

ToD Advisor's Notebook: Episode Notes **Lee Russell**

Notes from the Underground

The actual title for this show came from a Dostoyevsky novel titled "Notes from Underground. The "inspiration" for "Notes from the Underground" was a book called "The Tunnels of Cu Chi" by Tom Mangold and John Penycate. This was a very popular book in Hollywood circles when it came out (1985). Even people I knew who had no interest in the war read it. Besides "Tour", it was the basis for a sequence in the movie "Casualties of War." The writers (or I) often included some little thing for the veterans to relate to, and in "Notes" this was Ruiz chanting a little ditty, "Yea though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I shall fear no evil because I am the toughest M__F__ in the Valley!" Before he reaches the profane line, he trips over the tunnel entrance. I provided the "Tunnel Rat" insignia the three "rats" wear on their uniform pockets. I have no idea where (what unit) the real 196th Brigade got its "Tunnel Rats" from, or whether they had an insignia, but I found a patch in a junk bin in a NYC flea market and modified it for the show. I sent it off to the costumers and they copied it.

Dislocations:

Dislocations was the first Steve Smith episode, and it was all his creation. Unlike the other writers, Vietnam veteran Steve Smith had no need of an advisor and neither I nor the Army felt a need to modify a single word he wrote. Steve, as I said, was a member of 1/9th Air Cavalry, and always made a reference or two in his scripts to his unit or its operations. In "Dislocations", our guys use the 1/9th radio call sign "Saber," for example. There are also references to Bong Son, their former base, and to "the Cav's" operations in the A Shau Valley.

I don't know the actual inspiration for this particular episode

War Lover:

This episode was one of my favorites, with its depiction of burned-out Special Forces sergeant Ray Michaels. The Green Berets were a fairly small force and had been operating in Vietnam since the late 1950s. Their people had all served multiple high-risk combat tours. The original script was much less sympathetic to the character, but a lot of changes were made. (The title of the episode gives you an idea what the original concept was like.)

The Army PAO objected to Michaels smoking the Montagnard pipe in the beginning of the episode: "We know what is in the pipe!" they laughed. But they relented. I supplied both the pipe (purchased for the show from a Vietnam collector) and the Chinese land mine Michaels disarms. I "commissioned" the

land mine from a machinist friend of mine who made it out of wood. I have a photo of it someplace before it was painted. I also supplied the "skull and crossbones" pocket insignia the SF sergeant wears in the beginning. (I xeroxed a real one from my collection. As it is black and white, and sealed inside plastic, it didn't matter that it was a piece of paper and not a piece of cloth.) I also supplied the "cat's-eye" sapphire ring Michaels is wearing, one of the trademarks of the Special Forces (along with a steel diver's watch and an Army demolition knife. In the States he would also have the other two SF trademarks: a sports car and a divorce! LOL). I personally screwed up one line in the script. Michaels says he is from the 5th Special Forces Group at Nha Trang.

When SOLDIER OF FORTUNE magazine reviewed the show, they pointed out that he was assigned to MAC-SOG, and their headquarters was in a hotel in Saigon. Oh yes, Michaels brings his personal bodyguard on the mission. This man is a Nung, a Vietnamese of Chinese extraction. The Vietnamese looked down on ethnic minorities and the Nungs had a hard time of it. The US Special Forces trained them and found them tough and loyal fighters. Many SF soldiers retained them as personal bodyguards and paid their salaries out of their own pockets.

Sitting Ducks:

This was another favorite of mine. Its inspiration was a book called "Platoon Leader," by James R. McDonough, which was later made into a movie. It is an excellent book, but I don't recall it had much in common with either our show, or the movie, other than being set in a Vietnamese village.

The US spent a considerable amount of time and effort encouraging the South Vietnamese government to help the peasants through agricultural projects. This was done through Revolutionary Development Teams that moved into the villages with new farming methods, public works projects, medical care, education etc. US troops provided security.

In the original plot, the villain turns out to be the Kit Carson Scout. I managed to get this changed. Kit Carsons were former Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers who had not only given themselves up, but who had agreed to take up arms against their former comrades. American troops were always suspicious of them, but they were incredibly valuable assets in the field. They were under sentence of death by their former comrades and any who were recaptured were immediately executed out of hand. So far as I could determine, and the Army PAO supported me on this, there was not a single case of a Kit Carson turning out to be a VC/NVA double-agent. (The VC did have spies in the regular South Vietnamese Armed Forces, militia and police.)

Making the villain the Buddhist priest created its own headaches. A Buddhist organization in Los Angeles was outraged. One of the younger members of the

production office volunteered to go down to a regional library, after work, to research period newspaper clippings. Three hours later, he found a reference to a Buddhist temple in Saigon serving as a center of VC activity during the Tet Offensive, 1968. That clipping ended the matter, but it showed the sorts of pressure the show was under, on every episode.

As far the production went, one of the problems the set people had was in re-creating that inevitable Vietnamese terrain feature, the rice paddy. There weren't any in Hawaii, and the best that could be done was to line some small fish ponds with plastic tarps and fill them with water from tank trucks at every opportunity. No one was satisfied with the result but it was the best that could be done outside of moving production to Thailand.

Writer Steve Bello has the two NVA soldiers at the end armed with American weapons. The VC/NVA routinely collected weapons from battlefields and used them against us. This was part of their guerilla heritage, but had a side effect of increasing American paranoia and suspicion. GIs often felt this was proof of collusion between the South Vietnamese and the enemy.

Originally, the RD team was also to be depicted, but that part was cut. I did provide an example of their insignia which was copied by the costume department, but never used. Ever mindful of my fellow collectors, any Vietnamese insignia I created contained deliberate mistakes to prevent them from being taken for the genuine article, misspelling words, for example.

