Making Apocalypse Now

Episode 22: Dennis Hopper



Forward

By CINEMATYLER

Thanks so much for your support! I can't believe it has taken this long to get to one of my favorite characters in the movie. I think it was brilliant for Coppola to add the character as a counterpoint to the gravity of Kurtz. Somehow, the bizarre nature of Hopper's character (and Hopper himself) just seems to enhance how strange everything is.

We can see in the deleted scenes that perhaps Colby was meant to do this before his part was minimized such as in the exchange he has with Willard about not understanding feeling anything other than recoil when he kills people. In a way it makes sense to show how far down the rabbit hole the previous assassin went, but it never seems like that is really something that

could happen to Willard. I must say that I do agree with making Colby more of a mysterious background character.

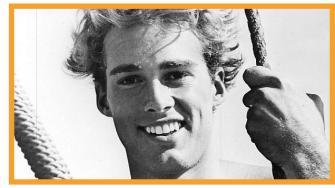
With the photojournalist however, we get the sense that he was someone who already had an eccentric personality and easily fell under Kurtz's spell and therefore he can portray the mind of a Kurtz devotee to the audience in an entertaining and whimsical way while keeping at the forefront, the central question of how Kurtz could possibly turn Willard. I really can't imagine anyone besides Hopper playing the character, which just goes to show the brilliance of Coppola's method of transforming the characters around his actors.

GONTENTS



Characters

-Pg 3-



Sean Flynn

-Pg 4-



Meeting Moonby

-Pg 6-



Selected Comments

-Pg 7-

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?



Dennis Hopper:

The Jester. Deep in a career slump from a brave artistic failure, Hopper would be given an opportunity to reinvigorate his career with Coppola's much anticipated war epic. The question is—can Hopper overcome his vices and turn in a good performance?



Jerry Zeismer (Assistant Director):

The Left-Hand. Along with playing one of the most mysterious characters in the movie, Zeismer would assist Coppola in completing his vision. He would give everything to the project, including giving up his chance to rest by staying behind during the hiatus to make sure the production was getting back on its feet.



Chas Garretsen:

The Photojournalist. Bringing his experience of photographing scenes of actual war, Garretsen would document the making of a fictional war with his keen eye for dramatic images. As an added bonus, his experiences would help shape Hopper's character into something both memorable and authentic.

Sean Flynn

MISSING IN ACTION

Intro

Sean Flynn, son of legendary actor Errol Flynn, initially started his adult life in acting, taking uncredited roles in films like "Where the Boys Are" in 1960 and landing a leading role in "The Son of Captain Blood" in 1962. However, he would trade in his acting career for something much more dramatic-combat photography on the front lines of major war zones. Sadly, this adventure would lead to his still unresolved demise in the jungles of Cambodia. Tragically, after his disappearance, his mother, French actress Lili Damita, spent much of the family fortune in a desperate search to find him. Despite her efforts, Sean was ultimately declared dead in 1984, long after he was captured at a checkpoint and handed over to the Khmer Rouge rebels.2

War Photography

Sean Flynn discovered his true passion in photojournalism, capturing rarely seen depictions of dangerous war zones—from Israel during an Arab-Israeli conflict to the jungles of Vietnam and Cambodia. Flynn took photos for major publications like TIME, Paris Match, and United Press International. His daredevil attitude was on full display when he parachuted into combat zones alongside U.S. troops during the Vietnam War.

(1) In 1970, with North Vietnamese forces pushing forward, Flynn took an assignment in Cambodia for TIME Magazine.

