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VOA NEWS

HOLLYWOOD — The new film from director Kathryn Bigelow captures the day-to-day life-and-death drama drawn from real experiences of a US Army bomb disposal squad in the Iraq war. Here's a look at "The Hurt Locker."

IED's — improvised explosive devices — have been a deadly fact of life on the highways and dusty side streets of Iraq. When one is found, they call in the highly skilled volunteers of the elite EOD — explosive ordnance disposal - squad.

After examining the device with a remote-control robot, a member of the team suits up in protective armor and attempts to disarm the bomb.

"If everything looks okay when I get down there, I'm just going to give these people something to think about. I want them to know if they're going to leave a bomb on the side of the road for us, we're just going to blow up their little road."

"Sounds good."

They don't call it 'the world's most dangerous job' for nothing. The margin for error is zero; and there is more to worry about than just the IED, with snipers and insurgents often lying in wait.

The Hurt Locker screenplay is by Mark Boal who, as a journalist, was embedded with an OED unit. Director Kathryn Bigelow, whose films include the thriller Point Break and the submarine drama K-19: The Widowmaker, says the suspense crackling through The Hurt Locker comes from that real-life experience.

"There was a tremendous amount of tension already in the script and that had a lot to do with the fact that Mark Boal was on an embed in Iraq in fall of the 2004 with a bomb squad," Bigelow explains. "His observations were the genesis of the script and it was a very reportorial look at that particular conflict at that time: a day in the life of a bomb tech. I wanted to protect that. I wanted the audience to feel a kind of you-are-there, boots-on-the-ground, fly-on-the-wall experience of Baghdad.

"I kind of looked at it as a sort of 360-degree threat environment," she adds. "You don't know if the gentlemen up on the third floor balcony over your left shoulder is hanging out his laundry or calling in your coordinates for a sniper hit. So, as relayed to me by members of the military that have been on various tours of duty, it's a constantly threatening environment."

Bigelow took her cast and crew to Jordan where they found locations to double for the Baghdad settings of The Hurt Locker. Co-star Anthony Mackie says it made the production feel very realistic.

"You can't fake that amount of heat," Mackie says. "You can't fake that sand. You can't fake the people. When you are on set and all of the extras are Iraqi refugees, it really informs the movie that you're making. When you start hearing the stories from a true perspective, not from CNN or Fox News, but from a perspective of people who were actually there, it gives you a clear viewpoint of where you are as an artist and the story you would like to tell. It was a great experience to be there."

Several dramatic films about American soldiers returning from the Iraq war have won critical acclaim, but failed to pull audiences into theaters. Brian Geraghty, who plays another member of the OED squad, believes this one is different because it portrays the reality of life on the front lines.

"It's not a preachy thing about war or not war," he says. "It has an action element and you walk away actually thinking. How many movies have you seen recently that you can walk away and really think about?"

Screenwriter Mark Boal says he and director Bigelow were careful to avoid any political agenda because, as Boal puts it, there are no politics in the trenches.

"The idea was to be authentic and faithful and reportorial to the human experience of the soldiers in the bomb squad," Boal says. "Look, it's a movie; it's not a documentary, so it's authentic within the context of telling a great story and making a really tense, exciting movie, but if you're a bomb tech in Iraq in 2004 you might have a whole slew of opinions about the state of geopolitics and the price of oil and what makes an administration fight a war ...all that stuff ...but you're not going to be thinking about that or talking about it when you're standing over a bomb."

The Hurt Locker cast also features Jeremy Renner as the bomb squad daredevil. There are cameos by Guy Pearce, Ralph Fiennes and David Morse. The ordnance disposal armor and equipment in the film is authentic, including a remote-controlled robot that was actually used to disarm IEDs in Iraq.