

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
ON MICROFICHE**

PART VI

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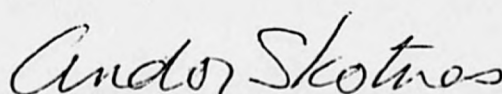
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Andor Skotnes
Acting Director

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HOLLYWOOD FILM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

James Wong Howe

Oral History Research Office

Columbia University

1985

Preface

The following oral history memoir is the result of a tape recorded interview with James Wong Howe. The interview took place in Mr. Howe's home on June 11, 1971. It was conducted by Mr. Higham for the Hollywood Film Industry Oral History Project. It is one of a series of interviews documenting the history of the Hollywood film industry.

Due to his untimely death Mr. Howe was unable to review and emend this interview. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview with James Wong Howe

At his home

Q: I'd like to begin by talking about "
and the fact that you photographed tests of Garbo.

Mr. Wong: You see, Charles, Garbo had her own cameraman at, she worked most with MGM; it was William Daniels. Somehow, or other, I was contacted by ^{Walter} Warner Wanger[?] and someone else with him, an associate producer. Dr. Eugene Frankie, yes. Gene Frankie was associated with Walter Wanger, and we were preparing to film "
" Anglaise -- Garbo and James Mason. They wanted me to shoot the tests. Now, either Daniels was busy or he was not available, so they called me, and said to report over at the Charlie Chaplin studies on La Brea at a certain time, and I was over there. I went over. And I met Katherine, Rolly
He was Mr. Chaplin's early day cameraman, and when Mr. Chaplin left for England, he put Rolly in charge as managing. Wonderful chap.

We walked on the stage, and he didn't seem to know much about it. He said, "Yes, Miss Garbo is willing to do a test. "

I said, "Where are we going to shoot it ?"

He said, "Well, you pick a place, the stage -- she comes -- I don't have a vague idea at all what she's going to do. "

So we waited, the electricians and the crew, and we waited and waited, expecting to see Miss Garbo and her entourage that

we thought she would have . But after waiting an hour or so, here she comes, all by herself.

I remember, she had a big black hat on. Straw, it looks like. And a pair of slacks and a white blouse. She's very gay, "Hello, hello, hello. "

"Where's the dressing room ? " We're more or less kind of standing around waiting for her agent, her manager, her hairdresser, makeup woman, you know, but no one.

Rolly says, "Well, I can take you over to the hairdresser and makeup. "

She says, "Oh no, I can go and do my own makeup, fix my own hair. I don't need any costume. You're just going to make close-ups, aren't you ;"Jimmy ?"

I said, "Yes, " so they took her over to a little dressing room. At Chaplin Studios, hadn't anyone worked there for many years, and I can imagine, the dressing room was just filthy with dirt, hadn't been cleaned, you know.

So , in about, oh, three-quarters of an hour, there comes Miss Garbo. She'd fixed her hair and put on her make-up, and didn't put it on very heavy, it's light, I remember. So she came down. She says, "Jimmy, what are we doing ? "

I said, "Well, let me see -- " There was a column, I remember, one of these portable columns, and I asked one of the men there to help me move the column over, and I put a round table, it looked like a kind of outdoor patio or outdoor cafe maybe.

Usually you have a table and somebody sits down there, and it's a kind of, they don't seem to be , photographically speaking, they don't seem to be comfortable or relaxed. And I thought that

if she sat on this table, and leaned on the column, you see, that it would more or less relax her, and I could photograph, compose a little better, and I always like to photograph people leaning on a wall or something, you know.

So she did, and she said, "Can I smoke a cigarette ? "

I said, "Sure. " So she asked someone, "May I have a cigarette ?" because I don't think she smokes.

Then, I was very nervous, Charles, you know -- Miss Garbo, whom I'd never seen very much , I mean, when I worked at MGM, and her sets were always encased with these screens we have, you know. No one was allowed on her set except the people working in her unit. The only time I saw her was when she'd walk by going to lunch or coming back. So here I am to shoot her test.

I didn't know how to light her. So I just started in with general lighting, and it didn't work. It looked awful, and I knew I was in a spot.

But I said, "Well, I have to get the cameras going, start the motors, regardless of how it will look. If it's not good we can always trim this or that, OK, we can have it cut off. "

But the minute the cameras started rolling, she took on, oh, a wonderful feeling, you know -- she expressed a wonderful emotional feeling of some kind, with a cigarette, and it excited me. You can see this creature come alive, you know.

And then I began to get a certain inspiration of lighting, changing the lighting, I could see what the individual required, so I said, "This is good, now, we're going to kill all the lights, " and I started with one, just one little spotlight, and I lit that and moved it around, and she stood, and now the sculptured face of hers , you know,

it was just wonderful, it just seemed to reflect the light, capture the light -- light is just like water, it follows lines, you see, and yshe'd just look up, with her cigarette, and the smoke curling up and you have this one light, and I put a little light in back just for her hair, didn't need very much-- her hair was light anyway, not a real light blonde but a blonde, rather medium.

Then I put one little fill light just for her eyes, to catch the light in her eyes, you see, and then I sketched the background.

Usually I always sketch the background first in lighting. But I know what the scene is and we have a script, you see, and I can sketch in the background to create the atmosphere, but with her at this time, I had to get the atmosphere from her, you see. So I lit her first. It was not the way I usually worked.

I made several styles of lighting. But there's only one or two that I thought were good. Oh, we took about a thousand feet of film, I remember, one magazine. Took us about, oh, three-quarters of an hour.

Finally she said, "Don't you think we have enough ? "
"Sufficient now ? "

I said, "Yes. " I was willing to stop then because I couldn't go any further. How far can you go just photographing a person leaning on a column ? So I was very glad that she said this. Then she said, "I think I go home. "

Q: She didn't dress, didn't wear a period dress ?

Howe: No. She just had this white blouse. No period dress.

And I thought, it's strange, gee, what happened to Garbo ? You know, usually she has her maid, hair dresser, make-up , costume woman, and here she comes all by herself.

Q: It's a period picture, too.

Howe: Yes, it was a period picture.

Q: Did you do any more work on the picture ?

