

HOW CHUCK NORRIS FILMS SEEM TO BEND THE COURSE OF HISTORY

BY STEVEN RONAI



Photo by Rick Husted

“Chuck Norris can split the atom with his bare hands.”

This “fact” is like many found on his official website, ChuckNorris.com. They entertain while reinforcing the idea that Norris is the toughest man on the planet. But could he be more powerful than we ever imagined? When one looks at his film and television work over the years, it seems that [Chuck Norris](#) can bend the course of history to his will.



Black Belt Archives

Chuck Norris in *Walker, Texas Ranger*, which the author links to the Great Britain/Northern Ireland peace process — and, on the lighter side, the creation of the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

Exhibit A

Reel History: *Missing in Action* was released in 1984. Norris plays Col. James Braddock, a former prisoner of war who returns to Vietnam with a congressional delegation. They're out to investigate the fate of American soldiers listed as missing in action. The head of the delegation seems ready to accept Vietnamese denials that POW camps exist. Braddock uses a combination of [chokeholds](#) and [roundhouse kicks](#) to prove otherwise.

Real History: A committee to investigate the issue of MIAs in Vietnam was created in 1991, seven years after the film. The Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs came to the same conclusion that its on-screen counterpart was about to — that no living

POWs remained in Vietnam. This paved the way for the United States to restore full diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1995.

The committee, led by high-profile names like Sen. John Kerry and Sen. John McCain, was later accused by some of ignoring evidence in order to reap the economic benefits of normalized relations with Vietnam. Regardless, its investigation did lead to more cooperation between the two countries to resolve the MIA issue. Joint American-Vietnamese search teams combed the jungle looking for evidence — not unlike what Braddock did (minus a few explosions and a hail of bullets). No live MIAs were found, but hundreds were identified through their remains.



Photo Courtesy of Cannon Productions N.Y.

Chuck Norris (right) as Col. James Braddock fighting for his life in *Missing in Action*.

Exhibit B

Reel History: *The Delta Force* hit theaters in 1986. It chronicles the mission undertaken by Maj. Scott McCoy (Norris) and a team of special operatives tasked with rescuing the passengers of a hijacked airplane. Complications ensue when the plane lands in Lebanon and the hostages, mostly Americans, are moved to a stronghold in Beirut. The Delta operatives are able to succeed despite the myriad of terrorists who stand in their way.

Real History: We may have Norris to thank for the fact that Delta Force is still in action today. At the time the film was released, the organization's image was still suffering from a botched attempt in 1980 to rescue American hostages held in Iran. Bad weather and damaged helicopters led to the mission being aborted. To make matters worse, a helicopter collided with a transport plane in the desert as Delta Force was withdrawing. The film's patriotic sentiment (along with Norris mowing down terrorists with an Uzi) contributed to the rehabilitation of Delta Force's reputation. The unit continues to play an important role in our national defense.

The 1980s were rife with Middle Eastern terrorism, and hijackings were plentiful. As we in America know all too well, airline hijackings are not a thing of the past. There was, however, an important change in the Middle East after this movie. The systematic kidnapping of American nationals in Lebanon, frighteningly common in the early 1980s, gradually ended. More and more Westerners were let go as the decade came to a close. This culminated in the release of Terry Anderson, the last American hostage, in 1991.

Chuck Norris' film and TV projects, the author says, have seemed prescient when it comes to certain events in modern history.

Black Belt Archives

Exhibit C

Reel History: In 2002 Norris released a TV movie called *The President's Man: A Line in the Sand*. Airing in the wake of 9/11, it cast Norris as the leader of a team that undertakes sensitive missions at the behest of the president. Using a combination of high-tech gadgetry and [martial arts mastery](#), they capture notorious terrorist Abdul Rashid in his Middle Eastern lair. Being imprisoned on American soil while awaiting trial doesn't stop his vendetta against the United States. Whenever a television camera is pointed his way, Rashid uses coded phrases to foment more violence.

Fortunately, Norris learns of this and foils his plans.

