

50 MPH: EPISODE 24

“I HATE THE AIRPORT”

Transcript (00:53:43)



KRIS TAPLEY

This is *50 MPH*!

[INTRO MUSIC]

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Pop quiz, hotshot!

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

There’s a bomb on a bus.

JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)

You’re deeply nuts, you know that?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Once the bus goes fifty miles an hour, the bomb is armed.

SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)

Stay on or get off?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

If it drops below fifty...

SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)

Stay on or get off?!

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

...it blows up.

ALAN RUCK (as “Stephens”)

Oh, darn.

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

What do you do?

KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)

You have a hair trigger aimed at your head. What do you do?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

What do you do?!

KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)

What do you do?

KRIS TAPLEY

I’m your host, Kris Tapley, and you’re listening to an oral history of director Jan de Bont’s 1994 summer blockbuster, *Speed*, straight from the people who made it happen. Now, don’t forget to fasten your seatbelts. Let’s hit the road!

KRIS TAPLEY

Hello everyone. Apologies in advance if this is a bit rough. I hope those of you in the States had a Happy Thanksgiving and to all listeners everywhere, welcome back after a little break. This episode of *50 MPH* was edited several weeks ago. In the interim, on November 13, I lost my mother, Jean, to a long battle of illness that has been a part of my daily existence for quite some time. This was two days before my birthday. But that’s not as sad as it might seem because I find myself comforted by the fact that my birthday is now so intertwined with my mother. After all, why wouldn’t it be? My mom played a significant role in my appreciation of movies. First of all, I know she watched *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in the hospital after I was born, so it’s entirely possible that’s the first movie I ever saw. That sounds like it might be apocryphal but I like it so I’m making it part of my origin story. It’s one of my favorite movies to this day. My mom’s favorite movie was *Gone with the Wind*. We spoke about it just not long ago, a few weeks back. She remembered seeing it as a little girl with her best friend back when movie theaters had these little sofa couples’ seats. She was in Girl Scouts at the time, so my guess is that would have been the 1967 re-issue of the film. She was born in 1956. Anyway, with my mom and my dad, I remember seeing stuff way too young like *Jaws* and *Aliens* and *RoboCop*. *The Exorcist* was something that always loomed large as a movie that shook my mom, and so that was a big moment when I finally saw and verified that effect with my own two eyes. When we would make the trip from whatever Virginia or North Carolina town we lived in at the time, and would come to my grandmother’s house, her mother’s house – which is where I am right now as I say these words, where my mom lived until she died, in this chair – we would often record a movie or two off of HBO. We later got HBO ourselves, and of course, we were frequent Blockbuster Video pilgrims. I feel like that is how I came to movies like *Ghostbusters* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Temple of Doom*, I seem to recall *Mask*, the Bogdanovich movie, *Mannequin*, *Enemy Mine* – just a mid-80s smorgasbord. The first movie I saw in a theater was *Masters of the Universe* in 1987. I was a big He-Man kid and the way my mom indulged my pop-culture bailiwicks, if you will, certainly shaped me in many ways. The last movie I remember seeing with my mom in the theater was quite some time ago. It was *The Dark Knight* in 2008, which is fitting seeing as Tim Burton’s *Batman* was such a huge part of my life 19 years prior. Mom would always ask me about the big

Oscar movies each year, and she was proud of my work as a journalist. She loved it when I would send my published works to her, as any beaming parent would. I could have appreciated that pride a little more. The last trip I made here with my wife and son was this past summer, as we would every year. She got to sit and watch *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* at home with her grandson, which was his first movie in the theater. His name is Foster, by the way, and you'll meet him very soon yourself. The last movie I ever watched with my mom was *Speed*. Go figure. I had wanted to do that together with her and my dad for a long time because it was always such a VHS mainstay and it reminded me of those simpler days. She knew about this podcast and had listened to the trailer. She was happy for me and this thing I had been building for the last few years. I'm not sure how much of it she was able to listen to as her health declined, but the last exchange we had was a text message about her excitement over a big interview I had completed with Billy Idol several days ago. So, consider that a preview of coming attractions. I guess the point of all this is there is a part of my mom in every single part of me, and my relationship to movies is no exception. *50 MPH* means even more to me now, of course, and I hope now that she's at peace, maybe mom will get a chance to listen. I think she would find it all interesting. Either way, I know she would be my #1 fan, because she always was. Thanks for listening to this. Let's get going.

KRIS TAPLEY

Alright, let's saddle back up, folks. This hell-ride isn't finished yet. We're coming down the home stretch of covering the chronological production of the bus portion of *Speed*, beginning with the early city and freeway material, then the big jump sequence and, now – the airport. You'll recall in our locations episode that this final stretch was originally meant to take place at Dodger Stadium, but they weren't able to secure the location. Transportation coordinator Randy Peters takes credit for suggesting the switch to LAX and so I want to start with him today and a little anecdote that he told.

RANDY PETERS

I knew guys at LAX. The shot with the 747 where their towing it and the bus goes flying in, I knew one of the guys that ran a ramp place over there, it was called Ontario Aircraft Services. He's still a friend of mine now, Steve Nevius. He has a charter company for Rocket Air. So, I would go over there and I'd go, "Steve, I need a 747 to do this shot." He goes, "So and so's freighter's coming in tonight, Kollita. We can pull it into the shot." And I said, "How much, man? What do you want? A thousand bucks? What do you want?" "Yeah, we'll do it for that." So, I'd go to Ian and go, "I need \$1,000 to pay this guy off." So, same thing, I go grease the guy off and next thing you know, you've got a 747 coming down a taxiway and we're freaking flying by it.

