

Document Citation

Title Magnificent madness!

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Source Daily Mail

Date 1979 Aug 14

Type article

Language English

Pagination 17

No. of Pages 2

Subjects

Film Subjects Apocalypse now, Coppola, Francis Ford, 1979

THE ULTIMATE WAR FILM, MAKING EVEN A MASSACRE SEEM UNDERSTANDABLE

Magnificent madness!

IN the final analysis, I suppose the madness doesn't matter.

Vietnam was a mad war anyway so it is natural that the film which provides its final epitaph should have a history of madness.

The film is Apocalypse Now! The star is Marlon Brando. The man who made it is Francis Ford Coppola. It has its New York premiere tomorrow. England will see it before the end of the year.

Apocalypse Now is madness made magnificent. For two-thirds of its two hours and twenty minutes, it is a vital, throbbing masterpiece. It is scary and funny and dramatic. And always it is powerful, the ultimate death trip told with a total grasp of what makes entertainment.

If that is a contradiction in terms, it is deliberate. Five years ago, after his huge successes with the two Godfather films, Coppola determined he would take the Vietnam experience and try to explain to people what really went on It is the third film about Vietnam to come out this year.

It is the third film about Vietnam to come out this year. But really it is the first—and certainly the most important. Coming Home, with Jane Fonda, had the war rumbling

REPORT BY DAVID LEWIN

away over the horizon. But essentially it was a messy love story with aspiration beyond its accomplishment. The Deer Hunter could have been about any war anywhere. It dealt with the impact that war makes on a tightly knit group.

Apocalypse Now is totally different. What it shows is America transplanted to another country for which there is little sympathy and no understanding.

A colonel in charge of the airborne cavalry who goes into action wearing a Civil War hat but no helmet says happily at the beginning of a dawn attack on an unprotected village: 'I love the smell of napalm in the morning. It smells like victory.' In print, that is gruesome. In the context of the film it has a kind of logic.

The kids in American uniforms with pure faces are killers, often stoned on pot, straight out of universities or slums. You don't hate them. You feel intensely sorry for them. Even the Mai Lai massacre, repeated here in miniature, is suddenly comprehensible.

In the front line they have steaks flown in from back home and barbecues with ice-cold beer. They haven't got

women. Right—a platoon of go-go dancers with rifles between their naked thighs are airlifted in to entertain and excite the men who may be killed or mutilated next day.

When there is a riot, and the girls are threatened with mass rape, only the organisers of the show are surprised. In Vietnam, Coppola is saying, madness and lack of thought came first, not last.

The happily adolescent colonel, brilliantly played by Robert Duvall, finds there is a water-ski champion on board a patrol boat. What a splendid and original way to go into action, thinks the colonel — water skiing alongside the assault troops.

Logic isn't suspended by Coppola. It is inverted, as in Lewis Carroll, and confirmed by plausible madmen.

The centrepiece of the story is a desperate journey up a Vietnam river by a Special Services captain (Martin Sheen) with orders from the CIA to 'exterminate with extreme prejudice'—what incredible words—an American officer (Marlon Brando) who is playing God with his own private army.



Brando has gone berserk but what makes his offence so heinous is that while he is no less insane than anyone else, his madness is outside the organised system. Private lunacy must be punished.

