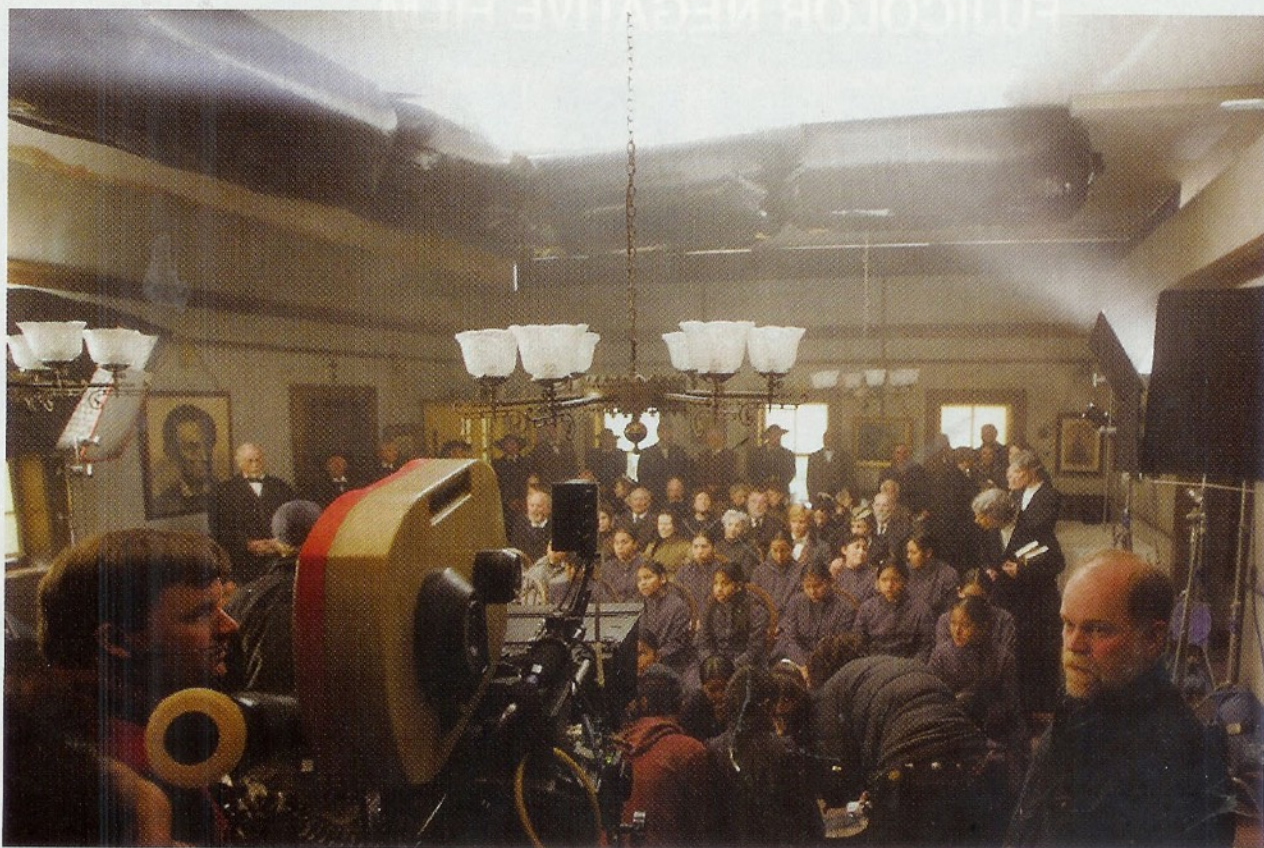


Western Perspectives

Right: Wages (far right) supervises the use of his "WagBags" — homemade helium balloons made from black Visqueen that can be used to flag light bouncing off of ceilings or walls. "I've had people laugh right in my face when they first see the bags," he says, "but they stop laughing when they see how effective they are." Below: Another of Wages' homemade balloon fixtures, which he says is constructed from "those 6-foot plastic garbage bags you use to throw away Christmas trees."

