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The Making of *The Green Berets*

By LAWRENCE SUID

With the release of Francis Ford Coppola's "Apocalypse Now" next April, Hollywood will have made its first film about Vietnam since John Wayne's *The Green Berets*. Unlike the 1968 movie about the Special Forces, however, Coppola received no assistance from the Defense Department in making his film.

Even though Pentagon officials have believed for several years that moviegoers are ready for a good, action film set in Vietnam, military men saw no benefit to be derived from cooperating with Coppola. In addition to requiring that all assisted films benefit the Services, Defense Department regulations stipulate that cooperation can be extended only to factually accurate portrayals of the military. Coppola himself labelled his movie, loosely based on Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, "surrealistic." Consequently, even when Coppola made overtures to the Pentagon for minor assistance, the military found no basis on which to extend help.[1]

In contrast, the government immediately saw benefit to be gained from assisting John Wayne on his production of *The Green Berets*. In advising President Johnson on how to respond to Wayne's direct request to the White House for assistance, his aide, Jack Valenti, wrote that "Wayne's politics [were] wrong, but insofar as Vietnam is concerned, his views are right. If he made the picture he would be saying the things we want said."[2]

John Wayne was not the first filmmaker seeking military assistance to produce a movie about the Green Berets. As early as January, 1963, Columbia Pictures wrote to the Army indicating a desire to make a film about a Special Forces Team. The Studio intended "to show the formation, military training and indoctrination

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of the men who make up this particular team, stressing, among other things, the importance of the work that the Special Forces are doing."[3]

The Army found the proposed film to be "very desirable" and recommended to the Department of Defense Public Affairs Office that it encourage the filmmaker to visit the Special Forces training installations.[4] By the end of 1965, however, Columbia had failed to come up with an original script which the Army considered acceptable for cooperation.[5] As a result, in June, 1966, the Defense Department cancelled the Studio's priority for a film about the Special Forces.[6]

In the meantime, Robin Moore's novel *The Green Berets* had appeared in the Spring of 1965. Focusing on the exploits of the Special Forces in Vietnam, the best-selling book created anger in the Pentagon because Moore described Green Beret units making forays into North Vietnam. Although the Defense Department denied such excursions had taken place, Moore had based his narrative on first-hand knowledge gained while accompanying Green Beret units in Vietnam.[7]

Moore later claimed that the Pentagon initially refused to cooperate with filmmakers who were interested in bringing his book to the screen because of the military's unhappiness with the novel.[8] David Wolper, among others, denied Moore's accusations. He said that while he had been very interested in acquiring the film rights to *The Green Berets*, his failure to make the movie had nothing to do with Pentagon intransigence. Wolper explained that Columbia's priority on the subject had still been in effect when he approached the Defense Department about securing cooperation. In addition, he said he had not been able to come up with the necessary financial backing for the project.[9]

In any event, by the end of 1965, John Wayne had discovered that the film rights to Moore's book were still available and wrote to President Johnson setting forth his interest in making a film about the Green Berets. He explained that while he supported the Administration's Vietnam policy, he knew the war was not popular. As a result, he thought it was "extremely important that not only the people of the United States but those all over the world should know why it is necessary for us to be there."

According to Wayne, "the most effective way to accomplish this is through the motion picture medium." He told the President he

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could make the "kind of picture that will help our cause throughout the world." While still making money for his company, he said he could "tell the story of our fighting men in Vietnam with reason, emotion, characterization and action. We want to do it in a manner that will inspire a patriotic attitude on the part of fellow-Americans – a feeling which we have always had in this country in the past during times of stress and trouble."

To make such a film Wayne explained that he would need the cooperation of the Defense Department. In support of this request for assistance, he cited his long film career and specifically, his portrayal of the military with "integrity and dignity" in such films as *They Were Expendable* (1945), *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), and *The Longest Day* (1962). He closed by suggesting that his film "can be extremely helpful to the Administration" and asked the President to help "expedite" the project.[10]

