as a military defeat. The North Vietnamese lost many soldiers and

failed to cause an uprising in South Vietnam as intended.² After Tet, television news coverage of the war steered away from its generally positive demeanor and began to become "adversarial" toward the American government.⁵

Following Tet, there was a major change in the public's opinion—not necessarily of the war



And again...

itself, but it seemed the American public had lost faith in the Johnson Administration.² While the American media exaggerated the damage of the Tet Offensive, it made clear to the public that the Johnson Administration "had been purposefully painting an inaccurate picture of the war," causing the American public to turn against the war.⁵

Some have attributed this turn in coverage and public opinion to trusted news anchor, Walter Cronkite, reporting in February 1968 that the war was "mired in stalemate."³ President Lyndon Johnson admired Cronkite and the statement deeply affected him, causing him to change his wartime policy.⁵ Johnson was quoted saying, "If

The War on TV

DID TV CAUSE THE USA TO LOSE?

I've lost Cronkite, I've lost Middle America."³

LBJ

On March 31st, 1968, Johnson announced that he would not be running for re-election. Johnson believed that television directly caused the United States to lose the war in Vietnam.²

scenes have on American opinion. Historians must only guess at the effect that television would have had during earlier conflicts on the future of this Nation: during the Korean war, for example, at that time when our forces were pushed back there to Pusan; of World War II, the Battle of the Bulge, or when our men were slugging it out in Europe or when most of our Air Force was shot down that day in June 1942 off Australia.¹

The Weather
Today—Chance of showers in the morning, then clearing, windy. High in mid 50s. Tuesday—Mostly sunny, cool. Probability of precipitation, 35% today. Temp. range: Today, 55-65; Wednesday, 51-71. Details, B1.

The Washington Post
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Index
68 Pages
4 Sections
Amusements D10
City Life B3
Classified C 6
Columns B 8
Editorials A18
Events B 4
Fed. Diary A20
Financial D 9
Obituaries B 6
Sports D 1
TV-Radio B 7
Women's C 1

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LBJ Tells Nation He Won't Run, Restricts Raids on N. Vietnam

4000 Hear Dr. King at Cathedral
Leader Reaffirms Intention to Begin March on Schedule
By Benardete Carey
Washington Post Staff Writer
The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to Washington yesterday and made an apparent effort to rekindle support for his planned April 22 Poor People's campaign here, shaken last week when his Memphis demonstration erupted with violence.
Speaking to an overflow audience of more than 4000 at National Cathedral, Dr. King declared again his intention to bring 200,000 poor people to Washington this month for a nonviolent demonstration.
"There will be a Poor People's Campaign," Dr. King told his predominantly white audience at the Cathedral.

Johnson Declares He Won't Seek or Accept Nomination
By Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writer
In a startling radio-television address to the Nation, President Johnson announced last night that he would not be a candidate for reelection this year.
He coupled the announcement of his personal decision with an order to cease air and naval attacks on North Vietnam except in the area north of the Demilitarized Zone.
He called this the first step to deescalate the Vietnam war and appealed to Hanoi to meet American representatives at Geneva or anywhere else for prompt peace talks.
The President said that he should not "devote an hour or a day of my time" to any partisan activity this year, and that therefore he would "not seek" and would "not accept" the nomination for another term as President.
Appealing for unity in the Nation, the President said he would devote all his time in the remaining months in office to seeking peace.
He said he would not permit the presidency to become involved in the divisiveness which he said was damaging the Nation.
No Room for Change

New Confidence on Vietnam Is Voiced by Taylor, Rostow
Stalinism Foes Rally in Prague

It's over.

The following day, Johnson said:

As I sat in my office last evening, waiting to speak, I thought of the many times each week when television brings the war into the American home. No one can say exactly what effect those vivid

The War on TV

DID TV CAUSE THE USA TO LOSE?

Public Opinion

It is hard to say whether or not television had a substantial impact on public opinion surrounding the war in Vietnam. The case for television's impact on the public opinion of the war is most strongly supported by the idea that print tends to create emotional distance, while television creates emotional closeness.² It is, however, possible that television affected policy through perceived changes in public opinion, despite whether or not public opinion had actually changed.⁵ Two Newsweek surveys found that television war coverage may have desensitized viewers to the horrors of war and may have even bolstered support for it, while a survey of television producers by Edward J. Epstein suggested that television news only reinforced existing viewpoints.⁵



The horror.

Selected Comments

PBR CREW



wayne via

I still remember back in the 1990's I had Apocalypse Now on laserdisc and the arclight was the highlight of the disc because I had a dolby stereo 5 speaker system and the arc light scene was awesome. The rumbles of bass felt like it was coming from all around the room. Apocalypse Now gets my vote as one of the best experiences in Dolby Surround i've had even in regular dolby stereo sound. The arc light is a blast for surround sound.



Selected Comments

PBR CREW



Robert Maybeth

The casting was mostly dead accurate, especially Laurence Fishburn, whose extreme youth happened to be a byproduct of someone that ultimately turned out to be a very skilled actor. And Martin Sheen melted into the role of Willard so well, it's impossible to imagine anyone else playing him - not the likes of Harvey Keitel or Pacino! (Hoo AHH) Captain Willard drives the movie as



we see everything through his eyes, in a way so relatable and compelling we easily identify with him. This happens because we are immediately shown a war-torn soul almost shattered by war, such that he feels "normal" nowhere else - and Sheen is completely plausible as tough enough to be what the film says he is (a seasoned Special Forces trained SOG soldier who has already seen and done too much)

But the character of Chef always seemed a bit out of place and somehow not totally belonging in the story, just for the actor choice. I understood Coppolla had a fondness for the actor and wanted to cast him since he is unique; but Frederick Forrest was over 40 at the time and looked it. Most people in Vietnam of that age bracket were senior NCO's and officers and wanted to be there, or had to be, for their careers, none were draftees! Although it's not unusual today for a 40 year old to volunteer for the military (who raised the maximum enlistment age to 42 in 2005 due to manpower demands of "war on terror"). But in the late '60's when the story is set, for there to be a 40 year old E-3 sent to Vietnam against his will, would be very unusual and would involve a whole bunch of waivers - and Chef made it clear in the movie the last place he wanted to be was in Vietnam.



Gene Hakman

I hate the way the PBR crew is portrayed in this movie. There were no 17 year olds on them because the training was over a year. In reality, the men who served on PBR's were highly trained and motivated and had volunteered to do one of the most dangerous jobs of the entire war.

Selected Comments

PBR CREW



Victor Barnes

Before Apocalypse Now came out, I was hanging in the village (NY) with the flute player in my band. His friend Laurence tagged along who had just come back from filming in the Philippines and we played frisbee in a park till it was time for Laurence to leave in the car he just bought to drive cross country to LA. I guess the rest is history.



DarthCheney

Lol I was the same age as Fishburne when I snuck into the theatre with my friend and saw Apocalypse Now for the first time. To this day one of the best movie experiences of my life along with the first Star Wars movie. Also, raised my cred in school cause I snuck in and saw the movie.



Clayton Goode

It's amazing to think how so much of this movie has become essential elements to any Vietnam war film and subsequently becomes a trope. The helicopter silhouetted in the orange sun; perfect use of voice over narration... As terrifying as the shoot must have been, it's interesting to see cast and crew still hold a lot of pride in their involvement with the film.



Direct reference to Apocalypse Now in Kong: Skull Island (2017)

SOURCES

Endnotes

War on TV Article

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