Howe: No. The picture was cancelled.

Q: I know.

Howe: And I was called to Jimmy Mason's home one evening . He said he wanted to talk to me. I had first met James Mason --

Well, as I was saying, Charles, I first met James Mason in London in '36 when I made "Fire Over England. " I don't think he was well known. He was just a bit player or extra really, a bit player I think he was more than an extra . And some reporter from some newspaper, I don't recall the name now, Hudson or something like that, asked me about my , how I felt working in England.

He said, "Do you see anyone around here, that are not big stars like Olivier, but might develop into a star, some talent ? "

"?And I suggest, there's a man sitting over there reading the paper -- now, I think he'd photograph well, and from what I've seen of him act so far, he hasn't got a big part, he's just a bit player, I see quite a good future for him. "

You know how time goes on, and Jimmy Mason developed into quite a well known player. And here I was going to do a film with him.

He called me over to the house and we talked about it, and he

showed me this clipping, you see.

He said, "Jimmy, you know I like you because you gave me a lot of encouragement and you were the only one really kind to me. You know, nobody ever there really thought I would have a chance."

So he said, "I was happy that we're going to do a film. But, I think it's fallen through. It's sad," he says, "I want to do the film very much, and I was surprised that Miss Garbo went to play this part, because it's really, the male lead is the biggest part, and I was surprised that she wanted to do it. But there's some financial disagreement or something," I forget, but I remember he said that Howard Hughes was to guarantee him to be paid but he wanted to be paid, Jimmy said I think, he wanted to be paid in American money rather than in British pounds or Italian lira. I've forgotten now which it was. But the fact that certain financial things couldn't be worked out -- it was cancelled.

Q: Max was mentioned as the possible director for it.

Howe: Yes. Yes, But I was disappointed, very disappointed, because I was looking forward to photograph Miss Garbo, because I think she's one of the most interesting persons. She had her own beauty, you know, because beauty you can't put your finger on, because everyone a different sense, idea of beauty, looks at beauty many ways. But I thought she was really most interesting and to me a beautiful woman.

Q: Turning to another subject, Humphrey Bogart you filmed in "Passage to Marseilles. "

Howe: Yes.

Q: I wonder what your memories are of working with him.

Howe: Well, I enjoyed working with Humphrey. I liked him as a person very much. Besides working with him, we used to go to the steam baths, Finlandia, they called it, down in the Big Crosby Building. He and Peter Lorre would be down there, and they were quite a pair. They were good friends. We used to have a lot of fun down there. He'd come down there, after a hangover, and steam out. Then they'd get together and go right across the street to a place called the Villanova, a bar, and then start all over again. I couldn't keep up with them, really.

But working with Humphrey was no trouble to a cameraman. He didn't have, what you say, good side or favorite side. He didn't care. He just went out there and you know, played his scene the way he played it. I know that the directors never had to give him too many directions. They would go into a corner and consult with each other sometimes, until Humphrey got his point over, see what the director really wanted. But invariably I think Bogie just played the scene the way he felt it. That's the only way he could play it. You know. How can you tell an actor like Humphrey to "act" a scene? It's just ridiculous. You just had to say, "OK, Humphrey," and to the cameraman he said, "Just tell Humphrey where the sidelines are" and we put a little chalk mark down, "Don't go past here, you'll be out of the light" or -- you know. And so in that area, he would play his scene.

Q: His own personality carried him through.

Howe: Yes. But the funny story -- because he only lived up here above me about a block away --

Q: On King's Road?

Howe: No, he lived up here on a different street, as a matter of fact, I don't know the street number. Peter Lorrie lived on King's Road. You see. And Humphrey on Queen's.

I was going to work one morning, did I ever tell you this? I was going to work around 7:30 and I went down to Queen's Road, down the hill, and I heard a voice, "Jimmy, Jimmy," and it sounded to me like Humphrey Bogart. I wondered why he's up so early.

I looked, stopped the car and I looked back, and I see a man with two kids on each side of him, holding hands there, in a vacant lot, and I backed up, and I began to recognize, it was Humphrey Bogart. In my mind I said, "I didn't know he had two children. He's out walking them."

Q: Sorry, we got interrupted --

Howe: We were talking about Humphrey Bogart and his two kids when I was going to work. Well, when I backed my car up, I see Humphrey Bogart, and he says, "Jimmy, you going to work?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Am I in the first shot?"

I said, "Yes, you are. You're supposed to be there at 9 o'clock. We're supposed to shoot."

"Can you see if you can delay it a little bit? I'm waiting for Peter Lorre to come pick me up." He said, "I want you to meet my friends."

I said, "I know them, they're the ^{the} Compson boys."

So he said, "Well, I'm going to meet Peter Lorre here and I think I'll make it but I don't think I'll get there until at least 9:30, so whatever you can do, I'll be very happy if you do it."

I said, "Well, I certainly will. But you'd better get there as soon as you can. I know that I won't need a great deal of time to get the shot, and you know how the production manager is, they're watching me every moment. "

So I went to the studio and got everything ready , and he was there around 9:30, but he ^{didn't need} needed make-up, because he was playing this "Passage to Marseilles, " I think it was, a prisoner, Devil's Island, and he'd escaped, he and Peter Lorre, and he had a growth of beard, dirty dungareess, and he looked just perfect that morning, but I was concerned. He didn't need any make up. I don't think Bogart ever used make-up, unless when he played serious pictures like with Bergman, you know, they have to clean up a little bit, but in this one, he didn't.

So what happened is, he came to work, and around lunch hour, I turned arond and looked, after lunch rather, went back to work, and I was lining up and I looked around, and there I see the whole ~~Gempson~~ (Thompson ?) family there -- Mr. Thompson, Mrs. Thompson and two kids. So Bogie evidently invited them over to watch how they make movies, took them to lunch.

Well, it happened to be that after, the day previous, Charles, Bogie and Peter Lorre went home together up to Peter's house, and Bogie's wife, not Lauren Bacall, ,w as to come there and meet him and then they would go home and go to dinner.