While Valenti had indicated to the President that Wayne would say "the things we want said" in his film, the White House played an insignificant role in arranging for cooperation. On the President's behalf, Bill Moyers informed Wayne that the Pentagon's decision to assist "depends on the script" and suggested he send a scenario to Arthur Sylvester, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.[11] While this was standard operating procedure for all filmmakers, Donald Baruch, Chief of the Motion Picture Production Branch in Sylvester's Office, did follow up Moyers' letter with a call to Michael Wayne, the producer of the proposed film.[12] Nevertheless, the Pentagon ultimately cooperated on the film not out of political considerations, but because officials considered the final screenplay as essentially another John Wayne action, adventure war movie and thought it would benefit the Services and the effort in Vietnam.[13]

Despite these factors, Michael Wayne required 18 months to secure approval for his script and begin shooting the film. Developing an acceptable screenplay proved to be a major hurdle to getting production started. In addition, the producer had to find a studio willing to finance and distribute the film about a now-controversial war. Finally, Wayne had to settle on a suitable site, one which provided the appearance of Vietnam and where military assistance would be feasible.

In February, 1966, as a first step in this direction, the producer hired James Lee Barrett, an ex-Marine and successful script writer to

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start work on the screenplay. Barrett's selection relieved Pentagon fears that Robin Moore would be asked to adapt his novel to the screen. The author had alienated the Defense Department by including in his book information about American actions in Vietnam which he had not cleared with the military and the Pentagon wanted nothing to do with him. In fact, Michael Wayne assured Don Baruch that Barrett would do "what amounts to an original screen play using only a few incidents from Moore's book." [14]

From the very beginning, however, John Wayne's own views on the conflict in Vietnam gave the script and ultimately the movie its focus. In answering Bill Moyers' "encouraging note" in response to Wayne's original request for assistance, the actor repeated his hope that *The Green Berets* would tell the American people what was happening in Vietnam. He explained that he wanted "to show such scenes as the little village that has errected [sic] its own statue of liberty to the American people. We want to bring out that if we abandon these people, there will be a blood bath of over two million souls." According to Wayne, the film would portray the professional

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soldier "carrying out his duty of death, but, also, his extra-curricular duties – diplomats in dungarees – helping small communities, giving them medical attention, toys for their children, and little things like soap, which can become so all important." He thought these things can be inserted into the picture "without it becoming a message vehicle or interfering with the entertainment." Wayne also mentioned that work had begun on the screenplay and closed by thanking the President for his interest in the project.[15]

In early April, both Waynes and Barrett visited the Defense Department to discuss details of the film and then traveled to the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina on a research expedition. Afterwards, John Wayne wrote to Baruch thanking him for leading his party through the Pentagon and its bureaucracy. He admitted they had "arrived with trepidation," but "left with a feeling of confidence that the Department was sincerely sympathetic and would cooperate within any reasonable limits."[16]

The senior Wayne also notified Moyers of his visits and commented on the strong impression the men at Fort Bragg had made on him. In addition, he attached a copy of a letter he had written to several Senators including Richard Russell and J.W. Fulbright, in which he advocated continued support of the government's policies in Vietnam and he asked Moyers if these views were "reasonably close to the thinking of our Administration." [17] The letter itself further amplified Wayne's position on the type of guerrilla activity he intended to portray the Green Berets fighting against in his film. He asked the Senators to remember that if such guerrilla-type warfare was successful in Vietnam, it could also take place in South America. Consequently, he suggested that any criticism of American policies in Vietnam might "damage our government's present policy and destroy the freedom which is being bought by the blood and lives of the people of Vietnam, the United States, and her other proven allies." [18]

If this letter clearly stated Wayne's position on Vietnam and so his reasons for making a movie on the subject, he still had a long way to go before actually getting the ideas on film. As a further step in this process, the actor took a three week USO tour of Vietnam where he was able to see first hand some of the action he intended to describe. In fact, the action came almost too close when Vietcong snipers fired into an encampment where he was talking to Marines. Wayne

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made light of the incident saying "They were so far away, I didn't stop signing autographs." Landing within seventeen yards of where he was standing, however, the bullets did bring the war close enough to the actor to give him a true feel of the conflict. [19]

In the meantime, Barrett was working on the first draft of the screenplay. By the end of May, Michael Wayne informed Baruch that it was half done and he hoped to have it finished by the middle of July. The producer was also working on the financial and distribution arrangements for the film and by the end of June had reached an agreement with Universal Pictures. [20]

