

## Document Citation

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Author(s)	Miha.
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**Attack Force Z**  
(AUSTRALIAN-TAIWANESE-COLOR)

Cannes, May 18.

A John McCallum Productions-Central Motion Pictures Corporation co-production. Produced by Lee Robinson. Directed by Tim Burstall. Features entire cast. Script, Roger Marshall; camera (color), Lin Hung-Chung; sound, Don Connolly, Tim Lloyd; editor, David Stiven; prod supervisor, Betty Barnard; prod. manager Me Chang Kwen. Reviewed at the Cannes Film Festival, May 18, 1981. Running time: 84 MINS.

Lt. Jan Veitch ..... John Phillip Law  
Capt. Paul Kelly ..... Mel Gibson  
Sgt. Danny Costello ..... Sam Neill  
Able Seaman Bird ..... Chris Haywood  
Sub-Lt. King ..... John Waters

In an industry currently much in the world's eye, it is a shame that the producers of "Attack Force Z" and their foreign agents failed to see enough potential in the film to give it the kind of support that it would have required to get it to the attention of the right quarters. As a good example of a well-paced, finely-acted war film, it is not much short of super.

In fact, for success in achieving what its intention was, it is ahead of many more-vaunted Aussie productions. The tale is of a five-man assault party of commandos in World War Two, whose task it is to land on an unnamed Asian isle, outwit the occupying Japanese, and rescue the survivors of a downed aircraft — one of whom is hugely important to the early conclusion of hostilities in the Pacific. How the latter will be accomplished concerns neither the structure of the film nor the action.

Early on in the production Phil Noyce, the original director, was replaced by Aussie vet Tim Burstall, who clearly got to grips with essentials of structure and plotting, and who has developed the characters firmly and economically. One technically-dubious moment in the characters' relationship occurs late in the piece when Costello (Sam Neill) questions the morality of it all while earlier he has been revealed as a total tactical pragmatist — in an early surprise twist that sets the uncompromising mood of the picture.

An awkward moment, perhaps, if the film is to be critically examined in fine detail, but the momentum of the action precludes too much interruption in audience attention. Burstall is aided by a handful of fine actors who inhabit their roles rather than play them: perhaps initially jarring is their youth — but the facts are that war is a young man's activity and truth to tell some of these actors, in their mid-twenties now, would have been "over the hill" at the same age in 1944. At least for the kind of stuff required for the script.

The Chinese element in the co-production was of benefit in terms of on-the-screen values, but Lin Hung-Chung's camerawork is better suited to local chopsocky pics than anything intended for wider western audiences. Poor framing, bad lighting and stilted viewpoints might be okay for the East, but occidental eyes require more, and it was clearly one of Burstall's burdens to have to operate with what must have been, to his normal standards in Australia, less-than adequate cinematography.

Thus, David Stiven's editing takes on more importance in the overall scheme of things and he is to be commended in the result. Eric Jupp's stirring music helps keeping going the mood it sets in the opening sequences.

Pic could be a solid piece of product if given support in the marketing areas, but it would seem that the essential confidence and continuity of effort in those zones are

lacking. Pity really, because "small" war films seem to be gaining acceptance, and this Aussie-made pic could have made a mark if it had been handled right from the outset. —Miha.