

tung set up shop after completing the Long March in 1936.

Years ago, several Westerners made the same trip to visit Mao at his command post. Edgar Snow slipped through the Kuomintang blockade and gathered material for what would become **Red Star Over China**, the first Western account of the Chinese Revolution. Several years before that, in 1937, a determined Canadian doctor, fresh from the front lines of the Spanish civil war, also made his way to Yan'an. His name, of course, was Norman Bethune. In many ways, Yan'an has changed considerably since Bethune's visit. It is now accessible by road (a paved one at that) and planes fly in weekly from Beijing. Much of the population still lives in the caves above the town, but unlike in Mao's day, power lines bring electricity to even the most inaccessible of mountaintop dwellings.

On this rainy morning in June, though, Yan'an seems to have been recast in its pre-revolutionary mold. Today is the day when the meeting between Mao and Bethune is to be shot. Mao (Zhang Keyao) stands on the hill as Bethune (Donald Sutherland) descends into the courtyard below, boards a waiting truck and drives away with the rest of the convoy. An impressive group of extras, dressed in the grey uniforms of Mao's Eighth Route Army, carry out manoeuvres with perfect military precision as many inquisitive Chinese tourists over the wall of the enclosure hoping to catch a glimpse of the two heroes from a bygone era.

These are the extras of August First Film Productions, the military film studio which produces most of the war epics seen on Chinese screens. Along with Filmline from Montreal and France's Belstar Productions it also happens to be a co-producer of **Bethune: The Making of a Hero**. Authenticity is often hard to

come by in the low-budget world of Chinese filmmaking, but this military demonstration surrounding Bethune's departure from Mao's headquarters is about as authentic as it comes. At other times, the Chinese notion of production values leaves much to be desired. Says Borsos, "I think we have different ideas towards filmmaking. Things are just done differently. They'll bring in a 1952-model car and say that it will pass for 1937. Faults in set design or props will just go unnoticed. If it were up to them, they'd film irregardless. By our standards, a lot of things, from food to transportation, are inadequate."

When co-producer Nicolas Clermont, from Montreal's Filmline Productions, spent New Year's Eve of last year in Beijing hammering out a deal to make the Bethune film a reality, the actual problems which were to be faced by the crew in Yan'an were furthest from his mind. The deal, which calls for the Chinese to put up about one third of the \$16 million budget in the form of services, seemed, according to Clermont, "like the logical thing to do for everybody." On location, however, the drawbacks to such a co-production agreement (China's first with a Western country) became obvious. "Language is the main barrier," admits Clermont. "It takes double the time for everything because you have to explain it to someone who is not necessarily a film technician or a film expert." The end result is that the crew has to put in long hours and has to content themselves with getting only one or two pages of script shot each day.

The primary gain made by the Canadian producers in co-producing the film with the Chinese is the ability to make an expensive-looking epic while only having to fork out a fraction of the film's actual cost. What they have to put up with in return is, among other things, a lack of

efficiency in the decision-making process and a dependence (perhaps even overdependence) on the Chinese to get certain things done (which, at times, can be quite problematic). Both drawbacks invariably lead to delays and conflicts.

"I often feel compromised," comments Borsos. "Because it's a co-production, I have to resign myself to not always getting things the way I want them. We're a crew of about 35 Westerners working in fairly adverse conditions relying on a Chinese support staff whom we can communicate with only through interpreters. We couldn't really go any faster than we already are. We're supposed to be finished in China by July 15, but I don't see us getting out of here until August."

And so it goes. Ironically, the troubles faced by the film crew are not dissimilar to those experienced by Bethune himself when he came to China in 1937. Nor are they terribly different from the more recent experiences of other Western visitors to China. There's always a danger in doing things first. If something doesn't work out quite right, there's no one else who can set you straight. If mistakes are made, you're the only one who can sort it out; and that process invariably costs time and money. Added to these standard complications is the simple fact that doing anything in China requires patience. What you are likely to end up with is an experience that can be quite uncomfortable and trying before it becomes rewarding. **Bethune: The Making of a Hero** is a project which seems to be stuck in this first (and almost unavoidable) stage of the Chinese experience. One can only hope that the troubles are overcome and that the ensuing results are worth the hardships endured.

Greg Clarke •

Making the Scene

It is the sixth consecutive day of a rare mid-July heat-wave in Montreal. The production of **Revolving Doors**, a Canada-co-production/France is into its third week of shooting in the Eastern Townships. Highway 10 leading to this region of Quebec is laden with Sunday day-trippers, seeking refuge from the cruelty of the heat in the shade of the surrounding mountains and lakes. The traffic trickles down to only a few cars as it approaches the town of Rock Island, at the end of the highway. It is here that director Francis Mankiewicz is working on "a very important scene" of the film.

