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A man in a cowboy hat and blue shirt is riding a brown horse down a dirt path in a desert landscape. The background features rugged, layered rock formations under a reddish-orange sky. The overall style is reminiscent of a classic Western film poster.

CAST

Joel McCrea Dave Nash
Veronica Lake Connie Dickason
Donald Crisp Sheriff Jim Crew
Don DeFore Bill Schell
Preston Foster Frank Ivey
Arleen Whelan Rose Leland
Charlie Ruggles Ben Dickason
Lloyd Bridges Red Cates

CREW

Directed by **Andre de Toth**
A **Harry Sherman** Production
Screenplay **Jack Moffitt, Graham Baker** and **Cecile Kramer**
Based on the Novel by **Luke Short**
Associate Producer **Gene Strong**
Director of Photography **Russell Harlan A.S.C.**
Production Designed by **Lionel Banks**
Film Editor **Sherman A. Rose**
Set Decoration **Allan O'Dea**
Assistant Director **Harold Godsoe**
Sound Engineer **Ben Winkler**
Special Scenic Effects **Harry Redmond Jr.**
Make-up Supervisor **Don Donaldson**
Music Composed and Conducted by **Adolph Deutsch**
Director of Music **Rudolph Polk**
Wardrobe **Eddie Armand**
Costumes for Miss Lake and Miss Whelan Designed by **Edith Head**



HATS OFF: ANDRE DE TOTH AND RAMROD

by Adrian Danks

It's always been difficult to know where to place director Andre de Toth. The highly influential auteurist critic Andrew Sarris corralled him within the vaguely defined and somewhat unhelpful category of "expressive esoterica" in his influential hierarchy of American directors. Martin Scorsese, a great champion of his work, deemed him a "smuggler" who worked surreptitiously within the conventions and partial confines of the Hollywood studios during the 1940s, '50s and '60s. Although de Toth did establish strong working partnerships with particular producers and actors (Randolph Scott, for example), he was never contracted to a specific studio beyond a small run of films and he prided himself on his ability to work independently within and alongside the system, producing subtle, idiosyncratic variations on popular forms, and demonstrating a particular affinity for westerns and crime films, in the post-war period. This nimbleness relegated de Toth to projects generally below prestige or A-grade status, and even his 'first-class' projects such as *Springfield Rifle* (1952), starring Gary Cooper, have a down-at-heel, pithy quality. Subsequently, de Toth is routinely written out of histories of American cinema, and when mentioned it is commonly only for the anomaly of him being a one-eyed director charged with making several films during the brief boom of 3-D in the early 1950s: *House of Wax* (1953) for Warner Bros. and *The Stranger Wore a Gun* (1953) for Columbia Pictures. Even those critics who do refer to and value de Toth's work often struggle to differentiate it clearly from that of his more lurid American contemporaries such as Sam Fuller, Robert Aldrich and Anthony Mann, though the astringency and sober matter-of-factness of many of de Toth's best genre films actually provides a fascinating contrast to the bold, primary-coloured iconoclasm of the work of these other directors. Hungarian de Toth is more accurately compared with his émigré contemporaries such as Robert Siodmak, Max Ophuls, Curtis Bernhardt and Fritz Lang. His focus on tortured domesticity – even in a number of his westerns, such as *Ramrod* (1947), intermittently indicates – finds a counterpoint in Lang films such as *Scarlet Street* (1945) and *Clash by Night* (1952), but de Toth's measured, quizzical but predominantly humanist and deeply ethical tone contrasts to Lang's bracing coldness and absolute moral fatalism.



While de Toth's most discussed films are probably *House of Wax* and *Springfield Rifle*, his greatest contributions to the medium are dotted across his 25-year Hollywood career and can be found in such terse, morally complex, elemental and pointedly violent works as *Ramrod*, *Pitfall* (1948), *Crime Wave* (1953), *Day of the Outlaw* (1959) and *Play Dirty* (1969). De Toth's cinema is uneven and peripatetic, but at its best it brings a measured, circumspect and deeply thoughtful sensibility and sensitivity to the conventions and landscapes of well-worn genres and situations.

Ramrod was the first of de Toth's many westerns and it can be argued that it is also his first truly significant film. De Toth had completed a short run of features in Hungary in 1939 and early 1940 before arriving in Britain, where he briefly worked for Hungarian-born British film producer and director Alexander Korda. He journeyed to Los Angeles in 1942 and quickly established a foothold in Hollywood. Although the three films he completed in America before *Ramrod* are sometimes turgid and uneven in tone, the World War II-themed *None Shall Escape* (1944), an audacious "fantasy" looking back on the war from the perspective of a Nuremberg-like war crimes trial, and the gothic film noir *Dark Waters* (1944) start to reveal de Toth's overriding interest in the traumatic legacies of the past, complex and idiosyncratic individual psychology, and the moral and ethical implications of particular (often violent) actions and decisions.