Burn, Baby, Burn:

By the time I was hired, the show's creators, L. Travis Clark and Steve Duncan, were gone. After having done the pilot they had turned over their interest in the show to New Worlds in exchange for a credit in the titles and New World's producing one additional script of theirs. "Burn, Baby, Burn" was that script.

Steve Smith, who got a lot of the drudge work of the show, was given the unenviable task of rewrite. He had to do all the little corrections that had to be made to the raw script before it could be shot. It concerned a depressing topic and no one was enthusiastic about it. One of the things that tore apart the nation in the 1960s, and the military in Vietnam, was the racial issue, and it had to be addressed. "Burn, Baby, Burn" was the first of several episodes to deal with this explosive issue. The script as shot had no major changes from the original, but it was rewritten several times for "tone."

Brothers, Fathers and Sons

I don't remember too many changes to this script. The costumers, Hollywood Raggs, enjoyed the challenge of recreating the "border print" patterns of the

Montagnard costumes. The VC official, Trang, is probably the VC District Chief, as he has his own escort.

This was the episode where the lady wrote the show an angry letter about the baby being killed at the end. She had only wanted an evening's entertainment and hadn't wanted to be so moved and upset by the program.

The Good, the Bad and the Dead

The "inspiration" for this show was a conversation I had with Steve Smith. I had previously written a memo on various things going on in the Army "culture" during this period. Drinking to excess was certainly part of Army life back then, and the Vietnam-era Army had a lot of alcoholic old soldiers like Decker. The character was based on a real ex-sergeant I knew of, from another unit. He was rumored to have been a former First Sergeant, and a Korea veteran, but now alternated between the lowest enlisted grades. The "Lifer's Association", as we termed the Army's non-commissioned officer corps (the career sergeants) protected him as he struggled to get enough time to retire with a decent pension. He looked 70 years old, he was maybe in his forties. Like Decker, he had been consigned to working in a fuel dump. Whatever sympathy you might have for him as a person was tempered by his being a real SOB and a mean drunk. The last I heard of him, he was awaiting court-martial for trying to kill a sergeant friend of mine as he slept.

When I discussed this with Steve Smith, it reminded him of a similar ex-sergeant he had served with, who once crawled through a minefield at night to get to a village where he might obtain, well, rental female companionship.

In discussing the episode with the writer, we considered how to introduce the character. I suggested the stolen chaplain's jeep and we laughed about how this was to be ToD's first "car chase." Another question was how the arrest would be handled. Would Decker be handcuffed, for example? I worked with a Vietnam-era military policeman who explained the arrest procedure back then.

The incident with the mine happened to a friend of mine. Claymore mines were command-detonated, directional anti-personnel mines that fired most (not all) of their energy and shrapnel in one direction. They were often used for ambushes, or for perimeter defense. VC "sappers" loved to turn them around and then trick you into setting them off in your own direction. My friend had been on ambush, near a firebase, and, after an uneventful night, went out to retrieve the claymore only to discover a Viet Cong actually stealing the mine. As I recall, the two stared at each other for a moment, my friend yelled "hey" and the VC ran away, without the mine.

Battling Baker Brothers

The inspiration for this script was simply that actor Eric Bruskotter had an identical twin brother. From a point of view of accuracy, however (which was my job), this script created a serious problem.

After WW II, and a few real incidents like the fictional subject of "Saving Private Ryan," the Defense Department no longer permitted more than one family member at a time to serve in a hostile fire zone. This Combat Exclusion policy applied to all the Armed Forces and was VERY specific. It applied only to blood relatives in the immediate family: father and sons, siblings of either sex. Husbands and wives, for example, were NOT included (and I personally know of one such couple who served in Vietnam at the same time). Quite a few brothers and fathers, and even some sisters, served multiple tours in Vietnam (usually in rear area jobs) to protect a son or brother from having to serve in-country. This was well known in the military. If you mentioned having a family member even in another service, people would immediately remind you of the policy.

When I first heard about the script I realized there was no way around this. There were some exceptions to the policy, for example if you were sent to Vietnam as part of a unit. The script expressly lets this out. Possibly neither brother had heard of the policy? No, the second brother is obviously a REMF (pronounced "Remph" = Rear Echelon Mother... well.....) clerk who would know things like this. When the episode aired, I nervously awaited the avalanche of calls and letters from veterans. Oddly, none came.

Other issues: as I recall, the Army PAO protested the "party" with the girls, wanting it clear this was NOT policy. Very, very few Americans captured by the Viet Cong or NVA ever managed to escape, but all who did, did it very soon after capture.

Nowhere to Run

This episode was the first episode written to bring female characters into the show.

The inspiration for all the First Season "hospital" shows was a powerful book called "365 Days" by Dr. Ronald J. Glasser, MD. Glasser served as a combat surgeon in Vietnam early in the "big war", '65-'66, I think. His medical details are horribly precise, his combat interludes somewhat less so. US soldiers had virtually no contact with any "round eye" women during their tour of duty, except for saying "hi" to a Red Cross "Doughnut Dollie" or a nurse if they were wounded. The Army PAO provided a woman colonel, Vietnam veteran nurse as medical advisor to the writers. Percell's accidental killing of a Vietnamese child was a nightmare everyone dreaded. No one had raised their right arm and gone to Vietnam to kill women and children. This incident will come back later to haunt Percell in a later episode. On a costuming note, I provided a purple and white

medical "pocket patch" insignia, worn by a soldier who opens a door in an early scene.

After the attack on the firebase, we get to see a sign put up by the helopad- WELCOME TO FIREBASE LADYBIRD, Home of Bravo Company 3/44th Infantry Please Wipe Your Feet.

3/44th Infantry was my invention.

The truck our guys are riding in has the name BIG ZEV painted on the door. An inside joke for producer Zev Braun.