When Barrett finally turned in the first rough draft of the screenplay in early August, Wayne wrote to Baruch that he wanted to send the writer to Vietnam for some first-hand information before revising the script. As with all makers of war movies, the producer was concerned with the need for military help to insure the right ambiance. Because television and news coverage had brought the war into American homes, Wayne explained that he could't "afford to come up with anything less than the real thing." Consequently, the producer felt the trip was necessary for Barrett "to familiarize himself with all the jargon, attitudes, equipment, and procedures indigenous to the war." [21]

While visual and oral authenticity may have been important to him as a filmmaker, Michael Wayne quickly discovered that the Defense Department was more concerned with the movie's plot. Although the request for the trip was granted, Baruch asked the producer to submit Barrett's rough draft of the screenplay so that his Office would have some indication of the direction the writer was taking. When it arrived, Baruch found the story disappointing. As written, the script portrayed a covert mission into North Vietnam to blow up a bridge and power plant and to "snatch" a high ranking Communist official. This portrayal conflicted with the normal Green Beret actions of "reconnaissance, surveillance and training" which the Army had carefully described to both Waynes during their briefing at Fort Bragg. Consequently, Baruch advised Wayne that the fictionalized mission "is NOT one that the Green Berets would participate in." [22]

The Army had an even more negative reaction to the script, informing Baruch's Office on September 14 that the plot was not acceptable because it described a mission in which the Special Forces

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would not be involved "under present policy." The Public Information Division therefore recommended that "the producer be informed that substantial plot changes would have to be made to conform with the mission of Special Forces in Vietnam before cooperation by the Department of the Army could be made." [23]

Barrett began these revisions as soon as he returned from Vietnam the next week. Writing to Baruch on September 24, he said that the changes suggested to Wayne would cause no problem. In light of his recent experiences in Vietnam, he stressed that he wanted to "write a meaningful, exciting, and enlightening motion picture, portraying our Special Forces as accurately and honestly as possible." Because the film would be the first movie about the Green Berets, Barret said he wanted it to be "the best" and so was sure his second draft would be done "to the satisfaction of all concerned."[24]

In attempting to do this, Michael Wayne and the writer went to Washington on September 29 to discuss the problems of the first script with Pentagon officials. Amplifying what Baruch had told the producer earlier in the month, the Army told Wayne that the Green Berets didn't go into North Vietnam as described in the script. The Service did admit that Special Forces units would conduct raids across the border if asked by South Vietnam. The officials stressed, however, that Green Berets would not take part in a specific mission into the North, only in conjunction with other actions. [25]

Wayne had felt the script contained a "legitimate" account of events which either had happened or could have happened. In fact, he thought it "was a better script than the film we made in terms of dramatic value for the screen." Nevertheless, at the meeting, the producer agreed to delete the across-the-border kidnapping. Wayne later explained he had no choice because he needed the Army's cooperation to supply needed equipment. Perhaps more to the point, he did not want to face his father with news that the Defense Department had refused to cooperate on a John Wayne war movie. According to the younger Wayne, he never told his father that the Army had rejected the initial script: "I was actually afraid to because he would have said, 'You dumb son of a bitch!' " In addition, the producer noted that it had already been announced that Batjac, the Wayne Production Company, was making *The Green Berets* and he didn't want any negative publicity. [26]

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Although Wayne told Pentagon officials at the meeting that he would have a revised script done by the end of October, Barrett again ran behind schedule. On November 8, Wayne had to tell Baruch that the screenplay would not be done for at least two more weeks. Ultimately, Barrett finished his work at the end of December. He then wrote to the Army Office of Information that he realized the script still had "technical inaccuracies" which were "unavoidable" because of his "ignorance of military matters and procedures." He

assured the Service that all errors could be corrected with the help of a Special Forces technical advisor and expressed confidence that the Army would be pleased with the final script. [27]

Despite this hope, when Michael Wayne finally sent the revised script to the Pentagon on February 2, 1967, the Army found many things it still did not like. Some of the problems pertained to purely technical matters such as having the wrong height for a free fall tower and the wrong type of aircraft. Other matters, however, related directly to questions of image and propriety. The Army suggested,

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for example, that a character's line be changed from "Well, sir, I'm a soldier and its [sic] the only game in town" to something like ". . . when I came in the Army a wise infantry sergeant always told us to 'Move toward the sound of the guns because that's where we'll be needed most.' " The Service also felt that the reference to war as a "game" would "degrade the image we are attempting to project with the movie." [28]