Ramrod was the first film made by Enterprise Productions, a joint-venture of producers David L. Loew, Charles Einfeld and actor John Garfield. This short-lived entity produced a series of sometimes high-quality and often left-wing inflected films between 1947-1949, including Robert Rossen's *Body and Soul* (1947), Abraham Polonsky's *Force of Evil* (1948) and Max Ophuls' *Caught* (1949). An independent production company, Enterprise, was designed to favour the vision of distinctive directors like de Toth (who was supposedly recommended by John Ford for *Ramrod*). Despite its reasonably high budget, *Ramrod* was a relative financial success which helped establish the company and led to de Toth being contracted to produce a subsequent, less memorable film later that year, the melodrama *The Other Love*. However, by 1949 Enterprise were struggling to maintain distribution agreements with the major studios for its small slate of productions (*Ramrod* was distributed by United Artists, then a smaller studio), and collapsed under large cost of Lewis Milestone's big-budget *Arch of Triumph* (1948) and the box-office failure of *Force of Evil*.

Based on a novel by the prolific western writer Luke Short, whose work sometimes dealt with internecine land conflicts, *Ramrod* tells of an intergenerational and gendered conflict that fractures a powerful cattle-ranching family. An increasingly violent feud develops between the family's daughter (Connie Dickason, played against type by de Toth's then wife, Veronica Lake); the owner of a rival ranch (Frank Ivey, played by Preston Foster) to whom

Connie has been promised in marriage; and her somewhat ineffectual and kowtowing father (Charlie Ruggles). Wading into these simmering conflicts is Joel McCrea's Dave Nash, a recently reformed drunk and drifter who is damaged by his past but provides the moral and ethical centre of the narrative (as well as taking on the role designated by the film's title) and whose vacillations between revenge and the law; Connie and the local dressmaker, Rose (Arlene Whelan); his outlaw friend Bill Schell (Don DeFore) and the sheriff (Donald Crisp), are central to the moral and ethical questions that drive the narrative.

The film emerges as a second cousin to Anthony Mann's *The Furies* (1950), another domestically themed western melodrama in which a firebrand heiress (Barbara Stanwyck) clashes with her dictatorial father (Walter Huston), but *Ramrod* plays in a significantly toned down, terse and reserved register. Whereas the emotions and feelings of Mann's characters are played across the harsh landscape, embodied in the fearlessly expressive lead performance of the righteously but hellishly vengeful Stanwyck, de Toth provides a subtler and less demonstrative environment to play out these conflicts. But the true strength of de Toth's film is found in the time and space it gives to other characters, situations and relationships. For example, much of the last third of the film is taken up with Ivey's pursuit of his outlaw friend Bill, and the latter, questionable character's selfless sacrifice to save Dave's life. As in many of de Toth's films, *Ramrod* prides itself on an uncommon sense of objectivity that gives all of the characters their reasons and justifications, mapping out a complex web of relations between the players. The film also utilises stereotypical western iconography to help frame and establish these figures in ways that both confirm and confound expectations. For example, the range of hats sported by almost all of the characters says much about their personalities as well as their relationship to environment and situation. Typically, de Toth does not resort to stereotypical demarcations of good and bad, black and white, but uses these hats as gestural markers that feel organic, idiosyncratic and fully lived-in.

Ramrod is generally categorised within a particular cycle of films that joined together the western with elements of film noir. Writer Luke Short was a key source for several of these films including Raoul Walsh's seminal *Pursued* (1947), a highly influential psychological western starring Robert Mitchum, released several months before *Ramrod*. Walsh's obsessive, unquestionably Freudian film is often claimed as the movie that launched and defined the noir western subgenre. This hybrid often borrowed stylistic elements from noir – a form that, in many ways was more of a style than a genre anyway – and shared a predilection for expressive violence and flawed protagonists caught within fatalistic and often doomed situations. In the context of the noir western, *Ramrod* is something of an anomaly. Although it contains elements that draw it close to the conventions and forms of noir, it places these alongside choices and emphases that complicate any straightforward



reading of its generic allegiances. There are several passages in the film, such as the early sequence where Dave wanders into town and disaffectedly samples its nightlife, that do betray some stylistic connections to noir, but the movie is more coloured by its distinctive use of its Utah locations and its common reliance on domestic interiors. Even the figure of Connie played by Lake, a character who bares close affinities with the femme fatale, offers a more complex vision of motivation, betrayal, vulnerability and even sexuality (in fact both central female characters come to recognise that sexuality and its display constitute their true power) than is commonly the case.

Despite their adherence to the conventions of genre and classical Hollywood filmmaking, de Toth's films present violence in a direct and often unadorned fashion. It is easy to come to the conclusion that de Toth's cinema is marked and defined by an often sadistic feeling for this violence, but that is more a question of its felt consequences than its magnitude. For example, gunshots in *Ramrod* are heard sparingly but with truly concussive force. The early barroom fight between Dave and Red (Lloyd Bridges) is notable for its brevity, physical impact and lasting effect: Red retains his scars until he is gunned down while seeking "long-range" revenge later in the film. The increasingly sympathetic Bill shows little remorse, and some continued satisfaction, when he realises he has killed an "innocent" man when seeking revenge for the fatal beating of Curley. Even the final showdown between Dave and Frank is a model of concision, with just a short, steely walk by Dave the flourish needed to communicate his fixed resolve. De Toth does allow himself one further ostentation, a shift to an uncommon point-of-view shot from Dave's perspective that shows the barrel of his shotgun and registers its deadly impact. The aftermath of this killing, like so many others, occurs in the background, a scene that continues on after the swift and decisive action has taken place. But this is not a matter of quickly cutting away from or de-emphasising violent actions. Killings are not generally messy or protracted in *Ramrod*, but the physical impact and legacy of these actions are registered profoundly and indelibly (and actions in de Toth's films always have very real consequences).