Costing roughly \$100 apiece, the units contain sockets for two 600-watt tungsten bulbs that are protected by cages. They can float up to 40' in the air on just a quarter tank of helium, and thanks to the thinness of the plastic, they provide as much illumination as more standard 4K balloons. The downside, according to Wages, is that the balloons are "very, very fragile. Unlike regular rental balloons, though, mine aren't under pressure, so they'll float for awhile even if there's a hole in the top, and you can fix any holes with regular cellophane tape."



think I've helped prove that TV doesn't always have to be about medium shots and close-ups. Viewers are getting past that, and it's only some producers and network executives who are trying to keep that myth alive."

Into the West was shot in 3-perf Super 35mm with a Panavision package comprising Panaflex Gold

IIs, a Lightweight and an Arri 35-3; in a few instances, Wages also used a pair of Millennium XLs. "Unless you're doing a lot of effects, the camera body is really just what the film runs through," Caso observes. "It's the lenses that photograph the picture, and by going with some lower-tech cameras we were able to afford a larger lens selection." In fact,

he and Wages chose Panavision gear chiefly because of their preference for Primo lenses. They carried Primo 17.5-75mm T2.3 4:1 and 24-275mm T2.8 11:1 zooms and some Ultra Speed primes "for confined spaces," says Wages. He adds that he likes the slight flare Ultra Speeds exhibit, which "I find to be very attractive for night work on a period piece." But he maintains that he shot "90 percent" of his segments with the 4:1 zoom on the A camera and the 11:1 zoom on the B camera.

Caso, who also stayed on zooms much of the time, always worked at the extreme ends of the lenses. "I used wide lenses up close to put the audience in the center of the action in the character's personal space. I wanted to put the viewer right there in the West at that time without romanticizing or glorifying the look. When I used long lenses, it was to evoke the majesty of our locations, to pull the background in. I tended to stay away from all the midrange lenses, everything from 32mm to 100mm. In fact, in episode



four, I didn't use those at all."

The cinematographers' primary film stock, Fuji Super-F 400T 8582, raised some brows during prep. Wages recalls, "The first question Steven asked me was, 'Why are you shooting Fuji?' I chose it because 8582 reads more into the highlights and shadows than any other stock I've used. It has more latitude than the older medium-speed stocks but has a similar grain structure. I'd rather accept a little more grain all the time than have [the look] change in the middle of a scene." Caso agrees, adding that Fuji's well-known felicity with muted colors was a valuable asset for a period piece. It also helped that the cinematographers happened to pitch Spielberg on the idea at a serendipitous moment. "He said he and Janusz Kaminski [ASC] were thinking of using Fuji on the film they were about to start," says Caso, "so he was very amenable to our experimenting with it. It was a happy coincidence."

Wages notes that one attractive feature of Panavision cameras is the gel slot behind the lens mount. "That enables me to shoot 400-speed tungsten stock outdoors in sunlight and put an 85N.9 in the back so the operator doesn't have to look through such a dark filter," he explains. "Then, as we get toward the end of the day, instead of changing film stocks, I just pull filters."

Over the years, Wages has invented a number of tools to facilitate working in tricky practical locations on short schedules. One such device is the WagBag, a black helium balloon that he uses to flag light bouncing off of white ceilings or walls. (See *Tricks of the Trade*, AC July '03.) WagBags came in handy throughout the *Into the West* shoot, especially for Wages, whose episodes featured more interiors than Caso's. "One set in which they were especially helpful was the Carlisle Indian School, which was built inside the abandoned prison that served as our



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Western Perspectives



The greenscreen at the end of this street facilitated the addition of visual effects during post.

production base in New Mexico," says Wages. "The ceiling was only about 13½ feet high and was white acoustic tile, perfect for bouncing light."

Wages also jerry-rigged an impressive creation for the third episode of *Into the West*: a low-tech taking lens fashioned out of cardboard tubing and a magnifying glass that he hot-glued to a Panavision Pinatar lens mount. "A lens mount is not something Panavision just hands out," he notes, but apparently, he has built up enough credit with the company's top brass to facilitate such experiments. "I called up [senior vice president] Bob Harvey, and he said to have at it." Hastily constructed during the last week of prep, the cardboard lens was originally intended to lend a unique look to a sequence of visions experienced by the series' main Native American character, *Loved by the Buffalo*. Wages relied on his still-photography background to design the device. "This wasn't the first time I'd done something like this," he notes. "I knew where I was going with it.

