Inchon (film)

Inchon (also called Inchon!) is a 1981 South Korean-American war film about the Battle of Inchon, considered to be the turning point of the Korean War. The film was directed by Terence Young and financed by Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon. It stars Laurence Olivier as General Douglas MacArthur, who led the United States surprise amphibious landing at Incheon, South Korea in 1950. Also featured are Jacqueline Bisset, Ben Gazzara, Toshirō Mifune, and Richard Roundtree. It was filmed in California, Italy, Ireland, Japan and South Korea.

Inchon 's plot includes both military action and human drama. Characters face danger and are involved in various personal and dramatic situations. The film concludes with the American victory over North Korean forces in the Battle of Inchon, which is considered to have saved South Korea. The film cost \$46 million to produce and encountered many problems during production, including a typhoon and the death of a cast member. Both the Unification Church and the United States military provided personnel as extras during the filming.

Inchon was released to theaters in the United States and Canada in September 1982 and then quickly withdrawn because of its poor performance at the box office. It has never been released on video or DVD, although it has sometimes been broadcast on television. It was the largest financial loss in film of 1982, earning less than \$2 million. Reviewers at the time gave it consistently bad reviews and later commentators including Newsweek, TV Guide and Canadian Press have classed Inchon among the worst films of all time.

1 Plot

Inchon begins with this disclaimer: "This is not a documentary of the war in Korea, but a dramatized story of the effect of war on a group of people. All persons other than those whose real names are used in this film are fictitious and any similarity between them and any persons living or dead is purely coincidental. Where dramatic license has been deemed necessary, the authors have taken advantage of this license to dramatize the subject." [2]

The film depicts the Battle of Inchon during the Korean War,^[3] which took place September 15–19, 1950 and is considered to the turning point of the war.^[4] The protagonist of the film is General Douglas MacArthur (Laurence

Olivier), who led the United States surprise amphibious landing at Incheon in 1950.^{[3][5]} A sideplot in the film involves an American couple who encounter difficulties in their relationship because of the ongoing war.^[6]

Inchon begins with a depiction of North Korean soldiers moving past the 38th parallel north into South Korea in June 1950. [6][7] People flee into the country's capital, Seoul. [6] A United States Army major's wife Barbara Hallsworth (Jacqueline Bisset) lives in a village located at the 38th Parallel, where she was attempting to buy antique furniture and items for her business as an interior decorator. [6][7] She hears a bulletin over the radio "The communists are coming", and decides to leave the village. [8] A limousine driven by a chauffeur takes her to Seoul. [6] She encounters a group of five South Korean children, and after her chauffeur is killed, she drives them to a safe location called the "Inn of the Sixth Happiness". [6][9] Along the way, she shoots a North Korean soldier between the eyes, which kills him. [8]

U.S. Major Frank Hallsworth (Ben Gazzara) is attempting to break off an affair with a young South Korean woman (Karen Kahn). [6][7][9] Her father (Toshirō Mifune) is aware of his daughter's affair with Hallsworth and does not disapprove of it. [6] Hallsworth receives word of the invasion by the North Koreans, and he travels north in an attempt to locate his wife with the assistance of army sergeant August Henderson (Richard Roundtree). [6][7] Henderson encounters Hallsworth's wife and fixes her vehicle's battery, and then reunites her with her husband. [9]

David Feld Park (David Janssen), a journalist in Tokyo, is waiting with other reporters for a press conference to begin which will be held by MacArthur. [6][10] Longfellow (Rex Reed), a second reporter awaiting the press conference, is generally a music critic but also reports on the serious events developing in Tokyo. [6][10] MacArthur is at his residence in Tokyo with his wife, and does not appear at the press conference. [6] He agrees with his wife that he is the only person who can rescue South Korea from the invasion by the North Koreans. [6]

Hallsworth and his former lover succeed in turning on a lighthouse to signal 261 U.S. ships, and the South Korean woman's father activates mines in the channel. [9] She dies during the ensuing battle. [8] The U.S. troops drive out the North Korean forces and people wave South Korean and American flags. [9] The last scene shows MacArthur reciting the Lord's Prayer. After this scene, a newsreel of MacArthur is shown. [11]

2 PRODUCTION

2 Production

2.1 Financing

Inchon was financed by Sun Myung Moon and Japanese newspaper publisher Mitsu Haru Ishii. [5][12][13] Moon was involved with the film's production from the very beginning. [2] Ishii was a member of the Unification Church in Japan, and a friend of Moon, and served as the film's producer. [2][8][14] Moon initially did not want the public to know that he was behind the financing of the film and its production. [12] Ishii said he was instructed by God to make the film. [8] Moon gave \$30 million to Ishii's film production company One Way Productions. [8]