Rock Island is an anomalous Québécois town only a few metres away from the Canada-U.S. frontier, with some houses confusedly falling within the borders of both countries. It is a jumble of Québécois and New England architecture. However, the turn-of-the-century 'Silent Movie Theatre' where the scene is being shot on this day is congruous with the film's period.

Based on Jacques Savoie's *Les Portes tournantes* which won the Prix France-Acadie in 1982, **The Revolving Doors** is described as both "a period piece and a modern-day drama"

The movie is the story of Celeste, a famous jazz pianist from a small town at the turn of the century. As a has-been, a much grayer Celeste reminisces on her "star" days in present-day New York.

Concurrently, the film tells the story of her son, Blaudelle, a painter, who was brought up by his grandmother in complete isolation from his mother. The complex family drama, co-authored by Savoie and director Mankiewicz, is untangled through yet another character, Antoine, Blaudelle's son, as he reads his grandmother's secret diary.

The theme of a family drama and the dissection of its intricate interrelations is not foreign territory for Mankiewicz — two of his two earlier films, **Les Bons débarras** and **Les Beaux souvenirs**, dealt with similar subjects. Where the first explored the possessive and obsessive relationship between a mother and a daughter, the latter concentrated on the triangular relationship of two daughters and their father.

"He (Mankiewicz) is very sensitive," says Gabriel Arcand, who plays the role of Blaudelle, Celeste's son in **Revolving Doors**. "Francis is attracted towards psychology like other directors are towards social problems. He is concerned with behaviour, feelings and relations. This is not to say that he is not interested in social issues, but only through behaviour," continues Arcand. "This makes it more interesting for the actors, because it allows them to explore their characters."

Although not needed for today's shoot, Arcand is here to observe. With a wildly overgrown beard for the role, he is unrecognizable from his last movie role as a leather-clad Buñuelian cow figure who shatters the hypocritical bourgeois com-



• Phillip Borsos giving direction on **Bethune**



• Pieces of the puzzle: Monique Spaziani and Jacques Denot

placency in Denys Arcand's *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*.

He is enthusiastic about *Revolving Doors*. "The movie subject is an extremely particular one. It is a puzzle. It is made of tiny pieces coming together. Some characters never meet on the screen. I never play with Monique Spaziani (Celeste) although she is my mother. By the time I appear on screen, Celeste is in her late seventies. I don't get in touch with Celeste at all."

Undaunted by the noon heat outside, Mankiewicz is working with a group of 50 extras inside the 'Silent Movie Theatre'. Dressed in time-period costumes, the extras are seated in the aisles at the left of the theatre. The scene is a community charity concert in the town of Campbellton. The extras are given instructions not to applaud too early after the announcer's introduction, but to wait for the figure to appear on stage. After several takes, the director seems content. The figure of Celeste appears from behind the stage curtains. She takes her seat at the piano. Cut.

It is 1:30 p.m. The crew breaks up for lunch. Mankiewicz lingers on in the theatre, consulting with the cameramen. Details have to be worked out for the next "very important scene."

Hasmick Egian •

Upper Canada Homestead

Fifty minutes outside downtown Toronto, north of Highway 401, is unspoiled country. Just short of Georgetown, a mile-long dirt road leads to the 200-acre Scotsdale Farm leased by Settler Film Productions from the Ontario Heritage Foundation. We reach a clearing where, knowing that a 19th-century homestead and farm lie beyond, an old carriage standing as testimony to the past is hardly surprising.

The growing community of trailers surrounded by pink flamingos, a bathroom sink, several johnny-on-the-spots

and a gravel parking lot look out of place. An old-fashioned horseshoe toss is being prepared for the crew's amusement.

Further down the road, another clearing reveals part of the recreated community of Scottish settlers who carved out a life in Canada in the early 1830s. A tall two-storey log cabin faces a smithy and rising above these wooden structures are bright lights, light reflectors and a boom microphone. A camera dollies along a track built perpendicular to the buildings.

For 26 weeks a year, the way of life of *The Campbells* becomes that for most of its 30-member cast and crew.

This area, the actual site settled by the immigrant Scottish families, boasts a full working, winterized farm and log house. The barn is supplied with chickens, geese, sheep, horses and Grace, a prehistoric-looking Highland cow. There are also streams and marshes, two bridges, a river and a quarry.

Scotsdale Farm is in use for winter exteriors, but all interior scenes are shot in a converted school in Etobicoke.

The idea for a pioneer family adventure series was developed by producer John A. Delmage with Fremantle International, a distribution company and investor in the series. Scottish Television, part of the British ITV network and a U.K. broadcaster, and CTV, the Canadian licensee, are also investors, along with Telefilm Canada.

