

AUTOMAT PICTURES

"RAMBO"

INTERVIEW WITH MARIO KASSAR

TAPE: #2 & 3 [R102 & R103]

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Q : Could you state your name and how it's spelled?

[02:00:07]

MK : My name is Mario Kassar, and it's M-A-R-I-O, Kassar, K-A-S-S-A-R.

Q : How did you meet Andy Vajna?

[02:00:17]

MK : I met Andy Vajna about, God, 25 years ago, maybe? He start a company in, um, in Hong Kong, uh, called PanAsia, where he was releasing, um, fore-- uh, foreign, uh, films like from the -- from Europe or for -- from the States in the Far East, and I was at that time based in Europe. And then I was working, uh, for, um, another person in the Far East called Arthur -- the Arthur Davis Organization, something like this. And then I met Andy Vajna and I was not very happy where I was -- uh, with the person I was working with, so Andy asked me, he said, "To -- do you wanna do something together? Do you want me -- you -- can you find me movies for, um, the Far East, Hong Kong, Thailand," you know, all those places. I said, "Sure, why not?" And then, you know, from that day on, then I introduce him to everybody in Europe and got him the movies for Hong Kong, and that's how I met him.

Q : And you just immediately hit it off?

[02:01:20]

MK : Yeah. Kind of immediately hit it off. I, I remember because I had a problem with the -- some kind of a minor financial problem with the person before Andy because I -- we used to work on "Shake Hands." And then the guy owed me, I don't remember the amount now, and I said to Andy, "The only reason I would work with you, if I got a piece of paper signed saying this, A, B, C, D, E, whatever. You know, and I'm talking -- I was pretty young, maybe 20-something years old. And Andy was very straight, said, "No problem, I'll, I'll send you the letter from Hong Kong."

[02:01:51]

I got the letter and within a year he had most of the movies in Europe or something. And that's how we met as that section of the

business. Then, uh, went to the other section of the business where at one stage I told, uh, Andy, "You know, I think I'm gonna come to Los Angeles for a little vacation and I'm working on a movie which I want to acquire the -- all the Far East --" we call them the Far East rights because Andy was in the Far East business. I was in the Middle East business, which is -- whatever is left of the Middle East. And, uh, it was an Italian film with Roger Moore called "The Sicilian Cross."

[02:02:36]

I don't know if -- how many people saw that movie, but in those days for pre-sales reasons -- 'cause in the old days, um, even in the States and mostly in Europe f-films were pre-sold to territories on titles, some actors, and -- but what they called press books, which is a very nice brochure, very plastified, laminated, looking great, with action scenes and, uh, photos of the actors, whatever. And people were just pre-buying it. Like, you put it in an environment, send it to a guy in Hong Kong saying, "This film and that starts in that day, that day, the price is whatever." He will say -- or argue, say yes or no.

[02:03:15]

Anyway, so I acquired that movie for the two, um, the Far East and the Middle East, and then moved to Los Angeles. And then -- and I was talking to Andy mostly on -- every day on the phone. I said, "Okay, well let's start our little company and that will be our first movie. We start in the distribution of those two areas." And from there on then we got little bit, uh, more aggressive and we grew bigger, from foreign sales organization, from one film to a foreign sale organization, to financing movies, to producing them and then to all kind of things.

Q : And what was it about the "First Blood" property that appealed to you as your first film to produce together?

[02:04:04]

~~MK : It was one of those -- you know, uh, I guess it goes by cycles in Hollywood. You know, there's always something, or one project that's been around forever and whatever, many studios, many actors, many drafts, and never made. Uh, we read the book and lots of drafts. I mean if my memory is correct, there were, there were drafts written in those days -- I mean you name it, I don't remember now, for McQueen, for Redford, for Newman, for Pacino, for Hoffman -- I think everybody, almost. And then we read that, uh, book by David [SOUNDS LIKE: Morela]. We read some of the d-- of course everybody draft for every actor was of course~~

~~different. And then we just said, "Wow, there's something there," you know?~~

~~[02:04:50]~~

~~And it happens that we're both non-Americans, so -- but, uh, still there was something there that attracted us a lot, and we ki-- we acquired the rights from Warner Bros., who owned all the rights of the book and the underlying rights and the screenplays and everything. And, uh, once we got the rights of that it was kind of a very strange intuition. We thought immediately about Stallone to play the part of Rambo, you know? Just Andy and me, I mean the, the vision was when, when we read the book or, or, or the drafts and this and that we said, "Shit, I mean this looks like -- sounds like Sly." I mean I may be crazy, but that, that was our vision. And then we, uh -- at that stage Mr. Stallone was presented or managed by a gentleman called, uh, Herb Nanas, who was very, very helpful, a very nice man.~~

[02:05:58]

And then, uh, we propose it to him and he was interested. And of course everybody in town thought, "Here are the two foreigners, what are they doing?" In fact, we asked ourself what we are doing. And at one stage, uh, Sly kind of change his mind. And then, uh -- because he writes. You know, he's also a pretty good writer. I remember one, one, one scene where we were hit -- I'm sorry, we were hit with maybe the news that Sly might not be anymore in the mood of being, uh, John Rambo, "First Blood 1," and I just came down the elevator, Mr. Nanas, and then I looked at Andy and then I said, "Well, you know, he maybe not -- doesn't wanna act it anymore, but he's got the character so much, he's been so much involved, maybe we can ask him to just finish, you know, writing it."

