

As the production dates approached for "Shore Leave," Gene Roddenberry, having suffered from a bout of exhaustion, took a break. He left behind a memo telling his new producer Gene Coon how NBC's Stan Robertson felt the script still leaned too much toward fantasy and wanted a few of the more fantastic sequences reined in. In his haste to leave for his own shore leave, Roddenberry failed to have the memo delivered to Coon.

Production began on Wednesday, October 19, 1966. Roddenberry returned from his R & R that morning and found the memo he intended for Coon still on his own desk. A copy of the shooting script was next to it. In the opening teaser, as it had been in all the previous drafts, was the giant white rabbit ... who can tell time ... and who can talk. "Oh my paws and whiskers! I shall be late!"

As cell phones, or their equivalent, were still just props on Star Trek, Roddenberry high-tailed it for Africa USA, over an hour's drive from Desilu. William Shatner recalled, "I can still remember him roaring up to our production vehicles in a cloud of dust."

It was too late to nix the talking white rabbit -- that had been the first sequence filmed this day -- but other story elements from writer Theodore Sturgeon's fertile imagination were soon altered. Roddenberry found a shady tree and began rewriting the script on a yellow legal pad. The changes had to be driven to Desilu for typing, copying by the mimeo department and then driven back to location. Fax machines, like cell phones, were also still in the future.

"I recall we had a lot of script problems," George Takei said. "There was one point where we actually shut down production and waited for the rewrites to be driven out. I had my running shoes, so I went out and got a good run in. Some people took their shirts off and worked on their suntan. But once the pages arrived, we had to do quick study."

Also on location this day, William Shatner, DeForest Kelley, Emily Banks, Percy Lopez, Barbara Baldavin and Bruce Mars, all for sequences in the lush "Ext. Glade #1" area. Emily Banks said, "I still hadn't seen any more of the script until I got out to [Africa USA]; that's when I started to see more pages and I asked, 'Oh, what is this?' and 'What is that?' I hadn't had much exposure to this sort of show, and had yet to see any episodes."

Bruce Mars recalled, "Theodore Sturgeon had written the Finnegan character so he was a little nasty and moody, and I read that thing and I thought, 'This could be better. I'd like to make this guy fun, not nasty but just a bit annoying and bring him to life in a fun way.' And so I had a good talk with the director -- Bob Sparr -- and he said, 'You'll have to go a little higher to make those kinds of changes.'"

This meant Mars would have to run his ideas by one of the producers, something that was not likely to happen.

"Little did I know that there were a lot of problems with the way the script was written," Mars said. "So, I'll be darned, but on that first day out on location, there's our boss [Roddenberry] sitting there on the set rewriting

everything. And Theodore Sturgeon shows up too, and I introduced myself and he looked me over and said, 'Yeah, you could be that Irish rascal.' We talked a little bit and I said, 'I've got a couple ideas for the character, which Bob Sparr liked,' and I gave Sturgeon my ideas about making Finnegan a bit more charming, more playful. He said, 'You know what, do it.'

"So Gene Roddenberry was sitting under a big tree and one of the sound men said, 'Good god, Gene is rewriting the whole script.' I said, 'You're kidding, what's up?' He said, 'Well, there have been some complications with the network and he's rewriting all these sequences for the next two days.' So I went up and said, 'Mr. Roddenberry, my god, I know you're a writer, but you're rewriting everything we're doing today?' He said, 'Yeah, and I'm going to make Finnegan more important in this. I just got a feeling that character is going to light up things.' So I told him my idea about the character, and he fleshed the fight out and added all those scenes in that made it so much better."

Day 2 filming at Africa USA for the death of Dr. McCoy (Courtesy of Gerald Gurian)

On Day 2, Thursday, filming continued on the "Ext. Glade." location for the attack of Don Juan, the Black Knight. For this, Leonard Nimoy joined the cast for McCoy's death scene and the gunning down of the knight. Next, Kirk chasing Finnegan.