We also get to see a morning ritual practiced throughout Vietnam, combat engineer minesweep teams at work, checking the roads for overnight VC "presents." The engineers wear the patch of my own unit, the 18th Engineer Brigade, parent unit of Army engineers in the northern part of Vietnam during this period. Naturally their minesweep gear won't work on a metal bridge, but that part is drama. The disappearance of the ARVN militia who are supposed to be guarding the bridge was the sort of thing US troops regularly encountered. I wince when I hear anyone called "Corporal" in this show, as the rank was little used in the Army during this period, certainly not in a medical unit. (He's the guy with my purple and white "pocket patch") on his uniform.

One of my other contributions was Nikki's room. I happened to have some photos, from another veteran, of a nurse's room. I made xerox blowups of these photos and sent them to the set people. This use of the interior beams of the building for her personal items, for example, is right from these photos. Goldman mentions his background as an "Army brat" in this episode. As we know from before, his father was a retired Army general and a Medal of Honor winner, both of which could have put Goldman into West Point, had he chosen. But Goldman is an OCS officer, indicating a serious conflict with his father's belief system, and a recent reconciliation with it.

Road Runner:

The "inspiration" for this episode was the movie "Flight of the Intruder," which included a sequence where shot-down Navy pilots are rescued from North Vietnam.

For me, responsible for the historical accuracy of the show, there were several maddeningly frustrating issues involved with this episode. The first was the matter of the pilot. Was he going to be Navy or Air Force? This was important for the costumers to know as far as possible in advance. Period flight clothing and survival equipment was going to be hard to find. To make matters worse, the two services even had different color flight suits and equipment. I needed a decision from the writer on this, but he waited almost until the actual shooting day to make

one. Happily, the costumers were able to come up with the right Air Force gear at the VERY last minute. (I had Navy stuff standing by to ship by FEDEX, but there would be the question of sizes. It might not fit the actor.)

Another issue involved the plot. The U.S. Air Force actually has an organization (the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service), specifically to rescue pilots. (By agreement, in Vietnam, flyers of either service who came down on land were the responsibility of the ARRS, those who landed in the ocean were the responsibility of the Navy.) For various reasons (Army field radios didn't work on the right frequencies, for example, so they couldn't talk to the downed pilot) both rescue organizations preferred that the Army just stay out of the way. However we needed this as a plot device, so the existence of the ARRS was ignored.

A more serious matter was the behavior of the survivor and the patrol, after they have rescued him. In the movie, the survivors of the crash in communist North Vietnam follow their orders to "head for the sea" where they have the best chance of attracting the attention of the rescue forces. The writer wanted this to be our guys' goal, too. However, in SOUTH Vietnam, this makes no sense. The South was full of US troops! Even if their radio doesn't work, the patrol need only attract the attention of a passing aircraft, or make their way to the nearest US firebase. (This last would be dangerous for a lone, unarmed pilot, but the patrol is well armed.) And what is waiting for our guys on the coast anyway, if they get there? Why, their own huge divisional base complex at Chu Lai! Unless the pilot wants to stop by the Officer's Club for a quick drink with Goldman, before going back to Thailand where he is based, there is no reason to go to the coast at all! The writer changed this. Now they are just trying to get out of the valley.

The last matter deals with Anderson's prior service in Vietnam, a topic I had dreaded having to address. Before I was hired, the writers had stipulated that Anderson was well into his third consecutive tour in Vietnam. (Actually you didn't volunteer to serve additional "full" tours. After you finished your first tour you could volunteer to stay longer in-country, up to six full months. You could then volunteer once again, etc. But the Army had an ironclad rule that you couldn't serve more than 36 consecutive months in a combat zone.) So where has Anderson been the last two tours? The show is set in a very specific time period, starting in late summer/early fall 1967. If we back off two years to the spring of 1965, Zeke must have been among the first American combat troops to arrive in Vietnam. He can't have come over with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, they had only arrived in August, 1966, as a unit, from Ft. Devens, Massachusetts.

In "Roadrunner" we now find out that Zeke had been in this area before on his first tour (spring 65-on), and his unit had suffered heavy casualties. Now the problem is that the show is set in the southern part of I Corps, which, until the very period of our show, had been the exclusive territory of the US Marines. NO Army troops, except Special Forces, had served there. Dilemma. However, in a few days in November 1965, the Army's First Cavalry Division (Airmobile) had

fought two terrible battles in the Ia Drang Valley in the northern part of II Corps, on the border with Laos. The battles, at LZ (Landing Zone) X-RAY and LZ ALBANY, cost the lives of several hundred US soldiers of what had once been General George Armstrong Custer's old outfit, now the 7th Air Cavalry Regiment. Sounds like what we need here, huh? In addition, we know that Anderson had served with Special Forces sergeant Earl Ray Michaels on his first tour (The War Lover). The "Cav" had been called to the rescue of several Special Forces camps in 1965-66. So THAT fits. We also have, if needed, a "sorta" explanation as to why Anderson doesn't wear his "combat patch," the insignia of his old unit, on his right sleeve (a jealously guarded privilege of those who serve in battle). The 1st Cav's patch was very large and he might have felt it was too much of a target. (On the other hand, this insignia was the MOST respected one in Vietnam, but.... who knows?) So it all sorta fits. I figured this all out and carefully, carefully, explained my conclusions and reasoning to the writer, and he sorta, finally agreed.

Okay, Zeke now was in the 1st Cavalry Division (spring '65-spring '66) and later transferred to the 196th Infantry Brigade (which arrived in August, 1966). The obvious reason for this was that the 196th arrived as a unit and all its original people's tours expired at the same time. So the Army would have moved people in and out of the unit so it could have a base of experienced NCOs to help keep its combat experience current for the new guys. Why did Zeke leave the 1st Cav? Well, maybe he had wanted to stay in the field and they had insisted he take the rear echelon job he had earned during his first tour. And so he jumped at the chance to go to the 196th. Okay, everything fit!

