

A SURF TRIP TO HELL

DECONSTRUCTING THE VIETNAM SURFING EXPERIENCE

SURFER's roving web editor, Scott Bass, has been a busy guy lately. Aside from pumping out children's books, hosting surfboard shows, and busting his butt for *Surfermag.com*, he's been plodding along with friends and partners Ty Ponder and Troy Page on the production of a documentary film, *Between The Lines*, based on surfers and Vietnam. The project got a boost when writer/director John Milius (*Apocalypse Now*, *Big Wednesday*) signed on to do the narration. We caught up with Bass for some insight into the world's heaviest surf trip.

GIVE US A QUICK SYNOPSIS.

It's a film about the huge impact the Vietnam War had on surfers during a very tumultuous time in our national history. The large majority of the surfers were draft-age, and almost all surfers had to answer the question: Do I do my duty as a U.S. citizen or do I figure out a way to get out?

HOW MANY SURFERS DO YOU THINK SERVED OVER IN VIETNAM?

I don't know the exact number, I'm not sure anybody really knows. However, 350,000 Californians served. And 5,822 died. That's 10 percent of the total deaths in Vietnam. That's a pretty high percentage relative to the rest of the country. John Milius called it a "California War" and he's right, of

course. The music, the symbolism, the drugs—you didn't find that stuff on main street in Kansas. You found it in LA and in San Francisco. And of course Camp Pendleton was the one of the last stops on a young GIs itinerary.

WHY SURFERS AND THE VIETNAM WAR—WHY NOT GOLFERS OR BASEBALL PLAYERS?

Surfing isn't just a hobby or just a sport; it's a complete lifestyle. I mean

surfers adapt almost everything they do toward the pursuit of riding waves. Even in a war situation. Surfers will do anything to surf. And there was surf culture that developed in Vietnam. Some people know about the China Beach Surf Club, but there was more to it than that. Surfers are surfers. They'll go to extremes to find good surf.

I IMAGINE YOUR FILM IS RATHER ADVENTUROUS?

The draft sent surfers out of the United States. Some went to Hawaii, but this is really the beginning of the era of discovery for surfers. Guys were going to Central America and Indonesia. They were on the run from one thing or another. The Vietnam War helped to establish a nomadic thread that still weaves throughout the surfing culture today.

WHAT IS THE MAJOR OVERRIDING THEME THE DOCUMENTARY EXPLORES?

Freedom. Freedom and choices and how those choices will affect you for the rest of your life. These days an 18-year-old kid doesn't have to make such a crucial decision. Today, young surfers aren't faced with the horrifying decision of going to war or becoming a fugitive. Back in the late '60s, 18-year-old kids were kissing their moms goodbye for the last time.

JOHN MILIUS NARRATES YOUR FILM. THAT'S A PRETTY BIG COUP. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

A bit of serendipity really. One of those "right place at the right time" deals. It was a no-brainer decision, we just had to get to him, you know, get to the right people. I ran into Milius' assistant, Leonard Brady, surfing out at Publics in Waikiki. We exchanged e-mails. John, of course, co-wrote *Apocalypse Now* with Francis Ford Coppola, and we all know him for *Big Wednesday*. So we were really excited, and frankly very, very honored to have John's involvement. And his voice—it's just this beautiful deep resonating thunder. And holy crap, talk about good stories! We spent a full day with him in Woodstock, New York, at a little sound studio, and I learned a lot about Genghis Khan, Daniel Boone, skeet shooting, and how to find a good BBQ joint.

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