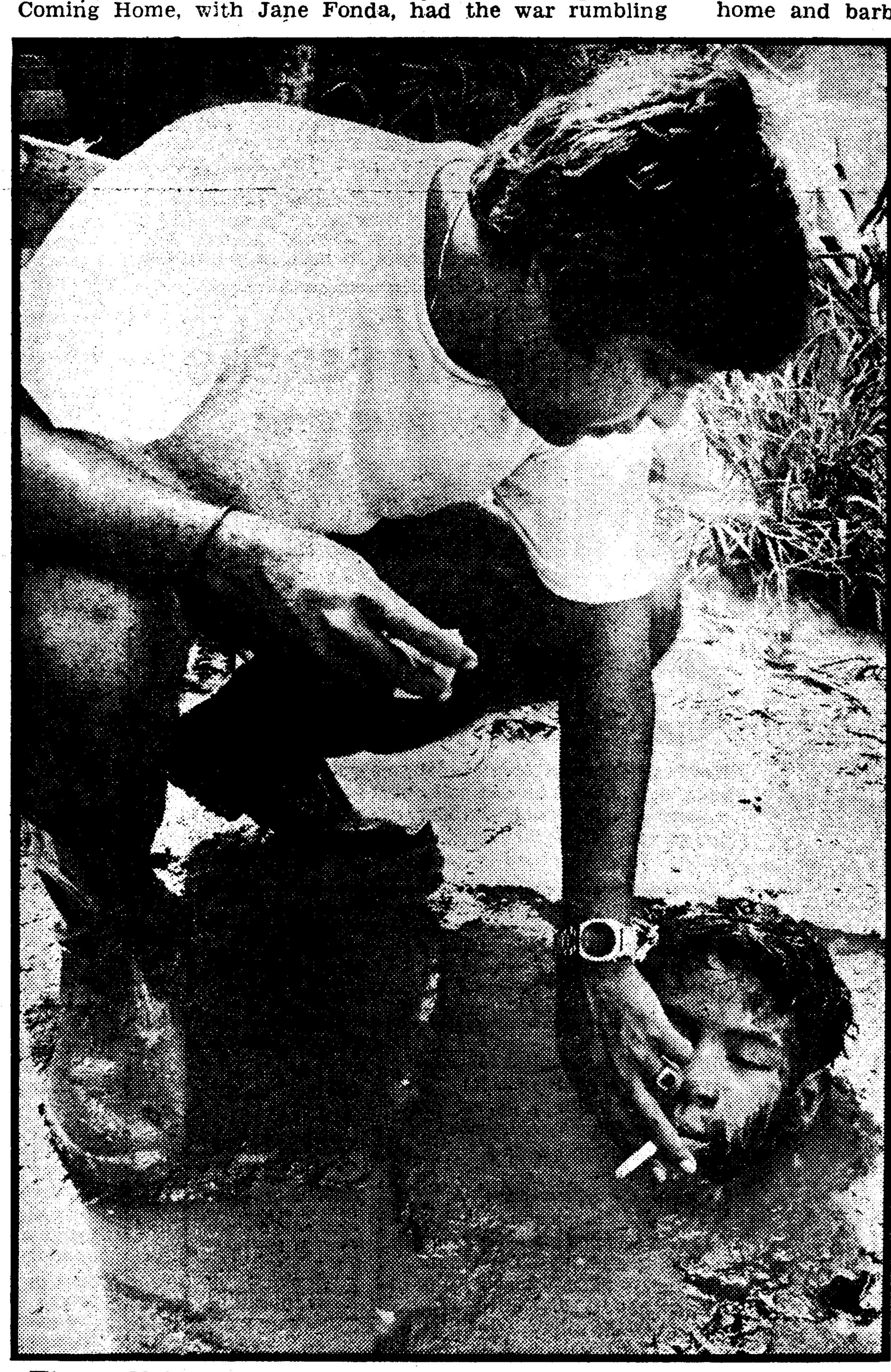
Gradually, during the making of the film, the general atmosphere of insanity enveloped everyone involved. Francis Ford Coppola put five years of his life and £7 million of his money into getting the film made.

He told me: 'As we went on longer and longer and deeper and deeper into the Philippines' jungle, where we were filming, we became crazy like the Americans who fought the Vietnam war.'

'Like them there were too many of us. We had too much money. There was too much equipment. We were no longer making a film in the jungle. The jungle had taken us over and was in control.'