Mars recalled, "Everybody was worrying about the budget and how long the filming was taking, and Bob Sparr says, 'Hey, listen, Bruce, we're losing light and I want to do everything in one take.' And so we only had one shot at a lot of that stuff, with Shatner chasing me -- one take, one take and one take. We just nailed it. I of course had my fingers crossed and everything, but I knew the character; I had him down. And so it all worked out and it really helped them to catch up a little bit."

There were problems, of course. Mars, despite being athletic and having played semi-pro baseball, twisted his ankle. He said, "It started to swell up pretty bad and I didn't take off the boot. If I had, I would have been dead. So we continued shooting and, with all that action that was needed, my mind just rose above it even though I could hardly walk. And when all the shooting was over, my foot was black and blue." (113a)

Mars was driven back to Hollywood and taken to Citizens Emergency Hospital for x-rays and treatment. As a result, the shooting schedule went through yet another of many revisions.

Filming continued without Mars until 9 p.m. with large arc lights being used to simulate daylight for remaining close angle shots. Many in the cast and all of the crew were unable to make it home for the premiere of "What Are Little Girls Made Of?," the seventh episode to air on NBC.

Day 3, Friday. More filming in the area of "Ext. Glade #1" took place, filming the airplane strafing scene and the tag scene featuring the Caretaker and his "Two Beauties." Emily Banks said, "I remember one thing, there was the lovely older gentleman who was the caretaker of the planet. He was such a nice man; so gracious and so handsome, but he had this one line that he kept forgetting. And they'd do it again. And then they'd do it again. And when I finally saw it, he had started to say the line and you could see he was starting to forget it, but the way it came out

of him, when he caught up with the line, it looked absolutely like stunning acting. His expression was just so precious.”

Also shot this day: the scene with the tiger which Robert Justman was so against. Justman had, in fact, written to Gene Coon weeks earlier while reading the latest draft of the script, saying: “Bailey sees a full-grown Bengal Tiger. Whatever beast he sees, he will have to see it in CUTAWAY. Unless, of course, you want to screw around working with a full-grown Bengal tiger on location or on stage. In which case, include me out.”

William Shatner, unlike Justman, saw no need for concern and was even hot on the idea of Kirk wrestling the cat. He felt the action sequence would be good for the episode ... until he saw the 150 pound animal tearing into its midday snack -- a chunk of uncooked meat on a large bone just about the size of a man’s thigh. And then the tiger got loose.

“I’ll never forget it,” said Bill Blackburn, who was with the company to wear the giant rabbit costume. “One of the grips was carrying a reflector and he tripped and, all of a sudden, that tiger just went berserk. The tiger had a chain around its neck, but the chain came off from whatever base it was attached to.”

Eddie Paskey, Shatner’s stand-in for the lighting set-ups, wasn’t about to stand in against a tiger. He remembered, “Bill was like six feet from this thing when the chain came off and, of course, everybody went nuts.”

“In my mind’s eye, I see Shatner jumping on top of the big prop box,” Blackburn added. “Everybody else was, like, transfixed; they didn’t know whether to run or not. And then the trainer came running in and got hold of the chain. It was one of those things that could have been really bad.” (17a)

Shatner recalled, “Instantly my testicles rose up into my Adam’s apple and the ignorant machismo that had been pulsing so heartily through my veins was replaced by sheer abject terror. I stood there trying not to look too horrified as I gracefully backed down [from the idea of wrestling the tiger], ‘for the good of the show.’”

At mid-day, the company made a move to the “Upper Lake” for the scene featuring Sulu finding the handgun and target practicing, and multiple camera dolly shots of Kirk and others running along the path. These later sequences required the laying of track so the large heavy camera and the men who operated it could be mounted on a rail platform and glide along, “tracking” Kirk and those who trailed behind as he ran toward the source of the gun shots. It is an elaborate type of shot and takes hours to set up and execute.

Emily Banks said, “I didn’t realize that I was going to be running around with legs hanging out [from the uniform] and shoulders hanging out [from the torn tunic]. But I do remember I did a lot of running. There was a lot of running. And I remember thinking on the first couple days, ‘They don’t want an actress, they want an athlete!’ I was exhausted, and we kept running and running.”

