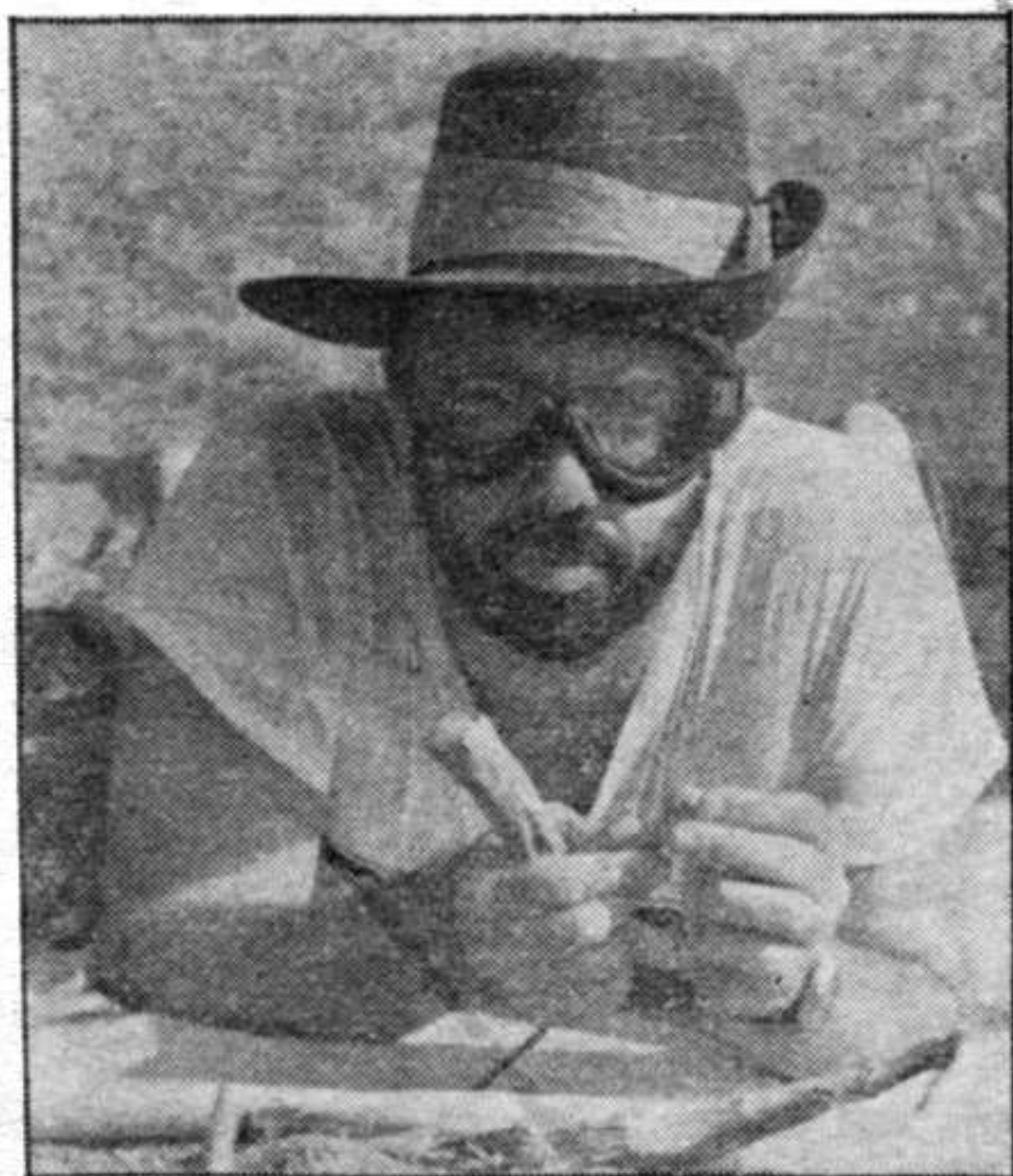


Document Citation

Title	Coppola storms Philippines for re-creation of Viet War
Author(s)	George McArthur
Source	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Date	1976 Jun 06
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Coppola, Francis Ford (1939), Detroit, Michigan, United States
Film Subjects	Apocalypse now, Coppola, Francis Ford, 1979

Coppola Storms Philippines for Re-Creation of Viet War.

BY GEORGE McARTHUR



Francis Ford Coppola enjoys commanding "army" for "Apocalypse Now," his Vietnam war epic.

BALER, The Philippines—The bamboo and red tile of the village certainly looked Vietnamese. And the GIs and Viet Cong vigorously shooting one another among the coconut trees seemed authentic.

But this was the Philippines. And who was that roly-poly American civilian yelling and sweating amid the smoke, wearing baggy swimming trunks, scruffy brown shoes, droopy socks and a rather desperate look.

It was Francis Ford Coppola making his much-debated film about Vietnam, "Apocalypse Now." And despite the desperate appearance, he was enjoying himself, directing his make-believe war with all the enthusiasm of a Green Beret colonel doing the real thing.

A few days before, things had been going badly, but now Coppola was reported in much better form, having shaved off his beard, lost some weight and regained his enthusiasm and good cheer.

For example, Coppola noticed that one of his fiercer looking Vietnamese extras lacked a weapon for a battle scene. With almost courtly grace he turned to some assistants and quietly asked:

"Will one of you please get this gentleman an AK-47?"