My original idea was to shoot with my own 38mm Zone Plate. [Ed. Note: A Zone Plate is a modified pinhole usually made of 35mm lithographic film; it consists of a clear hole at center surrounded by concentric rings that are alternately transparent and opaque.] But my Zone Plate has a stop of about f90 — the largest pinhole is about f180 — and we were shooting in Calgary in December, when the days were short and the sun was never higher than 50 degrees, so there wasn't enough light."

Then Wages hit upon the idea to fasten the magnifying glass to the cardboard tubes. "When I tested it, I estimated it at an 85mm with an f-stop of 0.7, so it's probably the fastest lens I've ever seen."

Interestingly, the lens flared so much that any image it captured was effectively obscured. Undeterred, Wages glued an aperture made of blackwrap behind the lens element and tried again. "I was able to get the lens to around an f2.8, and it made it a whole lot sharper." The trick was making the aperture cross-shaped

instead of round. "Instead of circles of confusion, it made weird little crosses that sent subtle streaks off to the four corners of the frame. They were hard to notice, but when I shot through tree limbs and other objects, it created a beautiful effect. A filter couldn't have done that, nor could any effect we might've added in post. And it cost about \$7 to make."

Director Sergio Mimica-Gezzan was so impressed with the look rendered by the lens that he decided to employ it chiefly for shots representing the point of view of daguerrotype photographer Ethan Biggs (Daniel Gillies) as he frames his subjects. "The lens only had a focus travel of about 1 inch, and it went from 2 inches to infinity within that, which made it very difficult to focus," says Wages. "But we had a real daguerrotype camera on set, and believe me, the lens on that thing was no better than the one I made. Therefore, it had exactly the right look. We also used the device for one of the vision sequences, but we created the effect we wanted for most of the visions by shooting at 8 fps and transferring at 8 fps to create a smearing effect."

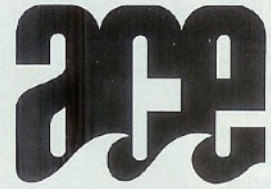
Caso also used some unusual equipment to obtain unconventional compositions. In one episode, a young Native American brave (Simon Baker) gets caught in a huge buffalo stampede, but the intervention of the tribe's medicine man causes the herd to mysteriously flow around the boy, leaving him rattled but unharmed — and worthy of a new name, *Loved by the Buffalo*. "You've seen buffalo stampedes in other movies, but you've never seen a camera *inside* the stampede," says Caso. "The ranch where we shot the sequence had 50 or 60 head of buffalo we were using for close-up work, so we had them build a squeeze point while one of the ranchers got on an ATV and drove into the herd, filming with a Super

16mm Ikonoskop A-Cam. We got shots where the camera is literally right alongside stampeding buffalo, shots you've never seen before in any movie." The small, lightweight camera, which is equipped with a 9mm f1.5 Kinoptic lens, is shaped like a dog bone: a front bulge holds the taking lens, a rear bulge houses the film spools, and a thin middle provides the operator with a handy grip. (See New Products, AC Oct. '04.)

Caso also used the Ikonoskop to enhance a cavalry charge, known to history buffs as the Sand Creek Massacre, in episode four. The incident is perpetrated by Col. Chivington (Tom Berenger), who leads a mob of bloodthirsty soldiers into a valley that's home to a Native American village. The sequence, which involved hundreds of soldiers charging down three hilltops that surrounded 50 tepees, was covered with 10 cameras that were placed up to a quarter-mile apart. Complicating matters further was the fact that it was scheduled on the first day of production in Santa Fe. "We had a new crew, a new director, a new location, new everything, so we decided we'd really separate the men from the boys!" says Caso, chuckling. "We tried to make it look like 300 soldiers were coming from each direction, whereas we actually had about 300 soldiers total. We had a huge dolly track on the left mesa, two or three cameras parked behind Chivington's main charge, cameras planted all through the village, and some Eyemos [loaded with Fuji Super F-64D 8522] buried in the ground so the cavalry would run over them." As a final touch, he handed the Ikonoskop (loaded with Fuji Super F-64D 8622) to Ben Scott, one of the stuntmen racing on horseback alongside Chivington, and got "great shots down along the line of the horse's face, the flag, and Chivington's face." With director (and former cinematographer)