1

The conflict in Cambodia from 1970 to 1975 was a brutal extension of America's fight against the North Vietnamese. It pitted the US-backed government, led by Lon Nol, against the Maoistinfluenced Khmer Rouge insurgents, supported by Hanoi. The Khmer Rouge eventually won, leading to a deadly regime that resulted in the deaths of up to 2 million people.²

Flynn shared his intense experiences as a photojournalist with his friend John Steinbeck IV, son of famous author John Steinbeck. They were known as hard-partying guys, often exposed to the harsh realities of war. Their experiences included capturing disturbing images of U.S. allies using cruel methods on suspected Vietcong guerrillas.³ Both men were not just observers but participants in the chaos of war-the men were in such dangerous situations that they had to be armed themselves to keep the soldiers from having to focus on protecting them. Flynn was known to have used his gun against enemy forces in firefights.3 What's interesting is that they were among the few Americans who protested the Vietnam War from within Vietnam during the conflict.3

Going Missing

Sean Flynn and fellow photojournalist Dana Stone, disappeared on April 6, 1970, while on assignments for Time magazine and CBS News respectively. They were part of a group of journalists who had left Phnom Penh on Highway One, headed towards what was then called Saigon, for a government-organized press conference. They learned of a Viet Cong-manned checkpoint on Highway One and decided to investigate.

Stephen Bell, a reporter for ABC News who later became an anchor on Good Morning America, was

Sean Flynn

MISSING IN ACTION

one of the last Westerners to see Flynn and Stone. He noted that while most journalists traveled in large limousines, Flynn and Stone preferred to travel alone on motorcycles. After taking a photo of them, Bell and the others returned to Phnom Penh, while Flynn and Stone pushed forward towards the checkpoint. That was the last time anyone saw them. Bell speculated that they were among the first journalists to go missing in the region, but their tragedy would become all too common.²

In the decades that followed, many of Sean Flynn's friends, including British Australian photographer Tim Page, continued to search for him, visiting Cambodia several times seeking clues about his disappearance. Page dedicated himself to investigating the disappearance and gathered what is considered some of the most credible information on the case.

While it has never been officially confirmed, reports suggested that Flynn and Stone were captured by Viet Cong guerrilla fighters and may have been held captive for up to a year before being executed by the Khmer Rouge. After many years of uncertainty and pain, Sean's mother, French American actress Lili Damita, declared him legally dead in 1984.

Was he Found?

In 2010, a potential breakthrough came when remains believed to be those of missing journalists, including Sean Flynn, were found in rural Cambodia by two amateur "bone hunters." These remains were discovered after a local man from Kampong Cham province in eastern Cambodia,led Keith Rotheram, a Briton, and David MacMillan, a



The Last Photo of Flynn and Stone

Scottish-born Australian, to the location. The local man claimed to have witnessed a horrifying scene during the war in which a foreign man with blonde hair was forced to dig his own grave before being killed.²

John Johnson, a spokesman for the US embassy in Phnom Penh, confirmed that the remains were promptly sent to the Pentagon's Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) in Hawaii for forensic tests. He cautioned that it was difficult to speculate on the duration of the tests, noting, "All these cases are individual." (2) This discovery offered a bit of hope in solving the long-standing mystery surrounding the fate of Flynn and other journalists who vanished during the Cambodian conflict.*

SCREENPLAY (1975 DRAFT)

123.

225 CONTINUED:

AUSTRALIAN
(shouting back)
I know, I know, it's all right.
Come in this way. It's mined
over there. This way. It's
all right.

Willard looks at Chef who is at the helm. He shrugs and they do as this man says. The P.B.R. moves towards the water's edge where there is a dock covered with concertina wire. The odd Australian stands waving his hat, guiding them safely in.

A thick greasy smoke hangs from fires that burn near the fort; fresh shell craters indicate a recent battle. Near the dock there is a tangled clump of corpses -- half submerged in the water. Other piles of bodies lie about, some of them on fire. Fire literally burns from out of the ground. Chef nods at the bodies.

CHEF

Charlie?

WILLARD

Looks that way.

CHEF

(looking at the

Australian)

Who's he?

WILLARD

God knows.

The boat pulls up. The Australian harlequin hops on board; the crew regards him with their dark faces splattered with mud and blood.