Ramrod also provides a fascinating sense of place and space. The most common contrast across the film is between the stark Utah exteriors and the protean domestic interiors that become important markers of power, control and gender. The film's two women, the fiercely driven Connie and the more conventionally feminine Rose, each provide a particular vision of this domestic space – something to be seized, constructed and burnished in the case of Connie; a more lived-in, expressly feminine and work-a-day environment for Rose. Although Dave is equally driven by his carefully justified and legalised revenge, his journey across the film is marked by his relationship to these women, as well as the interiors and the spaces that connect them. At numerous points in the early sections of the film characters comment on Dave's status as a "drifter", a figure uncertain in his allegiances

and circumspect in his motivations. This is a rare Hollywood film where one gets the sense of characters truly weighing up their positions and working through the complex choices they need to make. Dave moves along restlessly in the first half of the film, mirrored by the commonly tracking camera, before starting to slow down and fully occupy interior space in later sequences. He is brought to Rose's house/dressmaker's shop to recuperate after being injured in a shootout, and is then forced to hide in the makeshift domesticity of a cave. As he stumbles into town towards the end of the film and spends the night in the deceased sheriff's office, his relation to space and place once again pre-empts his following actions (in this case his rightful and sanctioned shooting of Frank). In its final moments, the camera is finally fully contained within the domestic space, co-existing with the couple (Rose and Dave) behind a closed door. This hermetic world suggests the closed-off future domesticity of the couple, but also regards the outside world as just too messy (and complex) to let such a blissful, if somewhat rushed-to, union to co-exist within it. It must exclude this world with its compromised allegiances and treacheries in order to produce this ending. Although *Ramrod* builds to this romantic moment, it doesn't let us or the characters forget the violence, compromises, betrayals and other harsh realities that have preceded it. Dave, of course, still doesn't remove his hat.

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PRODUCTION STORIES

Throughout the production of a big-budget film, unit publicists work overtime trying to plant stories in the press, in order to keep the film's name in the public eye over the months between initial announcement and eventual release. Many of these pieces would have been syndicated across dozens of American newspapers, especially if they were by renowned columnists like Jimmie Fidler (1898-1988), Sheilah Graham (1904-1988) or the legendary Hedda Hopper (1885-1966).

Typically "Hollywood" was the method by which the period of *Ramrod*, the new western colossal, was determined. Its heroine, Veronica Lake, and Edith Head, the designer hired to create the wardrobe, surveyed the styles of the 1890s and pronounced them "unattractive". Next they appraised the fashions of the 1880s and ruled them "impossible". But the duds worn by ladies of the 1870s they judged "adorable". So, *Ramrod* will be laid in the 1870s. To a mere man the whole affair seems just a bit ridiculous. Girls who lived on early-day western ranches didn't have exclusive designers, anyway.

(Jimmie Fidler, *Monroe Morning World*, 5 May 1946)

Motion picture people from Hollywood flew into Salt Lake City this week in an effort to secure electrical generation equipment powerful enough to light up an entire street at a movie location in Johnson's Canyon 18 miles from Kanab. Accompanied by Whit Parry of the Parry Lodge, the group accompanied by Utah Publicity Department representatives flew to Ogden to inspect motor generator outfits for sale by the war assets corporation.

(*Vernal Express*, 9 May 1946)

Location work on a motion picture becomes a very big business operation, as Director Andre de Toth learned when he made arrangements to take his troupe of 150 persons to Kanab, Utah, to film Harry Sherman's production *Ramrod*, starring Joel McCrea and Veronica Lake. De Toth scouted possible location sites in all the western States, using a chartered plane. During one week's time, he covered more than 11,000 miles.

(*Los Angeles Times*, 26 May 1946)

At least 200 Utahns will have a part in the production, half of them appearing as townfolk in several important scenes. The others will work in the preparation of sets. Selection of the park as the locale for the screen story was made by Sherman, [Andre] de Toth

and cinematographer Russell Harlan after the trio had covered approximately 3,000 miles visiting potential film sites in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada and Utah. As a result of their selection, Utah will gain much financial and publicity value. Enterprise Productions will spend \$1,750,000 on this picture, a good share of it in Utah. All news and feature stories relating to the picture which the studio releases will mention Utah.

(Bob Rhodes, *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 4 June 1946)

From Grafton, Utah, where the *Ramrod* company is filming location scenes, comes a breezy chuckle. On arriving there, the troupe encountered soaring temperatures and a howling wind that never ceased. After bucking the gale for five days, Producer “Pop” Sherman’s nerves began to fray. “My God, does it always blow this way here?” he asked of one William Russell, an old-time settler. “No,” replied Russell gravely. “About half the time it blows from the other direction.”