The next day (all this happened at the VERY last minute), I received a copy of the FINAL script, the one they were shooting. Zeke has now been assigned to the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. This is a seriously WRONG unit for him to have been part of. It was a tank/mechanized infantry unit that fought far down south near the Cambodian border. It had arrived in-country a month after the 196th Light Infantry Brigade had, in September 1966. The war the 11th ACR fought was VERY much different from that fought by the 196th. A totally different set of military MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) skills were used by each. Fighting from a tank required a totally different mindset than being a foot soldier. I telephoned the writer. "I thought we had agreed on this?" I asked. He casually replied that after talking to me, he had called the Army Public Affairs Office and they had suggested different units, and he had picked the 11th ACR. I was outraged! All my careful research, planning and explanation had been for naught! I exploded and I think I may have hung up on him. A few minutes reflection and I called back to apologize. It was an innocent mistake on his part and, I knew by this time, nobody was going to "get it." I had worked all the previous night at my "regular" job, and all day for "Tour" and I was just about to go back to my "regular" job. The writer graciously accepted my apology. "We can't have that," he said, and I agreed. It was the only time I lost my temper with a writer.

Pushin' Too Hard:

By the time of this episode two issues were of primary concern to the pre-production team: getting more female viewers and controlling production costs. It was hoped that the introduction of another female character, a woman reporter, would boost ratings. There were a lot of reporters in Vietnam, including some women. But writer Steve Smith was the only veteran I know to have ever encountered a reporter of either sex. He drove a male reporter from a helipad to the Division Public Affairs Office, and no words were exchanged.

The character of Captain Wallace had never been written as strongly as it should have been, in my opinion, and actor Kevin Conroy had been limited to some walk-on roles. He was a principle, and was being paid a lot of money and not used. (In fact he was so bored he had taken a second job, sketching tourists in Honolulu, to have something to do every day.) It was inevitable that he should go.

This was one of the episodes that didn't seem to go right. It was rewritten several times and finally totally rewritten, all for dramatic reasons. The issue of the flamethrower was one. Flamethrowers look very dramatic in movies, but in reality they are heavy, short-ranged, temperamental devices of value only in attacking fixed fortifications in major assaults. This didn't happen much in Vietnam. (The flamethrower sequence in the movie "Deer Hunter" is one of the movie's worst faux pas.) Without special training they are almost as dangerous to the operator as the enemy. No unit would take one along without good reason. We tried to cover this in the script by emphasizing the importance of the mission and that there were sufficient forces in support

USO Down:

The USO was most famous for the clubs it set up for servicemen in WW II, and for the shows it sent overseas to entertain them. Bob Hope was the personification of these. I got to see his 1967 Christmas show in Vietnam and it was wonderful. The USO also had other shows, traveling editions of Broadway plays, like "Hello Dolly" with Martha Ray, for example. Other celebrities also visited Vietnam under USO auspices: movie stars, singers (Nancy Sinatra was very popular), athletes, etc. Unhappily, the pop-cultural mood of "Make Love, Not War" wasn't very appropriate to the circumstances and no major rock group decided to tour Vietnam. What we got for entertainment were vagabond troupes of Asian rock bands, strippers and has-been comedians. These were booked through ordinary theatrical agencies and had nothing to do with the USO. They performed on makeshift stages outdoors on major bases and were paid out of unit funds. We were happy to have them. Just hearing a "round-eye" woman sing and talk back to you in the audience was such a treat! The women were treated like gold. I don't know what they were paid but they earned every penny.

Unhappily, several of them also lost their lives in the daily hazard of being "in-country," to aircraft accidents and land mines.

When I first had a chance to comment on the "USO Down" script, I humorously suggested having a woman Viet Cong character try to figure out what some of those costumes found in the wreck were supposed to be for. The writers were not amused..... The idea of arming a civilian is rather extreme. In "Roadrunner" the patrol even takes away the pilot's .38 revolver so he can't accidentally shoot someone - standard operational procedure.

Under Siege (won an Emmy for "Best Sound")

This was "Tour's" version of the seventy-seven day siege of Khe Sanh, a Marine Corps firebase built at the western edge of I Corps, adjacent to the Laotian border. Some explanation of the real siege may clarify events in the episode.

The siege became the focus of press reports and public attention. President Lyndon Johnson kept a model of it in his office to study, as he read intelligence reports. As the siege intensified, the North Vietnamese began to display an alarming self-confidence and tactical sophistication. On the night of Feb 7, 1968, steel-helmeted NVA infantry, led by tanks and flame-throwers, that no one knew they had, overran the adjacent US Army Special Forces camp at Lang Vei. (This attack is referred to in the episode.) After that, no one knew what the North Vietnamese were planning next, except that it would come as a surprise. They were right. The surprise turned out to be far away from Khe Sanh, in the cities of South Vietnam. It was called the Tet Offensive.

Several events of the real siege are used in this episode. NVA officers reconnoitering the base in captured US uniforms, for example. It wasn't possible to reproduce the rain and fog that isolated the base, nor the continual shelling. Reporter Michael Herr wrote a memorable first-person account of the siege in his book "Dispatches". Herr served as a screenwriter/adviser to the movie "Apocalypse Now" and his account is dramatized in the film. Happily, "Tour" did not try to duplicate this.

The tracks and red grease that the patrol finds was my contribution. Russian mortars came on a wheeled base so they could be moved around by hand. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong often pre-positioned such heavy weapons before a major attack. The use of the mortar shells in the repulse of the final NVA attack on the base was probably a contribution of the Army PAO. It wasn't mine. The improvised device Anderson rigs up at the end is called a "fougasse" (sometimes spelled, and pronounced: "Foo-gas"). As shown, it was any sort of thickened fuel, in drums, ignited by white phosphorus grenades. .