KRIS TAPLEY

That moment immediately follows what I consider to be the coolest shot in the entire movie as the bus tears onto the runway. A smaller plane lands in the far distance as a much larger one takes off in the middle distance, then here comes Bus 2525 blowing onto the scene. And in front of that, more layers, with orange delineators and pole lights and, ugh, it's just so good. Here's set decorator K.C. Fox.

K.C. FOX

Anything orange in the film, I was providing. I provided miles of orange snow fencing along 105. I provided, you know, hundreds of delineators, the stand-up delineators with flags and, you know, all those materials, all those construction site freeway materials, like, when they're driving onto the 105. And likewise, at one point we decided that when they went to the bravo tango area at the airport that they needed to be able to pass by something on a regular basis to make you feel like the bus was really going fast. So, I designed these standing lights, strobe lights, out of metal, and we tried them. And they were about six feet tall and they each had a strobe and they had a shelf on the bottom for weight. There was quite a few. There were at least a hundred of those standing lights and I'm sure I spent thousands – you know, probably a hundred thousand dollars or something for all of the lights, whatever it was.

KRIS TAPLEY

Art director John Jensen.

JOHN JENSEN

They wanted that up and they wanted some scaffold pieces and things, in foreground and in background, so that they could see the bus traveling through it. Otherwise, it was just open airstrip.

K.C. FOX

The security guy came out and said, you know, "You guys are going to be shooting in the bravo tango area. That means that if we get a bomb threat, you have to vacate the area in, like, less than 10 minutes with all your stuff." But everything would have to get picked up off the tarmac. So, he said, "Tomorrow, we're going to have a test, and if you pass, you can keep all those lights and flags and all that stuff." And, of course, it was very important to Jan de Bont and to Jack De Govia to have that as dressing out there. You know, it was a nice pop of color. It really made the bus look like it was moving when they were all stacked up like that, you know? It looked terrific. So, we did it and we passed the test. It took two trucks going in opposite directions with the driver, one guy in the bed, one guy on the lift gate, and another guy throwing them up to him. So, they would throw one to the next to the next and throw it in the truck. And we made it in under 10 minutes, but of course, all the light bulbs broke. At the end of some days there's just not enough glitter to rub off.

KRIS TAPLEY

First assistant camera Vern Nobles Jr.

VERN NOBLES JR.

They had a plane with a possible bomb on it and they moved it over there. Now they built the remote terminal over where we were. There's a whole other terminal there now, but back then that was the area designated – all the way at the end of the runway to the right, just by that big sand berm, it was a big open area and that's where they would bring planes if there was a suspected bomb, so they wouldn't blow up anything but the plane itself. Now at LAX, that's the extra remote terminal that you can take a bus to.

KRIS TAPLEY

And gaffer Chris Strong.

CHRIS STRONG

We had a day at LAX where they had an airplane emergency. One of the landing gears wouldn't come down. So, they kicked us all off and made us go far, far away and the plane came over the airport two or three times, and you could see that the landing gear, one of the main ones, was not down. So, they were getting ready, actually, to rid of us to foam the runway, but the guy kept going out over Catalina and just rocking the plane as hard and the gear finally came down.

KRIS TAPLEY

They were actually shooting at the airport during one of the frequent Los Angeles fires out here, specifically the Old Topanga Fire in Malibu that burned from November 2 to November 11, 1993. You can actually go back and turn up some pretty harrowing imagery of these fires, which lit up the night sky like something out of Mordor. Here's actor Joe Morton.

JOE MORTON

It really was kind of snowing ash while we were there, which sort of added a kind of texture to it. Looking up at the sky, it looked like the sun was the end of a lit cigarette in the middle of an ash tray.

KRIS TAPLEY

Still photographer Richard Foreman.

RICHARD FOREMAN

One day, all of a sudden, we saw huge fires up on the ridges in Malibu, and one by one, crew members that either lived in Malibu or had relatives living in Malibu went up to Jan and say, "Jan, I have to go." And by mid-day – I'm not sure when the fire started – but within four hours we had, like, a skeleton crew. I'd say a quarter of the crew had left. You know, because a lot of people lived in Topanga, which is, you know, close to Malibu. You know, they just had to go. Because when you can be at the LAX airport and looking up and see the actual flames, you know that it's big.

KRIS TAPLEY

And talk about harrowing, we're coming up on another big stunt. Once Jack Traven has the bright idea for Annie to high-tail it into the airport, he finally has some control over the situation as the bus can just keep doing laps as they try to find Howard Payne and put an end to this madness. In the meantime, Jack wants to take a stab at defusing the bomb himself so he convinces Payne to let him off. I just want to mention a beat here. You know when Keanu Reeves steps from the bus over to the police SUV to go get ready to go under the bus? I've mentioned before that I watched the movie with Vern and DP Andrzej Bartkowiak. During that screening, Vern pointed to the screen when that happened, when Keanu stepped across to the SUV, and said, "We can't do that

anymore.” Even something like that, insurance wouldn’t allow today without some kind of secure tether. It sort of makes you wonder if they even knew he did that, because as I understand it, there were a number of things Keanu did without the studio’s knowledge. Here’s first assistant director David Sardi.

DAVID SARDI

You know, there’s been a few times in my career where I’ve witnessed such total commitment from an actor, but Keanu was utterly committed to what we were doing. Everything from jumping from car to car, jumping on the bus, you know, going under the bus – you know, all of what he did was really impressive. I was just in awe of his – commitment is the word I use. And there’s only been a few times I’ve seen an actor commit to a role like that, and it’s – when they do, it’s always just really special.