Wayne again readily agreed to the requested changes and on March 1, he sent Baruch the revised screenplay. He also said he was working on a list of requirements he would need from the Army "if and when the script is approved." While the military and the State Department did suggest additional modifications in the new script, the Defense Department formally agreed on March 30 to cooperate on the film, assuming Wayne made the requested modifications. [29]

As with the earlier changes, the new requests related to both substantive and technical matters. Instead of referring to the war as "North against the South," the Pentagon said to insert: "We do not see this as a civil war, and it is not. South Vietnam is an independent country, seeking to maintain its independence in the face of aggression by a neighboring country. Our goal is to help the South Vietnamese retain their freedom, and to develop in the way they want to, without interference from outside the country." The DoD Public Affairs Office also pointed out that the brutality shown toward a prisoner by a Vietnamese officer and its approval by the Americans "is grist for the opponents of U.S. policy in Vietnam. It supports some of the accusations of these opponents against the U.S., and is of course a clear violation of the Articles of War." On a technical level, the Pentagon noted that the incident which causes the journalist to change his position and come out in support of the war is "objectionable." It said that the writer's seizing a gun and becoming a combatant "violates the rules under which he operates as a news correspondent, and to the extent that the incident is considered realistic by those who might see a film based on this script, might indicate that it would not be unusual for a newsman to perform such violations." [30]

Despite such objections, the Defense Department said it looked forward to working with Batjac "on what promises to be a most worthwhile and, we trust, successful production." [31] If the Pentagon was satisfied with the state of the production, Universal Studios had become disenchanted with their involvement in a film about an

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increasingly unpopular war. According to Michael Wayne, The Studio claimed to be unhappy with the proposed budget. But when he and his father sat down with officials to resolve the difficulty, studio executives raised questions about the script. As soon as the senior Wayne realized the Studio was looking for a way out of its contract, he got up, said "good-bye," and walked out of the meeting. Apart from the issue of the Vietnam War, a Universal executive subsequently called the screenplay the worst he had ever read. [32]

The appeal and dramatic quality of any film depends on its direction, acting, production values and editing as well as the caliber of the script itself. Nevertheless, even without considering the dialogue and character development, Barrett's final screenplay as submitted to the Pentagon did leave something to be desired dramatically. *The Green Berets* portrayed the activities of Lt. Col. Michael Kirby/John Wayne during a tour of duty in Vietnam. His actions as commander of a Special Forces unit are covered by a "liberal" journalist/David Janssen, who is at first skeptical of American involvement in South Vietnam, but is later won over to the military's point of view.

Kirby/Wayne is shown working closely with his Vietnamese counterparts. In the course of the story, the Viet Cong overrun Kirby's Special Forces camp before being driven back in a furious attack supported by American helicopters and planes. In the climax to the movie, a small Green Beret force kidnaps a leading Viet Cong officer. However, because the battle for the Special Forces camp is the dramatic and visual highlight of the story, the kidnapping becomes anti-climactic. If it had come before the battle sequence or been left out altogether, the movie would have had a much stronger dramatic impact regardless of the artistic aspects of Barrett's script.

While the Pentagon usually refrains from making suggestions of a purely dramatic nature, Don Baruch did talk to Michael Wayne about restructuring the script to improve its impact. The producer agreed with Baruch's observations, but felt it expendient to leave the screenplay as it was. In any event, whatever the merits of the story, John Wayne's name alone would make *The Green Berets* project attractive to most studios. As a result, Batjac found new financial backing almost immediately and signed an agreement with Warner Brothers on June 21, 1967 to finance and distribute the film. Shooting was then scheduled to begin in early August. [33]

To meet this timetable, Batjac had been searching for a suitable

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site on which to do the exterior filming ever since the Army had agreed to cooperate on the movie. John Wayne would have preferred to shoot the film in Vietnam, but admitted that "if you start shooting blanks over there, they might start shooting back." Okinawa offered tropical terrain and an Army helicopter facility. However, on an inspection trip, the actor and his co-director, Ray Kellogg, found that the aircraft would not be available on a regular basis. [34]

On its part, the Army strongly suggested that Batjac consider shooting the film at Fort Benning, Georgia. At first, the company showed little interest in the location, believing that Georgia would not look like Vietnam. After a scouting trip to the base, however, Kellogg informed John Wayne to say that the Georgia terrain would serve their visual needs. More important, the co-director found that the Army regularly had 20 to 30 Huey helicopters in the training