Well, I guess that Peter and Bogie got to drinking, got to talking, and forgot the time. Time passed and finally Mrs. Bogart arrived, and then the three of them got into discussions. I don't know what happened, but from what I gather, Mrs. Bogart got mad, and

she just left and took off jewelry rings, wrist watch, bracelets, whatever, got mad and threw them at Bogie, because they used to, you know, get into terrible arguments, fights, and they would throw things at each other.

So Bogie took the jewelry, picked them up. She left them. And he wrapped it up in his dirty handkerchief, part of his costume, and he stayed overnight there at Peter Lorre's. So next morning, he got up. I guess he had a hangover. And he was walking home, up the hill. Came down King's Road, coming up Queen's Road.

Right on the corner there, Queen's, the Thompson family had just moved in not many years, three or four years, and Mrs. Thompson was preparing breakfast. Bogie smelt this coffee, and he went to the back door there, he knocked. Mrs. Thompson came to the door and Bogie said, "Ma'm , your coffee smells so good, can I come in and have a cup of coffee? I'm Humphrey Bogart. "

Well, she said, "Yes, yes, " because she's a very charming woman, you know, "Come in, come in, yes, have some. "

He sat at the kitchen table there and she poured him a cup of coffee. I must admit it tasted wonderful, you know. He said, "Oh, this is wonderful. "

So he started telling Mrs. Thompson what had happened, you see. I told you that he and Mrs. Bogart had an argument, and he was at Peter Lorre's house, so she left him and now he was walking home and he doesn't feel too good and he wanted a cup of coffee, so he smelt this coffee and asked her, you know, to let him in.

I'm not telling this story too well, but -- so he said, "Now, could I have another cup ? " and by that time he'd shown her -- he said, "Look at the jewelry my wife threw at me, " and spread it

out on the table. And she'd become a little concerned. So she poured him another cup of coffee, and she went over and said to her husband, "Frank, Frank, you'd better come , there's a man here sitting, he's unshaven, and his name is Humphrey Bogart and he wanted some coffee and I gave him a second cup, and he said he and his wife had an argument and he threw the jewelry and he showed me this jewelry in this dirty handkerchief. You'd better come and see. "

So he came. They introduced themselves to each other. But he was a little suspicious, see, and he was about ready to call the police, until the two boys came.

Then he said, "Hello, Sonny, how are you ? " Then the boys heard the voice and they said, "Holy gee, Humphrey Bogart! "

You see ? Now everything was all right. The father believed him. Because they couldn't think, why Humphrey Bogart comes here, knocks at the door, back door especially, to ask for cup of coffee.

That's why, when I started work, I could see the Thompson family there, you see. They could ride home now and say "Humphrey Bogart came over and had coffee with us . "

I thought it was quite an interesting story. And that's Humphrey. You know. Easy going. I think he was just a wonderful actor.

Q: Was he often late on the set ?

Howe: No. He was always on time. I never had seen him late. I never heard him with any great arguments. You know. He would just do his work. Rather fun. He liked his drinks. He had a lot of fun. We used to have a lot of fun down in the steam baths, he and Peter Lorre, they'd just play tricks on each other. As a matter of

fact, I have a picture, with the three of us together, with the steam coming up somehow. But in this bath, really there wasn't any steam. It's very dry. You pull a string and water would drop on some hot rocks and evaporate and you feel this heat. But Bogie had some artist air brush it and made some steam come up. Peter Lorrie, Humphrey and myself, three close-ups.

Q: I'd like to see that. I'd like to talk a bit about some of the Westerns you've done. I'm particularly interested in the two or three silent ones, "The Alaskan, " "The Rough Riders, " and -- what do you remember of shooting "The Alaskan" with --

Howe: Thomas ^{Meighan} ~~Meehan~~ ?

Q: And Estelle Taylor.

Howe: Thomas ^{meighan} ~~Meehan~~, Estelle Taylor. That was a film that was made for the Lasky Studios, directed by Herbert Brennan. We went up to Canada to shoot the exteriors. I remember, in that particular film -- what year was that? 1925, I think it was.

Q: Mid-twenties. '24.

Howe: '24. Well, panchromatic film was not used very much. It wasn't used. We always used what we called the orthochromatic stock. And orthochromatic was sensitive to blues, not to the red side. Now, panchromatic film that came out -- panchromatic is sensitive to the whole spectrum, but you had to use filters. So I'd been using orthochromatic film, shooting all the interiors, and we had these Royal Mounted Police with the red coats. Well, with orthochromatic

the red went dark, and they would have dark coats on, black and white.

So we shot the scene now, showing them to get up ready to leave the door. Now, we go up to Canada, and we continue the scene where they come out and get on their horses and ride off with this mountain background, and we have many other scenes also. It was just beautiful up in Banff, Canada, Charles, around Lake Louise and Banff, and these wonderful mountains covered with snow, the blue sky and the clouds. So I was tempted to use panchromatic film, and by putting on a light red filter, it would make the sky look dark and bring out the mountains and the snow and the clouds. It would just be beautiful.

So I did. And we're ready for the scene, so they , the scene was now a continuation, where they come out of the little cabin and get on their horses. Now I changed to panchromatic film and shot the scene. We sent it back to the laboratory.

About four days later, we get a telegram. It says, "Why did you change the uniforms on the mounted police ? Now you put white coats on them, light coats, and here in the studio you had the dark red." "Suddenly they didn't know what happened. When I put the red filter on, it changed the red, you see, and made the red coats turn very light. Not completely white but very light.

So here, we'd seen them before and they had dark coats, and they come out of the door and they've got light coats.

They thought they'd blame it onto the costume man. But they didn't realize what I had done, and no one knows to this day, so they should -- well, they blame it on maybe the film stock or something wrong. So we re-made it. But I knew what happened, and I had

to go back to the orthochromatic film, you see, to match up.

Q: Panchromatic was used later on -- reds --

Howe: Oh yes, reds. If you didn't use a filter, the red came out very nice, but it wasn't completely black, you see, but you could use panchromatic and do many things with it.

Q: You had good conditions for shooting ?

Howe: In Canada, yes. It was beautiful up there, shooting. I remember -- of course Estelle Taylor at that time was in love with Jack Dempsey. I remember he came up. It was wonderful to get to meet the great Jack Dempsey, the champion.