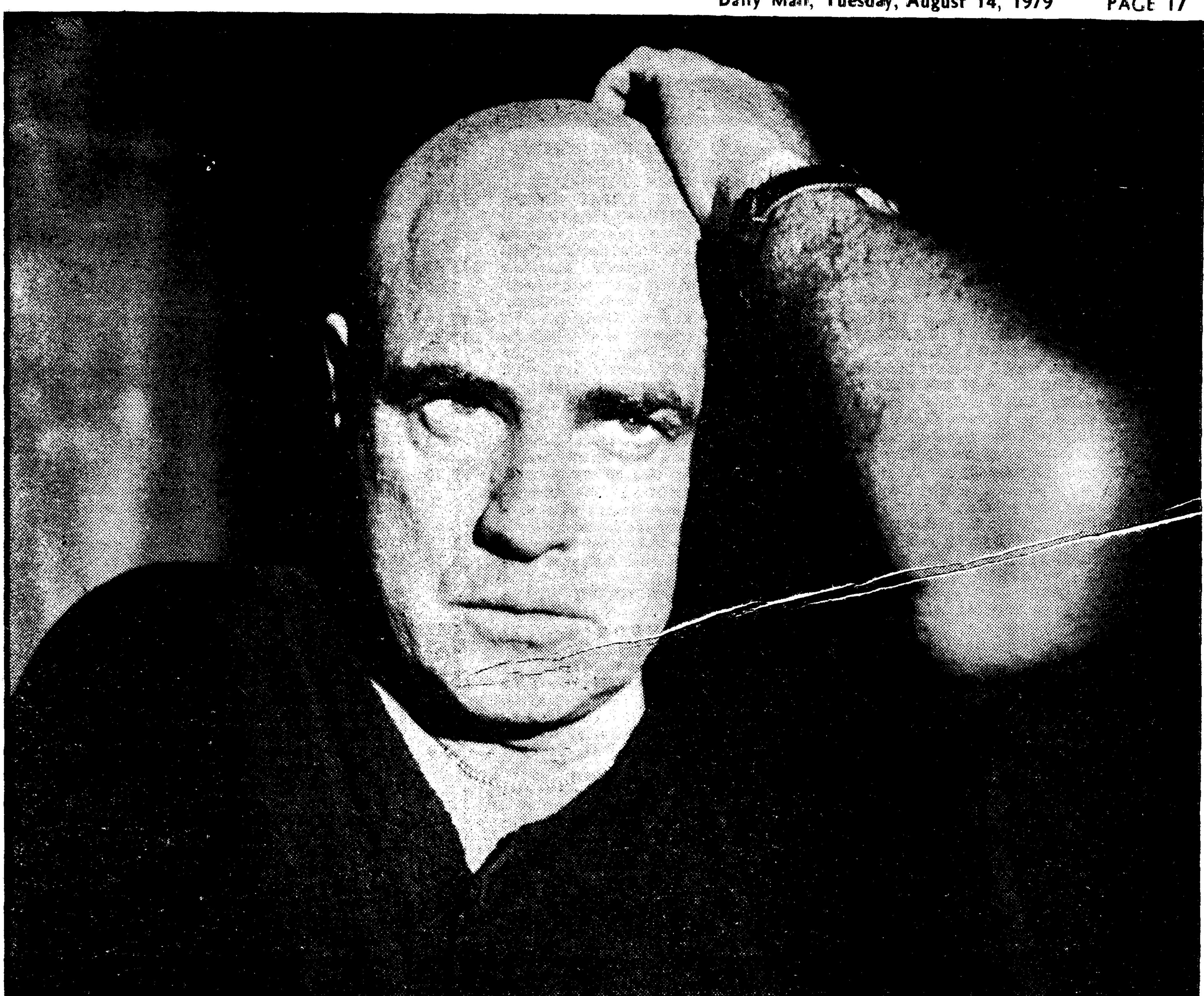
A sort of jungle fever set in. Hurricanes destroyed the film unit's camp. Martin Sheen had a heart attack. One of the stars quit because he couldn't stand the bugs. The Italian camera crew asked for pasta to be flown in from Rome. The Customs overcharged them by £2,500—no one noticed.

