

Making Apocalypse Now

Episode 18: Mr. Clean's Death



Forward

By **CINEMATYLER**

Thanks so much for your support! Like the Puppy Sampan scene, the Mail Ambush scene always seemed rather small in the grand scheme of the movie (despite resulting in the death of a main character). However, while making this episode, I realized just how much this scene is continuing to develop the themes and characters of the movie. The connection to Charles Manson was really interesting considering how infamous he became and how Kurtz was basically doing the same thing on such a large scale. It really highlights how bizarre the war setting is when something like the My Lai Massacre can go unpunished at the same time Manson's followers go on trial for *their* heinous crimes.

It was also interesting to find that Clean's tape recorder was not in the script. Coppola is great at finding these sort of "punchlines" to scenes that give them such a memorable impact. The puppy at the end of the Sampan massacre and Clean's mother's voice telling him to stay safe while he is lying dead add such an emotional impact to the scene while, at the same time, giving the scenes a deep poignance. It really shows how masterful Coppola is as a writer.

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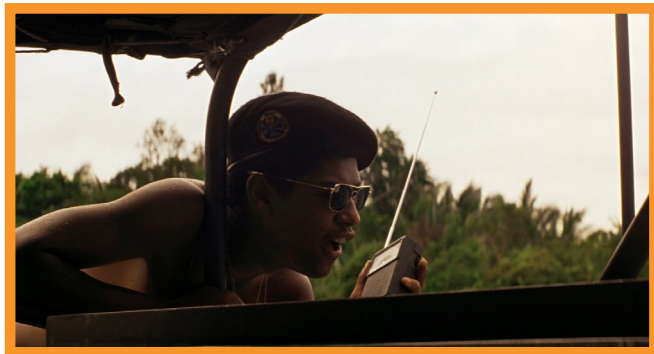
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CHARACTERS



Francis Ford Coppola:

The Hero. A director coming off the massive success of *The Conversation* and *The Godfather* parts I and II is about to embark on a journey that will test his limits—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Will he change the film industry? Will he survive?



Vittorio Storaro (Cinematographer):

The Genius. An Italian cinematographer apprehensively accepts perhaps the most important role on this team—capturing the images that will tell this epic story. A true student of light and color, Storaro must bring these grand ideas into reality. Failure would bring a potential end to Coppola's career. Can he do it?



Laurence Fishburne (Clean):

The Kid. A fourteen-year-old sets out on a once-in-a-lifetime journey and joins a cast of great actors including the likes of Martin Sheen, Dennis Hopper, and Marlon Brando. Will he become a great actor himself? Only time will tell.



Albert Hall (Chief):

The Captain. An actor with experience in theater, television, and Blaxploitation movies makes his jump to the mainstream with a memorable performance as the no-nonsense captain of the patrol boat at the center of this epic story.

Black Americans in 'Nam

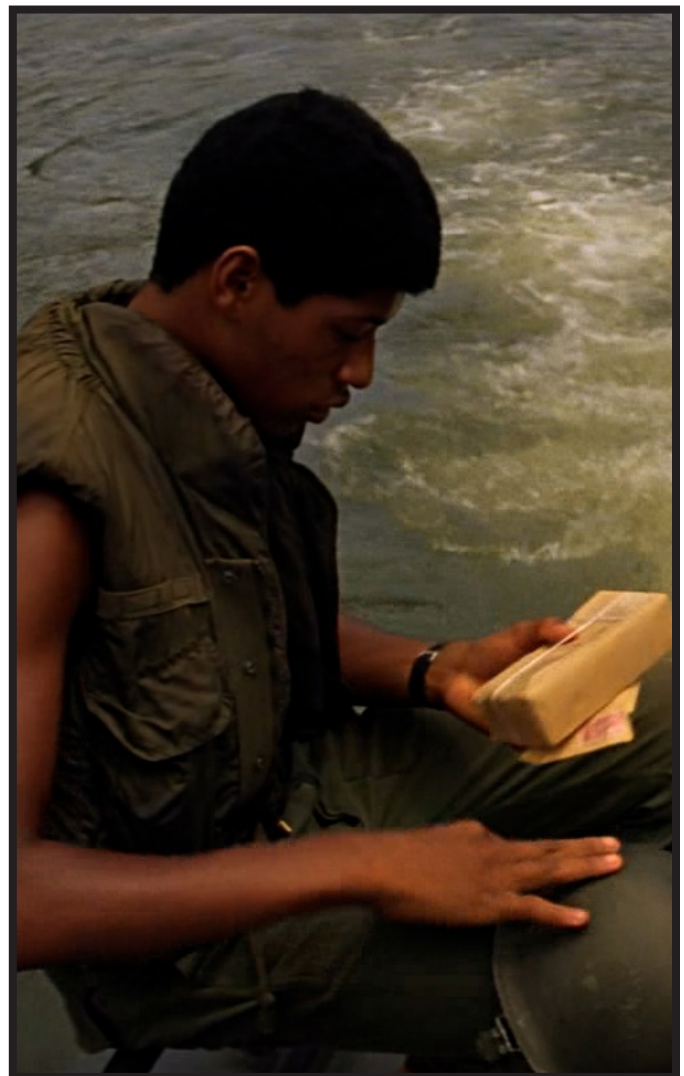
CONTEXT (SUMMARY)