(Jimmie Fidler, *Joplin Globe*, 25 June 1946)

Beau, 4-year-old son of Lloyd Bridges, stood by and wept while Joel McCrea beat the tar out of his pa for a scene in *Ramrod*. So Harry Sherman stopped the shooting, wrote the type in the script. Beau then got paid for doing the weeping in front of the camera.

(Hedda Hopper, *The Pittsburgh Press*, 25 June 1946)

Imagine the embarrassment of Joel McCrea, Preston Foster, Don DeFore and other he-men on the Zion National Park location of *Ramrod*. They were challenged to a game of softball by an all-female softball team of Virgin City, Utah, and the boys lost, 26 to 14!

(Sheilah Graham, *Kingsport News*, 26 June 1946)

To producer “Pop” Sherman, who prides himself on finishing pictures in less time than anyone else in the ‘A’ field, came Joel McCrea with a complaint—the shooting schedule for *Ramrod* would give him only one free day. “I’ll try to revise that,” promised Sherman—and he did. McCrea is now scheduled to work every day.

(Jimmie Fidler, *The Monroe News-Star*, 26 June 1946)

A deer, uncalled for in the script, will be seen in the Harry Sherman production of *Ramrod*, Enterprise Productions’ first film. The animal, obviously not at all startled by the film crew, moved into the scene just as Cinematographer Russell Harlan began shooting it,

and practically stole it from Joel McCrea and Veronica Lake. The scene was shot in Zion National Park, a game refuge where deer are almost as tame as the pup next door.

(*Los Angeles Times*, 14 July 1946)

In scouting for authentic backgrounds for *Ramrod*, Sherman discovered the town of Grafton, Utah—population three. Because the natural surroundings of Grafton are very similar to those mentioned in the [Luke] Short novel, Sherman found it necessary to take an option on the entire town to complete the film. For Miss Lake, *Ramrod* will present several ‘firsts’. It will be the first film she has made off the Paramount lot; her first western role; her first for Enterprise. And, what is more personally important to Veronica, it will be the first time she has worked for her husband, Andre de Toth, who is directing the picture.

(*The Miami News*, 14 July 1946)

It sounds like an old but refurbished gag, but Veronica Lake swears it happened. The actress, on location in Zion National Park for Harry Sherman’s picture *Ramrod*, saw an elderly Indian couple on a side trail. The man was on horseback, his squaw trudged afoot behind, sweat rolling down her wrinkled face. She was loaded with bundles, apparently a month’s supply of foodstuffs. “Why doesn’t the woman ride?” Veronica demanded of the man. Fully 30 seconds passed before he answered: “She got no horse.”

(*St Louis Post-Dispatch*, 21 July 1946)

Press agents apparently are stunned by all the publicity Howard Hughes has been accumulating on *The Outlaw*, for they’re resorting now to the most antique methods in attempting to grab space for currently shooting movies. Even the ‘accident’ and ‘dollar’ angles, rusty devices of the silent-day era, are getting heavy plays. During the past couple of weeks, no less than half a dozen stars and featured players were reported at death’s door because of alleged accidents on location. Veronica Lake, said to have been kicked by a horse and in a serious condition with the *Ramrod* company in Arizona, was entirely unaware of the ‘mishap’. [...] Another *Ramrod* story had Joel McCrea, the star, falling down a 25-foot embankment, suffering head contusions and being rushed to hospital for X-rays.

(Harold Heffernan, *The Miami News*, 24 July 1946)

During one of the hottest days last week, Joel McCrea and other members of the cast of *Ramrod* were working on a closed sound stage with half a hundred horses. As the day wore on and the air became more and more stagnant, the horses grew restless, until the trainer

complained that they needed fresh air. “Okay,” snapped the director, “take them outside.” Then, as an afterthought, he added, “But I want the actors to remain.”

(Jimmie Fidler, *The Mercury*, Pottstown, Pennsylvania, 25 July 1946)

There are flies on some of the actors these days, and it is causing the studios many headaches. Summer brings the fly season and their soaring and buzzing fouls up production something awful. On the *Ramrod* set I watched thousands of Enterprise dollars go down the drain while a dozen men chased a lone fly with DDT bombs.

(Bob Thomas, *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 8 August 1946)

Seems this is the first time in the history of movies that a director-husband has worked with his wife as a leading lady. De Toth and Miss Lake are doing their pioneering for Enterprise’s *Ramrod*, a top-budget cowboy epic. “I know one couple who was supposed to try it,” Miss Lake grinned. “Director Charles Vidor and his wife Evelyn Keyes. But they got a divorce before they ever got around to starting their picture.” The de Toth family keeps things strictly on a professional basis when they’re at the studio. “I call him Mr. de Toth and he calls me Miss Lake,” the missus explained. “We don’t even eat lunch together. You probably couldn’t even tell we were married unless you happened to know it.”