[02:07:04]

And, uh, we went back in the elevator and we -- it was like really was a long shot, and said, uh, "Okay, we understand. I mean life -- that's what's life in Hollywood, I guess it is, uh, could we just make a deal for him, since he knows the character so well and we've been involved so much in this, can he just write -- finish writing or write the screenplay? He's the only one who really 's got it all in his head." And they said he will speak to him, and after, after speaking to him of course for X dollars it was a yes. And then of course what happened is once he started writing it, it came back to him and he said, "Well, that's me. Why am I not acting in it?" I guess, you know, and, you know, then it was fine. Then he said, "Okay, I'm doing it."

Q : Talking about being accepted as producers, was it "First Blood" or was it "Rambo" that really got both of you guys the acceptance?

[02:08:04]

MK : Probably -- probably "Rambo." You know, the "First Blood" was kind of an esoteric experience worldwide, because here comes those two guys that, "Yeah, they're pretty smart, they know how to pre-sell and do, uh, promo reels and stuff like this and hardworking and they sit, uh, in Milan or in Cannes behind a corner table and try to hassle left, right, and center." But at one stage, you know, we were selling either it was Canadian tax movies or American low budget movies [CLEARS THROAT] and we were being the salesmen.

[02:08:38]

And then the problem was you're selling the movie to the -- to, to those guys, to those foreign distributors, and then you would be -- me and Andy would be blamed when, when it was bad. So blame for blame, uh, I looked at Andy and we looked at each other and we said, "You know what? We're taking enough blame here. Why don't we just do our movie? At least if we're blamed, let's, let's be blamed for something we've done, not being on the side trying to promote that this is gonna be great, has some great car chases, blah blah blah," you know?

[02:09:12]

~~And so, so we did the "First Blood" and of course, uh, "First Blood" was, um, uh, very strangely financed, actually. I had -- my, my godfather was a banker in France and it was all independently financed. And, I don't know, I just -- maybe a gut feeling, maybe, uh, uh, [UNINTELLIGIBLE] or things like this. I just went there to see him at the bank and I said, uh, "Will you do me a favor?" He said, "What?" I said, "I believe a lot in this book that I wanna make, uh, into a movie and I need a loan." He said, "Okay." He said, "How much is the loan?" And I don't know how actually I pronounced it, but it came out, I said, "18 million."~~

[02:09:57]

~~And -- [LAUGHS] -- and he said, "Well can you --" because in those days that was the word, "Can you pre-sell? Can you cover? Are you -- will you be okay?" I -- "Oh, sure. No problem." Because in my mind I was going for it. And that's how we got the financing of "First Blood." Now "First Blood" of course was not very easy because we had, uh, as you know, casting problems. We had to change an actor. Uh, for instance, uh, Ri-- the Richard~~

Crenna -- I mean Richard Crenna now, uh, uh, has become Richard Crenna for the three movies, but before that it was supposed to be Michael Douglas.

Q : Kirk.

[02:10:38]

MK : I'm sorry, Kirk Douglas, sorry. Uh, and Ted Kotcheff -- we ended up -- we choose Ted Kotcheff as a director for two very simple reasons, and that's very honest. Uh, was one of the very few directors we met in Hollywood -- wa-- we just arrived here, you know? And it was very funny, very nice. He did a movie which we like very much with Richard Dreyfuss, uh, I'm trying to remember the name, I'm sorry, but my memory is fading on me, but it was a good movie -- "Duddy Kravitz." My memory is not so bad. So -- and also there were those Canadian tax deals, so it kind of worked out.

[02:11:22]

So we hired Ted, we hired Sly, we got the financing and I remember I flew with Ted Kotcheff to San Francisco to watch a play, was Burt Lancaster and, and Kirk Douglas. I don't remember now the name of the play because we -- I wanted to wait at the end of the play to go in the back room and talk to Kirk with Ted about the part of Crenna, which we did. And of course l-- he loved the book, he knew everything about it, this and that. He said, "Absolutely, I wanna do it, I wanna do it, but there's one condition here." And I said, "What is it?" He said, "Like in the book, John Rambo dies. I kill him." So I actually didn't take that too much into, you know, a big event.