Among the first surprises the NVA had for Khe Sanh were the Russian 130 mm cannon referred to in the opening scenes. They outranged the standard US 105

mm guns, but were smaller and more mobile than our long-range 175s. The Israelis had taken a number of them off the Egyptian Army, a few months before in Sinai. That was the only reason the US knew about them at all. Prior to Khe Sanh, no one suspected that the NVA had any artillery at all in the South, never mind the latest Russian models.

The delivery of ammunition by helicopter sling-load, as shown in the show, became the standard means of resupply for Khe Sanh late in the siege. It limited the time the helicopters were exposed to enemy artillery. They didn't have to either land or hover.

Captain Heath makes a reference in the beginning to the reason the US was at Khe Sanh at all in 1968. It was to be the linchpin of the "McNamara Line." This was Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's plan to seed the Laotian border with all sorts of air-dropped sensors, acoustical, thermal, even olfactory, to detect NVA units on the move. The NVA had a lot of fun with the sensors, moving them around, hanging them up in trees, next to chimes and bags of buffalo urine.

For all his (the writer's) talk of "chain of command," Captain Heath continually goes over his superiors' heads to appeal to his old boss in Saigon for special favors. This was a big no-no and would seriously affect his career, even without his other bad decisions.

This was another of the episodes that was written and rewritten, for dramatic content, and just did not seem right. It underwent a final total rewrite, on the edge of shooting, and was finally accepted. This was also the end for medic Randy "Doc" Matsuda, played by Steve Akahoshi, a principal character. This was another cost-saving decision.

*Note: This episode was the only episode of Tour of Duty that won an Emmy for "best sound" category (Source: Steven Akahoshi)

Soldiers

This was another "reduced cost" show, but it turned out to be one of our best, I think. It was my personal favorite. Everyone assigned to Vietnam was eligible for a Rest and Recreation (R&R) leave once during their Vietnam tour. This was a five to seven day (depending on the destination) trip to any of half a dozen Asian countries, or to Honolulu, Hawaii. The military flew you there and back. Hotel accommodations were arranged, but paying for your stay was your responsibility. Each destination had its own attraction. The choice of an R&R was one of the most carefully considered decisions you got to make. Returnees from each R&R were debriefed for details and alternatives were discussed. Going with a friend was better than going alone. Eventually you made your choice, thirty days ahead of time, as I recall, and then, one day, the moment would come. You'd be taken

from your unit and flown back to base camp (Chu Lai for our guys) get your Class B khakis fixed up and then fly on a chartered Boeing 707 to, well, Paradise.

In this episode, Ruiz and Taylor, having carefully considered their options, have chosen an R&R to Bangkok, Thailand, famous for low cost partying and female companionship. As they prepare to depart, their friend Percell is sent on emergency leave to Hawaii where his hell-raising dad has suffered a near-fatal heart attack. They decide to go with him instead. Honolulu was generally the choice of married men, whose wives would fly out to join them. Hawaii was also one of two seven-day R&R's (the other was Sydney, Australia) which meant two days less "in-country." It was also the only R&R destination where you could drive a car, which was very important to some people. Changing your R&R destination at the last minute was an administrative nuisance, but was possible. Zeke has to call in favors for this one.

What happens to Percell is largely based on the experience of one of my friends, after a similar event. He was pulled out of a serious Tet Offensive battle and flown to his dying father's side in a southern European country. His father died before he got there, and he was authorized to stay on for the funeral. To the annoyance of his relatives, my friend displayed little grief or emotion. He had seen so many friends suffer and die. He basically went out and had a good time. Really, what else could he do?

One of the things that people were uneasy about were the rumors about "back home." Being in the military, and especially being in Vietnam, cut us off from the swiftly changing pop culture of the '60s. We had no direct contact with people our own age. The new replacements told stories about how the mood of the country was changing. It was turning against the war, and even those fighting it. No one knew what to expect. The girl our guys meet at the bar gives them a chilling update, especially Percell.

The character of the bitter veteran, Rudy Morales, a paraplegic now consigned to a VA hospital, was based on an incident in Dr. Ronald J. Glasser's book, "365 Days." So was the death of "Sweet Harold," a soldier so badly burned his race could not be determined. (The soldier's name was Harold Sweet, so the placard by his bed read: "Sweet, Harold".) A Roger Henry Sweet, an Air Force enlisted man, did die in Vietnam but this wasn't him. Glasser had changed the name. The research people who were supposed to check on stuff like this missed this reference.

What our guys do on R&R was based on my own experiences and some of my friends, such as systematically ordering all the fancy drinks on the menu, singing Army cadence calls in hotel corridors and waking up "regular" hotel guests. In the script, but cut for time, is a scene where our guys splash through surf, singing an irreverent antiwar cadence call: "Lyndon, Lyndon, heed my plea, I don't want to die in the Infantry.....".) There is a poignant scene where our guys return to their

hotel room to see the routine television station sign-off. One of the letters the show got was from a group of Vietnam vets who used to gather in a bar to watch the show. When our guys stop and salute the national anthem, everyone in the bar stood up and did so too.

Morales' final advice, that our guys should desert rather than go back to Vietnam, was based on my friend's experience. When he returned from emergency leave, his friends were outraged that he had not taken the opportunity to desert. It had occurred to him, of course, but there was never any question of him NOT going back.

Costuming notes. This was the first time we had to decide who gotten what medals by this stage of their tour. We had to do this VERY quickly and everyone got involved, the costumers, the Army Public Affairs Office, myself and even the actors. The ribbons are also worn in a certain order, too, and it is a nuisance to add one or remove one. Percell's uniform was the least trouble. He is wearing the one he flew to Vietnam in months before. Taylor had been wounded in "Notes from Underground," so he gets a Purple Heart, but how about Ruiz? Even the actor couldn't remember. The result was kind of a compromise, but we got no viewer complaints. The small colored pins worn on the Class A service cap denote the unit. As the 3/44th Infantry was fictional, there was no "correct" device. I could have designed one, but there was no time to do so. Our guys wear the insignia of the real 3/21st Infantry, a part of the real 196th Infantry Brigade.