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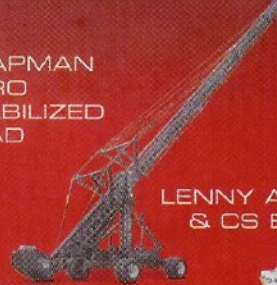
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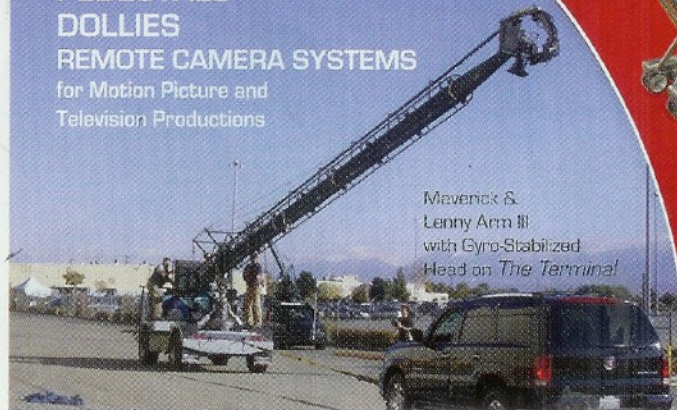


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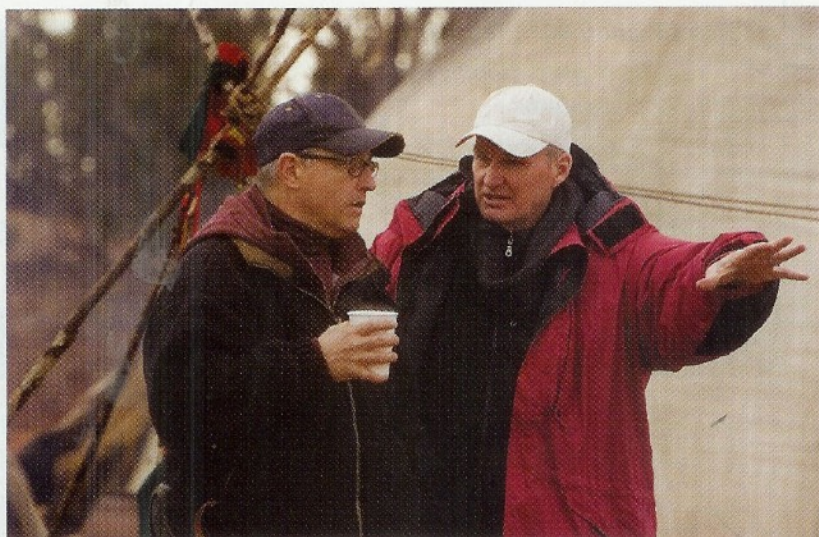
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Western Perspectives

Alan Caso (left) confers with fellow ASC member Michael Watkins, who directed one of the episodes of the miniseries.



Michael Watkins, ASC galloping between camera positions on a horse of his own, the crew filmed four takes and captured more than 40 angles of the action — and all before 11 a.m. Says Caso, “We knew anyone who’d stick it out through that would definitely last the rest of

the show!

“While filming the final episode, I handheld the Ikonoskop and followed one of the series’ enduring characters, Dog Star, through the melee of Wounded Knee,” he adds.

Although *Into the West* was

shot on film, the post process never left telecine. (The filmmakers watched DVD dailies transferred from hi-def masters throughout the shoot.) According to Caso, many telefilms and miniseries used to finish on film “for big gala premieres, but with digital projection, that’s no longer the case.” During filming in Canada, front-end lab work was handled in Vancouver; Alpha Cine Labs processed footage and Toybox generated dailies. Once the production moved to New Mexico, CFI-Technicolor in Los Angeles did the processing and Complete Post in Los Angeles provided dailies. All of the project’s final color correction was carried out at Complete Post.

“We had such a great dailies timer at Toybox, Mykel Thuncher,” notes Caso. “He really got it close enough to where [Complete Post colorist] Ed Twiford and I were able to get through the final timing of

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episode one fairly quickly. I sat in for four days with Ed, who just has a great eye. We spent the first two days working our way through the scenes from square one, adding more density, making the shadows richer, pulling a lot of the color out to keep it fairly desaturated. We got to within 15 minutes of finishing, and on the last day, we corrected the wide shots of all the remaining scenes to leave a blueprint, and the colorist filled in the spaces without me. He's so good, and I trusted him." Adds Wages, "I was very pleased with our dailies timers in both places. Mykel was terrific, and so was [Complete Post dailies colorist] Marc Wielage."

