

SHOOT ALBERTA

by Linda Kupecek

Wranglers are not unusual on an Alberta film set, but producer Peter Campbell of the Dreamland Picture Company Limited in Edmonton created a new job category of his latest shoot, that of rat wrangler.

Rat Tales, a one-hour television drama about Alberta's Rat Patrol, was shot on location in ten days on a farm near Bruderheim, north of Edmonton. The Rat Patrol was established by the Alberta Government in 1950 to man the Alberta/Saskatchewan border, fending off invading rats. Because of that service of the Alberta Government Pest Control Department, Alberta is in fact the largest single rat-free land mass in the world.

That rodent-free state created some difficulties on the shoot, reports producer/director Campbell, who had financed the project, starring John Vernon, through the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation, Telefilm Canada, CBC Alberta and Dreamland Pictures. The only rats around for the shoot were at the Valley Zoo, and once borrowed, were discovered to be inappropriately white in colour. So the rats were dyed, then put on call. Unfortunately, unaccustomed to the chill of the great Alberta outdoors, the rats refused to emerge from their hiding place on cue, and had to be lured and lobbied by the so-called wranglers.

Rat Tales, written by Francis Damberger, deals not only with the duties of the Rat Patrol, but also with the emotional repercussions of Hiroshima, as experienced by the war veteran played by Vernon, compounded by the intrusion of American soldiers from nearby war games. Campbell points out that the recent protests against cruise missile testing in Alberta, and the and the staging of massive war games at nearby Wainwright simultaneous to the shoot make *Rat Tales* particularly timely.

Vernon, interviewed by telephone in Los Angeles, calls the script "the best thing I have read or done in a number of years."

Despite the raw conditions of the short shoot (with the usual Alberta snowstorm blowing in to add to the fun) Vernon praises the experience. "The main thing is the writer and the director who found him and helped develop the final script, weird subject thought it may be. In my opinion, we have found a major writer. It was a pleasure to im-

merse myself in his thoughts and structures. In a very limited shooting time, it was an experience I'll never forget and I am very grateful for it."

Rat Tales, budgeted at about \$240,000, was shot on 16mm film, to be distributed on one-inch video, and will be broadcast on CBC Alberta next season. Campbell, John McQuaker (CBC Edmonton) and Wayne Skene (CBC Calgary) organized the development deal, which drew in AMPDC and Telefilm, the latter coming in at the very last minute, leaving Campbell with one week for preproduction. Campbell put together a crew which was a mixture of CBC and freelancers, with ACTRA, CUPE, IATSE, NABET and independent filmmakers working together.

With *Rat Tales* high-tailing it back to Edmonton for editing, the *Rad* crew past the finish line and back to L.A., *Hyper Sapien* (the film of many directors, p.m.'s and scripts) off to other worlds, the Alberta scene is still lively. *Mania* is shooting at ITV in Edmonton (Cinema Canada's calls were not returned, so no further information is available at this time) and *Mountain Men* is shooting near Jasper, while at least two major productions are scouting Banff and Edmonton.

In early November, four Canadian distributors visited Calgary to address members of the film community at a panel discussion at the NFB organized by Telefilm Canada, AMPIA and the AMPDC.

Maryse Rouillard of

Montreal's Filmoption International Inc.; and Toronto's Isme Bennie of Isme Bennie International, Ted Riley of Atlantis Films, and Cathy J. Ellis of Ralph C. Ellis Enterprises offered insight into their present needs and guidance for the future, with Ian McLaren of Telefilm acting as moderator.

Bette Chadwick of the Other Agency Casting Limited in Edmonton is back in her office after a nine-week stint in Calgary as the Canadian casting director for *Hyper Sapien*. Canadian actors in the cast included Robert Christie, Chuck Shamata, David Siebertson, Maureen Thomas, and David LeReaney. Chadwick praises the stunt team headed by John Scott, consisting of Tom Glass, Reg Glass, Brent Woolsey, and John Dodd... The Grand, Calgary's oldest movie theatre, will reopen its doors in late

December with new design and equipment, plus a new name: the Showcase Grand. This brings to 33 the number of Cineplex Odeon screens in Calgary... Two Calgarians are now on staff at *Saturday Night Live* in New York. Bruce McCullough and Mark McKinney from Loose Moose Theatre (home of the improvisational theatre sports) were spotted by Lorne Michaels during a gig in Toronto, and are now living in New York as *Saturday Night Live* writers.

TORONTO - *Tears Are Not Enough*, producer/director John Zarisky's 90-minute documentary about the fundraising recording featuring 53 Canadian musical personalities, aired Dec. 22 on the CBC-TV network. In concert with that broadcast, CBC Enterprises has launched the distribution of the *Tears* video cassette, sales from which are expected to reach \$300,000.

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