The cab driver jokingly refers to Ruiz and Taylor's "civilian clothes," the khaki trousers from their Class B uniforms, and their black military shoes and socks. They also wear their Army issue web belts-all trademarks of low paid soldiers off-duty. This was one of my contributions. The cab driver also refers to his own military service in WW II, with the Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team. His account is correct. Even after their families were interned in relocation camps, many thousands of Japanese-Americans volunteered to fight for the United States. The 442nd RCT, which fought in Italy and France, was among the most highly decorated units of WW II. Unlike other WW II veterans, Japanese-American veterans often returned to face prejudice at home.

Gray Brown Odyssey

The female character in this episode was originally supposed to be a woman South Vietnamese Army deserter, disillusioned with the war. The problem was that, while the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam - our allies) had some women soldiers, they were used almost exclusively in nursing and clerical roles. The writer and I tried out several scenarios like that, but finally she ended up being a Viet Cong.

At one point in the episode, they encounter an old farmer who orders them off his land at gunpoint. This is the second episode, the first being "Dislocations," to show an individual who has taken himself out of the war and is defending his right to do with a weapon. Vietnamese normally lived in villages and hamlets amid extended families and an individual on his own was almost unknown. There were, of course, occasional hermits or outcasts.

I supplied his rifle. I had two suitable weapons in my own collection I offered to the show and I got an urgent phone call from the prop master requesting them IMMEDIATELY. I had just gotten home from work, 8AM. Happily, it was trash day in my neighborhood and I ran around until I found a discarded cardboard appliance box in someone's trash. I took it home and cut it up into a shipping carton for the rifles. I then had to get them to Hawaii. It was too late for FEDEX. ToD's office manager (I wish I could remember her name, she was great handling stuff like this, which she did all the time) authorized me to take a cab to the airport and undertake an emergency shipping procedure. I found the first available flight leaving for Honolulu and asked the airline people if they could get it on the plane (I believe it was United.) I explained what was in the box and who it was consigned to. The only way to get a weapon on a commercial aircraft is if the pilots agree to take it and keep it in the cockpit with them. They agreed! (A lot of airline pilots are ex-military and I like to think one may have been a Vietnam veteran and a fan of the show.) I called the show from the airport and passed the flight information to our people in Hawaii. They met the flight, collected the rifles, selected one and it was in front of the camera the following morning! I remember looking at my watch as I left the airport. It was 1 PM. Quite a busy morning.

The rifle I supplied the show was a Russian Moisen-Nagant 1891. The show asked me to explain (for the record), why these would have been correct. The Russians supplied several hundred thousand such rifles to the Chinese in the 1920s, during their period of cooperation with Chiang Kai Shek. Afterwards, through desertion, barter, or capture, many fell into the hands of pirate gangs and bandits. In the late 1930s, the French disarmed many of these groups and passed the rifles to local militias. Our hermit evidently hung on to his. In reality, neither the Japanese, the Viet Minh or the Viet Cong would have permitted such a thing.

The woman Viet Cong would have had a serious problem if she had escaped from Goldman at the end. The Communist forces did not make much of a distinction between deserters and their own fighters who were captured. Both showed a willingness, on some level, to value their lives over The Cause. They could no longer be trusted.

Blood Brothers

The writer presented me with a problem here: he wanted Goldman to have a two part mission, with a gap in between. As we see in the show, his original decision

is to be questioned, but he is later to be proved right. I suggested the scenario, the Army PAO suggested the "deux ex machina" second part.

There was quite a dispute over what retired General Goldman should wear on his visit to the firebase. The PAO wanted civilian clothes (current policy.) A summerweight suit perhaps? Happily, I had a photo of retired General, and author/historian, S.L.A. Marshall in Vietnam. Like all distinguished visitors to forward areas, he wore a jungle fatigue uniform with his former rank and combat insignia, as though he was still a serving officer. General Goldman is an interesting character. He had won the Medal of Honor in WW II, and gone on to high command. There were two routes to success after WW II, the "Paratroop" route (General William Westmoreland was a paratrooper) and the "Tank Commander" route (his successor, General Creighton Abrams, was a "tanker" who served under Patton.) Recalling Ernest Hemingway's comment that "all tank commanders have the personality of bullies," I decided that Goldman should be a "tanker." This is reflected in his uniform.

In reality, the Americal Division PAO would have set the whole thing up for a nice photo opportunity. When a general visits, even a retired general, he "rides on rails." An excellent opportunity to pin a decoration on his son, in front of the cameras, would be arranged. Lt. Goldman would have been REQUIRED to participate. We did sort of a compromise.

Short Timer:

In Vietnam, it was usual to try to get a "short timer" out of the field and back to a safe rear area job for his last thirty days in-country. Sometimes this didn't happen, of course. There were a lot of rituals associated with going home, which, for many, assumed a superstitious importance. The crossing off of days on a calendar, for example, at the same time each day. Many platoons had a "Short Timer's Stick," an elaborate carved swagger stick carried by the "shortest" man in the platoon. It wasn't your personal property. When your DEROS (Date Eligible to Return from Overseas Service) came, you turned it over to the next "shortest" man. If two men had the same date, they might take turns carrying the stick.

Among the things you had to do when out-processing was, if you were getting out of the Army, see the Reenlistment Counselor. This was a part-time job held by one of the rear-area sergeants. Hardly anyone wanted to "re-up" (reenlist, from the period Army reenlistment slogan) except the "lifers," the career NCOs. They were staying in anyway, and Vietnam was a good place to do this. You wouldn't have to pay taxes on your reenlistment bonus, for example.

