



FEATURE

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"M*A*S*H" -- THE MOVE THAT WAS "ALMOST PERMANENT"

When the 4077th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, resembling an amalgam of cavalry unit, traveling menagerie and fashion show, packed up its tents in circus fashion to avoid an onrushing horde of Red Chinese soldiers, in the special one-hour premiere episode of "M*A*S*H," Tuesday, Sept. 21 (9:00-10:00 PM, ET) on the CBS Television Network, the move was almost a permanent one for the prize-winning Twentieth Century Fox-based comedy show.

Old cavalry officer Col. Sherman Potter (Harry Morgan), astride his favorite mount and sporting a "Black Jack" Pershing campaign hat, leads an evacuation parade that includes a procession of jeeps, a pedicab carrying Radar's pet guinea pig and rabbit, with his goats in close attendance, followed by a concerned Corporal Klinger closely guarding his choicest frilly frocks on portable clothes racks.

The zany "M*A*S*H" menage's retreat proves to be a temporary one when U.S. forces in Korea eventually blunt the Chinese thrust, and Col. Potter, with Teddy Roosevelt elan, comes charging back onto his command's home ground.

For a time, while planning the 1976-77 season, "M*A*S*H" executive producer Gene Reynolds and his trio of co-producers actually anticipated a permanent evacuation of their production company from its four-year exterior location at the 3,000-acre Century Ranch nestled in Malibu Canyon, where the brief "M*A*S*H" departure was filmed.

(More)

The historic Century Ranch spread, which traces its origins to the 17th-century California mission period of Spain's Father Junipero Serra, was acquired in recent months for public use by the California Recreation and Parks Department.

Thus the last chapter apparently has been written in the 35-year tale of motion picture and television production at the ranch, which began with the employment of its rolling hills to simulate Welsh coal-mining country for the 1949 film "How Green Was My Valley."

A vast potpourri of movie props and sets once sprawled over the varied topography that includes volcanic rock formations, lakes, an artificially created waterfall, a dam, and a suspension bridge across Malibu Creek, which often becomes a torrent in the rainy season. They were used in an equally varied array of motion pictures: "The Left Hand of God," "Wake Me When It's Over," "Che," "Tora, Tora, Tora," "Planet of the Apes" and "M*A*S*H."

All this, along with the "M*A*S*H" series exterior set at the Ranch's rear extremity, had been consigned to industry archives, until Reynolds found a receptive ear at the state's bureaucratic level. The irreverent comedy show was granted one more year's stay on the premises.

Reynolds and his brain trust of co-producers -- Don Reo, Allan Katz and Burt Metcalfe -- long ago had conceived a "M*A*S*H" move story in conjunction with the expected permanent exodus of the production company from Century Ranch.

Despite the last-minute reprieve, the producers elected to retain the 4077th Hospital evacuation idea. The premise, they agreed, retained its validity.