

Making Apocalypse Now

Episode 11: The Napalm Drop



Forward

By **CINEMATYLER**

Thanks so much for your support! I know it has taken a while for this video to come out and I appreciate your patience. Your support has helped me get some editing assistance where I can work on other things while the basic assembly is being taken care of.

It has always been so mind-blowing to me how they managed to even organize the Valkyries sequence at all, let alone in a remote location where basic resources are stretched and equipment is taken away at a moment's notice to fight in actual battles. I can only imagine how surreal it must have been for the pilots to go back and forth between playing war

and engaging in real combat.

The production during this sequence always reminded me of the production of David Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* where the shooting location was so remote that they actually had to build the bridge under the same conditions they had in the movie. They even used elephants to haul the materials to the site.

Anyway, I appreciate you taking this journey with me to figure out how such an iconic sequence was pulled off.

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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?



Dick White (Loach Pilot):

The Maverick. A veteran and world-class pilot must pull off incredible aerial maneuvers to give the *Valkyries* sequence its amazing action. Perhaps only one man was capable of giving the sequence its thrilling helicopter stunts and somehow the production found him.



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?



John Milius (Screenwriter):

The Renegade. His bold and sometimes far-out ideas give insight into where his visions of Kurtz and his army came from and how the character evolved over time.

Ariel Sharon

THE SIX-DAY WAR

In this episode, we took a look at the the Six-Day War that inspired the Valkyries sequence. What follows is some more detail on Ariel Sharon and the story that John Milius had in mind while writing one of the most complex battle sequences in cinema history.



Inspiration

Of all the now-iconic lines John Milius has written over his prolific career, he has said that his personal favorite is one spoken by Robert Duvall's Colonel Kilgore during the Valkyries sequence on the beach: "Charlie don't surf."¹ Milius said that despite the romanticized idea that many people have of a complex writing process, he writes his dialogue pretty quickly, almost off the top of his head.¹ In the case of "Charlie don't surf," Milius was directly inspired by a quote from Israel's Ariel Sharon published during the 1967 Six-Day War.¹

The scene was important to Milius because he wanted to show how a tough guy like Kilgore

subjugated himself to his hero, Lance.² He said, "I love the idea of this mighty Colonel getting to be a kid again."²

In an interview, Milius explained the quote that inspired Kilgore's line. The story goes that, just like how Kilgore decides to take Charlie's Point because he wants to surf there, Sharon captured enemy territory near the Suez Canal because he had heard there was a particular type of fish there and he wanted to go skin diving and see the fish.^{1,2} While skin diving, Sharon triumphantly declared, "We're eating their fish."¹

Ariel Sharon

THE SIX-DAY WAR

Who is Ariel Sharon?

Ariel Sharon was born in Kefar Malal, Palestine (now in Israel) on February 26, 1928.³ He was an Israeli general and politician who was known for his “brilliant but controversial military achievements and political policies.”³ He was a key figure in the Arab-Israeli wars and became Prime Minister of Israel in 2001.³ Sharon remained Prime Minister until he suffered a stroke in 2006.³

The Six-Day War

The Six-Day War was a conflict fought from the 5th to the 10th of June in 1967 between Israel and what was at the time known as the United Arab Republic, which was a coalition of Arab states primarily composed of Jordan, Syria, and Egypt.⁴ The Six-Day War, also known as the Third Arab–Israeli War, was a result of events going back to the first First Arab–Israeli War.⁴ When the First Arab–Israeli War ended with the signing of the 1949 Armistice Agreements, things were still tense between Israel and its Arab-majority neighboring states.⁴ In 1956 Israel invaded Egypt, triggering the Suez Crisis.⁴ Part of the reason for the invasion was that Israel wanted to force Egypt to reopen the Straits of Tiran, which they had closed to all Israeli shipping in 1948.⁴

The Straits of Tiran are narrow sea passages between the Sinai and Arabian peninsulas which separate the Gulf of Aqaba from the Red Sea proper.⁶ There are significant seaports in Jordan and Israel which can only be accessed through the Straits of Tiran, so they are strategically important.⁶ Israel was forced to withdraw due to

international pressure, but they were promised



Tanks for everything.

that the Straits would remain open.⁴ Following the incident, Israel proclaimed that if the Straits were to be closed again, it would be tantamount to a declaration of war.⁶

Well, in the months leading up to the Six-Day War tensions were growing dangerously high between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and in May Egypt announced they were closing the Straits of Tiran to Israel again.⁴ On June 5th Israel launched a series of airstrikes against Egyptian airfields and a ground offensive into the Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula, both of which caught Egyptian forces completely by surprise.⁴ Israel managed to conquer the entire Sinai Peninsula by the sixth day of the war.⁴

Sharon was in command of the 38th Division during the Six-Day War.⁵ He developed a complex

Ariel Sharon

THE SIX-DAY WAR

offensive strategy which was commended internationally by military strategists.⁵ He was said to have “inaugurated a new paradigm in operational command” and researchers at the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command studied his innovative planning.⁵ Sharon’s strategy “combined infantry troops, tanks and paratroopers from planes and helicopters” in a “simultaneous attack by a multiplicity of small forces, each with a specific aim, attacking a particular unit in a synergistic

reportedly nicknamed “The King of Israel” by the Israeli public after his role in the Yom Kippur War.⁵

Though he was considered brilliant, Sharon also had a reputation for being impulsive, dogmatic, and impossible to control, and as a result he made a lot of enemies.³ He was blocked from the top army position that his victories might otherwise have gotten him, and he retired from the army in 1973.³



Sharon or Kilgore?