[02:12:13]

Uh, I was more relying on my director. And then we left and then obviously, uh, you know, when you hear a lot, "Don't worry, everything will work out," is usually when you have to worry. And, uh, what happened is we -- the deal was made with, uh, Kirk Douglas and here we are in Canada, in Vancouver, in [SOUNDS LIKE: hope], cold when it's not supposed to be cold, snowy, rainy, you name it. Whatever has to go wrong of course goes wrong. And then there's a party where -- there's, there's this conversation where Sly said very clearly to us, Andy, me and Ted, "I am not dying in this movie." And we told Ted, "Ted, there's a problem here.

[02:13:01]

"The problem is Kirk thinks -- or is convi-- I'm sorry, is convinced he's gonna be killing John Rambo. John Rambo is being convinced he's not being -- gonna be killed by Trautman. So could

you please go speak to Mr. Douglas and resolve this situation?" And there was this pre-shooting party, whatever you wanna call it, or -- I mean those days, three, four glasses of wine later, Mr. Kotcheff comes back with a smile and, uh, we rush to him, Andy and me, and said, "No problem, it's all done." That's my understanding if my memory is correct. Well, the next day all we know is that Mr. Kirk Douglas -- 'cause, you know, the pages come in and things like this, has his, uh, car waiting outside his trailer, jumped in it, went to the airport and took the flight back to Los Angeles.

Q : Can you -- I'm sorry.

[02:14:01]

MK : [OVERLAPPING] I'm sorry. It's okay.

Q : [OVERLAPPING] [LAUGHS]. I do that, too.

[02:14:05]

MK : You can tell me, it's okay. Anyway -- and flew back to Los Angeles. And here we are in Canada, shooting an \$18 million movie with a very important actor, character missing. And I think -- I don't know if it was within the 20-- next 24 hours or 48 hours, first we I think tried, uh, William Devane, if I'm correct, and for whatever reason, I don't remember now, it didn't work out or whatever, and then we lucked out on, uh, Richard Crenna. And boom, he was in Canada, fitted, wearing his, uh, outfit, and from there on he became Trautman for the next movies. That's my short version, [LAUGHS].

Q : That's great. Buzz Feitshans. What does it mean to you to have the same producer on all three Rambo films?

[02:14:59]

MK : We met -- this is all in the years when we first came here and we, we met those people, like we met Buzz, we met John Milius, we met Ted Kotcheff, we met -- you know, very few people we met, and Buzz is a --

Q : [OVERLAPPING] Can I stop you there?

MK : Sure.

Q : [OVERLAPPING] Can we say Buzz Feitshans?

[02:15:15]

~~MK : [OVERLAPPING] Sure, sure. Sure. Buzz Feitshans, uh, has done and is doing and is a very good, uh, producer of -- a line producer or whatever you differentiate that in this, uh, world now. And he, he -- very honest, very serious, very down to earth, no Hollywood, uh, whatever, and we needed help. I mean we, we are -- we were not -- were kind of ignorant in a way. We were learning. We were learning, uh, maybe the hard way or the expensive way or whatever.~~

~~[02:15:50]~~

~~At the end of the day it turned out to be they thought we were geniuses, but we could have been real bad -- you know, not geniuses. But anyway, so -- and Buzz was kind -- we felt very comfortable having a Buzz because he had answers to all those, um, logistic questions. He knew -- he's done it before or that -- and he's kind of like our eyes and ears.~~

~~[02:16:12]~~

~~So we needed somebody and we always work with people that we trust and we believe in because at the end of the day a set -- a movie is like, um -- and I learned that from Andy, actually. He said it once to me and I, I kind of agree with him. It's like, uh, an airport traffic. It's a confusion. There's so many things going on. Uh, you know, things are happening here, this guy's eating a sandwich here, a truck is here, uh, this guy's doing nothing here, this guy's, uh, on the phone, but, but somehow if you look at it as a first-timer, you say, "Is this a movie? Is this gonna be a movie?" But then at the end of the day and then you look at the dailies or at the end of this eight months or 12, whatever, you say, "It's a movie and it looks good." So we needed that sanity and kind of check and balance kind of thing.~~

Q : Don't worry about language. You can't get Verhoven not to curse.

[02:17:04]

MK : I, I haven't cursed yet, but --

Q : [OVERLAPPING] Yeah. You don't have to worry about it.

MK : [OVERLAPPING] No, no, no.

Q : So how did you distribute "First Blood?"

[02:17:15]

MK : "First Blood" was, was very interesting. Going back to, um -- one of the reasons actually that we had, uh, pushed to get

Kirk Douglas is because not long before that there was a movie called "The Nimitz" that, um, ma-- ma-- was kind of a hit overseas, was with Kirk Douglas on an aircraft carrier that goes into time, and all the foreign independent distributors were, "Do you have anything with Kirk Douglas?" Or "If you have something with Kirk Douglas, sounds great." So we -- and when we announced the movie -- uh, I wish I had any of the -- of this left, but I don't know where they are anymore -- when we announced that movie we went to, uh, what they call the, uh, festivals. It wasn't Cannes, it was the Milan one, which was -- it's called MIFED.