Ishii said he was a member of the Unification Church "just like a Catholic is a member of the Catholic Church and I believe Rev. Moon is very sincere about doing the Lord's work". Ishii was president of the *World Daily News*, which is published by Moon's media conglomerate News World Communications which also published other newspapers, including *The Washington Times* in the United States. Robert Standard, associate producer of *Inchon*, was a member of the Unification Church of the United States.^[2]

Before deciding on the subject of the proposed film, Moon and Ishii considered the possibility of films on the life of Jesus or Elvis Presley. [12][13] In 1978, psychic Jeanne Dixon was consulted to communicate with the spirit of General MacArthur, and Dixon said that MacArthur's spirit endorsed the production of the film. [2][12][13] Dixon also helped choose Terence Young, who earlier directed the James Bond films *Dr. No, Thunderball*, and *From Russia with Love*, as the film's director. [12][13]

Inchon cost \$46 million to produce.^{[1][15][16]} The film's producers encountered difficulty after attempts were made to raise funding for the film from banks in Japan, and so the entire project was funded from Moon and the Unification Church.^[11] The screen credits credited Moon as "Rev. Sun Myung Moon: Special Advisor on Korean Matters".^{[2][8][17]}

In his book *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America*, author and scholar of religion J. Gordon Melton cites *Inchon* as an example when noting, "Moon has attempted to project his ideas into all areas of American society." Melton adds, "He has courted the scientific and scholarly world and organized numerous conferences, a peace academy, and a Washington think tank." [18] Moon later said in a talk to church members: "Why did we put so much effort into the movie *Inchon*? No matter what the result the motivation was for people to understand about MacArthur. I wanted to show how MacArthur loved God and loved people. MacArthur came to Japan after World War II and put the nation back together. He really respected and loved the people. He also loved God very much and fought with great strength against

tyranny and communism. That is what I want the people to understand." $^{[19]}$

2.2 Writing

Ishii saw a South Korean-made film about the Korean War, and came to the decision that "he wanted to make a film about the Korean War, on an international basis." He desired the film to be an "entertaining action film", but also said he was "very interested in depicting MacArthur as a human being and I want the world to know how miserable the war was for the Korean people."^[2]

Moore commented on the writing process: "The theme I had to deal with in *Inchon* was too big for a movie that was less than two hours. When Toho was originally involved, they wanted a love story between an American boy and a Korean girl. My technique is to research and then fictionalize, a technique I used successfully in *French Connection*. But I had to fictionalize the real landing at Inchon, making it seem that a lighthouse was a pivotal factor when in fact it wasn't. I couldn't do that, which is why other writers were brought in."^[20]

Ishii instructed Moore to include an emphasis on General MacArthur's spiritualism and faith in divine guidance. He told Moore to include three separate love stories in the film, "one between two Americans, one between two Koreans, and one between an American and a Korean". Moore explained that "the love stories were supposed to tell the story of the tragedy of Korea, the tragedy of the Korean War". Ishii stated to Moore that he did not wish for the movie to turn into an "anti-Communist tract". Prior to the completion of the film's screenplay, the film's producers encountered difficulties obtaining an affiliation with a movie studio. Ishii said that North Korea placed pressure on Toho Studios through labor unions in Japan, requesting that the studio pull out of its affiliation with Inchon. The labor unions criticized the film's production, saying that it was influenced by Moon and his Unification Church, in addition to the Korean CIA and was part of an effort to support the president of South Korea. Because of this criticism, Toho Studios canceled its participation in the *Inchon* project.^[2]

2.3 Casting

Laurence Olivier was paid \$1 million to play General Douglas MacArthur in the film. He was contracted for six weeks of filming, and received a payment of \$250,000 upon signing the contract and the remainder was given in four subsequent installments. His salary came out to \$50,000 per day. Double In addition to this fee, Olivier also received \$2,500 per week for his expenses. Double In deviation and explained why he agreed to be part of its cast: People ask me why I'm playing in this picture. The answer is simple. Money, dear boy. I'm like a vintage wine. You have to drink me

quickly before I turn sour. I'm almost used up now and I can feel the end coming. That's why I'm taking money now. I've got nothing to leave my family but the money I can make from films. Nothing is beneath me if it pays well. I've earned the right to damn well grab whatever I can in the time I've got left." [5]

Olivier researched the role by traveling to Norfolk, Virginia to visit the MacArthur Museum, and speaking with Alexander Haig, who had served as aide-de-camp to MacArthur. Haig told Olivier that MacArthur's voice sounded like W. C. Fields, and Olivier tried to imitate this. He enjoyed working with accents, and obtained recordings of MacArthur's voice. He was interested in various inconsistencies in these recordings, and especially in the difference in vowel sounds made by MacArthur. During filming, the makeup process for Olivier took two and a half hours, but after it was complete, he thought he neither looked like himself nor like General MacArthur.