Egyptian defense network. As a result, instead of supporting and covering each other as they were designed to do, each Egyptian unit was left fighting for its own life.”⁵ Later, he was

Conclusion

After retiring from the military, Sharon entered politics in the Likud party.⁵ He was eventually elected Minister of Defense and directed the 1982 Lebanon War in that position.⁵ During this time an official enquiry found that he bore “personal responsibility” for the Sabra and Shatila massacre and it recommended that he be removed from his role as Defense Minister.⁵ This scandal earned him the nickname the “Butcher of Beirut” among the Arab public.⁵ From the 1970s through to the 1990s, Sharon championed construction of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.⁵ He became the leader of the Likud in 2000, and was elected Prime Minister of Israel in 2001.⁵ Facing opposition within the Likud, in 2005 he left the party to form a new one called Kadima.⁵ He remained Prime Minister until 2006, when a stroke left him in a permanent vegetative state.⁵ He died on January 11th, 2014.⁵

Selected Comments

APOCALYPSE NOW

E

Ettore dipugnar

WW-2 armor were the Calvary also mechanized infantry Calvary.

S

striker8paints

Yep, Just prior to WWII the Cavalry (the US Cavalry has since founding always been Dragoon, aka Mounted Rifles) units traded their horses for armored cars and tanks and continued the mission of recon and screening during the war. Years later circa Vietnam some units were re-equipped with helicopters and continued the same traditional cavalry mission but the majority of Cav units retained their armor. Nowadays most US Cavalry units operate both aviation and armor. Once a Cav trooper, always a Cav trooper!

D

David Cruz

I was in Desert Storm on amtraks (Amphibious tracked vehicles), and we did something similar to playing Wagner, we strapped a big boom box on the front of one of the amtraks and blasted "Run to the Hills" by Iron Maiden. Works just as well... Oorrah!

Charley Company 1st Battalion 7th Marine Division. 0311.



Steven Phillips

@5:15 Marcos NEVER fought Viet Cong. The helicopters had previously used by US troops in Vietnam and were redundant by the time they were given to Marcos. I was in The P.I. from 1972-1975



Clem de la Clem

They didn't create a war movie, the created real war IRL and filmed it. The filming of Apocalypse Now was such a carzy process, it was int that sweetspot before CG but after huge box-office blockbusters and I don't think something like this will ever happen again in human history, unless someone is crazy rich and wants to do it outside of the hollywood system.

Selected Comments

APOCALYPSE NOW



Carl James Grindley

I think you should have called Milius and Coppola out for being less than ideally candid in their interview on the matter of the music. Both men would have known--as every film student knows--that Wagner's iconic music appeared in another cinematic attack, the ride of the KKK in DW Griffith's Birth of a Nation. Yes, Birth is a silent film, but it was distributed with a score for the in-house organist to use. There is absolutely no way that Milius wasn't making a reference and no way that Coppola didn't spot it and approve of it. The obvious interpretation is that the American troops attacking the village are being likened to the KKK. Coppola might be right in that the film isn't anti-American, but it sure is anti-army, a point that perhaps Sam Mendes got when he used the clip in Jarhead.



Robin Marks

Coppola had a bunch of helicopters and a small army to direct, and nobody died. Landis had one helicopter to direct, and three ended up dead. just saying. With Rust in the headlines, maybe I'm fixated on the dangers involved in filming. I'm actually surprised that no one died in the filming of Apocalypse. I know they killed an ox, but I don't think anyone died despite the insane conditions.

Had to add. The filming was benefitted by the actual war going on in the Philippines. War and violence are a contagion. So, it had to affect Coppola, and may have hardened him into a virtual General. I find it funny they couldn't be assured how many helicopters they'd have for shooting, since the helicopters may have been damaged or lost in an actual war. Just like any General, when your battle plan falls apart, you improvise and manage with what you have.



EdEditz

Francis Ford Coppola had an ARP2600 synthesizer that was used to make the helicopter sounds. You can replicate this on the Behringer 2600. Sounds amazing putting it through the ARP filter.

Selected Comments

APOCALYPSE NOW

H

Henry A

In a case of Life imitating Art, playing music as a form of psychological warfare to make the enemy give up and/or run away has been greatly influenced by this film.

When they are invading somewhere the Americans use Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries".

The French use the "Galop Infernal" from Offenbach's Orphée aux enfers.

The Germans will use anything by Rammstein, with "Feuer Frei!" being particularly popular.

And the British use... umm... "Barwick Green". ;-)

G

Gunnar Gundersen

The British have the "Agony Bags" aka Bagpipes. If you want to know how the enemy feels about them I suggest you read the effect it had on Argentine conscripts when they were used during the Falklands War.

H

Henry A

@Gunnar Gundersen I heard their use in warfare is to be banned on the grounds of being "cruel and unusual" ;-)

A

Archimedes Patty

I was in PSYOP in the 90s, stationed in Fort Bragg, NC. We'd get requests from the 82nd to play Ride of the Valkyries from our loudspeakers on the various DZs during Mass Tac. They loved it.

f

faembrugh

I saw this in a near empty cinema on a snowy day in 1979 (I was 14 and shouldn't have even been allowed in) and it was mind-blowing. I then totally confused my parents by requesting Doors and Wagner LPs for my birthday!

SOURCES

Endnotes

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2 - John Milius: A Brief QnA with the Narrator of "Between The Lines"
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3 - Ariel Sharon By Bernard Wasserstein
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4 - Six-Day War
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5 - Ariel Sharon
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6 - Straits of Tiran
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Photos

Ariel Sharon, by Jim Wallace (Smithsonian Institution).jpg - Wikimedia Commons

Six-Day War. IDF 14th Armored Brigade.jpg - Wikimedia Commons

Dayan w Kuntilla Raid comm.jpg - Wikimedia Commons

General Sharon. So.91.jpg - Wikimedia Commons

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