KRIS TAPLEY

So, let’s start talking about that under-the-bus bit. Here’s director Jan de Bont.

JAN DE BONT

The only tricky shot is when the cart goes under the bus the first time, from far away and then closer, closer, and then actually under it. That was very dangerous. And that was not Keanu, of course. Because the bus never stays a straight line and the cart doesn’t go in a straight line. But once it’s done, once it’s under the bus and moving under the bus itself, it’s all being controlled and it just looks dangerous. And the sound is there, also. You go – hearing the sound of the tires and the speed of it. That alone gets your adrenaline already going. That’s why those scenes only work so well, because they – you put them in the same position as the reality and you get a performance that is based on that adrenaline level.

KRIS TAPLEY

Stunt coordinator Gary Hymes.

GARY HYMES

We were able to do small sections of it where he was on that trolley, right? You know, you try to create a very stable and safe environment when you have someone who is not a stunt person on, let’s say. And so, we would do all the big masters and everything with the stunt guy, and then, as it’s going under the bus, of course, either we do a poor man’s or we would do it where the bus and that would be traveling, but it was no longer attached, of course, to the outside vehicle, you know, the winch system. It was on our little leader, so we could just move it four, six feet or whatever it was. So, of course, everything gets broken up into much smaller pieces. But no, absolutely, there were things that Keanu did where there’s no way the studio or insurance companies would let you do it today, or, and quite honestly, I don’t know many actors that would even – I mean, they’d probably look at you like you came from Mars if you asked them to do it, you know?

KRIS TAPLEY

Let's hear from the guy who you do see physically going under the bus. Well, one of them. I'll get to the other one in a second, but the shot where you see the top of Jack Traven's head going out toward the bus, that was assistant stunt coordinator Brian Smrz. Brian doubled Keanu both here and, you'll recall, in the jump from the Jaguar to the bus.

BRIAN SMRZ

I can't tell you how big a bus looks when you're laying on your back and it's coming at you. Because, again, the thing is, a bus really isn't tall enough to go under. You can get under it, but eventually, pretty quickly, you hit stuff that's lower than what – especially on a cart. You couldn't physically go all the way under the bus, so, we had a piece of Plexiglass that was, say, eight feet under, so I could just barely get under and then I'm going to be hitting the Plexiglass. But that's not a good thing, either, because – it's better than getting hooked up, but still, if the bus is going faster than you and my feet hit the Plexiglass, it's going to turn me sideways, and, you know, then I'm all sideways underneath the bus. So, that's – that's not good. So, it was a tricky situation. Again, I actually did not belt myself into the cart. I put webbing underneath. So, I had the Plexiglass and I had the webbing, like, that I could grab on to. I just had different hand holds that I could grab onto, because I thought, well, if it gets out of control, I'm just going to grab onto the underside of the bus and let the cart leave me. I didn't want to be attached to a cart that was under a bus and going sideways. So, that was my personal choice. It was pretty tricky because Gil Combs was driving the bus from the middle, so he couldn't see me. And then Ronnie Rondell was driving the tow truck from in front, but he couldn't see me, because there was all the gear and the truck and the thing. So, neither of the guys that are actually driving could see me, and then, Gary Hymes was in the back of the tow truck in a box, and he was giving cues for the vehicles to come forward and go back and, yeah, it was pretty hairy, actually.

KRIS TAPLEY

Stunt driver Gil Combs.

GIL COMBS

Yeah, that was – that got our attention, that's for sure. I really didn't envy Brian or Keanu, because, I mean, you know, that's the definition of being a passenger. I mean, you've got no control. None. I hate spots like that. You can't do nothing.

KRIS TAPLEY

Stunt driver Donna Evans also did some of the driving for this sequence as she was doubling Sandra Bullock in certain shots.

DONNA EVANS

That was, like, one of the worst experiences for me as a stunt performer, because I'm literally driving this huge bus. I see him. They're letting him go back underneath the front of my bus, and I cannot see him at all. And I have someone on a radio saying, "Slightly right. Slightly left." And, you know, you're just praying that the people on the radio don't

get their rights and lefts mixed up, because sometimes that happens when people are directing you.

KRIS TAPLEY

Here are actors Julia Vera and Carlos Carrasco with some perspective from inside the bus during all of this.

JULIA VERA

Just thinking about it right now, I'm getting chills. Because I remember looking at this truck in front of us, and I said, "What if it just goes sideways? What if the bus has to make the turn? Oh, no, we're going to" – it was – it was real.

CARLOS CARRASCO

There was even a Keanu puppet figure that they did some work with, which got its nose lopped off. I actually have a picture someplace of the dummy lying in the thing with no nose, which I think illustrates how really precarious that particular stunt was.

DONNA EVANS

So, that was, like, the worst thing for me as a stunt performer, because I literally had somebody's life in my hands, but I couldn't even see what I was doing. So, that stuff weighs really heavy on you when you have to perform something like that. When we say "relatively safe," I mean, "safe" doesn't mean the same thing to stunt people as it does to non-stunt people, because "safe" to us just means you have decent odds of coming out of it OK. It doesn't mean it's 100% safe.

KRIS TAPLEY

I also just want to throw in here that another stunt performer, Billy Morts, was down there for some of this action with the feet dragging and everything. But speaking of feet, there's one shot of particular note in this scene. I mentioned there's someone else you see physically going under the bus. So, there's sort of a Jack POV going under the bus and you see his feet. Guess who that was? It wasn't going to be a camera operator, I'll tell you that. It was second unit director Alexander Witt.