The 72-year-old Olivier, who had been in poor health for years, suffered during filming in Seoul because of the summer heat. Director Terence Young recalled when not before the camera Olivier lay on a cot, virtually immobile with pain and exhaustion, but that when needed "he dropped fifty years and stepped forward without complaint".^[21]

Richard Roundtree, known for the title role in the film *Shaft*, portrayed the character of Staff Sgt. Henderson in the film. ^[14] David Janssen, known for his role in the TV series *The Fugitive*, accepted a part as a journalist to work with Laurence Olivier. ^[22] Actress Karen Kahn portrayed the young Korean lover of Major Frank Hallsworth in the film. In a subsequent interview with *The Press Democrat*, Kahn said of the film: "It was supposed to be this *Gone with the Wind*. And it was the worst movie. It's in some of those worst-films-of-all-time books. After that movie I quit. I just couldn't take L.A. I was really thin-skinned. So I just got out." ^[23]

2.4 Music

Jerry Goldsmith, prominent and multi-award-winning film and TV composer, wrote the score for the film. [24] The music was recorded at Rome's Forum Studio in July 1980, and was fraught with difficulties - the studio was not large enough for his orchestra, and room noise made by the players and their equipment affected the tracks. [25]

In spite of the problems, Goldsmith was pleased with his score, describing it as a chance to "create interesting music out of a bad situation." The original 1982 soundtrack LP comprised 38 minutes of music, edited and assembled by Goldsmith and engineer Leonard Engel into an ideal listening experience rather than a chronological one. The album was issued on Regency Records; Intrada Records prepared a remixed edition of the complete score in 1988. In 2006 Intrada revisited the score and issued a two-disc

set, with the original LP making its compact disc debut on disc 1 and the entire score presented in film order on disc 2. [26]

2.5 Filming

Shooting took place in Hollywood, California; Rome, Italy; Ireland; Tokyo, Japan; and Seoul, South Korea. During the filming of *Inchon* in 1979, the involvement of Moon was "adamantly denied". Moon recommended editing and reshooting changes to the film's script, which "caused the production to return to South Korea three times, Rome twice and Los Angeles twice." [2][5][27]

The film included several technical errors. Cut-out cardboard pieces were used to depict military aircraft during battle scenes in the film, and one film critic said viewers were almost able to identify the threads attached to the cardboard cut-outs. Footage of a digital watch was spliced into the film, though this technology would not be invented for twenty-five years after the film's time period. [2] There were other problems. Jacqueline Bisset developed laryngitis during the film's production. [13] A set-piece for the film included a re-created version of a lighthouse at Incheon, but this was obliterated by a typhoon. [28] The movie had to go through a reshooting process after one of the film's stars, David Janssen, died during production. [29]

The production hired Samuel Jaskilka, a retired Marine Corps Lieutenant General who took part in the Battle of Inchon as a company commander, as technical advisor to the film. A portion of the movie was filmed aboard the USS *Cleveland*, an *Austin*-class amphibious transport dock during an amphibious operation off the coast of South Korea in 1978. The United States Department of Defense allowed 1,500 soldiers from the United States Army and United States Marine Corps to participate as extras in the film, at a cost of \$77,000. [2][14][28]

The Little Angels Children's Folk Ballet of Korea, founded by Moon in 1962, were featured in the film, along with many Unification Church members. [2] Shooting was held in Rome, Italy in 1979. [11] Olivier had health problems, and after shooting had finished in South Korea he had gone back to England. He was told he was needed for one last shoot, but he did not wish to travel back to South Korea. Arrangements were made to film Olivier in Rome, where he portrayed MacArthur against a backdrop, reciting the Lord's Prayer. [5] The film's director Terence Young was not happy with the completed version of the film, and said "the producers have turned *Inchon* into a Korean propaganda movie." [2] Ishii said: "No problem. We have 20 nations who want this movie."

