

When two worlds collide: aesthetics on a budget

Everybody is watching costs, so when Eric Trembl shot three television spots for the United States Air Force, he had to do more than capture visually intriguing images that are his hallmark as a cinematographer. He also had to work as quickly and efficiently as possible.

"We're in a recession," Trembl says. "We have to economize." Artistic sensibility, meet budgetary reality.

Production took place over a 10-day period, mostly at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. In keeping with the campaign's theme, "It's Not Science Fiction ... It's What We Do Every Day," Trembl captured footage depicting airmen conducting a variety of missions ranging from high-tech surveillance to search and rescue. Much of the footage was green screen shots filmed in a

hangar. That footage is integrated into a 3-D virtual world created by the post-production company MassMarket in Venice, California.

"The spots start with the feel of a combat video game, then cut to reality," Trembl explains. "Green screen elements are composited with film shot at practical locations."

The latter includes scenes filmed at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, where Trembl used 45- and 90-degree shutter angles to add a subtle staccato feeling to images of helicopters taking off in the desert.

"We also show some soldiers rescuing a colleague who has been injured," Trembl says. "The helicopters were insanely powerful and loud. We didn't have to do anything other than stand there and shoot film, because the helicopter blades were blowing things through the air around us."

Keeping production on budget required "incredible collaboration" between Trembl, his crew and director Phil Joanou (*U2: Rattle and Hum*, *Gridiron Gang*).

Trembl says tracking marks were laid down for green screen shots, giving him the option of shooting from other angles if there was time.

Trembl and his crew were able to move quickly and get more takes in the allotted time, while rendering the look he envisioned on KODAK VISION3 500T 5219 and KODAK VISION3 250D 5207 films.

"One of the beauties of film is you don't have all those cables and settings to double check like you do with digital," he says. "I love this (VISION3) stock in particular. I've used it for all my car commercials. It's got such fine grain and incredible latitude—it's

incredibly detailed in the shadows." Using film also played into the Air Force campaign's theme by giving a subtle organic quality to the non-virtual elements of the scenes.

To get that look of authenticity with digital cameras, Trembl says that he would have had to compensate for the "electronic" quality of the images, perhaps by using lower quality lenses or handheld cameras.

Some scenes were day-for-night shots. In those situations, Trembl used the 5207 film underexposed one stop. After testing three filters, he chose a new Tiffen model to create what he calls a "modern" day-for-night look. "The filter has almost a touch of turquoise blue," he says.

The exposure was perfect even underexposed. There was plenty of room for the colorist to fine-tune the look that the director envisioned.

Ten years ago, Trembl figures, he would have had twice as long to film comparable commercial spots. "We have to be very efficient and precise today, but we can't compromise quality," he stresses.



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1 Steadicam operator Mark Meyers is spotted by key grip Terry Ruffner as two soldiers jump onto padding in front of the bluescreen. (Photo credit: Eric Trembl)