

I was a "Life Support" troop while serving in the California Air National Guard's 115 TAS/LSS. Because we were based at the Van Nuys Airport which was close enough to the Hollywood Movie Studios that they liked to use our base facilities whenever they needed an air force base. We became known as the Hollywood Guard! Here is a true story about those movie filming days that may be of interest to your website visitors. In any case I hope you enjoy it and the two photos I've included.

## **FIREFOX and the HOLLYWOOD GUARD**

TSgt. Fredrick Gary Hareland, CANG Ret.

I'll never forget the very first time I laid eyes on the "FIREFOX", although I knew that it was only a prop for a movie it was nonetheless quite impressive and looked oh so real. It was painted flat black and resembled a cross between an SR71 and an F117 Nighthawk Stealth Fighter, which was really amazing since this was 1982 and the F117 would remain under wraps for another six years until 1988. I suppose that to be perfectly accurate that the movie "Firefox" actually resembled a cross between an SR71 Blackbird and the popular artistic version of the highly touted and reported, but never seen super-secret "Aurora" stealth aircraft. The real point is that had I not known that this was for a movie and as long as I didn't get too close to discern intimate details, I would have expected it to actually fly!

I was at the time a member of the "Hollywood Guard", which was the nickname for the Van Nuys Air National Guard. We were the 146<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Wing, 115th Tactical Airlift Squadron which owned and operated 16 Lockheed C-130 E Hercules transport aircraft out of our home base of Van Nuys Airport located in the central San Fernando Valley. Our moniker "Hollywood Guard" was due in part to the fact that the unit once hosted actor members such as Jerry Mathers –"The Beaver", Curt Russell and Sam Elliott, to name just a few of our movie types. The other reason was due to our close proximity to the major Hollywood studios which loved to film at our base, in fact we had the most filmed hangers in the world at the time. This brings us back to the movie "Firebox", and how I and scores of other guardsmen got to be Soviet Russian, AK47 toting soldiers for three 12 hour nights back in 1982. It was just another case of the perfect location, with the perfect infrastructure, the perfect pool of extras' with GI haircuts, and lastly the perfect distance from the Warner Bros. studio.

The location was the Van Nuys Air National Guard Base, the infrastructure was one of our oldest hangers known as the "Fuel Cell Hanger", the extras' were of course readily available "Air Guardsmen", and the distance from the studio was approximately 20 miles. It was announced that any Guardsmen who wanted to participate in a Clint Eastwood movie to be filmed on base to muster in front of the Fuel Cell hanger at exactly 5 PM on the given date. Probably 20 guys including myself made the muster

and were used from 6 PM until 6 AM for three whole nights as we portrayed Russian Soldiers. We had to draw and don our uniforms which we did from the back of a semi-trailer. The wardrobe gentleman must have worked at a carnival in his past because he just looked us over, grabbed our shoulders and shook us a little and volla was able to give us perfectly fitted uniforms. We were also issued real Soviet AK-47 assault rifles that actually fired blanks. All this excitement plus pay and excellent chow to boot!

The pivotal scene for the whole movie was being filmed in our hanger, which was when the American pilot Mitchell Gant, played by Clint Eastwood steals the Firefox aircraft right out of its hanger in front of the Soviets. We played the Russian guards and were supposed to protect the super-secret aircraft...but to no avail. I was the idiot who runs right in front of Firefox as she bolts from her supposedly safe stable. Second Assistant Director David Valdes was quite happy with my performance and told me so, although I told him due to the nearness of the Firefox almost running me down that I should perhaps deserve stuntman's pay. He only grinned back at me like he agreed with my assessment but wasn't about to change my pay. I was also one of the soldiers who ran after Firefox and started firing our AK-47's at it, which was really a lot of fun until my gun jammed. This movie business is a real kick but does have its downside, during the filming there were at least three cameras rolling, all from different angles which was a lot of film being pulled during those tree nights. Unfortunately most of it ended up on the cutting room floor which was disappointing from an extra point of view. As an extra you put in long hours for the amount of pay and there are probably a lot better ways to earn a living but our time with Clint and the boys will always remain a highlight of my life.

As for the Firefox full size prop, I got to meet and talk to John Dykstra who was sporting a big red beard and long hair at the time and looked like a Viking. He was cleaning the dust off of his pride and joy, being that he was "Producer of Special Visual Effects", for the movie and had constructed this fantastic looking fake stealth aircraft. He admitted that his creation consisted of a triangular radio antenna, lots of plywood and paint, two hot air balloon burners, and one VW bug engine.

The only authentic aircraft parts on the whole thing were the landing gear and wheels which were from an F4 Phantom, the starboard main gear wheel being chain driven from the VW engine to provide forward traction. Not only was this Firefox permanently grounded but it took two technicians hidden inside to operate the burners and even steer the beast. The only thing Clint was in control of was to call out steering directions over an intercom to the hidden technicians. Sorry to burst anybody's bubble out there but movie magic is the name of the game.

I know that many of you are wondering just what kind of a guy Clint Eastwood really is and what it is like working for him. I'll tell you that he is actually a very down to earth sort of a guy who drives himself to the filming location in an old but cherished out pick-up truck. He arrived by himself dressed very conservatively and is very approachable. I must warn you however that when he is on set and engaged in movie making, he is very serious about his craft and not to be messed with. I made the mistake of asking

him a non-essential, on movie making question and got the Eastwood stare...Popping forehead and neck vessels included, along with a verbal exhortation, something about trying to make a movie. Well I finally got over my dress down and anyway not everyone can say that they teed-Off Mr. Clint Eastwood and he did give my ex-wife an autograph. As for Mr. David Valdes the Second Assistant Director.....You Still Owe Me!

PS...Other Movies Filmed At the Hollywood Guard

- Fighter Squadron
- Stripes
- Outbreak
- True Lies
- Executive Decision
- Clear and Present Danger
- Patriot Games
- Presidio
- The Body Guard
- The Last Action Hero
- Enola Gay
- Mac & Me
- Raid On Entebbe

Here are some photos of Tsgt Hareland of the 115 TAS/LSS being a Russian in the movie FIREFOX which was being filmed in their C-130 fuel cell hangar.