4 5 RECEPTION

3 Promotion

The Unification Church wanted to distribute the film on their own, but Young told them this would result in a "total disaster".[11] The Unification Church funded the \$11 million promotion budget.^[31] One of the press kit releases was titled "The Korean War and Revelations", and it said that during the Korean War, a B-29 pilot took a picture of "the face of Jesus Christ ... amidst the bombers. While some called the occurrence a coincidence, many others agreed that it was only one of many incidences of God's guidance throughout General Douglas MacArthur's life. Jesus Christ has appeared at significant times throughout the 2,000 years of Christianity. It is common for Generals and those with the opportunity to change history to receive guidance through revelation." It added that MacArthur's "attempt to overcome communism was particularly significant, because the general embodied three qualities: love for God; love for mankind; and hatred for Communism." It also said that the art director for Inchon had taken a picture of the door of MacArthur's office in Tokyo, and the general's face had appeared on the photograph.^[2] The press kit for the film stated that the deceased MacArthur had said, "I was very happy to see this picture made because it will express my heart during the Korean War. ... I will make more than 100% effort to support this movie."[3]

4 Release

The world premiere of the film was held in Washington, D.C. on May 4, 1981 at a special screening at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, [2][14] as a benefit for retired United States Navy personnel. [32] This was the only time the film was screened in its 140-minute full version. [5] Between 25 and 100 protesters came to demonstrate outside the John F. Kennedy Center event. [14][17][33]

United States Senator Alfonse D'Amato was the chairman of the benefit committee for Washington, D.C. premiere of the film. Twelve members of the United States Congress had agreed to have their names used as honorary members of the benefit committee for the film's Washington, D.C. premiere. An additional forty-eight members of the U.S. Congress accepted tickets to the film's premiere. Lawrence H. Suid wrote in *Guts & Glory* that "... no more than fifteen or sixteen were willing to brave the pickets outside the Kennedy Center protesting the Unification Church and its involvement with the movie." [2]

On February 13, 1982, President Ronald Reagan, himself a former film actor and president of the Screen Actors Guild, [34] screened the film in the White House. [3] He noted in his diary: "Ran *Inchon* — it is a brutal but gripping picture about the Korean War and for once we're the

good guys and the Communists are the villains. The producer was Japanese or Korean which probably explains the preceding sentence". [35]

Inchon was shown at the 35th Cannes film festival in May 1982 but failed to interest any buyers despite a \$250,000 publicity campaign, [29][36][37] which included hiring the publicity firm Rogers and Cowan to arrange a large party and give out promotional *Inchon* jackets. [36]

In August 1982, MGM/UA contracted the distribution rights to the film.^[32] One Way Productions came to an agreement with MGM that it would take care of the costs associated with advertising and distributing the film, if MGM agreed to distribute *Inchon* for a profit share of only 15 percent.^[31] The normal fee for the film distributor was thirty percent of profits.^[31] The film was released in the United States on the weekend of September 17, 1982.^[8] It was cut from 140 minutes to 105 minutes for the U.S. release. The film was shown in the United States and Canada. It was never shown in the United Kingdom.^{[5][11]} *Inchon* was swiftly pulled from theater distribution because of its poor performance at the box office.^[38]

After its release, *Inchon* was never again shown in theaters, and was never released on videocassette or DVD.^{[27][39]} In the early years of the 2000s (decade), *Inchon* was shown on the U.S. cable television outlet Goodlife Television Network (now called Youtoo), at the time owned by the Unification Church.^[6] Bootleg copies of the film circulated from individuals that had copied *Inchon* from these television broadcasts.^[6]

5 Reception

5.1 Box office

The film's total gross between the United States and Canada was \$1.9 million. [5] It eventually took in \$5.2 million at the box office. [1] *Inchon* lost over \$44 million, and was the number one largest financial loss of 1982 films. [15][40] In 1989, a survey released by the entertainment research firm Baseline identified *Inchon* as "the biggest box-office fiasco of the 1980s". [15][41]

Inchon has been included on multiple lists of box office bombs. [42][43] Michael Wilmington of the Chicago Tribune placed Inchon as number six in a "list of Hollywood's 10 worst mega-flops". [44] Wilmington noted that Inchon displaced the 1980 film Heaven's Gate as "the bomb of the decade". [44] The Washington Post described Inchon as "one of the biggest commercial disasters in film history". [45] In 1995, the San Francisco Chronicle reported that The Guinness Book of World Records called Inchon "the biggest money-loser in film history". [42] Inchon was one of the "10 costliest movies", adjusted for inflation, at \$173 million in 1997 dollars. [46] In a 2006 list of "The top 10 biggest box office failures", Kat Giantis of