Q: Was Thomas ^{Meighan}Mann pleasant to work with ?

Howe: Thomas ^{Meighan}Mann, yes, very nice to work with. I had worked with him before. I was an assistant on a De Mille picture. But now I was a cameraman. Brennan was the one who was interesting to work with.

Q: The director.

Howe: Yes.

Q: In what way ?

Howe: Well, he was an actor before, I think. And a director on the stage. And he used to act out all the scenes for the players, see, walk through them, you know.

Q: Both male and female ?

Howe: Yes.Yes. I had made another film with Mr. Brennan, "Woman

with Four Faces, " with Richard Dix and Betty Compson, and I think Richard Dix was in jail and Betty Compson was supposed to be made up like an elderly woman, like Richard Dix's mother, to go and visit him in jail and to tell him, "Always look up above for help, my son." You see. As a preparation for an escape, because there would be a plane, airplane, dive over the prison yard with , when they were playing baseball on a Sunday, and Richard Dix would be in the audience, and he would run out and grab this ladder and hang on and they would pull him out of the prison. It's nearly impossible, you know, to hang onto the rope, but that's what it was.

So I went to the studio one night late to do some -- I always worked around in the back room, made still pictures, and I would develop them, you see. And as I went to the gate, went into the studio gate, I looked down on the stage. There I see this old woman with a shawl around and a cane. I said, to the gate man, "Who is that down there?"

He said, " I don't know. " He said, "That old director, he's down there, he's been walking around there, he's mumbling, rehearsing, I guess. "

So I walked down. It was Herbert Brennan, made up like an old woman with a shawl, with the glasses, with a cane, and he just kept looking up. He says, "Remember, now, my son, always look up for help. " And he's walking around the stage rehearsing himself, you see.

But you know, Charles, in this picture, "The Woman With Four Faces, " I had to photograph this plane diving down on this prison yard on Sunday. So we went to San Francisco , the San Quentin Prison it was, and we had permission. So I mounted the camera on the

airplane, and we flew over, and we made the dive two or three times, and I noticed the guards pointing their rifles at us.

And you know what had happened ? They had sent the permit over to the prison officials by car, and we flew over, we got there before the permit, and they were shooting at us!

I didn't know it till we got home. I was glad to get back.

Q: The "Rough Riders" was shot around San Antonio, wasn't it , in Texas?

Howe: That was shot in San Antonio. Victor Fleming directed. We had Charlie Farrell . Very interesting. I always enjoyed working with Victor Fleming. We were very good friends together.

Q: It was about the Rough Riders and Teddy Roosevelt.

Howe: Yes, Teddy Roosevelt. We had one scene where they were to take a lot of wild horses and break them for saddle. So they found a place out on the fairgrounds, and they advertised in the papers, they wanted cowboys, riders, to break wild horses. Everybody thought they naturally could ride a wild horse -- they applied for the job. Can you imagine, 400 wild horses, never been ridden before, and they saddle them and turn them loose all at one time!

Well, I never saw so many fellows tossed in the air. These fellows, they weren't really good riders. They just thought they wanted to get in the movies, you see. I think there were about 40 or 50 of them taken to the first aid camp.

It was dusty. The horses, the minute they started bucking, they kicked up so much dust, and all I could see was people, fellows going up through that dust in the air.

It was a great scene. I remember, Charlie Farrell was in that picture. George Bancroft. Another actor, one of the -- Noah ^{Beery} Barry. It was hot in San Antonio.

Victor Fleming, you know, he was quite a guy. I think he was a quarter Indian, big, 6 foot 2 or 3, good looking fellow, big hands. I used to look through a Bell and Howell camera, and I had to look out through the prism to focus, to line up my shots, and he used to say, "Oh, you've looked through enough, " and hit me on the back of the neck, and his big hands, you know -- oh, it made me dizzy.

I said, "Now, cut it out, Vic. " He always did that. Every day he'd hit me back of the neck. So I said, how am I going to keep this fellow from hitting me ? So I thought of a bright idea. I took a little piece of cotton and adhesive tape, I'd just stick it back of my neck, see, so when he looked down he thought I had a boil. He ^owuldn't hit me. Oh, this was wonderful. Every day I had to put that little piece of adhesive tape and cotton.

This went on for a couple of weeks, and I guess he began to think, it should be well, whatever'd happened, so one day through this heat in San Antonio the tape came loose and it flipped over, and he saw that I was fooling him, you see.

Well, he hit me -- I tell you, he knocked me out. He was a sadistic kind of a guy.

Before he came into the movies, he was a taxicab driver on Spring Street, and he used to tell me what they used to do. The streetcar, the motorman -- they used to try to run the taxi cabs over, you see, and they'd try to beat each other. They didn't have any signals in those days. So he said, "you know what we'd do , Jimmy ?

We'd wait till it rained, real rain hard, and when the street car would stop on the corner, we'd take our cabs and run over what they called that front part, cow catcher, they called it -- "

Anyway, it was something they put in front of the car to go along. And they would bend it down. Fender. They would run over it and bend it, and the motorman or conductor would have to get out in this rain, get soaking wet, trying to straighten this thing so the car could go , you see.

I remember on that picture, we had to have a balloon to go up, observation balloon. That was during the Spanish-American War. They went to Cuba, San Juan Hill, you see, they charged up. And we had this gas filled balloon in San Antonio.

He said, "Jimmy, you want to take a ride in it ?"

I said, "Sure."

He said, "Take your camera up there and get a shot. "

I said, "Fine. " He put the camera in this basket and he let this thing up there, and we got some shots, you know.

Then I said, "Victor, take us down. " I must have been up about 150 feet or so. And here he was, we had a rope fastened onto this basket, and Vic Fleming I would see down there swinging this rope. You know what he was trying to do ? He was trying to get it loose up there. You see ? Well, the only one who knew how to run this balloon was the man who owned the balloon. He had a son about 12 years old and he went up with us. He's swinging and I asked the kid, "What happens if the balloon gets loose ? "

He said, "Well , I think my dad always said he'd pull this string and let some of the gas out. " You know.