[02:18:10]

So we went to the MIFED and we had our poster, whatever, it was -- if I remember, the back of Sly running with the, with the thing and the bandanna and it says, "First Blood," uh, and Sly -- Sylvester Stallone and Kirk Douglas and Ted Kotcheff. And I don't think, besides maybe France, there was any interest in the movie. I think maybe -- may-- I don't think anything was pre-sold. Uh, reasons? I don't know, I can't speculate now. "Those two guys were not -- are not able to make some-- something like this. It's just a poster," you know. "Uh, Kirk Douglas, let's wait and see. The prices are too high," whatever. "Sly, yes, looks great, but he did some other movies, didn't work out."

[02:19:02]

Uh, I don't know, the combination of all that, at the end of the day we paced a lot and, uh, not much if nothing was pre-sold. But we were continuing in making the movie. Uh, and then the film is ready. Now when the film -- I mean ready, when the film finished shooting there's no point trying to tell any distributor, because at that time what they tell you, since you've already shot, let's wait and see it. And what we did is, um, something actually unique. We -- instead of doing it 15 or 10 minutes promo reel to show people, for studios or whatever, this movie had no distribution, no -- in America nowhere. I mean this movie was -- if it didn't work out it could have been just me and Andy looking at it for -- up to now.

[02:19:50]

What we did is we went for -- I don't remember now how many days, 48 -- uh, 24 hours a day, we got together -- I told Andy, let's do almost an hour, but I mean that being music, everything, because the worst case anybody can say, if the next 30 minutes is talk, there's enough here that there's a movie. Not to mention that the whole movie in our opinion was very good. So we did that and we invited all the head of studios. And nobody seen that except the mixers, Andy and me and, uh, uh, the people that work

on it. The head of the studio -- invited all the foreign distributors from abroad and, uh, we did a screening at the Avco theater, if I remember.

[02:20:49]

And all I know is an hour and five minutes later -- you know, you start with somebody making speech and, uh, this and that -- they all sit up and they all applauded, and the foreign -- And then we took everybody out to a restaurant, which was called -- it was -- I think it was called Orlando Orsini or something like this. Within, I don't know, two hours, all the U.S. were -- uh, all -- I'm sorry, all the foreign was sold at very high prices. And then, um, we did something unique in those days. We did a deal with Orion for the U.S. theatrical only. We kept all the other rights. We actually started this -- we kept the HBO thing, we kept, uh, everything. We separated everything. And, uh, the film opens in the U.S., it was October, and it's kind of a revelation.

[02:21:52]

The film, you know, was doing good, was doing good. But I think the deal was done in such a way that at one stage it didn't matter for Orion to spend more money because we were gonna be making more money, so they kind of stopped there. And it aggravated us a little bit, to say the least. In fact, that's the reason, um, we ended up with "Terminator 2" not with Orion, but with Tri-Star. So --

Q : The multiple endings that you shot --

MK : Yes.

Q : [OVERLAPPING] -- can you tell us about the other versions and if they still exist?

[02:22:32]

MK : You know, I've been looking. I -- honestly, I've been looking for them because, uh, it was a -- uh, a ve-- a very hard time personally for me because the ending -- we shot three endings, basically. There's an ending -- the, the actual end that you see in the movie where he walks out in the jeep and, uh, goes with, uh, Trautman after he makes this whole very emotional speech, there's the other one where he puts the gun in the hands of Trautman to shoot him and somehow he gets shot or shoots himself. I, I -- one of them he dies. And theatrically it was the most amazing ending -- plus in the book he dies.

[02:23:22]

And in those days, you know, uh, again, our -- I was not thinking at all about sequels or, or things like this. I was only thinking, "Great, this is my first movie and, uh, I wanna be -- I wanna make sure it's good and that it works" and things like this. So in my little office on Melrose I had, um, I don't know if they call them Advent, whatever, those big screen Sony televisions, and then I had a tape recorder of the music that Jerry Goldsmiths, uh, did and, uh, the song. And I, I think I must have spent three, four days driving everybody crazy running the endings with the music and watching, running the ending. And I think I was in the minority. I mean I was probably maybe the only one in that. And then I remember Sly -- you know, they said -- [SOUND PROBLEMS].

[02:24:25]  
[TECHNICAL]

[02:27:55]  
[DISCUSSION]

Q : All right, so we were at the three endings.

MK : There were three endings and I was saying --

[TECHNICAL]

Q : Okay.

[02:29:25]

MK : I was, uh, agonizing on those three endings, uh, probably one of the few ones doing that, between the tape recorder of the music I said and, and, uh, watching it on, uh, on the, on the video. And then I remember one famous line from Sly who told me, "Just remember 'Rocky.'" There were like, two "Rockys" already or something like this. "You never kill your hero at the end" or something like that. I said okay. Um, uh, you -- there's maybe some truth in that. But obviously financially, uh, every -- keeping him alive was absolutely right. Theatrically, though, it looked, it looked really good. I mean if I was -- if I was 95 years old and it would be my last movie and -- I probably would have done it the other way.