WILLARD

(continuing)

Who the hell are you?

AUSTRALIAN

Moonby. Got any Winstons?

WILLARD

Moonby what?

AUSTRALIAN

Moonby, 4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, Task Force. Ex-Corporal Moonby, <u>deserted</u>.

SCREENPLAY (1975 DRAFT)

124.

225 CONTINUED: (2)

WILLARD

(incredulously, indicating
the hundreds of natives)

What is this?

MOONBY

Oh, they're simple enough people. It's good to see you, baby. Nobody has any Winstons?

Chef automatically offers Moonby a Winston.

MOONBY

This boat's a mess.

WILLARD

Where's Kurtz? I want to talk to him.

MOONBY

Oh, you don't talk to Colonel

(he puffs, then

smiles)

You listen to him. God, these are good. I kept these people off you, you know. It wasn't easy.

WILLARD

Why did they attack us?

MOONBY

Simple. They don't want him to go.

CHEF

You're Australian?

MOONBY

Pre-Australian, actually. But I'd dig goin' to California. I'm California dreamin'.

WILLARD

(almost to himself)

So Kurtz is alive.

MOONBY

Kurtz. I tell you, that man
has enlarged my mind.

SCREENPLAY (1975 DRAFT)

125.

225 CONTINUED: (3)

He opens his arms wide, to indicate the breadth of his mind's expansion.

MOONBY

(continuing)
But lemme tell you, he is the most dangerous thing in every way that I've come on so far. He wanted to shoot me. The first thing he said is, 'I'm going to shoot you because you are a deserter.' I said I didn't desert from your army, I deserted from my army. He said, 'I'm going to shoot you

WILLARD Why didn't he shoot you?

just the same.'

MOONBY

I've asked myself that question. I said to myself, why didn't he shoot me? He didn't shoot me, because I had a stash like you wouldn't believe. I hid it in the jungle; the wealth of the Orient: Marijuana -- Hashish -- Opium -- Cocaine -- uncut Heroin; the Gold of the Golden Triangle. And Acid -- I make Koolaid that makes purple Owsley come on like piss. Now I'm
Kurtz' own Disciple -- I listen, he talks. About everything! Everything. I forgot there's such a thing as sleep. Everything. Of love, too.

CHEF

Love?

MOONBY
Oh, no, not what you think...

Cosmic love. He made me see things -- things, you know.

The whole time Moonby is chattering on, Willard has picked up his field glasses and scans the fortress.

226 WILLARD'S POV - THROUGH FIELD GLASSES

Men in small groups, huddled over food.

SCREENPLAY (1975 DRAFT)

126.

226 CONTINUED:

Now he settles on the entrance in the Temple. There are stakes in front, and on top of them are horrible shrunken heads.

227 BACK TO SCENE

WILLARD

Sounds like he's gone crazy.

MOONBY

No, Colonel Kurtz couldn't be crazy -- if you heard him talk, just last week, you'd never think he was crazy.

WILLARD

Is that where he is? By the shrunken heads.

MOONBY

Those heads, yes. Well, the rebels...

WILLARD

(to his men)

We're going ashore. Tie her up -- and leave your guns up, Lance.

LANCE

What?

WILLARD

Bring your rifles, that's all.
(looking at Moonby)
Take us to him.

.....

Right on -- he's been waiting for --

WILLARD

MOONBY

And shut up.

Moonby nods and shrugs, and hops off the P.B.R. Willard and the men follow.

228 MOVING VIEW - WILLARD, MOONBY AND THE CREW

As they proceed closer to the fortress-temple, men appear where a moment before there was only jungle.

SCREENPLAY (1975 DRAFT)

127.