Real History: The year after it was broadcast, American forces captured Saddam Hussein in his own lair, the infamous spider hole. Interestingly, members of Delta Force provided support for this action. Saddam then languished in prison until his execution at the end of 2006. Additionally, the hunt for Osama bin Laden concluded with his death at the hands of [Navy SEALs](#) in 2011. It appears that when Norris deals with fictional terrorists, real ones also get their just deserts.



Photo Courtesy of Cannon Productions N.Y.

Chuck Norris in *Missing in Action*, jumping from a tower to avoid enemy fire.

Exhibit D

Reel History: Norris was no less influential when he committed to playing Cordell Walker in the CBS series *Walker, Texas Ranger*, which ran from 1993 to 2001. In a 1996 episode titled “Flashpoint,” Walker meets former Irish Republican Army member Adam McGuire. McGuire’s decision to promote peace with the British makes him the target of his former IRA colleagues, who routinely use violence in an effort to force the British from Northern Ireland. When Walker saves McGuire from assassination, he keeps the peace process alive.

Real History: Great Britain and Northern Ireland signed the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. One of the driving forces behind it was Gerry Adams, a man thought by some to be connected with the IRA but who now was advocating peace like McGuire, his TV counterpart. When the IRA decommissioned large caches of weapons, some members felt betrayed and created their own splinter terrorist groups. Because these factions lack

mainstream support, a decline in terrorism has resulted. Life in Northern Ireland, while not perfect, has improved.

The rise of the [Ultimate Fighting Championship](#) also can be linked to *Walker*. [The first UFC](#) aired on pay-per-view in November 1993. Many people believed it was a one-time-only event after [Royce Gracie](#) demonstrated how dominant [Brazilian jiu-jitsu](#) could be against other styles. Then an episode of *Walker* titled “Night of the Gladiator” aired the following month. One scene featured Walker sparring and [grappling](#). For the many mainstream Americans who didn’t shell out for pay-per-view, it was their first exposure to armbars, triangle chokes, the guard and everything exciting about [mixed martial arts](#). Fast-forward to today: The UFC is with us and continues to grow in popularity. It now boasts a live reality show and is so pervasive that one can read about it alongside traditional sports in the local newspaper.

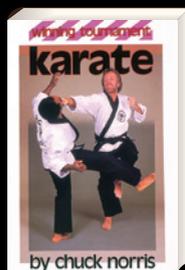
Concluding Arguments

Are these connections between cinema and history mere coincidence, or should all hail the power of Chuck Norris? His latest big-screen appearance was in 2012’s *The Expendables 2*. No doubt you’ll want to rent it tonight to see whether any future international events can be divined from the plot.

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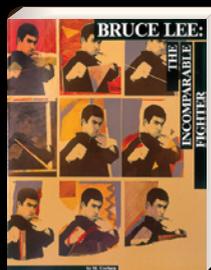
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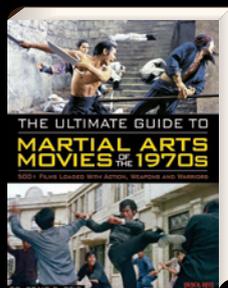
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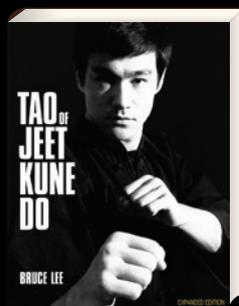
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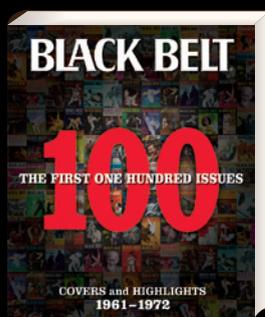
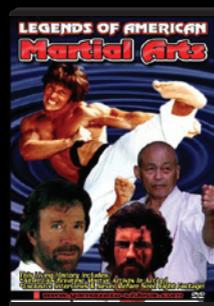
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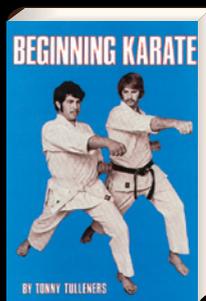
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