Q : So you said there were three. So the one that exists, the one where he gets shot by Trautman. What was the third?

[02:30:15]

MK : [OVERLAPPING] Well, he puts the gun in the hands of Trautman and asks hi-- he asks him to shoot him, or, or somehow he

pulls the trigger, I don't remember. Or I don't know, he falls down in the -- [CLEARS THROAT] falls down in the corner [CLEARS THROAT] and, um, he dies. And you got that music going and --

Q : And then is there a third ending?

[02:30:35]

MK : Uh, no. The two -- one having Trautman trying to shoot him, one himself and one, the real ending now in the movie where he goes out, uh, with Trautman in the jeep, I guess.

Q : So when did you first start working on a sequel?

MK : Not too long after. Not too long after. I mean it became -- this will be --

~~Q : [OVERLAPPING] Establish that you're working on a sequel.~~

[02:30:59]

~~MK : Yeah. Well, af-- when, when the film opened -- first of all, the big drama is what to call this movie, because in America -- I'm talking now for foreign. In America, "First Blood," everybody understand what "First Blood" is and there was the book and things like this. But the first country that released the, the film in Europe if my memory is correct was Italy, and they just called it "Rambo." So all of a sudden there wa-- there was no more "First Blood" or whatever around the world. It was "Rambo," "Rambo." They -- "Rambo 1," "Rambo 2," "Rambo 3." Everything was, uh, "Rambo."~~

[02:31:34]

~~So it opened, uh, when we were in October I guess '82, the first one, and it did not bad for, for that movie here and pretty good in the foreign. Uh, and we start -- the normal thing is, "Okay, now what else? I'm sure he's gonna be doing something else" and we started. We were friendly with -- also with, um, James Cameron and, uh, the other writer. I'm sorry, I'm trying to remember his name. Uh -- oh, God, my memory. It'll come back to me. Anyway, so -- and Sly and, uh, we said, "Well, let's get some ideas and everything." Between Sly, Cameron and everybody, uh, the idea was to go and rescue, you know, PO -- prisoner of wars in, um, Vietnam. And that's how it started and slowly, slowly there was a screenplay. And then came the point who's gonna direct this movie.~~

[02:32:41]

~~And it hasn't -- it's n-never very easy when, when you're dealing with an actor who can act, who can write, who can direct, who knows where the camera should be and things like this. So I had a friend of mine that when I was in Rome I -- he, he used to live in Rome too and I was very impressed with a couple of movies he did when, uh, when he was in Europe. One was called "The Cassandra Crossing" and -- with Richard Harris and a lot of actors, Sophia Loren and, uh, uh, I don't remember now many of those actors. And then he did something with Richard Burton also, um, very, very interesting movie, "Massacre in Rome."~~

{02:33:25}

~~And he was here, he, he's a very close friend of mine, and he says to me, "Mario, why don't you give me a chance if you're gonna go with somebody new?" I said, "I would love to help you, George. I mean this is really not up to me, it's -- I mean I'll be behind you all the way, it's more up to, uh, Sly." So I called Sly and I said, "Those are the tapes of the -- of this gentleman of the movies he directed. Absolutely he love doing "Rambo 2," will do anything for you, could you please meet him?" "Sure." So, you know, he was -- in those days, uh, uh, I used to smoke and he used -- and the director used to smoke and so between him and me I don't know how many packs of cigarette we smoke driving to Stallone's house. And, uh, we get there and they had -- we all have the meeting.~~

{02:34:10}

~~And we also prepped him a little bit to it because for -- he didn't know Sly and this and that [SOUND PROBLEMS] and everything went very well. And in the end they hugged each other and he became the director of -- uh, for, for 2. So in a way I'm very happy -- he did a great job. The film worked everywhere. That's what made us get the mov-- movie on to make -- we call it "Rambo 3" or "First Blood 3," whatever you wanna call it.~~

{TECHNICAL}

~~Q — : Because "Rambo 2" was about MIAs it did stir up a controversy.~~

~~MK — : [OVERLAPPING] Right.~~

~~Q — : What did you think about the controversy?~~

{02:35:21}

~~MK — : You know, I, I, I think ev-very time you do a movie that involves some politics somewhere you gonna have any controversy.~~

~~So I didn't think much of the controversy. I, I felt we were doing a, you know, a good story and I thought, uh, we were doing something, uh, very [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and very American and why not to go save some MIA people from Vietnam? I mean what's wrong with that?~~

~~Q : How involved were you with the marketing of all the films?~~

~~{02:35:56}~~

~~MK : Very. Andy and me were involved in every -- everything and everything that could be [SOUNDS LIKE: imaginably] -- to be done in a movie, from the designing of the logo to a poster to a teaser to a trailer to -- you name it.~~