(Virginia MacPherson, *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, 11 August 1946)

Joel McCrea tells it—and not without a bit of chagrin. When he was in Zion National Park recently, working in location scenes for *Ramrod*, he took time out one day to give a group of set-visiting kids a lecture about the intricacies of movie-making. He explained how the sound camera worked, how the camera crane was operated, how various ‘process’ scenes were filmed and ended, finally, by paying high tribute to the industry’s technicians. “Without them,” he explained, “it would be impossible to make pictures. They’re the backbone of the business.” At that point, one of his schoolboy listeners interrupted. “If that’s true,” said he, “how come it’s guys like you who make all the money?”

(Jimmie Fidler, *Joplin Globe*, 24 August 1946)

Sherman said, having McCrea as his star, he couldn’t be happier. “Joel is the greatest natural western star since the old days of Tom Mix and William S. Hart,” he declared. “He has authentic background, and he’s the finest natural horseman I’ve ever seen. No trick rider, understand. Just a guy who knows how to sit a horse with grace and authority.” Joel never uses a double when putting a pony through its paces. He bought his first horse

from a playmate, Dick Beldon, who later became the cowboy star Rex Bell. At 13 he began working during the summer on cattle ranches and continued till he entered college. His ambition was and still is to become a successful rancher. Working in the movie was a means of earning money to buy land and cattle.

(Hedda Hopper, *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 20 October 1946)

A 96-year-old bar, which at one time was polished by the sleeves of Maj. U.S. Grant a few years before the rough and tough soldier was elevated to command of the Union armies, has been obtained by Enterprise Productions for the Joel McCrea-Veronica Lake starrer, *Ramrod*. [...] Made of hand-carved oak, the bar once was the centre of attraction in a saloon in Mariposa, Cal. [...] As a matter of fact, Major Grant spent so much time in the bar downing gallons of high octane frontier liquor and trying to forget, the name of the saloon was changed from the rather prosaic “Mariposa saloon” to the “U.S. Grant bar”. [...] When Veronica Lake is told by husband-director Andre de Toth to walk into the bar and find Joel McCrea standing at the fountain of frontier refreshment during one scene of the *Ramrod* film, Veronica will be making a move many former female inhabitants of Mariposa wished they could have made. Never, during all the many years the “U.S. Grant” bar stood in Mariposa, Cal., was a woman permitted to defile the polished surface by leaning over the edge and yelling to the bartender, “Give me a drink, bub.”

(*Salt Lake Telegram*, 25 October 1946)

Three trunkloads of irreplaceable dresses of 1870 vintage and insured for \$75,000 arrived in Salt Lake Saturday as the advance contingent of the huge influx of film stars and press notables expected for the world premiere on Feb 21 of *Ramrod*, official Utah centennial film. [...] Two local beauties, Peggy Dixon and Betty Gerendas, were selected to model the dresses after a protracted search. The difficulty was in finding someone who could fit into Miss Lake’s outfits. The diminutive blonde star has Hollywood’s smallest waist, 20¾ inches around. Miss Gerendas slipped in easily. Her middle has a circumference of 20½ inches, a quarter of an inch to the good, no matter how you figure it.

(*Salt Lake Telegram*, 15 February 1947)

POLITICAL CONTROVERSY

Although set in Colorado, the film was shot and premiered in Utah, a decision that briefly triggered what the *Salt Lake Telegram* described as “a technicolored tempest” when two Colorado legislators, Senator Edward A. Whitaker and Representative Clem Crowley, were so annoyed by this outcome that they made denunciatory speeches about it in both the Colorado Senate and House of Representatives. This was followed by a formal rebuttal in the Utah House of Representatives by Representative Dan Frost.

SENATOR WHITAKER’S SPEECH

It has come to my attention that the Luke Short story, *Ramrod*, which originally appeared in serial form in the *Saturday Evening Post* issues of March 27, through May 8, 1943, and was later published in book form by MacMillan and Company, has been made into a picture by Enterprise Productions, and stolen from the State of Colorado by the State of Utah, billed as the “Official Picture of the Utah Centennial Celebration.”

As many of you gentlemen know, the story of *Ramrod* was laid in the fictitious town of Signal, Colorado. For the officials of Enterprise Studio, the producer and director of *Ramrod*, Mr Harry Sherman and Mr Andre de Toth, and most important, the officials of the State of Utah, to take this film dealing with the glorious frontier history of Colorado from the citizens of this State and premiere the film in Utah is not in keeping with the traditions of the West. *Ramrod* is as much a part of the State of Colorado as the City of Denver, Pike’s Peak, beautiful valleys and rivers and other natural and man-made attractions that have made our State the most beautiful in the West.

Now, I fully realise that Governor Maw and other officials of the State of Utah might be justifiably hesitant in comparing the glories of Colorado with their own arid, desolate state. But for them to usurp the motion picture version of *Ramrod*, dealing, as it does, with our Colorado settlers, their problems, their struggles, is a blight on the heretofore commendable record of the people of Utah.

Too, Mr Sherman, the producer of *Ramrod* for Enterprise Studio, a gentleman who has held the reins on over 156 pictures accurately dealing with the West, should realise that by permitting his most recent film to be filched from the people of Colorado and used in the promotion of the Utah Centennial celebration, he insults the people of Colorado, the theatre-goers of our State, who have, until now, been ardent and faithful fans of Mr Sherman’s films.