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program at Benning and so available during filming. Since the Hueys were an essential part of the story, this was a crucial part of the decision and after making his own inspection tour of Benning, the actor told Michael Wayne to make the formal request to use the facility. In his letter, of June 1, the producer also noted that the locations which most closely approximated the jungles of Vietnam were not in areas of the base then being used for training. [35]

In approving the request to use Benning, the Army indicated that "there will be a minimum of difficulty in acceding to Mr. Wayne's request." As was always the case on military cooperation, however, final approval of assistance rested with the local commander. In light of the Army's interest in making a film about Vietnam and John Wayne's involvement in the project, the Fort Benning command provided the filmmaker with most of the assistance he needed. The only major problem Wayne had as director was coordinating his shooting schedule with the availability of the helicopters and the base's training schedules. [36]

Under revised regulations governing military assistance since the controversy surrounding the making of *The Longest Day*, the Department of Defense kept a close watch on the production. Unlike earlier films which had had one technical advisor or project officer who supervised all aspects of military assistance, *The Green Berets* had three contacts with the military, a technical advisor to supervise Green Beret procedures, a liaison man with Fort Benning's Command who arranged for equipment and men when needed by the film company, and an overall Project Officer who informed the Department of Defense Public Affairs Office of progress on the production. [37]

On its part, Batjac had to supply the Defense Department with a detailed list of requirements before shooting began and a schedule of its day by day requirements while on location at Benning. The company also had to pay for all military materials used and had to hire off-duty soldiers to perform as extras in front of the cameras. Wayne was allowed to film regularly scheduled training maneuvers at no cost, however, as had always been the case in previous military assistance. [38]

While the Army could no longer do this or set up special exercises, the Service did do as much as possible to insure the visual authenticity of *The Green Berets*. Among other things, the Army brought a platoon of Hawaiians down from Fort Devens, Massachusetts and

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placed them on administrative leave so that Wayne would have enough Orientals to fill the screen. To help create the proper ambiance in which both the Green Berets and the "Vietnamese" could perform, Batjac built a Vietnamese-type village at a cost of more than $150,000 which the company later left standing for the Army's use as a training facility. In addition, following the new regulations, Batjac paid the government $18,000 for fuel and other items used exclusively in the shooting of the film.[39]

Despite the producer's careful efforts and the Army's attempts to implement Defense Department instructions, *The Green Berets* did not avoid controversy. In June, 1969, a year after the film opened, Congressman Benjamin Rosenthal (D-NY) launched an attack on John Wayne and his company for having made only a "Token" payment to the Pentagon. Although a General Accounting Office investigation, requested by the Congressman, indicated that Batjac had followed regulations as they were written, Rosenthal charged that the Army had subsidized Wayne in making his Hawkish film. In response, Wayne called Rosenthal "an irresponsible, publicity seeking idiot." Denying he had received more than $1,000,000 worth of weapons and man hours for his "token" payment, the actor/director said, "I wish this were the 1800's. I'd horsewhip him." [40]

Wayne's major problem in making *The Green Berets* had nothing to do with government regulations or Congressional criticism, however. He faced the task of portraying the Vietnam War in the manner he had promised to the President and Senators — the good guys against the bad guys. The conflict in Southeast Asia differed from earlier American conflicts in which the nation had for the most part enjoyed the support of its people. As David Halberstam, author of *The Best and the Brightest*, put it, "Vietnam simply wasn't a very patriotic war. It was a lie." As a result, he pointed out that it "was a terribly difficult thing for John Waynism." [41]

The key ingredients to Waynism are that all the other guys are richer, more powerful and dominate the town and you are part of the smaller group. You are leading the way for the numerically smaller group, weaker, don't have much ammunition, guns, whatever. Now, you suddenly have to take Waynism and transfer it to a place where you are bringing on the heaviest carnage in the history of mankind, to a peasant nation." According to Halberstam, Wayne was able to transfer Waynism to the Vietnam War by singling out one small

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microcosm of the conflict. By sending a twelve man Special Forces unit to fight with the Montagnards, Wayne created a classic Waynism situation, a small band of good guys surrounded by a sea of enemy bad guys, in this case, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. [42]

In another sense, Wayne himself was practicing Waynism in making *The Green Berets*. Because the war was becoming more and more unpopular, because it was brought into American homes every night during dinner, and because it might end at any moment, no one in Hollywood wanted to make a film about the conflict. Doves who

might give large amounts of money to the anti-war movement would not finance an anti-Vietnam film which might lose money. Likewise, except for Wayne, the supporters of the war would not make a pro-Vietnam film because they also recognized it would probably be bad box office.