While Coppola's ideas on Vietnam have upset the Pentagon from the inception of the film, professional soldiers may get a pleasant surprise or two. For one thing, the 37-year-old Coppola admits he has been getting a militaristic thrill from commanding his own

Please Turn to Page 37.



Vietnamese who survived the real war work on Coppola's authentic Philippine "battlefield."

Coppola Storms the Philippines

Continued from First Page

army, navy and air force.

By the standards of past Hollywood spectacles, Coppola's planes, boats, helicopters and infantrymen are hardly numerous. Still, he has a plush executive turbo-prop to fly him from Manila each morning to join his troops "in the field." Despite all the Hollywood first-naming on the set, he enjoys the perquisites of command—military or otherwise.

The helicopters get him particularly. He has 10 of them under hire and, as the guys in Vietnam used to say about the generals, he wastes one hell of a lot of "blade time." He likes to get aboard and swoop over the "battlefield" checking camera angles. He says he cannot help feeling a certain magnetism about war when he calls in his helicopter gunships (Gen. Robert E. Lee phrased it during the Confederate victory at Fredericksburg: "It is well that war is so terrible or we should get too fond of it.").

Having painstakingly created his Vietnamese village on the windswept eastern coast of Luzon, where the terrain resembles the Mekong delta, Coppola goes about destroying it with equal realism. This was Mafia gunplay from "The Godfather" raised to wartime levels at roughly \$1 for every blank round of ammunition. Coppola's \$12 million budget reportedly was shooting up like an early Lyndon Johnson cost estimate (and this before Marlon Brando ever grimaced into a camera). Before location shooting ends in September, Coppola has two more big outdoor sets to work through, including the massive stone figures of a Cambodian temple being re-created in a jungle.

Quite obviously, Coppola does not feel himself limited by the precise historic or geographic boundaries of Vietnam. He can also get testy about criticism that the film will be anti-Pentagon or even antiwar.

"It is an anti-lie film, not an antiwar film," Coppola said one day between takes. "I am interested in the contradictions of the human condition."

Coppola's public relations men are less subtle. Press releases refer to the "insanities and absurdities of American involvement in the war," and say the script will show the war as "merely an extension of mercantile colonialism."

These people also unblushingly claim the picture is

Please Turn to Page 39

Re-Creation of the Vietnam War

Continued from Page 37

being "heralded as the most prestigious film of this year, perhaps this decade."

The title, "Apocalypse Now," was enough to frighten off the Pentagon even before Coppola asked for help.

"That's a real no-win proposition for us right there," said one American officer in the Philippines. "Coppola must have thought we were nuts."

The original idea is drawn from Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," with the African colonial setting moved to Vietnam a century later.

Coppola is intellectually attracted by the contradictions in man—the good and evil perhaps being inseparable in most of us—and says he is trying to make a war movie that somehow will transcend conventional valor or cowardice.

As to why the movie is set in Vietnam, Coppola replies:

"It seems that thousands of people have asked me why I am making a picture about Vietnam. I tell them it is more unusual that I am the only one making a picture about Vietnam."

Coppola's argument with the Pentagon and the U.S. Embassy in Manila has actually been more vocal than real. He has gotten all he needed from the Philippine military establishment, including jets, helicopters, M-16 rifles and even a good supply of the Chinese Communist AK-47 submachineguns that have dribbled into the Philippines over the years.

The Philippine government relaxed its refugee restrictions to permit about 50 South Vietnamese, all with impeccable anti-Communist credentials, to play roles as Viet Cong (at a welcome \$7 daily each). All the Vietnamese are refugees in Philippine camps—mostly hoping and waiting for American visas.

Similarly, Coppola has recruited about 70 young Americans for roles as GIs. Many are students and a fair number are ex-soldiers who retired in the Philippines. One is a former B-52 pilot. Between action takes at the village-known as Go Cong, they lounge around just like GIs, talking the same vernacular and joking about "wasting" the make-believe Viet Cong, themselves lounging 50 feet away and making similar jokes.

Part of the GI reality that surrounds the location—including mess halls and mail call—has come from retired Army Lt. Col. Peter Kama, a Hawaii-born veteran of almost five years in South Vietnam who admits that he had mixed feelings when he signed on as a military expert for the film.

"I have won a few and I have lost a few," Kama says, "but I have gotten a great respect for Francis. When he goes over something with you he makes sense. So far he hasn't put anything on film that doesn't add up."

In shooting up the village, for instance, Coppola did not turn his GIs and gunships loose on an unsuspecting village of "innocents." The village was portrayed as a heavily fortified Viet Cong stronghold, complete with heavy machineguns for use against air strikes (a technical point that Kama lost. It was unlikely the Viet Cong would have had such guns at the time the scene was set). It was Kama who set up the trenches, emplacements and other fortifications for the village, and they were certainly authentic.

There are some other similarities with Vietnam—a country which Coppola never visited, though he had the John Milius script in hand since 1969.

For one thing, Coppola's 450-person cast and crew have overwhelmed the little town of Baler, which got by adequately on one telephone until the Hollywood invasion.

Now, prices have universally doubled, virtually every boat and jeep in town is working for Coppola, straw hats and T-shirts advertise "Apocalypse Now" and village maidens eye outsiders coyly and perhaps dream of film careers. In their way, such were Saigon and countless Vietnamese towns a dozen years ago.