~~Q : Any particular insight about the marketing that you have, as far as the success of the film?~~

~~{02:36:29}~~

~~MK : Um, on the first one we can -- since we were doing all our -- everything ourself, we were financing everything ourself, you know, it was an interesting, uh -- we had none of any issues here. On the -- trying to remember the poster of the second one, if there was any issue. I don't think there were any issues on the posters or, or, or the market -- I, I don't think so. I don't think so. Uh, uh, what we did -- we did something actually very good on the first one, with tha -- nobody ever done to -- after that one. We shot a teaser of the movie before the movie. We used -- um, uh, I, I, I can't remember the name of the DP now. I was flying from one place to another and one day just came all into my head that I kind of wrote it down and I said, you know, "Why don't we do this as a teaser, even be-before even, uh, the movie started shooting, where it's -- I don't know if you remember it at all.~~

~~{02:37:36}~~

~~In, in the "First Blood 1" there's, there's a whole thing where you start seeing somebody putting his boots on, putting a knife on, putting the bullets on, putting the bandanna on, you know, and then turns around, "Coming this summer." We, we, we shot that on a stage here in L.A. before the movie. So that was never, never I think done before and it kind of became I think to do later.~~

~~Q : Are those the same shots that appear in the film?~~

~~{02:38:03}~~

~~MK : Uh, they are not the same, no, but they're very close. I mean they, they, they, they were copied. Some of them maybe are the same, but they're not the same. No, I don't think so.~~

~~Q : And what was the distribution like on the second and third films, because it was different?~~

[02:38:20]

~~MK : [OVERLAPPING] Yes. On -- uh, as I told you, on -- after the release of the first one then we went and we did, uh, another deal with Tri-Star where Tri-Star had the U.S. and we had the foreign, and so there was no more any -- any, uh, paranoia about, uh, what do we do, who's gonna buy what here, how do we do with the screenings, like we did in the "First Blood 1."~~

[02:38:54]

~~So that's why "T2 --" oh, no, sorry, another movie -- "Rambo 2" and "Rambo 3" ended up with, uh, Tri-Star for the U.S. I think they -- maybe Tri-Star or foreign Columbia maybe picked up also some foreign, uh, territories. I'm not so sure now, I don't remember.~~

Q : Are you aware of the Russian version of "Rambo" that was released in '86 called "Solo Voyage?"

MK : [OVERLAPPING] Yeah. Yes, I, I, I, I think I even looked at it.

Q : Can you establish what we're talking about?

[02:39:23]

MK : Oh, God. Uh, uh, uh, they did a total reverse of, uh, of, of, uh, of "Rambo." I mean they did the Russian Rambo with a blonde ac-- blonde Russian actor. I don't remember now very well, it's years ago, but I know, I know they did that. Why not?

Q : And did you ever see the Middle East copies of "Rambo" that were dubbed --

[02:39:45]

MK : [OVERLAPPING] They were subtitled because of the film. Sure. I mean I, I saw part -- uh, part of them. I think they have to do -- I mean they wanted the movie so badly that they had to do something. Because "T3" was shot in Israel and of course there's a law in the Middle -- in certain parts of the Middle East that anything -- like an embargo, but if -- you can't deal with Israel or, or, or do anything with Israel. So we changed -- it

was changed -- no, uh, the studio changed it to -- because they, they subtitled the movie in French and Arabic, uh, even though everybody speaks English. Uh, so it became a World War II thing with -- kind of a little bit different from -- but the public knew. I think it was more of a politically correct and formality or something.

Q : I understand that you fought the MPAA about the rating for "Rambo 2."

[02:40:38]

MK : Yes. Fighting the MPAA is a kind of -- I don't know, I think, uh, [SOUND PROBLEMS] only certain directors and maybe studios can get away with it. Uh, we got a nice R on every one, maybe it's because, uh, his name starts with an R. It was not possible to get less than an R, but, uh, we tried. But on the other hand, in, in the old days, I don't know if they're doing it now or not, I think a lot of -- beside every kid in the world has seen it on, uh, the video, now on DVDs and not to mention the piracy that happens [UNINTELLIGIBLE], uh, on any film, uh, that you could buy a ticket for, uh, Cinderella next-door in the complex and then, you know, go see, uh, "Rambo" for -- it won't go in the box office of "Rambo" but, but the kid would see it.

[02:41:32]

[TECHNICAL]

[NEW REEL]

[DISCUSSION]

Q : Can you just --

[03:03:12]

MK : [OVERLAPPING] I, I have to just again say I'm Mario Kassar, M-A-R-I-O, K-A-S-S-A-R.

Q : Take two.

MK : Take two.

Q : Very good.

MK : Okay.

Q : How did Jerry Goldsmith get involved with the films?