228 CONTINUED:

They are mostly Montagnards, but far more savage looking than any we've seen before. They wear only loincloths and bandoliers of ammunition. Their bodies are painted in strange patterns. They carry Army M-16's, Russian AK-47's and a wide variety of knives and clubs. Women emerge from the brush as well. They are armed and equally primitive looking. Interspersed among them are a few taller men with paler skins, with the remnants of Army insignia on them. The paint on their bodies is, if anything, more bizarre. We CONTINUE TO MOVE ACROSS the entire group up to the stone gates of the fort, where thirty or so more are seen silhouetted against the sky. Willard and his men look up at people more primitive and more savage than any since the time of Captain Cook.

They encounter, in the center of the group, what once appears to have been an American. He is tall, gaunt, wears a flak jacket, but is otherwise naked, save a loincloth. His face is darkened from dirt, battle smoke, strange camouflage patterns. His hair and beard are long, matted with mud and grease. He carries an AK-47 decorated with scalps and human ears. Willard approaches this beast, who seems shy and retiring.

WILLARD

Who are you?

MOONBY

(breaking in)

His name is...

WILLARD

I'm not ever goin' to tell you to shut up again.

Moonby shuts up. The MAN tries to speak, but nothing comes out. He is as dumbstruck at seeing them, as they are to see him.

MAN

Colby. Exec. officer, A-Team... Special Forces. F-82 -- Col. Walter Kurtz, commanding.

WILLARD

What happened here?

COLBY

What -- happened here.

SCREENPLAY (1975 DRAFT)

128.

228 CONTINUED: (2)

WILLARD

Charlie?

COLBY

NVA regulars. They're coming again tonight. Tet -- their big -- assault.

Willard is the man in the middle -- he doesn't know what to say to this man, but he understands the forces that pounded him. He takes his arm.

229 REVERSE ON COLBY

looks at Willard, not understanding.

230 REVERSE ON WILLARD

Six months later, and he and Colby would be identical.

WILLARD

I'm taking you back.

Moonby slaps himself in the head with his hand.

MOONBY

Oh, no, don't say that.

COLBY

Take us back. Take us back! But, the operation -- the team. Colonel Kurtz has such plans for -- the team.

WILLARD

Take me to him, Major.

Colby starts, and then, seeing the shrunken heads on poles, he turns, agitated, to Willard:

COLBY

I had nothing to do with these operations -- I did not do the planning -- none of us did. It was all Colonel Kurtz -- he was the genius. You'll see -- the genius of our Colonel. He should be made a General, don't you think? A General? It's...

Suddenly, frightened, he stops. Without looking Willard knows that Kurtz is standing behind him. He turns.

Selected Comments

KURTZ TEMPLE



@Ruylopez778

I can think of no greater tribute to the Coppolas and everyone else in the cast and crew and what they endured than to study it in such depth and with such care. The layers of myth, chaos, absurdity, danger, frustration, confusion and madness that surround the movie and the production give us a deeper appreciation of what it means to be an artist, make art, or commit wholeheartedly to any endeavour. Inspiring, terrifying, fascinating, this series unlocks and expands on the movie and the accompanying documentary, at a time the current world is plagued by psychopathic entities, propaganda and lazy, derivative art. RIP Eleanor.



@en21b

What is truly amazing is the dedication to making the temple set, as well as the rest of the movie, as authentic as possible, by hand. I know there are other older productions that used large hand built sets for movies, Liz Taylor's Cleopatra comes to mind, but watching footage of people making it on set is awesome. I really love the passion the production crew had for wanting to bring the best possible movie to audiences. Not saying there isn't that type of love in any movie made today. However, with technology such as it is, to bring those types of visuals to a movie today takes no more than a graphic design artist to render the set on a computer. I know there is more to it. I am just simplifying. It just seems to me the real love in making movies is kind of gone in today's cinema. Again, not saying this is the case for every movie made today.

That being sad I really love this docu-series on the making of Apocalypse Now. When you are done with the last episode Tyler, I look forward to a YouTube super cut so I can re-watch them again one after another.