ALEXANDER WITT

The operators didn't want to do it. It's from the union where an operator can say, "No, I don't want to do that job. It's too dangerous for me. I don't want to do it." So, I had to do the one where the feet go underneath the bus, and being the director and the DP, the studio didn't know about it. Otherwise, they would have said, "No way." But the feet that you see that are going underneath the bus, those are my feet, because the operators didn't want to do it.

KRIS TAPLEY

And speaking of that dolly or cart or whatever you want to call it. You may have been to a Planet Hollywood location in the past and scene one of these things on display there, you know, "As seen in the movie *Speed*." Well, I'd like to invite special effects coordinator John Frazier to burst your bubble.

JOHN FRAZIER

We got a call years later from Planet Hollywood and they asked if we had any of the little carts from the movie that Keanu was on. And I says, "I don't know. There might be something laying around back there." I said, "How many do you want?" He said, "Well, we'll take as many as you have." I said, "Well, how many is that? Six? Twelve?" He says, "Well, you know, we'll put one in every Planet Hollywood. So, as many as you have." So, I said, "Well, they might be in a little bad shape." He said, "No, that's good. That's good. Whatever shape they're in, we'll take them." I said, "OK, can you hold on for a couple of minutes and we'll go back there and we'll look and see what we've got?" So, I literally put the phone on hold, and me and Dave Amborn, my foreman, we never left the office. We sat there watching the blinking light. So, I waited about three or four minutes, I pick up the phone and I go, "You still there?" He goes, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm still here." I said, "We've got 10 of them back there. Do you want them all?" He said, "Yeah, I want all of them." I said, "OK, come by and pick them." And I said, "Give me a couple of days to fix them up a little bit." He said, "OK." We hadn't even negotiated the price at that point, you know? So, we hung up the phone and Dave says, "It looks like we're in the dolly business." The guy wanted 10, we made him 10. You know, painted them, delivered them.

KRIS TAPLEY

Back to stunt driver Gil Combs.

GIL COMBS

If I made one lap, I made 50,000 laps in the weeks that we were shooting there, going around that course they had laid out for the bus. And, of course, the idea was to get around and go through the corners as fast as you could to make it look, you know, like it was still 50 miles an hour, so the bus wouldn't blow up. So, that was kind of a challenge, that big ol' heavy bus, because the suspension was really soft. When I take those corners, basically, I was doing a power brake thing to make the suspension squat and it would – I mean, it would – you know, it was almost like we were going to go up on two wheels again making them corners, you know?

KRIS TAPLEY

Actress Natsuko Ohama.

NATSUKO OHAMA

When you're doing these kind of action films, you have to be so careful, because there's unplanned things. They didn't account for the centrifugal force that would happen when that bus was going around the corner, and then, because those folding doors are automatic, and as we were pressed – because of the curve of the bus going around the corner and the whole group was pressed that direction against the door – it opened up. And Daniel was behind me and he just grabbed the back of my clothes and pulled me so I wouldn't fall out. It was bad. And so, we had lunch and when we came back there was an invisible chord across the door.

KRIS TAPLEY

In the middle of all of this, Harry and the folks back at the police station have stumbled onto something big.

[SPEED CLIP]

MARGARET MEDINA (as “Robin”)

Howard Payne, Atlanta P.D. Bomb Squad! Retired in Sun Valley in 1989 when a small charge left him with fingers numbering nine!

JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)

That’s our scumbag!

MARGARET MEDINA (as “Robin”)

Yep.

JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)

We got him. Jack, we found him.

MARGARET MEDINA (as “Robin”)

We can get to his place inside of 15 minutes.

JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)

Great. Jack, I want you to get out of there and sit tight. We’re going to go after the source.

KRIS TAPLEY

That’s right, they’ve located Howard Payne. Harry and the the SWAT team head out to bust the guy, but of course, another hair-raising moment happens when the dolly snaps free and flies out from under Jack as he clings to the bus’s bowels. Ortiz and the rest pull him up into the cabin but not before Jack leaves a screwdriver jammed into the fuel tank. Now they’re leaking gas. The clock is ticking even faster. Hopefully Harry and the rest of the team can get to Payne before time is up. Here’s set decorator K.C. Fox again to discuss our madman’s abode.

K.C. FOX

That house was a very late find. I remember having, like, one day to dress that house. At first, I don’t even think they were going to walk through the house, and then, “No, no, we’re going to see inside the house.” “Agghh! I’ll get some stuff! I’ll get some. The fact is, I was in Hollywood at the moment and the guys that worked at Omega Cinema Props laughed after it came out, because I had shopped nearly the whole thing there. I didn’t have any time to go anywhere else, you know? It was tough trying to get from the 105 freeway where you were, like, laying out orange fencing and trying to figure out what part of the freeway needed to be coned off that day. I remember that day being incredibly hectic. And then they blow it up!

KRIS TAPLEY

By the way, you should go back and listen to Jeff Daniels' fantastic story about this sequence and his death scene in particular. You know, the moment where Harry knows he's a goner. It's good stuff, back in episode 13. But here is actress Margaret Medina with a little more about working with Jeff here.

