

Season Two

A prelude

The first season of Tour wrapped in early May 1988, as I recall. Everyone was released to await the possible renewal of the show. The show had not done well in the ratings, but had been critically acclaimed, so we were hopeful. In late June, I believe, I received a phone call from the producers. They were calling from the CBS Affiliate's Trade Show (I forget its proper name) where programs are "sold" to local stations. I was asked for ideas they could present. The call was straight "out of the blue." Happily I had spent some time thinking about this subject and I had some suggestions ready.

One thing they told me first was that shooting was being moved back to California. It was a cost issue. Hawaii was an incredibly expensive place to film anything. The whole cast and crew were living in tourist hotels. (The costume people, Hollywood Raggs, were living on a rented houseboat.)

The first matter we discussed was the opening program, which would deal with the Tet Offensive. This was one of the most important events of the Vietnam War and would introduce the whole new season. It needed to be, frankly, a "blockbuster." I had seen several rewrites of the original "Tet Offensive" script, by TOD writer Rick Husky. It involved the platoon with some French and Vietnamese nuns and a group of orphans. It had been rewritten several times, each with a different character featured, Anderson, Goldman, even other platoon members. It wasn't bad but it was just, well, "ordinary."

Meanwhile, in a related matter, New World Productions had tried to sell a TOD spinoff to CBS. I had read the script, also by Rick Husky. In the pilot, Zeke goes back to Hawaii to help a former BRAVO company sergeant who had bought a cheap Honolulu hotel. Zeke helps the sergeant's beautiful daughter solve her father's murder and goes back to Vietnam. The series continues about the hotel. CBS didn't want it. New Worlds had violated a major commandment of the television industry and neglected to obtain CBS's approval for the development first. New Worlds was out the money for the two-part script.

There were some other things to consider. Tour was simply not attracting a female audience. The usual fix for this was introducing female characters, but this was going to be a problem, given the nature of the show. Basically, what was wanted was a steady girlfriend for Goldman and Anderson each, and maybe one of the other guys. This would be very hard to arrange in Chu Lai, where the real 196th Infantry Brigade was based.

I could also see that the writers were having problems writing fresh material for the show. Essentially the same characters were going out on the same sort of missions, each episode. (Actually, this was how the war was REALLY fought. However, this was television.) The original Goldman-Anderson "newbie-veteran"

conflict had been pretty much used up, too. Another source of dramatic conflict was needed.

The writers also desperately wanted to introduce some television "conventions" into the show, such as a bar where the characters could meet each night after the day's fighting and talk things over. This is a popular "television" idea, found in such shows as "M. A. S. H. " and just about every police drama on TV. Also it is found in books like Michael Herr's "Dispatches" which the writers had all read. ("Dispatches" is about correspondents, not soldiers, by the way). The concept would have been a big hit with the troops in Vietnam, too, but the Army insisted THEY stay out in the field all the time, and maybe drink a warm can of beer, once a month, on some firebase. (Also, officers don't drink with enlisted men, they have their own clubs.)

Taking all this into consideration, I proposed the following.

Move the show to the Saigon area and rewrite the "Hotel" script with a Tet Offensive theme. New sets would have to be built anyway, why not a "Saigon" one too?

If the unit was assigned to Saigon, they would have opportunities to deal with whole new characters each week. Not only Army men, but civilian contractors, CIA agents, missionaries, correspondents, VC assassination teams, etc. And if anyone in Vietnam was going to meet an American woman, it was going to be in Saigon. (Few GIs ever saw a "round-eyed" woman during their whole tour.)

There was some precedence for this too, after Tet, all the various Rear-Echelon (REMF) Headquarters units in Vietnam got themselves a "real" infantry company for security, rather than rely on MPs and support troops pulling guard. So our guys could legitimately be part of this. They would, of course, still be going out into the field and carrying out combat missions, although with the absence of any higher combat commander than Goldman. (i.e., TOD wouldn't have to pay an actor to play a recurring role such as "Lieutenant Colonel Dalby" or "Captain Wallace" in the first season).

As far as girlfriends went, Goldman could date anyone who would go out with him, military or civilian, except an enlisted woman. There wasn't much of a choice for Zeke. Nurses are officers and enlisted men couldn't date them. Period. (Often ignored, in reality, by the way.) Aside from nurses, only a single company of WACs (about 200, officers and enlisted) were assigned to Vietnam at any one time, all in clerical jobs around Saigon. It was left understood that Anderson's girlfriend would have to be a civilian, but we didn't discuss this in detail.

To replace the Goldman/Anderson conflict, I proposed that Goldman should have a rival for whoever his girlfriend turned out to be. I offered two alternative models. Either the rival should be a "Top Gun"-style helicopter pilot, who would annoy Goldman with his flamboyant daredevilry (actually typical of young Army

pilots in Vietnam) or he could be an Army doctor, like Hawkeye Pierce in "M.A.S.H." A womanizing draftee, intellectual, antiwar, skilled, having to deal continually with casualties and not liking it, yet willing to go out and put his behind on the line. In either case, a serious dramatic conflict.

I also suggested that, if an off-post bar was needed, they might keep the Hotel bar in mind. It was owned by the American daughter of a deceased member of their own unit, after all.

The producers liked all this and asked me to immediately write it up and send it to them at the convention, which I did. I was pleasantly surprised to see what I had written first appear as a TOD press release and then in TV reviews around the country.

Of my suggestions, the creative staff (the writers and producers), elected to pair Goldman with correspondent "Alex Devlin," and provide the character of helicopter pilot "Lieutenant Johnny McKay" as his rival. Happily, they declined the "Saigon Hotel Bar" concept completely.

The pairing of Anderson with civilian psychologist Jennifer Seymour was done entirely by the creative staff, but it wasn't a bad choice. The writers had been much impressed by the book "365 Days" and were able to use "Dr. Jennifer Seymour" to explore many of these concepts.