

FILMS

Standing on principle down under

By Lenny Rubinstein

Phillip Noyce, director of the feature film *Newsfront*, is energetic proof of a new Australian cinema, one that is nationalist and also socially concerned. In *Newsfront*, reporters' decisions reveal the tensions of a McCarthy-like era in Australia.

"I'm not interested in making movies about bank robberies that might happen anywhere," says the 28-year-old Noyce. He is just as adamant about the audience he had in mind for *Newsfront*. "This film was not made for an American audience; it was made for my people, not for export, and has aroused a great deal of debate."

That debate, Noyce explains, centers on the years of Liberal Party rule, and particularly the 17 years marked by the leadership of Prime Minister Robert Menzies.

"Menzies is seen by many as the architect of a great south-seas civilization and the creator of an expanding free enterprise economy in Australia after WW II," says Noyce. "But he was also a ruthless manipulator of public opinion. As the film shows, he tried to outlaw the Communist Party by playing up the 'Red Peril' and he also invoked the 'Yellow Peril,' the fear of Asian immigration."

The replacement of the Labour Party Government by Menzies' Liberals—liberals in name, but conservative by nature—marks the first conflict in the lives of the film's characters: the cameramen, editors and producers of the Cinetone Newsreel Company. One of those editors, Geoff McDonald (Bryan Brown), had already displayed his dislike of Menzies by altering a newsreel so that the new Prime Minister was shown giving a Nazi salute. When the drive to ban Communists begins, this same editor reluctantly crosses out a reference to dictatorship in a key narration.

Another character, the chief cameraman Len Maquire, (Bill Hunter), refuses to buckle under



Above: scanning the rushes. Insert: director Phillip Noyce. Right: filming the news.

and becomes the film's principal protagonist. He openly refuses to accept anti-Communist handbills from the local Catholic priest, an act that furthers an estrangement from his devout wife.

"What I've attempted to show is how a man like Maquire takes a stand," says Noyce. "It all seems straightforward enough: his brother Frank goes off to America to make his fortune and returns not only with an American accent and girl-friend, but also with a job offer for Len."

"Frank is representative of American influences, while Len represents the way Australia was and could have been. Frank deliberately sidesteps the question

of control in his job offer and Len is tempted, as any country like Australia would be in relations with a country like the United States. At the film's end he is tempted again and he refuses; to many Australians that's a wonderful moment."

The importance of America's cultural influence is a constant sub-theme in *Newsfront* and is a topic that fascinates Noyce.

He points out, "The first scene in the film is Chico Marx singing a song for a group of Australian war veterans in 1948 and the song happens to be an Australian folk-tune, *Waltzing Matilda*, that celebrates some of our national traits."

Newsfront is not only a tribute to the old-fashioned morality of its protagonist, but also to the rebirth of the Australian film industry. Bred out of the isolation and self-sufficiency forced upon Australia by the First World War, the native film industry produced dozens of films in the 20s. Closed down by World War II, that industry could not compete with America during the post-war years.

One of the pioneers of the Australian film industry, K.G. Hall, provided the model for the character of A.G. Marwood, (Don Crosby), the general manager of Cinetone.

"It's not just a job, but a great

privilege to be able to work and express yourself in cinema," says Noyce. "There's a pride in Australian skill and craftsmanship, and the new Australian cinema has become a vehicle for the new Australian nationalism."

Newsfront is distributed by New Yorker films, 16 W. 51st St., NYC 10023.

Twin nuke towers on screen register modern paranoia

By Michael Massing

The huge concrete condensers that rise so grimly from Three Mile Island have become a powerful icon of our times, an eloquent summation of popular distrust of nuclear power. But as they glared out at us from the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*, from the nightly newscasts, from the front pages of our newspapers, those cylinders bespoke another, more pervasive sentiment that has characterized the recent decade: paranoia.

That fear, and the confusion spawned in it in Pennsylvania, was conveyed in *Harrisburg*, the first of what will surely be a series of documentaries on the impact, and implications, of the harrowing events of the independently-produced film concerns itself less

with probing the whys and wherefores of the event than with projecting a scarifying, stylized sense of the psychological dividends the accident has provided us.

Throughout *Harrisburg's* 20-minute duration, the concrete cylinders of Three Mile Island have center stage. We glimpse them at various times of day, in different types of weather, framed by a house, a highway, a farm. Simultaneously, a series of voices from the radio boom forth with a stream of claims and counter-claims, appeasement and accusation, about the relative seriousness of the accident and the degree to which public safety is threatened. The static-ridden cacophony of unidentified voices reflects the confusion of the event as it unfolded.