MARGARET MEDINA

I think our first scene was the bombing of the house, and he just was funny because I'm an awe of him and Jan de Bont's accent was really thick, so I couldn't really understand him sometimes. We had a scene and then he was giving us direction, and he was going, "No, Margret, I don't want it like that." There's just a lot of stuff going on. So, finally, I said, "OK, look, I'm just going to be honest." I didn't tell him that I don't understand your accent, but I'm like, "OK, is this what you want? Do you want me to come up, look at Jeff, put my hand on the knob, and then hesitate and then go back?" He goes, "Yes, that's exactly what I want." I can't do a Dutch accent. I said, "Great. Thank you. We're all clear. Jeff, are you clear?" "Yes." "OK, we're all clear now? We're all clear. Great, thank you." And so, then we were getting ready to shoot and they were setting up the camera and Jeff goes, "I'm so glad you said something, because I can't understand his accent." And I'm, like, "You, that has, like, 20 more years' experience than me, Mr. Circle in the Square, couldn't ask him?"

KRIS TAPLEY

And then, indeed, Payne was a step ahead. The house was rigged to explode, taking out Harry and the rest of the team. Here's special effects coordinator John Frazier.

JOHN FRAZIER

When we did the explosion when Keanu's partner got killed, we used a guy's house. We went to the guy's house in the morning, blew out the front of it and he goes, "Whoa, whoa, boy, that's going to be interesting tonight." I go, "What's the interesting part?" He says, "I'm having a barbecue here in about two hours," he says, "and the front of my house is gone!" And it's, like, "Nobody told you we were blowing your house up?" He goes, "No, no." He says, "I knew you guys were in there, you were putting some drywall and stuff in the house so that it wouldn't get – but I never know – I never really knew what you guys were doing." He says, "That's pretty cool." He was real cool. He knew that, you know, that it was going to get fixed and it was going to be better than it was. Yeah, we weren't going to walk away from that one.

KRIS TAPLEY

Back to the airport we go and Jack is about to get the bad news.

[SPEED CLIP]

KEANU REEVES (as "Jack Traven")

Harry. Tell me good news, man.

DENNIS HOPPER (as "Howard Payne")

Oh, I'm sorry, Jack. He didn't make it.

KEANU REEVES (as "Jack Traven")

You fuck!

DENNIS HOPPER (as "Howard Payne")

It was the watch that led him to me, wasn't it? Huh? It seemed a little hammy to me to build the bomb out of my precious retirement gift, but, you know, I figured a sign that said "Howard Payne" would be pushing it.

KRIS TAPLEY

And then Jack really loses his shit.

[SPEED CLIP]

KEANU REEVES (as "Jack Traven")

Damn it!

SANDRA BULLOCK (as "Annie")

Jack.

KEANU REEVES (as "Jack Traven")

Agggghhhhh!

SANDRA BULLOCK (as "Annie")

Jack, come on. Don't give up on me. Come, please. Jack, stop it! Jack, come on. Stop it, OK? Don't give up on me now, alright. Hey, we're really scared and we really need you right now, alright? I'm really scared. I can't do this by myself. Please? Jack, please?

KRIS TAPLEY

Then there's the whole "Wildcat" bit, which you'll recall was a Joss Whedon concoction for Jack to discover that Payne has a camera on the bus. They misdirect that with a signal or whatever the hell is going on there that I've never fully understood, and now, it's time to get these passengers off the bus. Here's first AD David Sardi.

DAVID SARDI

The whole thing with extracting the passengers going from bus to the airport people mover was it kind of evolved. It was not something that was precisely planned. We sort of, like, got everybody out and we had the notion of what it was going to be, but it was clear that when we were doing it that the request that came from them, like, "We need a bump."

KRIS TAPLEY

I want to throw in some of the bus actors while we're on this. Here's actress Marylou Lim.

MARYLOU LIM

Some of the actors, they really kind of knew the laws and, you know, the guidelines of what they could get away with paying us and not. And they would come together. I remember they would all come to – “OK, we have to come in as a group and tell them that we’re doing this thing, so they need to pay us more.” I’m like, “Really?” It was kind of generated that way. I don’t remember who the ring leader was. It might have been Paula, I don’t know.

KRIS TAPLEY

She’s talking about Paula Montes, who sat in the back and passed away some years ago. Here’s actress Sherri Villanueva.

SHERRI VILLANUEVA

She was a cool little lady. She was, like, a little firecracker. She would tell us a lot of stories. I mean, she brought a picture of her and Kirk Douglas one day, because she was telling us stories about old Hollywood. I guess her husband was a makeup artist and she met him in Mexico and came back here. She would go to all these Hollywood parties all the time.

KRIS TAPLEY

Actress Julia Vera.

JULIA VERA

Paula knew everything about the business. When we did the stunt, she says, “This is stunt work. We should get paid for it.” She had been in this business many years. So then, Paula went chasing after the first AD and made him increase our pay, because it was stunt pay. She was something else. She was just very, very knowledgeable when it came to show business.

DAVID SARDI

There was no question in my mind, that – “Absolutely. You got it.” Because it was, right? They were moving at speeds from one vehicle to another, and there were a lot of times when the cast on the bus had to be very courageous. And they were all fabulous.

JULIA VERA

They would be waiting to grab you on the people mover, but just that clearance between the bus and the people mover, it must have been about three steps, but anything can happen in those three steps. The plank might shift, you might lose your balance.

KRIS TAPLEY

Always a welcome voice, here’s Loretta Jean Crudup.

LORETTA JEAN CRUDUP

You know what? We all got three hundred dollars. But Simone, we all had to talk her into doing it. When you saw her nervous reaction, that was not acting. That was for real.

KRIS TAPLEY

And finally, Alan Ruck, with a killer Jan de Bont impression at the end here.