Racial tensions within the U.S. military during the Vietnam War were heightened due to various factors, both at home and within the combat zones. The Vietnam conflict was America's first integrated war, but as it progressed, the racial divides became more pronounced. Influences from the Black Power era, alongside later events like the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., made these tensions worse.

Even after the Civil Rights movement, the U.S. and its military struggled with true integration. Project 100,000, which lowered draft standards, and institutional racism in draft boards, meant a disproportionate number of Black Americans were drafted. By 1969, opposition to the war surged among the black community, partly due to the impact on impoverished areas in the U.S.

Prominent figures like Muhammad Ali and Martin Luther King Jr. spoke against the war and highlighted its racial issues. Groups like the Black Panthers and SNCC felt the same. Still, some soldiers in Vietnam, as noted by journalists like Frank McGee and Wallace Terry, showed unity between Black and white troops. But this wasn't the case for everyone.

Black soldiers frequently faced open



racism, from Confederate flags on military gear to biases in entertainment. The discriminatory military justice system, promotional barriers, and assignment to high-risk combat roles made these feelings of resentment grow. Wallace Terry, an oral historian, noted the significant underrepresentation of Black culture in the

Black Americans in 'Nam

CONTEXT (SUMMARY)

military, especially in music.

As the war went on, racial problems in the military got worse, partly because of issues in the US. Black soldiers started showing more pride in their race and formed groups to protect themselves from racism. In places like Danang, racial fights were so common that streetlights were added to stop nighttime attacks.

In interviews, many Black soldiers said they might use weapons when they got back to the U.S., and they questioned why they were fighting in Vietnam when there were racial problems at home. But there were also stories of soldiers from different races helping each other in dangerous situations.

When they came back to the U.S., many Black soldiers faced problems like not having a job, facing racism, and dealing with PTSD. Their war experiences, combined with the lack of change at home, made them a strong group that could push for racial equality. Major Wardell Smith believed many might not act based on their feelings during the war due to personal reasons. But the war definitely changed how a whole generation of Black soldiers thought about race.*



Additional Facts

BLACK AMERICANS IN VIETNAM

The following facts help put the racial issues of America's involvement in the Vietnam War into perspective.



- In 1967, despite being only 11% of the US population, Black Americans made up 16.3% of all draftees.
- 64% of eligible Black American registrants were drafted, compared to 31% of eligible white registrants.
- A total of 300,000 Black Americans served in Vietnam.
- Black representation on draft boards was significantly low, with some states having none.
- In Louisiana, a Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, Jack Helms, served on the draft board until 1966.
- In 1966, only 1.3% of US draft board members were Black Americans.
- By 1970, Black American representation on draft boards increased but was still only 6.6% of all board members.
- Across all military branches, just 2% of officers were Black Americans.

Additional Facts

BLACK AMERICANS IN VIETNAM

- Black American troops were more commonly assigned to combat units, with 23% of such troops in Vietnam being Black American.
- The reenlistment rate for Black Americans was 50% between 1966 to 1967, double that of white soldiers.
- Confederate flags/icons were frequently painted on military vehicles, while bathroom graffiti targeted Black Americans.
- 1970 saw 1,060 reported cases of violent racial conflict.
- Black American troops faced more severe and frequent punishments compared to White troops.
- A 1972 Defense Department study showed that Black troops accounted for 34.3% of court-martials.
- Black troops were almost twice as likely as White troops to receive a punitive discharge.
- A total of 7,243 Black Americans died during the Vietnam War, which was 12.4% of total casualties.
- In the mid-1980s, Black American Vietnam War veterans had a PTSD prevalence of 40%, which was double that of White veterans.
- Black American veterans were more likely to face unemployment based on their race.
- A 1997 study found that out of nearly 400 Vietnam War memoirs, only seven were authored by Black American veterans, which is less than 2%.

