

## Abandoned Tour of Duty Scripts and Concepts

By Lee Russell

There actually weren't too many of these. The TOD writers knew exactly how many scripts they would need and apportioned them out carefully. As with all television shows, no script would be looked at unless it was submitted through an agent, for legal reasons. Unsolicited manuscripts sent to the show were returned unopened. So far as I know, no scripts that were submitted through an agent were used, either. Each writer got about \$50,000 per filmed script, so they weren't about to let any outsider in either, unless someone owed someone else in Hollywood a BIG favor.

Now a script goes through several phases before it is shot. The first is the CONCEPT. This is a paragraph about a third of a page long, describing briefly what happens in the show. If this is approved, then a TREATMENT is written. This is two pages long, and details, scene by scene, what happens. When this is finalized, a SCRIPT is written.

The following is a list of first and second season scripts and concepts that were never filmed, for one reason or another.

### **"War Stinks"**

When I was first hired for TOD, one of the episodes already scheduled was called "War Stinks." It concerned Ruiz getting into trouble for discarding a faulty high-tech device called a "People Sniffer." The concept had already been approved and was scheduled to be shot as about Episode 6.

One of my first assignments for TOD was to locate technical information on the device itself. The Army Public Affairs Office in LA came up with a blank. They weren't even sure it had ever existed. However, I vaguely remembered some period publicity about it. I had done research in Army resources before and the PAO (Public Affairs Office) let me try. In about an hour on the phone, I had located an example of the device in an Army museum, and had a xerox of its manual on its way to me.

After that, I heard no more about the script. However, I was eventually asked to provide a list of "high tech" items used in Vietnam that had proved ineffective, which I did. When I inquired about the status of "War Stinks," I was told that the project had been dropped. I don't know exactly why. Possibly for legal reasons concerning the manufacturer of the device and the name "People Sniffer."

### **"Apocalypse TOD"**

This isn't the correct name, but it gives you the idea. It was one of only two examples I know of where an outside writer was brought in and assigned a TOD concept to develop. As some of you may have noticed, many of the TOD scripts had their inspiration in Vietnam movies. This was to be TOD's "Apocalypse Now." The guest writer was an older television writer who had apparently not worked in a bit.

The concept and treatment for this episode were pretty straightforward. The guys are out on a patrol and get into a firefight with the North Vietnamese. They are pushed back toward a river when suddenly a US Navy PBR (Patrol Boat, River) intervenes and saves them with its firepower. The patrol gratefully scrambles onboard. Suddenly, Ruiz gets into a violent fight with one of the crewmen, another NYC Puerto Rican. It turns out that they were in rival gangs in the Bronx and Ruiz had accidentally caused the death of the sailor's brother. This is shown in a flashback. As the boat returns to its base, the two have to be kept apart. Finally the PBR sailor is killed, ironically saving Ruiz's life.

Okay. Looked at technically, the show needed to find a PBR. The US Navy doesn't use them anymore. Francis Ford Coppola actually had a real one, stolen from post-takeover Vietnam and sailed to the Philippines full of refugees. Tour would have to find something similar, buy it and modify it for the show. Happily, I knew where to find the plans. I also started researching PBR crewmen's uniforms for the costumer. A location in Hawaii would need to be found to double for the South Bronx, NYC. I would need to provide information for this.

Historically, there were no navigable rivers in this part of Vietnam. ("Apocalypse Now" was set on the Mekong, far down south). Okay, literary license. But there also weren't any rivers at all in Hawaii. The best that could be done was to shoot against coastlines and even piers draped with foliage. Shooting at night would help.

I worked a lot with the writer, over the phone (really no more than on any of the other scripts) but he never seemed to get the script together dramatically. Things happened, there are continual ambushes and such to get through, as well as fight scenes and arguments between Goldman, Anderson and the PBR's skipper. But it just wasn't very good.

The final disposition was made that the script was unfixable and probably too expensive to shoot anyway. The guest writer received whatever fee he had earned, perhaps \$500 and the concept was dropped. (I actually met him later, he bought me lunch in an NYC Greenwich Village cafe. Very Hollywood. He was in his late fifties, I would say, fit, suntanned and bitter. Several years later I saw his name on a brochure advertising a screenwriting software program. I did not order it.)