ALAN RUCK

This guy who used to be Kiefer Sutherland's bodyguard, Morris Dunster, this British guy – I don't even know if he's on the planet anymore – but he was a bodyguard for the Beatles way back in the day, and he was sort of Kiefer's aide-de-camp on *Young Guns II*, and he was just talking about athleticism. And he said, "It's balance. It's all balance and hand-eye coordination, and if you've got those two things, then you are athletic. You will have success as an athlete." And I do not have good balance. So, you know, when I was on that – whatever that board was between the death bus and the people mover, city bus, whatever it was we were moving onto, you know, I didn't have to act. He was like, "Alan, you're more scared! I've got to see it in your eyes! You scared!" But inside I was – you know, it was, like, "Oh, this is for real."

KRIS TAPLEY

Not everyone had the stomach for this. You remember Hawthorne James talking about how Jim Mapp, another one of the bus passengers, would not get on the bus when they were doing Hawthorne's transfer stunt because his heart just couldn't take it. Well, here's production designer Jackson De Govia with some strong but ultimately, interestingly, conflicting feelings on this stunt.

JACKSON DE GOVIA

I don't agree with that. I don't think you should take those risks. When I saw those actors stepping across from the bus to the airport vehicle, I was scandalized. I mean, they weren't athletes. They could have been killed, really hurt, at that point. It was moving at about 30 miles an hour, I think, when they walked across, and they weren't stunt people, you know? They were actors. And that made it much more real. I mean, the emotion just leaps off the screen at you. You know, you feel that fear. It's one of the things that makes it great.

KRIS TAPLEY

With all of our passengers safely out of harm's way, it's time for Jack and Annie to get out of there. She rigs the steering wheel and the gas pedal and he prepares the trap door for a spectacular escape sequence. Mark Mancina's score soars so gloriously that Paramount would use that bit in the trailer for *Braveheart*. But, beyond a couple quick shots to establish them, that's not Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock flying out from under the bus. It's Brian Smrz and Donna Evans.

DONNA EVANS

We had to have been doing, like, 40 miles an hour. And if you remember, the outfit that I was wearing doubling Sandra Bullock, I had bare legs, bare shoulders. If we didn't stay on that thing, the road rash was going to be like laying down a road bike. It was going to be horrible. But fortunately, that went really well and they towed us in and then they – there was a quick release and they released it, and then that's when we just go off. You know, who knows where we're going to go at that point? I mean, we've got these

wheels on the bottom of this thing, and it was really, really lucky that we ended up going exactly where we needed to go. And the thing is, is, you know, when they set that stuff up, it's always, "Well, it's supposed to work like this." But you never know if it's going to do that because there's so many variables involved in doing stunts that you may or may not think about. I mean, there were these little delineators that were on the runway, and if we hit one of those, it could have flipped us off the thing, you know? Which, I think we did run over some of them. I'm not 100% sure. But you just never know. So, you always prepare for the worst and hope for the best. You always go into it thinking this has the potential to probably really mess me up, hurt me, but I think it's going to work out well. Kind of a weird mindset. One of the things, I have to say, that was funny, was when I went to get the wardrobe to double Sandra Bullock, she had on that little dress, that little flower dress, and it was kind of see-through. And then she had on underneath – she had a, like, a body suit. But it was like a G-string body suit. It didn't have, like, stuff to cover your buns. And I was trying to tuck the dress between my legs and all that, because the last thing – I think I even taped it, because the last thing I wanted is for the darn thing to come up when we crashed and be em-bare-assed, if you get my drift! But that was the funny part I was more worried about keeping the dress tail than I was getting hurt.

KRIS TAPLEY

And not to bring things in on a downer, but you remember the emotion on display there when Annie bursts into tears as the adrenaline finally begins to seep out of her following this entire ordeal. Well, it would appear they may have shot that scene the first week of November in 1993, maybe even November 1st, judging by what second assistant director Maggie Murphy recalls here.

MAGGIE MURPHY

I want to say River Phoenix died that day. Because I remember Sandra was crying. They were very emotional. Everyone was emotional. It was very sad. It's kind of like when Alan Parker died and we were on *Runaway Bride*. It's, like, how do you help that actor recover so they can go back and finish the day? You know what I mean? When they're so distraught.

KRIS TAPLEY

Rest in peace to a legend gone way, way too soon. Now, with Jack and Annie safe, it's time for the coup de grace. The bus becomes untethered from Annie's makeshift rigging and steers off course and toward a massive cargo plane. Remember, this part of the scene, where the bus – and the plane – explode, was shot out at Mojave Airport, about a hundred miles north of LA out in the desert. Here's transportation coordinator Randy Peters.

RANDY PETERS

When we crashed that airplane, I got that airplane for them. Because I had a – a buddy of mine had a wrecking yard, an airplane boneyard called Aviation Warehouse out in Adelanto, and he had all the planes at Mojave. You know, all these mothballed airplanes. So, he had an ability to get airplanes. I would get airplanes on all sorts of

movies through him. Because, you know, I've done *Top Gun* and *Top Gun: Maverick*. I did both *Top Guns* and *Flight of the Intruder* and just all sorts of movies. Like, *Top Gun: Maverick*, we're getting an F-14, right? So, now I've got to figure out how to move it and get guys to take it apart and move it, you know, 500 miles up to Lake Tahoe, so. "Yeah, we got a free F-14 out at San Diego." And I said, "Really? Free." And I came back and said, "It's going to cost you 200 to move it." "200,000?" I said, "Uh, yeah. It's a huge deal, you know? You've got to take it apart. You had to get CHP. You've got to get Nevada police. You've got to get," you know. So, I said to Ian, "Look, we've got a stretch DC-8," which is, you know, the old 707, but this one's called a DC-8. Same kind of airplane, but different manufacturer. And so, I paid \$30,000 to blow that plane up. It was just, you know, parts that we were just – but then it cost – then after the blow-up, we had to clean it up, and I said to Ian, you know, "It's going to cost us" – I don't know how much it was. It was a lot of money, because you had to get dumpsters and guys. He goes, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Why do we clean it up?" I said, "Why do we clean it up? We blew it up." And Ian was in that shot.