MSN Movies placed Inchon as tied with Battlefield Earth for number seven. [47]

5.2 Reviews

Most newspaper reviewers gave *Inchon* negative reviews; among them were The Boston Globe, [48] The Philadelphia Inquirer,[31] The Miami Herald,[8] and The Washington Post. [7] In The New York Times, critic Vincent Canby commented, "Inchon is a hysterical historical epic, somewhat less offensive than The Green Berets and far funnier. ... 'Inchon' looks like the most expensive B-movie ever made."[27] A review in the influential entertainment-trade magazine Variety commented, "Olivier is convincing in his role throughout most of the saga, the only member of the cast to achieve that status. Screenplay generally treats all others as one-dimensional buffoons, giving them lines that are unintentionally laughable. One reason is that all plot digressions are simply window dressing to the film's focus on the brutally invading North Koreans and the bigscale counterattack by the good guys. No speaking roles are given to the Communists, for example."^[49]

Moon founded The Washington Times in Washington D.C. as a part of his international media conglomerate News World Communications in the same year Inchon was released. [50] According to The Times' rival The Washington Post, a full-length two and a half page version of a film review of Inchon written by critic Scott Sublett that was originally planned for the September 16, 1982 issue of The Times was killed by the newspaper's publisher and editor James R. Whelan. [17] Whelan told Sublett that The Times had a conflict of interest with regard to reviewing *Inchon*, and would not print his review.^[17] Instead, The Times printed a one-paragraph critical synopsis of the film, also written by Sublett, which said in full: "Puerile dialogue, perfunctory acting and haphazard construction doom from the start this visually impressive would-be epic about love and dead Reds in wartime Korea. Olivier (in a performance that is the nadir of his career) joshes, minces and rolls his eyes absurdly as Doug MacArthur. The script, by Robin Moore, is pure twaddle - a cross between South Pacific and The Green Berets."[17][51] Moore is the author of the novel The Green Berets, upon which the 1968 movie was based.^[52] On Monday the 21st The Times ran The New York Times review of the film.^[53]Reviewers Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert selected the film as one of the worst of the year in a 1982 episode of their program *Sneak Previews*. [54]

5.3 Later commentary

Multiple commentators have described *Inchon* as the worst film ever made, including *The Washington Post*, ^[55] *Newsweek*, ^[56] *TV Guide*, ^[13] and the Canadian Press. ^[57] *Inchon* was later profiled in multiple books on worst in film, including *The Hollywood Hall of Shame* by Harry

and Michael Medved,^[52] and *The Worst Movies of All Time* by Michael Sauter.^[58] In 2000, Kenneth Lloyd Billingsley, writing in the libertarian magazine *Reason*, said about a proposed film on Stalinism: "A film like this could easily have turned out as big a didactic dud as the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's 1982 bomb, *Inchon*, with Laurence Olivier as Gen. Douglas MacArthur."^[59] A 2009 review by Phil Hall for *Film Threat* was less negative, and he disagreed with the characterization of the film as the worst ever made, "I was genuinely surprised — this is hardly among the very worst films of all time. That's not to say it is a good film. It is a dull and forgettable movie, and I would never recommend it. However, its reputation for being among the bottom of the cinematic barrel is wholly undeserved."^[6]

A review in *Brassey's Guide to War Films* by Alun Evans was critical, calling the film "Arguably the worst war picture made in the last quarter of the 20th century". [60] Robert Niemi commented in his book History in the Media: Film and Television, "Plagued with a terrible script, horrendous production problems, and shoddy performances all around, the resulting film, Inchon ... was bad beyond belief."[12] Niemi wrote that Olivier's performance "was a low point in an otherwise distinguished film career".[12] In his biography of the actor, Olivier, author Terry Coleman called the film "probably the worst he ever made and one of the best paid".[11] Author Lawrence H. Suid wrote in Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film that, "what combat the film portrayed lacked any believability or authenticity... As a result, the movie met with almost unanimous critical disdain."[2] Moon's 2009 autobiography, As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen, does not mention Inchon, nor did he or the Unification Church ever produce another major commercial motion picture. [61]

5.4 Awards

6 See also

- 3rd Golden Raspberry Awards
- Box-office bomb
- List of films considered the worst
- Unification Church and North Korea
- MacArthur

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8 Further reading

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9 External links

- Inchon at the Internet Movie Database
- Inchon at AllMovie
- Inchon at Box Office Mojo
- Inchon at Rotten Tomatoes

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