Wages exaggerated color-temperature differences during production, which simplified shooting setups and also made color correction easier in post. "When you put big lights with colored gels in front on a Condor, it creates a lot of

problems," he explains. "You get kickback off the gel that lights the Condor, and wind is an issue. Why bother, when I can dial the blue out in post? When I do night work, I don't gel HMIs, so the 'moonlight' is really blue, and the fire effect is tungsten with full 85, which looks really orange. When I go into the color correction, I can isolate and control those two individually because there's enough separation between them. I can alter the intensity of the moonlight or firelight without those tweaks affecting each other."

When Wages and Caso spoke to AC, Wages was filming his final episode and Caso was prepping his final episode, and both cinematographers were enthusiastic about the challenges the project had presented them with so far. They were also encouraged by the silence emanating from the Spielberg camp. "Steven's watching all the dailies," says Wages.

"They told us at the beginning, 'No news is good news. If you don't hear from him, you know he's happy.'" ■

TECHNICAL SPECS

16x9
Super 35mm (3-perf)
and Super 16mm

Panaflex Gold II, Lightweight,
Millennium XL;
Arri 35-3; Ikonoskop A-Cam;
Eyemo

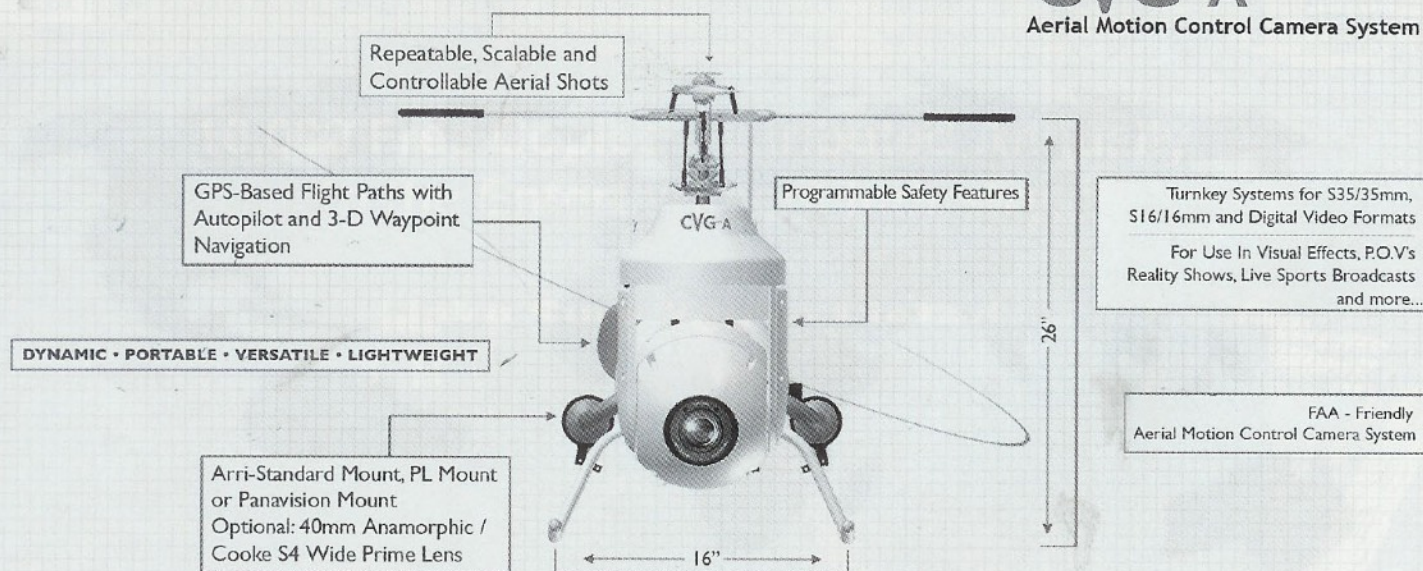
Primo and Ultra Speed lenses

Fuji Super F-400T 8582,
Super F-64D 8522/8622

Postproduction by
Alpha Cine Labs and Toybox
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CFI-Technicolor and
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