The chicanery that has been perpetrated against the people of the State of Colorado by the State of Utah and Enterprise Studio is definitely foreign to the long, fine record of cooperation and honesty that has been an outstanding feature in the history of the American West.

REPRESENTATIVE CROWLEY’S SPEECH

This morning Senator Whitaker in speaking before the Senate of the State of Colorado discussed the matter of the State of Utah stealing from the State of Colorado for the Utah Centennial celebration, the Enterprise film version of the Luke Short novel, *Ramrod*.

Many of you gentlemen realise that this story had as its background the mythical town of Signal, Colorado. Senator Whitaker pointed out that Denver, long neglected by Hollywood studios as the locale for picture premieres, should have been accorded the world premiere of *Ramrod* inasmuch as the story deals with the struggles, the hardships and the glories of early Colorado settlers.

I thoroughly agree with Senator Whitaker. Not only would such an arrangement have benefited theatre owners, restaurant and hotel owners, other businesses and industries of the State of Colorado, it would have provided, through large Denver attendance, an early and great financial return to Enterprise Studio.

By devious means, the officials of the State of Utah obtained for their Centennial celebration, the world premiere of *Ramrod*, christening the picture, “The Official Film of the Utah Centennial Celebration.”

Obviously, our neighbours in Utah fail to realise that had Mr Luke Short, the author of *Ramrod*, seen fit to create a Utah background for his story he would have done it. But he didn’t for the very good reason that there are few areas with sufficient colour in the State of Utah to add even the smallest bit of interest to any author’s writings. Hence, he chose Colorado.

All the tricks and all the devices used by officials of the State of Utah in grabbing the Enterprise production of *Ramrod* for premiere showing at the Utah Centennial Exposition are all right with me. But I do seriously object to Enterprise Studio’s having filmed *Ramrod* in Utah amidst a background of typically drab, uninteresting desert, while throughout the original or screen story the reader or the member of the audience is led to believe that the picture was made at a Colorado location.

Enterprise Studio and the State of Utah are guilty of gross misrepresentation in leading the public to believe that the backgrounds in the film are typical Colorado scenes. The background is a typical Utah background and the State of Utah is welcome to it... but Colorado should not be made to suffer at Utah's lack of scenic grandeur.

REPRESENTATIVE FROST'S REBUTTAL

A few days ago Senator Edward Whitaker and State Representative Clem Crowley of the Colorado House made statements before the Colorado State Legislature derogatory to the good name of the State of Utah.

Entirely without basis, these gentlemen claimed that Utah had stolen from Colorado the world premiere of the Enterprise motion picture, *Ramrod*, the film that we have been pleased to name "The Official Motion Picture of the Utah Centennial Celebration."

Senator Whitaker and Representative Crowley also claimed that the background appearing in the Enterprise Studio film, backgrounds that were made while the *Ramrod* troupe was on location at Zion National Park are supposed to represent a typical Colorado scene. That's not quite correct.

True, the story of *Ramrod* is supposed to have taken place in the hypothetical town of Signal, Colorado. However, it took Mr Sherman, producer of *Ramrod*, only a couple of days scouting around for location sites in Colorado to convince him that nowhere in our neighbouring state could areas be found that would even approximate the glorious natural background provided by our own Zion National Park area.

Another matter that both Senator Whitaker and Representative Crowley apparently know little about is that Mr Harry Sherman, who has produced more than 150 pictures dealing with the West, filming different pictures in every western state, claimed that nowhere in the West did he receive finer, more heart-felt cooperation from private citizens or state officials than he did in the State of Utah. For the ten weeks that the *Ramrod* players and crew were on location in the Grafton and Kanab areas, Mr Sherman stated that at no time were the citizens of Utah anything but unbelievably cooperative and filled with the typically warm, sincere brand of Utah friendship.

But, getting back to Senator Whitaker's statement that the Utah filmed backgrounds used in *Ramrod* are not to be found in any area in Colorado and, therefore, they will give strangers "the wrong impression of the State"... well, I am afraid that I must agree. Colorado never was as beautiful as represented in the Utah-photographed Enterprise production of *Ramrod*.

Senator Whitaker, you're going to have a tough time convincing visitors to Colorado that you have natural scenery comparable to that of Utah.

To answer your charges that the State of Utah stole the world premiere of *Ramrod* from the State of Colorado, I can only answer that you must remember we permitted part of the beautiful Utah scenery to be photographed and represented as part of Colorado and nobody in the State of Utah even thought of making a fuss over it.

In Utah, Senator Whitaker, we are always happy to lend a helping hand to a neighbour in need.

(Utah "Steals" Colorado Film', *Kane County Standard*, 14 February 1947)

However, the film ultimately proved less than a hit with Representative Frost's colleagues.

Members of the Utah legislature today suggested that the name of the new movie *Ramrod* be changed to "Hamrod".

The picture, first made by Enterprise Productions, had its world premiere here last weekend with full fanfare, including a special trainload of movie stars and Hollywood writers.