The producers of *Harrisburg*—Andrew Phillips, Ian Wood and Matthew Seig—have taken tech-

nology to task. But, like those who would extend their indictment of nuclear energy to all forms of advanced technology, *Harrisburg* takes the process too far. Nary a soul appears in the film, with the exception of a few anti-nuke demonstrators at the very end. Though an effective metaphor for the sinister implications of nuclear reactors, this studied exclusion of the human element leaves out those who suffer the consequences of the technology's abuse.

Harrisburg is perhaps too awed by the technology it indicts. But it has caught one of the meanest elements the accident has bequeathed to our psyches as we steel ourselves for the 1980s. ■

For more information, contact: Emerald City Productions, 350 W. 46th St., #3, NYC 10036.

Guindon



"Really? I'm shallow, too."

DELAYED REACTIONS

It may take years for Vietnam Vets' psychological wounds to show, and years more for the Veterans' Administration to do something about them.

By Jack Colhoun

TODAY I FEEL I COULD GO down and touch the earth. I think the decision is great for me and other Vietnam veterans who need help. Many of them are hiding in the closet, and we need vast advertising to tell them to reach out."

Stephen Gregory, a decorated combat veteran of the Vietnam war, said this as he stood on the steps of the Rockville, Md., courthouse on March 2. Montgomery County Circuit Court Judge John Mitchell had just decided to release Gregory from jail on probation, while he undergoes psychiatric treatment for "traumatic war neurosis." Two years ago Gregory was sentenced to 16 years in prison for taking eight hostages at gunpoint in a suburban Washington, D.C., bank in Silver Spring, Md.

Judge Mitchell's decision to place Gregory on probation could have important implications for hundreds of thousands of the more than 2.5 million veterans who served in Vietnam. Tens of thousands of Vietnam vets have filled the nation's jails and received less-than-honorable discharges from the military because of the difficulties they encountered adjusting to life in the States after returning from Vietnam. Untold thousands of Vietnam vets suffer silently from combat-induced psychological ailments.

After dropping out of high school at 17, Stephen Gregory enlisted in the Marine Corps. By the time he was 18, he was fighting in Vietnam. On his first day in combat, his company came under constant fire. On his second day, 14 members of his platoon were killed, including his best friend, whose body was blown away before his eyes. During his 1969 tour of duty in Vietnam, Gregory saw more than 350 days of combat, and received citations, including the Bronze Star and a Purple Heart.

Back in the States, Gregory was discharged from the Marines three days after having left the combat zone. Before he was able to trade in his fatigues for civvies, Gregory was convicted of assault in Ocean City, Md., after being taunted by a young man for being a "soldier boy." The Marines Corps issues Gregory an undesirable discharge in connection with the civilian assault conviction.

At home in Silver Spring, Gregory experienced flashbacks and visions of the faces of dead Vietnamese he had befriended. After a series of disappointing jobs as a bill collector, he found himself unable to get a better job because of his less-than-honorable discharge. His wife divorced him and did not allow him to visit his daughter. His numerous fights included one in which he injured his father. At least three times he attempted suicide.

When he entered the Citizens Bank and Trust Co. of Silver Spring in February 1977, Gregory had reached his breaking point. For six hours, he held eight hostages at gunpoint, experiencing flashbacks that caused him to fire more than 200 shots in the walls and airducts. Gregory later said he had thought "the Viet Cong were coming after me." He took no mon-

ey and did not injure his hostages. He told one of them, "I want them to put me in a place where I can play basketball and get help." The courts sentenced him to 16 years in prison.

The Gregory case came to the attention of a small, but growing, network of veterans, psychologists, psychiatrists, lawyers, and former anti-war activists concerned about the delayed psychological readjustment problems of Vietnam combat veterans. In Gregory's resentencing hearing before Judge Mitchell this March, Stephen Sonnenberg, a Howard University psychiatrist specializing in mental problems of survivors of catastrophes, told the court Gregory suffers from "survivor syndrome." John Wilson, a Cleveland State University psychologist specializing in the readjustment problems of Vietnam veterans, testified that Gregory, like hundreds of thousands of Vietnam vets, suffered in addition from "delayed combat stress syndrome."

Invisible vets.