Michael Wayne explained, however, that he and his father saw the controversy surrounding the war as making it "a natural subject for a film." Beyond that, he did not think the story itself was controversial:

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"It was the story of a group of guys who could have been in any war. It's a very familiar story. War stories are all the same. They are personal stories about soldiers and the background is the war. This just happened to be the Vietnam War." [43]

Michael Wayne may have seen the film only as telling "a fresh story because there were different uniforms, a different unit, and a different war." The Department of Defense may have seen the film as simply another John Wayne adventure film which would benefit the military and the war effort. The White House may have seen the film as saying the things it wanted said. And John Wayne may have played his standard soldier role, carrying out his mission while trying to survive in a hostile atmosphere. But the actor/director also saw the movie as "an American film about American boys who were heroes over there. In that sense, it was propaganda." [44]

For his efforts and for his patriotic propaganda, Wayne received nothing but criticism from film reviewers. Perhaps the most extreme attack, but only in the degree of extremeness, came from Renata Adler in the New York *Times*. According to the reviewer, "*The Green Berets* is a film so unspeakable, so stupid, so rotten and false in every detail that it passes through being fun, through being funny, through being camp, through everything and becomes an invitation to grieve, not for our soldiers or for Vietnam (the film could not be more false or do a greater disservice to either of them) but for what has happened to the fantasy-making apparatus in this country. Simplicities of the right, simplicities of the left, but this one is beyond the possible. It is vile and insane. On top of that, it is dull." [45]

Even the trade journals which are usually gentle with the films they review found *The Green Berets* wanting. *The Hollywood Reporter* called the film "a cliche-ridden throw-back to the battlefield pot-boilers of World War II, its artifice readily exposed by the nightly actuality of TV news coverage, its facile simplification unlikely to attract the potentially large and youthful audience whose concern and sophistication cannot be satisfied by the insertion of a few snatches of polemic." The reviewer thought the film was "clumsily scripted, blandly directed, [and] performed with disinterest" and predicted it would have a "chill run" domestically and "an even colder reception abroad." [46]

Wayne and his film did not lack defenders, however. Responding to Adler's New York *Times* review, Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC)

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told the Senate that the first paragraph of her remarks "was enough to convience anyone that this was a good movie," suggesting that Adler's calling the film "dull" was the tip-off. Saying that he found "it hard to believe that John Wayne could ever be dull," the Senator called Wayne "one of the great actors of our time. He is a true and loyal patriot and a great American. It is men of his caliber and stripe who have built America and made it what it is today — the greatest country in the world." [47]

Moreover, Green Berets who saw the film did not seem to find it false. One lieutenant colonel conceded that "when Hollywood's doing it, you have to expect some dramatization — some exaggeration. But I thought it was a real fine film." Another officer enthusiastically said, "I think it caught the essence." According to a Green Beret sergeant major, the film "was just God, Mother, and the Flag. Now who the hell could have any opposition to that? It was a good, low-key, accurate picture . . . . The accuracy was there, and the photography was real great."[48]

Anyone seeing himself or a reasonable facsimile of himself portrayed on the screen admittedly lacks some objectivity. In fact, *The Green Berets* proved to be no more or no less than another John Wayne adventure film. In many respects, it resembles one of his typical Westerns, simply set in a different locale. Michael Wayne went so far as to say it was a "cowboys and Indians" film. He explained: "In a motion picture you cannot confuse the audience. The Americans are the good guys and the Viet Cong are the bad guys. It's as simple as that . . . . when you are making a picture, the Indians are the bad guys." [49]

In *The Green Berets*, John Wayne relied on Army helicopters rather than a stagecoach or horses to transport the good guys through Indian territory. Nevertheless, the seige of the Special Forces camp resembled literally thousands of Indian seiges that had long been a staple of Hollywood Westerns. And, like these films, the struggle in Vietnam pitted white men against colored men, in this instance, yellow men rather than red men.