I said, "What are these sand bags here for ?"

He said, "Well, if we want to go up higher, we throw them off, you see. "

Here was this Vic Fleming trying to shake this rope loose. He's crazy.. Vicious.

Q: Vicious.

Howe: Oh! Another time we were making a film with Richard Dix -- "Zane Grey Story. " We were riding along the trail, about 1500 feet up, and suddenly he rode in front and he waved his hands. He said, "Stop, everybody, get off. There's a rattlesnake up here in front."

We got off and went down there, and there was a rattlesnake. He got a stick and he got ahold of the rattlesnake's neck and picked it up and looked at it and finally he threw it down. He always carried a little .22 pocket pistol, and a hatchet. He used to chop his way through the woods to get cameras set up, you see. So he said, "Now, fellows, I want to show you what a good shot I am. Without looking at this snake, I'm going to turn around and I'm going to shoot this snake right through the head. "

So we stood there, "Go ahead, go ahead. "

So he pulled this gun out, pointed it, and he pulled the trigger and he hit the snake right through the head.

My assistant, name was Archie Stout, he was there. He said, "You're such a good shot, let me see you shoot this cigarette out of my hand. "

He said, "Hold it up. " He stood about eight feet away. And he aimed and he shot, and you know what ? He shot him right through the finger. See ?

Vic Fleming, he was -- he had kidney stones.

And one day up in the mountains, we hear this groaning, groaning. I went over and it was Vic Fleming . He was lying -- we were sleeping in tents, and he'd fallen out of the bed, and he was lying in this mud. It was raining. Here's Vic. He was so big I couldn't pick him up, put him on the cot.

He said, "Jimmy, there's some tablets over there, get some, give me some water and give me some tablets. "

I said, "Can I do anything for you ?"

He said, "No, you can't. I'm passing kidney stones. I'll be all right. "

Finally he got back to bed and these tablets, I guess they eased his pain, but next day he showed me these stones he'd passed with his pee, you see.

Then he was sick for a while. I went over to visit him in his house. He lived down here not far from the studio in the early days. He was lying in bed there. Do you know what he had prowling all over him, playing ? A gila monster. Yes. They look like a little small alligator, you know. He got this gila monster. He found it in the desert some place. He took it home and it was a pet. And they're very poisonous. But here ^{he} was lying down playing with this gila monster.

.....

Side 2

Q: went back to Texas. In "Rough Riders" and you returned there for "Hud."

Howe: We were down in San Antone, Texas. They had a little small place, , Texas. Well, that was my first picture with ? who I think is a Wood, a very strange director .

Q: He had a very realistic and unglamorous style in it.

Howe: I went out to talk to Mr. ^{Ritt} about the film.

He said, "Jimmy, you know we're going to make this picture around this country. I don't think you're going to like it. There's nothing much to photograph. I don't know what you're going to do," he said, "all you're going to have is flat plains." He said, "Do you think that you can put clouds in?"

I said, "Yes. What kind of clouds do you want?"

"Storm clouds." So we looked for cloud shots. For a week we looked for clouds, because we could dub them in.

I said, "Clouds are good, but it's going to hinder your camera movements. When you zoom in for close-ups, what are we going to do with the clouds then?"

He said, "Well, we'll just use them in certain shots."

I said, "Fine."

He said, "Next week we'll go down and look at the location of the film. And then see what you think about it. I'd like to have you do this film. I'd like to be working with you. I thought of you often and hoped the opportunity would develop."

He said, "We'll go down and look at the location and see what you think."

Now, he gave me the script and I read it. I could see, they were living on this ranch of thousands of acres, raising cattle. And the loneliness, the isolation. When we went down to look at the location, I thought it was very important not to see any other farms or any other -- just flat land as far as you could see, and the sky. And to see how isolation and loneliness could be.

I couldn't see clouds in it, because they would become too decorative. It would look a little too pretty. I didn't want any beautiful scenery. There was the harshness of it, the bleakness.

So I said to him, "You know, Marty, I think it's wrong to put clouds in this, in these scenes. I think the thing is to, if we do have clouds, I'd have to put a filter in it to filter them out, to keep that hot sky and that hot ground that reaches as far as you can see. " You see ? " I think it would make a kind of a mood, a style we should have, and always you hear the wind blowing a little, and it swells and dies down now and then, you see. Then you have the housekeeper, she's a woman there who takes care of the house -- you know, you look at it and you understand the problems she would have, besides just cooking for the men and so on."

He said, "Well, that's a good idea. " So, when we went down there, ... there were the clouds. So I had to put on a filter and filter the clouds out.

By the time I left, a few clouds ... there were cattle, a huge ... and they drove these cattle, heads of cattle down, to shoot them (?)
(quality so poor here I can't understand it --EE)

And I said to Marty, "There are a few clouds...."

Marty said, "Well, for this we'd just better leave them in. "

I would consult with the director about making these decisions. I didn't want to take them on myself. I think that's the key to our relationship, mutual respect. I've always had great respect for the director. I think the cameraman should respect the director, and cameramen have respect for each other.

And where they lose respect...

You can't always be right.

Q: Where was "Hombre" shot ?

Howe: It was shot down in Arizona, about Tucson.

Q: Did you enjoy working with Paul Newman ?

Howe: Yes, I liked Paul Newman. I worked with him. I never had much close relations with Newman. He's a nice fellow. He's quiet, never says much . I could never figure him out. I don't think he could figure me out, either. Very cooperative. I can remember, he does his work -- the guy's so easy, you know, you don't know how ... That's what makes for great artistry, this ability to simplify things, you know.

I remember, "Hombre" was -- there was one sequence where they kept going up and up, up the hill, the mountain, yes, to the mine, and these thieves were coming to attack the stage coach.

One thing I remember is, that we had to go down about 500 feet, down in this gully, to photograph the bandits. And it was easy going down, but we forgot that we had to come back up. You know, and I was not as young as I was when I did the "Alaskan" --- that was what, what , years ago. I was probably about 60 ?

