

# The Expendables go to war

*The Expendables* opens with a small band of mercenaries battling to free hostages who have been captured by Somali pirates. Barney Ross, the leader of the mercenaries, is played by Sylvester Stallone. Stallone co-authored the script and directed the film. It was his first co-venture with Jeff Kimball, ASC since they collaborated on the production of *The Specialist* in 1994.

*The Expendables* was produced at locations and on sets in New Orleans and on the coast of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where exterior scenes on the island were filmed. The movie was produced in Super 35 film format coupled with digital intermediate (DI) timing. Kimball says that the widescreen 2.4:1 aspect ratio was an obvious choice, because of the scope of backgrounds that are like characters in the story.

They planned to cover many scenes with four, five or more cameras from different angles and perspectives, including wide-angle shots and close-ups of Stallone, Bruce Willis, who plays Church, and other actors.

Kimball assembled a talented and experienced crew, including a camera operator Vern Nobles who also led the second unit. Nobles provided most of the camera package. It consisted of ARRICAM Lite, ARRICAM Studio, ARRI 435 and ARRI 235 cameras and a range of Zeiss Ultra Prime lenses. Additional camera gear and accessories came from Keslow Camera in Los Angeles.

Kimball and Nobles had KODAK VISION3 500T 5219, KODAK VISION2 250D 5205 and 50D 5201 negatives on their palettes, which gave them the flexibility needed to work with multiple cameras at any time of day in virtually any environment.

One exterior setting was a two-acre compound filled with military trucks and tanks. There was a blue-screen in the background where the dictator's castle was composited into the scene during DI timing.

"When the mercenaries returned to the island, one of the first things they did was attack that compound," Kimball says. "We shot that and other scenes with real explosives. When we were blowing things up it was pretty much one take. But, if Sly didn't like the way it came out, we would re-do the whole thing.

"We blew up a full-sized, stripped-down Huey helicopter that didn't come apart in pieces. It just kind of burned. Sly had the pieces put back together, and we re-shot it the next day. The second time it came apart."

Another scene was filmed in a dark tunnel in the prison where the lead female character is held captive. The location was inside a former Civil War fort. For ambiance, Kimball put a 4-foot-long piece of UltraBounce on the ceiling and reflected a fluorescent light off it to simulate ambient moonlight. Other lighting came from Xenon flashlights. Sometimes he shone that light onto silver or gold cards to simulate fire light.

"We had to make every shot count, because some of the actors were only there for a few days," Nobles observes. The short list includes Jet Li, Mickey Rourke and Arnold Schwarzenegger who was there for a one-day cameo performance.

## Key Data at a glance

<b>Director</b>	Sylvester Stallone
<b>Cinematographer</b>	Jeff Kimball, ASC
<b>Cameras</b>	ARRICAM Lite, ARRICAM Studio, ARRI 435 and ARRI 235
<b>Formats</b>	Super 35mm in widescreen 2.4:1 aspect ratio
<b>Film stock</b>	KODAK VISION3 500T 5219, KODAK VISION2 250D 5205 and KODAK VISION250D 5201
<b>2nd Unit DP</b>	Vern Nobles

1 A scene from Sylvester Stallone's *The Expendables* with actors Eric Roberts (left) and "Stone Cold" Steve Austin (right) in action in Mangaratiba, Brazil. (Photo Karen Ballard)