Bruce Mars said, "We did do a lot of running and jumping. And Emily Banks did too. She was running back and forth with Shatner for the camera. And I saw her a few times just huffing and puffing afterwards. But so cooperative. She never complained."

Of her running partner, Banks said, "Bill's a lovely man; very talented; very calm. In fact, everybody was very calm, despite the pace of the work. It was just very easy to work with them.."

It was 7 p.m. and already dark for over an hour when the company turned off their daylight-simulating lights and wrapped for the night.

The next day, back at Desilu, associate producer Robert Justman wrote a stinging memo to producer Gene Coon about the photographic effects written into a new script being developed, and about how the filming of "Shore Leave" was progressing. He complained: "Gene, I am going to carp again about opticals. I know in my bones that we are in deep trouble with this show. And you may be able to detect from the tone of this memo that I am pissed off to beat the band. Not necessarily about this show, but what has been happening on the previous show and the one before that. I'll have to fill you in later on what happened at a little after 7 o'clock when I got a call from Location, but suffice it to say I am beginning to have fears that I have to sit personally on every God-damn shooting hour of this show. And if I have to, then this whole setup is incorrect. The time to ensure our getting as good a show for the money and in as decent amount of days and hours as possible is prior to shooting."

Day 4, Monday, October 24. Work continued around and near the Upper Lake, as Kirk chased Finnegan (with Bruce Mars' ankle having sufficiently healed) toward the rock area, and McCoy and Yeoman Barrows finding the storybook gown. After this, the company packed up and drove to Vasquez Rocks for the first of many visits. Work began late in the day for the scene where Kirk meets the image of his former flame, Ruth. The big "HMI" arc lights were again brought in to simulate daylight as the company continued shooting an hour into darkness, stopping at 7.

Day 5, Tuesday. Spock's beam down at Vasquez Rocks was filmed, as well as more with the Tiger (now kept on a chain -- a chain even the camera could see) and Finnegan baiting Kirk to follow him further into the area of the giant jagged rocks. Bruce Mars recalled, "Bob Sparr said to me, 'Hey, Bruce, are you afraid of heights?' And I don't like heights! So I said, 'Well ... why? What's up?' And he said, 'Do you see this big rock up there -- it's about five stories high and I'd love you on top of that baiting on our captain.' And I said, 'Holy macro, that's way up there! What's the shot?' He says, 'We're going to shoot at you from below, you up there jumping up and down and waving your hands and everything.' I said, 'Okay,' even though it wasn't anywhere near being okay, and I went up the back of the rocks and stepped out on there. It was made all the more difficult because they had those high-heeled boots which weren't really grabbing on the rock surface. So I'm out there and Bob Sparr is yelling up at me, 'Alright, move forward! Forward!' And, man, I was freaking out! And he was yelling up, "Forward! Forward! Come on Bruce, move forward! Now jump up and down and wave your arms!" Man, that was wild."

Also filmed, the start of the epic Kirk/Finnegan fight.

Day 6, Wednesday. The company had expected to be back at the studio for Day 6, but Robert Sparr, suffering through all the last minute rewriting, laying track for numerous dolly shots, and chasing daylight, had by this point fallen a full day behind. Nearly all of this day was spent shooting the balance of the fight between Kirk and Finnegan.

Day 6: As the sun sets and the temperature drops, Nimoy and Shatner rehearse their dialogue for the post Kirk/Finnegan fight scene (Courtesy of Gerald Gurian)

Bruce Mars recalled, "Bob told me that Gene Roddenberry wanted the fight expanded, that he felt it would be good for the show and make a great visual of me and the captain fighting. So he said, 'Bruce, make it rough and tumble.' I really enjoyed Shatner in that. We talked about the fight, and with Bob Sparr about working out some ballet moves – 'This will happen here and this will happen there, and the stuntman will do this, and you will do that.' Shatner was very nice to me, asking me what I was doing and what I wanted to do. You never really know what to expect – incredible arrogance or whatever - but I remember thinking, 'This guy's a really good guy.' And he made sure I had a couple good scenes during the fight. He'd say, 'Let's do this and let's do that' and, 'Ah no, the camera should be here not there,' and he would go talk to Bob Sparr about it. So he got me some good moments and I have nothing to say but good things about him."

