

DIGGING THE DIRT



Bill Leimbach and David Roach never expected to find themselves sitting in a local Townsville radio station calling for amputees.

But then, the life of a film producer has been known to take unexpected turns, particularly when attempting to recreate World War I on a \$9.5 million budget.

"We had half a dozen people ring us up," Roach, the film's co-producer and writer, recalls.

"Now these men – they were all men – had come back from Middle Eastern wars. They spent all night in the mud and in the rain and in the end they said it was fantastic, we did it for the blokes in the trenches.

"And they were talking about the diggers in 1915 – that kind of thing made the process so incredibly moving for us all, both the cast and crew."

The film, which is based on a true story, follows mining engineer Oliver Woodward (Brendan Cowell) after he volunteers to serve on the Western Front.

Woodward and a secret platoon then tunnel deep beneath German lines where they set the biggest explosion the world had seen up until that time.

The film, directed by actor and theatre director Jeremy Sims, succeeds in combining the heroism,

horror and mateship of war without descending into cliché.

"We were very lucky to have the support of the Woodward family on the project and they very early on understood this is not a definitive history, it's not a documentary, and a feature film has to tell a great story," Roach says. "And they gave us the flexibility to do that."

Roach – who also co-wrote Yahoo Serious' *Young Einstein* in the 80s – says he wasn't interested in making a jingoistic film.

"I didn't want to write a war film which was overtly 'pro' or 'anti' war. I also didn't want to make a war film where the enemy is just evil shadows ... or jingoistic.

"Mateship is a really important myth in the Australian ethos but it's been done to death and so I was more interested in looking at whether there is a negative side to mateship."

Leimbach is also hopeful that the approach will broaden the film's appeal beyond local shores, despite it being quintessentially Australian.

"We could have financed the whole thing at one time in Townsville," Leimbach says, before the global financial crisis forced the production to turn to Screen Australia for support.

"A lot of people were very apologetic – they lost their homes

and their businesses."

Screen Australia invested about \$3.26 million of the \$9.5 million budget, with Paramount Pictures Australia and Transmission Films expected to release the film on more than 100 screens.

Leimbach says the seven week-shoot was tough – split between day and night shoots – but the crew and local community rallied around the cause.

"At some meal calls at two o'clock in the morning we would have 140 people – Germans with blood all over them running down their necks and Allied soldiers ... all the extras came from the local community," Leimbach says.

The film was shot by Toby Oliver (*The Combination*) who was instrumental in shifting the production's original plans to shoot digitally and instead use Kodak 35mm film stock with lightweight ARRICAM cameras.

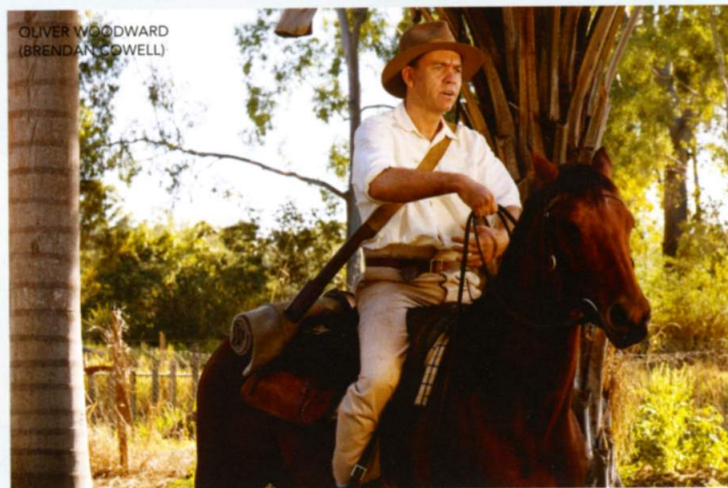
"So much of the film takes place in these tunnels that are lit by candlelight and that's what is really worrying about digital cameras, such as the RED; coping with that," Oliver said.

He says the look of *Beneath Hill 60* was less inspired by other films and more by art and photography.

"We put together 'mood boards' based on expressionist art from the period, some of the German expressionism, and then a range of different artists – van Gogh, Otto Dix – a few of these different artists from the era." - **Brendan Swift**

Beneath Hill 60 is released on April 15.

Check out the [INSIDEFILM](#) website for the trailer and behind the scenes footage.

***In The Trenches***

Cameras: ARRICAM LT (supplied by Panavision), Cooke lenses

Film stock: 35mm stock, Kodak Vision 500T and 200T

Post-production/VFX: Cutting Edge

Sound post: Sound Firm **EPK/trailers:** Solid State