The information SSG Carlton provides is pretty much correct, Taylor would indeed get a free thirty day leave anywhere in the world for agreeing to stay in Vietnam for another six months. He could also sign up for any Army Training School he qualified for. He would undoubtedly be offered a promotion and

several thousand dollars bonus, depending on how long he signed up for. This was fairly attractive to some. (My unit's supply clerk/armorer, for example, had reenlisted after six months in the Infantry and two battle wounds, for a rear-area job.) I did meet one soldier who decided to reenlist as he was outprocessing. (He was drunk at the time, too, but did it without the assistance of the reenlistment NCO.) They had to sober him up to take the oath. However, when he discovered that he would have to spend a few more days in Vietnam to process the paperwork, he decided to get out instead. My part in this, aside from providing the above information to the writer, was in providing the period reenlistment sign, a red, white and blue triangle with RE-UP ARMY on it, which appears on Carlton's door. It was too late to send a drawing by Fed Ex, so I described it over the phone for the prop people.

This episode is also unusual because it is set almost entirely at the Americal Division's Chu Lai rear base. This is the real "home" of the unit, but as infantry, they spend little time there. The cleaning woman ("hooch maid," a "hooch" was slang for your barracks or room) would not be there at night. With all the other Vietnamese workers, "Mama-San" would be brought out at dawn and taken back to her village late in the afternoon, by truck. The set is an excellent representation of a rear-area barracks, including the gray Navy-style bunks common in bases taken over by the Army from the Marines, such as Chu Lai.

We also see Taylor making a phone call home from the Chu Lai USO. This was usually done in the evening from the local Army communications radio station. (Called a MARS station-Military Affiliated Radio Station.) After hours, the Army radio operators would try to hook you up to a ham operator in the 'States, who would call your number collect from his own phone and patch you through.

The Viet Cong didn't try to walk around "in uniform" on US bases. Usually dressed as civilian workers, they would note the location of supply dumps or other targets, even pace off distances, for later attack. Sometimes, they would leave a booby trap or two.

Paradise Lost:

The aboriginal Montagnards were the original inhabitants of Vietnam. They bore EXACTLY the same relationship to the Vietnamese as the American Indians did to the Western settlers in 19th century America. Over the years, their tribal groups had been driven to the country's remote western mountains. Montagnard" is the French word for "mountaineer." The Vietnamese, both North and South, despised them. Their word for them was "moi" which means "savages." During the Indochina War, the French had organized many of the tribes to fight the Viet Minh. After their victory, the Viet Minh exterminated those that had opposed them in North Vietnam. In the South, where they were not even citizens, the Montagnards retreated to their mountains and tried to stay neutral. Unhappily the Ho Chi Minh Trail ran through the same mountains and neutrality was no longer

possible. Against the wishes of the South Vietnamese government, the US Army Special Forces began arming and training the Montagnards in the late 1950s. As they had done before, with the French, the tribesmen welcomed the US advisors. The Green Berets became honorary members of their tribes. They learned the languages, participated in ceremonies, ate local food and wore tribal dress, such as the brass friendship bracelets, with their military uniforms. Kithem is apparently from this period. The Viet Cong, of course, were doing the same with THEIR tribes.

The Army PAO did not like this script, not because of the scenario (in reality a contact with a "new" tribe would be turned over to the Special Forces) but because of the depiction of the South Vietnamese troops. Tour of Duty generally depicted the South Vietnamese armed forces in a good light. This show would be an exception. The Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) had their own Special Forces, patterned on the US Green Berets, who were supposed to work with the Montagnards. They weren't very effective. Their hearts weren't in it. (Hanging out with the "moi"? No way!) Sarcastic Americans said their unit abbreviation, LLDB, stood for "Look Long, Duck Back." The Army PAO objected to this characterization in the script but it was correct for the period and stood. Besides their regular troops, the Saigon government had several types of local militias and paramilitary forces. The ones we show in the episode are the personal troops of the local District Chief, called "Popular Forces." In US terms, think of them as the sheriff's posse of a US county. Some of these forces were quite efficient, others less so. It all depended on the District Chief. This chief is corrupt and overbearing and his PF unit reflects this. The Popular Forces made do with bits and pieces of regular uniforms and civilian clothes. They looked a lot like the Viet Cong, and were distinguished from them by their unit patches worn on their shirts. The designs could be complicated or simple. I designed the patch for the episode. It features an ordinary house cat! This is not as silly as it sounds. The superstitious Vietnamese regarded animals that hunted at night (like bats and owls) as possible "familiar" for ghosts and evil spirits. A cat might also be regarded as a harbinger of death, in the Vietnamese mythos.

I was also thinning out my collection of "tiger stripe" camouflage uniforms and the show's costumers, Hollywood Raggs, bought my extras, most of which appear in this episode.

Angel of Mercy

This episode is set just before the Jan 30, 1968 Tet Offensive, which turned out to be a turning point of the war. The previous summer, the Politburo in Hanoi had decided to launch their 1968 Winter-Spring Offensive, targeting South Vietnamese cities rather than military objectives. As always, their real objectives were political. They hoped to demonstrate both their own power and undermine American popular support for the war.

Preparations for this attack naturally took several months and could not be entirely concealed. Copies of the briefing document shown in the episode were actually captured. As shown, it was bound inside a Buddhist religious tract. Titled "General Attacks, General Uprising," it was part of the political preparation for VC commanders. Only general military details were discussed. Specifics were to be locally decided. No date for the Offensive was specified either, only "very soon."

One of the ways the orders were distributed was by having a senior NVA/VC officer brief subordinate commanders, who would return to their units and brief their subordinates, etc. This is what our NVA colonel is doing when he is captured. The rickshaw with bicycle outriders is a joke by the writer. In the VC and NVA, even generals walked. Slogans and catchphrases were an important part of orientation for a marginally literate force. Learning them EXACTLY was considered vital.

The confused backgrounds of Vietnamese on both sides of the war was common. The South Vietnamese nurse was actually born in the North. So was the real South Vietnamese Air Force Commander and President, Nguyen Cao Ky. Le Duc Tho, who negotiated the 1973 Paris Agreement with Henry Kissinger, on behalf of North Vietnam, was born in the South.