So they had to tie ropes . We had to hang onto the ropes and walk up , and you know, I got up, but a lot of the older players, Frederic March, that's the man I was worried about. Now, Frederic says he's about my age. I'm quite sure that he's a little older than I am. But he always said, "You know, Jimmy, I'm only about a year older than you. "

I said, "That's wonderful. You don't seem to be that old. "

I knew damn well he was about five years older than I.

But we had to have especially for the women, to climb up and down these steep cliffs.

When you look at the movie, you enjoy it, but you don't really know what the actors and the crew and people have to do to make them. What it involves . You forget. You never think about the difficulties. Like going down into this valley, this gulch, you know, and you just keep walking and walking and before you know it you're down 400 feet. You never realize that you have to climb back up there.

Q: There are quite a few hazards in filming Westerns.

Howe: Oh yes. You not only have to worry about the people climbing ahead of you, kicking rocks down at you, but you've got to be careful where you put your hands, because you don't know where a rattlesnake might be, any time. And the cactus, the sharp needles, you know. You have to wear boots , and boots are heavy. And you've got to be careful where you put your hands. The worst thing you can do is, you put your hand on a rock and there will be a rattler there.

Q: I'm always amazed by those shots, flights of arrows from Red Indians, that shoot directly into those without actually hitting the camera or the crew.

Howe: Well, we had pretty good arrow men, you know. Naturally they're rubber pointed. But still, it's dangerous. There are many dangers. There are many risks, when you're making a movie.

Many people have been hurt. But always they have stunt men to do a lot of these stunts for them, for the stars, because nobody is going to risk a star rolling down a cliff, jumping out of a two story building. It shouldn't be done. You shouldn't expect a star to do that.

Q: In "Tom Sawyer " there was a very interesting scene there, the children are locked in a cave, and after the picnic, and then Victor Jorry as the Red Indian , Injun Joe, falls into the cavern. Now, is that done by some kind of a reverse shot ?

Howe: Yes, that was done by what we call matched shots. He falls down in the cavern, you see.

"Tom Sawyer " was my first technicolor picture. It was ^{? Selznick} Selznick. I enjoyed working on that picture. I enjoy working with kids.

I think, just the
Q: -- the glow of candles in the darkness.

Howe: Yes, You see, there are many things you can use in color. I thought, when we were working on the cave, they walked around with these candles, as the only light source. But Tom Sawyer was wondering how they're going to get out of this cave. They're lost. So I thought, well, you know, it's wonderful, here now we have color. We've got candle light. It's a soft yellow glow. Now, let's have them walking around in this cave, looking for how they're going to get out, and holding these candles, and suddenly his hand goes through a white light. The color changes. And he wonders, what happened ? They look up, he looks up and he can see a little crack there, way up high, and that's what the sunlight

came down through. You see ? I think that's what makes the use of color. Now he sees that little streak of light up there, and -- what's the name of that girl ?

Q: Becky.

Howe: Becky , he says, "Becky, that's a hole up there. Now we can get out of this cave. " And they start climbing towards that hole. You see, Charles, that's why I say color is wonderful to work with.

Q: It catches the eye of the --

Howe; _-- yes, it has a certain -- but color I think can be used much more for dramatic films. I think anyone who makes color films should study about color, the psychology of color, applied to motion pictures.

Q: You hid, didn't you, a special something inside ?

Howe: Oh yes. Well, you know, Mr. ^{Selznick} ~~Selznick~~ -- I always had the greatest respect for Mr. ^{Selznick} ~~Selznick~~, because if he wanted something, he would give you all the time and facilities to carry it out, and to me, he was one of the great independent producers.

"Jimmy, " he says, "you know, we have a scene here where Tom Sawyer and Becky walk through a cave. It's tunnel-like!" He said, "Now, I don't want a cave built for you, that you can take one part side out and photograph it and light it, because I don't think it would look real. We're going to build this cave and tunnel, this tunnel they walk through , just the way it should be in the story. Now, it's up to you now to go ahead and light it so it looks real. I'm going to build it real, now you've got to help

make it look real by lighting it. "

Well, you know, in those days with technicolor they needed about 800 foot candles. That's a lot of light. Well, to light this old cave, the way they walked through, Mr. Sel^zneck said, "I want to see just a dark screen, and suddenly we see the screen light up and a hand coming in, and it's a candle and it lights up the entrance, but you can't see beyond the entrance, until they walk in, Tom and Becky walking through this tunnel, and the candle light goes ahead of them, and they become lit with it. "

But, 800 foot candles, how am I going to light this cave ? So my electrician and I got together, we try to hide lights in, and with dimmers and, oh, it didn't work. It just was so artificial, when we saw light coming in from other sources, rather than from this candle source.

So I thought, well, the only thing I can do is to build a harness and strap it on this boy and put his clothes over it, we'll have a little thing on it, so we mounted the largest^{est} globe I could get -- it was a , I think it was a 10,000 watt globe -- each globe -- but the boy's body could just cover it. And it gives off a lot of heat, so we pad this boy with an asbestos vest, so it wouldn't hurt his eyes because we want to photograph his back, you see, his back going through this tunnel, so I had to put glasses on this boy Tommy with dark lenses on his glass, so the light wouldn't hurt his eyes and he could see, and he held this candle and led Becky , and Becky had dark glasses on so the light wouldn't hurt her eyes.

Well, that globe gave off about 350 foot candles, for about 10 feet ahead of him , as they walked through. That's the way we accomplished it. But the only thing I asked was for them to

turn off the dripping water. They had dripping water coming dripping down from the cave. I said, "No, that has to be -- forget that. " Nobody will miss the dripping water.

I was afraid that that that water would drip on the globe and it would blow up, you see.

But the scene worked out.

Q: Is it possible to photograph a torch or a candle without any augmentation ?

Howe: It's very difficult. Because you have to have other lights around, and the other lights just diminish the light of the candle.

You can photograph striking a match, and the first glow of the match, you can get, but after that first glow, then it's difficult, Charles. It doesn't develop. No. We haven't got the film quite -- I think you could take two or three kitchen matches and light it and hold it close to this black and white , we could get an exposure.

Q: Not in color.

Howe:Not in color yet.

Q: I know that in "Molly Maguires " in order to light the mine, they used torch lights.