But finally it was finished. It could have been Coppola's Folly. It isn't. Apart from an uncertain final 30 minutes the film is a unique experience.

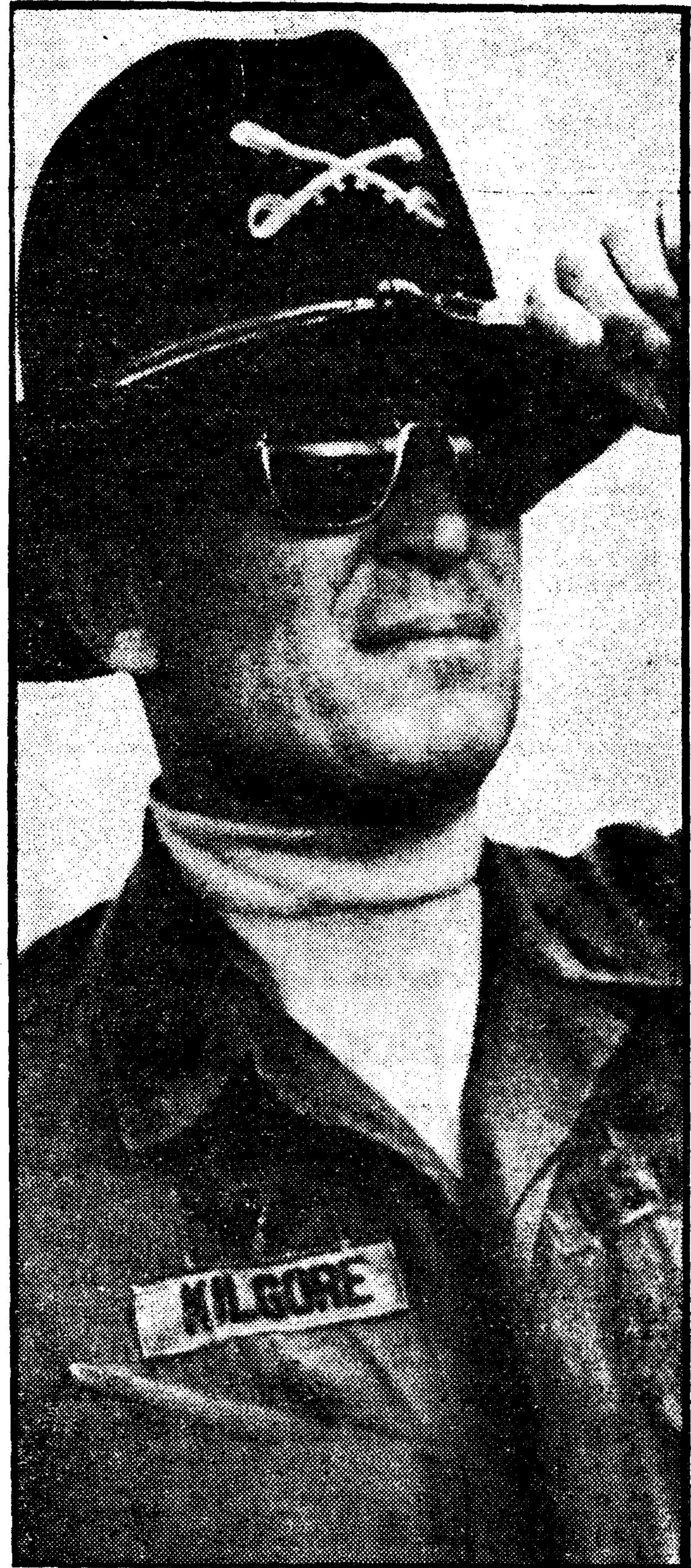


Time off from torture: Break for a 'prisoner' during filming