Before he resigned as President Carter's Special Assistant on Mental Health, Peter Bourne wrote: "More than 2.5 million Americans served in Vietnam; yet in many ways it is as though they never went, because America did not want to notice they had gone."

Ron Bitzer of the Veterans Education Project in Washington, D.C., notes that a high percentage of currently imprisoned vets were arrested soon after they were discharged, often with bad paper discharges that limited employment and social opportunities. According to 1974 Government Accounting Office statistics, 125,000 Vietnam vets are in local, state, and federal prisons.

For other vets, discharge from the military ushered in a period of relief and good times. "After this peaceful interlude," says Sarah Haley, a social worker at the Boston VA hospital, "many veterans suddenly experienced recurrent intrusive dreams, nightmares, daytime images, and waves of painful memory, and denial, numbing, and constriction." Sometimes this delayed combat stress reaction is triggered by a stressful situation similar to the Vietnam experience. Charles Figley, an Indiana University psychologist and editor of a new book, *Stress Disorders among Vietnam Veterans*, says a hot, humid day on a crowded street buzzed by a low-flying airplane may be enough to unleash a flood of painful Vietnam memories. Figley emphasizes, however, that the normal combat stress reaction is not violent, but rather strong feelings of anger, resentment, tension and depression, all emotions associated with the original Vietnam war stress.

In a 1977 study describing the problems encountered by vets in their transition to civilian life, John Wilson also found a psychic "numbing" which can last from five to ten years. A returned vet stops experiencing life emotionally, as a means of protecting himself from the lingering psychic pains of Vietnam.

L. Neff told the American Psychological Association in 1975, Vietnam veterans are "invisible patients with an invisible (nonexistent) illness," whose symptoms do not constitute an officially diag-

nosed entity. Dr. Chaim Shatan has reported that vets have frequently been denied treatment and disabilities by the VA because their psychiatric problems were not officially recognized. Other Vietnam vets have been judged by the VA to be suffering from "pre-existing psychic vulnerability," unrelated to combat in Vietnam, according to Sarah Haley of the Boston VA. Haley also notes that in the past, VA hospitals have not even inquired if vets who came for help had been in combat in Vietnam.

A national program?

Since the early 1970s, Congress has considered legislation creating a national treatment program for Vietnam vets. Although the Senate has passed a bill for the last four Congresses, the proposed legislation has never gotten out of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. The White House has given lukewarm support to these bills at best, but the VA has opposed their passage, as have old-line veterans' organizations such as the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Until recently, the old-line vets organizations held a majority of votes in the House committee, reflecting the belief of many World War II and Korean war vets that the Vietnam war was not different from earlier wars and Vietnam vets did not have special needs. Some older vets even hold Vietnam vets responsible for losing the war.

Since the 96th Congress convened in January 1979, the prospects for passage of a vets readjustment counseling program have improved. The Carter administration backs the bill from the White House to the Veterans Administration. The Carter administration bill earmarks \$9.9 million to establish a treatment program. Critics of the administration bill in the "Vietnam caucus" of the House of Representatives observe that the VA estimates as many as 1.5 million veterans from Vietnam and other wars may benefit from such treatment. VA officials deny the charge that the \$9.9 million allotted by the Office of Management and Budget was determined more by what was considered politically expedient in these balanced-budget conscious times than by the needs of veterans.

Tim Kolly, a legislative aide to Rep. David Bonior, believes the bill will pass both houses of Congress this session. But Kolly and other aides in the Vietnam caucus believe the bill is inadequate. "To provide any genuine readjustment counseling," Kolly said to *ITT*, "much more funding is needed, and there must be provisions included allowing the VA to contract private psychiatrists specializing in treating Vietnam veterans."

Kolly noted that when Stephen Gregory was placed on probation to receive treatment, there were no facilities on the East Coast to care for him. Gregory was sent to the VA Medical Center in Cleveland, where he now reports conditions are less than adequate. Even if there were more facilities for the treatment of combat stress disorders, Kolly says, retraining of VA employees would be necessary.

For many vets, whatever compromise is reached by the Carter administration and Congress in regard to a national treatment program for vets will be more than a decade too late. But for many others who were discharged honorably and stayed clear of the law, the establishment of an adequate national program would be highly beneficial. Wilson says, "We're going to be flooded with delayed-stress veterans." By the mid-80s, it is possible the number will go as high as 400,000.

Jack Colhoun was for six years editor of *AMEX-Canada*, the former magazine published by anti-Vietnam war draft sisters and deserters exiled in Ca...



Jessie Burn