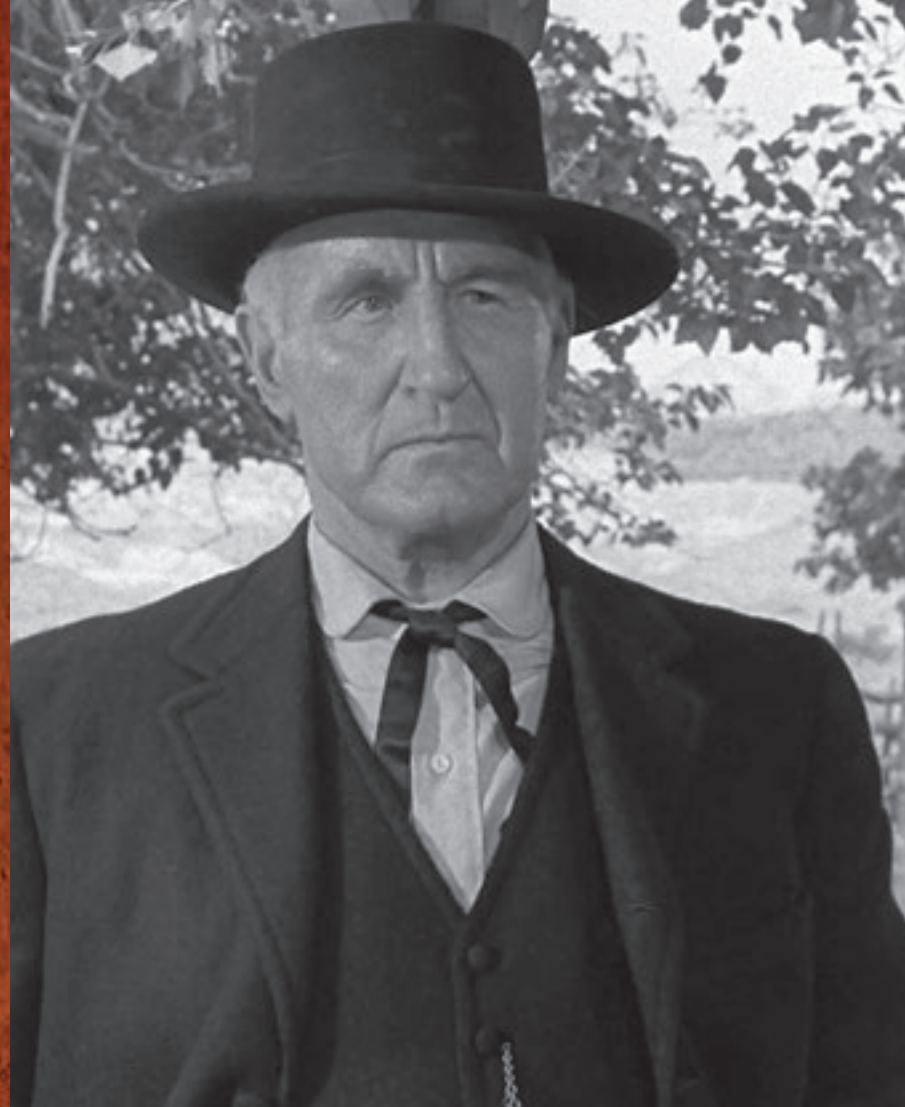
What embarrassed the lawmakers was that *Ramrod*, filmed in Utah's colourful Zion Canyon last year, was labelled as the "official" movie of Utah's current centennial celebration. Rep. Mark Paxton demanded that the state house "go on record as disapproving vehemently the use of our centennial seal on such a poor project as this." State Sen. Rue Clegg, a Salt Lake Republican, charged that the movie was "nothing but fourth-rate trash—it isn't even a good western. I personally feel that the name should be changed to read 'Hamrod' instead of *Ramrod*."

Seconding the Clegg sentiments, Sen. Elias Day, a Republican descendant of the Mormon pioneers who settled here in 1847, described the picture as "typical of only cowardice and murder. It is not typical of the clean spirit of adventure of the pioneers of the West." Republican majority leader Clifton G.M. Kerr had only one comment to make on the picture he saw at the elaborate premiere: "It's an awful lot of cackle for an egg."

Last week—before the picture was shown—the same legislature elected Joel McCrea, co-star with Veronica Lake in *Ramrod*, as "co-governor" of Utah. Today, Day declared "in my opinion, Joel McCrea should be impeached for allowing his name and that of Utah to appear in connection with such a lousy movie."

Before the trainload of high-paid talent arrived in Salt Lake City last week, studio publicists tried to stir up a civil war between Utah, which got the premiere, and Colorado, where the novel by Luke Short was laid. The gag didn't get very far. However, Paxton apologised to Colorado today for having had the premiere in Utah. "I'm perfectly happy at this point to wash my hands of the whole affair and give the picture back to Colorado," Paxton said. "The only trouble, I'm afraid, is that our sister state to the east won't want the thing once anybody there has seen it."

(Honolulu Advertiser, 27 February 1947)







CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

Ramrod is a good western with above-par names. [...] The femme angles give more than ordinary substance to this western which otherwise has its usual assortment of gunplay, hard-riding, skulduggery and the inevitable chase for the finale.