I don't believe ARVN nurses were assigned to US hospitals, and certainly not to work on US patients.

Period note: at this time, Nikki's pregnancy or abortion would have gotten her a General Discharge from the Army, had they been discovered.

Costume notes: The VC and VC didn't wear rank insignia in the field, but might have one of their rank devices in a pocket, perhaps. US troops had to learn other ways to tell the officers from the enlisted men. Only officers were issued leather belts, for example. Another way is the Chinese tunic the colonel is wearing, indicating he had trained in China.

Another costuming note: US troops were issued olive drab underwear, not the civilian print pattern Eric Bruskotter is sporting. One of the first things you learned in the field was not to wear undershorts. New soldiers who ignored this advice soon discovered why. In that climate, they inevitably caused a painful skin rash, much to the amusement of the "older hands."

The Hill:

The inspiration for this episode was the movie "Hamburger Hill", the 1969 battle it was about, and several lesser known actions. It was the official policy of the United States government to target the North Vietnamese Army and VC Main Force battalions to attack. Wherever they were, wherever they went, the US would fight them. No particular piece of ground meant anything more than any

other. If the NVA/VC were there, we would attack. After we won (we always would) then the objective was abandoned. Some bunkers might be blown up, tear gas grenades thrown into others, then we walked away. The NVA/VC soon learned they could re-occupy such positions almost at once. And the US would attack again. Note that this was the policy of the civilian government, principally Secretary of Defense Robert S. MacNamara, not the military.

The NVA and VC were masters of defense. They specialized in digging and camouflage. They tunneled into hillsides from the rear, constructing underground bunkers and pushing machine guns through firing slits between tree roots. Tiny camouflaged "spider holes" held snipers who connected to the main positions by slit trenches and tunnels. Point elements of US units might find themselves shot at or attacked in force from the rear. Approach routes were mined and booby trapped. Protected escape routes allowed enemy troops to safely withdraw.

One of the methods the US used to deny a captured position to the enemy was to defoliate it (kill the vegetation) with chemicals. The various defoliants (mostly commercial) were given color code names, Agent Purple, Agent White etc. One of the most effective was Agent Orange. Hastily developed, some batches were inadvertently contaminated during manufacture by the compound dioxin, a carcinogen which could cause long term genetic damage. The shutdown of a helicopter on such a mission triggers the Bravo Company attack.

The writer for this episode was Vietnam vet Stephen Smith. Other than providing the Agent Orange 55 gal drum markings, and some help with the citations, there was little need for my assistance.

Saigon Parts One and Two

As is normal for a TV production, TOD shut down completely after the first season's final episode was shot. (You get about 4-5 weeks off.) During the hiatus, I was asked to review a script for a proposed "spin-off" project. It wasn't much of a spin-off. Basically Zeke goes back to Hawaii and meets an ex-Bravo Company "lifer" (slang for a "career" sergeant) who had gotten out of the Army and bought a cheap hotel. He'd gotten involved with local gangsters and was in danger etc. Zeke helps him out of it and that's it. New World had commissioned a 2-part script (i.e., paid the writer "on spec") but had violated a major commandment and not gotten CBS to buy into the concept ahead of time. CBS wasn't interested in the new series' concept and New World was out the money. At the same time, TOD was in a bind for the second season opener.

As you might imagine, this was going to be important. Not only would it introduce the season, but it concerned the pivotal 1968 Tet Offensive. The first season had not done very well in the ratings, but was picked up by CBS because of its concept and critical acclaim. However, it had been decided to move the show's setting to Saigon in hopes of bringing in more female characters and more

diverse episode themes. The original Tet Offensive script was a one-parter which concerned a Bravo Company patrol finding some French nuns with a broken down car and some children that needed rescue. As the Tet attacks erupt around them, this becomes more difficult, etc. The show was rewritten several times, each with a different character in the lead, Zeke, Goldman and even others. None of the scripts were considered the blockbuster opener they wanted. At some point I suggested redoing the unsold pilot and setting the whole thing in Saigon, where the "real" 196th Light Infantry Brigade had been stationed before moving "up north" to the DMZ, where the first season had taken place. The Viet Cong would take the place of the original gangsters and all that was needed was some minor re-writing. The dramatic concept of the script would be unchanged. TOD went for it. Some details were added. (The captured Tet Offensive document concealed in a Buddhist pamphlet for one, this actually happened.) It also made a smooth transition to the "new" Saigon setting.

For What It's Worth:

One of the unexpected consequences of some second season decisions was to turn Anderson (no longer arguing with Goldman) into a kind of detective. Having his girlfriend be a psychiatrist was all right dramatically, but now a lot of episodes would involve soldiers with psychiatric problems. When the Army saw all these script proposals lined up, they dropped their support of the show. The Army PAO in Hollywood still continued to review the scripts, as a courtesy, but now no longer allowed the use of facilities, the rental of military equipment, and no longer provided a set advisor.

None of this was especially significant. Most of the episodes were set in rear bases or in Saigon. Several of the crew members had served in Vietnam and doubled now unofficially as set advisors. But it caused a sort of loss of focus. It also was not popular with veterans, either.

Like several other episodes, "For What It's Worth" was based on a few lines in the Ronald J. Glassner book "365 Days." Glassner was a medical doctor and not a psychiatrist, but he speculated on stress and the effects it might have on combat troops. This is now called "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" but was not recognized at the time.

The episode begins with, in my opinion, a preposterous and downright silly sequence of an American POW being carried in a cage. Any VC captives being moved (they didn't take many to begin with) walked. Any who couldn't, died. Period. Any such POW sighting would have immediately involved an operation to recover the captive. Any US troops who witnessed a fellow American in enemy hands would have been incensed. Here, it was "just another day." I discussed this with the writer, but it stood as written.