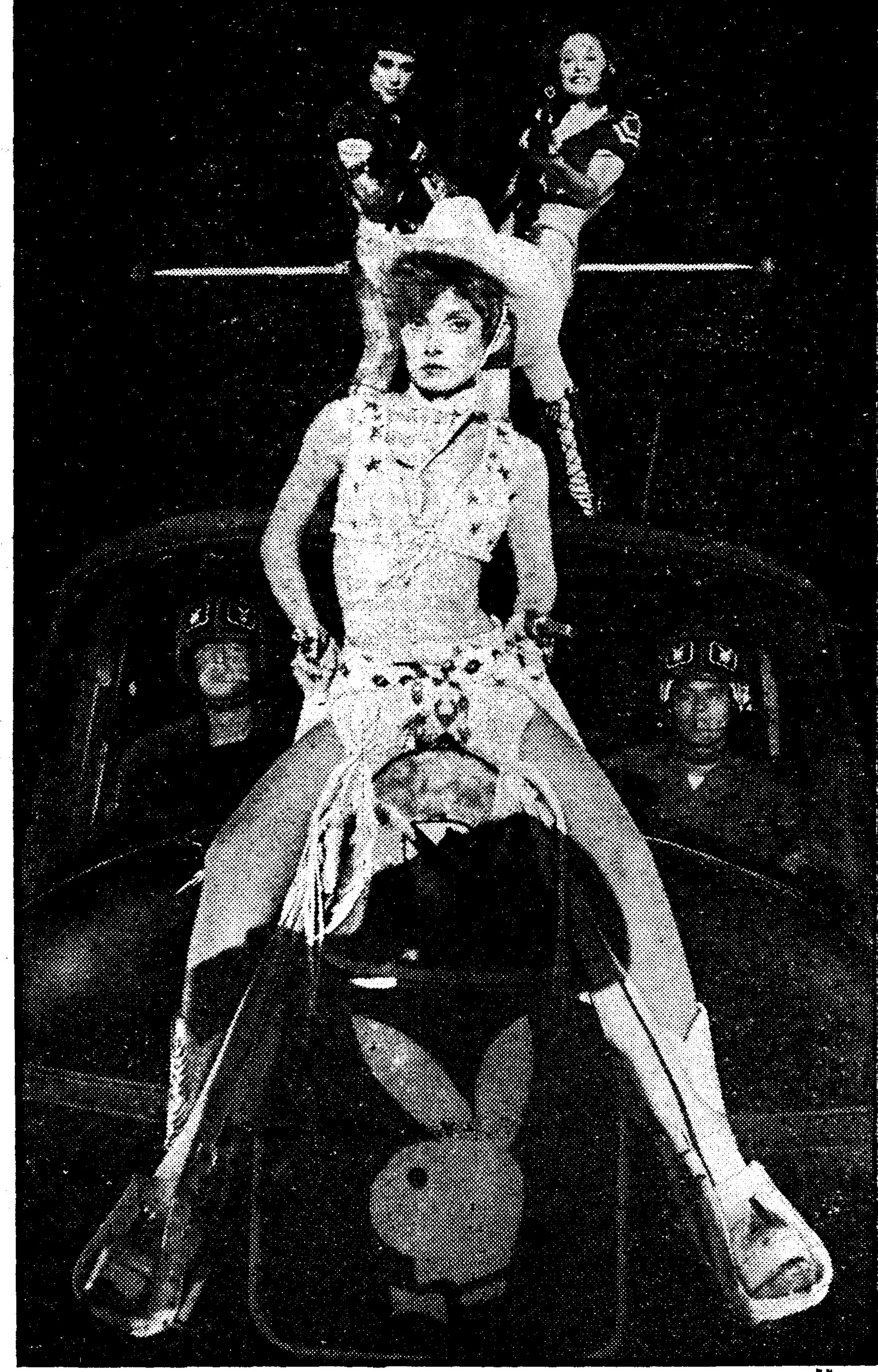
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Marlon Brando, head shaved for the part, as the American officer who goes berserk.



The colonel, played by Robert Duvall



Comforts for the troops—the go-go girls go in