### **"Jacqui Zambrano Script"**

Again, this script had a real name but I have forgotten it. As mentioned elsewhere, Jacqui Zambrano was the lady who hired me officially for the show. She had taken the job of researcher for the show for a VERY limited time, a few months only, because of prior commitments. I was in contact with her, by phone, many times each day, every day. The rule about "no outside script submissions" had a loophole. Anyone who actually worked for TOD, or its parent company, New World Productions, could submit a script. (I could have, too. In fact, I later learned that the show's creative staff expected that I would. I did not do so for two reasons: as technical support I wanted the writers to know I was giving my all to the show, holding nothing back and, frankly, "no talent" on my part, LOL.) Jacqui was an aspiring writer and had decided to submit a script of her own before she left. I worked with her kinda in secret, late evening office hours and weekends.

What she produced was simply wonderful. Like most beginning writers, the script was overwritten, which she knew, but she needed to establish her competence as a writer to the creative staff, that kinda just saw her as part of the background.

All TV scripts can be broken down into certain elements, called the "A" story, the "B" story and the "C" story. For example, in the TOD show called "Soldiers", the "A" story is that some of the guys go on R&R in Hawaii, the "B" story is that Percell is having a personal crisis with his father, the "C" story is the bitter Vietnam veteran they encounter and the resolution is that that Percell comes to terms with his father, they save the bitter vet from suicide, and they reaffirm their loyalty to their friends by returning to the war.

Now Jacqui's script had an "A," "B," "C" and "D" element.

What happens is: on a rare "day off," the company relaxes, opens mail, etc. Zeke receives a fishing hat, symbolic of his hope to leave the Army and return to the States to become a fishing guide at home. A Vietnamese boy who has made himself the unit mascot hangs out with his GI friends. Two new soldiers, one white, one black, argue and are about to come to blows. Then Goldman calls the unit to order. A Long Range Patrol unit has been trapped and they are to be airlifted in to rescue them. As they board helicopters, Zeke's new hat is blown away and the boy finds it.

At the battle scene, Goldman's platoon is quickly ambushed and takes several casualties, including Anderson. These are flown out, but then the NVA, in great strength, close in around the trapped platoon. ("A" story.)

Zeke is flown to the rear and hospitalized. He has been wounded before, he need not return. He meets a sardonic nurse, who had also seen too much of the war. She tries to focus Zeke on his life AFTER the Army and Vietnam. His enlistment is about to expire. He has done enough. So has she. ("B" story.)

In the ambush of Goldman's platoon, the black and white soldiers who hate each other are separated from the others and are alone in the bush. They continue to fight. ("C" story.)

Meanwhile ("D" story) the Vietnamese boy decides to go to the battle where his friends are and return Zeke's hat to him. On the way, he has to deal with American MPs, South Vietnamese soldiers, and finally Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers.

Resolution: days later this has become a major battle. Out of food, water and almost ammunition, Goldman decides on a desperate strategy, to attack rather than defend. At the last moment, a helicopter drops off a desperately needed resupply...and Zeke, AWOL from the hospital. Deferring without comment to Goldman's judgment, Zeke rallies the men and they attack. But the enemy is gone. There is nothing left to capture but a burnt and blackened hilltop.

The Army PAO loved the script, which was submitted to them, too. The TOD Creative Staff had a meeting with Jacqui and kinda said: "Hey, this is...nice... BUT. You should have checked with us first..." and that was that. She left per her deal just afterward.

Sometime later, still wanting part of her work to appear somewhere, she had the "C" story done as part of the Marvel Comic Book series "Nam."

Jacqui went on to become a writer for "Star Trek", "Young Guns" and executive producer for the Emmy winning "Gabriel's Fire" and "Pensacola, Wings of Gold."

### **"Original Tet Episode"**

As related elsewhere, the original "Tet" episode with the French nuns was written and rewritten by Rick Husky several times. Each time, Goldman or Anderson was the principal character. After deciding to use the altered two-part "Hotel" script, this one was put aside. It was perfectly shootable, but would have been too much to expect the other writers to agree to, financially.