[03:03:21]

MK : Jerry got involved because basically he was -- I met Jerry Goldsmith through the director of, uh, "First Blood 2," uh, George Cosmatos, which I told you before, and, uh, tried to convince -- it wasn't, it wasn't easy in the beginning. And then, uh, met with him and discussed it and finally it took him a little while, but then he agreed, and I think we have to be very thankful to him because he did an amazing score.

Q : For all three films.

MK : For all three films.

Q : The "Rambo" films have often been criticized for being anti-Russian and I was wondering how you feel about that analysis of the films.

[03:04:05]

MK : I don't know -- uh, anti-Russian, uh, I mean we're talking in the '80s and I think in the '80s there was always, uh, the bad -- the bad guy was the Russian, the good guy was the American and nobody was really talking about the Chinese too much. Uh, it just was, uh, a natural progression of the story. I mean not that we wanted to emphasize how bad the Russians are or are not, but I mean in the '80s it was -- made sense for the story.

[03:04:34]

If today you talk about, uh -- and that's in the year 2002 or three, whatever you say, you know, and the bad guy was the Russian, they say -- you know, I think people would look at you in a very strange way. This is my opinion.

Q : When it came time to do the third film, uh, was there some -- what was it about Afghanistan that drew, drew you to that hot spot of the world, as opposed to another place like El Salvador or Haiti or any other hot spot?

[03:05:01]

MK : I think we kind of, uh -- between Stallone, Andy and me, we kind of like, toyed with a lot of different ideas where would naturally Rambo be every time, you know, he ends up his journey. And it was appear -- where there was that big, uh, war going on between the Russian and the [SOUNDS LIKE: Muhajadin] in, in Afghanistan. Uh, and if you remember I'm sure, uh, in "Rambo 3" he didn't wanna -- as usually, he didn't wanna -- you know, he's always the person who is put in situations. He didn't -- he, he never starts anything, he reacts. And he was in Thailand and he

was cu-- with the monks and he was trying to really just live his life, til he was asked again to be helpful. And the only reason he really goes into Afghanistan is because the famous character of, uh, Richard Crenna was, if I remember very well, kidnapped by the, uh, Russians in Afghanistan. So he had to go there and it just made sense that we do the story there.

Q : Were you or, or Stallone particularly impressed by the Muhajadin's struggle at the time?

[03:06:15]

MK : I -- uh, uh, yeah. I mean, I mean I don't wanna get into political stuff, but, uh, I think they were, uh, you know, fighting their, uh, their -- for freedom, uh, you know? They were being attacked and, and des-- I mean killed and whatever by this huge army of, uh, helicopters and very strong, uh, power and they were like, uh, people on horses and, and guns and, uh -- defending themselves for freedom.

Q : How did you find shooting in Israel?

[03:06:56]

MK : Uh, uh, uh, I think it was very good. I think it was -- uh, they were very helpful. Uh --

Q : [OVERLAPPING] Can you establish Israel? That you were shooting in Israel?

[03:07:05]

MK : [OVERLAPPING] Yes, we, we, we, we -- okay. We -- I mean, uh, we did scout many locations before ending up in Israel, and it ended up that Israel was actually logistically and for all the reasons that made -- uh, financially and everything made more sense to shoot in Israel. It matched, you know, between the desert and, and, uh, and everything else they had there to offer. It was perfect. It was fine.

Q : And why were some sequences shot in Arizona?

[03:07:33]

MK : At the -- for the ending of the movie we, we were supposed to finish shooting -- uh, shoot that also in Israel, but I think, if I remember very well, we ended up shooting in Arizona because we stayed enough weeks in, in Israel and then time was running out, and then we just matched it with Arizona and shot it in Arizona.

Q : What is it you feel the Rambo character stands for?

[03:08:01]

MK : I think -- [LAUGHS], I don't know, Reagan said Rambo is a republican. Uh, I think, uh, honorability. I think he was, uh, uh, what you call a patriot -- a patriotic man, a real American, uh, kind of a hero, a misunderstood man. Because at the end of the day, if you follow the -- I mean, uh, if you start with the book, he was sent to do -- he was trained and sent to, to war, and then when he came back nobody was even talking to him. So, you know, you gotta kind of -- He represents basically the misunderstood American fighter who goes and fights for his country and then comes back and kind of being mistreated and not even thanked actually for what he did, in those days.

Q : And how does he stack up against other cinematic war heroes?

[03:09:01]

MK : I think just -- I mean it's like the old John Wayne, he's the real American hero.

Q : How did you feel about the toys that were made?

[03:09:19]

MK : People protest a lot on, on a lot of things, you know? We just -- they're toys. [LAUGHS]. You know, I do not believe in violence. We were not -- we were not like, promoting violence or not. But if you are making a film about either war or, or I mean reality of things, I mean there, there is violence in those stories. So you either portray -- portray the, the action and reaction of violence or you don't, but you can't have, uh, movies like "Rambo" where people are not shot or dying or wounded or anything. I mean it's a little difficult, I think.