As David Halberstam noted, however, the conflict in Vietnam had produced a switch in roles. Americans were no longer universally perceiving themselves as the good guys in the struggle. It just might be that we were the many bad guys surrounding a few good guys. Moreover, the war offered no easy way out for Americans; it was too

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complex and impersonal for pat solutions. Consequently, unlike his typical good guys against the bad guys films, Wayne could not solve the problems of Vietnam with a sudden burst of violence in the last reel of *The Green Berets* as he could do in most of his previous roles.

The film's very size also worked against Wayne being able to play his typical character. Most of his movies had relied on the Wayne image and his physical presence to carry the story. Trying to direct the film and at the same time act in it, Wayne also had to compete with helicopters, planes, and all the other instruments of modern war for star billing. In the end, he succeeded only in becoming lost in the cast of thousands and military gagetry.

Audiences came away from the film remembering the spectacular firefight and the Viet Cong general being snatched by plane out of the air far more than any of Wayne's actions. To be sure, like so many of his Western characters, Wayne is heading off into the sunset at the end of the film. Symbolizing, perhaps unconsciously, the difficulty he had in finding the proper direction for the film, however, Wayne's sun is setting into the East, into the South China Sea, rather than into the West.

Despite such geographic errors, dramatic problems inherent in the script, the controversial nature of the subject, and virtually unanimous poor reviews, *The Green Berets* proved to be a box office hit. Confounding critics and Hollywood insiders who had predicted the film would flop, it brought in $8,700,000 in film rentals during the first six months of its run. Against a production cost of $6.1 million, *The Green Berets* generated a total domestic theatrical film rental of $9,750,000, which constituted Warner Brothers' share of the theater box office for the United States and Canada.[50] Foreign distribution and sale to television brought in additional revenues.

The film's success confirmed Wayne's prediction that while he made it "from a hawk's point of view," he had made it "strictly for entertainment." At the same time, Wayne credited the criticism of the movie with helping to make it as successful as it was: "Luckily for me, they overkilled it. *The Green Berets* would have been successful regardless of what the critics did, but it might have taken the public longer to find out about the picture if they hadn't made so much noise about it."[51]

Irrespective of the artistic merit of the movie, it does appear that most reviewers were criticizing the Vietnam War and Wayne's hawkish

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views more than *The Green Berets* as entertainment. In addition, John Wayne had long since established his reputation and in a choice between that status and critics' opinions, audiences would be expected to trust Wayne rather than the critics.

Ironically, the Vietnam War itself marked the beginning of the end of America's glorification of war and the virtue of dying for one's country which was at the core of the Wayne image. For the first time since the War of 1812, Americans did not unite behind the government to wage a foreign war. And, for the first time since that conflict, the United States lost a war. The ramifications of this defeat for the nation are still not clear. What is already apparent, however, is that the shock of our failure in Vietnam has caused Americans to re-examine the virtues of war and the roles in life based on conflict, action, and martial success. Nevertheless, John Wayne and his image emerged from the controversies surrounding *The Green Berets* and his vocal support of the war not only unscathed, but seemingly more popular than ever.

NOTES

[1]Interview with Donald Baruch, Chief, Motion Picture Production Office, Directorate for Public Affairs, Department of Defense, June 4, 1976.

[2]Jack Valenti to Lyndon Johnson, January 6, 1966.

[3]Herbert Hirschman, Double H Productions, to Chief, Los Angeles Branch, Office of Chief of Information, Department of the Army, January 24, 1963.

[4]Interoffice Memo, Public Information Division, Department of the Army, February 4, 1963.

Memo from Chief, Public Information Division, Department of the Army to Production Branch, Audio-Visual Division, Assistant Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs, February 14, 1963.

[5]Donald Baruch to Raymond Bell, Columbia Pictures, December 20, 1965.

[6]Donald Baruch to Raymond Bell, Columbia Pictures, June 23, 1966.

[7]Interview with Robin Moore, December 22, 1974.

[8]*Ibid.*

Weekly Variety, May 10, 1967.

[9]Interview with David Wolper, July 21, 1975.

Daily Variety, May 10, 1967.

[10]John Wayne to Lyndon Johnson, December 26, 1965.

[11]Bill Moyers to John Wayne, January 18, 1966.