The Campbells serves to fill a need seen by producers on both sides of the Atlantic. The story of the widowed Dr. James Campbell, played by British actor Malcolm Stoddard (BBC's *The Voyage of Charles Darwin*) and his three children, played by John Wildman (*My American Cousin*), Amber-Lea Weston (*Hangin' In*) and Eric Richards (*Romeo and Juliet on Ice*), brings a significant Scottish and Canadian historical period to life.

Between 1830 and 1840 tenant farmers in the Scottish Highlands were evicted by the landowners who were converting the area to what they hoped would be more profitable sheep pastures. For many of the evicted, Upper Canada seemed to offer an exciting opportunity for a new life.

Delmage acknowledges that *The Campbells* may be described as a Canadian *Little House on the Prairie* "but without the syrup."

"We believe it has a wonderful shelf life," he says. "We don't stretch the credi-

bility of the period at all. We do our research and remain accurate to the social climate and mores of the time. We are not doing a documentary, nor being tutorial, but we do remind people of who Bishop Strachan was, for example."

Two story editors and Delmage commission the scripts for the weekly show. Schedules are tight. The scripts, submitted to CTV and Fremantle for approval, are written only a week before shooting. Each episode is produced on a tight \$250,000 budget.

The budget and time constraints pose particular challenges to Ruth Secord, the costume designer, and Seamus Flannery, the production designer.

Secord began her career in the theatre and studied theatrical design at the National Theatre School. In 1978 she worked on her first features - *Quintet* and *In Praise of Older Women*. This experience, she says, careened her into television where, for six years, she worked solely on CBC series (*The Great Detective*, *Seeing Things*) and productions (*Love and Larceny*, *Chautauqua Girl*), proving she is no stranger to period pieces.

Flannery studied at the Ontario College of Art, then worked at the CBC for seven years in the 1950s. After 14 years as a producer in England, including two as executive producer and head of production at the Rank Organization, Flannery wanted to get back to the grassroots of the business.

"I returned to Canada, became an art director and put my past as a producer behind me."

Working on a period piece isn't the biggest challenge for Secord and Flannery. "I have worked on period pieces from as early as the 10th-century Crusades to as far ahead as the 22nd century," says Flannery.

Secord adds that 1830s Canada is a difficult period to do only because "it's never been done before. You can't just go out and find clothes for people to wear. I design everything. The cutting is contracted out."

With \$1,000 for episode per costumes, "it's impossible, but I do it," Secord continues. "I'm a good shopper and I make do with things I don't particularly like. And there are compromises: we have different people appearing week after week in the same clothes and we make clothes that must go through all the seasons."

In today's scene, Cedric Smith, a neighbour arrives on horseback at the remains of a shed still smoldering from a spectacular fire staged the night before.

True to the times, this hot sunny day does not allow for any loosening of the collar or of anything else. Handsome in his grey wool frock coat, stock tie and top hat, Smith is a properly attired gentleman, no matter the weather.

The women are outfitted in high-necked, long-sleeved blouses and full-length skirts. Amber-Lea, as 14-year-old Emma Campbell, is similarly attired and also sports a large bonnet tied neatly under her chin.

One concession to modern times and a low budget is made. "Women at that time wore up to five petticoats," says Secord, "but our actresses wear only one, made to look like several."

A concern particular to designing for television serials, continues Flannery, is the place of work in turning written words into visual statements. Oddly constructed descriptions which can't be



• Fall preparations in Upper Canada

translated visually cause rewrites and delays.

"In TV we have between five days and one hour (lead time)," he says, "barely time to do the work we're directly responsible for, let alone liaise with other creative departments."

"The problems of being a designer are inherent in the script. If information is wrong, it must be corrected."

For example, light at night must be by candles; kerosene hadn't been created yet, so the Campbells wouldn't have oil lamps. Ditto for rainwear; rubber was not yet being manufactured, so when it rained everyone got wet. When it rains on location, everyone gets wet.

Being ever vigilant to the scripts is as much a part of the designers' jobs as creating the actual designs. "Five per cent of my job is building lovely sets," says Flannery. "Ninety-five per cent has nothing to do with being artistic."

"What is admirable is that the producers are doing something of quality," Flannery adds. "It is also a very brave thing to do. 1830s Canada is very peculiar. I've been here two and half years and I'm willing to fight tooth and nail for the series. I believe it is one of the best shows coming out of Canada. The show is successful; the public likes it. If you do quality productions, the public will like it. And *The Campbells* bears this out."

Producer Delmage certainly knows his audience. *The Campbells* represents one of the two top-rated Canadian shows for CTV attracting, on average, 1.1 million viewers per week. Season three will air this fall.

Leslie Goodson •