KRIS TAPLEY

He said "Ardeleto" there but I think he meant "Adelanto." SoCal desert town. Anyway, indeed, after the bus plows into the airplane and explodes in fiery glory, unit production manager Ian Bryce is the guy who gets out of the towing vehicle and runs away from the explosion. Here's Ian.

IAN BRYCE

Jan said, "Ian, why don't you go be in a tow tug?" And I go, "Yeah, alright." And we had already done the explosion, right? So, this was, like, an overlap piece where they just, you know, set some pretty big fire bars and they reset the fire on the airplane for a second, and I'm sitting in there waiting for Jan, and I've got the radio ready for somebody to say "action." And I remember being in that tow tug, and, you know, I hear the cue for the fire, and the fire came on, and I felt it inside that tow tug. And I just had a pair of overalls on. I didn't have Nomex or any of that business on at that time, right? It was, like, "It's an overlap shot, whatever." And the fire's, like, 30 feet away, whatever it was, but, man, when they came on, I was, like, "Say action. Say it now." Right? I didn't say that on the radio. I waited. I waited and just, you know, toughed it out, but, yeah, it was hot in there. And I've said to several people, "Yeah, if I looked kind of scared when I got out and ran away, that was real."

RANDY PETERS

And then, go back to De Govia and the art director. So, the door – it was 30 grand for the airplane, but the door was \$30,000, because that door was still usable, you know? The front door that was flopped open? So, I said, "Dude, you should just build a plug or fake it or something. Because this is what it's going to cost you," you know? And he was adamant and adamant and adamant. You know, I said, "You guys are idiots, because once you're going to blow the airplane up, you're going to blow the door up, too." So, yeah, we bought the door. It was thousands. It was probably as much as the airplane. I don't remember exactly how much it was, but it was pretty pricey. It was still used on some other airplanes and stuff and he could sell it, so.

KRIS TAPLEY

Speaking of production designer Jackson De Govia, here he is again talking about a bit of an Easter egg in this sequence.

JACKSON DE GOVIA

In *Die Hard*, when the bus with the terrorists in it arrives, it has a color scheme, green, yellow and so forth. It's to show up in the dark, because it was dark, and it also has the name of what it is, and it's "Pacific Courier." It means "Messenger of Peace." Well, I also put it in the opening of *Die Hard with a Vengeance* with the truck that blows up right in the beginning, and I also put it in *Speed*, because the airplane that is blown up has the same colors and it says "Pacific Courier." It's the same thing, and it was just something that tied all those together for me. It was, like, the mark that I made, that said, "This is a Jack De Govia thing."

KRIS TAPLEY

I like to think that John McClane and Jack Traven crossed paths. Maybe Jack was at the Police Academy and John came in to talk to the cadets about his adventures in LA and Washington D.C. Anyway, back to special effects coordinator John Frazier to talk about this glorious explosion.

JOHN FRAZIER

When you do these things, you know, you want that black smoke, and we generally mix it with diesel fuel. It's about a 75/25 mix. But what you want to do is you want to get old gas when you do these things, because it burns black, and so, we'll take a 55-gallon drum of gas just let it sit for a while. That old gas is a lot more volatile than new gas. So, when you're doing something like that, you want to use old gas. It's just like when we did *Apocalypse Now*, it was the same thing. It seemed like all the gas we had was just old, rotten, ready to almost lacquer gas.

KRIS TAPLEY

Not to get us confused with multiple Ians, but I want to throw journalist Ian Failes in here. Ian is the editor-in-chief of *Before & Afters*, a fantastic, Australia-based outlet covering the visual effects industry, and Ian's sense of all this is second to none.

IAN FAILES

I think they almost set the tone for some explosions in the '90s, right? That sort of gasoline look. And even the explosion in *Speed 2*, which Rhythm and Hues pulled off, of the oil tanker – which was probably from some real elements – it had the same look as the bus explosion, in a way.

KRIS TAPLEY

Ian, by the way, is the only guy on Earth who is maybe – MAYBE – a bigger *Speed* fan than me. He has a massive collection of memorabilia that he's even exhibited it in Sydney. But I'll get into all of that and more discussion with him at a later date. Getting back to this explosion, it had to be one of the largest ever captured on film at that point

in time. The current record holder, officially, is the destruction of Blofeld's base in the James Bond film *Spectre*, although, funnily enough, Michael Bay insists the explosions in *Pearl Harbor* were bigger. But in 1994, the only thing bigger than what we saw in *Speed* would have been the napalm strike that John Frazier was referencing from *Apocalypse Now* or maybe the big building exploding at the beginning of *Lethal Weapon 3*, which Jan shot. We can put away the tape measures for now, guys. Back to our other Ian, Ian Bryce.