It may very well have been the best-staged fight shot for TV. Paul Baxley and Vince Deadrick subbed for Shatner and Mars, respectively, for the more brutal punches and flips. Bruce Mars said, "I thought it was great. And something that spoke well of Bob Sparr is he was always taking the time to talk to Jerry Finnerman. He'd tell Jerry his ideas, but if Jerry had an idea that sounded right, he'd do it. He'd sign off on it and let Jerry do it the way he wanted. And I thought that was terrific to see a director and a cinematographer in such good sync."

So much time was put into the fight, in fact, that there was precious little time to shoot the other scene that had to be completed this final day on location -- Sulu's encounter with the Samurai Warrior.

George Takei said, "I remember us losing the sun. That scene where the Samurai soldier leaps out -- that was supposed to be daylight. The beginning part we shot in daylight, and we had to match it. We were shooting that at nine o'clock at night. They brought in all of the lights they could to try and simulate daylight.

It was really tense."

The location phase of the filming finally wrapped a bit earlier than Takei recalled, but still well into darkness at 8 p.m.

Day 7, Thursday, October 27, was spent in safe harbor, on Desilu Stage 9, for scenes on the bridge and in Kirk's quarters. Emily Banks continued to be featured prominently with the series regulars in a role that many believed might become a recurring one. The last shot for "Shore Leave" was taken by 5:52 p.m. And, finally, that was a wrap, allowing cast and crew to make it home in time for NBC's first airing of "Miri" -- broadcast episode #8.

On the very day Sparr was wrapping, Roddenberry sent a cover letter to Stan Robertson. It said:

“Perhaps there is some ‘I never break my word’ ego behind this, but I would appreciate your reading over carefully this final version of ‘Shore Leave.’ You may recall I promised you this would not be an ‘illusion’ show. It isn’t now. No one was at fault, certainly not Gene Coon. In his gradual switch-over to taking the reins of more and more of the producing, this was one item about [this] particular show we never did get around to discussing. And, as you know, I was on vacation.... The final rewrite I did was accomplished while the show was actually being shot, at considerable risk and hazard to our budget and schedule. I felt I owed it to NBC and to you.”

It was a valiant attempt, but the talking white rabbit opener was going to have jaws dropping at NBC Burbank.

Roddenberry would survive. Others, sadly, did not.

Despite the excellent direction, Robert Sparr had fallen out of favor with some. Bruce Mars shared, “I know there were some grumbles. Some of the actors weren’t thrilled with Bob Sparr and how he handled things, but, boy, I loved him. I thought he did a great job. He knew what he wanted to shoot. But he must have rubbed a few of them the wrong way with some of his shots. I remember they laid two sets of track for different dolly shots to have Shatner running after me. I wouldn’t say there was friction, but I could feel an undercurrent there that perhaps that was just over the top.”

In his post-production letter to Gene Coon, Bob Justman argued:

“Although I realize that a great deal of effort went into the cutting of this film, I am of the opinion that Robert Sparr did a superlative job. I realize that I am probably alone in my opinion, but I think that the conception of his shots and the motion and energy he created in his depiction of the exterior scenes was a truly creative achievement. Notwithstanding the fact that Bill Shatner and some of the other actors found much fault with Bob Sparr’s abilities as a director of actors, his overall filmic judgment has definitely come through in this show. Perhaps he did not give lip service to the egos of our series’ regulars, but Bob Sparr really cared about what he was doing and I, for one, am sorry that circumstances [are making] it impossible for us to bring him back.”

Justman was right. Sparr would not return. Sadly, the director was killed in a small plane crash three years later when scouting locations with Star Trek cinematographer Jerry Finnerman. The pilot was also killed. Only Finnerman, severely injured, survived.