Howe: Yes, in "Molly Maguires " I did have one shot -- unfortunately it was cut out. It was one of my favorite shots. Where Richard Harris was writing a letter -- no, he was writing a message to his girl friend, who was not in this village, mining town. And all he had was an oil lamp. And I had a little globe, oh, the size of, smaller than a peanut, -- it was a globe that they had made

to light up a certain instrument for the astronauts going to the moon. And I was able to secure about six of these little globes, because I needed them first to put on the miners' caps to light up as they walked into the mine, and I used this one little globe in this one scene, where Richard Harris was writing this letter, and all he had was this oil lamp. And I was able to hide this globe behind this oil lamp to light up the whole scene.

I photographed it in color. I think the globe gave me about 45 foot candles, technically speaking -- we had to use normally 100 foot to get a normal exposure, but being as this was a light effect, I didn't need 100 foot candles. 45 foot just worked out beautifully.

But you know, they had to cut the scene out. There's so many scenes cut out. That's the most, oh, frustrating thing for a cameraman, that sometimes you get certain scenes that are just wonderful, and you say "oh my, my other cameramen are going to see this and they're going to appreciate it. "

You know, it's wonderful, I love to do something sometimes so that for my cameramen friends to say, "Oh, he did that just right. "

But this was cut out.

Q: You should have kept it yourself.

Howe: Oh yes, I wish I could keep some of these things. You know, I never kept things because I always felt that you make something, it doesn't belong to you anymore, it just belongs to the public, and I've never been a collector of things I've done. I wish I had kept some of the films.

Q: You were doing sets in deep focus long before it became so widely

publicized in "Citizen Kane. "

Howe: Well, yes, Charles, I -- we were on a trip to the Orient, before sound came in, and when I came back, I was away, oh, less than a year, but anyway when I returned to Hollywood, sound had come in. Do you know, I couldn't get a job. They would say, "Have you made a sound picture ?"

Naturally I hadn't. I was away. "Oh well, it's a new thing. " It was a big mystery.

Well, I went around looking for an opportunity to photograph a picture with sound, and I just couldn't get in.

Well, I went to a preview and I met Alan He was there. I had worked with him before in the silent movies. At Lasky Studios, there was I made a picture called, oh, I've forgotten now, something with horse in it. Anyway, he said, "Jimmy, what are you doing . "

I said, "Nothing. I'm trying to find a job. "

"Why don't you come over and see me ? I'm at Fox. "

Q: " The "Sea Horses " ?

Howe: "The Sea Horses, " that's where I photographed Alan

So I went over to see Alan, but he wasn't in, and I met Vernon K . Howard. He said, "What are you doing , Jimmy ?"

I said, "I just came over to see Alan but he's not in."

"You working?"

I said, "No, I can't get a job. I've been out for a year. They say sound is a mystery and I've never made a sound picture. "

"Come in the office, I want to talk to you. "

I went in. He said, "You know, I'm going to make a

picture called "TransAtlantic" with Edmund Lowe and Myrna Loy. I'm in the dog house here at Fox. I've been assigned two or three cameramen and each time they take him away from me. I'd like to have you do the picture for me. "

I said, "Fine, I'd love it. I need the job. "

He said, "OK, you come on and shoot some tests. " He said, "You know, I've been having trouble with tests that come out a little bit out of focus. I don't know why. Something wrong. With the lenses, or something."

They had been using this incandescent lighting which is more or less on the red side, orange. So I felt, well, maybe the lenses are not corrected yet for this incandescent lighting. I didn't have a great deal of money. So I invested in some new lenses, Taylor, Hobson and Cook, British lenses, very good lenses. And they came out, some new lenses, I think it was corrected. I bought three lenses . It cost me about, I don't know, \$800, something like that.

So I went and shot the tests and I told him, I said, "Bill, you know, I had to buy these lenses on my own. Now, it only takes two or three days to make the tests. If you can stretch these tests out for a week or ten days, I'd earn enough money, if they didn't like the tests, to pay for these lenses, you see. "

He said, "OK, that's all right, I can arrange that. "

We shot the tests. They liked it. They liked the way I made the tests . So they engaged me for the film. And Bill Howard said, "Jimmy, I want to give this picture a certain style. How can we go about making it a certain style ?"

I said, "Well, I can do it with lighting, kind of a low, sketchy, key lighting, it's a mystery thing. " But I said, "You know,

Bill, I think one thing that might give it a style is, to photograph the whole picture with a wide angle lense, a 25 millimeter or 24, and just use that one lense, with exception when we shoot the close-ups. If we use that wide angle close up, it would distort the people a little bit too much. "

And that changed the lense. Now, we have to build the sets, you see, for that lense, in kind of a forced perspective. So we had an architect in, Gordon Wells. Well, he wanted to build the sets normal on the trans-Atlantic liner, but with a wide angle lense, it didn't work out. The passageways were too wide.

I said, "Make them narrower. " So we had to strike up changes in design, we had quite some trouble, he and I. We just got so that we had a hard time getting along because I was making too many changes and he didn't understand wide angle.

Well, by using a wide angle lense, and stopping down a little, to 4.5, 4, I could carry the depth of focus, so that I said, "Bill, you can have action any place, it will all be shot. Now, you have someone over there, 10, 15 feet away, he'll be shot, you don't have to cut to a close-up, you see. "

Usually, they're out of focus, you cut to a close-up, so you could see them. Then you cut back. Well, a lot of times your action is playing so well, you don't want to interrupt that action by cutting into a close-up. Just because he was out of focus. You see?"

And it was wonderful. Well, to make a long story short, the film "Trans-Atlantic, " we moved the cameras and we did everything and it had a certain style, and for talkies at that period, it revolutionized a certain thing photographically.

Q: You used muslin ceilings, did you ?

Howe: Yes, we used ceilings. We closed it in. And I think that was the beginning of what Greg Toland later in "Citizen Kane" called pan-focus, pan meaning overall focus.

Q: He always claimed that he originated that.