Selected Comments

DO LUNG SEQUENCE



@acemagalar2519

A detail I love about the bridge scene is how it's undoubtedly the most actively dangerous part of the river we see and it's primarily stationed with black men. I think it acts as a reference to how the government would often view minority soldiers as even more disposable than white ones and how they'd often be shipped to the most dangerous areas of the war.

D

@davidsummer8631

The bridge scene is definitely the border between the film's realism and its surrealism because after that scene it becomes a different type of film.

A

@austinlevi3452

It "bridges" the two.

S

@spacemanski

The scene involving the Roach is taken from or at least was heavily inspired by this section from Michael Herr's book *Despatches* - "We heard then what sounded at first like a little girl crying, a subdued, delicate wailing, and as we listened it became louder and more intense, taking on pain and sorrow as it grew until it was a full, piercing shriek..... A Marine brushed past us. on his hip he wore a holster which held an M-79 grenade-launcher. 'Put that fucker away,' the Marine said, as though to himself. He drew the weapon, opened the breech, and dropped in a round that looked like a great swollen bullet, listening very carefully all the while to the shrieking. He placed the M-79 over his left forearm and aimed for a second before firing. There was an enormous flash on the wire 200 meters away, a spray of orange sparks, and then everything was still except for the roll of some bombs exploding kilometers away and the sound of the M-79 being opened, closed again, and returned to the holster. Nothing changed on the Marine's face, nothing, and he moved back into the darkness." (pp. 142-43.)

Selected Comments

DO LUNG SEQUENCE



@mbryson2899

The continuous destruction and reconstruction of the bridge illustrating the absurdity and pointlessness of the conflict reminded me strongly of the bridge scene in "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly."



@AzraelSoulHunter

I had a funny idea that Roach just says "Yeah" at Willard's question because Willard didn't ask "Who is in command here?" or said, "Tell me who's in command here". He just answered his question in the most literal way possible, kind of showing how truly gone he is, he became more of a machine than a man. But it also shows how much clarity he has compared to everyone else, unlike other soldiers here who think Willard is their leader or the soldiers back in that campsite where it was raining like hell, Roach knows who is in command... And who that is? That is for Roach to know. Someone who got so deep into darkness and insanity that he came back with pure sanity and complete awareness of everything around him, but in the process he lost his humanity.



@bonerjoe1230

The Do Lung bridge scene is the best in the movie IMO. It perfectly encapsulates the horror and pointlessness of war. Visually it is one of the most stunning scenes ever put to film. Last year I got to watch Apocalypse Now in a movie theater and seeing especially this scene on the big screen was just breathtaking.



@connycontainer9459

Always loved that the mail made it through.



@finalascent

16:14 - one of my favorite scenes. It's not just about how he knows where his quarry is. He's intuitively one with his weapon, knows its trajectory and where it will hit. Doesn't even bother using those crude "ladder" sights...

Selected Comments

DO LUNG SEQUENCE

No

@Finkelthusiast

I always saw this scene as an allusion to the River Styx from Greek Mythology which once you've crossed you have entered hell. This also aligns with the characters on the boat only dying after this point of the film which is quite unusual for war films but makes sense symbolically.



@ElimGarakSpoonHead

In Vietnam, my dad was on a rescue mission at the mouth of a river. Marines were pouring out of the trees into the water and climbing up onto the sides of the boat. He said the sound of their heads hitting the side of the boat will always be the thing he remembered most.

J

@jopflah416

People think that the suitcase scene was weird but I and many others bought suitcases really early in our tour. At Camp Eagle, I gave money to a dude who was going to the PX to purchase a suitcase for me. He got some cheap ass Asian one because the PX was all out of the Samsonite brand. The handle broke the first time I used it after I was transferred to the south. Bought a Samsonite at the PX near Saigon and it's my attic to this day.

Z

@zooblestyx

In a VHS version with Swedish subs I saw in the 90s, the line "I dropped it" got a rather literal treatment. Instead of translating it into something that means "I took it", the sub had him say more like "I lost it". One might speculate that the timid bookworm who did the subtitle work was blissfully uncorrupted by the dark knowledge of American drug slang. We laughed at it with great merriment, and honestly appreciated and enjoyed the delightfully absurd tone it brought to the scene. In the middle of this darkly foreboding and intense scene, somehow it gave the impression that Coppola found this to be an important bit of exposition...? =D

SOURCES

Endnotes

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