[12]Michael Wayne Memo to "Green Beret" File, January 24, 1966.

[13]Interview with Norman Hatch, Chief, Directorate for Public Affairs, Department of Defense, June 4, 1976.

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[14]Interview with Robin Moore, December 22, 1974.
Michael Wayne Memo to "Green Beret" File, March 1, 1966.
Interview with Michael Wayne, August 5, 1975.
[15]John Wayne to Bill Moyers, February 18, 1966.
[16]John Wayne to Donald Baruch, April 18, 1966.
[17]John Wayne to Bill Moyers, April 18, 1966.
[18]John Wayne, identical letters to the Senators, April 15, 1966.
[19]*Time* Magazine, June 9, 1967.
[20]Michael Wayne to Donald Baruch, May 27, 1966.
Michael Wayne to Donald Baruch, June 30, 1966.
Daily Variety, June 23, 1966.
[21]Michael Wayne to Donald Baruch, August 19, 1966.
[22]Michael Wayne to Donald Baruch, August 26, 1966.
Donald Baruch, Memo for the Record, "Green Beret File," Sept. 1, 1966.
[23]Memorandum for Directorate for Information Services OASD (PA), from Department of the Army, September 14, 1966.
[24]James Barrett to Donald Baruch, September 24, 1966.
[25]Interview with Michael Wayne, August 5, 1975.
Donald Baruch, Memo for the Record, "Green Beret File," Sept. 29, 1966.
[26]*Ibid.*
[27]Michael Wayne to "Green Beret" File, November 8, 1966.
James Barrett to Army Office of Information, December 30, 1966.
[28]Michael Wayne to Donald Baruch, February 2, 1967.
Army Comments on "Special Forces Movie Script," [N.D.], Forwarded on February 15, 1967.
[29]*Ibid.,* Michael Wayne's copy with handwritten approval of changes.
Michael Wayne to Donald Baruch, March 1, 1967.
Daniel Henkin, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs to Michael Wayne, March 30, 1967.
[30]Enclosure to Henkin letter, "Requested Changes for Screenplay 'The Green Berets'."
[31]Henkin letter, March 30, 1967.
[32]Interview with Michael Wayne.
New York *Times,* September 27, 1967.
[33]*Daily Variety,* June 22, 1967; Baruch interview, June 4, 1976.
[34]Interview with Ray Kellogg, July 3, 1975.
Time Magazine, June 9, 1967.
[35]DoD Memorandum and Chronological Sequence on "The Green Berets," May 11, 1967.
Kellogg Interview.
Michael Wayne to Donald Baruch, June 1, 1967.
Daily Variety, June 1, 1967.
[36]Memorandum from Office of Chief of Public Information, Department of the Army to Directorate for Defense Information, OASD (PA), June 8, 1967.
Kellogg Interview.
Michael Wayne Interview.

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Interview with Col. William Byrnes, June 25, 1975.

[37]Lawrence Suid, "The Making of 'The Longest Day,' " *Journal of Popular Film,* Vol. V, Nos. 3 & 4.

[38]Batjac List of Requirements, May 12, 1967.

Department of Defense Instruction # 5410.15, November 3, 1966.

[39]Michael Wayne Interview.

Kellogg Interview.

Byrnes Interview.

Joan Barthel, "John Wayne, Superhawk," New York *Times Magazine,* December 24, 1967.

[40]*The Hollywood Reporter,* June 26, 1969.

Ibid., June 27, 1969.

Motion Picture Daily, June 30, 1969.

Michael Wayne Interview.

[41]Interview with David Halberstam, March 29, 1975.

[42]*Ibid.*

[43]Michael Wayne Interview.

[44]Interview with John Wayne, *Playboy,* May, 1971.

[45]New York *Times,* June 20, 1968.

[46]*Hollywood Reporter,* June 17, 1968.

[47]*Congressional Record,* June 26, 1968, pp. 18, 856-57.

[48]*New Yorker,* June 29, 1968, pp. 24-27.

[49]Michael Wayne Interview.

[50]Warner Brothers to Author, April 7, 1977.

[51]John Wayne Interview, *Playboy,* p. p. 88.

Lawrence Suid's book *on Hollywood & The Military Image* will be published Spring, 1978 by Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. This article, in revised form, will appear as part of that book.

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