Howe: No, he didn't originate it. Greg and I were good friends, and we talked about soft focus lenses and that, and I told him what I was doing in "Trans-Atlantic." And he carried that a little further with "Citizen Kane." He carried it further than I did, I must say, and he used what they call Waterhouse stops. That's, you don't turn the diaphragm, you drop a little slot in with a little hole in it that you figure for the exposure. It's a technical thing that only photographers will understand. But it doesn't matter, whether it's a Waterhouse or whether it's a diaphragm that you close down, as long as you close down a wide angle lens, the more you close down, the smaller the aperture, the more feel of sharpness you'd get, you see. And by using a wide angle lens, it's very simple, they carried more. But the fact that he said he origina^ted it, I don't think -- there's no one originated it, it's originated by the one that used the lens. The length, the focal length the lens was.

Q: You originated it.

Howe: You see, I used it on this picture, "Trans-Atlantic," which, by the way, after two weeks of photographing this film, the authority at Fox didn't know whether they liked it or not. But after two weeks I noticed that the studio manager came over to the set, and I saw him one day looking up at me. I thought something was

wrong. His name was Keith Weeks. He said, "Jimmy, when you have a moment, will you come down ? I'd like to talk to you. "

So I did."What do you want ?"

He said, "Would you come into my office after work ? I'd like to talk to you. I want to give you a contract, talk to you about a contract." You see.

So I said, "Fine. " I came in and talked to him about it. He said, "We like your work. First, it's rather strange, we didn't know if we liked it, but , now everybody seems to like your work, what you're doing." He said, "We'd like to give you a contract for four years.How much money do you want ?"

So I told him. He said, "We can't pay you that kind of money. Everybody else is getting a lot less money, and if we pay you that, they want that much. "

I said, "Look, I can't help about what they want, but if you want me, this is what I want. "

And do you know, until I came there, about a month or so, I was out of a job for a year. But since they want me then, I say, I think, -- well, maybe, this is the only chance I can-- you know -- ask for a little more money.

So I did sign up for a three or four year contract.

Q: I'd like to ask you about stars youphotographed. To me, the most beautiful close-ups I've seen in any film were Hedy Lamarr in "Algiers. "

Howe: Yes. Yes.

Q: What technique did you use to give her that beautiful , incredible look, or was she simply so naturally photogenic that it didn't require

any technique ?

Howe: Well, you know, in photography, Charles, the subject really has to be beautiful. We can't just go ahead and take a sow's ear and make it look a beautiful thing. We can make it interesting, but not beautiful. So when I was called to make a film called "Algiers " with John Cromwell directing, whom I'd made a picture for with Selznick called "Prisoner of Zenda, " and he liked my work and liked me and I had great respect for Mr. Cromwell, so he asked me to come and do "Algiers. " Walter Wanger was the producer , and it had Charles Boyer and Hedy Lamarr. I think it was Hedy's first picture.

Q: In America.

Howe: In America. I'd heard her. And I saw her in a film called "Ecstasy. " So , I didn't think much about how beautiful I should make her. I knew she was very lovely to photograph. And we had one sequence, scene in this casbah, when Boyer comes to see her and he fell in love with her. He looked at her, how beautiful she was.

And Mr. Cromwell said, "Jimmy, you know, this is where we can make a payoff, so I wish you'd take your time now and make her look as beautiful as you can."

So I did. I spent two hours to make her close-ups, and the close-ups of her throat, her ears, eyes, mouth, you know. I diffused it. I thought I made it way lovely.

So we ran the rushes, and she saw it. She said, "Oh, that's beautiful. Why didn't you make me look that beautiful in the other scenes ? "

I said, "Well, Hedy, I could do it. But -- "

She said, "I'm going to ask Mr. Wanger to remake all those

other close-ups to make me look as beautiful as this. "

I said, "That's fine, but you know what will happen? "

She said, "What ?"

I said, "You know, we're leading up to a certain thing. Now, if I make all the other close-ups as beautiful as this, then when we lead up to this, where do we go ? We don't have any place to go. If they all look alike, they all look so beautiful -- you see? Now, we're leading up to this, and this is where you really should, this is where Charles Boyer saw you and you look so beautiful. Then from here on, everybody looks at you always the same, you're just beautiful, and they remember that and that's where he's going to follow you out where he shouldn't go down to get to the boat, expose himself , to get shot. "

So you see, in photography, you've got to be able to use your lighting and camera, where to use photography dramatically -- if I had made her as beautiful throughout, then when we come to this point where Boyer meets her in this casbah, and looks at her and she's so beautiful, it wouldn't pay off then.

Q: He's seeing her with the eyes of his first love.

Howe: Yes. Yes.

Q: So that you have to graduate and step build it.

Howe: Right. Right.

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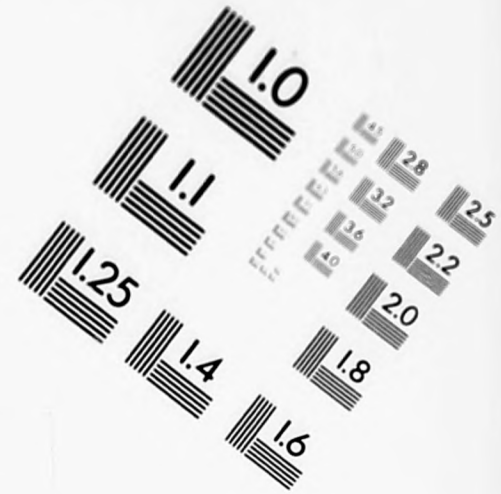
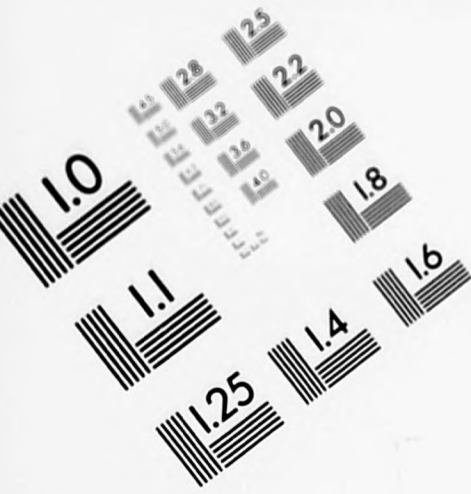
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