@MsZeeZed

Kurtz's temple base feels like a dream, but as you moved around the structure it felt real. I've never thought about that dichotomy before, not realising the temple was a built set too, so convincing is it. Its in keeping with the movie, where real places are infected by the surreal disruption of war. Its a great aesthetic and one of the most powerful aspects of the production as a whole. That missing French plantation scene fits well in the aesthetic, but not the narrative as the clash of three different cultures at once is too much for the film's visual storytelling. The film's story is cleaner with a clash of just two cultures at once, even if that's not how the world really is.

Selected Comments

KURTZ TEMPLE



@michaelhall2709

Oh, my. I'd had no knowledge of Eleanor Coppola's passing until just this moment, and I had to pause the video to express my feelings about it. Like you I had read "Notes" many years ago, and it had fueled much of my obsession with APOCALYPSE NOW over the years. In the book Eleanor Coppola basically fills the role of Willard in being the audience surrogate in a carnival of madness, but she's actually more like Conrad's original narrator Marlowe in that she's a pretty normal wife and mother surrounded by maniacs, chief of whom is the artist-wannabe-hero she's married to. Her musings on the meaning of it all, including dealing with her husband's revealed infidelity, give the book a sympathetic human perspective that's largely absent from HEARTS OF DARKNESS and APOCALYPSE itself.

As to the Kurtz compound, no question that if (like HEAVEN'S GATE) the film hadn't turned out to be a masterpiece, it would have been a major scandal.

Edit: reading her obit from The Guardian I see that she grew up in my hometown of Huntington Beach, and graduated from my alma mater HBHS the year I was born. Pretty cool. RIP.

@jimmycakes7158

On the surface people might dismiss the film, but it's the art and passion that went into it which makes it special and you become more endeared to it



@angelaarmie5789

In the 1999 book Asian Pop Cinema by Lee Server. Associate Producer of Apocalypse Now Eddie Romero states Coppola requested real cadavers but Romero refused for it is against local law and that they have very talented local sculptors they will hire. Page 109.



@fuzzydunlop7928

While Hopper's character is famously inspired by Sean Flynn, he behaves more like Michael Herr himself - reading Dispatches, you learn about the manic states he was in while in the field and the massive depressions he would feel while home in Saigon. Hopper's character to me feels like Herr if he were lost in the jungle, away from any other correspondent or any of the Americans. What would happen if he lost all restraint.

Selected Comments

KURTZ TEMPLE

@radosawkos2473

Last time I watched Apocalypse Now I had gotten the idea of the whole film being a metaphore for biblical Way of the Cross. Look at this all this symbolism, Willard just like Christ is heading towards certain death and confrontation with evil, both had their doubts and moments of uncertainty. Willard is ready to sacrifice himself and call in the airstrike, carrying the radio with him all the way like Christ carried his cross. And not forget the stops on the way, each one could stand alone as a point of reflection on all this journey. I know this was propably never intended to be interpreted like this by any of the producers but its just an interesting perspective and adds depth to the picture.

BTW Great work Tyler. I really love your stuff, the effort you put in any of those episodes just amazes me. Stay that way my guy.



@DavyDredd14 The Passion of the Errand Boy

@traumgeist

David Letterman hit the nail on the head with the One From The Heart comment. Since Coppola already gave up the motorboat, he ended up having to direct a third Godfather movie to avoid losing the house.

SOURCES

Endnotes

- 1. 1. People Magazine Inside the Mysterious Disappearance of Errol Flynn's Son by Lydia Price https://people.com/celebrity/the-mysterious-disappearance-of-errol-flynns-son-sean-flynn/
- 2. Independent How Errol Flynn's son was lost in Cambodia all but a pile of bones https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/how-errol-flynns-son-was-lost-in-cambodia-ndash-all-but-a-pile-of-bones-1931662.html
- 3. Salem-News Remembering Sean Flynn: a Photojournalist Who Died at War by Tim King http://www.salem-news.com/articles/may152008/sean_flynn_5-14-08.php

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