

Not just another war film

84 Charlie MoPic
Princess Theatre
Oct 6-10

review by Chris Helmers

I checked in to *The Gateway* yesterday to see if I could get another assignment and was gleefully given the upcoming premiere at the Princess called *84 Charlie MoPic*. Hmm...what could that be about? I pull out my trusty Princess guide and...URF!...it's another Vietnam war movie! And the thing came out in 1988, after I just recently recovered from the rash of Vietnam war movies! Well, whether writer/director Patrick Duncan learned from his predecessors or whether he just had the stuff, *84 Charlie MoPic* succeeded to capture me while the others just came off as Hollywood dramatizations.

An army cameraman, nicknamed "...MoPic...you know, motion picture?", and a green Lieutenant, nicknamed LT, are assigned to join a small unit of Airborne infantryman, 84 Charlie Company, on a reconnaissance mission in the central highlands of Vietnam. MoPic's film of experienced men in action will then be used to train new recruits. Thus, the film per se is meant to be a documentary—like a home movie—not a sensational drama.

Duncan, who spent thirteen months in Vietnam himself, describes his goal for the film saying, "The problem with war movies is that they become movies about war, and not about the warrior fighting it. I don't want to work out any good versus evil mythic symbolism in my film. My goal is to show the audience what happened to the young men in the Vietnam conflict, not on a soul-searching level, but what physically happened to them. I wanted to make the most intimate war film that could possibly be made." And he did. His use of this "home movie" technique is brilliant. The viewer becomes MoPic's camera. Everything the viewer comes to know is learned through the eye of the lens and the ear of the microphone. The actors don't have to act as if the camera is not there but, rather, their interaction with the camera(man) pulls the viewer ever deeper into the film and into a relationship with the characters and their lives. Not only is the film rolling during the interviews with the soldiers but also as they are running through the bush, being shot at, discussing their after-the-war dreams, and anguishing over the death of a "brother." Our intimate vantage point is impressed upon us as the soldiers react to the camera's presence during the private times of stress or anguish.



MoPic (Byron Thames) and friends document the Vietnamese war.

There is no need for the film to sensationalize or over-dramatize in order to achieve its goal. The impact comes through the unique filming perspective. The action scenes require no gratuitous or graphic violence. Men are shot at and die. There is blood—but rather than being subjected to slow motion scenes of bullets exploding through people's

brains—the viewer experiences believable realism. After a few seconds of surprised action, we find out the results of the sounds of shooting and the flurry of action.

No, this is not another war movie. You won't be able to jump up from this one as soon as the credits start scrolling onto the screen.

First Emperor on IMAX

The First Emperor of China
Space Sciences Centre

review by Rajan Bhardwaj

Maximum Image. That's what the Canadian-developed IMAX film format is all about. Projected onto a screen 30 metres wide and 23 metres tall, *The First Emperor of China* definitely gives the audience the big picture!

In 1974, three farmers digging a well in China's Shaanxi Province discovered an underground tomb of stupendous proportions, containing a startling array of over 7,000 life-size clay warriors, chariots, and horses. Archaeologists pieced together the details of one of the pioneers of civilization as we know it—the first emperor of China.

Along with documenting the historical events, this film exposes us to some very colourful re-creations of the sights and sounds of the era.

It tells the story of Ying Zheng, the young ruler of the Qin (pronounced Chin) state in what is now China in the year 246 B.C. After establishing complete control of his own state, the newly-proclaimed King Qin decides to unify the countryside under one government. After nearly a decade of fighting, the six major states are unified for the first time in history, and King Qin declares himself Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor of China.

The 40-minute docudrama is a co-production of Canada's National Film Board and China's Xi'an Film Studio, and took several years to go from the planning stages to the finished product. At first, the movie was to be mostly documentary, with little re-enactment. Unfortunately, however, this quickly changed. The relatively small budget of \$6.5 million was simply not enough to do justice to the huge battles that must have occurred when Qin's army of thousands poured down on neighbouring states.

Much of the money was spent on props and costumes. Over 2,800 costumes had to be designed and made for the film, as well as 1,000 suits of armour and 3,400 assorted weapons.

Although the costumes and props are essential for this period piece, the story

suffers, as the directors have to give up some details to allow time to pan over the elaborate sets and location shots the IMAX system makes possible.

The IMAX format is used well a few times during the film, when the audience is sent swooping over the Great Wall and when the huge clay army that Qin had placed in his tomb is shown, but generally the film is not really meant for the huge screen. It is difficult to relate the personal stories of this film in IMAX, because any close-up instantly becomes a 20 metre tall head looking down at you! With the budget it had, this film could have been an excellent T.V. documentary, instead it is only an average IMAX film.

Despite this failing, co-directors Tony Ianzelo and Lin Hao Xue still manage to bring home the fact that Qin was an extraordinarily important figure in China's history. During the 36 years that he was in power, Qin standardized the language and built a huge network of roads and irrigation canals. He also connected existing pieces into one Great Wall of China to protect the empire from Mongol raiders.

Although this film does not show every detail of Qin or of life in China at the time, it does present a highly interesting and occasionally stunning overall picture of Qin's legacy and the origins of one of today's most important nations.

If you keep in mind that most of the NFB's



Pullin' Out

King Qin and his entourage depart on a tour of the new Chinese empire.

projects and practically all IMAX films are basically informative, you will not be disappointed with *The First Emperor*. But if you're looking for a high body count and

gripping drama, go see *Batman* instead.

The First Emperor of China plays at the Devonian Theatre at the Edmonton Space Sciences Centre through to December.

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