IAN BRYCE

I mean, people think, eh, we just put a few gallons of gasoline out there, but no, it's complicated and you have to pay attention when you're rigging all that stuff. On *Twister*, you know, you might remember there's one point where they're racing with Dorothy to, you know, try to deploy it, and there's a petrol tanker, a gasoline tanker, falls out of the sky, and the red truck comes up to it right as it lands and goes around the back of the tanker. We did that for real. That was 100% live-action. That tanker had X amount of gas in it and powder and was strung up between two cranes, and that one we did twice. That was a huge gag to do again, right? But, you know, you just imagine when you're out in Oklahoma, and there's weather and you've got two cranes up in the up in the air and there's lightning, you know? Like, you go, "Oh, man, we've got to take that stuff down."

KRIS TAPLEY

First AD David Sardi.

DAVID SARDI

Another thing that I sort of pitched that ended up in the movie was, once all the passengers were off the bus and they were in the people mover, there was a reaction shot of them all reacting to the bus exploding. On the day, I was just, like, "Well, why don't we just set up a bunch of mortars and set off an explosion and, you know, you'll get a real reaction and you'll get a reflection?" Because we weren't going to do that. We were just going to, you know, do a shot of them, you know, watching and reacting. But I was, like, "Why don't we put an explosion element in that?" Because I would normally cue a reaction. I would go, "Three, two, one, boom," and they would all react. But I was, like, "Why don't we just fucking set off a mortar and get them to react?" And in the end, it turned out, you know, there was this great reflection of an explosion on them and it was kind of a great shot in the movie." And, you know, Frazier was, like, "Sure." I mean, I think he set off a five-gallon gas mortar blast that was massive. I mean, it was way bigger than it needed to be, but it was – it certainly got the reaction that I could never have gotten them to give by, you know, just going "boom."

KRIS TAPLEY

And on that, here's actress Sonia Jackson, one of the passengers on the bus.

SONIA JACKSON

They put us all on the bus and they said, "This is going to happen and we're going to test it." And they had these canisters spread out probably about 20 feet from us. And

then they said that, “This is a test!” You know, they went through the whole thing. “We’re going to test! Blah blah blah! Careful!” All that stuff when they prepare for the test, and these canisters went off like, “Poof.” And smoke came off and a little bit of fire, and we kind of went, “Oh.” You know? We just kind of looked at it and thought, “Alright.” And so, then they went away and talked about it, then when it came time to do it, it was, “Ba-ba-ba-BOOM-ba-ba-BOOM-ba-ba-BOOM!” And the fire shot up, like, 20 feet and the smoke and we got blown back from the window when we were standing there in the bus looking. That reaction was real.

DAVID SARDI

I remember that flight back. There was a bunch of champagne on that plane flying back. There was a lot of relief at the end of that.

KRIS TAPLEY

I bet there was. And guess what? We still have a first and third act to shoot. The elevator and subway sequences were filmed after the bus material, which is why I’ve structured all of this the way I have. But for now, I’d like to bid farewell – and dedicate this episode of *50 MPH* – to Bus 2525. A rugged workhorse on the cusp of obsolescence. Here’s to you. You took us on one hell of a ride. And I don’t know about you, but I could sure use a breather.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

KRIS TAPLEY

Next week on *50 MPH*...

KRIS TAPLEY

Let’s pump the brakes a bit and stretch our legs as *50 MPH* hits the halfway point. It’s time for a grab-bag episode! We break out a few choice quotes from the vault that haven’t found a home yet.

DON GRANGER

It’s harder now because we have inundated the audience with the children of *Terminator* and *Speed* and those other movies you mentioned.

KRIS TAPLEY

We also get into the thorny subject of Jan de Bont’s temperament on set.

DAVID MACMILLAN

Jan doesn’t know that he’s being an asshole at times, you know? When he’s shooting.

DONNA EVANS

Let’s just say when they called me to do *Twister*, I said no.

MARK GORDON

We didn’t get along particularly well, and so, it was not a happy experience for me.

KRIS TAPLEY

And we even ask a 7-year-old for his thoughts about *Speed* because we are not above child labor.

FOSTER TAPLEY

The bad thing is, like, the elevator was going up and then Jack Traven was about to get squished.

KRIS TAPLEY

Plus, reader reviews and emails!

KRIS TAPLEY

All of that and more next week right here on *50 MPH!*

KRIS TAPLEY

Thanks so much for listening. *50 MPH* is written, produced and edited by yours truly, Kris Tapley. You can find us on Twitter @50MPHPod. I'm @kristapley. That's Kris with a K. You can also catch every episode and more at our website 50MPHpodcast.com. If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things. We'll see you next time.

KRIS TAPLEY

What was your favorite movie when you were younger?

JEAN TAPLEY

I guess if you – what's it – *Gone in the Wind*.

KRIS TAPLEY

Gone with the Wind?

JEAN TAPLEY

Mmhmm.

KRIS TAPLEY

When you were younger that was one of your favorite movies?

JEAN TAPLEY

Well, I remember me and my girlfriend. Last name was Rogers. Used to, the theater – I don't know if they still have them – they had seats where two people could sit in them. Like your lovebird seats.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah.

JEAN TAPLEY

I don't know if they still have them. And we went to see *Gone with the Wind* and sat in those seats.

KRIS TAPLEY

That's a four-hour movie.

JEAN TAPLEY

And I remember – oh, well, there was intermission.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah.

JEAN TAPLEY

And then I remember us selling poppies afterwards. We were in Girl Scouts and we sold poppies, and I don't remember why we did that.

KRIS TAPLEY

Hm.

JEAN TAPLEY

You know what I'm talking about, right?

KRIS TAPLEY

Like, flowers?

JEAN TAPLEY

Yeah, but there was a – we did the paper. And it must have been something to do with Veterans Day or something. I don't know.