(*Variety*, 31 December 1946)

Ramrod is a maverick among western pictures, loping its solitary course away from the Hollywood herd. [...] Joel McCrea does the best job of his career as Ramrod (foreman) of Veronica Lake's Utah ranch, which would never be mistaken for a dude resort. It's no surprise to find McCrea a hero, Veronica a vixen, Arleen Whelan a heroine and Preston Foster a rogue. But you've never seen McCrea so leathery, Veronica so rawhide tough, Arleen so unposed or Preston so murderously treacherous. Sherman and de Toth kick over the clichés by giving Iowa's Don DeFore a bit of Irish brogue and letting Oxford university's Donald Crisp burr along with a Scotch accent instead of the customary Arkansasaw drawl.

(Sterling Bemis, *Des Moines Tribune*, 27 March 1947)

The pay-off gun duel introduces a new weapon—the double-barrelled, sawn-off shotgun, sometimes called the splatter gun. The film's realism isn't carried to the point where the villain's atomisation therefrom is revealed.

(E.B. Radcliffe, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 23 May 1947)

If you can imagine Veronica Lake as a tough little western hombre, then you get a rough idea of the latest horse opera. [...] It won't make much difference whether you come in at the beginning or the middle of this picture. You will be equally confused either way. It takes about 15 minutes of seeming double talk to figure out what the confusion is about.

(Betty Gose, *Amarillo Daily News*, 23 May 1947)

Everyone seems to be feuding in this film. Violence is law until Ramrod, a plodding foreman, comes into the scene. But he, too, finally takes the law in his own hands with the result that almost everyone in the film is exterminated. [...] Veronica Lake, in a role best described by an unprintable word, starts all the trouble by determining to have grazing land for her sheep.

(Boyd Martin, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 30 May 1947)

A well-written, intelligently directed action drama of the old West, *Ramrod* really rates the title of super-western, which is applied loosely to every cowboy opus that happens to get a first-run release. [...] It is commended because (1) it avoids the too-familiar cliché situations and “he went that-a-way” dialogue; (2) it has cross plots skilfully interwoven into the main story; (3) it offers several surprises and seems several grades above the usual cowboy drama in atmosphere.

(John L. Scott, *Los Angeles Times*, 31 May 1947)

Veronica Lake can look like a Persian kitten with her sleek hair, but she’s no fireside companion in the film *Ramrod*. Her clawing in revenge motif is more like that of a mountain panther when she strikes out to slash those who stand in her way. Even her own father comes in for mauling.

(Dorothy Raymer, *Miami Daily News*, 31 May 1947)

Time was when the ladies of western movies were demure damsels who came on the scene perhaps to pour a cup of coffee, teach school or to ride off into a pristine sunset with an equally pristine hero. But things, as has become only too apparent, have changed. The spirited lassies now are in there bussing and generally riding herd on unsuspecting wranglers enough to befuddle even the hardest cowpoke. Which is to say that *Ramrod*, the new tenant at the Globe, is an outdoor drama in which a beautiful but flinty blond dame is the catalyst for all the standard fireworks from a stampede to a gun duel in the quiet, dusty street of a cow town. Which is also to say that the director, scenarists and cast, many of whom are no strangers to this sort of emoting, have pitched in with vim to make this horse opera a pleasant variation on a venerable theme.

(Abe H. Weiler, *New York Times*, 30 June 1947)

Perhaps there is a tiny touch of novelty about *Ramrod*, the new glorified “western” at the Empire. For a “Western”, it has a rather distinguished cast; Joel McCrea and Veronica Lake are its stars, and it contains a number of well-known supporting players as well. But that is not new; it has become the habit of Hollywood in its wearier moments to add a bit of new glitter to the traditional “western” and to resell the article as though it were new-found gold. The novelty is that the brutalities and simplifications of the cowboy morals of *Ramrod* are not quite the same as usual. There is more than a touch of the modern gangster about them. “westerns” may not be the greatest of films, but they have a tradition and a black-and-white morality of their own. Apart from this disagreeable novelty, *Ramrod* is typical enough; it has its share of obvious excitements and rather more than its share of confusion.

(‘Our London Film Critic’, *The Guardian*, 2 August 1947)

It is good to have Joel McCrea at hand when a Western is in the works—or any other sort of outdoor action picture. The fellow oozes honesty from face and personality. His presence does considerable to give a stamp of credibility even to an outright formula movie. [...] This is a plotty western—and when was one not such?—but those who like vigorous and lethal action of this pattern—and have plenty of respect for McCrea as a sterling performer—will find it steadily entertaining.

(George L. David, *Democrat and Chronicle*, Rochester, New York, 6 November 1947)





ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Ramrod was remastered by Ignite Films from original film elements and delivered to Arrow Films in High Definition. Additional work to minimise dirt and debris was carried out at R3store Studios in London. The film is presented in the original aspect ratio 1.37:1 with original mono audio.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by James Blackford
Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni
Technical Producer James White
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Blu-ray Mastering The Engine House
Artist Sean Phillips
Design Obviously Creative

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Michael Brooke, Adrian Danks, Chris Edwards, Patrick Francis, Kevin Jackson, Adrian Martin, Anthony Nield, Jon Robertson, Jon Spira, Peter Stanfield



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