HOLLYWOODGLEE, LLC
1226 N Salsipuedes Unit C 1(805)704-5994 |https://hollywoodglee.com Larry@HollywoodGlee.com



Note from Roger â?? Command and Control

Description

Dear Cinephiles,

Yes, COMMAND AND CONTROL is a documentary, yes it plays like a thriller â?? and I assure you will be at the edge of your seat. It is also a history lesson of nuclear weapons from WWII through the Cold War and today. Itâ??s an extremely timely documentary â?? essential viewing.

Below is a review from LA Times. It plays tonight at 5:00pm and tomorrow at 7:30pm at the Riviera Theatre.

See you at the movies!
Roger Durling

Click here for tickets.



The thin line between safety and Armageddon is at the center of â??Command and Controlâ?? documentary
By Kenneth Turan â?? LA Times

Lots of documentaries these days will tell you to be afraid, to be very afraid, but few will scare you as coolly and as convincingly as â??Command and Control.â?•

Directed by Robert Kenner, who co-wrote with book author Eric Schlosser (a key on-screen presence), â??Command and Controlâ?• focuses on a Sept. 18, 1980, accident at a Titan II missile silo in Damascus, Ark., that came terrifyingly close to causing a nuclear explosion that would have devastated the entire East Coast.

But Kenner and Schlosser, who last collaborated on Kennerâ??s Oscar-nominated â??Food, Inc.,â?• are also telling a larger story about the inherent dangers nuclear weapons pose not just for our enemies but for ourselves. No weapons advocate ever thought one of these behemoths might detonate right here at home, but the inevitable conclusion on seeing this film is that one very well might.

As Schlosser says quietly, harkening back to the first Trinity site nuclear test in New Mexico in 1945, â??from the beginning there was the sense of this immense power just being on the verge of slipping out of our control.â?•

Though this kind of subject matter is by nature incendiary, Kenner and Schlosser have understood that handling the material as dispassionately as possible is the best way to make it completely unnerving.

Yet, paradoxically, the key people who lived through that 1980 event (almost all of whom are interviewed here) are, even nearly 40 years after the fact, nothing if not emotional about their memories, not surprising when you remember they thought a world-changing nuclear catastrophe was imminent.

Director Kenner has also been helped enormously by the existence, in Green Valley, Ariz., of the Titan Missile Museum, which is in essence an almost exact replica of the Titan missile silo in Arkansas where the accident and the drama took place.

The discreet re-creations of events Kenner and cinematographers Paul Goldsmith and Jay Redmond have filmed are essential in giving us an exact idea of how chilling the space in question was, how unnerving the looming presence of the enormous missile topped by a nine megaton thermonuclear warhead, three times as powerful as all the bombs detonated in World War II, nuclear weapons included.

â??Command and Controlâ?• begins dramatically, with the deadly accident. It is 6:25 p.m. on that day, and a re-creation shows two members of the Air Forceâ??s Propellant Transfer System team, nearing the end of their 12-hour shift, suiting up to service the behemoth.

â??Youâ??re counting on everything to work perfectly all the time,â?• says Jeffrey L. Plumb, who was 19 at the time. â??And things just donâ??t work perfectly all the time.â?•

So it was that Plumbâ??s coworker David Powell used a ratchet instead of a torque wrench to remove a gasket, only to watch in horror (so much so that he didnâ??t tell his superiors the full story for half an

hour) as the gasket fell and hit the side of the rocket, causing an immediate fuel leak that was a real threat to explode and perhaps detonate the warhead.

At this point â??Command and Controlâ?• goes back and forth between the Air Forceâ??s attempts to deal with this crisis and other past nuclear weapons accidents. The Air Force says there have been 32 of these, which is scary enough, but the film claims there have been more than one thousand.

Most terrifying of all, and gone into in some detail, was a 1961 event when a B-52 bomber broke apart in flight over Goldsboro, N.C. The resulting centripetal force actually armed the hydrogen bomb on board and when the weapon hit the ground, only one tiny switch prevented it from going off.

Off-site, Air Force higher-ups soon took over command of the Arkansas situation, but that didnâ??t stop the response from becoming chaotic and seat of the pants.

As related by the participants, the story became one of heroism and foolishness, of individual people who responded well and systems that did not. A nuclear explosion did not take place, but terrible things did happen, so embarrassing to the Air Force that even the people who acted heroically were shunned.

As terrifying as this particular event was, the back story is equally scary, including the realization that the United States and the Soviet Union at one time had between them close to 70,000 of these frightening weapons.

And it is very disturbing to hear the people who were in charge of using them, like Lt. Allan D. Childers, say that in the name of deterrence they were perfectly ready to push the launch button. â??I had to be prepared to destroy an entire civilization,â?• he says, â??and I had no problem with that.â?•

Most troubling of all, however, is the idea that nuclear weapons are machines, and every machine ever made has broken down at some point.

â??It will happen,â?• says Sandia Laboratories engineer Bob Peurifoy, a former weapons builder. â??Maybe tomorrow, maybe a million years from now, but it will happen.â?•

As I said, be very afraid.

(Source:www.sbiff.org)

Category

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Author
hollywoodglee