Q : Did you personally push the merchandising or how did that come about?

[03:10:12]

MK : Well, we actually kind of, uh, worked our way through the first one because we did everything ourselves. I mean, uh, as I said before, we kind of ended up only getting distribu-- distributors for the U.S. or the foreign after the movie was shot. We kind of got into merchandising, got into the toys, got into animation. Just -- we learned our way through it and it, it was, it was pretty big and it was fine, it was great. Actually it was good.

Q : And what is the best thing that you took away from the entire "Rambo" franchise?

[03:10:51]

MK : That's a good question. What did I take away? I'm actually very proud of it. And, uh, follow the instinct and if you believe something, just do it. And it took two foreigners to make an American war hero, three films.

Q : That's treat.

MK : Thank you.

Q : [OVERLAPPING] Anything else you'd like to add?

Q : We have two more questions.

Q : [OVERLAPPING] Sure.

Q : [INAUDIBLE].

Q : Oh, to shoot --

Q : [OVERLAPPING] And if there was any challenges the location created for the actors and the crew.

Q : Okay.

[03:11:28]

MK : What -- um, regarding "Rambo 2," the location, uh, uh, I mean let's go through the three "Rambos." The first "Rambo" was shot in Canada for -- because those were the days of the Canadian tax deal, and so it was a financial move and, uh, so we shot it in Canada. The second one, uh, we tried to go to Philippines and somewhere in the Far East and some other places and the -- we ended up in Acapulco because at the end of the day it was two hours a way, and if you don't tell people you were in Acapulco everybody thought you were in the jungle. And, uh, financially also was, was, uh, good to shoot it there because of the exchange rate and all kind of help from the, uh, Mexican, uh, crews and everything. And the third one, uh, Israel. So --

Q : Did shooting in Acapulco create particular problems for the crew or the cast?

[03:12:30]

MK : No. I mean it's not very difficult to be in Acapulco for -- I mean it's, it's a nice place, it's -- the locations were not too far from the hotels, maybe, I don't know, ten, 15 minutes if I remember. So no, no problems.

Q : Do you think there'll be a "Rambo 4?"

MK : I have no idea. Honestly, I have no idea.

Q : [LAUGHS].

[03:12:51]

MK : I think "Rambo" is a -- is kind of a trilogy. Maybe one day it will be.

Q : Great.

Q : What were some of the major differences in filming the sequel as compared with the original?

[03:13:17]

MK : That, that always is the, the biggest challenge when you're doing a sequel to something that kind of worked well. Uh, first I told you budget goes higher because all of a sudden you're doing a sequel to success, and then you have to make sure that you, you please your fans that went to see the, the first one and not disappoint them in the second one.

[03:13:42]

And I think we did that because if I remember the numbers the second one did in the U.S. three times what the first one did, because I think the first one's about 40-something million dollars in the U.S. and the second one was like, 150. And, and the foreign also did -- So the expectations were. Uh, the third one did less in the U.S., uh, when -- you know, unfortunately, but did still very good in the foreign. So those -- I hope I answered you.

N : Yeah. I wanna get the whole story of Carolco and Synergy and what is it, C-2 now?

[03:14:22]

MK : [OVERLAPPING] That's a -- yeah.

Q : [OVERLAPPING] That's another story.

MK : [OVERLAPPING] That's another long story.

Q : [OVERLAPPING] Another story, another day.

[03:14:25]

MK : [OVERLAPPING] But you are sitting in, uh, let's call it the new Carolco office and, uh, we're back in business and, uh, in fact we're, we're finishing, uh, one movie in about a week or two, which is, uh, "I Spy" with Eddie Murphy and, uh, Owen Wilson, directed by Betty Thomas, which is a Columbia picture. And, uh, we're starting, uh, in April 15, uh, "Terminator 3." So that's as close as you can be again in the Carolco sequel story.

Q : You gonna continue the name Carolco?

MK : [OVERLAPPING] Well, it's now, it's now called C-2 --

Q : Yeah?

[03:15:04]

MK : -- because we, we didn't get the, uh, the name, uh, of Carolco yet. But if we get it, it will be either Carolco or C-2 stand. In a way what Carolco was and when Andy and me had the split for, for a certain amount of years, he had Synergy. So we just took the C and put 2 next to it and called it C-2.

Q : How'd you come up with the name Carolco?

MK : Just a shelf name. It means -- means nothing, and only to us it means something and, uh, that's all.

Q : That's great.

[03:15:35]

MK : Thank you.

Q : We'd love to get that story someday.

MK : [OVERLAPPING] You'll get it one day.

Q : [LAUGHS].

MK : Well, thanks, you guys.

Q : Oh, thank you.

[03:15:42]

[END OF TAPE #2 & 3]